

Missing Nin

Without you, I'm lost

Von June-flower

Betrayal

This once was formatted in a really nice way... Animexx killed it^^ It was almost like a poem - I cannot describe it. I hope it has kept its charm. I really like this OS - please leave me comments and criticisms! Even if you didn't read it... I'm curious who'll come first. Whoever will be here first, this story is for you! Love, isa

Missing Nin

"It has been a long time, Naruto."

"So it has."

The way he's standing there, in the soft moonlight which makes his hair shine softly, he looks so much older and colder to me as he ever had before. I cannot see his face clearly, but I know it better than my own: blue eyes, clearer than every glacier lake could be, and colder than ice. There was a time when they shone warmly and sparkled happily.

This time is lost.

And it will never return.

Who would ever have thought that this might happen? If anyone had told me, eight years ago, that one day we would face each other, each one of us standing on opposite sides of a shinobi war – I would never have believed it. Or, at least, I would have said that it was me who was standing on the winner side.

How stupid human beings can be.

So here we are, facing each other in the dim moonlight, the trees around us you loved so much whispering in the midst of their dreams.

On the one side: me.

Sasuke Uchiha, last descendant of the once oh-so-mighty Uchiha-Clan, which was fully destroyed by its own heir. I know I have changed. Time passes nobody without changing him at least a little bit, and time last more heavily on us than on other people. Whatever I endured and experienced couldn't have passed anyone without changing him. But my hair is still black, as are my eyes, and the T-shirt I'm wearing is black, too. There is no fan on it nowadays. I only have a last name like everyone else does – but it doesn't make me special any longer. It's more the other way round: "Uchiha", the people say and stare at me. "That's the one, who..." "Right." The one,

who joined the snake. Who disappeared for four years. And who's back now.

But, you know, one gets used to everything.

And what is even more important than my family name is, that people in my home town still believe in me. Still rely on me, still trust me.

I know I betrayed them many times.

I regret it bitterly every time I see the sad faces when they think of Orochimarus attack that left so many people – Shinobi, my friends – behind dead. Only a name in a cold, dead stone. But when I needed help most, they came to help me, and there's no gift precious enough I could give them to show how thankful I am.

My brother, whom I once loved most and at the same time hated most, killed the greatest threat for Konoha-Gakure. And the Shinobi of the leaf fought by my side, died by my side – and we won. Orochimaru and his disciples are dead. They will never threaten Konoha again.

When I first came home, truly home, I wondered where he might be. I had not seen Naruto since that dreadful day down in the valley in which we met last, along with Sakura and Sai. I never saw him again. She saved him, I'm sure about that – but I didn't stay long enough to see it with my own eyes. I was angry that morning – I only came to check out something, and after I had finished, I left.

Without ever looking back.

What has changed, Naruto? What has gone wrong?

Now you are standing there, in your black mantle with blood-red clouds, and fox-red eyes are glittering at me. Who would have thought that Akatsuki ever could get a hold of you like that? I always thought they only wanted to kill you. You were so strong. I never wanted to admit it, but you really were. So strong I always had to train harder and harder to keep up with your racing progress. You just left for some seconds and – snap!

A new technique. A new strength. How? How? Why?

But, Naruto, looking at you doesn't make me jealous any more.

It makes me sad.

So sad that my heart hurts as if it was pierced with knives. Or with your fox-red talons.

What has happened to you?

"Did they force you?"

My voice is calm.

Do not show your feelings, little brother. Never let people know what you think.

"Who?"

You laugh, Naruto, but it sounds cold and cruel, not the sparkling laughter that used to come from deep within your heart.

"Akatsuki? Oh, no, Sasuke. I joined them by own choice."

That was definitely not what I wanted to hear. He went by himself? The 16-Years old boy who wanted to become the next Hokage? Who would have done everything – and with saying everything, I mean everything – to keep his home, his friends and his Hokage safe? The most loyal Shinobi of the whole town hidden behind the leaves?

But he doesn't look like he wants to talk and I guess I will have to force each single answer out of him.

"But why?"

He makes a gesture that can be interpreted as everything.

"Why should I have stayed? Nobody cared about me."

Now I cannot keep myself from sounding angry.

"Nobody cared for you? What about Iruka-Sensei, Sakura and Kakashi-Sensei? And the Hokage? They all still care for you. And what about Hinata Hyuuga?"

I can see immediately that that was the worst thing I could have said. Hinata Hyuuga is dead. Killed during a mission in which she was supposed to spy on me and Orochimaru. A 16-year-old girl, separated from her team for seconds, nothing more. A precious life, whipped out within seconds. I think it happened before he left Konoha, right? Last time we met, I could still see her in your mind. A beautiful, loving presence that filled your soul and your heart. Did you love her?

I don't want to hear the answer.

But your eyes wide and your fists clench, and your mouth opens to reveal pointed fangs.

"Don't you dare to talk about her!", you hiss. "You killed her!"

That's not true, Naruto. I didn't kill her myself. But I can see your point: It might as well have been my fault. If I hadn't left Konoha, she wouldn't have needed to spy on me. She might still be alive.

"So that was the reason you left?"

I cannot believe how calm my voice sounds. *Feelings are nonsense for weak idiots, little brother.* The one or the other way, Itachi always is with me.

But I don't care. Not now. You don't answer, but I can see the answer in your eyes. They betrayed you, didn't they? They really never accepted you. Sensei Iruka, who felt with you, yes, Sensei Kakashi, yes, in parts. Hokage-Sama... She loved you. But she betrayed you too, didn't she?

"Sasuke."

Your voice is calm and bare of any emotions. Why does your coolness hurt me so much? It really pains me. I always considered you my friend.

"I always considered you my friend, Sasuke. But I never even came close to you. I never could touch your heart. I never could reach you. Never."

That's not fair, Naruto, you were the one who made me learn how to feel... Even though I wish I hadn't.

"That's not true. We always were good friends."

"We were in the same team, but you always kept your distance. You thought I was annoying, remember?"

Yes, I remember. I envied you, I didn't want you to come closer in case you would notice that. Now I am sure, even if you had noticed, you wouldn't have taken an advantage out of it... It's against your nature. But today is too late.

"Is it my fault, too? Is it because I tried to kill you?"

"You tried often. Maybe it just was one time too much."

When did you start to hate me? It hurts deeply. I know I was cold and introverted, arrogant and distant. I know now and it's too late. But I know I was wrong.

"I am truly Sorry."

I never intended to kill him that night, down by the lake in the Valley of the End. It just happened and I was shocked by my own doing. And I never meant to injure him so deeply last time we met, either. Sakura saved him, didn't she?

I was an idiot.

I never knew how much you meant to me until I came back to Konoha and you weren't there any longer.

"Sasuke? The great Sasuke Uchiha feels Sorry?"

Again, you laugh, and it makes me feel like I am torn apart. That's not you, Naruto. I knew you wouldn't believe it. I was too arrogant. I thought I would become stronger when I joined Orochimaru, and indeed, I have. But I lost something as well.

Have you ever seen the back of that water tank you damaged with your Rasengan, the day Kakashi-Sensei stopped us from fighting, up on the hospital roof? Years ago. I bet you didn't, it would fit your nature perfectly well. You have never seen the proof that you were stronger than I was – already at that time. My water tank had a minor damage. Yours had to be replaced. Can you only for a second imagine what I felt? How I felt? That's why I left Konoha to join the snake. I told myself I wanted to become stronger so I could kill Itachi and so I could show him I was better than he was. Three years later, I realized Orochimaru wanted to use my body for himself and I still wasn't strong enough to fight him. What did I do wrong? I couldn't defeat him. Itachi had to come to save me. And he died for it, as did Orochimaru. Where did my brother find this last proof of family love? I thought he lost it long ago. I thought he was so much stronger than the snake. I think Orochimaru used a trap to lure him in. He hoped to take his body, but finally, both gave their lives. It's hard to feel Sorry for the San-Nin. But I feel Sorry for Itachi. He was my brother, after all.

And suddenly, all the people I had hated so much were dead.

I had no place to go and none to fight.

The day we met?

It was one of my last missions for Orochimaru. He wanted to ensure you still couldn't control the Kyuubi perfectly and that Akatsuki still had no reason to take it from you. I didn't tell him I already knew you could control the Ninetails perfectly well.

"Sasuke, I don't think you are in the position to judge me, neither to say you are Sorry. What you once did has no meaning anymore. I don't care any longer."

This smile is almost regretful.

"Once I hoped you to be my friend. I was wrong. I left Konoha because the two persons I cared most for were dead, the one or the other way. Sakura was only thinking about you and her medical training. As soon as I came back with Jiraiya-Sensei, she started to forget me again. Kakashi-Sensei went back to the ANBU-Squad and was gone most of the time. And Iruka-Sensei and Tsunade-Sama..."

He pauses, and I can see the pain in his eyes.

"They are waiting for you."

I can only try, Naruto. Please come back.

"Have you ever seen the people look at you as if you're a monster?"

He asks it silently, without pain or blame in his voice.

"Since my childhood, I was alone. I grew up without anyone caring for me. Some people might have come and gone. But they never stayed."

I remember another time, another place, a voice, so different from his.

"You never had a mother or a father or a brother! You cannot imagine how it is to lose

your entire family!"

My own words, full of hatred and anger and bitterness. So different from his own statement now.

"That's not right. There are many people who still love you and miss you. They care for you and would be happy if you came back."

"Don't lie desperately, Sasuke. I know there are some people who would welcome me back happily. Three persons, all in all, no more."

Well, if he knows that, why doesn't he come back?

"And your friends? What about your friends?"

What about me...

"Friends?"

The sad, heartpiercingly sad smile is back.

"What friends? The ones like you? The ones that left me when they saw I was old enough to live on my own? The ones that blame me because their cousin died? She might not have if she wasn't so interested in my well-being that she took the mission to Oto. The friends that have their own aims, their own lives? The ones, that are happy now – without me?"

Well, at least he hasn't forgotten them. How could he? Shikamaru, the laziest Shinobi in the world, has a girlfriend now. He's still complaining that she will die some day if she doesn't stop talking early enough. Well, I guess he makes her keep quiet some times. And everyone was surprised to find that Neji has a heart under his ice-cold crust as well. He and Tenten will be marrying next year. And Shino and Kiba and Lee... Everyone's well.

"You make them miss you."

"Wrong." He shakes his head. "I let them live their own lives. It's more secure, if you ask me."

More secure.

A life without you.

Naruto, you have helped every single one of them once in your life. How can you actually believe they would just forget you and don't miss you?

"Naruto."

"Hm?"

"Once, you said you wouldn't let me go, even if you had to break my arms and legs to drag me back home."

He laughs.

"What?", I ask defensively.

"It just sounds funny hearing you call the village your home", he explains.

"Well, you said it."

"Did I? I was stupid, I guess. You were the one who broke my skull instead. I could have been dead."

You were dead. I can still see your lifeless eyes in my nightmares.

"I am going to fight you if you don't come back with me."

"Now, that really sounds stupid."

"It might. But that's exactly what I'm going to do."

"I will never come back. I gave my heart to everyone in that damned town, Hell, I even gave it to you. And you trampled on it, you squeezed it and cut it until all blood I had

was gone. I gave my heart to a woman and you killed her."

Every time he mentions her, my heart jumps. He sound so angry and sad when he talks about her, but it is only then when his emotions can be seen. He might talk about his feelings of loneliness and how he felt betrayed by his old home town, but only when he talks about Hinata Hyuuga, one can see how he really feels. Only she provokes a reaction. Why?

"You really loved her."

"I even loved you."

"Loved", he says, and it hurts so much. I have missed you for the last eight years, Naruto. Three after our fight in the Valley, when I left, five after the final fight with Orochimaru and my return to Konoha. We are both 20 now. And even though it is just five years ago she died, you miss her more than me? I have thought of you all the time. The fact that, apparently, you have only her in your heart, makes me angry. And though – you said you even loved me.

"And now?", I ask, desperately waiting for an answer.

Only the wind whispers in the quietness of the night.

Everything is calm.

What will you do next, Naruto?

"I left that town."

He does not even mention their names, I realize, neither Konoha's nor Hinata's.

"And Akatsuki took me in, helped me, housed me and trained me. I guess they needed new people after Itachi died.

"They made you a killer."

"I don't care. You killed, too."

"A murderer, Naruto! An S-rank outcast!"

"It's not the title of the Hokage, but I guess it's fine."

He smiles slightly – or is it just the shadow of the night that makes him look as if he's smiling?

"They just want you because of Kyuubi!"

Now, his eyes really begin to sparkle dangerously.

"Well, at least *somebody* wants me because of Kyuubi!"

That's crazy! Akatsuki misuses him as the perfect assassin, and the only thing he thinks of is that at least they use him? That's absolutely ridiculous!

"You're crazy! In Konoha, everyone's waiting for you! Come back, Naruto, we'll make sure Akatsuki won't get you! They won't attack the strongest Shinobi town of all five continents!"

"So?"

He looks at me with his eyes almost closed.

"Have you spoken to the Hyuuga-Clan? They absolutely dislike me – for the obvious reasons. Nara? They will never allow a threat to arise in the village. Aburame? They think it is safer without me. Akimichi? Do whatever is best for their town – and I'm a disturbing factor. And Yamanaka... They just hate to have to prepare the flowers for the MIA-Shinobi (Missing In Action) and last time Orochimaru came, they had a lot to do. In their opinion, if I hadn't provoked Orochimaru, he'd never had come. They all said I should just forget about you and leave the snake be. Let him do with you whatever he wanted. So, they'll have even more work if Akatsuki comes now. Don't believe they lost power only with losing Itachi."

I close my mouth, open it again, close it again. What should I say? I know why Akatsuki hasn't lost power – they have *him* instead. And he's blaming me – and at the same time, he isn't. It sounds as if he has gone over that topic a thousand times before with himself and has convinced himself that he is right.

But if you think about it... He really *is* right.

The most Clans think he *is* a threat to our hard-fought-for peace.

"So who cares what they say? You have lived in Konoha for 16 years before you left. Before that, you never cared about what they said."

"Ha."

Naruto looks terribly sad.

"You think I just left? They told me to leave, Sasuke. They wanted me to go. So I left."

My head is empty.

I can see it in his eyes: he is telling the truth.

This idiot.

Loyal as he is, he even obeyed a word that made him lose everything he ever had. So that's why he feels betrayed by Tsunade-Sama as well: She made him leave. And I start hating her. How could she?

How many people in town know about that decision, I wonder? I bet not many. The others think he left by his own choice. And in that moment, I hate them all. The whole lot from that cursed village that I call my home town. How could they have done this to him?

"Naruto..."

My voice is unsteady as I reach out with one hand. I long to touch his hand, his face – but he shrinks back.

"What?"

Now he's angry, no question, I guess he does not want anyone to feel Sorry for him. It would be so Naruto-like.

"Sasuke – you came here to fight me, didn't you? You'd better do it quickly, because Akatsuki is waiting for my report. As soon as I'm back, they're going to attack the village."

"What? What did you say?"

I haven't understood a word he's talking about. I may sound stupid, but I really don't care about it. I just stare at him. "What do you mean by this?"

His face is bare of all emotions. Again.

"Akatsuki will attack the village as soon as I have reported them that your defense is as weak as it always was."

"You... You came to spy on us?"

"Yes."

No explanation.

No excuses.

"Naruto... You are willing to let your home town be defeated by the enemy? You are willing to see all your old comrades die? The people you grew up with?"

"It's not my home any more, don't you understand? It's nothing to me any longer. It stopped being my friend when you left. It stopped being my love, when she died. And it stopped being my home when I was exiled by the decision of the Clan meeting. When the people I loved most asked me to leave."

Oh God, no. He's willing to do it, I can see it in his eyes. He'll go right to the Akatsuki and tell them that we lost 3 teams of ANBU the last month and haven't replaced them

jet and that our defense really is weak at the moment. We have fought too often, Naruto. Do we have to fight again, now? I don't want to do it.

Without you, Naruto, I'm lost.

You were the one that gave me the aim to become stronger, who gave me a reason never to give up. To develop and become better every day of my life. I thought I found a friend in you.

Did you know how much it hurt to leave you, down there in the valley? Totally exhausted, deadly injured? I was amazed, Naruto. You were so strong. I had lost the fight if you hadn't been that exhausted already before we started. You were the one who had followed me without taking the chance of a break.

I could hardly walk after our fight and I could hardly see because my eyes were so wet. I never wanted to hurt you and by hurting you I injured myself deeply. I guess it was the appropriate punishment.

Without you by my side I have no idea where to go and what to do. Until now, I just followed your aim to protect the village and all the ones you loved. You showed me that even people who don't share the same blood can be close to each other, like a real family.

But now?

Now you say you won't protect Konoha any more and that you don't care for us any more. What happened to your wish? You wanted to become a protector once. Where did you lose it?

Without you, I just don't know how to live, Naruto.

I don't want to fight you.

What can I do?

Can anything I say make you want to return to Konoha once more?

Can anything I say show you how much Konoha needs you?

How much I need you?

"So what. Are you going to fight me, Sasuke? You could save your village."

But I can't. And he doesn't move either.

His eyes tell me their own story. So sad, so lonely...

Even if I wanted, I couldn't hurt him.

Only the moon watches as we stare at each other.

It's a quiet night with only the stars and the trees and the moon around us. I can remember he loved the trees so much.

Suddenly, he looks up.

"Ah", he says.

"What, Naruto?"

"Your friends are coming."

Really, they are. I haven't realized. Behind me, out of the mists that are slowly surrounding us, totally enveloping us, dark figures emerge.

A tall, blonde woman with the ceremonial mantle of the Hokage.

A normally bored, now totally alert man with silvery hair and a mask that hides half of his face.

Another man, with a scar across his face, a troubled expression and a brown ponytail.

And a pretty girl, pink, shoulder-long hair flowing around her face, who looks at

Naruto and at me and sees his hand in the pocket of his mantle and throws herself in front of me.

"Sasuke! He's going to attack you!"

She has her Shuriken out, her gloves on, this woman is ready to fight. I can see his eyes – oh so sad eyes – and know, he is right. Sakura never really missed him. She never really cared for him. The girl he first fell in love with – childish, naive love, but nevertheless love – she was always looking at me. The people he trusted more than his own life are coming to fight him. Sakura - she too is one of the people that only see your outside. Who don't care who you truly are. I don't say this is a bad thing – she can be nice, really. But she could never ever understand how he felt. Not even a little bit.

"Naruto."

Tsunade-Sama speaks and her eyes are cold and hard.

"You came to spy upon us. You want to betray us to Akatsuki."

Iruka-Sensei puts his hand on her arm to keep her from shouting but she just looks at him coldly and he backs away.

Naruto nods while Kakashi-Sensei only looks at him.

"Looks like my male students all betray Konoha in the one or in the other way", he says quietly.

"Looks like that", Naruto answers.

He knows something, I suddenly think, everyone knows something I don't. What is it? Why are they looking at Naruto so questioning?

Oh, but the look of Hokage-Sama is angry.

"You disappoint me, Naruto. I thought even if you were to leave Konoha, you would stay a noble and loyal Shinobi. You could have gone to Taki- or to Suna-Gakure and..."

"Hokage-Sama", Naruto interrupts her politely, "I tried. But wherever I went, nobody even wanted to shelter me for one night. Suna might have but I didn't want to endanger them. Only Akatsuki was willing to take me in."

"No surprise there!", Sakura shouts. She is still standing in front of me – as if I would need protection. "Only murderers would feel comfortable in the presence of an assassin!"

"Sakura!"

How can she say things like that? Naruto is not a murderer! Ha had no choice!

"Don't even attempt to try to defend him, Sasuke! I know you think he's your friend... But he's not! He would have killed you! He just is on his way back to bloody Akatsuki so he can tell them to come and kill us all!"

Naruto, how can you stay calm facing this horrible accusations? None of them is true! And not even Iruka-Sensei says something to your defense. He actually kept track of you wherever you went, did you know that? He keeps listening to the news until he hears something about you. He still keeps your picture on his bedside table. He, too, is missing you, can't you see that?

"You still didn't have to join Akatsuki", says Kakashi-Sensei and watches him closely. You stay calm and emotionless.

"Hokage-Sama..."

I want to explain that Naruto is lonely without us, that we have to help him...

"Hokage-Sama."

Naruto's voice is loud and firm, louder than mine.

"If I return to Akatsuki, they'll attack the village. But if I don't..."

What? What does he want to say? Oh, Naruto, I don't know what you're meaning. But apparently, everyone else knows what he wants to say.

Hokage-Sama finishes his sentence.

"If you don't return, they'll know we are strong enough to defeat their best assassin and probably them, too. They won't attack us then."

"No! You can't mean that seriously!"

Did I say that? Obviously, because blue eyes suddenly focus on me and they look somewhat warmer than before...

"But I do mean it, Sasuke. It's the only way to save Konoha, right?"

"Right."

The Hokage's voice is still cold and hard.

Iruka takes her arm quickly.

"No! You can't do that! Don't kill him – he hasn't done anything wrong by now! Please, I beg you..."

His voice is full of fear. How it must hurt him to see the boy who once was like a son to him like this!

See, Naruto, he really loves you. Please, don't do anything stupid!

But her eyes are glittering merciless.

"Well, if I have to kill you in order to protect my village – so be it!"

"N....!"

I am not fast enough.

Sakura wrestles me to the ground like a little puppy - where has she got all that enormous strength from? – and I don't find either the power or the will to fight her. I can just scream and watch.

"No! Wait! Naruto!"

Tsunade-Sama is so fast, I can barely see her. She is strong, too, every punch must hurt terrible and I guess that's the reason why Naruto always ducks under her attacks and never intends to take them directly. He knows her style well – he watched her fight so many times! But on the opposite, he seems to have developed a new fighting technique which he uses quite effectively against her. Do I sound as if watching was fun? Believe me, it isn't at all. It is terrible. Imagine your best friend in the world being beaten up and you cannot do anything. And then add the knowledge that he will probably die in the end – and you hope desperately he won't. Stir and mix with an huge amount of fear – and you'll might know how I'm feeling right now. But even then – you only might. Please forgive me for sounding cold and indifferent. I cannot help myself. I cannot watch. But I have to. Oh, Naruto... You've become so strong. Please... Let this not be the end! I can see you fighting her, but I can also see that you are fighting her like you fought me that dreaded day at the lake. You don't really want to hurt her... She must be around 60 now. Isn't she fit?

"Ahhh!"

Sakura screams as stones and rubble rain down on us. With one blow, the Hokage has spit up the ground, made rocks shatter and earth rain down all over. She has exactly hit the spot on which Naruto had been standing seconds before...
But he isn't there any longer.

Your eyes are fox-red, your claws pointed like your fangs, your red Chakra I know so well filling every inch of my mind.
Oh please, take care, don't hurt him, don't let him be injured...
But which god is listening? They never listened when I was calling. I'm on their "no-good"-list. Too many doubts. But now, please. Only one time. I'll never doubt again, I'll be good, just don't let him die. I don't want him to die...

The tree behind which his shadow clone was hiding breaks down under the shear force of the blonde San-Nin and she dodges his attack easily. Also, as three other clones run at her, she just fights them with her tai-jutsu. Two don't even get near her as her arms and legs move faster than light. The third one is more resistant and manages to punch her... A direct hit. She is thrown back a few meters but amazingly, she lands on her own two feet. And wastes no time as the third clone comes. He is hit directly above his heart, flies back and lays there, coughing up blood. But he doesn't disappear.

"So, was that you, Naruto?", Tsunade says. She's panting, too, no doubt. The fight takes his toll – she's not as young as she used to be. Even if she looks like that. "You're still as stupid as you used to be. You should know by now that one shouldn't get too close to me! I'm a Medic-Nin!" "I know you are", says Naruto. And gets up as if he just had received a friendly clasp and not a deathly blow. His hand brushes away the blood on his face. "But you're not getting younger, Tsunade-Sama. The impact should have thrown me back some hundreds of meters, not only this few ones." He's making fun of her, isn't he? But no, he's serious. Somehow, in the middle of the fight, Naruto treats his opponent with respect. Somehow, he manages to worry about his former Hokage. "Don't mess with me!",

she shouts and attacks again. They are fast. Naruto and Kyuubi are really working together well. His red Chakra surrounds him like the sand Gaara of Suna-Gakure uses. It builds up to a perfect defense. Tsunade tries to break it by increasing her speed but Naruto just slows down and closes his eyes. What is he trying now? He cannot see her, he cannot see the fist and the leg flying at him at the same time and at enormous speed, he will be hit and every hit taken from the hands of a medical nin can be a death sentence. Especially if your name is Naruto, you have allied with the enemy and you're fighting the strongest Medic-Nin in the world. Who, by chance, is protecting everything she loves... But his Chakra keeps him safe. It moves at his will – heaven, I've seen a lot of people do a lot of funny stuff with their Chakra, like Neji Hyuuga using it to destroy other peoples Chakra channels or like Kakashi-Sensei and myself using it in Chidori – but I've never seen anyone using it the way Gaara used sand! Where did he learn that? And from whom? It is really amazing. One arm of Chakra holds the fist of the Hokage, she tries to pull it back angrily but he holds her back. The other Chakra-flow has formed a wall in front of her leg, the kick never actually reached him.

"Damn!"

She is really angry. Her second fist races towards Naruto, blue Chakra glittering in a ball. If it touches him, he'll not be able to use his body any longer –he'll die immediately...

I cannot watch. I don't want to. But I cannot turn my eyes away so I see how a third Chakra-rank grabs her throat and pushes her away from him - and for a moment he is safe. Tsunade goes flying into a massive tree trunk and slides to the floor slowly. Naruto stands there and does not even seem to breath faster. He just looks at her. I know this look. He regrets hitting her. He is worried that he hurt her badly. No, Naruto, don't feel remorse - she tried to kill you! Don't stand waiting for something that never will happen! Go -

And suddenly, Tsunade-Sama is on her feet again, she disappears from Naruto's sight and he looks around the forest searchingly.

"Naruto!"

Her cry makes me shiver, it's so final. There she is, behind him, so fast, so fast, turn around, Naruto, she's behind you, turn....

"Naruto! Turn around!"

~***~

It happens in slow-motion.

I can see his face as he hears me and turns around to see Tsunade-Sama coming at him, her hand stretched out as if she wanted to stop him. And he looks at me... Your eyes aren't cold any more, Naruto. They are warm and soft, the way I remember them from past times and you smile at me.

You've always been my best friend.

And then he turns to face Tsunade on whose hand cold Chakra is sparkling, directed at his heart. And for some reasons I can read his thoughts - they are written on his face. He doesn't move.

He awaits her final blow.

His death.

I can hear him saying as he smiles at her: *"You've always been like a mother to me."*

Her hand hits him.

~***~

And everything jumps back into action:

Naruto flies backwards, his eyes broken but wide open.

"No!", I shout, or Iruka-Sensei shouts, I am not sure, and Iruka-Sensei reacts but I am faster. I jump and catch his limp body and shake him.

"Naruto! Wake up! This isn't funny!"

Sakura is still amazed how quickly I freed myself from her grip. She's at my side and looks at me.

"He's dead, Sasuke", she says silently, now, that he obviously is no threat any longer, she has no need of holding me back.

I don't believe her. He cannot be dead, he is just making fun of us, he...

Iruka-Sensei looks at him and walks away into the forest without ever looking back.

His face seems to be made out of stone, he is aged a 20 years at least.

Kakashi-Sensei says nothing but bows his head slightly. Another dead friend. He has had so many. But I don't feel with him for a second. He wasn't there when Naruto needed him most. He has no right of sharing his grief.

I hug the dead, lifeless body as if he would come back if I gave him my warmth and my energy and if I could, I would have done it immediately. But nothing happens.

Tsunade comes and kneels next to me, releasing his limp body from my grip. "Leave him, Sasuke. He is gone." She crosses his hands on his breast and closes his eyes. Is there a tear streaming down her face? I don't care.

"You killed him!"

I didn't realize I was crying until tears started running over my face. It doesn't matter. Not any more.

"You killed him! He trusted you more than anything and you killed him!"

My voice is unnatural high. I don't care.

It doesn't matter.

"He loved you! You were like a mother to him!"

But then, I cannot find more words.

Her eyes are so sad, so brown and warm, oh so sad, almost like his were. She turns around and embraces me. I don't want to, but I almost fall into her arms, it feels so comforting and loving. I think I have stopped crying but I cannot take my eyes off his face. It looks so peaceful. And almost happy. Tsunade-Sama hugs me and holds me tight - there is no need for words here.

Still, I feel the urge to tell her something.

"It was what he wanted, wasn't it?", I whisper and she nods.

"He wanted to save Konoha even if he had to die for it. He wanted to die for it, but somebody had to... had to..." There is a lump in my throat again.

"Somebody had to kill him, aye", the wise old woman says.

"And he wanted you to do it."

Again, she only nods.

"The parents he never had... You were his mother and Iruka-Sensei his father."

"And you loved him too, Sasuke."

I still have to swallow the lump, it is so big it hurts terribly.

"I still do."

~***~

Slowly, the sun emerges and a golden light falls upon his dead body. He looks like he is only sleeping - in his simple, black clothing that has a certain similarity with the Konoha Shinobi Uniform. After he got rid of this horrible mantle, one could have taken him for a Konoha-Nin... He never really got too far away from our traditions and rules, I guess. It was in his blood, after all.

Suddenly, figures in their dark uniforms appear, black skirts, black trousers, black shirts. Only black, the color of grief. Of death. And loneliness and sadness. Wouldn't a bright color would have suited him better? But it really doesn't matter. I have to learn to keep my thoughts from wandering like this again. Once, there was a boy who taught me how to live... And now, he's gone. And I'm lost, I really am. But everyone has come to say Good Bye to him. To Naruto Uzumaki, Konoha's most loyal and strongest Shinobi. They have never forgotten him, I wish he could see it right now.

But I bet he does.

"He'll be with her now", Tsunade says quietly. I know. She means Hinata. Yes, they'll be together now.

And once and for all, I pray you'll truly be happy now, Naruto. Don't forget that we'll remember you.

I'll see you, idiot. Don't try to hide from me.

End