

Clouds of Thunder

Von Karu

Kapitel 1: In spring, it is the dusk...

Cold. Freezing, biting cold. That's the first thing I notice because... well, I'm prone to having strange dreams. I'd had a phase as a kid where I'd had nightmares pretty much every night. The world being in strange colors, animals in shapes they absolutely shouldn't have, monsters trying to eat me... there had come the time where I'd just rode with it and concentrated really hard on opening my eyes until I really did, ending the dream. No one ever gets *used* to such dreams – or so I think – but acceptance and not freaking out that much helps a great deal in overcoming crazy dreams.

The cold however is another matter entirely – because I have never, *ever*, felt temperature in a dream. Hunger yes, thirst yes, the need to pee definitely, but not a single time any change of temperature.

I open my eyes and realize at the same time that what I'm lying on is *definitely* not my bed, and it's hard with edges, and did I mention the friggin' cold?

Ok, don't freak. I'm staring at a sky gray from clouds, and there is wind and something that *sounds* like a bird somewhere and by now I'm shivering from the cold. What the... no, no, no, you don't panic. There is some explanation for all that – there has to be, because as far as dreams go that tops every single one I've ever had and that says-

Fuck. I manage sitting up and pulling my old, black, *thick*, graduation-sweater closer around my body as I cross my arms in front of my chest in an attempt to defend against the cold. It doesn't help. My sweatpants are even thinner, but at least my socks are warm and fluffy – at the moment.

Hills- no, mountains. Everywhere. This has to be the fucking Himalaya, or at least the Alps with the way their peaks vanish into the misty clouds. It would fit the cold at any rate, and the rocky ground beneath me, but then again if this was the Himalaya there would have to be snow but there is none, so it could be the Alps because it's summer and-

Something moves. Or someone walks, because that's the sound of feet on gravel. I recognize it, because we have too many hiking trails no one ever bothered to asphalt for the simple fact that gravel is *so* much cheaper, no matter how shitty it is for cycling or walking in shoes that aren't sneakers or hiking boots.

My head snaps to the right.

The man's dark chocolate skin stands out against the grayish color of the sky, his peroxide blonde hair reminds me of those native African tribes with the light blonde, really curly hair, but his is straight and- you have to be fucking kiddin' me!

No, just no. This is *not* happening right now, because what is going on here is not right no matter how you turn it, and just fucking no.

I'm creative, sometimes in the strangest way, and I dream crap alright, but this is just...

He doesn't say anything. Just stops three or so meters away from me – of course, he doesn't know me, I could be an enemy, he has to *assume* I'm an enemy – and I stare. Staring is all I'm good for right now, because that fucking Kumo headband is all *in-your-face*, and I'm going crazy, have to be because this is just too real to be anything but.

I was lazing in my bed a minute ago, and now I'm face-to-face with that Kumo-nin who's staring at me like I'm an alien – can't blame him, I am kind of... or more than kind of, and I'm cold and he's a freaking ninja for god's sake, and he could kill me, and this is just too much.

"Who are you? Where are you from?" his voice is deep and the word's sound terrible to my ears because his dialect is just too strong.

He has to think I'm stupid the way I still gawk at him, but my brain just turns what he said over and over and over again, because I understand but I don't, not really, and what is- he's talking Japanese, of course.

Naruto, Kishimoto Masashi, manga. Japanese. The guy is talking fucking Japanese.

Fuck my life.

"Do you understand me?" he asks while coming closer. I'm a shivering, confused, horrified bundle of female on the ground, he has to see that I'm not a threat – no one can act that good, or at least I can't.

Breath. In. Out. Breath. In and out and in and out... I desperately try to slow down my galloping heart and stop staring, but neither really works. Come on, talk to him. He doesn't seem hostile as of right now, and I don't want to give him any reason to be.

"Y- yes, I understand," I choke out, fully knowing my Japanese sounds foreign – I fucking am, no matter if this is Japan, or me going nuts, or the Naruto- better don't think about that right now. Some kind of communication is essential here. Communicate, focus, don't scream, don't run, *don't fucking panic*.

His eyes narrow for a moment, then he steps up to me, pulls me up by my right arm and before I know what happened he's put his white cloak around my shoulders. His grip is tight and he won't let go, but the cloth helps against the cold.

"Who are you? Where are you from?" he repeats the questions from before. His tone is firm and now that he knows I understand him – or at least thinks I do, because my Japanese is definitely not on a conversational level – he obviously expects an answer.

I rummage around my head for the words, but the situation is not best for making me relaxed enough to come up with something that is both comprehensible and tells him what I want to say. Shit, shit, shit, I'm so not up for this.

"I'm human... not from here," is the best I can come up with, and when he gives me a calculating look I can see that he most likely doesn't believe me, though my Japanese seems to be bad enough to convince him that I'm really not used to speaking the language.

This close I can see that his eyes are really dark brown and he has a fine scar running down his right cheek. It would have been easier if he wasn't clever, but his gaze clearly shows that he is and his mouth is one thin line of displeasure. I probably confuse him, but well that's true on both sides right now.

With one sudden movement he has pulled me to his side with one arm and I see his hands coming together, but the moment I think *jutsu* it's already too late and we're, well... vanishing. To the naked eye that's probably what happens, but I actually feel the air rushing past me in a speed that reminds me of a rollercoaster but faster, and before I can even try to see the world passing by us we have already stopped.

So that's *Shunshin*, the Body Flicker Technique.

The shinobi looks at me as if he expected me to scream, or collapse, or do *something*, but I just stand there dumfounded – knowing the technique, theoretically being aware of what it does, and actually *feeling* it work is something else entirely, and just for an instant I'm awed, awed that I'm here and this is really happening, that this is a world where ninja create chakra-

He knocks on the door in front of us and pulls me from my thoughts, the grip on my arm still firm and telling me to behave.

Honestly, where should I run? And why, for that matter? He is a ninja and if one measure's in standards of this world I'm- a civilian. Maybe. But he doesn't that know that. I know that I'm helpless here, but to him I'm the unknown, the wild card.

If I wasn't still terrified I'd be laughing now, because *oh the irony*. I'm small and weak and don't speak their language well, but then they probably can't sense chakra from me, because I have none. I know it because I know this world, however fucked up whatever is happening right now is, but they don't know *me* and they don't know what I can do.

I should have landed in Konoha, I realize with a pang of... regret maybe, even though it's not like I actively did anything to strand here. I *know* Konohagakure, I could have manipulated Sarutobi or Minato or Tsunade or whoever is Hokage right now, could

have told them that I can see the future and-

From beyond the door comes the command to enter, the voice muffled but still much more understandable to me than the one of my captor.

He all but drags me in even though he wouldn't have had to if he'd just let me walk, but telling him that nicely is not in my vocabulary right now – not to mention that it wouldn't have been a good idea to talk back to him.

The room is dominated by a huge, curved wall of windows that overlooks the village.

I know where I am just a second before my eyes turn to the table in front of us and admittedly I'm curious, because if the one sitting there behind the desk is the right *kage* than the situation is not that horrible... because the Yondaime may be stubborn and more than a little frightening, but I don't want to be in a time where everyone is at war with everyone else.

"Raikage-sama," the ninja bows and I hurry to follow his lead. The Japanese value their bows highly – they are important, polite, a sign of respect – and I'm glad that they taught us how to bow properly at university. The first of three bows is just a better nod and the last highly formal, and honestly I can't bend my spine that way, but the second will do and I try to look formal while bowing, hands at my sides, back straight. In karate they taught us to look the enemy in the eye while bowing, but I'm not stupid, so no looking properly at the Raikage before my head comes back up.

Well, shit. I don't know his face.

The Raikage I know the least of are the first and the second, and the Shodaime I'd have at least recognized by his birds nest of black hair, so this has to be the Nidaime – I have absolutely no idea how long he was in office, what he did in his time as *kage* or how he died. Crap, so much for even thinking of manipulating him.

"Aoki-san," the second Raikage calls the shinobi and at least I have a name for him now, and then they start to talk and I'm lost. Aoki's dialect is even worse than I thought and the words are too fast for me to get much out of the conversation.

The only word I really catch – Aoki says it a lot but I only really understand when the Nidaime repeats it, surprise in his words – is *Black Lightning*. And my captor indeed has the tattoo, the kanji for lightning standing out in black ink on his right shoulder. He's probably the creator of the technique, though I don't know what this has to do with me... did he try to do something with the lightning and it backfired? Is this how I got here?

Then the Raikage turns to me and I'm not prepared for looking at him. Not as a leader, nor a potential enemy or someone I can use to get out of this mess, but as a person – because he smiles at me, his dark eyes warm and features relaxed.

He's a nice person. I honestly don't know why it hits me that hard, because Naruto and Sakura and other people in this world are nice people, too. I just didn't expect

someone from Kumogakure of all places to be so nice I guess, not when all the characters I ever knew from here are, well, different from him.

"You understand what we say?" he asks, his voice somewhat hopeful and the words more polite than strictly necessary when talking to a possible foreign shinobi.

"Yes, some of it," coaxing Japanese words out of my head is hard when there is so much else going on. I try to pay close attention and shove all other thoughts to the back of my mind.

He smiles almost encouragingly at me and goes for the next question, his words taking me entirely off guard, "What's your name?"

Fuck, why did he ask that? I think of my name automatically, and the nickname I'm being called by most of the time, and then of the people who use that name, the fact that I'm in a world that shouldn't exist, away from everyone I know, alone in that world, and what if you they decide to kill me? *Panic*. It's nothing I do, it's useless, as useless as tears because it changes nothing, but in that moment it makes me close my eyes, my heart hammer, my head hurt... my mouth tastes like bile.

I swallow and then tell him while opening my eyes. He looks intrigued and tries to repeat the word, but fails miserably since it's nothing Japanese can properly pronounce. His look is kind of apologetic and in the end he just nods.

Then comes a question too long and complex for me to understand the gist of. The Japanese they speak is not exactly like the one I'm used to, I realize then. More *bungo* perhaps?

"Can you repeat that? Shorter sentences, please," I hate this, the stumbling for words. I'm good with words, I know it. I'm a good writer, I know how to sound sophisticated when I have to and – most importantly – I know how to present my opinion. The fact that I can't do either right now just makes me cranky.

"How did you get here? Where are you from?" the Nidaime repeats in quick, precise words and this time I understand.

"I don't know," I couldn't even explain what happened in English, it's not about the language this time, "I was sleeping in my bed... and then I was here. I- I don't come from here."

A partial truth is the best course of action right now for the simple fact that I don't have a clue what part of the timeline I'm actually in. Telling them I'm from Konohagakure in hopes of Kumo handing me over would have been a gamble, and I never gamble. Either you win or you lose, and the odds are never in your favor. Let the Raikage and Aoki think of me what they want, but I'm sticking to *confused and overwhelmed* for the time being.

Telling them that I'm from another world would lead to the question how I know that, and I'm so not ready for telling them that they're just a product of imagination in the

real world. The more real world. Whatever.

His eyes have become sharp at my answer, "What is the name of the place you come from?"

I have no idea what the actual Japanese word for the earth-earth is called, but I think I know at least the kanji, "I can write it?"

It's more of a question than a statement, but the Raikage nods and hands me a sheet, brush and inkwell – I *really* should have taken those calligraphy lessons – and Aoki makes a strange sound beside me. When I look at him he stares like he can't believe I'd be able to write. At any rate I can make them realize that I'm not dumb that way.

Those are far from my best kanji because my experience with a brush is *very* limited, but they are legible. That's all I need for the moment.

After he has studied the word for a few seconds the Nidaime points Aoki to come over and take a look. They talk in hushed voices for a minute or so and I don't understand a word, *again*. Whatever conclusion they come to, when their heads turn back to stare at me two dark pairs of eyes regard me with more calculation than before. They are intrigued, or at least curious.

The Raikage asks something along the line of "Can you write better than you speak?", and my nod is probably a little too enthusiastic, but I *understand* kanji. I get what each one means and then I simply put them together to get the meaning of the word I'm reading.

We pass the sheet back and forth as we "talk". He wants to know how I speak their language, and I answer that a country in my world has similar language and that I studied it. He is surprised again when I tell him that there are many countries with many different languages where I come from. It's interesting that they obviously know that there are other languages but never seriously come in contact with the people who speak them.

Something about the language-issue obviously has caught the interest of both the Nidaime and his subordinate, but I can't pinpoint what exactly it is. They even have me say a few sentences in English, and listen attentively to what comes out of my mouth.

I have almost blocked out what my actual situation is when the word *chakra* and a question are written on a new sheet and handed to me. For a while I just stare at the paper – not trusting myself to look up for fear of giving myself away – and then slowly write an answer that is wholly incomplete, but still manages to convey that I know the *theory* and that some countries I know think of it as something like a science that uses the mind to make the body stronger. My last words are "It's complicated, I don't understand everything." and then I ask for the reason they wanted to know.

Aoki smirks, and it's not nice. It's like he understands that my chakra is not like theirs and that no, I'll never be a danger to them or their world – because I obviously don't have chakra or they would have told me. For a moment I'm both disappointed and

devastated that I'm here in this- this Naruto-world and still have no chakra.

The sudden sound of lightning makes me jump in the comfortable chair the Nidaime was so nice to offer me, and then my eyes focus on Aoki on their own accord.

Pitch black, small bolts of lightning are zipping around his right hand and forearm. I can't help it, I stare.

It's not just close to the lightning bolts coming down in a storm, it's the actual, *real* thing. The scale is way smaller, but it's still the same – and he is making it, creating something I know he shouldn't be able to. The rational part of me, the one that lived in a normal human world for over twenty-three years, tells me that this is *impossible*, that no one can just make lightning, but he *does*, and it looks effortless.

I'm jealous. I want to be able to do that, too. It's as easy as that. It's different when you just imagine it, when it's your fantasy, when you know something like this will never be real... it is real here however, in that world of chakra, and even enough I'm here now I'm still not really part of it. The knowledge burns.

"This is chakra," Aoki sees the awe and envy written all over my face, and it conjures that spiteful smirk on his lips once more.

"Aoki experimented with his lightning ability. That brought you here," the Nidaime interrupts our silent staring contest, and the man in question grumbles something unintelligible in return as the lightning on his arm vanishes.

I don't know what to make of that news, especially since I don't think anyone of the two of them is eager to get me back where I belong. Shite.

"Will you bring me back home?" I have to ask anyway, because even though I'm a nerd and fascinated at being here in the- *don't think it*, here, I'm hyper aware that this world isn't where I belong – these people can kill me in seconds and what stops them is a law that the Raikage can change at will or simply decide that it doesn't apply to me.

"He will try," is all the Raikage says before abruptly switching the subject, "I am the second Raikage, leader of the village you are currently in, called Kumogakure."

It's nice having confirmed what I already know, but there is no new information there and everything I can do is bow to him for a second time and say, "Raikage-sama."

"Sadly we cannot speak your name," he makes the appropriate pause before going on, "We need to give you a name that people from here can pronounce."

"Usui," Aoki cuts in from besides his *kage* without missing a beat, eyeing me with amusement in his eyes. He isn't sure I understand, but I do and I know that it's a badly veiled insult.

I don't have to respond though, because the Nidaime's chastising glare pretty much says it all and a mask of indifference slips on his subordinate's face immediately, Aoki

bowing in apology just as far as absolutely necessary.

"What does your name mean?" he tries, a coaxing smile brightening his dark face, and it makes me *want* to answer the Raikage, simply because he is a good man that doesn't need to actually be nice to me but still is.

I struggle for the Japanese words, "*Protection... and advise.*"

He draws kanji on another new sheet. *Moriko* is the name, but I like neither the sound nor the kanji combination. It can be mistaken too easily. Sighing I shake my head and almost feel the impatience of Aoki in my back, who clearly thinks that this whole procedure is ridiculous.

Three more names follow the first, but they all aren't right. These names aren't mine – will never be – and it makes me somber and unhappy as I realize that there is the possibility that I'll never hear- I concentrate on the new kanji in front of me, the ink still drying. It's a combination of three this time and it looks pretty enough. I ask the Raikage to write the pronunciation above the symbols for me.

Saeko. It's... something I guess, better than the others. Honestly speaking I won't ever like any name they give me, so this one is as good as any other.

"This is good. I like that one," I answer, because he made an effort and if I don't appreciate it I'd show him that I don't care, which I do. Not in the way he probably thinks, but it's better thinking of myself as not as alone as I actually am here, in this world that is not mine and that I obviously don't belong in.

"Very well," the Raikage puts the paper and brush away, "I'm busy at the moment, but we'll talk again in a few days. Aoki will take care of you and show you around the village."

I don't need to know him to recognize that Aoki hates that he's going to have to babysit me, and I'm looking forward to this as much as he is – which means not at all. No objecting the will of a *kage* however, and if I'm lucky Aoki'll be so annoyed with having me around him that he'll actually try to replicate the experiment that brought me here.

Ironically, *this* is what I'd given up a lot for yesterday if someone had actually made me the offer: to come to this place, to experience *shinobi* and *chakra* for myself, to walk around in a world that is not real in my world. *This* however is different. It's Kumogakure, a place I don't know in a time I don't know anything about, without actual chakra to defend myself, surrounded by people I doubt care about me beyond my benefit to their own agenda. I'm completely alone here.

I want my friends. The thought is clear in my otherwise empty head for a second, and it damn *hurts*, but then Aoki takes me under his arm as brusquely as he did when he brought me before the Raikage, and the rush of the Body Flicker takes us away to wherever he wants to go.

