

We set up camp later that night, several dozen miles from Konoha. We were making decent time, but not great. While most of the people in the group were physical monsters, Karin's flavor of overpowered body was more stamina based than strength based, so she was really holding us back. I didn't mind, of course, this wasn't likely to be a short term assignment. We had no idea where the three tails actually was, beyond that it was in the Land of Water, so I'd settled in for a lengthy trip.

Still, once we settled down, I pulled Karin aside to check on her. Sure enough, she was terrified of Kuroka, her Mind's Eye of the Kagura showing her what was essentially the equivalent of a tailed beast in human form.

"She's a monster!" spat the redhead. "She's got so much POWER! And she reminds me of..." she glanced at Naruto. "You know. What is she?"

The irony of Kuroka being confused for a Jinchuriki despite hiding her ears and tails wasn't lost on me, but I was about to respond as best I could when Naruto cut in. "Wait, she's like me?" He'd followed me to check on Karin, worry for his cousin pushing him to tag along when I pulled her aside. His eyes were shining as he looked at Kuroka. "You don't seem all crazy and stuff like those other guys. Well, I guess the ones we fought weren't but they were old guys. You're the same age as sensei and you can control that stuff so well? You're amazing, Big Sis Kuroka!"

Kuroka froze at that, and I almost winced, but Naruto just pushed past, completely ignoring the reaction as he happily chattered on about how cool she was. I didn't stop it. While Sasuke would be learning Youjutsu, Naruto was eventually going to need to learn Sage Mode, and having him become familiar with it through Kuroka could only help. Plus she could use an enthusiastic little brother, and Naruto had a way of worming through people's guards. There was a reason he got away with calling Tsunade 'Granny', when no one else did.

"I'm not the same as you," she corrected. "But I'm kind of similar, in a way. As for control, I don't really have that problem. I'm not a Jinchuriki, just someone born with chakra that's a little different. There are lots of people like me."

He nodded in understanding. "Like that Shark bastard that Kakashi-sensei and Guy-sensei fought!"

"That's...actually probably not a bad comparison," I nodded thoughtfully. "Kisame Hoshigaki is a freakish chakra monster. They even call him the tailless tailed beast. Kuroka is probably at about that level in terms of raw power." Of course, Kisame was also a blunt instrument (irony for a swordmaster). He smashed things with his raw power like a hammer, while Kuroka was more like a scalpel.

Of course, I wasn't sure how far into Ultimate-class she even was. She'd come to me fresh off killing her master and on the run, years before we'd seen her in the show, and even in DxD she hadn't really demonstrated raw power sufficient to be anything past maybe city block level.

Power scaling in DxD was kind of janky, not helped by the fact that each class was a pretty wide spectrum of its own, and it got wider the higher you went. Despite that prevarication though, Naruto looked awed by the statement. "What? You're as strong as that Shark bastard Big Sis? That's crazy! He fought Kakashi-sensei and Guy-sensei at the same time!"

Kuroka's face became smug. "Well, I'm pretty powerful, I guess. But I'm surprised to find out there are people around here who are at my level. I haven't seen anyone besides Master who can keep up with me."

"I told you that you'd be surprised," I shrugged. "As for Kisame...honestly I wouldn't want to fight that asshole. He's got a few nasty tricks that make him a menace in a straight fight. You'd honestly probably have an easier time handling him than I would." Way too many of my combat mechanisms were based on overwhelming chakra, both amount and application. Kisame's ability to eat that shit was obnoxious and hard to counter. Plus when merged with Samehada, he got way more physically powerful.

It was funny that between him and Itachi, I felt like I'd probably have better odds against Itachi at this point. My powerset was way more suited to taking him on, and after all my growth I didn't hate my chances of actually beating him.

Kuroka's expression was thoughtful. I suspected she'd been dismissing this world based on who she'd met so far. While we'd run across some seriously skilled people even in this team, we hadn't interacted with anyone too overwhelming in terms of chakra capacity so far. Naruto was the obvious exception, but it was also clear my disciple was an outlier.

Karin, for her part, seemed to be calming down. Being in close proximity to Kuroka with Naruto and I around was clearly helping her acclimate, so I decided not to push, and instead let her make peace with it in her own time. I turned to my student. "Hey, Naruto, I was actually meaning to talk to you. I have a new ability I wanted to teach you, if you want to learn. It isn't as big and flashy as the Whirlwind Iron Cutting Fist, but I personally think it's even more useful."

Naruto went stock still. "Wait, seriously? Another new technique? That's awesome! What does it do?"

"It lets you use your imagination," I said, in the most underwhelming description of the Outer Body Training Method I could possibly come up with. "Through meditating." That took quite a bit of the wind out of his sails.

"Oh...well, that's ok Sensei," he said with forced cheer. "I don't need to learn that. I think I have enough stuff to practice. Maybe you should teach it to Sasuke."

I burst out laughing. "It's a powerful technique, you brat," I scolded him. "Don't knock it until you try it. It's honestly probably the most useful technique I know, and it'll be about a thousand times more useful for you. This technique will completely transform everything about you."

And it would. As someone who had gone from essentially basic martial arts skills to a taijutsu master in less than a year with only a few clones, I could confirm more than anyone exactly how big of an advantage the Outer Body Trance was. Granted, it was much LESS effective if you didn't have my Black Heaven Art, which had been shown to have unnatural synergy with the technique, but still, with hundreds of clones to grind his proficiency, there was almost no technique Naruto wouldn't be able to brute force.

Clone spamming was already a monstrous resource for training, but if you added in the ability to simulate any technique you knew and fight phantom enemies without actually taking damage, it went up to a whole other level.

And so began our training in the Outer Body Training Method. The ki circulation technique was harder to learn than one would expect, and Temari had taken a while to even get the training method down, but Naruto, of course, had access to an almost limitless number of clones, so I doubted it would take him too long.

Karin, still quiet and wary of Kuroka, who had decided to take a cat nap out of boredom, watched with interest as I walked my disciple through the steps. She didn't seem inclined to try it, which made sense because the Outer Body Method was pretty boring to look at from the outside. If Naruto didn't have a staggering amount of trust in me I doubted I could have convinced that hyperactive idiot to sit still long enough to learn it.

"Now, one of the biggest benefits of this technique, in my opinion, is the ability to experience things like temporary states without accruing damage," I narrated as we worked on the ki flow. "I could, for instance, push myself into one of the higher gates and experience that in the trance without causing myself harm. This is excellent for you, because it means we can help you access the chakra of the nine tails inside you, and then you can experience that safely in the trance as many times as you need to without losing control."

While we could suppress the nine tails chakra with the chains or the prison dragon, that would just get rid of it. In order for Naruto to learn to use it properly, he'd have to actually experience the sensation of Kurama's corrosive chakra and learn to deal with it in a safe way. Add in the chance to spam clones to handle it, all without a chance of accidentally losing control, and I couldn't think of a better way to pull this off.

Well, obviously there was a better way, the crazy island where he could gain perfect control instantly or whatever, but he wasn't in a position to do that yet. For now, one tail at a time was our best bet, even if Outer Body wouldn't work until he actually experienced a tail.

Despite my assurances, Naruto still looked unsettled. "Sensei, I don't know if this is a good idea. I trust you, but the fox is...it's evil."

"The fox is destructive," I told him gently. "And that's a bad thing to us because we're the victims of that destruction. But as for whether it's EVIL, I can't say. Is a hurricane evil? Is a tidal wave? The tailed beasts are beasts, and beasts have instincts. Even so, just because a wolf will eat you in the wild doesn't mean Inuzukas can't partner up with them."

This was a tricky position to take. I wanted to prime Naruto to listen to Kurama, but I couldn't let on that I KNEW about Kurama because that would be suspicious as hell. I had to plant that seed without coming across as just being sympathetic to a mass murdering monster.

Naruto, thankfully, was probably the person most likely to be receptive to something like this. "You think the fox might not be that bad?"

"I don't know anything about the fox," I told him bluntly. "But I know that Stone was an enemy during the last war, and I know how much damage the hatred between our villages caused. I think that you should make up your own mind about what kind of being the fox is after you speak to it. The hatred of the previous generations don't need to be inherited. You proved that with your recent actions. If you hadn't made friends with Kurotsuchi, the raid on Konoha would have ended much differently. We'd have had to kill most of those stone ninja, and we might have suffered losses in the process."

His face lit up, both with a smile and a blush. "You think I should try to talk to it? Maybe make friends or something?"

"Maybe," I shrugged. "I can't tell you how to handle that. I just think that if there's one creature in the world that can understand what you've gone through it's the fox. You two have been stuck in there together, after all. I'm not saying there won't be bad blood on both sides, but we've already seen that common ground can be a good place to start if you want to make a friend."

Naruto stared off into the forest, his face pensive. I knew he'd heard me, and I had a good idea how things would shake out. I was happy with how that had gone, but for now, it was time to get back to training. Once he'd finished learning this, I could move onto my own training for the night. It was time for Kuroka to give me my first lesson on the art of Senjutsu. I was ready to become a sage.