

# Life and Death: The Race is On

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*I wasn't sure I was even going to write this, but I decided it would probably be best if I did. To any fans of Lee, you might want to read this.*

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# 1 - Lee's Choice

Nighttime in the deep forest of the Land of Fire. The full moon and cloudless sky leave the land drenched in an eerie blue light, at once peaceful and foreboding. The many rivers and streams create a constant flow of sound, an underlying beat that is quickly joined by others. The hooting of the owl, the singing of the cricket, and the rustle of the wind in the trees, all of it merging into a beautiful symphony of night, resonating across the blue and grey landscape.

Lee did not have time to stop and enjoy any of it. He was moving fast through the canopy, faster than virtually anyone else could ever dream of going, even with Izumi's seemingly lifeless form held in his arms. He had to get back to the village as quickly as possible, or Izumi wasn't going to make it. He was not going to let that happen.

A pair of deer started as Lee shot passed them in the trees. They bolted into the dark shadows of the trees, fearing some unknown predator. Owls fell silent as he flew by and his passage disturbed the crickets and many other insects, the air displaced by his speed blowing them from their tree branch perches. The moonlight was momentarily blocked out by a single stray cloud, which seemed to linger there, as if it was trying to taunt the racing shinobi and slow him down.

\*I will not stop,\* Lee thought to himself as he leapt from one branch to another, \*even if the moon and stars completely go out, I will keep going. I will not allow an ally of Konoha and a friend's sibling to simply perish without a fight. If only the Gate of Rest was not so taxing over long periods.\* Even though he was only half way back to the village, half way back to the medic-nin who were Izumi's only hope, Lee had to admit it, he was tiring. He looked down at the motionless body in his arms, feeling its faint heart beat with his heightened sense of touch. \*I will not stop now!\*

Onward the young chunin pressed, into the night, into the trees, into the future that lay ahead. He refused to allow his body to tell him to stop, no matter how tired he was, so he just continued to move ever closer to the village. Leap from this branch, land on this one, drop down two feet, duck under that limb, jump up to land on that branch. So went almost his entire journey, until there were only twenty of the original 200 kilometers left to travel.

Then, as he leapt from one branch to land on another, his eyes closed for just a moment longer than he intended, and he slid off his target and plummeted toward the ground forty feet below. There was no other branch for him to grab hold of, and no way for him to reach one of the tree trunks to slow the fall, so Lee did the only thing he could think of. He twisted in the air to make sure that he would strike the ground before Izumi and cushion her impact, he would not allow a wounded individual to come to more harm for his sake. He only hoped that the hard ground beneath him would not injure him too badly to continue. When he landed, however, it was not on hard ground at all, but rather on a thick bed of long and sturdy grass.

"How?\*" Lee thought to himself as he climbed to his feet again, \*I could have sworn it was packed dirt beneath me, not soft grass. I must be more tired than I thought.\* He looked down at Izumi again, but this time he could hardly even feel her pulse. It was there, but it was definitely weak. \*Not now, not after I

have brought you this far. Hang on, Izumi.\* He looked up and recognized a hill in the distance. He knew that it meant he was not far from the village, but he also knew that even with the Gate of Rest open he would never make it, not with how exhausted he was. He looked at Izumi once again and decided what he was going to do.

\*Kakashi-sensei, I know you told me to open only up to the third gate, but at this rate I will not make it in time. I care about all of my friends and allies, and to protect those I care about I will risk the higher gates. Please forgive me.\* And as Lee finished this silent profession, he opened the fourth and fifth gates simultaneously. He felt a rush from the sudden burst of chakra in his body and immediately leapt back into the canopy, moving faster than the eye could see. Lee made his way so quickly now that not a single creature of the night was even aware of his presence anymore. All that the deer, crickets, and owls noticed was a sudden increase in the breeze as he passed by.