

A Story of a Girl

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This is the story of Akara, the Red Demon of Kiri, her life as a new Suna nin, and the demon she fell in love with.

ChaosShipping, IgenShipping, YakusokaShipping (MariaKabuto), HyperShipping

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1 - The New Arrival

It was completely pointless to guard the eastern gate. As Kikiro sat with a kunai and a good book, he spotted a shadow on the horizon. Flinging down the book, he grabbed a telescope and focused in on the shadow in question. The shadow was revealed to be a girl.

Kikiro didn't remember anything like this happening in all the four years he'd been assigned to that accursed post, but he knew one thing: Kazekage-sama would want to know about this.

~~~~~

It was a typical day, in Gaara's opinion: wake up at five in the morning, down some coffee, train for two hours, run to work, sit at a desk and sign papers. He very nearly cried when Kenshin, his assistant, came running in half-hysterical.

"Kazekage-sama! There's a foreign shinobi that was found outside the eastern gate! She seems to be unconscious, and we need you out there, NOW!!"

Sigh. He ran a hand through his already messy red hair and braced himself.

"Alright...take me there."

~~~~~

There was a crowd around the gate by the time Gaara and Kenshin showed up. The mixed group of shinobi, medics, and the odd civilian or retiree parted at the sight of their Kazekage. After he managed to get through, he looked the foreigner over to assess the damage.

She wasn't much older than himself, maybe fourteen or fifteen. She had black hair, red bangs, and pale skin that looked as if she'd never seen sun.

Duh, of course not, he thought as his eyes caught sight of a Kiri (Mist) headband, you can't even see who's standing next to you in Kiri.

She wore a red fitted top that zipped up, a fishnet shirt under that, a pair of cargo pants, and leather gloves. He looked her over one last time, and directed his attention to the medics.

"Take her to the hospital. When she wakes up, I wish to see her."

2 - Initial Reactions

HI! I learned something interesting...Tori means bird in Japanese, and it's the tenth symbol in the zodiac...it explains a lot...

Akara had no idea where she was.

She sat up in bed, the sharp antibacterial smell telling her she was in the hospital. She shook her head to clear the fog and attempted to assess the situation. It soon occurred to her that she was in Suna, and as she raised a hand to rub her eyes, she felt a tug on the skin of her wrist. Looking up, she saw an IV stand beside her.

Concentrated rehydration serum...at least they aren't stupid...

A nurse walked in, all bronze-brown curls and silly smiles. Akara was forcibly reminded of her former sensei.

"Kazekage-sama wants to see you. Wash up and get dressed quick, and I'll get Kana to escort you to the tower," she said happily. Akara blinked her emerald eyes, and nodded.

~~~~~

Gaara was struggling with a finance report when the girl walked in. He heard the nurse accompanying her walk down the hall, and he shoved the report away.

"What is your business here?"

"I am a simple shinobi with no place to go, and I wish to join Suna's army in order to make a new life for myself."

Gaara nodded. It was a good reason.

"Very well. Previous rank?"

"Chuunin."

"Previous affiliation."

"Kirigakure."

Gaara paused. Now that he thought of it...Kiri wasn't Suna's ally...

"Why did you leave?"

"They gave me a choice between banishment and death. I'd rather be banished but alive than dead and my name spit upon."

She did have a point: Kiri was notorious for badmouthing their own shinobi.

"Speaking of names...your name?"

"Yashara no Akara."

He stopped again, then looked up at her in surprise.

"Akara of the Demon Eye? The legendary Red Demon of Kiri?" He narrowed his eyes. "How old are you?"

"Fifteen. I'm surprised you know of me."

The fifteen-year-old Kazekage sighed. "You're in the Bingo Book. You are a Chuunin, but your skills rival those of even the most dangerous S-class criminal."

The girl smiled. Gaara didn't know why, but that smile gave him the chills.

"Well, you obviously don't require my assistance: you can fill out that registration form yourself." She turned to leave. He stood, and called out to her.

"Wait."

She sighed, and faced him. "What?"

He looked at her skeptically. "How do I know you are who you say you are?"

She smiled that same blood chilling smile.

"Fight me."

Ooh...what do you think will happen now? I smell a fight scene coming up! Comment plz.

### 3 - My First Impression...

Yo!~ it is I, Panda-chan! Lotsa fight-scene goodness...life is sweet...

Gaara stared. Then he smirked at the intense little kunoichi before him.

"Do you really expect me to..."

She cut him off. "If you really want me to prove who I am, fight me. Nine o'clock, eastern gate. Meet me, and fight."

Gaara stared after her, obviously confused.

*Well that was interesting...*

~~~~~

Akara wandered down the street, smirking at the thought of a real fight. She knew he would come to humor her. He expected her to back down; his kind always did. She felt so alive...so powerful...it was intoxicating. She felt a heady rush of anticipation, adrenaline pulsing through her body and making her shiver in delight.

Promises of blood usually did that to her.

~~~~~

Gaara was faintly suprised to see her already there and casually studying her fingernails. As he stepped from the shadows, she smirked in his direction, and stepped foward to meet him.

"So, the almighty Kazekage has arrived."

Gaara sighed audibly. "Let's get this over with."

They sat opposite each other; she looking poised and graceful in her fighting stance, he summoning sand from his gourd and the surrounding area. They say, silent and deadly serious. The tension tightened the air around them and almost crackled audibly. Wind whistled in their ears, whipping sand, clothing, and hair into the air. Akara smirked at the Kazekage.

"Come."

~~~~~

And come he did.

Akara cooly analyzed the speed of the sand and in one fluid motion, she casually backflipped over it. Performing a few hand seals, she used her chakra to form...

"Secret Art of the Demon: Demon's Blade."

She watched his eyes widen as the kunai in her hand was elongated into a pulsating blue blade. She took advantage of his temporary shock and ran forward. Swiping at him with the razor edge, she only met sand. Jumping clean over the sand-user's head, she closed her eyes and performed hand seals. She smirked.

"Don't underestimate me, Kazekage-sama."

She opened her eyes, revealing violently green eyes and slitted pupils. "Yashara."

~~~~~

Gaara had begun to panic.

Everything he was throwing at her was failing. She had activated her bloodline, and that was never a good thing. If he learned anything when fighting the Uchiha, it was to never screw around when you're dealing with a bloodline.

"What's the matter, Kazekage-sama?" Was she ...taunting him?! "Afraid of a little demon-child like me?"

She disappeared. Gaara frantically looked around, but he saw nothing. A pulsing heat was applied to his neck.

"Heh...I win," she said, demonic eyes mocking and blade against his throat.

~~~~~

Six minutes later, he sat at his desk, and she stood before him. He was irked to find that she hadn't even broken a sweat.

"As of now, you are a shinobi and representative to the Village Hidden in the Sand, Sunagakure. if you choose to accept this title, you will forever be viewed as such, and carry the responsibility of that name."

He reached into his desk drawer, and pulled out the standard black band of a Suna shinobi, symbol proudly shining on its metallic plate.

"Hai, Kazekage-sama." Gaara nodded, and held the band out in his lean, firm grasp. Akara, however, didn't take it from him. Instead she smirked.

"Do those come in red?"

This is my favorite chapter in the world...

4 - Meddling Sisters

Hey!~ More goodness! I'm happy with all the comments I've gotten for this...but please tell your fans and friends about it...I'd like to have more readers...

Gaara stared at the kunoichi smirking before him, completely and utterly confused.

"I beg your pardon?"

Akara's smirk grew wider. "I asked if they come in red. It's a yes or no question, Kazekage-sama."

"Why on earth would you ask such a ridiculous question?"

"Let's just say I really like red," she said, emerald eyes flashing mischeviously.

"I like red too, but you don't see me asking about it," he shot back.

"Of course you wouldn't. To do so would require asking oneself, and if I were you, I'd be very concerned if my political leader began talking to himself."

She had him there. Finding himself unable to provide a rebuttal, he idly ran a hand through his red hair. Pressing a button on the intercom, he sighed.

"Temari, get the keys to the storeroom."

~~~~~

Akara looked up at the stacks of boxes and the shelves that seemed to reach for the heavens.

"Impressive," she remarked.

"Isn't it," said Temari proudly. The blonde kunoichi walked over to a small stack of boxes, and pulled one out from near the middle. Even in the semidarkness, Akara could make out a faded label reading "experimental colors".

"These were all the test colors from just after the appointment of the third Kazekage...they were rejected by the council because they were thought to be too frivolous." She pulled a bloodred band from a tangle of multicolored ribbons.

"Here we are." Temari handed it over to the other kunoichi, and smiled.

"You are aware that you will need to take a physical?"

Akara stiffened. She turned to face the Kazekage, looking at him with confusion and ...was that fear?

"I beg your pardon?"

"Surely you are aware that you are required to take a physical exam..."

She began shaking violently, headband nearly slipping out from her fingers.

"No," she replied shrilly, "i am not taking a physical! You cannot force me to!"

"I can and will." Gaara was calm, face a mask of impassivity. "I am Kazekage, and as a shinobi of this village, you are bound by honor and rank to do as I command."

She glared at him, emerald eyes flashing in anger.

"I will not be commanded. I am not yours or the council's puppet."

"Nevertheless, it is a requirement that even I submit to. If you refuse, you cannot be a shinobi of this village."

He watched her struggle over the options in her mind, and smirked in triumph when she sighed in defeat.

"When?"

"Three o'clock this afternoon. Do not be late."

~~~~~

Four o'clock found Akara in a foul mood. The medics seemed different from the ones in Kiri, and it threw her off.

Medics ask too many questions, she thought bitterly. She was interrupted by the arrival of Temari.

"Akara-san?"

"Yes, Temari-sama?"

The blonde looked around. "I know that Gaara can be a bit of a jerk, but try not to let it get to you. I wanted to ask, do you have a place you can stay?"

Akara replied in the negative. Temari grinned.

"How about staying at my place? My brothers and I have plenty of room, and I'm sure they won't mind!"

"Brothers?"

"Yeah!" Temari led the other kunoichi through the maze of alleys leading to her home. "i have two. Both can be really stupid at times, but they grow on you."

They took another turn, and entered a spectacular courtyard filled with infinite varieties of desert wildflowers. Temari led a stunned Akara up the walkway, meandering her way past a large sandstone sculpture.

"Kankuro? Are you here?" A teen with purple facepaint, black jumpsuit, and a curious cat-eared hoodpoked his head out of a doorway.

"Yeah, I just got back from..." his explanation petered out in his throat when he noticed Akara standing beside his sister.

"Hey, 'Mari," he started, gesturing toward Akara, "Who's the chick?"

Akara felt a twinge of annoyance.

"I am Akara no Yashara, and I do not appreciate your tone. Do you understand, or do I need to use shorter words?"

Kankuro gulped. "Understand. Crystal clear, ma'am."

Akara smiled, and turned to Temari.

"Where will I be staying?"

~~~~~

Gaara returned home in a foul mood also. The finances were an annoyance he could do without.

"I detest math," he muttered to himself. He turned a corner, throwing his straw Kazekage hat onto a sidetable. Entering the kitchen, all thoughts of dinner left the red-head's thoughts.

"TEMARI!"

The person before him winced.

"Temari-chan's brother is YOU?!"

"What the hell are you doing in my house?!"

Temari poked in her head.

"Sorry Gaara, I forgot to mention..."

She gestured toward the kunoichi before the enraged red-headed teen.

"Akara-san's staying with us for a while."

Haha! And now the fun begins! I'll have a new chapter by next week, I swear! Comment! Sayonara!

## 5 - The Unlikely Houseguest

Wows...you people make my day, you know that?

"Mari, what in Kami's name were you thinking?!"

Temari watched in amusement as Kankuro stormed about the living room.

"Honestly, what was going on in that blonde head of yours? It's obvious they hate each other!"

"I was thinking it was high time we had a person in this house who isn't afraid to whack Gaara upside the head and tell him exactly when he's being an idiot," she said, sipping her tea and reading the evening paper. Kankuro stared at his sister with a look of disbelief.

"You're willing to risk your quiet and my sanity to teach him a lesson?" Temari nodded.

"Are you on something?"

"I wish..."

~~~~~

Akara stirred and tasted the dish pensively. She then made a disgusted face.

"Needs more paprika..."

A hand reached out with a spoon, only to be whacked forcefully by the wooden spoon in her hand.

"Ow! What the hell?!"

Akara stirred more paprika in. "You can wait until dinner's finished like everyone else, Kankuro-san."

"But I'm hungry now!!!"

"Patience is a virtue..." She tasted the dish again. "Alright, dinner's ready. Tell Temari-chan to call Gaara-sama."

~~~~~

"Dinner's ready! Gaara, get your lazy @\$ downstair!" Temari poked her head into her baby brother's messy, disorganized room. "Gaara, I've been calling you for like, five minutes now. Wash up and come downstairs for dinner!"

"I'm not eating anything you made. Last time you cooked dinner, Kankuro ended up in the hospital for food poisoning."

Temari scowled. "Oh come on, that was one time! Besides, Akara-chan cooked dinner tonight."

"Akara-chan? When did that happen?!"

"Does it matter? Point is, you better get downstairs, or you won't be eating tonight. Kankuro's already at the table."

~~~~~

Gaara was extremely surprised to see Kankuro eating his food slowly, and Akara sitting nearby with her food. Normally, Kankuro would have wolfed down all food within the vicinity of his chair. He sat at his seat at the head of the table, Akara opposite him. He looked down into his bowl.

"Curry? That's unusual..."

Akara smirked. "It's an old family recipe from Kiri. Extra spicy chicken and beef curry, served over rice. Temari-chan told me you liked strong food."

Gaara didn't reinforce the idea, although it was completely true. Instead, he picked up a pair of chopsticks, and bit down on a piece of chicken.

The spices hit him so hard, it was insane. Pepper, curry powder, paprika, and a hint of cinnamon was the taste of the day in this dish, and the chicken and beef carefully nuanced each spice. Leeks, cilantro, miso, coconut milk, carrots, potatoes, and a medley of other ingredients toyed with his senses, and almost made him weak in the knees. Within seconds the bowl before him was empty.

"So I take it you liked it?"

He looked up at the kunoichi smirking before him. She looked pleased with herself, sitting there with her chopsticks in hand, watching his reaction.

"It's amazing. Where did you learn to cook like that?"

He saw her momentarily stiffen, but she snapped herself out of it. "I was the one in charge of cooking when I was younger."

Gaara didn't press the matter any further.

~~~~~

Akara was cleaning up when Gaara returned downstairs for his usual cup of coffee before a night of work. He paused in the doorway for a moment, watching her replace the last dish on the shelf. She seemed to not notice he was there, singing a song about a girl.

*I hope you know, I hope you know,  
That this has nothing to do with you...  
It's personal,  
Myself and I,  
We got some straightening out to do...  
And I'm gonna miss you like a child misses  
Their blanket, but I gotta get a move on  
With my life...  
It's time to be a big girl now...  
And big girls don't cry...*

It was a sad song, one that he was surprised to hear coming from such a person as herself. When he cleared his throat, she gasped in surprise.

"How long were you there?"

"Long enough." He grabbed his favorite mug from the shelf, the one with the little raccoon peeking out from the rim. Filling it with coffee, he turned and looked at her.

"So what was with the song?"

She crossed her arms in irritation. "Why, does my singing irritate the almighty Kazekage-sama?"

"No, I'm just curious."

She turned and walked out the door.

"It's none of your business."

There we are! I like this chapter, because it reminds me of the times my grandma made curry, and she'd let me help her make it...good times...

## 6 - Discussion and a Revelation

HA! This chapter's awesome!

"Gaara-sama, breakfast is ready."

Gaara walked downstairs, Kazekage robes in place. Temari and Kankuro had been gone for a week now, leaving the two of them alone in the house. Akara was in the kitchen, dressed in her normal clothes. But something was slightly off...

"You're wearing a skirt."

Akara looked at him, puzzled. "I beg your pardon?"

He looked up from his toast and eggs. "You're wearing a skirt. Why?"

She flicked her red bangs out of her face. "I can be feminine too, you know. It isn't a crime."

Gaara was silent for a minute. True, it wasn't that big of a deal, but the skirt was really short on her, and though she did wear fishnet leggings underneath, it didn't help much.

"It makes you look too feminine. That is a disadvantage."

"Looking like a woman is a disadvantage? That's utter crap."

"Women in themselves are the weaker sex."

"That's where you're wrong. Men are the weaker sex."

They were walking toward the tower now, continuing their debate as they walked.

"Women are infinitely superior to men in every way."

"How? Women have a low pain threshold, and they have little to no control on their emotions. Face it, they're weak."

"You're stupid. Women go through childbirth, and I'm not even going to mention what happens if they're shinobi..."

"Men also have superior strength and knowledge."

"That's crap and you know it. The two most knowledgeable and strongest shinobi in this world are women."



She had him there. As she smirked in triumph, he only scowled.

~~~~~

"You cannot possibly be serious," said Gaara incredulously.

"I'm afraid so, Kazekage-sama," said Baki.

"This is impossible...it has to be a genjutsu or something," said Akara angrily.

"I can assure you both that this is very real."

"Baki, for your sake, the council better be joking."

"Unfortunately no, Kazekage-sama," said Baki, ignoring the death-threat, "The council specified that Akara-san accompany you to Konoha. Because of her ability to finish her C- and B-rank missions quickly and efficiently, they have decided to allow her to take on A-and S-rank missions. In essence, she is an unofficial Jonin."

"I'm flattered by the council's decision, but unfortunately your Kazekage is a heartless bastard."

"And this particular kunoichi is a cynical, selfish she-beast," Gaara shot back.

"The Kazekage is also a self-centered, self-serving, and completely maniacal egomaniac," she said, surprisingly calm and collected as opposed to Gaara's visibly rising anger and frustration.

"May I say that this kunoichi is an evil, sarcastic, and sadistic cow?"

"I want to remind Kazekage-sama that not only is he spoiled and arrogant, but he was also beat by a kunoichi standing in this room right now," she intoned, smirking.

Gaara opened his mouth, but closed it again after finding himself unable to find a retort. Baki, who had been watching the verbal battle in amusement, smiled proudly.

"It seems you have been owned," Akara said, smirk now a full-blown grin. Baki laughed.

"She's right. You got served."

Gaara looked at the woman before him in contempt. Not only had she beat him in battle, but she'd also beat him verbally. TWICE.

"Touché, kunoichi, touché," he replied.

~~~~~

Akara looked around in surprise.

"Konoha is enormous!"

"Isn't it," said Gaara as he made his way through the crowd, Akara following closely behind.

"GAARA! YOU'RE HERE!"

An orange and black blur tackled Gaara, nearly knocking him to the ground.

"Good to see you too, Naruto..." he grunted.

Akara frowned. "Gaara-sama, are you alright?"

Gaara straightened up. "Yes, I'm fine. May I introduce you to my good friend Uzumaki Naruto?"

Naruto grinned at the frowning kunoichi, who glared down at him wearing the tradition garb of a Sunian citizen.

"Charmed, I'm sure."

His grin only grew wider. "Hi! I'm Naruto, dattebayo! What's your name?"

"I am Yashara no Akara, Kazekage-sama's bodyguard."

Naruto looked over to his friend. "Damn, Gaara! Where'd you get this one? She's scary!"

Her voice grew dangerously soft. "What did you say, you insignificant little worm," she asked, switching to her bloodline.

Naruto eeped and hid behind Gaara, who sighed.

"Akara-san, deactivate your bloodline. Naruto can't help it he's an idiot."

Naruto peeked out from behind his friend. "Yeah, I can't help it I'm...HEY!"

~~~~~

Akara had an interesting day as Gaara's bodyguard. She met all of his friends, including the medic Sakura, Neji, Shikamaru, Ino, Lee, Hinata, and others. She was suprised to see Gaara so relaxed and free of speech. It was extremely startling; he'd even chuckled occasionally. Very soon, they found it was time to go home.

"Promise to write?"

"I promise, Naruto."

"Don't forget to eat regularly...and don't overwork yourself! And don't forget to drink lots of water! You

don't want me to go to Suna and force you to!"

"Alright, I'll keep it in mind, Sakura..."

The duo left the Konoha gate behind, traveling quickly through the forest. But the entire journey, all she could think about was one thing: friends.

~~~~~

They returned home to find that Temari and Kankuro had returned while they were gone.

"Kara-chan! Gaara! You're home!"

"So," said Kankuro, reaching over and tousling Gaara's hair playfully, "Were you a good boy while we were gone?"

"Kankuro, don't mess with my hair. You know that bothers me."

"I know!"

Temari turned to Akara. "So how was Konoha?"

"It was okay. I'm going to go shower."

~~~~~

Gaara had finally escaped the clutches of his brother and sister, and was now walking down the hall to the restroom. He opened the door, and froze.

Imagine, if you will, a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming car. Gaara was that proverbial deer at the moment. Of course, Akara had the same look on her face. She had been wrapping a towel around her waist, and was now frozen as she stared fixedly at Gaara. After a few seconds, people as far away as the Land of Waves heard an earsplitting shriek.

"GET OUT!"

~~~~~

"Mari-chan," said Akara a few minutes later, "enlighten me: why is Gaara-sama such a jerk?"

"Well," Temari began tentatively, "He had a very troubled childhood..."

"So what, did it make him gay or something?"

"No...He has a problem. You see, when he was younger..."

"When he was younger, he had a demon, named Shukaku, sealed inside of him," said Kankuro bluntly.

"Yes...and if he ever fell asleep, he would be taken over by the demon and kill everyone in his way."

"It caused everyone, even our own uncle, to hate him. Our uncle tried to kill him."

"Now, he can't trust anyone. He's afraid to show affection, because anyone who ever said they loved him ended up betraying him."

"Oh," said Akara sheepishly. "Wow..."

"Yeah..."

"Y'know, for a smart girl, you're pretty good at playing stupid," said Temari pointedly.

Oi...This chapter totally kicked my @\$\$...but I finally finished it! Yays! \*throws confetti\*

## 7 - What The?!

Wows...so many comments... \*throws more confetti\*

*He entered his office to see Akara sitting in his chair. She smiled up at him, eyes heavily lidded. Her red lips smirked at him.*

*"Kazekage-sama," she simpered, standing and wrapping her arms around him, "I want you. I want all of you."*

~~~~~

Gaara woke with a start. His shirt was drenched in sweat, and his breath came in short gasps. He eventually calmed himself, and looked down at his sheets.

"Ah, frack."

~~~~~

Akara was in the laundry room when he came in. He carefully avoided her eyes as he shoved his sheets unceremoniously into one of the washers and started measuring soap.

"Nightmares?"

He didn't answer. He started fiddling with the lid of the soap box. *Damn it, just say something! Stupid hormones...*

Akara walked up to him. "Hello? I asked you a question..."

"Sure, think what you like."

She sat on the washer next to him. He noticed she'd changed her sleep shorts. "What happened with you?"

She sighed. "Period started."

"Ah." He poured in the soap, and set the water temperature on hot. He'd seen Kankuro do this many, many times.

"So, what's up with you," asked Akara. Gaara silently cursed her curiosity.

"Stress with work."

"I get it," she said, "Sucks to be Kazekage, don't it?"

He didn't answer her.

~~~~~

Gaara found himself in his office with an irritated Akara the next morning. She slammed the forms on his desk.

"For the love of Kami, Kazekage-sama! I didn't ask to be your new secretary/bodyguard/escort! Blame the fracking council for that! Now sign the goddamn forms!"

"It's the principle of the thing, Akara-san! I sign too many forms already! That's all I do all day!"

She exhaled, fluttering her red bangs. "Well, you knew what you were getting into when you accepted the job..."

She couldn't say anything else, because the door was suddenly kicked off its hinges by three very angry kunoichi. One had brown hair that was cut off at the shoulders, wearing a pink yukata; one had an off-white yukata and wavy brown hair, with a scarf doubling as a head band; and the last one had a black and red dress, blonde hair pulled into a bun, and black leather gloves on her hands.

As the trio stood there, Akara was sweatdropping and still holding her paperwork in her hands. Gaara sat with his pen poised over a piece of paper and a surprised look on his face. The blonde straightened up.

"Give us back our friend," said Kaori.

Kay, Kiki, and Maria better be happy about this...

8 - I Need New Friends...

Update! *still more throwing of confetti*

All was quiet, the trio staring at the duo. Gaara broke the silence first.

"I don't know or care who you are or where you are from, but you three owe me a new office door."

The brunette joined the blonde. "Don't you play stupid! We want Panda-chan back NOW!"

Gaara's mouth twitched slightly, and he turned to face Akara.

"Panda-chan?"

She shot him a withering glare. "Don't ask." She pinched the bridge of her nose in agitation. "Kaori, Kristen, what are you doing here?"

"We came to bring you back to Kiri," said the wavy-haired brunette, "We need you."

"Yeah," said Kaori, coming forward, "so hell or high water, we're bringing you back!"

Akara sighed. I need new friends...

"Guys," said Akara, voice edgy, "Even if I could come home, I wouldn't."

"Why?"

"I'm a Suna nin now. I pledged loyalty to Suna, and to leave would breach that loyalty and trust."

Kaori stared. "But what about Kiri? Don't you miss home? Don't you miss US?"

"I do miss you. Believe me. But if I go with you, I'll be killed. Plus, you guys would be banished too if you bring me back!"

The wavy-haired brunette let out a nervous laugh. "Yeah...about that...we're technically banished because we're AWOL at the moment..."

"YOU GUYS ARE WHAT, MARIA-SENSEI?!"

Maria winced. "We're absent without leave, plotting to bring back a banned shinobi, and on top of that, I cussed out the Mizukage."

Akara stared. Maria, Kaori, and Kristen shifted uncomfortably in Akara's glare. Gaara sweat dropped.

"You guys are such idiots. But you're all my idiots."

And just like that, the tension broke. Kaori and Kristen laughed and threw their arms around Akara's neck. Maria turned to the highly confused Kazekage.

"We're staying in Suna, but we'll probably end up in Konoha soon. Do you know of a good hotel?"

~~~~~

A week later, Gaara was in his office, reading over a report on burkas (don't ask). Maria, Kristen, Kaori, and Temari were out shopping, while Akara was filing some paperwork for him. Kankuro walked in, smiling broadly.

"Guess what, Gaara?"

Gaara looked up. "What? Did someone we hate die?"

Kankuro looked at him funny, then smiled again. "I have a mission! Temari does, too!"

Gaara stared. Kankuro continued smiling like an idiot.

"So?"

"So," said Kankuro, growing serious, "You and 'Kara-chan are going to have to watch the house while we're gone. Also, 'Mari said to ask 'Kara-chan to stop by the grocery store...we need oranges..."

Kankuro left, while Gaara returned to his work. Although he was looking at the paper before him, he didn't read a word of it. There was something that had been on his mind lately...

Gaara threw down the report. Growling, he raked a hand through his hair. What the hell was with him today? It wasn't like breakfast was bothering him, Akara had...

He snapped his fingers. That was it! The dream he had about Akara last week was what was bothering him. He stood, and walked to the window. Yeah, what had THAT been about? He certainly didn't think of her that way. No. Impossible.

He pressed his forehead against the glass. Why was he worried about that damn dream? It was vulgar, pointless, degrading, and...he stopped.

It was sexy.

And he'd liked it.

He shook his head violently. Snap out of it, Gaara! It was a wet dream, for Kami's sake! He picked up his pen, and started signing more papers, a frown on his face.



Damn hormones...

~~~~~

Akara walked to the house, humming a tune under her breath. She walked in, setting the grocery bag on the ground.

"Mari-chan! Kankuro-kun! I'm home!"

"They aren't here." She gasped, and spun around.

"Gaara-sama! You scared me!"

He smirked. "Just making sure you're on alert. My bodyguard has to be ready for anything."

She scowled. She was really beginning to hate that smirk. That sarcastic, overbearing, infuriating, sexy...

She mentally shrieked. What the hell?! Where had that thought come from?!

"Shut up," she replied. He looked at her.

"Make me."

"Don't tempt me," she said, pushing past him and making dinner.

~~~~~

Gaara went downstairs for a cup of coffee, as per usual, when he heard Akara singing again. He'd by now figured out that she only sang when she was thinking hard about something, and he could tell when she was upset by listening to the song.

She doesn't look, she doesn't see  
Opens up for nobody,  
Figures out, she figures out...  
Narrow line, she can't decide,  
Everything short of suicide  
Never hurts, nearly works...

She stopped. "Gaara-sama, get your goddamned coffee and leave. Now."

He silently cursed himself.

"Why do you always catch me in the middle of a song?"

He poured a cup, and leaned against the countertop. "Maybe I'm just lucky?"

She snorted. "Yeah, right...Lucky, my @\$\$..."

He smirked. "Lucky-@\$\$?"

She sneered, walking out the kitchen door. "Not what I meant," she said crossly, walking across the living room and starting up the stairs.

"What did you mean then?"

"I just meant that I highly doubted it that it was an accident."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that you're an arrogant jerk who makes fun of the very people who can beat you down if they tried!" She ran the rest of the way up the stairs, and slammed her door closed.

That statement stung. He didn't like Akara that much, but he did feel slightly unnerved when his subjects didn't like him. it brought back bad memories...

"Mom said not to play with him!"

"It's Gaara! Run for it!"

"Kankuro, don't speak to him right now...he'll kill you..."

He shook his head, and sighed. It'll have to wait for morning.

~~~~~

Akara sat in her room, staring out the window. Why'd she go and say that? Bad enough she insulted him, but she had to go and break his emotions?! She realized he was infuriating, but she had no right to go and hurt his feelings...

She yawned, and looked at the clock. Twelve in the morning. Akara sighed. She'd worry about it in the morning.

Done! Yays!! *throws all her confetti into the air*

9 - Kazekage Mishaps

Well...Updated a lot of my fics on this site and fanfiction.net, so go ahead and read all those...I have some good news: this is a really funny chappie! So read! SHANNARO!

Gaara probably had it coming to him. As he stared at the contents of the wicker basket, he felt his eye involuntarily twitch.

"Temari...come in here..."

Temari poked in a head. "What do you want, oh lovable brother of mine?"

Gaara faced her, and thrust the basket in her hands. "What is the meaning of this?"

Temari seemed confused for a moment, then she looked down and saw what exactly had her baby brother so peeved.

Each and every one of his Kazekage robes were pink.

"Well..." said Temari, trying to stifle a laugh, "it looks like you don't know how to separate your reds from your whites, little bro..."

"Don't toy with me, Temari..."

"Ask 'Kara-chan. She'd know, she's the one who does the laundry."

~~~~~

"Akara-san, we need to talk."

Akara turned from the sink. "What about?"

"This." He thrust the offending pink robes into her hands. She looked at them for a nanosecond, and then burst out laughing.

"Looks like you need to learn how to wash your own clothes, Gaara-sama."

Gaara was not amused. "This is your doing, isn't it?"

"You bet your Kazekage hat it is," she said, still giggling.

"Well, then let's see how funny it is when I ruin your clothes," he said through gritted teeth. And in a swift motion, he tore off the sleeve of her red shirt.

Akara quit laughing, and looked at him in shock and anger.

"You ripped my shirt!"

"I just ripped your sleeve..."

"This was my favorite shirt!"

"...please don't kill me..."

"OH, I'M SURE AS HELL GONNA KILL YOU! GET BACK HERE!"

Gaara did what any sensible person in that situation would have done: he ran for it. Akara wasn't far behind, brandishing a wet frying pan. Temari watched on with a bowl of popcorn, highly amused.

"Oi, Kankuro! Get your fat @\$ down here! You're missing the show!"

Kankuro poked a sleepy head out his doorway, and narrowly missed getting decapitated by the aforementioned frying pan. He watched as the two raced up the stairs, slamming the door leading to the roof.

Kankuro walked over to his sister.

"So are we gonna...?"

"You bet your puppet we are!"

And with that, the eldest two of the Sand Siblings, went up to the roof.

~~~~~

"Now, Akara-san, let's not be rash..."

"Fork over the money to replace my shirt, or the hat gets it." And as if to prove she was serious, she held out the straw Kazekage hat over the edge that bordered the busiest street in all of Suna.

Gaara gulped. "You wouldn't dare..."

"I feel my hand slipping..." Akara let the hat slip out of her hand a little. Gaara choked back a sob.

"Alright, here's my wallet," he said, chucking it at her head. She took it, and smiled happily. She tossed the hat toward him, and he caught it deftly with his index finger and his thumb.

"Oh, and by the way...The dye is just a genjutsu."

~~~~~

Gaara went to the office in a really foul mood. Once he'd released the genjutsu on his robes, eaten breakfast, and teleported to the tower, he found he was late for an early meeting with the council.

"Kazekage-sama, please. Akara-san should be promoted immediately."

Gaara stared at the offending man from the head of the table.

"No," he replied simply.

"But Kazekage-sama," said Baki, "her skills far exceed that of a Chuunin. She is better suited to Jonin level or higher."

"That may be so," he said curtly, "but the fact remains that she is still adapting, and that we mustn't lose sight of where her previous loyalties lie."

Baki massaged his aching head. At the rate things were going, Akara would never reach Jonin level, and he himself would never receive his lunch.

"Pardon me," said a voice. The entire table of politicians and high-level shinobi turned en masse to see Akara standing in the doorway. She carried a bento box in one hand and a sheaf of papers in the other.

"Forgive my intrusion, but Kazekage-sama left his lunch at home. Temari-hime told me to give it to him."

The council members stifled a laugh as Akara walked up to a disgruntled Gaara, gave him the bento, and bowed.

"Don't work too late. Temari-san said she'd personally come over here and drag you home kicking and screaming if she had to." And with that, she retreated to the hall. As soon as the door closed behind her with a snap, Gaara sighed.

"We will reconvene after lunch."

~~~~~

Gaara returned home that day at five o'clock in a foul mood. He was three seconds away from going up to Akara and giving her a piece of his mind. He slammed the door closed, making his siblings jump about a foot in the air. Akara was nowhere to be found.

"Where is she," he growled at his siblings. Temari sighed, and sipped her tea.

"She's at the grocery store. She said she'd be home in a few minutes."

Gaara nodded, jaw set in anger, and stormed up to his room. Even though he couldn't even remember if he had a floor, the chaos inside soothed him. As he opened the door, he stopped, eyes wide with shock. His eyes made a sweep of the room, almost refusing to believe what he was seeing. Standing stock-still, his face contorted with fury.

"SHE CLEANED MY ROOM!"

Temari and Kankuro flinched when they heard the enraged voice floating down from the second story. Oh yeah...Akara was in for it.

~~~~~

Akara, meanwhile, wandered the market. She loved the open air markets, whether they be in Suna, Konoha, or Kiri. She especially liked the fact that she didn't need to steal the food anymore, either, now that she had a steady paycheck and was away from Kiri.

She was just admiring a red silk kimono when she felt a faint chakra signature sneaking up behind her. She whirled around and nearly punched the offender in the face, before she saw who it was.

It was a group of girls, no older than herself. The leader of the pack had long, platinum blonde hair and hazel eyes. The girl on her left had black hair and blue eyes, while the one on her right had red-brown hair and brown eyes. All three wore way too much makeup and hardly anything else. The blonde was in a skimpy blue skirt and a barely-there tube top of green and pink spandex. The blue-eyed brunette wore a tiny pair of short-shorts and a skimpy little orange halter top, while the brown-eyed brunette wore a tiny little gray-green dress. All three had headbands, proclaiming them kunoichi of Suna.

Akara sighed. "What do you want?"

The blonde flipped her hair, and glared at Akara. Akara laughed.

"If you're trying to do a death glare, then you're failing miserably."

"I'm Haruka, and I'm the president of the Kazekage Admiration Society."

"Ah crap," said Akara, "fangirls."

"We are NOT fangirls," shouted the little brown-eyed brunette. Akara raised an eyebrow, obviously skeptical.

"And you are...?"

The girl ran a hand through her long, brown ponytail, flicking her wrist at the last moment and allowing the hair to catch the sun. "I'm Izanami. I'm the Vice President of the Kazekage Admiration Society. And my friend," she gestured to the blue-eyed brunette, who shook her head and made her long black hair shimmer in the light, "is Usagi, and she's the Secretary of the Kazekage Admiration Society."

*Great, thought Akara, Haruka, Izanami, and Usagi: a girl with a far-off brain, an idiot who invites way too much, and a rabbit. Nice names, they actually fit.*

Akara wasn't lying. Haruka stared at her. "You have a lot of nerve being around our Kazekage-sama. Gaara-kun is much too good for you."

*If only you knew, brainless...* Akara suddenly caught something. "What do you mean, YOUR Kazekage-sama? I'll have you know that he's his own person, thank you, and he doesn't belong to anyone."

*Especially you sluts...*

"Oh really? Then why are you around him," accused Haruka. Akara was getting really sick of this, really fast. The doges were making her mad, and the fact that Haruka was a brainless twit did nothing to alleviate that anger, either.

"Um, I don't know...maybe because IT'S MY JOB?!"

"You're lying," said Izanami, angry.

"You know what? I have stuff I have to do, so go and find a man to frack you, if they can get around the mind-numbing stupidity, that is."

Akara gave them ten seconds to digest what she'd said. Unfortunately, it took fifteen.

"HEY!" Akara smirked at them, turned, and left.

It was then that Haruka, Izanami, and Usagi made the biggest mistake of their lives. The three Stooges ran up, and grabbed her arm.

Akara immediately activated the Yashara, and whirled around. The three bimbos shrieked when they saw her fangs begin to grow and her feral, cat-like eyes.

"Don't you ever, EVER touch me, you sorry excuse for kunoichi. GOT IT?!"

The three shrieked again, and ran. Akara deactivated her bloodline, grabbed her groceries, and left.

She had a bone to pick with Gaara...

~~~~~

Akara walked upstairs, a bundle of freshly laundered robes in her arms. She entered Gaara's room, only to see him sitting on the red chaise lounge. She could tell that the former jinchuuriki was pissed. His eyes glowered in the semi-darkness. Good; she was pissed too.

"Well, explain yourself."

Akara walked to the dresser, placing the robes on top of its now clean and dust-free surface. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"You cleaned my room."

"No duh. This place was so filthy, I couldn't even stand to come in here. By the way, I like the red rug.

Nice and furry."

"Don't change the subject. You entered my personal space, and drastically altered it."

"Drastically altered it?! The only thing that needs to be 'drastically altered' is your attitude!"

"My attitude is just fine!"

Akara snorted. "Your attitude is crap."

"Oh really?"

"Yeah. Really."

"Well what if I said that your attitude sucks worse?"

"I'd tell you to piss off," she said, walking to the door. Gaara stared after her, infuriated.

He's kinda cute when he's mad... Akara thought. She shook her head. Great, now even her own mind was plotting against her.

"And next time, don't send your damnable harem after me. I get enough grief from Kaori and Maria-sensei as it is without your giggly fan club out to get me."

Akara left. She felt so much better now.

~~~~~

Gaara stood in his room, suddenly tired.

He knew that she was mad at him for more than just him snapping at her this morning. And when did his fan club find her?

Gaara sighed. Maybe he shouldn't have let Akara stay in the house for so long. It was hard enough for her to adjust without a crazy fan club baying for her blood. It almost made him wish that he was just another normal shinobi. He snorted at the thought: yeah, like "normal" and "shinobi" could fit into the same sentence...But he knew that he'd have to talk to the fangirls sometime, and he had a shrewd idea which fans he needed to talk to...

He dropped it. Temari was walking up the stairs, and he could smell Akara's curry, even with the door closed.

Done! Okay, just so you know: Haruka, Izanami, and Usagi are going to show up a lot from time to time. Haruka means "far-off", Izanami means "female who invites", and Usagi means "rabbit". If you want to know what Gaara's room actually looks like, then read this story [right here](#):



<http://www.fanart-central.net/story-50001.html>

Oh, and I might as well explain what the Yashara looks like. The Yashara gives Akara slitted, catlike green eyes. It gives her fangs, claws, and increases her senses, chakra, and speed a millionfold. The speed of her attacks draw off this unique trait in her bloodline. Man, this is a really long author's note...I think that covers all the bases, as I'll stop talking for now. Ja ne, minna-san! Comment!

## 10 - Festival of Love

Wow, two new chappies in one night...you people are lucky to have a writer like me...\*throws more confetti while watching kittens do La Cucaracha\*

Gaara hated this time of year.

It wasn't because it was extremely hot this time of the year, nor was it the fact that his siblings almost never received missions around this time. No, it was because around this time, Sunagakure held its annual Summer Festival.

The Summer Festival was always a big deal in Suna. It involved live entertainment, dancing, food, rides, bonfires, and games. And every year, the ten most talented kunoichi in the village performed the traditional dance of Suna.

Temari would take part; she always did. She was, after all, one of the best, and the fact that she was his sister probably meant something, too. But Gaara nearly choked on his morning coffee when he reviewed the list of kunoichi participants. As he scanned it, he could only utter one word, a word that sent the windowpanes rattling.

"TEMARI!"

~~~~~

"Me?"

"Yes you," said an irate Gaara. Akara blinked.

"I'm the top of the list of performers for the belly dance?"

"It's a tradition, one that is to be taken seriously, Akara-san. Don't call it a mere belly dance."

"But doesn't the person at the top of the list have to...?"

"Yes." Akara blinked.

"BULLshoot!" She slammed her fists into the table, emerald eyes flashing in malice.

"THERE IS NO WAY IN HELL I'M GOING TO BE DANCING IN FRONT OF YOU!"

Gaara rubbed his eyes. "Did I say that I wanted it like this? No, I didn't. I'm just as surprised and disgusted by this as you are, Akara-san."

She glared at him. He glared at her. Finally, she broke the silence.

"I hate you."

"I hate you, too."

It was silent once more. She turned to leave.

"Whatever, but you're footing the bill for my kimono."

Gaara paused. "Your kimono?"

"Yeah, my kimono! Did you expect me to go to the festival naked or something?!"

Before he could stop himself, an image of Akara (who was rather naked) popped in his head. He mentally gasped, and shook his head to clear the image from his mind.

"No, but I wasn't aware that you required new clothing."

"Who said what about new clothes," asked Temari, walking into the room.

Gaara sighed, and ran a hand through his hair. "Akara-san says she needs a kimono for the festival. I take it you want one too, Temari?"

"Heck yes! I can't wear the one from last year, everyone's seen it already!"

Gaara sighed again, and threw his wallet to his sister. Smirking, she caught it and dragged Akara to the market.

~~~~~

"What we need is something you can wear all year, but can be altered with accessories to look different each time you wear it. I have a few old kimono that should fit you, but this festival is the most important festival of the year," explained Temari as they browsed the shops. Akara didn't argue, instead choosing to just smile and nod.

The area of the market that they were in was filled with teenage shinobi and civilians alike. They weaved through the crowd, sidestepping the male Chuunin, who were sure to try hitting on them. As Temari consulted a map of the area, Akara felt a tap on her shoulder. She turned to see a large Chuunin male with tanned skin and blonde hair. His eyes were a startling lavender-blue.

"Hey, babe," he said, acting cool, "The name's Katsu. What's yours?"

"Excuse me," asked Akara, voice low and dangerous.

"I asked what your name is, hot stuff."

Akara smirked. "Wrong answer."

~~~~~

Temari winced when she heard a loud thud and a sickening crunch. She turned slowly to see that Akara had grabbed hold of the man's arm, and flung him into a large sandstone sculpture. Several somethings had cracked. Not the sculpture.

"I don't care if you're name means 'victory' or not, because I sure as hell am no prize for the likes of you." Akara straightened up, and walked over to Temari.

"Where to?"

"We can go to Mameha's. She has some of the finest kunoichi gear and kimono in Wind country, and with Gaara footing the bill, we can get you one to rival all of the finest ones the regular girls will be wearing."

Akara sighed. What on earth have I gotten myself into? I should've slacked off on my missions, then I wouldn't be in this mess...

"Well, who do we have here?" Akara cringed. Oh, for the love of Kami...

Temari and Akara turned to see Haruka and her little cronies, each carrying overstuffed shopping bags.

"The little freak and the fan girl? Well, queer ducks do flock together..."

Temari growled. "Care to repeat that, Haruka?"

Haruka snorted. "That's Haruka-hime to you. Soon, I'll be married to Gaara-kun, and then I'll be more powerful than either of you."

"Yeah, right...keep dreaming, Haruka. Everyone knows that Gaara would never marry a slut like you."

Haruka frowned at Temari's words. "You don't remember your place, to speak of the Kazekage so familiarly, Temari-chan."

Temari tensed. "I have every right. Or do you forget? He's my brother!"

"Keep saying that, Temari-chan..."

Akara stepped forward. "Are you accusing Temari of lying, Haruka of little sense?"

"Akara, leave the air headed bimbo to me," said Temari under her breath.

"Well, what's going on here?"

The five kunoichi turned to see Maria walk up, followed by Kaori and Kristen. Maria raised an eyebrow.

"Well?"

Haruka stuck her nose in the air. "You obviously aren't from around here. Either that or you haven't much sense. I'm Haruka, President of the Kazekage Admiration Society."

Maria twitched. I'll show you who hasn't much sense...

Maria didn't have a chance to, though. Haruka was now pinned to the ground, Akara's foot against her throat and her Yashara activated.

"Don't you EVER speak to Maria-sensei like that. EVER!"

"Akara!" The girl turned to see Kaori. "That's enough! Deactivate your bloodline!"

Akara removed her foot, and let her eyes return to normal. Her claws retreated, and her fangs became canines once again. Haruka coughed a few times, and stared at the red and black haired girl.

"You are too freaky! Come on, Izanami! Usagi! We're gone."

The three left. Kaori walked over to Akara.

"Panda-chan, what the hell?! You know what the Yashara does if you activate it for too long!"

"She insulted Temari-chan and Maria-sensei, Kaori! I had no choice!"

"Pardon," said Temari, "but who are you guys?"

Kaori and Maria smiled. "I'm Kiri no Kaori. I used to be on Akara's team!" Kaori turned to Maria. "And that's Mizuri Maria. She's our former sensei."

Maria smiled good-naturedly, and waved at Temari. "How do ya do?"

Temari smiled and waved back. Kristen spoke up.

"And I'm Karasu Kristen! I like you, you look nice!"

Akara smiled. It felt good to be with her team, if only for a short while. As they walked, they chatted about techniques and other such things as teen girls talk about when they shop.

"So what are you guys shopping for," asked Kaori as they walked to Mameha's.

"We need to get kimono for the Summer Festival. This year, we'll have mine, Kankuro, and Gaara's friends from Konoha visiting!"

"Cool," said Kristen, "I can't wait! We should get a kimono, too!"

"Kristen, we don't have enough in our travel budget for kimono!"

"But Maria-chaaaaan..."

"Why don't you borrow some of mine," said Temari.

"Could we," asked Kaori, excited.

"Sure!"

They walked into Mameha's. It was a small but well-lit and clean shop. A beautiful kimono of stars, moons, and nightingales was on display in the window. Temari smiled, and called out.

"Mameha-san? Are you there?"

A sliding sound and a dull thunk was heard, and a thin woman with black hair and an oval-shaped face appeared, riding on a ladder that slid up and down the shelves upon shelves of boxed merchandise.

"Ah! Temari-hime! You are back for a new kimono for the festival, I presume?" The woman's voice was warm and motherly, each syllable clear and soft like a note from a harp.

"Of course. I also brought a friend of mine, who is staying with my brothers and myself." Akara stepped forward and bowed. "I am Akara no Yashara. I'm deeply honored to meet you, Mameha-san."

Mameha laughed, and Akara was surprised to hear that it sounded like the chiming of the temple bells. "Rise, my dear girl. My, you are quite the pretty kunoichi."

"Thank you, Mameha-san."

"I think I have just the kimono for you," said Mameha thoughtfully. She disappeared into the shelves, returning minutes later with a large ebony box in hand.

"Try this on, my dear."

Akara gasped when she opened the box. A red silk kimono with black silk trim was embroidered with bamboo branches and blackbirds. The under robe was a rich ebony with mahogany trim, and the obi was black brocade with a red crosshatching pattern.

"It's beautiful," she breathed, pulling on the under robe. They had entered a smaller room in the back of the store, and all six were sitting or looking at the kimono in awe.

"Go ahead, child; try it on."

She slipped on the red overrobe, and Temari tied all the loops and complicated knots, finally tying the obi into the style known as a "hanging obi".

"Oh my Kami," said Kaori, "she looks like a princess."

"I do?"

"Yeah..."

Mameha looked at Kaori. "I think I have a little something for you too, if you would excuse me for a moment."

Mameha left the room for about thirty minutes, returning with four wooden boxes. Mameha looked at each box critically before selecting a sandalwood box.

"Try this on, love," said Mameha, gesturing to Kaori. Kaori blushed, as she usually did when confronted.

"O-oh n-no, I couldn't!"

"Go ahead," said the motherly middle-aged woman. Kaori opened the box, and nearly dropped it.

The kimono was a soft powder blue, with white chrysanthemums embroidered on it. the trim and the under robe were a rich cobalt, and the obi was navy-blue with a light daisy design in powder blue. She slipped it on, and had Temari tie the obi the same way as Akara's.

"You look like an angel, Kaori-chan," said Kristen.

"Do I really?" The blonde kunoichi lost her shyness for a few moments, gazing at herself in the mirror.

"Here, little one," said Mameha, handing a rosewood box to Kristen. Kristen put hers on quickly, barely standing still long enough for Temari to tie the obi. The kimono was a soft sea foam green, with rose-pink fans embroidered on it. The fans had little turtles on them in a faded moss green. The trim was a light blue, and the under robe was pink with green trim. Her obi was a light blue, with a green and pink squiggle pattern. Mameha laughed.

"There now, you little bird! You look like you could fly away at any moment!"

She handed a mahogany box to Maria, who opened it, and slowly slipped it on. Mameha tied her obi into the "box obi" style. Her kimono was covered with gray clouds on high mountain peaks, stark black against the steely blue background. The trim was a dark gray, the under robe the same with a steely blue trim. The obi was embroidered with tiny zigzags of black and gray. Maria looked like a gentlewoman, leading her little princesses to a dance or dinner party.

"And Temari-hime, a kimono for you." Mameha handed her a cedar box, which contained a dark-violet kimono with silver deer darting between chocolate-brown trees. The trim and under robe were silver and chocolate-brown, and her obi was silver with brown and violet crosshatching. Mameha tied the obi like all the girls had theirs, and stood back to admire the beautiful women before her.

"You all look lovely," she said, tears blurring her vision. "I remember when I was young. I was a geisha, wearing beautiful kimono just like these. After my retirement, I devoted my life to selling the creations of my father, creations that he passed the secret of to me."

"We thank you, Mameha-san. My only regret is not having enough money to pay for these," said Maria. Mameha waved it off.

"Keep them. As a gift."

"Oh, Mameha-san," said Temari, "We couldn't!"

"You can."

"At least send us a small bill. My brother wouldn't stand to hear of his older sister taking such extravagant gifts from the best kimono merchant in town!"

Mameha thought for a while, then sighed.

"Very well, then. The bill will come at the end of the week, as usual."

Mameha untied everyone, and folded the kimono away in their wooden boxes, taking care to fold dry herbs in with them to keep them from smelling musty.

"I shall see you next year, Temari-hime! Farewell!"

~~~~~

"You bought all of them kimono?!" Gaara ran a hand through his hair, frustrated.

"Gaara, be reasonable. They are guests of Suna, and they need to look presentable."

"And how much is this costing me?"

Temari bit her lip. "Twenty thousand ryo..."

Gaara froze for a moment, then relaxed.

"That's actually fairly cheap for five kimono...did she offer them to you as a gift again?"

Temari nodded. Gaara silently swore.

"I tell that woman every year: I'm not going to accept her not asking for payment. But does she listen? Never..."

"so, it's okay that I bought the kimono, then," asked Temari tentatively.

"Yes, it's alright."

~~~~~


Finally, the day of the festival arrived. The caravan from Konoha stared in awe at the spectacle and revelry around them. Vendors sold food on the streets, children in yukata and kimono ran by, ribbons and gauze scarves floating behind them.

The day was clear, a delightful breeze whistling through the metropolis. Naruto, Lee, Kiba, and Choji all wore yukata. Neji, Shikamaru, Shino, Ino, TenTen, Sakura, and Hinata wore kimono. The two Hyuugas wore theirs differently, seeing as they were of a particular style traditional to the Hyuuga clan. They slowly meandered through the crowd, finally making it to the Kazekage tower.

~~~~~

"GAARA!"

Gaara winced as Naruto's shout burst his eardrums.

"Hello, Naruto."

He found a hyperactive blonde bursting through his doorway, followed closely behind by the rest of the group.

"Well, glad to see you made it. I hope you all enjoy yourselves. Akara-san, Temari, and Kankuro said to say hi."

Gaara stood. "I need to prepare for the festival."

Temari and Kaori walked in, looking at Gaara curiously as he left.

"Temari!"

"Sakura! Naruto! You all made it!"

Kaori sat in the corner, shyness kicking in. Hinata noticed the quiet kunoichi, and walked over.

"H-hello..."

Kaori gulped. "Hi."

"W-what's y-your n-name?"

"I'm Kaori. I'm friends with Akara-chan."

The duo hit it off quickly. Before long, Hinata and Kaori were laughing and talking like they'd been friends forever. Neji noticed this, and inwardly smiled.

It seems my cousin has found a friend...interesting...

"KAORI-CHAN!!!"

The group turned to see Kristen run in. "Akara-chan wants to talk to you and Temari-chan! She says she needs help!"

"Alright, then. I'll go."

~~~~~

The festival was amazing.

Circles of dancers ringed the bonfires, casting an orange glow on their faces as the intricate patterns began. Kristen, Neji, Kankuro, Ino, Kaori, and Lee weaved through the dancers, copying the movements and having a good time. Naruto and Hinata joined Sakura at the goldfish booth, where they attempted to catch fish with the tissue paper nets. Gaara wandered about, desperately trying to escape Haruka, Izanami, and Usagi as Temari and Akara prepared for their dance.

"Lee-san?"

Lee turned to see Kristen. He had broken out of the circle of dancers to catch his breath, and so was surprised to see one of the others there.

"Yes?"

"I don't think you know me, but my name is Kristen. I'm friends with Akara-san?"

"Ah yes! The youthful flower who traveled with my good friend Gaara to my lovely village...I wasn't aware that she knew anyone here in Suna. It's pleasing to meet you, for you are just as beautiful a flower as Akara-san."

Kristen blushed. Lee was so charming!

"Would you like to go get some dango with me," she asked, blushing. Lee stared.

"Of course! I would love to eat dango with the lovely Kristen-chan!"

She giggled. "Please, Lee-san...call me Ki-chan."

~~~~~

"Excuse me."

Kaori turned to see Neji standing behind her. Her eyes went wide, and she could feel herself slipping back into her shyness.

"Y-yes?"

Neji sighed. She was stuttering almost as bad as his cousin...

"I noticed you with Temari-san earlier. You were talking with my cousin, am I right?"

Kaori gulped. "Yes, I...I was..."

"Hinata hasn't many friends. I'm glad that my otouto-chan found someone nice to befriend."

"You are too generous with your praise, Neji-san! I merely thought she was nice is all..."

He chuckled. "You are rather entertaining. Just don't lose that shyness: it's rather endearing."

He turned to leave, Kaori blushing madly as he did.

~~~~~

The gong signaling the start of the entertainment reverberated through the streets, calling dancers from the bonfires and carnival-goers from the rides and games. Gaara was now in his chair at the edge of the arena, safely away from the raging fangirls. He stood, and the crowd instantly quieted.

"Welcome to the two hundred and seventy-fifth annual Summer Festival," he said, voice carrying all the way across the stadium and to the guest's booth, where his friends and sibling sat. He was slightly irked to see Akara's friends there, but he pressed on.

"This festival celebrates not only the beginning of summer in Sunagakure, but also the beginning of the fourth year of the peace treaty between Sunagakure and Konoha." The crowd cheered, then fell silent. "And so, may I welcome the Konoha group here with us on this joyous day and may the entertainment begin!"

Pyrotechnics went off, and ten females appeared in a poof of smoke. They all were dressed in gauzy fabric in various colors and had their faces covered, their bright and shining eyes the only feature visible. Drums played and tambourines jingled out a rhythmic beat as they began performing amazing acrobatics and death-defying stunts, back flipping and cart wheeling lithely. The audience cheered as a pair of them came forward.

The Konoha nins instantly recognized the four ponytails on the blonde and the distinctive red and black hair of the other. Temari wore purple and periwinkle, with silver coins sewn onto her costume. Akara wore red and black, golden coins sewn to hers. She and Temari held katana in hand, and they began to spar.

The entire performance was a spectacle of light, sound, and color. At the end of the performance, the kunoichi gathered into a line, and the music slowed to a lazy, sensual beat as the women began the famous Dance of the Desert Sunset.

Akara didn't lie; it was loosely based upon a belly dance, but it was so much more than that. The performers broke into a whirling circle, then lengthened into a pair of lines: one facing the Kazekage, the other facing the rest of the audience. Akara had been following the traditional pattern up to now; which is why she shocked everyone by breaking out of the group.

She trooped up to the seat of the confused and slightly surprised Kazekage. Temari's eyes then held a glimmer of understanding, and she winked at the younger girl. The younger woman caught the hint, and began to dance.

Gaara couldn't believe what he was seeing. She was moving in the steps, but she made them (dare he say) coy and flirtatious. Her eyes held a fire within them that Gaara had never seen before, like any moment she would fall forward and beg him to take her. She was fluid, fiery; she captured the spirit of wind.

All too soon, the music ceased. The kunoichi bowed, but Akara remained motionless. As the crowd held its breath, she gave a low, sweeping bow, eyes never leaving the Kazekage's. Gaara was stunned for a moment, before realizing what she wanted. She wanted him to show his approval of her performance. He silently cursed his position, but he knew he had to act. He then did what many considered impossible: He smiled, and clapped.

Akara may have won the battle, but this war wasn't over yet.

This is the song I thought of when I wrote this:

<http://downloads.khinsider.com/game-soundtracks/album/naruto-original-soundtrack-3/19-tea-country.mp3>

Done! I know, took me long enough, right? I can explain...see, I had a lot of work going on, and I was desperately trying to update the fics that I had ignored for a while on FF.net and I had to do that on top of this...so yeah, feel free to attack me at any time...

11 - This Is Why I Hate Memories...

New Chapter...*throws more confetti*

Gaara and Akara sat together later on during the festival. It was about eleven at night, and yet everyone was still out and about.

"So, Gaara-sama..."

"Yes?"

Akara hesitated. unsure of how to continue. "Temari-chan wanted me to tell you that she's sorry about the kimonos."

"I see."

They sat in silence once more, just staring at the people passing by. Suddenly, Akara spoke.

"Gaara-sama, what do you think about life?"

He turned to look at her, obviously confused. "What about it? You live, then you die. Not much to it."

"Yes, but do you believe that people get what they deserve? Do you believe that people are given a predestined death?"

"Listen to you," he said, turning irritably to face the passers-by again, "you're beginning to sound like Neji did when he was a Genin."

"Gaara-sama, be serious."

Gaara stared at her again. "No, I don't believe in destiny and predeternined death! Okay?! Drop it!"

Akara sat silent, and Gaara turned away once again.

"I believe in it. I believe my father was let off easy."

"Please, Akara-san. You had it way better than a hell of a lot of other people out there."

She glared at him. "You think you're so smart, don't you?"

"I don't think, Akara-san; I know." She glared for the longest time, before she smacked him in the head.

"You think you're so sad, just because you're a survivor. You think you're above everyone else because

you had a hard childhood. Well here's something to think about: My father began beating me when I was three. Then, when I was ten, he started raping me." Gaara stared at her, faintly surprised at what he was hearing.

"We can all survive, Gaara-sama. We just don't have to be so goddamn sad doing it." Akara sat up, and walked away, kimono swishing behind her.

Gaara sat stock-still. Horrified, he thought about what she'd just told him. Rape was something he found unfathomable. It was a crime he didn't tolerate. Apparently, the council in Kiri didn't like rape any more than he did, because they usually gave the death sentence to rapists. Rape was more than just forcing a woman or man to have sex with you: it was stealing someone's innocence, someone's integrity. It was more than just a crime: it was a sin against another being.

Even when he was still under the influence of Shukaku, he'd abhorred rape, seeing as Shukaku had told him all about the demon values and etiquette. Rape wasn't something demons did: demons saw it as a crime to be punished only with death. Demons believed that a woman's consent to anything was equal to gold, and Gaara still held this view (even if the other views were slightly altered to make him a little more socially acceptable). So the thought of any man, especially the father, raping a little girl: well, it just made him sick. No person should be sane after an experience like that, and yet Akara was still as sane as the next kunoichi (not saying much, considering all the kunoichi he knew were psychotic).

Gaara sighed. Well, he'd just royally screwed up. Oh yeah, he'd screwed up big time.

~~~~~

"Stupid Kazekage...he thinks he's so smart..."

"Panda-chan?"

Akara snapped out of her brooding to see her friend Kaori standing nearby.

"Hi Kaori. Where's Ki-chan?"

Kaori sat down, and patted the bench seat beside her. "She went to go get dango with Lee. What's wrong? You performed very well at the finale, so why such a long face?"

Akara sighed. "I told Gaara-sama about my father."

"WHAT? When?"

"Just now."

Kaori noticed Akara trying not to cry. Sniffling, the blonde wrapped her arms around the other kunoichi. "Akara, it's okay to cry. Just let it out."

"Why does it hurt, Kaori-chan," whispered Akara. "It hurts to think about him."

"Akara, if only Maria-sensei and I had thought to turn him in earlier, then..."

"Kaori, if it's anyone's fault, it's mine. I deserve my scars."

"Even this one?"

Kaori pressed the side of Akara's torso. Akara stiffened.

"Yes, Kaori," she said, rubbing the spot, "Even that one."

~~~~~

The youngest of the Sand Siblings was searching through the crowd. Finally, he spotted a honey-colored head of hair, and began to walk toward it. Luckily for him, Kaori wasn't with Akara at the moment.

"Kaori-san?"

She turned, and felt her natural shyness come seeping back.

"Kazekage-sama...what's wrong?"

He sat her down. "We need to talk about Akara."

A glimmer of understanding lit her face. "What do you want to know?"

Short chappie, I know...I'll have a larger one up when I'm not quite so tired.

12 - I Don't Wanna Be In Love

New Chapter! Yeah...I'm suprisingly still awake...listen, if you want to know what Gaara's room looks like for this fic, you seriously need to read this fic. I'm not even joking.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/story-50001.html>

Enjoy the fic, okays? *throws more confetti*

Akara was on the roof. The festival was still going, and in the rush of people she knew she wouldn't be missed. She sighed, ruffling her bangs with her hands. Her kimono was half off her shoulders, her wooden zori in one hand and her legs hanging off the roof. Her skin was bathed in moonlight, making it glow preternaturally white.

He doesn't know anything about me...how can he think that? I swear, if he weren't Kazekage...

She sighed. It had to be at least two in the morning. She was suprised anyone wanted to stay awake. She slipped a hand into the kimono, pressing her cold fingers on the scar on her right side.

I hope he never finds out.

~~~~~

Gaara was stunned.

Kaori stared at her hands. He sat in silence, and she turned to face him.

"Don't tell Akara I told you. She'll never forgive me if I did."

"I understand." He sat up. "I need to go."

Kaori nodded. "She's going to be on the roof. She always does that, even at home."

Gaara nodded, and left.

~~~~~

Gaara entered his room, the moonlight filtering through the stained glass window leading up to the roof. He opened the hidden door, which floated soundlessly on well-oiled hinges. He took the stairs off the left

side of the balcony two at a time, remaining perfectly silent. Peeking out over the edge of the rooftop, he saw Akara sitting in the moonlight, staring up at the moon, tears flowing down her cheeks as she sang.

*Let's get these teen hearts beating; faster, faster...
So testosterone boys and harlequin girls,
Will you dance to this beat, and hold a lover close?
So testosterone boys and harlequin girls,
Will you dance to this beat, and hold a lover close?*

Gaara remained silent as he watched her sob silently, voice wavering each time she did. *She seems so sad...*

He climbed the remaining three steps to the rooftop. She still sang.

*Let's get these teen hearts beating; faster, faster...
So testosterone boys and harlequin girls,
Will you dance to this beat, and hold a lover close?
So testosterone boys and harlequin girls,
Will you dance to this beat, and hold a lover close?*

She paused, wiping the tears from her eyes, and Gaara watched as she hugged her arms, shivering. Gaara didn't want her to stop: her voice was mesmerizing. She let in a shuddering breath.

*So testosterone boys and harlequin girls,
Dance to this beat...
So testosterone boys and harlequin girls,
Dance to this beat...
And hold a lover close...
Let's get these teen hearts beating, faster, faster...
Let's get these teen hearts beating, faster...*

Her song ended, and he noticed her shiver again. Lucky for her, he had his cloak. He walked up behind her and wrapped it around her shoulders. She turned sharply, saw his face, and turned away again, ashamed.

"Don't turn away."

She glanced over to him, watching as he sat beside her. He grabbed her chin, turning her to face him.

"It's alright to cry. We can all survive. You just need someone to show you the way."

She stared at him, then gave a small, uncertain smile.

It was the very first time he'd ever seen her smile, and he never wanted to see anything else. Her smile wasn't the happy smile many people had: it was Naruto's smile, one that masked her sadness while allowing it to escape.

"Why do you always catch me during a song," she asked half-jokingly, letting out a shuddering breath.

Gaara didn't answer her. He only chuckled, and helped her up.

~~~~~

*What is this feeling?*

Akara entered her room. Closing the plain door behind her, she slipped out of her kimono, letting it drop to the floor. She quietly put on a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, and slipped into her bed.

*Why do I want to see his face? Why do I feel this way?*

He was always giving her attention. Granted, it was usually the kind of attention that you would give an annoying rival, but it was attention all the same. She turned on her right side, the scar itching slightly.

*I can't love him! No! He's annoying, arrogant, egotistic, and...*

She stopped. Her eyes went wide.

*I love him.*

She sat up, dazed. *Kami...I love Sabaku no Gaara. I love the Kazekage.*

It was wild, insane, completely unfounded. She couldn't get her mind off him. She loved his eyes, his smirk, the way he spoke even sent chills up her spine. He was in her mind, and he was intent on not letting go. She lay down in bed again, staring up at the ceiling.

*I can't love. I'm a shinobi. I don't want to be in love...love is a luxury I cannot afford...*

She turned on her left side, the side that faced the window. Moonlight shone brightly on his cloak, which lay on the chair next to her bed.

She wasn't going to sleep that night, that was for sure.

The songs I listened to while I wrote are Lying Is the Most Fun a Girl Can Have Without Taking Her Clothes Off by Panic! At the Disco and I Don't Wanna Be In Love by Good Charlotte. I used the lyrics for the Panic! At the Disco song though. YouTube them if you don't have the songs, they're both really good! Now please comment. I'd really appreciate it if you did.

## 13 - Striving To Forget, Seeming To Remember

Well, new chapter, mostly focusing on Akara's habit of training until she's numb or low on chakra. We even get to see the fruition of a new technique! \*grabs confetti bucket\*

Gaara threw down his pen in disgust. Running a hand angrily through his hair, he decided that the Wind Country's finances could wait a few minutes.

*Alright, focus your chakra...let wave upon wave of calm wash over you...*

His breathing slowed, and he felt his self-control come seeping back. He tried to utilize this time to figure out what the hell was wrong with him. Something was bothering him, something he couldn't quite peg a finger on...

He was spared any further thought by the timely arrival of Akara and Kankuro in his office. Akara had a sheaf of legal forms for him to fill out for the new Genin, and in a low voice that was meant to announce that someone had entered his office, she spoke.

"Gaara-sama, Kankuro-san is here to see you."

Gaara, still frustrated, merely rubbed his eyes in irritation.

"Fine. You may go."

Akara didn't leave, instead standing there as if she wanted to say something but couldn't.

"If I may, Gaara-sama, I would like to take the rest of the day off."

Everyone in the room stared at her. Akara, taking a day off? Had hell frozen over?

"And why, pray tell, would you want that?"

"I need to train. I haven't done so in three months."

Gaara sighed. There was always a catch: she was still in shinobi-mode, and therefore would do exactly as she said and train. He knew she was devoted to her work, but this was ridiculous...

"Alright. You are dismissed."

Akara turned to leave, and Gaara couldn't help but notice the way her hips swayed when she walked, the way her arms nonchalantly hung at her sides, swinging slightly. Her hair bounced when she walked, her eyes trained and focused ahead.

Kankuro noticed his little brother staring off into space, and followed the intimidating redhead's gaze. He smiled.

"You LIKE her, don't you?"

Gaara's head snapped away from the doorway and his brother, a faint burning sensation pricking his cheeks.

"Ha! I knew it! See, you're even blushing!"

Gaara shot a glare in his brother's direction, but Kankuro only laughed.

"I do NOT like Akara-san, Kankuro."

"Sure you do! I don't blame you, she's one fine girl. I'm just glad that she's single...I definately wouldn't mind a piece of that..."

Gaara didn't know what came over him. One minute, he'd been behind his desk, the next minute, he was in front of Kankuro, absolutely livid.

"Don't you DARE talk aboout her in such a manner. She would not appreciate being thought of as some little pinup in a teenager's bedroom, and I personally never wish to hear such derogatory language about her from my own family. Understand, Kankuro?"

Kankuro considered his next words carefully. After all, these could very well be his last words, if Gaara so chose to actually have him killed. It was times like these that you would absolutely hate for the political and military leader of the country to be your highly unstable baby brother...

Gaara was clutching his fists so hard the knuckles were a ghastly shade of white. Kankuro gulped.  
"Understood, Gaara..."

Gaara pointed out the door. "Get out of my office. Now."

~~~~~

Akara was in the training grounds, sweating profusely as each and every one of the thirteen windmill shuriken hit the target dummies dead-center in the head. She glared at the dummies, then walked up and yanked the shuriken from one. Sawdust and sand came hissing out of the cut in the dummy's burlap head.

She repeated the process twelve more times, then allowed the shuriken to be sealed back within the scroll she'd taken with her. The Konoha team had yet to leave, and as she sat there, she knew her friends would be leaving with it.

"I still have time for some kekkei genkei training..." she whispered to herself. This training was the one she needed the most. After all, the fact that her bloodline wasn't human probably wasn't a good thing were lack of practice was concerned.

She sighed. She'd conveniently "forgotten" to mention that fact to the others. No one in Suna knew she had demon blood, nor did they know exactly why she hardly ever used it on missions. It was quite simple, really: She didn't know how to control it still.

She concentrated hard, sending chakra from her chakra well in the Third Eye gate into her body, trying to keep the waves of mixed-blood chakra under control. She opened her eyes, and she found that she'd activated the Yashara without incident.

"Art of the Demon: Demon's Blade."

A blade of blue energy formed in her hands, enlongating the stubby blade of an average kunai she held in her hands. She focused in on the dummies, and with a wide arc she cut off their heads. Sawdust and sand flew everywhere, and she allowed the blade to disappear.

She then pushed a bit more chakra to her eyes, and forced them into the Amaterasu Yashara. She could see each tiny individual grain of sand, each tiny shaving of wood: it was a feeling like no other. She then flitted through some handsigns, and flicked her wrist behind her.

"Art of the Demon: Demon's Lash."

A long, electric-green whip extended from her fingertips and trailed behind her. She flicked it at the thirteen practice dummies, and they immediately melted from the poisonous chakra lash. The whip faded, leaving behind a huge mass of burlap, sawdust, and sand. She then took advantage of her insane speed, and used her Amaterasu Yashara to implode the fourteenth dummy she'd brought along as a spare. Panting, she deactivated the Yashara.

Four hours. She'd maintained control for four hours. She mentally gave herself a pat of the back. It was a milestone for her. Faint clapping was heard, and she turned to see the entire caravan from Konoha and her team, grinning like idiots and offering congratulations.

"Good work, Akara," said Maria, smiling broadly. Kristen and Kaori only glomped her, singing her praises.

The group from Konoha were stunned for the most part. Then, Naruto spoke up.

"That...was...AWESOME!"

Before she knew it, she had Lee, Sakura, Neji, Naruto, and the others gathered around her, asking where she learned such amazing techniques.

"Seriously, you were even faster than Lee! I didn't even think you were the one who blew up that dummy!"

"Remind me to never fight with you...it'd be very troublesome."

"I've never seen this kind of kekkei genkei before...is it exclusive only to Kiri?"

Akara paused, and turned to face Neji. "Yes. It is. I'm the last one of my kind to have this kekkei genkei."

"What happened to the others," asked Sakura. Maria, Kaori, and Kristen immediately blanched, and changed the subject.

"Say, why don't we eat at Akara's house? I'm sure Temari-hime and the others won't mind..." said Kaori rather hysterically. Everyone stared for a moment, then agreed.

~~~~~

Gaara still sat in his office. It was about five in the evening, and usually he'd be halfway home by now. But today, he felt that he needed time to think.

Did he like Akara? It was a thought that had plagued him all day. Sure, she was strong, smart, talented, and beautiful, but...

Oh Kami, did he just think she was beautiful?

He groaned in frustration and slammed his head on the desk. Not exactly the best idea, because now he had a whanging headache on top of being a complete and utter nervous wreck. Why the hell was he so worried?! You either like someone or you don't, and he obviously couldn't make up his mind. So he decided to head on home for some quiet.

Little did he know how far from quiet it would be.

~~~~~

Akara knew Gaara wasn't happy.

Especially when he'd started to bang his head against the wall. Repeatedly.

She figured she should've told him that the others would be there for dinner.

~~~~~

Kaori was sipping her drink when she was snatched from the table and shoved in the powder room under the staircase.

"What the...Temari-chan? Why did you shanghai me into a cramped powder room?"

"Listen, Kaori-chan, I have a question: Have you noticed if Akara-chan and Gaara were acting weird this week?"

Kaori thought about it. "I don't know about Gaara-san, but Akara-chan has been acting a bit strange lately..."

"Well, Gaara's been a little off too...so I was thinking, if you wanted to, we should try and get them together! They look cute together!"

Kaori's eyes flashed mischeviously. "I know precisely what you mean..."

They both grinned, and plotted their dasterdly plans.

"Oh, I do so LOVE matchmaking..."

~~~~~

"Gaara-sama?"

Gaara looked up to see Akara standing in his doorway. It'd been a few weeks since Gaara's little "episode", but the wall had been repaired, and Akara was sure that his skull hadn't been seriously damaged...

"Yes?"

"The council wishes to see us. They say it is important, and that this may possibly be an S-rank mission."

"Impossible. You are a mere Chuunin."

"Say what you please, but the council wishes to see us all the same."

~~~~~

"Oh...my...Kami..." said Gaara, shocked.

"Dear Lord above..." said Akara.

The two stared at the council members. There was a long, drawn-out, very awkward silence before...

"HELL NO!"

Baki winced. *Those two could be incredibly loud when they want to be...*

"I'm afraid no one else could handle it, Kazekage-sama," said an aging councilman.

"NO!"

"Akara-san, please..." pleaded a petite old lady.

"I refuse!"

"Alright you two," said Baki, laying it down in a way they could digest, "Here's the deal...you both go on a

high-level mission disguised as husband and wife. The objective is to seduce the leader of an extremely dangerous rebel group in Tea Country, then assassinate him. Just think of it as a paid vacation, only it's not for real."

The two mulled it over, before Gaara said something.

"Akara-san is a mere Chuunin. She could never perform this mission."

"Kazekage-sama, Akara-san has been made a Jonin."

"How?!"

"The council had made the decision to override your political power and through a petition of the ANBU she has worked under, they saw her fit for Jonin status."

"I'm a Jonin?"

Baki looked at the girl for the first time that day, and was shocked to see her eyes wide with disbelief.

"Yes, you are."

She then gave a huge grin, and looked at Gaara.

"Well, I guess you can't call me 'girl' or 'kunoichi' anymore...I'm almost an ANBU, and soon I'll be the captain."

"In your dreams," he replied, rather childishly. Baki sighed.

"So do you both accept?"

Gaara and Akara realised the futility of refusing, so they did what any sensible shinobi would've done.

"Hai," they said, bowing to the councilmen and councilwomen before them.

God...it's finally done...\*collapses\* Comment! \*throws more confetti\*



## 14 - Preparations

New chapter! FINALLY! \*Throws more confetti\*

Akara had tried to get in some training that afternoon. Temari and Kankuro had agreed to watch over Suna while Gaara was gone, and he sat in the shadows, watching.

Akara was standing in the center of the training area, stading before Neji, Lee, Kaori, and Naruto. From what Gaara could see, she'd challenged them to a sparring match. Gaara could only be skeptical.

*She's got a death wish, hasn't she? Even I couldn't beat Lee, Neji, and Naruto on my own...*

~~~~~

Akara rose into her taijutsu position, an image of elegance and grace. She was poised, balancing on the ball of one foot, and her hands were held out in a T-shape, eyes focused intently at the ground. Lee came at her first, foot swinging around to connect with the side of her head.

"Konoha Hurricane!" Lee almost hit her, but her head snapped up and her hands grabbed his ankle. She then used his momentum against him, throwing him six meters across the training field.

Neji then came at her, Bayukugan activated and palms flaring with chakra. However, her Yashara was activated, and his hands were smacked away like annoying gnats. She gave him a casual flick in the forehead, and he too flew back, crashing into a post that usually held a practice dummy.

Kaori and Naruto, sensing that she couldn't be beaten alone, decided to team up and catch her off-guard. She simply tossed them to the side like rag dolls.

She repeated this process with everyone there, including Temari. But no one could get close enough to even touch her. As the entire group picked themselves off the sandy ground, they all congratulated her on a sparring session well done.

"Good match, Akara-chan!"

"You were a formidable opponent, Akara-san!"

"Destiny declared you the rightful winner. Congratulations, Akara-sama."

She waved them off. "It was nothing, really," she declared, eyes slitted and feral.

"So," she called out, "anyone else want to challenge me?"

"I will," said a voice behind her.

~~~~~

Everyone gaped.

Gaara stood behind Akara, eyes cold and forbidding. They all knew that look: Gaara was getting serious.

Dead serious.

Akara smirked at him. "Looking to lose again, Gaara-sama?"

He only scowled. "I won't lose."

~~~~~

Akara and Gaara stood dead center, wind whipping their hair and clothing into a frenzy. They glared at one another, unblinking and willing to fight to the death.

At the very least.

Each went into their taijutsu stance. The others stared as Gaara sank low, lowering his center of gravity. They'd never known that he knew taijutsu: what else did they not know about him?

In a flash, they began.

All the shinobi in the vicinity dropped what they were doing to watch this awe-inspiring spectacle. The two flowed easily from one move to the next, grace and poise evident in each tiny movement. The moves weren't your standard moves, taught to all shinobi; they were so smooth and fluid, it was like the fighters were dancing. But in the fray, only Kaori and Maria noticed Akara twitch in pain.

~~~~~

Gaara was having a hard time: This girl was a master at this fighting style.

He dodged another fist, and went low to the ground to swing his leg and trip her. Before he could, though, he saw her twitch in pain, and she stopped. He watched in puzzlement and slight alarm as she clutched her head and screamed.

"NO! NO! NOT AGAIN!"

She coughed violently, horrible coughs that wracked her body and forced her to her knees. She let out a particularly horrid cough, and spit out blood.

Gaara went stock-still, frozen in shock.

"Gaara! What the hell did you do to her?!"

Kaori glared at Naruto. "Shut up! He didn't do anything! He didn't need to!"

Gaara only watched. Voice trembling slightly, he spoke.

"You're a demon," he stated.

All talking and yelling ceased. All shinobi backed away slightly, surprised. Akara gave a bitter smirk.

"So you figured it out, have you?"

"It was obvious," he said, a little stronger now. "You know the Demon's Dance taijutsu technique."

"I told you in our first fight," she said, rising slowly, "I told you that you should fear a demon child. You should have feared me."

"Hold on," yelled Naruto, the conversation finally clicking in his head, "you have a demon too?"

"Worse," she said, spitting out a bit more blood, "I don't contain a demon...I **am** a demon."

"No you aren't, Akara-chan! You may have demon blood, but you aren't a demon yourself." Akara waved off Kaori's remark.

"You know full well that it takes all I have in me to control that blood, Kaori. If I don't, then I'm as good as a demon."

~~~~~

That night was horrible.

Gaara might as well have not attempted sleep at all. After he and Akara walked home, she'd gone to her room without saying a word. Temari and Kankuro had simply shaken their heads at him, before they too went into their rooms.

Gaara didn't see the problem: he had a demon in him, and yet no one had reacted like this when he told them...maybe it was the fact that he was a guy?

Gaara rolled over for what felt like the thousandth time. Oh well...there wasn't much he could do. Besides, he had a mission tomorrow.

~~~~~

The duo ran through the forest, neither one speaking. Although she desperately wanted to kill the readhead, Akara knew that it would have to wait until after they completed the mission.

They stopped around noon, pausing only to rest and attempt to eat. By nightfall, they had reached a small village on the edge of Fire Country.

"Alright," said Gaara, speaking for the first time that day, "What's our cover?"

"We are Aika and Jiro Masayoshi," said Akara, looking for a cheap hotel they could stay in, "You are twenty-one, so act like it. I'll be twenty. We're posing as small-time weapon dealers from the outskirts of Wind Country, right on the border of Bird Country. We're looking to make a good business deal."

"Sounds like a good cover. It should stick."

"What we need to do," said Akara, perusing the newspaper for rooms, "is go into an alleyway or someplace and disguise ourselves. You need to change your hair color and hide that tattoo."

"And you," he shot back, "need to hide your bangs."

They began to walk again, ducking into a small alley and performing a temporary genjutsu. Gaara's vivid red hair turned a light strawberry-blonde, his eyes a blue topaz, and his tattoo disappeared. Akara's red and black hair became brown-black, and her porcelain skin was kissed with sun.

They exited the alleyway, and took a moment to look each other over for imperfections. Finding none, they kept walking.

"Alright, remember: we're husband and wife, so act like it. That means holding open doors and being all-around chivalrous."

"Whatever," Gaara muttered, wrapping his arm around Akara's waist.

Akara nodded, then took a left turn. A small, rather tidy-looking hotel came up before them, and they ordered a small room.

"Alright, here's your key. Have a nice night," said the middle-aged woman at the desk. Gaara and Akara walked down the hall, unlocked room ten, and stopped.

There was only one bed.

~~~~~

Done! Yays! Comment meh, people! *throws confetti*

And have a Merry Christmas! *skips away while humming Jingle Bells and sucking a candy cane*

15 - Fancy Dinner Party

Ha...I loved my Christmas! *jams out to new songs* I got iTunes, an iHome, and a crapload of junk! I love the holidays! *starts throwing red and green confetti*

"There is no way in HELL that I'm giving up the bed," Akara snarled.

"Good...because I'm not going to let you have it," Gaara shot back.

They locked each other into a death glare competition, and Akara threw her stuff down on the floor.

"I get the bed."

Gaara glared harder. "Contrary to that belief, I believe I will be getting the bed."

Akara smirked. "Whatever happened to chivalry?"

Gaara smirked back. "Who said that I'm not being chivalrous? I'm using samurai chivalry, which states that a woman has to shift for herself if she wants something done."

"If you think I'll let you get away with that remark, Gaara-san, then you are sadly mistaken."

Akara pushed him out of her way, and he pushed her back, sending her falling on her back on the bed. She grabbed the front of his shirt in an attempt to stay upright, and he came down with her.

They were in a very awkward position. Gaara had one leg between Akara's two legs. Her left hand had him held slightly above her, but she hadn't let go of his shirt. Her right wrist was enveloped in his left hand, while his right forearm kept him lifted above her. Their eyes locked in on each other, mirroring surprise, and was that...desire?

"Gaara-sama..." she breathed lightly, "get off me, please."

Why was she saying that when her heart was telling her to let him lay there?

Why did he not want to leave?

He slowly got off, and she sat up, fixing her hair. After an awkward silence, Gaara spoke.

"We might as well sleep in the bed together, because it will raise suspicion if we don't share it."

"You're right. We should probably fix the genjutsu so that it's fine-tuned and set for the duration of the mission."

"Agreed."

~~~~~

Gaara was sitting on the bed, fixing his tie and wondering what the hell could be taking Akara so long. She'd locked herself in the bathroom, and hadn't come out in a while. The creak of the bathroom door made him turn, and he vaguely remembered thanking Kami he did.

Akara's brown, nearly black altered hair had been curled and pulled back into a loose bun. Her makeup was flawless, with devil-red lips and liquid eyeliner. She wore a long, crimson dress with a slit that tempted him to touch but told him he'd die trying. Her long neck was bare, but she held a necklace with a bloodred diamond pendant. She seemed to be having difficulty getting it on.

"Gaara-sama," she said, walking toward him, "can you clasp this for me? I can't get it on by myself."

*Oh dear Kami...*

He wordlessly stood up. She was a full head shorter than him, he being six foot one, she being only about five foot six. He took the necklace from her outstretched hand, and he put it around her neck. Fixing the minute clasp, he couldn't help running a finger down her neck, gently stroking from nape to base. He heard her gasp sharply, and he turned her to face him.

"Let's go."

~~~~~

"Jiro, stop fidgeting," said Akara, using Gaara's cover, "you'll ruin your suit."

Gaara scowled, and glared at her. "Aika, don't reprimand me. It's so unlike you."

They were at a fancy dinner party being thrown by the leader of the rebels. He used his cover well, posing as the corporate leader of a major shipping company to recruit investors to his cause. The man heard Gaara, and walked up to them.

"Ah, the couple from Wind Country," he said, voice made loud with bravado and sake. Akara fluttered her eyelashes.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Ken-san. Jiro-koi, say hello to Ken-san. It's only polite."

Gaara rolled his eyes at her, and bowed. "Konnichiwa, Ken-san. I am Jiro Masayoshi. I see you've already met my wife Aika?"

"Yes," Ken replied, kissing Akara's hand. Gaara narrowed his eyes.

"Aika-chan, have you seen the refreshments table?"

Akara turned to face Gaara. "Why Jiro-koi, are you jealous? How terribly adorable!"

Gaara didn't answer her. Instead, he turned her to the table.

"I thought we'd agreed to not blow our cover," he hissed, disguising his movements with a well-placed reach for a glass of sake.

"I'm not. I'm pretending to be a playful, doting wife, *Jiro-koi...*"

Gaara glared. "Stop calling me that."

Akara smirked. "Would you rather I called you *Gaara-koi*?"

Gaara didn't answer her.

"Masayoshi! Both of you! Come here and meet the other investors!"

Gaara and Akara linked their arms together, and Akara put on her fake smile.

"Come, Jiro-koi," she said, walking toward Ken, "we have to be dignified."

"Oh yes, like I don't do that every day," he said sarcastically.

"I was speaking with my friend Kentaro here," said Ken, "and he was saying that he heard that Wind Country dwellers are supposed to be gifted dancers and singers. Is this true?"

"Well," said Gaara, slipping his arm around Akara's waist, "Wind Country is well-known for their education program...it's no wonder that word of our focus on the arts has spread..."

Gaara watched the man's face fall as he eyed the arm around Akara's waist. Gaara tightened his grip. He didn't trust this man. He didn't trust this man at all.

"Perhaps you both could give us a demonstration," said Ken, snapping his fingers.

One of the musicians in the corner pulled out a guitar. Akara instantly panicked.

Gaara pulled her out to the dance floor, and let go.

"Just do what's natural," he hissed.

Akara stood still. This was beginning to get out of hand, but before she could say that she'd rather sing first, the music began, a Latin beat.

She felt the music rush through her body, and she lowered her eyes. She began to move her hips, music making her body flow. The singer that evening began to sing again.

*Like a gift from the heavens,
It was easy to tell...*

It was love from above that could save me from hell...

Gaara stared, unable to look away. Akara had a magnetism about her when she danced...it seemed to only affect him, however.

*She had fire in her soul,
It was easy to see...
How the devil himself could be pulled out of me...*

Gaara walked forward, and tapped her shoulder. She looked at him through her eyelashes, and smirked. He wrapped his arm around her waist, joining into the rapidly-paced flamenco.

*There were drums in the air as she started to dance,
Every soul in the room keeping time with their hands and we sang*

The two moved in tandem, each movement evoking passion and fire.

*A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
And the voices rang like the angels sang, singing
A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
And we danced on into the night
And we danced on into the night*

Akara whirled, her skirt fluttering and wrapping around her legs. Gaara reached around and pulled her hair out of its bun, and the now-wavy hair cascaded free.

*Like a piece to the puzzle that falls into place
You could tell how we felt from the look on our faces*

Gaara felt himself losing control, as if he were a spectator looking down on his own life. Akara smoldered, igniting an inner flame in his soul. She passed mere millimeters from his body, her lips grazing his cheek.

*We was spinning in circles with the moon in our eyes
No room left to move in between you and I*

They were closer now, their fingers laced together and his right arm around her waist. Her left hand rested on her shoulder.

*We forgot where we were and we lost track of time
And we sang to the wind, as we danced through the night*

Each distraction melted away as their breathing mingled together and their heartrate skyrocketed. All that was present were the two of them.

*A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
And the voices rang like the angels sang, singing*

A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
And we danced on into the night
And we danced on into the night

The man with the guitar went into a solo as the crowd watched the couple whirl, spin, dip and dance. They were like fire and ice, wind and spirit, moving like they were mere extensions of their partner. They all felt the passion, the burning heat...it was incredible.

Like a gift from the heavens
It was easy to tell
It was love from above that could save me from hell

They slowed with the music, his hands running along her curves, caressing her form. Her breathing went ragged, and he was moments from ravishing her right then and there.

She had fire in her soul
It was easy to see
How the devil himself could be pulled out of me

One of her hands tangled in his hair; their eyes, though changed, burned for each other.

There were drums in the air as she started to dance
Every soul in the room keeping time with their hands and we sang

Dip, whirl, shuffle, and dip; her form melded with his, keeping perfect time with him.

A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
And the voices rang like the angels sang, singing
A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
And we danced on into the night
And we danced on into the night

The crowd began to cheer, amazed with the lithe, beautiful female and the sexy, talented male.

A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
And the voices rang like the angels sang, singing
A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
And we danced on into the night
And we danced on into the night

They slowed, and he cupped her head in his hand. Slowly, he brought her leg to rest near his hip, and her body into a low dip. His eyes burned into hers.

A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
And the voices rang like the angels sang, singing
A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a
A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a

A-yo-a-yo-a-yo-a

Akara didn't know what made her do it, but she did it: she kissed him. It was everything she had wanted it to be: He was gentle, soft...tempered with desire, she just had to admit: the Kazekage could *kiss*.

And we danced on into the night

The song ended, and the crowd burst into applause. Gaara and Akara were forcibly jerked into the alien place called Real Life, and they both broke into twin smirks. Both joined hands, and they bowed.

"Amazing," exclaimed Ken. He scurried up to them, reminding Gaara of a rodent.

"Aika! You and your husband are certainly the life of the party," he said, grasping Akara's hand. Gaara found himself wanting to *Sabaku Kyuu* the man, and forced himself to repress that particular urge.

"Now then...Aika, could you please come with me for a moment...?"

Akara looked at Gaara, who just nodded. She let go of his hand, and he let her go. Gaara leaned against a pillar, and lightly pressed his fingers to his lips.

Akara had kissed him. She'd *kissed him*.

Akara returned to his side, and he snapped out of it.

"Ken is pleased with my performance with you. He's taken the bait, Gaara-san. Phase one: complete."

Oh dear...it looks like things are heating up between Gaara and Akara, hmm? This next chapter might make people mad at me...please refrain from throwing tomatoes at me! if you wanna throw tomatoes, throw them at Sasuke! He EATS them!

16 - Realize

Heyo!~ New chapter! DUCK! JK, seriously tho...a word of advice: Listen to Realize by Colby Callait and Take Me or Leave Me from Rent when you read this. Onward to the fic!

The two entered the hotel once again, and stopped. Akara and Gaara both suddenly became painfully aware that there was only one bed, and they would be sharing it for the remainder of their mission. So then, Gaara did what any other normal person would have done in that situation:

"Shotgun on shower."

~~~~~

Gaara sat on the bed a few minutes later, listening to the shower running. He was thinking hard about the kiss. Truth be told, kissing Akara wasn't unpleasing: it was actually rather nice. But he knew, even if he didn't want to, that Akara probably didn't think of him that way.

He sighed, and turned to face the wall. *Might as well fall asleep before she argues with me on which side I'll sleep on...*

A voice floated out the bathroom door, and Gaara's half-closed eyes shot open. In two strides, he was already at the door with his ear pressed against it.

*Take time to realize,  
That your warmth is crashing down on in...  
Take time to realize,  
That I am on your side...  
Didn't I, didn't I tell you?*

Gaara strained to hear, brow furrowed. Tell him what?

*But I can't spell it out for you,  
No, it's never gonna be that simple...  
No, I can't spell it out for you...*

She was singing with a hint of sadness in her voice, almost regretful. Gaara's shoulders drooped slightly. She did regret kissing him.

*If you just realize what I just realized,  
Then we'd be perfect for each other  
And will never find another...  
Just realized what I just realized,  
We'd never have to wonder if*

*We missed out on each other now...*

The shower shut off, and Gaara dove for the bed. Picking up a scroll, he waited with bated breath for Akara to come out and scream at him. A few minutes passed, and he heard what he'd been dreading: the click of the bathroom door opening. He looked up from the scroll, and felt his jaw go slack.

Akara wore a black nightdress that cut off at her thighs, accented with a touch of black lace around the hem and collar. She sat on the left side of the bed, and he sat there on the right, waiting for her to turn and reprimand him. He heard her lift her hand, but the slap that he was expecting didn't come.

Turning, he saw her braiding her hair, as though it were normal to be in a hotel room with the Kazekage in a skimpy negligee. She'd dropped the genjutsu, and her hair looked dark with wet in the cheap incandescent light. She finished, and turned her head to look at him.

"Good night, Kazekage-sama."

~~~~~

Gaara awoke halfway through the night, feeling something abnormal. He sat up, and rubbed his eyes. He then felt the difference: Akara wasn't on her side of the bed. He looked over to the left, and froze.

Akara was standing in front of the window, hair let out from its braid and the strap of her dress sliding off her shoulder. Her eyes were half-lidded, and she had a little smirk on her face.

"Hello, Gaara-sama," she said, enunciating each syllable perfectly with her perfect pink lips.

She walked over, the moonlight making her a mere silhouette. She lay beside him, and she slowly pulled the covers off his body. She ran a hand down his bare chest, and purred.

"You're so very good looking, you know that?"

She lay down next to him, and her eyes locked in on his.

"Take me."

~~~~~

Gaara sat up, and snapped his head to the left. He let out a sigh of relief: Akara was still on her side, breathing deeply in that quiet way Gaara most associated with sleep. He relaxed his muscles, and rubbed his eyes.

That was the second time he'd had a dream about Akara in two months. He cursed lightly under his breath, and got out of bed. What the hell was wrong with him?! Why did his mind insist on torturing him?! A whimper made him turn back to the bed.

Akara was shivering- no, shaking. A look of intense pain was etched into her face, and she was making noises that sounded to him like a wounded animal. As he watched, she gave out a weak little wail, and

tears fell from her closed eyes. Walking over, Gaara sat on the edge of the bed, and did what first came to his mind: he rubbed her back.

She stopped whimpering, and Gaara started to whisper a lullaby.

*Sleep desert baby,  
Please don't you cry,  
The moon has come with the night...*

*Sleep desert baby,  
Safe here and warm,  
Until the moon says goodbye.*

She calmed, and quit her violent shaking. Gaara paused, and looked down on her. He didn't know what had made him sing that song. He hadn't heard it since he was six.

He pushed it aside, and went back on his side of the bed. Oh well...he'd figure it out later.

~~~~~

The next day found them both at a garden party at Ken's private onsen. Dressed in the same kimono from the Summer Festival, Akara nudged Gaara's arm.

"It's time to initiate Phase Two, Gaara-sama. Ken-san is now interested in me, which is exactly what we need for him to do. If I just keep playing hard to get, he'll eventually break down and ask me to spend the night with him."

Gaara tensed. He knew that the plan required Akara to sleep with Ken, but Gaara was infuriated about it all the same. To think of that arrogant man even touching Akara...wait, what the heck?

Gaara mentally kicked himself. *No! She's a friend...just a friend, nothing more...*

He sighed. Hell, who was he trying to kid? He'd much rather be the one Akara was trying to seduce than be the man she just happened to be teammates with.

"Aika-chan! Jiro-san! Glad you could make it!"

Ken scurried up to them in that ratlike way of his, and they bowed, Akara fluttering her eyelashes coyly.

"Hello, Ken-san! Your onsen is absolutely lovely."

Ken acted modest. "Oh, it's just a simple little onsen. Say, a few of the investors are going to stay after for a dip in the hot springs. Will you join us?"

Even though she was panicking, Gaara had to give Akara her props for keeping up the cool facade. Ken was moving faster than the plan had anticipated, and Gaara knew it. Akara soon regained her poise, and laughed.

"Oh, Ken-san! You embarrass me! Jiro-koi, what do you think? Should we stay?"

Gaara cleared his throat. "I don't see why not, Aika-koi."

Akara gave a deep blush, and Gaara instantly kicked himself for saying it. Just using that little term of endearment set Akara off her stride, and he'd gone and done it. Ken seemed not to notice, because he just laughed and scurried away.

Akara gave another laugh, this time one that wasn't fake, but a real, honest-to-goodness laugh. To Gaara, it sounded like the lovely little windchimes vendors sold on the streetcorners in Suna.

"Well, Gaara-sama," she said, recovering, "You certainly figured out your character fast!"

Gaara cleared his throat again, trying to hide the flush on his face. "Akara-san, keep your voice down..."

"Aika-chan! Jiro-san! Come here!"

The two instantly reverted back to their previous states, and with a smile on her face, Akara dragged Gaara to the group.

"Come, Jiro-koi. We must think of the plan."

Done! Sorry if any of you are mad about the whole Akara-going-to-screw-Ken thing...COMMENTS ARE LOVE!!

17 - Secret Agent Man (or, um, Woman?)

Oh lordy...sorry for not updating in FOREVER!

~~~~~

Akara and Gaara sat, listening as the other “investors” laughed at Ken’s not-funny jokes. Akara was obviously bored, staring off into space and absentmindedly swirling the sake in her glass. Gaara stared ahead, willing Ken to fall over dead of his own accord.

They had been asked by the odious man to stay behind with the other investors for a night at the onsen, and Gaara felt a pang of anger whenever Ken gave Akara a sidelong glance.

“Well, frivolity aside,” said Ken, “let’s relax and have a bit of quiet, yes?” Akara gave her fake smile to the man.

“It would be a pleasure, right Jiro-koi?”

Gaara nodded. “It would be appreciated. Thank you.”

They all went to separate dressing rooms, the wives and “female guests” in one room, the men in the other. The men stepped out, and slid into the water, shortly followed by their wives. Akara slipped in next to Gaara, maintaining enough distance for comfort but enough to keep their cover.

“Gaara-sama, we have to complete the mission tonight. We cannot afford to stall much longer.”

“I understand.”

Akara smiled once again, and winked at him. “Just leave it to me, okay, Gaara-sama?”

~~~~~

They all soaked for a while, Akara playing her role of a socialite wife well. Gaara watched her as he sat with the men, waiting for her signal. They’d agreed that Ken was likely to ask her during the garden party to sleep with him, and that the signal would be a jerk of the head. Ken had fulfilled his part, and now they could only wait.

“Say, Jiro,” said one of the investors, “your wife’s rather pretty. Are all the women in Wind Country that beautiful?”

Gaara looked over at the man, then back at Akara. She was laughing at something one of the women had said, and he was once again reminded of wind chimes.

“Some of them,” he said, eyes still on Akara, “some of them.”

~~~~~

“Aika-chan,” said Ken, swimming up beside Akara, “a word, if you please.”

Akara looked at him, and nodded. “What do you wish?”

Ken looked down at his fingers. “Well, Aika, I was wondering if you would like to render me a...well...service.”

“Service? What kind?”

Ken blushed. It may have been from the sake, but Akara knew better.

“A...intimate service.”

She put on a wide-eyed look of surprise. “Ken-san, are you implying that you’d like me to sleep with you?”

“Not unless you wouldn’t want to, of course...”

Akara looked over at Gaara, and jerked her head. He caught the signal, and nodded.

“My husband is highly protective...we would need to keep it quiet. How about midnight? Here, at the onsen?”

“Perfect,” he said, a wide smile plastered on his face, “but don’t be alarmed if my bodyguards search you before you enter. They’re paranoid, those Kiri-nin.”

Akara freaked.

“Kiri-nin?! Is it safe?”

“Perfectly,” said Ken, as though the thought was laughable.

Oh, if he only knew.

~~~~~

That night, Gaara and Akara prepared themselves: Gaara wore an ANBU outfit, while Akara wore a black kimono. They stole out into the night, carefully choreographing their movements; after all, Akara knew how dangerous a ninja from Kiri could be.

“Gaara-sama, we’re nearing the onsen. Lay low.”

“I’ve done assassination missions before, Akara-san. I know what I’m doing.”

A snort. "This coming from the guy who can't even sense..."

"We'd agreed not to mention that, didn't we?"

"Sure we did, Gaara-sama..."

Akara stopped in front of the gate that led into the onsen. She turned to face Gaara.

"Stay safe."

~~~~~

Gaara stuck near the wall, waiting for Akara to get past the checkpoint. He heard the Kiri Chuunin at the gate laugh nervously. Oh good, they were dealing with a novice.

"Handcuffs? Kunai? Wire?" The ninja looked at her suspiciously.

"What can I say," said Akara demurely, "I've got a bit of a fetish."

Gaara suppressed a snort. Really, how can you possibly take a girl like Akara seriously when it came to these kinds of matters? The ninja did, apparently, because he let her through. Gaara snuck along the perimeter, and his sand snapped the Kiri-nin's neck. The redhead chuckled.

This mission was a cakewalk.

~~~~~

Akara walked into the room, was searched again, and locked within. She heaved an aggravated sigh.

Honestly, Chuunin in Kiri are slacking off, she thought, was I ever this sloppy? Nooo...

She untied her obi, and slipped it off to reveal a black lace bodice and lacy lingerie. She also wore fishnet stockings, and fishnet fingerless gloves. Her hair was held back in a loose bun with a pair of black lacquered chopsticks. She heard the door open, and Ken walked in, naked except a pair of boxers. Akara sighed, and took the cuffs from her bag.

This mission was a joke.

~~~~~

Gaara slunk through the hallways of the onsen, killing every ninja in his way. As another novice fell, he heard Akara's voice floating out from behind a door.

"Are you ready," she asked.

~~~~~

"Yes," Ken breathed. Akara smirked.

"You've been bad, haven't you," she whispered, tugging at his wire-restrained hands. He winced, and then nodded.

"And you know what happens to bad boys," she asked, twirling a kunai on her index finger. He shook his head.

"What happens?"

She scratched the side of his face with the kunai, drawing blood. Pressing her face close to his, she gave her slow, seducing smile.

"They're punished," she murmured, licking the blood off his face. He hissed against the sting of saliva in a fresh wound.

"Have you been a bad boy?"

Ken choked back a moan. "Yes."

"Good. Then Yashara no Akara will punish you."

She snapped his neck, then slashed his throat. He was dead before he hit the floor.

Akara sighed, and spit the blood from her mouth. Pulling on her kimono, she was interrupted by a knock.

~~~~~

A Kiri-nin was dispatched to check on his master. He really knew that he shouldn't, but orders were orders: watch the Principle.

He knocked on the door. "Ken-san, are you alright?"

No answer. He knocked again, and he suddenly realized how quiet it was.

"Ken-san?"

No answer. He tore a hole in the rice paper door, and peered through. All he saw was blood, and a dead Ken lying on the floor.

~~~~~

"Crap," said Akara, jumping out the window. She'd been nearly caught. A figure landed beside her, and she swiped at it with her kunai. Gaara had to dodge in order to avoid getting stabbed.

"Kuso, Gaara-sama! Warn me next time you do that!"

"If you don't keep running for the hotel, then there will be no next time."

~~~~~

Naruto and Sakura were yawning at their post. They'd been stuck with guarding the gate, and so were actually fairly surprised to see Gaara and Akara running up, Akara in her training clothes and Gaara in ANBU gear. Sakura stared.

"Do I want to know?"

Akara stared back.

"I don't think you do."

~~~~~

"Remind me to thank Tsunade-hime for letting us hide out in Konoha. We didn't expect to be caught assassinating a rebel leader, but what're you going to do?" Akara flopped down on Sakura's couch. Gaara had passed out in Sakura's guest bedroom, and Sakura had hung up the phone.

"Well, I just called Temari and Kankuro, so they'll be in Konoha to get you guys. Naruto left to get bandages, so now I want to know: what the heck happened?"

"Well, the council, being the idiots they are, sent us on a mission together."

"Oh," said Sakura slyly, "romantic?"

"Not at all," Akara muttered. "We were to eliminate the coordinator of a rebel group. Ken Izuni?"

"Of Izuni Shipping Corps? Well whodathunkit..."

"Yeah, and now we're probably getting chased by said rebels," Akara finished. They sat that way for a while, before Akara spoke again.

"I'm bored. I'm going to mess around with Gaara-sama while he's sleeping."

"ARE YOU MAD?!"

Sakura tried to drag the Suna kunoichi back to the couch, but failed as the door to the guest bedroom was opened.

Gaara lay peacefully on the bed, one hand hanging off the edge of the bed and the other sprawled across his chest. Akara sighed at the sight.

"Aw...just like a little angel," she said sarcastically. Sakura stared at her.

"Yeah...a psychotic angel! Now let's not do this, please..."

“Too bad he won’t look like that for long...”

Akara pulled out an air horn, and Sakura paled.

“Are you sane? That’s like asking for death!”

“Ah, don’t worry about it,” Akara said, putting it up to his ear, “this is how Temari-chan wakes him up every morning.”

She turned to Sakura. “You might want to cover your ears.”

~~~~~

The blaring sound of an air horn sliced through Gaara’s sleep like a kunai through wet rice paper.

“SONOFA...!”

He fell off the bed, clutching his ears. “WHAT THE frack WAS THAT FOR? SERIOUSLY AKARA-SAN, WHAT THE HELL!”

Akara looked down at him, a huge grin plastered on her face.

“Glad to see you’re awake, Gaara-sama. Temari and Kankuro are waiting in the Hokage’s office. Get dressed and let’s go.”

~~~~~

Whee!~ New update! Comments are LOVE!

18 - Think of It As a Vacation

New chappie! *throws confetti* I hope you like it!

As soon as they reached the Hokage tower, an overzealous Temari immediately tackled Gaara.

“Oh my Kami! Gaara, are you okay? Did you get hurt? Never EVER leave on a dangerous mission without telling me again, do you hear me? I was worried sick!”

“Erg...Temari...can’t...breathe...”

Akara snickered. “Talk about a serious case of Mother Hen Syndrome...”

“Akara-chan!”

Akara was promptly glomped by Maria. “I was so worried! Are you okay? Did anyone hurt you? Are there any bruises?”

“Maria-sensei...I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?”

Akara looked at her skeptically. Maria stared, then let her go. “Sorry.”

“Gaara, you really should’ve seen her,” laughed Kankuro, “it was hysterical...she was screaming at Baki to tell her where you were. I can’t believe I didn’t tape that!”

Gaara whacked his brother in the head. “Shut up.”

~~~~~

And so it was decided that the Sand Sibs and Akara would stay with Sakura for the night. Sakura had no problem with it.

“It’ll be like a slumber party!”

Temari laughed. “We should seriously stay for another day...Gaara desperately needs a vacation...”

“I do not!”

“Oh, come on!”

“No!”

Temari fumed for a minute, then her voice became sugar-sweet.

"Please, little brother," she pleaded, her eyes going big and innocent, "Can we stay for another day?" Gaara looked at his sister, and immediately looked away.

"Please," she pleaded again, her lower lip shaking slightly. Gaara took one look, and melted.

"Fine," he groaned. Temari squealed and glomped him.

"Thank you, Gaara!"

She turned to look at a stunned Akara and Sakura. "The Shojo Face. One look, and Gaara is putty."

~~~~~

Sakura, Akara, and Temari stood in the kitchen, radio on and gossip flowing like water. Kaori and Kizumi walked in, grocery bags full.

"Hey guys," said Kaori, plopping down a bag of vegetables, "Maria-sensei has the tofu. She had to go feed her cat first."

"God, I hate that thing," said Akara, filling a pot with water, "Why the heck did she bring the damn thing in the first place?"

"She loves that thing," said Kizumi, "no way would she leave it."

"Hey Sakura," said Akara, "Turn it up! I like this song!"

*I'm in the business of misery;
Let's take it from the top.
She's got a body like an hourglass, it's ticking like a clock.
It's a matter of time before we all run out;
When I thought he was mine she caught him by the mouth.*

Kaori and Sakura sang together, swaying and throwing ingredients into various pots and pans. Maria came in, and Maria and Akara started in on the second part.

*I waited eight long months,
She finally set him free.
I told him I couldn't lie he was the only one for me.
Two weeks and we caught on fire,
She's got it out for me,
But I wear the biggest smile.*

Akara and Kizumi jammed out to the minor instrumental, and all the girls sang together for the chorus.

*Whoa, I never meant to brag
But I got him where I want him now.
Whoa, it was never my intention to brag
To steal it all away from you now.
But God does it feel so good,
Cause I got him where I want him now.
And if you could then you know you would.
It's gonna just feel so...
It just feels so good.*

Temari and Maria tossed Sakura and Kaori the tofu, which they threw in the hot wok. Together, Temari and Maria began the next verse.

*Second chances they don't ever matter, people never change.
Once a whore you're nothing more, I'm sorry, that'll never change.
And about forgiveness, we're both supposed to have exchanged.
I'm sorry honey, but I passed it up, now look this way.*

Akara began the next verse as the other girls burst out laughing. She spun around, threw some peas into the wok with the tofu, and began.

*Well there's a million other girls who do it just like you.
Looking as innocent as possible to get to who,
They want and what they like it's easy if you do it right.
Well I refuse, I refuse, I refuse!*

All of them joined together for another chorus, each giggling during the instrumental.

*Whoa, I never meant to brag
But I got him where I want him now.
Whoa, it was never my intention to brag
To steal it all away from you now.
But God does it feel so good,
Cause I got him where I want him right now.
And if you could then you know you would.
It's gonna just feel so...
It just feels so good.*

Neji, Gaara, Lee, Kankuro, Shikamaru, Naruto, Kiba, Hinata, and Tenten were sitting outside in the living room, staring at the kitchen door.

“What the hell are they doing in there?”

*I watched his wildest dreams come true
Not one of them involving you
Just watch my wildest dreams come true
Not one of them involving...*

Akara and Temari stopped, waiting out the instrumental. Kaori and the others were nearly done with the food, and Akara poured the pork and the beef (in separate pots) onto two plates. The instrumental ended, and Kaori and Kizumi began.

*Whoa, I never meant to brag
But I got him where I want him now.*

All the girls started in.

*Whoa, I never meant to brag
But I got him where I want him now.
Whoa, it was never my intention to brag
To steal it all away from you now.
But God does it feel so good,
Cause I got him where I want him now.
And if you could then you know you would.
It's gonna just feel so...
It just feels so good.*

“Oh man,” said Sakura, “I never get tired of that song!”

“I know, right?”

Kaori and Kizumi finished the rice, and dumped it into a huge bowl. Maria took the tofu off the heat and put it onto a plate, while Akara got out the bowls. Opening the door with a bang, the girls smiled and/or smirked.

“Dinner’s ready!”

Done! The Shojo Face will be showing up a lot during the series, so watch for it! Comment!

19 - Madness? This...Is...A...SLUMBER PARTY!

Chapter for my frendlings! *throws more confetti, janitor dude sobs at the never-ending mess*

The next day dawned bright and early. Gaara and Kankuro, however, saw none of this; they instead decided they'd sleep in.

Their door creaked open, revealing an ominous shadowed figure. The figure stalked into Sakura's guest room, silently skipping over piles of clothing that the boys had so carelessly left on the floor. In one hand she held a pack of markers; in the other she held a squeeze bottle of honey. Stealing up to the redhead on the top bunk, she uncapped a pink marker, and began to draw...

~~~~~

Gaara and Kankuro were jerked out of their peaceful sleep by the sound of Akara screaming.

"BOTH OF YOU GET YOUR LAZY ASSES UP OR ELSE! I SWEAR I'LL COME IN THERE AND GET YOU UP MYSELF IF YOU DON'T!"

Gaara woke with a jerk, and promptly fell on the floor. Kankuro had banged his head on the top bunk, and was currently rubbing his forehead. Gaara rubbed his hair, and paused.

There was something in his hair.

Something STICKY.

"TEMARI!"

~~~~~

"What did you do, Akara-chan?"

Akara giggled into her eggs. "Poured honey in their hair and drew on their faces."

Gaara and Kankuro burst into the kitchen, both in a foul mood. Gaara had little pink hearts on his face, a red heart where his tattoo usually was, and a green clover on his forehead. The circles around his eyes were darker, and looked a bit smeared. Kankuro, on the other hand, had red, blue, purple, yellow, and green squiggles and curlicues on his face. They both had twin death glares, and their hair was spiked with honey.

Both boys glared at a now-laughing Akara.

"Kami," she said, wiping the tears from her eyes, "you two look absolutely ridiculous!"

"It was your doing, wasn't it?"

"Got that right, Gaara-sama."

"Fix it. Now."

"No."

Gaara glared at her again. Normally, people would wither under this look. Not Akara: she just started laughing harder.

"You know," she said between gales of laughter, "You're hilarious when you're trying to be scary. Like a toddler who doesn't get his way..."

"Excuse me? A toddler? What are you then, a five-year-old?"

"You can't come up with a better insult, can you?"

Gaara opened his mouth to yell, but found he couldn't think of a thing to say. Akara smirked.

"You've been owned, Kazekage-sama. Owned for the third time. How's it feel to lose to a girl?"

He turned away, stalking to the bathroom. "Shut up."

~~~~~

Sakura decided to have a slumber party while the Sand Sibs were still there. Pulling out futons and pillows, Akara and Sakura prepared the room while Temari was popping popcorn.

"So, Akara-chan," she said, "do you argue often with Gaara-kun?"

Akara grinned. "He makes it too easy...it's funny how riled up he can get..."

"Riled up?"

"Yeah... you know, this is the third time I embarrassed him in front of other people. I did it once on the way to the tower; once again on the day I first visited Konoha, and today. It's really rather fun."

"Fun? Oh," said Temari, walking in with a huge bowl of popcorn in hand, "you mean bugging the hell out of Gaara? That's entertainment of a sort you can't find anywhere else on the planet."

"When are the others arriving," asked Akara. Sakura looked at her alarm clock.

"About a half hour. I invited Kaori-chan, Kizumi-chan, Hinata-chan, Maria-san, Tenten-chan, and Ino-chan."

"I don't believe I've met Ino-chan," said Akara as she pulled out her nightclothes. They all began to get

dressed, gossiping over the Jonin and Chuunin guys. Akara wore a red tube top, black silk pants, and her hair up in a loose bun. Temari had let down her hair, and wore purple and off-white silk pajamas. Sakura wore a pink tank top and red shorts, with her hair down. The doorbell rang, and they all ran out giggling.

“Hey,” said Kaori and Kizumi happily as they entered. Kaori wore sky blue cotton sweatpants, a white tank top, and her honey blonde hair in a long braid. Kizumi wore pink and purple pajamas with blue flowers on them and her brown hair in a ponytail.

“Hey, Kaori-chan,” said Akara, letting them in, “did you bring...?”

“Yup,” said Kaori, “Memoirs of a Geisha and House of Flying Daggers. Oh, and Hero if the boys decide to join us.”

“Speaking of which,” said Sakura, “What are the boys going to do?”

“Naruto invited a bunch of them to his house for a guy’s only sleepover,” said Temari.

The bell rang again, and Ino and Tenten entered, Hinata in tow. Ino wore purple short-shorts and a white tank top, hair in its signature ponytail. Hinata had left her hair down, and wore white silk pajamas. Tenten wore red satin pajamas with a gold dragon stitched on it, her hair up in her usual buns.

“Let’s get the party started!”

~~~~~

“Man, this party’s boring,” said Kankuro.

Gaara, Kankuro, Shikamaru, Lee, Neji, Choji, Kiba, and Shino were at Naruto’s apartment, and the truth was that the party was going nowhere. Naruto looked over at Kankuro angrily.

“I’d like to see you come up with an idea,” he said irritably. Gaara groaned.

“You’re all a bunch of idiots.”

Neji looked over at Gaara. “Oh, and you have an idea?”

“I do.”

Shikamaru sat up. “What is it?”

Gaara smirked. “First rule of being the youngest: snoop on the elder sister’s party.”

~~~~~

“Honestly, Hinata-chan,” said Kaori, “You have such pretty hair!”

"I know," said Ino, "even I'm jealous!"

The girls were all doing each other's hair, radio on and gossip flowing.

"So Kaori," said Sakura, braiding Akara's hair, "you have a thing for Neji, don't you?"

Kaori choked on her drink. "Are you serious," she exclaimed, "He'd never like someone like me!"

"A-actually," said Hinata, piping in as Ino wove white ribbon into Hinata's dark hair, "Neji-nii-san a-always t-told me he w-wanted a sweet, p-pretty girl. S-someone who was smart, b-but shy..."

"But I'm not pretty in the least!"

"Oh stop being so modest," said Temari, brushing her sandy blonde hair, "You look very pretty."

"Tema-chan's right," Akara said, mouth full of popcorn, "You're way prettier than me."

"Now Akara-chan's being modest," said Kizumi. Sakura and Ino laughed.

"Akara, you are a beauty in your own right," said Sakura, tying a red ribbon onto the end of Akara's braid, "I'm surprised that Kankuro and Gaara don't say so every day."

"Gaara-sama would never...!" began Akara. Temari stopped her.

"Nope. I think he likes you. And from how you just reacted, I'd say you like him too."

~~~~~

Gaara whacked his forehead on a tree branch. Kankuro snorted.

"Smooth move, Kazekage."

"Shut up, Kankuro," he said, rubbing his forehead. Neji smirked.

"Why so nervous? Did Temari speak the truth?"

"All of you shut up. They're talking again."

~~~~~

"I do NOT like Gaara-sama!"

Kaori snorted. "You realize that by making a huge deal out of it, you immediately prove us right, right?"

"Point is, I do not like Gaara-sama," said Akara, pouting. Temari just shook her head.

"Whatever...let's do karaoke!"

“Okay!”

SNAP! CRASH! Thud...

“KUSO! KANKURO, YOU IDIOT!”

The girls all looked out the window. Then they burst out laughing.

The branch the boys had been sitting on had apparently crashed to the ground. Kiba and Naruto were sprawled on the ground, Lee sitting on their backs. A disgruntled Neji blew a strand of hair out of his face while Shino got up off Neji's legs to dust himself off. Shikamaru and Choji were a tangle of limbs, and Gaara had a half-unconscious Kankuro on his back.

“Get off me you fat asshole,” said Gaara as he pushed his brother off of him. Akara and Temari laughed harder.

“Looks like you boys got here just in time for karaoke,” said Sakura.

~~~~~

“Who's up first,” asked Kankuro, flopping down on the couch in his sleep clothes. The boys had deliberated, and decided they would join the girls. Kankuro in question wore black shorts and a gray shirt. No one answered his query.

“How about Akara-san,” said Gaara. Akara whacked him in the head.

“ABOSOLUTELY NOT!”

“You think you can't do it?”

Akara pouted. “No...I just don't think I'm that good...”

Kaori and Temari looked at each other, and sprouted twin evil grins.

“Go ahead,” said Temari, “I've never heard you sing before...”

“You'll love it,” said Kaori, “She's awesome.”

“No, I am NOT good in any sense of the word.”

“Do it,” called out Kankuro. Soon, the entire room was yelling and calling for her to go up. Finally, she relented.

“Alright, fine. But I get to choose my own song.”

She walked up, and flipped through the song list. She paused on one, and selected it.

"I can't believe I'm about to do this..."

*Hey Jude, don't make it bad.
Take a sad song and make it better.
Remember to let her into your heart,
Then you can start to make it better.*

She began to sway in place, eyes half-shut and voice smooth and soft.

*Hey Jude, don't be afraid.
You were made to go out and get her.
The minute you let her under your skin,
Then you begin to make it better.*

She raised her eyes to look at Gaara. He locked eyes with her, and she immediately flicked her eyes away.

*And anytime you feel the pain, hey Jude, refrain,
Don't carry the world upon your shoulders.
For well you know that it's a fool who plays it cool
By making his world a little colder.*

Gaara was dumbstruck. Her voice held all of them spellbound.

*Hey Jude, don't let me down.
You have found her, now go and get her.
Remember to let her into your heart,
Then you can start to make it better.*

She wandered among them, eyes no longer looking at the screen. Occasionally, she'd pause by one of them, only to continue on to the next person.

*So let it out and let it in, hey Jude, begin,
You're waiting for someone to perform with.
And don't you know that it's just you, hey Jude, you'll do,
The movement you need is on your shoulder.*

Kaori and Temari suddenly got up, and joined Akara in the song. Each of them sang beautifully, harmonizing with the others.

*Hey Jude, don't make it bad.
Take a sad song and make it better.
Remember to let her under your skin,
Then you'll begin to make it
Better better better better better better, oh.*

All three walked to the front of the group, and began swaying side to side, smiles on their faces.

Na na na na na ,na na na, hey Jude...
Na na na na na ,na na na, hey Jude...
Na na na na na ,na na na, hey Jude...

“Okay, Gaara-sama! You sing now!”

“Uh...no.”

Temari smirked. “Don’t make me use the Shojo Face again...”

“Alright fine! I’ll do it.”

Gaara got up. He wore a black shirt and a pair of red boxers. Snatching the microphone from Akara, he turned to face the group.

“I want you all to know that you guys suck.”

“We love you too, Gaara,” said Kankuro, “so shut up and sing.”

Dear Prudence, won't you come out to play?
Dear Prudence, greet the brand new day
The sun is up, the sky is blue
It's beautiful and so are you
Dear Prudence, won't you come out to play?

His voice was rough, but had a soft quality. He closed eyes and sang low and sweet.

Dear Prudence, open up your eyes
Dear Prudence, see the sunny skies
The wind is low, the birds will sing
That you are part of everything
Dear Prudence, won't you open up your eyes?

He paused, and everyone laughed in an easygoing way. Dear Prudence was Akara’s favorite song, and she joined in.

Look around round
Look around round round
Look around

Gaara grinned, and Akara laughed.

Dear Prudence, let me see you smile
Dear Prudence, like a little child
The clouds will be a daisy chain
So let me see you smile again

Dear Prudence, won't you let me see you smile?

He looked at her when he sang it. She knew he did. It was hard to miss, and since he asked so nicely, she did as he'd asked: she gave him a smile, her real smile, the one he'd only seen on a rooftop in Suna, moonlight shining on her tear-stained face.

Dear Prudence, won't you come out to play?

Dear Prudence, greet the brand new day

The sun is up, the sky is blue

It's beautiful and so are you

Dear Prudence, won't you come out to play?

The song ended, and the group all clapped. Kankuro walked up to his brother, and tousled his hair.

"Great job, bro! Looks like those singing lessons paid off!"

"I hate singing."

"Shame...you're so good at it, too..."

"Anyone else? Or are we going to stop the embarrassment and watch a movie?"

"Two more people need to go, then we'll watch a movie," said Tenten, eating some popcorn.

"Get Kaori and Ki-chan to sing," said Akara and Maria. Both Kaori and Kizumi blanched.

"No way. Not gonna happen."

"Too bad," said Akara, throwing them both a microphone.

"But...!"

"Relax, it's Cascada."

How, how am I supposed to feel

When everything surrounding me

Is nothing but a fake disguise

I don't know,

I don't know where I belong

It's time for me to carry on

I'll say goodbye

Kaori jumped in first, Kizumi following close behind. They both knew the lyrics by heart, so it was okay that they weren't looking at the screen.

I can't stop the rain from fallin'

I'm drownin in these tears I cry

Since you left without a warning

*I face the dawn with sleepless eyes
No I can't go on
When clouds are pushin' down on me, boy
I can't stop, I can't stop the rain
From fallin*

Sakura jumped in with them, followed by Ino. They all began to get louder and louder, and everyone was cat-calling and having a good time.

*So, tell me where I went wrong
I'm stuck inside a dream long gone
It's hard to reveal the truth
Your love,
Is nothing but a bitter taste
It's better if I walk away,
Away from you*

They jumped up on the coffee table, and they all did their own thing, eerily in-sync.

*I can't stop the rain from fallin'
Im drownin in these tears I cry
Since you left without a warning
I face the dawn with sleepless eyes
No I can't go on
When clouds are pushin' down on me, boy
I can't stop, I can't stop the rain
From fallin*

“Awesome, Ki-chan,” said Akara, glomping her friend, “You and Kaori both!”

“Thanks, ‘Kara-chan!”

“Now, can we watch a movie?”

Akara looked at Naruto. “Yeah...but you boys won’t like it...”

Gaara smirked at Akara. “Try us.”

“You asked for it...”

~~~~~

They all ended up watching *Memoirs of a Geisha*, much to the boys’ grief. The girls would sigh dreamily whenever someone did something romantic, while the boys just sat there, wallowing in their own boredom. In fact, the only boy who was actually enjoying the movie was Lee.

“Why do you even like this crap,” asked Kankuro as he stared at the screen in boredom. Lee did a

Good Guy pose.

“Because this movie shows the wonderous passion of YOUTH!”

“I’d thought it’d be something like that,” said Shikamaru drowsily. Akara and the other girls glared at him.

“At least he’s watching it! Lee’s sensitive, unlike you pig-headed morons,” said Temari.

“Yeah,” said Kizumi.

“Whatever,” said Gaara, “once the movie’s over, anyone headed to Suna needs to get to sleep.”

“Aye aye, cap’n,” said Akara, pulling a mock salute.

~~~~~

“Have a safe trip,” said Sakura, waving to Temari and the others.

“You better write to us, Akara,” said Kaori. Akara laughed.

“Pinky promise! I’ll write once I get there.”

“See ya!”

“Bye!”

Okay, the songs in this chapter are as follows: Hey Jude by the Beatles, Dear Prudence by the Beatles, and I Can't Stop the Rain by Cascada. I've been in a bit of a Beatles rut, and this was begging to be written. Comment please!

20 - Another Day At the Office

Bored beyond reason. *throws confetti lazily*

It was a relatively normal day at the office for Akara: She sat at her desk, filing paperwork and occasionally signing documents for Gaara. She walked into his office, dropping off paperwork for him to sign after his meeting, and stopped.

A scream pierced the relative calm of the Kazekage Tower.

~~~~~

“GAARA-SAMA!”

Shinobi jumped out of the way as Akara ran through the halls of the tower.

“GAARA-SAMA!”

In a boardroom, a certain redhead sneezed. A medic paused in his presentation, staring. Gaara motioned for him to continue.

“GAARA-SAMA!”

Akara whisked past an open office. Temari watched as the frantic kunoichi ran past, and sweat dropped.

“GAARA-SAMA!”

Gaara sighed. “Very well, Ikari-san. Have the forms for the plans sent to my assistant by Thursday. Meeting dismissed.”

“GAARA-SAMA!”

Akara turned a corner and slammed into Gaara.

“Gaara-sama! It was horrible!”

He stared, then sighed. “What is it now?”

“I was in your office...”

“Okay.”

“Dropping off a few documents...”

“Alright...”

“When I saw...”

“Are you going somewhere with this?”

“...A scorpion.”

Gaara stared blankly at the girl before him.

“...A scorpion?”

Akara pulled a Shojo Face. “Uh huh! It was all big, and black, and scaaary!!”

“Are you serious? Akara-san, we live in the desert! You’re a kunoichi of Suna! GET USED TO IT!!!”

She began to sob pathetically. “But...but...it was scaaary! And gross!”

Gaara ran an agitated hand through his hair. “Fine...where did you see it?”

She instantly brightened. “Oh, I killed it already. But it was still pretty gross!”

Gaara twitched.

“I utterly loathe you, do you know that?”

“No you don’t! Everyone likes me!”

Temari walked up. “It’s true. Me and Kankuro like her!”

“Et tu, dear sister?”

“Yup!”

Gaara could only sigh.

~~~~~

Gaara sat at his desk, reading a document while Akara filed paperwork. He was reading it so intently that he didn’t notice Akara stop filing and sneak up behind his chair.

“Gaara-sama...” she said in a singsong voice, dragging out his name.

“What?”

“Gaaaara-saaama...” she said again.

“What?!”

“Gaaaaaaaara-saaaaama...”

“WHAT?!”

“I’m taking the day off, bye!”

And with that, she ran out the door, leaving behind a stunned redhead. Temari walked in, and saw the look on his face.

“She pulled the ‘I’m taking the day off’ thing again, huh?”

He nodded.

“Dude, you’re such a pansy.”

~~~~~

Akara wandered the marketplace, wanting to get a new kunai set, when she bumped into a little girl carrying some scrolls.

“Gomen,” said the girl. Akara grinned.

“It’s alright. I should’ve been paying attention. I’m Akara.”

The girl grinned back “I’m Matsuri. I was on my way to Kazekage Tower to drop off a mission report for Gaara-sensei.”

Akara snorted. “You mean to tell me that Gaara-sama had a student?”

“Yes,” said Matsuri a bit testily, “I’m his student.”

Akara burst out laughing. “That little...oh god, this is great! I finally have some more stuff against him!”

“Against him?”

“Yeah,” said Akara, wiping tears from her eyes, “I’m his assistant.”

“Assistant...? Oh! You’re the girl from Kiri that everyone’s been talking about! So tell me, is the rumor true that you live with Gaara-sensei in his house?”

Akara looked at Matsuri strangely. “I live in his house, but not with him...to be perfectly frank, I just don’t like him.”

“What’s not to like?! He’s handsome, skilled, and he’s Kazekage! He’s the most eligible bachelor in

Suna, to boot!"

"He's also sarcastic, sexist, rude, and easily beat."

"And how do you know this?"

"Because number one, I live in his house, and number two, I beat him only an hour after I left the hospital."

Matsuri stared at the girl before her.

"You beat Gaara-sensei?"

"Yup!"

"Is that even possible?"

"Only took me seven minutes..."

"Wow."

Akara laughed at the wide-eyed look on the girl's face. "How about you come to the mansion for lunch?"

~~~~~

Gaara came home at five that day, cursing Akara to the darkest pit of hell. Slamming the door closed, he was quickly ambushed by Matsuri.

"Gaara-sensei!"

"Ah shoot," he muttered, "Who let you in?"

"That'd be me," said Akara, leaning against the kitchen doorway. Gaara growled.

"Matsuri, get off."

"Yes, Gaara-sensei."

"Go home."

"Bye, Gaara-sensei!"

Matsuri ran out the door, and Gaara turned his fury on the Jonin in his kitchen.

"Akara-san," he said tersely, "next time, tell me when you invite a fangirl into my home."

“Not tell you about the rampaging fangirl in your house? Okay!”

She ran up the stairs, Gaara hot on her heels.

“Damn it, Akara-san! This isn’t a joke!”

“It isn’t? Oh, well why was it so funny, then?”

“Damn you!”

Temari and Kankuro walked into the house. Akara and Gaara were running around, jumping off the stairwell and crashing painfully into furniture. The two older Sand Sibs watched for a few minutes, before making their presence known.

“So is dinner ready, or what?”

~~~~~

They ended up eating takeout that night, with much arguing over bahn bao and dango about movies (among other things).

“Gaara-sama,” whined Akara, “Do I have Sunday off again?”

“Yes,” he replied tersely. He hated it when she did the whiny voice.

“Gaara-sama’,” mimicked Kankuro, “Why do you always do that, ‘Kara-chan?”

“The whiny voice? It’s because I know that he knows that I know he hates that voice.”

“And he knows that I know that he’s putty when you use the Shojo Face,” said Temari smugly. Gaara frowned.

“I hate you all.”

“We love you too,” said Temari, “fork over the pork buns.”

So bored...I'm supposed to be doing homework...Oh well.By the way, bahn bao is a name for pork buns.  
Those things are godly...

## 21 - Mobilize: Sound Prepares to Attack!

Sorry for the short update. I promise the next one will be much longer!

“Gaara! Get down here NOW! Dinner’s ready!”

The young Kazekage sighed. “Once again, the sister beckons,” he muttered.

Taking the steps two at a time, he walked briskly into the kitchen.

“What would you like, she who gives migraines?”

Temari frowned. “Dinner’s ready. Sit your bony @\$ down.”

Gaara sighed, and Akara plunked down a bowl of miso soup. Kankuro was in silent hysterics. The four ate, occasionally asking for food items to be passed their way. Finally, Akara broke the silence.

“So why is everyone so testy?”

Temari looked at her brother. “Gaara, did you not tell her?”

“I saw no reason to. She isn’t a diplomat, nor is she my sibling.”

“Gaara!”

Gaara knew better than to argue now. Temari had been pushed, and she was officially angry.

“Alright, I’ll tell her. Don’t freak out like last time,” he said nonchalantly.

“Akara-san, Sound is mobilizing. You know precisely what that implies, do you not?”

Akara nodded. “It means that the shinobi of Konoha are a few steps closer to the recovery of Sasuke-san.”

“Not only that, but there was word from a source placed in Sound that Orochimaru is plotting the kidnapping of a certain shinobi,” said Temari gravely, “a very special Suna kunoichi.”

Akara went wide eyed. “Do you mean...?”

Gaara nodded. “He wants to kidnap you.”

~~~~~


The two allied Hidden Villages began to mobilize. Konoha had no idea which village would be attacked first, which left Gaara and the rest of Suna completely in the dark.

“Gaara-sama,” said Akara one day, “What are we going to do? Will I be able to fight?”

“No. It’s too risky. You might get hurt.”

“But I want to fight!”

“No,” Gaara repeated, gritting his teeth, “we can’t risk it.”

She slammed her fist into the desk, sending a pencil and a few scrolls bouncing to the floor. “Damn it, Gaara-sama, I want to fight!”

He smacked down the pencil, and glared at her. “Akara, you aren’t going to fight! We have no way of knowing if they’ll attack here or in Konoha! Now sit down and shut up!”

Akara was flabbergasted. As her eyes widened, Gaara sat back down at his desk, and went back to his paperwork.

A sniffle broke the silence.

His head shot up, and he twitched in surprise. Akara was looking down at her feet, biting her lip and sniffing audibly.

“Wha...? What are you doing?”

She looked up at him, fat tears rolling down her cheeks and her big green eyes shining with unshed tears.

He panicked.

“You...you aren’t gonna cry, are you?!”

She turned away, sobbing lightly. He sat up out of his chair, and ran around his desk to stand in front of her.

“Don’t cry!”

Akara couldn’t help it: she burst into tears.

“I-I j-just w-want to h-help...” she stammered out, wiping the tears from her eyes. Gaara was frantic.

“Fine! You can fight! Just stop crying!”

She sniffed. “Really?”

Gaara slumped into his chair. "Yes...just don't get yourself kidnapped. That's the last thing we all need to worry about."

~~~~~

A lone figure hid along the tree line that was the border of Wind and Fire Country. His red eyes flashed in the darkness.

"She's here. I can feel it."

"Calm down," said his companion, hazel eyes staring ahead through thick wire-rimmed glasses, "We want her alive, or Orochimaru-sama will be displeased."

The youth with the red eyes smirked, and motioned for several shinobi to advance. "Well, let's not keep Suna and its Kazekage waiting."

Done! Comments are love, -ttebayo!

## 22 - Dinner and a Threat (pt1)

Filler chapter (le gasp!)

Gaara walked into the house. It was relatively empty, which was a rarity these days. He sank into an overstuffed armchair, and instantly figured out what felt wrong.

Where the hell is Akara-san?

He stood, and went into the kitchen. Nothing.

He wandered into the South wing. She wasn't in her room.

He looked in the garden, his sibling's rooms, and even checked his home office: nothing.

He had just returned to the kitchen when the phone rang (**AN: I don't know if they have phones, but in my story they do, SO DEAL WITH IT!**). "Hello?"

"Gaara-sama, I had to stop by the grocery store again. We were out of milk."

Gaara breathed a sigh of relief. "Akara-san, please leave a note next time. With Sound on the move, we can't take any chances."

He heard her laugh on the other end. "Sorry. I usually would, but today was a little hectic, if you remember. I had guard duty on the north gate."

"Just be sure to tell one of us when you leave. Since you are their target, we need to keep tabs on where you are in case you get snatched."

"Don't worry so much! I'll be perfectly fine! You know that I can take care of myself."

~~~~~

The company of shinobi reached the east gate of Suna with fifteen minutes to twilight. The red-eyed youth held out his arm, causing the following company of two hundred to stop in their tracks. He silently motioned in several directions, and the company quickly dispersed into squads of ten, covering any area within twenty-five feet of the village. As he watched, the hazel-eyed man joined the red-eyed teen.

"Orochimaru-sama trusts you, you know that, right?"

"Cut the crap. He's going to replace me."

A sigh. "I know. But he trusts you with the job of procuring his new body, so he must trust you."

“Whatever.”

~~~~~

Akara returned home, and began putting away groceries.

“Akara-san, is that you?”

She looked up. Gaara walked in, a coffee mug in hand.

“Yes, I’m here. I just got in.”

He sipped his coffee. “Good. I’m hungry, and Kankuro and Temari are in Konoha.”

Akara smiled. “Alright. I’ll whip up something. Go ahead and wait in your room.”

~~~~~

The red-eyed boy looked up. The moon was a large red sphere in the sky. He frowned.

“That can’t be good.”

~~~~~

Akara placed the bowl of soup onto the table, and wiped her brow.

“Gaara-sama! Dinner’s ready!”

No answer. She climbed the stairs, and knocked on his bedroom door. “Gaara-sama?”

The door opened. Gaara stood there, a towel wrapped around his waist and his hair wet.

“What?”

She stood there in shock.

“What?!”

She blinked. “Gaara-sama, please put some clothes on. Also, dinner's ready.”

~~~~~

Comments are LUV!

23 - Dinner and a Threat (pt2)

Please don't hurt me... *duck and cover*

Gaara returned downstairs, and sat at the table. They both ate in silence, neither speaking.

As Akara cleared the plates, a kunai suddenly crashed through the window, a note attached to the handle.

~~~~~

A shadowed figure dropped nearby, and the red-eyed teen smirked.

"Kabuto," he whispered, "Did you deliver the message?"

"Yes," the gray-eyed man replied, "and they will be reading it as we speak."

~~~~~

"What the hell was that?!"

Akara looked at the kunai curiously, while Gaara laid a hand on his chest, trying to recover from the shock of nearly getting decapitated. Akara then calmly yanked the kunai from the wall, and detached the note in time for it to flutter to the table and burst into flame.

Both shinobi cried out, but instead of exploding and killing them like an explosive tag would, it simply scorched the table, each charred spot forming into a character.

"Scorch marks," questioned Gaara, "that's rare...they usually only use that technique in Rice and Water country..."

Akara looked at them, and Gaara watched as her brow furrowed in concentration. "Can you read it," he asked her. She merely nodded.

"It says," she began, "'The girl we seek, the possessor of the Demon Eye, would do well to join in battle. If she does not, then we shall kill all who stand in our way.' Well," she said briskly, dusting off her hands, "That can't be good for the table, can it?"

"No it cannot," answered Gaara, using a napkin to scrub off the message. The two sat there for a moment.

"Gaara-sama," Akara said quietly, "Do you think they'll actually do it?"

“Do what?”

“Y’know...kidnap me?”

He sighed. “They coerced Sasuke into joining them and killed the Sandaime Hokage...I doubt they’d stop at kidnapping.”

“Then...maybe I shouldn’t fight.”

He stared at her.

“If you don’t fight, then everyone will think of you as a coward. If you do, then you will be kidnapped. Which scares you the most: loss of honor or loss of pride?”

“Neither,” she replied, “Because what I fear is losing all that I love and live for.”

~~~~~

The disk of red that was the full moon reached its zenith, and the red-eyed youth gave a rare grin. Kabuto looked sideways at the youth, and after a few minutes of observation decided that grinning made the teen look demented. Kabuto reminded himself to never make the boy grin ever again.

“Suigetsu,” said the red-eyed teen in a commanding tone, “rally the troops. We attack tonight.”

~~~~~

Kikiro had guard duty at the north gate that night, and as he gazed out at the desert (obviously bored), he saw feathery white float across his vision and his eyes slid closed.

Kabuto smirked in triumph. The guard had a weak and easily accessible mind...initiating the genjutsu was like cutting through butter with an executioner’s sword. Nothing too difficult about it.

He was disappointed.

~~~~~

Akara could feel that something was wrong. As she and Gaara sat in the kitchen, each trying to interpret the motives behind the note, one thing pounded a deadly drumline in her head:

There will be blood.

Her head snapped up. “They’re here.”

~~~~~

Suigetsu and Kabuto then waved three of the ten-man squads through. All around Suna, squads breached the gates and swarmed in.

Unfortunately for them, the one squad that the red-eyed teen was leading was the one squad that passed the police headquarters.

Of course that one squad would be the one to trip the alarm that alerted Suna to the invasion.

No yelling at me...this was something I had to think hard about. And yes, the scorch marks thing is from *Howl's Moving Castle*. I hope the creator doesn't mind that I borrowed the idea... Comments are love!~

24 - Screw the Plan, This is War!

Wow, two updates in one day...How lucky are you guys?

A caterwauling whine echoed all around the squad, and several of the soldiers heard the leader of the entire operation swear loudly through their radios, voice scratchy with the strain of the frequency. Immediately, all the men knew the invasion plan was blown to shoot.

~~~~~

Gaara appeared in the chaos and mayhem that was Kazekage Tower during an invasion. Shouting orders over the din of alarms, the youngest Kage in history showed himself for what he was: a leader.

“Kenshin, take fifty men and evacuate the civilians! Kurosaki, figure out how the hell they got in! Akara-san, Kyoga-san, Matsuri-san, scramble the troops and follow me.”

“Why are we scrambling the troops, Gaara-sensei? Surely they already know...”

“Matsuri, half of them are still asleep! Now go scramble the troops!”

“But-“

Gaara whirled around, and glared at the Chuunin. “That’s an order, soldier.”

Matsuri nodded, and went off. Akara, Kyoga, and Matsuri worked quickly. Already there were casualties: Matsuri had to dodge a shinobi as he slumped over, a windmill shuriken sticking out from his stomach. Every shinobi in Suna ran through the web of alleys and passageways, while deep underground fifty-two ninja were navigating the vast labyrinth of tunnels, evacuating all civilians and genin. So many shinobi were dying that the medics couldn’t keep up, and while a distress call was sent to Konoha, it would be three days too late for backup to arrive.

Gaara, Matsuri, Akara, and a few other shinobi were battling ninja in front of the Academy when suddenly Gaara called out, “There are only two kinds of soldiers on this desert tonight: those who are dead and those who are not. So follow me!”

He then ran toward Kazekage Tower, Akara, Matsuri, and the few shinobi uninjured following him.

~~~~~

The Tower was in chaos. Blood stained its sandy walls, and the shinobi were being slaughtered. As a teen with red eyes wiped off his blade, Gaara and the ragtag band of shinobi arrived.

“It can’t be...” whispered Gaara in awe.

“No...” said Baki, pausing behind Gaara.

The red-eyed boy turned. His hair was sticking up stiffly in the back, caked in dry blood. His pale skin barely showed beneath a layer of crimson, and his formerly austere black outfit had been replaced with the garb of an Otonin. The shinobi who had been present at an exam in Konoha three years ago were frozen in surprise.

“Uchiha,” Gaara growled.

Well, I didn't wear my brace while I wrote all this, so I'm in horrible pain...I hope you enjoy it despite me being crippled! Love ya!~

25 - Abduction! Akara Captured!

Gaara fangirls, please don't kill me...same for all you ChaosShipping fans...

Sasuke smirked. "Oh, so you're the pathetic excuse for a leader. I really shouldn't be surprised."

Gaara clenched his fists. "Get out. Now."

Sasuke started to walk forward. "Sorry, but I can't do that. You have something Lord Orochimaru wants. And he wants it now."

"Get the hell out of my village."

Sasuke took out his sword. "You, know, talking with you is fun and all, but it's getting sad. Are you going to fight, or what?"

"I'm telling you now: leave."

Sasuke smirked. "Make me."

Gaara tensed, only to be held back. He was stunned to see Akara walk forward.

"Gaara-sama," said Akara, cracking her knuckles, "I'll handle this."

As Akara walked forward, Sasuke could only chuckle darkly. "The great Kazekage is hiding behind a kunoichi? How pathetic. Is this really the best Suna can do?"

"Shut up," Akara spat out, glaring at the Uchiha. She pulled out a kunai, and Sasuke stopped.

"dog, please," said Sasuke, "I can easily take you down."

"Okay, number one: frack you. Number two: you couldn't even if you tried."

Sasuke sank into his stance. "Bring it."

Akara smirked. Before Sasuke could blink, Akara had activated her bloodline, and the kunai had become a pulsating blue blade.

"Too late."

~~~~~

Konoha was surprisingly quick to respond. Already there were sixteen squads fighting amongst the Suna

nins. Kaori kicked down a stubborn Otonin, and turned to her partners.

“Kizumi! Watch out!”

Kizumi ducked, and an Otonin sailed over her head. Maria dodged the attack, and flung a weighted knife into his back.

“Kaori, take Kizumi and find Akara! I got everything under control over here!”

Kaori and Kizumi nodded, and they jumped off. Maria then faced the oncoming rush of ninja, and sighed.

“Being a teacher sucks.”

~~~~~

Sasuke dodged the crack of the whip. It wrapped around a statue, melting it.

This is bad, thought Sasuke as he dodged, I need to wrap this up. Lord Orochimaru can't last much longer.

He ducked behind a pillar, and paused. He heard the crack of the whip lapse into silence.

“Oh Sasuke-kuuuuun...”

Sasuke stiffened. *frack.*

~~~~~

Akara smirked. “Sasuke...”

There was a subtle shifting in the shadows. The smirk became a maniacal grin.

“Here, kitty-kitty,” she called out in a mocking voice, “Come out, come out, wherever you are...”

She allowed the charka whip to dissipate and fade. “Come out, little Sasuke...”

There it was: another shift. Akara's slitted eyes gleamed.

“Found you.”

She pulled back her fist and sent it crashing into the pillar. The sandstone crumbled under her fist like dust. Sasuke looked at her in alarm, and scrambled back.

“What are you?”

Akara's claws extended, and a hellish aura surrounded her.

“Your worst nightmare.”

She advanced forward, chuckling. Sasuke watched in horror as a few of his soldiers passed by, and were annihilated by the kunoichi. Crimson now stained the girl's hair into red velvet, her hands dripping. The menacing figure drew back a claw...

“Akara! Don't do it!”

The figure turned wildly, and Sasuke took his chance. Throwing a jab into her neck, he threw down a smoke bomb, and when the smoke cleared, Gaara and the newly arrived Kaori saw only the bodies of dead Otonin.

~~~~~

“Damn it!”

Gaara slammed a fist into his desk, and looked up at the three Konoha shinobi before him.

“Why did you do it?! What the hell were you thinking?!”

He was royally mad, ranting as the three kunoichi stood before him with their heads bowed.

“You don't realize the magnitude of what you've done! They were after Akara-san from the very beginning, and you practically handed her over to them!”

“Gaara, calm down...”

“No, Temari! I'm not going to calm down! Instead, I'm going to send out a search party to go after that Uchiha bastard!”

Temari grabbed her brother by the shoulders, and sat him down into his chair.

“Gaara, you need to calm down and think rationally. They won't be able to go very far, and we can easily catch up to them. We just need to calm down and think.”

Gaara growled in frustration, and turned to his office window.

“Leave me. Just go.”

~~~~~

Akara awoke in a dingy cell. She pulled at her wrists, and cursed when she found them bound together tightly.

“I'm in deep shoot.”

Updates coming soon!

## 26 - Blinding Flash of the Obvious

I'm sorry for not updating! Please don't hurt me!

"Well, well... You're awake."

Akara looked up. Sasuke stood before her, and she growled ferally at him.

"Cut the crap, Uchiha. Where the hell am I?"

"You're in Sound. Specifically, you're in a cell approximately twenty feet underground. Naturally, there's no escape."

Akara turned away from him. "So, let me guess: you're telling this to me in the hope that I'll lose hope and crack. But crack and admit what? I can only assume that Orochimaru wants to take my body and use it as his own so he may live for another three years."

Sasuke was quite astonished: she'd figured it all out. Clearing his throat, he glared down the girl before him.

"If you must know, yes. You are to replace me as Orochimaru's new vessel. Congratulations."

Akara smirked. "It kills you inside that he has no interest in you at all anymore. Admit it. Leaving your village for power, only to be usurped by a girl: sucks, doesn't it?"

"Shut up!"

Akara smirked at the anger written on the Uchiha's face. As said Uchiha stormed out, she felt a surge of power. If it was this easy to get the Uchiha riled up, then what else could she get him to do?

~~~~~

Gaara paced in his office. He was furious with himself for letting Uchiha get away like that. Knowing Sasuke, he'd go straight to Orochimaru, which meant that they all were screwed. After all, no one in either village knew where Sound was.

Gaara sat in his chair, and rested his elbows on the desk, thinking. Akara was smart. If he knew her at all, then it was possible they'd be able to track her. But how?

And then it hit him.

Sasuke's blood.

Sasuke's blood had been practically soaking the walls.

Gaara sat up from his chair, and walked hurriedly out the door.

He had to get to the front of the building. He had to get there before it was too late.

~~~~~

"Wow, what happened to you, Sasuke?"

Sasuke winced as Kabuto poured peroxide on the wounds on his back. "The wench is part-demon, Kabuto. She went demon on my @\$@ and tore into me."

Kabuto smirked. "Don't tell me she reminds you of..."

Sasuke shot him a glare, and Kabuto refrained from finishing the sentence.

"Do not EVER compare Selina to that dog! EVER!"

Kabuto threw up his hands, a sign of surrender. "Hey, don't bite my head off! I wasn't saying anything like that!"

Sasuke glared a while longer, and then turned with a huff. "Good. Just because you're the medic around here doesn't mean that I won't hurt you."

~~~~~

"Stop!"

Gaara went up to the cleaning crew.

"You idiots! Don't clean it! We can use the blood to track them!"

Kaori looked at Gaara. "Are you retarded?! There's no way we can know who's blood this all belongs to!"

Maria walked forward. "Kaori, stop. Kazekage-sama, what are you babbling about?"

"Look," he said, leading them to the crumbled pillar, "There's blood right here. Uchiha had been standing in that exact spot. We can use Kakashi's dogs to trail this scent, because if I know anything from what Sakura's taught me, it's that he was injured right where an artery lies. That wound probably gushed blood all the way to Sound."

Kizumi went wide-eyed. "He's right! We can use it to track him!"

Temari straightened up. "Well what are we waiting for?"

If I've said it once, then I'll say it again: COMMENTS ARE LOVE!!!

27 - Recon: Gaara's Guilt

Two chapters in one day? Lucky you!

Akara woke to the sound of a door opening. From the taste in her mouth, she estimated that she'd been asleep several hours. She scowled as the Uchiha walked in.

"So, here to torture me?"

Sasuke threw down a tray. "No. I'm here to keep watch. There's food on the tray."

Akara looked at it. "This stuff is rancid. Not even the dogs would pick at it."

Sasuke smirked. "Who said the food was edible."

Akara spat in his direction. "You're disgusting."

He crouched down, and Akara wanted so bad to hit him. Unfortunately, she was still tied up.

"You're feisty. Orochimaru-sama likes that. It means that you'll survive."

"Tell Orochimaru he can burn in hell."

Sasuke frowned, and slapped her across the face. "Temper, temper, kunoichi."

"You bastard, I have a name."

She could tell he was irked. It was almost funny how badly he hid his emotions from her.

"Listen dog. You can agree to Orochimaru's demands, or you can die. Either way, I win."

Akara fumed. "And either way, I don't give a shoot."

Sasuke narrowed his eyes. "I guess there's no arguing with you today. Enjoy hell, demon."

~~~~~

Kakashi watched the pug sniff experimentally at the coagulated blood on the ground. "Well, Pakkun?"

Pakkun sneezed. "Damn, this is some foul stuff. It's almost like he went bad all the way to the core."

"Can we hurry," said Gaara irritably, "The more time we spend here, the less time Akara-san has to live."

“Calm down, Skippy,” said Pakkun, “I’m getting something. Follow me.”

~~~~~

Sasuke came back with another tray. Akara sat there, watching him.

“What, more rancid food? You people sicken me.”

Sasuke threw it at her feet. “You might as well eat it. It’s the only thing you’ll get to eat. And before you ask, we’re instructed not to give you water.”

Akara glared. “Bastard.”

He didn’t react. Akara smirked.

“So tell me, are you powerful enough to kill your brother?”

Sasuke twitched. “How do you know about that?”

She tossed her head. “I seem to have touched a nerve. Of course everyone who’s heard of the Uchiha clan knows about their demise. Tell me: When your brother found you, did you scream as your parents were killed before your eyes?”

Sasuke slapped her, infuriated. “You sick little dog! Don’t talk as if you know! You have no idea what I’ve been through!”

His words echoed around them. He was surprised when she raised her head, fury in her eyes.

“I have no idea? I HAVE NO IDEA?! Tell me, were you been beaten by your drunken father every day of your goddamn life?! Were you forced not to scream as he raped you until your teeth cut through your lips and bled?! You goddamn idiot, were you forced to steal food in order to live another day?! Enlighten me: WERE YOU?!”

Sasuke was taken aback. She kept screaming.

“But no! I have no idea what it was like to live in a huge mansion with a huge family and a mother who loved me! I have no clue what it’s like to live like a king as people huddle scared and alone in a shack while waiting for their daily rape! That’s right, I HAVE NO IDEA!!!”

Akara glared at him. “Get the frack out. I don’t want to put up with your bullshoot anymore.”

Sasuke shut the door with a snap. Kabuto stood there, reading a few files. Kabuto looked up.

“She’s loud, isn’t she? shoot, Sasuke, you shouldn’t have talked the way you did. You read the bingo book: she’s considered one of the worst recorded cases of child abuse in the history of Water country, and one of their toughest fighters.”

“Well how was I supposed to know? It’s not like I’m allowed to peruse the Bingo Book at my leisure or anything.”

Kabuto shook his head. “Sasuke, you seriously need some people skills.”

~~~~~

Temari looked at her companion warily. “I still think it wasn’t a good idea for you to come, Gaara.”

He stared ahead. “I have to. It feels like it was my fault she’s been captured. I have to do something about it.”

Temari said nothing. *He’s not telling me the whole story. I just know it.*

Ooh, Akara's mad. She'll be even madder if you don't comment.