

## The Bench at the Edge of the Village

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# The Bench at the Edge of the Village

by [grainjew](#)

## Summary

Sakura and Naruto, in the space of time after they are left behind.

*It's two days after Kakashi brings him back from the Valley of the End, battered and unconscious and without Sasuke but alive, that Naruto disappears from the hospital. Sakura goes after him, once the nurses realize that he's gone at all -- they've been having a busy few days coping with all the aftermath of the Sasuke retrieval mission.*

## Notes

I wrote this little moment a month or two ago and forgot to post it, but I like it, so here it is

It's two days after Kakashi brings him back from the Valley of the End, battered and unconscious and without Sasuke but *alive*, that Naruto disappears from the hospital. Sakura goes after him, once the nurses realize that he's gone at all -- they've been having a busy few days coping with all the aftermath of the Sasuke retrieval mission.

He isn't hard to find, by his somehow-a-master-of-stealth-despite-wearing-bright-orange standards. She is all set to scold him for running off when he should be resting, battered jacket and bandages and all, when she realizes three things:

1. He hasn't noticed her.
2. The bench he is hunched up on is the bench at the edge of the village, the bench where she had last seen Sasuke.
3. Naruto is crying.

Her indignation fades, and she remembers hugging her knees on this self-same bench as she waited for them to come back with Sasuke, worrying at her bottom lip in frustration and anxiety, tying and untying her Leaf headband to pass the time. She walks over to him and puts a hand on his shoulder, gently, perhaps more gently than she has ever touched him before.

"I'm sorry, Sakura," he says, unmoving. Naruto is constantly in motion, gesturing, grinning, boasting, promising. She didn't know he was capable of this kind of stillness, and she wishes fleetingly that she had stayed unaware. It's unnerving.

She sits down next to him, trying to think of what to say. She knows he's sorry. He knows that she doesn't think he has anything to be sorry for and that she is sorry. She knows that he doesn't think she has anything to be sorry for and that he's sorry. They've already had this conversation.

"I have a handkerchief," she says, "for your face."

"Thanks," he says, after a pause, as though it took him a few extra seconds to process her sentence. He doesn't take it, though, wiping at his face instead with a tattered sleeve.

She sits there and looks at him, really looks at him, for perhaps the first time in her life. With the endless, boundless energy gone, the optimism shut off for a precious hour like a well run dry, the wetness of tears still shining on his cheeks and darkening his bandages, she can only think about how small he looks.

Small, and fragile, and broken, and she was the one who forced him into the promise that made him this way. She realizes again that the softest she'd ever touched him was only minutes ago, that she had never tried to support him or comfort him, not truly.

She wraps her arms around him, in a sort of awkward sideways hug, and she feels him tense and then relax with a sort of astonished awe under her arms, like no-one had ever hugged him before. Perhaps no-one had. Slowly, she leans her face against his hair and she cries with him, for Sasuke and for Naruto and for herself.

And in ten minutes she'll be dragging him back to the hospital, and in twenty throwing an orange at him to make sure he eats and slapping him when he tries to talk her into treating him to ramen, grin wide on his face, but for now, they have this moment, on the lonesome bench by the village gates, and they can mourn their loss together.

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