

Revenge Is Best When It's Experimental

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by [AmethystCruel](#)

Summary

A young soul reaper struggles with lingering memories and feelings from the moment she died. The extreme aftershocks of her death leave her with an uncontrollable and violent spiritual pressure and a thirst for bloodshed.

She seems to be a perfect fit for Squad 11, but leaves the Gotei 13 in shock when she asks to be placed in Squad 12. The question begins to arise, why would a prime candidate for Captain Zaraki's squad, insist on being placed in Research and Development?

Notes

OKAY I wrote this one way and I hated it but then like an hour after I posted it, I finally had the whole picture worked out so HELL YEAH
Also I'm weird freaky mad horny for Mayuri Kurotsuchi

An Unexpected Choice

Chapter Notes

So uh idk how this came about it just did. apologies for any grammar mistakes, I re wrote this a few times. I still don't know if I like it or not and im sorry if it feels clunky. squad 11 and 12 are my favorites but im not sure if it comes across as cohesive yet. T_T it'll get better I promise. I hope.

Takes place after the Zanpaktou Rebellion but before Ulquiorra's first appearance in the world of the living.

“-especially not a woman!”

A force cuts through my skull and everything goes black for what feels like ages. Eventually I open my eyes and find myself laying on the grass, somewhere near the river. My hand presses against my forehead as I try to remember what happened. I see glimpses.

A man's voice. Suffocation. Stabbing. Running. Pain. Falling. Concrete. Screaming. Darkness.

That's it. I look around, not sure of my location. It's as my eyes look down that I see it. I begin screaming. I can't stop screaming. I'm looking at-

I bolt upright, my chest heaving as I breathe. My hands are shaking so hard that even as I clench them together, it doesn't stop.

“Fuck.” I whisper, scrubbing my hands over my eyes.

The same nightmare as usual. I'd been having off and on since the moment I came to the soul society. It didn't take a genius' brain to know that I was reliving my death in my sleep. I used to ask questions about it, but that only ever granted me with odd looks and ostracization. It was common for souls to remember their human life right after they cross over. A lot of them spend their first few years searching for their deceased family members. Eventually though, after the first 50 or so years in the soul society...you forget.

Unfortunately, there was no way to remember. It was just part of moving on. I wouldn't mind it so much if I had come here remembering anything else about my life. But that was it. I used to at least know my families names, but those have long been forgotten too. The only thing that remains in my mind now, is my death and the soul reaper that found afterwards and performed my konso. It was because of him that I decided to become a soul reaper.

But becoming one hasn't been easy. Since the moment I died, my spiritual pressure has been volatile. A dangerous intensity with the desire to kill. To seek revenge and bloodshed. How I managed to get here and not become a hollow, I'll never know. I've had to spend my first decade or so just learning to control my spirit energy in my own so I wouldn't hurt anyone... or let it be triggered by the slightest thing.

When I finally tamed it enough to mingle with other souls, I joined the academy. From there, I only got stronger. It wasn't easy though. Endurance, stamina, strength...those things didn't come easy to me at all. At times it felt like my body was fighting me, like just doing too many push up would take me out. The only things that did come naturally to me were my studies.

There was this instinctive desire to read and learn and create. Sometimes it felt like clues, little pieces of who I was before were seeping through. The only real thing I knew about who I used to be, was that I was smart.

I still am. I loved it. To an almost strange degree. Sure, it separated me from my classmates but I found that I didn't mind very much. Although, for a brief time I wondered if being a soul reaper just wasn't in the cards for me. That there wasn't a place for me. But the second I heard about Squad 12, Research and Development, I knew that's where I had to be.

The only real joy and reprieve I had from my haunting nightmares was learning everything and anything I could about this afterlife. About soul reapers, about hollows, about everything. If getting to Squad 12 meant that I had to buff up and make it through a military level training academy, then so be it.

Also I really wanted a zanpakuto of my own with cool powers so...that too.

I pulled myself out of bed and put on my shihakusho. I recently graduated from the academy, and was ready to finally take a shot at getting into Squad 12. I was so ready to go that I was practically bouncing as I made my way out of my small academy room. It was the last time I'd see it, and I was glad.

I had been sharing it with three other trainees and I didn't really fit in well with them. One of them wanted into the stealth force in Squad 2. Another one wanted into Squad 5 because he was convinced he was good enough to take a shot at the open captains position. (He's not.) And the third wanted into Squad 10 because "the lieutenant is hot."

Needless to say, our personalities didn't exactly mesh. Especially when I told them my goal to get into Squad 12. With the reputation Captain Kurotsuchi had for being a terrifying weirdo mad scientist, they didn't exactly think of me as cool either.

As I made my way through the streets outside the academy, a beautiful woman with long, flowing blonde hair was walking towards me. As she gets closer, I recognize her as Rangiku Matsumoto, Lieutenant of Squad 10. (God do I wish I could rub this moment into my roommates face.)

The rumors at school didn't do her justice, though. He had been totally right. She was absolutely breathtaking. (And also very well-endowed, shit. How did she wear her

shihakusho that open and not have a slip?)

I was so caught up in my staring I almost missed what she said as she approached me.

"Hey there! I don't think we've met before. Are you a new recruit?" She asked me with a friendly smile.

I bow immediately, wanting to make the best impression possible. "Yes ma'am, I recently graduated from the academy and am awaiting news of what squad I'll be placed in."

"Ah, a new graduate, how exciting! And please, there's no need to be so formal with me. You can just call me Rangiku." She laughs, waving her hand in front of her.

I breathe a heavy sigh and let my shoulders relax. "Oh good...I've spent so long being warned about watching myself around everyone and staying formal so I don't get reprimanded but it's just not something that comes natural to me. I feel like I've been walking on eggshells for forever."

Not long after I reached the soul society, I found out that I was a relatively young soul and that there were a LOT of really old souls that didn't know anything about how the world changed after they died. Which included most of my instructors at the academy. So I often had to speak in a more formal matter so as not to upset them.

Rangiku laughs again, clearly amused by my nervousness. "Oh, don't worry, I'm not one of those super strict types. Don't get me wrong, there are a couple of uptight stuffy shirts but I'm much more laid back."

"Well, laid back or not, it's nice to officially meet you, Lieutenant Matsumoto. I've heard great things about you."

Sure most of it was about how pretty and fun she was but she was very capable. I had read a lot of her field reports. One portion of our training was reading through multiple different reports from various Captains and Lieutenants so that we could learn from them. *The ones that were public, at least.*

I had actually read up on all the Squads and their Captains and Lieutenants so I could be as prepared as possible. And also I was nosy and curious and just wanted to know.

"Aw, thank you! You're so sweet! So, you're the new promising graduate the captains have been talking about!"

"Oh, you're welcome, I just—" My brain stops for a moment as I process what she said. "sorry did you say the captains have been talking about me?"

"Yeah, they keep an eye on the new recruits. They like to know who's coming up."

I look around for a minute before looking back at her with a blank stare.

“Sorry, you sure you mean me? And not someone else?”

”Yeah! They have your little academy photo with your file!” She laughs like I said something silly.

“My file?” I figured they kept at least a list of all the new recruits but a whole file? (That seems like a lot of paperwork.)

She gives me a smile that makes me feel warm inside. “They've been chatting about you quite a bit. It seems you've caught the attention of your teachers and they all passed their praise along to the captains.”

My eyebrows shoot up and my eyes nearly big out of my head. “Really? Who?”

I got pretty significant praise from my teachers but I never thought they were serious enough to tell the captains.

Rangiku tilts her head to the side and brings her finger to her chin. "Well, let me see. Captain Soifon of Squad 2 has had an eye on you. It seems she's quite impressed by your stealth and control."

Blatant shock fills me at the idea of the captain of the stealth force who trained at the hand of the infamous Yoruichi Shihoin, being impressed with me. It almost knocked the wind out of me. I knew I was quiet and did pretty well on scouting routines but to get her attention was something else.

(Then again, stealth assessments were pretty fun for me because it just felt like a big game of hide and seek.)

"Then, Captain Ukitake of Squad 13 has also mentioned you quite positively. He was particularly impressed by your skills during your final exams."

She pauses for a moment and cuts her eyes at me as a smirk spreads across her face. "On top of that, Captain Kyōraku from Squad 8 mentioned what a hottie you are!"

The last comment has me choking on air as I try to keep my mind on track. Captain Kyoraku was a notorious flirt and from anyone else it would be annoying but from what I knew of the man, he never really meant any harm by it.

“Oh...wow...you don't say, anyone else say anything?” My voice squeaking slightly as I speak.

Rangiku grins, clearly enjoying my flustered reaction. "Well, those were the ones that caught my attention, I kind of got bored towards the end and fell asleep but I can tell you that there were a few others who made comments about you, both good and...well, let's say more critical."

She pauses for a moment before continuing in a more serious tone. "But I wouldn't worry too much about those. Certain captains can be quite strict and nit picky but don't let it get to you, that's just how some of them are."

“Yeah, I heard there were a few tough ones. The one squad I don’t want in is Captain Kuchiki’s...” A shiver runs down my spine.

I had heard horror stories of how cold and mean he was and I wasn’t sure I’d last long if I was stuck with him...especially with my temper and mouth.

Rangiku nods, seemingly understanding my concerns. "Yeah, Captain Kuchiki is a real big stick in the mud. His Squad 6 is known for its discipline and order. How Renji survived under him long enough to become Lieutenant, I will never know!"

She quickly links her arm with mine and begins pulling me with her as she walks. I don’t even question where we’re going because I’m so caught up by her. “Yeah haha...Half the students in the academy with me had no idea what squad they wanted to be in.”

Rangiku chuckles as she pulls me along. "Oh, I know. The choice can be really tough. But hey, you've got plenty of time to figure it out. And in the meantime, you can count on me for some...guidance." She gives me a playful wink, enjoying the fact that I seem so enamored by her.

I laugh instinctively, enjoying the ease and relaxation her presence brings. I didn’t have many friends in the academy. I was more of a loner, so having this moment of friendship felt... really nice. For a little while we walk together while she talks about random things. From what I knew of her captain, he was rather serious and I made the guess that she didn't get to just talk like this with people often.

"So, is there any particular squad you want to join?"

I open and close my mouth, unsure what to say. “Well...there is one...”

Rangiku raises an eyebrow. "Oh? Which one?"

“Well...I'd be happy to make it in any squad at all...but...” I look down at my feet and pause.

She seems to notice my hesitation and squeezes my arm gently. "Hey, it's okay. You can tell me. Come on, I won't judge, I promise."

“Well...It’s my dream to join Squad 12.”

Rangiku blinks for a moment, before bursting into loud, raunchy laughter, like I had told the funniest joke ever. “Captain Kurotsuchi’s squad?”

“Oh, come on Rangiku! You said you wouldn’t judge!” I shout, scuffing my heel against the ground.

Rangiku catches her breath and holds up her hands in a mock surrender, still chuckling slightly. "I'm not judging! I'm just surprised, that's all. You said you were scared of Captain Kuchiki but Captain Kurotsuchi has scared off way more soul reapers than him. There have been people begging on their knees to be transferred out of Squad 12.”

“I know most people see him and his squad as strange but...I was always the odd one out in the academy. So, something about them just seems...comforting to me.”

Her gaze softens as she listens to me speak. "I understand. If Squad 12 feels like where you belong, then who am I to judge? Besides! I was just surprised that a hottie like you chose such a nerdy, underground squad! I mean look at this!"

Her hands shoot out and pull my robes open slightly and I shriek and slap her hand away.

”Rangiku!”

She just laughs some more and throws her arm around my shoulders as we continuer walking. I kept waiting for the moment that she would comment on the weird way I walked or stressed certain syllables when I spoke. Or when I made random observations on something unrelated to our conversation. But that never came. She just...enjoyed talking to me. I’m so caught up in moment I don’t realize we’re now standing in front of the doors to the main meeting hall for captains and lieutenants.

“Um...Rangiku...why are we here?”

She glances at the doors and smirks mischievously. "Oh, did I not mention? I was sent to find you! The captains want to evaluate your skills a bit closer before saying how many of them are open to having you join their squad!”

“What?? They do that??? And no you didn't tell me that!! Rangiku!!” I say half whispering, and panicking.

“Don’t worry, don’t worry! I wouldn’t have brought you here if I didn’t think you were ready. You’re a skilled soul reaper, and I have every faith in your abilities.”

“You haven’t even seen my abilities! You just said you fell asleep in the meeting about me! You’re just trying to fluff my ego so I'm not mad at you!”

She laughs and waves a hand dismissively. “Oh come on, I’ve heard plenty about your performance at the academy. Now come on! The captains are waiting!”

Before I can say anything else, she flings the doors open and drags me into the room and suddenly I’m standing before the entire Gotei 13. The room is silent as the captains and lieutenants turn their gaze towards me. Rangiku grins and gives my shoulder a reassuring pat before using flash step to move across the room and stand behind her captain. Each captain stands in a straight line in front of me. Their respective lieutenants are behind them. The first one to speak is Captain of Squad 13, Jushiro Ukitake.

"Ah, welcome. We've been expecting you."

Before I let the panic seep in, I force my mind to settle and let it move into auto pilot.

I can do this, I trained for this.

I let my mind focus and shift into autopilot. I bow deeply.

“We’ve heard plenty about you from your instructors. Today, we’d like to see some of your skills in action. Are you up for that?”

“Of course sir.” I keep my spiritual pressure steady and calm as I speak.

“Wonderful.” He gestures to an open area in the room. “You can demonstrate your skills there.”

I move forward and take my place before the heavy eyes watching me. The nerves in my stomach are so on edge I could vomit.

"Alright, let's begin."

After what felt like forever moving through every obstacle and skill set, Captain Ukitake raises a hand to stop me. I move back into resting stance and attempt to keep myself looking composed. The last thing I wanted was for them to think that a simple demonstration was enough to wind me. Captain Ukitake turns to the others and they exchange whispers and nods.

“Now the captains would like to ask you a few questions each.”

As he moves back, Captain Komamura steps towards me. You hear a lot of rumors when one of the captains looks like a dog, but none of them ever brought up the almost noble air about him. He carries himself with a very poised and yet welcoming air.

“Impressive performance. Your spiritual pressure is quite powerful. How do you maintain such a steady control over it?” His voice is deep and calming as he speaks.

“Several years of intense practice, sir. My spiritual pressure is naturally very intense and wild and I had to learn to control it very young. The academy helped me perfect it.”

He nods, a hint of what I think is respect in his eyes. “It takes great discipline and patience to control a naturally intense spiritual pressure.”

"Thank you, sir."

He steps back in line and Captain Soifon moves up next. She was shorter than I expected. A lot shorter. She almost looked like a young girl. I would almost say she was adorable if it weren't for the terrifyingly stoic look on her face. She gazes at me intently, her sharp eyes studying every inch of me. The tension in the room seems to grow tenfold as she approaches.

“Your performance and control are both good. However, what I want to know is why I should accept you into my squad?” Her voice is steely and cold.

“If you believe me to be a good fit and would want me in your squad I would be honored, ma’am. I am a hard worker and an even faster learner. I know Squad 2 requires having

immense control over one's body, spiritual pressure and mind. I can provide that without doubt." I even shock myself with how steady my voice is as I respond to her.

She intimidates me for sure so I'm proud of myself. She seems pleasantly surprised by my response, her hard expression betraying the slightest tiny bit of approval. She leans in slightly, her gaze never leaving my face.

"Hm, you speak without hesitation. You remain unflinching in the face of intimidation. That's a trait that few young soul reapers have. I will take your skills and talents into consideration."

As she moves back, her lumbering lieutenant moves up and begins to speak.

"What I wanna know is-"

He's swiftly interrupted by Captain Soifon slamming her foot directly into his stomach.

"Idiot! Only the captains are asking questions! When did anyone say anything about you!" She spits out at him.

"Aw what? I thought we all got to ask stuff!" He complains while stuff his face with food from his pocket.

"No! Now step back and shut up! You're such an embarrassment, Omaeda!"

I do my best to keep my face neutral as she berates him. (But, fuck it's funny.)

Thankfully, the moment is saved as Captain Hitsugaya steps forward. As he does, I see Rangiku behind him, smiling at me. She winks and gives me a thumbs up. I keep my face passive but feel a tinge of joy in my soul at her encouragement. Captain Hitsugaya crosses his arms over his chest. His icy blue eyes locking with mine. He doesn't speak at first, instead studying me for a moment.

"What exactly would make you suitable for Squad 5?"

(Wow, jumping right to the chase. I should've expected that.)

"I'm aware Squad 5 calls for soul reapers that can handle close combat with hollows and maintain their fight to a condensed area to keep from causing any disrupt in the world of the living. I have trained intently on how to handle keeping a precise and quick fight while leaving little to no collateral."

(Which wasn't fun but I knew was necessary.)

He nods for a moment as he listens to my answer. "Good. Showcasing your knowledge of the division shows you've done your research, or at the very least paid attention in training. I am satisfied."

He steps backwards and for a second no one moves. Then, a rustling of pink fabric catches my eye. Captain Kyoraku moves up and gives me a slow, warm smile from beneath his hat. I do my best to fight the blush rising on my face as he lifts it up and shows me his full face. I

had been told the captain was handsome but not THIS a handsome. He was downright gorgeous. He walks with a charismatic swagger, his feet tapping softly on the ground. He gazes at me, his eyes sparkling with amusement and intrigue.

"Ah, you've put on quite a show so far, young lady. Outstanding skills and quite a strong, yet controlled, spiritual pressure. Very nice." His tone is still cordial and relaxed, but there's a hint of seriousness behind his words. "You've been great so far, and many of us are impressed with your potential. But I'd like to know something that isn't just about your abilities. If you could choose any squad you wanted, which one would you want to join and why?"

(FUCK.) I didn't want to answer this question. I really didn't. I didn't want to jeopardize my shot with the other squads if the ones I wanted didn't want me but I also knew if I didn't answer it would look worse. So, I took a deep breath and looked him in the eye.

"While I would be proud and honored to be accepted into any squad in the Gotei 13, there is one that I would choose if I could."

Captain Kyoraku raises an eyebrow, clearly intrigued by my answer. He leans in just slightly, a small smirk on his lips. The entire room seems to lean in as well, eagerly wanting to know.

"Care to share which one you have in mind?"

I know what answer they're expecting. From my tenacity and rough fighting style, it's a no brainer that I would be expected to say Squad 11. Even Captain Zaraki was looking at me with an expectant smirk. My hands are clasped behind my back and I squeeze them together to fight my nerves.

"Squad 12, sir."

There's a brief silence as looks of confusion and surprise flash among the other captains' faces. Squad 12 was normally only directly sought after by soul reapers that were either seen as strange or weren't as tough on the battle field. At least, that's what most people assumed. (I knew better though.)

Captain Kyoraku raises an eyebrow, a hint of concern on his face. "Squad 12...May I ask why? It's a rather unique choice."

I open my mouth to answer but hesitate. I look Captain Kyoraku in the eye as I speak.

"Permission to direct my answer at Captain Kurotsuchi, himself, sir?"

Captain Kyoraku smiles at me, clearly amused by my request. He glances around the room, gaining approving nods from the other captains. Clearly, they're all intrigued by the boldness of my question.

"Granted. You may direct your answer to Captain Kurotsuchi."

I turn to look and immediately feel a rush of fear and adoration as I look up at him. He's even more intimidating than people say. He stares down at me with a bottomless look in his eyes. They seem to penetrate my soul as he appraises me, not an ounce of expression on his face.

His spiritual pressure is intense and overwhelming, yet somehow familiar in a weird way. He doesn't say anything, just looks at me and waits for me to speak. It's clear that I have his full attention.

“I know that it's most likely assumed I would say Squad 11. I was told many times throughout my training that I would be best suited there. And it would be an immense honor to join Captain Zarak's squad. However, I know myself well enough to know that while Squad 11 is what others think I should be, Squad 12 is what I am. And I don't mean that in a demeaning way, quite the opposite, actually. I won't lie, during my time at the academy, everyone gave Squad 12 a bad rep for being strange and weird and in turn treated me differently when I expressed my desire to join.

I've always been a more...intellectual of a student. I was often labeled as odd or strange because I was naturally more inclined to studying and research than learning kido. For a while, I felt like I wasn't good at being a soul reaper because of that but I know differently now. I'm proud of being a bit odd, and curious and studious. It makes me happy. While I love fighting, sometimes more than I should, I love learning just as much. Maybe even more. I want to know. And learn. And discover. It's what I crave. It's what brings me joy.”

Captain Kurotsuchi doesn't speak. He merely tilts his head and grins. I'm not sure how to take it but thankfully I don't dwell on it long.

Captain Kyoraku leans back, a thoughtful expression on his face. "Ah, quite the speech there, very insightful, my dear.”

I nod, digging my nails into my trembling hands. It felt good having all of it off my chest but now it was out there and I didn't know what would come next. I didn't know if this made any of the other captains see me differently.

Captain Ukitake moves to stand with Captain Kyoraku. "Hm, you've given us quite a lot to consider with your choice of squads. I'd like to ask you something about your time in the academy, though.”

"Yes, sir." I respond.

He offers me a gentle smile. "During your time at the academy, you mentioned that people gave you a difficult time because you were drawn to Squad 12. My apologies for that, it's deeply disappointing to hear of that kind of behavior. Did they ever say why they acted that way?"

“Well sir, to be honest with you there are a lot of people that join the academy because they have their own idea of what a soul reaper is. A one dimensional, single faceted idea and nothing else. People assume to be one you have to be a specific kind of fighter. A lot of more...simple minded people don't see the twelfth squad that way simply because they focus on research and development.”

He nods, understanding in his eyes. He glances over at the other captains, noticing some of them nodding as well.

Then, Captain Mayuri Kurotsuchi finally speaks. "Ah, I see. So you feel that your affinity for research and intellectual pursuits makes you a good fit for my Squad 12, hm?"

"Yes, I do. I have a photographic memory and I'm a quick study. I enjoy research, and have a naturally curious nature. To put it plainly, I find it fun. It brings me great joy, creating and developing and learning things. While some of my classmates found my interests to be boring or strange, I was more than satisfied."

He looks almost pleased as I speak. "A photographic memory, hm? A quick learner, you say? A curious nature?" He taps his fingers against the hilt of his zanpakto, narrowing his eyes at me. "Hmph, interesting..."

As he stares down at me, I can't contain the look of awe in my eyes as I think to myself about the endless nights I sat up reading his various research and studies.

He seems to take notice of my staring. A smirk tugs at the corner of his lips. "You've studied my research, haven't you? Admired my work, perhaps...?"

I fight the sudden flush that raises across my cheeks. "Yessir! I have. Specifically about the modifications you made to your zanpakuto, at least the ones you were willing to share in your research."

Captain Kurotsuchi's smirk grows wider, his eyes shining with a mixture of pride and intrigue. "Ah, my Zanpakuto, Ashisogi Jizou. You've shown an interest in it, hm? What do you know of my modifications?"

I could tell some of the other captains were impatient to ask their questions but I was all too happy to converse with Captain Mayuri for as long as he was interested.

"I know you modified it to self destruct in the chance it were to ever turn against you. You wrote that you decided to attempt it after the attack by Muramasa, it was truly a risk breaking your own zanpakuto without knowing if you would get it back after."

His smirk turns into a full-fledged grin at my answer. "Ha! You've done your homework. You really have studied my work. I don't know many people, especially soul reapers, who'd bother to gain that knowledge. Are you aware of any other modifications I've made to Ashisogi Jizou?"

Before I can respond, Captain Kyoraku steps up again. "Alright, you two can discuss this more later. We've got some more captains with questions to get through for now." He says with a highly amused smile on his face.

Captain Kurotsuchi lets out a huff, reluctantly tearing his gaze away. He glances over at Captain Kyoraku, annoyance in his tone. "Hmph, fine. Go on then, let the others ask their impudent questions..."

As he moves back in line, Captain Byakuya Kuchiki steps up, his expression as stoic and unreadable as ever. He eyes me coldly, and for a moment, there's just silence. Aside from the Head Captain himself, I considered Captain Kuchiki to be the most intimidating.

Finally, he speaks up, his voice calm and measured. "You said you were interested in Squad 12, correct?"

The question wasn't what I expected from him. "Yes sir."

He continues to stare at me for a moment, his eyes scanning my face. There's a hint of scrutiny in his gaze, as if he's trying to see through me.

"Hmm, I see..." He pauses a moment before asking. "Then I can assume you have no desire to join any other squad?"

"I would be more than honored to be accepted to any squad."

There is a beat of silence as he absorbs my word. He was clearly not expecting such a simple answer.

Captain Kuchki watches silently for a moment. "I see."

Without another word, he steps back in line, his face revealing nothing of what he's thinking. It leaves me more confused than ever. I'm distracted by the thought though, as Captain Unohana, of Squad 4, steps up. Her eyes are kind, but there's also a hint of sternness as she looks at me.

She speaks softly but firmly. "You mentioned something about your spiritual pressure. You said it was unusual. Can you elaborate on that?"

I shift from one foot to the other. I was beginning to feel like I was under a microscope. "Well, it's always been a bit wild. It's very aggressive and is rather transparent with my emotions."

"And what effect does it have on those around you?"

"Well, before I could control it, it often times caused the people around me to feel extreme discomfort, and paranoia."

Her eyebrows rise slightly at my response. "So it can be distressing to others if not managed. But now that you've learned to contain it, how do others react to it?"

"Most people don't notice it at all since I've gained control over it. I keep a very tight lid on it, so to speak."

"So, you can control it to the point that it's almost unnoticeable. A useful skill, especially for a soul reaper. But tell me, does it ever slip *out* of your control?"

I'm suddenly confronted by the memory of one of my first days at the academy. "It did. Once. My third day at the academy, during a sparring match. It slipped, and ended up running wild. I believe afterwards he was rather shaken up. It's not something I'm proud of."

I lie to myself at the end. Deep down, there was some tiny cruel part of me that was proud of it. Proud that I made him fear me, but I refused to acknowledge it.

Captain Unohana's eyes widen slightly as I recount the incident. The other captains exchange looks among themselves, looks of disapproval and concern in their faces.

"I see and what happened during that sparring match to caused your control to slip like that?"

"It was small and petty. Something I should've been able to deal with but I was still learning control and I let him get under my skin. He was taunting me and it wasn't anything I hadn't heard before, but that day it just wore me down too much. I trained harder to control it after that."

"Ah. So a moment of weakness, a breaking point, led to this incident. And since then, you've trained diligently to ensure it doesn't happen again. That's admirable."

"Thank you ma'am." I say thank you but the words feel hollow. I didn't deserve admiration. It was embarrassing for me, knowing I let some bonehead recruit get under my skin and loosen my control like that. Unohana stepped back and Lieutenant Hinamori stepped up, most likely taking a temporary stand until her squad got a new captain.

"My turn," she says quietly, her voice carrying in the vast room.

From what I knew of her, she was an overall very gentle woman that took her lieutenant position seriously. I had also heard that Aizen's betrayal had hit her the hardest. He was her captain, after all. I could tell the rumors were true because there was a slight tiredness and sadness in her eyes.

"Everyone has spoken of your academic success at the academy. How you passed so easily, scoring the some of the highest marks in the past few years but did you ever struggle with anything while at the academy?"

I pause and think. I had struggled in more physical aspects of my training but when it came to technique and more studious areas, I excelled. "Endurance was probably the hardest obstacle for me. I didn't have much of it when I joined so it took me a while to build it up."

"Thank you." She bows before stepping back.

I rush to bow in return, caught off guard by how quick she was. I then notice there's only two left. Lieutenants Izuru Kira and Shuhei Hisagi, both also standing in for their missing captains. They appear to be deep in thought. They exchange a brief glance, as if they've discussed what to ask beforehand, then Lieutenant Kira speaks first.

"We're going to ask you three questions. Answer as honestly as you can, please."

I nod curtly and wait. They both seemed so serious. Though it could just be the weight of having to act as both Captain and Lieutenant getting to them. While Hinamori was trying to keep a gentle air about the whole thing, these two were clearly much more sober about it.

Lieutenant Hisagi speaks first, a firm look on his face. "Question one. Do you have an ambition, a specific goal you wish to achieve in the future as a soul reaper?"

"I want to achieve bankai." I say immediately.

That was something I knew right away. That was my biggest goal. If anything, I wanted to achieve bankai. Some days it's all I could think about.

Both men nod, as if expecting that answer. Lieutenant Kira speaks next. "Question two. If you were given a direct order that contradicted your own moral code, what would you do?"

(Damn these questions were rough. I mean jeez, I knew that Aizen's betrayal had everyone on edge but this felt a little too serious.)

"It would depend on the situation at hand. If it were to be between life and death, I could sacrifice my own morality to save a life if it were needed. However, if it were an order that seemed unjust, and unlike what the Gotei thirteen stood for, I'm not sure I could follow through."

The young men exchange glances again. It's clear they were expecting a more cut-and-dry answer, but I just couldn't give them one. It was just too vague.

Lieutenant Hisagi clears his throat and asks the final question. "Question three. Think carefully before you answer."

He looks me directly in the eye, his expression stoic. "As it stands right now, what is your honest opinion of former Captain Aizen, and his constituents, Former Captains Ichimaru and Tosen."

"Shuuhei!" Lieutenant Hinamori whisper shouts from her spot, but Captain Kuchiki raises his hand to stop her.

I knew they were just making sure that there were no other defectors for Aizen trying to worm their way into the squads. Some others may have had mixed feelings about answering a question about such powerful Captains but I didn't. Bottom line was, I didn't know them, and I didn't want to.

I steel my face and lift my chin. "I have absolutely no respect or sympathy for them."

Lieutenant Hisagi appears surprised by my bluntness. There's a flash of almost relief in his eyes, but there's also a brief touch of sadness.

"I see." He says quietly, his voice betraying no emotion. "Thank you for answering truthfully."

As they step back, it grows silent again until-

"One final question, young soul reaper."

A booming voice echoes from the back and I almost piss myself when I see Head Captain Yamamoto step forward.

(Had he been there the whole time? I couldn't sense him at all. Not even a little.)

He suddenly seemed even more imposing than I could imagine. Everyone in the room stands a little straighter as the Head Captain makes his way forward. The silence is even more intense than before, if that's even possible. The energy in the room has shifted completely. His presence and reputation is as imposing as his size.

“Yes sir.” I keep my posture impeccable and do my best not to shrink in front of him.

He regards me with a stern gaze, his eyes seeming to see through me. The energy in the room is so intense, I can feel the weight of his next words even before he speaks.

"I have read the report on your incident at the academy. Slipped is an understatement. It took three seasoned officers to pull you off of your classmate and hold you down. They were forced to use kido to bind you. Your sparring partner suffered severe injuries and needed to be kept on a watch until his mental state was stable enough to return to the academy."

I felt like the ground was opening up to swallow me whole. I knew deep down that there was no way the head captain wouldn't be aware of the details. With Aizen's betrayal, it was only right to scrutinize every detail of every new soul reaper that entered the Gotei 13. I just wish I could've been lucky enough to be an exception. The unfortunate truth was, that for a moment, I was trying to kill my classmate. I wanted to kill him and every day since then, I've been afraid that I would release my energy at the wrong person and do something I could never come back from. Worse than that, I was afraid that this would be what dashes my hopes of becoming a soul reaper. That this part of me would be too reckless and risky to allow into the Gotei 13. When the head captain moves to speak again, I'm sure it's to tell me that I'm not fit to be a soul reaper.

"I wish to see for myself what your spiritual pressure is truly like, here and now."

(...What?)

Out of everything asked of me today, this one threw me off the most. The grip I had on my hands was so tight my nails were about to draw blood. “You want me to release the full extent of my spiritual pressure, sir?”

Head Captain Yamamoto's eyes narrow slightly, a hint of impatience in his voice. "Yes. I'm requesting a full release. I need to gauge the extent of your strength firsthand, recruit. If you are worried about effecting anyone in this room, do not. We captains are more than capable of handling it."

I breathe a shaky sigh and close my eyes. I focus on my spirit energy and as I breathe, it feels like a chain breaks. My spiritual pressure surges up like a tsunami wave. My hair whips around and the ground beneath my feet cracks ever so slightly. A massive wave of emotions explodes through the room, my anxiety over this meeting, my fear of standing before the captains, my excitement of being so close to becoming a soul reaper and then, lurking behind it, that one feeling that always waits in the back, that threatens to consume me over and over, an overwhelming, all consuming, intent to kill, rage. The very air around me seems to vibrate with the release of energy. There's an almost shrieking sound in the air. The only feeling in my energy now is a dying intent to kill. Rage. Hatred. Agony. The head captain doesn't move

an inch, the other captains don't flinch but their faces show it all. Almost every face in the room seems to portray the same thought.

Flight Risk.

The lieutenants however, aren't as unaffected. The lieutenants who are standing throughout the room seem to be struggling to remain standing, some of them holding onto the wall for support under the sheer intensity of it. Head Captain Yamamoto, however, remains firmly planted in his spot, his face like stone. Despite the wave of emotions coursing through the room, he doesn't waver an inch. I begin to sense that familiar feeling, one I've fought against my whole life. The feeling of my spiritual pressure threatening to consume me. I begin to worry that I may sink beneath the wave of it and submit to the emotion until Lieutenant Hinamori collapses. The sight of it jarring me back into my body and immediately causes me to pull it back in. It had been a long time since I fully released it and I struggled for a split second to get it locked back down but in no time, I had it fully tamed and pushed down just as I did before.

"Momo!" Captain Hitsugaya shouts as he sprints forward to the shaking Lieutenant.

She shakes her head as he helps her stand, insisting that she's alright. The room quickly falls into a tense silence. The captains and lieutenants take a moment to collect themselves, trying to shake off the feeling of the intense energy. Lieutenant Hinamori is now standing, but struggling to catch her breath. I felt awful. It was common knowledge that Lt. Hinamori suffered a fatal attack at the hands of the defectors and was still weak. Causing her this kind of pain left a sour feeling in my stomach.

Head Captain Yamamoto watches me silently, his expression unreadable. I get up the nerve to look around and check the expressions of the other captains. They exchange glances with each other, clearly taken off-guard by the sheer magnitude of the aggressive energy that was released. The violence of it. The bloodlust in it. Even the captains who seem to have handled it the best, like Captain Unohana and Captain Kenpachi, seem to be looking at me differently.

When the Head Captain finally speaks, his voice is so loud it almost makes me cower. "There is a clear intent to kill in your spiritual pressure. A raging hatred. Do you intend to kill one of us?"

"No sir!" I answer immediately, almost shocked by the question. "I...I've been a very angry person for as long as I can remember. There's a lot of anger inside me. I spent years trying to calm it or soothe it but...there's just too much of it. I'm afraid if I ever attempted release it through a fight, I would either kill someone, or it would consume me. So I keep it controlled. It's something I just have to live with, and I've accepted that."

As Head Captain Yamamoto hears my words, his expression doesn't waver. "I see. Anger and rage are powerful emotions, but dangerous when not controlled. It takes discipline and restraint to tame such intense spirit energy, and it appears you have managed it. Still, there is a very clear desire to kill in your spiritual pressure. You wish to kill someone."

"Yes. I do." I admit. I know there's no point in hiding it. "I've felt that way since I came to the soul society. It followed me through my death, this desire to kill someone in my human

life but I don't remember who. Now I'm left with this undying pain and rage and need for revenge but there's no one there for it to find. So now I live with it, this constant turmoil in my soul."

The captains in the room exchange wide-eyed looks, seeming uneasy by the admission. Even Head Captain Yamamoto seems taken aback, if only for a moment before his expression turns to one of contemplation.

"That is troubling." he states, his voice firm. "The desire to kill, even when you don't know the target, could put your fellow squad members in jeopardy. Are you sure you are able to control this feeling?"

"Yes sir. I am. I've spent my entire life here in the soul society, training and working to keep it contained. The only thing I sacrifice is the level at which I fight. I must hold back when I fight so as not to trigger it. But, if that's the price I pay for keeping control of myself, then I can pay it."

He nods slowly, his eyes never leaving my face. There's a level of respect in his gaze, the kind that comes from recognizing discipline. My determination is unwavering, and I hope he can see that.

"You've disciplined yourself well, and the fact that you can keep your energy at bay speaks volumes. Though the nature of your spiritual pressure is concerning as is the incident at the academy. I believe it is time to give an answer. Captains and current standing lieutenants, if you wish to extended an offer to this recruit into your squad, step forward and speak now."

This moment. This one right here is the hardest one thus far. Waiting, wondering if any of them see me as good enough to be accepted into a squad. I watch as Captain Kuchiki and Captain Hitsugaya step backwards almost immediately.

"While your control and technique are impressive, I'm afraid your energy is too much of a risk to be allowed into my squad." Captain Kuchiki says, his voice almost cruel.

Captain Hitsugaya nods along next to him. "I am inclined to agree with Captain Kuchiki's statement. I'm afraid it is too hazardous. Thank you for your time, though."

I nod my head, and keep my hands clenched behind my back.

(It's fine. That's only two squads. My chances aren't gone yet.)

Besides, there's only one squad that really matters to me.

The head captain also steps backwards, but that one didn't surprise me. It was common knowledge that most people didn't get into Squad 1 unless they were seasoned soul reapers. Working directly under the head captain was a very risk, and special privilege. They couldn't let just anyone in. The other captains glance at each other, contemplating their decision. Some seem to be conflicted, others appear to be more at ease, as if they've already made up their mind. Soon, Captain Unohana also steps backwards.

"You are very talented, but I'm afraid your skills aren't suited for dealing with the injured." She says it with a soft voice, but I can tell what she really means is that my spirit energy is too unpredictable and dangerous to be around people in recovery.

I don't let myself mourn it too much, I know my bedside manner is terrible, so it isn't too bad. Following her, Captain Komamura also steps backwards. There's a pitying look on his face as he speaks to me.

"My apologies, but I'm afraid you may need some more training and time to make peace with your inner conflicts. Knowing that it took going so far as to use kido to restrain you in the midst of your sparring is something I simply cannot overlook."

"I understand. Thank you for the opportunity." My voice cracks slightly at the end and I curse inwardly.

Now things were starting to feel bad. I was beginning to worry. If I didn't make it into Squad 12, and everyone else said no...I would never be a soul reaper. My worry is only made worse as Lieutenants Kira, Hisagi, and Hinamori all step backwards without a word. I feel my throat begin to tighten up, and the sudden pressure of water begins to push behind my eyes.

(This. This was the worst.)

One of the only things that I still struggled with. Rejection. Working so hard, for so long, and being met with no's. Being seen as too risky, or too damaged or too dangerous to be accepted in. I forced a passive smile onto my face as I awaited the rest of the Captain's decisions.

From the back of the room, I could see Rangiku's face staring at me with a pained expression. Her pity only made me feel worse. My eyes meet Captain Ukitake's. As he opens his mouth to speak, there's a look of pain and sadness in his eyes and I know what answer is coming. Before he can speak though, a voice cuts through the air.

"Well, I think you're all a bunch of idiots."

There, in that moment, Captain Zaraki steps forward, towering over me.

"You got some killer instincts kid, that's good. I think you could put up one hell of a good fight with spiritual pressure like that, so despite what the others may think, I believe you'd be a damn good addition to Squad 11." he says gruffly. "If you're interested, I've got a spot open for you."

I no longer am able to control my face. Relief floods my system knowing that if I needed it, I still had a shot at being a soul reaper.

A broad smile breaks out across my cheeks and tears stream down my face as I bow deeply. "Thank you, sir! Thank you so much!"

Captain Zaraki smirks, a rare glimpse of emotion showing on his face. He nods his head in acknowledgement.

"No need to get emotional, kid. I can tell you got the strength to back up your words. You're welcome to join my squad if you want."

Almost immediately, Captain Kyoraku steps forward. My eyebrows raise as he smiles at me. It shocked me that he would see me as having a place in his squad even after getting the full picture of what I was like. Some of the other Captains in the back seem puzzled by his decision but he just keeps smiling.

"I see potential in you, great potential," he says. "Sure, your energy is a little more on the lethal side, but you've already shown that you took the previous incident seriously and applied yourself to maintain a steady hold on it. That's good enough for me. I'd like you to know there is a spot for you in my squad if you choose it."

I bow quickly, my mind screaming with joy at knowing that this is real. That I'm going to become a real soul reaper. "Thank you sir!"

Captains Komamura and Unohana have small smiles on their faces, as if relieved at knowing that I would have a place after all. Head Captain Yamamoto seems to regard me with a sense of approval as well. It's clear that something about me has left an impression on them all.

Shockingly, Captain Soifon steps forward, her face serious and unreadable, but there's an intensity in her eyes.

"I could find a place for you in my squad," she says, her voice cool and steady. "Your skills of stealth and retrieval at the academy were impressive and seeing the level at which you can contain your spirit energy is exactly the kind of control the stealth force looks for. The offer is open if you choose to take it."

My eyes get a bit wide as the air leaves my lungs. I knew she had been considering me for Squad Two but I assumed the stealth force was a pipe dream. That was huge. I bow to her as I speak.

"Thank you very much, ma'am."

As Captain Soifon stands, her expression is stoic, but there's a small bit of satisfaction in her eyes. Somewhere amongst the exchange, Captain Ukitake silently moved backwards, a big smile of relief on his face. I'm sure he thinks I don't notice it but I do. Before I can read too deeply into it, Captain Kurotsuchi himself steps forward and it feels like my heart stops.

"Enough of your ridiculous offers. She already made it clear what squad she desire to join. Squad 12 is always looking for recruits with exceptional skill and intellect. Disregarding your spirit energy, your exam scores show you to have a very high intelligence and I only desire to have those capable enough to do the work I set out into Research and Development."

I barely contain the smile trying to etch its way across my face. I bow deeply. "Thank you so much, sir."

Captain Mayuri gives a slight inclination of his head in acknowledgement, his eyes studying me closely. I suddenly realize, I now have four squads to choose from, and it feels like a

dream.

"Congratulations, you have four squads willingly to offer you a place among them. You will have this week to make your final decision." Captain Yamamoto says, his voice holding an almost proud sound.

I bow for what felt like the millionth time that day and breathed the biggest sigh of relief I ever breathed.

"Thank you, sir. I will have my decision within the next few days."

(I don't need a few days, but I'll be respectful to the captains that offered anyway.)

The head captain then dismisses everyone for the moment, and as soon as he leaves, the room fills with sound, captains and lieutenants conversing, and before I can process it all, Rangiku comes racing forward and throws her arms around me in a tight hug. She's brimming with excitement, her usual cheerful demeanor on full display.

"You did it! You really did it!" She exclaims, her voice filled with glee. "I knew you could do it! Wow, four squad offers! That's impressive! But I wish my captain had offered you a position with us, we could've had so much in the same squad!"

Captain Hitsugaya approaches, his expression as serious as always, but it seemed a smile was trying to break through.

"Well done," he says, giving me a slight nod of acknowledgment. "Four squad offers is something to be proud of, especially for a new graduate. I hope you will make the right decision and choose the squad that will best suit your abilities."

Rangiku spins around, her arms still clenched around me. "Captainnnnn! How come you didn't extended an offer! If you think she's so great you should've said something!"

I laugh softly as she complains. I didn't take any offense to his lack of offer. I knew his squad wasn't the best fit for me, and so did he. "It's alright Rangiku, really."

Rangiku pouts slightly, but she begrudgingly agrees as she lets me go. "I guess you're right, the Captain always has a super serious reason for everything, even if it doesn't make sense to us lowly lieutenants."

"Rangiku..." he says, his tone mild but carrying a hint of warning.

I smile as I watch them. Despite their clashing personalities, they seem to have a really good work relationship. I don't even notice Captain Kyoraku approach me from behind. After a moment, he clears his throat. I spin around and nearly slam face first into his broad chest. My face flushes red as I catch myself. Captain Kyoraku chuckles aloud, clearly amused by me near-face planting into his chest.

He grins, a spark of humor in his eyes. "Careful there, don't want you getting a bruise on that pretty face before you've even officially become a soul reaper."

I laugh nervously, trying to not focus too hard on the fact that he called me pretty. "Sorry, Captain. I didn't know you were there."

He waves off my apology, still smiling a bit. He leans casually against the wall, his hand resting loosely on his Zanpaktou's hilt.

"No worries, no worries," he says, his voice easy and relaxed. "I didn't mean to startle you. Just wanted to see how you're doing after that intense evaluation. Tough decision you have on your hands, four offers, not many people can say that."

"Thank you sir."

His smile softens a bit as he crosses his arms over his chest and gazes thoughtfully at me. "I know you have your heart set on Squad 12 but I think you'd do very well in might as well. Or any of the others too. They're all good squads, and they all see something in you or they wouldn't have offered a spot."

"And what is it that you saw in me that made you offer me a spot?" I ask before thinking, relaxed by his casual demeanor.

Captain Kyoraku raises an eyebrow, a smirk playing at the corners of his lips. It's clear that he hadn't been expecting that question. He studies me for a moment before answering.

"There were a lot of things, really. Your spirit energy control is outstanding, and your performance in combat was impressive. But there was also another more selfish reason..."

"And what is that?"

Captain Kyoraku pushes away from the wall, his lean form uncurling, and he steps a bit closer, his gaze never leaving mine. Before he can speak, he's interrupted by Soifon.

"Don't let him butter you up or seduce you into choosing his squad. Honestly, Shunsui it's beneath a Captain to behave that way." She interrupts, suddenly standing next to him.

"Oh come now, Soifon, I was doing no such thing. I was merely making conversation and congratulating the young lady, that's all. Do you really think so low of me?" He asks teasingly.

"Yes. I do." She responds.

Soifon continues to eye me, her gaze unwavering and somewhat critical, though probably not intentionally. Meanwhile, Captain Kyoraku shoots her a glance, his expression a mix of mild annoyance and good-natured humor.

"Give the poor girl a break, Soifon. We just put her through the ringer, and now you're about to scare her off with your scary face." He says with a chuckle.

Soifon moves to make a snide comment at the captain but I speak first. "It really is an incredible honor to be considered for your task force, Captain Soifon."

She stops mid-sentence, her eyebrows rising slightly in minor surprise before her expression softens ever so slightly, but she still remains guarded and professional.

"Appreciated. Nice to see someone here with some proper manners. " she says with a slightly biting tone before glancing at Captain Kyoraku, who just grins shamelessly. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have some training to oversee."

I watch her leave as her Lieutenant chases after her, begging her to slow down. At the same time, Captain Hitsugaya drags Rangiku away with him saying she had paperwork to finish.

"Awwwww Captain! Come onnnnn. Can't I celebrate with my best friend?!" She wails as he tugs her by her sleeve.

"Rangiku, you met her today. You barely know her. You are not getting out of your duties."

I wave at her as she leaves, feeling a little bad for her considering how kind she's been to me. The rest of the room quickly emptied out, with everyone else giving me a brief congratulations until only I, Captain Shunsui, Zarak, and Mayuri remained. Their respective lieutenants stood just behind them.

"That was some crazy spirit energy. You could put several guys in Squad 11 on their asses with that." Third seat Ikkaku Madarame said as he and Fifth seat Yumichika Ayasegawa pass by on their way out.

"That would be Ikkaku's way of saying he'd love to spar against you some time." Yumichika said, giving me a smile. "Careful though, if you do join our squad, you'll never get away from him."

I place a hand on my hip and the other on the hilt of my sword. "Any time, any place, you just let me know and I'd be happy to knock you around a few times."

Ikkaku throws his head back and laughs loudly. "I don't know what the hell you were talking about thinking you wouldn't fit with us. With that kinda attitude, you're practically one of us already!"

A comforting smile crosses my face as I look down at my feet. "Thank you."

As the pair leaves, I feel eyes on me and glance upwards. Captain Zarak and Captain Kyoraku were looking down at me, their eyes intense with a similar emotion behind them that I couldn't quite place. Standing between them was causing my hindbrain to feed vulgar thoughts to the front of my subconscious. I needed to get out of there quickly before I embarrassed myself.

"Um...well...I suppose I should go think about my decision..." I say anxiously, hoping to get out quick.

I nod to Captain Zarak and Shunsui before turning to leave. What I don't expect is to come face to face with Captain Mayuri. He stands there, his eyes fixed on mine. It's difficult to tell what he's thinking, as expected. But there's a hint of interest in his gaze, the same interest

he'd shown earlier when choosing to extend an invitation for his squad. He doesn't say anything, but just stands there, watching me with an unwavering eye, like he's silently studying me. Several others had told me about how unnerving and scary being stared at by him was but I didn't feel that way. I often stared too much when I was thinking, which in turn gave me the reputation of being the weird one in my class. So, I merely stared back, fully soaking in the first up close look at the estranged captain that I was getting. His eyes stay fixed on me, unflinching, as I meet it with a stare of my own. There's a flicker of surprise in his eyes, and his lips twitch slightly, a rare reaction. Clearly, he's not used to people returning his stare so unabashedly. I tilt my head in return, silently letting him know I saw it. He remains stoic, but his eyes give away just a glimmer of surprise as my head tilts. There's something akin to approval in his face, as if he appreciates my audacity, my lack of fear.

Then, he speaks, his voice cool and measured. "You have a staring problem, girl."

"As do you, sir." I say back, matching his cool and even tone.

A smirk flits across his face at my response, and a gleam of interest sparks in his eyes. He takes a step closer, his head tilting slightly.

"Very observant. And quite fearless for a new recruit. Most people would've scurried away by now."

"Not to insult you sir, but I don't find you frightening or unsettling in the slightest." I say, still matching his calm stare.

Captain Mayuri raises an eyebrow, and there's a slight twitch at the corner of his lips, as if suppressing a grin.

"Is that so? I suppose I should be glad that I don't elicit terror from you, but I can't help but be a little insulted." He says, his voice still cool and steady, but there's a touch of humor in his tone.

"No insult intended at all, sir. If anything I find you rather interesting." I do my best to ignore how close he was standing.

Captain Mayuri's smirk widens just a fraction at the reply. He seems to almost like that I'm not cowering before him like most people do. He takes another step closer, his eyes flickering over my face, assessing me once again.

"Interesting, hm? Are you sure you didn't hit your head back in the academy?"

"Positive."

He seems to relish my unwavering confidence and unflinching stance. It's clear he's enjoying this little verbal sparring match, and to be honest so am I. He takes yet another step forward, encroaching upon my personal space, as he leans down close, we're almost nose to nose.

"You're fearless," he says, his voice low and measured, "Or just plain reckless."

"I can assure you sir, I'm both."

A wide grin plasters itself across his face at my admission, his eyes glittering in amusement. He stays in my space for a moment longer, he looks as if he's searching for something. When he finds no fear or discomfort in me, he takes a small step back, an almost pleased look on his face.

"Reckless and fearless, eh? Perhaps you do belong in my squad, then. I have a feeling you'd work well under me."

"I'm inclined to agree, sir. Now if you'll excuse me, I have some thinking to do." I say as I bow and take my leave.

I needed to move out of his sight quickly because there was a heat coursing through my body that I didn't expect at all. Before I'm able to disappear completely, he calls out to me, his voice tinged with mild amusement.

"Don't take too long making your decision. My patience is only so thin."

Paper Mule

Chapter Summary

Our MC soul reaper has made it into squad 12, now it's time to see how she's settling in.

Chapter Notes

HELLOOOOOOO my dears! I am so glad you like this and enjoy it. Please excuse any errors, I mainly write this on my phone T_T At the end of this chapter I have a little question or two for you all! 😊

Edit: This chapter was longer, but for whatever reason, AO3 wont upload the whole thing.

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

A mountain sized stack of reports made its home in my arms as I carted it around the seireitei. I had already distributed some to Squads 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7. Captain Kurotsuchi had been studying the recent spike in hollow activity around Karakura Town and had written an analysis report on it that needed to be dispersed to every squad captain.

It had been a little over 3 weeks since I had joined Squad 12. Most saw it coming but some were still surprised I didn't take the offer from Captain Soifon to join the Stealth Force. I can still feel the way she stared me down as I told her I was turning down her offer.

3 Weeks Ago...

Squad 2 Main Hall

"Have you come to inform me of your decision?" Captain Soifon asked, lounging in her chair in the Squad 2 main hall.

I bowed as I spoke. "Yes, Captain. I have."

Her unwavering focus remained on me, her demeanor as stern as ever. She allowed a brief moment of silence to linger before speaking again.

"Very well. What have you decided?" Her voice was firm and straightforward.

My hands shook behind my back. "I am honored at your invitation to join the stealth force. I know how rare it is that you offer anyone a seat that hasn't specifically asked to join. For that,

I am deeply humbled. But..."

I could see her folding her arms over her chest, her eyes narrowing at the word 'but'.

"I'm afraid I must respectfully decline. There is another squad that is better suited for my skills."

Her brows furrowed at my response. Her face displaying a hint of irritation.

"I see. And what squad might that be?" Her voice began to take on a more angry tone. "It's not that lazy sleaze Kyoraku, is it?"

I stifle a laugh as I answer. "No, ma'am, it's not."

Her irritation yields just slightly. "Then which squad have you chosen?"

A deep inhale makes its way through my lungs. "I have decided to accept Captain Kurotsuchi's offer to join Squad 12."

Her eyes widened, her face now displaying a look of shock and disdain. "Surely you can't be serious. That man is a walking hazard. His experiments are reckless and his methods are utterly unethical."

"I know, Captain, I do. But, I find him to be very intelligent. I would love to work under him and learn as much as possible."

Her eyes narrow even more as she looks at me. "Intelligent, yes." She scoffs. "But the man is a maniac with a blatant disregard for ethics and the well being of his own squad members. You really want to work for a man like that?"

"I know his methods seem..." I struggle with my words for a moment. "...unhinged to most, but...the results are always beneficial to the soul society, are they not?"

Captain Soifon paused for a moment before taking a deep breath, her tone a bit more measured now.

"His results are undeniable. However, you do understand that by joining his squad, you're all but outright willingly submitting yourself to his experiments? You would still join, even with the knowledge that you will be reduced to nothing more than a test subject, a mere object, in the eyes of Captain Kurotsuchi?"

I meet her gaze with a decisive, even stare. "Yes. I do."

The look of shock on her face is quickly replaced by one of resignation. "Very well. I cannot dissuade you. I only bid you farewell...and good luck."

Don't get me wrong, I was beyond honored by her offer but it just wasn't right for me. These last few weeks in Squad 12, I feel like I've been flourishing. Even with her little jab at me when I dropped some of these papers off.

"Regretting choosing Squad 12, yet? Paperwork mule hardly seems fair considering your skills."

I didn't pay her any mind though. I had learned quickly that that's just how Captain Soifon spoke. It got even easier to deal with her since learning about her secret crush on Lady Yoruichi. I'll admit, I may exploit it from time to time, but who wouldn't? As I weaved my way around various other squad members, I breathed a sigh of relief as I saw Squad 3's barracks come into view. I quickly picked up the pace and made my way inside. As usual, it was hectic. Squads 5 and 9 were about the same way. After losing their captains, all responsibility had to be divided up between the lieutenants and other available squad members just to keep order. Part of me felt bad about dumping more work on them, but I knew it wasn't up to me.

As I rounded the corner into the captain's office, I found Izuru and Shuhei sitting down at the small main table, piles of paper all around them. I was relieved that they were here together. It meant I had one less trip to make.

"Oh. Hey! Sorry about the mess, Shuhei and I thought it would be easier to tackle the captain work together rather than separately."

Great, now I felt worse.

"Unfortunately, this isn't a social call. I'm sorry to say, I'm here to add to the paper pile." I sighed, lifting the paper stack in my arms.

Shuhei groaned and scrubbed his hands over his face as he fell backwards onto the floor. "Come on, more? I don't know how much more I can take."

After declaring my squad choice, Rangiku had taken it upon herself to plan a night out to celebrate me joining the 13 Court Guard Squads. She had managed to drag Izuru, Shuhei, Renji, Ikkaku, and Yumichika along. I got to know them all much better over many, many drinks. Turns out, Izuru and Shuhei are both major lightweights. Shuhei composes himself a bit better, but Izuru is the worst at handling his liquor.

"Well, it's not anything you have to sign, it's just Captain's Mayuri's newest findings about the spike in hollow activity in Karakura Town."

They both sighed in relief as I gave them each a copy of the multi-page essay Captain Mayuri had wrote. Shuhei stared at it for a bit before groaning.

"I'm gonna get a migraine just reading this. Can't he ever just write it plainly? I don't know what half these words mean."

"That's not surprising..." Izuru muttered under his breath with a slight smile on his face.

"What? What did you say?" Shuhei demanded, sitting up fast, his finger pointing in Izuru's face.

Izuru laughed and swatted his hand away before turning to me. "Did you want to sit for a minute? We were just about to take a break."

I smiled appreciatively before shaking my head. "Nah, I can't. The Captain has a timer on me to see how efficient I am at my tasks, so I gotta move quick. I'm just lucky you guys were here together, saved me a trip."

"He's still timing you?" Shuhei grumbles. "Jeez, it's been nearly a month and HE asked you to join his squad. You'd think he'd know that you can do your job."

"Yeah, well..." My voice trails off as I shrug.

The truth is, I asked him to keep timing me. I wanted to get faster, stronger, more efficient, as much as I possibly could. Captain Kurotsuchi being the experiment sucker he is, all too happily agreed. I bid the two lieutenants goodbye and took off towards Squad 6. Hopefully Renji was there so I could just drop off the papers and not be stuck under Captain Kuchiki's cold gaze. A lot of people asked me why I was so intimidated by Byakuya and not Mayuri. The truth was actually really simple. As long as my captain found me interesting, he was fine. But Byakuya? He just seemed like he was born with a stick up his ass.

That was one thing I had to be more careful about. Cussing. Captain Kurotsuchi said that cursing is the easiest way to show your lack of intellect...despite the fact that I had heard him utter a few colorful words once or twice when he didn't get the results he wanted. Though, if you ever brought that up to him, he would give some half hearted response about how it was different when it was reactionary rather than in every other sentence. I understood what he was saying, I did. It was just such a hard habit to break.

"-come onnnnn! Just one little drink? Pleaaaasseeeee...." Rangiku's voice carried across the way as I approached Squad 6.

Renji and Rangiku were standing outside the doors to the inner offices of Squad 6. She had a pout on her face as she pulled at Renji's sleeve.

"No way!" Renji nearly shouted, yanking his arm away. "Last time I went drinking with you, I got so hammered, I overslept and ended up late to my meeting with my captain! He was furious with me! I am not getting in trouble because of you again!"

Rangiku huffed, crossing her arms over her ample chest. "Hmph! It's not my fault you can't handle your drinks..."

Renji's face was slowly turning as red as his hair when I entered the space. "Great! Someone to get her out of my hair!"

"Hey!" Rangiku whined.

I sifted the papers to my hip and I waved one hand dismissively. "Sorry, I can't be your savior today, Renji. I'm just dropping off some papers from my captain."

MY captain. It still felt so weird to say. I did my best to ignore the feelings I got in my stomach every time I said it, but it was hard. They were even harder to control when he referred to me as one of *his* squad members. I knew it meant nothing but I still enjoyed hearing it.

"Aw man. What is it this time?" Renji grumbled, taking a report out of my hands.

"Hollow reports and stuff. Mainly for the captains, so you guys can just hand it off to them."

"Phew! Good! I was worried I was gonna have to actually read all this!" Rangiku laughed, fanning herself with the report she grabbed.

"Well, unless you stop fanning yourself with it, I won't be able to read it at all." Captain Hitsugaya's voice cut through the air behind her.

She jumped up and shrieked, clinging to Renji's arm. "Captain! I had no idea you were there! How long have you been there exactly?"

The small captain huffed, snatching the papers from Rangiku's hands. "Long enough to hear you wasting time asking people to get drunk with you instead of doing your job!"

As he turned to me, I bowed, not wanting to invoke the wrath of the icy soul reaper. He gave me a nod, and I took it as my cue to get out of there. I gave a quick wave to the two sheepish lieutenants as I mentally crossed squads 6 and 10 off my list. Only 3 left. Squad 8, 11, and 13. It didn't feel like too much time had passed, so I felt like I was doing well. The only thing that worried me was that all three captains left on my list had a tendency to distract.

Captain Ukitake always wanted to offer tea and a chat that he assured you would take only a few minutes but then would suddenly be hours. Captain Zaraki, as well as his whole squad, always wanted to spar. Any time, any place. I practically had to fight to get out of there. And Captain Kyoraku? Well, he had a habit of trying to distract anything with long legs and a good rack. I needed to make this quick. Get in, get out, get back to Captain Kurotsuchi.

I decided to go for Squad 11 first. Not sure why, just had a feeling. I could hear the shouting voices getting louder and louder the closer I got to the squad barracks. Swords clashing, spirit energy running wild. There was a reason not many people just hung around the area. If you weren't tough enough, the wild spiritual pressure alone would knock you out.

As I slid open the main door, a random squad member went flying past my head, right out the door. A wave of screaming cheers echoed around the room. In the center, 3rd seat Ikakku Madarame stood with his shirt off, pounding his fists against his chest like an animal.

"THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKIN ABOUT!" He screamed as the other squad members around him cheered him on.

I was so caught up in the show of it all, I barely noticed the soft, nudging spirit energy approaching me.

"Is that for us? Or the captain?" Yumichika's voice asked from my right side.

My head whipped around and I saw him leaning against the wall, watching me amusedly. I gave him a scrutinizing smile as I moved towards him.

"Your captain, which I know really just means you since you're the only one in this squad that's literate." I teased him as I handed him one of the reports.

He threw his head back and laughed. "Hey now! Just last week, Ikakku managed to spell two whole words! Of course, the words were 'fight me' but still!"

The smile on my face widened as I laughed along. While I was more than happy with my decision to join squad 12, there were still times like now, where I felt like I was missing out on something by not being in squad 11. Captain Zaraki sure felt that way.

3 Weeks Ago

Squad 11 Barracks

"Hah? You're turnin me down? For that crazy crack pot in Squad 12? What's so great about him anyway?" Kenpachi's gravely voice echoed about the room.

"It's not about you or him personally, sir. It's just where me and my skills fit the best. That's all, sir." I responded, trying not to shrink under the weight of his spiritual pressure.

"Your skills?" he grunted. "You're a fighting machine, kid. Your skills are better than at least 5 of my own squad members, and you wanna go sit behind a desk all day?"

I press my knuckles into the small of my back to keep myself standing tall. "It's more than that, sir. I promise. My spiritual pressure is still hard to control in more intense fights and I only recently learned my Zanpakuto's name. Putting aside my own personal reasons for joining Squad 12, it's simply safer if I take my time and slowly hone my skills as I work in Squad 12."

I watch him slump back in his chair, grumbling to himself. I catch words like, '*whatever.*' '*waste of potential in squad 12.*' '*crazy fuckin bastard kurotsuchi.*' I do my best to stifle the laugh trying to force it's way out.

His face tenses up as he watches me. "What's so funny?"

I immediately straighten myself up, trying to force my face to a neutral place. "Nothing, sir."

"Don't lie to me. You suck at it."

"I'm sorry, it's just..." I bite down on my tongue, unsure if I should speak freely.

Sure Kenpachi was more laid back than other captains, often speaking in a crass manner no matter what the occasion was, but he was still a captain. My superior. If I pissed him off enough, there's a chance he could kick me out. And it was only my third week.

"Just what? Come on, don't pussy out on me."

There are no words that can describe the feeling that shot through my whole body at hearing him say *that* word. Yeah, he was vulgar and more often than not spewed every curse word in the book but THAT was not a word I had ever heard him say and it was taking everything in me to stomp down my reaction. Maybe that's what caused my lack of judgement as I replied.

"Well, Captain Soifon was slightly irritated by my choice but she was otherwise unbothered. You however, seem like you're...upset that I'm not joining your squad. That's all."

I once again find myself fighting a smile. He looked like a mad child, not getting what we wanted. It was kind of cute. Imagine that...Captain Zaraki...cute.

"Tch! Of course I'm mad!" He spits out. "You'd be great in my squad but instead, you're wasting your power by joining that group of nerds."

"Oh come on now sir, Squad 11 is still one of my favorite squads, just like you're still one of my favorite captains." I say teasingly, unable to help speaking to him in such a casual way.

If I were in front of someone like Captain Kuchiki or Captain Komamura, I wouldn't dare. But something about Captain Zaraki made it easy to just...talk shit.

"Tch." He rolls his eyes as he speaks. "Yeah, yeah I get it... no need to flatter me. Just think your choice could've been better."

"I know, sir." I reply, my eyes slowly beginning to wander across the expanse of his open robes and the scars littering his chest. I won't lie. It distracted me for a moment.

"See something you like?"

My face turns brighter than the sun itself. All I could think to do then was bow and leave. I even considered using flash step to get out quicker. Thankfully he didn't stop me. Not so thankfully, I could still hear his booming laughter even out in the hall as I ran away.

I still get a little red faced thinking about it.

Of all the things I expected from Captain Zaraki, flirting wasn't one of them. I would've been more prepared for him to challenge me to a fight rather than look at me like...*that*.

"Is that all?"

Yumichika's voice pulled me out of my thoughts and I saw him staring at me with a... knowing sort of look.

"What?"

"Oh nothing...just waiting to see if you face normally gets red around men or if it was just around our Captain." His voice was playful and catty at the same time.

I suddenly wanted to curl up and die.

“He told you?” I whined.

”Oh he told the whole squad!” He laughed, putting a hand on my shoulder. “But don’t worry, he thought it was adorable, and very funny.”

“That really doesn’t help, Yumichika.” I said, my face deadpanned. “I have to go now, before I’m embarrassed more.”

I can hear him laugh a little as I leave before he shouts and jumps into the sparring session.

It didn’t take long to get to Squad 8. Much to most people’s idea, the squads weren’t placed in a numerical order. They were scattered around in different places. I was hoping that Captain Ukitake was visiting Captain Kyoraku, that way I didn’t have to go all the way to Squad 13.

The cherry blossom tree in the garden of Squad 8 was in full bloom. Captain Kuchiki had one as well, but this one always seemed warmer. There were a few squad members about but I had yet to see Lieutenant Ise. Captain Kyoraku had tried to get me to just call her Nanao, but I knew she’d hated that, so I refrained.

I started to rush, just a little, cause I knew if I didn’t get back to my own squad in good time, Captain Kurotsuchi wouldn’t be happy. Thankfully, I heard Captain Kyoraku’s voice echoing from a nearby hallway.

“Oh come now, Nanao! You know I’m only teasing!”

As I rounded a corner, Lieutenant Ise rushed past me, grumbling to herself as she held her clipboard to her chest.

“If you’re here for the Captain, go ahead! He can deal with any paperwork himself!”

I watched her stomp around a corner before easing my way through the open door. He was lounging out on the floor near a small table. No doubt the small cups were filled with sake. His hat had been ditched and was sitting on the floor behind him.

”Captain Kyoraku.”

He slowly leaned his head back and his face brightened.

“Well well, I didn’t expect such lovely company today, but I’m sure happy about it.” He said, a sweet, lazy grin stretching across his face.

I moved to hand him a copy of the report. He barely turns, just reaching an arm up to hold it between his fingers.

“My, my, what’s this? Is it a love letter?” His voice was teasing and charming, as it always is.

“Afraid not, sir.” I say, fighting a smile. “Just a report for all the captains.”

He raised an eyebrow at the small stack of papers in his hand, pretending to examine it with mock seriousness.

"Ah, a report from Captain Kurotsuchi, you say? You know I love a good report." His voice is sarcastic before he laughs. "Let's see what he has to say this time."

His eyes skimmed through the paperwork, his playful demeanor masking any genuine concern.

"Ahh, the hollows in Karakura Town" he muses, setting the report aside. "They certainly seem to be causing quite a disturbance lately. It's good to keep tabs on their activities."

He shifts his position on the floor, leaning back on his hands. His face leans back and he stares up at me with a soft smile and a mischievous look in his eye.

"Come sit down, have a drink."

As amazing as having a drink and lounging around with the handsome brunette man sounded, I couldn't risk the wrath of Captain Kurotsuchi if he were to find out I was drinking on the job.

"I'm afraid I can't, sir. I have to get back to squad 12 in--"

"Oh, come on..." Captain Kyoraku chuckled, waving off my concern with a dismissive gesture. "You've been working so diligently for Squad 12 since the day you joined. A little break won't hurt."

The pleading, teasing sound in his voice was exactly the same as the day I turned down his offer to join Squad 8...and it was still just as hard to say no...

Chapter End Notes

Alright! So two questions,

1. Should our MC have a name?
2. Which call out do you prefer for her Zanpakuto?

#1- Fall To Ruin, Fushiginokuni

#2 - Infect Their Minds, Fushiginokuni

#3 - Succumb To Insanity, Fushiginokuni

Learning

Chapter Notes

The second half that ao3 wouldn't publish sorry for the wait!! We'll be back to the long chapters after this! Apologies for any grammar errors I've had trouble uploading this chapter for some weird reason.

3 Weeks Ago

Squad 8 Barracks

I took a deep breath before knocking on the sliding door in front of me. I knew he was in there and I knew he wouldn't be upset over my decision but I was still so...nervous.

"Come on in!"

I slid the door open and found him sitting at his table, an elbow propped up on it as he skimmed through various papers in front of him.

"Captain Kyoraku." I say softly as I bow.

His head raises up and as his eyes land on me, a smile crosses his face and he rises from his seat.

"Ah, there she is. I take it you're here to tell me if you're accepting or declining my offer." His voice is warm and inviting, as usual.

"Yes sir, I am." My voice wavered slightly.

I felt so tightly coiled inside I could break. I didn't know why I was so nervous. I knew he was a very relaxed man, with his own squad members and others. So, there really was no reason for me to be THIS nervous.

"I'm listening then. You're either going to make this old man a very happy, proud captain, or I'll just have to be a little sad that the squad is missing such a lovely girl like yourself."

He crosses his arms, smiling gently. I know I can't stop the flush of pink that covers my cheeks at the compliment he slipped in. Despite my best attempts to ignore it, THATS what made me nervous. He was so handsome and such a smooth talker that I wasn't sure if I'd be able to tell him my decision.

"You flatter me, Captain." I say, my eyes briefly finding the floor. "But I'm afraid you over exaggerate."

“Do I?” He chuckles softly to himself and ruffles a hand through his hair. “I think I’d know a beautiful young woman one when I see one. And I certainly see one.”

I was very quickly forgetting why I was here the more he talked. I had to focus, I couldn’t let myself get distracted. I made my decision, and I need to stick by it. No matter how persuasive and...handsome he was.

“All of...*that* aside. I want to say I’m so very honored that you would offer me a place on your squad...”

He raises a brow as I spoke. Jeez, he really keeps his robe open like that. I don't normally think much about things like this but his chest hair was making me a little warm.

“Of course. I always offer a seat to any and all who impress me at least just a little.” He takes a few steps towards me, leaning down just slightly. “Especially if they're pretty.”

“So I’ve heard...” I reply, slowly relaxing as I give him a teasing smile.

He chuckles softly and steps closer, a curious expression on his face.

“Have you now? And what else have you heard?”

“I would rather not say...” My face flushes more as I recall all the salacious stories the girls in the academy would tell about the heartthrob of a soul reaper.

“Oh? And why is that?”

He tilts his head innocently, trying to play the oblivious one in the situation. Though I would wager he already knew the kinds of things the women in the soul society whispered about him. I keep myself upright as I look up into his eyes.

“Because I have an inkling that you already know.”

His eyes squint for a moment before he pulls back and laughs. “You've got me there. I have heard a whisper or two. I just hope none of them influence your decision.”

“Not at all, sir.” I say as I regain a serious energy. “My decision, I'm afraid, was already made days ago.”

A low hum rumbles from his chest as he crosses his arms, as if he could sense what was coming.

“My, my. You wound me with your tone. You almost make it sound like it’s bad news.” His face was still light, but there was something in his eyes that said he already knew.

I didn't know why, but I suddenly felt bad saying it. “I'm so sorry sir, but I have to decline your offer.”

He looks at me with a small smile remaining on his face, but the smallest trace of disappointment in his eyes.

"I see. So, who's squad have you chosen instead?"

I knew he knew. But I also knew I needed to say it out loud. I needed to be proud in my decision. "I'm going to take Captain Kurotsuchi's offer to join Squad 12."

I watched him turn and sit back down by the table. "I figured that. The way you spoke at the exam, I knew it'd be a challenge to try and sway you my way. Still wanted to hold out hope that I had a shot though."

Despite his words, his energy was still as light and inviting as when I arrived. His brown eyes locked with mine as he grabbed two sake glasses- wait where did those even come from?- and he raised one up towards me.

"Here's to you joining the ranks."

I hesitate at first, but then I think, oh what the hell? Why not. I move to sit by him and take the glass.

"May you enjoy your new home."

We clink our glasses and quickly shoot the sake. It leaves a burning trail down my throat that I try my best to hide. Unfortunately, I fail, and Captain Kyoraku attempts to stifle a laugh that I know is at me.

"Apologies, I didn't even ask if you like sake." There's that mischievous look in his eyes again as he speaks.

I wave my hand dismissively and try to regain my composure. "No, it's fine. Really. Besides, Rangiku said she wanted to go out and celebrate tonight, so I might as well prepare myself."

His brows go up in concern and he moves to place a hand on my shoulder. "I should wish you luck now, cause if you're going drinking with Lieutenant Matsumoto, you'll need it."

"Oh, wonderful. Good to know."

He laughs and moves to shoo me away. "Go on now, join your squad and enjoy your night."

The smile on my face grows wider as I make my way to the door.

"Oh, and by the way," I turn at the sound of his voice and see the smile on his face. "though you may not be in my squad, you're always welcome to come have a drink with this old captain."

Present Day

Though I made it sound easy, saying no to Captain Kyoraku was always difficult. I'd had easier times hitting a moving target than turning down any of his requests. Sometimes I think that just made him want to ask me that much more. Maybe that's why I cave.

“Alright, but I can’t drink and I can only stay for a moment.” My big fat lying mouth says as I move to sit down next to him.

Captain Kyoraku's expression brightens slightly, clearly pleased that I gave in to his begging.

"Excellent" he grins. "No drink, no problem. Sit, relax, and rest your legs for a bit. It's always good to take a breather from work."

“Mhm, according to Captain Kurotsuchi, that’s all you ever do.” I say teasingly.

Captain Kyoraku was the only Captain more laid back than Captain Zarak. Though Captain Zarak let a lot slide, he was still temperamental at times. Captain Kyoraku, however, was as calm as a summer breeze. I don't think I can recall a single time in the last few weeks that he even so much as frowned.

He lets out a hearty chuckle, tilting his head slightly with a playful glint in his eyes. "Ah, Kurotsuchi's got an opinion on everything, doesn't he? And here I thought I was simply being efficient with my time."

I leaned forward and let my elbows rest on the small table. “And tell me, Captain. What are you being efficient about with this current break?”

“Ah, you’re quite a clever one, huh?” He glances out the open window, his gaze drifting to the tranquil scenery outside. "Well, I believe one must always be efficient in the art of relaxation. It's essential to rejuvenate the mind and soul."

"Mm. I see." I muse, feigning a look of innocence. "So, was Lieutenant Ise stomping out of your office in a storm of irritated spirit energy also part of this relaxation efficiency?"

He grins, raising his eyebrows in mild surprise. "Ah, so you saw her storm out, did you? She does have quite a way with exits, doesn't she? But yes, we had a...spirited exchange earlier." He admits with a hint of amusement. "According to her, I've perfected the art of getting under her skin."

I shake my head and sigh. "One of these days, she's going to have had enough of you."

He laughs softly, clearly not too concerned about Lieutenant Ise's threats. "Yes, Nanao has threatened me countless times." He turns and grins at me, showing no signs of being deterred by her warnings. "But I'm of the opinion that she secretly enjoys our little verbal spars."

"Shunsui! Are you busy? I've-" A bright, cheerful Captain Ukitake rounds the corner and pauses in the doorway. "Ah, my apologies, I didn't know you had company."

Yes! I don't have to run to Squad 13!

"Oh don't worry, we're just having a nice chat. Come sit!" Captain Kyoraku waves him over, clearly happy to see his friend. "Besides, I believe my lovely guest here has something for you."

Though I've heard his compliments a million times now, they somehow always seem to kick up just as many butterflies as usual.

"Oh? Does she? Well then, I came at the perfect time." Captain Ukitake says, sitting down on the other side of me.

I give him a quick bow before handing him the last report. "It's just a quick surmise of the spike in hollow activity in Karakura Town, sir."

He reads over it intensely, flipping through the pages. The times I had been around the captain of Squad 13, I had noticed he was a very fast reader. I assumed that when you're dealing with an illness like his, you tend to pick up skills outside of battle.

"Hm. I see." He murmurs to himself.

"Well? Whaddaya make of it, Jushiro?"

The white haired captain furrows his brow for a moment before laying the report down. "It's worrying. While spikes in hollow activity are nothing new, they're normally at random. These, however...are almost constant."

"That's what Captain Kurotsuchi noticed as well, sir." I add, appreciating that someone was at least halfway taking this report seriously.

I knew my captain tended to ramble and draw things out, but it was normally only when something concerned him. The longer the report, the more serious the issue.

"Hm. Thank you, for being so kind as to bring these to us. I'm assuming you carried a copy to every squad?" Captain Ukitake asked.

I nodded, clasping my hands in my lap. "Yes, sir. He wanted them out before the next captains meeting."

The two captains on either side of me shared a look over the table. Despite everyone's nonchalant attitude, it was clear that to some extent, there was reason to worry. Especially in the wake of former Captain Aizen's defect. As I looked between them, I could tell they were communicating silently, so I took that as my cue to leave. I quickly stood, and bowed to each of them.

"Thank you for the brief rest. If you'll excuse me, I need to get back before Captain Kurotsuchi has my head."

They both wish me well and I high tail it out there as quick as possible. Without any reports in my hands, I could use flash step to the max degree to get myself back. Before, I had to just walk normally or else all the papers would go flying. It felt nice to be able to just fly across the roofs. I wasn't sure what time it was, Captain Kurotsuchi refused to let me use a watch or even a stopwatch to keep track of how much time had passed. He felt that if I did my job correctly, that I would have no need to constantly look at the clock. I hated that he had a point.

As I reached the doors to Squad 12, I began to run normally. Using flash step inside Squad 12 was prohibited by the captain. One rookie recruit before me was running late and decided using it inside to get to his desk was a good idea. Instead he was met with papers scattering and flying through the air and a very angry Captain. Since then, no flash step allowed inside the squad building. I once asked Akon what happened to that recruit, he just gave me a look and said, 'don't worry about it.' So I decided that I didn't wanna know that badly.

By the time I reached the main lab doors, I was breathing heavy. I stopped and tried to control my breathing. Once it slowed, I made my way inside. The main lab was always busy, everyone in Squad 12 was always working, no matter the day or the time. It was just something you get used to. Rangiku had mentioned it the night we all went drinking. She commented on how she had tried to get Akon to go drinking with them multiple times, but he always declined. Knowing him now, I knew it was less about work, and more about the fact that Akon just wasn't a very social person. It was a shame, really, because if I'm honest-

"There you are!"

A lightning bolt of shivers shot through my spine as I turned to look up at my captain. He was standing a few feet away, holding a stop watch. I watched him click it and turn it in his hand to study.

"Hm. Just barely 2 minutes shorter than your last time." He muttered. "By my calculations, you should've been back 6 minutes before your last time."

His eyes narrowed as his gaze moved from the clock to my face. I kept my hands clasped behind my back so I could nervously pick at my nails without him seeing. Despite how much I admired him, I just couldn't shake the slight fear I had of him. But, I think that's just how he makes people feel.

"Well? Care to explain?" He questioned. "I'm waiting."

I watched him slowly lean forward, his shadow seemingly growing larger.

"And you know what I've told you about my patience."

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