## Watching

Von Khaosprinz

## Watching

For a long time, Sakumo Hatake had been watching.

He was just in time to watch Kakashi catching his blond student, and something in his chest grew tight when he saw the silent exchange between them. This boy had become one of the biggest pillars of support in his son's life, and Sakumo doubted he could ever be thankful enough.

He watched his son's inner turmoil first at the sight of his hyperventilating student in the snow and then at his estranged student trying to kill them all, and he *ached*. He ached, because his beloved child, grown man or not, had to feel something like this, but at the same time he felt proud, so very, very *proud* because his son *cared*, cared so very much. He was just hoping that fate wasn't going to turn that against him.

Sakumo kept watching as his son almost became the Rokudaime Hokage, and his chest felt like bursting with pride. That didn't last for long, though, at the sight of war looming over them, and pain and fear came into the mix as he was named Commander of the Third Division. Kakashi had already participated in one war too many at an age too young. He feared for what would happen. He had a bad feeling about this.

When he watched his son facing off against the Seven Swordsmen of the Mist, Sakumo felt *awed*. He had known that the Copy Ninja, Sharingan no Kakashi, was both known and feared across the whole continent, but this... He wasn't sure he himself, Konoha no Shiroi Kiba, would have been able to stand up to him. He felt tears in the corners of his eyes when he saw how much his son had accomplished... and how much he had *paid* for it.

His breath hitched in his throat when he watched Kakashi and Gai saving the young man everything depended on from Madara's fatal blow. If there was the time, he would feel amazement at how far Gai had come, and gratefulness at how much support he had given to his broken son for so many years without wanting anything in return. He would make sure to tell Dai about it as soon as he saw him.

Sakumo had known that fate wasn't nice or kind, but that it was cruel enough for this... He wanted to do something, anything, when he watched his son's world come crashing down around him at the revelation of the masked man's identity. Even the Yondaime Hokage, the man who had been more of a father to his son than himself, looked torn apart by this. He had seen from here, from this campfire (because he had been too much of a coward to see it alive), how important the Uchiha boy had been for Kakashi. His gaze shifted away from the pictures and he closed his eyes, pretending he didn't notice the wetness on his cheeks. He wasn't sure if he could ever forgive fate for pulling a prank so utterly cruel on his son. Hadn't it been enough already? Even if the return of his estranged student had calmed the crashing of his son's mind, he knew that Kakashi knew that this being a simple return would be too beautiful to be real.

As he watched Kakashi facing off against Obito in another dimension, Sakumo found himself praying. He wasn't sure what he was praying for- for his son's victory? He doubted it could be counted as a real victory if the screams he could hear breaking through from his son's innermost sanctuary only he could hear were anything to go by. That his son would leave the battle unscathed? There already was so much *pain* in both his body and his mind that sometimes Sakumo wondered just how strong his son had to be in order to be still alive and being able to feel happiness and care for other people. He doubted he himself could have done that. *No*, he corrected himself mentally as he saw Kakashi's arm, enveloped by lightning, piercing through his oldest friend's chest, and dully noted the metal rod protruding from his outwardly unwavering son's back. *I already proved I couldn't do that*.

He silently watched his son in this unfamiliar dimension, alone now, and painfully sewing the hole in his chest back together. Sakumo wondered where all this strength came from. *Probably from his mother*, he mused, *it certainly wasn't me*.

While he watched, he felt more tears slipping down his cheeks, but he couldn't care less. It seemed like fate wasn't that cruel, after all, when it allowed Kakashi and Obito to stand shoulder to shoulder again, even when his son had just tried to finish the job only to be interrupted by their teacher. But it seemed even the Konoha no Kīroi Senkō wasn't free from bad life choices, and it was some kind of consolation for Sakumo, however small. But then again, it was at the cost of facing someone who was almost a god, and no matter how deeply he wished for a good outcome, he was sure it wasn't so easy. Why couldn't life be simple once in a while. But at the same time, he felt a wave of gratefulness crashing through him so huge he thought he would drown in it, and all of it was directed towards that blond boy who had actually mastered a bijū. He wasn't even sure what for- for believing and trusting and caring for his son? For managing to sway that one person that was about to break the last remaining pieces of his son's fractured soul? He didn't know and he didn't care, because the feeling

itself was enough. And no matter how much it hurt himself so see and feel his son's agony, he knew he would pull through, with people like Gai and Naruto standing behind him to watch his back.

Dread started choking him when he watched the blond boy losing his bijū. Not only for the boy's life, but also what kind of impact this would leave on his son. The dread only rose and threatened to overwhelm him when he saw Gai opening the last of the eight gates and he feared for what this would do to his son. He fought with himself if he should keep watching or not, fearing the outcome, and almost *lost* the fight when his son lost his Sharingan, but fate showed mercy once more and Naruto reappeared, alive and breathing and practically vibrating with new found power and energy, and more tears spilled from Sakumo's dark eyes when his son got a new eye and his self-proclaimed eternal rival and friend and supporter was dragged back from the brink of death.

His lips were pressed into a thin line as he watched the Mugen Tsukuyomi enveloping the world, even if he was glad that the estranged student had returned to save his son from its effects. But Sakumo was smart enough to realise that this had only happened by chance. He wished his son wouldn't know that, but neither of them was the kind of people who could believe in things they knew were false.

It took all of Sakumo's self-control to not jump up and scream in frustration and sorrow and pain when he watched the battle still going on, another enemy appearing, a *god* appearing to oppose his son and everything he fought for. He really didn't want to lose hope, not now when they were still standing after all that had happened, but it was enough. *It was enough*. Just how many hardships would his son have to face before Sakumo could finally leave this place in peace with the knowledge that his beloved child was fine and well and in the best of hands?

He was petrified as he watched what this god could do- even more so when realization about the helplessness and *uselessness* his son felt became clear to him. He wished for something to happen, *anything*, that his son would come out alive of this without being drowned in self-loathing because he had wanted to do something but *couldn't*.

Sakumo slowly rose from his seat, eyes wide with shock when he watched his son trying to sacrifice himself for his student and the future in what seemed like slow motion. His mouth opened as he wanted to shout NO! Your time hasn't come! I don't want to see you here again so soon! when the dark grey bone-like rod was about to impale Kakashi, but he froze before a single sound could leave his mouth only to be heard by no one but himself. The Uchiha had saved his son, once more at the cost of his own life, and he sank to his knees in gratitude and sadness. He wrapped his arms around himself in an attempt to calm down, because this had almost been the end. Maybe not for the world, but for everything Sakumo dared hoping for even in the afterlife.

He still hadn't been able to rise to his feet again, kneeling in front of the campfire, when he watched his son opening his eyes again, and instead of black they were *red and black*, both of them, and Sakumo swore to himself to search for Uchiha Obito later

on to thank the man on his knees for everything he had done for Kakashi. Relief and pride overwhelmed him when he saw his son saving the pink-haired kunoichi, gathering what had once been his team and preparing for the final blow and actually dealing the final blow, all of them together, and even more tears sprung from his eyes. This time, though, they were because he was happy.

He was almost ready to leave this place in-between when he suddenly watched the Uchiha boy revealing his true intentions. Resignation spread through his body. Of course. Everything else would have been too easy. Warily he settled back on the log and his dark eyes followed the two young boys that had just saved the world together disappearing, and his son looking after them before closing his eyes, opening them again and they were only black this time and started to follow them. He was exhausted though and therefore slow, so Kakashi and his pink-haired student paired up, supporting each other to try and catch up to the second half of their team.

Sakumo's eyes widened when he watched his son finding his students. The destruction was one of a whole new scale and their arms... Something inside of him slumped as did his son, but the knot uncurled and made space for something else, something happy and relieved and *beautiful* when the son realised that this time, their team was back together. For real, even if it had literally cost them both an arm.

And Sakumo felt the same, because this time, he could be sure that Kakashi would finally have the peace he had deserved for a long time now, and that meant that Sakumo could finally, *finally* move on and meet the woman he had not seen in too long and tell her everything about the child she bore and never met. Now he knew that she would be proud, and he felt something in his chest flutter when he remembered her smile that had made him fall for her a long time ago, the same smile their son had been hiding from the world for too long, but Sakumo was sure that it was still there. Somewhere deep inside, buried beneath all the walls and masks his child had covered himself with, but he was sure that time for revelations had finally arrived. He was sure that Kakashi would finally be able to smile this breathtaking smile again, because *nothing* that might happen in the future could be enough to bring down his son, this *man* that had endured more than anyone else and still lived to tell the tale, tall and proud and *still not completely broken*. Smiling gently at the scene unfolding in front of him of the campfire, Team 7 back together and even if two arms were missing in the hug, it looked and felt complete. At last.

And Sakumo rose from the log, quenched the campfire in front of him and walked through the darkness that surrounded him. But only after a few steps, blinding light forced him to close his eyes, and when he opened them again and blinked to adjust to the brightness, the woman he hadn't seen in over 32 years yet never stopped loving was standing in front of him, smiling her beautiful smile with the mark above her lip. And she opened her arms to welcome him.