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Shiba Kaien and Kuchiki Rukia were still bandaged up but mostly healed when they stormed into his sister's home. "What..."

"Nii-sama!" Kūkaku cheered as she saw her big brother. Up until he grabbed her head in a claw-grip, "Owowowowow!"

"The fuck." Kaien had a vein pulsing on the side of his head, "*Did you do, Kūkaku?!?*"

"Ow! Get off, big brother!" Kūkaku grabbed his arm and tried to pry the hand off her head.

With both hands. And that made Kaien lose his grip, "What the fuck?!" He grabbed her right arm. "How-who-what in the world?!"

Kūkaku grinned and showed off the guns. "Oh yeah! Lil' sis has *two* of these babies again!" She flexed.

Kaien looked flabbergasted so Rukia pinched the bridge of her nose, "Kūkaku-chan." She said dryly. "*Explain.*"

"Hehehehe." Kūkaku giggled a little maniacally. "Oh, you wouldn't *believe* the shit I learned." She then stopped and squinted at both of them, "Why the heck do you two look beat up?"

A vein started pulsing on Kaien's head again, "Oh, I don't know." His eye twitched, "Maybe because my *dumbass little sister* helped a bunch of *ryoka* into the *Seireitei!*"

"Pffft!" Kūkaku started to cackle, "Wait, you two got your asses kicked by them?! Who was it?!"

"Hardly." Kaien scoffed, "We were taking it easy on them, up until they hit us with a few surprises." He grumbled.

"Ha!" Kūkaku barked, "As if that should matter! There's taking it easy and then there's losing to minnows, big brother." She tapped her chin, "Hmm, was it Ichigo? I suppose he could still stand a chance even if you used Bankai."

Kaien balked, "What the hell?"

"I take it that you *didn't* lose to Ichigo then. How embarrassing!" Kūkaku ribbed him.

And then Rukia took a paper fan out of her Shihakushō and whapped her husband and sister-in-law. "Kūkaku-san." She said, a smile on her face. "Start talking." She tapped the fan against her palm with malicious intent.

Kūkaku grinned, "Alright. You asked for it."

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Rukia and Kaien sat there looking like they had died all over again. "So." Kaien croaked, "Isshin is still alive, and we have a bunch of cute, very distant cousins."

“As nice as that is, I think it falls second to the *conspiracy gripping the entire Seireitei*.” Rukia barked at him. She punched her leg lightly, “I can’t even go tell all this to Nii-sama. He’d never believe any of it without proof. And even if he did, he wouldn’t countermand the Central 46.” She said, a tiny bit of bitterness in her tone.

Kaien put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her in for a hug, knowing how frigid that relationship was. “So... what now.” He growled, “The Central 46 won’t change its mind even with the evidence. It’s all circumstantial and based on word of mouth anyway. From the mouth of an acknowledged traitor too.”

“The only way we get justice here is if the masterminds step into the limelight.” Kūkaku said, “Which they’re working on anyway.”

Kaien scowled, “That’s not enough. We need to stop this execution.”

Rukia looked over at him with a small smirk, “You thinking what I’m thinking?”

“That depends.” Kaien said sardonically, “You thinking of paying Yūshirō a visit?”

Kūkaku began to cackle, “I’m sure the pint-size will *love* hearing that his big sister is around!”

The three started ironing out plans of their own. Hopefully it would be enough.

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“Jeez Ichi, you’re fast!” Yachiru was actually panting a bit as she landed behind Ichigo a few seconds after he had.

“You’re not so bad yourself, Yachiru.” Ichigo chuckled as he allowed her into the hideout. They made their way down the trapdoor and into the separated dimension below Sōkyoku Hill.

“Welcome back, Ichi...go...” Nemu trailed off. “...I have several questions.”

“Ichigo.” Lisa said calmly, her hands in a prayer-like motion in front of her face. She pointed her hands at him. “Why do you have Kenpachi on your shoulder and Lt. Kusajishi with you?”

“There’s a very simple explanation for that.” Ichigo said, equally calmly. And then he hefted Kenpachi up and hurled him. Everyone’s heads tracked the man as he flew over a hundred meters away and landed with a tremendous splash in one of the massive hot spring pools.

“Oooh! Hot springs!” Yachiru exclaimed gleefully.

“Go make sure he doesn’t drown, would you?” Ichigo told her.

“Kay!” She cheered and **Shunpo’d** out of her clothes, letting them fall on the ground.

Nemu tilted her head to the left, “I have several more questions.”

Lisa pinched the bridge of her nose. “...Did you recruit *Kenpachi*?” She asked him incredulously.

“No.” Ichigo said flatly. “Our fight pissed me the fuck off, and I’m not fucking done with him yet.”

Lisa opened her mouth, but the freshly-arrived Yoruichi beat her to it. “So you brought him to our *secret hideout*?” She pinched his cheek and stretched out his face.

“Oi! Quit it!” Ichigo tried to get out of her grip, but she just pinched harder.

“I don’t know, Kurosaki-kun.” Orihime had her hands on her knees as she panted. “You probably deserve it this time.” She had an amused smile on her face regardless.

“How am I supposed to train you for Bankai with him here, dumbass?!” Yoruichi hissed at him.

“What?!” Lisa blurted, “Bankai? How?! That takes at least a decade! We don’t have that kind of time.”

“Urahara.” Yoruichi said flatly.

“...That explains nothing and yet everything.” Nemu felt the fluttering of amusement in her stomach.

“Forget it.” Ichigo said, “You can teach me Bankai later.” He glared at Kenpachi, “I’ve got my whetstone right over there.”

Lisa let out a sigh, “Ichigo, I’m sure you know this already, but I think beating Tōsen and Komamura might have given you a big head. The difference between Shikai and Bankai varies depending on the individual’s innate talents and training, but the boost you get is generally between five and ten times. It is a *massive* boost.” Chad and Orihime, who had *not* known this, felt their eyes widen.

Yoruichi nodded, “Far more than you’d get from beating up Kenpachi for...whatever reason.”

“You’re wrong.” Ichigo said, glaring off at the pools. “And even if you were right, hearing that fucking moron’s Zanpakutō *screaming in agony* every time we clashed our blades pissed me off too much to care.”

Their eyes widened. “Oh.” Yoruichi said, her expression going flat. “Right. *That*.” She had never felt it before herself, Kenpachi was after her time... but to someone like *her* in particular, that was absolute blasphemy.

“He’s *that* out of sync?” Nemu asked, her eyes wide as she looked off into the distance. “I thought he just didn’t care. That is what Mayuri-s – *Mayuri* believed.”

“Yeah.” Ichigo growled, “Forget a *fucked* relationship. He and his Zanpakutō *have* no relationship. He’s so far out of sync with *his own fucking soul* that he’s tearing himself apart from within. And I won’t fucking have it.”

Lisa sighed again, “I still think this is foolish. You could always knock the stupid out of him *after* this is all over. But if you want to be an idiot, feel free.” She looked at Yoruichi, “How the hell did you expect to teach him Bankai in such a short amount of time anyway?”

Yoruichi shook her head, “Baths, everyone. I’m still a bit tired from my fight against Byakuya and Ichigo took on Kenpachi. Hot springs, on the double!”

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Ichigo let out a groan as he relaxed against the rocks in the spring. Orihime raised an eyebrow seeing Nemu practically cuddle with Ichigo on his left and Yoruichi sat very close on his right. He had an arm around both of their shoulders. “When did this happen?” She asked in amusement, wishing Tatsuki were here. She was situated between Sado’s legs herself, so she didn’t have room to talk.

“Since I killed her abusive bastard of a creator.” Ichigo said with a shrug. “And Yoruichi joined Rangiku and me pretty often before this all went down.” Not for sex, but he’d woken up with her tucked into his side a few times.

“Ah, Rangiku-chan has a talented tongue.” Nemu said in that soft vice of hers. Orihime’s cheeks flushed a bit at the unexpected admission.

Ichigo blinked and looked down at her, “...Right, I forgot you and Ran-chan had fun here and there before we met.” He chuckled as Yoruichi snickered in amusement.

Nemu blinked, “Did I say something wrong?”

“Nope.” Lisa had a smirk on her face. “Honestly, this is better than my manga in some ways. Just needs more smut.”

Sado looked to the ‘ceiling’ for patience. “Miss Yoruichi.” He said, “The Bankai?”

“Ah, right.” Yoruichi said, “So, for those who still have not actually achieved Shikai-” She turned gimlet eyes to Orihime and Sado, both of whom flushed a little, “The essence of Shikai is to communicate with and synchronize with your Zanpakutō. Bankai, on the other hand, requires you to externalize it and force it into submission. In other words, instead of using Jinzen to enter your Inner World, you summon it into our world instead.”

“Which is the part that takes *forever*.” Lisa grumbled, “Usually more than ten years of training even for the uber-talented. Even among the Noble Clans such as the Kuchiki, the Shiba, and the Shihōin who are born with unusually intense Reiryoku, only one in every few generations has the talent for it.”

“Yup.” Yoruichi agreed, remembering how long it had taken *her*, all those years ago. “Along comes Urahara who decides, ‘*ain’t nobody got time for that*.’” Everyone started to snicker, “-and he creates a device he called the Tenshintai. What *it* does is forcibly transfer and materializes the soul of the Zanpakutō.”

“Oh that’s *bullshit*.” Lisa groaned, “Fucking Urahara.”

Yoruichi started to laugh, “Yup, that was about my reaction when he told me about it. But it’s a dangerous method. He was the only one to ever use it, and it therefore has a one-hundred-percent

success rate, but he believed that using it for longer than three days could cause the soul to destabilize.”

Ichigo rolled his eyes. “Of course. He took a shortcut. It’s no wonder the soul wouldn’t like it. If he hadn’t had the talent for it, I’m pretty sure even one day would have killed him. I’m not surprised he didn’t allow anyone else to use it.”

Yoruichi lightly jabbed him in the side, “You’re not wrong, but I *do* believe you have that same talent. So I still think you should do it.”

Ichigo looked down at her and met her eyes. He smirked. “Thor. Get out here.”

Ozone filled their nostrils as lightning began to crackle behind him on dry land. Their eyes all widened as Thor materialized. “Ahahaha! It feels nice to breathe free air again!”

Lisa took one look at his massive size and bulk and had one thing to say. “Oh, your poor wife.”

Ichigo, Orihime, Yoruichi, and Thor began to cackle. Ichigo eventually settled down and smirked at Yoruichi again, “Still think I need your little doohickey?” Yoruichi growled and her hand flashed out. “OW! GET OFF YOU CRAZY CAT! THAT HURTS!” Ichigo thrashed as she pinched his nipple *hard*.

His hand snapped down and pinched her right nipple, and she let out a hiss. They were extra sensitive due to her piercings. “It would hurt way worse for you, kitty cat!”

“You wouldn’t dare!” The two glared at one another, lightning crossing between their eyes.

“Wouldn’t I?” They continued to glare.

She finally let go with a huff and he did so as well. “Don’t let your mouth write checks you can’t cash, brat.” Yoruichi hissed as the others chuckled. She turned to Thor. “So big guy, what do you say? Care to beat his head in for a while so he can learn Bankai?”

“Nah.” Thor chuckled and their eyes widened again, “Boy ain’t ready for Bankai, and I’m quite looking forward to seeing him beat that moron up and down this place.”

“What?” Yoruichi turned fully, “How can he not be ready for Bankai? He can already materialize you! On his own, even! All he needs to do is force you into submission.”

“He needs to force me into submission *at my strongest*.” Thor corrected, “You forget he’s not just a Shinigami, little lady. He’s a Quincy and a Hollow too.” Nemu’s eyes widened again. “And I’m the keystone of all his powers, not just his Shinigami powers. So long as he’s out of balance, he ain’t getting no fuckin’ Bankai.”

“Shit.” Yoruichi hissed in frustration. “None of us are Quincy! We can’t exactly teach him any of that!”

Thor shrugged, “That’s the deal, little lady. Nothing we can do about it. His Hollow side was easy. It’s mostly instinct anyway. That’s how I was able to teach him so much. But I don’t know a damn thing about Quincy techniques other than Blut, nor do I know any formal Shinigami shit.

Hell, until you got him that Asauchi, he couldn't even hear my name. He has a long way to go before he's in balance."

Nemu blinked, "You did not teach him **Ransōtengai**?"

"Ransowhatsis?" Ichigo asked, befuddled.

Nemu turned to him, "Mayuri's poison should have paralyzed you." She said matter-of-factly. "Like I was. I believed you to be using a Quincy technique called Ransōtengai. Mayuri knew *of* it due to our history with the Lichtreich but had never seen it no matter how many Quincy he studied."

"And by studied you probably mean *butchered*." Ichigo growled and Orihime flinched at the confirmation when Nemu nodded. "Anyway, *if* I used that, it was completely instinctual. Honestly, I was using my lightning to pilot my own nerves and force my muscles to move. Quite simply... every instinct in my body was telling me to break his face for what he was doing to you."

Nemu slowly blinked once more. "You are terrifying, Ichigo-sama." She smiled softly and let her head fall on his shoulder. He smiled back at her. Lisa, Yoruichi, and Orihime all thought, 'dawww...'

And then a new voice from a nearby pool rang out. "Yaaaaay! Kenny's awake!"

"Huhhh? Where the fuck am I?" Kenpachi's voice was next.

Ichigo's soft smile turned feral. "You have a good nap, Kenpachi?"

They saw the naked man step out of the pool. He was cut from marble but completely marred by scars. Orihime, Lisa, and Yoruichi wrinkled their noses. Kenpachi seemed not to have a single gram of fat anywhere on his body, so he somehow ended up looking both jacked and incredibly underweight at the same time. He had a massive grin on his face, "Heh. Where the hell have you brought me, Ichigo?"

"Somewhere we could heal you quickly." Ichigo stood and Orihime averted her eyes. The other ladies did no such thing and Lisa straight up got up and moved for a better view.

"What'd you go and do that for?" Kenpachi asked him as he stretched out his neck.

"Oh, that's simple." Ichigo vanished and palmed Kenpachi's face, "So I could beat you to death until you stop being a fucking moron!" In an instant, he had plowed Kenpachi through a rock outcropping and then thrown him into the ground.

Lisa adjusted her glasses, "You know, usually that would have gotten my motor running, but Kenpachi is a bit too gonk for it to be hot."

Orihime and Yoruichi let out groans.

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“What the hell?” Kenpachi laughed as he kicked Ichigo away, “I love a good fight, but I don’t even have my Zanpakutō, Ichigo!”

“I have it here, Kenny!” Yachiru, equally as naked as the rest of them, held it over her head. “Here!” She tossed it.

“Heh, thanks, Yachiru!” Kenpachi called out, holding out his hand to catch it. Only for it to vanish in a blur of motion. For the first time, Kenpachi’s grin fell. “What the hell are you doing, Ichigo?”

Ichigo had Kenpachi’s Zanpakutō in hand. “You won’t need this.” He said flatly. “You don’t deserve this.” He stabbed it into the ground. “You might as well swing around a hunk of steel.”

Kenpachi scowled, “What the hell does that mean?” He asked, no longer amused.

“Figure it out, dumbass.” Ichigo cracked his neck. “You want to fight with this thing again?” He cracked his knuckles, “Then all you have to do is take it.” And in an instant, he was inside Kenpachi’s space, a fist thundering into his ribs. A sickening crack rang out as blood spurted from Kenpachi’s mouth as he hunched over. Another punch sent him flipping through the air and landing on the hard stone. “Just don’t take too long, otherwise you might die.” Ichigo hissed before kicking Kenpachi in the side and sending him flying into another outcropping.

Kenpachi exploded out of it, aiming a punch for Ichigo’s head. It was sloppy and made Ichigo snort. Kenpachi’s attacks were wild, and Ichigo almost rolled his eyes as he realized what the man was trying to do. He stopped short and grabbed the man’s wrists. “Trying to push me past your sword so you can grab it?” His knee buried itself into Kenpachi’s sternum with another sickening crack. Ichigo landed and kicked him away once again. “You’ll have to do better than that.”

His eyes were sharp as Kenpachi got to his feet once more. It was like pain didn’t affect the man at all. He simply raced forward and Ichigo bit back a smirk as his Reitsu felt *just* that tiny bit sharper and heavier.

But nowhere near enough. He blitzed forward and his arms moved so fast they looked like a hydra’s many heads striking at once. The number of punches he landed made it sound like an automatic *rifle* was being fired in the cavern. Kenpachi’s body was instantly filled with craters and his eyes rolled into the back of his head. ‘*Huh, he didn’t fall. Not bad.*’ Ichigo thought to himself as he called out, “Medic!”

Orihime appeared in a Shunpo and quickly started healing Kenpachi. Yachiru was frowning as she poked Ichigo’s thigh. “Ichi, why aren’t you letting Kenny use his sword?”

Ichigo then realized he was naked next to a very young girl and he blurred, appearing with his Shinigami uniform on again. He patted Yachiru’s head, “Because Kenny’s a fucking moron and he needs to earn his sword back.”

“...I don’t get it.” She frowned more, “Kenny always has fun with his sword.”

‘*That’s what she said.*’ Ichigo felt like punching himself in the face for the random thought, “Do you have a Zanpakutō spirit, Yachiru?”

“Un!” She nodded, “Sanpo Kenjū It summons Boney and Lumpy!”

“Right, so you know your Zanpakutō’s spirit pretty well, right?” Ichigo asked.

“Mhm!” She nodded, “They’re my best friends! Other than Kenny, of course!”

“Kenny has a spirit too, you know.” Ichigo said, “Except they don’t know each other at all. In fact, they’re *hurting* each other because they can’t connect. Every time my sword clashed with his, I could hear his Zanpakutō spirit screaming in agony. That’s why I say he needs to earn it.” Yachiru’s frown deepened and she looked contemplative.

“I... kind of get it, I guess. I wouldn’t want Boney and Lumpy to be hurting for no reason.” She mumbled.

“Yup.” Ichigo chuckled and patted her head again. “Looks like it’s time for round two.” He cracked his knuckles as he saw Kenpachi waking up and glaring at him.

“Not before he gets dressed.” Lisa snarked as she threw a huge, clean Shihakushō at the man. Orihime opened the shield for it to sail through before closing it again. Kenpachi glared at it for a moment before putting it on.

The second Orihime canceled her healing technique, Kenpachi threw himself back at Ichigo. Off to the side, Lisa sat back down with Chad, Orihime, Yoruichi, and Nemu. “This is a waste of time.” She said as Ichigo clocked Kenpachi hard, disorientating him with two claps to the ears. “Most Captains don’t fight like this in the first place and it’s not like they’ll be able to get *that* much stronger like this. Not quickly, anyway.”

“Incorrect.” Nemu said softly, her unblinking eyes staring at the fight. “Kenpachi-Taichō is moving approximately two percent faster than the previous bout and his Reiatsu is one-percent heavier.”

Lisa looked at her askance. “Wot?”

Yoruichi bit her thumb. “Let’s see what they look like at the end of the day.” She said finally. “We’ll assess if we need to change anything then.” She said before standing. “We should get off our tight asses too. Facing that brat Byakuya really made me feel how rusty I am.”

Orihime balked, “That was *rusty*?”

Yoruichi only laughed.

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Nearly twelve hours had passed, and Ichigo was getting more and more irritated. Kenpachi’s Reiatsu had steadily increased with every deliverance of near-death Ichigo had given him. His speed had increased; his strength had increased... And yet his fighting itself was still complete shit. It was basically doing nothing for Ichigo because he was barely ever in danger. He glared at

Kenpachi, “You know, for someone who claims that a Zanpakutō is just a weapon and that fighting with the Zanpakutō spirit is the way of a loser who can’t fight on his own, you sure are fucking trash without it.” He blocked a jab from Kenpachi with his veins flashing blue from **Blut Vene**. He grabbed the man’s wrist and jerked him forward before smashing his fist into the man’s elbow and shattering it. He raised his knee to block a kick from him and then Judo threw him across the grounds.

“Fuck you, Ichigo.” Kenpachi grunted as he got up.

“You’re not pretty enough.” Ichigo snarked, “And you know what? You’re *boring* me.” Kenpachi looked like he had never been more insulted in his life. “At least fucking figure out **Shunpo** or something.” He vanished with a burst of **Sonido** and kicked Kenpachi unconscious once again, the man’s teeth clattering across the canyon. “Hey Orihime, you’re up again.”

Lisa groaned as he tossed off his clothes and got into hot springs, “Ichigo, *seriously*. You don’t feel *any* stronger after all that. Sure, *Kenpachi* is stronger, but what fucking use is *that*? He can’t fucking touch you without his Zanpakutō! His hakuda is complete garbage! We could be... I don’t know, working on your Kidō or something!”

Ichigo closed his eyes. “Have you ever heard of anyone getting stronger as quickly as him? Other than me?”

“No.” Yoruichi said flatly as she slipped onto his lap. “Not going to lie, it’s a bit terrifying.” Ichigo wrapped his arms around her, “You *sure* you know what you’re doing?”

Ichigo chuckled slightly, “You say that like I have a plan.” He snarked, laughing harder when she jabbed him with her elbow.

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Tōshirō was too young to be pulling his hair out like this. His investigation had turned up *nothing* so far. Or nothing useful, at least. The very first thing he had done upon reading that letter had been to go and search Aizen’s quarters again. He had been in there before anyone else, which is how he had even found the letter at all. The Onmitsukidō had already picked through the room by now, of course, but he hoped there would be *something*.

Contrary to his home, the room had been pretty spartan. If Tōshirō was honest, it had almost felt a little sterile. There was no additional evidence there. So Tōshirō had turned to the possibility of either the ryoka or the man’s old Lieutenant Gin having committed the murder. There *had* been that icy conversation between the two that he’d overheard. Aizen normally got along well with all of his subordinates and had been kind to Tōshirō on many occasions as well. The two having a conversation that pointed, cold, and suspicious boded ill for the Seireitei’s silver fox.

But Tōshirō had been *there* when Momo had discovered Aizen’s corpse. His body had been completely unwounded except for the killing blow. There hadn’t been a fight. To put it quite bluntly, in Tōshirō’s mind that eliminated the ryoka completely. Every single fight they had been in had been as loud and flashy as a Shiba fireworks show. Each and every fight had been a commotion and every single one of the ryoka had already had their strength assessed. It simply

didn't fit. The only one of their group who was *potentially* strong enough to kill a Captain silently was Kurosaki, and it just wasn't his style. Which left Gin as the obvious suspect...

Except, of course, for the fact that Aizen would have absolutely been on guard around Gin, based on the conversation he overheard. He completely doubted Gin's ability to not only kill Aizen but do so with his own sword. And so quickly that the man didn't even have a chance to raise his Reiatsu in preparation for a fight. The only person he could think of who could *possibly* pull something like that off was Soifon-Taichō, seeing as she was the head of the Onmitsukidō and by far the Seireitei's best assassin. But she wouldn't have been sloppy enough to leave a body in the first place. Suzumebachi's **Nigeki Kessatsu** destroyed the target's body completely. She wouldn't have bothered killing the man with his own sword.

It was maddening how little sense things made. Questioning Momo had been useless as well. She said that she had spoken with Aizen the night before, but the only thing they had discussed was the fact that Hisagi-Fukutaichō and Komamura-Taichō would be alright, and that Kuchiki-Taichō had called for Hisagi's discharge for daring to disobey orders and facing Kurosaki alone. It had been blocked, of course, but the nobleman always rubbed most people the wrong way with his attitude.

He had also spoken with Abarai Renji, another of Aizen's former subordinates. The redhead had admitted to Tōshirō that Aizen had mentioned his concerns to him as well. Specifically how Rangiku's crime absolutely did not match the punishment. That along with the fact that her Gigai was immediately disposed of and her stay of execution had ten days cut off from the usual thirty-five days had made Aizen suspicious.

Which, unfortunately, wasn't anything *new*.

Something about the whole situation stank from the Rukongai to the Reiō's palace, and Tōshirō was *running out of time* to figure out *what* that something was. Thankfully, *running* out did not mean he had *run out*. He still had over a week to figure this out.

He was running around in circles at this point. He had even gone back to the scene of the crime to see if he could find something else, *anything* else. But there had been nothing. Nothing but him and his thoughts as he sat on one of the taller towers and watched the sun come up.

And then something caught his attention: a Hell Butterfly.

Attention all Captains and Lieutenants. This is a report on the latest developments.

Tōshirō bit back a groan. "*What now?*"

There has been a final change to the date of Matsumoto Rangiku's execution.

"What?! NO!" Tōshirō stood up in shock.

The sentence will be carried out twenty-nine hours from now. This decision is final. There will be no further changes. That is all.

The butterfly flapped away.

“Twenty-nine hours?” He thought to himself, aghast.

Apparently time had run out after all.

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The second Kaien stepped over the threshold of the hidden room Kūkaku had told him about under Sōkyoku Hill, he felt the Reiatsu. “That’s a damn good defense. Kūkaku told me roughly where it was and it still took me an hour to find the damn thing.” He muttered as he closed the entrance behind him and went for the trapdoor. The instant he opened it, it felt like being punched in the chest by Reiatsu. “Damn, those two are monsters.” He chuckled as he hopped down.

Instantly, all activity stopped, including the fight between Ichigo and Kenpachi. “Who the fuck are you?” Ichigo growled as his Zanpakutō appeared in his hand in a flash of lightning.

Kaien smirked, “Is that any way to greet your older cousin?” He asked as Ichigo’s sword lowered a bit in surprise. He looked over at Orihime and Chad, who were sweating nervously. “Sup.”

Orihime giggled nervously, “Uhm, h-hi, Lieutenant Shiba.” She waved at him, “Is your wife alright?”

“Oh, we’re both fine, thanks.” Kaien said dryly. “You did a fine job with the initial healing.” Orihime rubbed the back of her head bashfully. “Thanks for that, little lady. You didn’t have to help an enemy.”

“You weren’t an enemy!” Orihime chirped, “Just an antagonist.” Kaien’s eyebrow twitched slightly. Well, if he was here anyway, he might as well show these two what it *really* felt like to face someone of his level.

Yoruichi walked up, “Kaien!” She smirked at him, “If you’re here, I take it that means Kūkaku told you everything.”

“Mhm.” Kaien scratched the back of his head, “Now I knew you were trouble, but I had no idea even you could pull something like *this* off.” He chuckled lightly.

Yoruichi snorted, “Please, I *am* the trouble.” She laughed a little bit. “So, what have you got for us?”

“A warning.” Kaien focused up, “You guys are running out of time.”

“What do you mean?” Ichigo asked, Gōzen Raiu slung over his shoulder. “We’ve still got nine days.”

“Not anymore.” Kaien said grimly. “They moved up Matsumoto’s execution date to tomorrow at noon.” Everyone froze for a moment as they looked at a blank-faced Ichigo.

The orange-haired young man turned around and glared at Kenpachi. “No more fucking around, Kenpachi.” His Reiatsu started to spike higher and higher, “You better take back your Zanpakutō and fast, otherwise I really will kill you.” He slashed his sword and Kenpachi dodged with

Shunpo. As predicted, Kenpachi had taken it *personally* that Ichigo had been *bored* with him. It only took until the second bout this morning until he had figured out the technique.

Ichigo followed in **Sonido** and kicked the man out of his beeline for his sword. It began to crackle with lightning as Ichigo brought it down. Kenpachi backflipped with the momentum and got the hell out of dodge.

Kenpachi appeared with a roar in a much faster **Shunpo**, his fist thundering into Ichigo's jaw. Ichigo flew, not really *wanting* to allow Kenpachi to take his blade back, but he at least needed to *sweat* here a little.

But to his surprise, the man didn't go for it. Instead he appeared above Ichigo and then *pounded* his face into the dirt. "Come on, Ichigo. I just started having a bit of fun with all this." He cracked his knuckles and laughed maniacally as he rained blow after blow on Ichigo.

Ichigo had enough and kicked his opponent back, "You'll need to do better than *that* to make me feel a thing." He said, spitting out a tooth and regrowing it instantly. He raised his right hand and beam after beam of lightning started to blast out. Kenpachi dodged all of them as Ichigo transformed his sword into his cannon. The man's eyes went wide as he instinctively tried to cut Ichigo's round with a sword that just wasn't in his hand.

"Holy shit!" Kaien yelped as Ichigo's massive bullet damn near cut Kenpachi in half.

"Oh, shoot!" Orihime raced over and quickly enveloped the man with her healing technique.

Ichigo was pacing like a caged tiger as Orihime got to work. Her healing had already massively increased in speed just from their time in the Seireitei. Kenpachi's entrails quickly returned to where they should be and he let out a half-gasp, half-cough as he sat up. Off to the side, Kaien's eyes were bulging from his skull. "Tch." Kenpachi clicked his teeth and got back up to his feet. "Thanks, girlie." He continued to glare at Ichigo. "Guess you really aren't fucking around anymore." He raised his Reiatsu again, causing most of the people under the mountain to grimace as it pressed on them.

"I brought you here to teach you a fucking lesson and to get the best whetstone I could ask for." Ichigo snarled, "But you're as fucking dumb as a brick, Kenpachi, and I'm completely wasting my time here." His rifle turned back into a sword. "Every time we trade blows, all I can feel from you is *fear*. What the FUCK are you so afraid of?! It sure as fuck isn't me!"

"I'm not afraid of anything, you brat." Kenpachi growled back.

"Yes you *fucking are*." Ichigo snarled back, "The bells. That fucking eye patch!"

"Those are just to make fights last longer!" Kenpachi protested, "And I'm not even wearing them now!"

"If you have to *hold back* to make a fight fun then it wasn't a worthy fight in the first place!" Ichigo said as something clicked inside his head. "...Oh, you *son of a bitch*." He glared *death* at Kenpachi. "It's not just the eye patch and the bells. You're not getting stronger at all. You're just holding back less."

Yoruichi and Lisa's eyes widened from where they stood off to the side. 'What?' Yoruichi even uncrossed her arms.

"The fuck is that supposed to mean?" Kenpachi asked as he glared back.

"It means you're so fucking afraid of never having a good fight that you're fucking *subconsciously sabotaging yourself*, you fucking moron!" Ichigo growled, "People couldn't stand under your Reiatsu, so you got an eye patch that suppressed ninety-percent of it. They then still couldn't keep up with you, so you put on the bells to give them an extra advantage. You even mentioned the fact that you didn't need to give me a free shot before our first fight. What's next? Will you cut off a leg to give them an easier target?"

Kenpachi's teeth were grinding, "I-"

"No." Ichigo growled, "You crush them and move on. If you have to handicap yourself to make a fight fun then it was never fun at all!"

"AND WHAT IF NO ONE CAN FIGHT ME?!" Kenpachi let out a roar. "WHAT IF I CAN'T EVER FIND AN OPPONENT WHO CAN MATCH ME?!"

"Holy shit, he's *good* at breaking people by talking." Kaien muttered, "I've never seen Zarakī like this."

"Say that when you've done something *other* than get your ass kicked for two days straight." Ichigo growled as he grabbed Gōzen Raiu with his other hand and dashed forward.

Except to Kenpachi, he appeared to be moving in slow motion.

USE ME!

'*The fuck was that?*' Kenpachi thought to himself. The feminine but *rough* voice was practically ringing in his ear.

USE ME! USE ME! USEMEUSEMEUSEME!

It was a positively manic chant. And he felt a pull on his very being. Ichigo was almost on him now, and yet Kenpachi's legs didn't seem to want to move.

USE ME! CALL MY NAME, ZARAKI! USEMEUSEMEUSEME!

Ichigo swung down, and Kenpachi swung up. Their blades clashed and blew everyone away. The blades ground against each other, throwing sparks everywhere. Kenpachi shoved Ichigo away as he stared at the blade that had just *appeared* in his hand. '*Is it you?*' He asked himself.

"So, you've got a Zanpakutō now." Ichigo's hand clenched around Gōzen Raiu's handle. "What are you going to do with it?"

**CALL MY NAME! CALL MY NAME! CALLMYNAME! CALLMYNAME!
CALLMYNAME!**

“Heh...” Kenpachi let out a short chuff of amusement as he completely ignored Ichigo. “Guess I’ve been having fun without you, huh? But you’re as bloodthirsty of a bitch as I am, huh?”

BLOOD! GIVE ME BLOOD, ZARAKI! CALL MY NAME!

A massive grin crossed Kenpachi’s face. “Yeah, that sounds good.” His Reiatsu started to spike impossibly high. Even Yoruichi, Kaien, and Lisa started feeling like they would be crushed under the pressure. “*Drink!*”

“Fucking finally.” An equally bloodthirsty grin crossed Ichigo’s face as several of the others experienced true terror, “Engulf the World and Blacken the Skies,”

“NOZARASHI!” Kenpachi roared.

“GŌZEN RAIU!” Ichigo’s voice joined his.

Calamity struck inside that training ground.

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