

# prologue

<https://readonlinenovels.com/nv/72af33b245e93566/akatsuki-hiden-evil-flowers-in-full-bloom/52970-h>

## chapter 1: AKATSUKI HIDEN - ITACHI AND KISAME

- Notes: Original Speech Patterns
- Novel's Opening/Prologue Summary
- Hypericum Erectum - Itachi and Kisame - Full Chapter
- Novel's Closing/Epilogue Summary

### PLEASE DO NOT REPOST

Translations are deleted fairly quickly, so it's probably safer to share it as a link. But share away!

Comments are enabled if anyone wants to join my gushing! :)

I've attempted to keep the translation more neutral, but my shipping shows more in the side tags

### NOTES: Original Speech Patterns

Some of the easiest to tell apart amongst any pair of characters

Eg Let's go, Kisame. | Well then, Itachi-san, shall we get going?

ITACHI - Uses casual 'ru' form, typical of most of the men in the Narutoverse. While typical for ninja in a shounen series, would be more rude and direct in standard Japanese. Uses the macho pronoun 'ore' for himself, like 99% of the men in Naruto, and the matching 'omae' for

others -sometimes uses the insulting 'temee' for Sasuke. However, uses polite suffixes san/kun for 'enemies'/ secret allies /Konoha ninja. In contrast, Sasuke never uses suffixes at all, and Itachi doesn't use them for anyone in Akatsuki, or for Sasuke himself. Swings between short and to the point and fancy/abstract words that are barely in the dictionary. Likes contradictions, either in the same sentence or a few lines later. I don't think he's ever sworn in the manga, but I need to reread his battle with Sasuke. Says 'chigau' (incorrect/different/wrong) enough that it's almost a catchphrase. Speech is active and direct - tag questions are used occasionally (eg. 'Am I wrong?'), but more to confirm a statement he already knows is true. The only discourse marker he arguably uses to soften sentence beginnings and break the ice (eg you know, so, well) is Kisame's name - otherwise, direct and to the point.

KISAME - One of the only characters in the series to use *keigo* - sounds somewhere between someone in customer service and the formal version learned as a second language. Polite, formal, and indirect, much softer speech patterns. Speaks like a mixture of Haku, Orochimaru and Mei. One of a handful of characters to use the gender neutral pronoun 'watashi,' which can come off as aloof and business-like (Iruka, Ebisu), or feminine (Orochimaru). However, despite politeness, very rarely uses suffixes to show respect: the only people who get them are Itachi (san), Sasuke (kun), 'Madara' (san) and the Third Mizukage (sama) - the other members of the Akatsuki and Kirigakure noticeably do not. Don't think he's sworn much either - has dozens of ways of saying 'my my/oh goodness/gosh' (the rudest he gets is towards Tobi after the 4 Tails capture and Pain seems surprised). But can be quite petty and nasty. Linguistics wise, uses hedging, tag questions, and discourse markers, softening speech - either defensive and tentative or passive aggressive, showing uncertainty.

KODAKA - Mostly uses casual 'ru' form, sometimes fancies it up like Kisame. Uses the youthful 'boku' to refer to himself, like Yamato, Rock Lee, or Haku. Name might be short for 'the treasure that is children'

KIIRO - Always uses casual 'ru' form, with macho 'ore' pronouns, and uses 'temee' (you bastard) towards nearly everyone, mostly his brother. Calls himself Kiirō-sama. Part 1 Naruto up to the max, despite (maybe?) being much older. Swears a lot, addicted to exclamation points - I feel weird not capitalising all his dialogue. Name means 'yellow'

OOMITSU - Name means 'big honey'

KOMITSU - Name means 'little honey'

## PROLOGUE

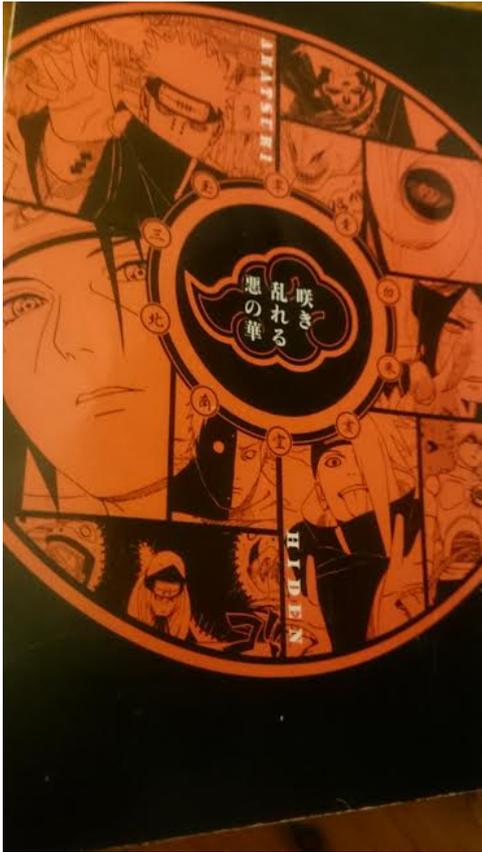
### PART 1

*“Darkness covers the sky. The stars sparkle quietly. The gentle person is being wrapped and cradled by the calming silver moon. However, the moonlight that illuminates their feet makes them anxious. We need the light. The strong illuminating light is the path we must advance. These people who’s wishes praying to be granted, depend upon on the darkness to be driven away across seas and mountains. The stars flee, the moon hides, we will put an end to the night. The start of the light–“Akatsuki”. New light will burn a new kingdom.”*

(Credit to YoruCompany Translations for the intro)

(<https://yorucompany.wordpress.com/2015/09/03/akatsuki-hiden-translation-chapter-1-01/>)

Prologue 2-4 Summary: A few years after the Fourth Shinobi War, Sasuke saves two children, Oomitsu and Komitsu, while travelling. They say their family was killed by the Akatsuki, and Sasuke is ashamed to have worn their cloak



## Hypericum Erectum \* \*

### PART 1

Pg30 - 75

Describe the world.

Actions echo from the earth.

Feeling informed one of the existence of others, the sweetness of happiness and the bitterness of misfortune nurtured people.

The fragrance of life was incredible, the connection a piece of the other world.

Sight, sound, touch, taste, smell.

The five senses of a person told them they lived in this world.

In one case, a rare visual power, the Sharingan carried by the Uchiha Clan, caused them to be born connected more deeply with the other worlds.

However, these strong ties were not eternal.

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While they could see even the unseeable, their eyes gradually lost their power, kept the other world away, and eventually shut up tightly.

They lost their eyesight.

Loved by bonds, betrayed by bonds.

To be toyed with by bonds, this clan, one wondered if this is the Uchiha?

One was also tied within these bonds.

"....."

They had entered the cave to escape the night dew. From there, a man withdrew.

In the cold night breeze, with a cloak where red clouds floated, his black hair also swayed.

Unlike his cloak, there were no clouds in the sky, and a round moon floated above. Both eyes that captured the moonlight were Sharingan.

The man looked up at the moon and slowly touched his forehead. His proof of being a shinobi, his headband. Engraved was the mark of Konohagakure... And yet it wasn't. A wound cut horizontally through Konoha's mark, the proof of a missing nin.

Uchiha Itachi.

It was the very man, the genius of the ancient and honourable Uchiha Clan, that was now a family killing traitor.

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However, there was something that even Itachi, who had cut off all connections, couldn't cut away.

His little brother. The little brother who was deeply hurt, split in two like Konoha's mark on his forehead.

He especially remembered the day of this month. He halted the Uchiha coup d'etat, and that day was covered in Uchiha blood. \*

The bond of affection between Itachi and Sasuke now turned to Sasuke's bond of hatred to Itachi, yet it was a complex link. Itachi had induced it. But he knows nothing, and was told nothing.

In the back of Itachi's mind, the image of another man was revived.

It was the man who Itachi had longed for as an older brother, from the same Uchiha Clan, Uchiha Shisui.

At that time, *he* had also fought desperately to stop the Uchiha's coup d'etat, and fell nobly. ....my dear friend, I can only ask this of *you*. This village....the Uchiha Clan....please protect them all...

Hoping for Konoha, hoping for the Uchiha, Shisui left in the shadows, falling nobly. His way of life was a shinobi's path. And Itachi thought like him. Carrying sin, such as wearing dishonour the same way he wears the Akatsuki garments, yet Itachi wasn't built into them.

If he saw his older brother continue to commit crimes, Sasuke wouldn't hesitate to kill Itachi.

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Itachi knew better than anyone the bitterness in handling loved ones.

When the time came for Sasuke to kill Itachi, he wanted him to kill him without feeling sorrow, without feeling anything. In his eyes, Itachi dreamed of it.

However, it seemed that it will take some time until the end.

Itachi closed his eyelids to block out the moonlight.

This eye still drips blood for people. Yes, from now on as well ~~

"Can't sleep, Itachi-san?"

Itachi heard a voice calling from behind him. Turning his head, there stood a great bodied man carrying the great sword Samehada, from the Seven Shinobi Swordsmen, the Monster of Kirigakure, Hoshigaki Kisame. Itachi's partner within Akatsuki.

"You left so quietly I thought you'd pulled out of the Akatsuki."

His words were impossible to discriminate between a joke and seriousness. When Itachi narrowed his eyes, Kisame gave a teasing grin.

"Please don't glare at me like that. It's a pain to disturb someone's alone time, but the purpose of Akatsuki's teams is to mutually monitor one another. We don't know who or when someone will betray it. Like Orochimaru."

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"....."

Orochimaru was also from Konoha like Itachi, and along with Jiraiya and Tsunade the man was a part of a legendary group called the Sannin.

He was a ruthless man who used any means to satisfy his desires, with the Akatsuki being one of his means. While he was enrolled in Akatsuki, he wanted to possess the natural genius, and set his sights on Itachi's body.

However, he decided he was no match for Itachi and withdrew from Akatsuki.

At the time, Itachi thought Sasori, a puppet user who'd been working together with Orochimaru, seemed to find the separation deeply and surprisingly painful. \*

"So I've been thinking, I'm proud to be able to be with *you*. At any rate, *you* are the Uchiha genius. On the day *you* betray Akatsuki, I'll have the duty of being entrusted to be a great step for that genius." \*

Itachi gave no reply and returned his gaze to the moon.

"Did you come to say such a thing?"

"Fufu....I understand. Of course, I didn't come here to abuse you with my silly chatter." \*

Kisame looked up at the moon in the same way. \*

Then that hand extended to Samehada on his back.

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"Now, I wonder which of us they'll target...eh!"

At the same time that Kisame left, the moon which had seemed so clear was fogged over. It wasn't clouds that blocked the moonlight. All at once, mist enveloped them, and even Kisame, a short distance away, couldn't be seen.

"...I guess they're going for me!"

Ninja Art, Hidden Mist Jutsu

It was a Suiton technique often used in the village of Kirigakure.

As he tried to pull out Samehada, many kunai flew simultaneously toward Kisame's upper back. Kisame carelessly flicked Samehada and knocked down all the kunai.

However, as Kisame's awareness was on the kunai, a new shadow emerged from the mist.

"Kisame, that's Kirigakure's hunter nin!"

More quickly than Kisame could react to Itachi's words, the hunter nin rapidly made hand seals.

"Suiton: Water Bullet Jutsu!"

When the warped, powerful body of water at the front fell, water exhaled from the mouth struck Kisame's body.

Again and again, new hunter nin appeared and started performing hand seals.

36

"Water Prison Jutsu!"

The Water Bullet Jutsu that struck Kisame's body was heavy, and the water surrounding Kisame's body became a ball.

The first hunter nin made water using the Water Bullet Technique, and another hunter nin used that liquid to make a water basket that couldn't be escaped.

"Okay, take Kisame and let's go!"

Their aim was Kisame alone. They tried to kidnap Kisame.

"Are you rookies? Haven't tasted much of this world, have you?" \*

But inside the water prison, Kisame laughed fearlessly.

"Kisame, don't overdo it. "

"That depends on our opponents now, doesn't it?"

In response to Itachi's warning, Kisame made hand seals.

"Wh-what the....!?"

Kisame swallowed much of the water in the water prison.

-----Suiton: Exploding Water Colliding Wave!!

When Kisame performed the jutsu, an amount of water incomparable to that of the water prison burst from Kisame's mouth.

37

"Shit, you idiots! The water prison jutsu has never broken down...!?"

The hunter nin that activated the water prison frantically placed both hands on the water prison, trying to hold Kisame in.

However, the water prison swelled endlessly, flooding it with water and compressing it from the inside, and it flew open like a water balloon when it burst.

“....are you finished before we even get flashy?” \*

Liberated, Kisame cracked his neck and fell into his stance with Samehada. “Well then, shall we get attacking too?”

In one gulp, Kisame tore through the hunter nin left over from the water prison.

“Uraaaaa-!!” \*

“Kya-!” \*

The great sword, Samehada struck his opponents in the pit of their stomach, breaking bones and enjoying the feel of their energy being “shaved” away. As it gouged into the flesh of the hunter nin’s belly and sent blood flying, Samehada took the opponents chakra and converted it into power for Kisame.

“Damn it-”

While grasping for their comrades who danced and flew through their vision like brittle, dead leaves, another hunter nin made hand signs.

38

“Now, I wonder which of us they’ll target....eh!” So here, Kisame says 「さて、どちらでしょうね」which basically means “I wonder which us [these people] are targeting.” The next line 「どうやら私のおようですね」would be “I guess they’re going for me.” These are pretty much literal translations, so do as you will with this information.

At the same time that Kisame left, the moon which had seemed so clear was fogged over. It wasn’t clouds that blocked the moonlight. All at once, mist enveloped them, and even Kisame, a short distance away, couldn’t be seen.

“...I guess they’re going for me!”

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The first hunter nin made water using the Water Bullet Technique, and another hunter nin used that liquid to make a water basket not sure if "basket" would be the correct term since the Water Prison we've seen seems to be a ball of water which surrounds the victim that couldn't be escaped.

"Okay, take Kisame and let's go!"

Their aim was Kisame alone. They tried to kidnap Kisame.

"Are you rookies? Haven't tasted much of this world, have you?" \*

But inside the water prison, Kisame laughed fearlessly.

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"That depends on our opponents now, doesn't it?"

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37

"Shit, you idiots!「馬鹿な」doesn't necessarily pertain to a specific person in this context. It's more of the common shounen manga trope of the enemy saying "i-impossible...!" The water prison jutsu has never broken down...!?"

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In one gulp, Kisame tore through the hunter nin left over from the water prison.

"Uraaaaa-!!" \*

"Kya-!" \*I think they said "Gya-!" here?

The great sword, Samehada struck his opponents in the pit of their stomach, breaking bones and enjoying the feel of their energy being "shaved" away. As it gouged into the flesh of the hunter nin's belly and sent blood flying, Samehada took the opponents chakra and converted it into power for Kisame.

"Damn it-"

While grasping for their comrades who danced and flew through their vision like brittle, dead leaves, another hunter nin made hand signs.

38

"As your comrades die before you, you still firmly make hand seals. It's as expected of hunter nin, isn't it? However, thanks to you all, I have the geographical advantage here."

Water spread around Kisame like a pond.

"Here I go....Suiton: Water Shark Bullet Jutsu-!"

The water took the form of sharks, baring their fangs. It was one of Kisame's speciality jutsu.

“Damn it! Suiton: Water Formation Wall...”

Faster than the hunter nin could make water walls to guard themselves, the Water Shark Bullet swam.

"Gyaaaaaa!"

The hunter nin were eaten and swallowed by the water sharks, vigorously blowing apart.

“Same city, same soil: you’ll be found hand in hand.”

The thick fog covering their surroundings cleared up, and the moonlight shine again. Kisame returned Samehada to his back.

“.....!?”

But then, Itachi sensed another chakra.

“Kisame, formation!”

As soon as he quickly leapt to his instructions, from within the thicket the two saw another man leap up.

39

“ ‘I have the geographical advantage here,’ are you serious?! Those words, I, Kihiro-sama, will reuse!”

The man who identified himself as ‘Kihiro-sama’ wasn’t wearing the mask of the hunter nin from before, and he didn’t even have a headband as proof of a shinobi.

But there were things that can only hit home from such a big mouth, and he made complex hand seals instantly. Great art had come.

“Suiton: Water Dragon Bullet Technique!!”

In response to Kihiro’s cry, from underneath Kisame’s wet feet the water dragon appeared. His skill level with chakra must be high. The water dragon rolled like a tuna as it hunted down Kisame’s body.

“Shi-!” \*

He had no time to make hand seals, he couldn’t reach a hand behind his back to grab Samehada. The water dragon slammed into Kisame’s body.

“Problem solved!”

However, before Kisame could be given a fatal wound, Kihiro cancelled the jutsu. The water dragon, which was a mass of water, danced toward the sky and burst open with a crash, like rain falling on the earth.

“Kodakaa! Let’s go!”

The latest person, the man called Kodaka, appeared to have already made hand seals underneath a thick cloak.

40

Surrounding them, countless tiny lights danced. Kihiro also made new hand seals.

“Hold up and stand back! Suiton: Angry Bitter Rain!” \*

When Kihiro performed the jutsu, the water falling like rain changed its colour to black and clung to Kisame’s body. Black rain snatched away his field of vision and covered his eyes.

"Got it...! Raiton: Electric Shock Needles!"

As Kodaka performed the jutsu, the light grew like needles, and in an instant flew to Kisame and stabbed him.

Each of the many needles was tiny, and he could only feel the pain from where the needle point touched.

".....!"

However, Kisame pressed down on his skin.

"This is...."

Some of the stabbed areas began to swell and turn red as he watched. Numbness spread from them, and unwillingly, Kisame fell to his knees.

"Hahaa! This is the end of the Monster of the Mist!"

He couldn't miss this chance. Kiiro drew his sword and aimed at Kisame's throat.

41

"...you were careless, Kisame."

Itachi easily stopped Kiiro's sword with a kunai.

"Wha..."

"You use techniques you're unfamiliar with."

Thrusting towards the sky, Itachi kicked his sole into Kiiro's stomach with all his strength. \*

"Guhuh-!"

"Kiiro!"

Kodaka caught Kiiro's body as the kick sent him flying, and jumped backwards to get out of range.

"I'm sorry, Itachi-san. Seems like it's poisoned. Making a poison with Suiton, and then getting it into the body with Raiton, huh....?"

With the poison and numbness, his movement seemed limited, but Kisame reached a swollen hand to Samehada.

"It can't be helped, so let's shave it off."

Without hesitation, Kisame directs Samehada to himself and carves deeply into the affected area.

"Th-that guy, his flesh...."

"What are you jittering for Kodakaaa!" Kiiro shouted at Kodaka, voice trembling as he watched Kisame carving off his flesh.

42

"You gutless bastard, even so, we'll hunt you down!" \*

"But Kiiro! The First One already hit. And that Sharingan....battling Uchiha Itachi is way risky. Let's get out of here!" \*

"Shut up! Let's kill Itachi too and make a name for ourselves! Last Second One, let's go Kodaka!"

Ignoring Kodaka's hesitation, Kiiro started making hand seals.

Itachi quietly closed his eyes and put a lot of power into his eyeballs.

"Both wealth and fame will fade away in the presence of these eyes, now then....disappear."

\*

-----Mangekyo Sharingan's Genjutsu, 'Tsukiyomi.'

".....!? Wha-, he-here's..."

Suddenly the world went dark. The only two people were Itachi and Kiiro. They'd been dragged in. Into the world of Tsukiyomi.

-----What kind of - what did you do!?

Kiiro stood on the edge of a lake, with both his hands and feet bound.

43

For the next 48 hours, you will continue to drown

At Itachi's words, Kiiro called out "What are you saying?!" Then something pushed against Kiiro's back with a thud.

Wha...!

Splash.

Came the sound of water as Kiiro's body hit the lake.

"AAAAAAH....!"

"Kiiro!?"

It was suddenly silent, as Kiiro fell over in the muddy soil, completely voiceless. His breathing was disturbed, and Kodaka shook his body in panic as fat drops of sweat poured from his whole body.

"AAH-AAAH!"

Kiiro instantly tasted 48 hours of torture, and reached out for help, seeking salvation.

"My my, seems like his life is at an end, doesn't it?"

Kisame laughed as he watched Kiiro take on Tsukiyomi. Itachi took out a kunai to put an end to the two students in the truest sense. \*

"Kiiro!"

44

Kodaka called Kiiro's name forcefully, taking the hand that stretched upwards towards the sky as if seeking the air. He clasped Kiiro's hand tightly and shouted his name again.

"Come on, Kiiro-!"

His earnestness halted Itachi's pursuit. \*

"Nii...sa...."

Kiiro gave a hoarse reply to Kodaka's cry.

"He-help me....Kodaka ni-san....."

Trembling like a frightened child, his strangled voice cut off when Itachi appeared.

".....shi-"

Kiiro gave a heartbroken scream as Kodaka disappeared with his body slung over his shoulder.

"Well well, seems like the pain and numbness has finally calmed down?"

Kisame placed Samehada into the ground and stood up slowly.

"It seems like they were brothers, doesn't it? It's still a strange jutsu though."

"....it wasn't a Kiri jutsu?"

"That was the first time I've seen a technique that combined Suiton and Raiton. The two of them seemed to be neither hunter nin or wore headbands, so I think Kirigakure could have hired other shinobi....?"

45

Well, I also broke off from Kiri, so I suppose it's fine, thought Kisame as he shrugged his shoulders. \*

"Using Suiton-made poison to cover the body, then hitting it with Raiton...it's a rare cooperation jutsu, don't you think? It'll take a while for the poison to completely disappear."

Kisame looked at the black water underfoot that may contain poison. However, Itachi didn't agree with Kisame's idea.

"There were countless strange lights, but there aren't that many swollen spots on you."

“The strike itself was like a needle, so it didn’t seem to have much attack power. Many of them didn’t hurt my body.”

"....."

Itachi’s gaze went to the surface of the black water.

"Itachi-san?"

Itachi moved his gaze to ignore Kisame as he tilted his head. Then he found his target in the grass and threw with a kunai with rapid agility.

“...a mouse?”

The kunai had caught a field mouse moving in the grass.

“Surely an enemy’s trap?”

46

"No, it's different." \*

Although its back was damaged, the mouse was still living, and Itachi dropped it into the black water.

The mouse struggled in the water, alarmed, and as made its escape it became wet.

As he looked at it, Kisame also realised what Itachi had seen.

Even now, the rat should be wounded by the black water, but no symptoms appeared.

The poison Kisame received was effective immediately.

In that case, the same symptoms should have appeared in the mouse.

“In that combo jutsu, perhaps the Suiton is pretending to be poisonous but in truth is something different. There must be a trap in that Raiton....”

Itachi was reminded of their words.

Kodaka used Raiton, and said “First One” when it hit.

And Kiiro shouted that the “Second One” was “Last.”

They guessed the secret was hidden there.

“For now, we should rest, Kisame. I tried to use Tsukiyomi on the name called Kiiro, but the cost was great. And if they recover, they’ll aim for *you* again.”

47

“Next time I’ll kill them.”

“Baseless confidence will bring negligence. Like you just a moment ago.”

When he pointed out that he was poisoned and brought to his knees, Kisame cackled and smiled.

“You’re not a talkative person, but you sure have some powerful arguments.”

“I have no intention to argue.”

While giving his brief answer, Itachi's line of sight moved from the black water to Suiton's surroundings.

"....."

There, something caught Itachi's eyes.

This is....

"From now on, shall we chase them, those brothers?"

Itachi was silent as Kisame said such a thing.

"They couldn't have gotten too far away. We'll find them."

Itachi also agreed.

Since Kiroy took on his genjutsu, they would have hidden themselves in a place not too far away to review his condition.

48

Help, Kodaka nisan.....

And if they said they were brothers, to hear his little brother's voice crying out for help, the older brother wouldn't be able to remain calm.

With Itachi's Sharingan, it would take much less time to take out two people.

"....."

However, Itachi trampled on something sinking into the mud as they walked towards a cavern.

"With that condition, you can't fight properly, right?"

"It's not a big deal."

"I thought you were the one who told me before to watch out for cannibalism." \*

".....!"

That was the first time he'd met Kisame.

Kisame had talked about how when sharks young hatch from eggs they cannibalise their fellows, and advised Itachi as a member of Akatsuki to be careful of him.

If he was careless, he would kill him.

So he dared to quote it now.

If he challenged him to battle in an imperfect condition he would weaken, and it may be him that became prey before the Sharingan. \*

"...kuku. In any case, that argument is powerful too."

Kisame's water got quietly drawn into the soil, along with the black water.

49

The moon gradually went to the western sky.

Among the big trees, the sound of the wings of insects and the younger brother's groaning voice could be heard.

Clenching his younger brother's sweaty hand, he continued sending chakra through, searching for his little brother's spirit to reconnect it.

"Kiroy....."

He wondered if they evening would come to an end without him regaining consciousness.

The worst happened, Kiroy's chakra was disturbed.

"...hold on, my brother."

While rebuking himself and waiting for Kiroy to recover, from Kiroy's mouth came the cry of -

"Kodaka....?"

"Kiroy! Your consciousness has returned!"

50

Kihiro scowled loudly, and slowly opened his eyelids.

“Wha- I- I’m holding on....I feel terrible!”

As he awoke, Kihiro swept away his older brother’s hand.

“Shit...”

Kihiro got up holding his forehead, and asked “What happened with Kisame, did you take him down?”

“Ah-no.....for the meantime, we’ve had to draw back....”

At Kodaka’s reply, Kihiro’s eyes rose and twitched.

“You bastard, what the hell were you doing?”

“Grr!” \*

Kihiro’s fist hit Kodaka. Kodaka lost his balance and fell to the bottom of the tree.

As Kihiro jumped down to attack again, the sound of insect wings grew louder.

“Damn it”

Kihiro lowered his swinging fist, and looked at Kodaka in detestation.

“Ki-Kii.....”

His brothers face was full of anger and hatred.

51

“Why were you the first born....on the condition that you were the oldest son, you got the secret jutsu....! If I’d been born first, it would have been for me! Then I’d be able to kill more easily!” \*

“Kodaka....originally, this was for killing people...” \*

“No way! Without that jutsu, there’s no use for a bastard like you!”

Shortly after that shout, Kihiro’s body rocked and swayed. Even though his consciousness had returned, Tsukiyomi’s mental exhaustion is a cruel, intense thing. The technique ended in a moment yet could often deprive all the personality, all the memories of a person.

“Ki-Kihiro, right now your body isn’t-”

“Don’t touch meee!”

Kodaka tried unexpectedly to support his body, and Kihiro removed his hands.

“Hey, let’s stop doing this kind of thing from now on. I responded to the Kirigakure scouts to earn money, but we’ve already caught enough....afterwards, I’ll just go back to the village quietly -”

“Shut up!”

Kihiro’s screams blocked out Kodaka’s words.

52

“You’d abandon our traditions, abandon our journey, just to live like people that wanted to stay in one place! Let’s forget about everything! They tried to throw us to the wolves! Why are you so calm?! I detest you! I *hate* you!”

Kihiro’s eyes glittered with angry light.

“Let’s go back and make our names....for that purpose, those guys are perfect!”

The Swordman of the Seven Shinobi, the Monster of Kirigakure, Hoshigaki Kisame.

Uchiha Itachi, the genius prodigy of the Uchiha Clan who possessed the Sharingan.

Members of the Akatsuki, with international orders to be apprehended. If one took down those two, they would quickly become a hero.

"We'll hit Kisame with the first one! And Uchiha Itachi.....the point is not the look in those eyes! Next time it won't be like this, will it?"

"....Kihiro...."

"As soon as I recover, I'm aiming for both of them! Got that, gutless?!"

Kihiro spat and slowly lay back behind the tree again.

Kodaka listened to the sound of insect wings and looks up at the sky. The moonlight weakened and the eastern sky began to brighten.

Putting his hands on the cheeks that had been beaten by his little brother, Kodaka bit down on his lip.

"I'm so sorry....Oomitsu, Komitsu...."

## PART 2

53

The next morning. He left the cave with Kisame as the sun rose.

"Well well, it was a persistent poison."

While Kisame says it in that manner, if he had been a normal shinobi, it would take a considerable amount of time to recover.

Using the power of others and converting it to chakra for its master, Kisame's condition remained unruined.

"So, don't you think we should search for those brothers? Because it will be bothersome if they return to Kirigakure with this news."

As the two leapt, they ran through the forest with tree branches as footholds.

"Since he took a bite of your Tsukiyomi, I think it'd be impossible for that younger brother to come back."

However, Itachi shook his head.

"No...in some cases, one can recover even without a strong spirit or excellent medical ninjutsu."

"Oh, what is it?" \*

54

"It's called 'love'."\*

As a result, Kisame gave a small, silly laugh for a moment.

"Love...is it? I never thought I'd hear that word from cool-headed you. I didn't think it was so easy to change."

"Granting feelings to other people can have a large influence outside them. My Tsukiyomi is spiritual destruction via genjutsu. Recovery isn't impossible if you can reconnect the spirit." \*

With a strong feeling, your opponent could be saved, but it wasn't feasible without loving affection.

As he listened to that, Kisame murmured "I see."

"Could that be the case with the older brother?"

"It's said it can't be said that there is no possibility.\* There's no evidence to the story. To think Tsukiyomi could be overcome by such a simple technique. However, that means I won't know the result until the end."

At Itachi's reply, Kisame laughed with a sigh.

"You point out the possibilities yourself, but you're also the one who deny it. Itachi-san, your way of thinking is complicated and mysterious as ever." \*

"By the way," Kisame continued.

"When we first met, 'we won't know what kind of person we are until our last moment...' You said that, right? So that means, now, we are in a situation when we don't even know about ourselves. Then, because we don't even know about ourselves, we couldn't expect to understand other people..... Is that what you wanted to say, Itachi-san?"

"Who knows."

"Kuku....You really are cold."

But while saying so, Kisame also looked like he was enjoying himself.

When he thought back, from the beginning, Kisame looked like he respected Itachi.

For Kisame, who in Kirigakure had the exclusive mission of comrade killing, did Itachi's role in executing, in killing, his clan, allow him to feel a sense of fellowship that existed beyond the limits of this place called Akatsuki?

People say you can only understand those with the same pain.

*If*, if Kisame perfectly understood what Itachi was feeling, did Kisame also grieve for his Kirigakure comrades whose blood covered his hands, did he too bear a deep wound to his heart?

No, Itachi denied.

In the end, he wouldn't know what Kisame was thinking. Kisame was walking forward, growing, in his own way. If Itachi said he understood it, it would be called insolence.

56

Besides, in any case, Itachi and Kisame were different.

Forcing his way through the shadows, for Konoha, for his clan, to be their cornerstone, Itachi moved towards his own death, yet Kisame wanted and needed someone to affirm his existence as a man called Hoshigaki Kisame, and while he carried the burden of killing his comrades in the shadows, he looked like one who would keep waiting and wishing to be touched by the light. \*

However, even he must bitterly understand that such a thing was impossible in this world. In that case, where is he advancing to? Is he chasing down another world, trying to step foot in in another domain? Is Akatsuki such a place?

In the end, it was nothing more than a fantasy. He wouldn't know until the moment he greets death.

For now, finding those brothers was Itachi's mission within Akatsuki.

Akatsuki didn't give out deep information until they obtained a certain trust and reliability of their members.

In order to prevent Akatsuki from handling Konoha, Itachi had to be the sole, easy frame for the Akatsuki. \*

'Brothers,' the world has a sorrowful ring for Itachi.

".....wait."

57

Exploring his surroundings with the Sharingan, Itachi moved forward, but something stopped his field of vision.

"Did you find those brothers?"

"No, it's different."

Itachi tracked it, masking his presence so avoid stimulating it. Kisame copied him, and as he followed carefully afterwards he noticed it too.

"Bees, is it?"

Yes, there's a single bee flying before Itachi. A poisonous bee. Not only that.

"There's something white on their feet, isn't there?"

On the bee's feet was a thin paper bill.

"When searching for the hive of poisonous bees, you lure them in the the stench of dead flesh, and butcher the poison bees once they've grabbed onto the meat."

It was an old fashioned method.

"And then you track them as they're forced to return to the nest? But for what purpose?"

"In order to exterminate the poisonous bees that sting people, as well as to eat the poison bee and their larvae."

58

“Come to think of it, a bee’s young are high in protein, aren’t they?”

Securing food during a mission was an important mission for shinobi. They prepared emergency provisions, but there were cases where the local procurement was not enough. In those cases, insects were also used as food. If the shinobi possessed the knowledge of eating insects, that is.

“Although it’d be nicer to have crab or shrimp, don’t you think?”

“Taste is secondary.” \*

“Don’t you really like kombu rice balls?”

“Now I may like that sort of thing” \*

The poisonous bees steadily advance.

The activity of the bees should have been about one old league (3.9km) around the nest. But they were already moving three leagues away. \*

This inconsistency made Itachi remember one thing. The thing that had been sinking into the mud when Kisame was attacked last night.

It was those same poisonous bees.

Itachi took out a kunai and moved forward without affecting the bees. Then, focusing both eyes, he cut the piece of paper from the closest bee.

Although the bee swung around as if surprised by the weight’s disappearance, it flew off straight ahead again.

Itachi detached the paper and spread it carefully.

“It looks unmarked, but this is....”

At first glance it looked normal paper, but they sensed a small amount of chakra.

“Itachi-san, may I borrow that for a moment?”

When it was delivered to Kisame, he held it securely in his thumb and poured chakra into it.

“!”

Thereupon, letters came up on the paper.

“...long ago, I was an ‘escort’ for the Cypher Division....I saw a kunoichi there handling special papers like this.” \*

The floating letters formed words, and spun into sentences.

There was written ----- *My thoughts for my family*

60

*How long have we left the village for your sake?*

*Maybe this will be the last letter.*

*Keep your bodies healthy and sound.*

*Even though we're far away, we're watching over you*

\*

“....it seems to be addressed to their family.”

As Kisame said what it was, Itachi stared in the direction that the bee disappeared.

“In Konoha, there’s a family of bug users called the Aburame Clan.” \*

“The Aburame Clan....I’ve heard of them. The ones who lend their bodies to bugs at birth, and are then able to freely control them by continuing to feed them their chakra?”

“Uh huh,” Itachi nodded.

“They’re different from the bugs that the Aburame clan uses, but that poisoned bee also listened to its master’s orders, and seemed to be flying to pass the letter to their family. And then there’s there’s the bees I saw dying in the muddy water last night.”

“Bees?”

Bees were mainly active during the day. At night, they returned to their hive to rest. Therefore, Itachi found it suspicious.

“Perhaps the brothers are manipulating poisonous bees like the Aburame do.”

At Itachi’s guess, Kisame stroked his chin with his hand.

“That reminds me, the symptoms of the poison resembled a bee sting. Then the ‘First One’...”

“When humans are strung by a bee, their allergy to the poison causes a fever. People who receive a lot of antibodies may develop serious symptoms when stung again by the bees.”

“First One” could have been an attack that left the antibody in their opponents’ bodies.

Then, Kihiro had shouted "Second One, the Last one" -----

"If you're stung again by those brothers' poisonous bees, it's possible you could die."

At Itachi's words, Kisame gasped, then snorted with laughter.

"Then it'll be okay if I stop their attacks? Afterall, living next to death is our everyday life, isn't it?"

He'd thought he'd say that. Such was the shinobi way. Itachi gave a small laugh and moved his eyes from the direction the bee had left, and this time to the direction from where it had flown. Those brothers should be there.

62

Itachi grasped the letter that the brothers addressed to their family.

"Let's go."

"Awww."

---He shouldn't have written such a letter, he should have taken his little brother and escaped quickly.

### PART 3

The stars shone by the time they found the poisonous bees.

Itachi found an enormous tree in the forest, and it was confirmed by the appearance of the poisonous trees flying around it. When it came into his sight, Kisame grinned.

".....Kihiro! It's them!"

However, the poisonous bees that had been flying around were lookouts on watch, and Kodaka, sitting on their roots, was alerted.

"Seems like the Raiton-using older brother is the bee user, doesn't it?"

Kihiro jumped out of the tree and tried to make hand seals in panic.

"Oops, sorry, but I don't think so."

Kisame aimed for Kihiro's sealing hands with Samehada.

"Bzzzz"

Although it barely got him, blood was shaved from his hands as his chakra was stolen.

“That might be for the thorough beating you gave me yesterday “

“Kiiro!”

"Go ahead! Prepare quickly! .....Suiton: Water Bullet Jutsu!"

Kiiro, who had flown backwards, remade his seals, and spit water towards the heavens.

It rained like yesterday, but the amount was overwhelming less than the water yesterday.

“Son of a bitch, there’s barely any water, but it can’t be helped....Kodakaa, let’s go! Second Last One!”

“R-right....”

The two made seals the same way as last night, that collaboration jutsu.

“Come on, Kisame.”

“I won’t be swallowed up by the same jutsu twice. First off....shall we have a suiton match?”

Kisame made hand seals to counter Kiiro.

64

On the other hand, Itachi saw Kodaka was going to activate his Raiton. A large amount of light surrounded Kodaka.

Itachi stared into the light and charged a lot of power into his eyes.

----that is.....

Thereupon, in the light some shadows could be seen. As he looked further, he grasped that it was the poisonous bees.

Furthermore, he could sense more of them wriggling within Kodaka’s coat. Not only in his coat, but in his body.

“Let’s go, Suiton: Angry Bitter Rain-”

While looking at Kodaka, Kiiro chanted his jutsu and tried to cover Kisame with the black, discoloured water.

“Suiton: Water Shark Bullet Jutsu!”

Then, Kisame’s Water Shark Bomb in the form of a shark devoured the Angry Bitter Rain.

“My Angry Bitter Rain....!”

The shark that had swallowed the Angry Bitter Rain changed to the black, discoloured water, and turned to Kiiro.

“Gyah-!”

Kiiro was directly eaten upright and blown from the tree while making signs.\*

“Ki-Kiiro.....! Shit, Raiton: Electric Shock Needles!”

Despite having his brother on his mind, there was a momentary gap between Kisame releasing his jutsu, and Kodaka’s uses that jutsu’s problem.

The glowing grains of light leapt towards Kisame, becoming thin needles at once.

This time it was Itachi who performed hand seals, bringing chakra from his belly to his cheeks.

“Suiton: Starch Syrup Capturing Field!” \*

He kneaded a large amount of chakra into water and let it stick like starch syrup, as the name suggested, to Kodaka’s Raiton.

Kodaka’s lightning stroke, which had poor capacity to kill, ran out of chakra before passing through Itachi’s Starch Syrup Capturing Field.

Itachi’s Suiton fell to the ground with its stickiness maintained. The poison bees captured amongst it were unable to move.

“My....my bees....”

As the jutsu broke, Kodaka’s face was pale.

“Your younger brother’s Angry Bitter Rain is a trap to take away vision. Your Raiton, so to speak, is an attack with poisonous bees, wearing your chakra and moving at the same speed as your Raiton. This causes your opponent to have an allergic reaction to the bee’s poisonous antibodies. First of all, this is the First One.

66

Itachi explained the mystery of the bees captured in his Suiton.

“But your opponent thinks the cause of the poisoning is the Angry Bitter Rain. Even if you assume it’s not the Angry Bitter Rain, the next thing to doubt is the Raiton jutsu. As a result, they’re not aware of the existence of the poisonous bees, and are pierced by the Second One, causing shock symptoms and dead...am I wrong?” \*

The poisonous bees twitched, gradually losing their power. With his jutsu discovered, Kodaka strengthened his expression.

“Speaking of which Itachi-san, I thought you used Katon, but wasn’t that Suiton?”

“There was a person in Konoha who used this technique, which is essentially sprinkling the ground and stopping the enemy, but is perfect for capturing insects.”

Using insightfulness to calmly analyse information. That was another of Itachi’s strengths.

Itachi’s eyes also saw through Kodaka’s jutsu from their original scene.

It wasn’t a jutsu used for fighting.

“I’m scared, that, this good for nothing....!”

Then Kihiro, who was blown away Kisame’s attack, appeared. Although his internal organs were shocked and he bled from his mouth, he hadn’t given up on the fight.

“If we defeat these guys, our names will echo through time as shinobi! Kodaka, get serious, hit them with the Second One!”

“Kihiro! It’s impossible. We can’t be enemies with such people. In general, this technique ---”

Itachi took over Kodaka’s words.

“When in danger, it’s a jutsu for escaping, don’t you agree?”

At Itachi’s words, Kodaka firmly closed his eyes.

“Yes we caaan, you bastard! There are no options to get away and escape! Kill them with full power!”

At his younger brothers urging voice, had Kodaka decided on his resolution, had he given up again? He flung off his heavy coat.

On the surface of Kodaka’s body, a violent gang of poison appeared, scrabbling. The poison bees who felt the strangeness left Kodaka and leapt away fiercely.

“Your words are right. We were a clan who originally made a living as beekeepers. The clan travelled, seeking flowers for honey and travelling with the season, but the dangers of travel were always there. To protect the clan, our Bee Department handed down a secret jutsu. It seems other clans use bees, but the secret of our Bee Department is our own secret jutsu created for self defense. “ \*

They protected their lives by following poisonous bees.

“Hmpf...there’s a story we were descended from the bug-using Aburame Clan, but the secret of the Bee Department is a single brotherhood. The poisonous bees are transmitted only through the eldest child, and the second child uses ninjutsu to protect the firstborn.”

Kihiro looks at the poisonous bees as he spoke so daringly.

“But if that’s the case, why aren’t you beside your clan? If it’s inherited secretly, a substitute won’t work. “ \*

Kihiro gave Kisame a bewildered look and shook his fist.

“Our clan harvested honey while taking risks, and it was high quality enough to be used in medicine too! But our clan was afraid of danger, stopped traveling, made a village and tried to settle down....” \*

“And the clan also threw away beekeeping.” \*

When he heard that, Itachi immediately sympathised. Those who’d sought and what they feared.

“The clan forgot the dangers and came to be afraid of the power of the Bee Department! Yet for generation after generation, the Bee Department kept on protecting the clan!

69

Strong powers were abhorred. Even with Itachi, even with Kisame, it wasn’t a long story.

“After our parents died, I got stronger contacts called poison bees, and Kihiro bore learning ninjutsu. It won’t get you a job, even in the village. And we have brothers below us. We have to feed our brothers....”

The letter they found earlier was probably what Kodaka had addressed to his brothers.

“At that time, Kirigakure shinobi who heard of our secret jutsu came as scouts. We left the village, and started doing a variety of duties.”

“The world of shinobi has no justice....! If you have power you’re recognised, and you can do anything with that power! There’s a big difference from the village’s trash.”

At Kiiri’s words, Kodaka’s expression clouded over. Kiiri didn’t notice Kodaka.

“This pointless story is over, Kodaka, don’t forget - !”

Were Kodaka’s intentions there? Sorrow drifted across his face, and he stretched both hands.

“...let’s go!”

70

“Suiton: Starch Syrup Capturing Field!”

As before, he uses Starch Syrup Capturing Field, but the number of poisonous bees are wrong. The bees slipped past and aimed at Itachi and Kisame.

“Kisame, use your water prison jutsu for a moment!”

“I don’t being in defense, but I guess there’s no other waaay...Water Prison Jutsu!”

Originally, the Water Prison was a jutsu to keep enemies in the water. But Kisame puts it on himself. \*

“Damn it...”

Poisonous bees fainted on their way through the water, unable to swim.

With Kisame’s body wrapped in the Water Prison, he hadn’t received any bee attacks at all.

While glancing to the side, Itachi leapt away.

His hand seals were that of Katon.

Although it would have been preferable to use it on Kodaka, the original operator, Itachi caught Kiiri, who bellowed at Kodaka to “Do something!”

These brotherly things, he understood painfully.

“Katon: Great Fireball Jutsu!”

The Uchiha Clan's speciality, the Great Fireball Jutsu. A scorching flame headed towards Kiiro.

71

Seeing that he was the one being targetted, Kiiro stared at the flame in dumbfounded defeat.

".....! Kiiro!"

Kodaka leapt faster than the flame could bake Kiiro. His hand stretched out and thrust Kiiro's body away.

" - GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!"

The flames burnt brightly. Kodaka's body burned.

"Ko-Kodaka...."

Kiiro couldn't sit on the ground and do nothing.

As the flames threw up over everything and burnt the trees around them, Kodaka appeared.

His skin had broken down, and his body gave off the awful speed of burnt meat. Still, he stood on two legs.

"Did the poison bees protect him?"

There was nothing left of their burnt forms, but it seemed that the poisonous bees near Kodaka had tried to protect him.

Kodaka attracted the remaining bees to surrender their last power.

Protected by Kisame's water prison, his hand couldn't reach them.

And he hadn't even hit Itachi with the First One yet.

72

Although neither victory nor defeat had occurred, a strong will stayed in Kodaka's eyes.

This would be his final defeat. So Itachi wouldn't miss any of his moves, he opened his eyes.

".....attack....!"

Moving with the screams, the poison bees flew to the sky at Kodaka's will? Itachi or Kisame? The answer was neither.

"Huh, wha, hey, hey-!"

The bees headed for his younger brother, Kiiro. Then, they all stabbed him at once.

Although Kiiro cried out at the sharp pain, the poisonous bees ruthlessly pursued him and stabbed him many times.

“What does he mean to do?”

Kisame watched the unexpected developments wide eyed in amazement. Kodaka sat on the spot and gave an ugly laugh as he watched his brother suffer.

“Why, we can’t win against them.....therefore, I can fulfill my wish.”

His wish? Kodaka nodded at Itachi’s question, and approached Kiiro’s side, which had been hit by so many bees he couldn’t move.

73

“I really didn’t want to be a shinobi....I didn’t want to kill people.....even if it’s overflowing with discrimination and prejudice, even if you’re poor, if you continue to carry on with beekeeping, everyone in your family can do it....so....Kiiro...!”

As he approached Kiiro, Kodaka took out a kunai.

“Kiiro....! Kiiro, you took away everything from me....! You hated me Kiiro, but I hated you more Kiiro - ! We can’t run anymore, but if you’ll die here, it’ll be by hands - ”

Kodaka’s hands holding the kunai greatly shook.

“The fate of the cursed poisonous bees, I’ll end the bee department....” \*

Kodaka stabbed the kunai into Kiiro’s bee covered body.

“Ko-Kodaka....nisan....”

“It’s all right....I’ll die with you as well....”

And Kiiro used the kunai he’d stabbed Kiiro with to stab his own heart.

“Even so, I - you and....and our other brothers too....love you....”

His body collapsed over Kiiro, and the poisonous bees crawled over their skin.

74

“Things sure get of hand when loving affection turns to hatred in brotherhood, don’t they?” \*  
Kisame muttered as he stopped the water prison. The words were directed to the brothers of the Bee Department, but for some reason they stabbed in Itachi as well.

Had there been any other way?

It was so easy for people to say that. But when pursued, a person's choices became extremely small.

"...if we stay here any more, we could get stung - the bees are agitated. Let's go."

"Aww."

He quietly turned his back and put the two figures who'd stopped moving out of his mind's eye.

It was his own little brother, Sasuke, that crossed his mind.

Was that the place Itachi truly imagined for him at the end of his hatred?

However, he denied the thought.

Sasuke was a gentle child. Amazingly innocent, too soon dyed in the colour of a heavy weight of a human being.

It made the heart weak and extinguished the mind.

So black, black and dark, the bewildering darkness of hatred.

In this world where battle continued, the Uchiha's blood, so easily exposed to despair, had to use their strength to win in order for the pupil to survive.

75

-----Sasuke.

He was prepared to die and give him everything. Waiting for him to overcome him.

If there was one thing he regretted.

Like Kodaka, to die without telling his true feelings.

---You too....and my other brothers too....love you.

He didn't know if Kiros heard him, but he was confident that he did in this world.

For Itachi, who held everything in his heart, he envied him.

In his final moments, what would he talk about? Then again, he wouldn't know until the second of his death.

FIN

## EPILOGUE SUMMARY AND CLOSING WORDS

As Sasuke rests with Komitsu and Omitsu, Kiiro returns after what seems like almost a decade - Kodaka does not. \* Sasuke muses how Akatsuki started as something good and turned into something evil, but that their names will never die.

And it ends like this:

“The Akatsuki too had family.  
The Akatsuki too loved.  
They too were shinobi, they too were human.”

## chapter2: hidan and kakuzo

“...hey, come on, give me a break already.”

The wind from the valley floor rose and flowed through the forests, raising a cool, refreshing breeze. Surrounded by mountains in all directions, and far away from villages... This was the perfect place to relax.

But to a follower of the Jashin faith, to one who sought out slaughter to make sacrifices to Lord Jashin, Hidan was bored to tears by this place. When he remembered that the reason they were here was to make money, Akatsuki's rules be damned, he wanted to kill his partner.

Then again, even if he were to kill his partner, the dude just wouldn't die. The same went for himself. It'd just be a meaningless fight.

“Seriously, I've got commandments to stick to. Let's get the hell out of this boring ass forest so I can kill something,” Hidan, who'd grudgingly placed himself in the organization known as “Akatsuki”, complained to the man walking in front of him, and the man he'd partnered up with in Akatsuki: Kakuzu.

“The man at the exchange point said there's a 1.5 billion ryo bounty in these forests. He doesn't lie, not when it comes to money.”

Of course, Kakuzu would have liked to believe that his information was credible. But, to Hidan, it didn't matter either way.

After all, to a religious follower shaped by his faith, attachment to money was a huge taboo. On the other hand, Kakuzu frequently commented that money was the only thing anyone could believe in. One could say he and Hidan were the perfect example of complete opposites.

A tree stump caught Hidan's eye, and he sat down on it with a bored look on his face. It must've been a big tree, for the tree stump was large enough for two people to lie down on.

"I'm done with walking around in circles. I still gotta pray for repentance for not doing a ritual today. If you're gonna look for the bounty, you're doing it solo, Kakuzu, because I ain't taking another step."

Hidan took out his necklace with the symbol of the Jashin faith.

"You and your prayers..." Kakuzu muttered with distaste while eyeing the tree stump Hidan was sitting on.

Something was out of place.

"...it's so simple, we missed it."

"Hm? Whassat?"

"There's someone in the area. You can tell from just looking."

"the fuck?"

They were surrounded by steep mountains and forests spreading out as far as the eye could see. There were probably no humans in these lands anymore, just wild animals. Hidan'd already whined countless times to Kakuzu that there was no way there were people here.

But then Kakuzu jutted his chin towards the tree stump Hidan was sitting on, and said, "That tree stump wasn't naturally formed by lightning or by being struck. A person cut it."

Hidan turned to look at the tree stump he was sitting upon. Its surface was completely flat and smooth.

"Well, yeah, I guess so..." Hidan would concede that, but that alone wasn't enough to entirely convince him that someone was here. "Someone probably cut it a super long time ago. Like, maybe they wanted to build a chair or something, yanno?"

"Perhaps, but this cutting work looks new."

"Huh? Well, sure, I guess... But, come on!"

In any case, Hidan simply wanted rid of this forest, as quickly as possible.

"We've come this far and the fucker's still no where to be found! Unless he comes to us instead, we're never gonna find him!"

Just give it up, Hidan. Kakuzu plans to continue his search.

Suddenly, an unfamiliar man's voice rang out: "W-Who the hell are you guys?!"

The two of them tensed and, when they looked towards the voice, they saw a middle-aged man.

Kakuzu never let his feelings show, but the moment he saw the man's face, Hidan could tell Kakuzu was immediately in a better mood. "It seems he has indeed come to us."

"Wait, seriously, that's the fucker?!"

Now Kakuzu wasn't the only one with lifted spirits.

"Fuck yeeeeeeah! Lord Jashin! I'll finally be able to conduct a ritual!"

It was the first time they'd run into a person in days. Hidan'd been holding his necklace in his fist to confess his sins, but changing his prayer to one for conducting rituals instead, he swiftly rose from the tree stump.

"Didn't you say you weren't going to take another step today."

"Fuck that, I can conduct a ritual! If I don't do this properly, Lord Jashin will remove his blessings from me. And if that ever happens, if my bond with Lord Jashin ever fades, I don't know what I'd do..."

"...I don't get all these religious values, but I do understand that because you've been jabbering on and on, our 1.5 billion ryo bounty is getting away."

It was as Kakuzu said; all they saw was the other man's back facing them as he ran away as fast he could.

"We finally find him, and he runs. I'm going to kill him."

"Fuck you; I already said I'm going to kill him! Don't you dare move from that spot!" Hidan yelled, pointing at the tree stump.

Kakuzu crossed his arms, looking weary. "...Hidan. Don't get ahead of yourself. You'll die."

"Like you need to remind me!" Hidan, grinning, kicked himself off of the ground.

In a single moment, he'd closed the distance between himself and the bounty, and he swung down his three-bladed scythe. "Take that!"

The blades grazed the man, and blood splattered. However, it wasn't a fatal wound.

The man, now realising he had no chance of getting away, turned around, ready to form hand seals. "Damn it! Guess I'll have to engage..."

But then the man paused, when he saw Hidan laughing away madly.

Hidan retrieved another weapon from within his robe. It looked like a normal rod, but after flinging it up and down, its tip extended and it became a sharp spear.

“Lord Jashin! Let me prove my faith!”

Hidan then plunged his newly-extended spear tip into his own palm. Watching this sudden unexpected display, the bounty’s eyes went wide like saucers.

“Ugh...” Hidan removed the weapon from his palm, and his blood spilled out over the ground. He drew the symbol of the Jashin faith with it.

Hidan stood in the center of this symbol and brought his blood-stained scythe to himself and licked the bounty’s blood off of it. In doing so, patterns resembling a skeleton rose to the surface of his body. “Everything’s in place.... Hahahahaha! Lord Jashin must be fucking pleased right now!”

Hidan was at his peak. He couldn’t stand it. In a few moments, the grandest pain of all time would be inflicted upon this body of his.

“Let’s begin!!”

And then, Hidan pierced himself through the heart.

The man, bewildered by Hidan’s actions, couldn’t comprehend what was happening, but felt an incredible surge of pain run through him, and he spat blood out from his mouth.

“...this feels... so... damn... good...!”

It was the first taste of death Hidan had had in a while. The euphoria ruled over his entire body. And, the bounty, unable to do anything, fell to his death.

The only thing left in the area was Hidan’s haggard breathing.

But then, a new unfamiliar voice rang out, “That’s... That’s amazing...”

Hidan had been enjoying the pain of death at its finest, hellbent on eating up every single last bit of it, when he was pulled back to reality. “Who the fuck is that?! Don’t interrupt, dammit!”

Alertness and irritation clear in his eyes, Hidan sought out the source of the voice. As soon as he had found it, he felt the physical effects of his ritual begin to take place, and he grew weak.

He’d been the first one to claim that there was no way there was anyone in these woods, but there was a young teenage boy looking over at him from within the shadows of the trees. And, he looked happy.

He must’ve been playing with the dirt or something, for he was clutching mud balls.

“Who the fuck are you?” Hidan tilted his head to one side without really thinking about it.

“...what’s the matter, Hidan. Aren’t you done with your ritual yet.”

Kakuzu, who’d been waiting at the tree stump, noticed that Hidan was moving strangely, and he approached.

“I haven’t even started yet, dammit! But, hey, there’s a brat over there.”

Hidan pointed at the boy peering out from the shadows of the trees, but Kakuzu kept looking Hidan.

“Hidan, even if it is a child, don’t let your guard down... You’ll die.”

“If he could kill me, I’d let him. D’you really think a kid like him could take me out, anyway?!”  
Hidan grabbed his scythe once more. “In any case, shall we just kill him?”

It was clear that Hidan was eager to clean this place up as soon as possible, but the kid did not attempt to run. In fact, he simply looked flushed with happiness.

“...wait, Hidan. This is an interesting brat.”

Curious, Kakuzu stopped Hidan from raising his scythe.

“Well, yeah, I guess so...”

Upon seeing the scythe lowered, the boy raised his hand, leaned forward and called out, “Hey! What was that move you used? Doesn’t it hurt?”

“What? Of course it friggin’ hurts. It ain’t just as painful as death; it’s death itself.”

“Death itself... To kill your opponent, you must taste death yourself... You carve your opponent’s death upon your own body... That’s so cool!”

Looking at the gleeful boy, Hidan then turned to Kakuzu and said, “That kid’s fucked up.”

“I think you’re fucked up too.”

“the fuck you just say?!” Hidan raised his voice without thinking, and the boy began to ask more questions.

“Isn’t the pain of death unbearable? Aren’t you scared?”

“Huh? I’m a follower of the Jashin faith, kid. Lord Jashin watches over me and protects me. Once you get that, there ain’t nothing to fear no more, seriously.”

“Jashin faith... Lord Jashin...” The boy repeated these words to himself over and over again. Then, as though he’d found an answer, he jerked his head up. “Hey! I wanna join the Jashin faith too! How do I do that?”

At these unexpected words, Kakuzu muttered, "What an idiot."

"Hey, what the fuck is that supposed to mean?! The Jashin faith is the best, and it's the one and only true religion in the world! Of course people would want to join it!"

Just mere seconds ago, Hidan had called the kid fucked up, but he took personal insult at Kakuzu's comment and he just had to object.

"Yeah! That's right! Of course people want to join it!" The kid joined in on the shouting, agreeing with Hidan.

"The only thing you can believe in is money," Kakuzu repeated his mantra. Then, he asked the boy, "You, what's your name?"

It was rare for Kakuzu to ask people for their names.

"I'm called Hohozuki!"

Hohozuki. Hidan looked at the boy again. This boy was charming in every way. However, this was Hidan, who was unperturbed even in the faces of the people he killed for his rituals. But, the boy did say he wanted to join the Jashin faith, and that sent Hidan reeling.

An increase in the number of Jashin followers was a joyous event. If this kid was for real, he would have to be taught everything in detail, from the wonderful teachings of the religion's origins to the its strict commandments.

But for now...

"I've gotta finish my prayers for this kill. We'll talk after."

Hidan then lied down upon the mark of the Jashin faith, which he'd previously drawn with his own blood.

"A Jashin ritual... I'll observe from right here!"

Hohozuki left some distance between himself and Hidan, and then sat down, sitting up straight. The proper posture for observation.

"Make it quick. Your prayers are excessively long."

"There's no concept of long or short when it comes to prayers! It's just bad karma, seriously."

"So ya see, killing is the basis of the Jashin faith. "Thou shalt slaughter thy neighbor", "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, rip their hearts out from the left of their bodies". And there other exemplary sayings like..."

After the, as Kakuzu put it, “excessively long” ritual had ended, and the unique markings on Hidan’s body had disappeared, Hidan, with passion blazing in his eyes, began preaching the teachings of the Jashin faith to Hohozuki, who had watched over Hidan the entire ritual.

“Um, killing people actually saves them, right? But, do I need to be strong to kill people?”

“Damn right. Otherwise you’d get killed instead and you wouldn’t be able to spread the grand teachings of the Jashin faith to the rest of the world. I was granted immortality, upon the multitudes of sacrifices we followers had made, so we could keep the teachings of the Jashin faith going forever.”

It’d been a long time since Hidan had spoken about the doctrines of the Jashin faith. As he continued speaking, he got increasingly fired up. But, there was someone who was getting increasingly cold.

“...I’m sick of listening to you two talk. Give it a rest already.”

Kakuzu had tossed the corpse of the bounty to the foot of the tree stump and had sat down on it himself. He’d shut up and ignored the conversation taking place, but was finally complaining.

“Fuck you! How many days did you make me tag along with you on this little side job? This ain’t shit compared to that! Besides, you’ve already gotten what you wanted!” Hidan yelled, pointing at the corpse.

At that, Kakuzu shook his head. “This guy’s family’s got bounties, too.”

“the fuck you mean...?”

“You’re slow on the uptake... I’m saying we have to look for this guy’s family, too.”

“...the fuck?!”

Hidan had thought the only thing left for them do was get out of the forest, but apparently the game was going into extra innings.

“You can’t be fucking serious! We took a fuck-lot number of days just to find this fucker! I ain’t walking around no more!” Hidan wanted out, out of this damned forest in which he could barely conduct a decent ritual.

“You’re an idiot,” Kakuzu said.

“Who the fuck you calling an idiot!?”

“The fact that the bounty was here, means his nest is close.”

“Nest?”

“He probably lives someplace near here. There’s a high chance his family will be there.”

And then, Kakuzu looked at Hohozuki.

“Hey, kid. Where’d you come from?”

“Huh? Me?”

“There’s no way a kid like you would be living alone here, in a forest so deep within the mountains. Is there a hidden village in these parts?”

Hohozuki hesitated, his eyes shifting from side to side. But when Hidan asked, “Well?”, he nodded, honest.

“Yes, there is... It’s the village I’m from... It’s right over there,” Hohozuki said, pointing his finger in the direction of the village. It was the same direction Hidan and Kakuzu had come from.

“What? We came from there, and there wasn’t no village.”

“But, but, but there is!”

It didn’t appear as though he was lying. When Hidan turned his confused eyes to Kakuzu, Kakuzu grabbed the corpse lying at his feet and lifted it up, revealing the corpse’s face, stained with dirt and blood.

“Was he from that village too?”

Hohozuki did not shy away from the corpse, but instead neared it to confirm the bounty’s identity.

His narrowed his eyebrows, squinted his big eyes, and thought long and hard. But, in the end, he simply cocked his head in puzzlement.

“Um, I think he might be from the village... I don’t remember seeing him around, though.”

“Is the village that big?”

“No, not at all. Generally speaking, I know the faces of all the villagers. If this man was in the village, I’d know him too, but...”

He knew the faces of the villagers, and he believed this man was from the village as well, but could not remember him. Hohozuki was contradicting himself. The existence of the village, in the first place, was highly suspicious. Hohozuki could probably understand that much.

“Um, if you want to go to the village, I’ll guide you there!”

It seemed he was trying to dispel that suspicion.

“Aight.”

Hidan was all for giving it a quick look, but Kakuzu was cautious.

“This bounty of ours... You’ve witnessed us killing him—him, a man from your own village. And you know we plan to kill his family as well. Why, would you still help us?”

“Well, because! I wanna join the Jashin faith! To be honest, I’ve never really liked that village anyway...”

Hohozuki was holding some mud balls and he was fiddling with them restlessly.

“So you hate your village, eh?”

“Yeah... Actually, my village has these shared beliefs that are a lot like religion.”

“Shared beliefs?”

“Wipe out the past, live in happiness; that’s the basis of it. To forget everything that’s not happy. To love peace, to change this place into paradise on earth.”

“Huh, I see. Matches up pretty well with my own religion, huh.”

“Yeah, exactly!” Hohozuki piped up at Hidan’s words. “It was a friend who told me to live there, so I put up with it for his sake. But when I saw you, Hidan-san, living the way you did even with the pain of death carved on your body, it hit me! That I want to live the same way you do! So, please, believe me!”

Hohozuki stared Hidan straight in the eye.

“...first, we’ll have you bring us to the village. We’ll believe you after that,” Kakuzu said from the side, and Hohozuki nodded.

With the tree stump as the start point, the young boy started walking south.

“What’re we gonna do, Kakuzu?” Hidan asked Kakuzu, sounding less than excited, as they followed behind Hohozuki.

“We’ve come this far. We’re going to collect all the money we can get.”

“Ugh, it’s always money, money, money, with you!”

Was there really a village up ahead, as Hohozuki had said. And would the family Kakuzu was targeting be there.

Hidan was completely uninterested in money, but if there was a village there, he’d be able to conduct a massacre.

These past few days, he'd only repented and confessed his sins, without offering any sacrifices to Lord Jashin. If he could make up for that now, that would be good enough for Hidan.

"...we're here," Hohozuki said, presenting them a steep cliff.

If one were to peek past the cliff, they'd be able to see the running river beneath it. The river had probably formed this cliff over time.

The winds blowing from the valley were strong, and would occasionally bring the water from the beneath the cliff into the forest.

"...there's no fucking way there's a village here, dammit!" Hidan yelled without thinking.

"But, there is!" Hohozuki said.

He showed Hidan and Kakuzu the mud balls he was holding, and then threw them as hard as he could towards the opposite mountain.

"What're ya doing?"

They strained their eyes to follow the little mud balls, and then they hit the opposite mountain... not.

"Holy shit, they disappeared?!"

At the same moment the mud balls were to hit the opposite mountain, they disappeared from sight.

"Pfft, an illusion..." Kakuzu began looking at his surroundings most pointedly, thinking he had it all figured out.

"Hey, Kakuzu, what the hell is doing on, seriously!"

"It would seem that while our guards were down, we got ourselves caught in an illusion. Because of that, the only thing we can see there is a mountain."

Right then, the strong winds from the valley floors began to rise.

As they were standing at the edge of a cliff, when the water from the river joined in the wind, its mist touched their cheeks. Kakuzu snorted and then whispered to himself, "So this is the source."

"Will you tell me what the fuck's going on!?"

"Um, when the river water rises, a fragrance that causes illusions wafts up from the river bed. The fragrance also has a relaxing effect, so it makes you think the forest air is cool and refreshing, rendering you oblivious to the fact that you're in an illusion."

Now that he thought about it, the atmosphere in the area did feel almost too perfect. Kakuzu immediately formed a hand seal.

“Release!”

Dispelling the illusion, Kakuzu looked at the mountain once more, and a look of understanding came over his face. “So that’s what it was…”

“Kakuzu! Let me see it too!” Hidan complained almost desperately.

“Release the illusion yourself,” Kakuzu growled, but still did release the illusion for Hidan.

“...whoa...” Hidan gasped at the sight.

There was a gargantuan hole dug in half-way up the mountain, and there were houses lined up in that hole.

There was a strange feel to the place that would make Deidara, another Akatsuki member, who thought of nothing but art, want to bomb it straight away if he were ever to see it.

“The village people call it “Shangri-la”...”

Hohozuki had been so bubbly, but as he looked at the village, his eyes turned dark and muddled. Hidan didn’t really care either way.

“The bounty’s family might be there, huh. What’re we gonna do, Kakuzu. We gon’ kill everyone?”

If Hidan and Kakuzu had each other, they’d face absolutely no trouble destroying a village of that size and scale. But Kakuzu didn’t want that.

“These are quite the special circumstances... We explore the city, find what we’re looking for, and leave with minimal damage.”

“What, can ya follow the scent of money?”

“...more or less.”

Hidan had been ready to go in there guns blazing, but if they were going to have to go undercover instead, he’d have to put off his rituals as well. His mood immediately soured.

“Um, the village people have a firm grasp of who’s who in the village. If you go in there looking like that, you’ll give yourselves away, I think,” Hohozuki said to Kakuzu, sounding worried.

“I suppose that would be the case, since the village is avoiding the public eye...”

“What do we do, Kakuzu.”

Hidan was about to propose simply going in there and killing everyone after all, but then Hohozuki jumped into the conversation with an, “um, well...”.

“If you want, you can use the transformation technique and turn into me. You’d be safe that way,” Hohozuki said, pointing at his own face.

Upon hearing those words, Kakuzu hummed to himself, and then formed hand seals.

Not a hair was out of place; they looked exactly the same. No one would know which was the real one, even if they stood side-by-side.

“Kakuzu, what ‘bout me?”

“You’re not fit for undercover jobs... You wait here.”

Hidan had figured it’d probably be that way. He pouted, bored already.

“Um, the make of the village is pretty complicated, so you’ll get lost if you don’t have a guide. When you enter the village, further back you’ll see a tree pillar. Please make your way there. And then, a friend of mine, “Ameyuki”, should come by. And then—”

Hohozuki squatted down and began gathering dirt, kneading and molding it. In a matter of seconds, he had a large mud ball, and he passed it to Kakuzu.

“If you give this Ameyuki, I think things will go well.”

Kakuzu had no idea what this mud ball was or what it was for, but took it anyway.

“And? Where’s the entrance to the village?”

It appeared that even getting into the village, half-way down the mountain, would be difficult as well.

“You jump.”

A primitive method.

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

“If we made a road into the village, other people would notice it, and it’d be easy for them to invade us, so we didn’t make one. Everyone from the village is a ninja anyway, so they can jump in pretty easily.”

“What, so you’re a ninja too?”

Hohozuki really didn't look like one, but he rubbed his two dirt-stained hands and nodded repeatedly.

"Hidan, watch over him. I'll be back."

If there was no other way into the village, he'd had no choice but to jump. Kakuzu kicked himself off the cliff, taking a giant leap. He took the exact same path as the mud balls Hohozuki had previously thrown at the opposite mountain.

"He's lived a long time, man, so he's pretty handy, that Kakuzu."

Kakuzu landed perfectly, and went straight towards the village, disappearing into the hole without so much as a wave back to them.

"That's that. Guess I'm on stand-by. This sucks."

"Um, if you want, could you tell me more about the Jashin faith?" Hohozuki asked, rubbing his neck.

Since joining the Akatsuki, Hidan had been surrounded by atheists. Even if he were to talk about the Jashin faith, his words would fall on deaf ears.

"Well, you leave me no choice! Now, you see, about the Jashin faith—"

"...what unique structures."

As Hidan went on talking about the Jashin faith, Kakuzu had stepped foot into the village.

Near the village entrance, there were several men who looked as though they were the village's inhabitants, and they were all making hand seals.

These men were probably the ones applying the illusionary effects to the river waters being blown by the wind. If they were doing this everyday without rest, they were quite the guarded bunch.

You couldn't tell from the outside, but this hole ran much farther back than one would expect, and there were closely-packed buildings all lined up. It would take a fair amount of time to find someone in a place like this.

The thought of Hidan growing impatient and then going on a rampage ate at Kakuzu, but Hidan could talk about the Jashin faith if that Hohozuki kid was with him, so Kakuzu figured he had a bit more time.

Just slightly further in from the entrance was, as Hohozuki had said, a large tree trunk that acted as a pillar holding the hole open. It was the backbone of the village, basically.

If he stood here, Hohozuki's friend or whatever should come by. Kakuzu, feeling uneasy and still taking on Hohozuki's appearance, took an extensive look at his surroundings.

“...Hohozuki.”

Suddenly, he heard a voice from the shadow of the tree calling out to him and approaching him.

When he looked towards the voice, he saw a person with brown skin and silver hair. The person had a sleek physique, and Kakuzu could not tell if it was a boy or a girl. The person was androgynous, no doubt, but Kakuzu believed it was a boy. He appeared to be just slightly older than Hohozuki.

“Ameyuki?”

When Kakuzu called out that name, the boy stopped in his tracks, considering Kakuzu carefully. His line of sight went to the mud ball Kakuzu held. Kakuzu did as Hohozuki said and handed it over. He could feel chakra coming from the mud ball.

The boy took the mud ball, and then crushed it immediately. The chakra that'd been bound inside of it went into the boy's body.

“...I see. So that's what this is about.”

Apparently, this mud ball was being used as a tool for communication.

“I understand. I'm Ameyuki... Hohozuki's friend.”

He bowed his head low.

“I will be your guide,” he said, and then began walking.

Kakuzu couldn't tell exactly what Hohozuki had said to Ameyuki, but Ameyuki did appear to be very politely entertaining him as a guest.

But, Kakuzu also wasn't so gullible as to completely trust both Hohozuki and this boy called Ameyuki.

“Do you doubt my sincerity in helping you...?”

Compared to Hidan and Hohozuki, this young boy was pretty good at reading people.

“It's simple... I have no will of my own... I just continue living, as Hohozuki wishes... When you look deep into me, you see nothing... Yes, that's right... I am just an empty vessel...”

He was like a living ghost, and the words that poured from his lips were also nothing.

What he said didn't quite much up with what Hohozuki had told Kakuzu, though, and so Kakuzu asked, “...didn't Hohozuki say he was only living here because a friend had told him to?”

“Living in the village... That was also by Hohozuki’s will... Because... I am nothing if not Ameyuki...”

Ameyuki’s reply was not an answer. Incomprehensible things were the only things that came out from this boy’s mouth.

“Pay me no mind... Just fulfill your role and find what you’re looking for...”

There was scant light in this cave, which made it look gloomy, but the villagers were coming and going with bright smiles.

“Man, what a peaceful day.”

“Keep looking to the future!”

“Isn’t it wonderful, that we’re all alive today?”

Whenever the villagers met each other, they would say such things.

“...they’re really harping on this peace and happiness thing.”

If he’d brought Hidan along, Hidan would have definitely lost it.

“These are the shared beliefs of the village... Wipe out the past, live in happiness...”

“You think you’re holding true to that?”

“Who knows... Hohozuki’s the only thing I know... I don’t really know him, but...”

“But?”

Ameyuki turned around in silence, and turned his sights on to the lush green forests opposite the cave.

“Hohozuki said he didn’t know the face of the man you guys had killed... I wonder if that’s true... “Shangri-la” or whatever doesn’t exist,” Ameyuki spat, his eyes becoming as muddled as dirt. “This is... the Valley of Lies.”

“...and so ya see, the Jashin faith’s teachings are the best thing ever.”

As Kakuzu investigated “Shangri-la”, Hidan and Hohozuki had returned to the giant tree stump, as Hohozuki had told Hidan that he might once again get caught in the illusion if he were to stay by the cliff side.

Hohozuki got excited at everything Hidan said, and would passionately say things like, “I want to convert even more now!”

“But, uh, hey! Killing is really difficult, right...? I think I’d get killed instead, by the people who wish for peace.”

“Those fuckers won’t be a problem if you kill the whole lot of ‘em. ‘sides, those superficial assholes who talk about peace? They don’t exist,” Hidan sneered, and then continued. “Long ago, I was surrounded by these fucking pacifist atheists. They avoided fights, and were little cowards who were afraid of hurting people. Those assholes are all talk.”

“Really?”

“Damn right,” Hidan said, nodding. “I got fed up with those peace idiots, and, when I bared my fangs at ‘em, you know what they did? They tried to fucking kill me. If they really loved peace and hated fighting, they shoulda just rolled over and died at my mercy, seriously.”

At Hidan’s story, a look of revelation came across Hohozuki’s face. “That’s true,” he agreed.

“Them fuckers were just enforcing their wishes of a safe and secure world without death on other people. When that got threatened, they were all suddenly a-okay with killing! If you wanna escape the fear of death, then you should just die.”

But that would also be a problem, because if everyone died by their own hands, there’d be no one to offer up as sacrifices to Lord Jashin.

“To save people from the fear of death, we have no choice but to kill them...”

Hohozuki was digesting Hidan’s words with careful thought.

They were both so caught up in talking that neither had realised it was already evening. Was Kakuzu still looking for the bounty’s family?

That greedy bastard never changes, Hidan thought.

“Speaking of which...” Hohozuki spoke up. “Um, thou shalt slaughter thy neighbor... Hidan-san, does that mean you’re going to have to kill Kakuzu-san, too?”

Kakuzu was probably, as Hohozuki implied, the closest person to Hidan right now. But, all Hidan said was, “he ain’t my ‘neighbour’, man.”

“He’s not your neighbour?”

“That friggin’ miser and I are complete opposites. We ain’t nothing like neighbours or whatever.”

As he heard that, Hohozuki’s body started trembling. Then, he nodded, composing himself, as though he’d just received the affirmation he needed.

“That’s right... Hidan-san and... Kakuzu-san... are different... Just like me... and Ameyuki...”

Hohozuki narrowed his eyes, and smiled. He turned his eyes towards the direction of the cliff. "Hey, uh, I think Kakuzu-san will be coming back pretty soon."

With no time to even ask how he knew, it was as Hohozuki said, and Kakuzu returned. But, he was empty-handed.

"Aw, man. They weren't there?"

"I looked at all the villagers' faces, but as far as I saw, I couldn't pinpoint anyone as the guy's family."

If that was the case, that meant they had no more business in this forest. Hidan looked down at the bounty at his feet. He wanted to kill everyone in the village, but if they didn't cash in this bounty soon, it was gonna decay. After all, just getting out of this forest would take a few days.

"Right then. Let's get the hell outta this forest," Hidan said, getting to his feet.

"No... We'll camp out here tonight. We leave at first light," Kakuzu said. He still wanted to stay here.

"What!? We got no more fucking business in this forest! This dude's gonna rot, man!"

Hidan pointed at the corpse to make his point, but Kakuzu simply ignored him and began setting up camp.

"Um, I guess I'll take my leave as well. I'll come see you off when you leave tomorrow! See ya!"

Hohozuki bowed, lowering his head, and then ran off towards the cliff.

"...he adores you quite a bit."

"Just means the teachings of the Jashin faith are awesome, man," Hidan boasted, puffing his chest out.

This, too, Kakuzu dismissed with nothing more than a hum. He then turned his sight towards the direction of the cliff, to where Hohozuki had run off to, and as he did, he said, "Tomorrow, we're going to kill that kid and his friend Ameyuki before we leave."

Those words made Hidan blink a few times.

"Wha? What the hell for?"

"They know too much about us."

"Well, yeah, duh. But if we were gon' kill them anyway, shouldn't we have done so already?"

There should've been plenty of chances for Kakuzu to kill the kid he'd met in the village, Ameyuki, as well as for Hidan to kill Hohozuki who'd been with him this entire time.

Kakuzu looked at the bounty.

"On the first sweep, I couldn't find this guy's family... But, I noticed there were some who appeared restless, roaming around."

"All over the world, there are people who roam around restlessly, man."

Hidan didn't see the need to look too deeply into that.

"That village is unique. Everyone in that village talks about happiness, and anything negative is covered up and hidden away."

"What the hell. Fucking creepy, that's what it is."

"But amongst them, I saw people acting as though they were looking for someone, and they just screamed anxiety."

"Then ya shoulda just killed them."

Hidan was getting increasingly confused, and he crossed his arms and tilted his head. Just what was Kakuzu getting at?

"...we'll take a look at the village tonight. That way, we'll see this valley for what it really is."

Hidan didn't know what Kakuzu's real intentions were, but he did know that Kakuzu was in high spirits. Maybe he'd had a money-related premonition.

Killing people for money went against the teachings of the Jashin faith, but if Kakuzu was making a move for money, battle was sure to follow.

"...as long as I get to let loose, whatever, man."

The sun sank, and the forest was wrapped up in a darkness that was impenetrable even by the moonlight.

Hidan was up on a tree branch, sitting and leaning back against the tree trunk and taking a rest, when he suddenly heard someone call his name.

"Nn...? 'the fuck you want..."

He rubbed his eyes and moved to let out a loud yawn. Just then, Kakuzu jumped over to the tree Hidan was on and slapped his hand over Hidan's mouth.

"Mmph!"

“Look.”

Hidan wasn't in the mood to follow orders now, but he turned his line of sight to where Kakuzu was pointing, and realised what was happening.

There were several lights. Someone was here. If they strained their ears, they could even hear them talking.

“He never stays out this late... Something must've happened to him...”

“Stop saying such unhappy things! We'll find him, all of us.”

“That's right. Besides, what do you think we Shangri-la villagers are, huh?”

Hidan swept Kakuzu's hand away, and then looked at the people down below once more. They held torches, and were apparently looking for someone.

“They're probably the bounty's relatives...”

“Our bounty? You sure 'bout this?”

The torches the people held also illuminated each and every one of their faces.

“Their faces are all wrong.”

“Huh?”

“I'll handle this.”

Kakuzu took his Akatsuki cloak in hand and pulled it off. There were four masks on that back of his.

“...hey! Over there! There's a body at the foot of that tree....”

“No... It can't be... Darling!”

The villagers had found the corpse laid out beside the tree stump. Hidden under the wails resounding through the forest was the sound of threads ripping as one of Kakuzu's “hearts” broke through Kakuzu's flesh, jumping out of him.

Innumerable black fibres coiled to give it shape. This was Earth Grudge Fear, a forbidden technique from Kakuzu's village, the Waterfall Village.

“What... What is this chakra...?”

Sensing Kakuzu's menacing chakra, the villagers turned their heads up to look up the tree at Hidan and Kakuzu, but Kakuzu was even faster, and had already formed hand seals.

“Lightning Release: False Darkness!”

In that moment, a bright flash ran through the forest.

“...instant death, seriously?”

“You’d have taken too long.”

The lightning had hit the villagers straight on, and, unable to do anything, they simply fell to their deaths. Instant death.

Hidan got down from the tree and looked down at the villagers’ faces. He noticed something straightaway. “Hey, what the fuck. Their faces changed.”

Hidan’d only briefly looked at them earlier, from when their torches had illuminated their faces, but he knew for a fact that these fallen villagers here, all of them—their faces had changed.

Kakuzu looked at the face of the woman who’d run over to their bounty’s corpse earlier.

“There’s no mistaking it... This is our bounty’s family.”

“What the fuck does that mean? Lots of strange shit going on ‘round here.”

Kakuzu ignored Hidan’s question, and went to look at the faces of the other villagers who’d accompanied this woman.

“...just as I thought... That’s what’s going on... “The Valley of Lies”... How apt.”

“Hey, Kakuzu! Explain this shit to me, right now!” Hidan shouted, out of patience now.

Kakuzu finally turned over to look at him. “Hidan, all of these people, they were living their lives, constantly under the transformation technique.”

“Transformation technique? But why?”

“Because. All of them are bounties.”

“Huh?”

Hidan didn’t recognise the faces of bounties, but he nonetheless looked down at the corpses again.

“They were probably afraid of living with a target on their backs, fled from civilisation into this deep forest, and made the village.”

Kakuzu seemed to understand everything clearly, but Hidan was still confused. He pointed to the very first bounty they’d killed. “But, you recognised this dude.”

The moment this man appeared and Hidan had went after him, Kakuzu had known he was a bounty. That meant he hadn't been using the transformation technique.

"Think back on what the brat said, when he saw this man."

The brat in question was Hohozuki. Hidan tried recalling what he'd said.

"Um, I think he might be from the village... I don't remember seeing him around, though."

"If this man was in the village, I'd know him too, but..."

"This bounty probably released the transformation technique when he headed out from the village. That's when he ran into us."

That's how Kakuzu knew he was a bounty. On the flipside, Hohozuki, who only knew this man's face under the transformation technique, did not know who he was.

"Why the hell would he release the transformation technique?"

"Living a false life can be stifling, and he probably wanted to get away for a while. In the end, no one can really escape their pasts, after all."

"Uhhh..."

Even after listening to Kakuzu, Hidan still couldn't quite swallow the half-assed explanation. The only thing he knew for sure was that the village was packed with bounties.

"So ya mean the village is a...?"

"It's a goldmine."

Hidan and Kakuzu made their way to the edge of the cliff, which was bathed in moonlight. Hidan pressed his Jashin necklace to his lips, and offered up a prayer to Lord Jashin with a grin on his face.

"There might be big-name bounties in there as well. Don't let your guard down. You'll die."

"Heh. If they could kill me, I'd let them, Kakuzu."

It was as though that exchange was their cue, and the both of them took off.

"AIIIIIIright! Lord Jashin! Imma kill all these fuckers! Every single one of them!"

Hidan landed in the village, screaming. There were several ninjas there, still applying the illusionary effects to the river to hide the village. When they saw Hidan, they all got into fighting stances, poised to attack.

“Who are you!?”

But, these were inexperienced, peace-loving idiots who usually only ran away from battles. And, with no intention of starting a ritual right there and then, Hidan simply raised his three-bladed scythe and sliced off their heads.

“Heh.”

Along with their deaths came the release of their transformation technique. The faces on the rolling heads changed.

Kakuzu was also killing other villagers under the transformation technique. To Kakuzu, who recognised the faces of all bounties, seeing the release of the transformation techniques brought him much glee.

“Hidan, I’m going after the village leader... There’s a high chance there’s a large bounty on his head, if he holds such a pivotal position.”

“But I wanna kill that fucker too!”

“There’s another target better-suited to you.”

“Huh?”

A large question-mark regarding Kakuzu’s words popped up in Hidan’s head, and just then, a familiar face appeared before him.

“Hidan-san...”

It was Hohozuki. The boy who said he’d wanted to join the Jashin faith. He’d probably heard the commotion and had come running out here. Right beside him was Ameyuki. It was the first time Hidan had seen him.

Hohozuki was staring straight at Hidan, and suddenly, he appeared to be no different from the other villagers who were scrambling around, trying to escape the sudden invasion.

“...I’m going to do a proper ritual, just you wait!” Hidan readjusted his grip on his scythe and sped towards him. “Starting with you!”

The blade headed straight for Ameyuki, who’d been hovering around behind Hohozuki. The blades went right through Ameyuki’s head.

“...’the fuck!?”

In normal circumstances, the skull would crack, and blood and brains would come gushing out. But, no such thing happened. Instead, Hidan felt as though he’d just sliced through loose soil.

“...s’this a clone!?”

Ameyuki’s body turned into a lump of earth, and it crumbled like dirt.

“An Earth technique...?”

Ninjas from the Rock Village were well-versed in Earth techniques, and Hidan figured this was a variation of their Rock Clone technique. However, Ameyuki’s clone did not disappear the same way as a Rock Clone, but was still solid in shape, similar to a Sand Clone.

“Fuck, I ain’t good at this analyzing shit...” Hidan muttered. He turned to Hohozuki and saw that his appearance was changing as well. “...’the fuck?”

Hohozuki’s appearance was changing into that of the clone Hidan had just destroyed: Ameyuki.

“Who the fuck are you.”

The boy who was supposedly Hohozuki looked down at both his hands with hollow eyes. Life gradually seemed to return to those eyes, and Hidan could feel chakra flowing out of him.

“...you gotta be fucking kidding me.”

Hidan could feel an inkling of a foreign type chakra, one that he had never felt before.

“I am... Ameyuki...” The boy who was supposedly Hohozuki said. “Since that day, I’ve been living life as Hohozuki... I mean, after all, I am just empty...”

“Huh?”

“Hidan-san... This entire time, I’ve been living in this village under the guise of my friend, Hohozuki... I kept a clone of myself beside me...”

In that case, the one whose eyes sparkled while listening to the teachings of the Jashin faith had been this boy, Ameyuki, all along.

“While I am myself, I also exist as a lie, as someone else... That was the clone, Ameyuki... And you killed him... So now, I am the real Ameyuki again...” At that, Ameyuki clenched his fist. “You... You’ve set me free!”

Ameyuki suddenly joined both his hands together and formed hand seals. He didn’t bother hiding his killing intent, letting it hit Hidan full-force.

“Oho, that’s the way to go, kid!”

Hidan raised his scythe and aimed for Ameyuki.

Ameyuki slammed both hands to the ground in an attempt to protect himself, yelling out, "Mud Release: Mud Wall!"

"Mud!?"

It was the first time Hidan had heard of a 'mud' release.

The part of the ground that Ameyuki touched was turning into loose mud. Then a wall shot up from it, it turned into muddy water, and hit Hidan head-on.

"Gah! Dude, this is gross!"

Hit by the muddy water, Hidan was covered in mud all over. Furthermore, the mud clung onto his body and it was slowly hardening.

"I am finally freed! Which is why... You... You, who I respect above everyone else... You, who are my 'neighbour'... I must kill you! Mud Release: Bottomless Mud Hole!"

Ameyuki continued attacking Hidan, whose movements had already dulled and slowed.

"Fuck!"

A sinking sensation overcame Hidan's body, and fast, and when Hidan looked at his feet, the spot on which he'd been standing had turned into mud—transfigured into a bottomless swamp. Countless numbers of hands reached out from within the mud, seizing Hidan's body and pulling him towards the depths of the swamp.

"Shit!"

From the sleeve of his clothes, Hidan pulled out a piece of rope. He swung it and had it wrapped around a protrusion on a nearby house. Then, with pure, brute force, Hidan pulled.

"What in the flying fuck is this fucking Mud Release, you goddamn fucking piece of shit!"

He'd pulled himself up to the roof of the house, and when he looked down at the swamp, he realised it was getting wider and wider. It looked like the entrance to the underworld, almost.

If it'd been Kakuzu, he'd already have analysed and figured out the situation, but this was Hidan who was unskilled in this aspect. However, there was one thing he understood.

"It's a bloodline limit, huh..."

A bloodline limit: abilities that were hereditary, attainable only through the blood passed down from their family's previous generation. They were unparalleled abilities that faced the extremes of human emotions; envy, hatred... There were many who went out of their way to make those born with bloodline limits feel different.

Another Akatsuki member, Uchiha Itachi of the Leaf Village's Sharingan was a bloodline limit, too. Hidan heard that he'd killed his entire clan, his fellow Uchiha's.

"That's right... I use Water and Earth Releases to give birth to a Mud Release... Calling it a bloodline limit is all well and good, but the strongest and most highly-praised ninja, Senju Hashirama, also used Water and Earth Releases to form his own exceptional power, the Wood Release..."

The Wood Release: A supreme and renowned Release that no one could ever hope to duplicate. What Ameyuki was using, was the Mud Release.

"To use our bloodline limit, my family had to grovel in the dirty soil... Everyone around us laughed at us for that..." Ameyuki looked down at his own dirt-stained hands. "I was ridiculed as well, and the only one who was ever nice to me... was Hohozuki... But..."

Ameyuki's chakra split and swelled once more. "Mud Release: Mud Dolls!"

From the swirling bog appeared innumerable Mud Dolls in the form of humans. Hidan was the main target of these Mud Dolls, and they climbed the walls of the building to get to him, on the roof.

"Well, damn."

Hidan swung his scythe at them, one after another, but whenever he sliced these Mud Dolls, they would simply grow back their arms and legs. They continued climbing, until they were finally surrounding Hidan.

"Sheeh, 'the fuck are you guys...!?"

When the Mud Dolls touched Hidan, they forced the mud through his mouth and his nose, as though wanting to coat him.

Hidan choked.

The disgusting mud filled up his mouth, and it forced its way down his airway. Hidan couldn't breathe. His entire body would be filled and covered with mud.

"Ngah...!"

Hidan brandished his sole spear, and pierced himself in the lung.

"Hah!"

His lung spat out blood that was mixed with mud that had forced its way down his airway. "...goddammit, this hurts like fuck! Damn it to hell, this is a different kind of pain, dammit!"

Even as he went on ranting, more Mud Dolls continued to appear from the swamp, one after another, and they continued going after Hidan.

Hidan kicked himself off of the roof and lunged straight at Ameyuki, removing the spear from his lung. “Fuck! You!”

Ameyuki moved to make more hand seals, but Hidan was faster, and before Ameyuki could finish his hand seals, the tip of Hidan’s spear had scratched his cheek. His skin tore, and blood sprayed.

There was blood on the spear tip. Hidan licked it off.

Immediately, monochrome patterns rose to the surface of Hidan’s body.

Hidan used the blood pouring out of his lung and onto the ground to draw the symbol of the Jashin faith. “Hahahaha! The preparations are compl—”

“Mud Release: Bottomless Mud Hole!”

Hidan had thought that would be the end of it, but Ameyuki used his technique again.

“Ack! The ground...!?”

The ground on which Hidan had drawn the Jashin symbol crumbled and turned to mud. Even if Hidan were to get away from the swamp and try drawing the symbol again, Ameyuki would simply aim his swamp there and turn the ground into mud again.

“Huuuuuuuh!? You gotta be shitting me!”

It was only then Hidan realised: He was possibly the least compatible opponent for this Mud Release.

Ameyuki raised both arms slowly, and the corner of his mouth lifted. “Show me more... Let me see you offer up prayers to Lord Jashin...”

Sensing bloodlust from above him, Hidan reflexively moved out of the way. In an instant, Mud Dolls fell from above and onto the spot on which Hidan had just been standing.

This was a village dug out from a mountain. The ceilings, the walls... All of it was made from rock and dirt. The ceiling began turning into mud as well, and the faces of Mud Dolls appeared within it. Pushed by gravity, they fell.

“Fucking mud assholes!”

Even then, Hidan was ready to take on the challenge, but then he heard a voice say, “Hidan.”

When Hidan turned to look, he saw Kakuzu standing on a roof, carrying an unfamiliar man on his back.

“Kakuzu! Gimme a hand here!”

“I’ve killed the village leader, but there’s a high chance there are other big-name bounties here... We’ve got to kill all of them. There are more villagers than I thought, so this will take some time.”

The man on Kakuzu’s back was probably the village leader he spoke of.

“Fucker! Just use your damn techniques and crush this whole village!”

“Are you an idiot. If I do more damage than necessary and they become unrecognisable, we can’t cash them in.”

“Yeah, well, I guess... Shit, you really think about nothing but money, don’t you?”

Kakuzu jumped and landed right next to Hidan. “There’s no point to you fighting here. Return to the forest. You’ll die.”

Hidan thought Kakuzu would be helping him out in the forest, but on the contrary, Kakuzu simply took off, aiming for the other villagers and leaving Hidan by himself.

Hidan grinned and then yelled to Kakuzu’s receding back, “Like you need to remind me, Kakuzu!”

Hidan leapt over the Mud Dolls, running straight for the village entrance, and then jumped towards the opposite cliff where the forest was. Ameyuki gave chase, landing in the forest as well, and then starting up his Bottomless Mud Hole technique again.

The land on which the forest trees had been planted turned into mud. The trees fell one after another, floating along the mud.

“I won’t let you get away, Hidan-san...! Every bit of dirt will turn to mud... As long as you are on land, you cannot hope to escape me!”

Hidan kept running, avoiding the mud, shirking the fallen trees. Hidan had to admit, it seemed futile. But then, a certain something caught his eye.

Hidan looked back, and once he had ascertained that he’d created a certain distance between himself and Ameyuki, he plunged his spear into his own hand. As though gouging something out, he swirled his spear around, making a larger wound, and blood came gushing out.

“Hidan-san, let’s end this!”

Ameyuki put his hands together to make more hand seals. But just then, an excruciating pain ran through Ameyuki’s leg. His knee buckled beneath him, and he fell upon the mud-soil mixture. He raised his head.

“The preparations are complete!”

Hidan had stabbed himself in the thigh, and beneath his feet was the Jashin symbol drawn upon... the giant tree stump.

This giant tree stump had been something for them to sit down on, and something of a landmark in these forests, and now, Hidan had used it as something to draw the Jashin symbol upon.

“Kakuzu, man, you sure know how to talk in circles.”

“There’s no point to you fighting here. Return to the forest.”

That’d been a hint. Drawing the mark upon the giant tree stump—that’s what Kakuzu had been getting at. And then, believing he had the home-court advantage, Ameyuki let his guard down, allowing Hidan to pull the wool over his eyes.

Hidan pulled the spear out, and then put it over the left side of his chest. It was Hidan’s win.

“I’d expect nothing less, Hidan-san...” Ameyuki smiled calmly as he stared at Hidan.

“I’m gonna fuck you up so badly with the pain of death!”

“Yes... That’s exactly what I want...”

Withstanding the pain in his leg, Ameyuki got to his feet, and then sat down, his posture perfect.

“I was despised by everyone, and the one who saved me from that, was Hohozuki... But one day, a group of ninja who wanted to do business with slave traders came to the village I was living in, and they took the village’s women and children... Hohozuki was one of those children...”

Ameyuki gazed far out into the distance as he recalled the events of that day.

“To save Hohozuki, I used the Mud Release techniques... I destroyed the enemy, more or less... That’s what put a bounty on my head... But people like those ninjas weren’t the only ones who wanted my head...” Ameyuki said, his eyes insightful. “The people from my own village who’d seen my powers grew frightened, and they tried to kill me...”

It was a common story. It was one of the injustices that infested this world.

“Hohozuki found out, and then he heard stories of this place, “Shangri-la”... He heard that we could throw away our pasts here, and forget everything, and live in happiness... But, on the night we’d planned to run away, the villagers had suspected our treachery and they killed Hohozuki...”

A tear fell from Ameyuki’s eye.

“I wanted to die with him, but Hohozuki told me to look to the future and live on, so I came to “Shangri-la” by myself... But even then... There’s no way I can ever forget Hohozuki and the fact that he’d died for me... There’s no way I can ever live in happiness, in “the Valley of Lies”...”

Even as tears flowed from his eyes, Ameyuki smiled.

“Hohozuki died because of me—he, who taught me about the light... But now, I can die by your hand, Hidan-san, you who showed me the light... I can become a sacrifice to Lord Jashin...”

Ameyuki was delighted at this prospect, delighted with all of his heart. Hidan could understand that much.

“Hidan-san, can I just request one thing? There are people who I want to sacrifice to Lord Jashin...”

“People you wanna sacrifice?”

“Yes...”

Before Hidan even replied, Ameyuki closed his eyes and put his hands together.

“Thou, shalt slaughter thy neighbor...”

Ameyuki began forming hand seals. It was a far more complicated combination of hands seals than the ones Ameyuki had used thus far, and he was forming them without a single pause or mistake. Chakra enveloped his entire body.

“First and foremost, the neighbours I need to kill are these people! Mud Release: Land Slide!!” Ameyuki suddenly got to his feet, and he stretched his hands out, up ahead of the forest, in the direction of the village.

Hidan could only guess what Ameyuki was doing, and he dashed up a tree. From the tree, he could see the village, “Shangri-la”.

“Holy shit...”

In one single moment, the mountain, in which Shangri-la was in, came crashing down. The earth and dirt that’d been holding up Shangri-la turned into soft, shapeless mud, and the entire village crumbled down, swallowed up by the deep river along the valley floor.

“Hey, what the fuck, man!? Is Kakuzu gon’ be okay!?”

He was worried for a moment, but then realised it was Kakuzu he was talking about, so he’d probably be just fine. Hidan snorted and then jumped down from the tree.

“You’re alright, kid!”

In Hidan’s right hand was his spear. The moment he stepped back on top of the tree stump, Hidan gave his heart a mighty stab.

“Lord Jashin’s... gonna be so damn pleased...!” Hidan yelled as the ecstasy of the pain of death rose within him.

“...thank you...”

Hidan looked over, and saw that, even as he coughed up large amounts of blood, there was a happy smile on Ameyuki’s face.

“So, you managed to kill him.”

Kakuzu had been in the heat of things, but he’d escaped the village safely.

Amongst those he’d killed were a few highly valued bounties, and Kakuzu had made sure to bring them back with him.

However, the most valuable bounty in that village had been... Ameyuki.

Ameyuki hadn’t just killed the ninjas who’d attacked his village, but his own villagers who’d killed Hohozuki as well. He’d killed them all. As a result, he wasn’t just a bounty on the black market, but an official wanted criminal in the Bingo Book.

“He put a clone of himself in the village. Even if it were just a clone, to put his appearance out there probably meant that, deep down inside, he wanted to be found,” Kakuzu said.

Hidan was lying on the tree stump, offering up his prayers. Ameyuki laid beside the tree stump, and Kakuzu looked down at him.

When Ameyuki had been guiding Kakuzu around the village, he’d been completely expressionless. Now, though, he appeared content.

Ameyuki had caused the deaths of the ninjas that’d attacked his village, the people of the village he’d been born and raised in, and also his friend. Ameyuki probably found the very existence of the Jashin faith, which encouraged slaughter as a means of saving someone, as a saviour to himself.

“In any case, when will you be done with your prayers? I want to get to the exchange point as soon as possible.”

Kakuzu always complained about this, even while Hidan was in the midst of the ritual. But, this time, Hidan was smiling, as though he didn’t care.

When Kakuzu tilted his head in question, Hidan answered. “It’s gonna take a while longer. We had a martyr today.”

End of chapter 3

### Chapter 3

Day of Emergence

Akatsuki Hiden

by Shin Towada

Feel free to leave comments :)

Everlasting beauty, transient beauty, each kind of beauty spoke. For that, they also represent their bodies. That was one artistic combination.

“ I want high quality clay... Hm.”

Smoke was rising around the “plain” again. There was a village in this place only a few minutes ago, and he raised his voice.

It was Deidara who destroyed this village, his golden hair hanging from a high position, looking with his blue eye at the bag that hung around his waist. He originally belonged to the bombing unit in the Hidden Rock Village but the “Akatsuki”, which he was a member now of, took an eye out for him when he was involved in an anti-national bomb attack and brought about terrorism.

Today, he was ordered by the organization to destroy this village. Deidara was supposed to be good at such large scale destruction works.

“....”

Sasori, Deidara’s partner, did the deed of killing the remaining that survived from the explosion, so as to ignore Deidara’s words. It was Sasori’s eleventh puppet Hiruko who was

deeply **bent** and moved to drag his body. Former Hidden Sand’s main body, Sasori, who was praised as a genius modelling specialist of the puppet brigade, was actually inside this Hiruko. The appearance of his main body looked like a boy as he was when Sasori still resided in the village.

“Hey, Sasori my man. Which clay would easily express my art?”

“Ah? Clay?”

Deidara opened both hands to Sasori who reacted this time. Deidara had a tongue licking mouth in each hand. These mouths made clay into detonating clay, converting it into an explosion destroying everything by aesthetically shaping the detonating clay. Art is an explosion. Deidara always sought new art.

“It is important to thoroughly review from the foundation to stimulate sensitivity... hm.”

“So, how about accustoming to your clay?”

“If there is clay that would make my art feel more intense, my art should be polished... hm.”

Clay was mixed into both hands to knead chakra, however there were some clays that absorbed chakra quickly while others did not mix well with chakra. Besides, there were various changes depending on the clay, such as the difference in the power of the explosion. Right now, he was using clay that fit his needs, but accustoming slowed his sensitivity. So, clay was reduced from this mission. Here was the spirit of resolution, finding new clay and refining art.

“Clay, huh?”

On the other hand, Sasori had also used clay for his puppets.

“There it is... In the land of wind, there is a ‘Village of Ceramics’ which is close to the border of the land of river.”

“Village of Ceramics?”

“The Village of Ceramics is free of ninjutsu. I have also visited a couple of times, but there may be quality clay over there.”

Speaking of ceramics, it was also considered to be art. There might be encounters that would tickle Deidara’s art mind. Thinking that way, he was not able to sit still. Strike while the iron is hot. Deidara put his hands in his bag.

“Alright.”

A bird of a beautiful form was fleshed out from the clay. If thrown with a \*pon\* and signed with a seal, it quickly grew to a size that people could ride on.

“Let’s go then, Sasori my man.”

When he jumped on the back of the bird and looked back, Sasori complained to him with “Ha? Reporting back to the organization is a priority. Why are you going now?”

“After having decided on the job, I need refreshment... hm.”

Sasori was disgusted when Deidara said “I need refreshment”. However, Sasori was familiar with Deidara’s personality, quietly muttered “It can’t be helped” and rode the bird’s back with a sullen expression.

“Alright, I’m leaving for the Village of Ceramics! Hm! “

The bird spread its wings and jumped swiftly. When Deidara pointed into the direction of the sun, the bird also began flying towards it.

“...Let’s get right to it.”

Sasori felt calm.

“... Wow, it’s surprisingly crowded, hm!”

It was about four days after leaving the destroyed village. Following Sasori’s suggestion that it was better to avoid the Hidden Sand Village as much as possible, fly over the land of river where the deep forest continued and finally enter the land of the wind. They reached the Village of Ceramics which was surrounded by mountains. It was supposed to be a land with a stoney desert image like the Hidden Sand Village but this place has a lot of greenery and water. The scale was more of a town than a village. It seemed bustling to Deidara who imagined a remote boundary where people were arbitrary. There were chimneys in this village, and smoke was rising from everywhere.

“Sasori, my man, what is that?”

“That is the smoke of a kiln that burns pottery. Here and there, fire is being burned in a kiln.”

“I see...hn? My man, then what is that?”

Now he noticed something glittering in the village, reflecting the sun.

“That is a ceramic tile. The villagers here use pottery for walls and sidewalks too.”

“Wow.”

Pottery tiles decorated the whole village from kilns that constantly raised smoke. There was a building that looked like a shining temple in the center of the village, it was exactly the village of art.

“If I destroy it with my art, it will be beautiful... hm.”

“Hey, don’t forget what you came here for.”

While listening to Sasori’s warning with a disgusted expression, he landed on a miscellaneous forest a little far away from town to avoid eye contact.

“...Hm? What’s wrong with you, Sasori my man?”

Covered with a shade and prepared to head for the village, he noticed that Sasori was looking in a different direction from the village.

“People live here too.”

Looking at it, the forest had some smoke rising. Perhaps there was a kiln that burned pottery.

He was wondering if it was also an old man who disliked the bustle of the village, when he suddenly heard a cracking sound.

And something sounded sharply broken.

“...Huh?”

There was not just one cracking sound, but it kept repeating. Deidara matched his face with Sasori but there was something that tickled in that sound.

“... Sasori my man, I will take a look at it for a moment.”

Deidara ran without waiting for a reply.

There was a miscellaneous forest where Deidara landed on the hillside of the mountain. As he climbed a steep slope, he found a kiln lined up to the lodge on the slope.

“Is that... hm.”

A woman was standing in the vicinity of the kiln. Her age was mid-teens. Her hair was bundled carelessly and her body was covered in soot. Really messy. She had a white acupoint on her hand. She turned that point as a gurgle and exhaled after gazing carefully. Then, she glanced up.

“This is not the ultimate white that I want!”

“....!!”

When she shouted, the woman greatly rocked her hand and unexpectedly beat down the point to the ground. There was a loud cracking noise. There were countless pieces of pottery around her when he saw her. It seemed that this was the identity of the sound.

“... You think art is an explosion! Hm!”

Looking at the sight, Deidara unexpectedly sprang up. Deidara, who also found beauty in destruction, thought that she might also have similar sensitivity to him.

“...?! Who are you?”

Watching Deidara who showed up so suddenly, naturally, the woman was puzzled.

“I also pursue art! You destroyed the work and felt the beauty of the moment, hm!”

“Destruction is beauty...? It is not that.”

The woman immediately denied it.

“I was breaking it.... Because it was a failed work.”

“...are you saying that it all failed?”

As he asked that, Sasori showed up from the miscellaneous forest as he waited. The woman made her lips loose.

“That’s how it is. You are a human being after all. You can go to the village if you want to buy pottery. There are as many of them as there are ‘other people’s tastes’.”

After saying that, she stepped on the mouthpiece of the pottery and went to the workplace behind the kiln. She was unfriendly.

“Before that look at my art, hm!”

Despite being denied, Deidara who felt a selfish feeling of sympathy called the woman and made a small bird with detonating clay.

“Art...?”

“Look closely, hm.”

He brought the small birds closer to her eyes, and then marked them.

- Katsu!

“...Wha!”

He blew them up without blinking, and although the power was weak the girl held her ears in a state of surprise.

“How is it? You felt it, hm!”

As Deidara talked proudly, she said

“It’s a cheesy work.”

“What did you say?? Are you stupid about my art?!”

Deidara instantly spat out angry words. The woman said “I am not stupid” while making a cool face.

“Those who use the word ‘art’ often make strange and complicated works that are difficult to interpret so I thought such work would come out. A simple thing came out, contrary to my expectations, and I said it was cheesy. Sorry.”

It was hard to understand whether she was apologizing or not but it seemed like she was reflecting for the time being.

“I like such simple works. I also felt similarity. I do not understand the explosion, but there may be art like that too.”

She spoke impressively. It seemed not all of Deidara’s works were considered good but she showed understanding.

“I am Kanyu. I am living to revive the ultimate ‘Hanasaki’ technique. If flowers do not bloom then all fails.”

As she looked down at the scattered pottery again, Kanyu’s face was distorted with regret.

“If you are someone who pursues art, I don’t know whether you like pottery or not, but you can go to town for the moment. I have to knead soil. See you later.”

And Kanyu disappeared into the workplace.

“‘Ultimate white’ and ‘Hanasaki’ technique... what are those?”

Deidara picked up one rolling ceramic piece and lifted it to the height of his sight. Glaze was painted and the color was a beautiful white. Does it mean more whiter?

“...Oh well, whatever! My man, Let’s always go to town in a place like this! My art is called, hm!”

“You kept me waiting, I will kill you.”

While feeling caught in the words of Kanyu, Deidara passed through the miscellaneous trees, heading for the Village of Ceramics.

“Oh, it really is full of china pottery here, hm.”

Advancing the road paved with colorful ceramic tiles, Deidara looked brightly around. There were many pottery shops in the village and ceramic tiles were stuck to the outside of the shops. The trade merchants who carry big luggage with such exterior tiles were eagerly waiting.

“Hey, my man. Why are they not in the store? Hm.”

Anyway, why not go inside and see the goods?

“...It is troublesome to check each other when there are hundreds of large shops. To save time and effort, they applied the tiles like that.”

“So... what do you mean?”

Sasori further explained to Deidara who swallowed badly.

“That is the owner of the shop... They are pasting the tiles made by ceramists. Sample is that fellow.”

Looking closely, the store had different tile qualities and designs.

“You can roughly imagine the items that deal with the outer wall, hm.”

“It is more strange if you look closely. Besides, the shops that have many ceramists come with tiles in a wide variety.”

The tiles of the outside wall of the store in front of Deidara were sparse. On the other hand, the shop on the other side of the road was big and the tiles were stuck firmly to the outer wall. It was flowing to the shops of trade merchants.

“It’s a convenient system but these are places that symbolize power, hm.”

“Ha, as a symbol of power? ... You are wrong. Take a good look.”

Sasori turned towards the center. There was a huge building.

“A temple... Hm.”

“I guess it looks like that. But it’s not a temple... that is the residence of the village head here.”

Going straight ahead along the way of ceramic tiles, the residence could be reached. Apparently this village was made around the mansion.

“Let’s go... hm.”

They stood in front of the mansion. Ten thousands of tiles were affixed to the outside; Sasori said

“Commonly known as the Ceramics god house. The Village of Ceramics is ruled by this Ceramics family for generations.”

All the tiles were gorgeous. One piece was highly artistic. Apparently it still seemed to be under construction and many tiles were carried to the premises.

“...My man, what do you think?”

The body of Sasori was in the puppet. He felt the main body smile at Deidara’s question.

“It’s a bad taste.”

Deidara said “That’s right.” and nodded.

Not limited to this pottery god mansion. While talking about ceramic tiles in the village and admiring the village for making it possible at first sight, each piece of work that formed was uselessly luxurious, self-assertive and intensely stuck to the nose. Although he saw this pottery god house to strengthen that thought, Sasori saying the words “bad taste” was soothing and refreshing to Deidara’s feelings.

“When I first came here, it was not a bad taste so far.”

“Hm? Was it different before?”

“Yeah. At that time the whole village was continued in a simple white.”

Between the words of Sasori, he remembered the mention of the ultimate white Kanyu was talking about.

“However there are more trading dealers who have come to buy than when I came before and the village is crowded. The village seemed to be enriched.”

“Well, art is fluid... hm.”

He also wanted to see the thimble white village that Sasori had seen but there was no progress in looking back to the works of the past.

“My man, we have to go find clay quickly, hm!”

The village was already nice. He had to find clay for his art.

“...Do not get inside.”

As far as almost everyone in the Akatsuki member was concerned, Deidara and Sasori cannot afford to that case either. The investigation for inundation was not suitable and he killed a few people by the time he found out that the clay used for the pottery of the village was being mined from one of the hills surrounding the village.

“It is a hassle to treat yourself with such things.”

Moreover, the clay at the mining site, which was made by scraping the mountain, did not seem to be able to be pleasantly picked up, and there were several guards at the entrance. The guard was pierced by Hiruko’s tail and rolled. It was difficult for them to say it was peaceful without being noticed by anyone.

“Sasori my man, you also use subordinates.”

As he stepped over the corpse, the road-like cave is continued. He relied on the torches that lit the way and walked behind Sasori.

“There are many usable pieces.”

“That reminds me, you can purchase items for your puppet anyway.”

“I calculate it and put it in order to maximize the function of the puppet. Everything is wrong.”

Deidara shrugged his shoulders when he saw Sasori’s tail swaying.

“Oops, I did not want to make you angry, hm.”

He thought he was getting angry.

“Because I’m fascinated by the overwhelming ability created from washed art and the explosion that destroys everything, it seems that the subordinates are disturbing my art... hm.”

Originally, he wanted free artistic activities. He did not belong anywhere, he would not submit to anything, and he would express his art. And let people around the world recognize it- However, there was something in his head.

“...”

Deidara held his eye consciously. Something was deeply burned to Deidara’s mind.

Following a brave image on both sides while being illuminated by the backlight, eyes more brilliant than the light--- Itachi with Sharingan. Looking at the eyes that emitted enlightenment

as if to seem omnipotent. His art was perfect, Deidara thought. Deidara's heart rippled every time he thought about those eyes while thinking so. In order to complete his art, it was necessary to overcome them. That is why he did not satisfy himself like this, and he stuck this way with his art. Looking for clay was one of them.

"...That's right my man. How is that subordinate doing with Orochimaru?"

"Huh? What suddenly happened? You know too, don't you. I don't know what will happen after the operation."

Sasori sometimes used the brain control technique when making his spies act. This is a technique that shuts down the memory with a small-size needle into the subordinate's brain, the memory center. Spy investigation is a nervous exhausting fight. If it is long term, the exhaustion may be intense and information leaks often. To live while lying about another person, even more, is unimaginably overly severe. That is why it makes it easier to carry out missions by sealing memory with the technique of sand dementia. And the spy sealed with the technique was under Orochimaru who was a former "Akatsuki". Among Sasori's subordinates, he must have been an excellent human being sent to him. Originally, Sasori had been Orochimaru's partner, and hated him strongly. Orochimaru was originally an abhorrent opponent for Deidara, who also robbed him from free art activities. Because Orochimaru left the "Akatsuki", the "Akatsuki" began looking for a new member. Even though Orochimaru was marginalized from his surroundings, he was highly praised for his abilities. There was no doubt that he could not be ignored. It seemed that Orochimaru was worried about Itachi. And it's always about that guy Itachi, Itachi, Itachi. Why were the eyes of that man acknowledged only.

"I will kill Orochimaru with this... hm."

Sasori did not reply. In this kind of situation, it was better to have more hands. A piece to kill Orochimaru.

"Mm, here, hm."

They finally arrived at the discovery area. There was a northern broad cave, and a tool for clay was placed.

Deidara took the clay and ate it with his hand and kneaded chakra.

"Yeah, yeah, I see... hm, hm."

It was a spider that gripped tightly from the exhaled clay. He threw it to the wall of the clay layer. The spider ceased a small scale explosion when he marked it with a sign and yelled

“Katsu!”.

There was a hole in the clay layer which had been stuck, and the clay scattered.

“How is it?”

Deidara twisted his head and looked back to Sasori.

“I feel that my art has not been transmitted... hm.”

Although badly yes, he couldn't feel the power which was overwhelmingly exceeding in the previous one. In this case it was inconceivable to bring a banter and go home.

“Bad, my man. Even though you led me here... hm.”

Deidara apologized to Sasori, who took him to the Village of Ceramics. Sasori didn't reply to him, looking down at the scattered clay.

They already killed a few people, including the watchdog at the probe. If it was a town of this size, it would make a fuss everyday. It was Deidara who was in a hurry to leave quickly because he had already used the cave, but since Sasori said “I have something to confirm” they went back to the village again.

“Where are you going, my man?”

“...”

Proceeding along the path of the colorful ceramics tile was the center of the town, Ceramics god mansion. When recalling Sasori's words and thinking it was a bad taste in mind, he noticed something was more noisy.

“What the hell?”

Looking carefully, he noticed that some people were troubled.

“Stop killing the work of ‘Hanasaki’ any further! A heritage that was passed down to the Village of Ceramics!”

There was a woman shouting at a man in front of the mansion at the center. It was Kanyu, the first person he met when he came to this village.

“Woah, you entered, Kanyu. The times have changed. The era of Hanasaki is over.”

A plentiful guy who can be said to be the extreme of the bad taste worn everywhere, was wearing extremely colored clothes in contrast to Kanyu, and ceramic accessories that shone in seven colors. He was around forty.

“...Ceramics god Gosho. Perhaps that is the current village leader.”

“That fatty is the head?... hm.”

In Deidara’s hometown, Tsuchikage Onoki who governed the Hidden Rock Village for many years was just an old geezer who lived too long at first glance, but his gifted talent and experience was rich. He was one of the people Deidara was planning to kill. It can be said that he can’t be ignored. And here is the Village of Ceramics. Although he thought that this corresponding person would be doing as much as he could head at this place where various ceramists would be, Goshō’s pottery accessories worn by him shone, there was no such thing as a different leader standing at the top other than himself.

“Look! This mansion! It is more beautiful than the plain and poor ‘Hanasaki’ construction. The town is also reborn as fresh, now it has increased its purchase, and it got rich in moisture! All my skills!”

Goshō raised his hands to show off his power.

“It is not a lack of gorgeous complaints for customers! You abandoned the technique that has been handed down from generation to generation, and it is as if it was not like I can forgive you! What do you think Mayaki would think if he saw this?!”

“Shut up!”

While shouting, Goshō hit Kanyu hard to his annoyance. Kanyu’s thin body flew and hit the ground.

“Huh, Kanyu?”

“Are you okay...”

Residents of the village around who were watching tried to rush to her, but Goshō glared at them.

“I think you can have a rich life thanks to me!”

That being said, people’s legs stopped.

“That Mayaki old geezer left the village and disappeared! Now I am the leader! Defiants will be chased from the village!”

People looked at Goshō and muttered a small “sorry” to Kanyu before escaping. Goshō looked down on Kanyu. Kanyu glared back at Goshō.

“‘Hanasaki’ that floats on unspoiled white, was this not a village that loves honorable art...?”

“Nonsense! To think I would somehow love beauty and honor art... Is this a trade show? Will my belly grow with art?”

Gosho kicked Kanyu.

“A human who talks about art has a terrible delusional habit! It’s just a scratch that cannot see reality!”

As soon as Gosho said so, Deidara tried to put his hand in his bag lowered to his waist.

“...Hey, stop it.” Sasori said to Deidara who had a blue line on his temple.

“He’s making fun of art! I’m going to kill him!”

“Do you know where this is? There are many passers-by. Don’t attract unnecessary attention.”

Deidara hit his tongue harshly to Sasori’s words.

“Kanyu, you are the one who understands herself in this village, a silly woman possessed by the vision of art!”

Gosho swiftly turned with disgust, turning over a warm colored wool and tried to back inside the mansion.

“...hm.”

Deidara once again put his hands in his bag and made a spider with only his finger joint. Sasori was amazed but said nothing this time. To make it good, Deidara threw the spider on Gosho’s coat, then at the moment he opened the door of the mansion, he yelled “Katsu!” As soon as it made noise, Gosho’s clothing burned.

“Wha, it is not, ahhhhhh!”

“Gosho-sama!”

Seeing the sudden burned clothes, the men rushed in panic. Gosho who made noise shaking his fat body was comical.

“... You are...!”

Laughing while holding her belly, it seemed that Kanyu had noticed him. She may have thought of him as well as the art Deidara showed her before. She stood up and came up to him.

“... I’m sorry.”

“Ha? I only did it to mess with him.”

Still, Kanyu smiled about seeing Gosho running away into the mansion.

“Now I understand a bit about the goodness of your art. It is refreshing.”

Good things were seen, Kanyu bowed her head in thanks, and tried to leave. Sasori addressed her.

“Hey, little girl. What happened to the ‘burning in full bloom’?”

Kanyu turned over.

“Do you know Mayaki?”

It was an intolerable shout, but she felt a stinging surrounding line and kept silent. She took up the sunlight and looked up to the glowing shrine that glittered even more with a complicated expression on her face.

“It is hard to talk here. Let’s leave the village.”

“Is this made out of pottery... hm?”

It was a shrine located further up from the kiln of Kanyu. It seemed that the name was Ceramics Shinto Shrine, but there was a white torii to look at. Looking closely, it seemed to be made of pottery.

“Hm...”

And this torii had a pattern that looked like a flower blooming up.

“That is Hanasaki.”

The technique Kanyu was trying to revive. When she told him, Deidara wearing the usually used scope on his left eye, looked at the model.

“...It is a crack, hm.”

Yes, a fine crack was made on the surface of the pottery, which imitated the shape of a flower.

“That’s it. Hanasaki is a technique that creates cracks thinner than a needlepoint on the surface of the pottery like a flower. A small crack becomes a shadow and draws a pattern on white ceramics.”

Kanyu gently touched the torii made of Hanasaki.

“However, it is difficult to create Hanasaki. If the crack is too deep, the pottery will break, and if the crack is too shallow it will not be seen as a flower. Even with lots of knowledge, experience and skill, Hanasaki cannot be established. Mastering Hanasaki’s skills was an honor to no more than anyone in the village....”

Kanyu took her hand off the torii and looked at Sasori.

“I love this Hanasaki technique more than anyone, and the Hanasaki has been more loved than anyone by the predecessor ceramists, Mayaki.”

Kanyu takes out a ceramic pendant from her chest. A flower patten crawled out, crowded on the surface of a round pottery.

“So, ‘Mayaki of full bloom’... Hm.”

“Yes, he is also a benefactor who took over me after my parents died. This pendant gave me an abrasive personality when I said I wanted to become a potter. It is also a testimony of the teacher’s teacher, and Mayaki has the same thing.”

Unlike Goshō, this guy seemed to have quite been an engineer.

“By the way, my man, why did you know about the predecessor?”

“... Because my Grandma used Hanasaki pottery for her puppets.”

Hearing Sasori’s words, Kanyu nodded as if a point of interest was told.

“Puppets... I have heard of it. I was asked by the Hidden Sand Village to make a puppet piece. Hanasaki is strong against fire, and the conductivity of chakra is better than anything. The cracks crack though chakra throughout human blood... Although it is difficult to mass produce.”

“I heard that there was only Mayaki who could make parts according to the clients’ request.”

“Yes. His own artistic creativity was the top priority for Mayaki.”

It would have been better to make something that you would like to make rather than asking other people for help.

“It seems to me that Mayaki is tossing away the village by all means.”

"Mayaki did not abandon the village!"

Kanyu made a fist and raised her voice.

"Certainly... indeed ten years ago Mayaki was a bit odd. Said he will abandon the village, said that he will search for a new place, got angry because this village is no good anymore. "

"So did he go somewhere alone, hm?"

"I don't know... One day he suddenly disappeared. It is not only Mayaki who disappeared. Also other potter masters who had the Hanasaki disappeared. One of them gave me a letter saying: 'I will come back when I find a new place.' That's it. It's already been ten years."

Kanyu tightly held on to the Hanasaki pendant.

"And then Goshō became village leader. Goshō dislikes Hanasaki and recommended everyone to make gorgeous and luxurious pottery with great reception. It was traded at a high price, the village became wealthy but on the contrary ... the Hanasaki technique quickly disappeared. Now, no one can make the flowers bloom."

The sun set, trees shook in a cold wind. Kanyu watched the Village of Ceramics spreading at the foot of the mountain. Ascending from the village, smoke was blown into the wind.

"Goshō's skills are good... but there is no future in this village that chooses money over art. It is right to put an end to leave the village, but I will not go part if Mayaki will come back someday."

At that point, she apologized for talking about herself for a long time.

"The sun is setting. It might be dangerous to return to your journey. If you do not have a lodging house, you can use my house. There is enough room."

Deidara looked at Sasori.

"What do you think, my man?"

After Sasori showed nuisance to think for a moment, he answered, "I'd like to rent an accommodation."

It was unusual for cautious Sasori.

"Okay, I will depend on you, hm."

Kanyu said "Yes." while smiling slightly.

Kanyu's house behind the kiln had a wide space to live alone, giving Deidara and Sasori a room for each. Deidara was on the second floor. If he thought about it, he hadn't been absent from the "Akatsuki" since destroying the village. There was a small desk and a poor bed, but it was enough for him being tired. While taking off his clothes, lying down on the bed with light clothing, Deidara gently rubbed his hands together. There was no need to devise a new concept for an explosion. Perhaps Sasori was also taking care of his "puppets". Sasori himself was a maintenance person.

"Hm? What is that strange smell... hm?"

Noticing a smell that stuffed his nose, Deidara woke up. He slightly opened the window and smelled from there. Looking out, he could see smoke rising from the kiln. Apparently that smell came from there. Kanyu was in front of the kiln adjusting fire. Deidara opened the window and jumped to the ground from there.

"You are still working... hm."

"...! Where did you come from?"

Suddenly seeing Deidara appear behind her, Kanyu was very surprised but quickly returned her eyes back to the kiln.

"It is said that it's most difficult to adjust fire to Hanasaki ... it is almost finished. I'm keeping my eyes on it."

The kiln winded red flames. Pottery was being burned here. However, the fire power seemed weak to Deidara who got into explosions.

"It's better to burn it faster, hm."

Art is an explosion! Although Deidara spoke hotly, Kanyu said "If you do that the pottery will be shattered. By the way, did you mind not eating?"

Kanyu made a simple meal for Deidara, but Sasori did not eat, he went to his room early.

"Ah, my man is alright. He doesn't need rice for his art... hm."

"It seems that the inside is a Hidden Sand Shinobi using puppets. Sasori... was it? Is Sasori also a puppet?"

"It is not cool to talk too much about it, but well, that's it. I am a shinobi pursuing art just like him."

"It seems that yours and Sasori's art are quite different."

"Sort of. But what I am looking for is different. We collide a lot. I can't really understand his art, hm."

Kanyu enthusiasts, and powers the firewood.

"Then why are you with him?"

It was probably a simple question. To that question Deidara did not particularly worry.

"Even so, Sasori is an artist and also a respectable person, hm." He answered.

He did not like being with him, but even so it was Sasori.

"Sasori killed himself, a human being, for his art. Well, as expected there seems to be no more parts to kill... hm."

Sasori sought permanent beauty and changed his body into a puppet. There was no human part left, only the nucleus in his chest.

"I see..."

With Deidara's explanation alone, it would not be able to explain the whole circumstance. Still it seemed there was a feeling in Kanyu.

"You are prepared for it."

Kanyu exhaled.

"It's already been 10 years since Mayaki disappeared... Before I knew it, I may have been influenced by this village that gave up art."

"Art is a fluent thing. Even if I do the same thing everyday, it makes sense, hm."

Deidara didn't mind, he got to know Kanyu. Just talked about themselves. Still, he seemed to have grown attachment towards her and was at a loss for words.

"Yawn.. I'm getting sleepy. I will return to my room, hm."

Deidara who talked about his favourite things killed his yawn and returned home without worrying for Kanyu. This time he entered properly through the entrance and tried to go up the stairs.

“...Deidara.”

Sasori came out of his room as if waiting for Deidara.

“Sasori, my man. What’s wrong?”

“Get ready now. We’re leaving.”

Deidara blinked unexpectedly. Sasori kept on without regard.

“We need to steal clay.”

Deidara laughed for a second, with wide open eyes that twinkled. He was not sleepy anymore.

“I’ll be coming soon, hm.”

“Don’t keep me waiting.”

Art was the energy of Deidara.

They left the house not to be noticed by Kanyu, and the first place they headed to was the Ceramics Shinto Shrine. Sasori looked up at the white torii that seemed to be shining even in the dark.

“It is confirmed.”

From the bottom of his “Akatsuki” clothing, Hiruko’s tail showed up, and he suddenly attacked the torii. The torii made of pottery was destroyed by Hiruko’s tail and crumbled down.

Deidara saw the debris fluttering and it sparkingly shined, he cried out “My man! Why did you not let me do it. Surely, hm.”

“It won’t make sense if you blew it away. Deidara, pick up the debris and touch it.”

“I was thinking I wanted to blow it away with my art.”

“Shut up already.”

While complaining about not being able to get rid of it himself, Deidara picked up one of the debris and traced it with his fingers.

“...!”

There was a pottery feeling on the fingertips. He could somehow imagine the feeling when this was still clay. Even that would have been such fine clay so that it was not comparable to the clay that was in the mining site.

“My man, this...”

Sasori confidently laughed through his nose, looking at the village where smoke ascended.

“In order to protect the village they sacrificed anything but do not believe anyone else at all, Grandma admitted it was Hanasaki. Of course materials are also determined to the highest.”

“So there are other clay mining sites... hm.”

Then where was it? Sasori's eyes were directed at the village to Deidara's doubt. No, at the center of the town to be exact. Smoke was rising from there as well.

“Deidara, do you think you can make something good for those who make fun of art?”

-*Gosho's skills look good.* He recalled Kanyu's words. It got so ridiculous now that it became a furious discomfort.

“There are things that can be done to some extent if the material is good.”

Sasori was reading from every word of Kanyu.

“So... the work of that person is a big deal, hm!”

The light of the lantern made of pottery was quietly illuminating the village. Following the light, they stepped on the path of the glowing tile, and the Ceramics god mansion came to sight. Deidara, who stood in front of the gorgeous gate, grinned. Finally he could do art at free will.

“Let's go, art is an explosion!”

The one who jumped out of Deidara's hand was a detonating clay that exploded into the shape of a little lovely bird. It flew into the gate and snapped at once.

---Katsu!!

The bird exploded at the edge of the gate. The art of another work sublimated momentarily with the power of Deidara's art.

“This is art... hm!”

“What was that?!”

Immediately the guards of the mansion came out running. There seemed to be only money, and he seemed to have hired shinobi.

“What are you!”

The guard who found Deidara came charging with Kunai.

“Hn.”

Then, thin chakra strings jumped out of Sasori’s “Akatsuki” clothing. It stuck to the guard who came across.

“Hey.”

Sasori slightly moved the chakra strings, and with a leap, the guard was beaten down to the ground.

“This is the end.”

He manipulated the guard to watch himself stab his throat with a kunai.

“What is going on?”

Watching the sudden self-perpetration by a group, other guards cleared.

“If you don’t look at it, you can’t see my art.”

Then Deidara threw spiders at the other guards.

--Katsu!!

A body blew away with the blast. The shinobi who originally did not have great courage originally due to the overwhelming power difference trembled and ran away.

“Deidara, there must be a workshop of ceramic pottery in the center of the ceramics mansion. Don’t detour. Blow it up properly and make a way.”

“There’s nothing suitable for art, hm!”

The place broke through the frontal area. Deidara put his hands in his bag.

“... What does this mean...”

Immediately after hearing the grand sound of destruction from the direction of the Ceramics Shinto Shrine, Kanyu came running to see what had happened, and saw the destroyed Hanasaki torii.

Stunned and not understanding the reason, an explosion sounded from the direction of the town this time. When looking at the center of the village, fire was rising from the Ceramics god house.

“No way...”

Kanyu rushed down from the shrine and jumped into the house.

“Not here.... Not here!”

The rooms seemed to be deserted. In the meantime, a new explosion sounded from the town.

“...Ah.”

Kanyu pursed her lips and ran towards the town.

“Is this a workshop?”

A sudden raid attack inside the mansion. The servants screamed and ran away. There was no one in this workshop, clay was being discharged from the doorkor.

“Maybe this is it... hm.”

Deidara stood in front of the muffler and pushed his palm against the clay. The mouth on his hand ate the clay with munching sound. It felt different from the usual. Sensation of chakra was kneaded in. Grasping the explosive clay that came out and smoothed over the sound edges if molded.

“It came up... hm.”

Deidara's body trembled with excitement. He made a C1 spider type, but what he usually did.

“My man! You can compare this clay with the one I always make! A smoother curve enhances deformed beauty to the utmost limit. This is an art revolution, hm!”

Deidara cried out with the spider, but Sasori did not look at Deidara but dropped out the workplace shelves one after another using Hiruko’s tail.

“My man, my art...”

Despite Deidara who wanted to convey the merit of his art, Sasori said “I’m not interested” without hesitation.

“What do you mean not interested, hm?!”

Deidara shouted that the fuse line was not short at all.

Ignoring that, Sasori seemed to be looking for something. On the shelves which were now scattered on the floor, was a scroll with information about crafts.

Sasori said “ This is it.”

Finding scrolls with somewhat challenging drug formation, Hiruko stopped on the shelf.

“...Secret message about glaze?”

Glaze used on china pottery like Kanyu did. A glaze is like a paint that gives luster to the surface of ceramics. Sasori seemed to be free, but he put the scroll into his garment.

“There are things that can be poisoned depending the glaze ingredients. The village of ceramics is the most familiar thing including the dangers of such glazes. Among them, it is said that there was a secret of glazes in the ceramics house with the oldest history.”

Because Sasori put poison in his puppets, he had a deep knowledge about poison. Poison always comes with an antidote. If he did not constantly create new poison, the poison would not be effective. Therefore, he was interested in the toxicity of the glaze.

“Sasori my man, was this perhaps the purpose from the beginning?”

“ I guess I only moved because of you.”

Somehow it seemed like he had a blue line on the temple, and a revolutionary spider on Deidara’s hand.

“My man, my purpose is not yet achieved! We have to find out the existence of this clay... hm!”

There must be an exploration site to this clay somewhere. The flame from the blast was increasingly gaining momentum. Firefighting was meaningless. He continued going inside without hurrying, saying "I want to find that Goshō guy, hm."

"As expected, he is not in the mansion, hm."

"He will be roasted pork."

Talking about that, feet turned in the garden.

"....!"

Then, something crossed the field of his vision.

"My man, there!"

Looking more closely, a man with a busy figure jumped out of the mansion, entered the garden and ran to the back of the site.

"My man, it's Goshō, hm!"

He tried to stop his movement by throwing this revolutionary spider, but Sasori said "Wait. The movement is suspicious. I will do the rest."

"He stands out, hm!"

It was difficult to lose sight of his round body that ran with heavy footsteps. And his feet were desperately slow. Though it came down to him, Sasori was short-tempered by too much tears and muttered "I will kill."

The next thing Deidara said "My man, did you kill him yet, hm!"

"Did you finally get it?"

At last, Goshō's movement stopped in the corner of the vast grounds. There was a small torii which was not as high as knee length. Because the color was white and shiny, it probably was made of Hanasaki porcelain just like the torii that was in the Ceramist Shinto Shrine. Then, Goshō started to watch out for them. Deidara, who thought it was suspicious, gazed through his scope on his left eye. Then immediately near the torii, he found an iron entrance that seemed to be hidden in the grass.

"My man, this is probably the entrance to the exploration site, hm!"

There was clay. Deidara confidently ran to it. He knew the place. There was no need to wait anymore.

"Well, there was something I wanted to tell you... hm."

Deidara appear so suddenly, surprising Goshō.

“What are you!”

*-What is art! Will my belly grow with art!*

*-Those who talk about art are terribly delusional! It's just a scratch that can't see reality!*

Goshō spoke words that disrespected art. Deidara who loved art and lived in art could not forgive this.

“How cool will it be. Well, isn't art... hm.”

Deidara threw a spider at Goshō. A detonating clay that drew a gentle object line and flew. Goshō opened his mouth looking at it. Deidara held two fingers in front of his nose bridge.

“It's an explosion!!!”

-Katsu!!!

This village's fine clay, the crafting clay began to flash and burst. Its powers were not comparable to what he used before. Hot wind reached the position where Deidara stood.

“Ha, Succeeded, hm!”

“Hey, this door has been sealed and will not open.”

Sasori went by looking at the iron door following the underground where the grass burned out, just beside the torii that was caught in the explosion and had no trace left.

In a hurry, he saw countless tags on the door and even he did not get burnt while receiving the blast.

“Sealing technique?! Why does a ninjutsu free village have such thing?”

“For such a house that has continued from long ago, even if you can't use ninjutsu, they were making a special skill.”

Sasori said while reading.

“Apparently this seems to be the seal that only Ceramic Shintoists can open and close.”

“... Thing is...”

“This door will not open.”

“...”

“...”

A rainy silence flowed between the two of them. But Deidara would not lose.

“... Coming so far by hand, the soul of my art won't stay silent, hm!”

He ate the clay found in the workshop of the Ceramic god mansion, this time with a lot more chakra.

“My eighteenth, C2 Dragon, hm!”

Deidara was able to use the amount of chakra kneaded in clay according to the situation.

Deidara jumped on the back of the dragon.

“My man, jump on!”

Sasori rode behind Deidara. This time, he tried to fly into the sky.

“... Deidara, Sasori!”

Kanyu entered the mansion which had already been torn apart by them. She glared at Deidara.

“You did this by all means... why?”

“Noisy.” Sasori interrupted Kanyu. “You are clinging to this village as an excuse for Mayaki's duty.”

“...!”

“It is evident that you came to a non-conforming place. You chose this falling village rather than art... it is stupid.”

Kanyu was poorly pointed out by Sasori and could not reply.

“Let's go, Deidara.”

As told, Deidara spread the wings of the dragon.

“... Wrong.”

Kanyu seized her first and lifted her face.

“I just can't forgive you for breaking a work of Hanasaki!”

Perhaps she was talking about the torii of the Ceramists Shrine.

“That's why I came here! Because you hurt a thing precious to me!”

Maybe, it was just a bluff. Still there was a strong will as an artist in the eyes of Kanyu.

“Then it would be better to get away from here... hm.”

At the same time as Deidara said so, the dragon emerged.

“Because the beauty of Hanasaki may disappear forever... hm.”

It seemed that Kanyu did not immediately understand what Deidara was saying. However, she understood by swallowing the words.

“...”

Kanyu distorted her expression, turned her back on Deidara and ran away. The dragon slowly rose to the sky.

“I owe her my gratitude for the lodging and meal, hm.”

“I left home before taking a rest, and I almost ate food.”

He would like to say he did not owe anything to Kanyu. Deidara laughed at Sasori through his nose.

“My man, you are bad for breaking the torii, hm.”

“Ah? Why is that?”

The long tail of the dragon shook. While looking down at the town with his left eye scope, Deidara said

“I’m not even sure if I want to blow up the Hanasaki... hm.”

When Sasori broke the big white torii, white flowers were scattered and it was art. If Deidara exploded it, it would have been sublimed even more beautifully. Deidara wanted to see it. That is why- he needed a creator. He looked down from the sky to the Village of Ceramics. The ceramics god mansion in the center was burning red and was illuminating the town’s ceramic tiles with red. The scenery of the village in irrational coloring with no sense of unity dyed in a red color was beautiful.

The long tail of the dragon suddenly shrunk so as to sink it inside. The clay of the tail went through the body of the dragon, it was shaped into another form and looked out of the dragon’s mouth.

“Now, I am satisfied with this... hm.”

The newly dragged out dragon spread its wings towards the ceramic god mansion.

“Wow...”

Kanyu was running with full speed without rest from the Ceramics god mansion, wiped her sweat and stood in front of her own kiln. In fact, she should flee farther. But in the kiln was the work that she made. As usual it may be a failure. But still, she did not want to run away from here. The sky of the Village of Ceramics burned red, and there was a dragon far away in the sky.

“...!”

A new dragon was created from the dragon's mouth. The dragon flew to the center of the village. Kanyu resolved to prepare and closed her eyes.

--Katsu!!!

A shock wave like a roaring sound she had never heard before was destroying the air.

“...hm!”

Something was destroyed and crushed. Enormous energy that took away everything. It was the ultimate beauty that ended only at the moment and could only be seen in a moment. Deidara was convinced every time he saw this.

“Art is an explosion!”

The blast reached the place of Kanyu, and the fire in the kiln went crazy.

The village that prospered as a village of art was now only a mountain of rubble. As flames smoked out, there was a deep and large cavity in the place once called ceramics god mansion.

It was now a hole molded by an explosion.

“... Awesome, hm.”

Deidara made a round-roof look around the dragon that landed on the cavity. There was a huge exploration place in the basement of Ceramics god mansion. Gosho probably burned away from the fire, so he had probably tried to evacuate here.

“Finally, I found it, hm!”

Deep in the ground, clay was placed. Deidara took the clay and confirmed it by eating it with his hands. Chakra kneaded quickly, tension arose inspiration. It was exactly fine clay. However, Deidara dropped his shoulders once again seeing the exploration site.

“Hey, my man. The clay is too little, hm.”

That’s right. He finally found this mining site. But the amount of clay was not large. When he was looking for the prospecting places where clay was stored, he finally found a hidden room in this confusing place.

“I don’t have to see it in such a place, hm!”

Tearfully looking inside, he made his eyes unexpectedly round.

“... my man, my man, just a moment, hm!”

“Ah?”

Deidara did not lend a hand to the search and called Sasori who was looking at the secret text of the glaze that was drawn from the ceramics shrine.

“It’s a skull mountain, hm.”

There were a number of white corpses.

“...”

Sasori observed it carefully and stretched out his tail together as a result of noticing something. The tail picked up the necklace that was on the neck of the skull, roughly robbed it. The skull rolled.

“What, my man. Did you want it, hm?”

“Take a look.”

A necklace was presented to Deidara who tilted his neck. There was a round pottery pendant on it. It was fine and shiny, and the flowers were in full bloom. He had some familiarity to it.

“... Kanyu was the one who had it, hm.”

“Thing is this skull...”

Looking at the rolling skull, Deidara recalled his name.

“It was ‘Mayaki of Full Bloom’, hm.”

Kanyu said that this pendant was a testimony of a teacher.

“There is also an inscription of Mayaki on the back. There is no mistake.”

When Sasori left the concealed room, he again dug deep into the ground and looked over the exploratory site again.

“... Originally it may have been getting less.”

“Hm? What does that mean, my man?”

Sasori breathed a single breath.

“Human beings generally reside the place where there are necessary resources to live in. Water or food is a good example, but here is the village of pottery. It would have developed as a residential village in a place where all the things necessary for making ceramics are available. In short, this clay. However, over the years it may have been using the resources.”

If he looked from the ground from here, it was far deeper.

“Probably the Hanasaki technique will not be realized without this clay. So Mayaki is not saying that you should abandon the village and aim for a new place.”

“Also it was the son Gosho who disagreed, hm.”

Decorating the town with a bad taste and remembering the appearance of Gosho, which was wearing glittery decorations.

“It is an advanced blossoming technique, but it is for either professional. People like gay and luxurious goods. The girl said that the excellent Hanasaki potter disappeared with Gosho, but Gosho sealed the Hanasaki and his own father for self-interest. It is a bad party.”

Sasori said that Gosho should be made a fool of. For some reason, Sasori seemed irritated. He asked himself if there was something on his mind to wonder about that made Gosho kill his intermediate family. However, Sasori immediately returned to normal.

“Well, even if he did, the clay here is a luxury item. They used it for their own pottery. Besides he used ordinary clay for the other guys, and made the village prosperous by transforming it into a gorgeous thing. In a sense, I guess he was a good guy.”

Sasori was short-tempered, but there was also a point somewhere it could be overlooked. Gosho seemed to be evaluated and brought to an objective. However, Deidara was not interested in money making and the prosperity of the village. It was another thing that caught him.

“Well then, did the Hanasaki disappear now, hm?”

Deidara was going to bring all the clay here. Even so, there was no desired amount, but the clay necessary to make Hanasaki disappeared.

“Now, I don’t know. However...”

“However?”

“... It seems that she did not give up on the ‘burning in full bloom’.”

Indeed, that girl-

Waking up was caused by pain. She realized she was alive because of the pain.

“Huh...?”

Kanyu held her head up. At her back was a stack of leaves that could have been blown from the woods around the house. Apparently this branch of leaves absorbed the impact.

“... My work!”

The first thing she thought about was the pottery in the kiln. As the surrounding landscape had changed, Kanyu looked for the kiln.

“Ah, there!”

When she found the rising smoke, she dragged her body and approached the broken kiln. All pottery in it was also broken. Kanyu sat on the spot.

“...?”

However, she noticed that the broken pottery was shining white. She also saw an engraved pattern. Kanyu tore off the clothes she was wearing, round her hands and picked up the pieces that still had heat from the kiln.

“This is...”

There, a beautiful flower pattern emerged. This was the ultimate white “Hanasaki”.

“Stupid, how come...?”

*-It's better to burn it faster, hm.*

She recalled Deidara's words. At the same time, she was inspired by the blast and thought of the burning kiln.

“Okay, you do intentionally make cracks with a high temperature at a stroke!”

Taking care of the pottery too much, it had not been possible for Kanyu to make a momentum for fire. That was not good. It had to be burning with enough momentum to explode. The clay seemed to have been unable to withstand this high temperature, but it was a great step for Kanyu.

“Soil... even if I find clay that can withstand high temperatures...”

There was a voice to revive again. It was called burning in full bloom, and it is was Mayaki's word that left the Hanasaki as wanted. She wished she had waited for the day returned Mayaki to this village.

*-Kanyu, no matter how old it is, because of art, the eagle will go looking for new ground!*

Holding the fragments engraved with flowers tightly, Kanyu spilled tears. Something fell from the top of Kanyu, and it was immediately beside her with a \*Kaching\* sound. There was a pendant that broke to the impact when she looked. Kanyu was familiar with it. Mayaki told her that it was proof of being a teacher.

“Why?”

Kanyu clasped it and looked to the sky. There was a dragon that made its wings wide and flew away. She couldn't see from there but Deidara and Sasori were on its back. Kanyu picked up the fragments in the kiln and the broken pendant with both hands and stood up.

“You made sure to let me revive the Hanasaki technique!”

The dragon did not react and flew higher and higher.

The art of pursuing yourself may be violence against someone in a sense. Perhaps a too strong individuality may not be able to gain an understanding of others. Still, they moved on their way. It seemed that those two lives emerged on the back of the dragon that flew high in the sky.

## chapter 4:

Pain and Konan- This is the most boring chapter so I'll resume it quickly: Tobi and Zetsu tells Pain and Konan the localization of a Jinchuuriki and Tobi orders Konan to go to get him but she refuses saying she can't leave Pain which makes Tobi get angry but Pain tells Konan to go that he'll be okay and so she does. She heads to the place where the Jinchuuriki is but meanwhile she is flying she sees from above a flower and flies down and picks it, That flower makes her remember a lot of moments she had Yahiko this is the boring part of where she had a lot of flashbacks like she remembers when Yahiko gave her as present a flower -this was before they met Nagato- and she also remembers when Yahiko sacrificed himself to protect her from Hanzou and she blames herself for death and bla bla. She later arrives to the Jinchuuriki's place but starts to fight him but at the beginning she was kinda weak because the flower put her under a genjutsu but she easily broke it off by throwing the flower and then defeated the Jinchuuriki, he didn't even dure 10 seconds against her. The chapter ends with Zetsu telling Tobi to kill Konan because she would betray them but Tobi tells him that's not worthy because it would make Nagato to enrage and Konan always keeps Nagato calm.

## epilogue(summary):

Epilogue: Sasuke says goodbye to those brothers and he starts to walking away keeping with his journey but he was walking forward and crosses a boy which tells him "Hey I can't believe you're alive" -this was the bug boy from Itachi's story- and Sasuke tells him "I'm not Itachi," and then they hang out a bit and the bug boy tells Sasuke Itachi was really good person and this causes Sasuke's heart to break inside to which he replies he indeed was. The novels ends with the narrator saying the Akatsuki weren't that much evil, even if they did all that evil things they were

still humans and had people they loved.

"The Akatsuki too had family.

The Akatsuki too loved.

They too were shinobi, they too were human."