Old Dog versus New Tricks
by Zakad

Summary

Kakashi doesn't care who is on the genin team the Hokage shoved at him. He's going to fail this team just like all the others and retreat back into ANBU, where even if his comrades die, they at least have a fighting chance.

(Team 7 always passes the bell test in the end. But this time they pass with flying colors.)

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Kakashi looks up from the memorial stone and curses quietly to himself. Judging by the length of the shadows, it is well past midday. He meant to keep the brats waiting but not this long. Then again, if they aren't there, he can say they failed to obey orders and skip the bell test all together. If Sandaime doesn't approve, he can give the brats to a different jounin instructor.

To Kakashi's disappointment, the kids are still waiting and they aren't happy about it. One of them, probably Naruto given the kid's documented propensity for pranks, has stuck a chalkboard eraser in the door frame. Kakashi doesn't smell any itching powder and white chalk can't be seen in his grey hair. He half-hopes they'll be so disgusted by his failure to dodge that they'll give up and go home.

Kakashi opens the door. The eraser bounces off his head. Naruto, sensei's living legacy, falls to the ground laughing. The civilian girl, Haruno Sakura, is trying to keep a straight face, but the bright shine of her eyes betrays her amusement. Sitting on top of the desk behind her, Itachi's little brother, the last Uchiha, looks quietly dismayed by Naruto's success.

"My impression of you is..." Kakashi glances them over, evaluating their clothing and readiness for
Naruto wears a dark-orange, long-sleeved tee with the Uzu-spiral sewn onto both shoulders and dark grey shorts. He has a dark blue vest with tiny silver crosses on the collar that otherwise mimics the green chunin flak jacket. It pockets are stuffed full of prank supplies. He wearing a pair of orange-tinted goggles across his forehead and his hitai-ate is wrapped around his left upper arm. His coloring is all Minato-sensei but the shape of his face and his smile are all Kushina.

Uchiha dresses in one of his clan's traditional training outfits, a dark blue shirt with a wide collar, white arm braces with large silver crosses circling each forearm, and long shorts. His hitai-ate is in the proper position guarding his forehead. He is solemn and quiet but not the budding mass of hate most of ANBU had predicted he would become after his brother's betrayal. His hands are deftly tucking the away the ends of a French braid in his teammate's hair.

The civilian girl is odd. Her pink hair and pale green eyes will attract a lot of attention once she grows up a little more. For now, she chooses to draw the eye with a modified cheongsam in dark-red with silver crosses embroidered along the bottom edge and dark-green capris. They aren't the bright colors a child would normally choose, but red is still a color all but the strongest shinobi will avoid. As Kakashi watches, she ties her hitai-ate like headband, tucking the knot snug against the bottom of the braid. At least she seems unmoved by her broody classmate's attention, which is a good sign.

Kakashi kicks himself mentally for looking for positives, wonders idly why they all have crosses stitched onto their clothes, and prays that they will fail soon so he can retreat back into ANBU. Nobody, but especially not these kids, needs his presence hanging over them like a curse. At least in ANBU, death is never a surprise.

"I hate you," says Kakashi. "Meet me on the roof for introductions."

After telling them his name and essentially nothing else of value, he points to Naruto. "You go first."

"I'm Naruto Uzumaki! My likes are ramen, especially Ichiraku ramen, but Ryū-nii won't let me eat ramen everyday. My dislikes are the three minutes it takes ramen to cook and fresh vegetables. But ones cooked in ramen broth are okay! My hobbies are watering plants and learning to make fireworks from Ichi-nii. My dream for the future is to protect my precious people and to become Hokage!"

Kakashi blinks slowly. It seems Naruto never kicked the ramen habit even after moving in with his guardians. Given how much Naruto's parents had enjoyed eating at Teuchi's ramen stand, Kakashi isn't exactly shocked. Naruto sounds happy. That's a good thing and another reason for Kakashi to stay away.

"Next, the girl," says Kakashi.

"I'm Sakura Haruno. I like stories, especially weird ones like Uryū-sensei and Ichigo-san tell, and I dislike spicy foods. My hobbies are playing trivia games and competing with Ino and Hinata. My dream for the future is to prove my strength as a kunoichi and to master all five elemental chakras."

Kakashi raises his eyebrows in a silent expression of surprise. That is an impressive dream, especially coming from a civilian. If she shows any promise at all in the survival test, he will suggest Sandaime find her a female mentor until a spot on a new genin team becomes available.

"And last," says Kakashi.

"My name is Sasuke Uchiha. My likes are... my friends. My dislikes are sweet foods. My hobbies
are taking walks and training. My dream for the future is to re-establish the Uchiha and to achieve justice for my clan."

Clear and concise, which is unsurprising from an Uchiha. They were once known for being remarkably direct with outsiders. (Non-clan members generally weren't worth the effort of intrigue.) Sasuke's Academy assessment says he is standoffish, but he doesn't seem to have any objection to Naruto or Sakura. The fact that he has made friends after what he witnessed is almost a miracle in itself. Maybe he takes after Obito rather than Itachi.

Kakashi mentally sprints away from that line of thought and retreats into the familiar pre-genin hazing script he has perfected and refined over the years of failing genin teams. He doesn't tell the children that due to a higher quality of Academy instruction five teams are expected to pass this year. There's no need to to get their hopes up.

After leaving the new Academy graduates to stew in their fear of failure, Kakashi finds himself at a loss for things to do. He has already visited the memorial stone, and he tries not to do that more than once a day lest he lose too much time. Gai is usually up for a challenge, but he always gets squirrely when Kakashi has a genin team to fail. It's almost like Gai thinks it's a good idea for children and Kakashi to exist in close proximity to each other.

Abruptly Kakashi remembers that as a jounin instructor he has access to the village's surveillance files on his charges' families. He has never bothered to look at the files for his previous potential students, but this is a perfect chance to see how Kurosaki Ichigo and Ishida Uryū act around Naruto when Kakashi isn't on guard duty. If he goes now, Sandaime might believe him when Kakashi says he intended to teach Team 7 until they failed the bell test. Perfect.

In the morning, Kakashi plans to check if the children have gathered at 05:00 as he had instructed, then stop by the memorial stone and give an update, and then wander back around ten or eleven to begin the bell test. Those plans are derailed slightly when after his shower he finds a wide streak of bright orange in his hair.

Naruto must have added dried paint or ink to the chalkboard eraser as a secondary prank. Kakashi can't use a transformation to hide the color. According to their Academy tests, all three can dispel a simple genjutsu. He will have to wash his hair again to get the dye out, maybe more than once. Kushina would have loved it. Kakashi is glad he only has to deal with the brat for a few more hours.

When Kakashi finally makes it to the genin, after several attempts at washing his hair and finally breaking into ANBU HQ to requisition some of their more potent dissolving agents, it is time to begin the bell test. He tells himself that he does not derive any additional satisfaction nor feel avenged by the disheartened looks on their faces when he reveals two and only two bells and tells them the rules.

Before Kakashi can send them off, the girl gasps. "Oh!"

Sasuke and Naruto both look at her in alarm, but something in her expression must reassure them. Kakashi can practically see their eyes fill with hope. The change unnerves Kakashi though he is careful not to let it show or ask himself why.

"Did you think of something, Sakura-chan?" asks Naruto.

"It's Method 2," says Sakura firmly.

That means absolutely nothing to Kakashi, and for a brief moment, she seems to have stumped the boys too.
Sakura huffs and points at herself. "Method 3." She jerks at thumb toward Sasuke. "Method 1."

That still means absolutely nothing to Kakashi, but the boys pick up on her meaning this time and nod eagerly in agreement.

"Sakura-chan, you're brilliant," says Naruto.

Kakashi narrows his eye. He's never seen a group of Academy graduates so friendly after hearing the rules of the bell-test. If they aren't going to take this seriously, he'll fail them without hesitation.

"We'll start when I say go," says Kakashi reminding them of his presence.

The children snap to attention and slide into ready stances. That is somewhat better, but Kakashi isn't prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt, even if one is sensei's son, the other is Itachi's little brother, and the last is unburdened by any personal ties to Kakashi.

"Start," says Kakashi.

At his word, all three race for the treeline. To his surprise, instead of separating or turning on each other, they gather together in a huddle. Kakashi considers creating a shadow clone to spy on them, but ultimately he decides it's too much of a hassle. Instead Kakashi pulls out the latest installment of Icha Icha and keeps track of their chakra signatures.

After about ten minutes, the children go their separate ways. Kakashi surprises himself by feeling disappointment. The Hokage has forced new graduates on him for years, and none of them have ever demonstrated true teamwork. Occasionally, two children would team up and abandon the third. When that happened, Kakashi showed no mercy.

A quarter of an hour passes while the brats run through the trees and undergrowth stopping occasionally with no definite pattern. Kakashi starts to think he'll have to go in after them if he wants the test to finish today when, to his dismay, the three of them proceed to regroup.

Kakashi considers what he knows about the three wannabe genin and tucks his book away. Naruto is a prankster, the Uchiha has his clan's fire jutsu, and the girl, well, if she wants to master all five elemental chakras, then she's likely found a way to learn at least a few by this point. Kakashi will be fine, but Icha Icha is only paper.

The three graduates charge out of the trees. They're in a straight line, spaced decently apart, but he can't take down all three at once with anything less than a killing blow or overpowered jutsu. For some reason, the girl is at the head of the line despite being slower and weaker than either of her teammates.

Kakashi is ready to call the test when the girl trips. But she lands in a textbook perfect fall and rolls smoothly out of her teammates' path. When Sakura slaps the ground, Kakashi sinks into the ground up to his ankles.

Naruto charges past her without stopping and flings something at Kakashi face. The decision to dodge or knock the item out of the way is taken from Kakashi's hands when it explodes violently several meters away from Kakashi. The distance doesn't matter. Kakashi is blinded and partially deafened by the flash bang.

Kakashi senses Naruto divert to one side and feels the familiar build up of chakra that proceeds the Uchiha' Great Fireball Technique. It had been one of Obito's more successful jutsu and between his old teammate and Itachi, Kakashi has a decent grasp of how large and how hot the fireball is going to be. Sasuke's fireball isn't hot enough to kill him outright, but it is large enough to cover Kakashi's
entire body and produce some nasty burns.

Part of him is tempted to switch with one of the brats, but Naruto is too chakra-dense and Sakura won't recover easily from a blast like that. Even he's not a enough of a bastard to maim a child during a test. Instead, Kakashi reaches out and substitutes himself with a suitably large log on the edge of trees.

Kakashi can feel the wires wrap around him as soon as the jutsu settles. He's lucky that he wasn't moving when he began the substitution jutsu and that the trees are laced with basic tripwire and not razor wire. He hasn't set anything off or been ripped to shreds.

Kakashi’s eye hasn't recovered entirely from the flashbang. Neither has his sensitive hearing. He doesn't know how well any of the brats sense chakra or if they can at all, but he can't stand in one spot waiting for them to find him. He can sense the brats coming, but he can't sense whatever the wire around him is attached to. He carefully raises his hand and pushes up his forehead protector to reveal his sharingan eye. This isn't the first group he's tested that's forced him to use his gifted eye, but it is the first group that brought it out so early.

Kakashi scans his surroundings. He can't see the field clearly from his position, but he doesn't see anyone approaching his position. There are several taut and slack lines surrounding him. Kakashi cuts through the slack wires first.

At least five pounds of chalk dust explodes over Kakashi's head. Fortunately none of it gets into his eyes, and his mouth and nose are well-protected by his face mask. He still has to resist the instinctive urge to sneeze. The chalk is definitely laced with something, and the smell of it irritates Kakashi's nose.

Kakashi makes the executive decision to slice through all the wires surrounding him and jumps straight up with a chakra-reinforced leap. A brace of shuriken blasts through the place Kakashi was standing and a second incendiary device goes off underneath him. None of the attacks he's seen so far are lethal for someone at his level, but Kakashi can't deny the brats are taking him seriously.

Kakashi lands briefly in a tree before heading back into the center of the field. The trees aren't safe, not with how long he gave the brats to set up traps. He passes out of the treeline and barely manages not to gape. Somehow, they've flooded the entire field with water. Probably dropped the ground level to increase the size of the lake and maybe added more water. Naruto would have enough chakra reserves to do something like that.

Kakashi touches down with just enough chakra to keep upright on the waves and almost tips over when the surface beneath him pushes back. Nearby a cloud of pink smoke shoots into the air, and Kakashi hears a startled yelp. It's a genjutsu covering the ground, not water, and it's a strong one. But now that Kakashi knows the genjutsu is there, he can disperse it with a brief manifestation of will.

Kakashi has forgotten to cover his sharingan-eye in all the excitement. He mentally congratulates the caster of genjutsu and reminds himself to recommend whichever brat made it to Kurenai. She'll have her hands busy with her genin team but talented genjutsu users are a rarity to be cultivated.
Kakashi slides his forehead protector back down. His other eye has recovered, and he doesn't need to waste that much chakra in a fight with pre-genin. Sasuke stumbles a step backward, still shaken by the unexpected sight of the sharingan. Kakashi moves to attack him anyway. There can't be any hesitation in battle.

"Kakashi-sensei, suck it!" shouts Sakura.

Kakashi whirls on his heel, struck by the girl's audacity. For his trouble, he receives a jet of water to the chest. It's strong enough to blast him back several feet. Sakura doesn't have enough chakra to supply the steady stream, but Kakashi can see that she's not making the water itself, only redirecting water from the lake.

Kakashi performs a jutsu without hand signs. Given the distance and the distraction of the water, it takes more chakra than he would like, but he drops Sakura into the ground up to her chin. It's the same jutsu she used on him when the fight began only much stronger.

There's another startled squawk from Naruto and then he and Sasuke both blaze past Kakashi to help their teammate. They don't even make a glancing pass at the bells, though from their positions, it's clear they were preparing to attack Kakashi from behind.

Kakashi doesn't try to attack them either. His skin is has turned raw and red, and Kakashi is drowning in the sensation of burning. The chalk powder had been mixed with some kind of dehydrated acid, which was reactivated by Sakura's water jutsu. Much of the powder has been blasted off by the high-powered stream, and as a chemical base, chalk naturally neutralizes much of the rest, but there's still enough acid left for Kakashi to feel it.

Kakashi takes a brief moment to tell himself he skin isn't burning just itching. It works reasonably well. He's not in agony by any means. He refocuses on the brats.

Sakura is talking Sasuke through the hand signs necessary to loosen the dirt around her, so they can pull her out. Naruto has armed himself with a pair of kunai and assumed a guard position between Kakashi and his teammates.

Kakashi meets Naruto's gaze through his goggles and begins his attack.

By time lunch rolls around, Kakashi has kicked all three pre-genin up and down the field together and separately, trapped them all in individually tailored genjutsu, dumped them in a pit of slime, and sent all of them flying into the trapped woods. The three brats are panting and exhausted, and Sakura really did throw up, but she aimed at Kakashi when she did and came closest to grabbing the bells out of all three of them.

Kakashi ties both Naruto and Sasuke to the logs and tells himself he's making a point not being petty.

"I'll give you have an hour to eat, Sakura. Then the three of you will decide who's advancing to genin and who isn't. Don't untie your teammates," says Kakashi then he disappears from their sight.

Kakashi doesn't bother warning her not to feed the boys. They've demonstrated so much teamwork over the past two hours, that they've blown all previous contenders out of the water. Kakashi will have to pass them. At this point, all Kakashi really needs is to hear their reasoning for working together. The half-hour is a buffer between Kakashi and the reality of becoming a jounin instructor.

"We've only got one bento, but I can split it three ways," says Sakura.

Sasuke snorts and Naruto shakes his head vigorously.
"Nuh-uh!" shouts the blond. "You threw up. You need the food. I've got some ration bars I can get to when we're free."

"And if Kakashi-sensei doesn't give us time to set up like he did this morning?" asks Sakura. "I can't last against him on my own."

"You eat half and split the other half between us," says Sasuke. "But you eat your half first. Who knows when Kakashi will come back?"

"Feed Sasuke before me," adds Naruto. "I've got plenty of chakra left."

Sakura accepts this logic and tucks in to the bento. The boys argue battle plans while she eats, then Sakura critiques their plans while she feeds Sasuke, and Sasuke comes up with rebuttals to Sakura's critiques while she feeds Naruto. Their best plan is for Sasuke and Sakura to pin down Kakashi while Naruto harvests the traps left in the woods for supplies.

Kakashi has a horrifying vision of himself walking into the Hokage Tower covered in neon paint and feathers and decides he's heard enough. He reappears in front of them in a flash of lightning. None of them look frightened by the special effects but they do look suitably impressed, which soothes Kakashi's pride.

"You've all done a good job this morning," says Kakashi and it's not even a lie.

If Kakashi had wanted to kill them, the brats wouldn't have stood a chance. But when Kakashi limited his skills to a level the kids could come close to matching by working together, they had given him a solid workout.

Kakashi ignores his still burning, ahem, *itching* skin and removes the bells from his belt. The acid had left them tarnished, but they still jingle daintily when he waves them in front the genin.

"Unfortunately, I still only have two bells," he says gleefully. "Who among you will advance to become true genin?"

There is a long silence as the three look from one to another. Kakashi is pleased to note they are taking his threat seriously this time. But instead of leaning away from each other, they lean in together, even Sasuke and Naruto tied to the posts as they are.

Sasuke is the first to break. "Naruto and Sakura should pass."

"No way!" yells Naruto. "That's not how it's going down, duck-butt!"

"Yeah, Sasuke-kun needs to advance. Then Naruto and I can fight for the other position!" says Sakura.

"Oh! I was going to suggest fox-hunter-headman, but a fight would be better!" agrees Naruto.

Somehow, Kakashi hasn't anticipated this reaction. Though maybe he should have, since they passed all of the other teamwork tests with flying colors.

"Explain your reasoning," says Kakashi. "Sasuke, you go first."

"I'm an Uchiha. Even if I have to repeat another year, no one will doubt I'm a strong shinobi, and since I am familiar with the Academy's workload, I can use the extra time to focus on my clan's techniques. But Sakura and Naruto don't have that advantage. They need to advance to genin, so they can stay competitive with other shinobi our age," says Sasuke.
"Hmm," said Kakashi. It's a remarkably well-thought out and practical answer. And mildly alarming, given that the least theatrical Uchiha Kakashi has ever known was Itachi. "Naruto, your turn."

"Part of Sasuke's dream is to restore the Uchiha, and that means being recognized as clan head, and Sasuke can't be recognized as clan head until he's an adult in the village, and he can't be an adult in the village unless he's a real ninja or really, really old!" says Naruto. "For me and Sakura, we both want to be there, but no part of our dream that will be held back like that if we don't become genin now. So we'll fight and see who wants it more, right Sakura?"

Sakura nods vigorously. "That's right, Kakashi-sensei! We're not just teammates, we're friends! And friends support each other. So if one of us has to stay behind, the other two will still be there, waiting for them to catch-up. All three of us are going to be Konoha-nin, but Sasuke's the only one who needs to walk away as one today."

The only redeemable thing about this situation is the bright, tomato-red of Sasuke's face as he blushes and fails to remain stoic in light of his friends' support. Kakashi is going to have to pass them. They have earned it completely. He is about to be sidelined as a jounin instructor for an indefinite period of time. He needs to tell Obito, Rin, and Minato-sensei. They're probably already laughing at him from the afterlife.

"You pass!" he says with a genuine smile. True, the smile is hidden behind his facemask, but it's completely genuine.

The three of them stare at him in shock. Not quite the reaction he is anticipating.

"Uh, which of us pass, sensei?" asks Sakura tentatively.

"All of you pass," says Kakashi barely containing an eyeroll. There are the happy smiles. "Konoha shinobi are driven by the Will of Fire, the desire to protect and fight for the village and our comrades. It is what makes us the strongest of the Hidden Villages.

"In the ninja world, those who break the rules are scum, that's true, but those who abandon their friends are worse than scum. I see great potential in all of you."

"Woo-hoo!" yells Naruto. He slips from his ropes with ease and sweeps Sakura and Sasuke, who has also escaped, into a spiraling hug. "Method 2 for the win!"

Naruto steps back and held up a hand for a high-five. Sakura blushes at the praise but slaps his hand with gusto.

"Nice catch, Sakura," adds Sasuke. He holds up a hand too.

Sakura blushes a bit more for Sasuke than she had for Naruto but doesn't hold back the strength of her high-five. Her actions remind Kakashi of Rin, who never let her crush on Kakashi interfere with her desire to be a strong ninja. A wave of regret and dismay—and a tiny kernel of fear that he would lose this team too—threatens to overwhelm him.

"What is method two, exactly?" asks Kakashi scrambling for a distraction.

"Ichi-nii said there are three ways to make friends!" explained Naruto. "Method 1 is asking somebody over to share a meal, and sometimes you need to ask more than once. It's for situations when fighting won't work."

"Uryū-sensei calls it the breaking their spirits with kindness method," added Sasuke.
Kakashi recalls that Sakura had referenced Sasuke as a method one. Is that how Naruto and Sasuke became friends? Kakashi has been out of the village more often than he was in it since the Uchiha Massacre. By the time he was back on Naruto-watch, Sasuke had become a frequent guest at the Kurosaki-Ishida-Uzumaki residence.

"Method 2 is fighting alongside someone, covering their weak spots, or fighting for them if they can't," continues Sakura. "It's the friendship-through-teamwork method, and sometimes it means fighting for someone else even if it doesn't benefit you directly. When you said there were only two bells for the three of us even though you said nine graduates would pass, I thought a teamwork test made sense."

"Well-spotted, Sakura. Being able to think logically and recall sensitive information under pressure is one of a shinobi's most valuable tools," says Kakashi honestly. "What's method three?"

Sakura's look of delighted shock at Kakashi's assessment promptly turns into a deep scowl. She glares at the two boys, who look completely unrepentant. Naruto's smile stretches wide at her glare and Sasuke smirks.

"Method 3 is when you beat friendship into somebody," explains Naruto.

"What?" asks Kakashi flatly while Sakura huffs and rolls her eyes.

"It's when you fight someone with all your might to show them the strength of your convictions," clarifies Sasuke.

"It's for making friends with enemies or people you don't have any reason to trust," says Naruto. "But it only works if you're both alive at the end, so Ryū-nii said we probably couldn't use it as much as Ichi-nii has."

Kakashi had found the files on Naruto's guardians to be sparse at best. What little information the files do contain does nothing to explain this situation.

Kurosaki Ichigo is related to Naruto through a shared Uzumaki ancestor. He makes fireworks, a specialty of his father's clan. Since settling in Konoha, Kurosaki has developed a range of smoke grenades and flash-bangs that are very popular among jounin and chunin with enough extra pay to spend on quality products. He sells civilian-quality pyrotechnics throughout the Elemental Countries and makes a tidy profit.

Visual assessment from Naruto's ANBU guard corroborated with evaluations by various Academy instructors indicate that Kurosaki has some hand-to-hand combat experience, definite skill with bladed weapons, and a steady hand with a calligraphy brush. He is brash and direct but also unquestionably kind to anyone he perceives as needing protection. There is no indication that Kurosaki has ever beaten friendship into anyone.

Ishida Uryū is closely related to Kurosaki but has no direct connection to Naruto, but of the two, he's the one who is technically being held hostage in the village until Naruto comes of age or makes chunin, whichever comes first. Ishida works at the hospital and is by all accounts a highly skilled surgeon. Despite having no skill at medical jutsu, he is more than capable of meeting the exacting hospital standards that are Tsunade's legacy in the village.

The Hyuuga claim that Ishida doesn't have chakra coils at all and therefore can only be a simulacrum of some kind possibly from Wind Country. There is an official notice from Sandaime that rejected that line of inquiry with orders not to pursue the subject.
Despite his lack of chakra, Ishida is also reported as skilled at hand-to-hand combat, extremely skilled with a bow, (and had forced lessons onto not only Kurosaki and Naruto but also Sasuke and Sakura), and is talented with a needle and thread. Again, there was nothing irregular in his psychological profile though Ishida has filed more discrimination complaints against the Academy instructors than any other individual alive.

Now Kakashi is wondering what other strange teachings Kurosaki and Ishida have instilled in Naruto. They seem to have infected Sasuke and Sakura too. He abruptly realizes as Team Seven's jounin instructor, he will probably have to meet Naruto's guardians and Sakura's parents.

"They used method three on you?" Kakashi asks Sakura.

"They did!" she says, happy to complain. "They told me for us to be friends I had to fight Naruto every day for a week. Then on the last day they switched it up without saying anything and I had to fight Sasuke. Can you believe it?"

Kakashi can't believe it, actually. The whole set-up sounds like something out of a kid's movie. But then again, they were children then. They are genin now.

"We told all the girls in Sasuke's fanclub that," says Naruto. "But Sakura and Ino were the only ones who lasted all six days with me, and Ino didn't take it seriously when she was fighting Sasuke."

Yamanaka Ino, Kakashi considers idly, has probably grown up with horror stories about the Uchiha's propensity for stealing jutsu. She undoubtedly knows the basics of the Yamanaka's specialized techniques, even if she hasn't mastered them. A clan-raised kunoichi would never risk revealing clan secrets for the sake of friendship with a boy.

"Does that means you're not friends with Ino?" asks Kakashi.

Sasuke shrugs. "We're not close, but we're not enemies or anything."

"I'm friends with Ino," announces Sakura. "We're rivals."

Kakashi keeps his face still. He can never let his team meet Gai. It's too bad for Sakura, she'd probably get along great with Tenten, but Kakashi can't risk these three learning about his own long-standing "rival."

"Ichi-nii says that just because you don't make friends right away, it doesn't mean you can never be friends. And Methods 1 through 3 can be used or re-used at any time," explains Naruto.

"Is that so?" asks Kakashi. He'll need to fit this into Kurosaki's file somehow. "In that case, why don't I take you all out for ramen?"

Naruto cheers. Sasuke and Sakura both roll their eyes but neither one appears to object.

"This will be our usual training field, so go ahead and disable your traps," says Kakashi. "Get cleaned up, and I'll meet you at Teuchi's stand in an hour."

"What will you be doing, Kakashi-sensei?" asks Sakura. She sounds innocent, but Kakashi has already learned she's got an attitude under that pink facade.

"I will be reporting the formation of Team 7 to the Hokage," says Kakashi. He'll be taking yet another shower and changing his clothes first. Luckily Kakashi still has some leftover supplies from his raid on ANBU HQ this morning. If Naruto put dye in anything else, Kakashi won't need nearly as much time to wash it out.
Naruto is busy rejoicing about ramen, but Sakura and Sasuke both smirk at him. They try to hide it, but Kakashi is a literal expert at reading facial expressions. Just for that, Kakashi is assigning them the Tora-mission the minute it becomes available.

"Oh yeah, I almost forgot," says Naruto. He pulls a strip of paper from his pocket and hands it to Kakashi.

It's a street address Kakashi instantly recognizes as Naruto's house followed by a date and time. It's written in a very clean hand. It's not Naruto's or the doctor's, but it looks neater than what they have on file for Kurosaki. Kakashi will need to add "can disguise hand-writing" to Kurosaki's file too.

"Since we passed, you're invited over for dinner," says Naruto brightly. "Ichii-nii and Ryū-nii have so many questions. And Sakura's parents are coming too."

Kakashi can practically feel his ghost leave his body. He looks at the hopeful faces of his new brand new genin and musters a smile. "I'm looking forward to it."

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**End Notes**

I feel that Kakashi is in a very bad place through at least the first half of the show. Ichigo and Uryu have opinions about leaving people in bad places.

Thank you for reading. Please review!

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