

The Greater Things in Life

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One-Shot. Slight AU. It has Shika/Ino, Nar/Hin, Kaka/Kure, Neji/Ten... I think that's it. But yeah, I hope you all enjoy!!!! Don't forget to leave a lil' review for us ^^ Oh yeah, this is loaded with WAFF, fluff and cavity enducing sweetness, s

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Chapter 1 - The Greater Things in Life

2

1 - The Greater Things in Life

I spent the night at my friends house. She's known as snowtiger321 here. But this is just a dribble of our favorite couples. Uh, yeah. I'm just going to warn you again. This thing is loaded to maximum capacity with WAFF, fluff and cavity enducing sweetness. You have been warned...

Disclaimer~ My attempts to own Naruto haven't worked yet. But I'll let you know when I succeed. Until then, I don't own any of the charactors. But me and snowtiger321 would like to take credit for the adorable plot.

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The Greater Things in Life

Many years ago, two years before the nine-tailed fox (Kyuubi) had made his appearance, in the rule of the Fourth, two Jounin's confessed their love for each other at the altar of marriage. Kakashi gently leaned over and kissed his new wife passionately. He then swept her into his arms. (bridal style, they're getting married, duh!) The surrounding people applauded. Deep inside, they knew that it was meant to be.

Kurenai then leaned her head on her new husband. Everything was perfect in life. However, two years later, she became happier then even she could have of imagined. She and Kakashi were blessed with a child. They named her Kyasarian. She had the beauty of her mother, and yet the wisdom of her father. She was born two nights after the great fox attacked. Her birth brought hope to all of the villagers, and especially her parents.

Thirteen years later, she was walking down the streets of Konoha. She was kneeling on the ground. If anyone were to pass by, they would have of assumed that she was just goofing off, or picking something up. But Kakashi knew better.

"So what are you doing?"

Kyasarian jumped at the sound of her fathers voice. But then she instantly relaxed.

"Konnichiwa, you're late."

Kakashi grinned sheepishly under his mask. "I stopped by the bookstore to get the newest issue of Come Come Paradise..."

He was then faced with the pouty face of his daughter. "NANI?!?!?! You KNOW what mom said about those books..." Usually, he had some lame excuse, but THIS time it wasn't that far-fetched...

He attempted to change the subject. "Uh... so what are you looking at?"

The smile retreated from her face and she instantly looked down. A small butterfly with a damaged wing

was on the ground. "Is there a healing jutsu you can use on it...?"

Kakashi shook his head gravely. "I'm sorry, but there isn't. It is too small for any of my jutsus to take any effect. It's a part of the cycle of life. You live, you die. That is the way of the shinobi."

She shook her head violently. "NOOOOO, there's gotta be SOMETHING you can do!" It was usually a good thing to have a ninja as a father, but sometimes, she couldn't explain to him why the smallest things had a tendency to bother her.

He stood up and walked away. She didn't move an inch. Just watching what could be the poor things last breaths. It struggled to fly, but fell back down.

Soon, a shadow came above her. She jumped and turned around. She sighed in relief to see a friend.

"Konnichiwa Shino-kun."

He just stood there. "Why are you here?"

She cocked her head. "What do you mean? I was here first. What are YOU doing here?"

He only looked down at the struggling butterfly. Soon, Shino kneeled down next to her. "I heard that there was an injured butterfly around here, I decided to check it out."

She, once again, cocked her head. "Where did you hear it from? Did dad come and tell you?"

He shook his head. "No, my bugs told me."

She slowly nodded. "Is there anything you can do...?"

He shook his head. "There is nothing I can do..."

She looked sadly down at the helpless creature. Shino continued.

"...but, my bugs might be able to help."

He closed his eyes (not that she could see...) and started talking to the bugs within himself. Slowly, they started coming out and surrounding the creature. She watched in awe, and he just stared. A few moments later, they stepped away, revealing a swaying butterfly. After a few moments, the butterfly spread it's wings and flew away.

She watched with amazement. Even her father wasn't able to heal the butterfly, and yet... Shino did without even a second thought. She continued watching it fly into the distance.

Shino was watching her from behind his glasses. He was surprised at her kindness to the insects. Usually, people would consider them 'gross,' or 'just bugs.' But she was different. Her compassion had truly touched him.

"Would you like to go into the forest with me? I just received word that a beetle was injured in a fall."

She smiled and stood up, following him into the woods of Konoha. This time, the beetle did not make it. A sole tear made it's way down her cheek, elegantly framing her face. Her hair was dark brown and lined with silvery highlights.

Somewhere else in Konoha...

Hinata leaned gingerly against a tree. She was careful not to disturb other bruises along her body. She had just completed another day of hard training. But it wasn't because of the training that she was outside sitting down by a tree, it was because of what always came after training that generally gave her the hardest time.

Her father would always treat her like crap. She always felt so inferior to Neji. She felt her self-confidence plummet. A cool breeze came, gently carrying her short hair into the sky. A silent tear ran down her face. Then another. And she just got so tired of holding it back and trying to be strong for him.

She realized that he wouldn't notice her. Naruto already liked Sakura. And besides, what would someone like him do around a weakling? The long held back tears finally broke through. She was tired of holding them back. Her body shook with each deep sob. A chill ran through her body as the breeze continued. She had forgotten her jacket inside.

'Go figure... the one time I take it off...'

She didn't hear the footsteps approaching her.

"Hi-Hinata-chan...? Is that you...?"

She gasped and turned around. Surely as ever, Naruto stood there, looking at her with this confused look on her face.

"Na-Na-Naruto-kun... gomen, I didn't see you..."

He grinned. "What are you sorry for?"

Her smile vanished as her true emotions broke the calm mask. She turned away. And started sobbing softly again.

He sat down next to her and just watched her cry for a few seconds. He wasn't really sure what to do! He had never been in this situation before. "Uh... Um... Hey Hinata-chan...what's wrong?"

She turned and looked into his deep blue eyes as he looked into her pearly white ones. Her face was flushed from the tears. But she told him the story about her father, Neji and any of the other things that were bothering her, well... almost... She didn't mention her crush on him... of course!

Naruto faced her again. "Wow, you really had that bottled up in there, didn't ya?" She nodded. But she

still had the tears left. So she didn't care about looking like a fool anymore, she just cried.

Naruto wasn't sure what to do. But he hesitantly reached his arm around Hinata and pulled her into a hug. He held her close as she just let all of her worries empty out. He didn't really mind as she sobbed into his shoulder. He himself had spent a lot of time crying when he was younger. But he had convinced himself around the age of 8 that he wouldn't cry anymore. But he broke that commitment when he witnessed his dear friend, Sasuke "die", and also when Haku had died.

He hushed her and gently rubbed her back. After she had calmed down, he just continued rocking her in his arms. "Listen, if you ever feel like crying, you can always come to me. Whether it's 3 in the evening, or 3 in the morning, I'll always be here." He liked the feeling of helping someone.

She looked up to him with red eyes and a genuine smile. "Ari-ari-arigato, Naruto-kun..."

He helped her up and stood next to her. "Well, I say that we go get a bite to eat. What do you say we head over to Ichiraku's?"

Hinata rubbed her eyes and nodded. They began their way over there. A breeze came and sent another chill through her body. He noticed this. "Here, take my jacket." He took it off and handed it to her. She took it and put it on. The warmth from his body was everywhere in the jacket. In every breath, his smell filled her senses. She sighed contently and followed him.

Somewhere else...

"Stupid kunai getting stuck in the tree," Kaylee grumbled to herself. "Now how am I supposed to get it out?" Not looking where she was going, she nearly bumped into Naruto and Hinata.

"Oh, konnichiwa, Kaylee-chan!" Naruto said cheerily to Kaylee, giving her his trademark squint. Hinata smiled and offered her a little wave.

"Konnichiwa, you two! Where are you going?"

"We're going to Ichiraku's for some ramen."

"That sounds like fun. I've been trying to get my kunai out of a tree in the park, but so far, no luck yet."

"I hope that you can get it out, K-Kaylee-chan," Hinata squeaked timidly.

"I hope I can too, Hinata-chan. I'll see you I—" Kaylee never finished her sentence because suddenly a bark was heard and a small brown and white puppy ran out of an alleyway and jumped onto Kaylee, licking her face.

"Hey, Akamaru! Don't jump on Kaylee like that!" came a voice from the alley. Kiba stepped out of the alley, an apologizing smile on his face.

"Gomen nasai, Kaylee-chan. Akamaru must really like you." He picked Akamaru up off of the ground and set him on his shoulder. Kaylee had fallen on the ground from the surprise, so Kiba helped her up.

"Konnichiwa, Kiba," Naruto said stiffly.

"Hi, Kiba-kun," Hinata said in barely more than a whisper.

"Hey, Hinata!" Kiba smiled. "Go jump in a lake, Naruto," he snapped at the blonde boy. Clearly, he still held a grudge against Naruto for beating him. Akamaru growled at Naruto, retreating into the hood of Kiba's sweatshirt.

"Anou, Kiba-kun?" Kaylee put in to stop a confrontation. "Could you help me with something? My kunai is stuck at the top of a tree, and I can't reach it. I need some help."

"I'll help, Kaylee-chan!" Kiba smiled brightly. "Where's the tree?"

"It's in the park," Kaylee explained.

"Well, then let's get going!" he replied, giving her a wide grin. "See you later!" he waved to Naruto and Hinata as he followed Kaylee to the park. After carefully picking their way through the foliage, Kaylee stopped at the base of a huge oak tree with a thick trunk.

"There it is," Kaylee said with an frustrated sigh. "I can't reach it, no matter how many times I try to climb up there." The kunai was indeed quite high up in the tree; nearly at the very topmost branch.

"How did it get there?" Kiba asked.

"Well, I was practicing, and I threw it the wrong way, and it ended up there," Kaylee said, pointing up at it.

Kiba nodded. "Here, hold on to Akamaru. I'll get it for you." Akamaru gave out a small, happy bark as he was placed in Kaylee's arms, and Kiba stood stock still for a moment, concentrating. Then he ran flat out to the tree, literally running up the trunk and retrieving the kunai, then jumping back down to the ground. Kaylee was struck dumb with amazement.

"How did you DO that?!" Kiba cocked his head in the most adorable way, looking at her in disbelief.

"Haven't you mastered controlling chakra with your feet?"

"No..." Kaylee said slowly. Kiba gave her a warm smile.

"Well, now's as good a time as any for you to learn." Kaylee's eyes lit up.

"You mean you'll teach me?! Really?!"

"Uh huh," Kiba replied, giving her his doglike grin. Akamaru barked happily in Kaylee's arms.

"Domo arigato, Kiba-kun!" Kaylee squealed in joy, hugging him. He turned bright red, although she didn't notice.

"Dou-itashimashoote, Kaylee-chan," Kiba laughed when she let go. He scratched the back of his head in embarrassment. "Now let's get started." Kaylee immediately paid him rapt attention as he began his explanation. "First, concentrate on what your goal is: to climb the tree. Push your chakra to your feet, and don't put too much or too little or you won't be able to climb it right. Got it?"

"Hai, Kiba-kun!" Kaylee said brightly, nodding several times.

She stood still as Kiba had before, concentrating on the tree and moving her chakra to her feet. Then she charged the tree, and actually managed to climb a foot or so before falling back to the ground.

"Ow! That hurt!" she said as she got up, rubbing the back of her head.

"That was great for your first try though," Kiba offered to cheer her up.

"Thanks, Kiba-kun. I couldn't have done it without you."

"Now, just keep trying." Kaylee nodded and tried again, this time getting much farther, but then stumbling suddenly. She started falling at a breakneck pace. She closed her eyes tightly, preparing herself for the impact, but instead found none. Instead of a harsh meeting with the ground, she felt warm arms holding her close. She opened one a crack and saw Kiba looking at her, a worried expression clearly etched on his face.

"Are you all right, Kaylee-chan?"

Kaylee blushed. "Hai, Kiba-kun. Arigato. You saved my life." Kiba turned bright red for the second time that day. She seemed to have a certain talent for bringing color to his cheeks. As Kaylee got up, there was an awkward silence between them. Akamaru, who was now in Kiba's sweatshirt, barked something at Kiba. It was probably something about him and Kaylee, because his blush deepened considerably.

"Akamaru!!!" he yelled, embarrassed by Akamaru's "words". Kaylee cocked her head, confused.

"What did he say?" she asked. Kiba panicked and started to stumble over his words. He... uh... I... Akamaru said... uh... that... he...has to go to the bathroom!!!" he lied quickly.

After getting Akamaru out of his shirt, he sent him off into the bushes. Akamaru was confused. He hadn't said anything along those lines, but decided to take the opportunity anyway.

Kaylee didn't buy it, but pretended to. Whatever it was that Akamaru said, Kiba wasn't in any way going to tell her. Still, she planned to get it out of him, whatever Akamaru had said. The said puppy came out of the bushes, barking repeatedly at his master.

"Be quiet!" he pleaded to his dog, his blush deepening... if that was possible.

Kaylee giggled. They were so kawaii when they argued. She heard the dog bark more things, and Kiba futilely trying to stop him. Soon after they ended their bickering, and she managed to stand up after laughing so hard. They continued their training, but Kiba wasn't able to look her in the eyes...

Kiba turned to Kaylee. (avoiding her eyes... of course!) "Uh... I was wondering... Uh... I mean... I heard Naruto saying something about heading to Ichiraku's. Do ya wanna grab some ramen?"

She turned to him and nodded gleefully. Kiba laughed. "That is, if he hasn't polished off the last of their ramen before we get there!"

They both shared a laugh and headed to everyone's favorite ramen bar.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Konoha...

Neji was having a little problem with Ten Ten. They had been going out for three months now, and Ten Ten was mad at him for forgetting their date for her birthday. He wanted to make it up to her, but had no idea where to start. But there was one person he knew who could help. Sure, he didn't like the guy, but this was a desperate situation, and desperate times call for desperate measures. He stood up from his kitchen table and walked out the door, heading for Shikamaru's house. This was NOT going to be easy.

Shikamaru heard a knock on his door and answered it. A stunned expression took control of his face. I mean, come on! It wasn't every day that the heir to the Hyuuga clan showed up on his doorstep.

After Naruto had beaten Neji in the Chuunin exam, he had become noticeably changed. That's one of the reasons that he had finally gotten together with Ten Ten. However, now that he had swallowed his pride and asked for help, and he was 'welcomed' by THIS kind of reaction... it didn't go too well with him.

"Are you just going to stand there gawking at me or are you gonna let me in?"

"Oh!" Shikamaru replied quickly, snapping out of his initial shock. "Sorry, this is just really weird. What the heck happened with you and Ten Ten anyway?" Neji tried to lay it on him easy, but to no avail.

"NANI?! YOU FORGOT HER BIRTHDAY?!" Shikamaru yelled at the top of his lungs so that the whole neighborhood could hear him. Neji quickly ducked inside his house so that no one saw, and slammed the door.

"Shut up!" he hissed at him, clamping a hand over his mouth. Shikamaru made a series of muffled noises, waving his arms. Neji took his hand off of his mouth.

"—birthday of all things! She'll never forgive you for this!" Neji felt as though a bucket of ice water had been dumped over him. Those last words echoed painfully in his head. He couldn't bear to lose Ten Ten.

"Shikamaru! There's GOT to be a way I can make it up to her! I'll do ANYTHING if it meant that I could keep her!" Neji pleaded with him, grabbing him by the shoulders and shaking him violently.

"Okay, okay! I'll help you already!" Shikamaru said frantically, prying Neji's hands off of himself with difficulty, as the heir of the Hyuuga clan had an iron grip. "Have you apologized? Sincerely?"



"Yes, I have! More than once!"

"Have you offered to do something for her?"

"Yes!" Neji said impatiently.

Just as Neji replied to that last statement, an odd thought struck Shikamaru. "Did she mention something special that you could do for her, before she got mad at you?"

"N—wait, yeah, she has! She said that the best thing I could ever do for her was...well... She's always wanted to go dancing in the moonlight. Well, she's never said it to me in person... but I accidentally heard her talking to one of her friends..."

FLASHBACK

4 girls were sitting around the room giggling. They were playing one of those games that girls play at sleepovers. None were things that he was very familiar with. He was just walking down the street, but then Neji heard Ten Ten's joyous laugh. Then, Sakura spoke up.

"Okay Ten Ten, it's your turn!"

Now, Neji wasn't one to eavesdrop on a conversation but... this WAS Ten Ten we're talking about, and she was among other girls. Girls usually had a tendency to speak their mind when around other girls. So he stopped by the window and used his ninja skills to remain silent.

Sakura continued. "Okay Ten Ten, what is your idea of the perfect romantic night?"

There was silence. Then, Ten Ten spoke up.

"Well, I can imagine my crush of a life time..." All of the girls giggled as Ten Ten spoke the name of her crush. Neji wasn't pleased by the fact that he couldn't hear who she liked.

"I can imagine that he would stop by my house carrying a bouquet of Calla Lilies. And I would go to my door and he would ask me if I wanted to go on a walk in the woods. It would be nearing twilight, and we would watch the sunset through the clouds and trees. It would grow darker and then the moon would show up through the trees, and then we would wind up dancing in a clearing. Then the stars would be shining on us as we shared our first kiss. And then a breeze would come up and he would hold me close to keep me warm..."

All the girls in the room started going through phases of "Awwwwwww" and "KAWAII!!!" and more "Awwwwwww's."

END FLASHBACK

Shikamaru nodded. "That would be PERFECT! You're lucky you remembered it all!"

"Thanks for your help," Neji said after a long pause. He hated it when people helped him. He liked it better if he figured things out on his own. He exited the house, closing the door behind him and raced to the Yamanaka Flower Shop.

He entered the shop, to see Mrs. Yamanaka at the counter with a bouquet of roses in front of her and a pair of clippers in her hand. Neji went slowly up to the counter, embarrassed.

"Uh... can I get a bouquet of Calla Lilies please?" he asked.

"Sure, Neji! Here, have Ino-chan help you." She turned away from the counter and called: "Ino-chan!" Neji was about to object when Ino emerged from an aisle containing sunflowers and daisies.

"What is it, Okaasan?" Ino asked. She noticed that Neji was standing at the counter, looking mortified. She almost burst out laughing, but contained it. "Oh, konnichiwa, Neji. What are you doing here?"

"I'm getting some flowers for, uh.." He hesitated. "...my mom." Even though Ino didn't buy it, she didn't press the matter.

"So you wanted some Calla lilies?" Neji nodded and she led him to the aisle containing the flowers. While Ino selected the flowers, she decided to pry a little.

"So who are you really getting the flowers for Neji? It's no secret that you and Ten Ten are going out. Calla Lilies are her favorite flower." Neji was shocked and again mortified. Ino knew by his silence that she had hit the mark. She turned around with the bouquet of lilies and he took them. The two of them came up to the counter and Neji put his wallet on the counter. The lilies had been moderately expensive, but he was able to pay for it. Then he exited the store without a word.

The sun was beginning to dip towards the horizon as Neji raced to Ten Ten's house. If his plan didn't work... well, he didn't want to imagine the consequences. He hesitated at Ten Ten's door, his fist raised to knock. He was more afraid than he had ever been in his life. A girl sibling was one thing, but a girlfriend? Neji had no idea what he was going to do. Swallowing hard, he knocked twice on the door, trying to dispel his fears. It was Ten Ten who answered the door. For a moment, she stared at him, wide-eyed. Neji broke the silence.

"Uh, I know you're really mad at me, but do you want to go on a walk? And I brought these flowers for you." Ten Ten found her tongue at last.

"Sure, Neji. Arigato," she added as she took the flowers from him.

She left the house and they walked in silence for awhile. The silence was shattered when Neji offered his arm to her and added. "Ready?" She smiled at him and accepted his arm. "Hai!"

The two continued their walk in silence for a few minutes until shades of pink, purple and orange entered the Hyuuga's line of vision. He stopped her in mid-step and put an arm on her shoulder. "Here, look up there." He pointed up to the horizon.

It was line of trees framed by one of the most amazing sunsets that he had seen in years. The sun was in a way so that you could look at it and not hurt your eyes, and yet have your body warm just by looking at it for the briefest moment.

He looked over and smiled at the look on Ten Ten's face. It was covered in pure amazement and

etched with gratitude. And the look of her eyes held such joy, words had no right trying to describe it.

Once they were finished watching the sunset, they continued on their walk. The sound of animals going about their own way and insects that played music for them. He stopped in a clearing, Ten Ten did the same. He turned to look at her.

Her eyes were brimming with so many emotions, he didn't have time to sort through them all. One that he could see clearly though, was love.

He quickly remembered her words at the sleepover.

'...and then we would wind up dancing in a clearing...'

Without another moment of thought, he quickly took her in his arms and began to sway gently in the breeze. She was hesitant at first, but then gently rested her head on his shoulder. He held her closer with each passing moment, and she allowed herself to get lost in the moment. She closed her eyes, but not before getting a glance at the beautiful deep orange moon. (aka: Harvest Moon)

It was hard to tell who was enjoying it more. They were both lost in the moment of each others company. Her hair was elegantly swaying with the wind. Her calming presence in his arms. Her graceful steps. Everything was just perfect.

After dancing for awhile, they broke apart. Looking into her gentle eyes, Neji noticed another emotion: hope. He didn't have to think hard as to what would come next. He closed his eyes as she did the same. They gently closed the distance between them. They would have noticed a shooting star overhead, but both were too busy.

After they broke away, they looked into each others eyes. Everything was perfect. They began to head back to Konoha. Not a word was spoken since the sunset, not a word was needed. The breeze picked up. The sweet essence of cherry blossoms filling their senses.

Truth be told, she wasn't cold at all. But if she were to remain content, then the last part of her dream might never happen! So Ten Ten pretended to shiver for a few moments. Neji was waiting for this opportunity and wrapped both of his arms around her. She leaned her head on his shoulder.

They reached her house, much to their dismay. Ten Ten hovered in the doorway for a moment.

"Arigato, Neji-kun. Without you, my dream would have never come true. I forgive you."

"Your welcome, Ten Ten-chan. I'm glad. Good night."

"Good night," Ten Ten whispered back. Then she closed the door, and Neji let the events of the night wash over him. He now felt more complete than he had ever felt before, as if a missing piece of a puzzle had finally been put in its place. He turned and walked slowly back to his house, happier than he had ever been in his life.

THE NEXT DAY...

Sakura was running through a foreign forest. She was on a mission with Sasuke. Or... she WAS on a mission with Sasuke...

FLASHBACK...

"Sakura, I'm sorry. But I just needed an excuse to get out of the village. I am sorry to say that I am leaving the village so I can grow stronger. I will not remain in this village while Itachi goes about his way, ruining other peoples' lives."

And with that, he was gone. "SASUKE-KUN!!!!!" She was wailing over the fact that he was gone.

Two days later...

Sasuke's replacement arrived. He found her crying in the shadow of a tree.

"Sakura-san...?"

She turned around quickly. Sakura could recognize that voice anywhere.

"Lee...?"

He flashed her a cheesy smile and gave her a thumbs-up.

"Now that we're on this mission together, I can finally prove my love to you! And now is the perfect opportunity!"

Sakura sighed. 'of all the nin's in the village... they had to send him...'

Instead of saying that, she replied: "Good luck trying." Then she informed him of the mission, which was quite difficult. Instead of a downcast face and diminished hope, Lee looked even happier about his quest to win Sakura's heart. Sakura's inner self was fuming that the ploy didn't work.

"This is going to be great!" Lee chirped happily. "Hurry, Sakura-san! There might be enemy ninja's around," he added seriously. Sakura paused for a moment, and then nodded, following Lee as he jumped up into the tree and towards their target, a particularly nasty giant centipede that was terrorizing the nearby village.

Soon, they came within eyesight of the beast, and they crept cautiously along a thick branch. Suddenly, Sakura lost her footing and began to plummet towards the ground. Although Lee caught her arm just in time, she had let out a small scream, which immediately put the centipede on the alert.

She put her hand over her mouth, ashamed about what had happened. As soon as Lee helped her back onto the branch, Sakura looked away, expecting to be yelled at or something along those lines. But it never came. She felt a hand on her shoulder and she looked into those eyes that are lined by two caterpillars of eyebrows.

"Are you okay?"

She nodded. "Thank you. Are you ready?" He nodded.

"Let's go." They jumped in simultaneously and prepared to fight the monster. After a few minutes of battling, Sakura began to grow weary. Her senses became dull, and she didn't notice the centipede's leg until it was too late. She was immediately rendered unconscious.

"Sakura-san!" Lee yelled as he saw her fall to the ground. He dashed to her side, and gathered her into his arms, depositing her safely in a nearby clearing. Then he ran back to the centipede, finishing it off easily.

He spent the next two days tending to Sakura. He diligently watched over her, making sure that nothing further happened to her. Staying true to his word, he protected her with his life.

Sakura was in Lee's arms as she began to come to, her surroundings coming slowly into focus. Lee was leaning against a tree, eyes shut tightly as if in a nightmare. She began to stir and he was brought to reality.

"SAKURA-SAN!" he yelled happily, forgetting all about the nightmare he had been trapped in only moments ago. "You're all right!" Sakura looked blankly at him for a moment, the events with the centipede slowly coming back to her.

"Y-you saved me?"

"Of course, Sakura-san. I told you that I would protect you until I die."

The rest of the day they spent in the clearing, with Lee helping Sakura recuperate. Once he thought she was fit enough to travel, they headed to Konoha.

Sakura thought hard about the events that had occurred when she had awakened. She remembered the pained expression on Lee's face that had been caused by his nightmare.

Sakura turned to him, giving him a worried look. "Lee, what was your nightmare about?" They both halted, and Lee's face grew serious, and he hesitated for a moment.

"It was that...you never woke up..." he said quietly. She was stunned. Sakura faced him and opened her arms.

"I'm fine now, thanks to you." She gave him a quick peck on the cheek. "Arigato, Lee-san. Let's go home."

The next day, at Shikamaru's house...

"Where is it?" Shikamaru yelled in frustration. Of all the days that he wasn't able to find his forehead protector, it had to be today. The day Asuma sensei had assigned Ino, Chouji, and himself a mission. Shikamaru quietly cursed his luck, but kept picking through the pile of clothes on his bedroom floor. Throwing aside a pair of pants, he found his protector. Sighing in relief, he pinned it to the side of his jacket as he usually did, and quickly raced out the door, heading for their customary meeting place, the

large tree in the center of the park. Luckily for him, Shikamaru wasn't the only one who was late. Chouji had stopped to pick up some food for them all, since he was hungry himself.

"Gomen nasai, everyone. I was hungry."

"That's all right, Chouji. Now, what I need you to do is find a kitten that's been running loose. He belongs to Anko, the woman who was your examiner during the second part of the Chuunin exam. All three of them nodded and went off into the trees, hoping to catch the kitten by surprise so that it wouldn't be able to run.

"Shikamaru, I found him," Chouji whispered as loud as he could to his companion, who was several feet away from him looking in a different direction. Shikamaru turned his head to him and nodded for him to try and grab the cat. Chouji jumped out of the tree, grabbing the kitten around the middle with both hands.

"Gotcha!" Chouji yelled triumphantly. The kitten struggled to get away, but Chouji held him firmly. "Hey, where's Ino?" he said suddenly, looking around. Shikamaru looked around also.

"I don't know. Why don't you take the kitten to Anko, and I'll find Ino?" Shikamaru offered.

"Okay!" Chouji said brightly. This way, he could get some food on the way.

"I'll see you later then," Shikamaru called as Chouji started off. Then he turned and jumped away through the trees, first going back the way they had come, and then through the surrounding areas. When he didn't find her in the trees, he went to the ground, looking everywhere. He was worried. Ino was usually the first to everything, and it was rather odd for her to not be around.

Thankfully, he found Ino sitting next to the fountain in the center of the park.

"Oy, Ino!" Shikamaru called, waving. "What are you d—?" He broke off, seeing that Ino was not in good condition. She was holding her leg close to herself, and she wore a pained expression.

"Are you all right?!" Shikamaru asked, worry etched clearly on his face.

"Well, I was going through some trees, and I slipped," Ino explained, looking at her leg.

"You need to get to a hospital, Ino."

"But I can't get up, Shikamaru." The raven-haired boy thought for a moment.

"Then I'll carry you." Ino turned bright red, hiding her face behind her injured leg. Luckily, Shikamaru most likely didn't notice, because he didn't say anything. He walked up to Ino and slipped one arm under her knees, and the other on the middle of her back. She was slightly heavy, but he carried her with ease. Although it was a long way to the hospital, he made it without one mention of how troublesome it was to carry her. While Ino was being fixed up, Shikamaru informed Chouji and Asuma of Ino's wound, and came back to the hospital with the two of them behind him. All three of them went to her room as soon as the doctor came out, saying that Ino would make a full recovery.

"Here's some food I bought you, Ino," Chouji said, holding out a bento box to her.

"Arigato, Chouji," she replied, taking the food gratefully. Asuma decided to offer some words of encouragement.

"The doctor said that you would make a full recovery. And once you're better, we might go on a C-rank mission, instead of doing little things like rescuing kittens." All three of his student's eye's lit up.

"Yeah, I'm serious." All three of them cheered, happy that there was now a less boring mission to look forward to.

"Um, Shikamaru? Can I talk to you, alone?" Ino asked.

"Huh? Okay, sure."

Asuma and Chouji left, saying their goodbyes to Ino. Once they closed the door behind them, there was an awkward silence.

"What's so important that you could only tell me?" Shikamaru asked.

"It's nothing really important, but I just wanted to thank you for taking me here. You've done a lot for me, and I wanted to do something to pay you back."

"Like what?" Shikamaru asked, cocking his head. Although he had a sneaking suspicion about what it was, he decided to just let Ino get to it.

Ino looked away from him for a moment. "Sit down for a second," Ino said, motioning to the chair that had been laid beside her bed. Shikamaru sat, and Ino sat up a little higher in her bed, turning her head to face him.

"I just wanted to say...that I love you."

At first, Shikamaru thought that he wasn't hearing properly. But when he looked into Ino's blue eyes, he saw that she did indeed love him. "I...I love you too, Ino." He leaned forward in his chair and placed his lips upon hers, glad that he could finally confess his feelings for her. Once the kiss broke, Shikamaru left, but not before saying one last thing.

"If you ever feel like you need to talk to someone, or cry, or yell, or anything. I'll always be here waiting for you. I'll always be waiting. No matter when or where, I'll be there as quickly as I can. I love you...Ino."

## ELSEWHERE IN KONOHA

Shino and Kyasarian had gone out on "rescue missions". Shino's boarders had really taken a liking to her. As a matter of fact, that's all that they were really mentioning. It's "Kyasarian this" and "Kyasarian that". It's not that he really minded, he liked being around her. He wasn't really sure what it was about

her, but he liked it. She was different from the other girls.

He slipped on his sunglasses and headed out the door. Walking down the sidewalk, his thoughts drifted back to her again. 'What is it about her that causes her to always find her way into my thoughts.'

He wasn't watching where he was going and accidentally ran into Kakashi. After picking himself up, he muttered. "Gomen Kakashi Sensei."

The teacher facing him nodded and smiled from behind his mask. "Just who I was hoping to run into!" The teacher chuckled. "Even though I hadn't meant to actually run into you!" He ended his laughing bout when he realized that the Chuunin before him found no humor in the situation. "Kyasarian is looking for you. She told me to tell you that she will be waiting for you in the park."

Shino nodded and headed towards the park. Kakashi only laughed to himself and nodded. 'What is it she sees in that boy...?'

Shino made his way down the street. Trying to ignore all of the millions of voices running around in his head. Most people think about how hard it is trying to ignore that one voice in the back of their head. HA! They should try living day in and day out with MILLIONS of voices all throughout their body.

The voices were growing stronger by the moment. And they used to try and remain mostly silent throughout the night, BUT NOW... the would gang up on him and speak a few moments before he would fall asleep. Causing that to be the last thing on his mind, and usually trigger his dreams. And do you know what they were about? Her.

'You should ask her out!', 'You two would make a kawaii couple!', You two are PERFECT for each other!' or 'What a sweet girl, you two should hook up!'

Shino usually talked with them silently. But now, he just couldn't take it anymore! "WOULD YOU GUYS JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!!! I'LL ASK HER WHEN I'M READY!!!! SHE PROBABLY WON'T EVEN SAY 'YES'!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Kyasarian, (who was standing meters away...) jumped at the sudden outburst. She had never heard him raise his voice over a normal speaking tone. She began to head over to where he was, only to find a beet-red Shino, muttering something to himself... or rather THEM.

"What was going on over here? Who are you trying to ask?" Shino felt the heat continue rising to his cheeks. 'Oh crap... does she REALLY not know!?!' He heard the bugs inside of him cheering things about finally seeing him find someone just for him. He cringed. He never was really good with expressing himself.

Kyasarian cocked her head to one side, causing Shino to look away. 'TOO... KAWAII...can't... breathe...!!!' She heard an audible gasp as she heard Shino finally manage to fill his lungs. She let out a giggle. "Did a bug find it's way into your windpipe... again?"

He laughed uneasily. "Uh... yeah." Then he felt small pains inside of him. That's what they did whenever they were displeased with what their host was doing. They were biting him. 'What's that for!?!' and he



heard it loud and clear, all of the millions speaking at one time. 'TELL HER YOU BAKA!!!!!!' He visibly cringed, did they have to do this?

Kyasarian just stood there, a worried expression slowly creeping onto her face. She knew clearly what was going on. They were talking to him. Most people would say he's always quiet, but he's nearly talking every moment of the day. In a meek voice, she timidly asked. "What are they saying?"

'Crud, crud, crud, crud, crud!!! Are you guys happy now!?!' He heard cheering again. Shino sighed. He obviously wasn't going to be able to get out of THIS one... 'What do I say? She's just...looking.... at me!' He then heard the girl bugs talking about adorable things he could do. Running up and giving her a kiss, (Shino cringed) or sweeping her off her feet. ('too fairy-tale-ish...') and when they realized nothing was working, they just screamed. 'JUST TELL HER!!! MAN, ARE YOU JUST GONNA STAND THERE ALL DAY!?! GET A MOVE ON!!! SHE'S WAITING AND SO ARE WE!!!'

Shino realized that they would NEVER leave him alone unless he got this done and over with. 'stupid bugs...' "Uh... Kya?" Shino saw the worry on her face fade away. "Yeah?" Shino felt his palms get sweaty, his throat began to close up, and his heart started beating faster and louder! He felt like he could HEAR his heart beating!

"Uh... Kya... I was uh... I mean... I just wanted to say that... Um... this might sound kinda weird... but.. Wait.. uh... Hm... 'COME ON, OUT WITH IT!!!!!!'

Kyasarian smiled. She knew what he was about to say. She realized that his 'little buddies' were probably making it harder on him. She grinned, walked over to him, and without a word, planted a kiss on his cheek. "I love you too, Shino-kun."

She swore that she heard his dormers cheering as Shino turned 5 shades redder. But she also saw a rare occasion. He smiled.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Konoha...

The park was very quiet, except for the fact that Kaylee and Kiba were still training. They had been training all morning, with Kaylee getting better and better at controlling her chakra with her feet. She was nearing the top of a tall sycamore tree, when she lost her footing, and jumped from tree to tree to get back down. She was breathing heavily from using so much chakra. Akamaru barked something to Kiba, and he nodded.

"I think that's enough for one day, Kaylee-chan. You should rest. Actually, we've both had a hard day, so let's both rest." Kaylee nodded, managing a weak smile.

"Yeah, you're right." Kiba plopped himself down under the tree she had been climbing. Kaylee hesitated for a moment, color starting to rise in her cheeks. Akamaru gave her a reassuring bark, much to Kiba's discomfort.

"Akamaru..." he growled dangerously. Akamaru merely exited his sweatshirt and bounded into Kaylee's arms. She smiled and stroked his soft fur. Kiba looked up at her, a little red showing on his cheeks.

"He...uh...wants you to sit down...next to me..." Akamaru barked triumphantly, and Kiba scowled. He had a

knack for getting Kiba into situations he'd rather avoid. Kaylee smiled, and sat down right next to Kiba, with Akamaru in her lap.

"Arigato, for everything, Kiba-kun. Without your help, I probably wouldn't have learned how to control my chakra properly."

"Dou-itashimashoote, Kaylee-chan," he replied, looking at the ground. Kaylee closed her eyes and leaned back against the tree, enjoying the warmth of the sun and Akamaru. She was very tired, and she soon fell asleep, right on top of Kiba's shoulder. He turned bright red, but couldn't move, or else he might've woken her up. Akamaru let out a quiet bark to him. Kiba gave him an incredulous look. His dog barked again, this time more forcefully.

"No, I'm not going to—" Akamaru cut him off with yet another bark, adding a growl. Kiba gave him a pleading look. Akamaru kept it up, and Kiba reluctantly put his arm around Kaylee's shoulders, pulling her closer to him. "There, are you happy now?" he hissed. Akamaru gave him what someone might say was a smile, and others might say was a grin, and settled into Kaylee's lap.

Kiba, who was as tired as Kaylee and Akamaru, rested his head on Kaylee's, his eyelids soon closing.

Unfortunately for them, they weren't the only ones in the park that day.

"It's such a nice day," Ten Ten said happily, looking around at the beautiful nature that the park had to offer. She was on a walk with Neji.

"It sure is," Neji agreed, slipping his hand in hers as they walked. As they turned a corner in the trail they were walking along, they spotted two familiar figures under a sycamore tree.

Ten Ten stopped for a moment, squinting at the pair. "Is that...Kiba and Kaylee?" Neji looked in the direction of her gaze and an evil grin spread across his face. "Yes, it is. Let's go see what they're up to." He and Ten Ten snuck quietly over, trying to make as little noise as possible.

"Now, where's my camera when I need it?" Ten Ten whispered quietly, looking through her bag. Neji, on the other hand, wasn't worried about little things like that. He went closer to the pair until he was right next to Kiba, and gave him a sharp kick in the side.

"Hey, wake up! What are you doing?" Ten Ten took on a scowl as Neji said those words.

"Neji-kun!" she hissed at him. But Kiba was already waking up, very quickly.

"I just want to know what he's really up to with training Kaylee," he muttered back to her as Kiba came to.

"Mmmm, nani?" he said thickly, still slightly groggy from sleep. He noticed that two shadows were over him, and he looked up to see the solemn face of Neji, and Ten Ten's smiling one.

"So, how's the training been going, Kiba?" Neji asked sarcastically, giving him an evil grin. Kiba swallowed hard, but scowled up at him.

"Go away, bakayaru." Ten Ten glared at him, but Neji showed no outward signs of offense. Instead, he decided to tick Kiba off even more.

"So, that's your little girlfriend, ne? Is that the best you can do?" Kiba felt the blood rise to his head, and he glowered at Neji, his canine like teeth clearly visible.

"If you say another word about Kaylee, I'll—"

"You'll what?" Neji asked coolly, crossing his arms. "Beat me to a pulp? You couldn't lay a finger on me."

"Neji-kun...don't..." Ten Ten pleaded with him. Neji held up a hand to silence her.

"He hasn't got the guts anyway." Those words echoed loudly in Kiba's mind, and he clenched his fists, his entire body shaking with rage.

"Ko...musume..." Kiba hissed through his gritted teeth. Kaylee began to stir suddenly because of Kiba's movements, as well as Akamaru. Her eyes opened slowly, her ice blue eyes peeping out.

"Ohayo..." she muttered sleepily. She rubbed her eyes, shifting so that she was sitting upright. She noticed that Neji and Ten Ten were standing over them and turned bright red. 'Oh crap...did they walk in on us?! This CAN'T be good...'

Akamaru yawned and stretched, and then started growling at Neji. He could tell that Neji was up to something sneaky. He let out a series of barks to Kiba, who nodded. He went through a series of complicated hand seals, and tossed a food pill to Akamaru and ate one himself.

Neji's eyes widened. Kiba was going to use the Half Beast Clone. Naruto had barely scraped out of it during the Chuunin exam, and he had had the Kyuubi on his side. He wasn't certain if he could defeat Kiba when he was like this.

"I don't have the guts, huh? Wanna bet?" Akamaru was now an identical clone of Kiba, and he charged Neji, almost bringing him to the ground, but Neji moved just in time, taking out a kunai. Akamaru didn't let up on his assault. He narrowly dodged Neji's kunai strokes, countering with powerful swipes of his/Kiba's now claw like hands/paws. Ten Ten could only watch as they fought furiously. The real Kiba held her where she was with a murderous glare.

Kaylee, on the other hand, couldn't stand watching them fight. She wanted to stop them, but had no idea how. 'What am I supposed to do? What CAN I do?' she thought desperately. Then, a thought came to her. It was rather risky, but it was the only thing she could think of doing. Both Akamaru and Neji had kunais in their hands, and Kaylee had one as well, in her kunai holster. She noted the attack patterns on both sides as she took out the kunai, praying that it would fly true. She stood up suddenly, and threw the kunai as Akamaru and Neji connected yet again, the kunai lodging itself in the holes at the ends of the kunais and pulling them out of their hands. They were pinned against a nearby tree, quivering.

Both Neji and Akamaru ceased their fighting, looking at Kaylee in amazement. Not even Ten Ten could have pulled off something like that.

"Stop fighting!!!" she yelled at them. Akamaru turned back into his normal self, and Neji lowered the arm that had been holding his kunai. Kiba's face softened, and he threw Kaylee an amazed look. Ten Ten gawked at Kaylee, extremely jealous that she had pulled off something so difficult.

"Kaylee-chan..." Kiba said simply, at a loss for any other words. The said girl looked him in the eye, and then turning bright red, looked away.

"Come on, Neji-kun. Let's go," Ten Ten said, grabbing him by the arm and pulling him away. She could tell that they needed some 'alone time'.

Kaylee sat down again next to Kiba, avoiding his eyes. Akamaru crawled into Kiba's sweatshirt and started barking at him again. Kiba rolled his eyes, shaking his head several times.

"No—I'm not—stop it—SHUT UP, AKAMARU!" he yelled. Kaylee giggled, and he gave her a strange look.

"I think I know what he's trying to make you do," she smiled. Kiba turned bright red.

"Uh...um...uh...well...you see..." But Kaylee put a finger to his lips.

"Shh... you don't have to make up an excuse." Kiba stopped stuttering and his face grew serious.

"Then...you know?"

"Yes, I know. But we won't know if it's meant to be until we try. What do you say?"

In response, Kiba touched her face with one hand, staring deeply into her eyes. He leaned forward, and gently placed his lips upon hers, but not before saying one thing.

"I love you, Kaylee-chan."

ELSEWHERE...

Hinata and Naruto had gone to Ichiraku's a few times during the week since that first time. He didn't realize how enjoyable it was to have someone eating with you. Naruto had seen Hinata eyeing some of the wildflowers every time they passed Ino's family shop.

Naruto had also grown to appreciate Hinata's company throughout the past few days. He wanted to do something that showed her just how much she meant to him. He might even be starting to love her. No one else paid him a second thought. But Hinata, she truly cared about his welfare and that look in her eyes... Just thinking about it gave him butterflies and his heart rate raced on.

'Wildflowers... THAT'S IT!' He stopped by Hinata's house on the way home from training.

"Nar-Nar-Naruto-kun! Wha-what are you do-do-doing here?"

Hinata began to blush and play with her fingers. Naruto only sighed.

"Uh... well, I was wondering if you wanted to go on a walk with me...?"

Hinata smiled. "Sure, I'd love to go on a walk with you, one second."

Naruto fidgeted with his jacket as he waited for Hinata to come back out. He turned around and began to watch the birds fly overhead. He was brought back to reality when he heard an all-too familiar voice.

"What are you doing here?"

Naruto jumped out of his skin. He turned back to the door expecting to find Hinata, but was shocked at the sight before him.

"GAH! Uh... um... Konnichiwa Neji!"

Neji only glared at him. "Like I said, what are you doing here?"

Naruto blushed. "I... uh... um..... Well... ya see... uh....."

Luckily, Hinata showed up behind Neji and let out a small cough. "Neji-kun... Naruto-kun and I are going for a walk."

Neji gave her a suspicious look, but let her pass anyway. Naruto turned to walk away, but Neji grabbed Naruto's arm. "Don't try anything funny."

Naruto gulped and laughed uneasily. "He he heh, I won't try anything funny, I mean... what do I look like... a clown... heh..." And with that, he took off down the street to catch up with Hinata.

Once they entered the woods and got about ½ way down the trail they usually go down, Naruto stopped Hinata where she was and turned to face her. "Do you trust me?"

Hinata was growing uneasy. "What?"

Naruto grinned his foxy smile and asked more persistently. "Do you trust me?"

Hinata thought for only a moment and nodded. "Yes, yes I do, Naruto-kun."

Naruto grinned. "Then close you're eyes."

She did as she was told and heard him say. "No peeking!" Hinata only nodded. She then felt a sudden warmth overcome her as she felt his hands slip into hers. "Come on, it's a surprise."

His sweaty hands and her sweaty hands made for a slippery combo, but a much appreciated one at that! A new scent filled her senses. He then let go of her hand a few moments later, only to feel his presence behind her. "Okay, open you're eyes!"

Hinata did as she was told, only to suddenly be the happiest girl alive. She was in a meadow with millions of wildflowers. So many magical colors blending together. The combined smell was sweeter than anything she had ever imagined. The sun was just beginning to prepare to set on the distant horizon of trees and brush.

"Wha... It's... Wow... Thank-you, Naruto-kun. I've never been happier!"

Naruto was in awe watching her face light up at the beautiful display. "You really are pretty when you smile."

With this Hinata blushed. She wanted to wrap her arms around Naruto and just give him a hug, but her body wouldn't let her move. Luckily for her, Naruto wrapped his arms around her and gently whispered in her ear. "I'm glad you like it. This is our spot from now on."

Hinata's face lit up. She turned to face him. "Does that mean...?"

Naruto smiled. "Yeah, yes it does."

NOW Hinata was the happiest girl in the world. She was content to just stay in Naruto's arms for the rest of the day. The two of them would often come back here and just enjoy each others company.

~~~~~  
And that's that. Yeah, it took us 2 days to write. Sorry about the two OC's we added, I just don't like leaving Shino and Kiba alone all the time! But yeah, heh. If u read all 25 pages, could AT LEAST leave us a review. We did tag-team writing. So yeah, thankies again!

_KakashiAngel34