

barnacles eating steel

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barnacles eating steel

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Summary

A collection of drabbles in a universe where ships girls are saniwas, and sword boys are admirals. Each odd-numbered chapter focuses a ship girl saniwa while even-numbered chapters focus on sword boy admirals. Everyone is in their OU forms (as in: all swords are still tsukumogami, all ships can still fire cannons).

Next: Yamashiro is absolutely convinced Nihongou doesn't exist.

Akashi (the ship)

Chapter Summary

Akashi learns that some fears are justified, and even doctors kill.

Chapter Notes

CHARACTER DEATH WARNING HAHA (CRIES)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Akashi doesn't know how to hold a knife.

She is not like the swords she is surrounded by. She was forged in iron and steel, but also fuel and bauxite, ammunition loaded into anti-air mounts she would hopefully never have to use. Akashi was not made for combat, and never will be-- she is the only specialized repair ship in the Combined Fleet, and her job is something that never taught her how to kill.

She does, however, know how to hold a scalpel.

When they called her up and said she was to get an entirely new job, Akashi didn't know how to feel. There are only so many others who know how to repair, because putting things together is an art much less savage than tearing it all apart. She holds a scalpel like a buttercup, like the fragile handle of Kongou's teacups, because her knife is supposed to slice but never kill.

"Well... I'm not sure if this is really my thing," Akashi says when they fit her into a *saniwa*'s outfit, *onmyoji* hat and all. There is a tentative quality to her voice, the obvious *um um um no* in her pauses which she does not dare articulate out loud. They told her that every single Fleet Girl has this ability, this innate spiritual power that comes with their reincarnation. Their souls are linked to the tides of the sea, the breath of the earth itself, and they have the means to give *tsukumogami* corporeal forms.

The Abyssal Fleet is not the only threat in the world. They are not the only spirits trapped in time, so fixated on events long gone that they try to reenact it. But unlike the Abyssal Fleet, which doesn't have the ability to travel through time, the Retrograding Army is a much more silent enemy. They don't seek glory long past. They seek a resolution they never met with.

Akashi understands the importance of protecting the past, and thus, she doesn't complain that much when she's brought away to a distant place called the 'Citadel'. She promises to write

letters back to Kure Naval Base. She's not sure if she'll have the time for that, but-- well, it doesn't sound like she'll be going back soon.

When she is presented with Kashuu Kiyomitsu's sword, she holds him like a scalpel. He is an artifact to her, not a weapon, and Akashi doesn't think she can ever see him that way, especially when he springs to life with her command.

(They're all so human, just like them. Just like the Fleet Girls. She can't call them weapons, or machinery, or just cold steel.)

Once Kashuu finds his footing, he recovers rather quickly from the surprise of actually *having* feet. "Uhh," he breathes first, before clearing his throat. "I'm the child beneath the river. Kashuu Kiyomitsu. I may be difficult to handle, but my performance is good."

Akashi shakes his hand, taking care not to accidentally crush his fingers. While she's not a combat ship, she's still remarkably strong compared to a human. "I'm repair ship Akashi. If you take a little damage, I can fix you up in the base. Just leave it to me!"

Kashuu smiles, then raises an eyebrow. "Huh?"

"Oh, uh--" Akashi waves her arms wildly. "Nothing, nothing! I'm your saniwa. I'm not experienced in warfare, but I'll try my best!"

The first time Kashuu comes back screaming is after they've returned from the battles of Hakata Bay.

The fortuitous wind that was said to aid the Japanese against the invading Mongols had, in fact, caused the Swords Army to make a great mistake. They called that wind the *kamikaze*, a *divine wind*, and Akashi did not live long enough in her past life to recognize that name as the same one they gave to cascading aeroplanes almost seven hundred years later. But she is certainly alive now, when Squad 1 bursts through the Citadel gates and Kashuu *begs* his squadmates to hide Yasusada from her.

She has never truly been in battle, but she certainly feels the rush of adrenaline that quickly surges through her veins, leading her to throw her room door open and rush onto the scene. Her assistant sword, Taroutachi, tells her the gist of what's happened in a tone more urgent than she's ever heard him having. "The divine wind was against us," he proclaims, and Akashi suddenly feels the sheer gravity of the situation. "When we were searching for the Retrograding Army, they used the wind to catch us off-guard with falling trees and rocks. We managed to fight them off, but Yasusada has been heavily damaged."

Akashi's stomach drops. "Eh?! How heavily damaged?!"

Taroutachi gives her a bow, and he's still taller by a head. "I am sorry. Had I pr--"

"No, it's my fault-- if it was the wind, I shouldn't have told you to go to the North," Akashi quickly says, before shaking her head. "Nevermind! Right, move away, let me look at him!"

This feels familiar, she realizes, as the rest of her swords clear the way for her. A crowd has gathered, but only Kashuu makes himself into a barricade, as if her presence will kill him. This is something she's never seen before, from the boy who always tried to get everyone's attention, and she listens to his words very, very closely.

"You can't fix him," Kashuu chokes. Akashi looks down, and realizes the tip of Yasusada's sword had been snapped off, like a beheading. His human body is-- unresponsive, at best. "Don't throw him away."

"Don't worry, Kashuu," Akashi says softly, bending her knees to pick up the two pieces of Yasusada's real body. "Like I said. I'm a repair ship."

Kashuu doesn't understand her words, doesn't realize their *saniwa* isn't a human herself-- but he does step aside for a moment. "Master," he says in a voice far too serious for such a flamboyant person, "I know what can't be fixed. Like-- I've seen this before--"

"You can come watch me, Kashuu."

Repairing swords is a completely different matter from repairing ships. It is not their human body that needs tending to, but their sword one, and the human body will eventually snap back into place. Akashi lays Yasusada on the floor and begins to work while Kashuu watches, gripping the hem of Yasusada's sleeve as if he'll slip away. She notices that his eyes are trained on her the entire time, but she does not say it. "He's still alive," she decides to say to Kashuu as she gathers materials. "I felt a pulse, see? Living bodies have a pulse."

Kashuu doesn't reply.

Akashi melts steel and folds it into the cracks. Kashuu watches, almost without blinking, always expecting her to stand up and say *I'm sorry, you were right, he can't be fixed*. But Akashi doesn't speak, doesn't move from her seat at all, doesn't even drink the tea Taroutachi brings for her until it grows as cold as the beads of sweat rolling down her face. She works for two hours, five hours, nine hours and twenty-two minutes before she's satisfied with the measurements she's recorded down. She's checked the curvature of Yasusada's blade, right down to the fifth significant number and the dimensions of its thickness. Cannons and guns were always easier to fix, in hindsight-- but swords are at least preferable to human bone.

(Except that human bone is organic and can heal on its own, over time. Swords can't. She thinks swords are better, because they are less complicated than a living body, but that's a fatal misconception.)

This is the defining moment, then.

Akashi draws molten steel across the broken tip of Yasusada's sword and hopes to god she's got everything down pat when she presses it back on. Her finger is punctured on the pointed edge, but she doesn't react. The blood mingles with liquid steel as it digs into her bones. But she doesn't let go.

She has something which other swordsmiths don't have-- the spiritual power to make everything go in her favor.

Yasusada's wound disappears from his neck, and his eyes fly open with a gasp. Kashuu and Akashi have both not slept in more than a day, but they burst into a chorus of sound anyway, a non-too-unpleasant cacophony of *thank god, thank god, I can't believe it, it worked--*

"You're tougher than you look," Kashuu says when Akashi tries putting her own finger back together. "...As I thought. Humans don't heal that quickly."

"What do you mean I'm tougher than I look? Do I not *look* tough?" Akashi laughs at her own words, because she knows she's not what other Fleet Girls would call 'tough', not in the conventional sense. "I'm alright! I just need to bandage it together, and I'll be fine after a while."

Kashuu quickly grabs her wrist.

It turns out that swords are a little more observant than they appear, and Kashuu comes from an age where people still die from toothaches or little scrapes turn into gangrene. It would be a bit too complicated to tell Kashuu that she's not actually *human*, so instead, she just lets him do what he wants. He undoes Akashi's horrible bandaging-- it was just a placebo to convince him she was alright, obviously he didn't fall for it-- and gets to work. He doesn't know exactly how to go about this, and Akashi, who has put so many people back together, can point out a few dozen errors in what Kashuu's doing before he even picks up the needle-- but she doesn't.

"I've sat in one place for, like, *years*," Kashuu mutters, fingers steadier than she expected them to be. Swordsmen don't seem like the kind that can handle delicate work, but Kashuu does fix his own clothes. "Of course I've watched people do this before. Master, it's a little too deep, are you sure you shouldn't get a human doctor--"

"Oh, I'm glad you're so worried about me," Akashi says while reaching out to pat Kashuu on the head with her free hand. "Ah... really, really, I'll be fine!"

Kashuu stares at her. "You're too reckless, Master! Jeez... you're just like *him*, you know..."

Akashi blinks, then decides not to ask who is this 'him'. (She remembers calling her own admiral reckless at times, and wonders if all leaders just go down the same path.) "You could actually say I'm a doctor," she hums, and Kashuu doesn't look convinced. "Hey, what's with that look? I always handle the maintenance of everyone around me!"

"Done," Kashuu suddenly says. "You didn't even flinch when I was sewing."

"Like you said, I'm tougher than I look," she retorts while smiling. "Thank you very much! Remember, Kashuu, don't be afraid. Whatever injury you get, I will put you back together."

"Master--?"

"The first time I repaired you, you said something," Akashi hums. Their first sortie was an absolute disaster, with Kashuu almost destroyed at the end, and she was concentrating too much to respond. "I'll answer it now. Of *course* I love you! You've done so much for me."

Kashuu decides to smile back, and Akashi's words are both what he needed to hear and what dooms him in the end.

Kashuu does return screaming a few times, but mostly it's at the people who have done idiotic things, or curses at the enemy that carried over to when they flash back to the Citadel. Akashi has met a sword named Akashi Kuniyuki, and honestly, she's ashamed he could share her namesake with someone so profoundly shameless-- but Kashuu retrieved him with a proud smirk all over his face, so she can't be *too* harsh with the tachi.

The alarming event is when Kashuu returns one day, and he doesn't speak at all.

"I'm sorry," Yasusada says, when Akashi sees Kashuu snapped right in half in front of her. Yasusada doesn't open his mouth again, just sits in a seiza and bows, staring ceaselessly at the floor. Kashuu's human body is still present, not yet dismissed by the saniwa's hand, and there's no way in hell Akashi plans on doing that.

She picks up the two broken pieces of Kashuu Kiyomitsu. She holds them like scalpels.

"I'll fix him," she says. She doesn't listen when Yasusada says this isn't a break she can ever put back together.

Taroutachi tries to give her the report-- it was some break in formation, this time, while they were at Atsukashiyama-- but she doesn't hear it. She closes the repair room door, puts Kashuu's body on the floor, and begins to work. She remembers how Yasusada's body still had a pulse, weak as it was. She can't find a pulse on Kashuu. She decides not to waste any more time searching.

Yasusada watches her, like Kashuu did, but he doesn't hold anyone's sleeve. He simply continues bowing down, not daring to look her in the eye, just staring at Kashuu's chest which does not rise and fall. Taroutachi doesn't interrupt her this time. Yasusada learns that their saniwa doesn't need to eat.

She works, works for two hours, three days, two weeks and one more sunrise. She works till her fingers begin to fumble and she cuts her skin so many times on Kashuu's broken edges that he is washed in her blood. She continues for two more seconds before she realizes it's hopeless. The curvature of a Japanese sword simply makes it impossible to fix if it's snapped in the middle. That kind of injury is like-- a torpedo to the hull, a fire in the engine room, the destruction of every steering mechanism whilst heading straight for a rock--

Akashi collapses upon running out of fuel.

Either a *tsukumogami*'s body doesn't rot, or Akashi was using her powers to make sure Kashuu's didn't. As if she already knew he would rot anyway.

"I said I would put him back together," Akashi whispers, and can't quite find it in herself to ask Yasusada to help her.

“Did you know?” Yasusada’s voice begins strongly for someone who has been sitting in silence for over two weeks. Akashi realizes he doesn’t aim to comfort her. “He jumped in front of me and said he would be fine. He said you would never throw him away. You would love him forever.”

They remain like this for a moment, Akashi completely collapsed on the floor, secretly mechanical limbs stiffened together, and Yasusada standing over her, suddenly more human than their own *saniwa*. “He was always careless with his own life. I told him not to blame me if he died. He didn’t blame anyone, but he should have blamed *you*.”

Yasusada is similar to Kashuu, but not at all a carbon copy. He does not offer to stitch up Akashi’s wounds, even if these ones cannot be put back together physically. He doesn’t seek Akashi’s attention, never did, not like Kashuu, and she can guess that perhaps it’s because of this *Okita-kun* he repeated in his sleep when she was watching over him all that time back to make sure his injuries were really healed--

She doesn’t remember if she says *I’m sorry* or *Please forgive me*. Her consciousness returns to her when she’s suddenly back in her own office, smell of fuel all over.

“You were heavier than I expected,” Yasusada says, and he sounds significantly calmer.

Akashi blinks. “Uh... did I black out? S-sorry, I...”

“You’re not human,” he suddenly declares, and Akashi sees the fuel can in his hands. She tastes the oil in her mouth. So he figured it out, then. “Kashuu always said that you liked to call yourself a ‘repair ship’ in front of him. He never understood why.”

“I’ll forge him again,” Akashi almost shouts with as much conviction as she can. “I’ll summon his spirit! He won’t remember me or what’s happened here, but he isn’t gone forever. And I won’t mislead him this time. I overestimated my own abilities. You can tell everyone else what I am-- if you know, I mean, I can explain--”

“I’m sorry too,” Yasusada cuts her off. “For yelling at you. I was angry.”

(Like Okita was, but at least this time, Kashuu can just be forged anew.)

She does not throw him away. She doesn’t even melt him down. Akashi wraps him in cloth, stitches up every wound in his human body, and buries him in the garden. She leaves his sword in his hands. Before he is covered by the earth, she bows and says a flurry of things that no longer matter, such as *I love you*, *I love you* or *I am sorry*, *I am sorry*.

She realizes that she does not need to be a combat ship to end a life.

She pulls him out of the fire like a scalpel.

“Uhh,” Kashuu breathes first, before clearing his throat. “I’m the child beneath the river. Kashuu Kiyomitsu. I may be difficult to handle, but my performance is good.”

Akashi reaches out to shake his hand. “I’m repair ship Akashi. If you take a little damage, I can fix you up in the base. Just leave it to me! But remember: only a little damage! Don’t be reckless!”

(Some fears are justified.)

Chapter End Notes

kashuu must always suffer

Mikazuki (the sword)

Chapter Summary

Mikazuki attends several unofficially compulsory tea parties. Or: he wonders if he's lived for too long.

Chapter Notes

character death warning (but its ok!! they come back!!!!)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Mikazuki tries to skip the first tea party.

Kongou doesn't take *no* for an answer. At least, not easily. If he says he's too busy, she'll just move it to his office so he can work at the same time. If he says he's too tired, she covers the floor in futons and makes him tea in bed. The tea she makes is almost unnaturally strong, and Mikazuki, who thinks his tastebuds may be a bit less sensitive than young humans, immediately retracts on his statement when he drinks.

"See, admirals, this *black tea* will calm your nerves!" Kongou peppers her speech with hilariously exaggerated English words, and at this rate, Mikazuki will be fluent in one more language by the end of the year. That's one more language than any of his masters before. "You can do your paperwork with a clear mind!"

"Hahaha, I suppose I'll trust your judgment," Mikazuki hums. He decides the tea is an acquired taste, and he'll probably like it. Eventually.

Kongou pouts in response. "Why do you say 'suppose'? I won't poison you! Admiraaa~al!"

He puts up much less of a fight the next few tea parties. Somehow realizing he doesn't like the taste of strong English tea, Kongou has begun trying Japanese teas too. Then the more modern commercial teas, mixed with milk and iced instead of heated. Her sisters prepare scones about scones, cakes upon cakes, tiny morsels of sweet desserts or lemon flavors sprinkled onto biscuits to go with the beverages.

The Kongou-class battleships are amongst the strongest in the entirety of Kure Naval Base. If this is how they like to be repaid for their efforts, Mikazuki decides he'll just play along.

Tenryuu elbows Mikazuki in the hallway. "Yo, admiral. Pretty sure Kongou's got the hots for you."

“Me?” Mikazuki seems genuinely surprised for a moment, but Tenryuu decides it’s probably just a trick of light. He’s never surprised. “Hmm, I would have thought she would prefer someone with more energy.”

“Come on, don’t tell me you don’t realize!” She knocks her knuckles against his foreheads. “Anyway, catch ya later, expedition’s going off. Oi, don’t do anything stupid to break her heart!”

The tenth tea party takes place that evening. Kongou asks Mikazuki a lot of things, but he does ask *do you love me*, and she laughs before saying *of course I do!*.

(Kongou doesn’t take *no* for an answer. So, she never asks questions first, and she never asks Mikazuki *do you, too?*.)

On the twenty-third tea party, Kongou tries preparing curry soup while the sister who is supposed to entertain Mikazuki falls asleep.

Hiei was the first of the Kongou-class battleships which he had constructed, and so she is the secretary ship, seeing that she has the most experience under his command. Ship construction is quite different from forging, it seems-- while swords like him are *tsukumogami*, the warships are real girls, the souls of machines reincarnated into human shapes. Construction is the process of taking these very real girls and deciding what ship they are. They throw them through steel and bathe them in fuel, and then they remember *everything*.

“Sleeping on the job again?” Mikazuki’s voice is impossibly calm, but the ships surrounding him has mistaken that for cold anger. In reality, he’s not too bothered by anything. (Is that better or worse?)

Hiei gets up from being slumped on his desk. “Unngh... ah!” She jolts away, almost hitting Mikazuki in the jaw. “What is it? I wasn't sleeping! I swear I wasn't!”

“It’s fine,” he says, patting her on the back to stop her flailing. “You can sleep, if you’re tired. I know the sortie this morning was rather trying, wasn’t it?”

And so, Hiei falls asleep in the futons Kongou has stuffed into Mikazuki’s office, after turning over a few times with an exclamation of *I can’t believe I’m sleeping in my big sister’s bed~!* Mikazuki realizes that it honestly is Kongou’s bed at this point, seeing how often she barges into his office, waits for him to be done with his duties, and accidentally falls asleep before that point.

Mikazuki has a lot of work to do. Most of it is catching up to speed with the 23rd century. At least, when it comes to military tactics, the girls do not need to be trained too much to get the hang of it.

When Kongou appears with a half-stirred pot of curry soup and sees Hiei snoring, she sighs.

“Admiraal,” Kongou whines, “you worked her so hard again! And yourself, too! Don’t you ever sleep?”

“Well,” Mikazuki begins, “I have been asleep for over a thousand years. I’m just making up for that time now.”

Perhaps it is confusing to say that to someone who thinks he is human, but Kongou doesn’t really react, just tilts her head. “*What?*”

“I am much older than I look,” Mikazuki laughs with a smile. “Do you really want to be interested in an old man like me?”

“Like I said, the one who will capture the admiral’s heart is *me!*” Kongou puffs out her chest, like a proud bird, before suddenly leaning over to whisper. “Also, I’ve got a secret to tell you...”

Mikazuki widens his eyes. “A secret? Hahaha, how scandalous. I wonder what kind of secrets you hold.”

“Heeey, you’re horrible, admiral!” Kongou stomps her feet for a moment, before leaning back to his ear. “I’m actually the oldest ship in the entire Kure Naval Base... don’t tell anyone else, okay? I’m trusting you, admiral! To hear a lady’s age is an *honor!*”

“Is that justification for what you’re doing, then?” Mikazuki looks at the papers in his hands. “After all, I’m quite sure romance between an admiral and a soldier is forbidden. Is it because we are both old and shameless?”

Kongou has a lot of things to reply. She could say, *oh, so you actually think there’s romance between us?!* or exclaim *wait, it’s against the rules? Oh, no, no, noooo~!* But instead, she just blinks wildly, making an odd ‘uhhm’ sound before Mikazuki continues on.

“Hahaha! Pay no mind to me,” Mikazuki says. “The expedition team is returning soon. I should check on them. And besides-- normal naval rules do not apply to us. As long as I can unite everyone under one force, everything goes.”

(That’s why the *tsukumogami* of swords are so highly prized for this role. They are older than humans, have seen more things, and are generally a lot more charismatic in their leadership. Even if they don’t seem the type. ...Even if they were never made for combat in the first place.)

Since Hiei is snoring away, Kongou is the one who immediately opens the door for Mikazuki while he daintily steps out into the hallway. The expedition team return with much more fuel, and Tenryuu looks mightily pleased with herself. “A huge success,” she declares, eyes falling to the sword on his waist. “So! Can you swordfight with me today? I’ll go easy on you, since you say you’re an old man and everything. And I don’t go easy for just anyone!”

“Hmm,” Mikazuki hums, and he notices the destroyers behind Tenryuu looking at him expectantly. There is another ‘Mikazuki’ amongst them, a girl named after the crescent moon,

and maybe he should one day tell her that he is the very crescent moon she is dedicated to. “I don’t see why not.”

“Alright! Prepare for a beating!”

“Oh, didn’t you just say you’d go easy on me?”

During the fight, Kirishima somehow jumps in to act as the commentator. The destroyers cheer in their high-pitched voices for Tenryuu, while Kongou frantically stirs that curry soup she was preparing for Mikazuki to eat once he’s done. He dances around Tenryuu, not letting her land a single hit on his sword and not landing a single hit on her.

“What the hell?” Tenryuu tries another slash. “How long have you been practicing?”

“Oh,” Mikazuki begins, “perhaps a few months or so. I was asleep the rest of my life.”

“Don’t be so cocky--!”

The fifty-second tea party is started by Mikazuki, when he visits her in the docks.

She does not scream, or toss him out. She doesn’t go *admiral, this is a private place, get out--!* Her body is submerged in hot water, literally, to heal the wounds she’s sustained. Repairing ships in this way seems a little more simple than swords, and Mikazuki doesn’t completely understand how it works.

Kongou turns around.

“Admiral, I could’ve advanced further!” Her voice echoes over the walls, and the rest of the docks are empty. The only one who was damaged was her.

“You may have sunk,” Mikazuki says calmly, waning smile on his face. “You took a direct hit, and was heavily damaged. The moment Hiei reported back, I called for a retreat.”

Kongou slams her fist on the ceramic tile floor, and she pulls her hand back when it cracks into two. Mikazuki doesn’t flinch.

“...Sorry,” she says, first in a voice far too soft for her. And then she repeats it-- “*Sorry!* I’m so sorry! Admiraaal, I got damaged and pulled everyone back! We won’t get another chance to infiltrate the enemy main camp again for ages because I--”

Mikazuki reaches out to pat her on the head. She doesn’t dare to look him in the eye. “It’s fine, it’s fine,” Mikazuki repeats in tandem to her apologies. “I simply couldn’t let you advance. Not even mentioning how worried Hiei sounded-- you’ve served me for so long, I couldn’t risk letting you sink.”

“Admiral! You’re too kind!” Kongou hugs his legs, and it’s a miracle he doesn’t fall into the water. “So forgiving! This Kongou, definitely won’t fail you again! *Promise!*”

“Haha, I believe you, I believe you,” Mikazuki says. “I have lived for a long time, Kongou. All I have learnt is that another chance will always come. It may take a long time, but nothing lasts forever.”

(Everything turns to dust.)

“Do not rush to put yourself in danger,” Mikazuki continues, and Kongou nods. “After all, we are both old, but not too old to live.”

Mikazuki reveals a carton of cookies he’s sneaked into the docks, and gives Kongou express permission to eat while there. The tea he’s prepared for her as well is remarkably good for someone who claims to have never done it before (Hiei offered to help, but Haruna immediately paled and feigned illness so Hiei would have to escort her to her room). He even fetches her special tea set when she asks for it.

Kongou wonders if the admiral’s heart is already hers, and decides not to assume such things.

Halfway through the sixteen-thousandth, three-hundredth and eighty-fifth tea party, Kongou turns to dust.

She figured out, around fifty years ago, that Mikazuki isn’t human. “Think of it this way,” Mikazuki explained-- “It wouldn’t make much sense for a normal human to lead all you very special girls, would it?” He told the Mutsuki-class destroyer Mikazuki about the origins of his own name. Tenryuu apologized for all the times she’s threatened to snap his sword in half after losing while sparring.

“So you were *serious*,” Kongou gaped. “When you said you have lived for a thousand years!”

“I never said I was joking,” Mikazuki replied coolly.

Mikazuki does not age. He sleeps sparingly, gets humongous eyebags and even complains about his back now and then. But he does not age, has *never* aged, because the beauty of the sword Mikazuki Munechika is one that transcends the boundaries of time. And it is a good thing that it does, because the Abyssal Fleet are not leaving the seas, not disappearing-- but of course. They are the representations of grief and feelings so strong they gave birth to monstrosity. They will not die for centuries.

Kongou is not completely human, but she is less immune to the passage of days.

She was born as a human girl. She does not age like one, but she still does age. Time is like barnacles eating into steel, lapping up her skin and rusting her mechanics. Normal warships are scrapped long before they reach this state-- and constant maintenance could keep them alive for much longer.

But no one knows how to keep the human part of her from rusting.

Haruna sunk ages ago, before the three thousandth tea party, and they have always poured an extra teacup in her honor. Kirishima was destroyed in a horrendous blast by the enemy-- her headband was the only thing they could recover.

Hiei died voluntarily, stepping down as the secretary ship when she realizes she could no longer move her fingers. Her bones were weak after living for so long in this human form, and it would cost too much steel to maintain her. It wasn't effective. Tenryuu followed her soon after. Mikazuki did as well, still looking as young as she did when she arrived, but they are all older than they look.

"It'll be *fine*," Kongou reassures him, though he does not think he is the one who needs it. "After we're scrapped, we'll just be reborn again. *Problem nothing!*"

Mikazuki lays out five teacups, and five plates. He makes the scones and desserts by himself. "I know. Don't worry about me."

"I heard Hiei was built again," Kongou hums, eyes still sparking with life. "Kirishima and Haruna have been good, right? Just because their *onee-san* can't look after them right now, doesn't mean they should slack off!"

"They're all as well-behaved as they've always been," Mikazuki says. Four teacups remain untouched. For the last few weeks, Kongou has refused to let her sisters see her like this. "Well, I'm sure they'll be glad to know you still worry so much about them."

Kongou would nod, but she's not sure if it'll snap her neck-- and perhaps she can't even move in the first place. "Sorry, though. That I won't remember anything from this life when I'm built again."

Mikazuki's smile doesn't drop.

"I've lived for very long, Kongou," he replies, as if he's said this a thousand times. "I will simply meet you again."

"Thank you," she manages to say. And then, she adds as an afterthought, but it is just as important as everything else she's said-- "Mikazuki."

For a moment, Mikazuki considers asking if she loves him, but her eyelids seal shut and she cannot respond.

On the first tea party, Mikazuki prepares Kongou's favorite tea.

She takes one sip before her eyes widen and she immediately stands up. "Admiral! This is *super!*"

"I'm glad you think so," Mikazuki replies. Her sisters say something else, something like *welcome back* or *I missed you*, but Mikazuki can't hear it over what Kongou shouts next.

“A man who can brew tea is such a *gentleman*,” Kongou declares, balling her hand into a fist before punching the air. “Right! I’ve decided! The one who will capture the admiral’s heart, is *me!*”

Mikazuki drinks black English tea. He decides that it has always been his favorite.

“I am much older than I look,” Mikazuki laughs with a smile. “Do you really want to be interested in an old man like me?”

Chapter End Notes

have you ever thought you have lived for too long

ALSO PLS SEND IN REQUESTS BECAUSE I HAVE 0 IDEAS OTHERWISE

Maya

Chapter Summary

Maya realizes that living a simple life isn't so bad.

Chapter Notes

i love maya..... my wife. also some depictions of violence

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“*Crap*,” Maya swears when she realizes why the basket she was holding felt so heavy-- “I meant to put three-hundred units of steel into the smithy, not six-hundred! Hoy, Kasen, why didn’t you stop me?!”

“I didn’t think you were capable of mistaking six-hundred steel for three-hundred,” he deadpans, taking a sip of his tea. Like the insufferable brat he is. “Please do not swear, Master, it is unbecoming of a lady.”

Maya sticks her tongue out. “I’ll become the unbecoming of your *ass* if you don’t--”

“Inappropriate,” Kasen spits, cutting her off. “Well, since it’s already melting, I may as well assist in the forging. Let’s get to work before we end up wasting everything.”

Their endless back-and-forth does not stop, even as the sword in their hands begins to take shape, and Maya *should* be concentrating all her energy on the forging but she *isn’t*. She doesn’t remember what she was saying, exactly, when everything went south-- *go to hell*, probably, or some other less tame variant-- and in that exact moment, *everything is white*.

“Yo,” Tsurumaru says, and Maya doesn’t hear the rest because he pops up right in her face and makes her trip into the fire.

For all his talk of elegance and the like, Kasen swears a *lot* when he quickly grabs Maya to drag her out of the flames. Tsurumaru catches onto what’s happening and immediately kills the fire by grabbing a nearby water can which was *supposed* to be used to cool his own newly-forged sword, but now Maya is just drenched, shivering, and covered in half-burnt clothes. “No burns to the skin, it seems,” Kasen hums. “That’s fortunate.”

“I’m going to break your nose,” Maya hisses, before looking at Tsurumaru. “You too! Get over here!”

Tsurumaru throws his hands up in a surrender. “Are you sure? I know you’re the saniwa and everything, but your clothes are about to fall into pieces--”

“Prepare your face!”

Someone screams. Kasen, probably. Tsurumaru just laughs.

Maya follows along for sorties. There is no room for arguments there.

She doesn’t require an entourage to escort her, or even a bodyguard to stand by. This is probably breaking a few dozen protocols and defying a few hundred laws in common sense alone, but Maya has never been one for following rules anyway, especially since she now makes up her own.

“Oi!” Maya yanks on Urashima’s ear. “Pay attention, pipsqueak, we’re all supposed to be scouting!”

Urashima practically squeaks under the tug, and attempts to pry his saniwa’s fingers away. He doesn’t succeed. “I am, I am! I’m just-- er, distracted, my lady, about how you’re putting yourself right on the front lines and in danger! What if something happens?”

“If you guys were actually incompetent enough to get me into trouble, I’ll just join the fighting,” Maya replies with an off-putting flick to the wrist. “You’re a wakizashi, use your eyes! Shoo!”

Needless to say, her roughness isn’t for everyone. But she is not cold, not unkind, and most definitely not cruel.

When the combat squad returns, their saniwa’s muscles are aching just like theirs-- perhaps a little less so, because she didn’t fight and she *is* a warship, but that’s a technicality. “What a day,” she groans while popping open a can of fuel disguised as coke. “Oi, Kasen!”

No response from her assistant sword. Maya wonders why the hell she chose him first. “Ahem. KASEEE--”

“Hey, hey, Master, he’s writing.”

Tsurumaru is the one who cuts her off, and Maya just turns her head back to glare at him. The sides of her mouth is completely covered in oil. Tsurumaru pretends it doesn’t smell. “So he sent me out to talk to you instead. What’s up?”

“What’s he writing?” Maya sighs, before cracking her neck. “Nevermind. Get over here and massage my back.”

Tsurumaru blinks. “Massage your back?”

“Are you deaf, boy?” Maya says that without venom or anger. “My back hurts, so massage it. Just around the shoulders.”

With a shrug, Tsurumaru decides to just go with it. While Maya leans backwards, Tsurumaru sits cross-legged behind her to begin kneading her shoulders. “If you make Kasen do things like this all the time, it’s no longer a surprise that he hides away so much. Oh, Master, you have a lot more muscles than expected! Your shoulders are rock-solid!”

“*Too* solid. They’re all stuck together and stiff,” Maya mumbles. “At least you’re stronger than Kasen. Oi, a bit more force at the back.”

“Are you sure? You know, I might dislocate your shoulder at this point.”

“I’d like to see you try.”

As if taking up the challenge, Tsurumaru begins pressing onto Maya’s shoulders all the more harder. He’s stronger than an ordinary human, but still not that strong, so Maya feels no fear about him actually dislocating her shoulder. Tsurumaru helps to pop the back of her neck, and she pushes back her scapula--

That’s when Tsurumaru picks up a *real* can of coke, still cold from the fridge, and sticks it to the back of her head.

The sudden cold makes Maya yelp immediately, accompanied by an immediate jolt forward. She leaps onto her feet, as if she’s rushing into battle, but her surprise dissipates when she just hears Tsurumaru laughing.

“Hahaha! Sorry, sorry. But look, you leaped all the way forward!” Tsurumaru continues chuckling. “I haven’t seen you that worked up since I accidentally made you fall into the fire. ...Oh, what’s with that murderous look, Master?”

Maya balls her hand into a fist. “You! Don’t run away! Get back here--”

She chases Tsurumaru through the Citadel for the rest of the day. Kasen sighs and prepares dinner for everyone except the two of them. Tsurumaru, sporting a gigantic black eye, shares a bag of chips with Maya.

From then on, Tsurumaru’s surprises only get worse.

Sometimes, Maya would wake up, only to realize her wallpaper has been completely replaced by pictures of birds. Or, even worse, she would wake up and realized her hair has been dyed in some ugly neon color. Tsurumaru would then promptly waggle a bottle of hair dye remover in her face, and another chase would ensue.

Or perhaps he would try pulling the classics on her-- for example, a bucket filled with liquid of questionable origin would be positioned above her room door. Once she dodges the bucket with her excellent reflexes, she would then trip on a rope she didn’t even realize was there until it was too late. An entire sack of flour would be emptied on her, much to the amusement of Tsurumaru, who would then have to spend an hour or so nursing his bruises. Once, Maya spent the entire day being followed by music-- upbeat tunes while walking, a sad melody

when she accidentally broke her favorite mug, dubstep when she began to prepare for a sortie, and-- worst of all-- *sexy jazz* when she was just innocently talking to a certain Shokudaikiri Mitsutada. It was at that point where she commanded Tsurumaru to get the fuck down from the rafters and turn off the goddamn iPhone, holy *shit*, no matter how similar Mitsutada is to Tenryuu, she's not *interested*--

"So," Tsurumaru laughs, "were you surprised?"

"You're really asking for it now," Maya growls after he's caught replacing all her shampoo with fish paste. She was seconds away from using it, and the only reason she didn't was because she's far too familiar with the scents of sea life to not notice. "Tsurumaru! What's up with you and surprising people?"

Tsurumaru shrugs. "Well, Master, you're always complaining about how simple your life is, and talking about going skydiving or racing... I mean, if even time travel isn't enough to sate you, then I've taken it upon myself to make your life more interesting!"

"Bullshit," Maya retorts. "As if you'd bother that much."

"Hey, don't underestimate how much any of us care for you, Master." Tsurumaru says it in such a casual tone that Maya almost misses the fact that he's being serious. "You're a good person. But you keep getting right into danger by following us along. We get worried about that, you know."

Maya sticks out her tongue. "I've said it once and I'll say it again. I'll be *fine*. Honestly, the enemy would be a piece of cake for me!"

"Master," Tsurumaru interrupts, "it's nice to keep yourself on your toes, but don't put your life in jeopardy. You're human. We're the swords. We'll be the ones fighting."

If Maya was speaking to anyone else, this would be when she retorts. Perhaps she would finally declare how she wasn't really human, not at all, and the hardness in her shoulders is not just made from muscle. But because this is Tsurumaru, her eyes only widen. "Eh? Tsurumaru, are you okay? Did you fall sick?"

"Hey, hey, just because I'm being serious doesn't mean I'm ill," Tsurumaru says. "By the way, Kasen's making curry tonight."

There's immediately some kind of sparkle in Maya's eyes. "*Alright!* I'm getting the lion's share! No arguments, it's an order straight from the saniwa!"

And so, their conversation is forgotten, buried amongst a midst of many others. Maya does not realize how deeply Tsurumaru treasures this simple life, with only the mildest of harmless surprises. She does not realize how much he knows that the future can slip away from under your feet ever so easily.

She laughs over the curry, poking fun at Ichigo's inability to take spice and how Urashima's hair is falling into his food as well. She does not think about how not everyone may be here at the same time tomorrow.

It happens while they're looking for Nihongou.

When Maya hears reports that a few missing swords may have been spotted, she sets out immediately. Firstly, she needs her swords to fight through three 'training courses' to gain government permission to enter the damn area in the first place-- "It's just *that* dangerous," Hotarumaru hums. "But we can do it!"

"And we have to fight through for three courses *again* the next week to renew our rights," Maya sighs. "Well, then we've just got to find him in this week! The Retrograding Army's probably gathering their troops and their kidnapped swords here. We'll beat them up 'til they drop everything for us!"

Maya follows along, of course. Everything is as usual-- Kasen remains the steadfast (?) captain, while Tsurumaru follows in second position. Urashima and Mitsutada follow along the middle, while Hotaru and Ichigo tail on by the sides to wipe out anyone remaining. Maya fetches the horses, and the sortie begins.

Things go wrong when they encounter something lightning fast.

Maya has not yet set foot in the history of Ikedaya, because it is too dark a memory and her tantous are still only training. So she's taken completely by surprise when the yari zips across the front lines, striking right after the troops fire and no one has the time to even twitch.

"Shit!" Maya swears to no one in particular, except for the sky, and the swords scatter immediately to try wiping it out. "No, no-- is everyone okay?! If you can't get rid of it, retreat and regroup!"

Everything had been going too easily, so *remarkably easily* compared to when she was fighting at sea. There were no unlucky potshots to the engine room, no torpedos to dance around-- but nothing lasts, and both on and off the battlefield, fortunes change in moments. When even Hotarumaru can barely strip off the yari's equipment, Maya decides she *can't* let fate get the better, and she marches towards it--

But no, it's already too chaotic, the rest of the enemy squad is mobilizing and *god knows* where Kasen is, Ichigo is screaming something and not at all sounding princely, Mitsutada yells in a voice that isn't cool at all, Hotarumaru's been hit, Urashima's lying in the corner, this--

She wipes around to try punching the enemy oodachi. then, she learns how different close-range combat is compared to guns or aerial warfare.

Her hit misses, barely gracing its side as it feints. It raises the entire oodachi to focus completely on her, and now, she finally hears Tsurumaru's voice as he barrels into the oodachi's side and grabs Maya.

They both end up tumbling down the slope and into a groove of some nearby bamboo.

“Wh-- what the hell,” Maya pants, forcing herself up on her elbows and checking for injuries. “Tsurumaru! Crap, where’s everybody else?!”

Tsurumaru’s ragged breathing can be heard right next to her, and her eyes dart left and right to look for approaching enemies. “*Heh...* this should be fine. Jeez, the yari in the training courses weren’t as tough... no tachis, oodachis or yaris can enter the bamboo, right? We should be safe for now.”

“Yeah--” Maya blinks. “Hold on, then how come you could slip your way through?”

Tsurumaru gets up on his knees, and he’s kneeling to Maya. He’s not standing up. “About that... right, hah, they really got me this time, huh? What a surprise...”

“Stop being cryptic!” Maya forces herself onto her feet. Fuck bruises, they’ll get better-- “Tsurumaru! What’s--”

She grabs Tsurumaru’s clothes. It’s wet.

It takes two seconds to realize her arms are running with blood, and three more to realize they aren’t her own. Tsurumaru lets out some sort of discordant laugh before his back arches and he collapses backwards, so Maya can see exactly where the blood is spilling from-- his abdomen. His sword is in his hands. Half of the metal has been shaven off. It’s the human equivalent of disembowelment.

That’s how he fit through the bamboo. He’s almost in pieces.

“Fuck, *fuck--*” Maya immediately grabs Tsurumaru. “Oi, stay with me! Sheathe your sword, hold onto my shoulders! We’ll find Kasen, he has the time travel device, and retreat!”

“Master,” Tsurumaru breathes, “I’ll go ahead instead. Find Kasen while I distract them.”

Maya spits on the floor, heaving herself up with Tsurumaru on her back. “No way! With those wounds, you’ll be an easy target!”

Tsurumaru tilts his head. “Isn’t that the point?” He pushes onto Maya’s back to try squirming off. “Master-- there’s got to be an entire enemy squad between us and the rest of them. I’m being serious now, it’s either the both of us or--”

“There’s no such thing,” Maya hisses through her teeth. She can see the enemy in the distance, burning fire seeping through ashen bones. “There’s no such thing, you hear me?! We’re all getting out of here!”

Tsurumaru sends a kick into Maya’s knees. She doesn’t even wince. “Sorry for speaking rudely-- I can’t even speak much, okay, just-- hear me out, I’ve lived--”

“Don’t you dare say you’ve lived longer than me when you act like a kid--”

“I don’t want you to die!”

(It's sometimes better to live a simple life, where you don't have to come to terms with your own mortality so often.)

Maya pauses for a moment. The enemy doesn't. She still can't see the rest of the squad, so she reaches to her back to grab Tsurumaru's arms and drag them across her shoulders. He's taller than her, technically, but Maya has carried entire crews of men.

"I won't die," Maya promises. There are no guns on her person, and now she's got a passenger on her back, but she won't miss this time. "Aren't you the one who said not to put my life in jeopardy? It's fine, I'm in no danger at all."

Her voice is soft as she finishes her sentence, and Tsurumaru can't see it, but she's smirking from ear to ear.

"So," Maya begins, "I'm going to make a ruckus! *Come at me!*"

Tsurumaru can barely hold on when she jumps right at the first oodachi before it can even move. There is no yari in this squad (thank god), so she has all the time in the world to literally punch a hole right in its face. She swiftly sends a kick down its stomach before whipping around to grab the approaching uchigatana by its neck. While the oodachi recoils, Maya *swings* up the enemy uchigatana's human body like a ragdoll, before slamming it right into the oodachi.

She then grabs the uchigatana's sword and snaps its over her knee like breaking chopsticks.

The bodies of the Retrograding Army are rough with bone splinters and crackling fire-- little scratches embed themselves on her skin, but nothing more. Tsurumaru almost screams when a tachi almost slices into her arm, but Maya then grabs the tachi *by the actual blade* before crushing it in her hands. The shattered metal causes wounds to be etched all over her palm, bleeding messily only the grass, but the damage she's done to the enemy is more than enough to make up for that. Maya snaps to the right, and the remaining oodachi is already mobilizing, blade swinging down to her face--

"Don't you know how inelegant it is to attack a lady!?"

Kasen somehow manages to parry the oodachi away, giving Maya the time to jump back. "Oh! There you are!" Her voice is peppy, as if the sliced-up skin on her hand doesn't hurt at all. "Hey, where's the rest of the squad?"

"We're here, we're here!" Urashima flies in to disable the second uchigatana. "Kamekichiii! Hang on!"

"Next time we come here," Mitsutada pants after wiping out the last enemy, "we're bringing shield soldiers."

Tsurumaru's just surprised there even is a *next time*.

When asked about her fighting prowess, Maya just shrugged and said she was trained in the martial arts.

“What, no pranks today?” Maya looks around at the suspiciously innocent-looking courtyard. No rope traps, no strings to trip on, no odd smells or strange colors-- it’s disconcerting.

“Tsurumaru, did I fix you completely? Let me check!”

Tsurumaru quickly waves his hands in front of his face. “No, no, it’s nothing. Just... after the surprise you sprung on me, I don’t think I can ever top it again.”

Maya rolls her eyes, before pinching Tsurumaru’s nose. He yelps. “Yeesh, I’ve been telling you all the time! I can fight! I’m *Maya-sama*, after all! You just don’t listen!”

(Maya is made for action, but she supposes she can treasure this simple life, the interludes with no fear of death or nasty surprises.)

Chapter End Notes

alRIGHT heshi ttk next, then maybe ooyodo saniwa, then kuri ttk?

Hasebe (Heshikiri)

Chapter Summary

Hasebe is a fantastic first follower. A first follower is not a leader.

(Or: What's in a name?)

Chapter Notes

im so sorry heshi and ossan and

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Nagato is built, constructed out of more steel and fitted with more bullets than Hasebe could ever imagine, he immediately takes out a list of names to check how many more ships the naval base can handle. This list cascades down onto his office floor, spelling out the names of mountains, of seas, of ancient cities and of eras long gone. He then takes these names, filled with feelings and gorgeous imagery, and assigns them all a goal, a mission plan, an enemy to outwit, a life to end.

The secretary ship Nachi took one look at these plans and said, with her breath smelling of alcohol tinged with industrial fuel: “So, when will we get to rest?”

Then, before Hasebe can answers, Nachi laughs as if it’s a joke to herself. Hasebe barely bristles. “You can rest in the time between the operations,” he answers, and Nachi laughs even more.

Becoming an admiral is akin to stepping into a different world, or perhaps stepping on a landmine and being reborn. It has been so long since Hasebe has thrown away his sense of self, his individuality, and every single thought towards the idea of his own future. He is a sword, nothing more, nothing less, and simply gaining a human body did not change that. He did not entertain the fantasies that so many others had, others more foolish than him, some unable to even serve their master to the end. Their lives ended in betrayal and blazing fire eating into their bones, and that is a fate Hasebe would never accept, and would never want for himself.

He has been a captain before, but never the person who creates the battle plans from scratch, especially not for naval battles. He looks at their guns and is reminded of Oda Nobunaga’s *arquebusiers*, charging down Mount Hiei and shooting every monk in their way. He looks at

the second ship of the Kongou-class and wonders if she knows about the atrocities committed on the mountain that is her name.

“I am Battleship Nagato, pleased to meet you. Leave the enemy battleships to me,” Nagato greets, stepping out the docks and giving Hasebe a quick bow. Her eyes then fall to the name stitched onto his coat. “Do I call you Admiral Heshikiri?”

“You may call me Admiral Hasebe,” he replies. He has learnt now to wince at that name.

“You lousy piece of shit! I hate you! *I hate you!*”

Akebono’s howling can be heard by every person in the building, but most pretend, for her sake, that they cannot.

There is no hesitation within her, no apprehension other than the minute sobs between her words. Hasebe turns around to look at her. “I asked for a mission report, not this.”

“Ushio’s dead,” Akebono spits, and that’s all she needs to say. “You knew this would happen! You sent us to-- to an area filled with *submarines*, and one of them launched an opening salvo, so she was hit! But you ordered us to continue ahead! You--”

“I am aware,” Hasebe quickly returns before Akebono can continue. “I am so--”

“Sorry isn’t *enough*--”

Fusou picks Akebono up while she’s still kicking and screaming, muttering something under her breath, something that sounds like her own name. Hasebe only realizes later that she was saying *misfortune*, *how unfortunate*, *how--*

“Heeere’s the mission report,” Junyou begins, and she tries slurring her words out even though he can tell she isn’t drunk and definitely isn’t happy. “Upon encountering the enemy boss squad, their opening salvo struck Ushio, and she sank before the battle begin. We managed to wipe out the boss because Akebono got reeeal close and personal to make sure they were sunk. I heard from Nachi we’ll get a medal for our efforts and all.”

It’s an incredibly informal report, but Hasebe has learnt to keep his expectations low. “Thank you,” he says, and Junyou doesn’t say *you’re welcome*. “I understand my orders were difficult to carry out, so I praise you for succeeding in your mission, even with one ship down. This victory is due to your leadership, and Ushio bravely fighting to the end.”

“Mhhhm,” Junyou hums. “You’re talking like you expected us to defy you.”

Hasebe looks up. “Of course not. Loyalty is the least I expect from all of you.”

There is a funeral later, with an empty casket because they could not even retrieve Ushio’s shattered remains. The eulogy is always the same-- she carried out her orders with pride, and she perished while bravely defending her comrades. There is no need to ever change it.

But when the night falls, Nachi suddenly bursts into the room, completely drunk off her ass and no longer laughing. “Junyou wants you to change the eulogy,” she hiccups, and Hasebe stares at her incredulously. “Oh, she said-- she said Ushio was terrified. She continued forward because she thought defying you would be worse than death.”

Hasebe takes a deep breath, and he is not sure whether to feel anger. Because it is true, that the punishment for disobeying *should* be worse than death, because they are the soldiers and he is the general. It was the same when he was the soldier, and it always will be. And this kind of abrupt, blatant disrespect from his very own secretary should be punishable in the worst possible way.

But then Hasebe remembers it's not the sixteenth century anymore. So he calms down, until Nachi continues.

“That's what she said, Admiral Heshikiri.”

“Get out,” Hasebe immediately says. “If you can't keep your head now, you can't be trusted with the position of secretary.”

Nachi leaves without an argument, as if she was already expecting this result. As if she *wanted* it. And for a brief, terrifying moment, Hasebe wonders if he deserves the name, *Admiral Heshikiri*. If he is instilling so much fear into his discipline that he embodies the rage of his previous master.

People feared Oda Nobunaga the most when he was being kind. They feared him because he was unpredictable. If Hasebe simply remains as he is, consistent, commanding respect-- then it should be fine.

(But is that an excuse not to be fine?)

He sits back onto his seat-- when did he stand up, anyway-- and looks through that list of names again. He needs another secretary. Perhaps the girl that performed so well during the previous few sorties, then.

When Nagato enters the admiral's room, she also smells faintly of alcohol. What Hasebe doesn't know is that Ushio fought alongside Nagato in their past lives. That Ushio and Nagato surrendered together, giving up both their dignity and whatever hopes they had left for the *Kantai Kessen*, the decisive battle that never came. Ushio was there when Nagato was stripped of all the pride she was born with, failed all the expectations placed upon her.

What Hasebe also doesn't know is that Nagato was there, when Junyou and Nachi got way too drunk and too many things were said. She was there when Nachi said, *Do you know how much he hated being called Admiral Heshikiri?* She heard Akebono immediately cry out *Admiral Heshikiri! Admiral Heshikiri, I hate you!* She saw the fleet girls nearby, stricken in their grief and their fear for an admiral they do not love, rising in unison to holler that name. As if it would destroy Hasebe. As if he could hear them from buildings away, in their rooms, crying into their hands.

Nagato stands up straight and bows. "I, Nagato, would be honored to become the secretary ship, Admiral Hasebe."

"How is Akebono?"

"Still uncooperative," Nagato states. "She refuses to go on sorties. I fear that if we send her out, she will prove a danger to her fleetmates."

Hasebe looks at his list of names. Nagato can't understand why he uses paper instead of a computer, because he definitely doesn't look like a crooked old man who can barely understand how a screen monitor works. (But he is, isn't he?) Akebono's name is a single symbol in kanji, a name that means *dawn*, the beginning of a new day, a splendid burst of color across the starlit sky-- but Hasebe does not seek her colorful language, or her splendidly rude tone. "She is already too strong for expeditions," Hasebe notes. "With how she's trained and been remodeled once, she will use up more fuel than others."

"Yes," Nagato nods.

Hasebe puts down the list on the table, and he crosses off Akebono's name. "Send her in for scrapping."

"Understood."

It should be an honor, to die for your master. Ushio's death was an honor. And Akebono's will be as well-- even though she has to be dragged, kicking and screaming, by Nagato because she *knows* what's going to happen to her. Hasebe concludes that they do not see their deaths as an honor because traditional Japanese values has degraded to nothing, and they are unappreciative, detached from their culture, and too entrenched in the future.

(But it is the opposite. These are the girls who remember another life, a war they fought, a time where they *did* see their deaths as an honor. They also remember all the atrocities committed and lives taken for this very same honor, and when they are reborn, they cannot find themselves thinking the same thing. They have gone through too much after being taught too little.

People saw Oda Nobunaga as a demon because he defied those values, defied honor, defied Buddhism and the well-being of the Emperor.

And now the fleet girls see Hasebe as a demon because he hangs onto those samurai ideals without letting go or allowing any defiance. Hasebe is different from Nobunaga, but ultimately, those under him do not feel that difference.)

"Nagato," Hasebe begins after she's finished the job. "Why do you follow my orders?"

Nagato looks surprised for a moment. "Because you are our admiral."

If Hasebe had just gained the role of admiral, he would have accepted that answer without a second thought. If this was the same Hasebe who was under the *saniwa*, there wouldn't even

be another answer in his mind. But Hasebe has seen more than he ever expected, been placed with responsibility beyond himself, and he shakes his head.

“Is that the answer you truly feel, or is that the answer you think I want to hear?”

“I can give you another answer,” Nagato says. “I follow your orders because I know you are only doing what you think is right. That’s what I feel.”

And the worst thing is, Nagato is completely right, because Hasebe does not enjoy cruelty or sadism.

This is just the way he is.

Nothing can change it.

In the days that follow the funeral and Akebono’s scrapping, Hasebe does not act like anything is out of place. He speaks with Nagato about the state of affairs in their naval base as if he does not realize the unspoken truth is *everyone hates you*. He does not ask for their affection, after all, only their loyalty.

“Hey, admiral,” Nachi one day begins. Hasebe would expect her to sound bitter over her demotion, but also isn’t surprised when he can’t hear any of that. “Do you know what some ships call you when they think you can’t hear them? They call you *Admiral Heshikiri*, someone as cutting and cold as his last name.”

He immediately dismisses her, but the damage has been done. Sometimes, the full extent of a defeat cannot be measured in the resources lost, or the bodies left behind. Instead, defeat comes in the form of a name, a title that will never be washed away from a person’s image. The stern admiral with no passion in his eyes and only results on his mind, *Admiral Heshikiri*, is what he is now known as. He knows he is defeated because this is the one power the fleet girls hold over their admiral-- the power of their own words. And unintentionally hearing that name, around the corners and through the walls, is like being ground under someone’s boot, a constant reminder of *you cannot erase him, that Oda Nobunaga, you cannot erase his legacy or simply forget about him like you did with Kuroda Nagamasa. You cannot be kind like Nagamasa either, because it is Nobunaga who named you first. Remember, you are stained by his bloodshed forever.*

Nagato is the one who finally brings it up one day. “Don’t you hate that name, admiral? Can’t you punish those who say it?”

“Don’t you think,” Hasebe *snaps*, “that I’ve done enough?”

His words are something that sound foreign even to himself, because it is a concept he is unfamiliar with. That he’s done *enough*, and that even as the general in charge, there are some things he has no right to do. “Do you ever wonder,” he breathes, “why I act like this?”

Nagato is named after an old province which Nobunaga never managed to conquer in his lifetime. Her name means ‘long gate’, evoking the imagery of towering splendor and red *torii*. And just like her name, she almost towers over Hasebe now, standing just a bit higher in her waterjet heels and upright headgear.

“I will listen if you have anything you want to say,” Nagato answers.

And then he tells her.

“I remember what it’s like to be prized.”

Nagato’s declaration is enough to make Hasebe look at her.

The name she assigns to him, *Admiral Hasebe*, is chosen out of basic respect. It doesn’t matter if Hasebe told her enough to make her understand why he hates that other name which creeps through the hallways, or whether she even knows that he’s not completely human. All those sort of things aren’t important for her to know. And in turn, Hasebe doesn’t need to realize how Nagato knows exactly what leadership feels like.

Nagato was the flagship of the Imperial Japanese Navy. When orders were given, they were shouted from her stern. When she speaks now, voice pitched low and mind forever thinking of military tactics, she hollers with the same voice her captains had. When bombs were dropped and people screamed in fury, they screamed her name.

And when bright light consumed her-- it was some sort of futile revenge for people already gone.

(But it’s better that way, isn’t it? Because she can handle it. But Hasebe--)

“I do not want to transpose my memories onto yours,” Nagato continues, without elaborating on any of those ‘memories’. “But I want to say that I understand.”

And that is the one pivotal difference. Because no one understood Nobunaga, not his closest advisors, not his family, and definitely not foreign missionaries who were haughty enough to consider themselves his friend.

Nagato understands what it means to be prized and then given away for nothing.

“What’s in a name?”

Nachi breaks into the admiral’s room when Hasebe is out and Nagato decides to just let her in, as long as she doesn’t spill sake on anything. (In retrospect, perhaps Hasebe made Nachi the secretary because she reminds him of someone he both remembers and doesn’t want to.)

“Hey, Nagato, what’s in a name?”

“What?” Nagato raises an eyebrow. “What are you going on about?”

“Why does he hate that name so much?” Nachi looks at the navy list. “What’s in the name of every single ship he’s struck off this paper?”

“Nachi,” Nagato sighs, massaging her temples. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but please go and get drunk.”

(But Nachi’s name means *knowledge*, and Ushio’s name meant *tides*. With Ushio’s death, it should’ve been obvious that the tides are turned against them.

“What’s in a name?”)

“As the former flagship of the Combined Fleet, I will lead you to victory on the dawn horizon!”

But she didn’t lead them to victory in their first life, and she won’t now.

Nagato made a request for Nachi to be put as the flagship of the 1st Fleet instead of herself. After all, Nagato has only ever truly fought on Japan’s own waters, and Nachi has knowledge beyond her about the foreign seas. Hasebe agreed to her decision, because he has always praised logic, and he won’t change his mind now.

There’s a surge of Abyssal ships, coming from the south-- tropical waters, where the weather means life and death even more than before. To send his ships out isn’t a decision Hasebe makes. This is the one decision that duty alone decides for him, in the form of a paper sent from the government, and it feels familiar, to simply obey orders from a higher position. It feels familiar, and for some reason, Hasebe no longer likes it.

“I know this isn’t your decision,” Nagato reassures, because this is a high-risk mission which they can’t retreat from as easily as others before. They will fight, and they may die. “But, Admiral Hasebe, promise me one thing.”

In retrospect, he should have known this would be the last time he ever speaks to Nagato. The sudden enemy attack, the fateful decision to swap out the flagships, this promise-- everything is too symbolic, too coincidental, like a story just waiting to unfold. But orders take priority, always does, and Hasebe follows his orders right til the end when it’s too late to turn back. They will lose themselves in this war, just like Oda Nobunaga and the hundreds around him, sailing off to chase the dawn horizon even though *dawn* was scrapped weeks ago.

And so, he forgets her last words to him until Nachi returns without Nagato’s body but only the ghost of her breath, which brushes against his ear.

“Nachi asked me, what was in a name. I’ve been thinking long and hard, and I’ve decided that there is everything yet nothing in it. Because names can be changed, and titles can be

stripped away in seconds. But for as long as you have that name, it will mean everything to you.

Admiral Hasebe, I need you to promise me one thing. Let this sortie be the last atrocity committed in your name. Keep whatever title you want, like how I kept my position as one of the Big Seven. But destroy whatever you don't, like-- the test subject for that enormous light at-- no, nevermind.

I know I may be asking for too much now. But if fate will have it and I return, I, Nagato, will stand by your side. If it doesn't-- even if you think they hate you, if you ask them to help, the fleet girls will. They are not unkind. They know what it is like as well.

If you hate that name, then become a person that does not deserve the title 'Admiral Heshikiri'. Promise me this."

Hasebe bows his head, but Nagato isn't there to stand by him.

Chapter End Notes

i am so so so sorry

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