

Out of the Shell

By alchemest1

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This story is based off of a fiction written by my good friend Nextguardian (NG). The OC characters are property of Nextguardian and My friend Keiko (A.K.A. Shadowthe_hedgehog) It details the experiences of NG's Fan character Ryouko.

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1 - So it begins

(Disclaimer: This story is based off of a fiction written by my good friend Nextguardian.)

(I do not own the canon characters or the Ocs.)

(The OC characters are property of Nextguardian and My friend. Keiko and I have been) (granted full and unrestricted permission to use these characters and their abilities.)

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(Some of the events mentioned are part of Nextguardian's main Naruto fic.)

(If you wish to know more)

(I encourage you to take a look at his story

[\(Thank you and enjoy the story.\)](#)

"No! What have I done! How! Why!" Ryouko bolted upright upsetting the desk of scrolls in front of him as he pulled his kunai from its pouch on his right thigh readying himself for an attack. Standing in the dim circle of light cast by his overturned desk lamp panting heavily; the kunai gripped tightly in his fist he realized "It was a dream...no not a dream....a nightmare." Settling back into his desk chair he leaned forward and put his head on his knees and closed his eyes letting his breathing calm and reality catch up to him. "I fell asleep studying. That's all. It wasn't real," he assured himself placing the kunai back into its pouch. "I didn't do it. It was just a dream." Ryouko shook his head and sat up trying to analyze his way through his nightmare before the details slipped away. This had been the third time in a week he had been haunted by this creation of his mind. Ryouko was not one to place much stock in dreams but this one was different. It seemed so real that every time he had it he found himself waking up in a panic and drenched in cold sweat. It reminded him of the dreams Sakura had once had. They had always been a terrible omen. Ryouko rummaged around under the pile of upset scrolls and found the clock. "Four forty-three. Huh. I have to be up in seventeen minuets. Damn it! Oh well, so much for the all night studying."

Ryouko stretched and headed into the bathroom of his small shabby apartment. He turned on the shower and turned to study himself in the small cracked mirror above the sink. He stared deep into his reflection's hard stoic expression. He glowered at where once had been his left eye, hazel brown and full of life, now a cold, sightless, empty socket thanks to Garaa. He noticed how large and dark the bags under his eyes had grown during his three years since coming to live in the Village Hidden in the Leaves. He took a deep breath and ran his hand through his sleep mussed brown hair the nightmare still on his mind.

As he stepped into the shower he began to replay the dream over in his mind. All he could ever remember was bits and pieces, but these small fractured bits disturbed him greatly. Many of the scenes he recounted did nothing to help make the dream any less confusing; Sakura crying clinging to a limp human form, the Leaf Village in flames, innocent villagers lying motionless on the ground. These images disturbed him, but it was the longest scene that disturbed him the most. He saw himself bowing to a dark figure. He couldn't tell who it was but he knew this was an ominous presence. He heard the figure speak, and he heard himself pledge allegiance the figure and watched as he took his kunai and dragged its edge against his palm. He watched as he swore an oath of blood to the dark figure; this image above all else for some reason made his blood run cold. Ryouko leaned his head against the wall of the shower

and allowed the water to clear his head and wash away the dread the nightmare had left in the pit of his stomach.

Ryouko feeling somewhat less apprehensive stepped out of the shower and began to dress absentmindedly. He had never been one to be overly concerned with style but chose rather to dress simply and functionally. He wore traditional black gi pants with his kunai pouch on his thigh, a black tee-shirt with a white collar and a black tactical vest which held many of his other weapons. This simplicity suited him. He felt it balanced out his otherwise complicated personality. After dressing Ryouko once again studied himself in the mirror. Staring back at him was the same stoic expression that greeted him every morning. To him though he saw only someone weak with emotion and to human to become what he longed to be. Scowling at his reflection he pulled on the final pieces of his attire. A black face mask that hid the lower portions of his face and the expressions of emotion he so loathed having and a black headband at an angle that hid his mangled eye. Finally he tied his Hitai-Ate around his forehead which left only his right eye visible. As he adjusted his headband Ryouko returned to his bedroom and began to search around under the pile of scrolls on the floor. Finding what he was looking for he straightened up rolling up a long scroll he had been working on since his first week in the village the "ShoBu." As he tied the ShoBu closed and stuffed it into one of the pockets of his vest he made his way to the door. Before he left he took a final look around the small cramped apartment and then walked out into the fading night.

As Ryouko walked slowly down the empty streets he thought about the day that lay ahead. He wasn't looking forward to a lot of it. He had a meeting with the council to determine if he was finally ready in the eyes of his peers to be granted a chance at the Chunin exams. He had been denied every time by one smug Tokubetsu Jonin. Ryouko fumed silently at the thought of him. He couldn't stand Ebisu. Ebisu had stood in his way ever since his first time through the Chunin when he had been forced to forfeit the match to save the lives of Ino and Sakura. Ebisu had said he wasn't old enough to handle the pressure and responsibility. Now this would be his sixth time of applying to take the Exam and as long as Ebisu was still on the Council he was sure this wouldn't be his last time of applying. His patience was beginning to wear thin on this matter, but he saw no alternative but to continue to apply.

One bright spot in his day was that he had a session of training with Sakura. She had pointed out that since he had a way of always getting injured that he should learn the arts of a Medi-nin. This hadn't much appealed to him at first, but upon her insistence and mostly the fact that she herself would be teaching him had brought him to see the logic in her idea. After this few hours of reprieve it would be back to the day he couldn't quite bring himself to look forward to. After his medic training he was to assist in a d ranked mission with squad nine. Normally this wouldn't be a problem as he got along fine with most of the team, but for two reasons this time it was a problem. For one, D ranked meant dull pointless work and two Linda Awash would also be present. Who had made the arrangements for this mission he didn't know but he would have loved to thank them with a boot in their rear.

Linda had once been a close friend and though it had never been official they had once been together as a couple. Now Linda hated him for reasons that escaped Ryouko. She claimed to still have feelings as a friend for him but at the same time professed her hatred for him. Her signature saying about him was that she wished he would be paralyzed in order to keep him from being able to do missions in which he might be killed. Ryouko guessed that in a twisted, deformed sort of way her claim of some friendly feeling may be true, but mostly she was just hostile. The thought of having to work with her for an afternoon put him in a sullen mood. He could imagine the nasty scowls and muttered put downs. These

didn't really bother him, but he didn't like having her around as it brought up painful memories. It had been for her he had lost his eye, he missed her friendship, but such was life.

Ryouko looked up from his thought as he heard a soft rustling of leaves above him. He sighed in resignation and counted down, "Five, four, three, two, one, now." At the now he merely took a steep to the side and began to walk again. "If you're going to try and sneak up on someone you're going to have to be quieter than that Naruto." he said casually over his shoulder to the form plastered face first in cobblestone road. Naruto sat up rubbing a large bruise on the side of his face.

"How'd ya know it was me! And why'd ya have to move for!" Naruto grumbled loudly as he ran to catch up with Ryouko in the darkness ahead.

"For starters it would be a lot more effective if you hadn't tried it on me every morning for the last three days." Ryouko couldn't help but allow a small smile. Naruto had a way of making a nuisance of himself but at the same time making you like him even more. "Why don't you ever try it on Lee or Sakura"

"Are you nuts! They'd kill me!" Naruto said an arm behind his head and a mischievous look in his eye. "Although it would be cool just to see what they would do!" he grinned over at Ryouko who merely rolled his eyes and shook his head.

Ryouko strolled on for a bit without saying anything Naruto tailing along after him. Ryouko knew why Naruto was hanging around. Naruto knew that every morning Ryouko when out to get his breakfast and if he stuck around he was liable to be asked along. Ryouko merely shook his head again as he reached the door to his normal morning haunt. As he walked through the door he called back to Naruto who had stopped outside the shop. "Well are you coming to eat or not"

"Yeah, you better believe it!" Naruto shouted as he barreled through the door after him. Inside they took Ryouko's normal seat and looked at the menu more out of habit than really needing to. When it came time to order they both put in their normal orders.

"How can you eat Ramen this early in the morning Naruto" Ryouko asked wrinkling his nose at the idea.

"Man, I could eat Ramen for breakfast, lunch and dinner too!" Naruto exclaimed. "This place isn't half as good as the place Iruka-sensei takes me to, but hey it's ramen!"

Ryouko merely shook his head again. "So Naruto, what does your day look like. Mine looks pretty grim. A meeting and a D ranked mission." Ryouko failed to mention the training with Sakura knowing the ribbing would be endless. "What's worse is the mission is with team nine." Ryouko looked up at his friend with a meaningful look.

"A D ranked mission! That really does blow, but what's so bad about being with team nine! Old Bushy Brows might be too uptight, but his team 'ain't that bad." Naruto said distractedly as there food arrived.

Ryouko picked at the bowl of creamed wheat in front of him and stated flatly. "Linda is going to be there." Naruto looked up with an eyebrow twitching and a long wad of ramen stringing from his bowl to his mouth. Slurping the noodles the rest of the way into his mouth he laughed nervously.

“Yeah, I can see how that's going to be a bit awkward. That kunoichi is as cold as ramen left out overnight in winter! To be honest she scares me to death!” Naruto said with a slight shiver. Silently Ryouko agreed with him despite Naruto's strange analogy.

“I hear you on that one Naruto. She sometimes scares me to death too.” Ryouko sighed as he looked down into his bowl feeling slightly more depressed at the idea of the day ahead.

The small bell over the diner's door jingled merrily as it opened causing Ryouko to look up. The only reason this interested Ryouko was that no one had visibly walked in. Ryouko watched the door intently. As he watched a small pug mix dog trotted from the entrance and jumped up on a stool at the bar. Ryouko watched as the dog began to scan the crowd intently. Ryouko knew the dog. It was Kakashie's summon Pakkun, but Ryouko was wondering what he was doing here. It was a rather comical site as the man behind the bar raised an eyebrow and started towards the dog sitting at his counter.

“Shoo, not a place for doggies, you can't be in here!” the man behind the counter said in a tone that most people reserve for animals. Pakkun heaved a sigh and turned around on the stool to face the shopkeeper.

“Look it's early. I'm tired and I don't want to be here. I'm on official business for the council. Now you have ten seconds to tell me if a boy named Ryouko is in here before I bite you.” Pakkun growled in annoyance. The stunned shop keeper stared wide eyed at Pakkun unable to speak. As the ten seconds ended Pakkun started to growl. The shop keeper coming to his senses realizing he was about to be bitten flung his arm out pointing to Ryouko and Naruto's table.

“That's him over there! Please don't bite me!” The man pleaded a giant sweat drop above his head. Pakkun rolled his eyes and jumped down off the stool heading towards Ryouko through the crowded diner.

Ryouko who had been listening to the conversation grinned under his mask as the pug trotted up to the table. “A little snippy today are we Pakkun! It's not like you to want to bite for something that petty.” Pakkun jumped up on to the chair across from Ryouko and helped himself to Ryouko's mug of coffee since Ryouko didn't drink it.

“I wouldn't have bit him. You humans taste terrible. Anyway, I wasn't in the mood to deal with that stupid baby voice you people use on me. It's sickening.” Pakkun said before lapping at the coffee. Naruto snorted in laughter a noodle coming out his nose. “Nice kid. You know that's really disgusting right.” Pakkun mused as Naruto recycled to noodle back into his mouth.

“Oh yeah! This is coming from someone who licks his own butt!” Naruto shot back looking triumphant until Pakkun latched himself on to his arm. Naruto swung his arm around yelling.

Ryouko leaned forward on his elbows steepling his fingers ignoring Naruto's cries of “Get off you sadistic pug!” and “Do you realize your biting the next Hokage!” and called out over the noise.

“So, what brings you here Pakkun! I don't think you came just to keep Naruto and I company over breakfast did you!” Pakkun let go of Naruto's arm and dropped back onto the chair. Giving a final sniff of

annoyance at Naruto who was massaging his bitten arm Pakkun turned his attention back to Ryouko.

“No, I didn't. I came to fetch you actually. The council has moved up your appointment and I was supposed to find and escort you to the council chamber. I was also supposed to deliver a message to you from Sakura whom I ran into on the way here. She says if you like you can start your lessons earlier since your meeting has been moved up.” Pakkun stated all of this in an official drawling voice sounding very bored with his speech. Naruto had looked up from his fourth bowl of ramen at the mention of Sakura's lessons. A mischievous look spread over his face as he stared at Ryouko.

“You never mentioned you were having private lessons with Sakura! What's she teaching you' Female anatomy” Naruto grinned stupidly “I could teach you that!” Ryouko looked up ready to clock Naruto but froze as he realized the series of hand signs Naruto was performing. Ryouko slammed his eyes closed just in time as Naruto yelled “Ninja Art Sexy Jutsu!” Ryouko's face reddened as he heard the unmistakable sound of several of the nearby men rocket backwards with massive nosebleeds. A giggling laugh and a young female voice called to him “Awww! Don't you want to look at me Ryouko-san' How sad for me. Oh well!” and with that there was a small pop and Naruto burst out laughing. “Man you should have seen the look on your face when you realized what I was doing. You turned beet red! I almost got you! Believe it!” Ryouko, ears burning and face set in as dignified an expression he could muster, decided to ignore Naruto and instead addressed Pakkun who was shaking his head with a paw over his eyes muttering to himself that his master had a bunch of knuckleheads for students.

“Umm' I think we should probably get going now.” Ryouko said with a slight catch in his voice. Pakkun didn't say anything but merely nodded his head a paw massaging his temple. Ryouko started towards the counter to collect the check with Pakkun on his heels. As Ryouko pulled out the money to pay an idea popped into his head and he smiled. “The young man who was eating with me is getting the bill.” The shopkeeper nodded and strolled over and handed Naruto the bill.

“What! This isn't mine!” Naruto yelled as the shopkeeper held out the bill to him.

“I do believe it is sir. The young man you were dining with informed me you would be paying the bill this morning. So, you either pay or find yourself washing dishes.” The shopkeeper said with an airy wave of his hand.

“Where is that pervy Samurai! I'll kill him!” Naruto yelled looking around the diner for Ryouko. Spotting him near the door Naruto shook a fist at him, but Ryouko merely grinned mischievously and waved. Naruto scowled and began to clear the plates of the table and sighed. “Which way to the sinks” he asked miserably.

“Thanks for the meal Naruto.” Ryouko laughed as he walked out. “Lord knows you deserved that one.”

“Amen! That pest had it coming after that!” Pakkun said with a grin. Pakkun feigned thinking for a moment and then with a smile much like Naruto's had been stated, “Although I am curious. How is Sakura's female anatomy”

Ryouko's back stiffened as he stopped. Even by the pale dawn light you could see how red his ears turned. Ryouko didn't turn to look at the dog but simply stated. “I wonder what Kakashi-sensei would say if his summon returned to him neutered” After this he simply began to walk on, this time leaving Pakkun

to stand in embarrassment.

Pakkun stood for a moment in shock but then shook his head and ran to catch up with Ryouko's retreating form. "You have definitely gotten bolder since you've lived here." he mused to Ryouko's back. "When you first arrived here you wouldn't say hardly a thing. Now you're about as ornery as Naruto."

Ryouko glanced sideways at the dog then looked ahead as he answered. "This place has been the first place I have really had friends to be ornery to. This is the first place aside from with my parents that I have ever felt was home enough to allow close friends." Ryouko pondered his thoughts for a moment and then looked down to the dog who appeared slightly surprised at this sudden change of mood. Ryouko let a slight smile form as he realized the oddity of confessing this to a dog. "Before I came here I never really had anything set to fight for. I fought for a general idea. Now..." Ryouko took a deep breath inhaling the smells of the crisp autumn morning before continuing; "Now I have a purpose to my fight. I fight for those I care about. That more than anything I think has weakened the shell I had when I first arrived. I'm still trying to decide if that is a good thing or a bad thing." he said this last part with a bit of a laugh.

Pakkun trotted along beside Ryouko silently. He was surprised that the young man had opened up to him. To himself he muttered "This bites. I've always been horrible at this kind of thing, but I feel like I should say something." Pakkun looked up at the boy striding next to him for a long moment studying him. He wasn't the same young man that he had been when he had arrived. He had grown and in some ways he had broken out of his shell, but in others he had built it up even more. Pakkun could see that despite his somewhat more relaxed appearance he still was wrestling with some very powerful inner turmoil. These battles had aged him far beyond his years and left a somewhat haunted look in his eyes. Pakkun cleared his throat. "Trust me kid. It's a good thing. You need to let down your barriers. I'm not saying let your guard to trouble down, but let it down to your friends. If you truly believe that you now fight to protect those you care about don't be afraid to let those you care about in." Ryouko looked down at the pug an expression Pakkun couldn't decide on his face. Pakkun returned the stare and simply stated. "Just think on it kid."

Ryouko was a bit startled by the advice. He had not expected understanding from the pug, Ryouko had often been surprised by that quality from both Pakkun and Holly, his keeshonden summon. Ryouko let a smile of appreciation show in his eyes as was his mouth was covered. He hadn't realized it but they had reached the doors to the council chamber. As he put one hand on the handle preparing to open the door he stopped and looked down at the pug. "Thanks Pakkun I'll think on what you said."

"That's all I ask kid." Pakkun said with a small smile as he and Ryouko walked into the council chamber.

2 - Councils regard

Chapter 2[br]

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The council room was quiet as the council waited for the arrival of the days first appointment. The dimly lit room was ill suited for such early morning meetings as it had the habit of making one drowsy. Around the crescent table behind which the council sat many of it's members were struggling to remain awake many yawns passed through the silent chamber. Kakashi had abandon all pretext of remaining awake and was leaning back in his chair eyes closed and feet on the desk snoring softly. Next to him Anko was casting him disapproving looks. On the other end of the table another figure had taken Kakashi's lead and was also fast asleep and leaning against a rather disgruntled looking Ibikki. The only people that seemed to be fully awake in the chamber where Anko, Ibikki and the Lord Hokage himself. [br]

[br]

Suddenly the door swung open and a young man and pug dog walked into the chamber. The young man strolled purposefully forward and and stopped several feet from the desk, bowed and knelt before the council taking in it's members. If the rather unprofessional appearance of the members surprised him he didn't mention it. The dog too came forward and sat in front of the desk. The dog however rolled his eyes and muttered "How professional you all look this morning Lord Hokage." The Hokage nodded grimly and gazed around at the lounging council with a exasperated look. The members were busy trying to arrange themselves in a more dignified and imposing manner. Anko to advantage of the opportunity and used a sharp jab in the leg with her kunai to wake Kakashi and Ibikki merely moved allowing the other sleeping figure to crash to the floor. After the council had settled. The Lord Hokage who had a look of tried patience with his council turned and faced the new arrivals kneeling in front of him and addressed the dog.[br]

[br]

"Thank you for going and fetching the boy Pakkun. I appreciate that immensely you may return to your master now." the Hokage said with a genial smile at the pug. The pug bobbed it's head in thanks and trotted over to Kakashi. Who had picked up an open scroll on the desk and was ready to roll it up. Before he did the pug put a paw on his leg an annoyed expression on his face. The Jonin looked down at the pug and raised an eyebrow. [br]

[br]

"Yes Pakkun? Can I help you?" Kakashi asked an amused look in his eye. [br]

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The pug rolled his eyes and let out a low growl. "Next time you go find the kid. I don't do early! Not to mention this kid always unnerves me a bit." The pug said yawning and stretching. [br]

[br]

"I don't do mornings either Pakkun. That's why I have you. So you can do them for me." Kakashi said

his eyes closed in a goofy grin behind his mask. [br]

[br]

“Your lucky your my summoner or I would bite you” growled the pug while scratching behind his ear and glowering up at his master. Which merely made Kakashi grin all the more. [br]

[br]

“Is that so, isn't that nice. Anyway, why is it the kid makes you so unnerved? Is he really that odd Pakkun? You've known him nearly three years you think you would be used to him by now.” Kakashi teased patting the pug on the head. [br]

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Pukkun put a paw over his eyes and muttered something that sounded like “Why do I have to be summoned by someone so immature.” then looking up at his master and stated with a sniff. “Let's just say this one throws his kunai at a different target than the other shinobi. The kid is wiser than he should be at his age. Just thinks differently. The fact he thinks at all puts him at odds with your other knuckleheads. He just isn't natural.” [br]

[br]

“Thank you for your opinion Dr. Pakkun, but I believe your time is up.” Kakashi said eyebrows raised in amusement as he rolled up the scroll and the pug vanished still grumbling under his breath. [br]

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Anko rolled her eyes at Kakashi. “Can we get on with this meeting already?” She asked in her typical abrupt manner. [br]

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“I quite agree.” The Third said nodding his head. “We have kept the boy waiting long enough.” The Third turned and smiled at the young man that hadn't moved a muscle since he had knelt. “Come now Ekyt. You've been through this before relax a bit. You can sit you know. You don't have to kneel all the time.” [br]

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Ekyt hesitated a moment then sat cross-legged. “Thank you Lord Hokage.” [br]

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The old Kage shook his head and smiled ruefully. “Your formality has always stunned me Ekyt. To have such discipline at your age is a wonder. Some of my Jonin aren't even half as disciplined as you are.” He laughed motioning toward Kakashi who had his hands behind his head and his feet on the desk again. Kakashi only grinned and nodded politely at the Kage. The Kage chuckled again and as he caught the slightest of smiles cross the boys face. The Kage knew that the boy liked Kakashi and he had succeeded in getting the boy to relax a bit. “I'm assuming you know why you have been called before the council this morning do you not?” The Kage asked politely but with authority. [br]

[br]

“Yes Lord Hokage. I know why I am here. You will inform me of your decision on whether or not I will be able to participate in the Chunin exams.” Ekyt said this in a stiff formal tone. Although he had seen them all lounging about only minuets before and had personal relationships with majority of them the council

still unnerved him. He saw the strength of the village sitting before him and that image made him feel awkward and unworthy. "If I may ask though. Why was my appointment moved up so much?" Ekyt asked letting his curiosity go a bit. [br]

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The Hokage smiled slightly before answering, "That will be answered momentarily. First however we will address the matter of your application of request to participate in the upcoming Chunin exams." The Kage Watched as Ekyt unconsciously straightened ever so slightly in hope. The Kage looked down slightly sighing then looked up into the boys eyes. Ekyt visible sagged in a defeated manner having recognized the look from the previous five times he had applied. "I'm sorry Ekyt. Your request was denied by one vote last evening." The Kage truly felt sorry for the boy. He knew that he was being held back for foolish reasons, but the laws were clear on the matter. [br]

[br]

Ekyt sighed , but then straightened and lifted his chin proudly. He turned and glared at the one he knew had denied him for the sixth time the chance to advance. Ekyt had expected to find Ebisu looking smug and cocky about his success at keeping him back, but the Tokubetsu Jonin instead had a face that suggested he had just swallowed a peeled lemon whole. Ekyt couldn't help but look surprised at the normally smug Jonin's sudden sour look. He turned to look at the Hokage questioningly. The Hokage was smiling slightly at the look of confusion on Ekyt's face.[br]

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"As it is a confidential matter I'm not at liberty to say who it was that denied you the vote that would have let you take the exam, but I will say it has remained the same person every time." The Hokage said with a slightly amused expression as Ekyt looked back and forth between the uncharacteristic face on Ebisu and the Kage. "Now on to the reason why your meeting has been moved up so far." The Hokage said with a fatherly laugh at the still confused looking Genin. "You have in the last three years shown more potential than anyone in this village has in many years. You have mastered techniques that you shouldn't be able to preform in any right at your level. You having not even been raised shinobi are able to do things not even some of my Jonin can." He motioned to Ebisu who grimaced and looked rather ill.

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"Thank you Lord Hokage." Ekyt said not sure where this was going. The Kage held up his hand imploring that he be allowed to finish.[br]

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"So, it is by my decision that I would like to motion that Ekyt be promoted to the rank of Jonin." The Hokage beamed at a dumbstruck Ekyt.[br]

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"Lord Hokage, I don't know what to say." Ekyt stammered. "This is such an honor to have this considered, but isn't it a useless gesture?" Ekyt asked unable to keep out the hope in his voice and forgetting his formality a bit. "I mean. Won't the person that has kept me from taking the Chunin exams just vote no." [br]

[br]

The Hokage lowered his head and in a semi mischievous voice that would have made Naruto proud answered. "Well true, but this time it only takes five votes." [br]

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Ekyt felt his heart jump as his hope was restored. "Is it really a possibility Lord Hokage?" Ekyt's excitement had made him forget his normally disciplined demeanor and the Genin was now grinning from ear to ear under his mask and his good eye danced with hope.[br]

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"Well, it does take the votes of the Five highest ranking members of this council." The Kage said in an offhanded manner as if to disregard this detail. Ekyt's shoulders slumped instantly and the fire in his eyes died. [br]

[br]

"Oh." Was all Ekyt could muster. His hope had evaporated as quickly as it had come. Ebisu was on the top five. He would never vote in favor of the motion. Ekyt cast a despairing glance at the Jonin. He still looked rather ill. This puzzled Ekyt, but he didn't care. He began mentally berating himself for showing so much emotion. He knew better than to let them get a hold on him. [br]

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The Kage watched the almost instant return to Ekyt's usual stoic demeanor. He watched the flame of hope disappear from his eyes. The old Kage almost felt bad for the boy. "Let's just take the vote and see what happens." The old Kage said with a sympathetic smile and an encouraging tone.[br]

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Ekyt merely nodded as he couldn't speak past the knot of disappointment in his throat. This vote was pointless and discouraging. Ekyt didn't understand why Lord Hokage wanted to put him through this disappointment. He almost spoke out that he declined the offer, but decided that it didn't matter either way. [br]

[br]

Lord Hokage stood and put his right hand in the air and spoke to the council with deliberate authority. "I motion that the Genin known as Ekyt be skipped past the rank of Chunin and promoted directly to Jonin for his incredible skills and dedication to this village. Will all those of the top five please vote 'Aye' or 'Nay'. I as the head of the five vote Aye." The Hokage took his seat and looked at the Council expectantly. [br]

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Anko stood and threw Ekyt a rare but impish grin. "Ah, damn, what the hell why not. I can handle having the little punk around as a Jonin. Maybe I'll get to spar him and wipe the floor with his face. He has my vote. Aye!" Anko sat down with a blissful look on her face. Ekyt shivered slightly as he knew she was imagining kicking the crap out of him. For some reason, Ekyt felt rather fond of her despite her somewhat brutal demeanor.[br]

[br]

Following Anko, Ibikki stood and gave Ekyt an appraising look over. Ekyt had the odd sensation that he

was being x-rayed and had to fight the urge to fidget. Ibikki nodded as if confirming what he had suspected. "This young man shows promise. I would love having him a Jonin. He might one day make a valuable addition to the ANBU. He has my vote as well. Aye!" Ekyt managed a weak smile for the head of the ANBU black ops. That statement was high praise coming from him. He tolerated many, respected few. Ekyt would have been more pleased with himself had he not known that despite that praise this motion would fail.[br]

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Following Ibikki's vote of Aye; Kakashi spoke lazily, not bothering to stand or take his feet off the desk for that matter. "I've known this kid for Three years. I'm the one that welcomed him to the village. He is basically been a constant member of my team since Sasuke deflected. I know what he can do and I'm definitely not worried about him as a Jonin." Kakashi who's eyes had been closed as he spoke opened his uncovered eye and glared down the table at Ebisu. "He would be a better Jonin than some of the ones we have." Ebisu flush angrily, but said nothing. Kakashi closed his eyes again and said in a offhanded manner. "He definitely has my vote." With this he feel silent. Ekyt couldn't help but smile at the completely unconcerned way with which Kakashi spoke. [br]

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The chamber feel silent after Kakashi finished. Ekyt reluctantly turned and face Ebisu not wanting to face the smug face he knew he would see there. He knew all to well Ebisu would be relishing a chance to stop Ekyt's dream again. Ekyt stared into the surprisingly annoyed face of the Jonin. "Well, let's get this over with. Go ahead and ruin the motion." Ekyt spat a bit more disrespectfully than he meant in front of the Hokage. The Tokubetsu Jonin looked like he was having a hard time controlling his temper as he stared back at Ekyt.[br]

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"It isn't my call this time or believe me I would crush this motion this moment. A punk juvenile that associates with the likings of sub-standard and sub-human shinobi like that beast Naruto do not deserve to hold the honored rank of Jonin. Regretfully I have no say in this motion, so if you excuse me I don't care to defile myself by talking to your likes." Ebisu said through gritted teeth in a hiss laden with the purest of hatred and loathing before turning his attention away from a stunned Ekyt. [br]

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Ekyt stared at the Tokubetsu Jonin in disbelief unsure of what was going on. "Sir?" He asked turning a inquisitive gaze to the Lord Hokage. "I don't understand. He's the fifth ranking member of the council. What's he mean he doesn't have a say?" [br]

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The Third smiled and let out slight chuckle. "He means he's been replaced during this session by someone of higher rank. He has no say in this matter only his replacement does." Saratobi lowered his head slightly and leaned forward lighting his pipe smiling slyly. "You didn't think I would ask to carry a motion I knew would be shot down did you?" The Third leaned back into his chair comfortably an rested his hands on the arms of his chair a smile on his Fatherly face and a brow arched in amusement as he puffed on his pipe.[br]

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Ekyt stared at the old Kage the hope and excitement he had felt at the first mention of the promotion

starting to stir again. He kept it in check though as the motion hadn't been carried yet and he still didn't know in who's hands his destiny rest in. "If Ebisu isn't the one casting the vote who is?" Taking a quick calculating glance around the chamber it was then that he realized there was indeed one more person than usual sitting at the curved desk. He was leaned back in his chair feet on the desk much like Kakashi was. Ekyt did a double take as he recognized the man grinning back at him.[br]

"That would be me kid." The man said his eye's sparkling at the stunned look on Ekyt's face. "Long time no see. I happened to be here on official business and Saratobi here asked if I would like to help out an old friend. What can I say I couldn't help but agree just to see the look on that @\$\$ Ebisu's face when I took his place." The man laughed.[br]

Ekyt opened his mouth to speak but instead closed it and shook his head, a broad grin on his face, trying hard to suppress a laugh. The man chuckled and nodded his head winking at Ekyt. Then without warning hopped up onto the desk raising a finger high into the air and declaring loudly to the room in general. "I cast my vote in favor of this young man joining the ranks of Jonin so long as he swears not to be a pompous @\$\$ like the substandard shinobi I replaced on this council. I vote aye so long as he swears to follow Kakashi and I's legacy of making sure everyone has a chance to excel as a shinobi. So let it be written let it be done. Ekyt is now a Jonin!" With this the man did a back flip off the desk and landed grinning in front of Ekyt. "Congrats kid." he said pumping Ekyt's hand animatedly. [br]

Behind him the Third put a hand over his eyes chuckling and shaking his head. "Ryu my old friend your lucky your a former favored student and a Kage. You just stole my lines." [br]

Ryu turned and mischievously winked at the old Kage. "What's the fun of having immunity to the laws of your village if I can't have a bit of fun and cause some disruptions while here." The Third just chuckled and turned his attention to Ekyt.[br]

"Like Ryu sensei said. Congratulations upon obtaining the rank of full Jonin." The Old Kage stood and bowed slightly to Ekyt who returned the gesture enthusiastically. "Now onward to more business. It just so happens that your promotion here has made you eligible to run an A ranked mission that Ryu has requested we assist with." The the old man beamed proudly at Ekyt. "You being the most qualified and available to work this mission have been personally selected by Ryu to head up this assignment. Ryu will give you a briefing at 1600 hours. Until then. I believe you have a medical lesson to attend with Sakura-chan do you not. I think you will be surprised further once you arrive there. I think it best if you extend your session with Sakura. I will attend to finding someone to replace you on the mission you had docketed for this afternoon." [br]

Ekyt stood stunned at the old Kage's announcement then looked at Ryu. A broad grin splitting on his face. "You really chose me personally Ryu-sama?" [br]

Ryu twitched his brow once and grinned. "Last time I saw you fight I was major impressed by your skills. I was rather disappointed when the fight was ended. Let's just say. I'm curious as to just what you can do. I think you will do the job I need nicely." Ryu clapped Ekyt hard on the shoulder then turned around to the rest of the council with a broad grin. "I'm hungry how bout all you? How bout we all get a bite. Kakashi is paying." [br]
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Kakashi looked up from his book startled. "Uhh? I am?" [br]
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Ryu merely laughed and strode to the door throwing them open and nimbly jumping up into the trees calling over his shoulder to Ekyt. "I'll meet you at the village gates at 1600 hours sharp. Don't be late." [br]
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Ekyt merely shook his head trying hard not to laugh at the rambunctious Jonin's total randomness as he turned to receive his dismissal from the Third who was leaning back in his chair his head tilted back massaging his temples; his pipe dangling dangerously from the corner of his mouth. [br]
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"That boy is going to be the death of me yet." He mused as he sat up straight and watched the young Kage bound away through the trees. Turning his attention to Ekyt who with a bit of difficulty had returned to his disciplined demeanor although a hint of a pleased smile could be seen through his mask. "Well it seems you have made out pretty well from this meeting today my boy. There is one final thing I wish to attend to before I dismiss you to your medical lessons. It has been discussed as of late that we need some fresh blood here on the council. According to the vote we will be taking here after you leave I believe one of our members will be being assigned to a duty that will be taking up a lot of his time." With this everyone on the council turned and looked at Ebisu. Ebisu merely closed his eyes looking livid and sunk deeper into his chair. Ekyt grinned even larger under his mask a feeling as though Christmas had come early filling him rapidly. The old Kage returned his attention to Ekyt a mischievous grin on his face once again. "I believe Ebisu will have his hands quite full with his new soon to be position as personal trainer and tutor to every academy student that has trouble with anything. As he will be so busy he won't be having time to attend the council proceedings. It is the councils wish that you consider our offer to join this council. You are a noble and honest man and we could use you desperately with us. So if you would please think on it and give us your answer upon your return from your mission." With this the Third nodded his dismissal and turned to the rest of the council. [br]
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Ekyt could barely hold his demeanor as he bowed to the council and backed from the chambers. As he reached the chamber doors and began to pull the doors closed he could hear the old Kage as the council to vote now on the issue of Ebisu's transfer of position. Ekyt nearly laughed as instantly there was a unanimous and strong aye from the council. Ekyt turned and looked out over the cherry blossom strewn road that lead back into the heart of the village. Taking a deep breath of the fragrant aroma he exhaled enjoying the thought that his life for the first time since he arrived seeming to be moving forward. Grinning from ear to ear he began to make his way toward his lessons with Sakura the day seeming to just get better with each step. [br]