

**Credits: MissStormCaller**

## **Prologue + Reports**

Hey! There's a lot of interest in this book so I did a full translation of the first free chapter read below and continue reading under the cut.

## **WE DO Knot ALWAYS LOVE YOU**

**Original work: Tite Kubo Novel: Matsubara Makoto**

### **Synopsis**

#### **Chapter 1 :**

3 years have passed since the invasion of the Wandenreich. Many lives lost, the scars of battle are not yet healed. Those who survived are finally beginning on the path to recovery.

One day Kuchiki Rukia and Abarai Renji announced to everyone that they will have their names entered into a family register\* (\*i.e. registration of marriage).....

A story about new bonds born from the end of the battle which were not drawn in the original story.

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3 years have passed since the invasion of the seireitei by the Wandenreich.

Normality finally returned to the soul society which was in extreme turmoil.

Squad 1 - squad headquarters assembly room.

“from now on we will open the headquarters of the 13 Court Guard Squads. Captain Commander?”

The first squad's vice captain Ise Nanao urged. The captain of that same division, Kyoraku Shunsui nodded once before moving forward.

“it's bad everyone is busy huh. Today is merely reports of the reconstruction situation so we should be finishing early.”

Each division's captain and vice captain were in a row overlooking the assembly room. The recently reconstructed assembly hall seemed to be completely new, full of the aroma of fresh timber.

“haa.... The smell of wood is nice isn't it? Well then, Nanao Chan please!”

“Yes. So first of all... ”

Whilst turning over bulky documents, Nanao starts reporting about the reconstruction situation. As he listened to that voice Kyoraku thought about the 3 years.

The most damage suffered in seireitei was at the first district, also known as 'shinou district', including the first division barracks and a great number of administrative facilities.

As a war time special exception, the lives of the people who evacuated were saved by opening the personal residence of the Central 46. However, what they saw when they returned to the ground after the war was a whole surface of scorched Earth, exhausted from the remains of destruction. There was insufficient manpower, goods and materials to rebuild houses, whilst everyone was merely sunken into despair, one among the Central 46 was the first to make progress towards reconstruction, Amakado Nayura.

Nayura who became a sage, succeeded the position of her father who was murdered by Sousuke Aizen, she is still a young girl.

She is also the head librarian of the Great Spirit Book Gallery where all events and data of the soul society are forcibly accumulated, studying the human world and Shinigami with an open mind. Everyday seeking how to change the current state of the old fashioned central 46.

At that time there was an assault on the central 46 underground compound by the sternritter. Half were killed, the ones that remained alive were also more or less wounded. Even if the body can heal, the fear from witnessing such atrocities cannot be wiped away. Those who came forward to resign from their seats are no longer able to expect work as a supreme judicial body like the pre-war central 46.

But before that situation Nayura was optimistic that the time for change was now. So she scolded the older people(sages) who were disheartened and cooperated with the captain commander of the Gotei 13 Kyoraku, together they established new law one by one. This young soul was not afraid to progress forward and the older people who were inspired by that passion also started to change slightly.

After the war, she first set out a law to simplify the procedure of the court seal. An official court seal must be presented to the gatekeeper of each pure soul gate when entering Seireitei from Rukongai. She made it possible to obtain a court document which originally could only be obtained through a complicated procedure which normally takes several weeks, now it is only a simple procedure at a special personnel recording station installed in front of every gate. As a

result, it became easy to carry materials from outside the Seireitei and it became possible to welcome the people of Rukongai widely as a work force. Also, at the special personnel record management station spiritual power was checked whilst simultaneously registering fingerprints, an invitation to the spiritual arts academy, a training institute for Shinigami, is extended to those who have promising spiritual power. The benefits given to Soul Society because of this law is unfathomable.

Materials and manpower are in line with the reconstruction efforts proceeding rapidly.

“End of report”

Nanao bows down.

[Kyoraku] “well!” he clutches both hands in front of his chest.

“There’s another piece of good news today

...Now please come forth and tell us from your own mouth”

Prompted by kyoraku, with a nervous expression they walked out of the line.

It was 6th division vice captain Abarai Renji and acting captain of the 13th division Kuchki Rukia.

## **Report**

### **1**

The now deceased Yamamoto Genryūsai Shigekuni, established the inner seireitei which produces talented personnel who become soldiers of the Kido corps, Stealth force, and the Gotei 13; The shino academy a shinigami training institution boasting a history of 2000 years.

In that large auditorium that can feasibly accommodate all graduate students, the fourth year students who have just finished their summer vacations are gathering.

“In the previous protection of the Soul King great war, the Gotei 13 lost approximately half its soldiers, I hope you are all aware of where you are.”

The academy principal with the strong physique continues speaking whilst looking at all the people.

“It goes without saying our Shino Academy is a 6 year system. However due to the Shinigami Apprenticeship system established the year before last, after the summer of 4 years, you will

have belonged, as an apprentice, to each company of the 13 court guard squads and acquired on site experience as a shinigami.”

The shinigami apprentice system is a new system created to maintain the Gotei 13 due to a grave shortage of soldiers. The apprentices study at the academy in the mornings and in the afternoon they are actually split into each division to assist with duties. Prior to this system graduate students were distributed to each division after graduation, for the first year as an apprentice around senior colleagues, the duties of a shinigami is studied.

The framework of trying to finish the apprenticeship period while studying in the outskirts is this following shinigami apprenticeship system: “Work is delayed everywhere, manpower is insufficient! Personnel wanted as soon as possible! On this occasion it doesn’t matter if you are a graduate student!”. Although it was a system acting as a temporary measure and they were greeted with the sorrowful voice of the scenes in front of them, their eagerness was elevated by examining their aspirations closely. The lessons were also fun, so it seems to be popular with the graduate students in question.

“so today, for the purpose of preparation as a shinigami, I come to Kira Izuru, 3rd division vice captain and former graduate of the academy!”

Hearing that the students stood dazed. Captains and Vice Captains in Soul Society are like first class celebrities from the human world.

“Well then Vice Captain Kira, truly nice to meet you, please”

Invited to take the podium by the Academy Principal, Kira izuru, with a pale visage and feeling no vigour looked over the auditorium. Eyes gleaming at the appearance of the actively serving Vice Captain.

(young people of the future, it is said that the dead man will preach a Shinigami’s pride.)

Izuru sighed a little and lowered his eyes.

After the lecture, he passed into the guest room, he deposited himself deeply into the seats of the sofa on his back, breathing heavily.

It seems that the direct line of sights of the all the young people has greatly fatigued Izuru’s spirit.

“Kira, thank you, although I’m busy, sorry!”

The head of the Shino Academy, Isawa Genji, gave a broad smile, he lowers his back against the sofa, situating himself in between it and a low table on the opposite side.

“It’s ok. Even though the two of us have taken over the same sofa, I simply cannot refuse to share or also move you”

Last year, the 6th division’s lieutenant Abarai Renji was invited to give a similar lecture and the year before that the 5th division’s lieutenant Hinamori momo was invited to do the same.

“If you say so, I appreciate that”

Genji breathed out a quick breath, “okay if I do a little paperwork?” He pulled out a box stuffed with paper bundles from under the table.

“Do you usually work here?”

“The chair in here is the softest, the desk is also wide”

Izuru saw the piled up documents ( \*onomatopoeic word - sound of heavy items being stacked up), “That’s not 'a little paperwork' at all” he murmured with amazement.

Genji, just like Izuru and Renji are all the 266th class of graduates of the Academy. Izuru was enrolled in the advanced class throughout his 6 years - special class composed of high achievers only - in contrast, Genji was enrolled in the second class throughout 6 years. Because of this, originally it seemed as though there was no point of any interaction between these two, but because their student dormitories were shared they became close friends.

“you were the type that finished up homework in one go after you collected it, right?”

He remembers talking loudly until late at night, back facing the writing desk.

“Tell me this is all for today?”

Genji complained, keeping his eyes lowered on the documents.

“eh?... That much...?”

“Manpower is lacking everywhere at the same time, don’t you think? I’m efficient at my paperwork because I had to take other teacher’s share around here also. At any rate, I don’t understand why I am a 'Tiger of paperwork' when I was in the 5th division commanded by lieutenant Hinamori.”

“Isn’t it Captain Hirako who commands? Even if... Hinamori san had such a nickname... I was not aware”

“By the way, 'Dragon of paperwork' is Aizen Sousuke, 'Hawk of Paperwork' is me! Don't you think I suit this second one better no matter what?”

“Yeah, yeah. I know full well that the fifth division is proficient at paperwork.”

Laughing, Genji proudly puffed out his chest, Izuru watching gave a small smile.

“well I don't want to disturb your work so I will go now”

“Wait, wait, wait!”

Genji hurriedly halts the rising Izuru.

“I was able to meet with you after a long time, let's talk a little more?! With the exception of going to the department of research and development once a month, I'm at the academy all the time so I'm hungry to learn about the topic of the outside!”

Hearing that Izuru's movements suddenly stopped.

“Once a month... to the research and development department? Why?... ”

“Did I not tell you that?”

All of a sudden and without a care, Genji rolled up his hakama.

“Incidentally both of my legs were blown off during the Great War. I have prosthetics now.”

Part of the smooth milky white, manufactured prosthetic legs peeked through the dark blue trouser hem.

“There's legs that are indistinguishable from the real thing, but it's from the compensation of the 13 court guard squads. Well, this however is okay since there's no difficulty of obstacles in my daily life.”

Genji was the third seat of the 5th division.

When the sternritter invaded Genji was an essential part of the superior shinigami, his lost legs became artificial ones, instantly long distance travel with hohou shunpo became unusable. 3rd

seat was no longer appropriate for himself, Captain Hiraki Shinji requested that he drop his position and suggested instead that he becomes the head of the Shino Academy.

“I was pretty confident in my hohou, so my legs being like this came as a shock but... Since starting this job I am extremely busy every day, nonetheless it’s fun! I’m not the type to deal with this sort of thing in the first place, but I can understand what kind of place the students can stumble in if they become disheartened. I intended to be a sharp and able 3rd seat in front of Captain Hirako, despite this I guess he saw my true essence.

Hirako’s words ring in his ear as he recalls it.

“Head of the Academy, what do you think?... If so I’ll hug you.”

Understanding himself that it is a recommendation after recognising his talents, Genji accepted that with gratitude.

“So that’s why! I don’t worry about my legs anymore.”

With a slap on the knee Genji laughs. Indeed, his cheerfulness is likely to aid young people who are lost, Izuru thought.

“I see, it was very difficult Isawa.”

“I heard you were killed in action, intel came in that you had returned to the battlefield in a dead condition, it was chaos.”

In the last great war Izuru suffered injuries that meant 30% of his body was lost. That fact that he is still able to move is because the 12th division’s Captain Kurotsuchi Mayuri, recovered Izuru’s dead body and gave him experimental body remodelling surgery. The surgical procedure, which was done without permission, was a brilliant success, and thus Izuru lives while his condition is dead.

“I read the research paper about the experimental body remodeling of a commanding officer that appeared in the returning issue of the ‘Seireitei Communication’, I was finally convinced. Something of this sort happened.”

The ‘Seireitei Communication’ is a magazine edited and managed by the 9th division, the publishing system was not yet in order and had to be suspended in the first year after the war. In the first re-issue, a list of a great number of war deeds and the state of progress of the reconstruction efforts is published, Kurotsuchi Mayuri’s report is attached as an extra file at the end of the book:

*Lieutenant Kira Izuru Death Demon Arts Surgery success! Relief even though he is dead! The mystery of the Death Demon Arts Surgery is made public!*

Due to the report content with a sensational headline attached, Izuru becoming the subject of demonic experiments of the department of research and development, was well known in the Seireitei.

“No matter if you are alive... Not alive.... Well anyhow, I am glad to meet you again” \*

“.... Thank you.”

A grumbling noise came from Kira’s breast pocket, his denreishinki\* (\*a soul reaper phone) buzzed.

Genji: “Check it. You don’t know it might be urgent.”

Izuru glanced through the electronic correspondence that was lit up with the characters that read [Received New]. The sender was Abarai Renji.

Report 1 (Part2/2)

*I did another full translation, for chapter 2 this time, enjoy!*

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“It’s from Abarai kun. Can’t we gather this evening?”

Hinamori Momo’s name is also in the address field.

“Is Hinamori san also invited?...what about you?”

Understanding, and simply raising his face to reply, Genji smiled and placed his hand on the piled documents.

“Can’t you see this Lieutenant Kira?”

“...I will give your regards to everyone, Principle of the Academy”

That said, Izuru also returned the smile.

Whilst the two were talking about the situation, a woman with black hair flew in from outside the open window. Her shiny ponytail swayed with the movement of her head.

“Are you having fun?”



With both hands at her waist, she laughed, it was Shihoin Yoruichi.

“Greetings, Shihoin Sensei!”

“It’s been a while, Shihoin san”

The two tried to stand up but were halted by her hand, Yoruichi lowered her back somewhere across from Izuru.

“Well, the first time in half a year Kira. Are you getting along well with Otoribashi?”

Captain of the third division, Rojuro Otoribashi, has a deep understanding of music, not only for appreciating musical composition, but also enjoying the act of playing musical instruments as a hobby.

When Yoruichi was serving as the head of the Shihoin clan, Rojuro would sometimes commission the Gagaku\* squad of the Shihoin clan to repair and tune instruments that he brought from the human world.

(\*note: Gagaku is a type of classical, ancient Japanese imperial court music). The relationship that existed between these two is an old friendship. Once or twice a year Yoruichi visits the offices of the 3rd division bearing gifts from the human world. On the occasions they would exchange words a few times, Izuru became an acquaintance as a result.

“uhh well, as it is. I’ve gotten used to musical performances during my duties also.”

“... You can get used to it?”

Izuru shrugged his shoulders to Genji’s question. At the headquarters and offices of the 3rd division many musical instruments are placed, lined up side by side, depending on the mood of Rojuro however, the musical performance can start during duties with disregard for others. At first Izuru criticised it, but since after the musical performances he noticed his work efficiency improve remarkably, he tolerated it.

“You turn a blind eye to it! If you took up musical instruments from that guy, nothing is left!”

“I won’t do anything”

Yoruichi nonchalant at disregarding Genji’s chiding glance. These two people seem to be doing well, Izuru smiled from his inner heart.

“By the way.... How is the work of a lecturer? Shihoin Sensei”

“Ha! Youngsters tease me...”

After a fleeting glance at Izuru, Yoruichi transferred a large scrap of paper into Genji’s palm.

“Persons who have their names here can already enlist in due form”

Genji looked at the written down names, grunting and eagerly nodding in agreement.

“What are these circles affixed to these kids?”

“Oh, you can put those guys into the 9th division. Their skills in Hakuda is limited, they’re intelligent and they take an interest in writing.”

“I understand!”

Genji produced a notebook from his pocket and made a note of Yoruichi’s words, placed the scrap piece of paper between it before closing it.

“I was surprised... You’re working seriously as a ‘sensei’ aren’t you?”

With a twitch, Yoruichi lifted one eyebrow at Izuru’s manner of speaking.

“Did you make fun of me just now?”

“Such a thing would be absurd...! However, since I heard from the captain that Yoruichi san, you had a troublesome expression at the time you accepted...”

“I think even now it still feels bothersome.”

“Shihoin sensei... Please do not say that in front of the students. Such a thing like that.”

Yoruichi understanding and looking as if she wanted to say something to Genji, looked up to the ceiling with her arms folded.

“Did I not tell you? I don’t know how a genius is supposed to guide average people... Once every half month I have to take the responsibility of being a special lecturer, If I said that I’d become captain of the 8th division after its restoration, I probably wouldn’t have to take other responsibilities in this place.”

If she refused the captaincy of the restored squad, a lecture on Hakudo/Hohou must be delivered to the 5th and 6th year students every other week. That was the proposal handed down from captain commander Kyoraku to Yoruichi.

“We probably couldn’t go on by leaving people as talented as Shihoin san idle...each squad openly elects at least one person for Academy lecturer and therefore orders have been sent down to all divisions.”

“Since a great deal of the original teachers were lost in the 'Protection of the Soul King Great War’... ”

During the great war all students were evacuated to their dormitories.

As a result of large amounts of spiritual pressure gathering, the attack of the Soldat\* (\*soldiers) of Wandenreich was concentrated in the dormitories, the lecturers preparedness to die in the defensive battle was spread wide before the eyes of the students. All the officially seated lecturers were experienced and skilled, even so it was difficult to overthrow the numerical advantage and one after another they fell.

Under the desperate circumstances, shinigami wearing masks appeared cutting through dark clouds.

“Superheroes are here!”

It was the 9th division’s 'Super' vice captain, Kuna Mashiro who decided to pose sternly whilst trampling on top of a Soldat.

When going out to the front to ambush the Sternritzer, the captain of the 9th division Muguruma Kensei, did not permit Mashiro to follow.

“Hey! I’m also going! (onomatopoeic word - act of dragging on)”

Naturally Mashiro tumbled around the ground resisting. If it was the usual scene, then it would have been noisy with thundering voices, kensei folded his knees and told Mashiro to keep together within his line of sight.

“Go to the Academy Mashiro. Go and protect the future of Shinigami.”

He grabbed her left arm to help her up. There was a lieutenant badge fitted there, handmade by Mashiro.

“...I guess you are not merely a vice captain?”

Mashiro pushed up her back, leaping into the night sky without turning to look back.

Her “SUPER 9” engraved symbol received a red glare before the light of the sunset.

Even though the students were protected by the actions of Mashiro who hollowfied, the number of lecturers diminished as far as one third, now the training of Shinigami is urgent business, it was no exaggeration to say that replenishment was the most important task.

“Protection of the Soul King Great War....I can’t bear that vile name.”

Yoruichi openly confessed. Izuru also agreed.

“...It cannot be helped. If you tell the truth you won’t be able avoid confusion and disorder”

After Kurosaki Ichigo triumphed over Yhwach, that dead body was transported to the Soul King Palace by the hands of the Zero division. Hundreds of bindings were placed around the dead body which still contained a vast amount of spiritual power even after death, by storing it as the new lynchpin in the Soul King Greater Palace, the world was spared from collapse.

The demise of the Soul King also concealed, the fact that it is the mastermind of the great war who keeps this world tethered now, the sequence of invasive wars by the Wandenreich which is referred to by the name of ‘Protection of the Soul King Great War’.

“The Soul King Palace was guarded, and our Soul King was not murdered...apparently that’s what the students were taught, it’s seems that something like this sort of falsification was also inside our historical studies I think.”

Genji looked as if he couldn’t finish what he was saying, he shook his head a little.

“Distortion for the convenience of the hand that’s spinning it... History is like that.”

Muttered Yoruichi whose eyes held a trace of anguish. She recalled the time she was once considered a traitor and pursued by Soul Society, the two sank into silence.

“Don’t all make a depressed face! It’s not at all me.”

The words of a disgruntled Yoruichi was interrupted by a knocking sound on the door.

“Principal, Sensei! I was told to come and collect completed paperwork!”

A voice that appeared to be a male student could be heard through the door.

“It’s okay I will take it myself!... I will go in a minute. We must also talk about the subject of official enlistment.”

Genji excused himself from the two, with the processed paperwork tucked under his arm he exited the room.

Waiting until the footsteps faded away Yoruichi turned to face Izuru

“... Well then just the two of us”

Her eyes smiled mischievously, grasping the situation, Izuru’s disposition turned cold.

(A snake glared at a frog... No, in this case was it a cat glaring at a mouse...?)

As expected, Yoruichi without hesitation brought herself close.

Leaning backwards, his back hit the elbow of the sofa, coming to a stop.

“According to what I hear, it seems you to have a large hole in your body right?”

“... W, what’s this all of a sudden?... ”

Izuru instinctively placed his hand over the right side of his chest. As a result of the cavity, that move only caused his hand to sink into his Shihakushou.

Immediately following the death demon arts surgery, he was instructed to dissipate the heat of the body without covering the hole, so he had to live in a state of leaving one shoulder exposed. However after the war was over, the problem of heat dissipation was resolved and it became unnecessary to expose the hole, Izuru was thus able to wear his Shihakushou fully again.

“Kurotsuchi said! Nemuri is a masterpiece of artificial soul technology, Kira is a masterpiece of body remodelling surgery...Let me see that hole.”

“Whaa....!? I wouldn’t like that!”

“I didn’t say anything harsh, I just want to see how the cross section is, it probably won’t decrease in size huh? Hey! Hey!”

Inconsiderate of Izuru’s protests, Yoruichi seized his right sleeve and forcefully yanked.

“Stop please!”

He tried to remove the hand secured to his collar and as he twisted his body an opening door entered his vision.

“Kira! These guys have a few questions and...”

Genji returned accompanied by two female students freezing at the sight of the two.

Izuru’s Shihakushou was loose. Yoruichi half straddling him.

Genji shut the door immediately.

“S... Sorry Kira!”

“Don’t apologise this is not what it looks like!”

Izuru pushed Yoruichi aside and rushed out of the room. From the corridors the voices of two people shouting “Sorry!” and “not what it looked like!”, can be heard.

“It’s curiously too good that things turned out like this.”

Yoruichi purred without flinching at the situation, same as how she arrived earlier, Yoruichi left through the window.

—The next day rumours of a “forbidden relationship between Shihoin Sensei and Lieutenant Kira” went around the academy. For a while, it was said that Izuru was afraid to be deadly cursed and glared at every time he came face to face with the 2nd division’s Captain Soi fon who adores Yoruichi.

## 2

Central Shinou Library.

A long period of Ise Nanao’s break was assigned to reading.

Going to the library that had just been rebuilt, there’s no trace of the original building that she’d normally be accustomed to, it feels a little out of place. Nevertheless, whilst turning over pages engulfed in the smell of paper one after the other, she was not concerned with things other than the contents of the books.

Her hand picked up a new book. It was her favourite book she reread many times over. When she turned over the front cover there was an emblem stamped there indicating that it was a book belonging to the 8th division’s library.

(This book, I stamped it...)

Next to the emblem, the name of the person in charge is filled in [Ise Nanao]. It was her clumsy writing from when she was still very young.

A mid-size library was erected in the residential area of each Gotei 13 division respectively. The damage caused by the Great War varied, since the reconstruction efforts focused on and progressed from the locations that were indispensable to daily life, any libraries with damaged sections were left as it is in a state of closure. When they went to inspect the reconstruction sites, the state of affairs hurt Nanao's heart, she appealed to captain Commander Shunsui Kyouraku about whether the central library alone could be preferentially restored.

Construction began immediately, the books that survived through war damage were gathered from each library, and stored on brand new bookshelves.

(It was not burnt... Good)

Nanao, who was a member of the 8th division from a very early age, immediately after enlistment was entrusted with organising the book collection of the 8th division's library.

Yadomaru Lisa who was serving as vice captain at that time was an unrivalled book lover, she used the division's expenses to buy all sorts books proclaiming "it's for the sake of exhibiting it in the library". The books that have been read were adequately packed up, since they were thrown into the book collection storage cabinets by the vice captain, the storage cabinets of the 8th division's library was also a good place for disorder.

'An honorary member of the central library' - a title awarded to graduate students of the Shino Academy whose annual book lending exceeds over 1000 this year - Lisa who heard the rumour that something like that existed, advised Kyouraku that Ise Nanao, who is hoping to be assigned to the kido corps, is a talented person as an honorary member, who should be welcomed into the 8th division instead.

For a moment Kyouraku was surprised and his movements came to a stop, he immediately wore a smile, "we get along well don't we" he said showing Lisa the procedural documents concerning Nanao's enlistment that he had filled in just now.

Lisa did not have much doubt about that coincidence. Naturally Kyouraku also caught on to the disastrous scene of the 8th division's library, and everyone can see that it was obvious Nanao was the most suitable person for its betterment. If he heard the same "Honorary members rumour" that Lisa heard, then Kyouraku moving to acquire Nanao was only a natural course of events.

There was speculation about the Shinken Hakkyouken, at the time Lisa had no way of knowing about it.

In this way, Nanao was assigned to squad 8 and sent into the division's library which had lost its order.

(How nostalgic...)

Taking the books out of the stacked boxes, and briefly examining the contents, she stamped the emblem on. She recorded the data of the books onto a computer terminal and arranged it in accordance with the classification system. It was a very enjoyable occupation for Nanao who loves books. She became close friends with Lisa who would sometimes turn up at the storage room carrying a new book collection. One day every month, they'd bring mutually recommended books to the office after work, a reading circle that consisted of only two people was held.

The night Lisa became a victim of Aizen Sosuke's hollowfication experiment, Nanao clutched her book whilst visiting the squad building - from that day on, no reading circle was held.

"... This book was on Lisa chan's desk. Seems it was prepared for the reading circle, for you."

Several days since the disappearance of Lisa, Nanao visited the library when Kyouraku turned up to hand over a book. It was a book on advanced kido that only officially seated members were allowed to read. Nanao still remembers Kyouraku's back as he left whilst whispering to her in a low voice to read it in secret.

"Without that how would you become a vice captain right... "

Worried about her limited aptitude for Zanjutsu, Lisa showed her the path forward. Nanao was primarily excelling at Kido, with the intention of ignoring the notion of learning Zankensoki\* (\*the 4 basic shinigami techniques) in a well balanced manner; in order to become more skilled than anyone else as an outstanding Kido user, she relied on textbooks to refine her skills.

Even now Nanao still treasures the worn out Kido text book, it was her strength.

"Hello, Nanao san"

Her name was called in a small voice pulling her out of her memories. Turning to look over at Hinamori Momo who was smiling.

"Are you off duty?"



She enquired whilst sitting opposite Nanao.

“Yes that’s right. Hinamori san... It’s still work hours for you know right?”

She looked at a clock hanging on a nearby pillar. There was still around two hours left until work time ends.

“By order of captain Hirako, 'you are already finished for today.' 'My daughter does nothing but work! 'play hooky from time to time why don't you!' he's always scolding me.”

“ah, that’s kind”

“Even Nanao san said something like this, when you try to work on a day off the captain commander appears to scold you, you get bothered don't you? Both captain Hirako and the captain commander try to give us too much rest don't you think?”

“That’s true. It’s nice to be able to read at ease like this, however, I want him to understand that I have no qualms using this time for work...”

“Indeed”

The two sighed together at the concern of their superiors.

“You like to work too much?”

Suddenly Yadomaru Lisa’s face peeked out from behind the tall bookshelves.

“Lisa san!... Ah”

Hinamori grasped her mouth to hold back her loud voice.

“Hi relax. It’s only me now.” Lisa sat down next to Nanao and the flustered Hinamori calmed down.

“Even now you still love reading.”

She said eyeing the stack of books on the desk. Nanao surprised, gazed at the side of her face. She is a person with scarce facial expression, but sentimentality revealed itself within her eyes.

Emotions were gradually increasing until Nanao suppressed the tight squeezing in her chest.

“Yadomaru san...! I... all that time thanks to you...”

“I don’t need that sort of gratitude... Hey look, Nanao gets excited quickly and Hinamori gets startled.”

“huh?! No, no! Please don’t fuss over me...! Because I will even read books in a corner... ”

Hinamori waved both hands in front of her eyes excitedly and stood up.

“Hinamori, sit”

“Yes...!”

Without going against Lisa’s piercing gaze, Hinamori sat down immediately.

Observing Nanao who looked a little uncomfortable and Hinamori who trembled slightly, Lisa sighed a little.

“I don’t know why Nanao is thankful to me but, what I’ve done for you, it was merely a trivial thing for your life... It was just an opportunity. You became a vice captain, from you, yourself persevering don’t you agree? Therefore I do not need gratitude. Understood?”

“Yadomaru san... ”

“Answer!”

“Y... Yes!”

This conversational exchange felt like nostalgia that made Nanao want to cry.

(Ah yes, that’s right, vice captain Yadomaru always found it difficult to deal with gratitude...)

Whenever Nanao expressed gratitude with words, there was always a crease between her brows on a face that looks uncomfortable. In order not to injure the mood of her respected vice captain, in the moments she wants to convey gratitude, it is done without words, she simply remembers to bow her head.

Nanao looked straight ahead at Lisa, calmly she bowed. She lifted her face, Lisa was watching intently with a look in her eye that said 'she finally remembered'.

“Fuuuuu... Uuuuu... Hiiuuuu!”

The two turned their faces towards the voice that escaped from the opposite side, Hinamori was shedding tears.

“Huh!? What’s the matter Hinamori san!?”

Nanao confused, rushed over to Hinamori to hand over a handkerchief and rub her back.

“Sorr...ry...! Things like that...important times...feelings....both of you....there was many things.... I think... I...!”

“Your empathy is too intense...?”

Nanao consoled Hinamori in front of an amazed Lisa.

[“Just like before... Does having poor zanjutsu skill incapacitate you as a Gotei warrior?”]

She remembered those young eyes, where tears were held back in those eyes so much so that they were on the brink of spilling as they looked up to her.

The Kido textbook prepared for Nanao that night seems to have crossed over into her hands satisfactorily.

(That small Ise Nanao is now the vice captain of squad 1)

Lisa smiled wryly to herself as to what the passage of the years was like.

Waiting for Hinamori to stop crying, Lisa spread out this year’s edition of the official seated officer register before the two.

“I need both of your cooperation for a moment.”

Placed on the register there are the names and photographs of every squad from captain to 20th seat.

“Uhh... Lisa san, this is...?”

“It’s been half a year since I became captain of the 8th division, but I’m constantly being told to nominate a vice captain.”

After Kyouraku and Nanao transferred to the 1st division, Nanao was acting on squad 8’s captain and vice captain duties. Lisa was finally inaugurated as the new captain 6 months ago, she was happy to take over the duties of a captain but Lisa stubbornly refused to act on the duties of the vice captain too, even now the 1st division’s Nanao is taking on that share of the duties.

“I would be saved the trouble if I were released from taking on the duties of the 8th’s vice captain as soon as possible.”

It was not impossible for the 1st division to perform the duties of the 8th division because there is another excellent vice captain in addition to Nanao who’s called Okikiba Genshirou, it was no wonder that they could spare that amount of time for others. Now that reconstruction is urgent, no matter how much time you have it’s still not enough.

“If I tell the captain commander ‘you have two vice captains so give me. Nanao’, he says ‘absolutely impossible!’”

Nanao felt her cheeks getting warmer, she coughed once to regain her composure.

“Originally, I was expecting to place the 4th division’s 3rd seat Iemura Yasochika san as my vice captain. However it was too late for that plan Iemura san was already pulled from squad 4.”

At that time, the 7th seat of the same division Yamada Hanatarou was promoted to 3rd seat when Iemura left.

“But after the Great War, Iba san who was inaugurated as the captain of squad 7, said that he had taken Iemura, thus the vice captain candidates of the 8th division became empty.”

Each division’s captain has the right to designate their own officers from the 9th seat up, they also possess the ability to effectively overrule central 46 nominee appointment decisions.

Transferring Iemura to the 8th division was the central 46’s decision, but Iba Tetsuzemon’s nomination right was given priority.

“I was aiming for Akon also but Mayuri had taken him, and that guy that’s my third seat...Enjouji I don’t want to promote him.”

Lisa played with the tip of her braid by whirling it around with her left hand finger, whilst using her right hand to point at Enjouji on the register. Even after half a year in her new post, she has not yet memorised his name, there is an absence of interest towards the 3rd seat Enjouji Tatsufusa.

“3rd seat Enjouji is no good?”

Hinamori inquired, Lisa shook her head from side to side confirming he is ‘no good’.

“This guy looks like he has the expression of small fry don’t you think? Not the look of a vice captain.”

“Aha... Hahaha...”

With nothing more to add, Hinamori and Nanao could only laugh.

“So, I want to hear from the two of you, at this point even if they are low ranked seats can you name me anybody who will let me skip work, and is able to work quietly?”

Lisa uttered whilst tapping the seated officer register with her finger. With the preface of 'please skip work from time to time' looming over her, Hinamori pointed to the 4th division's 3rd seat Yamada Hanatarou.

“How about Hanatarou kun? He is a hard worker but has a weak disposition, and he is very talented young person!”

“Yamada at the 4th division...is he related to Seinosuke?”

Hinamori inclined her head, she was unfamiliar with the name she just heard, “Seinosuke... San?”

“It is a very reminiscent name... Vice captain Yamada Seinosuke. Surely he wasn't Hanatarou san's older brother?”

“Huh!? Hanatarou Kun's 'older brother' was a vice captain!?”

Nanao nodded 'yes' to a surprised Hinamori.

“At the time Yadomaru san was vice captain of the 8th division, he was the vice captain of the 4th division. When he retired, he was replaced by Kotetsu Isane san who was then promoted to vice captain.”

“If you are the younger brother of Seinosuke then surely you'd be talented but...”

Lisa looked intently at the photograph on the register. The young man who's awkward smile was displayed on the photograph, had his mouth partly open, his eyebrows in the shape of an eight\* (\*Note: not the English '8', the Japanese eight - hachi - 八 ← his eyebrows looked like that lol).

“His depressed face looks like he's being pushed almost to the point of death any minute now, this kid also does not feel like a 'vice captain'.”

“Is this face like the others... ?”

Nanao gave a strained laugh and as soon Hinamori gazed at the register she twisted her head around.

“What kind of person is this 'Ayasegawa Yumichika'? He looks like a narcissist but I think he can work.”

Lisa pointed at the 3rd seat of the 11th division. The eyes of the two people who were asked met, they simultaneously sighed a small sigh.

“Yumichika san is certainly an excellent person but...”

“It is likely he will refuse because he has only rejected transfers to other squads so far.”

Hearing both of their replies, Lisa rested her chin in her hands.

“Even so, as expected I do not know these people...”

She looked over the portraits of the official seated members register and realised that should could longer receive newcomers who were the way she wants them to be.

“Though I was enlisted and promoted some time ago, you'd think that the seated officers would have ascended seat positions in the same way since then... After the Great War a considerable number of seated officers had to be replaced...”

The highly ranked seated officers went out to the front lines to do battle. Consequently many lives were lost, but for the people who were left over, their responsibilities and pride in earning ranked seats was burnt deeply onto their backs. Because of that, a strong resolution resides in the eyes of the newly elected seated members.

“Haaaa, if Nanao has grown accustomed to the work of the 1st division then I wonder if I can take Okikiba?”

Lisa remarked whilst resting her back onto a chair swinging her legs which were crossed over each other.

“I'm not so sure...? We cannot do without Okikiba san at the 1st division... Monthly tea ceremonies are also now hosted by Okikiba san.”

When he was still alive, Yamamoto Genriyusai Shigekuni assembled troops together once a month where he, himself would perform a Matcha\* (\*green tea) tea ceremony. After his death, the tea room facing the garden was destroyed and the tea ceremonies came to a stop,

nevertheless, in accordance with the reconstruction of the squad building and the tearoom, it was reopened by Okikiba's hand.

"The tea ceremonies of the 1st division resumed! I didn't know that...!"

When Hinamori was inaugurated as vice captain, she once accompanied Aizen to participate in the monthly tea ceremony.

"Okikiba san says he's not the type of person that has the abilities to act in other squads yet, so I would like you to wait until I know for certain.... Besides, now I am learning how to make Koucha\* (\*Black tea). At the tea ceremonies I plan to serve not only Matcha but good Koucha also.

"I see, Sasakibe san..." Said Lisa muttering few words. Nanao smiled a sombre smile and nodded.

"I am reading the documents vice captain Sasakibe left behind after his work ended, the more I learn, the more I understand, the world of tea is deep...I'm getting emotionally attached and absorbed into this."

The loyal 1st division's vice captain Sasakibe Choujirou who was lost in the last Great War, yearned for Britain and admired its Koucha. The cultivation of tea leaves did not go as imagined, his deep knowledge with regards to Koucha was profoundly better than anyone else in Soul Society, even Genriyuusai who disliked Western things, loved his unique Koucha blend enough to admit it was "delicious".

"Even if they only come back to us now, Ji' san and Sasakibe san, they can rest in peace."

From the shadows of the bookshelves where Lisa was lurking behind not too long ago, the relaxed form of Hirako Shinji appeared this time.

Chapter 4:

“Ca...Captain Hirako?!”

“What in the world, how long have you been there....?!”

Whilst Nanao and Hinamori fell off their chairs in surprise, Lisa alone was unfazed.

“I was here since the discussion around the tea parties. Obviously I noticed you.”

“If you noticed us then please say something! Please come and call out to us with your voice immediately, captain!”

“You seem upset, Momo. Oh my, though it seems I have broken into a girl’s meeting, I was wondering whether or not it was okay for me to say something.”

“You’re only here to eavesdrop, pervert.” Lisa coldly stated.

“You can’t say that about me only!” Hirako refuted.

“That’s true but, just when you thought what kind of things three gathered women might talk about; ‘Genryuusai, Okikiba and Sasakibe...’ we were merely talking about old guys were we not? One love story!!”

“Please do not get upset because of your own arbitrary expectations...”

Nanao sighed whilst pressing her temple, the toll of a bell coming from outside could be heard, indicating the end of work shifts.

“It’s no good at such a time like this....! I’ll be back soon.”

Nanao swiftly returned her book to the bookshelf, moving in front of the doorway in the same manner.

“Hinamori san, Yadomaru san, thank you for today. Let’s talk again!”

The pair smiled sweetly.

“Yeah, let’s talk again”

Hinamori waved her arm with a smiling face, Lisa, in silence lifted up her arm a little.



“And then.... Captain Hirako, from now on will you please stop secretly snooping around near here?”

In the end she drove the point home, and Nanao left the library. Hirako gave a strained laugh whilst leaning against a wall by the window.

“That little Nanao chan has grown up splendidly... ”

Since the libraries that are constructed on the residential block of each squad is operated under the management of that particular squad, there are many books, for example, on the healing arts in the 4th division’s library, and in the 6th division’s library there are many books on noble aristocratic history and etiquette, it tends to be the product of a true reflection of the squad’s own style.

The 5th division’s library not far from Hirako’s residence, boasts the Gotei 13’s best book collection quantity, due to most of them being noteworthy academic books donated by Sosuke Aizen, Hirako had no desire for those.

Conversely, the 8th division’s library had many multi genre books purchased by Lisa who bought whatever took her fancy, Hirako who also passed by frequently, saw a consequent change in the young Nanao.

After the end of work hours, on their way back from work, the troops enter the library and begin to flip through books. Troops from all squads gather at the Shinou Library since this is the only Library that is still open.

After briefly bowing to the three people sitting in the seats close to the entrance, everyone headed inside.

“It’s the first time since the reconstruction that I was in able to come here, it’s a great success.”

“Yeah. Since the books have been gathered side by side from each squad, you don’t need to visit several places here and there, also reading various genre of books is popular. Captain were you also looking for something... ?”

“No, I was looking for Lisa”

Lisa who was folding up the official seated members register, raised her head and said “Me?”

Hirako pulled out a mail order catalogue of “Seireitei Communication” from the sleeve of his

captain's haori, he opened it up and folded the corner of a page. It was a page of expensive items handled by "YDM Book Sales".

After Aizen's rebellion, Lisa earned a great deal of profit from Shinigami clients, by ordering books and CDs on sale in the Human World and then delivering it secretly to the buyer thus developing "YDM Book Sales".

In light of the expansion of the business after the great war, she accepted employment as a Captain on the condition that she be permitted to use the 8th division's Senkaimon for the transport of goods.

By paying advertisement expenses to the 9th division and obtaining a merchandise page in the monthly mail-order catalogue, the popularity of "YDM Book Sales" rose instantly and business was on an upward trajectory.

"I need ask a favour of you! This "Modern hairstyles encyclopedia" five volume set, reduce the price a little more! Am I not always buying your things in the magazine? Huh? In some way or another give me a special customer discount!"

"Impossible! Everyone buys it at the established list price!"

"Both of you please lower your voice a little more....!"

Even though Hinamori chided them in a low voice, they continued to talk loudly.

"That's cruel~~~! I can't use the squad's expenses to buy books because my library is not restored yet~~~!"

"In that case, until it's a good time to re-build your library then! At that time I will begin to write a receipt for you at the 5th division building without fail! However by that time it may already be sold out!"

"..... Captain"

Hinamori placed her hand on Hirako's shoulder.

"What is it Momo...!? Mo.... Momo?"

The corners of her mouth were rising but her eyes did not smile at all. She glared at Hirako with frightening eyes that pressed down like a dark night.

"Please buy your personal preference in books with your own wages, am I right... ? And then... Lisa san"

With a \*whoosh\* she turned her head, those eyes captured Lisa. Lisa did not divert her eyes, she gulped and swallowed her own saliva.

"Not limited to just my squad....Please do not issue fraudulent receipts, am I right... ?"

Watching as Lisa nodded at high speed \*nod nod nod\*, Hinamori exhaled a breath, "If you are able to understand then that is good!" she laughed.

She went back to her usual soft smile.

"Well then, I will also go now! Today I have a meeting with Abarai kun and Kira kun."

Hinamori bowed her head and excused herself before leaving.

As soon as the door closed, the two people burst out chattering.

"Huh!? Just a minute....what!? That made my heart beat extremely hard but....!?"

"A demon.... A demon was here!!"

"Her eyes went dark!? How can I return to everyday life after something like that!?"

"I don't want to go against Hinamori"

This will forever be carved into both of their hearts as "The Hinamori Incident".

## Chapter 5

West Rukongai 1st District Junrinan.

The 10th division's captain Hitsugaya Toshiro, used his break to visit his grandmother's residence.

The pair were snacking on amanatto\* (*\*sugared red beans*) bit by bit and having a chat. For Hitsugaya, who sets off hurriedly every day, time passes by peacefully, it was above all a healing experience.

Daylight began to fade into darkness, and the end of work shifts bell can be heard coming from the seireitei. Hitsugaya who was laying on the tatami mats, lifted himself up and stretched out widely.

"I'll go now grandma, I'll come again."

He tied the cords of his sandals on the concrete floor.

"Come back home anytime. Grandma will buy amanatto again."

"That's okay you don't need to. I'll buy them when I return."

"Is that so? Thank you, Toshiro."

"Yup. Well then, I'm off see you next time"

Lightly waving his hand to his grandmother who came to see him off, Hitsugaya walked into the midst of the sunset.

He went down the path along the outside of the Seireiheki\* (*\*Pure souls wall*).

When the Hakutomon\* became visible, his legs suddenly stopped. (*\*White path gate aka The western gate that Jidanbo guards*).

"\*clash/clang\*! Shuooooo... \*thud!\*"

"Ugiya— Damn!! I have no choice you're making me do this...!"

"I will not allow that! Shu-ba-ba—"

“Guaa!! Sougyo you rascal!! I’ll get you for this~~~”

From a back street alley, the voices of a young boy and a young man playing ‘pretend’, can be heard.

(That voice.... Somewhere....)

There was something familiar about the voice of the man playing the role of the villain.

“Ahahaha! ‘Ganju nii-chan’ is really good at acting huh! I wonder if it’s because Kukaku sama is always being angry?”

“Ye-ah. Well, I’ll see you again, Ganju nii-chan!”

“Alright! Take care!”

The young boy’s footsteps faded away. The man who was playing the ‘bad guy’ noticed Hitsuguya on the spot where he had turned the corner of the private residence, with a “woah” he was taken aback.

“Y... You’re, Squad 10’s.....!”

“I’m Hitsuguya Toshiro. You are.... Shiba Ganju was it?”

“Even though it’s practically our first meeting, my full name came out so well!?”

He doesn’t remember ever talking with Hitsuguya face to face. In the photographs published in “Seireitei Communication”, the figure itself is familiar, but he’s only seen the real thing few times, in addition to that; it was to the extent of crossing him in a short instance or having seen a figure no larger than a child from afar.

(I’m quite famous amongst the shinigami!? Huh!? No way, is that why this guy came to meet me too!?)

Ganju fantasized, being the imaginary leader of Shinigami, giving instructions to Hitsuguya.

[“Younger brother of Shiba Kaien!?”

Why does he solicit such superior talent to the shinigami!? Captain Hitsuguya, please go at once!”]

Whilst grinning and rubbing his chin, from his partly open mouth his voice spilled out “I mean, no way, no way, no way! I will not become a shinigami~!”

He did not stop his voice, “What’s gotten into you?” Hitsuguya inquired, throwing Ganju off balance, he shook his head if nothing else.

“I remembered you as someone from the Shiba clan, when that child called out your name just now.”

“oh, that’s why.... ”

His fantasy rapidly disappeared. His shoulders dropped a little, “What you just saw...we were playing Sougyo” he chided Hitsuguya who was spying on them.

“Playing Sougyo....?”

“Even though you’re shinigami, you don’t know? ‘Sougyo no okotowari’, it’s Ukitake san’s masterpiece!”

Ganju then unexpectedly spoke from the bottom of his heart.

‘Sougyo no Okotowari!’, it’s an action-adventure story in ‘Seireitei Communication’ serialised by the 13th division’s captain, Ukitake Jushiro.

“Oh.... That story”

“Your reaction is weak! It’s amazingly popular isn’t it?”

‘Sougyo no Okotowari!’ is a self-contained story in which good is rewarded and evil is punished, the main hero Sougyo protects the villagers and confronts baddies, it was a popular work amongst children. After the great war, the procedure of obtaining court documents was simplified so the comings and goings between Seireitei and Rukongai became lively. This work which was prevalent in the Seireitei, also rapidly spread among the children of Rukongai.

Now no matter which district of Rukongai you go to, the stand-alone book of ‘Sougyo no Okotowari!’ is entertaining children every day, even after it has become worn out after many times reading it.

“... Can’t read any further new works. ...”

The last ‘Seireitei Communication’ was published before the invasion by the Wandenreich began. The contents of ‘Sougyo no Okotowari!’ that was published three months ago, depicted

the shrine maiden/sorceress of the village falling into enemy hands, Sougyo was injured with a severe wound whilst also rescuing her.

***[The wounds I bear when protecting myself is painful, however the wounds I bear when protecting somebody else is not painful! ]***

Sougyo's words seem like a direct reflection of Ukitake's spirit.

Hitsuguya thought of that white haired shinigami and bit his lip a little.

"It was a story intended to be completed in one go, so I can't say I felt a sense of discomfort when it ended."

As he said that, Ganju sniffled a few times. Hitsuguya removed his gaze from Ganju and stared at the Seireitei standing still in the evening sky.

"My older brother.... Shiba Kaien, he served as the vice captain of squad 13, when he came home he would always talk about Ukitake san. At that time, I was still small so I can barely remember the kind of things he said but...I remember well, the side of my proud big brother's face as he talked."

"... I see"

Even as the past three years has flowed by, Ukitake's spirit lives on without fading in everyone's memories, in stories left behind.

In that alone, Hitsuguya felt a little secure.

"I'm sorry for keeping you. Looks like you were heading back?"

"That's ok.....it was good to be able to talk to you."

He saw Hitsuguya smile a little, Ganju also smiled.

"Hehehe, I see! See you then, Captain san!"

Whilst his back was was heading further away, Hitsuguya picked up a faint sense of nostalgia.

["Take charge while I'm gone, Toshiro!"]

The former captain of squad 10 was a man who smiled heartily.

Kurosaki Isshin, formerly Shiba Isshin, father of Kurosaki Ichigo and Uncle of Ganju.

(Shiba Ganju...)

He turned his back and walked away.

We don't know, someday we might be reunited with him, as a Shinigami in the Seireitei—  
Hitsuguya vaguely thought.



Chapter 6:

6th sector - Ryotei\* "The safflower".

(\*A fancy traditional Japanese restaurant)

In Eastern end of the 6th sector, there is a block of noble residences standing in a row.

The head of the Kuchiki clan - one of the four noble families - have for generations, shouldered the responsibility of squad 6 captain, the squad building for that division exists in the 6th sector, and the Kuchiki clan are purveyors of various long standing shops that are lined up side by side there too. For that reason, nobles wishing for fine quality goods all set up residence here, the common soldiers have dubbed this wealthy sector "Kizokugai (Noble city)".

"Hey Yamada... Is this really the right place!?"

The 4th division's vice captain Kiyone Kotetsu asked Yamada Hanataro, the third seat of the same squad, who was concealed behind her as they walked.

"It's a prime location, it should be right....but...."

Hanataro timidly followed Kiyone whilst checking the electronic correspondence that he received from Kuchiki Rukia, many times over.

As they passed through bamboo thickets and advanced on a straight gravel covered road, the Sukiya-mon\* (\*Sukiya architecture style gate) came into view. Before the lattice door there was beautifully brushed lettering that said "The safflower" and paper covered lamps cast a soft light on its surroundings.

"Th... This is the place.... isn't it... "

"We're already late for the get together, there's nothing we can do but go in."

As Kiyone made up her mind, she raised her hand to the lattice door. The wind blowed and bamboo leaves rustled.

"Lieutenant... I already have a stomach ache...!"

"Keep a strong spirit Yamada! Otherwise your internal organs will be twisting apart as soon as we enter!"

"Uuuu... I'm afraid.... "

“We are vice captain and 3rd seat! So even if you are going in and out of such a high class establishment, it’s not at all strange! That’s right, it should not feel strange! It’s alright, it’s alright!”

Whilst encouraging themselves, they opened the sliding doors and took a step inside.

The entrance of the restaurant was at the end of a stone pavement where both sides were dotted with paper lamps arranged in a row, and before that a pink kimono clad nakai\* was waiting for them. (\*Nakai - like a waitress/hostess at ryokan restaurants)

As the figures of the pair entered her vision, the nakai respectfully bowed and said “welcome, please come.”

The pair bowed their heads slightly as they walked hurriedly on the stone pavement.

“uh... We have an engagement with Kuchiki...”

“Yes, we have been informed, Kotetsu sama, Yamada sama”

Without any doubt, their names were indeed invited to the restaurant as expected, they both exhaled a breath of air in relief.

“I will guide you, please, this way.”

Led by the elderly nakai, they advanced through the corridors facing the gardens that had been arranged to magnificent levels of detail. The amber of the polished floorboards shined.

After crossing the corridors where huge koi fish were swimming atop a pond, they were shown into a private room.

“Here it is....your guests have arrived.”

The nakai called out through the (fusuma) sliding panels, to which a reply of ‘yes’ came from the inside.

The nakai slid open the panels noiselessly, with smiles towards Hanatoro and Kiyone, “Everyone is here now”.

“Kotetsu dono! Hanatoro!”

Rising from her zaisu chair, Rukia greeted them. Beside her, Abarai Renji also stood, with a bow he said “Thank you for coming when you are so busy!”

“eh? What’s this, what are you talking about!? Everyone is coming aren’t they!”

The familiar shinigami placed themselves around the extravagant low table placed in the middle of the spacious tatami room.

“Glad that you could make it~!”

“Thank you for coming, Kiyone san, Hanataro kun.”

Rangiku Matsumoto waved her hand and Hinamori momo swiftly bowed her head.

“Yo, Kotetsu! How’s the 4th squad?”

“Isn’t it fun working in the same place as your older sister?”

With a laugh, Kiyone said “fairly!” in reply to Madarame Ikkaku and Ayasegawa Yumichika.

“Yamada kun you were promoted. Congratulations.”

Kira Izuru congratulates Hanataro who shyly touched his hand to his head.

“Th....Thank you very much, Lieutenant Kira... !”

Observing that scene Hisagi Shuhei spoke.

“Oi, that was a while ago! Did you not see the seated members register that came out after the Great War? That was very hard to produce you know... !”

“I’m looking at it properly. It’s just that his face is merely different since the promotion.”

“That’s true, today is the first time seeing you after the great war.... I think.”

“Did you not meet at the times of your physical examinations? It seems every soldier has been made to go to the coordinated relief station.”

Renji asked Izuru who replied “I’m exempt from physical examinations.”

“This guy gets examinations at the department for research and development, so it’s ok.... Haven’t you read captain Kurotsuchi’s research paper?” Hisagi asked.

“I have read it but.... What’s it like coming back to life and then becoming amazingly strong?”

“You are truly an idiot.”

“Zero reading comprehension.”

Rangiku and Hisagi said in lightning quick remarks.

“e-eh? Why? what’s wrong?”

Rukia patted Renji on the back and said “I’ll explain later...”

“Well, don’t stand there forever Kiyone and co, sit here!”

That said, Rangiku pointed to two empty seats next to Hinamori.

“But Rangiku san, we cannot decide such things as our seating arrangements can we? Like the head of the table or the foot of the table.”

“Now now, there’s no need to be so formal! I think it’s okay if we put the captains in front of the tokonoma\*! Right Kuchiki?” (\*Tokonoma = alcove where art or flowers are displayed)

“Yeah.... It is. If that’s alright with everyone.... ”

Opposite Renji and Rukia, a slightly disgruntled Hitsugaya Toshiro who was placed at the other end of the table, nodded in agreement indicating that it was no problem. Kiyone and Hanataro sat down and all seats were occupied.

Curiously enough, against the tokonoma, the right hand side of the low table was entirely male members, the left hand side was three women + hanataro. Watching as Rangiku laughed saying “Hanataro is also on the girls team!”, Yumichika shook his head thinking 'good grief'.

“You’re a 'girl' yourself, you’re a bit old for that kind of thing don’t you think.”

“Hold your tongue Yumichika! Do you want me to knock you out!?”

“Come now, Rangiku san! Yumichika san also, please stop it’s no big deal!”

Kiyone rebuked, Yumichika shrugged his shoulders and said “understood”.

“Ahem.” Renji stood up straight and puffed out his chest to speak.

(Saying “ahem” was clearly absurd)

(Should have said more than just cough “ahem”....)

(don't think this “ahem” is a meaningful word.....?)

Rangiku, Hitsugaya and Hisagi thought.

Renji, with a nervous expression, looked around at all who were present. After also standing up, from the tension, Rukia's cheeks were slightly flushed.

“T-today, thank you for sparing your valuable time for us.”

Rukia's voice sounded shrill and nervous. Her cheeks became increasingly red.

Renji inhaled a breath of air.

“Actually about that, we.... ”

Everyone unconsciously stopped breathing due to the tension in the air, the pair's heartbeats could be heard.

“We, are getting married!”

Renji declared, together they bowed deeply.

Chapter 7: A moment, of silence.

When the couple raised their faces, Rangiku grinned and applauded them.

“Congrats!”

“That’s great, Abarai!”

“Congratulations!”

Ikkaku and Yumichika also clapped their hands at the same time. One person after the other spoke words of congratulations and applauded.

“err... Thank you very much, we are happy. We’re happy but... Everyone isn’t surprised.... ?”

“We had intended to set up something like a surprise but.....”

Rangiku smirked as she saw both of their expressions which was a complex mixture of both joy and confusion.

“Well, don’t you know?”

“There’s an important announcement’, I thought, when Rukia chan didn’t include it in her message earlier, how can one think otherwise?”

To Yumichika’s words, Hinamori also smiled and nodded in agreement.

“Since it was just me and Yamada that were both summoned by Kuchiki, I thought "what’s the announcement about?" until we came here, but.... Everyone is here and at a place of this sort of ranking"

“That’s right. When I saw this place’s appearance I also thought it was that kind of announcement.”

Kiyone and Izuru also agreed with everyone.

“I... Did not realise anything at all.... ”

As Hisagi muttered that, Rangiku quickly remarked harshly with “Thickhead! Uncool! Sleeveless!”

“huuuh.... Sleeves are irrelevant.....!”

Directly opposite a moaning Hisagi, Kiyone shook Hantaro's shoulder and asked "Hey, what's up with you Yamada?"

"Huh! I was so amazed that my consciousness went flying!"

Hanataro whose eyes were left wide open, finally regained his senses.

"A-are you okay? Hanataro!?"

Looking at her face anxiously, he replied "yes" to Rukia, Hanataro bowed deeply to the pair.

"I'm sorry I lost consciousness when we were celebrating.... "

Renji took no notice of the apology and instead showed him a smile that said 'it's no problem'.

"uhh... Congratulations, Rukia san, Renji san....! The marriage of the two of you...I, am truly happy...! The fact is, I don't understand why, even myself, but...I want to say "thank you", I just feel like that."

Hanataro tried to reflect upon every little word so that he could convey his blessing to the best of his ability.

"Thank you, Hanataro.... "

".... Thanks"

Looking at the couple who earnestly expressed their gratitude, naturally everyone's smiles grew.

"Once again, congratulations! Kuchiki, Renji!"

Rangiku declared.

"May you both live together in happiness!"

As Kiyone clapped her hands, a round of applause was given to the couple again.

Rukia smiled shyly, Renji displayed a toothy grin.

——Hitsugaya thinks.

The road to restoration is still far ahead, there are many places where untouched wreckage is spread far and wide. Meanwhile, the appearance of these two people who will build up new connections, will become hope for everybody.

“What is it? You’re grinning~”

Rangiku laughed a little, poking Hitsugaya repeatedly with her fingertips. There was no moodiness like there usually was in his voice that calmly responded with “nothing”.

“... It must have took considerable effort to do all this, Abarai!”

Hisagi said looking around the wide room.

“No I, left the task of the restaurant up to Rukia...”

“Because I don’t know much about restaurants, I wanted the people of my household to book a restaurant with private rooms for me.”

“Well, it’s such a high class restaurant that’s why.”

Rangiku said shrugging her shoulders.

“It’s my first time coming to kizokugai (noble city), I was insanely nervous~”

Kiyone laughed it off as Rukia apologised to her for that.

“It was reported to me that this restaurant was not pretentious, and that it was popular...”

Chiyo, a maid who usually performs miscellaneous chores around Rukia, is the youngest employee of the Kuchiki clan, she is a familiar companion for Rukia. For that reason, she entrusted the selection of the restaurant to Chiyo with confidence.

[“I will make preparations so that you have the perfect restaurant for today’s gathering!”]

She recalled Chiyo’s self confidence, face brimming with a smile.

It is certainly a perfectly suitable place for a gathering. Apart from the fact that it is not actually ‘popular’.

“Well yeah, seems like it’s popular with the four noble clans”

Ikkaku uttered, everyone nodded in agreement.



“But I think we are highly ranked enough for a place like this, aren’t we? There’s one captain, eight vice captains and two 3rd seats?”

Yumichika said, looking around at all. Who were present.

“We don’t come to establishments like this because it’s not a question of status, it’s a question of money~”

Rangiku responded with a sigh.

“Uuh... I’m scared of the bill....!” Renji held his head in his hands, from the corner of the room, the nakai who lingered there approached to slide open the panels.

“... Abarai sama”

“Yes?”

“We have received payment”

“eh!? From who....!?”

“That is... From a certain ally...Nothing more.”

The nakai spoke ambiguously about that certain somebody.

(It’s Kuchiki Byakuya....)

They guessed the person’s true identity.

“... I’m sorry, for inconveniencing my brother... ” Rukia muttered, Hitsugaya then spoke.

“I don’t think such a thing is any trouble for him...he’s happy you guys are getting married”

Raising her head, Rukia fluttered away tears that had filled her eyes.

“... we have to go thank him”

Renji uttered to Rukia in a whisper, who strongly nodded in assent many times over.

“If the head of the family has paid for it, then do not hesitate to eat and drink!”

“Even if Renji paid for it, I don’t feel like holding back...”

“Yeah! I’m a man who doesn’t hold back when he’s being treated!”

Listening to the exchange between Ikkaku and Yumichika, an exasperated Hitsugaya grumbled “Don’t throw your chest out like you’re proud of that...”

“... Hinamori? What were you looking around for just now?”

Rangiku remarked, Hinamori a little shyly pointed to the sideboard of the low table.

A beautifully carved crane was there.

“At first, I thought the carvings here are amazing. So then, if I looked around at only the celebratory things...”

In the tokonoma there was a hanging scroll suspended there with calligraphy, and white plum blossoms were arranged in a vase. There were splendid pine trees on the gold leaf covered folding screens and cherry blossoms in full bloom painted on the fusuma sliding panels.

“It’s a bit overkill for a celebration right...”

Izuru said feeling a slight pressure in his forehead.

“Is this room normally used for celebrations?”

As Hinamori asked, the nakai gave a relaxed smile and lowered her head whilst she replied.

“... We were able to make preparations like this with instruction we received from a certain ally.”

Surprise ran through everyone in the room as they all started to chatter.

“eh!? You were able to alter the interior design!? Didn’t you book the reservations just this morning Kuchiki!?”

To Kiyone’s inquiry, Rukia said “yes” and nodded.

“Everything today was down to my brother to begin with...”

It may have been reported to him by Chiyo out of worry, Rukia thought. In contrast with a perplexed Rukia, everyone was lightly smiling.

“Captain Kuchiki.....is he not awkward at celebrating?”

Ikkaku remarked, followed immediately by Yumichika and Rangiku.

“He’s too excessive. The celebration feels congested.”

“He’s not exactly used to celebrating.”

“Captain Kuchiki’s ‘cold demeanour’ image is unrivalled but...there must also be a side to him that’s in high spirits since his younger sister is getting married...”

Hisagi keenly stated.

“Haha... Although he might get angry if you said such a thing, I think that is very heartwarming.”

“That’s true.” Hanataro chuckled, agreeing with Hinamori.

“...I think he wanted to do something a little extra before Kuchiki san leaves his hands.”

Izuru looked at the interior of the room overflowing with good-luck charms, the true motives inside the heart of a reticent man, he thought. It was beyond imagination that this room came from his usual not very talkative self.

“Please accept it with the feeling that it is filial piety towards your older brother.”

Said Hitsugaya. Rukia happily smiled ‘yes’.

When the couple conveyed their intention to marry to Byakuya, he only said a few words;

["I see....understood."]

After saying just that, he left the couple behind in the room that he exited.

The next day onwards, especially because his attitude did not seem to change and his demeanour was the same as usual when they encountered him, he did not object to the thing but it seemed he he didn’t give much blessing either....the two were continuously worrying.

Today however, they understand that Byakuya, beyond all expectations, blesses their marriage fully, the couple felt relieved by that.

## Chapter 8:

“Renji, let’s get everyone something to eat or drink soon.”

“Right! Please, we beg your assistance!”

Hearing Renji’s request, the nakai turned her body towards everyone.

“Then, we will begin....How about beverages?” She asked whilst bowing deeply in a seated position.

“It’s okay if we request whatever we want, captain Kuchiki’s treat right!? Then let’s have your most expensive sake please~!”

Rangiku said in a cheery voice, Ikkaku also added “Bring bottles!”

”Both of you are shameless.....ah, sake cups for each person please.”

Hisagi’s face looked as if he wanted to say “don’t you drink yourself after all, Yumichika!”

“The captain doesn’t need a sake cup~. It’s believed your growth will stop when you drink sake right? Captain.”

Looking at Rangiku’s broad grin, Hitsuguya felt a twitch in his temple.

“....It is a special celebratory occasion. I will also drink.”

“Is that okay?~ You won’t grow taller, isn’t that right?~ No matter how much time passes, you won’t mature like that ‘Daiguren Hyourinmaru handsome edition’ time?~”

“Be quite Matsumoto!! Besides that’s not the name of that form anyway!!”

Rangiku is speaking about the appearance of Hitsugaya’s Bankai at the time it was shown in the ‘Protection of the Soul King Great War’. When the ice petals that bloom in mid air disappear, Daiguren Hyourinmaru exhibits its true worth, corresponding with that power, Hitsugaya temporarily grows into the body of a young man.

“That’s right Rangiku san. That’s ‘Daiguren Hyourinmaru version two~noble son of ice~’ is it not?”

“I conclude that it’s ‘Dai-Daiguren Hyourinmaru.’ (\*Dai=big)

“Ayasegawa, Madarame! Why are you both naming it as you please!? .....And Hisagi! What were you writing down just now!?”

“Well umm....If I publicly advertise the name in 'Seireitei communication' it will raise up excitement, won't it....”

“Absolutely not!!”

Elsewhere from the clamor of voices arguing back and forth, Hinamori, with a smiling face told the nakai “some fruit sake for me please.”

“Hey captain~ please let me take pictures when you grow into an adult. At that time, I didn't have my denreishinki\* because I was carried in the medical treatment pod, I couldn't take a photograph~!” (\*Soul reaper mobile device)

“I refuse!!”

“The same as everyone else for me is fine” said Izuru.

“By the way, Rangiku san what were you doing at that time? didn't see you on the battlefield”

“Me, well I was told by the captain, everyone was doing as they pleased, causing a scene and the destroyed Soul King Palace wreckage was falling down on Seireitei, I was breaking it up with Haineko until it became an okay size! Simple~! The fact is, I was doing my best!”

“Really? it was like that....! Since I was swiftly attacked and on the verge of death the whole time, I can't remember anything at all.....pff that is pitiful!!”

Next to Kiyone who raked a hand through her hair, Hanataro whispered his request for some green tea to the nakai.

“[‘Great war - persons of distinguished service behind the scenes special feature’].....Not bad at all!”

Hisagi muttered, writing down his idea for a special feature in his notebook.

“.....It's been a long time since things have been lively like this”

Renji laughed a little, Rukia also nodded in agreement “That's right”.

Prior to the Great War, it was part of everyday life that troops from each squad would gather and drink sake together after work. But now, every squad is busy with reconstruction

operations, even if you just drink with people of the same squad, troops of several squads gathering as drinking parties was extremely rare.

The couple were deeply grateful that these troops were able to accept their invitation under such circumstances.

—1 hour and 3\_ minutes since the start of the banquet.

The drunkards, Rangiku, Yumichika and Kiyone, were persistent, only when they finished listening about the couples meeting up to the marriage proposal, information that they had inquisitively pried from them, did they finally set the pair free with a look of satisfaction.

“And? When is the ceremony?”

Ikkaku said whilst gulping down the expensive sake like water.

“I discussed it with Rukia, but we’ve planned to not conduct a ceremony, we will only register the marriage.”

“It’s such a time like this, so just being able to celebrate with everyone in this way...”

“You can’t do that!!”

Rangiku shot up and slapped the low table with a \*bang\*. With eyes bulged open, she thrust her index finger towards the pair.

“You must absolutely conduct a ceremony!!”

Rangiku spoke with hopeful eyes to Rukia who was at a loss for words.

“For sure, I want you to plan it because it’s such a time like this....! Everyday I’m receiving reports like ‘that squad house has been repaired, that facility has been reopened’, you know? I think this is bright news. But then again, everything is usually just “this is restored back to its former self”....!”

Hearing of the reconstruction advancement was a pleasant thing. That sentiment was no lie.

Although it was no lie—

“When I received an email from Renji this morning, ‘is this a marriage announcement?’ That’s what I thought, for the first time in a long while it truly felt like my heart was boiling over in

excitement! I was so cheerful!.....since you two made me feel so great, how you decided not to hold a ceremony.....such a thing like that....I absolutely will not tolerate it!"

After saying that, Rangiku gave a tender smile. It was not merely a consequence of drunkenness, that the area around her eyes were slightly tinged with red. Hinamori cried loudly as if the sake she had consumed had slackened her tear glands, "I also want you two to hold a wedding ceremonyyyyy....!"

"Oh~ there there.....Hey Abarai Kuchiki-i! Hinamori is crying like this! Take some responsibility, hold a ceremony!!"

Kiyone barked embracing Hinamori's head closely.

"I also agree! Besides, Renji.....if you don't hold a ceremony, what if captain Kuchiki doesn't remain silent~?"

Ikkaku emptied his sake cup with a gulp.

"At any rate, it gives captain Kuchiki a reason to want to celebrate. If this one celebratory occasion is wasted, he'd be offended."

Saying that, Yumichika with a confident expression looked at Renji. Blood drained from Renji's face.

"[The true revival begins from here—Abarai, Kuchiki, two vice captains, marriage ceremony special feature].....50 pages, fully loaded opening spread wedding photos.....not bad!!"

"It's not good to connect anything to work right now, Hisagi san"

Without paying attention to Izuru's candid advice, Hisagi reviewed the draft of the magazine's content from next month onwards.

"There are rarely marriages like this between fellow lieutenants. No one complains when you celebrate on a grand scale."

Hitsugaya said, calmly tilting back his sake cup.

".....thank you very much. Truly.....how we are so blessed.....!"

Rukia placed her hands on her knees grasping tightly, she looked at Renji.

“Let’s hold a ceremony, Renji! let’s allow everyone to celebrate this to the marrow of our bones!”

Though it could’ve been written off as a desperate proposal, Rukia’s eyes however were sparkling with happiness. Renji hit the palm of his hand with his fist “alright! Let’s do it!” he reciprocated with a smile.

“Everyone, we will have your attendance! Will you please accept this responsibility and come?”

Everyone gladly nodded to Renji’s invitation.

“If it’s been decided as such then I need to make preparations for a kimono in a hurry~! And putting in a booking for measurements!”

Rangiku excitedly took out her denreishinki and began to send an electronic message to a familiar draper.

“Matsumoto.....just the other day you said you have too many kimonos that you can’t wear them all, wasn’t a cabinet brought over to you from my office.....?”

Hitsugaya was uninterested in garments, he only had a few clothes himself. For that reason, originally there were two cabinets placed in the Captain’s office, now one remains without much use. It was absolutely no problem to have things that do not get used, but considering there was already twenty cabinets crammed into the lieutenant’s room; Rangiku’s passion to purchase even more new things whilst also possessing that many kimonos, was no small wonder to Hitsugaya.

“I will also go for new kimono tailoring.....!”

“Ah! Well then Hinamori, shall we go together?”

“Uhh, is that okay!? I definitely want to go with you!”

Kiyone raised her hand “me too, me too!” At that exchange, Rukia’s eyes also shined.

“Lieutenant Matsumoto, me too.....!”

“Kuchiki you can’t! Isn’t it captain Kuchiki who should be deciding the arrangements for your kimono~? He will undoubtedly give orders for the highest quality things, so behave yourself!”

Rangiku said, Rukia feeling slightly abashed nodded her head in agreement.



“Err.....I, have no experience in something like this..... what’s appropriate for a man to wear.....?”

Hanataro enquired after timidly raising his hand.

“Well, I think it’s okay for the guys to wear their shihakusho. After all this is acceptable uniform. Also I have no money to buy”

So when he saw Hisagi laughing that it was okay and he need not worry, Hanataro exhaled a large breath of air and said “that’s good.....”

“It seems there is no money because Hisagi San does nothing but waste it..... Yamada kun, if you go to a draper store and tell them about the sort of budget you have and what kind of thing you want to wear, they will choose something precisely adequate for you. Try going there once.”

“Th...thank you very much, lieutenant Kira”

Hanataro bowed his head to Izuru over and over again until he was halted by Izuru who said “that’s enough!”.

“I, should wear Western clothes~! I wonder if you will invite Ichigo and Orihime chan too?”

“That’s right.....! Of course we will speak with them!”

Renji replied to Yumichika, he then asked Rukia “is that okay?”

Rukia nodded ‘of course’ enthusiastically.

“.....for a while, things will become more busy now.....”

Uttering that her face radiated bright with joy.

## Chapter 9 :

6th sector - Kuchiki clan mansion

On a morning after one week since the gathering at the marriage announcement has passed.

“Nii-sama!”

Finishing squad preparations, Kuchiki Byakuya exited his room only to be called to a halt by Rukia. She nimbly folded her knees and propped herself up with both hands on the plain wood of the hallway.

“Today I will leave for the nyuseki\* formalities”

*(\*entering a family register as a married couple)*

After bowing and then raising her face, Byakuya looked at Rukia with softened eyes.

“I see.....has an appointment for going to the Kininkai already been settled?”

Rukia tilted her head at hearing this unfamiliar word ‘Kininkai’.

“Go to.....Kininkai.....? Don’t I simply submit a notification to the Personnel Record Administration Bureau.....?”

Watching his younger sister-in-law who looked puzzled, Byakuya’s eyes widened in bewilderment for just a moment.

“.....Chiyo”

“Yes, I’m here!”

Immediately there was a reply coming from the right hand side behind Rukia. Turning to look over her shoulder, to her surprise, her maid Chiyo was kneeling there whilst lowering her head in a deep bow.

“Give a detailed explanation to Rukia”

Without saying what, Byakuya gave this command with only a few brief words.

Having no need to enquire back, Chiyo responded with “as you please”

“.....I will go now”

“Take care, Byakuya sama”

“Take care, Nii-sama!”

Chiyo said that whilst remaining in a low bow, Rukia stood up and watched his back until he was out of sight.

“Well then.....Chiyo. What in the world is this 'Kininkai' that nii-sama was talking about?”

Rukia returned to her room accompanied by Chiyo, together with Abarai Renji who had just come to pick her up, they sat face to face with Chiyo.

“Kininkai is an abbreviation for 'Kinin\* (*\*Golden seal*) noble assembly. In cases of marriages involving the four noble clans it is compulsory to submit a document to the Kinin noble assembly, that document should be presented by the head of the family themselves.”

“I see.....! So that’s why nii-sama asked me if I had a fixed appointment for going to the Kininkai”

Chiyo nodded 'that’s right’.

“Where is this 'Kinin noble assembly’?”

When Renji asked, Chiyo laughed “you should avoid being impatient, Renji sama!”, she spread out a piece of paper with four folds that was kept in between her waist sash, in front of the other two.

“In which case, please allow Chiyo to deliver an explanation regarding the process of the nyuseki!”

On that paper that was entitled [Rukia sama, Renji sama course of events up to the nyuseki], there was beautifully brushed writing and a myriad of details were penned. Chiyo pointed at them one by one, she carefully explained the numerous formalities leading up to the nyuseki.

“It.....it’s this complicated!?”

“I even feel the ill will of someone who doesn’t intend to get married.....!”

The pair who had finished listening to everything, both had their heads resting in in their arms, a summary of the nyuseki process is as follows.

1- For the marriages of persons residing within Seireitei - submission of marriage registration to the (7th sector) Personnel Record Administration Bureau.

2 - For the marriages of Gotei 13 soldiers - submission of regimental soldier marriage registration to the (4th sector) Gotei Soldier Record Administration Bureau.

3 - For the marriages of official seats and above - submission of high spirit marriage registration to the (6th sector) Higher Order Spirit Rank Administration Bureau.

4 - For the marriages of nobles - submission of noble marriage registration to the (Central 1st sector) Noble Assembly.

5 - For the marriages of the four great noble clans, a marriage certificate is presented to the Kinin Noble Assembly (Central 1st sector), the husband and wife are present under the head of the family who submits it.

6 - Report to the captain/vice captain of the entire division at the squad's headquarters.

"By the way, the reception counter of the Kinin Noble Assembly is only open from 9am to 11am, so please be aware of that! It is for that reason that Byakuya sama was concerned about going to a Kininkai appointment"

"Is that so, that's no good I can't take half the day off.....!"

Nodding a 'yes', Chiyo looked at her pocket watch.

"If you are going to face this process from now.....because you are both well accustomed to using shunpo, Chiyo thinks you will be just in time to present yourselves for regimental soldier marriage registration!"

"Even if we use shunpo we can't visit more than two places!? Right now it's still....."

"It is seven minutes past nine"

"It is!? I understand that the Kininkai is compulsory, I hope I can go as far as submitting a document to the Noble Assembly!"

"Renji sama.....the offices have a waiting time, that part is unavoidable. Since there is no way that each administration Bureau will simply do marriage registration at the reception desk....."

The Personnel record Administration Bureau that deal with people going in and out of Seireitei is particularly busy, it was famous for its long waiting times, it is said that they handle all procedures throughout the whole day.

“Renji, I wonder if there is no help for what you were saying to Chiyo?.....Chiyo do you mind if I take these instructions?”

“Of course not!”

Chiyo gladly folded the paper up and respectfully held it out to Rukia. Putting it into her pocket, Rukia clapped Renji’s shoulder and stood up, “let’s go”

## Chapter 9:

### Marriage Registration

#### 2

7th division barracks.

Whilst walking Goro the pet dog at the back of the squad building, the 7th division's captain, Iba Tetsuzaemon, went around the premises to collect the previous day's paperwork.

The typical collection method is that after work, each soldier submits their paperwork of the day to the collection box in front of the office, but the former captain Komamura Sajin did this in a specific way, "Morning collection walk", which Iba continued to this day.

Upon finishing the collection, Iba returned Goro to his pen, he took a seat on a bench that was placed next to that pen. The bench was right under the growing shade of a Yamamomo tree, and a refreshing breeze was blowing. Iba took out a bundle of reports from the documents container, he shifted his sunglasses to his forehead and eyed the contents thoroughly, he then inked areas of concern in red.

When the paper bundle reached half its original amount, Goro who was sprawled out by Iba's feet with a white fur coat that swayed in the gentle breeze, pricked up his ears, and then raised his body.

"What's wrong, Goro?"

Goro barked once as if to bring attention to something, he gazed intently at the alleyway beside the squad building and wagged his tail excitedly. Before long from that alleyway appeared two young werewolves wearing student's hakama indicating they were students of the Shino Academy, they started sprinting into a tumble.

"Urui! Shouma!"

"Tetsu saaaan!!"

The older brother Urui, who's grey fur fluttered, jumped at Iba's right leg as he stood up from the bench.

"Tetsu San, Tetsu San!!"

The younger brother Shouma who had an ivory-white coat of fur, clung to the left leg also. Goro delightfully ran laps around Iba.

“What have you been up to so early in the morning?”

After patting their heads, Iba grasped the back of their collars, peeled them off of him and then lowered them back to the ground. The pair playfully followed and pet a slightly disheveled Goro whilst talking.

“Since we are starting the apprenticeship from tomorrow, throughout today we are learning the path leading to the barracks of the division we are temporarily affiliated with, sensei told us to examine what’s around us!”

Shouma declared, “it’s the last day off before things become terribly busy!” Urui added.

“So then, Tetsu san! We.....”

Pulling Urui’s sleeve whilst breaking him off mid-sentence, Shouma said “Big brother that’s unfair! I will also say it!”

“Well then, let’s say it on go! Ready, set, go!”

“We were assigned to the 7th division!”

From around his waist height, two sets of cute round eyes stared up at Iba.

“Both of you! That’s amazing!”

“Right! It’s awesome! Since it’s 1 out of 13 and 1 out of 13.....err.....”

“1 out of 169!”

“Ah! That’s the probability! Big brother calculates fast.....!”

With a “that’s right!” Urui placed his hands on his hips and threw out his chest. The thick bushy tail that protruded from his hakama swayed left and right.

Normally, the former apprentices were selected at random, the head of the academy probably allocated them both to the 7th division whilst considering their feelings, Iba thought.

“Ah, that’s right! We wanted Tetsu san to make us a tail hole again, today we’ve brought our Shihakushou’s hakama given to us by sensei!”

Urui tucked up his sleeves, from a bag he took out a black hakama accompanied by a small sewing box which he then handed over to Iba. "Mine too" Shouma also took a hakama out from the bag.

"Of course.....even though I'm not your mother....."

Despite uttering that complaint, Iba opened up the sewing box and began working. Contrary to that manly appearance, Iba was nimble fingered, from carpentry to housework and sewing, he could do anything. It was also Iba that made a hole in their student hakama for their tails to pass through which the werewolf brothers were currently wearing.

Urui and Shouma sat on both sides like they were sandwiching Iba, they watched fixedly, captivated by his skill.

"Hey, Tetsu san. We went to meet Sajin sama yesterday night. We informed him that 'we are starting our apprenticeship from the day after tomorrow'."

Urui said whilst focusing his gaze on the tip of the needle sowing forward with a \*prick-prick\*.

"You snuck out of your dormitories again!.....then, was Sajin dono doing well?"

"Uh huh! When we went and hunted such a plump pheasant!"

Shouma spread both of his hands widely with a complacent smile.

"I see. that's good"

"It was still warm and delicious"

Urui watched as Shouma licked his lips, "That's bad manners!" he chided.

"Sajin sama wanted us to tell Tetsu san that as a leader of people you must, more than anyone else, take care of yourself"

As Urui said that, Iba's hand suddenly stopped moving.

"Tetsu San was at the training field late at night and was discovered by Sajin sama" Shouma giggled.

".....He can see through anything..... I'm no match for Sajin dono....."

Iba sighed and then laughed a little.



Komamura Sajin did battle using the secret “Humanisation technique” handed down to him by his werewolf clan in order to strike down the enemies of Genryusai, in the end, the price he paid for that was transforming into an animal that could not speak.

Along with becoming a wolf, Komamura survived through the Great War, he remained hidden in the hills behind the training fields, Iba reported to everyone that “Captain was killed in action”.

All the existing captains and vice captains felt the spiritual pressure of Komamura - although it became much smaller and could not compare to before - but respecting the decision of Iba, they dealt with it as if he were killed in action.

Even when it became a popular topic of conversation that a large wolf had settled in the hills behind the 7th division’s training grounds, everyone in the inner circle thought “it’s Komamura Sajin.....” whilst maintaining an air of indifference towards the subject.

One night, after half a year had passed since Komamura began living on the hillside.

Iba thought that it seemed as if Sajin was summoning him, he jumped up from his futon. He grabbed his haori and rushed out the front.

“It’s going to be getting reasonably cold.....”

Iba walked upon the training grounds, Komamura sat at the foot of a grass covered hill. When he caught sight of Iba’s figure, he got up and gave a small bark, he then lead Iba up the hill. As he followed, he tread firmly on the soft ground where fallen leaves had accumulated, he was guided before a hole, approximately one meter in diameter, dug directly into a steep slope.

“Is there something inside.....?”

Iba stooped down and concentrated his gaze inside the the pitch dark hole.

“Who is it? Sajin sama.....?”

He thought he had imagined hearing the small voice coming from inside. Komamura barked towards the inside, there were sounds of something stirring about, two young werewolf boys crept out. They were wearing clothes that were similar to rags, their fur was slightly dirty, only their eyes were a breathtaking vibrant orange colour.

“This is.....! Are they werewolf children.....!?”

Looking at the surprised Iba, the two werewolves with cute eyes said “Woow!” in a raised voice.

“It’s Iba Tetsuzaemon San!”

“Awesome, awesome! It’s the real Tetsuzaemon san!”

The pair delightfully ran around Iba.

“Sajin sama called him here! Thank you very much!”

The young boy with grey fur threw his arms around Komamura’s neck. Komamura responded with a sniff and softened his eyes.

“Tetsu san! We came here because we want to become shinigami!”

The other young boy with ivory-white fur, jumped about whilst grasping Iba’s clothes, he teared himself away and said “hey! When people meet people, they introduce themselves first!”

The pair kneeled alongside each other whilst resting on both hands in front of Iba.

“It’s nice to meet you! I am Urui of the werewolf family! I’m this guy’s older brother”

“I am called Shouma! I’m the younger brother!”

In unison they voiced a “pleased to meet you” and bowed.

“I’m Tetsuzaemon Iba. 7th division captain.”

Iba bowed sternly, “we know!” Shouma laughed.

“We read this and decided we want to become shinigami!”

Urui carefully took out a worn out magazine that was inside his pocket, he showed the front cover to Iba.

It was a squad 7 special feature issue of 'Seireitei communication' published many years ago.

Iba carried the two back to the squad house, they both took a bath first of all. Meanwhile, he quickly prepared rice balls and soup in the kitchen, the pair got up from the bathtub and put on new clothes, they then sat in front of the hibachi\* (*\*traditional Japanese heating device*) and ate their meal. Komamura hated the idea of heading inside, but he was pulled in regardless given

no choice by the brothers, thinking “good grief” at the situation, he settled himself down in the corner of the room.

“So you guys, how did you come here?”

Iba asked the two who were now completely clean, whilst he was warming up with hot sake.

“We were packed into uncle’s\* cargo!” (*Note: this ‘uncle’ person is **not** actually their uncle, ojisan is not uncle in this context but using other words like ‘mister’ didn’t flow well with the text so he will be referred to as ‘uncle’*)

“Shouma, he won’t understand if you just talk about that all of a sudden! Tetsu san, is it okay if this becomes a little long?”

Watching as Iba nodded, Urui put down his soup bowl and began talking.

“Because our werewolf clan normally live inside a den, we almost invariably don’t know anything about the situation of the outside world. Even if we ask adults they say they don’t know, so I thought I should go see for myself, together with Shouma, we secretly sneaked out of our den at the dead of night.....”

“We went to a nearby town! The stars that came out were amazing!”

“The werewolf clan live on top of a large mineral deposit where various gems are mined, they are extracted for business. Since we knew that once a month, an adult takes the gems to a nearby town to exchange them for clothes and other supplies, we followed the scent and went there. It was night so there was no one on the streets but, the both of us got to take a look around for a while.”

“Then, we met uncle!”

At the edge of town, a large refined looking man with a muscular build, was happy to see the two small werewolves and gave a broad smile.

“That person, he always carried out the gem transactions with our werewolf clan, he was uncle goods transporter.”

“This book, he gave it to us!!”

Shouma put aside his food and instead picked up and embraced the “Seireitei communication” magazine.

“Since we knew uncle would be in town in the evenings of the days the adults would go bartering for goods, we went to meet up with him many times, we heard about the outside world.....stories of the Gotei squads. The fact that a very powerful ryoka came, that there was a battle to protect a human world town, that there was an awfully huge war and a lot of shinigami lost their lives.....”

“Apparently, a lot of the 7th division shinigami also passed away. Sajin sama too.....we were told he was dead. However we would not believe that! Such a big, strong and cool person like Sajin sama could not be dead.....!”

“So then, we decided to go and confirm it. If he had truly died, at that moment.....we said, let’s become shinigami in Sajin sama’s place!”

The Hibachi’s glowing embers were reflecting in the eyes of the two who looked directly up at Iba. The original orange mixed with red, it appeared as if the insides of their eyes were set ablaze.

“If we said that to our mother, she would tell us 'don’t say such reckless things!' She’d get so angry that she’d lock our bedroom door from the outside at night.....in the daytime the adults are watching and we can’t sneak out, we were worried about what to do, on the day our father had bartering duty, he took us with him to town”

Before departing, their father said “since they’ve been secluded in a den the whole time, they’ve started talking about becoming shinigami. If I show them around outside a little it may calm them down.” He persuaded their dissenting mother and then took the pair out.

“Our father did the business transaction at the edge of town with uncle goods transporter, at the end he said "won’t you transport these guys to Seireitei”.

“At that moment father handed over a red gem wrapped in a cloth, I saw it!”

“It was a ruby I think. I guess that was our transport fee.....father said 'shrewdly follow down the path that Sajin sama has opened up’ with a smile he sent us off.”

Watching his father’s figure as he waved his hands enthusiastically, Urui suddenly thought that their father also might in fact have wanted to become shinigami. 'Did he give that up when we were born’.

As they both remembered their father, they seemed lonely, their ears turned downwards. The quiet room resounded with the noise of crackling charcoal.

“Uncle gave us cloth to hide our faces, so we wore that and walked through Rukongai for several days.....we were then concealed inside a wooden box and loaded onto a cart before a huge gate.”

“We were taken in swiftly without being exposed but, we were told we couldn’t be unloaded in a place where there were people watching, so we went to uncle’s delivery destination! It was a very big workshop called ‘Omaeda Jewels’.”

“The Omaedas’ company buy gems from our werewolf clan.....!”

‘Omaeda Jewels’ is one of soul society’s Jewelers run by the Omaeda clan. The second division’s vice captain Omaeda Marechiyo serves as the manager of the precious metals department; it was a familiar company Iba thought, but he’s never heard of there being any relation to the werewolf clan before.

“To start with, we thought we should meet Tetsu san, we asked uncle about the location of the 7th division. In order to not be discovered by people, we only traveled at night time, we passed through mountainous terrain and forests.....on the night of the third day, in the middle of the forest we detected the scent of a fellow wolf.....!”

“We thought, Sajin sama is alive after all! We followed the scent and arrived at that hole, finally we found Sajin sama!!”

At that moment their excitement returned, Shouma stood up and started hopping up and down on the spot.

“We explained to Sajin sama about everything until we came here, ‘Tetsuzaemon will surely be of help to you’ he told us.....”

“Wait a minute! You guys can understand the captain’s speech.....!?”

“Eh? Tetsu san doesn’t understand?”

“Shouma, people don’t understand wolf language. That’s normal.”

Urui declared, Shouma sadly lowered his tail and walked towards Komamura. Sitting beside him Shouma said “Sajin sama is there anything you want to tell Tetsu san? I can relay it for you”, he brought his ear close to Komamura’s mouth. After pondering on this for a little while, Komamura gave several low barks, catching his words, Shouma came back in front of the hibachi with a smiling face.

“What did captain say.....?”

“First of all he wants you to stop calling him 'captain'! Since Tetsu San is the captain now, it's uncomfortable to be called so”

“I, I see.....! I apologise, ca..... Sajin dono!”

Facing towards Komamura, Iba bowed his head, “you saved it at the last moment just now!” Urui said.

“And one more thing, 'Tetsuzaemon is well suited for parenting' he says!”

“Huuuuuh.....!?”

“Hahaha! I also think so too Sajin sama!”

“Me too I also think so!”

Watching as the pair rolled with laughter, a slightly embarrassed Iba took a gulp of his sake.

“What in the world do you think the time is right now.....captain Iba!?”

Vice captain Iemura Yasochika, who came to give a warning to what seemed like soldiers staying up late, was lost for words when he saw the line up of faces illuminated by the Hibachi.

(Who are those wolf children!? And could that big wolf in the corner possibly be Komamura Sajin sama then.....!? So does that mean those wolf children are members of Sajin sama's clan.....!?)

“Ah! I know this guy!” Said Shouma pointing at Iemura whose mouth was agape.

“He's the person that's third seat of the 4th division!”

“If I'm not mistaken.....that is Iemura san! Hey Tetsu san, why is there a 4th division member here so late?”

“You both might have read in 'Seireitei Communication' that this guy is in the 4th division, well he's my vice captain now”

Hearing that, the pair exchanged a glance at each other's faces “vice captain!?” they rushed over to Iemura.

“Nice to meet you! I’m called Urui, of the werewolf clan!”

“I’m called Shouma!”

Together they said, “Pleased to meet you lieutenant lemura!” and they bowed.

“Th-that’s very kind…… I’m lemura Yasochika, vice captain of squad 7……”

“These children, I will take responsibility over these werewolf brothers”

“Tetsu san, you’re accepting us!?”

“Hooray!!”

The two kicked off the floor, flying past the hibachi to embrace Iba. Behind his sunglasses, Iba looked fondly at them, he gently placed his hands on the two heads.

“What are you mumbling about lemura, it’s off-putting! Spit it out clearly!”

“No, that……it’s just that captain Iba makes that kind of facial expression too……”

It was the first time in half a year seeing Iba with a smiling face. Naturally he was a man who didn’t smile very much, after the Great War and since the captain’s inauguration, his face was always tense and stern.

“What, you have the cheek to say that……!”

Iba tried to throw his sake cup at lemura after feeling embarrassed that his smiling expression was seen but was stopped from doing so by Komamura. Komamura barked several times in a row, before long Urui translated the contents.

“You get too worked up. You need to loosen up the tension in your shoulders some more”

Dropping his raised arm, Iba apologised to lemura, “sorry”.

“Please don’t apologise……it was on the spur of the moment. I will understand if I get a scolding right now however, if you will just allow me to say this……”

lemura came closer to the hibachi, he sat on his heels in front of Iba and pushed his spectacles up.

“Captain Iba, I believe you have the tendency to be a little too stubborn. You train until late every night, regardless of the late hour I have to wake up to heal your wounds. It seems as if I was seated as vice captain because of the fact that I was from the 4th division. Even if I tell you to take a little rest, you do not listen, you relinquish your day off to train again and again.....watching the captain being like that, the troops also train all the time until late, they barge into my place to fix their broken arms and fractured bones. Even when I have vice captain duties. Everyone says 'I want to be strong like captain someday', 'I want to be able to support the captain someday', truly.....you are a wonderful captain. Except in just one place, you don't seem to appreciate your vice captain much.”

Iemura said almost without taking a breath, he fearfully raised his face, Iba silently held out a sake cup for him.

“.....thank you very much”

Iemura accepted it and remained quiet as the sake was poured.

The werewolves who were exhausted fell asleep atop Iba's knees, their light snoring could be heard. Settling against the Hibachi's embers, the two continued to drink together in peace.



## Chapter 10 :

“Look! How do you like it?”

Having completed sewing holes for their tails to pass through, Iba handed over the hakama one by one to each of the two.

“Thank you Tetsu san! Is it okay if we also wear them now?”

Shouma said hastily, raising his hands to the cords of his student hakama, “wait wait” he was halted by Iba.

“Keep it for tomorrow! I have to return to work already”

“Okay.....”

Shouma disappointedly put the hakama back into the bag. “Hey Shouma let’s go!” Urui urged, whilst waving enthusiastically at Iba they dashed towards the alleyway beside the squad building.

Rukia and Renji who received a numbered ticket at the reception desk of the Personnel Record administration Bureau, decided to use the lengthy waiting time to visit the 7th division barracks which was nearby to the administration bureau, they ran into the other pair in that alleyway.

“Wh-what! Those are the kids people have been talking about.....!”

The young brothers of the werewolf clan who pass through the academy are rumoured to be ‘super cute’, they were particularly quite famous amongst the female troops who liked cute things.

“Awesome!! Two vice captains!!”

Shouma’s eyes sparkled as he looked up at the couple.

“Tetsu san! Lieutenant Abarai and Lieutenant Kuchiki have arrived!”

Urui went back to the rear of the squad building to call out to Iba.

“Yo, wolf kid! What’s your name?”

Renji bent down, his line of sight connected with Shouma’s.

“I’m Shouma! From tomorrow, I’m an apprentice shinigami of the 7th division! .....cool! I wish I also had that sort of hair colour!”

“Hehe, you think it’s a nice colour? My real hair?”

Looking at Renji’s crimson hair, Shouma wagged his tail.

“Yeah.....!”

Rukia approached closer as though she was being drawn in by that fluffy tail, Shouma suddenly pricked up his ears and began sniffing. Following the source of the scent, his nose was brought near Rukia’s body.

“Hey, hey!”

Renji caught the back of Shouma’s collar and held him up.

“You can’t just go boldly sniffing a woman like that! If you sniff around like that it will look bad!”

“.....Don’t sniff around in the first place”

“I’m sorry! But I did that because there was a sweet scent, I instinctively.....”

Hearing 'sweet', Rukia said “I see, was it the scent of this?” from her sleeve she took out a small pouch. Opening the mouth of that pouch, she showed the inside to Shouma.

“Candy!!”

Looking at the multicoloured candy, Shouma unconsciously licked the tip of his nose whilst sticking out his tongue. Rukia closed the pouch and handed it over to Shouma.

“Eat it together with your older brother”

“Yay!!”

Shouma hoisted up the pouch and hopped up and down, from behind him Urui, who had returned with Iba in tow said “Thank you very much Lieutenant Kuchiki!”

“We must go now! Shall we look around the premises?”

“Oh yeah, right! Tetsu san thank you for the tail holes!”

“Tetsu san see you again tomorrow! Goodbye, lieutenant Abarai, lieutenant Kuchiki!”

Iba urged them forward, ahead of him the pair looked as if they were competing with each other as they left.

“The brothers are very pleasant.....”

“They seem quite popular at the academy from what we hear.”

“I strongly understand that feeling.....!”

“That fluffy tail, it’s making me want to touch it or something”

Rukia’s thoughts ran away to that wagging tail, as if it had seared itself into her memory just now.

“So what did you guys come here for? By the looks of it, it seems like you’re off duty but.....”

Renji was wearing his shihakusho but with his vice captain badge removed, Rukia was clad in a cool, pale blue-green kimono.

Iba put his hand on his chin whilst looking in the direction of the pair who lowered their heads together.

“We’re going to be getting married now, so we’ve come to pay a visit”

“We will continue as lieutenants together with being a married couple, so we came to say, please continue your support towards us”

“I see, right! Fellow vice captains getting married, this is a joyous thing!!”

Iba clapped his large hands, applauding the shy couple. However, suddenly attaining a thought about something, his hands stopped.

Marriage, marriage registration, Personnel Record Administration Bureau, waiting time — inside Iba, everything linked together into one.

“Right now the both of you, you’re under the Personnel Bureau’s damned long waiting time?”

“That’s right! Really, how is it this long!?”

“We thought we’d use the opportunity to come here, sorry to disturb you, captain Iba.....”

“I don’t mind! I suppose we’re busy with one thing or another, thank you for showing up!”

Iba clapped Rukia’s shoulder with a pat, he struck Renji’s shoulder with a fist.

“Ouch!!”

“Keep it up, Abarai!!”

Iba grinned. Renji answered back with a “yes sir!” and a bow.

“I have to return back to work, since I’m still in the middle of filling in paperwork. I wish you happiness!”

Iba glanced at the documents tucked under his arm, he then lightly raised his hand at the pair as he went to return back to the squad barracks.

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When they returned to the path leading towards the Personnel Record Administration Bureau, Rukia asked Renji a question.

“Renji.....captain Iba, was he always that way from the beginning.....?”

“Even though I was told he was ‘a certain way’..... I didn’t think anything in particular about it you know?”

“I see.....”

Rukia appeared as if she was thinking about something, “what is it?” Renji enquired.

“I don’t have that much of a deep relationship with captain Iba but..... I suppose I was surprised by how easy it was to talk like that..... I had the impression that it would be difficult for me to talk to him”

“Well..... he’s not the easy to talk to type”

“What would be good to say.....uh.....amicable...like he’s become gentle.....”

Rukia shifted both hands, trying to represent something fluffy and round.

“That shape.....are you thinking about those small wolf kids.....?”

“That’s right, that’s it Renji! Perhaps captain Iba had changed because he has become the acting parent of those children.....!”

Even though it was through sunglasses, when Iba looked at the werewolf brothers, his eyes were very gentle.

(..... certainly, if such a fluffy thing is wandering around near oneself, it’s impossible to come off as being unapproachable forever.....!)

Rukia strongly thought whilst at the same time deeply lamenting the fact that their apprenticeship was not at the 13th division instead.

## Chapter 11:

Squad 4 barracks office.

After finishing her patrol of the Coordinated Relief Station, Kotetsu Isane returned back to the squad barracks, "I'm back~!" she called out whilst opening the door of the office.

"Wel-come w-ack w-ig sis"

The younger sister Kiyone who was grappling with piled up paperwork on the tabletop lifted her face up and replied whilst her mouth remained stuffed with suzu castella\*. (*\*Bell shaped Japanese sponge cake*)

"Oh! Eating sweets during work again!"

"It's fine! It's only us! I need to consume enough sugar because I use my head for paperwork"

"You did that at the 13th division too right? Without eating sweets"

"No no, the amount of paperwork at the 4th division is different! I absolutely cannot do without eating this~"

Kiyone said whilst tossing the suzu castella up into the air, catching it with her mouth before eating it. She did not stop herself from eating even as Isane chided her "Ugh! Can you not spill any sugar on the documents?"

"Oh yeah, before coming here just now, I saw Kuchiki san and Abarai kun!"

"Oh! they said they were getting married right?"

"Yup! They'll both keep up as vice captains so, they said they appreciate your continued support. It looked like they were in the process of going to file their marriage registration at the Gotei Soldier Record Administration Bureau."

"Oh, it's near this place"

"I was asked if the wait for the Soldier Bureau was long, so I informed them that it's quick around there"

As the name suggests, the Gotei Soldier Record Administration Bureau, is the administrative office that manages the information and data of soldiers belonging to the Gotei 13, and since it is only off duty officers who visit the reception window, the waiting time is remarkably short compared to that of the Personnel Record Administration Bureau.

“When I became vice captain, I also went there to adjust the record of my squad affiliation..... it’s already been three years since then.....”

After the death of former captain Unohana Retsu, Isane was urgently appointed as squad 4 captain. It was a compulsory appointment where refusal or putting it on hold for later could not be permitted. Squad 4 is a facility that includes the Coordinated Relief Station which is a hospital for shinigami, it was impossible to proceed forward in the absence of a leader at a time when they had numerous wounded people from war.

[ “It may be difficult but, I have no choice but to request this of you..... I’m sorry” ]

Kyoraku himself visited Isane, he left behind a written appointment letter. For a short while, Isane stared in blank amazement at the letter, snapping up she chased after Kyoraku, she caught up with him at the spot he had exited the squad barracks, she put forward her wish to have Kotetsu Kiyone installed as her vice captain at the same time as her own inauguration as captain.

“Hey, big sis. Your vice captain, why was it me?”

Kiyone asked without pausing her hands from her task.

“What’s this all of a sudden?”

“Come to think of it, I believe I’ve never asked you. Since we grew accustomed to working around each other as soon as I took office, we were able to do our best, right? Both of us were feeling down on top of that.....”

“..... that’s why, I wished that”

Isane muttered those few words whilst processing the paperwork one by one.

“At that time, I.....wanted to stay close to Kiyone, and I wanted Kiyone close to me so I can be there for her”

Isane with Unohana, Kiyone with Ukitake. They had just lost partners that they had felt a mutual sense of reverence for. Isane thought they could not overcome it unless they supported each other.

“Of course, not only that! Kiyone’s kaido\* (*\*healing kido*) ability was also taken into account!”

“Yeah, thanks..... but is it enough to be nominated for vice captain?”

Kiyone laughed and turned her head, becoming a little shy at the serious tone of the conversation.

“What are you talking about! You were number one out all your classmates in kaido!”

“I guess so~ but learning in a classroom as opposed to practical training was completely useless”

“seems that it was written in the data of the academy that your kaido ability was so high that they had to supplement that more.....captain Unohana put off saying it all that time. In truth, Kiyone, you were supposed to be assigned to the 4th division.”

“Really!? If I remember correctly I wrote down my wish to join the 4th division on the course evaluation report.....”

Isane revealed that her younger sister wished to work at the same squad, Unohana smiled softly at Isane and informed her of the true state of affairs.

“Just before the official decision was made, Genryusai sama suggested to the head of the Academy and captain Unohana that Kiyone be assigned to the 13th division. Captain Unohana said that they wanted to place a young person whose speciality is kaido near captain Ukitake..... particularly at that time, Captain Ukitake’s health had become discouraging, captain Unohana would frequently go up to *ugendo*\* for his medical treatment.”

*(\*ugendo - Ukitake’s quarters where he would often go to rest)*

“Right it was like that.....! At the time, though I also talked about it to you big sis, it was strange that they immediately sent in a fresh recruit to be the captain’s personal guardian. I see.....Genryusai sama.....”

Kiyone once again recalls how truly loved captain Ukitake was by everyone. New recruits themselves as well as veteran soldiers alike held deep admiration for Ukitake whenever they encountered him, Kiyone instantly came to love him a lot.

“When Kiyone joined squad 13, captain Ukitake started to gradually recover..... and when captain Unohana returned from her house calls, she would speak highly of Kiyone, I was very happy”

“What a wonderful younger sister” she would say as Isane remembers being beyond ecstatic about that herself.



“Because Kiyone has the seal of approval from captain Unohana, she can confidently bear the title of squad 4 lieutenant, so that’s enough!”

“It’s not that I’m losing my self-confidence but.....thanks big sis”

Kiyone smiled reaching her hand out towards the suzu castella. However, the inside of the paper bag was empty already.

“Oh, it’s all gone. Big sis, don’t you have anything sweet?”

“You’re still eating? Don’t you have dinner?”

“Even though I’m full I still have room for dessert, so It’s fine~”

Whilst she said that, Isane opened up a cupboard which was tightly packed with sweets.

“There’s so many! Does my big sis really eat sweets like this.....?”

“Those are snacks for the flower arrangement class. Everyone has tea and sweets whilst observing the flower arrangement”

Unohana used to host monthly flower arrangement classes, now Isane continues to do so. Kiyone does not participate because her legs get too numb whilst sitting on her heels, however it is a popular class where most of the female troops of the 4th division attend.

“Even so, it looks like a lot.....”

The shelves were crammed full with a variety of sweets.

“.....I just had to buy those. They were sweets that Yachiru chan liked.”

-----

It was the last words Isane exchanged with Kusajishi Yachiru.

As she applied the reiatsu healing treatment in both of Yachiru’s arms which ended up broken and fractured by Sternritter V ‘The Visionary’, Gremmy Thoumeaux’s ability, Kiyone was finally able to release the breath she had held in.

“Phew.....with this, you should be able to move one way or another”

“Thank you Kote-chin!\*”

(\*Just in case you've forgotten Yachiru calls Isane 'kote chin')

Smiling and getting up, Yachiru looked up at the "stage" Gremmy had produced. Zaraki Kenpachi and Gremmy battled on top of an enormous cuboid that was formed by raising up the ground.

"I have to go!"

"Aah, please wait lieutenant Kusajishi! You shouldn't move around so vigorously yet....."

Isane's outstretched arm slipped through quickly as she broke off into a run.

"Finally.....Finally Ken-chan can call out to me....."

She faintly murmured.

Those were Yachiru's words, the last that Isane had heard.

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"Since there is no longer a chairwoman, the Shinigami women's Association meetings do not take place anymore.....vice president Nanao san is busy, and Research and Development is in charge of Nemu san who is currently still a baby....."

Kiyone resumed her work whilst gulping down konpeito\* (*\*a type of Japanese candy*), Isane leant forward with an "eh!?"

"Nemu san, she's already grown up to the state of a baby!?! The last time I saw her she was not yet completely....."

She recalls being absolutely perplexed at being introduced to "Nemuri Hachigō", a clump of flesh floating around inside a transparent cylinder filled with culture fluid.

"Because everyone was saying they were scared and they didn't want to go, during this time I had to take the medical examination results from those guys at the Department of Research and Development, right? So, I saw Nemu san at the time, she was wildly crawling around the department. When I greeted her, she stopped and bowed her head.....it was cute"

Hachigō was created based on the brain retrieved from the artificially created soul Nemuri Nanagō, although the body is different, Nanagō's memory and spirit is being taken over.

"Haa.....I want to see.....! I wonder if it's okay if I also go and see her?"

"Why not? I got the impression that Captain Kurotsuchi can't help but brag about her"

Isane instantly broke into a smile and said "I wonder when is good" she happily turned over the tabletop schedule book, suddenly she lifted her face as if something had just struck her mind.

"Shall we also invite everyone when we go to meet Nemu san.....? The Shinigami Women's Association"

".....yeah, I think that's a great idea!"

Kiyone nodded in agreement and gave a broad smile.

This was the first step towards the launch of a new order of the Shinigami Women's Association.

## Chapter 12: 6th Division Barracks - Lieutenant's room.

After they finished submitting their documents to the Higher Order Spirit Rank Administration Bureau earlier than expected, they had quite some time left until the Noble Assembly reception counter was opened which they had to visit next, Renji who was accompanied by Rukia, came to pack things up at his private quarters.

"You haven't tidied up at all!?"

As soon as she opened the (*fusuma*) sliding screen, Rukia was dumbfounded by the disastrous scene before her.

Surrounding the futon that was laid out at the centre of the room, clothes, books, a soccer ball to muscle training goods, every possible item was scattered about in utter chaos.

"It's because I was occupied one way or another It couldn't be helped you know!? There's a box over there, so you can gradually pack everything in however you want"

"It's okay to do it however we want? But shouldn't we consider sorting it out....."

"Nah, right now speed is essential! We'll sort everything out at our new home!"

Whilst wondering whether or not that would be the reality, Rukia began packing things up off of the floor and into the box.

Officially seated members who are 9th seat or above, are given private rooms within the squad barracks. Most people go to sleep and wake up there, however people wishing to live outside the squad barracks are given a class of housing appropriate to their station. No more than one room of a housing complex is rented out to those up to 3rd seat, but when it comes to captains and vice captains, they are provided with detached housing large enough to be called 'mansions'.

Until now, Renji was living at the squad barracks, Rukia at the Kuchiki mansion, after the establishment of their marriage they will both utilise that system and move into a mansion together built in the central first sector.

“This looks okay! I’ll tidy up bit by bit later myself. Thanks, Rukia!”

“This is.....enough? .....alright”

To Rukia, the place still seemed like it was cluttered, but she convinced herself it’s good enough if the person himself says it’s okay.

“There’s still a little time. Drink some tea or.....”

Breaking Renji off mid-sentence, “Renji san!”, the third seat of the 6th division, Yuki Rickichi came running down the hallway whilst waving his hands.

“That’s good! Made it in time!”

“What is it Rickichi? What do you want with me?”

“Well both of you rather than just Renji san. And not me but my younger brother”

“Me also?”

“Younger brother?”

“Younger brother, I’ll call him”, the pair turned their heads as he left them on that spot, Rickichi continued to run through the hallway. Not even a minute had passed and Rickichi had returned accompanied by the 13th division’s Yuki Ryūnosuke.

“You..... you’re Yuki Ryūnosuke!? Aren’t you stationed on duty!?”

“Heh! I apologise! Shino san should be undertaking those duties sufficiently, so please pardon my intrusion~~!!”

Ryūnosuke said, energetically dashing to kneel down on the ground before them.

“Urahara san wants to convey to the vice captain that you should feel more at ease than usual because Tsukabishi Tessai san will join in aiding Shino san.....”

Madarame Shino is Ryūnosuke’s companion, they are a two person set-up stationed on duty in Karakura Town.

“That being the case there is no need to worry.....”

“Do you know each other?”

“I am a soldier of the 13th division. I am tasked with an on-going mission in Karakura town”

“And he’s my brother! It seems this guy has a package for the two of you from Urahara Kisuke san.”

Prompted by Rikichi, Ryūnosuke removed something wrapped in a (furoshiki) cloth that he was carrying on his back, he held out a box that was inside it to the pair.

“For some reason, I’m afraid to open it.....”

Renji who accepted the case, placed his hand over the the lid.

“Yeah.....because it’s a gift from that guy.....”

Rukia who appeared as if she was being hidden by Renji’s body, watched intently as his hand worked to open the box.

Just before the box was completely opened, a puff of white smoke appeared from inside, Urahara’s voice began to play out, **“Hell~o~! It’s been awhile since I last contacted you~!”**  
“Whaaa!?”

“Huuuuuh!?”

Regardless of the fact that Renji had thrown down the box in shock, the voice continued to stream out. Ryūnosuke crouched down appearing to be protecting his head with both arms, Rikichi, unable to remain standing due to the surprise, fell on his backside.

**“Kuchiki san, Abarai san, congratulations on your marriage!”**

Sounds of a fanfare reverberated in addition to his voice.

“Did you tell him about it?” Renji inquired, Rukia shook her head from side to side.

**“It’s the second day off duty together for you both, so that must mean today, to start with, you should have gone to the High Spirit Bureau, after experiencing the trauma of the waiting time at the Personnel Bureau, the two of you set out from early morning, however you unexpectedly finished early, since there is time until the next public office is opened, this time you should be returning to the 6th division’s barracks to tidy up the lieutenant’s**

**room, seeing as Abarai san is well acquainted with Yuki Rikichi san, I thought I'd get Rikichi san's younger brother Ryunosuke san to go there~"**

"You're practically a psychic aren't you!!"

Renji yelled whilst sweating. Of course, Urahara couldn't respond because it was a recording.

**"Because I am indebted to you both, I have also prepared a special gift for you from Urahara Shop!"**

In an instant the white smoke cleared away and its contents became exposed.

**"Tenikui\* (\*lit. transfer posts) Warp Assistor~!!"**

Inside, there were red pegs and blue pegs, eight of each no bigger than one's palm, and fitted into the space that was empty, there was a silver coloured plate with 'Tenikui Warp Assistor' carved onto it.

**"Those pegs were made using the technology of the Tenkai Kecchu\*, with this you are able to transfer items instantly between two points when you enclose something with four of these pegs of the same colour! I have sent two sets for the two of you who will be living together outside of the barracks after this, so now you are able to move things between your house and respective barracks in an instant!"**

*(\*Tenkai Kecchu - think back to the fake Karakura Town arc, it's the device Urahara created to swap out the real KT with the fake i.e. those four giant pillars)*

"Teleportation!? That's insanely convenient isn't it!!"

"It's certainly convenient but....."

Rukia feeling precautious, thought it was too good to be true.

**"I've made similar things in the past but, the captain commander scolded me saying 'What if our enemies manage to use that to crowd us and attack!'.....well for that reason please use this secretly~"**

"It's for that reason he shouldn't spread such a thing....."

"Well, but still.....! It's okay if we use it secretly....."

"We can't possibly use something Genryuusai dono said no to can we!?"

**"Incidentally, Kurotsuchi san has used and installed something similar to this throughout the Seireitei~"**

"See I told you so!"

“What do you mean 'I told you so'! Captain Kurotsuchi can go as far as using experimental things like this because he's in a position where he's expected to develop technology.....”

**“Which reminds me, the Shinigami Women's Association also used a warp device installed by Nemu san when going to their hideout.”**

“.....huh?”

“But.....!”

**“And then, Omaeda san also paid Kurotsuchi san a great deal of money, making it possible for him to warp between his home and his squad barracks”**

“Alright, let's use it! This device is already being widely used!”

When Rukia declared as such, with a \*woosh\* Renji posed victoriously.

**“.....I think by this point Kuchiki San would have also given in, so the explanation of the product is now over!”**

Knowing her thoughts were being read perfectly, she let out a groan in annoyance.

**“Well then, Kuchiki san, Abarai san, I wish you everlasting happiness! .....please talk to me if you have any worries. I can offer advice, whatever I am able to do”**

“We should have nothing to fear if we could get advice from the founder and former director of the Department of Research and Development! Should we?”

“Ah.....really.....”

How many times has this person helped them? No matter how desperate the situation was, he always devised countermeasures, and managed to show them the path forward.

Rukia's heart overflowed with gratitude.

**“Furthermore please note, this voice recording will not automatically terminate, as long as the box stays open it will loop repeatedly.....Hell~o~! It's been awhile since I last contacted yo-”**

Rukia quickly closed the box. Renji silently took it, without pause he tied the lid with a spare hair cord so that it would not open.

“.....I get the impression that Urahara san is 'that sort of person' huh.....”



Rikichi muttered with regret. For the soldiers who have never actually encountered Urahara, their knowledge of his remarkable feats comes from 'Seireitei Communication', and there are many people who see him as a hero. Rikichi was also one of those people.

"I was also inspired by him, until I actually met him....."

Hinting at the implication that he isn't inspired by Urahara anymore, Ryunosuke sighed. As for, Rukia it was easy to imagine the possibility of him being put through various practical jokes by Urahara whilst he was stationed on duty.

"There is no other person who is as reliable as him when it came to times of war....."

"If Urahara san isn't being revered by this guy, then that must mean there is peace in the Human World too, am I right? It's a good thing, don't you think?"

Renji said with a laugh.

"That's true....." Rukia said with a soft expression whilst nodding in agreement.

## Chapter 13 :

6th sector - Kuchiki clan mansion.

On the morning of the day they were to head to the Kinin Noble Assembly, Renji passed through the Kuchiki clan's huge main gate with a nervous expression. As he advanced on the stone pavement that had been swept clean, he was greeted by an old man with white hair wearing a pair of round spectacles - Seike Nobutsune, an attendant attached to Byakuya.

"Abarai sama, we have been expecting you"

Calmly bowing, he opened the door of the (*genkan*) entryway, "please come inside"

"Nah, I'll meet her in front of the entrance....."

"I have been informed to tell you that you are to join Byakuya sama for breakfast"

"With the captain!? U-understood"

Renji became increasingly nervous, moving awkwardly, he followed behind Seike.

Three food trays were placed in the banquet hall, Byakuya, Rukia and Renji silently moved their chopsticks. The tray's lacquerware was lined up with a variety of small bowls overflowing with side dishes and white rice, appearing as if he couldn't resist it any longer, Renji posed a question.

"Is it always this quiet.....?"

He felt awkward that nothing but the sound of him eating stood out, given the fact that the other two were eating almost without making a sound.

“We usually eat separately. Nii-sama eats here, I eat in my room. Since the 13th division is quite far away from the mansion.....If I don't finish breakfast beforehand and depart earlier than Nii-sama, I won't make on time for the start of work”

When Rukia calmly put down her chopsticks, the waiter, who was standing by at the corner of the room, immediately removed her food tray and placed down another tray with Mizugashi\* (*\*a type of Japanese Jelly dessert*) and tea on it. Rukia responded with a “Thank you”.

“You could live in the lieutenant's quarters couldn't you? It's more comfortable being able sleep until just before the start of work isn't it~? Captain, you also stay overnight when it gets too late right? In the captain's office”

“.....I do not stay overnight”

“I see.....pardon me”

“.....are....-licious.....”

“.....huh? What was that?”

Renji turned his face towards her, Rukia's head remained lowered as she murmured something.

“The meals are delicious.....in this house.....! I think It's normal to want to eat here every day right.....!?”

Her face became bright red as she said this. Seike and Chiyo who were waiting back wore smiling expressions that looked as if they wanted to say '*goodness!*' and '*oh my!*' Appearing as though he was suppressing the expression in his eyes, the waiter was overcome with emotion. “That's rather gluttonous.....”

“Shut up!”

“But yes, it's certainly extremely tasty. I'm not surprised if you'd want to come back here every day just for that”

After emptying out his 4th bowl of rice, Renji set his chopsticks down, he brought his hands together showing appreciation for the meal. Looking at Rukia who was eating a pear whilst her cheeks were still stained with red, Byakuya coughed once.

“It's fine if you want to come back here to eat anytime”

“Awesome! Thank you very much, captain!!”

“.....I wasn’t talking to you”

Looking at an astounded Byakuya, Renji laughed and said “I understand that!” In a loud voice.

“Nii-sama, thank you very much.....!”

As her eyes lightly filled with tears, Rukia smiled. Seeing Byakuya’s eyes tenderly narrow in a soft expression, Renji’s mouth gaped wide open.

"Ca.....c-ca.....ca- captain smiled.....!?"

“What do you mean 'C-c-c-ca'.....? Even Nii-sama smiles sometimes.....”

“Rukia”

Perceiving the will in Byakuya’s voice that 'no more has to be said', Rukia held her tongue.

“I have finished affixing my seal on these documents..... I will go now”

Byakuya promptly exited the room leaving the other two behind. Without a sound, Seike also follows.

“.....Captain, he was feeling a bit embarrassed wasn’t he?”

As Renji uttered that, Chiyo who looked as if she was unable to restrain herself any longer, burst into laughter. “Hey” the senior waiter chided, with a bow of her head she apologised. However her shoulders were still shaking.

“We should get going too, Renji.....Chiyo don’t keep laughing forever, please help me with this kimono”

“Certainly!”

Chiyo quickly walked up to Rukia who had stood up, carefully she adjusted her clothes which were slightly disheveled.

“Abarai sama this way”

An elderly servant who was in front of a (fusuma) sliding screen that lead to an adjoining room, called out to Renji.

“Huh? Even me?”

Saying that Renji looked to Rukia, but she inclined her head like she also knew nothing.

When Renji stood before the sliding screen, two servants immediately drew back the panels.

Placed at the center of the room was a beautiful clothing rack with two mounts, there a five crested kuromontsuki and haorihakama\* was hanged up. (\*Traditional Japanese formal wear for men)

“Cool.....! .....huh? Is this for me!?”

“It is indeed. Byakuya sama ordered that you receive this.”

“Nii-sama.....!”

Finished with her adjustments Chiyo stepped back, Rukia stood lined up beside Renji.

“Come to think of it..... on the evening we reported to Nii-sama our intention to marry, after Renji had returned home, I was asked "does he have a ceremonial suit to wear?" but I answered that well, at any rate he probably doesn't have one....."

“Why'd ya make up your mind on something like that, you don't know maybe I do have one!? I don't have one but still!!”

Rukia looked at Renji with an expression that said '*I thought so*'. Renji turned his face away, he then approached the montsuki.

“These crests.....they're camellias?”

Attached on the black fabric there were crests, dyed in white, representing the 6th division's squad flower, the camellia.

“We were informed that Abarai sama doesn't have a family crest.....but if it's the squad's camellia flower, then it's suitable as a crest is it not?”

Saying that, the servant calmly bowed. “A camellia crest was Seike sama's idea” Chiyo added.

“Ah! That old guy!”

“Byakuya sama said everything including this crest is fine.....”

“Even if that was kept private, he would accept it wouldn't he?.....”

Picturing Byakuya with an extremely troubled expression, Renji let out a small sigh.

“That was so thoughtful of him.....this is great, Renji”

“Right! .....’but well, in the end even with this montsuki, Rukia hopefully won’t feel awkward walking next to him’, that’s what this probably means am I right?”

With a “eh?” Rukia looked up at Renji.

Renji laughing, pat her small back and said, “.....everything he does, it’s for you, Rukia”

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Central first sector.

When Rukia and the others arrived with the documents at the window of the reception desk of the Kinin Noble Assembly, one of the officials, who appeared to have been contacted already, greeted them with a respectful bow.

“The head of the family, this way”

The man opened up the massive double doors that were at his back, Byakuya proceeded inside.

“The two of you, please wait there”

Rukia and Renji sat down side by side on the dark green sofa he indicated to. Making sure they were seated, the official headed inside the room and closed the doors.

The waiting room fell silent. Although the space wasn’t that wide, Rukia thought the place was built too large for merely four clans.

“Before they see to us, he has to affix his seal right?”

Unaccustomed to wearing montsuki, that are apparently quite uncomfortable, Renji turned his head several times.

“This morning Nii-sama said that he had already finished affixing his seal on the documents, so because of that.....here, he only has to submit those documents isn’t it?”

“If he’s just submitting a document then it’s not necessary to go into a separate room, ya kno-  
.....”

Quicker than Renji could finish talking, the doors of that inner room were opened up again. Entering the waiting room themselves, the male official passed through the doors followed by Byakuya.

“You’ve finished already……!?”

He looked at the clock that was hanging on the wall. Not even five minutes had passed since the two had entered that separate room.

“Abarai Renji sama, -Abarai- Rukia sama”

Watching as Rukia’s shoulders sprang up with a start, the man smiled softly.

“Congratulations on your marriage”

Saying that, he presented a single sheet of paper before the two.

It was a '*Certificate of Marriage Acceptance*'.

“Thank you……very much……”

As a consequence of the fact that the formalities had gone by so fast, it was Renji who listlessly accepted the certificate, but as soon as he saw the characters 'Abarai Rukia' written there, he stood up from the chair.

“We did it Rukia!! With this, we were finally……finally able to get married!!”

Taken aback at being named “Abarai” herself, Rukia’s mind went blank, but she regained her composure when Renji shook her shoulder.

“Abarai Rukia sama”

“Ye-yes!”

Rukia looked in the official’s direction whilst willing herself to stay in control so as not to lose that composure she had just regained.

The man took out a yellow coloured form that said “*Notification of Gotei soldier name change*” before speaking.

“If you’re going to be using the surname 'Abarai' whilst on duty from now on, then please submit this form to the 'Gotei Soldier Record Administration Bureau'……”

“It’s fine, I will keep the Kuchiki surname as it is”

“What? You’re not changing it?”

“I absolutely cannot change it!!”

Although Renji seemed to be somewhat dissatisfied with this, Rukia decided to refuse altering her gotei soldier registered name as she thought there was a real danger that her mind would get distracted if person after person that encountered her called her 'Abarai'.

Giving a slight nod to the official, Byakuya headed outside. The couple also followed suit.

(My last name is Abarai now)

Rukia thought it was quite strange how her family name had just changed In a matter of minutes. As she walked, Rukia wondered whether or not a day would ever come where she'd get used to being called 'Abarai', Byakuya who was walking several steps ahead of them, stopped abruptly.

“.....You two are husband and wife now”

He said this whilst his back remained turned towards them. They instinctively straightened their posture.

“.....Renji”

“Yes!”

Renji’s facial expression stiffened as he waited for Byakuya’s next words. Slightly lowering his head, Byakuya spoke.

“.....Take care of Rukia”

Bowing deeply, Renji answered with sincere conviction, “of course.....!”

Rukia held back her tears and bit her lip.

“Captain.....! I will, absolutely.....at all costs for Rukia-.....”

"I've made arrangements for you to be able to announce your marriage at the captains meeting this afternoon.....don't be late."

Byakuya coolly spoke, interrupting Renji who was about to say something good.



“This.....afternoon.....? Eh....!”

“.....Eh? Eeehh!? Today!?”

Feeling a sense of vertigo from their emotions, the pair fell into a slight state of panic.

“But.....about that.....I still have to prepare myself.....!”

Losing the senses in her teary eyes, Rukia’s gaze darted about.

“I-isn’t this a bit too sudden!? Perhaps after we’ve settled down a bit more.....”

“Are you saying.....my efforts have been rendered futile.....?”

Byakuya slowly turned his head to look over his shoulder, he looked at the pair with eyes that had cast aside emotion.

“We’ll announce it today”

“Please accept our sincere apology for your troubles”

At that moment, the pair had collected themselves again.

“If that is the case, then make haste”

With a final sharp look, Byakuya immediately shunpo’d away.

For a moment they stood there in a daze before coming to their senses, in a mad dash they headed back towards the Kuchiki mansion to change into their shihakushou.

## Chapter 14 :

Squad 1 barracks - captains' meeting assembly hall.

Finishing her report of the reconstruction situation, Ise Nanao bowed down. Kyōraku Shunsui walked out to change places with her, "Well!" he said bringing both hands together in front of his chest whilst surveying all who were present.

"There's another piece of good news today"

"This is it....." Rukia thought to herself, quaking with nervousness, she balled up her fingers and breathed deeply.

".....now, please come forward and tell us from your own mouths"

Prompted by Kyōraku, the pair passed behind the line-up and stood side by side in front of the entrance of the assembly hall. As everyone's gaze settled on the pair, their throats went dry.

"Uhh, I....."

As Renji was about to continue talking, Rukia poked his side with her elbow. "Oh, I see" Renji murmured, clearing his throat with a single cough he started again.

*(Note: it's impossible to translate to English, but here Renji used his normal pronoun 'Ore' which is very casual and rough, Rukia elbowed him to speak formally, he uses 'watakushi' in the following line which is a very formal pronoun along with other humble vocab)*

"Right, I Abarai Renji along with Kuchiki Rukia, completed our nyuseki today!"

"We will both continue to proceed with our current professional duties as a married couple, so we appreciate your continued support and guidance from hereafter"

The two bowed at the same time, Kyōraku took out a party-popper that was concealed up his sleeve and pulled its strings. A dry crackling sound echoed through the room.

"Wow! Congratulations~! How about everyone else!? Aren't you all surprised?"

Kyōraku looked around at everyone's faces as the confetti fluttered about all over the place.

".....oh my, really? Everyone's not very surprised at all huh.....?"

"It seems everyone already knew? That probably means those two didn't keep it hidden.....I was also already aware of it because I heard it from Hinamori san."

“Whaaat.....everyone already knew?.....”

Soifon then spoke to a somewhat dejected Kyōraku.

“I have no interest in these matters but, it’s only natural that I’d have information coming in”

“I heard from Izuru. Congratulations. If you need celebratory music for the ceremony, you can consult me at any time”

Rōjūrō Ōtoribashi also known as 'Rose', gestured as if he was playing the violin.

“I-I received word of it from them both personally”

Isane hurriedly spoke presuming that they were making their statements in order of squad number.

“I heard about it from Momo. Congrats to you both! This one was in such high spirits saying how she was going to buy a brand new kimono for the first time in ages you know?”

Hirako pointed his thumb at Hinamori who was standing behind him. “Do you have to talk about me right now.....!?” Hinamori said as her cheeks reddened.

"Both of them came to give me their greetings too, so I was also aware”

Iba continued the discussion, skipping over a silent Byakuya.

“I also knew. Congratulations.....Rangiku has requested that I purchase a pearl hair accessory from the Human World before the ceremony, but is there any other person here who also needs something too?”

“Don’t do business at the captain’s meeting, Lisa! Shūhei is very eager to do a special feature in 'Seireitei Communication' on your marriage. But If you don’t like the sound of that you can refuse him ahead of time right?”

Behind Kensei, Hisagi brought his hands together and prayed “please allow me to do it! I beg you.....!!”

“I also heard from those two first-hand..... It’s good you were able to complete the nyuseki successfully”

Hitsugaya had been concerned about whether or not such formalities would be completed without any problems, as he had heard from Rangiku that the far too troublesome process could appear to make both of them lose heart.

“I also knew. Since Ikkaku and Yumichika kept yapping on and on about it”

As he said that, Kenpachi picked at his ear with his pinky finger. Behind him, Ikkaku pursed his lips tightly with an expression that looked as if he wanted to say that he didn’t kick up *that much* of a fuss.

“Of course I knew as well. I also know about the device that was gifted to them from Urahara.....”

When Mayuri cast a glare in their direction, the pair broke out into a cold sweat and swiftly averted their eyes. “Oh my” Kyōraku said whilst shrugging his shoulders.

“If everyone already knew, then it would have been agreeable to just skip over this marriage announcement.....but, I suppose we can’t leave things as it is without discussing the ceremony properly”

“....ceremony?”

Together, they both tilted their heads.

“But we haven’t made arrangements for the ceremony yet.....”

“We were thinking about making arrangements for the ceremony after this, and then making an announcement again separately”

Hearing this, Kyōraku tilted his head this time.

“Eh? But, I was just told that the ceremony will be held in two weeks time”

“Eeh!?! By whom!?”

At Renji’s enquiry, Kyōraku pointed to Byakuya and said “by captain Kuchiki.” Byakuya’s facial expression did not shift in the slightest, his eyes were cast down as he remained silent.

“I’ve arranged for you to have three days off around that time since it seems the two of you will need it to prepare”

“Hyu~! Nanao chan, you’re so thoughtful~!”

“P-please wait a moment.....! My heart still needs to gather itself.....!”

Rukia clutched her heart firmly. She was unable to completely calm the palpitations in her chest.

“Captaaiiin!! Why do you never consult us on these matters—!?”

The several people amongst those who happened to be present, who also knew about Byakuya’s ‘poor celebration skills’ thought “looks like he’s done it again~”, whilst finding the scene amusing at the expense of the couple.

“Huh.....you mean you both truly didn’t know? Despite the fact that you’re the bride and groom?”

The pair fiercely nodded many times over at Kyōraku’s question, confirming what he had just said.

“Captain Kuchiki~ you should really Inform the people in question as one would expect, otherwise it’s pointless you know~”

Responding to Kyōraku’s mild chiding, Byakuya opened his mouth to speak in a somewhat astringent manner.

“.....I also know from my own experience that the marriages of the four noble clans is a series of complicated procedures.....”

It had taken as far as two months for the nyuseki with his late wife Hisana to be accepted, Gotei soldiers also had few days off back then compared to now.

“In addition to that, I could not possibly believe that you two oblivious ones.....would be able to put in order the appropriate ceremony arrangements and such”

Watching as the pair who were at a loss for a response, sank into silence, Kyōraku laughed.

“Well to sum it up, what you mean is, *‘everything up till the nyuseki must have been very difficult, so please leave the bothersome ceremony preparations up to your big brother’* am I right?”

“Truly quite the troublemaker aren’t you”

Byakuya glared at Hirako’s exasperating grin, “oh how scary!”, he said whilst shrugging his shoulders.

“Nii-sama.....truly...thank you very much.....for everything!”

After Rukia had said that, the couple bowed low. Byakuya exhaled a small breath, “captain commander.....please continue” he said urging on Kyōraku.

“I discussed it with captain Kuchiki not too long ago..... it’s not very often we get to see things like fellow vice captains getting married, so what this means is, expressly for the ceremony day, the end of work hours will move up to around two hours earlier. I suppose there will be many amongst the troops who would also like to attend.”

“Whaa!? You’d do something like that for us!?”

Renji exclaimed in surprise, at the same time, Rangiku delightfully raised her voice “you mean it!? Hooraaay!”

“.....Matsumoto”

At Hitsugaya’s reprimanded, Rangiku half-heartedly apologised, “Yees, sorry!”

“Well even though it will be two hours earlier, the time of the ceremony will still be a little late but.....I think an evening bride will undoubtedly be just as beautiful”

Kyōraku said this with a warm expression. Enveloped in a whole flood of emotions, Rukia bowed.

“Indeed, how peaceful this all is.....if we are already done here then I will go back now”

Separating himself from the line, Mayuri heads towards the doors. Rukia and Renji hastily forked out left and right, clearing the path for him.

“Because your cute little Hachigō chan is waiting right~”

At Hirako’s teasing, Mayuri suddenly stopped walking.

“O-ho.....it seems you do not value your life.....?”

As turned to look over his shoulder, his golden eyes were lit with murderous intent. Renji who was standing nearby instantly felt goosebumps on his back.

“Now now, don’t quarrel~”

Kyōraku spoke as he clapped his hands.

“Although it’s true that we will be breaking up this meeting now, captain Kurotsuchi will not kill captain Hirako! Okay?”

Kensei looking rather astounded mumbled “what sort of warning is that.....”

Mayuri snorted with a \*hmph\*, Akon followed as he left.

“Well then, I now declare this Gotei 13 captains’ meeting session over. Thank you for coming”

Nanao’s voice sternly proclaiming the captains’ meeting over, echoed throughout, as for the couple, it was a captains meeting that the pair would never in their life be able to forget.

Chapter 15 :

## The Ceremony

### 1

Human world.

Karakura Town - Sakurabashi park.

This park constructed on the hills overlooking the railway track was Inoue Orihime's favourite place. Even though it is only a small park with a few dozen or so trees and couple of benches, every bench is placed in front of a great view and there is no disappointment wherever you sit. Amongst those, Orihime particularly liked the bench facing opposite the railway track, she loved watching the trains and the town from there.

Kuchiki Rukia and Abarai Renji were currently sitting side by side on that very bench. The time was around 10 p.m. and the small night view of Karakura Town was spread out below them. Because Renji was not as familiar with the Human World as much as Rukia was, every time a train would pass by he would curiously follow it with his eyes.

"Kuchiki saaan!"

Orihime dashed up the stairs leading up the hill whilst waving her arm. When the pair stood up and waved back, she raised her voice in surprise, "huh? You're here together with Abarai kun too!?"

"Yo! You're looking well, Inoue!"

"Yup, I'm well!"

Orihime replied whilst ascending the final few steps on the staircase, "fuu, I've arrived~" she said, recovering her breath when had reached the top.

"I'm sorry for taking up your time this late"

With Rukia in the middle, the three of them sat down beside each other on the bench.

"Not at all, don't worry about something like that! I'm so happy you came to see me!"

"How about the store? Is it still thriving as usual?"



“Uh huh! Business is already booming everyday!”

Orihime currently works as a regular employee of a bread and cake shop called ‘ABCookies’. After her older brother Inoue Sora passed away, she was getting along by receiving assistance with living expenses from a distant relative; but because of the fact that the relative had originally declared that they would only provide assistance up till high school graduation, since the summer of three years prior, Orihime had been searching for a job placement for after graduation. During that time, she was working at the shop part-time, the shop manager who had learnt of her situation insisted that Orihime be fully employed by the company.

“Rangiku san and Soifon San have also often come to buy things”

“Lieutenant Matsumoto I can understand, but captain Soifon too.....!?”

“.....Yoruichi san gets her to buy it for her, am I right?”

“Ah that’s true” Rukia thought, understanding completely.

“So then, what’s happening today? You’re even here together with Abarai kun.....”

Orihime observed the couple. For some reason or another, she felt that the air that flowed between the pair had become even more intimate than before, Orihime stood up, “oohh!” she said in a loud voice.

“Ehh! Wait, could it be!? Ah, perhaps the two of you.....the two of you.....!”

With eyes wide open she stared at them in round eyed wonder, Orihime’s cheeks were instantly coloured red. Smiling with her whole face, Rukia tried to convey the message without saying a word but—

“S-s- sta- started dating!?”

——Orihime’s intuition was off the mark twice as much.

“Pfft! Hahahaha!! Dating.....no, but in a sense it’s somewhere along those lines!!”

Orihime looked blankly at Renji who had burst into laughter, Rukia then spoke.

“Inoue, me and Renji.....today, we completed our nyuseki”

“Eh.....eeeeeehh!? Nyuseki.....that means, you’re married.....right!?”

Rukia nods, 'that's correct'. Orihime inhaled a deep breath, she began to sob even as a bright smile remained on her face.

"Inoue!?"

"Haaa.....uuu.....pardon meee.....! This is such a pleasant surprise..... I've become an emotional mess.....!"

Standing up, Rukia tenderly embraced Orihime's shoulders leading her to sit on the bench again.

"Con....gratulationsss.....Kuchiki.....sann....."

Orihime was heaving with sobs as Rukia rubbed her back whilst nodding and uttering comforting words.

".....You fool, what are you grinning at.....?"

Rukia said knitting her eyebrows together, noticing Renji smirking whilst looking their way.

"it's kinda nice to think.....You going over the top to take care of someone like that just now, since I've never seen you like that you knowww....."

Although he didn't say it, he actually thought that her face full of affection was beautiful.

"Haa.... I'm okay now.....thank you, Kuchiki san! I truly congratulate the both of youuu!!"

Orihime smiled sweetly.

".....Thank you, Inoue"

With a finger, Rukia gently wiped away the single trickle of a teardrop that had just escaped.

After completely hearing and laughing about the troublesome story around the nyuseki from the other two, Orihime casually asked Rukia, "you've told Kurosaki kun about it already right?"

"No, not yet. We were thinking to go and announce it to Ichigo after this but.....I wonder if it's too late now"

Saying that, she looked up at Renji. "He probably stays up late anyhow" Renji stated definitively without any sort of basis.

"It's really okay that I was told first.....?"

Feeling a little shy and fidgety, Rukia hesitated a few times as she replied to Orihime.

"Th-that's because, Inoue I consider you.....my.....b-best girl-friend! So therefore.....I thought...I should tell you first....."

She spoke as her last few words became a little mumbled.

".....your face is redder than the time I asked you to marry me ya know"

"Sh-shut up!!"

Watching as Rukia grew red to her ears, Orihime laughed and became teary eyed once again.

"Thank you, Kuchiki san! I admire you very much too!!"

After seeing the couple off, Orihime hurried back to her house. Saying "I'm home" to the portrait of her late older brother before catching her breath, Orihime put in a phone call to Dokugamine Riruka.

".....Hellooo?"

After four rings, Riruka's somewhat displeased sounding voice could be heard.

"Sorry for calling so late! It's me Orihime"

"When I went to your shop last week, I told you didn't I!? I said I'm busy with the launch of a new brand right now! Does this mean you didn't listen when I was talking!?"

Riruka is currently working as a designer in the apparel department of an enterprise managed by Yukio Hans Vorarlberna. Jackie Tristan also works at the same business but she is constantly

flying all over the world because she is engaged in work concerning the aid of developing countries, therefore she is almost never seen.

“Of course, I was listening to you! But this is a bit of an emergency.....”

“Emergency.....? In that case, please tell me about the matter quickly!”

“Yes! Thank you, Riruka chan! Well.....”

Whilst annoyed that she did not speak with haste, Riruka listened as Orihime talked about Rukia getting married, and the fact that the ceremony that was to be held two weeks later, is fast approaching.

“So then, I want to give her something, a gift, but what would be good.....? Something handmade.....that can be used at the wedding ceremony, I think something like that would be nice.....”

“It has to be something suitable enough for a beginner to make.....”

The sound of fingertips tapping on a table could be heard through the phone.

“What about a bouquet or a ring pillow.....but that world has standard traditional style dress for a Shinto ceremony, doesn't it?”

“Oh, right!..... Eh, well then that means, Kuchiki san, in a Shiromuku\*.....!? Haaa, that would be absolutely cuuute.....!”

*(\*Traditional Japanese white Kimono for brides)*

“Don't lose your cool.....moreover that Rukia girl is a noblewoman isn't she? Since everything will probably be prepared to the highest of quality, if an amateur decides to makes things like traditional style dress accessories, it may pale in comparison.....”

“Ohh!!”

In response to Orihime's loud voice, Riruka complained with even more volume, “be quite!! Don't suddenly burst out into a ridiculously loud voice!!”

“Sorry sorry.....well, how about a dress? A wedding dress!”

“Huhhh!? There is no way a beginner would be able to properly make something like a dress in just two weeks you know!?”

“But, if I try my very best....!”

“Abso-lutely impossible!!”

“Uuu.....! I wanted to see Kuchiki san in western style garments too.....”

Orihime muttered with deep disappointment.

“.....in that case, how about a veil?”

The sounds of rhythmical tapping on a keyboard could be heard clearly through the earpiece, “I looked it up just now, it seems there’s a fair amount of people who like to combine western hairdressing with a Shiromuku nowadays” Riruka informed.

Orihime imagined Rukia’s form.

A wataboshi\* (*\*traditional bridal hood-like headdress*) will surely suit well with that elegant small face of hers she thought. However, it seemed to her that the people who would be assembled there could more fully enjoy and appreciate Rukia’s beauty if she could be seen through a veil that was completely transparent rather than a wataboshi that would cover a great majority of her head.

“I think that’s a very good idea.....!”

“If it’s a veil, then you basically just cut soft tulle, even an idiot can do it. And then, how about adding on some embroidery with fine thread around the hem? If you do small embroidery, even if it’s somewhat poor, as long as it’s seen from a distance it will be unnoticeable”

“Yes yes, I want to add on embroidery!”

“I’ll write down a set of instructions and send it together with the materials first thing in the morning. Your address hasn’t changed has it?”

“Eeh!?! No that’s fine, thank you very much for your help! I’m extremely grateful just because I was able to get advice from you! Afterwards, I myself will go and look for.....”

“Huuuh!? You called me when I’m busy, don’t hold back now!”

Riruka held her phone in one hand, with the hand that was vacant, she had found what she was looking for, “hm, this will also be of use.....” one by one she had ticked off the materials.

“Thank you Riruka chan, but really it’s okay.....”

“shut up, I told you to be quiet!! .....I’m almost done! I’ve already disappeared twice with the intention of not having to deal with you lot anymore! And yet, since we met again three years ago, you’ve been using every possible pretext to call me about things like .....a new stock of tasty doughnuts, and whatever else! You understand me Orihimeee!?”

“Yes, sorry! .....but Riruka chan, you always come to buy.....”

“I only pass by that shop because it’s tasty there, things like whether or not you are working there does not concern me in the slightest!!”

“Pardon me~~~!!”

Phone calls with Riruka always eventually becomes a lecture. Orihime witlessly calls Riruka who likes scolding her like this. Listening to an angry Riruka’s voice who was full of vitality as she spoke, ‘ah, we’re not so lonesome anymore’, she’d think as her heart would become warm.

The following day, a package arrived from Riruka, it contained a great deal of materials and a document with a set of instructions, and——

[I spoke a bit too harshly yesterday

Sorry]

——Written down on a note.

## Chapter 16 :

Eight days since the evening the announcement of the nyuseki was made.

When Kurosaki Ichigo who had just finished afternoon classes returned home, the genkan entryway was filled with shoes of various sizes.

“They’ve already gathered here huh..... I’m home”

Removing his shoes, he headed towards the living room. As he reached his hand over the knob of the door to open it, in an instant, the door opened from the inside and Arisawa Tatsuki came flying out.

“Whoaa, watch out!”

“Oh, sorry Ichigo! Since I have a karate class, I’m going now!”

“Ahh, you said you were teaching at the community center right.....”

“Yeah, that’s right! See you!”

Tatsuki hurriedly slipped on her shoes, “thanks for your hospitality!” she said as she left through the genkan entryway.

“Ah, onii-chan welcome home!”

Ichigo paused a step before the living room as Yuzu greeted him from inside.

“Orihime chan brought a lot of cakes from ABCookies for us! We were all eating some just now. You can choose the ones you like too onii-chan, they’re in the refrigerator!”

“All right”

With a nod he entered the room, they were seated in a circle on cushions laid out on the floor when they all looked over at Ichigo at the same time. Spread out in the middle was the wedding veil they were all in the process of making.

“Kurosaki kun, welcome home! Thank you for your hospitality!”

Orihime smiled at him whilst clutching a plate of chocolate cake in her hands, Sado Yasutora who was next to her, raised his arm slightly in greeting “it’s been a while, Ichigo.” In his other hand, he was holding a cupcake with rabbit shaped candy and plenty of cream on it.

“You’re late aren’t you Ichigo! Arisawa has just left!”

“Welcome back Ichigo. You’re taking classes on Saturdays too, that’s great”

Asano Keigo and Kojima Mizuiro who appeared to have already finished eating their cakes, were relaxing by drinking black tea and stretching out their legs.

“Ichi-nii welcome.....Ishida san, how do I do this last thread here?”

Raising her face as she spoke, Karin glanced up at Ishida Uryuu who was next to her, he showed her the embroidery he had sewn on before giving her advice. From the opposite side, Isshin also peeped over at the way he manoeuvred his hands.

“You’re doing it too!?”

“It’s okay isn’t it! Daddy wants to congratulate Rukia chan as well!”

After replying to Ichigo, Isshin continued to prick at the embroidery with a serious look.

“Here! Onii-chan’s portion!”

Yuzu handed over a mug containing black tea to Ichigo, she then sat down next to Karin before resuming her work again.

It was on a morning, a week ago, that Ichigo received a message from Orihime on his mobile phone. She had sent all the participants that were here now a group message detailing how she wanted to gift a wedding veil for Rukia and Renji’s wedding celebration and asked them if they could help her add the embroidery. Orihime compared and adjusted everybody’s schedules, Ichigo offered that they use his house as the location and thus it was decided that they would assemble at the Kurosaki clinic.

“wow.....you’ve already completed a fair amount huh”

When he looked at the wall clock, he noted that it was around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. They were told in advance to meet up at 1 p.m. and only two hours had passed since then. Nevertheless, the veil was about seventy percent complete already.

“During this week, Inoue san went round to everyone’s places and got them to do the embroidery” Mizuiro stated.

“Everyone?” Ichigo enquired to which Orihime replied -



“Eh let’s see, I believe I started with Hiyori san~ and then I went to Hachi san and Love san, after that I went to Urahara Shop~ Urahara san and Tessai san and Ururu chan and Jinta kun! Then, the day before yesterday, I went to Kukaku san’s place.....”

“You went to Soul Society too!?”

Orihime casually nods ‘yes’ to a surprised Ichigo.

“Urahara san lent me a sort of mantle that extinguishes reiatsu so I wouldn’t be exposed when I went there, I think the two of us weren’t caught out.....?”

“That’s not really what I’m concerned about but.....well, never mind, and then?”

“When I had Ganju kun doing his embroidery, Yoruichi san came saying ‘I heard about it from Urahara!~’ Yoruichi carried me on her back whilst shunpo’ing all around the Seireitei.....I was able to get practically all the people I knew to do the embroidery~!”

“Inoue, I don’t expect him to but.....did Kuchiki Byakuya also.....?”

At Sado’s question, Orihime regrettably shook her head from side to side.

“Byakuya san.....he watched”

“Watched.....?” Uryuu muttered, cocking his head in puzzlement.

“His attendant.....old man Seike san, but.....that Seike san said ‘I cannot allow the head of the family to do something like needlework!’ so then, Seike san sewed instead and Byakuya san watched him.....look, this very pretty one is Seike san’s embroidery!”

Looking at the patch of embroidery Orihime was pointing at, everyone raised their voices in administration saying “ooh~!”

At that moment, a voice calling out “pardon me!” coming from the entrance of the clinic could be heard.

Yuzu hurriedly rushed towards the reception desk, “yes, I’m coming now!”

“Daaad, it’s a patient!”

“Yeah, yeah”, being called in the direction of the clinic, Isshin stood up.

“Will you save my part for me!?”

“No one is going to steal your part you bearded basket-case! Go quickly”

Karin coldly dealt with Isshin who pouted as he exited the living room. Yuzu returns in his place and joins the circle.

Ichigo who had just finished eating a fruit tart whilst everyone worked in silence sat down in an empty spot, “so, where should I start?”

“Here! There’s a set of instructions written down on this, you can do your embroidery around here Kurosaki kun!”

Written at the very top of the piece of paper handed over from Orihime it said “Strawberry Flower Sewing Technique”.

“This embroidery.....they’re strawberry flowers?”

At the centre of the five white circles imitating flower petals, there is an asterisk pattern stitched with golden thread representing the stamen and pistil.

“It’s a flower I’ve liked since long ago.....”

Orihime adds gold embroidery to the middle of the flower petals everyone had already sewn, one by one she completed the flowers.

“The strawberry flower in hanakotoba\* (*\*the Japanese language of flowers*) means 'Happy family' as well as 'Respect and love'.....I think both are perfectly suited as a motif for a bride to wear”

Uryuu spoke whilst stitching the petals with accuracy similar to that of a sewing machine.

Surprised, Orihime then said “I only knew about the 'Happy Family' part.....!”

“Why do you know the language of flowers.....it makes me feel uncomfortable”

“You shouldn’t say such things to your friends!” Yuzu chided a frowning Ichigo.

“Shut up.....! I don’t forget information after having seen it once!”

“Really!?” Keigo said lifting his face up at Uryuu’s words.

“Is there like a trick to it or something? I’ve become awfully forgetful recently~ Yesterday for example, I couldn’t come up with the word 'socks', so I looked it up with the terms 'Foot' 'Wear' 'Bag'! Then it retrieved the word 'tabi'\* (*\*split-toe socks*) so I became all the more confused!”

As Orihime and Yuzu laughed aloud, Mizuiro smiled and said “oh? I wonder if it’s a brain disease?”

“Would you please stop trying to hand down such a scary medical diagnosis! Doctor Ishidaaa~! please tell this guy that an unqualified person shouldn’t make such arbitrary judgements~!”

Uryuu completely ignored the matter Keigo had brought up. “Don’t cry Asano kun!” Yuzu who was sitting next to him said in encouragement whilst patting his back.

“That reminds me, you got into a medical school.....med school costs an insane amount of money doesn’t it? Are you sure that’s okay even though you’re poor?”

Ichigo asked whilst his gaze remained lowered on the shape of the flower petal he was carefully sewing.

“.....I considered getting a scholarship but, my father paid for my tuition expenses. If it was the old me, I might have rejected such an offer but.....my relationship with my father has improved to the extent that I can accept his money with gratitude.”

Watching as Uryuu calmly spoke about the matter, Ichigo quietly nods. “Ishida was quite an unpleasant guy in the past wasn’t he?” Keigo said, only to be ignored and then comforted by Yuzu once again.

“Sorry but, it’s about time I get going too.....”

Checking his wristwatch, Sado stood up. “What, Chad too?” Ichigo said disappointedly.

“Yeah. I was asked to be the sparring partner.....of the heavyweight champion of Japan.”

“Huuuh!? The heavyweight champ is Andou Daniel isn’t it? Do you go to the same gym!?”

“No, different gyms.....it seems he is an acquaintance of the chairman of our gym. He wanted to fight 'a big guy'.....”

“So that’s why he called for Chad then huh.....better not let the champ lose his confidence” Mizuiro said shrugging his shoulders.

“Muu.....! It won’t be like that.....I think, probably.....”

Whilst whispering to himself with shaky confidence, Sado headed towards the genkan entryway.

“Go easy on him!” Ichigo called out to his back.

On this day, Andou had come accompanied by his legendary coach who was captivated by Sado's talent, it would take some years of persuasion before Sado decided to go pro after initially saying it's not something he had in mind, in one fell swoop he was guided to the position of world champion but—that is a tale a little further into the future.

As time went by, Keigo, Mizuiro and Uryuu also returned home, only the Kurosaki siblings and Orihime were left in the room. When Uryuu left Orihime also tried to leave, "I'll finish this up later at home.....", however Yuzu held her back saying she wanted to help a little more.

Now, Yuzu was standing alongside Orihime in the kitchen, seeming to enjoy herself as they prepared dinner. Ichigo and Karin continued sewing the embroidery on the floor whilst also absentmindedly listening in. Karin took over the task of adding the final touches Orihime was doing earlier with the golden thread.

"Yuzu, seems like she having fun huh"

Karin spoke at a volume that only Ichigo could hear.

"Oh yeah.....it feels like she's more high-spirited than usual"

".....That girl, she behaves as if she were a mother, she should take it easy and let others help her instead of doing everything herself don't you think? So that's why, I think she's very happy whenever Orihime chan comes around."

Continuous cheerful laughter coming from the other two could be heard.

".....how about you?"

"Me? As for me.....well, I'm also happy.....because, Orihime chan, she reminds me of mother.....just a little"

Karin's hands stopped moving, she looked up at the portrait fixed on the wall. At the center of the oversized poster, there is a portrait of their late mother Masaki laughing brightly.

"Haa, it's impossible to get properly sentimental when her picture is like that"

"Certainly not with a picture like this huh"

The two looked at each other, together they laughed a little. The door connecting to the clinic behind them opened and Isshin had returned, "are we having dinner soon~?"

"Yup! Orihime chan is also helping! Aren't you glad, Yuzu!"

“Uh huh! Most of it was prepared by Orihime chan! Isn’t that right Orihime chan!”

Yuzu smiled. “I have confidence in this dish!” Orihime said puffing up with pride.

“You had fun huh! So, what kind of dish did you cook?”

“Tonight’s main, butter and soy sauce stir-fried.....”

“Ooohh, that sounds good~~~~!” Isshin interjected.

“potato salad omelette gratin hot-pot!”

Orihime smiled brimming with confidence, the somewhat unknown concoction was boiling down in front of her.

“Th.....that sounds...good.....doesn’t it, Ichigo?”

“Don’t ask me.....”

—As the five people who encircled the butter and soy sauce stir fried potato salad omelette gratin hot-pot, proceeded with their meal, it was said that the pot of food was immensely delicious.

Chapter 17:

Soul Society.

6th sector - Kuchiki clan ceremonial shrine.

Many shinigami were gathered at both sides of the path extending between the gate of the shrine to the shrine itself. Some came rushing in their usual shihakushou, others wore their hair up and were dressed in beautiful kimonos.

Because there is no god in Soul Society, religious shrines or temples do not exist within the Seireitei. Many people revere the Soul King like a god, however he is only a King, not a god. In Rukongai, several temples have been built to enshrine the gods and buddhas that the residents had worshipped during their lifetime, and all of them are temples into which the residents had brought over their beliefs from the Human World. The Kuchiki clan have built a shrine in front of a mausoleum dedicated to the spirit of their ancestors, it is used as a venue for rituals and ceremonies. From family meetings to wedding celebrations and funerals, every possible Kuchiki clan event is held at this shrine.

“Uu.....I’m feeling nervous.....!”

Orihime whispered standing next to the black suited figure of Ichigo. Orihime was wearing an airy, light pink dress made from chiffon material, its prettiness coupled with the rarity of western clothing caused all the surrounding gazes to gather on her.

“Why are you nervous.....?”

“I don’t know anything at all about this world’s customs.....I was thinking, what if I do something discourteous.....”

Orihime cast her eyes down feeling uneasy, Uryuu then spoke.

“I heard from Hisagi san just now, it seems that only those from very wellborn families hold ceremonies in Seireitei. Typically, people will just invite their close family and friends for a celebratory banquet after registering the marriage.....so the ceremony proceedings and customs differ from family to family, this means there are no set rules.”

“.....Ishida, that information isn’t resolving anything is it.....?”

With a wry smile, Uryuu then responded to the issue Sado had pointed out.

“Well, that may be so. But what I wanted to say is that most people in attendance here also know nothing about ceremonies, so that means there’s no need for Inoue san to get worried either.”

“You could’ve just said that from the beginning you know.....”

As Uryuu opened his mouth to refute what Ichigo had just mumbled, the clear sound of a bell echoed far and wide, coming from the direction of the gate. In an instant, the noisy surroundings fell silent. Standing on the other side of the gate where a silver coloured bell was hoisted up, the shrine maiden spoke with a commanding air.

“Bridegroom, proceed!”

The gate slowly opens.

Everyone steadily gazed at the person who had come into sight, it was Abarai Renji clad in Kuromontsuki-Haorihakama\* (*\*-black- traditional formal-wear for men*). At the same time as Renji stepped through those gates, the gagaku\* band began their musical performance (*\*Classical Japanese court music*).

The elderly head priest guided Renji in time with the elegantly tuned rhythm. After proceeding down the path, taking one step at a time, Renji stopped before the stairs leading up to the shrine. Prompted by the priest, he turned to face the gate. The bell rang out again.

“Head of the family, bride, proceed!”

The shrine maiden’s voice resounded, Kuchiki Byakuya appeared before the open gate, dressed in a grayish-blue montsuki-haorihakama.

Byakuya held up a red umbrella in front of the palanquin that pulled up outside the gate. The bamboo blinds were lifted up, from inside, Rukia stepped down.

At her appearance, the crowd rose up in cheers with ‘hurrahs’.

Her body was wrapped in a Shiromuku\* (*\*white bridal kimono*) made from a pure white material that looked as if the fabric itself was emitting light, and on her head she wore her wedding veil. The veil swayed gently, matching Rukia’s movements and each time the gold of the embroidery would sparkle as it reflected the setting sun.

Rukia slips under the red umbrella that Byakuya is holding up and the two start walking side by side on the path approaching the shrine.

“.....she’s wearing it”

As Ichigo talked to her in a whisper, Orihime was already crying aloud, overcome with emotion.

“She's wearing it even though....I said....it's okay....if she shows it off...by wearing it later....in the ceremony! I'm ha...ppyyy.....! Kurosaki kun.....please...!”

She handed the SLR camera she was holding to Ichigo. It was Orihime who had purchased it especially for this day, she repeatedly took test photographs at home to make sure it was in perfect working condition to deal with today's event, however she did not expect that she would cry so much to the point where she could no longer hold up a camera.

“.....I'll take the pictures for you, so at least you can cry with some peace of mind”

Ichigo looked down the viewfinder, “Th...ank...you...!” Orihime said whilst pressing a handkerchief to her eyes.

Ichigo repeatedly pushes down the camera shutter taking photographs as the figures of the two people gradually drew near. Using the zoom function, he could see well through the veil as Rukia wore a smile. Byakuya, was the same as usual with his calm demeanour.

(He should at least smile on such an occasion.....)

'There's no help for that guy' Ichigo thought, smiling wryly as he operated the camera.

The two passed by in front of Ichigo and the others who were standing right in the middle alongside each other, by one side of the path approaching the shrine. Rukia looked at the sobbing Orihime and smiled at her affectionately, with a smile on her face she then turned towards Ichigo, who was pointing the lens at her. The sound of the camera shutter set off. Byakuya shot Ichigo a look as if to say 'you shouldn't bring such boorish things with you'.

The two calmly walked down the path along with the music, they finally reached Renji who was waiting in front of the shrine. Renji bows and Byakuya closes the red umbrella he was holding before handing it over to Renji.

“.....I want you to be happy”

It was said in a voice that only reached Rukia.

She looked up at Byakuya. His solitary eyes were somewhat narrowed.

“Nii...sama...!”



Her eyes filled with tears. Byakuya exhaled a breath, he formed the words 'don't cry' with his mouth, placing his hand on Rukia's shoulder he gently sent her in Renji's direction. Renji held up the red umbrella and welcomed Rukia under it. From under the umbrella, Rukia bowed deeply to Byakuya.

Urged on by the head priest, the couple ascending the stairs of the shrine one step at a time.

Byakuya gazed at their backs engulfed in emotions.

The priest recited the norito-soujou\*, and after the couple exchanged sake cups during the san-san kudo\*, all the marriage rituals were completed without a hitch.

*(\*norito-soujou - a ritual that includes announcing the marriage at the shrine + prayers/blessing the couple)*

*(\*san-san kudo ~lit. 3-3-9 times~ - exchanging ceremonial sake cups three times with three different cups, taking three sips sips from each cup)*

## Chapter 18 :

After the ceremony, a banquet was held, a reservation was made at Renji's favourite bar and eatery, 'Daruma Bar', not far from the Kuchiki clan's ceremonial shrine.

Based on reflection of what had happened last time, this time it was Renji who decided to conduct the arrangements for the restaurant, but complaints arose from Rangiku immediately, "if only you had left it up to Kuchiki, we might have been able to drink at a high class ryotei restaurant again~!"

"High class restaurant? what do you mean, lieutenant!?"

When the 13th division's third seat, Kotsubaki Sentaro pressed Rukia for a reply, he received a shoulder tackle from Kiyone who interrupted the conversation.

"Get away!! Snot nosed gorilla woman!!"

"But I also went~! Both the alcohol and the food were delicious at that place~!"

"Why were you invited and I wasn't!?"

"Because it was a gathering of the marriage announcement for close friends! Where close friends gather, get it!?"

"Lieutenant.....could it be you really.....dislike me.....!?"

“She surely dislikes your gross bearded headband wearing self!!”

“It’s not like that at all, I do not dislike you! The only reason I didn’t invite Kotsubaki dono is because of the fact that I had already informed him of the news at the squad barracks! It was an unforeseen set of events that the place turned out to be a high-end restaurant!.....!”

Orihime clicked the camera shutter looking at Rukia who appeared flustered as she acted as a mediator between the other two.

“Flustered Kuchiki san, you don’t see that too often.....! Hee-hee.....I just took a cute picture.....!”

“You only took a picture of Kuchiki just now?.....you can take a picture of me too you know?”

“Really!? I want to! I want to take a picture of you!”

She wanted to show off her newly tailored Kimono, unable to help herself, Rangiku posed before Orihime. Rangiku’s golden locks of hair suited well with her light violet coloured Kimono that was adorned with large peony flowers.

“Alright! Let’s take a picture with all the girls surrounding Kuchiki!”

“Waa! Good idea~!”

At Isane's approval, all the female shinigami that were sitting about the place gathered around Rukia.

"Captain~! Please could you press the camera shutter for us~!"

"Why me.....!?"

Whilst complaining, Hitsuguya received the camera from Orihime, and snapped several photos as instructed.

When the band of girls brought their faces together to check the photographs on the Camera's LCD screen, Kyōraku Shunsui came in saying "Pardon me for disturbing you".

"Captain commander!! You came!?"

Rising off his seat, Renji greeted Kyōraku.

"Oh my, isn't this splendid sight~"

Kyōraku's line of sight skipped over Renji and focused on the group of female troops dressed in Kimonos. Rukia walked out from the middle of that circle of girls and bowed, "thank you very much for coming, captain commander."

"Aah Rukia chan! I've come to talk to you"

“With me?” Rukia tilted her head. Kyōraku nods and indicates to the entrance of the restaurant.

“Let’s step outside for just a moment. Abarai kun, could I borrow your bride just a little?”

“Eh? Ah, yes! Go ahead!”

Renji watched their backs until they were out of sight whilst wondering what they had to talk about.

In front of ‘Daruma Bar’ there is a large pond, and placed by the bank of that pond there are several benches for sobering up on. Rukia sat down on one of those benches as instructed by Kyōraku.

“Here, for you”

Kyōraku sat down next to her and handed her a sizeable package wrapped in a furoshiki cloth. It contained something soft inside it.

“What’s this……?”

“Please, open it”

With a nod she untied the knot.

“This....is.....!”

The characters for "13" jumped right into her vision.

“.....to you, from Ukitake”

It was squad 13's captain Haori.

“From...captain Ukitake.....?”

“Before Ukitake used 'Kamikake', he handed this over to me and said, "appoint Kuchiki Rukia as the next captain in my place".....I hit back telling him not to say such ill-omened things, but he laughed and pressed on saying "I must ask you to keep this a secret from Kuchiki. Since I may still be bearing this Haori again right”

“Aah, 'again' it is”, Kyōraku thought.

Again, a person has entrusted me with something of great importance and passed away.—

“Something like.....me being the likes of captain.....the sort of capacity required for that.....”

Rukia places her hand over the '13' and bites her lip. 'To take on this responsibility myself.....' the mere thought of that made her body tremble to the point where her back teeth were

chattering. Despite this, the fact that Ukitake had personally left this behind for her, made her heart burn passionately with gratitude.

“.....This haori was originally tailored for Kaien kun”

“Eh.....?”

Rukia’s eyes widened at the sudden mention of that name.

“Though I think you’ll know this better than me.....Ukitake had a very high opinion of kaien kun.....he was planning to retire and hand over the position of captain to Kaien”

Ukitake had visited the 8th division’s barracks with tea cakes where he confided in Kyōraku about those plans.

“I have such confidence in my knowledge of medical treatment techniques, so how about I become a consultant at the the coordinated relief station?”

They appeared to have fun at the talk of Ukitake’s future course after retirement, four days later—— Shiba Kaien would battle a hollow and lose his life before Ukitake’s eyes.

“.....I didn’t know he had gone as far as ordering a captain’s Haori”

That day, Kyōraku had only taken Ukitake’s talk of retirement half seriously. It simply seemed like an extension of their usual chats over tea.

(You were serious huh.....)

After Kaien's death, he couldn't bear to part with it for decades, so the haori lay idle in a corner of the captain's office. When he decided to re-tailor it to fit Rukia, Ukitake was most certainly smiling and laughing again like that day.

"I didn't give this to you till today, because I was waiting for your heart to grow"

"My heart.....?"

Kyōraku nodded a yes.

"You are strong. If we look at your abilities alone, it is at the sufficient level required for captaincy.....however, your heart was not catching up. Being able to rise to the responsibility of taking leadership over a squad.....that sort of heart"

".....I see....."

".....Nevertheless!"

Kyōraku stood up, with a smile on his face he looked down at Rukia.



“I was thinking, looking at the young people of the 13th division who were in attendance at today’s ceremony. Within themselves, they feel your heart has already grown.....that as a captain, you have a heart that will hold up the squad.”

“Everyone thinks.....I’m....?”

“I wonder whether it was because Ukitake was the captain all that time.....there were many amongst the young people of the 13th who were ready to lend their support.....”

“Yes....that's right, really.....they're always helping”

Since Rukia had become the acting captain of her squad, she was of the opinion that her work would probably increase to correspond with that, but despite the fact that Kiyone had even transferred to the 4th division, Rukia’s workload had barely changed. Kotsubaki had informed her that from long ago, at squad 13, the troops had devised ways to decrease the captain’s workload in order to lighten the burden on Ukitake’s shoulders.

“That way, everyone can give their support.....and it seems that everyone wants to give their support, even if it may be on the captain’s terms.....”

Rukia fixed her eyes on the haori.

To give support, and be supported — I wonder if I could also become that kind of captain myself.

“It’s okay you don’t have to do this right now. I’ll wait for your decision.....but I think at this point in time, you are capable enough for captaincy. Just don’t forget about it alright?”

“.....Understood! Thank you very much.....!”

Rukia stood up whilst tightly clutching the haori, she bowed deeply to Kyōraku.

“Oops, I almost forgot.....here, congratulations on your marriage!”

Kyōraku takes out an envelope from his sleeve before handing it over to Rukia. The envelope was thick enough to feel the weight of the heavy banknotes inside.

“I...I cannot accept something like this!”

“Now now, please accept it thinking that is from both me and Ukitake!”

At Kyōraku’s words, her hands ceased its shaking.

“Ah, captain commander.....!”

Rukia extended her arm to return the envelope, but as soon as she did, Kyōraku had disappeared using shunpo. With a huff, she carefully tucked the captain’s haori back into the wrapping cloth.

“Captain Ukitake.....please give me a little more time. At any rate, I won’t fail.....!”

In the not so distant future, I'll surely be ready.

Rukia made a vow at the haori and then returned to the restaurant in a half run.

Four hours have passed since the start of the banquet, when the people who were drunk began to leave, Uryuu stood up and said "I have to go soon.....Abarai, Kuchiki san, thank you for today. May you be forever happy."

He came close to the couple and gave a slight bow.

"Also.....I wasn't sure when was appropriate to give a celebratory gift since the reception was not held at a ceremonial hall but.....is it still okay now?"

Uryuu spoke, lowering his voice, he then held out a special envelope, containing his monetary gift, to Renji. Sado who was watching them said "me too....." before taking out his gift, in a chain reaction, Ichigo and Orihime also gathered their own gifts in hand.

"Every single one of you brought something!?! We don't need all of this you know! Because, just the fact that you went to the trouble of coming here from the Human World for us, that is more than enough!"

“Well you have no choice! You have allowed us to eat and drink like this.....inside you’ll find Human World money, so the next time you happen to go there, please buy clothes or something for your gigai with this”

Uryuu forcibly pushes his gift into Renji’s hands.

“Because I feel that way too! Here!”

Imitating Uryuu, Orihime also slips her gift into Rukia’s hands.

“It would be discourteous if I had to take this back home.....please quietly accept this”

“This one's from me, and this one’s from my old man”

Sado’s, Ichigo’s and Isshin’s gifts were piled into Renji’s hands.

“Even Isshin dono.....!?”

At a surprised Rukia Ichigo then says -

“That guy.....when Kaien died, he really wanted to cheer you up. He regretted it so much at the time. So he says he wants you to be the most happiest a person could be”

Isshin is Shiba Kaien's uncle.

Isshin was the captain of squad 10 around the time of Kaien's death. That his proud nephew had passed away, it was naturally a shock, he had heard from Ukitake about the details and circumstances leading to his death, Isshin thought that Rukia needed a helping hand the most, he visited squad 13 many times. However, when he saw her much too pained face from the side, he found it impossible to call out to her no matter what.

".....I see....."

Rukia thinks about herself back in those days. From the day she ended Kaien's life with her own hands, when she was closing her heart up into a deep, dark place, she wanted to tell herself, "you are cared for by many people, and are kept in their many thoughts."

"It's not good to have you open the senkaimon so many times for us, I think we'll also be leaving then?"

At Ichigo's suggestion, Sado nods in agreement.

"Eeh~! Going home alreadyyy~? It's okay if you stay with us right, Orihimeee~?" Rangiku said looking somewhat intoxicated. Next to her, Hisagi and Izuru were completely passed out drunk.

"Thank you, Rangiku San! But, since I have to work tomorrow morning....."

"Well, I guess that can't be helped.....how about you Ichigo? Stay with us?"

Rangiku narrowed her eyes and smiled devilishly, “th...there’s no way I’m staying!” Ichigo replied in a hurry.

“What! Suuuch a pityyy!”

Rangiku giggled whilst waving her hand next to her face a little, “well then, see you again next time huh~”

“I’ve just called someone and asked them to open the 6th division’s senkaimon now!” Renji said returning his denreishinki\* to his pocket. (\*Soul reaper mobile device)

“Rukia, hold on just a minute, I’ll escort these guys up to the gate. You should remain here with all of our other friends!”

“Alright.....everyone, thanks for today. I received such a wonderful veil, and yet, you even went as far as giving us celebratory gifts.....thank you”

She gave them a quick bow.

“I’ll see you again in the Human World!” Rukia said with a smiling face, she then turned back, heading inside the restaurant.

## Chapter 19 :

Along the road heading towards the senkaimon, Renji who was at the very back of the group he was escorting, called out to Ichigo who was walking directly in front of him.

“.....what is it?”

The distance separating them from the other three people ahead widened meaning their private conversation could not be heard.

“.....Don't you think you should make things clear soon too?” said Renji.

“Huh?” Ichigo said, tilting his head in puzzlement.

“Don't play dumb.....I'm talking about Inoue.”

“Whaa.....!?”

Although he knew she wasn't close enough to hear them, Ichigo reflexively looked for Orihime's reaction. Orihime seemed to be having fun talking about something with Uryuu and Sado who were by either side of her.

“You're in love with her, aren't you?”

“.....That is.....!”

At Renji's blunt manner of speaking, Ichigo tried to force his words words out one by one.

“Don't keep such a nice girl waiting too long.”

“.....I understand that” he said responding with a voice that seemed to disappear.

“.....but....don't act so patronisingly all of a sudden.....! And anyway, you were so slow it took *you* many decades yourself.....”

At Ichigo's grumbling, Renji ran up to the three people walking in front. He called out to Uryuu and Sado and ushered Orihime away with a wave of his hand.

“That guy.....! What is he up to!?”

Feeling dejected, Orihime dropped her shoulders and walked in Ichigo's direction.

“We're having a conversation just between the men, so you should go that way.....”

“R...right...”

“Is Kurosaki kun going too? I’ll walk at a distance from you all”

“No, I.....”

He watched the group walking ahead of them. Renji looked at Ichigo and gave him a firm thumbs up as if to say ‘good luck’.

“.....seems like I don’t have to go over there”

“Oh, are you sure.....?”

Orihime looks up at him in a questioning manner. *“I’m too bad at expressing my mind!”* Ichigo thought, feeling like he wanted to tear his hair out.

“Kuchiki san was so pretty huh.....” Orihime whispered keenly whilst completely unaware of what was truly on Ichigo’s mind.

“The veil suited her extremely well don’t you think.....? *Haa.....*”

Recollecting the scene, Orihime seemed to be overcome with emotion, yet again her eyes began to fill with tears.

“Kurosaki kun, thank you for taking over the camera for me today! I’m looking forward to seeing the photographs.....I’ll arrange them properly into an album and then send a copy to everyone too!”

Orihime smiled at Ichigo whose face remained tense as he replied “yeah”.

“.....what’s wrong, Kurosaki kun?”

In response to Orihime frowning in concern, Ichigo shakes his head saying “it’s nothing”.

Whilst they were having a silly talk, the senkaimon could be seen in the distance. The three people who were ahead, were already before the gate having a friendly chat.

Ichigo takes a very deep breath.

“Hey, Inoue”



Standing still, he looked at Orihime.

“What is it?”

Tilting her head to the side, Orihime looked up at Ichigo.

“There's.....something I'd like to talk to you about, so next time, do you think you could you make some time for me?”