

# Letting the Bedbugs Bite

By Evilevergreen

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# 1. Family Duty

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OoOoO

Prologue: Family Duty

A eight year old girl smiled happily as her mother hummed to her as she brushed her hair. The little girl tried to mimic the song so that she could sing along, but it was choppy and off key, unlike her mother, who's voice was smooth and comforting. The mother giggled lightly as was her nature, when it came to her eldest daughter. "There you go," the mother whispered as she placed the brush on the dresser and kissed the top of her daughter's head. "Now off to bed with you."

"Okay," the brown headed girl chirped as she jumped into her futon and looked out the window for a moment. The smile on her face grew larger as a man approached their home. "Dad's home!"

"Shh, not so loudly," her mother asked of her. "Your sister is already asleep for the night."

The little girl's big brown eyes widened as she cupped her hand over her mouth. "Sorry," she whispered when she finally brought it down.

"Underneath the sheets now, okay." Her mother held the pillow as her daughter pulled back her sheets and climbed in. Her mother than gave her back her pillow before tucking her in. "I'll send your father in to say goodnight and then straight to sleep with you, alright?" The little girl nodded before her mother left her room.

A few minutes later, her father came through the door. "I'm surprised you're not sleeping," he said as he knelt by her side.

The little girl said nothing at first as she sat up and threw her arms around her father. "How was your day?" she asked before pulling away.

She looked curiously at her father as his smile slightly faltered. "It was fine. Just fine," he assured her as he gestured for her to lay back down. He then took her little hand with both of his before he kissed it. "Know that I love you very much," he began, his voice sober. "And I would do anything to protect you, your mother, and your sister."

The little girl frown at her father's strange words. "Dad?"

"Go to sleep now," was all he said before she could really ask anything. He then turned off her light and before closing her bedroom door behind him whispered, "Sweet dreams. Don't let the bedbugs bite."

The little girl yawned as she turned in her bed and told him that she wouldn't. And her dreams were sweet, but they did not last long as late into the night she was awoken by the sounds of her father yelling. Curiosity taking over her, she slipped from her bed and cracked open her door. She could hear murmuring voices, but not exactly what was being said, so quietly she tiptoed down the hall and looked around the corner. Sitting completely in the dark were her mother and father and two men she recognized from her uncle's court by their uniforms. As they spoke their voices steadily rose until she could hear every word that was being spoken.

"I will not allow you to put my family through this!" yelled a dark haired man in the middle of the night to the two men who sat before him and his wife, it was her father. "My daughter is only a child. She hasn't even entered the academy yet," he explained. "She can't do this."

The visitor's eyes were filled with concern, but they went unseen as the small party spoke. "Please, my Lord-" the visitor had began.

"Don't patronize me with such a word. You want to suck up? You do it to my brother and my brother alone." The little girl's father looked at the men angrily. "Now get out my home, Ukon."

"Hirokaru-san, please, you must understand!" Ukon begged of him.

"Ukon," came the gentle voice of Hirokaru's wife, Osen. "My husband has asked you very kindly to leave, so I suggested you do so," she suggested. "Now if my dear brother-in-law would like to pursue this matter, may he face us himself."

Ukon swallowed hard, his hand shaking as it came to rest on the scabbard of his sword. His action was then followed by his companion. "I'm sorry, Hirokaru-san, but you must understand, we were told to ask, but if you declined once again. . . we were to take the child by force." There then came a sharp grasp by both of the visitors.

Osen gave a low small laugh. "That's. . ." she looked to her husband, "what's the word?" she asked as the blade of her twin tantos had been placed at the necks of their visitors. "Amusing?" She then looked back to Ukon and the other. Her tone became deadly serious as she regarded them. "If you want to walk out of here with your lives, you will lay down your swords and tell my brother-in-law, if he is to take anything by force from me and his brother, not to send sniveling little boys in a rush to die." She looked back and forth between the two. Now do you understand me?" she asked.

"You do not give enough credit to our Feudal Lord," finally spoke Ukon's companion for the first time. "He knows of your skills and that of your daughters'." The edges of his mouth then began to curl up as he tilted his head just a bit so that Osen could see the glint in his black eyes. "We were not sent alone."

Osen's eyes widen as she immediately jumped back, her husband now standing by her side with his sword drawn as more than a dozen men entered their home.

"Stop it," the little girl whispered to herself as she saw her parents being circled. "Stop it," she said louder, but still no one heard her. And then as she opened her mouth to say the words again, blood splattered across the wall next to her. The girl was frozen for a moment as she watched her mother and father taking out the men from her uncle's court. She then watched as her mother was too occupied with three men in front of her to notice the one behind her. It was only then the girl's voice was heard. "Mom, watch out!" Her warning came just in time as her mother was able to counter the attack.

Osen's daughter was happy for only a moment before she heard. "Grab the girl!" She grasped and took a step back as she saw two men run towards her, but was taken by surprise as they only passed her. They were going after her sister! She then ran down the hall after them, screaming for her sister to get up and run, but it was too late as they entered her younger sister's room.

The girl ran down the hall after them, but froze in the doorway as she found herself surprised yet again. The two men were bowing before her seven year old sister, who hadn't been sleeping as their mother had believed, but fully dressed, sitting on her futon with a bag prepared. The sister stood and gestured for the men to stand. "What is going on?" the eldest sister asked.

"I knew this was coming," the younger sister began as she approached the other. "Uncle will let you all live, if I do this willingly," she explained.

"Do what?" the eldest sister didn't understand.

"I'll miss you," was all the younger sister said as she hugged the confused girl. She then slid to the side as she went to leave out the door, but was grabbed tightly by the wrist by her sister.

"Why you? As the eldest, this should be my responsibility, whatever it may be," she told her.

"The answer is simply," she began as she turned around to face her sister. She then quickly grabbed her wrist in return, loosening the elder sister's grip on her before turning her around and kicking the inside of her leg, causing her to fall to her knees easily. With the eldest sister's arms pinned behind her back the younger one slightly bent over and whispered, "Because I'm better than you." She then looked up to the men in her room. "Let's go," she demanded and in a blink of an eye they were gone along with everyone else that had entered their home that night.

"Where is she?" Hirokaru yelled when he saw only one of his daughters. "Where's your sister, Morigami?"

Morigami, still in the position her sister had left her in could not answer her father's question, as she had not heard it. Her hands balled up into a fist as they violently began to shake and tears fell upon them. Morigami then threw up her head back as she yelled at the top of her lungs, in the hopes that her sister would hear her. "I will not lose to you!"

The younger sister sat quietly on the floor with her hands on her lap in front of the Feudal Lord, her uncle, as she waited his instructions.

He looked fondly at his favorite niece. "Your name for this mission will be Tenten."

To Be Continued . . .

## 2. Chapter Two

Chapter Two:

A twenty-four year old Hyuuga Neji waited impatiently outside the closed bathroom door inside the home he shared with his wife, Tenten. She had been in there longer than most days and he couldn't help but to wonder if that was a good or bad thing for this particular morning. The waiting for him was on the brink of becoming unbearable when at last the door finally opened and she stepped out. Neji looked at her hard, willing her to say what he longed to hear, but he could already tell that that wasn't going to be the case as she sadly lowered her head as she shook it from side to side. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

Neji closed his eyes as he let out a big breath and rubbed his temple with two fingers. "I need some air. I'm going for a walk," he announced before turning around and walking away from her.

Tenten's head snapped up. "Neji, wait I'll come with you," she suggested.

"No need," he told her, not even turning around to look at her as he answered. Tenten sighed as she heard the front door close behind him. She then looked down at the pregnancy test she held in her hands. It read negative, just like all the rest.

Neji and Tenten had been married for a little over three years and at first having children didn't seem to be a big priority on their list of To-Dos. That is, not until a year and a half ago when his cousin Hinata announced to the family that she was pregnant with her and Naruto's first child. After that, with Neji being the genius of their family, a lot of pressure was placed on him to start having children of his own.

At first, Neji and Tenten were excited about having a child to call their own. Neji wanted to be the father his own never had the chance to be, but after many tries they noticed they weren't having a lot of luck. Tenten once suggested going to see a fertility doctor, but Neji refused to believe that anything was wrong with either of them and quickly dismissed the idea.

Tenten walked back into the bathroom and threw the test away before turning around and leaning on the counter sink. She crossed her arms over her chest as she reevaluated her situation. Her head then fell into her hand. She wanted to cry, but with everything she had refused her tears. She just felt like such a disappointment for not being able to give Neji what he wanted.

Finally getting herself together, Tenten decided she would take her own walk and so headed to a nice quiet little place she had only visited a few times before. They served a variety of teas that she found she quite enjoyed. Once there she ordered a drink and took a sit off in the corner. As she got comfortable she looked out the window and smiled at the bright beautiful day. Konoha was such a wonderful place, she could hardly imagine living anywhere else.

She could still remember the day she had been brought to the hidden village. She was seven years old as she stood before the Third Hokage for the first time as a handsome looking

Chuunin explained to him that she had been found near the boarder and that she looked to be orphaned. The Third asked her a few questions about where she was from and about her parents, but she told him that she couldn't remember. The Chuunin then explained that when she was found that it looked as if she had suffered from a blow to the head. The Third then asked her if she at least remembered her name and she replied with her given name of Tenten. She had been a citizen of Konoha ever since.

"Tenten-chan," Tenten looked up when she heard her name being softly called. She looked up to see Hinata and her one of her teammates, who's name escaped her mind for the moment.

"Ohayo, Hinata-sama," Tenten greeted the younger woman before her. "Please sit, join me," she insisted and so Hinata and her teammate complied.

"I didn't know you were a fan of such tea," Hinata observe regrading Tenten. "So how are you and Neji-kun?" she asked politely.

"We're fine," Tenten lied as she smiled convincingly. She then noticed one of Hinata's teammate's eyebrows raise above his dark shades. What is his name? She couldn't help but wonder, feeling a little slow for not remembering the name of someone that ran in their group of friends, but he was such a quiet person that often Tenten really didn't notice when he was around. Shrugging it off she then turned her attention back to Hinata. "And you and Naruto? How are things?"

Hinata smiled brightly. "Wonderful," she began. "We just found out this morning that we're going to be having our second child." The smile on Tenten's face fell immediately, but she soon caught herself and so recovered, but it wasn't quick enough for Hinata's observant eyes. "Oh no," Hinata cried, looking horrified with herself as she covered her mouth with both hands. "You must think I'm horrible."

It was then that her teammate rose, realizing that maybe this wasn't his kind of conversation. "I'll return in awhile."

"Of course, Shino-kun," Hinata agreed before once again regrading her fellow kunoichi. "Gomen nasai, Tenten. I should be more considerate about what I say to you. I know you want a child very badly and that you and Neji-

"It's alright," Tenten waved the matter off as she interrupted the other. "Congratulations. I'm happy for you, really. Oh, and I'm sure Neji will be too," she reassured her. "So when do you plan on announcing it to rest of the family?" she asked, but found she was barely able to listen. This news would surely break Neji, she knew. He was such a very prideful being and would feel as if his cousin was winning a game she didn't know she was playing. Plus, there was the fact that everyone they knew seem to know about the problem they were having and Neji would not take well to knowing that he was the center of such a subject. Failure in any aspect of his life just wasn't acceptable.

". . . so you'll be there, yes?" Tenten caught the end of Hinata's question.

"Yes, of course," Tenten shook her head, straightening up as she drunk more of her tea. The two then began to speak of other matters before Shino rejoined them. He didn't participant in

the conversation all too much, but rather just enjoyed his own tea as he listened to the two women. Before long all three were finished and so headed outside. "This was nice," Tenten stated. "We should do it more often," she suggested and was both pleased and surprised when not only Hinata agreed, but Shino as well.

The three then said their goodbyes before she started on her way home feeling a lot better than she had when she left that morning. Although she had to admit she wasn't looking forward to when Neji found out about Hinata's pregnancy. She debated whether or not to tell him before the announcement was given or just pretend to be surprised when it was.

Walking into her home, Tenten was surprised to see that Neji was home before she was. Usually when he took one of his so-called 'walks' it consisted of finding Rock Lee and training all day. "Hey," he said softly with a look on his face that Tenten had never seen before as he stood from the couch when she entered the living room.

"Is there something wrong?" she asked as she approached him.

He took her hand as they sat back down on the couch. "Yes," he admitted. "I've been thinking and I believe what you said a few months ago may have been right."

"I don't understand. What was I right about?" she inquired.

And as Neji went to answer her question, Tenten finally recognized the expression on his face. . . it was shame. "Maybe," he closed his eyes, "maybe we need to see a doctor," he said as if admitting defeat. He then opened his eyes to look at his wife. "I've been selfish by letting my own shortcomings affect us. I know I haven't been a good husband," he confessed to her. "But I want to change that. I can't stand letting you down anymore. So I no longer care how it's done, just as long as we can have a child."

Tenten looked at Neji, almost in disbelief. Here she had been in the mind frame of thinking that he blamed her for not being pregnant, and so apologized every time she found that she wasn't, only to discover that at the same time he blamed himself. "Neji," she whispered as she touched his face. "You are a good husband. Never once did I think you were letting me down. You couldn't even if you tried," she told him before leaning in and softly brushing her lips against his. "I love you," she spoke against his lips before claiming them with her own.

Neji's only response was pulling away, causing Tenten to look at him curiously. "I ran into Naruto this morning," he informed her.

Tenten sat up. "Oh," she breathed knowing Naruto wasn't one for holding something back. "Then you know about Hinata?" she asked carefully.

"Hai." Neji then shook his head. "We're not going," he made clear.

"Of course," Tenten told him what he wanted to hear, but she had already promised Hinata that they would attend their party and so figured she would try to change his mind later on. "So are you hungry?" she asked standing up. "I was about to prepare some lunch." She started to walk towards their kitchen.

Tenten then gasped in surprised when she felt Neji wrap his arms around her from behind. "I love you too," he finally said as she turned her head and smiled at him. Neji kissed her gently, pulling her closer to him as he did so.

Tenten had always been everything to him, although when looking at them from the outside it may have appeared to be untrue. Neji could never be described as one who wore his heart on his sleeve and so there may have been those who questioned his sincerity when it came to his wife.

In fact, he knew they did, as he had once overheard someone say to their companion that Neji had only married Tenten out of convenience and necessity to continue the Hyuuga line and how sorry they felt for the poor girl. But truth be told, those people didn't bother Neji, though lately he was starting to fear that it was Tenten who was starting to question his sincerity and so decided he would do whatever was in his power for her never to doubt him.

To Be Continued. . .

### 3. Green and Gold

#### Chapter Three: Green and Gold

Neji stared down at the dinner Tenten had prepared for the evening. It had been close to a month since they had gone to see a doctor about the problem they were having conceiving. After a few tests, they discovered that Neji's instincts had been right and that the reason they had been having trouble did lie with him. So the doctor prescribed to them the proper medication that was needed and instructions on how to prepare it.

Everyday, three times a day, Tenten prepared her husband's medication and mixed it with his food. She thought if he actually didn't have to see it, that they could pretend as if nothing was wrong, and maybe have some sense of normalcy within their lives. Tenten then looked up from her own meal over to Neji. He had been quiet lately as she watched him pick at his food. She wanted to tell him to eat, but didn't want to push him. She knew he had already taken a major blow to his ego and that coaching him as if he were a small child probably wouldn't help.

Neji could feel his wife's eyes upon him and so for her benefit he finally gathered some food with his chopsticks and brought it to his mouth. Tenten seemed pleased with this before going back to her own dinner. With her no longer watching him, Neji began to pick at his food again. It wasn't that the meal wasn't good, it was. Tenten had actually surprised him by being an excellent cook. It was just no matter what she cooked or how well it was cooked, his medication left a bitter aftertaste that after almost a month was finally starting to get to him.

Neji let out an angry, silent sigh as he readjusted the chopsticks in his hand and stabbed the food within his bowl. He hated this feeling growing within him. He had been denied his father and he had come to terms with that, but now the fates were pushing it as they put him and wife through such a trial.

"Neji?" he heard Tenten speak his name for the first time since their meal began. "I know you said you didn't want to go, but Hinata and Naruto's party is tomorrow at the Hyuuga Manor. I think it would be disrespectful not to show joy on such an occasion," she explained.

"You're right, I said I didn't want to go and my decision has not changed," he told her. "I am no longer concerned with the interworkings of my family."

Tenten frowned. "That's a lie," she stated firmly. "Because if it were true, we wouldn't be going through our lives as if we were racing a clock. Now if you'll please, hurry up and finish your dinner," she practically demanded.

"No," he growled, staring into her brown eyes as he shoved the bowl of food off the table. He watched as Tenten gasped, but dared not to break eye contact with him. Seeing as this was unless and that she would not back down, Neji stood up and began walking out the kitchen. "And if you are so concerned about not appearing disrespectful, attend yourself," he told her before stepping out the room.

Tenten stared at where he had once stood for a long time before she sighed and pushed herself from the table to go get a broom and the trashcan. She carefully lowered herself to her knees as she picked up a big piece of the shattered glass. She rested it in her lap as she ran her fingers tenderly across the green and gold design and took an unsteady breath before actually throwing it away and cleaning up her husband's mess.

Neji went to bed early that night, deeply regretting the petty argument that he let get the better of him. He sat up in their bed when Tenten finally entered the room. "Tenten," he began, but wasn't quite sure exactly what to say. He had acted so foolish.

Tenten opened a drawer to retrieve her night clothes. "It's alright, Neji," she said with her back to him. "Accidents happen," she told him as she turned to him and smiled.

The dark haired man lowered his head as his wife expression. "Please, don't make excuses for my poor behavior," he asked of her. "I'm sorry about . . . wasting the medication," he said slowly.

The smile on Tenten's face grew pained as she shook her head. "The medication?" she asked and Neji, with his head still down, nodded. "Medication can be replaced, Neji, but my-" she spoke frantically, but stopped when Neji gave her a curious look. "Never mind," she spoke before heading out the room to prepare her bath.

By the time she came back, Neji was already fast asleep. She climbed in next to him after turning out the light. "The medication?" she murmured in disbelief and disgust before she too allowed sleep to take her.

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The next morning, Tenten went to the little tea house as she had become accustomed to meeting Hinata and Shino there everyday. She was a little late and so Shino was already at the table when she arrived. "Morning, Shino-kun," she greeted him brightly after ordering her drink and making her way to him, he nodded in response. "Where is Hinata this morning?" she asked.

"Helping to prepare the Manor. She will not be joining us this morning," he informed her.

"Aw," Tenten nodded before taking her tea with both hands and taking a sip.

"How were you injured?" Shino asked when he saw the bandage around her hand.

"Oh." She looked sadly at her hand. "I had a bit of an accident yesterday while I was cleaning up some broken glass." Shino seemed satisfied with her answer, but continued to listen as she went on. "It was my mother's bowl," she whispered softly as she shook her head. "And he didn't even notice." She then seemed angry with herself. "I don't even know why I used them last night," she stated as she usually only used them for her and Neji's anniversary or on one of their birthdays.

"Your mother?" Shino probed.

"Hai," she replied before looking at her companion for the morning. "I don't remember much about my life before coming to Konoha," she began. "So she was the only mother I had ever

known. She took me in when no one else seem to want me." Tenten smiled at the thought of her. "She was very good to me. She treated me as she treated her son, my brother, as if she had given birth to me herself."

Shino then watched as her eyes grew dull. "She died a year after Neji and I were engaged. I believe it was of a broken heart when my little brother died during the Chuunin Exam. Before she died she gave me my wedding gift early. A pair of bowls with an elaborated green and gold design. Together they were breathtaking, which is why I was surprise when she told me one was a spare. She then told me they should only be used with someone I love and as long as I did that, I would be happy."

"They seem to be precious to you. It's hard to believe you would be so careless with one of them," Shino noted.

Tenten frowned. "I wasn't."

"Ah," Shino replied as he realized what must have happened.

"Oh." Tenten slightly drew back in surprise when she felt something on her unbandaged hand. She giggled for a moment as she noticed one of Shino's Kikaichu crawling on her.

"Gomen," Shino offered as he reached out and allowed the Kikaichu to crawl back to him, his fingers slightly brushing her skin as he did so. "She's a bit unruly at times. As she does things without my permission."

"Ah, a rebel among the group." Tenten watched as the small bug disappeared under the sleeve of Shino's greenish coat with a smile.

"I hope you are not offended," Shino spoke softly almost as if he would be scolded.

"No, not at all," Tenten reassured him. She then pushed her drink aside as she crossed her arms on the table and leaned forward a little bit. "You know what? I think today is the most you have ever said to me."

"So it seems," was all he said as he slightly lowered his high collar to drink his tea.

"Why do you cover yourself up like that?" she asked without thinking, but straightened up when she clearly saw a frown form across his lips as he lowered his glass. "Sorry. Maybe that's something I shouldn't ask."

"You would be correct," he said a little harsher than he meant to as he once again hid behind his collar.

Funny, how in moments he reminds me of Neji, Tenten thought before the rest of her and Shino's morning went on without another word being shared between the two.

## 4. Chapter Four

Chapter Four:

"Where are you going?" Neji asked his wife as he stood in the doorway of their bedroom to find her getting dressed up. Tenten didn't respond as she stood in front of the vanity mirror. She tilted her head slightly to one side before starting to put on a pair of pink earrings that compliment the dark green spaghetti strap dress that she was wearing for the evening. Her brown hair was not done in its usual pair of buns, but ran down her shoulders in gentle waves. "Should I assume you're talking to me?" Neji asked as the silence had dragged on for a few minutes.

Tenten sighed as she finally turned around. "You know very well where I'm going, Neji. I just really wish you would come with me," she begged of him.

Neji then entered into the room and walked towards the nightstand where he had left a book. He flipped through the pages casually. "Have a good time," he told her before exiting the room.

Tenten could feel a headache coming on, but tried to push it aside as she turned back to her mirror. Her attention then went to her line of perfumes that she had on the bottom self of her dresser. All of the bottles were practically full as she had only had a few occasions where she could actually wear them. She soon picked one out and dabbed a little on her wrist, on her neck, and in between her breast. After returning the bottle to its rightful place, Tenten made her way over to her closet for a pair of heels to wear for the evening. After slipping on a comfort pair and throwing a shawl that matched her earrings around her arms, she left the bedroom and made her way to the living room.

In the living room, Tenten found her husband, who was resting on the couch with his feet up as he thumbed through his book. "Neji, I'm leaving now," she told him, giving him one more chance to change his mind. When she finally realized that wasn't going to happen she made her way towards the front door. "I'll be back in a few hours," she announced before finally leaving.

Tenten was in no big hurry as she took her time walking to the Hyuuga Manor. Every few meters or so she couldn't help but peek over her shoulders, half hoping to see Neji behind her at any moment. She put the idea out her mind as her home grew smaller and smaller on the horizon line. There was a soft, cool breeze as she walked, causing her to pull her shawl just a little tighter around her arms and shoulders as she looked up into the rapidly darkening sky.

The sky was like a painter's canvass. Pinks and purples littered the air above her as the sun made its daily descent below the covers of the evergreen branches. The full moon was slowly starting to make itself known as wind swept clouds gradually drifted by. Tenten smiled to herself, it was going to be a clear, beautiful night.

"Madam Hyuuga," Tenten was addressed formally by one of the servants as she entered the family estate outside of the ballroom. She bowed politely before being asked, "Should we wait

for your escort?"

Tenten opened her mouth to inform them that Neji wouldn't be joining her that evening, but before she could there was suddenly a large figure standing next to her. She turned, overjoyed that Neji had changed his mind, but Neji was not who she found. "Shino?" she said taken back by his presence.

He wore formal clothing, which Tenten noticed really wasn't a step up from what he normally wore expect now that the large overcoat he wore was black. His head protect was missing for the evening, causing his dark brown hair to fall over the top of his shades. Shino said nothing as he offered Tenten his arm. She looked down at it and hesitated for a beat before actually taking it. She nodded her thanks as the servant announced them to the rest of the party. There were a few strange looks from Hyuuga family members, but each knowing Neji's stubborn nature, thought little of his absences as at least Tenten was there to represent him.

"Shino-kun! Tenten-chan!" Hinata's soft voice could hardly be heard as she approached them, a small child of nine months residing on her hip. "I'm so happy that you came," she told them with a huge smile on her face that slowly faded away as she looked around. "He's not coming is he?" she asked trying not to sound disappointed that her cousin had no desire to acknowledge her in any shape or form.

"I tried, Hinata, but Neji. . ." she shook her head from side to side.

"It's alright. I know you did," Hinata's smile returned to her face, but for some reason it just didn't seem as bright as before.

Tenten thought to change the subject. "So how is this little one?" she asked reaching out and tapping the small child on the nose, which she received a small giggle for.

"Iruka is fine," Hinata began. "I tried getting him to bed before the guess started to arrive, but that didn't work out too well," she informed Tenten as she indicated she wanted to hold him and so Hinata passed the child to the other woman. Hinata and Naruto's son, it was decided before he was born, would be named after the first person that acknowledge Naruto. For in his own way, Iruka was like the father Naruto never had and Naruto could think of no other way to thank him than by naming his first born after him.

Hinata and Tenten's conversation continued about the baby. Kiba soon joined their small party for a while before 'rescuing' Shino as he put it and having the other follow him as he went to scope out the finger food they were serving before the main course was announced.

"Have you asked her yet?" Naruto seemed to appear out of nowhere beside his wife.

Hinata blushed slightly, which Tenten found endearing, because even though the two were married now, Hinata still had moments of bashfulness around him. "I'm sorry, Naruto. I couldn't," she told him.

Tenten looked at the couple curiously as Naruto began to speak, "That's alright." He smiled from ear to ear as a hand went behind his head. "I guess I should ask anyway, huh?" he thought out loud.

"Come, Iruka, time for bed," Hinata said to her son before bidding Tenten goodbye so that she could tend to her child.

Naruto was slightly bumped by a Hyuuga member as he passed, dislike clearly in his eyes, which seemed to go unnoticed by Naruto himself as he only stated that the ballroom was getting crowded and wanted to speak to Tenten alone about something.

The two then made their way to the empty balcony. Naruto opened the huge glass stained doors before they stepped through them. Tenten smiled as she looked at the clear skies she had predicted as she made her way over to the railing and slightly rested against it. She then looked over to Naruto, who had followed her and now stood beside her. He looked nervous for some reason. "Naruto-kun?" Tenten asked gently. "Are you alright?"

He nodded his head, his expression sad as he regarded her. "Yeah, it's just. . ." he began slowly. "Lately, I've been thinking a lot about your brother."

"Oh." Tenten immediately found herself looking away, sometimes it was still hard to talk about him. "He- he adored you, you know," she spoke tenderly at her brother's memory. "Thought the world of you. Wanted to be just like you." She gave a small laugh. "And then surpass you."

Naruto lightly laughed with her before giving a heavy sigh. "He meant a lot to me too," he confessed before lowering his head. "I miss him so much. To lose him, after everything that had happened with Sasuke, almost broke me."

Tenten stepped closer to the blonde headed man before she placed her hand on his shoulder and gave it a slight squeeze. "I know," she said in a comforting voice.

Naruto turned his head and looked at her. "Hinata and I have thought a lot about what we would name our second son if we had one. With your permission, we would like to name him. . . Konohamaru."

"I know, if he were still alive, he would be honored to know you wanted to name your son after him." Tenten nodded. "You have my permission."

Naruto's smile widen, almost in relief, as if he had been fearing she would decline him. "You're the best Ten-chan."

"I know," she teased before he told her he had to find Hinata and tell her the good news. Tenten did not follow him inside, but instead stayed outside and admired the moon. After a few minutes she spoke. "Thank you. . . about before." She then turned around so now that she was facing towards the party inside. On the far side, a figure stood covered in the darkness of the shadows, before slowly stepping out into the light. "Hello again, Shino."

His hands were in his pockets as he made his way over to her. "How did you know?" he couldn't help but ask, for his sheath skills were top notch and not many were able to detect him.

"A little rebel told me," Tenten said indicating the Kikaichu on her arm. "Figured you come looking for her sooner or later."

"Indeed," was his reply as he held his hand out for the Kikaichu, who refused it by running away. It was hard to tell, it being night and with his hair covering so much, but Tenten could almost feel the frown on Shino's face.

"Here, let me," Tenten offered as she lifted her arm and found the small beetle. "I think she likes me," she said as she gently picked up the rebel. Shino held out his hand before Tenten placed the bug within his palm. She then blinked in wonderment as she ran her fingers across his palm. "For a fellow ninja, you have surprisingly soft hands."

"My tactics are from med to long range. Though not in practice, it isn't uncommon for me not to pick up a weapon," he explained as Tenten continued to feel his hand. "Tenten. . . this is uncomfortable," he admitted as he started to pull away as he was not really used to being touched.

"Oh!" she said as she quickly pulled away. "Forgive me. I've been told I have issues with personal space," she blushed.

Shino was about to respond, but was cut off before he began. "Tenten!" A voice called loudly from the balcony door.

Both Shino and Tenten turned their heads towards the sound and instantly Tenten's face broke into a smile. "Neji," she replied as she quickly walked towards him. "I knew you'd come," she stated happily as she seem to completely forget about Shino. "I must tell you what Naruto asked me," she told him.

"Of course," he responded as his hand found the small of her back and he guided her back inside the ballroom. Neji then regarded Shino, frowning as he did so, "Aburame," he recognized the other man. Shino nodded doing the same before he was left alone.

He then turned towards the moon, raising his hand as he considered his friend. "You're not fooling me," he began. "I know what you're doing," he told her as she tried to look innocent. Shino leaned on the railing as he shook his head. "I swear, you'll be the death of me," he said with the hint of a smile as the rebel disappeared beneath his skin.

To Be Continued. . .

## 5. All I Want

### Chapter Five: All I Want

Soft, cool fingers mapped the delicate curves of the bare woman that lay in front of him. She smiled into the night air, her eyes closed as she felt the light trace on her skin. The woman then gave a small sigh as the hand continued its exploration from her thigh on up towards her stomach. She then felt the other hand as it gently swept her loose brown hair from her face before a reign of slow, wet kisses began to litter of neck, back, and shoulders.

The woman than gasped loudly, causing the dark haired man to emit a rare, low chuckle as his hand had quickly made residence between her legs. She then turned to him, opening her eyes as she did so, but it was a moonless night and so she could only make out the silhouette of the man she was now wrapping an arm around.

Her other hand went up to his face. She first swept his dark locks out of his eyes, not knowing why as she still could not make out a single feature. Her fingers, with great care, then ran across his lips, which slightly parted at the gesture as he took several of her fingers into his mouth. He then took her wrist and began to kiss her palm at first before making his way up her arm and then past her shoulder as his lips found the place between it and her neck, where he parted his mouth and bit into her skin.

At first the bite was teasing and gentle, but then suddenly, he roughly pulled her against his bare chest. His teeth then began to dig further into her, until the point where he broke the skin and so he sampled the metallic liquid that seeped out. The woman arched her back, her face reading of pain as her nails slightly sunk into his skin, not knowing if she wanted him to continue or stop. Then when she finally thought she could bare no more, he pulled away and then crushed his mouth against her own.

She could taste her own blood as their tongues clashed together. He then growled aggressively, almost in a warning like form as he pushed her onto her back and climbed on top of her. He reached down, parting her legs as he settled himself between them.

Finally, he broke their kiss, each gasping for air as he did so. Breathing heavily and not having her fill with him, the woman curled her arms around his back and brought him back down to her, where she paid him back and revengefully bit into him.

His jaw clenched and he sucked in air through gritted teeth as she made no attempt to be gentle with him. He eventually had to take a handful of her long, brown hair and practically rip her off of him. He paid no mind to the pain she had caused him, as he once again flipped the script. His hand letting go of her hair as it gently began to caress her cheek. He then showered her face with butterfly kisses and she sighed contently. "Tenten," he whispered as if it were the only name that mattered in the world.

If it were possible, she pulled him even closer. "Please," she murmured into his ear, parting her legs even further, telling him she was ready for him, and so he would have her beg no more as

he made the two of them one. She closed her eyes as he filled her, "Shino," she breathed into the night air.

Tenten bolted straight up in her bed. Her eyes widely snapping open as she breathed heavily. She turned her head to the left and discovered her husband, who was still sleeping soundly with his back to her. She then took slow, deep breaths as her hand went to her forehead before she ran her fingers through her hair. She had to calm down, she knew. She then threw back the sheets and swung her legs over the edge of the bed, where her feet made contact with the cool, wooden floor.

She didn't even bother to find her housecoat before she ventured out of her bedroom and down the hall to the bathroom, dressed only in a t-shirt of Neji's and a pair of cotton panties. Once inside the bathroom, she closed the door behind her. She then turned to the sink and ran the cold water. She bent over it and made her hands into a bowl before splashing some of it onto her face.

She then looked into the mirror and stared at herself for moment. She looked so tired, but how could she not, when since the Hyuuga party, which was two weeks ago, several of her dreams had been plagued with a man who was not her husband? At first she thought nothing of them, they had started out so innocent, reflecting reality with her, him, and Hinata at the tea house. But then Hinata was gone and it was just two of them, but still everything was so innocent.

Everything then started with a simple touch. . . initiated by her, but followed up by him. After that the dreams grew more intense as their caresses became more purposeful. But that last dream had been too much for Tenten, for it had been the first dream she had of him where they were actually intimate and it bothered her greatly.

Tenten splashed another bowl of water onto her face before drying off. She then went to step out of the bathroom, where she jumped back in surprise when she found Neji standing outside of it. "Oh, you scared me," Tenten spoke with hand on her chest.

Neji looked at her oddly with her words. "Is something the matter?" he asked.

"No, nothing," she told him as she went to walk to pass him, but Neji reached out and took her wrist, causing Tenten to look down at it.

"You're lying to me," he began. "You haven't made eye contact with me in days."

"I haven't?" she asked, but still made no contact with him.

"Look at me," he demanded as the grip he had on her wrist slightly tighten and he activated his Byakugan against his own wife. Reluctantly, Tenten did what was asked of her, knowing full well that Neji would be able to see what she so desperately had been trying to hide. Neji studied the movement of her eyes, frowning as he did so. "Fear," was the first word that escape his lips. "Guilt," his frown deepened with the second word. He then released both his grip and his bloodline limit as he regarded her. "I want the meaning behind them."

Tenten shook her head. "I've been having a few nightmares. Nothing more," she told him as she headed back to their bedroom.

"Are they about me?" he found himself asking before he could stop himself. "Your nightmares, I mean."

"No," she answered quickly, not stopping as she finally reached the bedroom.

Neji soon stood in the doorway, watching as Tenten prepared to take a bath. She had taken one before she had gone to bed last night, but her dream had her longing for another. "Do not deny you have been acting strangely around me lately."

"Not everything revolves around you, Neji," she stated calmly as she closed her dresser drawer and walked to the doorway, which Neji still blocked. "Excuse me, please," she began, looking him straight in the eye as if to prove a point. "I don't want to be late meeting Hinata and Shino."

Neji, knowing what had become her morning ritual, simply nodded before stepping out of the way.

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Tenten never made it to the tea house that morning as she found her feet had carried her to the academy. It was a school day, but classes wouldn't be starting for a few more hours. She made her way to the playground where she took a seat on a swing. She closed her eyes, feeling the morning air on her skin as she swung.

She didn't know how long she had been there when she heard a voice behind her. "It seems I've been stood up."

Tenten whipped her head around to find Shino under the shade of a tree. She slowed down her swing before she stood facing him as he walked towards her. "Morning," she greeted softly.

"You know it's common courtesy to inform someone when you don't plan on showing up," he explained. "Like Hinata."

"I'm sorry. I didn't realize how late it was," she told him.

"It's alright," he let the matter go as he sat down in the other swing.

Tenten stared at him for a moment, before she retook her own seat. She pivot slowly back and front on her swing, unsure of what to say as she found herself growing more uncomfortable around Shino every time she saw him. Not that she was sure that he noticed at all as they really didn't say much to each other when they did meet at the tea house. It was just that every time she saw him, she couldn't help but think of the dreams she was having. She felt guilty for allowing him to invade her thoughts.

"Do you find comfort here?" Shino asked her.

Tenten blinked curiously at the question. "On the swings?"

"No, here at the academy." He turned his head to look at her.

Tenten tilted her head to one side as a smile slowly appeared. "Yes, I guess I do. I have very fond memories of this place."

"I'm glad for you," he stated.

"That's a strange question, Aburame," she began. "Did you not enjoy your school days?" she asked him, for being in the class ahead of him she never had a lesson with him.

"Not in particular," he confessed. "My fellow students didn't seem interested in knowing me once they realized what clan I was from."

"Oh," Tenten lowered her head for a moment. "It must have been difficult."

"Not really." Shino then began to pivot on his swing as well. "When you don't know what you've missed, you don't tend to miss it when you don't have it."

"Wise words, but untrue," Tenten corrected him, which caused Shino to cock an eyebrow, for not many people ever challenged him. "You're a very observant man, Shino. I doubt you would be able to look at your peers and not want what they have. Yes, you may not have missed it, but it would have been something you would have craved."

"Then you've caught me, for it was," he admitted to her. "But that was one craving that was satisfied long ago."

"When you made your three-man team?"

"Hai," he confirmed. "So memories of this place aren't all pleasant for me."

"Then maybe we should leave," she suggested as she stood. Shino said nothing as he followed her lead. The two then leisurely made their way off the school ground. They walked in silence for awhile before Tenten spoke again. "Shino, may I ask you something?" He nodded. "You said, when you made your three man team, that one of your needs, friendship, was fulfilled, what were the others?"

Shino turned his head and gazed upon her as if debating if it was something he wanted to share. "There is only one other," he began softly. "But the risk of going after it is too great."

"No risk is too great when going after something you want, Shino," she encouraged him.

"Hn." He contemplated her words as he turned his head back to the path they were walking on. "You're right. I shall keep that in mind."

To Be Continued. . .

## 6. Mission Unknown

### Chapter Six: Mission Unknown

"Shino." Neji frowned as he heard his beloved wife breath another's man name in her sleep.

It means nothing, is something he would have thought if this had only occurred once. Shino was her friend and people were bound to dream about people they knew. Neji was guilty of it himself. But what bothered him so greatly about hearing the bug user's name was that this was the fourth night in a row.

Neji took a deep breath before letting it out slowly as he continued to watch his wife sleep. His suspicion, he knew was unfounded. He knew with everything he had that Tenten loved him. . . but, doubt had dug itself deeply into his mind.

He had been right about the argument they had several weeks ago. He no longer cared about the interworkings of his family or their opinions. So all the pressure they were trying to place upon him to have a child of his own didn't bother him in the least. But Tenten's face, every time she had to tell him that she wasn't pregnant, broke a part of him that he didn't realize existed before.

Hinata's party, he didn't want to go to for the simple fact that he didn't want see Tenten attach herself to baby Iruka and watch her as she longed for one of her own. Neji couldn't help but wonder what he would become to her if he could not succeeded in giving her a child. Would she eventually grow tired of him and leave him for someone who could?

He wanted to think that she wouldn't, but seeing her happy was the only thing that really mattered to him. So he knew if that dreadful day ever came, he would step aside and dissolve their marriage without protest, but until then, he would fight tooth and nail until they had a child of their own.

Hyuuga Neji then threw back his sheets and rose out of bed. He then carefully readjusted the sheets over Tenten's shoulders before getting ready for the day. He was already in the kitchen preparing breakfast when Tenten made her way over to the counter. "Well, this is new," she said with a smile, as it was usually her out and about before Neji in the morning. "And you're cooking?" she asked in a teasing tone.

"I do know how," Neji stated as he beat batter for pancakes. "I was hoping you would skip your meeting with Hinata and Aburame today," he asked of her as he turned away so that he could the pour batter into a skillet.

"Oh?" Tenten walked around the counter so that she was closer to Neji. She then rested her hands on the edge as she leaned against it. "Any particular reason why?" she asked.

Neji smiled as he placed the glass bowl on the counter before turning to Tenten and wrapping his arms around her. "I was hoping we could pick up were we left off last night before we were

rudely interrupted," he told her, leaning in so that he could place kisses upon her.

Tenten's brow slightly furrowed as her hand came up to his arm, rubbing where the his ANBU mark was located underneath his clothing. "You seemed a little upset last night when your mission scroll came in. So when do you need to meet with the Hokage?" she asked.

"Not until noon," he informed her, not once straying from his task.

"Do you suspect you'll be gone long?" The question was innocent, but hearing it caused Neji to slightly back up.

"Why? Do you have something planned in my absence?" he couldn't help the accusatory tone that entered his voice with the question, but Tenten seemed to miss it altogether.

"No." She shook her head as she smiled. "I was just wondering if it would interfere with something you might have planned coming up."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Neji told her honestly as he went to flip the pancakes over.

Tenten rolled her eyes, her smile still bright. "Sure you don't," she said as she quickly kissed his cheek before going over to wash her hands so that she could help him make breakfast. Tenten was in the middle of adding Neji's medication to his portion when there came a knock at the door.

Neji gave Tenten a small gesture telling her to continue before he went to see who their visitor could be. At the door Neji found a Postal Nin standing in front of him. "Yes?"

The Postal Nin pulled out a package as he spoke. "I'm looking for a Hyuuga Tenten," he informed the other man.

"I'll take it. I'm her husband." Neji reached out for the package only to have it pulled away before he could reach it.

"I was instructed to give this to her personally," he had taken a tone with Neji, that he never would have, if he had known who the white eyed man was.

"Neji, who's at the door?" Tenten asked as she came out the kitchen. "Oh." Her eyes went a bit wide as the Postal Nin came into her view. She then walked towards the two men as she gave a small awkward smile that had not gone unnoticed by her husband. "Did something come for you, Neji?"

"Actually, it's for you," he told her as he stepped out of the way.

The Postal Nin then handed the package to its rightful owner, giving Tenten a small nod as he did so, causing the tension from her face to slip away as Neji heard her whisper, "Thank you."

Neji closed the door as Tenten opened her package. Inside was a scroll, which she immediately read. Tenten's hand covered her mouth as her eyebrows came closer together. It was only after

a minute that Neji realized that Tenten was no longer reading the scroll, but simply staring at it, as if not believing what was on the page. "Who is it from?" he finally asked, surrendering to his curiosity.

Tenten's head snapped up, looking at Neji as if she had forgotten he was in the room with her. "Uh," she began nervously as she rolled the the paper back around the spool and held it behind her back. "It's from a former client of mine. From that three month long mission I took last year, remember?" Neji nodded. "It's just an update about their situation."

Neji crossed his arms and leaned against the back of the couch. "From your expression, I assume all is not well."

Tenten sighed. "No, that's not it. All is well, it's just. . ." she trailed off, a look of concern on her face. "Neji. . . I'm going to have to take a rain check on breakfast, there's something I have to take care of," she told him.

"Are you telling me, you need to leave the village?" he asked.

"No, nothing like that," she shook her head quickly. She then stepped over to him and gently kissed his lips. "I'll be back in a hour or so," she let him know with a smile before leaving their home.

Neji's brow furrowed, something didn't feel right about what she had just told him, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. Then as Neji made his way back to the kitchen it struck him like a bolt of lightning. "She lied to me," he said out loud as he swiftly turned back towards the front door. Then before he knew it, he was out the door, tracking his own wife.

Neji had to keep his distance. Tenten had an uncanny ability of sensing those who were following her and so had to activate his blood line limit to make sure that he didn't get too close. He followed her to one of the training grounds within their village, where Neji was surprised to find the Postal Nin waiting for her.

He watched as Tenten held tightly the scroll she had received before the Postal Nin handed her a pencil. She then unrolled the scroll and held it up against a nearby tree and proceeded to write something down. "Phase Seven: Incomplete," Neji read out loud the very short message, before it was rolled back up and sealed by the Postal Nin, who then disappeared into the trees above.

A moment later, Tenten roughly collapsed onto her knees. Neji's first instinct was to go to her, but he fought to hold himself back as not to alarm her that he had followed her, but he soon lost that fight as his need to know if she was alright grew strong. So with all the stealth he possessed he made his way closer, deactivating his blood line limit in the process. Neji stopped dead in his tracks when he finally noticed Tenten's bobbing shoulders. . . she was crying.

Neji then began to wonder, what in the letter she had received could have upset her so much. And as he watched the tears run down her cheeks, he wanted nothing more than to comfort her. He was about to reveal his hiding place to do just that when he suddenly took a sharp intake of air. Emerging from the trees, stood Aburame Shino. He then silently made his way over to Tenten before sitting down. Tenten's downward head snapped up as she realized

someone was there with her and immediately began to wipe away her tears. Neji was not close enough to hear her words.

Then, after what appeared to be small conversation between the two, Tenten threw her arms around Shino and began to cry again. Shino appeared surprised by the gesture, and looked almost like he was about to push her away, but then as his hands came into position on her waist, he found he couldn't. Shino then wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer to him. Neji's face was impassive as his eyes took in the scene before him. His shoulders slightly fell before he turned around and headed in the opposite direction.

OoOoO

Tenten was home within the hour. She found Neji in the living room polishing his hand knives. "Keeping busy?" she asked as she took a sit beside him. Neji said nothing as he continued his task. Tenten smiled as she moved in closer to him. She then lifted her hand and tucked his long dark hair behind his ear. "Did you eat?" she asked, but still received no answer, but she didn't seem to mind. She was used to her husband's standoffish ways.

Neji ignored her as she placed seductive little kisses along his jawline as her hand found his thigh and began to move up. "Put this down," she told him, when she got tired of being ignored, as she reached for the kunai in his hand, which he easily relinquished. "And kiss me." Tenten placed the weapon on the table, before taking a hold of Neji's face and turning him towards her.

Neji sighed as they made eye contact before Tenten leaned in to capture his lips, but before she could, Neji slightly pulled away. "No," he told her. "I didn't," Tenten looked confused, but then realized he was telling her that he hadn't eaten, meaning he hadn't taken the first dose of his medication.

Tenten slowly pulled away before she stood and walked over to the kitchen door, which she then slide open. Everything was exactly where she had left it nearly an hour ago. "I don't understand, Neji," she began with her back to him. "I mean, is there something I'm just not getting?" she turned around to face him. He had been acting so strangely towards her lately. She then slightly shook her head as she placed her hand on her chest. "Do you not want a child as badly as I do?"

"I do," he confirmed.

"Then is it me?" she asked, hesitating as she took a step towards him. "Do you not want a child with me?" She rested on her knees beside him on the floor and placed her hands, one on top of the other, on his knee. "Am I not a worthy enough woman to give you a Hyuuga heir?" she voiced a long thought fear as she waited for his answer.

"I want a child more than anything, Tenten," he made clear. "But not with you," Tenten's eyes grew wide with the words, "if you are not faithful." Neji had already promised himself, if she wanted someone else that he would let her go, but that didn't mean he would make it easy.

Tenten frantically searched his eyes. "Not faithful?" she questioned. "Neji, I have always been true to you."

"I went to the Hyuuga manor today," he stated suddenly.

Though she tried to hide it, a strange expression filtered onto Tenten's face as she removed her hands from Neji's knee. "Oh?" was all she could manage to say.

"Hinata-sama tells me she hasn't been to the tea house in quite awhile," he began. "That it has only been you and Aburame in the mornings."

"It's only tea, Neji," was her excuse. "Nothing more, honest."

Neji then leaned towards her and gently took her face in his hand. "You lying to me about who you are meeting, is not nothing," he pointed out. "You calling out his name in the middle of the night, is not what I would call nothing," he seemed especially angry at that fact as he pulled his hand away. "And you, just this very morning, embracing him as if he were your lover, is more than nothing."

Tenten's eyes filled with fear. "You- you followed me?" she asked. "How much did you see?" she asked quickly.

"That question alone plagues my mind in doubt," he told her frowning. "Know now, I will not tolerate an unfaithful wife."

Tenten slowly took in what she was being told. Her face of fear turning into one of anger. "You bastard!" she hissed. "You speak as if I am something replaceable. I have been a good wife, Neji. I keep our home, tend to your every need, and have put up with your impossible demeanor," she informed him. "The only man I have ever laid beside is you," she made clear. "And for you to think otherwise," she slightly shook her head, her voice softening, "I don't know. . . but it hurts," she admitted as she wrapped her arms around herself.

The Hyuuga looked over the woman before him and then stood. "So you are not sleeping with-

"No!" she exclaimed before he could even finish the question. "He is only a friend," she reassured him.

Neji slightly rose his head. "Fine." He then side stepped her before entering the kitchen.

Tenten scoffed before she followed him. "Fine?" she questioned. "Is that all you have to say to me?"

"What else would you have me say?" Neji asked as he poured the beaten eggs, Tenten had been preparing, into the sink as they had been sitting out too long.

"How about saying you're sorry? I mean, you followed me when you had no right to and then accused me of adultery." She marched over and stood on the other side of the island counter. "I want to hear you say you were wrong and that you trust me."

Neji then faced her. "I will not," he told her, which surprised Tenten. "My reasons were valid."

"That's not the point!" she yelled. "You were wrong!"

The two then stared defiantly at each other before Neji sighed silently. "Forgive me," he gave her a small bow as he spoke. "I did not mean to upset you."

Tenten sat down looking at her husband in disbelief as he went to throw away the cold pancakes that had been cooked earlier so he could start a new batch. "Are you still hungry?" he asked as if they had not just had an argument.

"Starving," Tenten confessed somberly.

To Be Continued. . .

## 7. An Unequal Pain

### Chapter Seven: An Unequal Pain

The dawn of the morning was just peeking into the small Hyuuga home, but the souls that resided within it had already been up for more than an hour. Tenten said nothing, as she went over each and every one of Neji's weapons, making sure they were clean and durable before placing them in his pouch on the bed. Neji sat on the other side with his back to her, a map in his hand as he went over the fastest routes in and out of the Fire Country.

Mission mornings: They were always very tense and very quiet. The assign ninja going over mission specs and possible strategies, all in the name of completing their duty.

Tenten had finally assembled Neji's supplies to her liking before she left his ready pouch sitting on the bed before walking over to their closet. She reached high above her head to the shelf, her fingers seeking until they came across smooth and cold porcelain. She firmly took a hold of it and brought it to her before holding it in both hands. She sighed as she regarded the mark of the wolf. The wolf was dedicated, loyal, protective, and familial - everything that symbolized Neji.

Tenten walked over to her husband and stood before him and presented to him, his ANBU mask. Neji rose his head to her as he rolled up his map and laid it on the nightstand before reaching out to take the mask from her hands. "Tenten," his voice along with his eyes were soft. "I trust you," he confessed. He then shook his head. "About yesterday, I just need you know. . . just in case, that I-"

"Don't speak," Tenten interrupted him as she guided their hands to the nightstand to put down the mask. "Whatever you have to say, you say when you get back."

Neji nodded his head in understanding before Tenten took either side of his face and gently kissed the cursed mark on his forehead. Neji's lavender eyes slowly closed and he let himself exhale as he felt his wife tender kisses on his face. "We can't," he spoke. "I'll be late," he expressed his concern.

"Let them wait," were her words as she lowered herself to her knees before claiming Neji's lips with her own. Her hands found the buttons to his ANBU uniform before she began to unfasten them. Neji gave her no more protest as he allowed the clothing to be striped from his body. He then broke their kiss as he took a hold of Tenten's arms and as he stood, he forced her back onto her feet.

He stared into her eyes and behind those hazel orbs he saw passion and need and so would not deny her. Neji then suddenly crushed his mouth against his wife's. Their tongues pushing against each other in a display of dominance that neither could seem to take from the other. Neji kissed her as if he were hungry for her as he licked and sucked on her lips. And as his lips played, his hands worked to pull the small frame of Tenten closer to him. His hands journeying south until they met the curve of her backside.

Tenten was only dressed in a short, almost sheer, purple house coat that morning and so Neji took the fabric and let his fingers bring in up slowly until he was able to feel the cotton panties that she wore underneath. Their kiss once again came to an end before Tenten began to nip and suck at Neji's neck and shoulder.

She then felt Neji's agile fingers tug at the little clothing she had on before she took a step back. Neji watched her longingly as her hands went to the rope around her waist before she allowed the robe to fall off her shoulders before it formed a pool around her feet. With his eye still on her, Tenten's thumbs found the band of her matching purple panties and bent over as she slide them down her long tone legs. She then stepped back into Neji, placing a kiss on his chin before undoing the drawstring on his pants and help him out of them.

Neji then took a hold of her and gently laid her down onto the bed, his caresses were soft and deliberate as he explored the familiar body before him. As what came with time, he knew exactly where to touch her to get the sounds he wanted out of her. He smirked in triumph, when she shivered underneath him, when he pinched that spot low on the inside of her thigh.

Tenten's hands hooked around Neji's shoulders before she slightly, but firmly pulled him just a little closer. Heeding her wordless request, Neji lowered himself onto her. She found the weight of him comforting; the heat of his body intensifying the lust she felt for him as he positioned himself between her sprawled legs. Then with one powerful and swift motion, with a grace held only by one born with the Hyuuga name, entered into her waiting body. Tenten exhaled as she felt her husband fill her. Neji then lovingly stroked her face as his hips thrust against her slow and deep. Tenten moaned as she arched her back into him to better feel his penetration. Their breathing became heavy and labored at they worked themselves into a quicker rhythm until each could take no more and they gave in to their bodys' release.

Neji slowly withdrew from her before collapsing beside her on his back. He closed his eyes and raked his fingers through his darks locks, his chest heaving as he rediscovered his lungs. He then felt Tenten shift in their bed before he felt her arm wrap around his chest and hold him tightly. "Come back to me, Hyuuga Neji," she prayed.

The man beside her opened his eyes before taking her hand in his own and planting a kiss upon it. Then with heavy lidded eyes looked to his wife. "I will," he told her. A tear slid down Tenten's cheek before she climbed on top of him and rested her head on his chest, where she held him a bit tighter. Neji tenderly ran his fingers through her hair.

He had never seen Tenten so upset before a mission before, but then again, it was he who had broken one of their unwritten rules. He tried to tell her again, how sorry he was for all the fighting they had been doing as of late, which signified his own weariness when it came to his mission. Of course, Tenten had picked up on it and it had frightened her. She didn't want to hear him speak as if he weren't coming back. She wouldn't allowed it. Neji then took a moment to kiss the top of her head. "I promised," he whispered. "I'll come back to you."

OoOoO

Neji arrived near the gate opening to find two of the three ANBU members he had been assign with for his mission. Kiba leaned casually against the wall with his arms crossed. His mask resembled that of a dog. A little off to the side of him was Ino, whose mask resembled that of a

boar. "Neji-kun," she called when she saw him approach her. "Where the hell is Shikamaru?" she asked as if he should have known.

"How am I to know?" Neji replied simply, as he began to wonder the same thing. Whenever Shikamaru led a mission, despite his laziness, he was usually very punctual. His tardiness for this particular mission left Neji in a state of uneasiness, but he didn't want to focus on that before their mission even began. So he turned his head towards Kiba and his brow furrowed underneath his mask, if he hadn't known before hand that was Kiba, he probably wouldn't have recognized him.

Akamaru had always been by Kiba's side and with his absence, due to an illness Kiba did not care to discuss with anyone outside of his family, Neji wondered if he would be able to focus on the mission as he should.

"Good, you're all here. Gather round." Neji, Ino, and Kiba each came out of their thoughts as they heard Shikamaru approach him. He wore his ANBU mask, which resembled a fox. The three gathered around their mission leader as they waited for their instructions. "The mission we were assigned has been put on hold."

"What? Why?" Kiba asked. "What could be more important than-"

"We've had a kidnapping," Shikamaru interrupted him. "It took place a few hours before dawn. The assailants are said to be from the Firefly Country."

"How did they get in undetected?" Ino asked.

"Well, right now, it looks like they may have had help from the inside," Shikamaru informed them.

"Are you telling us there may be a traitor within Konoha?" Kiba asked angrily.

"It's only one of many theories as of now, but if there is a traitor that isn't our mission to find out," Shikamaru explained. "There is a child of Konoha out there who we need to bring home. This mission is of the utmost importance."

"It was a child?" Ino's voice was filled with concern, as she was a mother herself, but knew for a fact that her five year old daughter was safe at home with her husband, Chouji. "Whose?"

Then slowly the Fox turned towards the Wolf. "Heir to the Hyuuga clan," he announced.

"Iruka-san," Neji breathed to himself as he imagined an inconsolable Hinata. "What are your instructions," he almost demanded of the man before him.

Shikamaru pulled out a map and they squatted to the ground as he explained that they were going to split into two groups, so that they could cover more ground, as they headed towards Firefly Country. As he continued with his plan the rest of his team pulled out their ear pieces and made sure they were on the same frequency. "Alright then," Shikamaru stood up, "let's move out."

The four man group then started towards the open gate, but stopped and took a step back when a blonde headed figure landed in front of them. "Not without me," Naruto made clear. "I'm going with you."

Shikamaru sighed as he stepped forward and regarded the outraged father before him. "Don't be troublesome, Naruto. You heard what the Fifth said, you're too close to this," he told him.

"Too close?" Naruto questioned with a look of disbelief on his face. "Too close!" he yelled. "My son is out there!" He pointed outside the gate. "Those bastards came into my home and took him from his bed. So I'll damned if they don't pay by my own hands!" Though his face showed nothing but anger, tears began to brim in his eyes. He had waited too long for a family of his own to let someone steal it from him.

"You are not thinking clearly," Shikamaru said firmly, he had no time for this. "In this condition, you can not be a productive member of any squad. So if you really want to help, stay home."

"I will not abandon my son!" Naruto yelled.

"So you will abandon your wife instead?" Naruto quickly turned his head when he heard the calm voice of Neji.

"What?" Naruto seemed confused. "I would never. . ."

"The family will be going through a great hardship with Iruka gone. Hinata will need your support and your strength during this time. She will be worried enough about your son, don't make her worry about you too," Neji explained. "I can only imagine, if I had a child-"

"That's right," Naruto began heatedly. "Because from what I understand, the only thing you'll ever be able to do is imagine." Neji was little taken back by Naruto's harsh words, as they, in Neji's opinion, hit far below the belt. "You'll never know what it's like to have your child taken right from underneath you as you sleep. So don't you dare try to console me, because you'll never know this pain. You'll never know-"

"Naruto-kun!" His name was bellowed surprisingly by Hinata. "What are you doing?" she asked as she made a hesitant step forward. "Where are you going?"

"Hinata," Naruto cried, all anger falling from his features immediately before leaping over the four ninjas and landing before his wife.

Seeing her blood-shot eyes and her distraught face, Naruto lowered his head and pulled her into his arms. He then finally allowed the tears, he had refuse to let shed, fall down his cheeks. "Nowhere," he told her as she buried her face into his chest and clung on to him as if her life depended on it. "I'm not going anywhere," he whispered to her. After a few moments Naruto rose his head and looked to Neji, guilt written all over his face. "Neji, I-" he began, but Neji cut him off with a gesture of his hand.

"We should go," Neji suggested to Shikamaru, who nodded. The four man team were then off like streaks of lightening.

Neji jumped from tree to tree, turning his head slightly to make sure that Ino was keeping up with his speed. When he saw that she was, he allowed himself to be distracted by his thoughts. He knew Naruto only said what he said out of stress and anger, but Neji knew he spoke the truth. With the way things were going in his life, Neji knew he may never know what it would be like to have a child of his own. And what Hinata and Naruto were going through now, he knew he would never know that type of pain.

To Be Continued. . .

## 8. The Offers of Others

### Chapter Eight: The Offers of Others

Three days. Three long days had the four man team been traveling toward the Firefly Country, but even the strongest of teams need to rest and recuperate. Neji sighed as he poked the fire before him with a long stick. The night air was cool which was evident as Neji caught Ino shiver as a light breeze swept by. "It's late," he informed her as the sun had set hours before. "You should try getting some rest," he instructed as their journey would begin again at dawn's first light after receiving a call from Shikamaru over their ear pieces.

"That's okay. I'll keep watch tonight," she offered. "You need your rest as well."

"I can't sleep," he told her truthfully. "There are too many things to worry about to sleep peacefully."

"Well," Ino began thoughtfully. "Maybe it would help if you talked about them."

Neji looked up at her for the first time that night, Ino once again shivered, not from the cold, but from the eerie effect the fire's light had on her teammate's eyes. "I appreciate your concern, but that will not be necessary," he said, as he had never been one to express himself openly.

Ino nodded before she drew her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. She then began to stare into the fire, which she did for quite awhile before she spoke again. "What Naruto said before we left was hurtful. He had no right to say it," she let her opinion be known. "He's an idiot."

Neji's brow creased with her words. "What Naruto said was out of panic and fear for his child. I can not hold what he said, in that state, against him," Neji stated, and for the most part it was true.

"Well, if it makes any difference to you. . . I think you'll make a fine father," she told him with a smile.

"Thank you," there was true gratitude in his voice as he spoke. "But I doubt I'll ever get to chance to see that," he slowly revealed his fears. "Tenten. . ." he sighed. "She wants a child so badly and so do I," he admitted. "But she knows I can't give her one." Neji then scoffed angrily. "And by Naruto's comment the other day, it appears quite a few people know it."

"A marriage can still be complete without children, Neji," Ino tried to reassure him. "You and Tenten love each other and that should be all that matters."

"Do not patronize me," Neji slightly snapped. "For it is easy for you to speak when you have Kikio at home," he spoke of her daughter.

Ino huffed loudly at his reaction and the mention of her child. "Tell me, Hyuuga, if given the

choice, would you rather have a childless marriage with love or a loveless marriage with many children?" The question confused Neji greatly. "You and Tenten are lucky," she made clear. "Your marriage was out of choice and not obligation. So don't tell me what is or is not easy."

Neji calmed a bit as he once again spoke in his normal tone. "I know of obligation as well. And as a husband, it is my obligation to ensure my wife is loved and happy. Loved she is, but happy, she is not. . ." his voice soften. "And I fear, if I can not give her what she needs, she will find it elsewhere." He shrugged as he closed his eyes. "That is, if she hasn't already done so."

Ino nodded. "Your eyes still amaze me, Neji," she began. "I didn't know you knew of Shino."

Neji frowned, not liking the way she had said that last statement. "She has been having tea with him," his frown deepen, "every morning, for quite some time now."

"And as of late?" she asked.

The dark haired man looked at her curiously. "What do you mean?"

Ino's eyes widen a bit, thinking she had said too much. She thought to change the subject, but knew the man before her would press the matter. "My family's flower shop does business with the tea shop that Tenten frequents. I'm there almost every morning for the day's deliveries," she explained. "At first it was three of them. Hinata, Shino, and Tenten. They never really noticed me, I was always in the back. But after awhile it was just Shino and Tenten and they always seemed so- so friendly," she said softly. "And it's just as of late that they," Ino seeing Neji harden face found it hard to speak. "Well, they haven't been showing up at all and since you said-

"I understand," Neji cut her off, not wanting to hear anymore. "It's late," he stated as he cast his eyes downward. "And I think I will take you up on your previous offer," he told her before he slowly laid down. He sighed heavily as he closed his eyes, suddenly feeling very tired.

OoOoO

To think, she had actually been happy when she had gotten the message that the Hokage wanted to speak to her personally and now. . . she just wanted to die as she stared at the green book that Tsunade had handed her. "I- I don't understand," Tenten told her mentor.

"It's very simple," Tsunade began. "I want you to look through these cadets and chose a three man team. I think you would make a fine Sensai," she told her with a soft smile.

Tenten only shook her head from side to side. "But I thought only unwed kunoichis were chosen to led a three man team, that and. . ." Tenten sat down, suddenly feeling lightheaded. "That and barren women," she said the word as if it were forbidden. "Hokage-sama, please," panic lined her words as she spoke. "I am wed and I am not bar- I am very capable of having children," she wanted known. "And though I thank you for this opportunity, once I have my own children, my focus will be on them. So I must decline this offer."

"Tenten-chan," Tsunade sighed. "Graduation is coming up very soon and there are many Jounin I could chose from, but I want you to lead a Genin team," she let be known.

"But Hokage-sama, when I become pregnant-"

"Tenten!" The dark haired woman was cut off sharply. Tsunade sighed before being slowly. "You should know that I have reviewed over you and Neji's medical records." Tenten's heart sunk. "I'm sorry, but your husband. . . Neji is sterile," she came out and stated.

"No!" Tenten responded loudly. "He's on medication, we're trying to fix it."

"Yes, I know. And seeing how Neji is from a very noble clan and how skillful he is with his bloodline limit, heirs from him would have been a great asset to this village, which is why he was prescribed such a powerful fertility drug. But it has been months and if it hasn't worked by now, chances are, it won't," she told her sadly.

"Hokage-sama." To Tsunade's ears, she sounded on the verge of tears. "What will I tell Neji?" She thought of her husband. "He will be so furious."

"My concern is not Neji right now. It is you," she made clear. "Listen, do not speak as if you see this as a punishment. I am not trying to rub salt on this clearly open wound. But please believe me, a Genin team, can be very rewarding. If you allow yourself, you will not only be their Sensai, but their mentor, their friend, their light when all is dark. If you teach them well, believe in them, and love them, they will believe and love you. You will be like a second mother to them and maybe, for the unfortunate ones, the mother they never knew."

"It's not the same," Tenten needed her to understand.

"I know," Tsunade soothe. "But give it time," she advised. "Things will work out in the end."

"Will Neji have his own team as well?" she asked.

Tsunade shook her head. "No, assuming all goes well and Iruka-san is returned home. It is Hinata-sama's wish that Iruka and his siblings that will follow are trained by Neji when they are older. Surprisingly, Neji has already agreed."

"Already agreed?" Tenten said to herself as she had not been informed before of Neji's plans. Tenten's face became placid as she stood, the cadet book held close to her stomach. She then spoke flatly, "I will have my list of candidates by the end of the month." She looked her Hokage straight in the eye. "If you'll excuse me, I have a lot of research to do before that time." She then nodded before quickly leaving the tower.

OoOoO

Tenten sat at home, staring at the book in her hands. She was afraid to open it, afraid of accepting her faith. She had realized, as she was traveling home, that the Hokage truly was trying to help, but in her own way. She should have been grateful, but instead acted like a selfish, spoiled child. She felt ashamed of herself for showing such behavior in front of someone she admired so much. Her Genin, whomever she may chose, would be the closest she would ever have to her own children.

The Hyuuga wiped the tears that had fallen from her eyes, feeling a bit defeated, but then she suddenly stood and heaved the book with all she had across the room, as she let out a cry in frustration. Tenten felt as if she were going to breakdown that very moment, but before she was going to allow herself to do just that, a knock came from the door. She gasped softly from the unexpected sound. "Who is it?" she asked.

"Shino," his voice came clearly from the other side.

"Coming," she replied as she quickly moved across the room to pick up the abused cadet book off the floor. She placed it on the table, face down, before going to answer the door. "Ohayo, Shino," she greeted her friend with a false cheeriness, which caused him to cock a eyebrow curiously. "Please, come inside. I'll be ready in a moment."

"That's alright," he told her to her surprise. "I'll wait here."

"Suit yourself," she said with a nod as she left the door open, in case he changed his mind. Tenten made her way to the bathroom, where she cleaned her face. She still felt as if she would cry at any moment, but it wasn't something she wanted to do in front of Shino. . . not again.

Moments later, she and Shino were out the door. They hadn't gone to the tea house in quite a few days, but instead had take up walking around a few of the practice ground sites. The two friends were talking about nothing in particular when Tenten paused and appeared off to her side. Curious, Shino followed her line of sight and discovered the same thing she had.

In one of the training grounds were several cadets from the ninja academy. Each were taking turns throwing kunais at a wooden target. "They're dedicated," he noted as it was the weekend. He then turned to Tenten when he heard her sniffle. "Ten-chan?" His brow furrowed, wondering if he had said something before that could have upset her.

He had only seen her cry once before. She had been all alone in the woods, not far from where they were standing now. When asked what was wrong, she simply stated that she and Neji had had an argument. Shino did not push for more information as he had no time when the woman in front of him took him by surprise when she threw her arms around him. It was at that moment that one of Shino's scouting beetles returned to him and informed him of the presence of Neji. Shino instance thought was to push her away and he had position himself to do that, but as she began to sob harder, he realized that would have been cruel while she was in such a vulnerable state. So Shino made the only choice that was left to him, he comforted her. A moment later, he was informed that Neji was no longer in the immediate area.

"I've been chosen to lead a Genin team," Tenten finally spoke, causing Shino to abandon his thoughts.

Knowing only single kunoichis were chosen to become Jounin instructors, Shino did something he had only done on very rare occasions. . . he spoke before he thought. "You're divorcing Neji."

"What?" Tenten quickly turned to him. "No." Shino then saw the panic that lined her features. "Did Neji. . ." she began, unaware she was shaking her head from side to side, "Did you hear Neji mention something, before he left about-"

"No," Shino quickly reassured.

"Shino, please don't lie to me," she asked of him.

"I do not make a habit of lying," he told her, a bit disappointed that it was something he had to point out to her. The woman before him nodded, knowing that much was true of him. "In my opinion," he paused, this time carefully thinking over his words. "Hyuuga would be a fool to ever think about leaving you."

An unbidden blush rushed to Tenten's tanned cheeks. She smiled shyly before she placed a hand on his chest. "Thank you," she breathed. She then watched as Shino lowered his head, ever so slightly, to look at her hand. Tenten quickly pulled away, forgetting that Shino disliked any kind of contact. "Sorry," she said softly.

"No." Shino pulled his hand from his pocket and hesitantly reached for Tenten's wrist and placed her hand back where it had rested upon him. "I've grown fond of your touch," he admitted as his own cheeks were now tinted with a light pink.

They stood like that for a very long moment, before Tenten took back her hand and swept some hair from her eyes as her bangs had growing long. She cleared her throat before she spoke, "As I was saying, I've been chosen to lead a Genin team." She found she could not look upon his face. "And I would appreciate your keen eyes as I study some of the cadets. I will gladly repay you." She then once again looked at him as she smiled. "Maybe I can cook you dinner some night," she suggested.

"I accept your offer," he responded with a nod as his hand once again found his coat pocket.

To Be Continued. . .

## 9. A Team's Bond

### Chapter Nine: A Team's Bond

"Ohayo and welcome to Team Three. My name Hyuuga Tenen and I will be your Jounin instructor." She smiled pleasantly at the three, young, clean faces before her, though in her heart of her hearts this was the last thing she wanted to be doing. "I would like to start off by getting to know you guys a little better. So why don't you stand and give us a little introduction?" There didn't seem to be any protest. "Who would like to start?" she asked as she placed both hands on her hips as she noticed that the Genin before her suddenly avoided eye contact with her. "You." She pointed to the boy to her immediate right, who was sitting on a huge bolder. "Start with your name, something you like and maybe a goal or dream you have."

The boy she had pointed to hopped to his feet. At his full height you could easily tell that he was the smallest of the group. "My name is Kurojai Youji," he spoke clearly, his blue eyes bright though his tone was quite the opposite. "I like to write. And I have only one goal, to suppress my siblings," he stated before sitting back down.

"Kurojai?" Tenten stared at him for a moment and then suddenly it came to her. "As in Kurojai Moegi?" she asked excitedly as Moegi had been one of Konohamaru's teammates. "I didn't realize she was your sister," she told the boy honestly as Youji had not been one of the cadets she had done a lot research on as she and Shino had agree during their initial scope of him that he didn't appear to be ideal 'team' material.

After Konohamaru's death, Moegi became very focused and determined. After completing the Chunin exam she broke away from Udon, her step-brother and your Jounin instructor, mostly because she could no longer stand the look in their eyes when it came to her. Udon had explained what had happened in the Forest of Death to their Jounin instructor, his story made it very clear who was to blame for the death of their teammate. Moegi did not deny it.

She knew she had been the weakest of the three and that her weakness was the reason that the one she loved was dead. So her goals had changed the moment Konohamaru died in her arms. She would be the ninja, Konohamaru always believed she would become. That would be her gift to him. She wanted to prove that he wasn't wrong about her. . . but that, that's a different story.

"Yeah. . ." Youji said softly, his shoulders slightly slumped, his family had been divided since that day. His father, a civilian and a contractor within the village took his daughter's side, while his mother, an ANBU member, took her son's. Youji, the child of both parents, was often neglected for his older siblings, the jewel of each of their parents' eye.

Tenten then turned to her next student expectantly. "My name is Hisakawa Rio and I'm a bit of a book worm. You can usually find me in the library." Tenten blinked rapidly when she realized the one speaking was not a little boy, but a little girl. Rio was a bit of a tomboy, as she was raised by her father and lived with a twin brother, whom she was often mistaken for. "Uh- I've never really thought about my goals or my dreams. Can I answer that later?" she asked.

Tenten nodded. "Sure," she answered before looking upon the last in line. He was a blonde headed boy with the kind of green eyes that pierced right through you and had you holding back a shiver. "I am Yukiro Chion." His voice was pleasant enough, but hid something Tenten couldn't seem to find. "I have no goals - I have no dreams," he stated.

"Surely there must be something in your life you want," Rio said to her new teammate.

"I want for nothing," he assured her.

Tenten figured that she would keep it light their first day, but told them that their training would begin in two days and to meet her bright and early as this was their assigned practice ground. She then dismissed them.

After they left, she sat down and leaned against the bolder Youji had been sitting on early as she brought out her cadet book. She had been surprised to see that after all the research she had done, that she had not gotten one student she had requested and she couldn't help but to wonder why. "The first meeting went well, I hope." Shino came strolling into the clearing his hands in his pockets as always.

The brunette looked at him and smiled. "It went as well as could be expected," she told him. She then took Shino's offered hand and stood back up. "They will be a challenge to teach. Each seems to be a bit reluctant in their own way. Especially one by the name of Yukiro," she informed him. "He gave me nothing, but his name."

Shino shrugged. "I did the same thing with Kurenai-Sensei," he shared.

"Really? You? You don't seem the type. You being an opened book and all," she teased as they began to walk.

"It's not easy opening up to someone who only wants to get to know you because they have to," he explained from his point of view.

Tenten looked at him with concern written on her face. "Is that how you really felt?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied. "So Yukiro probably picked up on the fact that you really didn't want to be there and so offered you nothing because it wouldn't have been genuine on your end."

Tenten lowered her eyes shamefully. If it had been obvious to Shino, who wasn't even there, it must have been obvious to them. "I'll work on that," she promised him.

"I'm sure you will," he told her, giving her hand a slight squeeze. It was only then that she realized that her hand had never left his. She lowered her head and looked at the way her hand seem to fit perfectly into his. She was still so amazed at how soft they were and their warmth. Then, without warning, Shino violently pulled his hand away and placed it back into his pocket. Tenten was about to question his actions, but the answered appeared before she had the chance.

"Ohayo, Rock Lee," she greeted the man dressed all in green with a smile, her heart filled

slightly with panic as he had not returned her smile, wondering if he had seen her and Shino holding hands.

"I have urgent news," Lee began immediately, not even bothering with a greeting of his own. "Shikamaru's team is home."

"And Iruka-san?" Shino asked about Hinata and Naruto's son.

"He is unharmed," Lee let be known.

"That's wonderful!" Tenten exclaimed excitedly as she threw her arms around her teammate, who did not hug her back. She pulled away slowly and looked at him curiously wondering why he was looking so somber. "Lee?"

"There is more," he said softly. "It seems that they were pursued by the kidnappers and were ambushed about two days away from Konoha's Gate." His round eyes lingered on Tetnen. "One of them was. . . was mortally wounded during the attack. He's at the hospital now, but they don't think he's going to make it. . ."

Behind black lenses, Shino took in Tenten's reaction. She had grown pale as Rock Lee continued to speak. She took a deep, unsteady breath as she tried to appear strong at the news they were receiving. Her shoulders slightly shook as her hand came to her face and covered her nose and mouth, tears forming in her eyes. She then slowly turned to him. "I'm so sorry. . . to lose a teammate." Her head went from side to side.

It was then that Shino came back to earth and realized that Rock Lee was not speaking about Neji, but Kiba. Though his expression showed nothing, Shino's blood ran cold before he turned from the two members of Gai's former team and disappeared heading towards the hospital.

OoOoO

Shino soon arrived at the hospital, one of the nurse, who immediately recognized him quickly pointed him in the direction he needed to go. He thanked her with a nod and soon found himself running down the hall. A few people sightly stared at him, a few bystanders later on would even swear that the usually stoic Jounin left tears in his wake.

He stopped flat in front of room 159, his lips parted as his chest rose up and down catching his breath. He took an impulse step back as the door in front of him started to open. He then found himself looking into the eyes of Kiba's older sister. "Hana. . ." he did not have to say more for her to understand what he was trying to convey. She sadly shook her head.

"I'm glad you're here. He's asked for you," she told him before side stepped him and started to walk away, but then quickly turned back around when she remembered something. "Shino!" she called, who turned in response. "Don't tell him about Akamaru," she asked of him. Akamaru had been ill, going on several months. Kiba had seemed lost without him, distracted even so much to the point, Hana couldn't help but wonder if he should have been going on missions in the first place. Kiba insisted that he was fine and told her to do her best to take care of his larger than life companion. Hana did all she could nothing what that lost of Akamaru would do to her brother, but nothing more could be done as two days ago Akamaru had finally

succumbed to his illness and was found the next morning. Hana had been dreading telling her little brother the news when he came back from his mission, but with him on his own deathbed as well she saw no point in it.

"Of course," Shino assured her before entering the hospital.

Though his eyes remained closed a small smile appeared on Kiba's face. "Hello comrade," he greeted the other.

"You shouldn't speak," Shino advised him as he sat down on the bed and looked down at his pale friend.

"Why not?" he asked weakly, his eyes still closed. "I'm dying anyway," he said with a smile.

"Now is not the time to joke," he chide him.

Kiba scoffed. "You're always acting like the Alpha dog. Bossing me around."

"Would you respect me if I didn't?" Shino asked honestly.

"Not a bit." Kiba finally opened his eyes sleepily. "Is that a smile?" he asked in disbelief when he saw the curve of the other's lips. When he knew he would get no reply Kiba turned his head toward the window and let sun's light bask upon him. "Shino? Can I ask you something?" he began softly.

"Of course," was Shino's response.

"Don't do what I did," he asked of him. "As ninjas our lives too short."

Shino looked at him curiously. "I'm not sure I follow," he admitted.

"I never allowed myself to tell her just how much I cared." Shino realized immediately whom he was speaking about. "I thought there would always be time. And then she went and married another man on me. Don't do what I did Shino," he repeated as he turned back to his friend. "You think you're slick, but I know you too well. If you love her, don't wait to tell her."

"She's a married woman," Shino brought up a very valid point, nothing there was not point to denying Kiba's suspicion.

"And if you respected that, her scent wouldn't linger on you," he pointed out.

Shino sighed as he lowered his head and removed his shades. He rubbed his closed eyelids with his fingers. "My behavior of the last few months has been shameful. I've tried to stay away, but everyday we grow just a little closer. And I know that everyday I come closer to making a fool out of myself," he admitted his fears. "She loves her husband. She would never leave him for me."

"Please, don't deny yourself happiness," Kiba begged of him. "If you want something, fight for it!" he urged him. "Do what I was too afraid to do."

"I can't." Shino slipped back on his shades. "I can't willingly do something like that to Hyuuga, not a fellow ninja we basically grew up with," he argued.

"Will you not honor a dying man's last wish?" Kiba asked him sadly. "I just want to know, when I'm gone, that my team is happy." Shino said nothing. "Promise me, Shino!" Kiba demanded angrily. "Promise me, you won't live your life in regret as you stand in the shadows!" he barked. "Promise me!" he cried trying to sit up, his whole body shivering in pain as his many wounds opened back up and blood soaked through his bandages and clothing.

"I promise!" Shino replied in a panic as Kiba had taken a hold of his coat and refused to let go until he said the words.

"Who's the Alpha dog now?" Kiba asked with a smile as he gave into his pain and slumped forward into Shino, where he died peacefully in his arms.

To Be Continued. . .

## 10. What You See

### Chapter Ten: What You See

It was early morning as Neji sat silently in his living room, dressed all in black, as he waited for his wife. Tenten sighed softly as she existed the kitchen, a bowl in her hands. She lowered herself to her knees and offered him the bowl. "You should eat something before we go," she suggested.

"I'm not hungry," he told her, taking the bowl from her and placing it on the table. "So if you're ready, we should start heading out."

Tenten looked at him worriedly. "Neji, please," her voice was pleading. "I haven't seen you touch anything in two days."

"I will not repeat myself," he said sternly as he stood. He then made his way over to the front door. "Now come," he practically ordered. Tenten stood, nodding her head as she did so.

They walked in silence through the streets of Konoha as a few others passed them by. "Ohayo," they were greeted softly by Chouji, who was carrying his small daughter in his arms and had his wife's hand within his own. Tenten returned his greeting, but both Neji and Ino said nothing; they didn't even offer a glance in the other's direction.

Kiba's funeral ended up being a very private affair. It consisted of only his family and those he considered to be close friends. Everyone was so caught up in their grief as they paid their last respects to a fellow Shinobi, that not many of them noticed that the one face that should have been there was nowhere to be seen. "Shino, he has not taken Kiba's death well," Hinata informed Tenten when she was asked about his whereabouts.

Tenten had grown worried as she hadn't seen in the last few days. "He's locked himself up in his apartment." Hinata lowered her gaze. "He's hurting so badly and- and I don't know how to help him," she admitted, tears forming in her eyes. Tenten, seeing the younger woman in pain, wrapped her arms around her and pulled her into a tight hug. Hinata latched herself on to the other, where she then allowed herself to cry. "I don't know how to help him," she cried again, feeling as if had failed her teammate somehow.

"It's going to be alright, Hinata," she tried to assure her. "I'm sure all he needs is a little time." Tenten continued to comfort Hinata as best as she could when something caught her eye. She turned her head slightly to the side to find Neji, who was speaking to Ino for the first time that morning, to her knowledge. She could not hear their conversation from where she stood, but distress was clearly written on Neji's face. It became even more apparent when Shikamaru paused in front of them for a moment, where he then made eye contact with Neji, who in turn lowered his own eyes before Shikamaru walked away, shaking his head noticeably.

Ino then looked from Neji to Shikamaru and the back to Neji before going after her teammate. As the two made their way from Neji, Tenten felt a pair of eyes on her and turned her head only

to make eye contact with Chouji, who also appeared to have seen the strange interaction between the three ANBU members. He looked at her questioningly, but Tenten only shook her head and shrugged.

OoOoO

After the funeral, Neji and Tenten made their way home, where each changed their clothes silently. When Tenten was finished, she decided she would give another attempt at trying to get Neji to eat something. She was almost out the bedroom door when she heard a soft voice behind her. "It was my fault," Neji admitted, his head lowered as his wife turned back to him. "I'm the reason Kiba is dead."

Tenten's brow furrowed. "What?" she spoke, thinking maybe she had misheard him. She took a few steps towards him. "That can't be true. Whatever happened I'm sure it wasn't your fault," she stated, but Neji said nothing in return. "But what did happen out there?" she asked, wanting to know. Neji shook his head, not wanting to share, but it was too late for that, he had opened a bag that now could not be closed. "Neji," she urged.

"He had been distracted. We all knew it from the beginning, but we all pulled our weight, to compensate for it," he began. "It wasn't a problem, not until. . ." Neji trailed off, closing his eyes.

"Not until, what?" Tenten probed about his two month long mission.

Neji then finally looked up at her. "Something- something happened out there. Something that should have never happened. I got absorbed into other matters, that had nothing to do with the mission."

"I don't understand," she told him, trying to figure out what he was trying to tell her. "What did you get into?"

Neji was silent for a moment as if debating his words. "It doesn't matter," he finally told her. "I'm home now and it's over," he reassured her. He then gently took a hold of her. "Tenten, I know this is going to sound strange, but," he seemed conflicted, "could you just tell me you love me. I really need to hear it right now," he asked of her. Tenten's expression showed her confusion. It was a request he made often. "Please," he begged of her.

"I love you, Neji," she told him before she wrapped her arms around him and held him tightly. Neji shuddered in her arms as he buried his nose in the nape of her neck as his own arms found their way around her.

"Thank you," his voiced sounded relieved.

"Anytime," she said softly, not sure if she should be worried about what her husband was hiding from her. But she knew not to push and that he would reveal everything to her in his own time as he always did.

Her husband then responded with the last phrase she thought she would hear from him on the particular day. "I'm hungry," he announced.

Tenten couldn't help but giggle at his words as she pulled away from him to look upon his face. "How about some lunch?" she asked. "What would you like?"

"No," he shook his head. "I'll make lunch. I should get back into the habit."

Tenten looked at him surprisingly. "You won't hear me complain," she told him before he left the bedroom to head to the kitchen. Then could help but smile as his leaving form. Suddenly, her head jerked back as something came closed to her face. It was flying around unsteadily, causing the Shinobi to frown. She was about to smack it out of the air, when she recognized the little bug invading her space. "Rebel?" she whispered, holding out her hand for the Kikaichu to land on.

Her brow furrowed deeply as she took in the strange movements of the beetle. It looked almost drunk. And though Tenten didn't know what was really going on, there was one thing she was certain of, if the rebel was in such a bad shape it could only mean one thing. "Shino," she said worriedly, before taking off not even bothering to close the front door behind her as she ran.

Neji, being cause at the sound of rushing footsteps stepped out of the kitchen to see the open door. "Tenten?" he called, but of course heard nothing but silence greet him. He lowered his head as he made his way back into the kitchen, assured that she had only stepped out for a moment.

OoOoO

"Shino!" Tenten yelled loudly as she soon found herself pounding at the front door of his apartment. She then heard the click of the lock before the door slightly opened to reveal the man in which she sought so desperately.

"What do you want?" Tenten quickly blinked at the tone Shino had used towards her.

"I uh," what was she doing there, she couldn't help but ask herself. She then brought up her hand to reveal the small bug in her hold. "She came to me," she began. "She looked ill, so I figured you weren't doing so hot yourself." She then tilted her head to one side. "Are you alright, Shino?" she asked.

There was a pause before he answered, "No." He then opened the door wider and held his hand out. His rebel Kikaichu immediately obeyed him as she took refuge underneath his skin. The way his hand shook did not escape Tenten's notice.

"Can I come in?" she asked him.

"You should go home to your husband," he told her, he then went to close the door on her, but was surprised when her hand shot out and stopped the door from closing on her face. "Please, go away."

"But you're ill," she stated.

"It's just a fever. It will pass," he told her.

"Just let me take care of you," she offered. "I know I'm no med-nin, but I can at least make you something warm to eat before I leave." Shino looked upon her genuinely concerned face and nodded. Tenten smiled as she let her within his home.

"Wasn't that Hyuuga Neji's wife," asked a woman to her companion, who lived across the way from Shino's place.

"I believe it was," she responded. "That poor man. She doesn't have any shame, does she?"

"I know what you mean," the first woman began. "You would think that she would at least have the decency to not show up at her lover's home in the middle of the day."

Inside, Shino made his way to his bed where he collapsed down on it before then curling into a ball. Behind his black shades, he closed his eyes. Tenten's smile turned into a frown as she witnessed his exhaustion. She then turned towards the kitchen area of the small two room apartment. It took her a few minutes to get acquainted with where everything was, but once she did the small home was filled with the scent of a home cooked meal.

She made a small bowl and then put the rest away in the refrigerator in case he wanted some later. She then made her way over to Shino's sleeping form where she placed the bowl on the nightstand before taking a seat on the bed next to him. She placed a hand on his shoulder and leaned towards his face. "Shino," she whispered quietly as she gently shook him.

"Hn?" was his reply.

"Sit up, your food is done," she told him, but he remained laying down. Her hand left his shoulder as she debated something over in her mind. She then placed her fingers on his hood and slowly pull it back, uncovering his dark, wild hair that she hadn't seen since they were Chunins. She pressed the back of her hand against his forehead which was wet with sweat. "You're burning up." She then stood up and for the first time really looked at the room around her. She spotted what she was looking for and made her way over to it.

Tenten pulled open the drawer to the dresser she was standing in front of and immediately found exactly what she needed. She pulled out a set of pajamas. "You need to get out of that heavy coat," she told him as she approached him once again. Agreeing, Shino finally set up, but with great difficulties. He then went to stand, but so wavered dangerously that his shades fell from his face. With expert speed Tenten quickly rushed to him and held him tightly in fear that he would fall over. "Whoa, I got you." She made sure that he was steady before letting him go.

"Thank you," he breathed looking down at her. Tenten went to speak, but her words failed to escape her mouth as she looked into Shino's eyes for the first time. They were the darkest shade of black that she had ever seen. Her reflection burned brightly with his dark orbs almost making her forget where she was.

Shino then quickly turned his head, which pulled Tenten out of her stupor. "Sorry," she spoke feeling she had done something wrong as she took in his reaction. She then bent over and picked up his shades, which she handed back to him. He slipped them back on quietly. "You should change," she suggested as she also picked up the pajamas she had dropped so that

she could catch him.

As Shino shrugged off his large green overcoat to the floor, Tenten blushed and turned her back to him as he undressed. She only turned back around when she heard his weight land on the bed behind him. She smiled as she took in the sight of him in yellow pajamas covered in little white ducks. "They were a gift from my mother," was his excuse as he too now blushed.

"Uh-huh," she said playfully as she reached for the bowl on the nightstand and sat down next to Shino on his bed. She took the spoon and filled it with the still warm liquid and brought it up to his mouth.

Shino frowned. "I can feed myself," he told her as he reached for the bowl and the spoon, but his hands still shook violently.

"I see why you don't lie," she began as she looked from his hands up to his eyes. "You're not really good at it." The spoonful of soup soon came back to his mouth, but Shino refused to take the food. Tenten sighed. "Do you want me to make choo-choo sounds like a train?" she asked before Shino finally tasted the meal she had prepared.

When the bowl was nearly empty, Tenten sat it aside. "Thank you. It was very good," Shino said gratefully.

"You're welcome," she said with a smile. She then watched as Shino looked down at his hands. They no longer shook. "I guess all you really needed was a good meal?"

"That or the attention of a beautiful woman." Shino then surprised himself with his own boldness as the back of his fingers brushed Tenten's cheek.

Tenten's eyes grew wide with the gesture, but found she could do nothing as Shino pulled her closer as he leaned in and tenderly pressed his lips to hers. He then brought his other hand up to her face. "If you don't want this, tell me, and I will stop." Tenten said nothing as she slowly pulled away and Shino had no choice but to lower his hands, his expression briefly reflecting not only his disappointment, but his embarrassment. He had been too forward too soon. "I am sor-" he had gone to apologize, but was not able to finish his sentence as Tenten had reached for his shades and pulled them away from his face.

"I like to see the eyes of the man I'm kissing," she told him before she once again felt his lips on hers.

Meanwhile, Hyuuga Neji sat alone at the kitchen table within his home. The meal he had prepared had been finished for quite some time now. He had made her favorite, Chinese. He sighed as he realized that she wasn't coming home for lunch and that his work had gone to waste. He wondered where she was and was tempted to use his Byakugan to search for her, but he had made that mistake before, and it had done nothing but lead him to the wrong conclusion. Besides, he knew his wife loved him and that she wouldn't do anything to jeopardize their marriage, he saw that now. And with that reassuring thought, Neji smiled to himself and began his meal.

To Be Continued. . .

## 11. Selfish

### Chapter Eleven: Selfish

His heart rate was erratic and out of control, so much so that Tenten thought it was going to beat right out of his chest, but his face, like always, betrayed nothing. Shino's expression was calm and relaxed as he hovered over Tenten on his twin size bed. His dark eyes stared into her brown ones, as if trying to memorize each and every breath she took. "Shino-kun," she whispered, causing Shino's eyes to move down to her parted pink lips.

Shino then slowly lowered himself down to her, their lips once again greeting each other. Shino had never know such softness before, had never know the closeness of another being such as her before. It was all so new to him and so for the first time, that he could remember, he was nervous and unsure of himself. He wondered how long she would allow him to touch her so gently and how far she would allow this to go. They were still fully dressed as they made out on his bed, although a few buttons on his pajama shirt had come undone, courtesy of Tenten herself.

Besides, Shino, had always considered himself a gentlemen, he didn't want to force her into anything that she wasn't ready for. But then again, how did one go about starting an affair? Shino pulled away for a moment as the word resounded in his ears. . . affair.

"Shino," Tenten said, her voice full of concern, at the sudden lost of contact. "What's wrong?"

Shino hesitate with his answer. The honorable thing to do was to end this now, before either of them got too attached or did things they would surely regret later, but he didn't want to. Shino had always played by the rules, always did what was expected of him. And where had that lead him?

Nowhere, he had concluded. He lived in a tiny apartment, his circle of friends was small, and he had a creeping suspicion, out of the ones he did consider his friends, that half of them probably couldn't remembered his name. Plus there was the fact, that the one he had considered his best friend, they had just buried. And despite that, Shino had always done the right thing, for other people, so when was it his turn?

When was it his turn to do something for himself? He had been fighting it all this time when it came to Tenten. She wasn't his to have, and the right thing to do was to get up, but as she laid underneath him, her eyes focused on him and only him, he realized he had never had this before and he wasn't about to give it up so willingly.

And so Shino answered her question the only way he could. "Nothing," he finally responded, which placed a smile on Tenten's face as her hands began to once again roam his body, touching him in ways he never knew existed. Shino then felt his body become warmer and instantly knew it wasn't his fever coming back.

Feeling more confident about what he had chosen, Shino's actions became more aggressive.

He sat up and quickly shook off his pajama top, his lust filled eyes took in Tenten as she laid on her back, her long sun kissed hair skewed across his pillows as her legs rested on either side of him. "Come here," the shinobi whispered his demand as he pulled Tenten up, forcing her to place her hands on the bed to balance as their lips once again came together and their tongues tangled with each other.

Tenten moaned softly into his mouth as she maneuver herself to her knees without breaking the kiss. Once on her knees, Tenten's hands came to rest upon Shino's chest, which was not only hard, but chiseled in all the right places. Her hands brushed his broad shoulders as she went to wrap her arms around him. And as Shino wrapped his arms around her, it didn't escape her notice that his chest wasn't the only hard part of his body.

Finally needing air, Tenten was the one who finally pulled away. She took a deep breath as her lungs took in their fill. She then slightly glanced down and saw the budge in Shino's pants that long to be free. Then as Shino's hand found the drawstring to her own pants and began to untie it, the situation at hand finally hit Tenten. What am I doing? She thought in a panic.

After untying her pants, Shino rested his head against Tenten as he slowly began to pull them down. "Wait!" Tenten cried, completely pulling away from the man before her. "Shino, I- I," she stuttered as she shook her head from side to side. "I'm sorry, but I can't do this," she said quickly before getting out of bed redoing her drawstring.

Shino lowered his head, as if it were improper to watch her dress. "I understand," he replied calmly.

At his tone, Tenten turned back towards him. Her shoulders fell as she looked at him on the bed. "No, you don't." She walked back over to him where she cupped his cheek, causing him to once again look at her. "I like you," she confessed.

Shino's skin reddened at her words. "I like you too," he confirmed.

"I know," she said, backing away, "which is why this is so difficult." She wrapped her arms around herself. "I don't mean to lead you on or to be some kind of tease, but Neji. . ." she trailed off.

Shino, who had been standing on his knees, finally relaxed as he sat down on the bed as he closed his eyes. "Is your husband," he finished her statement for her, which threw him at last back into the present.

"Yes," she murmured. "And we may have our problems, but he doesn't deserve this," she realized. Shino only nodded his head to agree. "I'm sorry, Shino," Tenten took a silent breath, "but I don't think I can see you anymore." The man before her head snapped up, his eyes showing his surprise. The expression, coming from Shino was so foreign that it sent a chill down Tenten's spine. She tried to explain her statement. "I didn't mean too, but I care for you," she admitted, "more than just on a friend level." She shook her head from side to side. "I can't betray my village like this."

At her words, Shino slightly cocked an eyebrow. "Your village?" It was now Tenten's turn to look surprised.

"I meant, my husband, and in turn Konoha," she recovered. "Neji's bloodline limit flows the strongest within him. It's important for him to pass that on to the next generation."

Shino stood. "So this is about children?" he wanted clarified.

For the first time, in a long time, Shino was looked at as if his intelligence had escaped him. "Well, of course. What else is there?" she questioned.

Shino stepped closer to her. "There-" he faltered, not only in his speech, but in his steps towards her. "There is love."

"I love my husband!" Tenten stated defensively. "No one should ever have to doubt that."

"And I don't," Shino told her as he reached up and placed both of his hands on either side of her arms. "But what you are fighting, I know it as well, and it's the only battle, in my memory, I wish not to win."

"And for me, it's a battle I have to win at all cost," she admitted. "I can't surrender to this. It would be too unfair to Neji and. . . and selfish of me."

"Then be selfish," Shino urged her, his voice sounding more emotional than he ever thought it could be.

Tenten then narrowed her eyes suspiciously. "What are you saying?"

Looking at the expression on her face, Shino slowly released her. He then walked over to the night stand where he picked up his dark shades and slide them back on. "I'm sorry," he began, his voice taking on his usual tone. "I had no right to ask that of you." He went and picked up his shirt off the floor and began to put it back on as he spoke to Tenten with his back to her. "You have overstayed your welcome, you should leave."

Tenten's head slightly jerked back at the complete 360 she had just witnessed. "Alright," was all she said before she turned around and walked towards the door as she placed her hair into a sloppy ponytail.

She reached for the doorknob and pulled it opened before quickly turning around. "Shino, I-"

"I know." She was cut off by Shino, who still did not face her. "You don't wish to see me anymore. It's done. . . we're done. So please, say no more."

With nothing more to be said, Tenten sighed sadly before stepping out and quietly closing he door behind her. As soon as Shino heard the soft click of the door he turned around to stare at the space that was once occupied by the other. He then lowered his head as he reached up and once again pulled off his shades, his eyes bearing a sadness he would not allow her to see.

OoOoO

"Where have you been?" were the first words out of Neji's mouth as Tenten entered their home. "Your food has gotten cold," he stated.

"I'm tired, I'm going to bed," she dismissed him all together, but as she passed him, it was then that Neji truly took in her appearance. She looked as if she had been training since she stepped out.

"Are you alright?" he asked gently, knowing that she wasn't planned to meet up with her Genin team until the next day.

"I'm fine," she lied as she continued on her way to the bedroom. Neji followed and watched as she let her hair down before falling lazily into their bed before climbing under the sheets.

Neji, concerned over her behavior slipped into bed beside. "Come here," he asked of her as he held his arms out for her. A small smile came to Tenten's face as Neji held her close. As she listened to the soft steady rhythm of his heart she found comfort. "I know what's been going on," that is until those words were said. Tenten's whole body froze as she waited for him to continue. "You think your students won't respect you."

Tenten visibly relaxed. "Yes, that's right." It wasn't all too much of a lie as it had been on her mind as well. "They come from different backgrounds and it seems that each has their own demon. I'm not sure if I'll be able to reach them."

"Our Hokage is no fool, if she placed these cadets under you, it must have been for good reason. She believes in you almost as much as I do," he let be known. "You'll find a way to make things work. You always do." He smiled at her. "Sometimes it amazes me how quickly you come up with a back up plan."

"I had to learn the hard way to think on my feet," she confessed. Then it was as if a light bulb had come on over her head. "That's it!" she quickly sat up smiling brightly at Neji, who looked asking of her. "I know how I'm going to get them to act as one." She quickly got out of bed, and went to her drawer which was filled with many scrolls.

Neji gasped as she pulled out one he had only seen her use once before. He still had nightmares about it, though he would never admit it to a single soul. "You can not be serious," his tone was disapproving. "They're only rookies," he pointed out. "And not even at the top of their class."

"They'll be fine," she reassured him. "This technique will insure a strong unit."

"But at what cost?" Neji asked. "The chakra levels needed to maintain it-"

"Neji!" she cut him off as she went back to join him on the bed. "I'll be fine as well," she said confidently before she gave him a gently kiss.

"Still. . . I would like to observe and have a med-nin near by." It was no suggestion. "Just in case."

"Fine," she didn't feel like arguing with him. "Who?"

Neji gave it some thought before answering. "I trust in Ino's skills." Tenten nodded her head to agree.

OoOoO

Team Three, which consisted of Rio, Chion, and Youji stood in front of their Jounin instructor as they anticipated their first official training exercise. It was early as the morning sun was just now cracking over the horizon. Chion's blond hair whipped in the wind as his blue eyes squinted as he tried to make out the two figures standing far up in the trees. Soon, with the help of the steadily rising sun, he was able to recognize one as his Sensei's husband and the other as the med-nin, Akimichi Ino, who had helped delivered his cousin's first child.

"The rules are simple!" barked Tenten so loudly, that Chion's felt his neck pop when he went to turn his head back towards her. "All you have to in the next twenty-four hours-" she pulled out a silver and purple scroll and with one long continuous motion opened it with a grace none of her students had ever seen. She placed the scroll on the ground before doing several hand singles that went by too fast to read before placing her hand on words written on it. As soon as her palm made contact with the black letters they glowed a brilliant shade of green. Rio gasped as she witnessed her Sensei's eyes go from an earthy brown to an eerie bright green. "-is survive."

To Be Continued. . .