

Naruto Takami wo Mezashite

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Takes place after the Time Skip, outlining the adventures of Naruto and friends.

Note: I've done my best to include all honorifics, as well as the Japanese names of the jutsus, to try to give it that Naruto feel.

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1 - Welcome Home, Dattebayo!

NOTE: My OC, Ekyt, is replacing Yamato, because...well, because I hate Yamato. So, Ekyt's in^^

“AGHHH! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! EVERYONE'S A CHUNIN BUT ME?!”

Sakura sighed deeply. “Welcome back Naruto-kun,” she muttered, “I hadn't noticed how...quiet it had gotten around here...” (Sweatdrop)

“Well, it's only a matter of time! I'll be Hokage! Hey, how's Granny Tsunade doing?! Is she ready to give it up yet?!” Naruto asked in excitement.

“Of course not! Tsunade-sama is doing fine, the village is getting better! Or, it was. Now that you're here...” Sakura murmured.

“What?! HEY!” Naruto shouted. “WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY”

“I thought I heard a familiar shout. Welcome back Naruto-san!”

Naruto looked to his right. Ekyt leapt down from the tree he had been sitting in.

“Looks like you've grown,” Ekyt pointed out.

Naruto put his hands behind his head and grinned.

“Yeah. Well, ya know, it happens to guys my age. Looks like you're different too...but I can't place it...”

Ekyt's change was more subtle. He was taller, and the bags under his eyes more defined, but other than that, he looked the same. Except...

“Your eye!” Naruto shouted, nearly poking said eye with his outstretched finger. “It's fixed!”

Ekyt closed both eyes, clearly grinning under his mask. “Well, you have Sakura-san to thank for that.”

Sakura blushed and shrugged, a pink color rising on her cheek.

“It was nothing, really! And it's Sakura-CHAN, you've known me long enough!”

Ekyt shrugged. “I have a hard time adding that honorific to a chunin's name. You still outrank me, but I'll get it right eventually. Anyway, I've got a name, too. Kaguya.”

Ekyt looked up at the sky, then suddenly back down, as if he had remembered something important.

Sakura remembered it first.

“That's right! Iruka-sensei, can't forget that! Naruto-kun, come with us. Iruka-sensei wants to see you!”

Ekyt coughed suddenly. “Sakura-san, I have to go, I have that meeting...”

“Ekyt-san, you and your work! Oh well, not like you had a choice. Good luck,” Sakura told him.

“Thank you. And, Naruto-san, good to have you back!”

Ekyt leapt off, using the trees as a road.

“So, Sakura-chan's a chunin now?” Naruto asked the pink-haired kunoichi, his face etched with lines of surprise.

“That's right!” she replied happily, flashing a peace sign.

“Naruto, will you slow down?”

Jiraiya came up to them, panting from exhaustion.

“Come on Pervy hermit, couldn't you keep up?!” Naruto taunted.

“S-shut up already,” Jiraiya managed around a deep breath.

“Jiraiya-sama! Good to see you!” Sakura exclaimed, giving the Toad Sage a hug.

“You, too Sakura-chan! My, you’ve grown! Into quite the lovely young lady...” Jiraiya gulped, getting a familiar look in his eyes.

Oh, it would be so wrong to do research on her...but it would be SOOO good! No, no, she’s not old enough, and it’s wrong! Maybe a little peak...no, no, no!

Sakura and Naruto watched this strange, wordless battle.

“Is he okay Naruto-kun?” Sakura asked, a sweatdrop forming on her head.

“That happens a lot, dattebayo,” came Naruto’s reply, coupled with a sweatdrop of his own.

“So Naruto-kun...you’ve grown...am I...more womanly?” Sakura asked, blushing.

“You look the same Sakura-chan!” Naruto declared with a thumbs up.

Sakura’s face contorted into an unmistakable mask of rage.

“WHAT?! HOW DARE YOU?!” WHAM! Sakura punched Naruto, sending him hard into the ground.

Jiraiya gaped, but kept his thoughts to himself.

Between the rage and the power, she’s like another Tsunade...I pity the Shinobi who crossed her...

Ekyt sat rigidly before the council. Tsunade-sama, Ebisu-sensei, and Kakashi-sensei. Ekyt knew all of them, but each was imposing nonetheless.

“I’m sorry, we have to deny you,” Tsunade-sama sighed.

“I had a feeling. Sorry for bothering you.” Ekyt tried to keep the disappointment out of his voice, knowing he was failing miserably at that.

“It’s nothing personal, you know,” Tsunade told him, “It’s just not easy to bend the rules.”

“It’s not personal on your part Tsunade-sama, I understand *that*.”

Tsunade rubbed her brow. “And why do you say that?”

“I get the feeling that someone is working against me...and I’m sure I know who it is, and why. But I have no proof, so I won’t offer an accusation. Do you have a mission for me today?” Ekyt’s tone had become dry by the end. He had said all this before; just not to Tsunade-sama.

“I’m afraid not, only A and B ranks today. Unless you don’t mind delivering this...” Tsunade offered a scroll to Ekyt. She noticed his hesitation before he took it.

“Right, of course. To Iruka-sensei?”

“That’s right.”

Ekyt got up and left the room, his back military-straight as he walked out. The doors clanged closed behind him, leaving Kakashi, Ebisu, and Tsunade.

“We denied him again...and he knows why. This is ridiculous, but there’s nothing I can do,” Tsunade told them, looking at Kakashi for approval.

“Rules are rules. There are, of course, ways around them, as Ebisu is all too familiar with,” Kakashi muttered, casting a dark glance at Ebisu.

“If I thought he was ready, I would say yes!” Ebisu almost shouted, his voice indignant at the thought of the accusation of bias.

“Ebisu, if even Kakashi thinks he’s ready...he’s ready. What, exactly, do you have against him? You know how hard-pressed we are for chunin...” Tsunade’s tone went lower, more menacing.

“He has no team, and he is disrespectful towards me!”

Kakashi shook his head. “That young man doesn’t have a disrespectful bone in his body, and you know

it. We need another opinion, one that will decide this. We can't hold him back without a real reason...'

Ekyt made his way to Ichiraku, taking the seat at the end of the counter. It was clear that his meeting hadn't gone well.

"Hey, Sakura-chan, what's his deal?" Naruto wanted to know.

"Oh, that...well, I shouldn't be the one to tell you...hold on..." Sakura walked over to Ekyt. After a brief discussion, she dragged him over to the table.

"So, how did the meeting go?" She asked.

"Same as the last four years...no dice." Ekyt closed his eyes until they were half-lidded, giving him an air of unconcern.

Sakura, Iruka, even Naruto knew better.

"Ebisu-sensei?" Sakura asked gently.

Ekyt nodded, closing his eyes the rest of the way and balling up a fist. "But this is nothing, no big deal. Naruto-san just came back, we should be celebrating, not brooding!"

Sakura gave Ekyt a small smile, knowing full well that he was one Shinobi who NEVER partied. Faking it for Naruto's sake was a rare kind of friendship, to be sure.

So the party began, and Naruto was bombarded with questions about what he had learned and seen in his time with Jiraiya.

"Iruka-sensei, I got you something..." Naruto reached into his backpack and rummaged around.

"Well, thank you Naruto. What is it?" Iruka asked.

Ekyt and Sakura exchanged glances. Naruto- being thoughtful? Too good to be true...

It was.

"Ekyt-san, I have something for you, too!"

Naruto stood up, his hands empty. Then, he made hand signs.

"Haremu no Jutsu!" he called. POOF! (English: Ninja Harem Jutsu)

Twelve naked, giggling girl Naruto's popped up, taking their places around Iruka and Ekyt.

"Iruka-seennseeiiiiii...look at you! The look on your face is so adorable!"

"Ekyt-kunnnnnn...do you think I'm...cute? Pretty? Beautiful? Oh, the strong, silent type! You bad boy!"

The twelve girls threw themselves at the stunned Shinobi, blowing kisses, posing, and hanging around their necks.

Iruka cracked first. His eyes widened, his mouth dropped open...

Ekyt followed suit. At the same time, they both had geysers of a nosebleed. The blood rocketed them backward, out of Ichiraku, and sent them high into the air, like bleeding Roman Candles. They both arced high, then fell hard, eyes twitching on the ground.

"OH YEAH, I MISSED THAT! I GOT YOU GUYS GOOD, DATTEBAYO!"

A few hours later, Naruto recovered from the beating Sakura gave him.

Meanwhile, as Naruto was laughing, someone else was more somber than usual.

"Kazekage or not...I need to gauge my strength."

Temari gulped. "Gaara, is there really any need? You're the most powerful, no one can stand up to you, you know that!"

Gaara closed his eyes. "The chunin exams...almost four years ago now...do you remember my opponent?"

Temari's eyes grew wide. **D-does he know? About how I treated him? That...that would send him into a rage...**

"I do Gaara. The name was Ekyt. But he's a genin, he offers no threat to you, not anymore!" Temari said, putting her hands up beside her head.

"The one opponent that I've never had a definitive victory over...Now I will get that victory..."

2 - Kyouran wo Kazekage

Naruto woke up early, stretching himself, then stumbling to the kitchen to make his morning ramen. Naruto's apartment reflected its owner: Untidy, but comfortable. Anyone who walked into Naruto's apartment walked away amazed that (a) Naruto was still alive, after nothing but ramen, and (b) that Naruto remembered to take care of his plants. Near the window, a money tree was stretching toward the sunlight, drinking in the life-giving rays.

As Naruto was munching, half asleep, he looked vaguely out the window. Seeing two familiar figures, Naruto perked up. He looked at them, at his ramen, back at them, back at the ramen. Deciding to have the best of both worlds, Naruto gulped his ramen down in one bite, then took off after the two figures.

"So Ebisu-sensei is the problem? Not a surprise, dattebayo," Naruto told Ekyt.

The two had met in the woods, along with Lee, for an early workout. Naruto, however, had only given his jaws a workout so far. Ekyt and Lee, who had similar training habits, were already sweating with the effort it took to complete their exercises. Today they were leaping from tree to tree, racing to the top. Ekyt won the first race, while Lee had taken the second. Naruto pulled out the third race. By that time, it was time to move on to hardening their hands and feet by kicking and punching trees.

"Yeah, it's Ebisu-sensei, I'm sure of it. He's just got his hitai-ate in a wad because I'm friends with you, and I show more potential than his students. Or so Kakashi-sensei said," Ekyt replied, grunting as he hit a knot on the tree's rough surface with a punch.

"Ekyt-san, have you taken this up with Tsunade-sama? It is not right for you to be held back, and you know it. And you, Naruto-san, are you taking the chunin exams? I am certain you have the ability."

"You still haven't learned to talk yet Bushy Brows? That formal crap ain't worth it, dattebayo!"

Lee rolled his eyes, while Ekyt gave a tolerant smile.

"Remind me again why we had him train with us this morning Ekyt-san?" Lee requested.

"Because it's the nice thing to do, and it's good for all of us. Besides, aren't you tired of beating me in sparring matches Lee-san?"

Naruto's eyes popped out. "What? You've never beat him?" Lee shook his head, trying not to sound too proud. "That is right, with the footnote that Ekyt-san will not use ninjutsu or genjutsu while sparring with me."

Naruto had a strange look on his face when he turned to face Ekyt. "Wow...you are really stupid."

"Kazekage-sama, where are you going?"

"Kazekage-sama, please, wait!"

"Let us come with you!"

Gaara turned around slowly to look at his people. "Listen to me. No one follows me to Konohagakure. I have business there, private business. Unless anyone thinks that I am incapable of handling it?" No one dared speak up. Some people even backed up, pressing themselves against the adobe buildings of the Sand Village. The town people, normally brash and proud, seemed to shrink at the sound of their Kazekage's voice. They crowded into stores and homes, anything to avoid the stare of their leader.

Ekyt showered and dressed quickly. He was going to meet Iruka, Kakashi, Naruto, and Sakura for lunch. It wasn't normally his thing, but damned if he was going to let them know just how depressed he was. He glanced around his apartment, his gaze falling on his discarded black headband. That had been used to cover his eye when Gaara had destroyed it. It's dark hazel color had left it, until Sakura performed a surgery that had someone fixed it.

Like I needed another reason to like that girl... Ekyt thought, smiling fondly. When he realized what he was doing, he immediately smoothed his face back to normal. **No, we've already has this talk. We don't drag the girl into it. You've got enough guilt to start your own religion, don't make yourself feel guilty by making her feel guilty.**

Kakashi looked up from his book long enough to laugh at Naruto retelling how he had gotten Ekyt and Iruka with the Haremu no Jutsu. (English TV: Ninja Harem Jutsu) Lee was amused by it even, until Naruto warned him that he was next in line for the dreaded (Sort of dreaded) jutsu.

"You cannot crack me with that childish jutsu, Naruto-kun," Lee claimed stubbornly.

"I'll get you yet Bushy Brows, dattebayo," Naruto warned with a mischievous smile on his face.

While Lee and Naruto hashed it out over that, Ekyt looked over at Kakashi and Iruka. He said nothing, however, and went back to his meat and vegetable ramen. He had to eat carefully, since he was reading his scroll, titled "ShoBu."

"Hey, what's in that thing anyway, Pervy Samurai?" Naruto was leaning over the table, trying to make out the scroll.

"Pervy Samurai? You never told us about that one Ekyt-san, would you like to share?" Lee asked, stifling a laugh. He knew the story full well, but wanted to hear it again.

"Get bent, Lee-san," Ekyt retorted flatly.

Kakashi reached over and took the scroll. His visible eye widened slightly.

"That's a lot of jutsus. When did you do this?" Kakashi questioned, holding the scroll out to Iruka.

"Every since I came here. Every technique and exercise that you, and Iruka-sensei, and everyone else, has taught me. I wrote it down, and modified it if necessary."

"Can you...can you actual perform these?!" Iruka asked in surprise. Ekyt was still a genin, so he shouldn't have been able to.

"Yeah. I, er, well, study them every night, until 4:00 am."

"WHOA! Ekyt-kun has less of a social life than Iruka-sensei, dattebayo!"

Iruka glared at Naruto, then motioned Kakashi to the side.

"HE'S still a genin? Knowing all that?" Iruka hissed, glancing at Ekyt, who was carefully rolling up the scroll.

"I know. He's near jonin level, and he could be cultivating those skills. It's Ebisu, he's got a grudge

against the kid...and Naruto too.”

“What do you mean?!” Iruka almost shouted, not liking where this was going.

“Naruto’s not permitted to take the exams either. Ebisu also voted “no” to a couple others, but he was right about them. That’s why it’s so hard to pin him down for this,” Kakashi replied, an unusually edginess in his voice.

The Leaf Village grew silent. It wasn’t every day they got a visit from the Sand Village’s Kazekage. It was still more often than they liked. Gaara’s demonic glare seemed to burn holes in everyone who met eyes with him. No one in the Leaf Village had forgotten how bloodthirsty Gaara had been at the chunin exams four years ago, or even the one four and a half years ago. The way Rock Lee had to have an emergency surgery to save his career as a Shinobi. And then, the way Gaara had destroyed Ekyt Kaguya’s eye.

After the exams, Gaara’s rampage had continued, until Naruto Uzumaki (With some help from his summon, Gamabunta) put the Sand Villager down for the count with, of all things, a headbutt.

Gaara made his way to Ichiraku. Without a word, he attacked Ekyt from behind.

Ekyt heard the sound of something whizzing toward him. He hit the dirt, while throwing his chopsticks like senbon. Gaara’s sand blocked the chopsticks, knocking them harmlessly to the ground.

Kakashi, Iruka, Lee, and Naruto stood up, ready to fight.

“Not you. Him. Only him...I owe him...” Gaara’s hand pointed at Ekyt.

Ekyt immediately stood up. Lee and Naruto tried to wrestle him to the ground.

“Think about what you are doing Ekyt-san! He will kill you!” Lee grunted, struggling to restrain Ekyt.

“Ekyt-kun, you’re good, but he’s a kage!” Naruto protested, also struggling with the effort of keeping Ekyt restrained.

“He’ll kill everyone until he gets me...Look, I’m going to lead him away from all the people. Go tell Tsunade-sama, but don’t interfere in the fight. This is between Gaara and me now...”

“Foolish...if you had let your friends help, you might have stood a chance against me...Sabaku Kyu!”
(English: The Coffin of Crushing Sand)

Ekyt evaded the sand attack by focusing his chakra and jumping up and over it.

“Enkou Doragan no jutsu!” Ekyt countered, making a punching motion with his fist. (English: Dragon’s Flame Jutsu, previously known as Dragon’s Ember Jutsu)

Gaara’s sand blocked the attack. When Gaara went to attack again, he found a portion of his sand unusable.

“What? What did he do to my sand?” Gaara wondered this aloud.

“Fire attack. It hardened your sand. For the record, really not a smart thing to voice something like that in combat!”

Ekyt's taunt was followed by a three kunai. Gaara's sand flashed up again, stopping the kunai just inches from his face. Gaara showed no emotion, even though he had just been close to death.

"Pathetic...What?"

There was an earth-shattering explosion. Ekyt had laced the kunai with exploding tags. While Gaara had taunted him, the kunai fell to the ground at his feet. The force of the explosion from the tags was blunted by the sand, but Gaara was still thrown backwards. The heat from the explosion managed to eat away at Gaara's sand supply, making more of it immobile.

"Kakashi, we've got to stop this! He'll get killed!" Iruka shouted, trying to get Kakashi to understand. "We can't. He gave his word to a duel. Besides, the town needs our protection, and Ekyt will be fine." Iruka flipped. "WHAT?! HE'S A GENIN, KAKASHI, A GENIN! THAT *THING* IS THE KAZEKAGE!" Kakashi gave Iruka a hard look. "I know, Iruka. I know. But we have to let them be, for now, or Gaara will massacre the whole village..."

"Ryusa Bakaryu!" Gaara called, a little emotion dripping into his voice. (English: Quicksand in the Style of a Waterfall)

Ekyt looked panicked as the sand suddenly began to rise. It rose past his ankles and to his knees in seconds. **Think...come on, there's a way out of this!**

"Magen: Narakumi no jutsu!" Ekyt countered. (English: Demonic Illusion: Hell Viewing Technique) He hadn't wanted to break out his signature genjutsu yet, but Gaara had forced his hand. **Damn it...it's costing me a lot of chakra...but it's got to be costing him more. All that sand can't be moved...I can fight without chakra, he can't...I've got to make him waste his chakra!**

The sand stopped flowing at Ekyt's knees. Ekyt took the momentary lapse to pull himself out of the sand. He used the body-flicker jutsu to get some speed up. Gaara was holding his head, stroking the mark on his forehead, muttering "Love me...Dad, love me!" over and over again.

"He's WHAT?!" Tsunade-sama shouted, knocking her desk clear of scrolls.

"He HAD to, or Gaara was going to kill everyone!" Naruto argued.

"He is right Tsunade-hime, it is true! Ekyt did not provoke him, Kazekage-sama just attacked without reason!" Lee drove home the point Naruto had introduced.

"You two, get Haruno Sakura. If Gaara's here, we're going to need medic-nins. I'm going to the fight," Tsunade ordered.

"Okay Granny Tsunade!" Naruto said peppily, glad to have something to do.

"Damn it, don't call me that!" Tsunade shouted at Naruto's rapidly fading form.

"Kage Bushin no Jutsu!" (Shadow Clone Jutsu) Ekyt made the handsigns as rapidly as he could. Unlike Naruto, Ekyt could only make four clones at a time. But those four clones were about to come in very handy.

"Bakuhatsu Baisuu no Jutsu!" (Multiple Explosions Jutsu) was Ekyt's next call. This attack used exploding tags set in a leaf (The hitai-ate mark) pattern around the enemy. When one was set off, the domino effect occurred, creating multiple explosions.

Gaara recovered just in time to see Ekyt activate the first exploding tag.

“Suna no Tate!” (Sand Shield) Gaara’s sand formed a protective cocoon around him, blocking out the explosion. One wall, however, was penetrated. Ekyt took the opening.

“Dainamikku-Entori!” (Dynamic Entry) Ekyt hit the flying sidekick, scoring the first real hit of the match. Gaara’s head snapped back. His sand started to close the gap made by the exploding tags. Ekyt managed to backflip out just in time.

“Still hiding in your little bubble, Kazekage-sama? Come out of there! Seneijashu!” (Hidden Shadow Snake Hand)

Four snakes burst from Ekyt’s wrist. Hissing angrily, they sped toward Gaara’s sand shield, easily penetrating it. Once Ekyt sensed they had bit down, he pulled forward. Gaara’s form hit the inside of the sand wall.

“Perfect! This might do me in, but no time like the present to play my ace! Mikazuki no Mai!” (Dance of the Crescent Moon)

This attack was spectacular, and very hard to learn. It involved created three shadow clones, then attacking with a sword in an intricate pattern. Ekyt, who had trained as a samurai before becoming a Shinobi, picked it up quickly from Hayate Gekko. Hayate had something of a brother complex with Ekyt for some reason.

Ekyt and the clones danced in and out of the range of Gaara’s sand, slashing at it aimlessly. Suddenly, all four used the Body Flicker Jutsu to get a half-second ahead of the sand. That’s all they needed. Four swords were thrust into Gaara’s sand shield. All four hit the Sand Kazekage.

“That must have done it...” Ekyt said aloud, not entirely sure. **I hope I didn’t kill him...**

The Sand Shield disintegrated, revealing Gaara. His skin appeared to be peeling off.

“Damn it! Sand Armor!” Ekyt snarled, wondering how he had forgotten that.

Gaara looked at his shoulder. One of Ekyt’s clones had managed to land a cut. Ekyt, however, was panting, tired from all the sudden chakra use. That meant he was vulnerable when Gaara used his next attack.

“Sabaku Kyu!” The Sand Coffin attack snared the Leaf Shinobi, leaving him helpless.

“You shouldn’t have tried to hurt me...you shouldn’t have! Now, I’m going to make you pay! The price is your blood! Your blood! BLOOD!”

Ekyt couldn’t move just yet. He could only watch in horror as Gaara used the *last* Ekyt wanted to see demonstrated first hand.

Gaara’s smile turned truly demonic as he called it:

“Tanuko Neiri no Jutsu!” (Play Possum Jutsu)

NEXT ISSUE: GAARA UNLEASHED THE SAND DEMON WITHIN HIM, THE SHUKAKU! EKYT’S CHAKRA IS JUST ABOUT GONE, HE’S GOT TO COUNTER, QUICK, OR THE SAND’S DEMONIC RULER WILL FEEL “ALIVE”!

3 - The Shukaku Lives!

Gaara's head fell forward, resting on his chest. He was asleep. In a battle, this would normally be a REALLY bad thing to do. But in Gaara's case, it all but assured victory.

Slowly, sand began to cover Gaara, and it kept growing, completely covering the Kazekage. But it didn't stop there. In a short time, the sand demon within Gaara would be awakened.

The One-Tailed Shukaku would live again. The sand monstrosity grew into its Tanuki-like form, its piercing yellow eyes causing some bystanders to shiver with fear.

"Before you kill me...why me, Kazekage-sama? Am I really a worthy test of your skills?"

The Shukaku laughed. "Oh please, there are MUCH more worthy warriors than you. But, somehow, you almost pulled off a win against me. I can't let that go unpunished...it might lead people to believe that I have a weakness...you're not actually worth my time. Be honored by the fact that you're going to die by the hand of a legend. Maybe you'll be a footnote in history, if you're lucky. The foolish one who tried to fight off something larger than life single-handedly."

Ekyt's thoughts were almost a poison to him at the best of times. People who talked to him had sworn that they had never heard someone doubt himself so much. When they pointed out that he had talent, he pushed the compliments aside (thought he was grateful to receive them). Some people claimed that Ekyt was just being modest, and that it was almost cocky. But anyone who had known him for the last four years knew that was the way he was.

Now Ekyt's thoughts were becoming a poisonous bile, ready to claim his life. Fortunately, emotions got involved. **So he's not taking me seriously either...what does it take? What do I need to do to be taken seriously, to be a threat, or even respected? That's it, I'll give this sand bastard something to remember me by!**

Ekyt pulled against the sand, but it wouldn't give. Gaara's transformation was almost complete, and Ekyt could do nothing to stop it. But he wasn't going to let himself die in some psycho sand hug attack. So he opened the first Gate of chakra, the Gate of Opening. He felt himself become more powerful. That was normal, and the direct effect of opening the first gate of chakra.

When you open the first Gate, your brain removes the limit on how much muscle you use at one time. Normally, your brain will only allow you to use twenty percent of your muscle. With the first Gate opened, you can use up to one hundred percent.

There were two catches to opening the Gates. One was that it was potentially fatal if done incorrectly.

The second was that, once the power was gone, you fatigued quickly and would need to rest.

The power was enough to give Ekyt an escape. He had to use a lot of power, but he broke through from the sand.

Gaara's Shukaku swiped at the newly-freed Ekyt. Ekyt jumped up on its enormous arm and ran, the extra chakra giving him more speed. He landed a solid kick to the Shukaku's face. The kick, however, did nothing.

“Free at last...so good...I won't let you force me back in to my prison!”

The Shukaku spoke again, which scared everyone in the Leaf Village more. The creature was so evil and so (rightfully) feared that even the few people who had considered helping Ekyt froze in their tracks, gaping at the sand behemoth that had materialized.

“Get them out of here!” Ekyt shouted to the various chunin who had materialized from the crowd. Why were they just standing around, they had innocent lives to save!

The Shukaku batted Ekyt away, sending him flying back-first into a tree. Adrenaline kicked in, and Ekyt ran back toward the Shukaku. It swiped at him again, but only hit a log. The replacement jutsu had come in the nick of time.

Ekyt threw a series of kunai after he closed the First Gate. The Shukaku put up an arm, stopping them. An exploding tag went off with a loud BANG, creating a small dent in the Shukaku's arm. It retaliated by used an attack that Ekyt knew all too well...the very attack that had destroyed his (newly healed) left eye four years ago.

“Suna Shuriken!” (Sand Shuriken)

The shuriken were heading for the crowd.

“No! Damn it!” Ekyt got a running start and, just as he had done four years ago, prepared to sacrifice his body for the life of someone else.

The sand shuriken hit his left eye. It was four years ago all over ago. Ekyt clutched his eye, but felt nothing.

“It happened again? But...why?” Ekyt was on his knees, a hand over the hurt sensory appendage. The look of sheer terror in his other eye chilled everyone present to the bone.

The Shukaku roared triumphantly. Then something caught it's eye. Something wrong. That human kid shouldn't have been smiling, not after that.

POOF!

“Shadow clone? Where's the real you?!” the Shukaku snarled. IT began to thrash around, trying to hit Ekyt. The chunin in the crowd woke up and started parading people away from the fight. One chunin looked back, with real sadness in his eyes.

“Rest in Peace,” He said quietly, before hurrying to help the others.

Ekyt was hiding up in a tree, trying to think of a way out of this. The nice thing about fighting something so powerful was that if you couldn't make a decision, it was made for you.

“Futon: Mugen Sajin Daitoppa!” (Wind Release: Infinite Sand Cloud Great Breakthrough). The Shukaku's grating voice shouted.

The tree Ekyt had been in was destroyed in the vicious wind attack. The force of the blow sent him to the ground, where he landed hard, face-down. Ekyt was amazed to find that he had only suffered a cut lip and a black eye as a result of the fall. The rest of the attack, the giant sand-filled wind had done more damage, ripping through his shirt and cutting him in countless places. The cuts were small, but stung. Thankfully, his tactical vest had provided him enough protection to continue.

Ekyt saw his opening. He thought of his eye, and how it had been destroyed. He thought about Sasuke defecting, and how he had attacked Sakura. Finally, he thought of all the times he had been bullied. Nothing ever came of it. But one thought brought hate surging to Ekyt's chest. **Why do bad things**

happen to good people? And why aren't there any consequences for bad actions performed by bad people? Why is it the innocent who suffer?

(NOTE: THE FOLLOWING JUSTU IS UNIQUE TO EKYT, AND I HONESTLY CAN'T TRANSLATE IT PROPERLY, SO IT WILL BE IN ENGLISH)

Ekyt felt his body begin to ache. For once, pain was a good thing; it meant life. Ekyt's hate grew in his stomach, then moved to his chest. When it hit its zenith, Ekyt reached to his chest and put a hand over his heart. The hand burst into a crackling blue flame, spitting purple sparks all around it.

"The Blue Flame Chakra? I'm honored I get to see it first hand...but it won't help you, you can't even hurt me!" The Shukaku's taunts brought a grin to Ekyt's face, though it was hidden by his mask.

"Who says I'm aiming for YOU?" Ekyt shot back. He had Gaara in his sites.

The Shukaku, belatedly, realized what Ekyt was going to do. It swung a giant arm at him, but the Leaf Village genin leapt over it.

"TRANSPARENT HAND: BLUE FLAME PROTECTION SEAL!"

Ekyt's hand moved so fast that the molecular structure began to break down, held together by sheer will. This was the secret to the attack. The molecules vibrate so much that the hand becomes transparent, allowing it to pass through solid surfaces. In this case, the solid surface was Gaara's stomach.

Ekyt's hand pierced Gaara's stomach. It was a gruesome thing to do, but in this case, it was a necessary thing to do. Ekyt squeezed his hand and pulled slightly. Then he removed his hand. Two seconds later, the Shukaku's claw stabbed Ekyt high on the shoulder, exiting out the other side. But that was all the Shukaku could do.

The Blue Flame Protection seal forced the Shukaku back into Gaara's body, then sealed it inside. In Ekyt's weakened state, the seal was temporary. But it ended the fight. Gaara's chakra was gone, and Ekyt was in too much pain to continue.

The results of the match vary from Village to Village. Sand Villager's say the match ended it a tie. The Leaf Village maintains that Ekyt won the match BEFORE succumbing to the incredible stab wound.

Sakure and Tsunade materialized from the crowd.

"My God...Sakura-chan, if he keeps losing blood at this rate, he's dead. We've got to..."

Whatever Tsunade-sama was going to say got cut off by Ekyt suddenly leaping up and throwing a forearm out. Sticking out of it five kunai, all of which would have hit Tsunade's head.

"Don't make the mistake of attacking, especially if someone's back is turned!" Ekyt yelled. He didn't have much chakra left, but he could pull off one more stunt.

"Magen: Kokoni Arazu no jutsu!" (Demonic Illusion: False Surroundings Technique)

The four attackers screamed. What each one saw varied, but they all had the same effect: The body was tricked into seeing something scary that wasn't there. From one attacker's scream of "My God, the water!", he apparently saw a tidal wave coming at him.

The genjutsu was enough to hold off the four while they were arrested by the newly-arrived ANBU agents. Ekyt gave them a warm "Thank you" and a wave before his body finally started to give out on him due to fatigue and chakra use.

"Ekyt-san! Please, lie down!" Sakura pleaded, grabbing his uninjured arm gently and forcing him to lay on his back. Once he had cooperated, Sakura and Tsunade cut off his shirt at the sleeve so they could get a look at the wound. While it was deep, and certainly painful, there would be no lasting damage if it

was treated quickly. With that in mind, Sakura and Tsunade used a special medical jutsu. "Shosen no jutsu!" (Mystical palm technique [Sometimes called "Chakra palm"])

Ekyt stood with Team Kakashi, and some new guy he didn't know. The new guy seemed to be as much of a statue as Ekyt. At one point, the guy had tried smiling at Ekyt. That had scared the hell out of Ekyt. The smile looked so fake, and it was out of place. Ekyt did his best to give the impression he was returning it.

"While I can appreciate your bravery, it was grossly misplaced Ekyt-san," Tsunade-sama began. "Of course," Ekyt said politely, his voice giving away nothing. He pulled at his shoulder a little bit, feeling every cut stretch and burn for a second.

"Now, I've asked you all here for a reason. Ekyt, you have served as Team 7's substitute fourth member on and off for four years. The time has come for Team 7's open position to be filled."

Ekyt didn't dare get his hopes up that it would be him.

"This is Sai. Sai, this is Team 7, who you'll be joining."

Sakura and Naruto looked downright furious. Ekyt, who didn't know Sai, kept his emotions in check.

"Congratulations," Ekyt offered.

"You seem like an asshole," Sai replied.

Immediately, Kakashi and Tsunade grabbed Ekyt.

"Let me kill him! Just a little! Please!" Ekyt was trying desperately to get at Sai.

"You don't seem to have a penis," Sai offered, sounding pleased with having someone to banter with.

(NOTE: IF THIS IS FOUND OFFENSIVE, I WILL REMOVE IT IMMEDIATELY!)

"WHAT?! YOU SON OF A-"

Ekyt was really struggling now. Naruto was grinned wickedly. But that faded quickly, as he had to hold back Sakura.

"Sakura-chan, take it easy! Take it easy!" Naruto pleaded, holding the struggling kunoichi back by her waist.

"Don't say that to Ekyt-san!" she snarled, just inches away from Sai's face with her fists.

"You seem like a hag," Sai told her calmly.

Naruto let go of Sakura, either in shock or on purpose. Sakura rushed toward Sai, cocking her fist back.

"TSUTENKYAKU!" (Painful Sky Leg) Tsunade called, slamming her heel on the ground. A crater swallowed up Sakura. Despite this, you could still hear Sakura trying to get out, still trying to get to Sai.

With Ekyt and Sakura each tied to a respective chair to keep them from killing Sai, Tsunade explained.

"Sai doesn't have experience with emotions or relationships. That was an attempt at being friendly. You see, he learned that people some times express their friendship by bantering and insulting one another. What he said meant the opposite."

"He still didn't have to bring... THAT part of me into this!" Ekyt protested, blushing furiously. Of course that was said with two women in the room, one of which he had a major-league crush on.

"He meant no harm. Besides, don't they call you the pervy samurai?" Tsunade-sama said with a snicker.

"Yeah, but on the opposite sex and...wait, wait, THAT isn't true! I mean, yeah, the name, but it was an accident!" Ekyt said. He stopped, wondering if he had talked himself into a corner. **Probably** Sakura and Tsunade giggled over the look in the flustered young ninja's eyes. He let them have their fun. He himself, well, he wasn't having any.

So, Team 7 had been reformed. They didn't have any missions right away, other than to get to know each other better. Boy, that was serving as an awkward time. Sai's offhand, flippant remarks and insincere smile, Sakura's violence level raised after Sai made a rather rude comment about "girls like her," and Naruto was just plain annoyed at the thought of needing another team mate. Kakashi admitted he wasn't thrilled with the prospect, but orders were orders, he told his team.

As for Ekyt...

"You're wondering why I didn't put you on Team 7." Tsunade wasn't asking a question, she was making a statement.

Ekyt nodded silently, standing near the window. It was a gorgeous day in Konohagakure. But Ekyt wasn't the type to really take notice. He couldn't see the forest for the trees.

"You had your reasons. It's not my place to question them," Ekyt said matter-of-factly.

Tsunade chuckled at his stoic response. "But you're pissed anyway," she pointed out.

"More or less. Although it's not just this, as you probably guessed from my meeting with the council the other day," came Ekyt's reply. Still, his voice gave nothing away.

"I had to do something about your fight with Gaara. He's the Kazekage of Sunagakure, what were you thinking?"

Ekyt lost his composure.

"What was I- Wait, are you saying I'm being punished for this?!"

Tsunade-sama had expected this, and she didn't blame him. "It's the council's opinion that"

"The council's or Ebisu-sensei's?" Ekyt asked, a very real edge in his voice. Tsunade's mouth dropped open in shock.

"You-wait, Ebisu..." she sputtered for a second.

"The Kazekage came here and attacked me, threatening the Village in the process. I'd like to think that any self-respecting Shinobi's nindo would include protecting the Village and its inhabitants with every last breath in their body!"

Ekyt pushed away from the window, both eyes closed, his breath deeper with the rage in his chest.

Tsunade closed her eyes and sat down. "I understand, you know. But I can't do anything without the council's approval. If I had my way, you'd have been a chunin three years ago, at least."

"Be honest with me, please Tsunade-sama- what are the chances I will EVER be promoted in rank?"

Tsunade's reply took a suspiciously long time, and Ekyt knew it.

"So I was right...someone is holding me back...that explains the lack of missions as well..."

Ekyt straightened up, his eyes half-lidded.

"Then let me relieve you of one last burden Tsunade-sama. It's about the only thing left I can do for the good of the Village."

Ekyt reached for his hitai-ate. He untied the not that bound the head-covering styled forehead protector to his head. He let it drop into his hand, where it rested at his side.

"What are you...don't you dare!" Tsunade warned Ekyt. "We don't want you to leave!"

"We? Or you...?" Ekyt replied sadly. "I'm not going to leave. But I'm not going to be a half-assed Shinobi either. I'm doing it right, or not at all."

Tsunade, who had been so close to one of her trademark displays of rage, stared at Ekyt for a few

moments. Then she sank down into her chair, cupping her hands in front of her.

“Please...just wait it out. Things are going to change in the council. But I ask you, not as Hokage, but as a friend...trust me. Let me fix this. In the mean time, you keep your nose clean. Sound fair?” Tsunade offered her hand.

Ekyt looked at the hitai-ate in his hand. He put it back on his head and tied it securely on top of his head again.

“Sounds fine. I really appreciate it.” Ekyt took her hand, and in doing so, took her word.

**NEXT ISSUE: A SURPRISING ADDITION TO THE COUNCIL. AND, GETTING TO KNOW TEAM 7!
DON'T MISS IT, DATTEBAYO!**

4 - A Bet from the Legendary Loser

Early in the morning, before the dew had left the grass, a tap came at Ekyt's window. Ekyt, who hadn't fallen asleep until two hours ago, woke with a start, his hand reaching for the kunai he kept in a hidden pouch in his blanket. He whipped toward the window, stopping in surprise. A monkey? Who the hell had sent a monkey here this early?

Ekyt opened the window, allowing the monkey to clamber inside. Silently, it dropped a small scroll at Ekyt's feet before it scampered back out the window. Ekyt stared after it for a moment, all sorts of questions rattling around in his head, before he knelt down to pick up the scroll. His hazel eyes narrowed at first, then widened in surprise at the contents of the scroll.

Him? Why does he, of all people, want to see me?

With that in mind, Ekyt grabbed his clothes for the day, got cleaned up and dressed, and rushed out the door.

Ekyt raced down the street, dodging various people and animals.

"Morning Sakura-san!" he called to the pink-haired kunoichi.

"Hm? Oh, Ekyt-san, good morning!" she replied, giving him a wave. **I wonder where he's rushing off to so early? Oh well. I'd better hurry, I've got to wake up Tsunade-sama. I hope she wasn't out late again last night, she's so miserable in the mornings when she stays out late!** Sakura thought with a shiver. Angering Tsunade-sama was something along the lines of signing your own death warrant.

"Ah, damn! Lee!" Ekyt remembered suddenly. "Kuchiyose no Jutsu!" (Art of Summoning) Ekyt called, still running. His dog, Holly, fell into step behind him.

"Kid, it's too early for your crap! Whaddaya want?!" Holly whined, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes with one paw as she ran to keep pace with her human.

"Message...(pant)...for Lee-san...here!" Ekyt spoke in fragmented segments, already tired from running so quickly for so long. In his gloved hand was a scroll, with a scrawl that Holly could barely make out.

"Alright kid, but if you wake me up this early ever again, I'm going to bite off your arm. If you're dumb enough to do it after that, I'll gnaw off something else, and we'll work our way up to the important stuff. Believe it!" Holly sighed in resignation and took the scroll, running off to find Lee.

Ekyt barreled up to the door, paused for a second to straighten his clothes and hitai-ate, then rang the gong.

"Ah, prompt, just like I remember! Come in, come in!" A distinguished, elderly voice called.

Ekyt walked into the house, er, mansion. The foyer's floor was made from a rare wood, with an Oriental rug placed over a small part of it. Paintings lined the room, and there was a holder meant for a sword just inside the door. Immediately visible was an enormous deck that overlooked a pond, surrounded by an Asian garden. Every flower seemed to be in bloom, and two turtles and blue heron occupied the pond. They were picking placidly at the water, picking out the awkward fish that strayed from its school.

"Come out on to the deck, it's too nice a day to be inside!" the voice called again.

Still wondering what this was about, Ekyt stepped through the house and out onto the deck. A small breeze had picked up, pleasantly tossing some small leaves around and scattering petals across the pond, creating small ripples in the otherwise glassy water.

Standing before a partially covered canvas stood the one who had summoned Ekyt. The Third Hokage. He insisted on being called "Sarutobi" now, as the Hokage title had been passed on.

"Good morning to you, Ekyt. How are you?" Sarutobi asked pleasantly, making another stroke on the canvas with his brush. He stepped back to admire his work, brow furrowed in concentration.

"I...I am well, thank you, Sarutobi-sama," Ekyt told him. As always the Third Hokage could tell when someone wasn't being entirely truthful.

"That is not what I've heard. And there's no need for the rigid, formal tone, lad. I'm not Hokage anymore," Sarutobi told Ekyt friendly. "Please, sit down, sit comfortably. I've called you here for a reason that I believe will crack even your stoicism..."

"Good morning Ebisu-sensei!" Sakura intoned brightly.

"Hmph," came the usually reply.

"Bastard..." Sakura muttered, but she went back to her scroll, studying the tenketsu.

Tsunade was waiting for Ebisu when he came in.

"Tsunade-sama, you summoned me?" Ebisu said stiffly.

"Yes, I did Ebisu. I'll cut to the chase: You wanted approval to be a squad leader. It's the council's opinion that you have one more test to pass. A simple sparring match. It begins in one hour's time at the academy. I'll dismiss you so you can prepare."

"The match proctor?" Ebisu asked rigidly.

"I can only reveal that I will be there. There will be multiple judges, rather than one proctor."

"Hey, Granny Tsunade, what's with waking me up this early?! I need my rest, dattebayo!"

"Naruto, don't call me that!" Tsunade snarled in reply. "As for why I've called you here, I need you to accompany me to the academy in one hour's time, on a C-ranked mission."

"FINALLY, something to do, dattebayo! Hey, does that freak have to come?" Naruto asked.

"Sai? (rubs temples, exasperated tone) Yes, he does. All of your team will be there. And he's not a freak...well," Tsunade paused, ruffling Naruto's hair, "No more of a freak than you!"

One our later, Ebisu walked into the academy classroom. He saw Umino Iruka, Gekko Hayate, Hatake Kakashi and his team, and Tsunade.

"So, I'm sparring you, eh Iruka?" Ebisu crowed.

"Actually, no, I'm here as a judge," Iruka replied, a smile on his face. Everyone seemed to be smiling. **What are they up to?**

"Hayate-san, you then, right?"

"(koff)Nope," the sick-looking Hayate replied, a small grin on his face as well.

Ekyt and Sarutobi walked in on the other side of the room. Ekyt and Ebisu saw each other and they both

froze.

“What’s HE doing here?!” They shouted in unison, accusing fingers pointed at each other.

Tsuande calmly walked between them, giving them each a shove backward with one hand.

“This is killing three birds with one stone. Ebisu, if you defeat Ekyt, you get a squad. Ekyt, if you defeat Ebisu, you will be promoted to chunin. Lastly...you two hate each other, what better way to end the hostilities?”

“He does not stand a chance! He is only a genin!” Ebisu taunted.

Ekyt piped up, not being able to restrain himself any more.

“The last time you fought me, I had one eye, a broken leg, and a ton of depression. The only way you beat me was to kick my broken leg. You don’t have that escape this time!”

Ebisu began to sputter incoherently, so Ekyt spoke up once more.

“I’ll make you a deal, Ebisu. If you win, I won’t even apply for the chunin exams for a full year, in addition to admitting that you are superior. If I win...You change your vote and let Naruto take the chunin exams.”

Ebisu was absolutely furious. “I never- I mean- where do”

Ekyt adjusted his hitai-ate. “Is your courage failing you, Ebisu-sensei?”

That was enough to spark the fight.

“You’re on!”

Ebisu lost all dignity and charged at Ekyt. Ekyt used a **Kawarimi no Jutsu** (Body Replacement jutsu) to disappear. As Ebisu stood, looking around in confusion, Ekyt was crouching behind him. That’s when Ebisu heard it:

“**Sennen Goroshi!**” (One Thousand Years of Death)

Everyone watching burst into hysterical laughter. Ekyt had taken a page from Kakashi’s book. Using two fingers, he jabbed Ebisu hard enough to propel him across the room. Ebisu’s head rocketed off the far wall.

“Wow! Ekyt-san used the Super Powerful @\$@ Poke!” Sakura declared.

“I guess he really DOES write down every jutsu we show him,” Kakashi remarked, a grin visible even under his mask.

Ebisu leapt up, rubbing his, er, rectal appendage. Ekyt immediately ran in to follow up on the attack. With his black *tabi* boots extended in front of him, he used another basic attack.

“**Dainamikku-Entori!**” (Dynamic Entry)

Ebisu parried Ekyt’s kick by using his forearm. He returned with a punch aimed at the temple. Ekyt blocked that, but was hit by Ebisu’s kick to the sternum, which sent the genin skidding backward.

“**Seneijashu**” (Hidden Shadow Snake Hand) Ekyt called. This jutsu was one of Orochimaru’s signatures, but Ekyt had learned it from Mitarashi Anko. Anko had taken a liking to the spunk genin, and was willing to help him out when she could. Because of this, she rode Ekyt harder than any other students during their training sessions. He had responded well to the training, and this jutsu was his reward.

The snakes stemming from Ekyt’s wrist snared Ebisu, then reeled him in. As Ebisu sailed in closer, Ekyt

focused his chakra to his hand, hardening it. As soon as Ebisu was in rage, Ekyt punched him. Between the pulling of the snakes, and the “push” created by the punch, Ebisu went down hard.

“So, Tsunade-sama, your plan worked perfectly.”

Tsunade shrugged at Sarutobi’s words. “These two were going to fight whether I sanctioned it or not. I figured I might as well use that to everyone’s advantage.”

“If you don’t mind my asking, Tsunade-sama, who’s your money on?” Kakashi asked.

“Is that a bet, Kakashi-san?”

Kakashi shrugged. “My money is on Kaguya Ekyt.”

Tsunade replied: “No bet then. So’s mine.”

Ebisu leapt up, furiously making hand signs.

“**Kage Bushin no Jutsu!**” he shouted. Three clones of Ebisu leapt out from behind him, all aiming for Ekyt.

Ekyt threw a series of kunai, all laced with exploding tags. While Ebisu focused on that, Ekyt went for the jugular: “**Magen: Narakumi no Jutsu!**” (Demonic Illusion: Hell Viewing Technique).

“Kai!” Ebisu said smugly, ending the genjutsu while deftly dodging the exploding tags. His right fist tagged Ekyt in the face. While Ekyt was distracted, Ebisu took the opportunity to throw a kunai at him.

Ekyt saw it, but could only block it with his forearm. That gave Ebisu an opening:

“Joro Senbon!” (It’s raining needles from heaven). Hundreds of razor-sharp senbon zipped toward the already wounded Ekyt. At least half pierced him in different places.

“Agh!” Ekyt grunted with pain. He plucked one needle out of his skin before Ebisu used a chakra-enhanced punch to send Ekyt into the wall. Bloody at the corners of his mouth, a tell-tale sign of internal injury, Ekyt slid down the wall, landing with a thud.

Hayate, the closest judge, asked Ekyt “Do you want to give up?”

Ekyt shook his head, coughing out a glob of blood, then wiped his mask with his hand.

Ebisu flew over and grabbed Ekyt around the neck, holding him up. Ten times Ebisu’s fist glanced off Ekyt’s face. A knee to the stomach ended Ebisu’s devastating combo, leaving the opposing genin lying in a heap.

Ebisu rocketed in for the kill. Ekyt had one more trick up his sleeve.

“Kuchiyose no Jutsu!” (Summoning Jutsu). Ekyt’s summon, a Chinese Water Dragon named Umisu, popped up in front of Ekyt. To everyone’s surprise, it spat out a Mizu Bushin no Jutsu (Water Clone) of Ekyt.

Ebisu snickered and slashed the clone with a kunai. That left his back open for the real Ekyt to do some damage by virtue of taijutsu.

“Mikaihatsu shindou koutei!” (Backward Impact Flight, formerly known as the Backward Konoha Snapdragon)

Ekyt gripped Ebisu around the neck and around the legs, then used his chakra to leap high into the air.

Ekyt shifted his weight and aimed Ebisu downward, then pushed forward, increasing the momentum.

The impact was devastating. Ebisu was lying in a crater, unconscious from the impact.

Ekyt stayed standing for about three seconds longer, then he crumpled to the floor, needles sticking out of him, and his body resembling one giant bruise.

“Well, he won. Once he regains consciousness, I’ll give him his vest and make the announcement. Sakura, once you’re done stitching him up, you’re officially a Tokubetsu Chunin, so you can brag to your crush there (Points at Ekyt, earning a glare from Sakura) that you still outrank him. Since I know you can handle stitching him up, I’ll congratulate you now,” Lady Tsunade offered.

“YES! I CAN TAKE THE CHUNIN EXAMS! UZUMAKI NARUTO IS ONE STEP CLOSER TO BECOMING HOKAGE, DATTEBAYO!”

Sakura gave him a hard hit on the head. “Stop it, can’t you see I’m working here, you retard?”

Sai came over and looked at Ekyt’s body. “He’s a wimp.”

“Don’t say that about Ekyt-san!” Sakura snarled.

“Hey, don’t put me in the same category as a ***** like Ekyt!” Sai replied.

Kakashi held back Naruto and Sakura. “Good to have things start to turn around...I think...”

5 - Gentle Impulsions

Ekyt admired the new vest reverently. The green color, the red swirl...it just seemed perfect. And he had earned it.

"Aren'tcha gonna try it on?" Tsunade-hime prodded, knowing full well that Ekyt was still shocked. Beside her, Sakura smiled encouragingly, and even Naruto gave a grin, brimming with confidence. They had gathered around Ekyt's bed, where had been (forcibly) confined for the last two days, recovering from the hundreds of small, but deep, cuts caused by Ebisu's attacks. Ekyt's taped arms and thick tactical vest had protected him somewhat, but senbon could, and did, penetrate it's thick confines. His skin was covered with angry red puncture wounds. Despite this, Ekyt had tried to go get missions, like always, but Tsunade-sama finally had Sakura force him to go home. He had spent the time working on his scroll, ShoBu. He had been adding to it for four years, and now that he wasn't allowed to leave his bed, he had plenty of time to review any jutsus or other techniques he might have forgotten over the years. There weren't too many, since he studied the scroll nightly. Now, he was free to get out of bed and take missions again. He was thrilled with that, and the fact he was now a chunin. If indications from Kakashi-sensei were correct, he would be jonin before long. With a smile hidden behind his mask, Ekyt shrugged his brand new chunin vest on. Something about wearing it made him...different. He straightened his back and shoulders, and just looked...professional.

And hot! CHA! Sakura managed a cute smile as she made her way over to congratulate him. **Good for Ekyt-san. I know how hard he worked...with Ebisu-sensei out of the way, he'll be jonin in no time. It couldn't happen to a more deserving guy.** Sakura, lost in her own thoughts, bumped into Ekyt. "S-sorry," she replied sheepishly. **Did I just stammer? Now I'm sounding like Ekyt!** Sakura was almost amused by the thought. Stammering was something Ekyt would do when nervous, usually around kunoichi. **Especially around me. I guess I've got that stigma of working with Tsunade-sama...Jiraiya-sama DID say I was like a second Tsunade...I'm not sure if that's good or bad yet...**

"It's alright," Ekyt replied courteously, his tone still as though he were addressing a superior rather than an equal.

"Congratulations Ekyt-san. We all know you deserve it." Sakura's warm words put a smile on everyone's face.

Ekyt started to bow, but was surprised by Sakura's move. So was Tsunade-hime and Naruto! As Ekyt had bowed forward, Sakura kissed him on the cheek.

"What?" Sakura asked innocently. **Did I just-just kiss him? Why aren't I upset over it? Oh well, he DID deserve it. Besides, it was just a friendly thing.** Sakura dismissed it as nothing.

"WHOA! Sakura-chan kissed the Pervy Samurai!" Naruto exclaimed. His exclamation earned him a brutal punch to the head, courtesy of a pissed-off Sakura.

Ekyt made his way to Tsunade-hime's office, having been summoned there. He received a few compliments on his new attire. When he passed an incredibly angry Ebisu, Ekyt had a feeling today was

going to be incredible.

“So, now that you’ve reached chunin level, it’s time for you to get missions more suited to the abilities we know you have. Team Kakashi is heading to Koubagakure, the Herb Village, to retrieve a plant that may be a cure for your cousin’s (Kimimaro) disease. Iruka will be going with them, which leaves the classroom in Nara Shikamaru’s hands. You might be wondering why I’m telling you this...” Tsunade paused as the door to her office was opened. In strode two imposing figures.

“Perhaps I might be the one to tell him, Tsunade-sama,” Morino Ibikki said curtly. At Tsunade’s gesture, he continued.

“Your request for Exam Proctor training is denied, for the time being. Our ANBU forces are depleted, in two areas in particular. Mitarashi Anko and myself are going to test you to see how adept you are to these areas. We will not tell you how, when, why, or what. Go about your business as usual...we’ll be watching.”

Ekyt had dealt with Ibikki and Anko before, and he had a guess as to how to handle this.

“Alright. Hope I don’t disappoint,” Ekyt replied, his voice giving away nothing.

“So, your mission. I want you to take three genin out, and have them spar you. Use Kakashi’s bell test, or one of your own. But give them an objective, a time limit, and a lot of pressure.”

As if on cue, Shikamaru slouched in. “I have the three genin you wanted Tsunade-sama,” he drawled. He gave Ekyt a friendly nod, which Ekyt returned.

“Kazuki Okkuu; Momoko Yuuka (Kunoichi); and Tsubasa Katsuyori.”

Three genin stepped forward, out from behind Shikamaru. One pushed to the front of the other two.

“My name is Kazuki Okkuu! And you think you’re good enough to teach me?! I know all about you, pervy samurai!”

Okkuu was obviously a handful. He had a short, but unruly mane of thick black hair, styled like a Brillo pad. He was dressed in a black jumpsuit with short sleeves.

“Please excuse Okkuu, his brain is underdeveloped,” the one called Katsuyori piped up, gently guiding the struggling Okkuu back toward Shikamaru. He bowed to Ekyt. “My name is Tsubasa Katsuyori; It is very nice to meet you.” Katsuyori was dressed in a pair of black pants that led up to his white, long-sleeve turtle-neck sweater. His eyes were a curiosity. One of them was grey, while the other was a deep blue color.

The third member of the group, the kunoichi, was a shy red haired girl. “My name is Momoko Yuuka. My family owns the *Kinokiita* diner.” It was obvious the little girl was shy, as her green eyes darted around constantly.

Ekyt gave them all a warm grin with his eyes. “Well, let’s go talk about this elsewhere. With your permissions, Tsunade-sama...”

Tsunade smiled. “Of course.”

“Kakashi-sensei, are we almost there?!” Naruto was whining...again.

“Naruto, shut up! Didn’t your time with Jiraiya-sama teach you patience, at least?!” Sakura snarled in reply, having heard enough.

“I think Naruto is PMS-ing,” Sai stated.

“WHAT?! I’LL SHOW YOU PMSing, you bastard!” Naruto flew into a rage, aiming for Sai.

By force of habit, Kakashi reached back and restrained Naruto from killing Sai. “That’s enough. We’ll

be there soon, relax!"

Sakura had been deep in thought the whole time. "Kakashi-sensei, if we DO get this plant, how are we going to give it to Kimimaro-san? He's loyal to Orochimaru..."

Kakashi shrugged. "I'm sure they'll figure something out. Our mission ends with getting this plant."

Sakura had another question: "Why is this A-ranked sensei?"

Kakashi looked at her mildly. "Didn't anyone tell you guys? The land is in the middle of a civil war."

"Alright, Let's start by learning a little about each other. Who wants to go first?" Ekyt asked his group.

"How about YOU, pervy samurai?" Okkuu muttered.

Ekyt stood up. "My name is Kaguya Ekyt. I am a chunin of Konohagakure. My interests are getting better at my job, and other things that don't concern you. My dreams aren't important, and my desires are meaningless. So, how about you go ahead Okkuu?"

Okkuu stood up, drawing himself up high. The four were sitting on Lone Pine Hill. The Hill was alive with the spring's floral decorations. Konohagakure seemed to have a perennial springtime, as the Cherry Blossoms fell year-round. The peaceful scene was now disrupted by what appeared to be the second coming of Uzumaki Naruto.

"I'm Kazuki Okkuu! I'm a genin. My dream is to defeat every ninja in the world, and to kill every last samurai! I want to make those bastards pay for killing my father!"

Ekyt flinched slightly. **So, some day he'll come gunning for me...it'll be interesting to see what happens when I tell him I'm a samurai...**

"Thank you Okkuu-kun. Now, how about you..." Ekyt pointed to the kunoichi of the group.

"My name is Momoko Yuuka. I'm a genin. My dream...my dream is to meet a special boy, have a family, and make my parents proud of me. I want to be strong, and brave, and show everyone that violence doesn't always have to be the answer."

Ekyt gave her a friendly nod.

The last member stood up.

"I am Tsubasa Katsuyori. I am a genin. My goal is to become a jonin...and a samurai. I want to immerse my life into the martial arts, and become the second Musashi Miyamoto. As a ninja, I want to become the like the Third Hokage."

"Kakashi, that plant is going to be difficult to get. Sakura should pick it, it needs a delicate touch. I've read that the plant is more receptive to the hands of a kunoichi as it is."

Kakashi nodded at Iruka's words.

"Naruto's clones and my Sharingan will hold off any attackers. Iruka, you escort Sakura, then both of you leave, no matter what. With or without Naruto and I, if necessary."

The Land of Herbs was an autonomous nation, rather than a village. It usually had no trouble, no wars, no major problems. Every Village, from the Leaf to the Sound, needed their medical herbs. To attack the land would mean the death of too many to justify, even for the Sound and Sand Villages. The Land didn't have any ninja of it's own, save for one, the Koubakage, it's leader.

The Land itself was beautiful farmland. Some areas had been left natural, adding to the pristine majesty that nature offered if one knew where to look. There were lush green forests, wide open plains, and even

an oasis of sorts. Everything seemed perfect. How such a place could have a civil war was a big question.

“Kakashi-sensei, what is the war about? How did it start? And Why?” Sakura wanted to know.

“Alright, now that we all know each other, let’s get started. Your mission is to defeat me by tying a ribbon around my arm. You each have one. Anyone who doesn’t get a ribbon on me...well, you don’t want to know.”

“Tell us!” The genin demanded as one.

“Well, I can only pass two of you. If you’re the last one to get a ribbon on my arm, you fail the test and go back to the academy. If you don’t get a ribbon on me AT ALL...you will be failed completely and stripped of your Shinobi status, as well as barred from taking the Genin exams ever again.”

Ekyt had never seemed scarier to the three young genin.

“So, whenever you’re ready...attack me, and a word of advice: Try to kill. You won’t win if you hold back.”

Why does all this seem familiar? It’s like Déjà vu or something...

Concealed nearby, Anko, Ibikki, and Sarutobi (Formerly the 3rd Hokage) watched Ekyt handle his new group.

“He’s good with kids,” Sarutobi commented.

“It’s his other skills I’m interested in. When I had my little...chat with Ebisu, he mentioned how brutal the kid’s genjutsu was. I’m anxious to see it in action.” Ibikki was focusing intently on Ekyt and the three genin.

“You don’t think he’ll actually use it full-throttle on the kids, do you Ibikki? You know the kid has a conscience. Not to mention common sense,” Anko murmured. He might not go full-tilt, but even holding back, showing control, was a great indicator as to how deep the kid’s power ran.

“Good for Uzumaki Naruto this kid came along. I always said Naruto would be one to watch...well, it’s damn time somebody started watching, because he’s going to get real good, real fast,” Ibikki commented.

“Have either of you heard Ekyt’s...ambitions?” Sarutobi asked, taking notes on Ekyt.

“No. What?” Anko asked in surprise.

“He wants to serve the village, to thank them for accepting him. He wants to become a trusted advisor, an exam proctor, a teacher, a squad leader, a jonin, a council member, and ANBU.”

“Full agenda. He plans to pull all that off? More power to him if he can. I doubt anyone could. Uzumaki Naruto has a better chance of becoming the Sixth Hokage.”

Sarutobi cast a glance at Anko. “I have no doubt he will achieve some of that list. He is already a trusted advisor. He’s teaching right now. And, if I’m not mistaken, Ibikki, you are recruiting him for ANBU. That’s three right there, out of seven, all at age 19.”

“Go ahead, attack. You’re going to have to really try, because I’m not going to hold back,” Ekyt warned. The three genin just stared at him stupidly. **Alright, let’s see what happens if...wait...those are clones...good start kids...**

“AHHH!” From behind, Okkuu tried to attack Ekyt. Ekyt simply put up a forearm to block the punch, then

used an open-palm push to the chest to push Okkuu away.

Ekyt was then riddled with shuriken and kunai, courtesy of Yuuka and Katsuyori.

“We killed Ekyt-sensei!” Yuuka shouted, running over to his body. POOF! The “body” was a log.

The Land of Herbs looked war ridden. Holes in the fertile soil were plentiful, and a lot of the vegetation had been destroyed.

“Alright, let’s make this” Kakashi began.

“HALT! INTRUDERS! ENEMIES OF THE KOUBAKAGE!” came a shout. Peasants came running out, pitchforks aimed at Team Kakashi.

“Never mind. Iruka, Sakura, you go and find that plant. Naruto, Sai, you’re with me. We need to buy them time...”