

# Culprit

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*Naruto's innocent walk home turns into a fight for his life... Will he get help in time? And who's the culprit  
Someone who knows Naruto already? Someone else? Or... maybe both?*

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**Chapter 1 - Attack**

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# 1 - Attack

**Hola n Kon nichywa minna-san! Welcome to my Naruto fic, and please tell me what you think! Enjoy!**

**Note: This takes place between the time where Naruto becomes a ninja, and the Zabuza arc.**

**Disclaimer: Naruto I own not. - - - Chapter 1 - Attack - - -** The sound of leaves being crunched echoed throughout a lively forest. Birds sang joyfully, and rabbits and squirrels hopped and darted over tender blades of grass, searching for a snack, or just moving around. Two figures strolled along a dirt path that led them through the many green trees, neither speaking a single word. As the afternoon sun peeked through the thick blanket of leaves, the two figures left the shadows and were switched into the light.

The man in front walked purposely, with long, quiet strides. There was a hitai-ate tied around his head, with the emblem of a leaf on the silver plate, indicating that he was a ninja from Konoha. A harsh, jagged scar ran from his right eye down to slightly below his chin. He wore casual, comfortable clothes so that he could move freely, and his raven hair was tied into a short, low ponytail.

The boy next to him looked younger, and a lot more carefree than the stern, weathered-looking man next to him. He walked with his fingers casually interlaced behind his head, and he also wore a Konoha hitai-ate. His hair echoed the older man's raven color. However, it was shorter, and had more of a spiky look to the style.

After five years of traveling, it'll be nice to finally be back in Konoha. Right, father? the boy asked, breaking the long silence in between the two, sans the continuing merry chirping of birds and the scurrying of forest creatures.

It will be nice to stay in one place again, agreed the man in a gruff voice, his dark black eyes never leaving the road in front of him. It was obvious that his mind was elsewhere.

Silence blanketed them once more, before the sound of footsteps made the traveling pair stop, and quickly switch to high alert. The father's hand strayed instinctively toward his pouch for a kunai, while his son's did the same.

A black-haired male stepped out of a clump of trees hiding a path up ahead and to the left, a younger boy following him. The man stopped walking, and turned towards the two raven-haired companions. The boy stopped as well, but he seemed more timid than his calm-looking companion. At the sight of the two newcomers, the father and son relaxed slightly, and straightened their posture.

Asuko! Long time no see! the man greeted, strolling to the older raven-haired male and then shaking his hand. The older newcomer had short black hair, a Konoha hitai-ate, and cheerful eyes. He also bore his own scar that ran across his right cheek, and he wore the standard Jounin attire. And you as well Ryo! he added, giving the younger raven-hair a friendly smile. Ryo returned the smile and added a bow

to his welcome. It's nice to see you too Hitashi-san, he acknowledged respectfully.

It's great to see you again too Hitashi, but I actually wasn't expecting to see you so soon, Asuko replied. I heard that you had gone traveling as well.

Hai, that was three years after you started already. Anyway, Kai and I returned to Konoha a few weeks ago. It's been hell trying to get everything back in order! the man exclaimed with a laugh. And after being gone for five years, you're going to have to do a hell of a lot more than we've had to!

Asuko sighed. You had to remind me. And I'm going to have to change out of these comfortable clothes and back into the Jounin attire as well.

Ryo sighed as the two older men continued to chat. *Damn, he's right, I'm sure father and I will suffocate from all of the dust we'll inhale when we get home.* Refusing to think about the impending workload, he turned his attention to the boy next to Hitashi, Kai.

Kai was silently observing the ground. *Apparently it's very interesting,* Ryo thought, amused. But he knew, from past experience, that Kai shouldn't be messed with. *He had some of the highest scores in our class! Heh, I'm glad he's on my team.*

Ryo's musing was interrupted as the two older men started heading toward Konoha, yelling for their sons to hurry and follow the two leading Jounin. The two Genin trailed them not long after. *It'll be nice to meet again as a team as well! Training alone is alright, but I miss practicing with Kai and Misuna!* Ryo thought, anticipating the next meeting the three would have.

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The afternoon was wearing away, and an array of dark colors now decorated the sky as the sun sank below the horizon. Crowds moved through the now lighted streets, and stopped by in favorite restaurants to eat dinner. As did a certain blond-haired boy. A young twelve-year-old kid clad in bright orange apparel ducked under the red flap that was part of his own favorite eating place, Ichiraku Ramen.

Oi! Ji-san! he called.

An affable-looking man appeared from a door in the back of the ramen stand. Ah! Naruto! Ichiraku Ramen's favorite customer!

Naruto giggled as he adjusted his Konoha hitai-ate proudly. Hai! Only you make the best ramen ji-san!

Teuchi laughed good-naturedly. Why, thank you! Tonight, how about your favorite?

The blond's eyes lit up with anticipation. Yosh! That sounds good!

Okay then, Teuchi said, starting to prepare the ramen.

Naruto sighed and closed his eyes as he breathed in the heavenly aroma of his beloved food. *Nothing like ramen to end a day! Especially when I got another boring mission today!* he added frustratingly. *I*

*need some ramen to help feel better! And I also need a REAL ninja mission!*

Today, Team Seven acquired another D-rank mission delivering mail that had arrived for the local townsfolk. And while the citizens who received the mail were happy enough, it was an entirely different story for the three young Genin.

Right after Naruto, Sasuke, Sakura and Kakashi had left the Hokage tower, the teacher had announced that he had important documents to sort out for the Hokage, leaving in his traditional puff of smoke, and leaving three ninjas with a cart full of letters and packages.

LIAR! Sakura and Naruto had accused, even though their sensei was already gone. Sasuke had merely scoffed before turning to the cart.

Reluctantly, the three had separated the mail evenly among themselves, and set off for the districts for the deliveries, each Genin grumbling angrily to themselves. Sasuke wanted to train for his upcoming well, sooner or later - revenge, Naruto wanted a real ninja mission, and Sakura didn't see how any ninja could end up with a job like this.

Surprisingly, the deliveries had eaten up most of the day, and the team split up after completing the mission to go eat dinner and sleep, so that they could start training early tomorrow, since Kakashi would most likely be late. They figured they might as well do *something* productive with the three hours that their sensei took to meet them.

And so here is our favorite loud and unpredictable ninja, eagerly awaiting his ramen. As the steaming bowl was placed in front of him by a smiling chef, he reached over and took a pair of hashi from the container in front of him.

Itadakimasu! Naruto yelled happily as he broke apart the hashi, and started to noisily slurp the noodles. **(1)** As he ate the meal, he glanced around, and noticed the absence of somebody who should've been behind the counter, alongside her father.

Ji-san? Where's Ayame? Naruto asked after gulping down the noodles in his mouth.

Teuchi turned around from where he was wiping his hands with a towel. Ayame? She's out delivering ramen to a family not too far from here. She should be back soon. He glanced worriedly out past the red flaps lining the front of his ramen stand. It is getting late though&

Don't worry ji-san! I'll look for her! Naruto exclaimed confidently.

The chef smiled. I would appreciate that Naruto.

Naruto grinned as he swallowed the bit of ramen that was left. Go-chiso-samadeshoota! She'll be back in no time! he called back to Teuchi as he put his money on the counter and left Ichiraku.

Make sure you stay safe as well Naruto! shouted Teuchi as the blond left.

Hai!

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Naruto glanced back and forth as he walked the streets of Konoha. *Ji-san did say that she wasn't too far from Ichiraku, and this is the only direction from there that leads to houses.* Lines of worry started to appear on his face as he didn't see her. *What could've happened? She couldn't have been---*

His thoughts stopped as he heard voices up ahead. The blond ran forward, and saw the girl he was looking for exiting a house.

It was nice seeing you again Takunu-san! Ayame said as she walked out.

Ayame-chan! Naruto called as he neared Teuchi's daughter.

Ayame turned around, and saw Naruto stopping next to her. Konbanwa, Naruto-kun!

Oi, ji-san's starting to worry, the blond informed her. A slightly exaggerated cough from his left made him turn to look at the owner of the house. He was met with a glare full of antipathy in piercing black eyes. *I've seen that look before,* the demon container thought gloomily, looking away from the angry man to the ground near Ayame's feet.

Naruto-kun, is something wrong? Ayame asked.

Hm? Naruto looked up from the street. No, nothing! he assured as he put on his biggest grin. But it's getting late, and ji-san's wondering what's keeping you.

Oh! I guess I lost track of time. Takunu-san has been gone traveling, and it's been so long since he's ordered from Ichiraku! I'll be heading back there now, she said as she walked past Naruto. Sayonara Takunu-san! Sayonara Naruto-kun!

Sayonara Ayame-chan, Naruto answered, but he didn't hear the man say anything. He turned back to the house, but saw that the door had already been closed. Not wanting to think about the man who had glared so heatedly at him, he walked off to his own home.

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Stars were starting to emerge from the dark sky that blanketed Konoha. The brilliant sparkles and bright moon lighted the way to the apartment complex where Naruto lived. A quiet, calm silence filled the air, giving a nice serenity feeling to the area. *Even though this place can be far from calm sometimes,* Naruto thought, gloom filling him again. But he shook his head stubbornly, banishing the dark thoughts from his head.

As he neared the building, he noticed something. The calm aura had suddenly changed for the worse. The tension of this new silence was almost palpable, and Naruto's eyes shifted around uneasily. He knew how dangerous this part of town could be at times.

Without warning, a sharp pain hit him on his right side, the stabbing prick that accompanied it

disappearing as fast as it had come after a few mere seconds. His eyes widened as he gasped in surprise and stumbled. The demon container looked around furiously, trying to get a glimpse of anything that moved.

Nothing. Not even a shadow twitched. The silence continued to stifle the air around him.

Naruto breathed heavily as he stumbled toward the complex, climbing the stairs and almost tripping over half of them. A wave of dizziness hit him as he reached his floor, forcing him to stop walking and lean against the wall for support. As he recovered and walked to his apartment, the feeling left as suddenly as it came. It was almost like the pain was receding. *Maybe it was from the shock of being hit*, Naruto reasoned. *It s not the first time I ve been attacked around here though. And maybe that baka kitsune is doing something to help.* Taking this as a sufficient deduction, he opened the door to his apartment and continued.

As he walked into his apartment, he bolted the locks on his door tightly, before walking into his bedroom, tiredly changing into his pajamas, and flopping down on his bed, his sleeping cap resting on his head.

The blond dismissed the attack as another regular act of hatred...nothing to worry about.

How wrong he was. - - - **(1) Did ya know that slurping noodles noisily in Japan is a way of telling the host that the meal is delicious?**

**Yosh! Chappy 1 done! Who did this horrible crime upon Naru-chan? What is it going to cause? What will you find out in the next chapter?**

**#evil laugh# Who knows!**

**Ciao for now! Arikashikari**