

I stepped into the clearing with relish. It was such a beautiful day out here alone in the forest. The breeze was chill, the sun was shining, and no one was trying to perforate my body with either elemental forces or throwable ninja tools. Truly it was wonderful to be alive.

I'd considered bringing backup, of course, but ultimately, I had no clue how strong Kuroka was going to be. I'd done my due diligence, hoping to pick her up at her most vulnerable (creepy, I know, but I didn't fancy getting murdered), and while the specific time period of her being on the run at eighteen after killing her master meant she'd be weaker than the version of her in the series, she was still most likely Ultimate-class, even if the series was incredibly vague about what exactly that entailed.

Taking a deep breath, I started carving symbols in the dirt, slowly working my way through the particulars. My one advantage here was that intent mattered. I had some parameters I knew would be key to this whole mess. For one, I needed a Kuroka whose chakra and Senjutsu were compatible with mine, at bare minimum.

After finishing my calculations, I gritted my teeth, reached into my body, and pushed open gates four and five. Kuroka's strength might be hard to pin down, but "a lot" was a safe bet, which meant I would need a staggering amount of chakra to summon her. With my current third gate permanence physique, my chakra was firmly S-rank, so doubling it once and then again gave me a pretty substantial amount to play with, and I was relieved to find that it WAS enough, since I tried to avoid going three ahead because that was when you started taking damage.

I grimaced, shaking my head. I was stalling at this point, getting lost in my head to avoid the fight to come. I bit my thumb, dripping blood onto the summoning circle, then stepped back, making sure my hands were up and my Ten was ready for flowing water.

There was a blaze of power, and I was shocked to see the circle of seals begin to glow rather than being obscured by the normal puff of smoke. Between the carved symbols, glowing energy began to rotate, and I could have sworn I saw a glowing symbol for a split second...before a puff of smoke DID obscure it after all. I waited for a moment, letting the smoke clear, and focused on the form inside the summoning circle.

Kuroka looked...rough. She was beautiful, for sure, large breasts, thick thighs, pale skin, long dark hair. But aside from that, it was clear she hadn't been having a good time. Her skins as covered in bites and scratches, her hair was messy and filled with leaves, her bright amber eyes were sunken and shining with rage and violence, and when she met mine, they narrowed in fury as her lips peeled back in a hiss.

"Ok," I said calmly. "I realize that this probably looks bad, but if you'll just hear me out, we can talk about this peacefully an-"

She snarled, her hand flickering up, and a sphere of blue energy exploded across the clearing at me like a cannonball. I didn't even hesitate, my hands casually guiding it aside before it could

impact me, but my eyes widened in shock as I maneuvered it because of the sheer WEIGHT of the energy. I deflected it pretty easily, but upon looking down I noticed my feet had skidded back about ten feet in the dirt. Holy shit.

“Stop!” I snapped. “Seriously, you’re safe, I’m not a devil, I don’t work for devils, and I have no desire to contact another one besides you. Just think for a second, you just used Senjutsu, did that FEEL like normal nature energy?”

She froze, her eyebrows furrowing. “I...what the hell?”

“This,” I said slowly. “Is not your world. You’re in a different reality. I summoned you here to talk. I can send you back whenever you want, and I will if you ask, but I was hoping I might be able to hire you.”

Her eyes narrowed suspiciously. “Hire me for what?”

“Senjutsu training,” I shrugged. “I want to learn it. It’s not uncommon here, though it’s still pretty rare. Everyone here uses chakra and has the capacity to learn it, but it’s hard to pick up. You’re a genius at it, from what I know.”

Her lips twitched, a smug grin trying to surface. “This is true,” she said loftily. “But why should I work for you?”

“Well, it’d give you somewhere to lay low, at least,” I shrugged. “I know you’re on the run, and this is as far from the Underworld as it gets. No devils are going to find you here. Not to mention you have chakra, which means I can actually teach you a few tricks too.” Grinning, I walked over to a nearby boulder, slamming a hand into it and shearing the top off with whirlwind iron cutting fist. A quick use of ultra lightweight rock had me balancing the thing on my pinky, and Kuroka stared at me slack jawed as I tossed it into the air, letting it drift slowly back down to my hand like a falling leaf.

“How the hell did you do that with chakra?” she demanded. “You didn’t use any magic, I’d have sensed it. Chakra is good for Youjutsu or mixing with natural energy for senjutsu, it doesn’t control GRAVITY.”

I grinned at her. “It can. It can do lots of other stuff too. Remind me to teach you the Shadow Clone Jutsu sometime.”

“And you just want me to teach you Senjutsu?” she demanded. “Because you’ve been staring at my tits since I showed up, and I get the feeling it’s not to try to predict my attacks.” She crossed her arms under her substantial chest, smirking smugly when my eyes flicked down. “How do I know this isn’t some plan to get yourself a pet kitty?”

"I can summon people from other dimensions," I said dryly. "If I wanted a docile catgirl to fuck, I could have found someone easier to handle. You're an ultimate class devil who killed her last master. I'd have to be an idiot to think you'd be easily controlled."

She hummed with interest. "My last master, huh?" she said silkily. "Implies I'm about to have a new one. You gonna be my MASTER, stud?"

Her tone made it clear what that would entail, and I swallowed at the innuendo. "Maybe. If that's what you need to make this happen. Of course, you're not expecting me to be able to do that at all, are you? You can't sense any demonic power from me, and are sure I can't keep up because I'm human."

The cat girl giggled. "No offense, stud, but having some fun magic tricks with chakra doesn't make you-" her eyes widened in shock and she hurled herself backwards, her head barely vacating the space my fist started occupying before the discharge of the soul crushing strike.

A loud bang split the air as the qi exploded, and she stared up at me from her spot sitting on her ass where she'd fallen retreating. "That...you could have killed me!"

"I don't hit anything I don't plan to hit," I corrected. "I knew you'd dodge. You're a natural sage, and that means reading the flow of people's energy to predict attacks." Her Senjutsu was a lot like Jiraiya's Frog Kata, albeit much less difficult for her.

Surging to her feet, she bared her teeth at me. "That doesn't count, I wasn't ready! Fight me now. One on one. I'll show you that Sages aren't something to look down on."

Stepping back, I spread my arms, gesturing for her to take a shot. She snarled again, blurring forward, and her body split into a dozen different images. I didn't panic, I just pushed chakra into my Ten, expanding it outward to cover the area within about twenty feet of me as I manifest the nen art of *En*, a powerful sensory field.

Kuroka came HARD. Claws and fists and snarling fury under cover of illusions, mixed in with a deadly poisonous mist that would have screwed me if I hadn't been working on my flowing water first to try to keep up with Sasuke.

I put her down. Once. Twice. Three times into the dirt, and with the third I pinned her in place completely. She snapped and writhed, trying to throw me off her, desperately trying to attack me, but finally, she gave up and slumped down, letting her head fall to her side. Her chest was heaving, her face was pale, and she looked...beaten.

Letting her go, I got up, offering her my hand. She took the hand and let me pull her to her feet. "Did I put your mind at ease?" I asked gently. "About my strength?"

She pouted, averting her gaze. "You don't have to make it weird. You beat me so I'll teach you. But I'm not calling you Master. You're not. Just because you're kind of strong...you have to earn that."

I winked at her. "Guess I'll need to put some work in then, Kitten." She blushed, pouting harder, but didn't argue.

There was more to discuss. Her sister, her plans to resurrect her species, her desire for revenge, there was a lot of it...but not today. Today I just stripped off my vest, offering it to her to cover the ill fitting kimono she wore. The anime played it off as her trying to be sexy, but I could recognize the garment for what it was. She didn't have any other clothes.

She took it, blushing, and then slipped it on, buttoning the vest as best she could. "So...where are we going anyway? And where even are we?"

"We're in the land of fire, near a place called Konohagakure, or the village hidden in the leaves," I said solemnly. "It's a ninja village where I live. I'm a member of the Shinobi Corps. A Jonin, to be more specific."

Her ears, which had been flattened up until now, perked up. "Did you say NINJA village?" she asked with a grin. "Because I'll be honest, I don't get a shinobi vibe from you."

"Well I am one," I protested. "In fact, I'm not JUST a Shinobi. I'm the leader of a ninja clan. My name is Kai Mikado, and I'm the first generation leader of the Mikado clan, thank you very much. If you're going to be working for me, you should know whose service you're entering at least." I tried not to sound smug, but I don't think it worked.

Her smile, which had been taking on an interested edge, peeled into a cat that ate the canary grin. "Oh, a CLAN LEADER," she purred in amusement. "Well I'm so sorry if I didn't show you the proper respect Mikado-sama. Please allow this humble kitten to repent for her unforgivable rudeness." She bowed low enough that her enormous breasts almost spilled out of the Jonin vest, clearly aware of what she was doing and just as clearly enjoying it.

Rolling my eyes, I turned and headed back towards the village. She giggled and skipped along behind me. I stopped. "One more thing, can you use those illusions to hide your tails and ears?" I asked bluntly. "There are no Youkai here, and the closest analog is...well I'll explain but it would cause problems if people got confused."

A two tailed catgirl had ONE analogue in this world, and given the recent stress with Stone, I didn't want to give Cloud an excuse to start trouble. She pouted, but with a quick flash of dark fire, her ears and tails vanished. Beaming, she grabbed my elbow, letting me lead her, and we headed back for the village. Guess I was introducing her to everyone today after all.