Abolish Private Property

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Summary

It all starts the day Akari gets into a debate with Minato Namikaze on a battlefield during the Third Ninja War. [Or, that one raging communist SI/OC in Kumo that nobody asked for (or deserves, honestly).]

Notes

1.) This fic was co-authored by Sage Thrasher.

While Sage does beta work on pretty much everything I put out, to say she just beta'd this fic would be downright disingenuous. The conceit came out of a spitballing session we were having for another fic of mine, and accidentally birthed this fic idea Athena style.

She came up with the plot outline.
She did a lot of the theoretical legwork with the communist lingo and concepts.
And she was there every step of the way when it came to working through the additional scenes that I filled in on my own.

She's as passionate about it and treasures it as much as I do. It's on my account because I
did the scene-by-scene writing, but it was absolutely a team effort and I want to recognize that here.

2.) This fic is crack played dead straight. If that's not your thing, click off my man.

Is it a ridiculous, cracky premise? You bet. Is there an atrocious amount of dick jokes and general profanity? Yep. Is the main character built from an absurd caricature of a communist? Absolutely. Does it feature some equally absurd situations? It does, indeed. But this fic also features ruminations on extremist ideologies in connection to the following: the consequences of taking them to their logical conclusion and whether the ends justify the means; where the line should be drawn there; and the hypocrisy that can arise when somebody with these ideologies realizes that it's easier to apply them to a non-personal situation compared to one they're more personally attached to. A deconstruction of the political, social, and economic problems inherent to military dictatorships.

There are moments of character growth; Akari, our lovely little self-insert, has her complexities, as do all of the characters in this fic. Here and there, it opts to make some sharp commentaries.

The fic doesn't always take itself seriously, but there are moments where it does, and it can be a bit of a tonal rollercoaster. I recognize that this is not the kind of fic for everybody. So, if that's going to bug you, might as well skedaddle, eh?
Chapter One

As the variable capital always stays in the hands of the capitalist in some form or other, it cannot be claimed in any way that it converts itself into revenue for anyone.

It all starts the day Akari gets into a debate with Minato Namikaze on a battlefield during the Third Ninja War.

She, Ay, and B were sent out to cut off a potential Konoha offensive. Or rather, Ay and B were sent out to cut off a potential Konoha offensive. She's here because, in the words of the Third, their wise Raikage, "somebody has to keep her and her bitch mouth under control so she doesn't embarrass our village, and you two idiots are the only ones who might do it."

So here she is. Out, patrolling, when the three of them come across Minato.

Akari hears Ay start swearing.

Minato eyes the three of them up. She can tell that he recognizes Ay and B, as most people do. But there's an undisguised confusion in his gaze when his eyes land on her, and Akari relishes in the opportunity this presents.

A fresh audience? That's exactly what she's here for.

Akari clears her throat.

Ay whips around to look at her and snaps, "Don't you dare—"

"Hey, you fucking tree hugger!" Akari shouts.

Minato blinks. He points at himself.

Ay makes a grab for her and Akari ducks out of the way. "Yeah, you, blondie! I'm talking to you!"

B cackles.

"You kiss one of those trees, lately? Ever try and stick your dick in it?"

Still, this garners no reaction. Minato continues to stare at her like he hears this every single day of his life. And maybe he does. She always hears that Konoha ninja are a weird bunch. Tree-related-sexual activity could be a regular thing for them. It wouldn't surprise her.

Ay glares at her. "Akari, one more word and I swear I will—"

"How's it feel to fuck a tree? Real rough? The bark leave a bunch of scratches on your micropenis?"

B leans over to Ay. "Yo, she's got it, though," B stage-whispers, one hand raised to block his mouth. "Say what you want, but her ducks are in a row."

"No, they aren't," Ay says. "Or she'd have learned to shut her mouth and listen to her superiors at
some point in the last seven years."

Akari pays them no mind. She's too focused on putting her core into it as she screams, "I bet it can't compare to how hard you've fucked your own ninja. Really letting the system do the work for ya, eh? With your autocratic dictatorship built on the backs of child soldiers?"

Minato frowns. "I'm—wait a minute. Kumo uses child soldiers, too."

Ay glares at her.

"But we're not an autocratic dictatorship! We're a communal one."

"You're not… what's an autocratic dictatorship? And a communal… dictatorship?"

"Dictator. You know, big bad leader, total power over whatever they're leading. In an autocratic dictatorship—see: your shithole of a village—is when there's no input from other people, it's all down to the dictator. No meaningful participation from the subordinates. A communal dictatorship involves transparency and mandates. We hold our leaders accountable."

"But… Kumo is just as bad as us?"

"No."

"Yes!" he says. He knits his eyebrows together and looks at her like she's told him it's summertime in the middle of a blizzard. "All of the ninja villages are autocratic dictatorships, according to that definition," he says. "They were built on a foundation of military dictatorship. Kage titles are passed down to the most powerful ninja in the village. And if it's 'communal' in the full definition of the word, that'd include the community, wouldn't it? As in, some kind of population representation? None of the villages have that."

"But Kumo is transparent about this. That's the key, here," Akari says. "We're not trying to act like we've got some kind of moral high horse." She smirks. "We're not a bunch of bitch ass babies continuing to show blind loyalty to a corrupt government, all the while acting like we're anything other than literal murderers for hire."

"Oh, shit," B says. "She went there, man, that's lit."

From where she stands, Akari can see Ay's life pass before his eyes as his soul dies on the spot.

"Fine. It might be a flawed system—"

"Ha!"

"—but that doesn't mean it can't be changed from the inside."

"Oh, yeah?" she says. "Sounds like big talk from a pretty boy like you."

"Anything is fixable," Minato says firmly. "It just takes the right person to do it. And I plan on becoming Hokage one day."

Akari scoffs. "Dismantling a system from the top just sets you up to be absorbed by it."

"What's your plan, then?" he asks. And unlike her, he doesn't sound like he's asking out of bad faith. His voice is too earnest and open.

"Violent revolution."
"That's… it?"
"Well, yeah."

"Violent revolution against ninja?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I said, dipshit!"

"Trying to spring a violent revolution on a military dictatorship is asking to be killed."

"Not when it's a ninja versus ninja fight! The playing ground is even."

Ay pinches the bridge of his nose and mutters under his breath, "Fucking moron."

"You're just saying that because you're bourgeoisie scum and you know that when the revolution comes, you're going to find your head propped up on a stick."

Minato holds up a hand. "What's… bourgeoisie?"

"The powerful ones. The oppressors. Those benefiting from the fruits of the worker's labour."

"You should be sectioned," Ay says.

"Only if you have a death wish." Akari turns a disapproving eye on him. "If you sectioned every slightly unstable jonin you'd have an empty workforce. Besides, don't act like it's not in your best interest for all of your jonin to be slightly unstable—it makes them more dependent. Warped ninja have no chance of developing outside skills and breaking from the ninja lifestyle."

Minato, looking almost surprised, says, "I think she has a point."

"Yeah, you are kind of bourgeoisie scum," B says. "Even if I think that word is dumb."

"It's a dumb word to describe dumb people like all three of you."

"You know what?" Ay says.

He sinks into a fighting stance and Akari knows that her debate is over. So does Minato, from the way he tenses.

"You're going to tell me either way, right?" Minato asks.

And instead of answering, Ay flies at him.

Akari takes this as her cue and gets the fuck out of dodge.

"What have you been told?"

"No revolutionary ranting outside of actual combat encounters, where it can serve as a worthy distraction tactic."

"And what did you do?"

"Go on a revolutionary rant before the combat started."
The Third nods slowly. He regards Akari calmly. "So this is what it feels like to fight a losing fight," he muses. "Were you spanked a lot as a child?"

"No. Spankings are unconstitutional."

"Is that so?"

"Corporal punishment is a breach of basic human rights. And honestly, if you have to devolve to hitting your kid, that's a mark of having already lost the fight because it shows that you can't reason your way out of the argument. It's an argument she got a lot of mileage out of against the Kumo villagers who helped 'raise' her after she was 'kidnapped'.

Akari grins. "You gonna spank me now, daddy?"

Ay bristles like a cat whose tail was stepped on. "Show some respect, you brat."

The Third waves a hand. "She's fine. Really, I expect this shit from her." He raises an eyebrow. "And it sounds like whatever she said worked, too. You almost landed a hit on Namikaze?"

Ay clenches his jaw. "Almost, yes."

"Better than any of our other ninja can say," he says. He exhales from his nose, his arms crossed over his chest. "Though I recall you also were charged with preventing this little asshat from running her bitch mouth. Those were my exact words, weren't they?"

"No," Akari says. "You told them to keep me and my bitch mouth under control."

"Ah, right. Thank you."

"I tried to intervene—"

"But the revolution cannot be stopped. Once the cry rings out amongst the workers, nothing can stamp it out forever. Revolution is inevitable—"

"Kill me," Ay mutters.

"—and the longer you fight against it, the worse it's going to be," she continues, louder to speak over him. "You can still save yourself now."

The Third makes a couple of vague hand motions.

"We need a clean break from the system, so that means the two of you are going to have to go. We can't move forward until all traces of the old power are wiped out. But, hey, if you give in willingly and accept that communism is the superior form of governance, I don't see any reason why you can't make it out of this with your heads intact."

A couple of ANBU appear on either side of Akari. Each grabs one of her arms and together, they lift her off her feet.

"You can't silence me!" she shouts as they drag her out. "The red voice rages on!"

"Have your mission report in by tomorrow morning," the Third calls to her.

"You'll get no mission report from me and like it!"

"No report, no pay!"
Akari turns in a ten-page manifesto as her mission report, and she gets half the payment she was supposed to.

The bourgeoisie scum continues to dangle capital over her head. But they cannot keep her down.

"You know—"

"For the love of the kami, shut the fuck up."

"I'm morally opposed to the whole idea of having jinchuuriki. It's like, flawed. You're enslaving sentient beings."

"Who got her started?"

"I dunno, man. I think somebody brought up that B was working with the Hachibi again, and that's why he was gone all day yesterday."

"Like that's really fucked up. Tying them to vessels without their permission? No wonder the tailed beasts are so difficult to work with—you wouldn't want to work with one of the other villages if they kidnapped you, put you in chains, and said you had to take orders from some random asshole."

"We had a rule. Nobody was supposed to bring up Hachibi around her—even you B!"

"Sorry, yo. Hachibi likes her though."

"And anyway, no one person should have that much power. Even if we ignore the enslavement part, you can't share the power of a tailed beast equally. Only nine people will ever be able to hold the power, and even then, not all the tailed beasts are equally powerful. There's no way to create equal distribution. It seems like the obvious choice, to just let nobody have it?"

"You realize that you'd kill every current vessel to do that, right? Including B?"

"Sacrifices must be made."

"Whoa. That's cold, bro."

"Look, nuclear deterrence is never a good way to go about things."

"What does that even mean?"

"No, dude, don't—"

"The big dum dum goo goo babies need a better explanation?"

"Great. Look at what you did."

"I'm not drunk enough for this."

"The jinchuuriki are the big boom boom. Make things go explodey. If you have something that can make other things go explodey, it makes you more likely to use it. So, if you want to keep things
from going explodey, you got to eliminate the big boom booms."

"Somebody, just kick her out."

Akari sits on the ground in front of the bar at three in the morning.

No matter what she says or does, they resist her. They're hardwired to do it at this point. Nobody wants to listen to their local rampaging communist when they get up on a soapbox. She knew this would happen—it happened in the other world, too. Working as a city planner, at least, she had the power to manipulate the cities to benefit the revolution, even if all the municipal suits learned to tune out her ranting within a few weeks. She could make sure the streets were wide enough to riot, keep the sewage closer to the bougie parts of town, allot additional budget to improving the poorer parts of the city, small things like that.

She doesn't have that kind of power in this stupid weeb world. Not yet, at least. Being a jonin is cool, and all, but she doesn't even get to vote on anything. She just gets a title to throw around that makes people shake in their boots, sometimes. There's no political power. No practical use for inciting change.

She needs a new plan of attack.

Her eyes wander around the seedy streets of Kumo's bar district. Flashing neon signs, litter all over the concrete, a handful of ninja passed out in drunken stupors. A few prostitutes wander around, lit cigarettes in their hands. The place reeks of downtrodden working-class energy, and she spends more time here than anywhere else in Kumo.

But how? What should she do next?

A drenched piece of paper carried by the breeze smacks her in the face. Akari pulls it off with a sneer, holding it between two fingers. The ink is smudged. She squints, and she can make out some kind of advertisement for a new restaurant opening down the road.

Then, the idea comes to her.

Pamphlets.

She'll write her way out. She'll write everything down, as far as she knows. And then she'll distribute the means for righteous revolution to the masses.

To herself, she whispers, "It's time for the proletariat to rise."

"What did she just say?"

"Ignore her. I think she's that dumbass jonin who got her promotion from being so annoying that she frustrated enemy-nin into turning around and leaving."

"Really? I heard she made three nin commit suicide at once to get away from her."

"You know, I've heard her go off a few times, dude. That wouldn't surprise me.

She turns to look at them, a couple of chunin stumbling along arm in arm. They're clearly drunk, and one of them had a brown stain on his flak jacket, which could either be alcohol or barbeque
sauce.

She sneers at them and glares. "Vive la revolution, fuckers," she says.

Their eyes widen and they scatter.

They'll learn. All of them will learn, one day. And she's going to teach them.
Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Political economy came into being as a natural result of the expansion of trade, and with its appearance elementary, unscientific huckstering was replaced by a developed system of licensed fraud, and entire science of enrichment.*

Ay slams a piece of paper down on the table.

Akari looks up from her book. She tucks a lock of mint green hair behind her ears and says, "Yes, bougie scum?"

"What the fuck is this?"

She eyes it. "That looks like a piece of paper, to me."

"Don't play dumb."

"That's funny, coming from you."

Ay holds the paper up, right at eye level with her, and Akari can't help the small, victorious grin that her lips twist up in.

It's one of her pamphlets.

Getting those things printed had been an adventure for her.

Her first instinct had been to use clones to try and write it all out. She started with four poorly formed clones but found that they went off on tangents instead of copying the original pamphlet word for word. Then three more strongly formed ones, but that only gave them more of a mind of their own.

So, she had to find a different route and that road that led her to the Kumo propaganda department.

She had to bribe one of the asshole desk-nin to let her use their copying machine since there was only a handful in the entire village, but it worked. She'd never been more grateful to have a set of boobs that she can put good use to for the sake of the cause. A flash of her boobs, a flash of the scanner, and she walked out two hours later with seven-hundred copies of her pamphlet. She let him foot the bill for the paper, though she doubts the village will notice it. That paper is a resource that should be her right, anyway.

To say that Kumo's lower levels of government are disorganized and poorly run is an understatement. They care too much about the stabbing and the exploding to pay attention to whatever poor fuck has to sit in front of the copying machine for nine hours a day and print off school books, newspapers, and anything else the village needs to keep the wheels on the brainwashing bus chugging along.
"What have we told you?" Ay asks.

"A lot of things."

"No revolutionary ranting outside of actual combat encounters, where it can serve as a worthy distraction tactic," Ay says. "Why is that so hard for you to understand?"

"That's not a rant—rant implies a lack of structure and a certain level of informality." She points at the pamphlet. "That, you uncultured swine, is a fully structured dissertation."

From a few tables away, she hears somebody whisper, "Does she have a death wish?"

Akari turns to look at them. "Yes," she says. "I have a death wish." She places her attention on Ay again and leans back into her chair, arms spread wide. "Please, martyr me. Kill me right here and now over this pamphlet and let it fan the flames of—"

"I'm letting Lord Third deal with this," Ay says, a disgusted look on his face. "I have better things to do."

He marches out of the library.

Akari cups her hands around her mouth and calls after him, "Tell the Third I'm still waiting to be smacked! Preferably by his massive capital-cock!"

"Go do something productive, you waste of space," he calls back. "We're leaving for the frontlines in a week! Go train. I'm not saving you if somebody tries to kill you."

"Spoken like true bougie scum!"

"She can't keep doing this," Ay says. "It's disruptive and ridiculous. She's seventeen years old and a full-blown jonin. She's not a child anymore, she can't keep doing—whatever this is."

The Third stares down at the pamphlet. There's something of a grudging smile on his face, and he runs his hand down his goatee. "This is actually very well written."

"Dad."

There's nobody around, not even any ANBU loitering around to hear them, and that's the only time Ay ever dares address his father in such an informal manner.

The Third raises a hand and Ay falls silent. The Third has a contemplative look on his face that makes Ay's insides go cold.

"What are you thinking?" Ay asks.

"Have you read any of this?"

"No. I'm sure I've heard all of it at some point. She's constantly going on about all of this, and it all sounds the same after a while."

The Third slides it across the desk. "You really should sit down and give it a read."
Ay can't find a way to express how badly he doesn't want to do that respectfully, so he settles for staring down at the offending piece of paper, taunting him from on the desk.

The Third taps his finger against the pamphlet.

Ay picks it up like it could randomly go up in flames any second now, as dangerous as an unstable explosive tag.

"Did I ever tell you why I initially tasked you and your brother with keeping an eye on her?" the Third asks.

"No. You just told us she was causing trouble, and you needed us to keep her in line."

And here they were, seven years later. With Akari running around throwing pamphlets that could probably get anybody else executed for treason like she was doing them a favour.

The Third laughs. "That sounds about right. Naive of me, in hindsight." He nods down at the pamphlet. "We got her the usual way, you know. Picked her up from some village when she was two or three. The village raised her for a couple of years, and when she was five, off she went to school. And right away she was causing problems for her teachers. They complained about how disruptive she was, and how she encouraged bad behaviour in her fellow students. But it never seemed to go anywhere. And then one day, when she was ten and about to graduate, something she did struck a chord."

"What did she do?"

"Incited an actual rebellion," he says.

Ay stiffens. "What? I never heard about this."

"Because I suppressed it immediately. But, it happened. She told the rest of her class about how only nine of the students who graduated in their grade would be given teachers, and that the other ninety or so of them would be left on their own."

"The old tradition," Ay says. "Quality over quantity. We didn't produce as many ninja as other villages, but we had an army of A-rank threats." He blinks, and a look of dawning horror washes over his face. "Wait, does that mean…"

"She's the reason that was changed, yes. Because none of the students really cared when she told them about it, initially. It was never a secret that the vast majority of students wouldn't make it past genin, and were destined for a life of raw materials mining. But then she offered them an alternative. She told them about something she called 'collective bargaining'. That if all of them threatened to intentionally fail their exams and stop coming to school altogether, the village would be forced to negotiate, and that they could hold it over our heads. Because we couldn't lose an entire year of ninja."

"And that worked?"

"Scarily well. Only about three of the students couldn't be talked into the plan, and none of the three were those the village wanted to put into the main track." The Third shrugs. "She claimed we were 'privatizing and restricting' the basic right to further education that all of them should have been entitled to. And she tapped into feelings of abandonment and hopelessness. No idealistic ten-year-old brat wants to think that their village doesn't value them enough to keep training them."

"And that's why we tripled the jonin sensei pay," Ay says. "So that enough of them would be on
board to train every one of our school graduates."

"That's why we do it. It was a suggestion from Akari. And it worked like a charm. The amount of
money the village allotted towards paying jonin sensei grew exponentially—at least ten times as
much—but over the last few years, as that group of graduates have now ascended to chunin and
jonin level, we've more than made back the initial investment."

The Third gets up from his seat and moves over to the window. He folds his hands together behind
his back, and Ay moves over to stand beside him.

"That was, what… seven years ago, now?" the Third says. "You've been hearing her so long I think
you stopped listening. I want you to read it. She might surprise you."

Ay charges back into the office two days later. He's breathing heavy, and his eyes are wide, and as
soon as he's in the room he marches right up to the desk and slams both of his hands down onto it.
The wood shakes and a few papers float off onto the ground.

The Third stares at him. Then he motions for the ANBU to clear the room, and a couple of his
advisors, who had been waiting to start a meeting with him, scurry out as well. "You read it?" he
asks, one eyebrow raised.

"It's idealistic and ridiculous and naive. Half of it doesn't even make sense because she's just
making up words and concepts without bothering to explain them." He lets out a long, heavy
breath.

"But?"

"But… it's not all bad."

"No, it's not," the Third says. "Some of it is quite ingenious."

"I don't think I'd go that far." Ay sighs. "And it… if I've ever wondered whether or not she cares
about the village, and seeing it grow stronger…"

The Third smiles wryly. "Only somebody who truly cares about the village would invest so much
time and energy into critiquing it," he finishes.

"Yeah."

"Indeed. It's an odd realization to come to, one that wasn't easy for me, either. But you understand
now why I've taken the interest in her that I have."

"I still think she's dangerous," Ay says. He's surprised by how hard that is for him to say.

"Obviously she is," the Third answers. "But no Raikage ever got far without taking risks. And as
dangerous as she might be, she has just as much power to help us. That's how ninja are. You either
direct their energy to help you or sit back and watch them destroy you."

"And you think she's going to help us."

The Third smiles. It's smug and knowing. "Think of her as a contingency plan."
Ay stiffens, and he takes a step back because he has an idea of what that might mean but he's desperately hoping he's wrong.

That's only confirmed when the Third laughs, saying, "So you've figured it out."

"You think… she'd…"

"She might not be the most powerful ninja we've ever produced. Far, far from it. Her combat skills aren't anything special, by our standards. But that is the sharpest mind I have met in a long time, and she's got enough charisma that once she finds the right angle, she can make anybody listen to her. She's a natural-born leader. And she's fearless." The Third's laugh booms around the empty room. "She looked an S-rank threat dead in the eye and asked if he sticks his dick in trees, then told him it was small. That's the kind of guts you need to run a hidden village."

"It was stupid," Ay says.

"Boy, the difference between stupidity and fearlessness is whether you win."

Ay shakes his head, sighing. "So if I were to die, or if I don't want to become the next Raikage, she's who you'd elect in my place."

"Once she's older? Yes."

"Even with… how extreme some of her ideas are?"

"Radical ideas are the key to innovation, and through innovation and hardship, we grow stronger. If she's willing to shoulder the burden of changing the systems, then I don't see why there's any reason to fear it. I don't let her go hog wild now just because I refuse to shoulder that burden for her." The Third scoffs. He steeples his fingers and rests his chin on them, and there's a bitter smirk on his face. "Won't let that bitch mouth of hers get me in trouble."

And so, Ay bows. He bows to his father, to his Raikage, and to the man whose opinion he respects more than anybody else's. "Thank you for telling me, sir. I'll keep that in mind."

Ay finds her again in the library. It's the only place she goes consistently, and it's a safe bet if he's ever looking for her. He'll know if she's anywhere else—she's as quiet as a rockslide.

"Ah, my favourite bougie scum!" Akari cries as soon as she sees him. "How has your day of privilege suited you?"

He looks at her, long and hard, and she rolls her silver eyes when he remains silent.

"The next time you want to print something," he finally says, cutting her off, "don't flash your tits at the unsuspecting virgin that runs the copying machine."

"Don't tell me what to do."

Ay is about two seconds from wringing her throat. She's asking for it, she really is. But he
remembers what the Third said. The version of Akari that came out in her writing, the person that, behind the bluster and the smooth as sandpaper delivery, had one or two worthwhile things to say.

He cares about his village. And he knows she does too. So, he shoves down the urge.

"What I mean is that the next time you want something printed, you'll have a place to do it. You won't have to scar some genin who never did anything to you."

"I saw that dude's boner, what I did definitely didn't scar him." She eyes him up like a predator sizing up its prey. "But you have my interest."

Ay takes a deep breath. "Look. I don't agree with a lot you have to say, and there are some conditions, but Lord Third and I both know you have the best interest of the village in mind. And I think the village will be better for hearing what you have to say."

She gives an appreciative whistle. "Well, fuck me," she says. "The bougie scum has a comrade in him, after all."

"What is that even supposed to mean?"

"It was a compliment. Take it or leave it."

"Whatever. You ready to hear my terms out?"

"Hit me with them, big boy."

Akari takes the offer.

Sometimes, even if it's coming from bougie scum, you take what you can get. And she can appreciate the olive branch for what it is. So what if she can't encourage active rebellion more than once a month? Her ideas and concepts are strong enough to do that without her having to forcefully proletarianize her audience. Maybe it's frustrating to have the number of copies she can print cut down to 500. And, yeah, running everything by Ay first before it gets printed en masse will annoy the shit out of her.

But on the upside, there's no escape for him, now. He has to read every single word she writes when she puts pen to paper, and if that's not a victory in and of itself, she doesn't know what is.

It's a start. And every movement has to start somewhere.

"C'mere you tree fuckers! I'm just a sad little Kumo nin, all by my lonesome, out here! Won't one of you come and show me a good time? I'm not a tree but I don't shave, so if you close your eyes and use your imagination, it might feel the same!"

She's starfished on the forest floor, staring up at the canopy. Her throat is sore, at this point, since she's been shouting for hours. Her back is wet from the damp, mossy ground. It's not cold, at least—not by Kumo standards. Though she's sure it's a rather nippy December morning for any Fire Country natives.

Ay and B are off somewhere, lying in wait for some unsuspecting bitch to inspect the commotion, at which point she can lure said bitch to their location. Or they'll come to her. It depends. She's got
a mic on, meaning that Ay and B will hear the second she encounters enemy ninja and can come running. Plus, they have to listen to her scream about fucking trees for as long as she has to ruin her voice for this plan. Which makes the whole thing worth it.

They're about half a day into Fire Country, in the rough area of one of Konoha's outposts according to their information. Close enough that somebody will hear her eventually.

She split her attention and worked on her next piece of writing for a couple of hours, but her wrist is sore and she's running low on paper. And she's tired. Breakfast was five hours ago and according to modern labour laws—at least, where she came from, way back when—she should have been allotted a proper break an hour ago.

**Labour laws.**

She sits up and jots that down.

Ay probably won't let that one go through the copier, but she'll start writing on it and save it for when she's liberated herself from under the bourgeoisie's thumb.

Or she can take a route she's toyed with and ghostwrite it, then send it off to be published by somebody else. She's sure there's some uppity male noble in the capital that would relish the chance to publish something controversial like this. Get some quick and easy attention. She doesn't need the credit—as long as it's out there, somewhere, she's satisfied.

"Well, well, what do we have here?"

Akari looks up from her paper pad and takes in the three Konoha ninja standing about fifteen feet away from her. "A tree waiting to be fucked."

One of them, a girl with lavender purple hair, leans towards a boy with boring brown hair and says, "I told you she was talking about fucking trees."

"Why would I have believed that?" the boring boy answers. "What Kumo nin in their right mind would just sit in enemy territory and scream about fucking trees?"

The third one, a boy with blonde hair so light it almost looks silver, makes some kind of inhuman squeaking noise and gapes. The other two look at him, but he doesn't seem to notice.

"Well, it's what you guys do, right?" Akari waves her pencil around vaguely. "Stick your dicks in the little holes or like, rub your vagina up against it?"

"No," Lavender Girl breathes. "No, that's not something we do at all."

"Are you sure? I've heard rumours, and the last one of you I ran into didn't exactly deny it."

Finally, Blondie says, "Holy shit. Namikaze was telling the truth."

"And look, man, I'm not here to kink shame. Whatever. Like it's totally disgusting and you guys should be ashamed of yourselves, but you're among friends. Not fellow treefuckers, because yikes, but like definitely friends. I'm all for acceptance as long as all involved are consenting adults."

Boring Boy looks at Blondie wildly. "What do you mean, *Namikaze was telling the truth*?"

"Didn't you hear? He ran into Ay, Killer B, and some weird chick in Kumo a few months ago. He said he got into a debate with the chick. Something about child soldiers? But she opened by like,
telling him he had a small dick and asking if he got, uh…” Blondie looks back at Akari. "What was it?"

"I asked him if the bark scratched his micro-penis when he rode the Hashirama trees to kingdom cum."

"What the fuck?" Lavender Girl says. "No, actually. What the fuck. Can we just leave her here?"

Blondie holds out a hand to stop her, shaking his head. "No way. We gotta take her back alive. Namikaze deserves to defend his honour, on this one."

Akari stands up. She crosses her arms in the air, making an 'x' shape. "Hold up. Time out, guys, gals, and other pals. This one?" Akari asks. "Sorry, are you trying to tell me that this isn't the first time Namikaze was rumoured to have fucked a tree? Or is this some other kind of inanimate object?"

Blondie coughs. "It was, uh. There was a rumour he…"

When Blondie trails off, Boring Boy rolls his eyes and says, "Somebody spread a rumour that he got himself off while charging his hand with lightning chakra."

"What?" Lavender Girl screeches. "How come I never heard that?"

"How did you not hear that? It was going around the entire chunin and jonin population!"

"How does he still have a penis?" Akari asks.

"It was a rumour!" Blondie cries. "Nobody knows where it started."

"Cute. Thanks for the new material."

Lavender Girl looks at Boring Boy with clear pity in her blue eyes. "Namikaze's gonna kill you in your sleep."

"If we bring her to him, it'll balance out."

"Yeah, so, on that note," Akari says, slipping her pad into her pocket. "I'm gonna have to decline. And if you're good little Konoha nin, you'll respect my lack of consent and let me go on my way."

"No?" Blondie says.

Boring Boy smacks in him the arm. "Why was that a question, you idiot?"

"No," Blondie repeats.

"Always question," Akari says. "Question everything. Question me, question your orders, question your village, question—"

Lavender Girl springs forward like a coiled snake and Akari dances out of the way.

By the looks of it, Boring Boy is the only jonin. He's got on the usual jonin blues she sees on Konoha nin. The other two might be, as well, because they have the flak jackets, but Lavender Girl didn't come at her fast enough to seem like a jonin. More like high chunin.

Not that they're old enough to be out here, in the first place. She doubts any of them are older than sixteen, and Blondie especially looks like he's a fetus, maybe fourteen, at the oldest. She has no
intention of fighting them. She won't hurt them and she isn't confident she could disable them without causing damage.

And, more importantly, she doesn't want to let Ay or B hurt them, either.

She wonders if she can outrun them and shake them off her trail, then go to meet up with Ay and B. She could always say that they backed off when she ran.

That's it. That's her plan.

"This has been fun and informative," Akari says, stepping back in the opposite direction of Ay and B, "but I gotta blast."

All three of them snap into combat mode. The change is stark, as it always is when humans flip the switch and turn themselves into weapons. And now she knows that it's time to run like she means it because if she doesn't, she might actually be in a bit of a tight spot, here.

She books it.

And quickly, it becomes clear that she cannot, in fact, lose them on her own. Not Boring Boy at least, who is proving to be anything but boring in combat when he starts throwing shurikens as big as overweight chihuahuas at her and a few of them get too close for comfort.

The other two are flanking her the whole while, too, and Lavender Girl seems to be chucking senbon at her pressure points, while Blondie bodily throws himself at her every ten seconds or so and knocks her off her balance.

By the time Ay and B arrive on the scene, there's blood dripping down her arms and she thinks she might have sprained her ankle, or something, because there's a sharp ache each time she puts weight on it.

One of the shurikens goes right for her head. She doesn't think she's going to dodge in time.

But before it can take her out French Revolution-style, Ay breaks onto the scene and snatches the thing out of the air.

Everything stops.

Boring Boy looks at Ay with the expression of a mouse chasing the scent of cheese who just turned the corner and found themselves face to face with a mountain lion, and she hears a few startled swear words from the direction she thinks Lavender Girl is hiding in.

And she contemplates how she wants to handle this.

She has nothing.

Ay looks ready to throw the shuriken right back at Boring Boy, and Akari knows for a fact that it will kill Boring Boy because Ay doesn't play when it comes to combat.

Thankfully, Minato flashes into existence right in front of Ay and places a hand on the shuriken.

Lavender Girl stumbles out from behind a tree on Akari's right, a three-pronged kunai clutched in her hand. Blondie follows suit on Akari's left. Now, all of the Konoha nin are well within her sight once again, safely tucked behind Minato Namikaze.

Minato smiles and, with the same cheeriness as if they were playing a game of hide and seek, he
says, "I know you're there too, B, and if you so much as breathe in the direction of any of these kids I will kill you before you can get close enough."

"Well, shit, man," B calls. "There goes my plan."

Minato turns his attention to Akari again. He tilts his head, curious. But "Hello, again," is all he says.

"Hi, lightning masturbator. I figured you were a quick one pump chump as it is—can't figure out why you'd wanna go any faster than that."

There's a chilling silence that washes over the scene.

Slowly, Minato turns to look over his shoulder, the pleasant smile never leaving his face.

Lavender Girl instantly points at the two boys. "I had nothing to do with this. I'd never even heard that rumour before."

"Fuck off, Kari."

"Can we talk about this later?" Blondie asks, looking over his shoulder at where B is lingering. "When we're not, uh. You know. Face to face with two of Kumo's strongest ninja? And… whoever that chick is?"

"Later, then," Minato says jovially.

Blondie and Boring Boy pale.

Akari steps back and sucks in a sharp breath through clenched teeth when her ankle protests. Ay turns to look at her, and she's surprised by the amount of concern on his face, though it's smothered in a heartbeat as if it was never there.

Minato flicks his gaze from Ay's face to Akari. She expects him to press the advantage she'd provided, distracting Ay like that.

But Minato shakes his head and drops his hand from the shuriken. "There's no need to finish this fight," he says. He jerks his head towards Akari. "She's injured and I've only gotten faster since the last time you saw me."

"I don't think that choice is up to you," Ay says.

"Actually, it... definitely is."

"Oi, Namikaze," Akari says. She wraps her hand around a gash on her upper arm. "We never got to properly finish our debate. I've got a whole bit on Gramsci to hit you with that I've been thinking about since our last go."

"Gramsci, huh? Never heard of him." Minato grins at her, wild and sharp. "But I look forward to it, Akari. I'll look for you."

And then before anybody can say anything else, all four of the Konoha nin pop out of existence, too fast for her eyes to track.

Akari falls back onto her ass.

Ay sighs. "You let a bunch of kids get the better of you."
"It's true," B says. "You coulda beat them if you wanted to."

"If either of you thinks I'm gonna fight a kid then you really don't fucking know me."

"You are a kid," Ay says.

"Doesn't factor."

"This is stupid."

Ay stoops down and tosses her over his shoulder, fireman style.

"What did I say about manhandling me?" Akari says.

"Nothing I listened to."

"Shouldn't pick up a lady without permission. Gotta make sure you do it of her volition."

Using his free hand, Ay points an accusing finger at B. "You need to stop listening to her, too."

B shrugs. "That one's common sense if you don't wanna cause offence."

"Pass me to B," she says. "He's nicer, has my permission, and I know he'll hold me like a lady deserves to be held."

"Whatever."

And so she's handed off to B, who holds her bridal style, and with the grace of a gentleman. She pats him on the cheek and B preens.

"We've wasted enough time," Ay says. "Let's get a move-on. And I'm not explaining this when we get back to Lord Third."

"Fine by me."

Chapter End Notes

lol
Akari does write out her essay on labour laws. Another on unionization follows because she’s never seen a group of people more deserving of a union than ninja, honestly, especially jinchuuriki. She even gets going on gender equality and passive sexism because as it turns out, traditional pseudo-Japanese values aren’t ideal to making any gender happy, but it’s such a big undertaking that she ends up tabling it for after the war is done, when she’ll be able to give it the attention it deserves.

That leaves her with two polished essays that Ay looks at for all of about two seconds, sighs, and says, "You know this shit isn't going to fly, right?"

She shrugs and moves on. She lets the bourgeoisie think they have control over her.

The next time she's sent out of the village for a mission, she mails it off to the capital.

"Great. Thank you both for coming today."

B grins at her. "Thanks for inviting me. I don't know what this is, but I can't wait to see."


"You're welcome!" Akari says.

Yugito glances around the empty library, her lightly painted lips pursed. "What... exactly are we doing here, anyways?"

"I have a proposition for the two of you."

"Great!" B says. "Can't wait."

Akari pats him on the hand. "Thanks, sweetie."

Yugito skews her gaze between the two of them.

"Now, I would like to introduce the two of you to the concept of unionization."

"Union... as in, like. A kind of uniting?" Yugito asks.

"Yes! Unionization describes the process of a group of people—generally workers, but jinchuuriki in this case—coming together to form a singular unit with similar goals. It allows you to throw around more weight when it comes to negotiating with employers, or for you guys, the villages."

"Negotiate?" Yugito asks, eyes wide. "That's... not how this works."
"Well, why not?"

"It's just not. Like, the entire concept of a Kage is somebody with complete and total control over the population of their village. We've got the councils, and stuff, but like, it's really only the Raikage that has say. And their will is absolute. They tell us to jump, we say how high—we don't argue that instead of jumping four feet we should only jump two."

Akari hums. "Are you happy with your situation, Yugito?"

Yugito knits her eyebrows together.

She's so young, really. Two years younger than Akari, but without the age of another life. Fifteen. A baby. A child. And people insist on treating her like she's some kind of monster.

B, at least, is both older and equipped with a skull thick enough to stop a freight train. She knows that while it's no walk in the park for him, the treatment from the villagers doesn't get to him as bad, especially not with Ay and the Third standing behind him like they do. Yugito is on her own.

When Yugito doesn't answer, Akari says, "Well? Are you?"

"I…" Yugito looks down at her lap. "I don't know."

Akari folds her hands. "Then let's find out, shall we?"

She pushes a pamphlet across the table to Yugito. She doesn't need to give B one—he already has a copy of it. He reads all of her pamphlets.

"Frankly, I think the ideal in this situation is for all of the currently living jinchuuriki to kill themselves and free their beasts—"

Yugito chokes.

"—but I guess we can do this, for now."

"I'm sorry, what?"

"This? For right now, you guys can—"

"Uh, no. Rewind to that 'jinchuuriki should kill themselves' bit."

"This whole thing is whack," B says to her. "The tailed beasts got stuck in us against their will, so us dying to set them free is us paying them back."

"And you're okay with that?" Yugito asks.

"No. But I recognize the privilege I have over my beast, yo," B says. "Something has to change. We owe the beasts some kind of exchange."

Akari coughs into her hand and says, "Death."

B rolls his eyes. "She's taking it too far, but I think the idea is solid if we lower the bar."

"Okay," Yugito says, dragging it out. "What's… this 'lowered bar' idea."

"If you want to be weaklings about it and take the bitch baby way out, here's what I guess you can do, too. But I don't completely approve of it, and I still think that at the end of the day you owe it to
your beasts to set them free."

At Yugito's bemused look, Akari sighs.

"Fine. So, basically, it involves all of the world's jinchuuriki coming together to create a basic set of principles and guidelines that both they and the villages must follow in regards to the treatment of the sealed beasts and the jinchuuriki they're sealed in. We're talking communication with your beasts, an open dialogue with the Kages, and cultural sensitivity training for civilians and ninja…"

"Marx Gramsci."

"Sir, I'm really not sure this is funny."

The Third smirks, leaning back in his chair. "I'm an old man, Ay. My time is nearly up with this position. I'm afraid for me at this point, it is, in fact, rather funny."

"I told her this was too radical. A direct call for labour rights? That's not just hitting the ninja population, that's impacting our civilians, too. She's directly gone against our agreement."

The Third tilts his head. "Has she?"

Ay slams his hand down on the pages of the essay. "Yes, she has! I told her that I couldn't publish them—"

"But you didn't, and neither did she, technically," the Third points out. "Marx Gramsci did."

Ay's face grows shocked and more than a little indignant at this, his eyes wide and his mouth agape. "She needs to understand that she can't get away with this. She's like a child who's never been…" And the Third can see as the realization dawns on him.

"Never been punished," the Third finishes. "Do you want to know why I've never punished her?"

Ay doesn't answer, other than to scowl at the ceiling, as if that's what's wronged him, and clench his hands into fists.

"Akari isn't one to respond to punishment. If you punish her, you prove her right, because—"

"If you have to devolve to hitting your kid, that's a mark of having already lost the fight because it shows that you can't reason your way out of the argument," Ay quotes, remembering the conversation from almost a year ago, now.

"Indeed. Death doesn't seem to scare her, at all. We can't intimidate her that way. Even if we were to kill her, then what? And how bad does it look on us, as a village, to have to kill a jonin dissenter during wartime?"

"Looks like we can't even keep our own in line."

"Yes." He sighs. "And all that aside, her message is out there, and anybody who heard it—which is more than you might imagine, even before she pulled this stunt—will see her death as our capitulation. As she so kindly put it to you, you'll 'martyr' her."

"Which will cause exactly what she wants," Ay says. "Internal dissent."

The Third nods, his hands rested on the war table they're stood at.
"She pushes boundaries because she knows that there's nothing we can do," Ay says. "She knows that we're in a corner, and no matter what we do, we lose. Our hands are tied."

With a distinctly sarcastic flourish, the Third waves a hand. "Thus, the war of ideologies wages on. Much as I might have ordered you and your brother to keep that idiot under control, I think part of me always knew there was no controlling her. Only slowing her down." He smirks. "I suppose that's why I find this funny, now. Her mess won't be mine to clean up by the time she fully breaks free."

And then comes the horror. It drips from Ay's voice like tar as he says, "It'll be mine."

"It'll be yours."

"What... do I do?"

"You let your beliefs stand on their own," the Third says. "There are ways to combat it other than to sit back and watch her wreak havoc. Why do you think I've thrown myself so heavily into keeping up morale and the war effort?"

Ay nods. Slowly, he asks, "Are we winning?"

"For now. But I think with the end of the Third War, the tides might turn. If we win, then we've led them to victory under the merit of our ideas," the Third says. "And if we lose, then all of a sudden the alternative she offers is that much more appealing. If our way failed once, it might fail again. So why not try something new?"

Ay pales further. "And you're... planning on retiring, when the war ends."

With an almost sadistic glee, the Third says, "After negotiations have been fully worked out, yes."

He lets Ay stew on that for a minute.

"However, I'm not entirely out of tricks," the Third says. "I've got one more thing to do with her, to get her out of our hair for a few months. And it might prove to slow her down, depending on how it turns out."

"What?"

"It seems that Kirigakure has decided to turn on us."

"What?"

"From what our information says, they're hedging their bet against us. And taking the chance to get in an early hit, or two."

"But we're—"

The Third holds up a hand, and Ay falls silent.

"I'm aware. They're just a group of bloodthirsty assholes, I think. To their own detriment—they've opened themselves to attacks from two fronts, now." The Third traces his hand down map they're standing above, stretched out on a long, oval shaped table. His finger moves along Lightning's southern border, the coastline of the Kaizoku Sea. "Regardless, they've turned on three separate teams of ours. Which is more than enough to call for retaliation."

"You want to send her to the southern front?"
"No," the Third says. "I mean to send her into Kirigakure." He shrugs. "If she dies, then she dies—it's no clear suicide mission, no way for it to be seen as an intentional death on our part. But if she lives?"

And finally, at this, the Third sees the first hint of a smile break over Ay's face. "The Kirigakure's leadership is unstable, at the best of times. And entirely against everything she stands for."

The Third nods. He sits down at the head of the table, a satisfied smile on his face. "Exactly. If she wants to create chaos, let her create chaos. If she loses, she's out of our hair. And if she wins, then there goes our enemy. Either way, knowing her, she'll be enough of a shit disturber to distract Kirigakure and allow us to focus on energies on defeating Konoha."

And Ay is torn because on the one hand, he wants her out of the way. As a new Raikage, still getting his bearings, she sounds like a nightmare to deal with because he knows she'll go for the throat when he's not prepared for her. But on the other.

Ay realizes that he doesn't want to see her dead.

Though, he knows that doesn't matter; it's not his call to make. Not now. It's Lord Third's, and Ay will respect whatever choice his Raikage makes.

"When are you planning on sending her?" he asks.

"Within the week," the Third says.

Ay nods. "I'll pass word onto her, sir."

"Good."

"Gonna burn me at the stake? Knock my head off? Poison me?"

"No. We're not killing you."

"Really?" she asks. "You sound ready to. And I'm down—the sweet, cold embrace of death welcomes all comrades."

Ay exhales.

He wants to punch her, but he knows he shouldn't. Lord Third told him that the most valuable thing he could learn in anticipation of taking the hat was how to be levelheaded. Being levelheaded doesn't include punching his subordinates when they piss him off.

So, Ay keeps his hands firmly in his pockets. "You're not being punished."

She makes a small 'huh' sound. "Yeah? Then what're you gonna do with me, bougie scum, if you aren't gonna spank the baby?"

"We're giving you the chance to cause chaos," he says. "How much do you know about Kirigakure?"

The smile that unfurls over her face, small and devious and pointed, turns Ay's gut cold. It's the smile of somebody who's seen victory before ever stepping foot on the battlefield.
"Enough," she says. "When do I leave?"

"End of the week."

"I'll do you one better—I'll leave tomorrow."

At that, Ay shakes his head. "Whatever. Do whatever you want—you do anyways."

She pats him on the head, "Whatever. Do whatever you want—you do anyways."

She pats him on the head, and Ay kicks his leg out at her, a halfhearted retribution attempt—he feels justified in this one. She started it. Plus, he didn't try and punch her. He tried to kick her. It's different.

Akari nimbly hops over it.

"The bougie scum learns," she croons. "How cute!"

Fuck being levelheaded.

Before more than that singular thought can resonate through his mind, Ay has his leg cocked.

This time he doesn't hold back. His foot sinks into her gut and sends her all the way into the wall across the room. From beneath the crater she made in the wall, on the ground, covered in plaster and flecks of paint, Akari cackles.

Lord Third was right, as he always is.

Hit the baby, and then what? Watch as she laughs at you from the ground, through her broken ribs.

Ay walks away with her voice ringing in his ears and a headache.
Chapter Four

Chapter by iaso

The entire movement of history, as simply communism's actual act of genesis—the birth act of its empirical existence—is, therefore, for its thinking consciousness the comprehended and known process of its becoming.

On her first day in Kiri, Akari notices two things: it's very wet and the people are ripe for revolution.

All she sees are oppressed people. Shops with broken windows and busted doors. Homeless people in the alleyways huddled around fires. Skin-and-bones children running free. Air thick with booze and cigarette smoke. Disenchanted ninja, moping around, shoulders hunched and a leer on their face for anybody who so much as looks at them.

She sees civilians left under the foot of ninja, and ninja under the foot of a tyrant Mizukage. The whole place reeks of a rigid caste system that ignites an indescribable glee in Akari's heart.

She learns quickly that those sitting on the lowest caste, whose lineage drew back to civilians and ninja alike that were defeated in battle and annexed into the village, are also the most populous. As one expects. Most of their work revolved around the most dangerous jobs. For civilians, that included mostly hard labour, and for ninja, they were war fodder, left on the frontlines or sent into enemy territory. Scattered and constantly occupied, it kept the undesirables from revolting.

That is, until Akari gets there.

"My people," she murmurs to herself, standing in the streets, a thick fog around her. "My comrades."

This is where she'll start.

She sidles up to a couple of ninja at a bar in the outer ring of the village. They eye her warily, their hands already hovering over their weapons.

"Hello future comrades," she says. "Might I interest you in a wonderful thing known as communism?"

"The fuck are you on about?" one asks.

"Your freedom."

The other one squints at her. "What?"
She pulls out a couple of pamphlets, passing one to each of them. "Think unionization. Think economic equality. Think having clothes on your back, a roof over your house, and food on your table, all without having to be the wealthy's bitch." At their skeptical—and borderline hostile—expressions, she shrugs. "You'll also get to kill anybody and everybody who's oppressed you in violent revolution as we overthrow the Mizukage."

The first man throws his drink onto the ground. The glass smashes against the scuffed, rotten wooden floors, and what was left of the sake filters into the grains. "Sign me the fuck up."

Her power grows like this. She hits bar after bar, skeevy black market after skeevy black market, and while not everybody is amenable to her advances, enough are that she feels the thrill of success burn in her veins as she amasses her comrade army.

After a few months, when the lower class ninja populations have grown to trust her, brought in by her promises of equality and retribution, she starts to secure the allegiance of those left in the village with blood limits.

It's not a clean transition.

Some within the movement already disagree with her choice to allow bloodlimit users into the revolution. She lets them. If they want to doubt her, they're welcome to. And so some of them leave.

Not all of the clans with blood limits are willing to trust her, nor have anything to do with non-blood limit users. That many who do join are treated warily doesn't help the situation any. But, with time, she's able to get the groups to unite under a common cause, and while there's no erasing a history like that, eventually she talks them into coexisting peacefully.

Her comrade army grows stronger.

Long live the revolution.

"Take back what is yours!" she shouts.

"Yeah!", "Woo!", "That's right!" the crowd cries back to her.

"No more going on the suicide missions!"

"No more!"

"No more breaking your back for labour you don't benefit from!"

"No more!"

"No more empty plates, as the rich civilians and the upper echelon of ninja feast!"

"No more!"

She can see other ninja leering on the rooftops and the sidelines, but they dare not take a step forward, now with the ring of ninja surrounding the crowd and Akari herself in a Kiri-style jonin vest that'd been donated to her.

"You got something to say, you bougie cunt buckets?" she calls to them.
The crowd rustles at this. People turn and shout, scream, and throw their fists up in the air.

From their place on the outside, the ninja sneer.

"Fight the power!" Akari shouts.

The crowd echoes back, "Fight the power!"

And at that, the ninja scatter. The crowd roars their approval.

Akari prepares to go on with the speech when she hears the thwip of a kunai heading towards her head and she ducks.

"Getting spicy, are we?" she asks.

She gets no reply, and she can see her ninja ready themselves for a fight, but she holds up her hand.

"Let me," she says. "Don't get hurt fighting my battle."

Because as much as she loves, adores, and values her little red rebels, they're mostly genin and chunin level, with only a couple of jonin sprinkled in. And she sees no reason for them to be involved in a fight she's more likely to win.

Akari cracks her knuckles and squares her stance.

A mist settles over the stage.

"Don't be a pussy, you pussy!" she shouts. "Get your ass out here and fight me!"

She senses it rather than sees it—the flash of movement within the fog, the way it starts to shift as somebody approaches, and she dodges. A katana blade slices through the air where she previously stood.

Akari scoffs. "You're one of those? One of those boring-ass weeb bitches, with the power of God and anime on your side?"

She hears a smattering of confused mutters from the crowd.

She loves them, she does, but sometimes it pains her how uncultured people in this world are.

The ninja takes another shot at her, and Akari rolls her eyes. "Fine, asshole."

She pushes her fingers through Snake, Ox, Dragon, Snake, and then the Ram seal, and says, "Lightning Release: Lightning Amour."

It's one of Ay's techniques. She siphoned it because knowledge should be shared equally, and holding your techniques under lock and key is stupid and he can suck her dick.

She can't hold it as long as him, nor can she utilize it as well as he can, but it's generally visually intimidating enough that it works as a nice "fuck off" technique when the need arises. Like right now.

Akari pulses her chakra, and the air around her electrifies. The mist quivers. It tries to hold, but another pulse of her chakra and the mist falls apart, leaving a thirty-something boring-ass dude with long black hair standing across from her on the stage.
She waves. "Hey, there you are. Ready to stop playing hide and seek so I can mow your ass like grass, baby boy?"

She can see the very second the Mist nin realizes what he's gotten himself into and goes to flee.

"Not so fast!"

She pushes her fingers through another set of seals, and says, "Lightning Release: Shock Whip!"

A whip made of lightning chakra materializes in her grip and she cracks the thing, the sound like the rumbling of an oncoming storm. The ninja freezes.

Akari might be a pretty run of the mill Kumo jonin, but she's still a jonin. She earned her stripes just like everybody else, a more difficult feat in Kumo than in most other ninja villages. And that means when push comes to shove, she's not above a good ass-kicking, especially if she's taking out a swine like this.


But grown-ass adults are well within her jurisdiction, especially when they've taken the first swing.

"I know what you're thinking." She deepens her voice and says, "Oh, yes, whip me, mommy!" She tilts her head. "Or daddy. I'm okay with either. Gender is a construct, after all, and I'm all for equal opportunity kinks, shame them as I might."

The ninja turns on his heel to run.

Akari flicks the whip out before he can get far, an easy feat thanks to the enhanced reaction time from the lightning armour. The whip catches him on the ankle and she sends a shock through it. The ninja seizes up as the current tears through his body.

She reels him in, crying, "We caught a live one, boys!"

The ninja thrashes. He tries to flick senbon at her as she drags him across the stage, and she flicks the whip again to send another round of electricity through him. He screams, loud and sharp, and Akari pulls him the rest of the way over.

"You stupid bitch," he says, breathing heavy. "You're dead, you and all these stupid, naive fucks."

"Aw, sweetie." She leans in close enough to pat him on the cheek and he turns his head to try and bite her. "That's not very nice."

She flicks her whip. The electricity surges. "This one's for Lenin!"

Flick. "For Marx!"

Flick. "For Engels, who deserved better than what he got! Everybody else might forget you, but I swear I never will!"

Flick. "For Wallerstein!"

Flick. "Hans Singer, Raúl Prebisch, the beautiful bastards who graced us with dependency theory!"

Flick. "Not for you, Stalin, you gnarly ass dick baby!"

Flick. "Not you, either, Kim Il-sung!"
Flick. "Or Kim Jong-il or Kim Jong-un, you ass backwards troglodytes!"

Her chakra reserves having taken enough of a hit that she's feeling a bit light-headed, Akari lets the chakra whip dissipate, and after that, she lets go of the lightning armour.

The Kiri nin is nothing but a blackened crisp at her feet. For good measure, she kicks the body, and her foot crunches as it makes contact.

There's dead silence.

Then, the crowd roars their approval.

Akari knocks the body off her make-shift stage. It rolls into the waiting crowd, where people take turns kicking it, as well.

She gives the crowd a chance to die back down before she finishes off her speech. With that accomplished, Akari retreats away from the crowd, knowing that they'll try and swamp her if she stays around too long. She can hear the sounds of people shouting and cheering amidst the steady pitter-patter of rain, and as she gets undercover, the sound of water as it pings off the tin roof.

One of the ninja waiting there for her—a man named Shinji, one of her own, one of her trusted—approaches her.

"Hey, got somebody here you might want to meet," he says.

He steps aside to reveal a young woman, maybe a year or two younger than Akari, with bright red hair and wide eyes.

"Hi!" the girl says.

Akari raises an eyebrow. "Hi."

"I'm Terumi Mei, and I've got a group of ninja that want to join the cause."

She skews her gaze towards Shinji. He nods.

"Cool," Akari says. "Welcome to the revolution, comrade."

Mei gives Akari a wide, toothy smile, and Akari returns it with a sharp one of her own.

Akari doesn't regret bringing Mei and her ninja in, not for a second.

Mei quickly establishes herself as the second in command within the operation, calling the shots and giving impassioned speeches of her own. She's a quick study, drinking all of the knowledge Akari can pass onto her through her pamphlets, her Marx Gramsci essays, and general ideological word-vomit.

And Mei brings something to the table that Akari could never—the first-person experience of Kirigakure. She spent her life in the carnage. She went through the graduation test. She was sent to the front lines, expected to die, and lived by sheer force of will.

So, Akari adjusts her plan.
From his office seated high in the village, the one place in which, through the fog, every inch of
the village can be seen, the Third Mizukage stares down at the interaction.

"So that is her?" he asks, face stoic.

"Yes, sir," the hunter-nin kneeled before him answers. "That's believed to be the Kumogakure
agent."

"And she is talking to my jinchuuriki."

"... yes, sir."

"What is she saying?"

The hunter-nin falls silent for a few moments. Then, they say, "She appears to be telling him that
he is oppressed and that he... should throw off the chains of the bourgeoisie and embrace the role
of the proletariat. She is..." The hunter-nin stiffens and makes a choked noise. "She is promising
that if he joins her cause, she will grant him to be the one to... uh. To uh, end your life."

The Mizukage snaps his gaze downwards. "Were those her exact words?"

"Ah, no. Sir. Her exact words were..." The hunter-nin swallows. "You can use your massive slug-
chakra cock—if the Rokubi consents—to slap that asshat of a Mizukage into a well deserved,
watery grave."

His face tightens. "And what, per se, did my jinchuuriki say in response?"

"He hasn't—" The hunter-nin cuts off. They wait. And then they sputter. "It—it sounds like he
agreed!"

The Mizukage steps forward and presses his hand against the glass.

She glances up, right at him, and smiles a smile that he will see in his wildest nightmares.

The hunter-nin stationed twenty feet away sends Akari a thumbs up. A novel thing, having agents
on the inside who can set things like this up.

She pats Utakata, the lanky noodle of a teenager with the Rokubi sealed in him, and says,
"Welcome to the cause, comrade."

He grins. "Can't wait."

Satisfied, she turns towards the office, where she knows that the Mizukage is watching her, and
lifts both of her hands towards him. Her middle fingers rise.

Utakata snickers. "Shit," he says over his laughter, eyes wide and thrilled. "You really are nuts."

"The only nuts here are my massive stainless steel ones, which the Mizukage will be sucking like a
newborn baby in about a month."

"Kami."
"We don't believe in Kami, here—strictly secular."

His eyes grow wide like a kid who's gotten the first eyeful of his Christmas haul and is ready to rip open the mountain of boxes under the tree.

She grabs him by the wrist and leads him off towards what she has affectionately nicknamed her lair, the underground tunnel system where her little rag-tag revolution has been building its weapons and conducting its business.

"Come on," she says. "There's socialism to be had."

"You're leaving?"

Situated on her bedroom in the lair, a drab thing made of concrete walls and plain white furniture, Akari looks up from her book. "Yep."

"But you—we're almost—what?" she screeches. "You can't!"

"You guys don't need me anymore."

"You're the one who started all of this! You gathered us, you taught us, you led us. You can't just leave when we're a week away from throwing a coup d'etat!"

"And now my adorable commies are going to slice off your idiot of a Mizukage's head and then you're going to take over."

Mei freezes. "... me?"

"You."

"But I—I don't..." She shakes her head. "Are you sure?"

It's funny—Akari hadn't been tempted to stick around before now. She never even considered it.

The situation had always been clear cut, to her. Run in. Mobilize the people. Give them the tools to unshackle themselves. And then let them work it out on their own while she heads back to Kumo, her mission accomplished in more ways than one. She was Marx, in this situation, not Lenin—she was just here to be the ideological backbone and to give them a push, not to see the damn thing through.

"Why would I stick around?" she asks.

"Well, I... who else is going to take over as Mizukage?"

So this is what true power feels like.

She always derided Stalin and Kim Jong II and every other fuck who took the power the people placed in their hands and twisted it. But for the first time, she really sees it. How easy it would be to get drunk on the power.

And that maybe she's already a little tipsy, herself.

Akari braces her hands on Mei's shoulders and grins. "You're the most zealous little fuck I've got here. Of course, I'm sure. You'll do great. Besides, you'll still be able to contact me if you want. And there's always Gramsci." Akari pokes her in the chest. "But... you've got a red heart."
Mei furrows her brows. "Everybody's heart is—"

"Shhh," Akari says, placing a finger on her lips. "Red heart."

"Red heart," Mei mumbles around her finger.

"Good girl."

"She did it."

"Told you she'd do it, she's the kind to get through shit."

The Third smiles at the intelligence report. He casts his gaze up to Ay, who looks equal parts relieved and terrified. "She did, in fact, do it," he says. "The Third Mizukage is dead, and Terumi Mei is the new Mizukage. She was given the hat after about a third of the village's ninja population was killed in the uprising. A good chunk of those ninja were jonin, taken out by the jinchuuriki." He settles back in his chair, hands folded. "Regardless of whether Terumi allies with us, they've removed themselves as a potential enemy by crippling their fighting force. They've now formally ceded from the war."

"Damn," B says.

The Third and Ay look at him, waiting for a rhyme, but B just shrugs.

Ay frowns. "So this is what a violent revolution actually looks like."

"It is."

Akari picks this moment to kick down the office door and march in, an attendant stumbling along behind her, crying something that dies in his throat when the door swings open.

"Sir, I'm so sorry, I—"

The Third waves a hand. The attendant bows deeply and hurries off back down the hall.

"How are my favourite bougie scum?" she asks, her hands on her hips and a wide grin on her face.

B grins. "We're great, now that you're back to set us straight."

Ay rolls his eyes, his previous reaction well hidden. "Six months to spearhead a revolution?" he asks. "You're losing your touch."

"Trial run. Baby's first violent revolution. When I dig in my heels and really go at it here, I'm sure it'll only be four."

Her grin is razor-sharp, and Ay suppresses a shudder as pinpricks run up and down his spine.

"Will it?" the Third asks.

"You bet, daddy," she says. "Just you wait."

The Third gives her a faint smile. "I'm not the one that's going to be dealing with your bullshit."

"Oh?"

He sends a pointed glance at Ay and looks back at Akari. The look on her face is downright
delighted as she turns to Ay, and she bounces on the tips of her toes, looking like a child waiting for candy with her wide eyes and her hands clasped in front of her.

"Oh, Ay," she sings. "Hear that?"

He grimaces. "Unfortunately."

She leans forward to whisper in his ear, "Better prepare your asshole for my monster cock, big boy, because I plan on going in dry."

Ay steps back, eyes narrowed. "You're disgusting."

"You know what's really disgusting? The exploitation of the worker by the bourgeoisie. The worker isn't equipped with the economic tools to defend themselves, and without any labour laws or unionization," she throws a sarcastic look over her shoulder at the Third, then to Ay, "they're left out to dry by the government. They're at the mercy of bougie scum like you three."

"No," Ay says. "I'm not listening to this."

He bows to the Third and then turns on his heels, intent on leaving the room.

On his way out, he hears B say, "So who is the worker, anyways? You say it a lot, but you've never actually explained that phrase."

Ay whips around faster than he's ever done anything in his life. "B."

B shrugs, unperturbed. "Hey, man, I'm just wondering. Ain't nothing wrong with a little bit of studying."

"Don't listen to him," Akari says. "He's a worthless capitalist swine." She pokes B on the nose. "You, on the other hand, have the right spirit. When you ask questions you can learn new things and when you learn new things you can—"

"Shut up," Ay says.

"You can't shut up—"

"The raging cry of the revolutionary," Ay says, voice as dead as the Third Mizukage. "I know. You've said it a million times."

"And yet, here we are. Having this back and forth because you can't seem to get it through your thick fucking skull."

Ay glares at B. "We're leaving," he says. "All three of us, so that Lord Third can go back to doing something useful instead of wasting it on this dumbass conversation. B and I are going to go one way, you're going to go the other."

"I'll go whichever way I want."

"You might want to head towards your home," the Third says. "I'm sending you back out to the frontlines tomorrow night."

"And why would I do that?" she asks. "I should be given at least two weeks' worth of downtime following a mission that long."

"You've made… friends, let's say, with Namikaze Minato. I've on good authority that the part of
the frontlines I'm sending you to is the one in which he's currently stationed."

"Sold."

. .

Akari steps to the side as a couple of kids sprint past her full tilt, screaming and laughing as they play in the packed streets. On either side of her, she can hear stall sellers announcing their wares, many of them waving to her and calling her name as she goes by.

She remembers these days. Her memories of growing up in this world are fresh in her mind, even with a decade's worth of years weighing them down.

Coming from her backwater village, with parents who thought her equal parts too smart and too mouthy, villagers who snuffed her, nobody who would take her seriously. It was just like her last life. A dead end. A worthless expenditure. She had believed this go-around would be yet another journey of mundanity, and she did it with a bitter sort of resignation.

The second she saw those Kumo nin walk in and heard the whispers of them stealing children, she didn't hesitate to grab one by the sleeve and demand they take her with them. And they did.

Kumo has been home to her ever since. It was the people of Kuno who raised her, with open doors and tables full of food. Kumo who embodied the idea that it takes a village to raise a child, and put it into practice with more success than she ever imagined it could be.

The adults who heard her arguments against corporal punishment and listened. Who may have rolled their eyes at her and decried mouthy young kids, but who respected the backbone she showed by standing up for herself and backed off. Not all of them, no, but enough to matter.

The Kumo children who listened to her ideas, acted on them, and gave her her first taste of victory at the ripe old age of ten years.

And the Third who first cemented the idea that her desire for change maybe wasn't so crazy after all when he plucked her from relative obscurity and treated her ideas with respect.

"You're a fiery one," he had said. "A big head on those small shoulders, with a big ass mouth to match."

She'd bristled, initially. Thought he was blowing her off.

Until he'd added, "And some dangerous things coming out of it. Guess I better watch myself, hmm? Don't think I'll be taking my eyes off of you anytime soon, you brat."

And he was true to his word. The Third tried to keep her quiet. He tried to put a leash on her. For years, now, he's done everything he could to suppress her from creating chaos in his serene little kingdom.

But never once did he tell her she was wrong, and never once did he dismiss her out of hand.

She'll never forget that.

Because at the end of the day, she knows he understood as well as she did that above everything else, Akari loves this village. She loves these people. Even the shitty ass bougie scum like Ay and
B, or the ones who laugh and sneer at her for being some batshit insane asshat who raves the day away.

These are her people, and she pushes forward because she wants the village to be better. She wants her people to be happy and successful and she knows that she can give that to them. And what she wants for them? Freedom? Equality? A real chance at life? For the better.

And through violent revolution, they can have it. She knows that first hand—Kirigakure was her test case. It worked. Her ideas? Put into practice. Her methods? Tried and true.

Kirigakure was burned to the ground, and from its ashes, the phoenix will rise.

Akari looks around her. The smiling faces, the happy children, the peace, even where prosperity is missing.

She wants better for them, more than anything; she doesn't know if she can watch it all go up in flames. It was easy for her in Kiri because those weren't her people, not really. They were her people in spirit. Their thirst for equality and revolution quenched her soul. But she didn't grow up around those faces and she didn't experience those hardships.

There are serious problems with how Kumo runs their village. People profiting who shouldn't, and more people than Akari can count being relentlessly exploited.

Civilians who can't make it in mining, weaponsmithing, armouring, or any of the other handful of trades that the village values, and are left destitute as a result, homeless skeletons that haunt the alleyways. Genin and chunin being worked to the bone for barely enough to scratch by, if even that, and told that their only option is to toil away at menial labour that will never sustain them financially or head to the frontlines to die for their village. She refuses to let that go unacknowledged. And she doesn't think she's on the completely wrong track, with that.

But there's so much that's not awful. So many sights before her eyes that aren't rotten.

It makes her wonder.

If Kumo is Ay's asshole, is she prepared to demolish it? Can she really go in dry?
"Hey, treefuckers!"

Her voice echoes around the mountain range, and the Konoha ninja turn towards Akari. There's two of them, a couple of kunoichi huddled behind a boulder. The looks on their faces when they hear Akari's voice is like kids with their hands caught in the cookie jar.

As they well should be. This is a fair way from the usual battlefields—seems like they're trying to find a way to circumvent the front and get behind the Kumo forces. How deliciously underhanded for a couple of Konoha ninja.

"I like your hair," Akari shouts to one of them. "Bright red! Very in the spirit!"

"Kushina, you don't think—"

The red haired one—Kushina, then—her eyes still locked on Akari, puts her hand over the black haired kunoichi's mouth. Black-haired girl's equally black eyes widen, but she doesn't try and move the hand away.

"Kush—"

"Mikoto, shh," Kushina hisses. "I want to hear this."

"You know, the last girl I talked to said she doesn't rub her Arby's #1 on trees but I'm not sure if I'm sold yet."

Kushina furrows her brow. "What's an… Arby's?"

"Your vagina."

Now, Mikoto shoves the hand away. "It is her. We need to go! I did not get dragged away from my son, against clan regulations, to put up with—"

"If you think I'm listening to that dumbass flee-on-sight call, you're out of your mind. She's not dangerous, she's just a nuisance."

"She might not be dangerous to you, but she is to me," Mikoto whispers. Akari might not normally be able to hear, but the surrounding topography carries the sound. "And besides, you know she's
not getting it because of her alone—eighty percent of the time she's been spotted, it's been with two of Kumogakure's strongest." Her eyes flicker red with little black flecks in them, and she surveys the area.

"Both of you are reppin' the good colours!" Akari says. "Wonderful. Brings a tear to my eye, seeing you Konoha nin already embracing the colour scheme."

Kushina shoves her freshly freed hands over Mikoto's eyes, instead. "Put those things away!"

Mikoto swats her away again.

"You're going to hang around?" Akari calls.

There's a canyon between them, further than any sane person would try and jump, even with chakra. Which is part of why there's not been any fighting in this area; it's nothing but rocks and crevasses, unideal for combat. But ninja aren't sane. So, it doesn't surprise her to see them here, probably contemplating trying to clear it.

"No—"

Before she can finish, Kushina says, "Yes!"

Mikoto's eyes widen.

"Great," Akari says. "Then I can get into my speech."

"Oh, no…"

"I'm going to introduce the two of you to this terrible thing known as capitalism."

"Hey, wait, I know that word," Kushina says. "Minato talked about it before."

Akari freezes. "He did?"

"Yeah. Said some dude named, uh. Granshi?"

"Gramsci?"

"Yeah, him."

A delighted gasp leaves Akari's lips. "Wonderful! Oh, the pretty boy is learning!"

Akari digs into her bag and pulls out something she'd written specifically with Minato in mind, knowing she'd run into him eventually. Kushina and Mikoto tense up. She rolls her eyes and says, "Relax, tree fuckers. I just have something for Namikaze."

"You… do?"

"I've got an in with Gramsci," she says. "And I got ahold of their latest work. I knew I'd come across Namikaze eventually, and I figured he'd be interested in some further readings, courtesy of good ol' Akari the Commie."

Kushina's expression goes pinched, and Mikoto shoves her shoulder, hard.

"Kushina, don't do it."
"You won't have to deal with the moping if I don't."

"This is a terrible idea! She might be weird, and seem kind of harmless, but she's a Kumogakure ninja and I know you've heard about what she did in Kirigakure."

Akari raises an eyebrow. "That's spread, has it?"

Mikoto frowns. "Yes."

"What's wrong?" Akari asks. "Scared the Big, Bad Commie is gonna hide under your bed and tickle your toes in the middle of the night?" She freezes. "Oh, man, do you guys have feet fetishes, too? That's like two ridiculous birds with one grenade. Please tell me you guys aren't double dipping in the kink juice."

"What's wrong with me?" Mikoto asks. "No, what's with you? People died in that rebellion. A lot of people. And it wasn't all corrupt, cruel ninja who died."

Akari tilts her head, one hand planted on her hip. She shrugs a shoulder. "You're right."

Mikoto stops, eyes wide and mouth agape. "... what?"

"Skepticism is good. Doubt the man, don't take everything at face value, all of that." When Mikoto continues to look confused, Akari sighs. "You're right—a lot of people died during the Kirigakure rebellion, and there's no clean-cut way to categorize the casualties. It's not my place to deny that, or tell you how to react to it."

And something weird happens on Mikoto's face, a mix of things that Akari can't read, and then her expression settles into one of neutrality. "What's the thing you wanted to give to Minato?"

Akari holds up the essay, which is honestly better described as a novella at a hundred and fifty-seven pages long. "Child soldiers in ninja villages," she says. "We argued about this the first time we ran into each other. Figured he'd be interested."

"Alright," Mikoto says. "Throw it over."

Akari hefts it like a frisbee and tosses the thing over the crevasse. Kushina plucks it out of the air. Kushina flips through a few of the pages. She sighs. "Guess I know what he's doing, tonight."

"Not you?" Akari asks.

At that, Kushina's face goes as red as her hair. "Mind your own business!"

"Gladly. Because my business is spreading the good, the wonderful, the immaculate word of Marx Gramsci, who, in this particular instance, took great influence from Karl Marx—no relation—with a dash of Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. The other two less so because, well, anarchism has its own weird appeal but it's not the way to go, guys, gals, and other pals. Government is a necessary thing."

She holds up her hand, her index finger raised. She wags it at Kushina and Mikoto. "But not everything they say is wrong, you know. And right here, right now, I'm going to tell you today how capitalism in the hidden villages has turned ninja—specifically genin and Chunin—into wage slaves who get strung along with meagre pay and little to no chance at ever reaching jonin rank, which causes..."
"How long has she been going?" Kushina whispers.

Mikoto glances up at the sun. "Like, twenty minutes."

"Should I… attack her now?"

"I don't think Ay or B are going to be coming, so… maybe?"

Tentatively, Kushina throws out a chakra chain at the rocks beneath Akari’s feet. The cliffside crumbles, and Kushina can hear the whistle of the rocks as they fall down. An elephant-sized dust cloud puffs out. But as it settles, she sees that Akari danced out of the way.

"That's the spirit!" Akari shouts, pumping one of her fists. "Turn your chains into weapons of your own use!"

Kushina slides behind the safety of the boulder as Akari launches back into her speech like she'd never been interrupted in the first place. Mikoto crouches beside her.

"I should have listened to you, I think," Kushina says.

"When have I heard that before?"

"Yeah, whatever. Let's get going. I've had enough of this."

"Finally."

Minato freezes, staring uncomprehendingly at the thing Kushina holds in her hands. "But it… how did you…"

"I ran into What's-Her-Face from Kumo when Mikoto and I were sent out," Kushina says. "She told me to give this to you. Said she got an early crack on the newest Gramsci thing, on child soldiers, and she thought you'd want to read it."

His eyes grow wide. He takes the book from her hands like the paper will crumble if he holds it too tightly, and Kushina rolls her eyes.

"This is awesome," he mumbles.

Kushina huffs. "You're such a nerd."

"You were gone for a long ass time."

Akari doesn't bother to look at Ay, who she knows is standing in the door of her tent, with his arms crossed over his chest and his mouth pursed into a line so thin she could floss his ass with it.
"Policing me, bougie scum?" she asks, sharpening her kunai.

"Checking up on you. Who'd you terrorize?"

"Some Konoha chicks trying to flank us. One was named Mikoto, the other Kushina. Second one was dating Namikaze, by the sounds of it."

There's a stretch of silence. Intrigued, Akari looks over her shoulder to find exactly what she expects, though Ay's stiffer than she thought he'd be, if that was even possible.

"Kushina?" he asks.

"Yeah," she says. "Bright ass red hair. Used these like, chain things." Akari takes a second to wiggle her finger like it's a worm, then goes back to her kunai.

Ay pinches the bridge of his nose and lets out a slow breath. "You came into contact with Uzumaki Kushina? And didn't mention it?"

"Didn't realize she was somebody important."

He squints at her, but she's telling the truth on this one. She doesn't tend to pay much attention to the heavy hitters from Konoha. Namikaze is the only one she cares about, because he's the only one thus far who has been amenable to her discourse. Or, at least, is willing to engage with her. The rest of them can choke, for all she cares.

"Well, she is," Ay says, voice and expression flat. "She's suspected to be the village's jinchuuriki."

Akari drops her kunai. "What?"

He grows smug. "This is why—"

"A jinchuuriki?" she says. "Ah, fuck! If I'd known that, I could have hit her with the fucking unionization speech, really dug into that. I've been bouncing the idea of a jinchuuriki union off of B and Yugito, and I got Utakata's input when he visited—"

He narrows his eyes, annoyed both at her disregard for the gravity of the situation and the fact that he's listened to her long enough to pick up the contradiction. "What happened to jinchuuriki being flawed? Didn't you used to say that we should just free all of the tailed beasts and let the vessels die, B included?"

Akari stops. She blinks. If Ay didn't know better, he'd say she was stunned into silence. But he does know better, and he can see the gears in her head turning as she evaluates him, an almost clinical air to her.

Ay can't even begin to describe how much easier—and more sane he'd be—if she had an empty head. She doesn't; he's more inclined to think at any given time, her mind moves fast enough that she could play three separate games of shogi at once and still hold down a conversation. Too many people mistake her for a moron. Which is her own fault because she markets herself as one, the way she behaves.

Ignorance is bliss, as they say.

She shrugs. "That's still the ideal. Freedom for the tailed beasts. But I guess it's a bit too utopian, for right now, so I've adjusted. Unionize now as a temporary measure, and when the current vessels die naturally, we don't reseal the beasts. Win-win."
Ay sits down on the log beside them, a missive held in his hands. His face is drawn and tired.
B chomps down on his ration bar. "What's up with you? Looks like your ass's full of bamboo."

"You kidding? After how bad he got fucked by that group of Konoha nin yesterday, his ass is so loose you could fit a whole damn forest in there."

B snorts. He holds his hand out for a high-five, and Akari claps her hand against it without looking up from her book.

"Literal children," he mutters. He sighs. "Report just came in that Namikaze blew up Kannabi Bridge. Without their main supply route, Iwagakure's gonna be crippled—dead in the water, even."

Akari lets out a low whistle. "Look at the pretty boy go."

All Ay can do is shake his head at this point.

With Iwa starting to lose their ground, Kumo sends troops over to help.

A mistake is made, in this: Akari is sent over unchaperoned.

The first jinchuuriki she runs into a week after being sent over is Roshi.

She approaches him one evening, when the fire is high and the bowls are full. He sits alone on a tree stump, glaring down anybody who gets too close.

He also has bright red hair and Akari takes this as a good sign.

"Hello, my good jinchuuriki," she says. "Might I interest you in this wonderful new thing called unioniz—"

"If you don't fuck off right now I'm going to rip out your throat, you pint-sized piece of shit."

Akari stares at him. Slowly, she nods.

Plan adjustment.

She turns and walks away.

"Ah, hello. Who are you?"

A grin settles over Akari's lips.

Yes, she made a good choice, adjusting her approach. Because despite the bulky and intimidating —and red—armour he has on, his voice is light and pleasant. He sounds like an elementary school teacher, almost.

"My name's Akari," she says. "You're Han, right?"

He nods. He pulls down the mask from where it covers the bottom half of his face and lets it sit
around his throat, and then lowers the white cloth, as well. The smile on his face is open and sweet, a perfect match for his voice. "You're one of the Kumo ninja sent to help us, I guess?" he asks. "I heard there's a fair few of you."

"I was. Kumo's doing what it can to help its ally."

"Good to have you. Was there something you wanted from me?"

"Actually, I wanted to tell you what I can do for you."

He raises an eyebrow. She feels a bit like a child being humoured, but if that's what it takes to get this plan off the ground, then so be it.

"Is that so?" he asks.

"You bet. Tell me—have you ever heard of the term unionization?"

"I haven't, no."

She pulls a pamphlet out of her hip pouch and hands it to him. "Then, buckle up, buckaroo. I'm about to take you on a ride."

"You weak ass piece of shit."

Han sighs. "Roshi, please."

"Don't 'Roshi, please' me on this one. I can't believe you." Roshi scowls at them from his cot, his eyes narrowed to slits. "Tell me you didn't."

"Did you even hear her out?"

"Of course I didn't! What could a little shit like her have to say?"

"There's no need to be so crass."

"Yes, there is! I would rather die than do some kinda dumb shit like whatever she's spewing out."

"Please, Roshi. I think this will benefit everybody."

Roshi blows air out of his nose like a bull preparing to charge. "Stop doing that."

Han knits his brows together. "Doing what?"

"That voice."

"What voice?"

"Your bitch voice. You know I hate that."

"Can you please just be reasonable? We're trying to have a civil conversation about this."

"There's nothing civil about that brat and whatever she has to say!"
"How would you know? You didn't listen."

"I don't need to! I know her face. I know that kinda look. And if you weren't such a god damn doormat, you could have told her to fuck off like I did."

"Except that I'm glad I didn't because I genuinely liked what she had to say, as did Kukuo."

Roshi tosses the sword in his hand down onto the bed and marches over to Akari. He towers over her, and in the background, she can see Han place his face in his hands and shake his head.

"The fuck did you say to him?" Roshi asks.

"I told him about a plan I have to unionize all of the jinchuuriki so you can each loosen the leash around your throat and fight for better treatment from your fellow villagers. Jinchuuriki have consistently seen less rights than their average ninja counterparts, and it's not fair." Akari leans forward, putting herself almost nose to nose with him. If he thinks he can cow her by trying to be some kind of Snape ass bitch, looming his greasy ass face over her, he's got the wrong one.

"And I'm arguing that the tailed beasts deserve to be released after jinchuuriki die naturally," she says. "A total break from the system, as a whole. Let it die out rather than perpetuate."

Roshi doesn't move, and neither does Akari.

In the background she hears Han murmur, "Completely ridiculous…"

Roshi's head snaps around. "What was that?"

Han stares at him, deadpan. "You're being completely ridiculous."

"She started this!" Roshi says, jabbing a finger at Akari.

She snaps her teeth at him as if to bite it and he yanks his hand away with a disgusted look.

"I'm more inclined to think that you did," Han says.

"What?"

Han squares his shoulders and says, "She approached you in good faith and you turned on her like an untrained mutt with anger issues."

Roshi takes a step back. He regards Han, posture tight and his mouth twisted up like he sucked on a sour lemon. "Holy shit. You actually do like what she had to say, don't you? You agree with it?"

"Yes," Han says, throwing up his hands. "That's what I've been trying to tell you."

Roshi glares at the two of them. "Fine. I'll join this stupid—whatever fucking—group thingy."

Akari grins at him. "Welcome to—"

"Ah-ah!" Roshi says. "Not because I give a shit about any of that." He points at Han. "But just because he's gotten himself neck deep in this, by the sounds of it. And where he goes, I go."

And when Han smiles at Roshi, a soft thing full of gentle exasperation, Akari sees the first crack in Roshi's mask when the corner of his lips flick upwards on response.

Her jaw almost drops. Almost. It's a near thing, and she taps her finger against her chin, as if to
make sure it's in place.

Neither of them notice her epiphany, with how wrapped up they are staring at each other.

Of all the things she expected to come from this interaction? This wasn't one of them.

As she and Han slip out of the tent, she hands him a new pet project of hers, something she's let sit on the backburner next to her gender equality essay while she focuses her attention on the jinchuuriki unionization project and labour rights.

A cute little pamphlet with a cartoon rainbow and the words "So I Hear You're Gay" printed along the top of it.

He makes a thoughtful noise as she hands it to him, and when he reads it, a laugh bubbles out of him, light and small. He ruffles her hair.

Akari rolls her eyes. She raises a hand to smooth out her hair, fiddling with her part a bit to get it back to its usual messy-but-intentionally-so-it's-kind-of-cute form. "So, I'm right?"

She gets a nod in response. "What tipped you off?" he asks.

"You two look make goo-goo eyes at each other. It's kind of gross, honestly," she says. "How long?"

He hums. "Seven or eight years, now."

"Have you ever thought of marrying him?"

Han blinks, and his feet stop in their tracks as the question works its way through his thoughts. Finally, he says, "I… not really, no."

"Would you like to?"

And the look that crosses his face melts Akari's cold, dead heart. A painful mix of melancholic and wistful. "It's a nice idea," he says quietly. "Maybe one day."

She nods. Her finger taps against the rainbow on the pamphlet. "Hold onto that."

He dutifully slips it into his kimono, though she feels like it's more for her benefit than his.

She turns to face him fully. "You guys deserve as many rights and avenues for your relationship as anybody else," she says. "Everybody deserves that, regardless of how 'unconventional' other people might see their relationship as. And I'm going to make that happen."

Han smiles at her, and he says, "I believe you."

"Good. Now, let's talk union communication."
The state is based on this contradiction.

It is based on the contradiction between public and private
life, between universal and particular interests.

For this reason, the state must confine itself to formal, negative activities.

"So, here we are."

"Indeed."

Akari stares at the Third, leaned back in his chair for what will probably be the last time.

"There've been some good times, daddy."

"Good times," he says wryly. "Is that how you view them?"

"Come on, don't be like that!"

"Of the thirty years I spent as the Raikage, you have been the biggest thorn in my ass, you little shit."

"You flatter me."

The Third scoffs. He pushes himself to his feet and walks around the office, running his hand over the surface of his desk, the window, the war table. A solemn air follows him around the room.

"You plan on putting Ay through the wringer, don't you?"

"Why ask a question you already know the answer to?"

"Hmph."

"Gonna ask me to be gentle on him?" she says. "Tell me to be nice and slow? A good, gracious lover?"

"No," he says. "My son is strong, and he fights his own battles."

The Third stops in front of the map. Pieces from the now finished war—a war they lost—lay scattered over the surface of it, a series of toppled targets and pushed back boundaries. He picks up one of the wooden flags and runs his thumb over it. With a shake of his head, he sets the piece down.

His hand comes to rest over Kumo, his palm so big that it swallows up the entire village. "What I ask is that you be kind to Kumogakure. Be gentle on this village."

The Third gazes at her with eyes as hard as the mountains surrounding them and Akari gazes right back, her head tilted to the side.
She swallows whatever nonsense she was about to spout.

"You love this village," he says. "As much as I do, and as much as Ay does."

Akari meanders over to the table. She drags her finger over Kirigakure, nothing but a speck on the map compared to Konoha or Kumo or Iwa. A layer of dust coats her fingertip and Akari blows it off.

She meets his eye. "And?"

"I'm glad for what you've done for the village."

And when she snipes back at him, "Are you?" it's not nearly as snarky as she intends for it to be.

"You've tested my patience. And fuck knows you've pushed Ay to levels of frustration far beyond anything he's ever imagined, which I'm sure you'll continue to do. You'll make him hit his limit, and then take another step past." The Third chuckles, a deep, almost bitter sound. "I'm surprised the boy still has hair. But all you've done has been in the pursuit of making this village better. You're Kumo, through and through, under all of that defiance and fire."

She sighs.

She wonders if he remembers that when she came to Kumogakure, one of the first homes she stayed in was his. Even as their Raikage, this big, towering hunk of meat and muscle, he welcomed the children of the village—be they born here, brought here, or immigrated here—into his home and treated them like his own.

She remembers him tossing her up on his knee and offering her a chunk of bread. Telling all of the assembled punks a story about some mission he went on when he was a genin, and what he learned about himself and his teammates. He made sure every child left his home with a full stomach and a smile, because even in his leisure when his time was meant to be his own, he turned around and gave it back to his villagers.

To his people.

And whether or not Akari ever acknowledged it, she's never doubted that she was one of his people.

"Of course I am."

"Then I ask you to be gentle on this village. Thrash Ay however you want. It's his job to hold his own against you, no matter how fierce you prove to be. But this village, regardless of whether or not it meets your ideals and your standards, has done nothing but open its arms to you. Don't repay that with a knife in the gut, you hear me?"

"Yeah," she says. "I hear you."

"Good."

Akari waits in the lobby of the Raikage's building, the place where the preliminary peace talks are set to take place. One of the upper rooms has been booked. Already, Ay is in there with B at his side and a handful of other delegates. They're just waiting on the Iwa and Konoha representatives at this point.

She's there out of passive interest.
Which of the tree fuckers are they going to send?

Will she get lucky, and will Iwa send Han? Her correspondence with him about the jinchuuriki union has been fruitful, but nothing beats good ole face to face discourse.

So, she remains there in the lobby, cross-legged on top of a table. And she waits. Even as the other Kumo nin glare at her, as if that's going to actually do anything at this point.

She only unglues her attention from the door for a split second to grab a magazine, but when she looks back up, who else is waiting for her but Minato Namikaze.

Akari hops to her feet and shouts, "You!"

Both Minato and the dude with him—some freaky ass old man who reminds her of an albino porcupine—spin around to face her.

Minato's face as the recognition dawns on him is downright delighted. "You!"

Albino Porcupine frowns, his brows knit together, but she can see as he puts the pieces together. He grabs Minato by the back of his vest. Minato ducks out of it and flies over to where Akari is standing.

"I read that Gramsci paper," he says.

"And?"

"It was incredible. Definitely not realistic, but—"

"What do you mean not realistic? What's unrealistic about thinking that children shouldn't be turned into weapons?"

"I mean, it completely ignores the innate danger of the world. Not training from a young age is bound to both limit future development and leave young people defenceless."

"But no ninja actually stands a chance of adequately defending themselves until they hit chunin, and the average age for that is fourteen."

"Starting training later is just counterproductive, though! They'll just be defenceless longer."

"Not if you expedite the training process. Start basic conditioning at age eight—if the child shows an interest—and then once they hit twelve, only then are they allowed to start learning jutsu and weapons training. And no real combat situations before sixteen."

"How are they supposed to build up enough dexterity and muscle memory? You can't just start somebody that late and expect them to pick it up as easily."

"There are other ways to train dexterity than actual weapon practice—"

"Which all villages include in the early years of their Academy."

"—and besides, efficiency-wise, your ability to practice a skill is exponential. The older you are, the more equipped your body is to learn, so the better you're able to grasp the skill. What you gain from the ages of five to eight is inconsequential, and could probably be made up in a year of intense training."

"What you learn at age five is foundational! It preps you to learn moving forward."
"Which, as I said, can be replaced by non-combative alternatives."

"It doesn't work that way! That's like expecting somebody to learn how to write, but only letting them stretch out their fingers and trace the letters, but not pick up a pencil until ten years old. And there's a point where being older actually makes the skills more difficult to pick up because your body isn't as receptive to building new muscle memory. By waiting too long, all you're doing is prolonging the process——"

"You can't compare handwriting to thrown weapons——"

"Yes, I can? A lot of the skills are the same! Both are dexterity focused activities that require hand-eye coordination——"

"One is an essential skill, the other isn't——"

"That's way too biased of an assertion to make——" Minato gasps. "Wait… this is. Basically word for word, what Gramsci had to say. And writing being an essential skill, that was something he wrote about in his essays on lowered rates of literacy among civilian populations in ninja villages."

Akari smirks at him. "Is it?"

"Well, yeah, but—oh, wait." His brow furrows. "Yeah, I remember you mentioned him a year and a bit——" Minato cuts off, and a second later, his jaw drops. His eyes go wide as saucers. It's so much blue, like the sky on a cloudless day. "You were talking about Gramsci a year and a half ago."

She shrugs. Minato takes a step forward, practically vibrating.

"You were talking about Gramsci a year and a half ago! Gramsci didn't start getting published until a year ago. And… your writing style, in those pamphlets you hand out. It's so similar. And you have a personal 'in' with Gramsci, enough to get early copies of his essays."

Minato's so close, at this point, that their noses are almost touching. "You're Gramsci," he breathes. "You are, aren't you?"

Akari pokes him in the chest. "I thought you were supposed to be a genius? Huh? What took you so long to figure it out?"

"Whoa," Minato says, voice small. "But… why write under a different name?"

"Originally? To circumvent the shitty bougies who wanted to silence me. But at this point, I just keep doing it because sexism is a thing and the big dick politician men here can't pull their heads out of their asses long enough to realize that a woman has as many valid ideas as a man. Bunch of pussy bitches."

"Wait, does that mean that Gramsci is starting to work its way into the Land of Lightning's civilian politics——"

"What the actual fuck are you two doing?"

Minato jumps back a step at the booming voice.

Porcupine Man is standing a few feet away from them, eyes narrowed. Everybody else in the lobby has turned to stare at them, but the cowards they are, nobody dared approach. Except for Porcupine Man.
"Are you trying to ruin this?" Porcupine Man hisses at Minato. "You're causing a scene at the peace talks! Arguing is the opposite of what we're trying to do!"

"But—no, wait, but she—"

"Can it."

"How do you brush your hair?" Akari asks.

"I'm not dealing with you," he says. "I know who you are. I know your brand of bullshit. This little idiot might be willing to indulge you, but I'm not."

Minato whines. "But, Jiraiya—"

"Nu-uh. We're leaving. We've got places to be, actually important things to do."

Porcupine Man stoops down and tosses Minato over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, and he marches off through the lobby.

Minato reaches out his hand towards Akari and shouts, "I'll find a way to contact you!"

"No, he won't!"

Minato deflates like a popped balloon, and the two of them disappear into the upper floors of the building. Akari would follow, if not for the fact that there are ten ANBU agents dedicated to keeping her from interrupting the talks.

Which is a complete violation of her right to knowledge and the free spread of information, but whatever. Go off, assholes. She'll just siphon the details from B later.

Ay pinches the bridge of his nose. "Of course, she did."

The Third laughs. "Come on, don't act like you didn't expect this."

"If I had known that Namikaze was going to be tagging along, I would have done something to keep her as far away from this building as possible."

"Live and learn, Ay. This is why she always had missions out of the village when I was planning to host political meetings."

Ay curses himself for not having thought to do that.

It helps nothing that, as Lord Third knew would happen, interest and support for Akari within Kumo has grown since the war ended. Lord Third didn't win them the war. And the blowback from that hasn't been anything extreme, but Ay thinks that's more symptomatic of this being a ninja village than any reliable indicator for dissatisfaction with the current regime.

Ninja whisper behind raised hands and the civilians gather in their homes and their bars to complain about the failure of a fight they can never hope to understand the complexities of.

Ay needs room to win them back over without her throwing her 'rise of the worker' bullshit in their faces.
And then he remembers the scroll he'd thrown aside earlier, into his 'deal with this later' pile following the preliminary talks amongst the villages.

The actual peace talks that the other kages will be attending is in another couple of weeks. It's not too late to get her out of his hair for that and buy himself some time to appease the masses in one fell swoop.

Ay rummages through the mess of papers and comes out with the unfinished first draft he'd written up earlier for a three-month-long diplomatic mission to Suna. Right now, it's scratch notes, based on what the Suna representative requested during their talks. He still needs to add a few details and send it off to the administrative wing to be cleaned up and turned into a formal mission scroll.

The Third watches, and when he sees what Ay's holding, he bellows out a laugh. "That's a bold choice. Ready to give up on the sandy bastards already, eh?"

Ay scoffs. "What can they offer us? It's not like they produce strong enough ninja—not even their daimyo has faith in them. At best, they're parasites that we can use as fodder when the fighting breaks out," he says. "Let them entertain her for a few months while I settle the talks and get settled as Raikage."

"Very well," the Third says. It's said neutrally, and Ay knows better than to expect anything more from Lord Third.

This is Ay's reign; the Fourth Raikage is in office now.

Not the Third.

And while he might offer bits and pieces of advice surrounding the inner workings of the village, Ay knows his father better than to expect any kind of political advice. As the Third said before—the Raikage mantle is Ay's burden to bear, now. His choices have to be his own.

Ay scrawls Akari's name in the corner and gets to work on finishing up the draft.

Suna, despite having claimed to be an ally, left Kumo to rot within a year of the Third War starting. And now they see fit to open their hand and expect Kumo to fill it.

Ay is nothing if not fair. He'll repay them in kind for what they've given Kumo.
Chapter Seven

Political Economy regards the proletarian ... like a horse, he must receive enough to enable him to work.

It does not consider him, during the time when he is not working, as a human being. It leaves this to criminal law, doctors, religion, statistical tables, politics, and the beadle.

"I don't like sand… it's coarse, rough and irritating. And it gets everywhere."

"Sounds like somebody I know."

Akari, crouched on the dune, lets the handful of sand sitting in her palm cascade down between her fingers. "Shut the fuck up, you bougie scum dipshit. You don't know me or the prequels; you don't know my culture."

Juri, the Suna jonin tasked with babysitting Akari, casts her a baleful glare. He's a middle-aged man—middle-aged by ninja standards, at least. Probably thirty years old. She would swear he's seventy, though, for all the fun he is.

He met up with her at the midway point between Kumo and Suna, and in the day and a half she's known him, a solid image of who he is has formed in Akari's mind. He's an old fucking fart of a bitch with a flagpole so far up his ass that Akari's surprised she doesn't catch a glimpse of Suna's insignia flapping in the sand-encrusted breeze when he opens his mouth.

Ay handpicked him to serve as her escort for the next three months. Birds of a feather, she supposes. Or pricks of a tiny dick size. She's seen what Ay is packing and Juri has some mighty tight pants on beneath his stupid, billowy man skirt—she'd be bitter too.

"Am I supposed to know what those words mean?" he drawls.

She jabs a finger towards him. "You will." She jabs another finger at the beige buildings, standing stout on the horizon behind a wall of stone. "They all will, too."

Juri brushes a strand of highlighter yellow hair back underneath his shawl and rolls his eyes. "Just shut up and follow me. Don't say anything stupid—if the gate guards take a shot at you, I'm not saving you."

Akari sneers at him. "Don't need you to, piss baby. The proletariat saves themself."

Akari gets two steps into Suna when her oppression senses go off.

People trudging through the streets with bowed heads. Desperate folk shoving their wares at anybody who passes by, the words passes through chapped lips and formed in sallow cheeks. Even
the ninja guarding the gates, a couple of genin, have a sag to their shoulders like the weight of the worlds sits on them, not a few stray grains of sand and thin cloth shawls.

The grin that unfurls over her lips is slow and curled by mischief.

"Honey… you've got a big storm coming," she mumbles.

Juri gives her a funny look. His gaze flicks from her to the sky, and he shakes his head. "There's no signs of a storm on the horizon."

"Not that you can see, no."

Carefully, he says, "Okay."

She turns to stare at him dead on. "But you will."

"Is that a threat?"

Akari hums. "Why don't you show me to my quarters, swine? I'd like to see whether or not you fucks cheaped out on me."

A breeze rolls over them. It carries the smell of freshly baked flatbread, spices, and vanilla, a combination that scorches Akari's nose in the loveliest way. She tucks a strand of green hair behind her ear, unabashed as Juri grows stiff.

"Chop chop," Akari says, clapping her hands. "Before I'm forty." She's ready to settle down in her quarters and get started on the outline for her newest pamphlet. Hopefully there's a long walk to wherever she's staying—she'd like to get more time to observe and gather a bit more information, so she can tailor it to the masses needs.

Juri's hand ghosts over his waist before it settles down at his side. "Very well."

She cocks her head.

From the steel in his eyes, Akari has no doubt that it was an intentional movement. A threat for a threat, it seems. But he doesn't scare her—she'll let trash like him intimidate her over her dead red spirit.

She gestures for him to lead the way and he starts through the worn, grooved slabs of stone that make up the pathways of Suna's streets, and she trails along behind him.

She has three months in this village.

Akari's grin widens.

That sounds like a challenge, to her.

She finds a desk in her room that is stocked well with paper and writing implements. Intended for her correspondence with Kumo, no doubt.

Perfect.
She knows that'll come in handy later, once she's ready to mobilize.

"... continued attempts to—"

"What are you doing to help your people keep from starving?"

The elder's mouth clicks shut and he blinks.

Akari raise an eyebrow at him. "Well?" she asks. "I've been here four days and all I see are people who look like they haven't had a proper meal in months."

And yet, all four of the men sitting around her (whose names she can't be bothered to learn) look like they've been eating just fine, and she's sure their kage looks the same.

Not that she'd know. She's never met the guy, even though the council'se now had a meeting each and every day since she's gotten here. Unsurprising, that the oppressor can't make time to meet for the benefit of those he's oppressed.

"That's not pertinent to the current discussion—"

"Yeah, but this discussion is boring as shit and I don't care about helping you guys recoup your militaristic interests."

Old Man One frowns. "But that's what you're here to do."

"No, it's not," Akari says. "I'm here to work out what Kumo can offer Suna—"

"And we're in need of work for our ninja as we're being economically choked by lack of work."

"Why give you resources if I don't trust you'll allocate them fairly."

Off to her right, Old Man Four, the oldest of them, scowls at her. "It is not your place to dictate that, nor is it relevant to your village's interests. This is a negotiation of mutual benefit, correct? We are here to discuss what you may offer us and counter it with what we can offer you in return."

"Bold of you to assume that you can match us in contribution," Akari says. "You can't give Kumo back what Kumo can give you. So, if you can't match us, what you do get from us has to be used in a way Kumo approves of."

And she does care about what Suna can give Kumo. She knows they have very little to offer, and she wants to make sure what she takes from them won't be yanked out of the pockets of those who can't afford to give. She wants to take their manpower and their knowledge: specifically, their poison mastery and armouring skills, both of which Kumo could use improvement with. But she wants nothing financially from them. Which she doubts Ay will agree with, but Ay sent her so that's his own fault.

Old Man Three sighs. "Can we call a recess? This is going nowhere."

"What, you old geezers need a nap? Gotta change your diapers, or something?"

"Watch your tongue," Old Man Four hisses. "You are here on grounds of mutual respect."

"Respect is earned, not owed. Earn my respect and then we'll talk."

The tension in the air bubbles and burns and Akari knows they want her to wilt but they'll bend
over and suck her left nut before she'll ever let an oppressor intimidate her.

Old Man Three stands up and the metal legs of his chair screech against the stone. "Enough. We'll take a recess and pick this discussion up again in two hours."

Akari leans back in her chair, watching the men whisper to each other as they file out the door.

She knew they'd never come to see things her way. She knew they'd resist the redistribution of capital and scoff at any attempts she might make to do so. And all it does is cement her desire to find a way to give the people the tools they need to force the issue.

Rasa eyes the pamphlet placed down on his desk like it has the destructive potential of an unstable explosive seal. Pinched between his thumb and index finger, he dangles it in front of his face, expression pinched. "What is this?"

Crouched in front of him, the ANBU agent answers, "It was found in her room, my lord."

He frowns. "But what is it?"

"A call to action for the civilians to 'unionize' and for the genin and chunin to fight for equal pay with jonin."

"Unionize?"

"We believe it means gather as a work group to argue for better pay."

Rasa drops the pamphlet like it burned him and raises an eyebrow at the agent.

The ANBU agent shrugs.

With a sigh, Rasa leans back into his chair and stares up at the ceiling. Three weeks in and she's already causing him a headache. Though, from what he's seen of her, he supposes that he should be glad she didn't start in on this sooner.

He's only been able to make it to a handful of the meetings, occupied as he has been with getting the village back in order. Organizing the hospital and taking stock of the supplies one day, checking in on the schools another, more than a few spent supervising the fuinjutsu work being done in preparation for his wife's pregnancy, and a week he lost to his trip to the capital on a fruitless meeting with the daimyo to try and squeeze even a single shipment of grain out of the tight-pocketed child.

And now he gets to come back to this mess.

"And how long has she been working on this?"

"Since she entered the village," the agent says. "She began circulating them last night after retiring to her room."

"Bold of her. She thinks we wouldn't notice?"

The agent remains silent.

Rasa sits up. "What?"

"She escaped out the window in her quarters and left a note on it indicating that she understood we
were watching and would know she left her room."

His eyes narrow to slits.

What can he do?

This is an act of disrespect to his rule, and a dangerous one. He's not been Kazekage long—brought to power in the middle of the war, his rule is still on shaky, young feet, not yet fully beneath him. Suna lost the war Rasa was supposed to win for them, that the masses think his predecessor would have won. They're vulnerable to something newer and more appealing.

But Suna's desperate for money and supplies, and if this visit goes well, Kumo will provide them with jobs and aid. He needs to keep Kumo happy; this deal has to go through.

And he can't imagine kicking out that girl will win him any favors with Kumo when she's known to be close with the Raikage.

"Tell me," Rasa says. "If you were in my position, what would you do?"

"I'm not sure that's my place to say, my lord."

"I'm making it your place. What's your opinion?"

The ANBU agent goes quiet and Rasa watches her roll her shoulders.

She's older—one of the few remaining veterans of ANBU. At thirty years old and having never gone past chunin, Haru is as innocuous and seasoned as his agents come.

"I think I would tread lightly," she says.

With a wry smile, a mere quirk of the corner of his mouth, he asks, "Not remove her immediately?"

"I would like to. But an assassin's instincts can't be that of a kage's. And if I'm in your position, I have to look at the bigger picture." She lets out a breath. "I would keep an eye on her and observe, then make a more permanent decision."

He nods. The words turn over in his head as between his fingers, he fiddles with a clean brush. Take a measured, careful approach, and prepare to strike like a viper should the need present itself. "Thank you. Dismissed."

Haru bows low and disappears in a hot gust of wind, leaving nothing but a few stray grains of sand on the rug.

He will watch, and he will wait, but he will not do it idly.

Rasa raises a hand.

From behind him, one of the ANBU agents detach themselves from the shadows and appears in front of him. "Lord Kazekage."

"I want all writing implements removed from Akari's quarters. She will be permitted to take notes in supervised environments, but she is not to be given any chance to write privately."

"Right away, my lord."
When Akari walks in, the room looks untouched. Her covers are askew and the chair to her desk is pulled out at a thirty-degree angle. The window is open a crack to keep the room from growing musty in her absence, a potted cactus sat on the sill. One side of the deep maroon rug on the dusty dirt floor is curled up from when she kicked it on her way out this morning.

But she knows in her bones that somebody else was in this space while she was gone.

"What kind of fuckery do we have here?" she asks, to herself and to the handful of assholes trailing her at all hours of the day.

And then she sees it. Her desk that had this morning sported an impressive stack of paper for her to use—so she could communicate with Kumo, they had said, but she knew it was a sort of flex, in its own right, because paper isn't cheap in a treeless land—was now bare. No brushes, no ink, no paper.

Akari shoves the rug aside and kicks her heel against one of the boards. She loosened it early on, in one of the brief periods where she's been able to lose her trails and make it back to her room without any eyes on her. It's where she stashed her more important notes, some emergency supplies, and extra paper, just in case something like this came to pass.

It was empty.

"You dusty bastards."

Not that she expects any less from them. Stealing from the proletariat is in their nature.

She'll just have to get a bit more creative then, won't she?

It comes to her a few days later.

She's out getting a drink in one of the village's bars. There's no better place to get a handle on how the people feel than in a bar, so it makes an ideal place for her to brainstorm about how she wants to handle this whole thing.

She takes a sip of whatever kind of alcohol they make in this part of the world, letting it burn her throat, unbothered as her body will metabolize it before it can intoxicate her. The glass clinks as she sets it down on the 'table', a literal hunk of rock, just like everything else in the bar is. The entire bar seems to have been carved out of the side of a mountain, leaving raised chunks of rock to serve as seats, tables, the bar table, and then nooks chiseled out along the sides to serve as shelves. It's exactly the kind of ingenuity she expects from the working folk that occupy the place. A sandstorm that wore down the stone until it became a home.

Juri sits across from her, empty-handed and unabashed as he watches Akari nurse her drink.

Beyond the time she gets alone in her quarters, the dumb fuck hasn't left her side for a second since her tools of trade were wrenched from her. He's there outside the door as she takes her first piss in the morning, at her back as she sits in on the bougie meetings where officials bitch about what they want and not what the people need, and even to this dingy, dank cave-like bar that reeks of cheap alcohol and mold. All with no pretense of doing this for any reason other than to spy on her.
She can't knock them—surveillance is important, after all. One must always know what's going on in their village. But she'd rather not spend her day with his filth breathing down her neck.

"When do you think they're gonna yank the beast out of that old man?"

And at that, her ears perk up.

They're on the other side of the bar, murmuring amongst themselves. From the lack of reaction on Juri's face, she doubts he can hear them, or that if he can, he's paying their words much mind.

"I hear soon. I got a friend in the Seal Department, and he said Lord Kazekage has been inquiring about their research progress again."

"Jeez. Man, I'm kinda surprised the geezer hasn't croaked already, down in that shitty basement." From behind her, she hears a scoff. "At least it's probably nice and cold down there."

"Ha. Yeah. Bet it is. Better than he deserves."

"I've seen that place—it's exactly what those monsters deserve."

A grin stretches over Akari's face.

Juri scowls at her, leaning forward in his seat. "What is it?"

"Oh, nothing." She chugs what's left of her drink and slams the glass back down, wiping her mouth off on her arm. "Care to get me another?" she asks, holding her glass out to him.

"No."

Akari rolls her eyes. "Dunno what else I expected."

She hauls herself up and saunters over towards the bar, the grin on her face growing, curled in at the sides, all cheshire cat and promise of chaos.

She has her new plan.

It takes her another few weeks of wandering Suna with an open ear to get the pieces she needs to hunt down her mark; like a puzzle coming together, she forms an image.


But she also knows that she can't jump right into this. The bourgeoisie guards their capital with prejudice, and she has no illusions about what kind of adventure breaking him out is going to be. Once she makes this move, there'll be no going back.

So, she'll wait. Bide her time. And when she can cut her losses? She'll make sure that she goes out with a bang.
Chapter Eight

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time,
the expression of real suffering and a protest
against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature,
the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.
It is the opium of the people.

In the Suna night, there is peace and quiet.
The moon sits high in the sky over settled dunes. A cluster of charcoal-stained clouds rolls over it, skewering the light like a slice of cheese.

Not a thing stirs.
Then, chaos.

"Know your rights!" is the voice that shatters the silence.

Akari stomps on the roof of the home she stands on, listening as her voice bounces around the stone structures like a bouncy ball. "Free yourself from the chains! Demand equality, demand equal food rations!"

She watches candle lights flicker to life through circular carved windows. A hush of voices joins hers.

"You deserve to have what the bourgeoisie hoard!"

A few people come out of their homes, but from within the little rounded structures, she hears a voice shout to her, "Shut up asshole!"

"The red voice cannot be silenced!"

"We'll see if you still feel like that when I shove my shoe up your ass," another voice shouts at her from one of the homes. She sees two women standing a few homes down in rumpled linen pyjamas, their hair messy and eyes squinted.

"Try it! I dare you!"

One of the women scowls, looking ready to follow up on the threat, but the woman beside her settles a hand on her arm. "Come on, let's go. This idiot's not worth it—come back to bed."

The other woman grumbles but allows herself to be led inside.

"Cowards!" Akari shouts at them. "Fight for your rights! Fight for those who can't fight for
"C'mon," another woman says to a man standing beside her. "Let's go back to sleep, too."

He waves a hand at her. "No, wait. I kinda wanna hear this."

"Yes! Good! Open your mind and your heart to the red voice." She clears her throat and takes a deep breath. "Let me introduce all of you, on this fine evening, to the concepts of wage slavery, the distribution of wealth, and the dangers of the free market!"

Akari slips through the doorway, secure that she's lost her tail.

She holds a bucket of red paint in one hand and a brush in the other.

The village is spread out around her. She's at the highest point she could find, perched on the centermost point of the village where all of the walls come together. Down the walls, she can see another close with a tub of paint in hand, as well, who had the same idea.

Akari glances down at the brush.

She tosses the brush and chucks the bucket up into the air. She produces a kunai with an explosive seal trailing off of it and chucks it at the tub. It connects with the bucket mid-air and the entire thing punctures, sending the red paint spurting out of the tub and all over the rock huts laying below with sad chunks of plastic interspersed in it.

The other Akari shouts something at her and a second later repeats the action to much the same effect.

Below them, a few dozen huts are covered in red.

Success.

She watches the other Akari cackle and hop off the wall and disappear into the sea of huts. She scans the village, prepping to follow when she hears the telltale tap of sandals on stone behind her.

Without another thought she ducks down and rolls forward, coming up in a crouch a few feet away. A Suna ANBU stands where she had been, kunai outstretched.

"Too slow!" she sings.

The ANBU's posture loosens, like a parent who's caught their kid reaching into the cookie jar and is annoyed but unsurprised.

"You can't keep me down! Scummy secret police—"

This time, she's not fast enough, and the ANBU catches her with the tip of his kunai.

She watches herself disappear into a puff of smoke and sparks, then nothing.
Akari pauses, her back pressed up against a wall as she slinks through the basement dungeon. The memories of the clone rush back to her.

The ANBU are definitely onto her, then. She figured, with the fact that the labyrinth has a notably thin guard, but it's good to get confirmation. She expects she'll have another few clones out of commission soon.

She flips her hand through the seals and a messy clone pops up in front of her. Its hair isn't quite formed right and it's missing an eye—she's stretched thin, with seven clones running around at this point. She's kind of glad that it's only got too-short hair and no right eye.

"What in the fuck—"

Akari shakes her head. "Shut up," she hisses. "We're in the middle of fucking covert ops, here."

"Whoops."

"Go on," she says, gesturing down the hall. "Down the hall that way, two lefts, a right, a left, three rights, straight. Keep going up. You'll pop out of a grate in the middle of the village. I don't care what the fuck you do, just, you know, the usual rules."

"Cool."

And off the clone goes.

Akari heads back off in the opposite direction, deeper into the labyrinth. Given how many cliche medieval vibes this place is giving her, she's fairly confident that if she gets to the bottom of this shit hole, she'll find the old man.

So, she keeps going.

"I want you to make chaos."

The genin raises an eyebrow. "Excuse me?"

Akari shakes the baggie of ryo, raising an eyebrow. "Chaos. C-H-A-O-S. You know, the concept. Opposite of order. Or do you need me to break it down baby-style?"

He scowls. "Want my help or not, smartass?"

"Want the money or not?" she challenges.

"Just… just get on with it."

"Get people riled up. Grab their attention. Try not to let it be anything traceable, don't go getting yourself in trouble. Also, avoid getting mixed up with any ninja and don't hurt anybody, don't bother any kids, blah blah blah. Don't be stupid. Just… be a distraction."
"Why?" he asks.

"I have things I need to get done."

"... what things?"

"Why do you care?"

"Do you think I'm stupid? You're a foreign ninja giving me money to start shit. Is that supposed to look like it's not suspicious?"

Again, she says, "Why do you care?"

His entire face shuts closed, the curtains yanked shut on his emotions. "I'm not a traitor."

"Why not?" she asks. "What has this village given to you? You starve while your leaders feast."

Even in the dim light from the moon, largely blocked out by the village walls behind them, she can see how hollow his cheeks are, the glassiness of his eyes. In rumpled clothes and bent posture, the genin embodies what she has come to recognize as the oppressed worker.

Interestingly, at her words, he stiffens, rising to his full height. "Why should they have to starve? It's not like five people eating enough could keep the entire village from starving. I'm happy to let them have enough so they can keep working and pull the rest of us out of this mess, especially Lord Kazekage. He's worked harder than any of us to bring this village back from the brink—he needs the food more than I do."

Akari cocks her head and considers him.

Curious.

Well, she supposes that not every worker has the spirit of the comrade in them.

She slips the patchwork baggy back into her pocket. "I mean, that's fair, man."

And not wanting to risk him getting in the way of her plans, she slips forward and strikes him where his shoulder and neck meet, knocking him out before he can blink. A new trick, one she realized she needed in her arsenal.

He crumbles to the dirt in a heap. She leaves him there to be found by the ANBU and heads off before they can catch up to her.

Akari's wrong—she gets to the end of the labyrinth and the room at the end does not, in fact, have the old man in it.

So, she retraces her steps, making another three clones on the way, one of which stays behind with her to open doors and snoop around. A few of the rooms end up being occupied, and she ends up knocking out the skeleton crew of guards left behind.

She finds the old man at the midpoint.

The door blows off its hinges thanks to the explosive seal placed in the middle of it. She drops the
wind jutsu she has around it, containing the shockwaves and energy and sound in a bubble of wind, and as the remnants of chakra fall away she watches the explosion's remnants disperse like a balloon having its air released slowly through the spout instead of being popped.

He sits surrounded by seal-etched steel bars on the bare stone ground. His posture is meditative, his hands settled loosely in his lap and his legs crossed, the pot sitting a foot in front of him.

She notes his bald head and long beard. The barbarity of his situation, not a single amenity in place to meet the most basic of needs. The ice-cold dampness in the air.

Then she recognizes the robes around him and a long, annoyed groan escapes Akari.

The man opens his eyes. "Oh, hello," the man says. His voice withers and shakes like it's come out of a cobwebbed phonograph. "Who might you be?"

"Are you fucking serious?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I just—a monk?" Akari says. "You're a monk?"

"I do believe so."

"I didn't think they even had that kind of dumb poo-poo shit here!"

He tilts his head. "Poo poo… shit."

"Oh, fucking…" She groans again. "There's no time for this. We'll deal with this later. We need to go now, or they're going to—" Before she can finish, she feels them pop another clone.

"And where might you be taking me, my dear?"

"Kumo," she says.

"Ah. Thank you for the effort, but I believe I will pass, for now."

"You'll… pass."

"Indeed."

Akari stares at him. "You'll pass."

"Yes, that is what I said."

"Okay. Why?"

A small smile takes over his face like he's been presented with a mangled macrame owl gift from a child. "My dear," he says. "Why would I trade one prison for another?"

She takes a second to consider. "Yeah, okay. Fair. I mean—look, man. You don't have to come to Kumo, alright? You can—I don't know. Go chill in a fucking monastery," she says, only just managing to not gag on the word. "All I ask is that once I get you out of here and we're not being chased by Suna, you let me plead my case. Talk to you about the state of jinchuurikis in the world and try to win you over. That's it."

"Your bargain is my freedom in exchange for a conversation?"
"A political one. And a moral one. I have, like, a thousand different—" Another clone pops. Akari shakes her head and the proverbial swinging blade of doom drops down an inch closer to her head. "Right. Yeah. A conversation."

"Hmm. Very well. I believe that is a fair deal."

"Alright," she says. "Great. Now, how to get you out."

"Oh, that?"

"Yes, that. I don't know jack about seals."

He chuckles.

The old man pulls himself up off of the floor and dusts off his robe. He steps towards the bars, unconcerned. The skin on his hand is crinkled origami paper, soft and worn, in sharp contrast with the unyielding metal as he wraps his hand around the bars. There's a flash of chakra and the sealwork is scorched off the metal. His arms glow blue and he parts the cage like it's made of cardboard.

"You could have left that entire time."

"Perhaps. But to what? And at what cost?"

"Holy shit," she breathes. "I can't wait to sit down and talk with you."

His bright green eyes twinkle. "The feeling is mutual, my dear."

They slip out of Suna amidst the chaos.

People are shouting and bright red paint is splattered all over the otherwise bland, ugly stone structures of the village. And, for a split second, Akari catches sight of a fully naked ninja streaking across the rooftops, screaming incoherently the whole way. A couple of ANBU follow hot on his trail.

"This was your doing?" the monk asks.

"Some of my best work, I think," Akari says. At the clear judgement on his face, she rolls her eyes. "Look—I didn't hurt anybody, alright? I just made a bit of a mess. I had to keep their attention elsewhere somehow."

The old monk hums but doesn't respond.

They take an old side route out of the village that the monk leads her too. A few Suna ninja go down in their wake, but all in a strictly non-lethal manner, as per the monk's ruling. Akari has no interest in arguing.

Rasa works his jaw and glares daggers at the wall across from him. "Run through it again."
"At two in the morning, Akari slipped out of her room and headed towards the middle of the village. She was followed at a distance as per your instructions, to investigate where she went without allowing her to identify she was being trailed," Haru says. "Upon reaching the middle of the village, she created five separate clones."

The room around them is lush, annoyingly so for Rasa. He has no doubt the daimyo puts him in rooms like this on purpose—the man never misses a chance to rub it in Rasa's face that he and his sycophants in the capital want for nothing.

He adjusts the finely woven cotton nightclothes, almost uncomfortable on the overly plush bed as Haru stands a few steps inside the room, a shadow painted on the bamboo walls in stark black by the candlelight at his bedside. A breeze rolls through the room and the flame sputters and sends ripples through the shadow like a rock dropped in water.

"Unable to follow all of the clones and discern which was the real one, two of the agents trailing her each picked a clone and followed it while the third went to gather back up. However, neither of them followed the real Akari. More agents were brought in to canvass the village for her, leaving behind only a handful of guards in the underground base."

He didn't have to ask why they didn't leave a more robust guard retinue behind—with the amount of seal work on the cage, there was no way she should have been able to access Bunpuku. The only person who had ever broken through those seals was the seal master herself. It would have seemed pointless to leave behind more than the bare minimum when they didn't know yet that that was where she was headed.

And Rasa doesn't think Akari is the one who broke Bunpuku out. She might have the ability to stir up chaos but she's no seal master, nor does she have the strength required to bend metal like it's putty. Bunpuku must have gotten himself out, somehow, and she was just there to facilitate.

Haru pauses, her head inclined to Rasa, and he gestures her on.

"It appears that she implemented her clones to distract us. Every time we tracked one down and destroyed it, another would pop up. Eventually, the clones became clear as they grew more and more deformed, but by the time we dispersed all of them and returned to the underground base to see if she had gone there, she had broken Bunpuku out and the two were headed towards a section of tunnels believed to have been sealed off."

"Did you follow?"

"Yes, Lord Kazekage," Haru says. "They are being tracked on strict orders to not engage unless instructed to do so by you."

Rasa clasps his hands together, his elbows rested on his knees.

Bunpuku must be taken alive. Should he be killed, the tailed beast will be released and then the village is out its beast regardless. But attempting to capture him alive complicates things, as does the fact that his companion is a ninja of unknown skill. She is well known for her antics and affiliations to the leadership of Kumo; little information exists about her fighting abilities.

It's too risky to try and engage at this rate.

But that doesn't mean he can't benefit from this situation. What would the new Raikage say if he found out the agent he sent in as a negotiator ended up kidnapping Suna's jinchuuriki?

"Tell them to pull back."
"So you're telling me," Akari says, squinting in the firelight, "that you talk to the Ichibi regularly?"

"That is correct."

"And it's cordial?"

"Indeed."

"Huh."

Bunpuku smiles. "He has been my friend for many years, child. All I had to do was show him the same kindness I show any other living being I encounter."

"Your friend," Akari says. She hums. "And I assume the feeling is mutual?"

"I would hope so."

"Our jinchuuriki's been attempting to do the same thing for a while," she says. "Not sure he's had much success."

"It was no easy feat. A tailed beast is a creature scorned—their trust must be earned like any creature that's been abused. Slowly and with good faith."

"How long did it take you?"

"Oh, perhaps ten years. I have been his vessel for almost twenty, now. We have had much time to build a relationship."

She lets out a low whistle. "You care about him?"

"I do."

"And you want what's best for him?"

"To what extent I can, yes."

Akari tilts her head, intrigued. "Explain."

"I am not Ichibi," he says. "I cannot truly understand what is best for him—only he may do that. I could never hope to comprehend the millennia he has seen and lived, and how this imprisonment must have affected him. While to us, the decades that have passed since the village's inception seem significant, to Ichibi it has been but the blink of an eye."

"Then would you agree that the most decent thing is to allow him to choose for himself?" she asks. "To set him free so he can do that?"

"Is setting him free allowing him to choose for himself?"

"Of course it is. Somebody can't make a truly free choice while stuck in chains."

Bunpuku hums. He stares down at the flames and pokes his stick into the embers. The fire releases a burp of sparks, sputtering happily, and Akari takes another bite of her rabbit.
She had offered him a skewer but he refused. He's vegetarian. Which, even only knowing Bunpuku a few choice hours, is about what she'd come to expect of the man. She might think he's dipshit for wasting his wisdom on religion, but at least he's principled.

"An interesting perspective to pose," he says.

"One you disagree with?"

"I have not yet decided."

"But if you knew it was what he wanted, if he told you himself that he wanted to be free, would you be willing to end your own life for it?" she asks.

"Would I put myself to the blade for him?"

"Yes."

"I believe I would," he says. "But his feelings on the matter might surprise you."

Akari leans back a bit, watching Bunpuku through narrowed eyes.

How she can feel so much respect but so much scorn for one person at one time astounds her.

The first person she meets willing to go to commit for his ideals as powerfully as she is on this topic and yet, on another, she disagrees with him on such a fundamental level. She doesn't understand it. Though, she supposes that's not a bad thing. That's the whole point of free thought: he can believe in his whatever dumb spiritualistic shit he has and she can deem it as dumb garbage idiot shit.

She sighs. She takes another bite and considers him while she chews. "What are you going to do now, then?"

He quirks a feathery white eyebrow. "Already given up on bringing me back with you?"

"Not like I'm going to physically force you," Akari says, shrugging. "And you've not been convinced by anything I've said so far. Besides, just because I didn't convince you now doesn't mean I've given up entirely. I'm just going to recalculate and try again."

Bunpuku laughs. "I look forward to your future attempts, my dear."

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