

Ekyt vs. Ryofu

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My OC (Ekyt/Ryouko) takes on Andr28's creation, Ryofu. See the first chapter for further description.

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1 - Description

Their first battle was a year ago. Ekyl (nextguardian), the pure-hearted defender of Konohagakure, sees his life go up in smoke at the hands of Ryofu (Andr28).

Two years later, Ekyl (now known by other names, among them Ryouko) is still troubled by his battle with Ryofu. Now he wants closure, and he'll do whatever it takes to get it- perhaps even forsake the peaceful life he's worked so hard for.

STATS:

NAME: Ekyl

AGE: 18 (20 during second and third chapters)

CLAN: N/A, Adopted name of Sarutobi (Explained in-story)

BIO: Typically a fire-user, Ekyl was once the student of the Third Hokage. Before his training could be completed, the Third was killed by Orochimaru. Having access to the Leaf's library and the Third's collection of scrolls, Ekyl studied alone. His abilities were not noticeable for quite some time, though he won over instructors with effort and tenacity. A vicious defender of the Hidden Leaf, Ekyl's anger at his village's semi-destruction has eaten at him. When his closest female friend is taken from him, things turn more sour for the boy.

NOTES: Ekyl has the unique ability to survive the Reaper Death Seal when he is it's caster- at a heavy price. Most of his attacks are fire-based, though shades of the Third Hokage can be seen. Also, it's rumored that Ekyl may have at least one kekkai-genkai.

NAME: RYOFU

AGE: TBD

CLAN: HOUSEN

(NOTE: BIO WILL COME SOON, AFTER I'VE GOTTEN MORE INPUT FROM RYOFU'S CREATOR)

2 - Ekyt vs. Ryofu I (Re-posted)

PLEASE NOTE: RYOFU AND CERTAIN MARKED JUSTUS ARE THE PROPERTY OF andr28a! RYOFU AND HIS JUTSUS HAVE BEEN LENT TO ME WITH CREATIVE CONTROL FOR THIS FIC. QUESTIONS CONCERNING RYOFU SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO HIS RESPECTIVE OWNER.

ALSO NOTE- MOST OF RYOFU'S JUTSUS ARE NON-CANON TO THE CHARACTER, AND ARE USED FOR CREATIVE PURPOSES ONLY. THIS FIC IS NON-CANON TO THE FICS OF nextguardian AND andr28a.

PLEASE ENJOY!

Whoosh. The wind whistled through the midnight air, sending small rocks and dust flying through the air. It was a peaceful night to most. To some, it was as restless as any other night.

Three figures stood at the valley of the end. Ekyt, the last of the Kaguya clan (discounting his parents, who have taken another name to protect themselves from Ekyt's enemies); Sakura Haruno, the medical prodigy training under Lady Tsunade; and Ryofu, a complete mystery. To Ekyt, anyway. Sakura seemed to know him very well. And he knew her just as well. A fact that was not lost on Ekyt.

"Well, you have my answer, Ryofu. No." Ekyt was looking out across the valley. Even though the night's stress had been great, Ekyt looked younger than he was. Except the bags under his eyes. And now, the newly-grown five o'clock shadow across his face. Absently, Ekyt shaved with a kunai, as if it were an everyday thing.

Ryofu seemed to be amused by this.

"And suppose I took this gesture as a slap in the face?" he asked, smiling slightly. He put a hand on Sakura's shoulder, noticing the slight tense in Ekyt's muscles.

"You can take it however you want. My answer stays the same. I'm loyal to the Hidden Leaf." Ekyt let his eyes droop to a half-lidded state. Ekyt stuck a fresh chakra cigarette in his mouth, snapping his fingers the spark he needed to light the now-smoldering, relatively new combat enhancer. A strange creation that only he used, this cigarette had the same effects as a ration pill, except the time-release. Instead of fatiguing after three days, this was a boost to Ekyt's regular chakra in small doses.

"Well, I guess I can't persuade you then. Sakura, anything to say before we go?" Ryofu asked kindly.

"Ekyt, come on, this is perfect! He's like a brother, and you're the perfect boy for me! You really care about me, don't you?" Sakura asked excitedly, an idea forming in her head.

"Of course I do. I wouldn't have said "I love you" if I didn't mean it," Ekyt replied gently, knowing that his words were going to be used against him. Words as sacred as those shouldn't be misused!

“Then come with Ryofu and I!” Sakura exclaimed, opening her arms for an embrace. Any second, a blushing Ekyt would step into her hug, and everything would work out. It always did.

Only it didn't work that way.

“When I said I loved you...I said it to a different Sakura,” Ekyt began slowly. He paused, reaching for his hip flask. After a fortifying gulp of sake, Ekyt continued. “The Sakura I said I loved...was loyal to the Hidden Leaf. And she wasn't a killer. She was as kind as she was beautiful and talented. That's not who's standing here now. To think what you've become...” Ekyt shook his head in disgust, turning away from Sakura and Ryofu.

“So you're going to go it alone, are you? Brave boy. It seems we're opposites in some ways, and in other ways...we're almost the same person...” Ryofu muttered cunningly. Ekyt stopped halfway up the sandy slope he was in the process of climbing.

“What are you saying?” Ekyt growled, not turning around. Ryofu half-grinned.

“Well, you're going the path of a loner. You're not accepted in the village you love so much. And just when you've found a girl who loves you for you, you're willing to piss it away because you don't like her friends. What a pity.”

Sakura was just standing there, slack-jawed in shock. **Ekyt...I thought...he really cared...but he never lies, either...and I HAVE changed. Has his love changed, too?**

“I'm going the path of the loner because that's what was given to me. YOU, on the other hand, corrupted the mind of an innocent girl. I don't know how, or why, but you did...” Ekyt blew smoke out of his mouth. “You did what you did. I know where my loyalties lie.”

In an instant, Ryofu was in front of Ekyt. “You're passing up the ideal life. More than your village can offer you...Sakura...freedom...power...acceptance. You want it. Don't deny it.”

“Who's denying it?” Ekyt pushed past Ryofu, but once more found him in the way.

“I think you're denying YOURSELF, as a matter of fact. Opportunities like this come along once in a life time. The girl of your dreams, and people that accept you...you can't always have your cake and eat it, but that's exactly what I can give you.” It was a blatant challenge.

“Look, I gave you my answer. Now, you can get out of my way, and we can leave as something less than enemies. It's obvious Sakura's made her decisions about where her loyalties lie. And I believe I've made MY loyalties clear as well.” Ekyt gave Ryofu a long look in the eyes, then continued his way up the bank. This time, he found Sakura waiting for him.

“Ekyt, please! Don't make me choose! I've never felt safer, or more powerful, or...better, than I did with Ryofu. You could, too!” Sakura pleaded, her pale green eyes searching Ekyt's dark hazel eyes for an answer. But it was his mouth that gave the answer.

"I'm not making YOU choose. I'm choosing for myself. You made your choice, Sakura. And now, you're saying that this guy, whoever he is, makes you feel everything that I made you feel? How am I supposed to feel about that? And this dismissive attitude toward the Leaf? What would Kakashi-sensei say? Or Sasuke?"

"Irrelevant. They're both dead," Ryofu said offhand, as though stating an obvious fact. It wasn't yet common knowledge.

"WHAT?!" Ekyt's mouth dropped open slightly, then clenched up tightly.

"Sakura killed them. Granted, she didn't have a choice, really, but"

Whatever Ryofu was going to say was stopped by Ekyt's fist nearly beheading him. The punch, as it was, sent Ryofu skidding back down the sandy embankment. Ryofu didn't say anything right away; he only rubbed his cheek where Ekyt's hard right hand had left its mark.

"You miserable son of a dog! You take the girl I love...you take away the few friends I have...then you try to screw with me?! You damn bastard demon!" Ekyt was furious; maybe beyond furious. Ryofu just said, perfectly calmly:

"Don't make an enemy of me. That would be a mistake you would live AND die to regret."

"Back to hell, you demon! Even if I have to see you there personally!" Ekyt snarled.

"THAT would be your mistake. You don't want to see my true power. And I don't want to unleash it..." Ryofu warned.

"Give me one reason...Just one reason I don't kill you right now...I don't care about 'talent', or 'abilities', or 'gifts'...they don't win fights, they START them. It's your heart, soul and dedication that win fights. I hate to put my honor on the chopping block by killing you, you heartless son of a dog. But I've never seen everything I care about...tossed around so recklessly...STOP WITH THAT DAMN SMIRK!" Ekyt finally tagged Ryofu with as hard a right hand as he ever threw. Ryofu sat in the dirt, touching a hand to where Ekyt's fist had cracked him. Ekyt's fist was bleeding, but he didn't notice, or didn't care.

"Stop it!" Sakura shouted. "Don't make me choose between my 'brother' and my lover!"

"EX-lover! If you've turned your back on Konoha like this, you've turned your back on me!" Ekyt shot back. He had never dared to talk to Sakura like that. He had loved her, maybe even still did. But this...this was too much.

Sakura began to realize that she made some kind of a mistake. But was her loyalty to her first savior, or the boy she had opened her heart to?

Ekyt took knives, swords, and jutsus for me. He risked his life to save me. But Ryofu has treated me like a sister, and saved me from that horrible, unendurable shame when I younger...why can't

they agree? Why does this have to happen?!

“You, the demon...” Ekyt growled. “There’s only one way for us to settle this. As if an angel and devil fighting over an innocent soul, so should you and I fight over Sakura! The winner will live life with her, free of the other’s interference! I don’t mean for this to be a sparring match. I mean this as a contest- to the death! The loser dies. Fair enough?”

Ryofu simply shrugged. “If you wish yourself an early grave, then so be it!”

“No, don’t do that! I don’t want one of you to die!” Sakura’s pleading fell on deaf ears as the two stood across from each other. Similar to Naruto and Sasuke, the place for the battle was at the Valley of the End. At the same time, they kicked off, sand rising in their wake. Who had the advantage was unclear; Ekyt’s training had come mostly from the Third Hokage; Ryofu’s was largely unknown. But it was a safe bet neither was a pushover in combat.

“Multi Shuriken Shadow Clones!” Ekyt shouted, throwing two shuriken, which suddenly became two hundred shuriken.

“Water Style: Ice Wall!” Ryofu countered. A wall of ice stopped the shuriken from reaching their target. It also gave Ryofu the opportunity to use his next jutsu.

“Water Style: Ice Daggers!” The wall of ice suddenly formed hundreds of jagged points, and they were flying towards Ekyt. Ekyt made a set of handsigns, and used his next attack.

“Fire Release: Fire Encampment Wall!” Tongues of flame encircled Ekyt, melting the daggers and giving Ekyt precious seconds to plan a strategy.

When I hit him earlier, he didn’t offer much resistance. I’m going to guess that taijutsu isn’t his strong point...but getting near the clever bastard isn’t easy. Ekyt exhaled again, smoke rising, as he tried to concoct a quick plan of attack. It gave him enough time to stop the charging Ryofu, though.

“Water Style: Moving River Jutsu!” The water that had gathered under Ekyt’s feet shot toward Ryofu’s feet, creating a current that swept him backwards.

“Water Style: Ice Prison Formation!” Ryofu shot back. A dome of ice started to grow around Ekyt. Ekyt leapt up, but his foot was snared in the ice.

shoot!

Ryofu took the opportunity to throw a kunai. Ekyt had time to lean backwards, but his foot was still stuck in it’s icy prison. That ice was also rapidly thickening. Ekyt had to make his move, now.

“Dragon’s Ember Jutsu: Clone Instigation!” A Shadow Clone of Ekyt popped up and used his signature fire attack, melting the ice enough for Ekyt to scramble away. Less than a second later, Ryofu’s next jutsu struck home.

“Earth Style: Boulder Release!” Ryofu’s voice echoed throughout the valley, and even seemed to ripple the water itself. The ripples were actually huge rocks lifting up out of the earth, and flinging themselves at Ekyt. Ekyt wasn’t sure how to counter this at first. A split-second before his rock-filled doom, he got his idea. It was a relatively new jutsu, but it was worth a try.

“Tatsunokuchi: Dragon-Head Gargoyle!” Ekyt said in desperation, as the rocks closed in.

“Too late!” Ryofu declared. But in that, he was mistaken. The rocks had struck Ekyt, but he was coated with stone, in the shape of a dragon’s head! The rocks hadn’t done any damage!

“Damn it! You’re clever, I’ll grant you that...” Ryofu waited for Ekyt’s response. But the gargoyle didn’t move. That was when Ryofu heard it, from above him. Ekyt had scaled one of the enormous statues!

“Ryuuza: Dragon Constellation Jutsu!” Ekyt leapt off the rock, aiming his legs downward in a two-footed kick. But that wasn’t what Ryofu noticed. It was the gathering of stars into a dragon shape. The ‘dragon’ roared, and aimed straight for Ryofu. Only when it got closer did Ryofu realize that it wasn’t made of stars; balls of fire had strung themselves together.

“Water Clone Jutsu! Replacement Jutsu!” Ryofu shot off in rapid-fire succession. The ten water clones he had created took care of the dragon, while the replacement jutsu helped him evade Ekyt’s kick. But not entirely. As Ryofu landed behind Ekyt and punched, Ekyt spun and kicked with a reverse round house.. Just as Ryofu’s fist hit Ekyt’s stomach, Ekyt’s kick hit Ryofu in the chest. Both skidded across the ponderous valley and into opposite walls, panting from the effort it took to fight so long. Ryofu glanced at the sky. He smiled widely; the advantage was his now. When the full moon hit, the seal on him weakened, and the power of the five-tailed Houkou shone through.

Ekyt shivered suddenly. **This chakra...I haven’t felt anything like this since Naruto unleashed his demon fox! That was four tails...this is more...it’s coming from Ryofu...so the demon has a demon with him, does he? I’d better play my aces, and now!**

“HAH! NOW THE FIGHT ENDS! ARE YOU SCARED YET?!” Ryofu yelled, shaking rocks and rippling the water. Ekyt glared back.

“I’ve stared death in the eyes before. Itachi Uchiha, Sasuke Uchiha, even Orochimaru. And I’ve walked away, alive. I’ve seen Naruto Uzumaki’s demon unleashed. And I’ve faced the Shukaku with AND without Gaara. It’s ironic that I’ve been chosen to face you. I’ll just deal with you the same way I did them...only this time, if I kill you, you’re collateral damage. My heart has hardened, even if only for one night. Even if the girl I loved has turned her back on me, I can’t let the village I love feel any more pain at your expense!”

Ryofu simply laughed; even that forced Ekyt to cover his eyes, as dust kicked up. Ryofu had, by now, grown five tails. Those five tails struck the water, creating a tidal wave fifty feet high. Ekyt had to use chakra to run up the walls of the valley. At the top, he used his first trump card. Or, rather, two trump cards. Leaping down gracefully, Ekyt let two scrolls fall with him. Paying the blood tribute, Ekyt ran his thumbs down them.

“Dual Summoning Jutsu!”

With two large pops, Ekyt called forth two of his summons. The first was a giant snake, named Shuurai. Shuurai was polite to Ekyt, and always called him master, despite Ekyt’s instance on calling him ‘Ekyt’. He rivaled Gamabunta in size, and wasn’t violent by nature.

The second summon was an older monkey, named Enma. Enma had fought alongside the Third Hokage, until the Third’s death. At that time, he signed a summoning contract with Ekyt, the Third’s last student.

“Transform: Adamantine Yoi!” Ekyt barked. Enma nodded, and turned into a long black staff, harder than diamond. Enma could also lengthen himself at will, and could even extend his arms, legs, or eyes out from the staff to assist in combat.

Ekyt landed on Shuurai’s head, holding Enma in a guard. Ryofu couldn’t help but laugh; he was nearly completely consumed with the Houkou’s power.

“What is an old monkey that can perform magic tricks going to do for you? I admit, you snake is impressive- but useless!”

“That will be determined by this battle!” Ekyt responded, sticking out his tongue. But this was no childish gesture. As Ekyt stuck out his tongue, so did Shuurai. Ekyt paid a blood tribute- on his tongue?

“Acid Tongue Jutsu!” Ekyt said, his voice garbled as his tongue was sticking out of his mouth. Shuurai spit an acid at Ryofu, who leapt over it handily, just in time to see the Yoi rocketing towards him. Ryofu dodged that, too. Ekyt retracted the staff before Enma was hit with one of the tails Ryofu/Houkou was swinging around. Ekyt himself didn’t notice that he was about to be hit!

THWACK!

The tail knocked Ekyt off Shuurai, sending him tumbling end over end, into a showdown with the rocks at the end of the valley that he wasn’t going to win. Enma jumped in the air and hung from the side of the cliff by an arm, still in staff form.

Unless he has some grand plan, the boy is doomed...He should have used the Fourth’s Jutsu right away...the Reaper Death Seal would have ended this...Although, Ryofu’s enormous chakra would explain why Ekyt didn’t try it. A chakra that huge, never mind the demon’s chakra, would take a lot of energy to pull out. After losing his girl, and learning of so much death in one night...his energy must have been lower to begin with. But that DOES give him an option...One few people know about...

Shuurai burrowed up from the ground and caught Ekyt in his mouth- and swallowed?!

“What the hell are you doing?!” Ryofu demanded. He didn’t like the uncertainty. Until now, Ryofu had more or less controlled the fight. Now, thanks to Shuurai, it was up in the air.

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“Are you ready, master?” Shuurai asked Ekyt, who was preparing himself.

“Go ahead, Shuurai, I’m ready. After this, get out of here, I don’t want you hurt. That thing could take all of us out with those tails, and that pure chakra.”

“I understand, master. Here we go!” Shuurai hissed politely, burrowing up from the ground.

Only a split second had passed, but it felt like an eternity to both combatants. Now, Ekyt made his move.

Shuurai spat Ekyt out, and straight at Ryofu!

This is too easy! Ryofu thought, ready to finish Ekyt off.

“Transform: Adamantine Yoi Prison!” Ekyt called out.

“You think some pathetic can hold me?!” Ryofu asked, the five tails now whipping around.

“No, but it CAN protect me!” Ekyt shot back. Enma leapt towards Ekyt, and broke off into separate staffs. They formed a box around Ekyt, like a cage. It was from in here that Ekyt made his desperate move:

“Blue Flame Chakra: Activate!” Ekyt put a hand to his chest, over his heart. On his right hand, the one across his chest, a crackling, semi-transparent blue began to grow in size.

“WHAT IS THAT?!” Ryofu demanded.

“THAT is one of my kekkai-genkais! The Blue Flame Chakra! It’s pure emotion, pulled from my body. You aren’t the only one who has a second chakra to call on!”

Ekyt extended his right hand out and grabbed Ryofu, while the cage kept his tails at bay.

“TRANSPARENT HAND: FIVE ELEMENTS SEAL!” Ekyt shouted, feeling himself weaken. On his right hand, five small blue flames popped up on each of his fingers and thumb. On the pink was ‘fire’, the ring finger had ‘water’, the middle finger had ‘wind’, the index finger had ‘earth’, and on Ekyt’s thumb was the question mark, the ‘void’ symbol.

Ekyt jammed his hand onto Ryofu’s chest. Instantly, both were shot backward, wincing with pain. Ekyt sunk under water for a moment, while Ryofu had hit the stone wall.

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What the hell did he do to me?! I can’t feel the Houkou anymore! Ryofu realized that he now wore a new seal. He could control earth, wind, fire, and water, but it was the fifth mark of the seal, ‘void’, that stopped him from breaking it.

My chakra nearly gone...time to make one more move...

--

That did it. Agh, damn it, it burns! But that thing is sealed. My chakra is almost gone, I've got to make my next move count!

--

Ekyt swam back to the surface, while Ryofu pried himself off of the rocks. They glared at each, and each cast the last jutsu of the fight at the same time:

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"Blood Manipulation Jutsu!" (Property of Andr28a) This jutsu gave Ryofu control over the water content in a person's blood, enabling him to control them.

"Blue Flame Protection Jutsu!" (Property of nextguardian) Unique to Ekyt, this jutsu repels attacks at the cost of chakra.

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The two jutsus canceled each other out, leaving the two Shinobi standing, but with little chakra to play with. Ryofu reached for the kunai pouch on his arm. Ekyt dodged the first one and started to move, reaching into his tool pouch. But he didn't grab a knife, or an exploding tag. He grabbed a small black jar, which had been sealed with a small scroll. Ryofu had to admit he was curious, and slightly worried. Ekyt opened the jar, dipped a finger in, and- painted his face.

"I don't think Shinigami (the death god) is going to care how you look when I kill you, so dolling yourself up now is pointless," Ryofu pointed out dryly. Ekyt favored him with a mild look, two red lines now on the sides of his eyes. (looks like this [normal face- 00] ['painted' face- -0--0-])

"Get bent. It's not makeup. It's the last ace in the hole I'm going to play- my own bloodline. Surely you've heard of the Kaguya clan and their unique ability- the Shikotsu Myaku, otherwise know as the Corpse Bone Pathways!" Ekyt pulled off his vest, then peeled off his shirt, leaving it hanging around his waist, tucked into his pants.

"Of COURSE I'm aware of it! But are YOU aware that it will do you as little good as it did the rest of your clan?!" Ryofu shot back. "Foolish...headstrong...all of them. Better that the world is rid of them! And once you've lost, the world will be free of the pestilence of your clan!"

Ekyt narrowed his eyes. "I know nothing of your clan...are they all loudmouthed, annoying, and manipulative, as you are?"

While Ryofu laughed and tried to respond, Ekyt reached back. He started to pull on a bone, as if drawing a sword from his back. Instead, out came a sharp bone, hardened by calcium and sharpened by Ekyt's chakra. Ryofu did indeed know that, because his response was:

“How are you doing that without chakra! Wait...of course...that damn cigarette...” Ryofu noticed the last bit of the cigarette burning away. Ekyt put the smoking remains out, and exhaled one last time.

“It gave me the boost I needed...now, we need to finish this.” Ekyt’s voice went flat, and his face completely unreadable. This baffled Ryofu, who himself switched personalities like Sybil.

Is it that red mixture on his face? He isn’t 100% Kaguya in heritage, so perhaps that is a supplement around his eyes? It must be altering his thinking as well...interesting...Well, interesting or not, his time is ending- now!

Ryofu threw another kunai at Ekyt, then followed it in. Ekyt knocked the kunai aside with his bone, then stabbed at the incoming Ryofu. Ryofu ducked the stab, and tried to get in close. Ekyt arched his blade down, barely missing Ryofu’s head. His foot didn’t miss Ryofu, as he used Ryofu’s stomach as a springboard to leap backward, back into sword range. He continued to cut while Ryofu continued to dodge. Finally, Ryofu drew his own sword.

This blade was unique. Without showing any damage to it’s target, it could pull out and destroy the soul. Ryofu made a cut, and smugly watched as it took effect. Ekyt had blocked the strike, but his soul was gone.

“Are you waiting for something special to happen?” Ekyt made a neck-level cut at Ryofu, who only barely managed to evade it once more.

“You should be dead! Why aren’t you dead?!” Ryofu roared, finally losing his patience.

“Protection of the blue flame chakra...just because I can’t access it for jutsus doesn’t mean that it isn’t there. I know full well what your sword can do. ANY student of the sword has heard of Sutoru. (NOTE- The name ‘Sutoru’ is my property, while the sword belongs to andr28a. ‘Sutoru’ means ‘absorb’. This is not a canon name for the sword)

“I can just destroy you with the sword itself, no matter,” Ryofu murmured, as though discussing the weather.

Their fight continued another ten minutes, neither of the two gaining an upperhand. Both now had a ton of small cuts lining their bodies, but no one was going to die from them. Panting and bleeding, the two met in the middle of their battlefield.

“It is pointless to continue like this. The fight would only serve to kill us both. One of our lives may still be saved...” Ryofu was offering an unlikely truce.

“I agree. We should settle this in the only fair, unobjective way...” Ekyt replied.

“Sakura?” Ryofu asked simply.

Ekyt nodded in reply.

“Asking her to bloody to her hands...I won't do it,” Ryofu said firmly.

“I wasn't thinking execution...I was thinking suicide. Sakura picks, and the person she chooses to die commits suicide. Agreed?” Ekyt hated to put Sakura in a position, but this was the only fair way left.

“Agreed.” Ryofu extended his hand. Ekyt took it, meeting Ryofu's eyes. They seemed sincere enough.

It's strange that this fight stemmed from an innocent offer...an innocuous suggestion...and it resulted in as fierce a battle as I've ever even seen, let alone participated in... Ekyt bowed his head, hoping Sakura would just pick quickly, so his life could either continue peacefully, or end peacefully.

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“Choose, Sakura. You've got to make a choice now. Both Ryofu and I have exhausted our chakra. You decide who lives...and dies...” Ekyt spoke as calm and placidly as he could.

Sakura looked back and forth between Ekyt and Ryofu. Both boys had so much for her, saving her life, or her dignity. She had to choose?

“There's no other way?” Sakura asked desperately.

“No...one can not live in harmony with the other,” Ryofu replied. He and Ekyt glanced at each other. Their expressions were unreadable.

Sakura held the kunai in her sweaty hands. Could she really choose? Tears streaming down her face, she threw the kunai.

It lodged in Ekyt's chest. He put a hand to his chest. Blood spilled out of his mouth and flooded around his hand. He was grinning. POOF!

“Death can mean a lot of things...” Ekyt said from a tree branch nearby. “Well, you've made your choice...And I've made mine...”

Ekyt pulled on his sleeveless trench coat, with the Kaguya crest proudly displayed on the back. He placed a blackened straw hat on his head.

“Consider me dead...I'm not a warrior worthy to defend Konoha anymore...and certainly not worthy of you, Sakura...the best thing I can do is leave both, free of my weakness.” Despite the clear sadness and anger, there was almost a sense of peace behind Ekyt's anger.

“You-you're leaving?” Sakura asked. “When are you coming back?”

Ekyt looked up, a smile spreading across his battered face. “You aren't familiar with samurai customs, are you? Upon our greatest dishonor, we embrace one last hope to salvage our honor. In my case, my reasons for living have been taken from me. My career, my love, my focus...”

“What are you going to do?!” Sakura demanded.

“I owe you no explanation! But, I suppose you have a right to know, don’t you? I’ll tell you, but you won’t like it. I’m going to commit seppuku.”

Sakura gasped. Ryofu’s face showed the slightest change.

“You’re going to...to kill yourself like that? All because you lost a stupid fight?!” Sakura shouted. Everyone lost now and then, didn’t they?

“It’s my only way to save my honor...but THAT is lost on everyone but me, it seems! All I can say...I wish you and your ‘brother’ the best. And I want to say I understand, Sakura. He did as much good for you as I did, maybe more. I wouldn’t have envied your choice in this situation. Choosing the more powerful of the two...that was smart. You always were brilliant,” Ekyt replied, almost mockingly.

“As for you, Ryofu...you and I live different lives...stay the hell out of mine for my last few minutes. You’ve already ruined my life, you spawn of satan. If I find out you’ve ruined Sakura’s anymore than you’ve already ruined it, I will haunt you until we get our rematch in the afterlife,” Ekyt growled threateningly. Ryofu didn’t say anything else.

“Well then. Thanks for giving me a month, Sakura...a month where I understood life as something more than a warrior...And you, Ryofu...thanks for ruining everything I hold dear. I’ll see you in hell someday...hopefully, I’ll be looking down from heaven and laughing at your damned soul.”

“You’re bitter over losing the fight...” Ryofu couldn’t help but challenge. Ekyt glared at him. Slowly, his eyes turned toward the sky, as if there was a great message up there.

“There are more important things...such as life...than a stupid fight. Was it the final straw? Yes. And I hope you and your dear ‘sister’ can live with it...so ends the Kaguya clan!”

Ekyt walked away. It was only then that Sakura and Ryofu noticed Ekyt had donned his Hakama from his samurai training.

“Don’t blame yourself, Sakura. You made the only choice you could. His death is by his own hand...” Ryofu chimed in quietly.

Sakura was silently crying. She leaned on Ryofu, who wasn’t sure if this was a win or not...

What a presence of mind...the mentality of Bushido, the way of the warrior, in a time that has dated it’s usefulness...

--

Ekyt hiked until he found the most peaceful spot he could. He summoned the Elder Monkey, Enma, and asked Enma for a final request.

“Will you be my Kaishaku-nin?” (Kaishaku-nin: When a samurai commits ritual suicide, he has a second

samurai, usually a trusted friend or older sibling, to cut off his head once he's carved a plus sign in his stomach.)

"The Leaf has disintegrated...Sarutobi's sacrifice was in vain after all..." Enma murmured, taking Ekyt's long sword.

"Not in vain, Enma. He gave us precious time...And this enemy was not one even he could have foreseen..."

"I suppose you're right. But now- you're betraying your promise to the Leaf? Killing yourself like this? How does it benefit anyone?" Enma shot back.

"I'm not going to do it, Enma. But it the least painful way I could step aside and let Sakura have the life she wants. I can't be with her...not anymore. That bastard tainted her soul...And I will never abandon the Leaf...just my old life...it's time to become someone else. Please, lend my clone your chakra while he commits seppuku...I have to work this ruse properly, or I'm of no help to anyone...As strong as the samurai code of honor is, it HAS been dated...and my own promise to serve the Leaf has not."

--

Ekyt withdrew a short dagger from a summoning scroll. He took off his headband and laid it in front of him. He laid his family crest, and finally, his longsword in front of him.

This was all really Ekyt's clone. The REAL Ekyt had already moved on. But still, he had to work to keep up the gruesome spectacle.

'Ekyt' plunged the dagger into his stomach. Both the real Ekyt and Enma had to control their chakra to make sure the clone didn't disappear. The clone continued, carving a plus sign into it's flesh, then bowing it's head forward. Enma cut with the longsword and severed 'Ekyt's' head.

Sakura and Ryofu stared on in a state of disbelief. Sakura burst into tears and Enma picked up the 'corpse' and disappeared.

--

And what of Ekyt? His life was over as he knew it. Only his promise to the Leaf kept him alive after that. Now, known only as 'Ryouko' in the ANBU black ops, Ekyt swore that, one day, he would kill Ryofu. But it would take time to forget Sakura, Ekyt's first love. Ekyt could only embrace Sakura again, when he had escorted Ryofu to the gates of hell.

NOW, AN EXTRA ENDING- I PRESENT THE ORIGINAL ENDING TO THIS FIC! IT IS NOT TO BE CONSIDERED CANON BY ANY MEANS!

SCHWINNNGGG!

Ekyt felt a piercing pain in his back. Then he felt nothing. Little by little, his body was numbing. Forcing himself, he turned his head. Sakura had stuck a kunai in him, at the base of his spine.

"I'm sorry, Ekyt, I had to! I couldn't let you kill him!" Sakura sobbed. Ekyt forced himself to stay upright.

Ekyt spat out blood. So, it was going to end. Well, he could do only one more thing. Forcing his numbing hands and arms to work, he made the handsigns, the last in his arsenal, and the most powerful.

"Lord Third...forgive me...Reaper Death Seal!" Ekyt coughed out, more blood spilling onto him. He grabbed onto Ryofu.

"I told you...it's the soul...that wins or loses fights!" Ekyt declared. The Death God, Shinigami, was floating behind him now, and had Ekyt's soul trapped. Ekyt, in turn, had grabbed Ryofu's soul.

"Let go!" Ryofu knew the consequences of this jutsu. He CAN'T have the strength to pull my soul out! Sakura stabbed him in just the right spot! His chakra and his life have to be gone!

But Ekyt held on. He gritted his teeth, and gave one last tug. Ryofu's soul was now in Shinigami's hands. The Death God greedily ate the soul up. Then, it drew its sword from its mouth, and stabbed Ekyt's soul, before sucking it up.

Ekyt's mask was gone now. Sakura took it off. But now she could clearly hear Ekyt's last words.

"You're...free...Sakura..."

FIC DESCRIPTION:

An OC clash of the titans! Ekyt does battle with Ryofu (andr28a). Ekyt's life goes to hell, and now it's a fight to the death in a last attempt to make things right! Will Sakura side with her boyfriend (Ekyt) or her oldest friend (Ryofu)?

3 - BONUS- 'Lost' Second Chapter

Please Note: This chapter is simply an extra, and not part of the story. The next chapter is the true sequel. For now, please enjoy this. If you like it, let me know, and I'll finish it.

-NG

NOTE: NORMALLY, I WOULDN'T MAKE EKYT/RYOUKO THIS 'ULTIMATE', BUT FOR THIS PARTICULAR FIGHT, IT BECAME NECESSARY.

"DAMNIT! WHY AM I BEING TORTURED LIKE THIS?!" Ryouko finally shouted, kicking hard. His bed collapsed into pieces from the pressure.

"THESE DAMN NIGHTMARES! THAT FIGHT I LOST! WHY WON'T YOU LET ME SLEEP?! DAMN YOU!" Ryouko shouted at nobody, nothing. He had risen through the ranks in ANBU, but his nightmares had never quelled. Sakura going off with that monster, and abandoning her life in the Leaf.

You never forgive or forget your first love...

Ryouko had thought carefully, and knew he was choosing a cursed existence. But it couldn't be helped. He had no choice. If this torturous nightmare was to ever end, he had to do it.

--

Sakura wondered, not for the first time, what would have happened if she had chosen Ekyt over Ryofu. It had been an impossible decision. In her mind, Sakura knew that Ekyt would be the more understanding, and even the more willing to die. But still, knowing he was dead, it was a horrible thought. She wasn't tortured by nightmares, thanks to Ryofu's genjutsu, but her existence felt unnatural. Forced. As if she was tethered to this world by something other than life itself. As if a stake of guilt had been driven through her body, forcing her to live this existence.

--

Ryofu hadn't given much thought to Ekyt over the course of two years. A death was a death. Granted, he questioned the outcome of the match. COULD Ekyt have won if he wasn't emotionally drained at the end? Had Ryofu won the match, or had it ended in a draw? It was a little strange for Ryofu to think of anything but 'winning', but Ekyt had been hard to kill. In the end, it was Ekyt's own hand.

--

Ryouko asked Lady Tsunade.

"Please, my Lady. Only you know of my existence...I have no choice. These nightmares have driven me to the brink of insanity. My psyche can't hold out much longer without a ray of hope...and this is the last

ray I have...”

Tsunade didn't want to do it. “You want...his eyes? Sasuke's?”

Ryouko shook his head. “I want one of Kakashi's, and one of Sasuke's...When I face him again, I want to avenge their deaths.”

“I can't do that, Ryouko. You must understand that...” Tsunade told him, concerned for him. Ryouko was going to crack on her, at age twenty-two?

“Then I'll go get the OTHER Sharingan, if I must. But this fight may not be winnable without it. That...and I will take any other advantage I can.”

Tsunade put up a hand. “I will do it. The surgery. Your eyes will be infused with the Sharingan. But promise me- you'll come back alive. And...bring Sakura. Alive.”

Ryouko bowed. “I will, my Lady. You have my word.”

Tsunade nodded once more. “Fine. We will begin immediately.”

Ryouko bowed even lower. “Thank you. I have one thing I must do...”

--

Ryouko lit the candles, then sat in the center of the strange mark on the ground. It had been written in blood, making it a grotesque feature in this darkened warehouse. Ryouko's hands flashed with handsigns.

“Forbidden Art: Mind Invasion!”

Ryouko closed his eyes and concentrated, a black scroll tied with a red cord in his mouth. In his mind, he willed his message to Sakura and Ryofu.

I'm coming for both of you...this time, we'll have an end, Ryofu. Genjutsu might not affect you, but a forbidden art such as this will get your attention. I'm not the same man you fought once before. For two years, you've infected my mind, a continuing nightmare. Now, I'm going to end that nightmare. This time, you die! It ends now! I WILL find you. You WILL be in Otogakure in two days.

--

Ryofu woke up with a start, Sakura next to him.

“I felt it... 'his' chakra...and I heard his voice...” Ryofu muttered, slightly startled. He didn't think much of it, thought- until Sakura spoke up.

“I felt it, too. I'd know Ekyt-'s chakra anywhere...and his voice...could he have lived?”

That's what Ryofu was wondering.

Is it possible he survived, after all that? HOW is it possible? I saw him die! No matter, he can't defeat me! And he'd only continue to attack my psyche...all right, Ekyt Kaguya, we'll have our finality!

--

Ryouko woke up, feeling his eyes. Sharingan, in both of them. One containing the Mangekyo Sharingan, the other still without it.

"The surgery was a success. Your body accepted the eyes. Now...what's your plan?" Tsunade asked. She had gotten involved because this guy was a major threat to her village. If Ryouko was willing to combat this foe, then she had to back him.

"I need four corpses. This is going against the grain, Lady Tsunade, but I think Lord Third would understand. This menace MUST be stopped, or the Hidden Leaf will crumble. I now carry the blood of the Uchiha clan, and my Kaguya heritage. I will hate myself until I die for this, but it's the last move I have."

--

Ryouko waited in Otokakure, knowing they would come. Sure enough, amongst a swirl of mist, Sakura and Ryofu appeared, both pale as ghosts. Ryouko was waiting in his ANBU armor, a mask over his face.

"Don't try to hide your face with me, I know who you are!" Ryofu shouted.

"Ekyt?" Sakura asked timidly. She cautiously approached him, stopping a couple feet away. Ekyt hadn't moved. Sakura reached up to take off the mask. But as her hands met the mask and started to lift, Ekyt dissolved and became a puddle of water.

"So you remember me?" Ryouko asked, standing on top of a boulder. "I suppose I should be honored. But I'm not AS you remember me...I'm a very different man, now. In name, in look, and in psyche."

Ryouko jumped down, his hand pulling his mask off. He put a chakra cigarette in his mouth, lighting it with a snap of his fingers. Ryofu chuckled at the site.

"So you're a couple years older. Nice speech, I'll give you that."

Ryouko raised an eyebrow. "You should know...you and Sakura have been addressing me by a name that has no meaning. 'Ekyt' is dead, he died two years ago. Before you stands what's left of his physical self. That 'self' is called Ryouko. And I'm very different. But you'll only see ALL of it in combat. But I suppose..." Ryouko closed his eyes, and focused his chakra. "...it couldn't hurt to show you PART of what's changed!"

Ryouko opened his eyes. Ryofu stared, his mouth dropping open slightly. Sakura screamed.

“No! You CAN’T have! How could you?!” Sakura wasn’t making much sense, but then again, nothing was at this point.

“My right eye...from Kakashi. My left eye...from Sasuke. Two people you saw fit to kill. Now, they live on in me! I’ve trained my body handle the Sharingan, as if I was an Uchiha. But I’ve done so much more in that time! Things you would have never dreamed of! Things I would have been incapable of, just two years ago! But one must do what is necessary to protect his home.”

“You’ve lost it if you think a couple of old eyeballs are going to scare me off!” Ryofu shot back.

“I don’t WANT you to run. I came for a fight. If you were to run, I would have to hunt you. We both know that would take time, and I think you’d like a fight just as much as I would. So stop beating around the bush...”

Ryouko’s hair blew in the wind, as he hunched over to fight.

“...And accept this challenge!”

“Consider it done!” Ryofu shouted.

“And you, Sakura? Do you plan to stay out of this fight?” Ryouko asked, the malice gone from his voice.

“W-what?! What are you talking about?!”

Ryouko closed his eyes and made hand signs. A jutsu that had taken two years and his innocence was about to be performed.

“Corpse Reanimation!” Ryouko shouted. The ground shook as coffins rose from below. Ryouko was standing on top of them while they were rising, something close to insanity in his eyes.

“Yo-you couldn’t have! No! But that’s Orochimaru’s jutsu! Why do you know it?!” Sakura demanded, already crying at seeing Ryouko’s pure soul tainted with such a jutsu. She could see the old ‘Ekyt’ shatter, as if a pane of glass.

“I know it because I have to know it,” Ryouko replied mysteriously. “Don’t you want to know who I’ve brought back? I think you’ll be interested enough. A blast from the past, Sakura. It’s only right to pay your respects...to the people you killed!”

Four coffins emerged from the ground. One by one, their lids fell off, echoing across the empty wasteland that was going to serve as a battlefield.

Kakashi. Sasuke. Third Hokage. And- an empty casket? Sakura peered inside. A blue glow elicited from it. And it was familiar...

“The fourth casket...very dear to me...it’s my emotions, Sakura. I can remove them, as you know. I had to...otherwise this fight wouldn’t be any different than the last. I let emotions cloud my judgement.

Without them, I think clearly, mechanically. And I know what's best for the Leaf- is that demon's death, and your return. Come forth, emotional chakra!"

The chakra had taken on the form of the old 'Ekyt', and just stared.

4 - The Second Confrontation (part 1)

PLEASE NOTE: THIS FIC TAKES PLACE PARTIALLY IN THE NARUTO WORLD, AND PARTIALLY IN A VERSION CREATED BY ANDR28. CREDIT WILL BE GIVEN THROUGHOUT THE STORY AT DIFFERENT TIMES. TO START OFF:

EKYT/RYOUKO/OTHER ALIASES FOR SAME CHAR- nextguardian
Ryofu- Andr28

Ekyt lay awake, eyes bloodshot. His hand was currently moving in odd, jerky motions, picking a hole through the tatami mat. The bags under his eyes had grown, and now made him look almost more sickly.

Sleep...what's the point? I can't sleep. I might as well study...Because, someday, I'll run into him again. And her, too. I'll see them again, and this time, I'll take him down. And her...I can't forgive her. I can't understand her. I will stop trying to. This damned fight has gone on for two years now, all in my head. The first fight...I lost because of her. She chose me to die...she let a bastard demon who couldn't understand...couldn't love her...over me...the one who would have given anything and everything for her...she helped him, meaning to or not...she was a dupe, and I'll never forgive the one who duped her...

Ryofu Housen.

Ekyt got up, immediately punching the wall, cracking the hard plaster and wood. As he retracted his bloodied hand, moonlight streamed in. A full moon...just like at the fight between Ekyt and Ryofu.

Even if I face him again, in my current state, what's the point? We'd only fight to another stalemate...then again, I DID seal his demon off. The Five-Tailed Hokou, or something like that. I suppose it's too much to hope the Akatsuki got him...

Ekyt pulled out his scrolls, lighting a chakra cigarette to keep awake. A glance at his right, bloodied hand stopped Ekyt as the cigarette met his mouth. It was twitching. Ekyt studied it for a moment, trying to ascertain if there was any medical damage. When he concluded there was no lasting damage, Ekyt let his thoughts drift again.

An action I can't control...or is it fear? Am I afraid to fight him again? Fear...that's unacceptable. I'll find him and beat him. That's what these two years have been for. That's all I lived for. Not just revenge, but there's a vague ray of hope that I might save lives...and maybe even...her...

Ekyt's dark eyes closed. Slowly, he reached for a container of sake. He poured himself a glass of the strong rice brew, hoping to stop his heart from beating so quickly, and to stop his hand from shaking.

I'll kill him. For better or worse, I'll kill him; one way or the other.

--

It's been two years since Ekyt and Ryofu clashed. In that time, Konohagakure re-grew it's lost strength. Minus Kakashi and Sasuke, of course. Sakura herself was gone with Ryofu, leaving only Naruto as the original member of Team 7. Sai and Yamato had been added, along with Ekyt's only protégé, Yuushi Akamadori. It was no longer Team Seven, but the four got along well enough (minus Sai, of course) and soon gelled into a strong team.

As for Ekyt...he became a lot of things. All of them good, but none of them as a jonin or chunin. He was stuck as a genin. Couple that with everything else, and you had one angry twenty year old.

I had a life, finally. Possible promotion...and her. Sakura. My girlfriend. And what memories? None. A first kiss, and little else. I know love is painful, but this...this is worse. Her...in the arms of another man. Even if it's not love, it's not with me. I had to let her go, didn't I? Had no choice...All to make her happy.

Then I hear about the deaths. Kakashi and Sasuke. Two more powerful than me, killed by...her. No, not her, she was controlled by him. Bastard. Bastard. Bastard! BASTARD!

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Strong enough to confront what didn't kill you. You train, you earn your stripes, and then you KICK THE @\$\$ of what made the mistake of letting you live!

Ekyt rolled up his sleeves, studying another scroll. This one...

I wouldn't lay my eyes on this normally, but you only get one shot at vengeance; TRUE vengeance. If you lose a second time, then you've gotta win three times. If you lose three times, you'd better win four times. This will take one shot. One win. A loss is death. Two more years of suffering...no.

No more chances, no excuses, no more lies.

--

And what of Ryofu?

Two years...two years since he crossed me! With his 'values', and his 'good guy' talk, and all that crap about the soul winning a fight! Utter Bulls*! All of it! And yet, in the end...he died, but he took my power with him.**

Too bad nothing lasts forever. Not even the elements, I guess. No matter how powerful you are, there's always someone more powerful. There's always someone to aspire to. And that's why I fight- to be the most powerful. Well, that's not ALL of it, but enough for now.

"Can it be removed? A simple question, so you can give me a simple answer," Ryofu said, his voice strained with exaggerated patience.

“Of course it can. But it will come at a price,” the voice responded.

“I anticipated that. Nothing is ever free. Name your price, it will be worth it to be rid of this damn tattoo!” Ryofu had to work hard to keep himself in check. **Losing my temper now could cost me...and Sakura shouldn't see that happen. The last time I lost my temper...well, no need to go there. That's a horror story, even to me!**

-

Sakura watched in silence as Ryofu bargained.

I watched him die...he killed himself, all because I chose him to die over Ryofu. I still have nightmares of that moment. Watching that sword arch down and cut his head off, the blood flowing from his stomach...like rivers...it's scary. But I can't tell Ryofu...I can't tell anyone. I gave up everything for him, I don't want him to think I'm having second thoughts or something. I owe him so much!

But it cost me Ekyt...the boy I truly loved. The look of pain in his eyes when I chose him to die...I cried for a week. I'd never seen him so hurt and frustrated. I almost wanted to reach out and help him. I could have healed the stomach wound and blocked the sword...that's what troubles me the most.

I could have helped him. But I willingly chose not to.

-

“Seal Release!”

The seal on Ryofu's stomach disintegrated, evaporating as black smoke into the air.

“Now, about our price...” a dangerous set of eyes glowed, looking at Ryofu.

“Yes, yes...Blood Manipulation Jutsu!” (Blood Manipulation Jutsu- property of Andr28)

Before they could respond, those who had just helped Ryofu were now bound by his will.

“Funny story- I can control the water content of your blood, making you my slaves! Well, I guess it isn't funny for YOU! Now then- damnit!”

Itachi Uchiha had blocked the Jutsu.

“Control of the Akatsuki is a very impressive thing. But you've made a mistake. Time without the Hokou has made you weaker. Only a few of us were here in body and spirit. Our minds are usually the only attendees to this type of meeting. So you've left myself and my partner free...But that's not your only mistake.”

As Itachi was disappearing, his eyes seemed to flash back to another time.

“You’ve also killed my little brother, whom I knowingly let survive my massacre. That will not go unpunished. But as you’re too much for even myself at this point, our conflict will have to wait until I’ve received backup.”

“Bring who you will! I’ll either control them, or they’ll die! Unless you don’t show your REAL self here again, coward! And your brother- hah! Child’s play! If HE was your chosen successor, your pathetic clan is better off in hell!” Ryofu snarled and laughed at the same time. If he had sent Itachi Uchiha packing, then he was getting closer to being the one strong person that all could aspire to. There were three legendary Sannin, and Ryofu was equally as powerful as one of them- Orochimaru. He hadn’t yet tested his skill against the others, but that was only a matter of time, now that he controlled the Akatsuki.

--

Tsunade had seen the change in Ekyt very quickly. She had called it to the jonin’s attention, and even Jiraiya’s as well. The change was understandable, but disturbing. Today, as Tsunade was perched on the Hokage Mansion, with Jiraiya next to her, she saw Ekyt walk by. For once, he didn’t have a scroll in front of him. But something was wrong. He was wearing a long black coat, as he did when he first came to the village. His eyes were set forward and down, as if he couldn’t look at the world around him. Or perhaps as if he were in another time.

It wasn’t horribly strange by itself. This scene happened quite a bit- really whenever Ekyt needed to sulk. It was as if he hung a ‘do not disturb’ sign around his neck each time he put on that coat. It was the other change that disturbed Tsunade more.

“There, you can see it at his waist. He’s never without it now,” Tsunade said, pointing to the object in question. Jiraiya craned his neck.

“A sword? That’s not strange, Tsunade. You know the kid’s past as well as I do...”

Tsunade shook her head. “No. I know it BETTER than you do. I happened upon Sarutobi-sensei’s crystal ball a couple years ago. What I saw frightened the hell out of me. I’ve never been more worried about that kid than I am now. I need to ask him, but I can’t get the words out...”

“And what are those words?” Jiraiya wanted to know.

“Why did you fake your own death? Who was it you fought? Who took Sakura?” Tsunade shook her head in frustration. “I don’t care about him; not at all! But Sakura was my apprentice! And he was the last one with her! But then I watched him...he committed ritual suicide. But a day later, he showed up at the village. His eyes were glassed over, he was running a fever, he looked like he hadn’t slept in days. He had the hell scratched out of him, too. From a fight- a big one. But I don’t have any details. And him and I...well, we clash most of the time. I doubt he’d talk with me. He hardly told his own girlfriend anything about himself; so why would he talk to me?”

“Tsunade, instead of focusing on the ‘why’, why don’t you think of him as a chance to get Sakura back? You know he’ll be going after her eventually. Why not give him what he needs to bring her back?”

I can't condone using him..."

"But I can!" Tsunade declared. "And I will, too. I'll hate myself, because I just can't hate that kid entirely. But I WILL do what I have to."

Below them, Ekyt kept walking, his left hand on the guard of his sword. No one noticed or commented, surprisingly. Even people Ekyt knew...no one bothered with him. While Tsunade watched Ekyt's sword, Jiraiya watched his eyes.

Those eyes weren't as lifeless as Tsunade believed.

When Orochimaru left the village, I moped around the same way, Jiraiya remembered. No, not exactly the same. Ekyt's eyes are closer to Orochimaru's than mine. Hate-filled, lusting for vengeance...I need to talk with Ekyt before it's too late and he does something he regrets.

--

Ekyt walked silently through all the people, not even noticing who they were. He had been this way for two years, so no one took it personally anymore. They just chalked it up as Ekyt being shell-shocked from some terrible battle.

That was fine with Ekyt.

Outside the village, Ekyt heard bells on the wind. So close to the village, he thought nothing of it. The farther he got from the village, the more he dwelled on the merry little sound. Finally, safely away, Ekyt halted.

"I know you're following me. You haven't been keeping it a secret, wearing those bells, so it's not skill on my part. If you have something to say to me, just come out and speak. If you have to attack me, hurry up and do so. If you have nothing to say to me, then leave me alone and stop wasting my time."

Ding ding.

"Doesn't sound like we're welcome, Itachi."

"Given our previous conflicts, I can imagine why, Kisame. Regardless, he's the only one who might believe our story."

"...You're right. Maybe I can kill him when we're done with this..."

"You can try," Ekyt said, still unmoving. All except his left thumb. That was moving just enough to free his sword from its case a little bit. "Itachi and Kisame. From the way you're talking, I'd gather you've come looking for me. Or, at least, someone I can help you find..."

"Our target's not the Jinchuuriki today. We've come...I can't say it, Itachi."

Itachi appeared in front of Ekyt before Ekyt could draw his sword.

"We've come to you for help."

--

"Doesn't look like I got them all, Sakura. That's a shame. Oh well, doesn't matter. Hidan, Kakuzu, Zetsu, Sasori, and Deidara will be enough. They DO say that the leader of the Akatsuki is incredibly hard to beat; he's worshipped as a deity in Amegakure. -?"

Sakura wasn't paying much attention. She was looking off, staring into space. Ryofu huffed in frustration, but did nothing else.

It's only natural, I guess. She hasn't gotten over the whole 'bonds' thing. I understood those once, too. I guess I still do to some extent, if I can feel empathy for her. The loss of her loyal boyfriend. It didn't make matters easier, considering she had to choose. But that's how it worked out. This moping is pissing me off, though...

"Would you feel better if there were flowers on his grave?" Ryofu said suddenly. *Anything* to stop her damn sulking!

"I guess...it's not just that, though. Ryofu, don't you get worried. I mean...when you're at the top, you get a giant bullseye put on your back. Aren't you concerned that someone powerful might aim for that bullseye?" Sakura asked timidly, sitting cross-legged on a stone hearth that had only a few embers remaining in it.

"I welcome the challenge, so no. Come on now, we'll visit his grave."

I'll surprise her and reanimate him. I don't know if that'll help or hurt, though...oh well, one way to find out. Besides, keeping my jutsu fresh will be a good thing.

--

Ryofu knew where Ekyt's grave was. He didn't visit it but once, and that was hardly a social call. It was more of a check of his own handiwork.

He didn't have a pulse when I dug him up. I don't know what I was worried about. I'll give him credit for being a man of his word, and even given me a lot of trouble. But when all was said and done, I was the better of us. I own the Akatsuki. All he got out of the battle was a six-foot hole. Hardly the spoils of a victor. Well then, time to get to work.

Sakura had prayed quietly, but she stopped suddenly. There was a chill in the air. It was thick with chakra; a familiar chakra. Ryofu wasn't familiar with the chakra, so he didn't notice. Besides that, he was busy preparing his jutsu. That made Sakura sigh with relief.

He didn't notice? I guess that's a good thing. If he had, he would have gone ballistic. A chakra like that is unique...Ekyt's emotions fed his chakra. He was never happy, I guess, except when he was with me for that month. But the 'depressed' feel of his chakra- that I know all too well.

Could it be? ...

...

No, he's dead. I saw the corpse. No one could fake that. I'm just missing him. Enough foolishness.

--

"Do you mean to tell me that...that demon took the Akatsuki over? Just like that?" Ekyt shook his head. "I'm not surprised you escaped, both of you. But how much power has he gained in two years?"

"More than you'd care to know. Although...you don't seem to be the same person, either." Itachi's Sharingan didn't show any change. It was more of Ekyt's aura that had changed. "You...you are fighting without hope, but you're stronger for it?"

Ekyt shrugged, reaching for a scroll. "I haven't just sat around moping for two years. I've studied and trained hard, waiting for an opportunity like this. As for the change you sense...that's my emotions being sealed away. They get in the way, so when I'm feeling a particularly nasty emotion, I seal all of them in a scroll. I can access them at will."

"That's not too different from how we work, Itachi." Kisame shouldered his giant sword and leaned against a tree.

"No, it's not. But against our enemy, clear thinking may not be enough." Itachi deactivated his Sharingan, feeling no threat. His eyes slid to Ekyt. "He believes that you're dead. As does the girl, Sakura."

Ekyt narrowed his eyes. "Well, I did die, in a manner of speaking. 'Ekyt' is dead. I'm more of what remains of him. I'm the same person, but I'm less inclined to be merciful these days. The alias 'Ekyt' was both my biggest pride and my biggest blunder. I made him into a fool who let a fight be decided by someone else. Never again- better I should die in the attempt to win than let a third party claim victory or defeat in my stead."

Kisame had fought with Ekyt before this, but he was different now. "So if you aren't 'Ekyt', what should we call you? If we're going to be comrades for a short time, I guess I should know your name."

Ekyt had his eyes closed, his sword across his shoulder. "Since 'Ekyt' is dead, this one doesn't have a name. My sword is called 'Kaitou no Seikatsu' ('Sharp Sword of Life', roughly translated. Name is mine)."

"You named your own sword? Kinda pathetic. What does that blade do to earn that name?" Kisame taunted.

"It's a link to my old existence. If 'Ekyt' no longer exists, but 'I' do, there must be a link. I've chosen this sword to be it. If you have an objection, speak to the blade. It's not respectful for someone to speak ill like you just did, then ask a favor."

Itachi had set up this little test purposely. He sat back and watched. **He's cold and ruthless, not at all**

like his old self. He's spoken truthfully, as far as I can tell, at all times. The most disturbing part of all this is that he doesn't acknowledge Kisame or myself as a threat...

It's not out of arrogance or confidence. He simply doesn't care. If we were to attack, he would just attack back. You can almost see the cold logic in his thoughts.

--

Ryofu used his mastery over the elements to lift the dirt in the grave. The grave itself was small and modest, at the base of a maple tree. It was little more than a rock with 'Ekyl' carved on it. There were flowers on the grave, but they were withered and dead.

Good. No one comes here anymore. I wonder why? Did his own village despise him that much? WHAT?! You're kidding. You MUST be kidding!

Ekyl's grave had a body in it, but it wasn't Ekyl's.

5 - Stone Best Left Unturned

Ekyt...no, not Ekyt, this one didn't have a name. The remains of Ekyt walked, keeping two steps ahead of Itachi and Kisame. He kept moving forward, completely disregarding his two VERY dangerous comrades. From the start, this one had called the shots, ignoring Itachi's genius and Kisame's ruthlessness. It was clear that he had made this mission his own, and most likely didn't give a damn about why Kisame and Itachi had come to him for help.

"You know where you're going?" Kisame finally questioned, mostly to break the silence. The sound of crunching leaves and crackling branches was all that could be heard for a while, and that was getting on the impatient Kisame's already-frayed nerves.

"Yes, I'm sure. Although this stealth is pointless if you insist on yelling out stupid questions," the remains of Ekyt said matter-of-factly. "Either you trust me, or you don't. Shut up for a second!" the remains of Ekyt threw a kunai into the bushes.

"HEY! What was that for?!" said a voice.

"Stalking around like that in the shadows- you really find it surprising that I took you as a threat? If you're not, why don't you come on out here and tell me why you're following me?"

"...Fine, now that I've been found out. What can it hurt?"

'Ekyt' vaguely recalled this guy. "You're from Konoha."

"You got it! I've been dispatched by Lady Tsunade to see what you're up to. And I've got a helluva report for her! Hanging out with Itachi and Kisame! That surprises me, Ekyt. You're a hardcore Leafeer, so what're you doing with criminals? That's not like you at all, according to your records."

Ekyt didn't seem bothered. "I'm doing what the Hokage sent me out to do. I'm brining back her apprentice. Tell her that the two I'm with have reasons of their own, and that I'll be taking their help."

"She's not gonna like that. And you know what? It'll be MY head she bites off. So you'd better come up with a better explanation than that."

"What was your name again? Ryu or something like that? Well, that doesn't matter right now anyway. It might be better for me to know less. Just give Tsunade this scroll. It absolves you of any wrong-doing. So, take this, and quit following me. I don't mean to come off with an attitude, but this mission is rather personal to me. I'm sure you understand..."

"No, I don't," Ryu (Properly of Doomlord1234) shot back, "But I'll trust you. You've never betrayed our village before. I can't say I like your company, but I won't judge. If you're chasing that demon, then I suppose you'll need help. Just keep in mind that there's more than one demon around, and they aren't all evil."

It wasn't hard to tell Ryu wasn't satisfied with that answer. But he had heard of Ekyt, the last student of the Third Hokage, and decided that if a student of the Third couldn't be trusted, who could?

Not like he's Orochimaru. No, I can't sense any maliciousness, at least not towards me. For now, I'll just do what he says. But I'll be watching.

--

Ryofu couldn't hide his surprise from Sakura. While she leapt for joy, he stared into the grave, growing more and more angry. What he had thought was a body was a wooden dummy. The dummy had certainly been carved in an interesting fashion. It looked like Ekyt, but it was one insult after another.

It's right hand pulled down an eyelid, while the dummy's tongue was sticking out. (All carved wood, of course. No actual tongues or eyelids) It's left hand was clearly giving Ryofu the finger, while the writing on the forehead only served to make him madder.

Try again, sucker! the writing taunted. That, coupled with the dummy's insulting gestures caused Ryofu to smash it into splinters.

Damn him, making a fool out of me like that! I can't wait to show him that the Hokou is back! Last time, we fought on his terms. Not this time. No, this time, I'm going to destroy him because I WANT to.

Ryofu had actually acted in self-defense the last time he and Ekyt had tangled. Ekyt had charged and attacked upon hearing the news that Sasuke and Kakashi were dead. Ryofu had to defend himself. Not that it surprised him; he wouldn't have approached someone like that if the person wasn't worthy. (See Ekyt vs Ryofu 1- NG)

"Having fun playing in the mud, demon? It suits your intellectual capacity."

'Ekyt' was standing on 'his' headstone, having fallen from the tree above. "Kindly stop molesting my corpse."

Before Ryofu could respond, Sakura saw Ekyt.

"Ekyt?! You're alive!"

Sakura rushed toward Ekyt, but stopped dead in her tracks. This didn't feel like Ekyt anymore.

"Ekyt is dead. I'm what remains of him, the fool. And you...you turned your back on Ekyt." This one cocked his head, giving Sakura an even glance. He then spoke the words Ekyt would never say:

"You don't interest me at all. You'll only side with that demon again. If my trust was so precious to you, you shouldn't have betrayed it."

The wind blew through the clearing, kicking up leaves and dust. Whatever this man was, it wasn't Ekyt.

That was apparent by the way he strode forward, unconcerned by the damage his honesty had caused.

"I don't have a name. This one has answered to Ekyt for simplicity's sake. But after tonight, when my hands are stained with the blood of my first kill, Ekyt will be but a memory on the wind. And you...all of you who willingly participate in evil...I shall be at your mercy. Even if I discard the name 'Ekyt', I cannot discard all I made him to be."

"What the hell kinda talk is that?! You're not making any sense, you damn nut!" Ryofu didn't like this at first, but gradually, he decided he was looking forward to this fight. He wasn't afraid, simply anxious. A battle without anxiety wasn't a battle.

"Not to you, perhaps. Because you've only ever seen one side of Ekyt. You didn't see him for who I created him to be, only for what he became. Ekyt, simply put, was myself, modeled after warriors I admired. But poison, in the form of desires, was leaked into Ekyt's existence. For a time, he just enjoyed life. He had hoped...simply for that. He had respect, self-respect, and a girl. Someone to care about, someone to protect and serve."

"What do you mean?"

"When Ekyt died, his shame lived on in his remains. No matter what, I couldn't push out the facts: Ryofu, you killed my friends, and you stole my girl. No matter what the context, the girl I loved was in the arms of another man. That was Ekyt's greatest regret- he couldn't protect her. That is why Ekyt had to die. That said- I hope you've prepared yourself, Ryofu. Death will come on swift wings for you who have misused the innocent love of a female heart!"

Ryofu couldn't help but laugh now. "Are you serious?! Talking in Shakespeare isn't gonna help you! And the 'love of a female heart'?! THAT'S your motivation? First you tell the girl that she 'doesn't interest you', and now you're all about her heart? You're really a piece of work, Ekyt!"

"You continue to refer to me by that failure's name. Would I be correct to assume that you aren't prepared to face this one in combat? Or is my confidence rattling you?"

Ryofu shook his head, still laughing. "No, nothing that dramatic. It's just funny. You see, I can see your real nature- no matter how much you call yourself 'nameless', Ekyt is still you. You'll be him until the day you die. That'll be today, by the way. No more suicide stuff so you can save yourself and stalk me!"

"Save myself? Are you that stupid?" the nameless remains of Ekyt fired back. "Save MYSELF? From what? The two years of self-exile I gave myself for failure? Death would have been easier. No, the only one I aim to save is Sakura. You called my bluff- she DOES interest me. I will bring her back to the Leaf Village, and she will see you for the demon you really are. And since we can't agree on a name for this one, how about this: Kaitou no Seikatsu- or just 'Kaitou'. This one gets tired of saying 'the remains of Ekyt', so I'll just name myself."

Kaitou turned his back to Ryofu, to face Itachi and Kisame. His eyes wandered to Sakura as well.

"Itachi, Kisame, Sakura...it is indeed true that there IS some of Ekyt left. I would only use it for your protection. Please hold still...Protection of the Blue Flame Chakra!" Kaitou declared as he tapped each of

the three on the shoulder.

“This will block his Blood Manipulation, as well as the effects of his sword, at least for a time. That said, I will fight him. Itachi and Kisame, you can handle the remains of the Akatsuki. You might have to kill them. Are you prepared for that?” Kaitou asked, calmly glaring at each person in turn.

“HAHA! Kid, don’t pretend you understand the Akatsuki! We actually can’t stand each other! I guarantee we were all waiting for the others to die so we could grab a bigger slice of the pie. Less people, more profit. Aside from Itachi, I couldn’t care less about the rest of these guys!” Kisame began tearing the wrapping around Samehada, the greed dancing in his eyes.

“All the better. Sakura, I’m sure I haven’t convinced you yet, especially after my little tantrum earlier, but it’s time for you to come back to the Leaf Village. I don’t care if you hate me. When all is said and done, you can kill me if you feel it’s necessary. But there are so many who still need you. People who can be saved from illness, people who can be saved from their inner demons, and people who don’t want to see you throw your life away. Think this over, if you will- Naruto, Yamato, Tsunade, and myself- just four of the people who have protected you. Ryofu did indeed protect you from a horrible fate, but haven’t I done the same? Hasn’t Naruto? You showed your thankfulness to Ryofu. But if he was truly worried about your best interests, he wouldn’t demand gratitude.”

“I’ve demanded nothing from her!” Ryofu snarled, angered by the accusation. “She came with me of her own free will, as you well know! Think me a demon, or a murderer, or whatever else, and I’ll be the first to tell you that you’re right! But don’t presume to tell me that I’d demand *anything* from someone! I don’t need anyone!”

Kaitou turned his head calmly, though his voice was even colder. “If you demand nothing, then you’ll have no problem letting her go.”

“WAIT!”

The single word from Sakura echoed across the clearing.

“You. Ekyt, Kaitou, whatever! Let me talk to you, just you!”

Kaitou seemed to agree. Favoring the group with a glare, he made his way over to Sakura, walking past Ryofu to do so. He stopped next to him, as if they had just passed on the narrow dirt path and happened to stop.

“Gentleman’s agreement to hold the battle off until she’s said what she has to say.”

“Fine,” Ryofu agreed. Everyone seemed to relax for a moment. Sakura shuffled a few paces away to a more private area.

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“...Do I really not interest you, Ekyt?” This had been playing on Sakura’s mind since Ekyt had said it. She hadn’t meant to ask it, but she couldn’t help herself. Her eyes seemed almost piercing to ‘Ekyt’,

though he waver at all.

“...No. Ekyt is fond of you. I see what he saw, and I understand why. But understand, when it appeared Ekyt lost his head, what he really lost was his heart. He truly loved you, and when you chose Ryofu, that was when the fight was really lost.”

“I don’t understand!” Sakura balled her hands into fists, angry at her ignorance of the situation. There was so many twists and turns, and so much to understand!

“Think of this, then: When did Ekyt ever give up, or quit, or let someone else choose the ending of a fight? Can you think of a time?”

Sakura wracked her brain; she could not. She had not one singular memory of Ekyt ever bowing out like that. Well, there WAS once. Ekyt had once taught at the academy. When he once refused to acknowledge Neji Hyuuga as a sensei, Neji had struck a child in class. Ekyt immediately bowed to Neji and surrendered, on the condition that the children not be hurt further. That memory stood out in Sakura’s mind.

Kaitou looked conflicted, but he let his expression soften. “Sakura, I will become Ekyt again, just this one time. And what Ekyt would tell you is this: If you’re happy with Ryofu, you should be with him. If the slightest doubt arises in your mind, Ekyt would protect you with all he had. And last of all, he would tell you that he loved you, and that...well, you are you, *Shoujo*. Whatever choice you make is fine, but don’t wander down the path of evil. Your debt of gratitude has been paid.”

With that, ‘Ekyt’ evaporated again. ‘Kaitou’ remained, looking as stern as before.

“Maybe he’s right...I will be Ekyt until I die. But it won’t be today...”

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Kaitou was struck with an idea as he walked back toward his group.

“The more you two kill, the better. If you don’t kill them, Ryofu will later. And they just might come in handy for us. But it’s important that you immediately put your chakra into the bodies of those you kill, otherwise this horror will start all over again.”

Kaitou had one last speech in mind for Ryofu. He shoved his hands into his vest pockets, looking somewhat at peace, now that the moment of reckoning had come. “You know, I hadn’t planned on letting Ekyt out to fight this match. But I think it’s best...after all, he holds the grudge with you, right?”

It has to be said now that Ekyt was still Ekyt. All this ‘Kaitou’ stuff- simply a tactic. To Ekyt/Kaitou, this was a way to win and nothing more. He had no choice but to play all his aces. He didn’t know how Ryofu had changed in two years, but if he had control over even the Akatsuki, it wasn’t looking good. But that wasn’t going to stop Ekyt from trying.

Nck. Ekyt bit his thumb and ran it down a scroll, opening it as he went. PHWHOOF!

The raw emotions hit him hard, as they always did. But there was no damage. Ekyt really HAD sealed his emotions in that scroll- that was really the biggest truth that he had told. Everything else could have been a lie. All the better.

I know genjutsu doesn't affect him, but that doesn't mean his mind can't be messed with...

"Heh...fool. Let me see...Deidara and Sasori, Hidan and Kakuzu...who should go first, I wonder-!"

Itachi had already attacked. His genjutsu took out Hidan and Kakuzu in it's first strike.

"Their bodies are immortal. Their minds, not at all. But that doesn't hold true with Sasori. My genjutsu can't penetrate that scroll, and I can't afford to use Tsukuyomi again so soon."

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NEXT CHAPTER: Down to business. Ekyt and Ryofu pair off and finish their brawl. Itachi and Kisame deal with the rest of the Akatsuki. But they'll hardly be alone, now that Ekyt and co are being followed!

Please note: So far, this has been mostly about 'Ekyt' rebuilding his life. There will be more of the REAL story next chapter.