

Dragon of the Spring Ch. 3

Hiruzen Sarutobi, third Hokage of Konoha, sighed as he tapped out his pipe. Around him the walls of his office shimmered with a barrier designed to isolate the interior from all forms of surveillance. It was honestly a thing of beauty, a product of the Second Hokage working in conjunction with masters from the now-defunct Uzumaki clan. Not only did it blur everything within, block chakra, and prevent all sound from leaving, but it also acted as a sensing array so no one could cheat it by sneaking inside before it activated. His rival Danzo learned that the hard way when it cost him one of his spies.

Such a barrier also prevented anyone inside from sensing anything without, and also prevented his own ANBU bodyguard from doing their jobs, which is why he didn't bother using it very often. The man standing in front of him right now, though, was one of the few people who could ask for the extra privacy, and receive it no questions asked. Kakashi Hatake had bought that privilege with over two decades of blood, sweat, tears, and heartbreaking sacrifice for Konoha. No matter how much of a shiftless slacker he had become in recent years, Hiruzen would always have time for him.

Even when he brought the aging Hokage a mystery hidden in an enigma wrapped up in a sizzling explosive tag.

"She's already back home?"

"She woke up on the way to the hospital. By the time we got there even the bruises had vanished. The medic declared her in perfect health. I had to buy her some fresh clothes on the way, though. Or strange questions might have been asked."

His brow furrowed in worry. Civilians might think a new bloodline was cause for celebration. They were wrong. While a new bloodline did present a significant boon to any shinobi village, they also presented a significant risk. Particularly when the bloodline holder was female.

A male bloodline holder could sow their oats and donate their sperm. They didn't even have to worry about child support, the village provided generous rewards for women willing to bear the child of endangered bloodlines. There was a reason poor Sasuke Uchiha found himself hounded by young women, and his good looks and talent were only a small part of it.

With a girl, however, the equation got a lot more complex. Until Sakura Haruno gave birth to a son, who in turn grew up to spread his seed, the whole project would have a single point of failure. A point of failure that would have to be guarded. Which meant it fell to Hiruzen to decide how best to guard that point of failure, and how many resources to commit to protecting it. And hope that their enemies were less committed to eliminating the threat.

He couldn't even order the Haruno girl away from active duty. From the sound of it, her bloodline was made for combat. And Konoha needed to know the full extent of that bloodline if they were to know the extent of the opportunity she represented - and the extent others would go to deny them.

And all this assumed the bloodline even bred true. The First Hokage's Wood Release was an infamous example of an ability which should have been inheritable, but had since proved decidedly otherwise.

"And young Sakura doesn't have any idea as to full extent of her ability?"

"She didn't even know she had an ability, beyond the ability to heal quickly from injuries. But since she's never received worse than bruises, no one really noticed." Kakashi tilted his head in thought. "I did notice she seemed to shrug off injuries faster as her body grew hotter. I think the regeneration, the anger, and the flames are all one package. She might not be able to show one without the others."

"And you're certain she doesn't have a seal of any kind on her?"

"First thing I checked. She's not a jinchuuriki."

Hiruzen nodded his acknowledgement. On the face of it, it was an absurd question. Every single tailed beast had been sealed, and the two tailed beast containers associated with fire were both active duty shinobi in service to Konoha's rivals. But both he and Kakashi had painful memories of a promising young kunoichi who had been turned into a living bomb by Konoha's enemies using a deliberately fault tailed beast sealing.

Hiruzen slowly refilled and lit his pipe. After puffing on it for a minute, he delivered his verdict. "We'll keep the team as it is. Pulling her will simply draw unnecessary attention." His eyes narrowed. "Train her Kakashi. Train her control. Even if she isn't one, much like a jinchuuriki, the greatest danger is she will lose control in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"What about Naruto? Should I give him similar training?"

"Mmm... no. Naruto knows of his burden, but has shown no signs of drawing on its power. His seal is still strong. Best let sleeping dogs lie."

"I take it I also have to tell Sakura to keep quiet about her abilities?"

"Do you think she can keep it secret?" It was a non-trivial question. With the current fad for lionizing bloodline holders, any new bloodline ability would be widely celebrated. Instant recognition and social advancement. Such would be tempting for a grown shinobi, let alone a daughter of civilians. Hiruzen mentally scoffed. The whole celebration of bloodlines had started in just the last few years, a propaganda campaign by his own office to try and keep alive not just the Uchiha, but a few other bloodlines that were close to extinction.

Kakashi had been considering the question. Finally, he replied, "I think she will, if I tell her to. From what little I've seen, she's a remarkably self-possessed young woman. Apart from a few people and things, there's very little that excites her. She'll keep quiet. The real trouble will be my other genin. I don't know how much they saw or heard."

"I'll leave it to your judgement on how to handle them."

The old man sighed again as the barrier fell and the jounin left. It wasn't just potential enemy action he had to worry about. Any clan in Konoha would be delighted to have a powerful new bloodline holder as a vassal. It had been a major struggle to prevent the Uchiha from being absorbed after the massacre left Sasuke alone, and that was with the fame of the Uchiha name acting as a barrier to acquisition. The Harunos might as well be meat in a pool of hungry sharks. Best for everyone involved that Sakura grow strong enough to make her own decisions before the other clans came calling.

Sakura found the days after her aborted genin test to be passing strange. Being told you possessed a powerful and hitherto unknown bloodline ability should have been a life changing event. Yet, after being admonished to keep it a secret, her life went back to being mostly mundane.

Yes, she was a genin now instead of an academy student, but that just meant a different kind of mundane. Sasuke was still a brooding loner who she had to resist punching out every time he looked at her with dismissive eyes. Naruto was still a hyperactive loudmouth who was way too stubborn for his own good. Neither of them treated her any differently, which implied neither of them had witnessed her little freak out during their test. Her days were still filled with training and chores (that called themselves D-rank missions) and in her free time she still hung out with Ino and complained about boys.

The differences, she supposed, lay in the details. For example, her personal training with Kakashi emphasized emotional control and keeping your composure under stress. This was honestly a bit hilarious. Didn't he realize that Sakura had been controlling her volcanic temper for as long as she could remember? She wondered if Kakashi spent his personal training time with Naruto teaching him how to be a prankster. Or maybe he was teaching Sasuke how to be an uncommunicative jerk?

She supposed Kakashi did have one point. Sakura needed to be able to call upon her ability at will. If it had been a real fight, Kakashi would have had multiple opportunities to kill her before Sakura got strong enough to start shrugging off damage.

With Kakashi helping her, Sakura found she could in fact maintain a certain level of strength without first getting angry or getting into a fight. It was a bit like clenching a muscle, in that the strength would slip away if she stopped paying attention. But as long as she focused, she could maintain a temperature just shy of setting her clothes on fire. Which also left her strong and fast enough to keep up with most chunin, at least according to Kakashi.

Still, it quickly became clear that unless she chose to fight in the nude, her bloodline ability would quickly rack up the bills on replacement clothing. Not to mention the embarrassment of being naked in public when she eventually came down from cutting loose. That meant carrying

multiple changes of clothing at all times. Which was a definite inconvenience for any shinobi, and finally prompted Kakashi to teach her something genuinely useful.

Storage scrolls! Sakura had known they existed, but never had she thought she would have the opportunity to make them, at least not so early in her career. All her life, whenever the topic of fuinjutsu had come, teachers in the academy would brush it off as being way too complicated and difficult. The students were taught how to use certain common seals, but nothing on how to make them.

Kakashi made them look easy. He claimed that he was only a dabbler in the art, but Sakura suspected that Kakashi's standards for 'dabbling' was a lot higher than most people. His instructions on how to create storage scrolls were clear, concise, and included guidelines for her to run her own controlled experiments so she could customize them to her specific needs. In particular, he helped her figure out how to make storage scrolls that were far more resistant to flame than mere paper and ink had any business being. The scrolls still wouldn't survive if she held on to them while going all out, but at least she wouldn't set them on fire by accident.

Even better, the storage scrolls were tangible proof that she was, in fact, learning something useful under her jounin-sensei. This was very useful for helping Ino corral her own team. The poor girl had done nothing but complain about her sensei, who apparently preferred to play shogi with her teammate Shikamaru than teach them new techniques. Now that Ino could point to Sakura as proof of what other sensei were doing, she could shame her sensei into getting off his ass and taking their training a bit more seriously. Sakura extracted a promise from Ino to keep her updated on how things went with Team 10.

Sakura didn't tell Ino, but she felt her own team 7 had its share of problems. On their team training and assignments, Sasuke and Naruto spent more time needling and arguing with each other than actually doing their jobs. It didn't matter how well Sakura did her part if the two idiots were too busy arguing to do theirs. And their sensei was absolutely no help, too busy giggling into his porn to discipline them. More and more, Sakura was beginning to wonder if this situation didn't call for a little bit of temper. To put into those fools the fear of exactly what would happen should they not shape up right damn quick. But she'd promised her sensei to keep her cool and her ability under wraps, and she did her best to meditate on the fire in her blood and ignore her team's antics.

Of course, those antics got kind of hard to ignore when, after yet another mundane chore rendered excessively complicated by the boys' inability to keep on task, Naruto's own frustration boiled over into a demand, right to the Hokage's face, that their team be assigned a higher ranking mission.

To her shock, instead of shutting the idiot down, the Hokage said yes! Even Naruto's attempt to beat up the very rude and drunk bridge builder was brushed off!

At this point, Sakura's own temper was getting harder to keep in check. It just didn't seem worth the effort when her own teammates got better results by doing the opposite. Yes, she knew the situations were not exactly equal. Her temper tantrums had the potential to be a lot more

destructive than Naruto's. But Sakura was so damn tired of being the reasonable professional one, only to see her efforts be ignored.

Thus, as their team left for their very first C-rank mission, Sakura was running much hotter than usual.