

Good - Better - Best

Von whatever

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Kapitel 1: Good

Today had been the worst day ever.

First, there was this wagonload of paperwork to do. Well, that was normal, since his taichou had taken over the job of looking after the 3rd division, but every few minutes there would be someone to interrupt him. Every single one of them thought they were more important than all of those reports he had to write. So of course he hadn't finished when the next problem arose: an attack from Hueco Mundo. To be truthful, there had only been some Hollows and not even Menos Grande, but they just had to send Renji to defend Seireitei. In the end, the incredibly weak Hollows were defeated and to top it all off, he had to work late into the night to make up for the lost time. His captain really was unforgiving when it came to work.

As soon as he finished the last annoying document, he sprinted out of the office and into the nightlife. He was supposed to meet Rukia at their normal meeting point – a plain café/bar in the middle of Rukongai – and he was late as hell. It seemed to be something important because Rukia had appeared rather nervous when she told him to meet her there that night. Deep down Renji was hoping Rukia would tell him how she felt, even if it would mean rejection. But he wanted to know if she could, perhaps, sometime in the future reciprocate his feelings. He'd had this crush on her since they were little, always hoping she'd confess to him one day.

Sometimes he tried to remember when he had begun to really like Rukia and there was always this little scene which came to his mind. There had been an argument in their little home because one kid had stolen the sweets of another. Of course they didn't need to eat, but they had been little kids and little kids love to eat sweets. The kid whose sweets were stolen was really sad and had cried like there was no tomorrow and so Rukia had given him her share. Renji believed this was the time when he'd begun to truly like Rukia. So hopefully she was still there, waiting for him and drinking a cup of water (not sake, no, Rukia definitely couldn't hold the smallest cup of alcohol and she knew it. The one time where she tried to drink a bit had been hilarious and she had been so embarrassed the morning after. Renji had liked that cute little red on her cheeks.).

Once he was near the café, Renji sped up a little more. Fortunately Rukia was still sitting at their normal table and was not only drinking (tea, he noticed), but eating, too. Her food smelled delicious and he felt his mouth water. He came to a stop in front of the table and sat down, panting heavily.

"Sorry I'm late, your dearest brother made me work overtime again." Rukia was silent as she stared at him. Renji felt uncomfortable. "Uhm, hey, I'm really sorry, okay? So don't be mad, alright? I hate it when you're mad at me." He grinned a bit awkwardly. Rukia stayed silent, but motioned for him to order something, so he did. Only after his order was delivered, Rukia spoke up.

"Renji, I've got to tell you something."

"Yes?" Eager to hear her confession of love for him, he leaned forward. Rukia shifted slightly nervous.

"You know, I had to stay for a while at Kurosaki's, right?" Renji nodded, feeling slightly unsure. "Well, the problem is... I know you like me, Renji, but... Damn, this is so frustrating!" Rukia let her head fall on the table, sighing deeply. He sure as hell wasn't a woman, but he wasn't stupid, either. This definitely didn't sound like the beginning

of a confession. His hopes came crashing down.

"Why don't you just spit it out, I won't hate you, you know?" Renji told her, not letting his feelings show. Rukia lifted her head and smiled thankfully at him. His heart skipped a beat.

"You're my best friend, Renji, so I wanted to tell you first, even before I told Nii-sama." Renji nodded encouragingly, feeling honoured to at least be the first one to know. "Well, the case is... while I was staying at Kurosaki's, something more than friendship developed between us, and now we're... sort of... you know... together. I'll be staying in the real world for a while longer now, so I probably won't see you again soon. I hope you're not mad at me." Rukia stared at Renji pleadingly, begging for forgiveness. She had known about his feelings for quite a bit now, so she felt terrible for telling him something like this. But maybe that could help him forget her and move on with his life, move on to someone who fit him better. But according to the look on Renji's face that would take some time.

Renji felt stupid. Kurosaki... The one who had been so desperate to save Rukia, who had done everything in his power to stop her from being executed... He should have seen it coming. He should have realized that there was something more than pure friendship which motivated him. The only thing which overpowered this feeling of stupidity was sadness. Well, of course he did realize after her first few sentences that she didn't reciprocate his feelings, but to hear it from her just made it sound more real. First it had been suspicion, now it was a fact. And that fact hurt. A lot.

"Oh, so, erm, congrats, hope you're happy," Renji finally spoke, forcing himself to smile. Rukia saw that and felt miserable. "Renji, I..." "So, sorry, but I need to go back to the office, I didn't manage to finish all the reports I need to write. Thank you for telling me! Later!" Renji stormed off, leaving Rukia behind. What he had told Rukia had been a lie: he did finish all reports, but he needed an excuse for leaving. And now, although it had been just an excuse, he went back to the office.

He arrived after a few minutes, hoping everyone else had gone home a long time ago. Fortunately, he couldn't detect anyone's reiatsu. *At least I've got a little luck today.* He stepped into the office, closing the door behind him. He decided to not turn the lights on in case someone came by.

Opening a drawer he retrieved a bottle of sake. That was what he needed right now: to get drunk, forgetting everything that had happened today. He put the bottle to his lips, taking a big sip from it. He continued to drink one bottle after another, getting more drunk with every sip he took. Although he had been drinking much, it wasn't midnight yet. And soon, steps could be heard, steps which were coming nearer and nearer by the second. But Renji did not hear for he was far too drunk to notice anything besides the sake he was holding in his hand. He didn't even really notice the not-so-tall figure stepping into the office.

"I see. Rukia told you about her relationship." Tiredly, Renji turned his head in the direction of his captain's voice. "Uh-huh. Wanna drink, too?" he asked, waving the bottle. Byakuya followed the invitation, taking a bottle of his own. "Cheers," Renji muttered and took yet another sip. "Cheers," Byakuya agreed and followed Renji's example. Soon, both men were drunk because unlike Renji, Byakuya couldn't hold his alcohol very well. He even let his stoic façade fall and behaved like any normal drunkard would. The two of them were sitting really close, drinking in silent understanding. The more sips they took, the closer they were sitting until...

"Renji, what are you doing? Forgot all about our party? Just get up and...oh, good evening, Kuchiki-taichou." The intruder formally bowed and straightened again. He

shot them a curious look. "So, uhm, what about it?"

"Yeah, yeah, don't rush me, 'm coming already." After a lot of staggering, cursing and some help of his desk, Renji finally managed to be standing. He eyed his taichou questioningly. "You coming, too? Whole division's partying, wouldn't be fun with you missing."

"Guess I should," Byakuya muttered and tried to get up. Unfortunately, he couldn't decide which two of his four – or was it six? – legs were working and why were there suddenly three Renjis wanting to help him? He reached for his head, confused as he was, but couldn't find it. "Seems like I'm drunk," he stated as matter-of-factly as a drunkard could.

"You're not the only one here," Renji replied as he tried to grab for his taichou's hand and utterly failed. He cursed. "Come on, don't just stand there, help!" Biting back his sniggering, the member of their division stepped into the office and helped his taichou to get on his feet.

"Can you walk?" he asked grinning.

"Course I can, who d'you think I am, eh?" Renji answered annoyed. The other raised his hands defensively.

"Hey now, don't get mad, it was just a simple question." Renji grumbled, then snaked his arm around his captain's waist in an attempt to support him. At first, Byakuya resisted, but after almost tumbling to the floor he gave in. With the mysterious member of their division leading the way and Renji supporting his captain, they arrived at their destination a short while after. The party had already started and everyone was drinking and enjoying themselves. Their guide hurried away as soon as he saw his friends and Renji seated his captain on a mat not too far away. Then he himself plopped down next to him, too. Renji grabbed a cup of sake and the bottle standing next to it, waving them in his taichou's face. With a short nod of his head, Byakuya affirmed that yes, he wanted another cup. Right after nodding, he reached for his head. "Bad idea," he mumbled.

"You sure you want 'nother one?" Renji asked, hesitating after seeing his captain reaching for his head. This time, Byakuya refrained from nodding. He simply held his own cup under Renji's nose – at least he hoped it was the right one – and waited. Renji sighed and complied. Miraculously he managed to fill the cup without spilling much. It was Byakuya who spilled most of the sake while guiding the cup to his mouth. Although Renji was quite drunk himself, he was sober enough to realise his captain had had enough for the night. Unfortunately that realisation didn't stop him from drinking more sake himself. In the end, they were both too drunk to even sit straight. Some way or another though, both of them managed to get home. Renji's home, that is. Along the way they more or less decided that Byakuya's home was far too far away for him to reach it safely and because Renji was his fukutaichou, it was his duty to let Byakuya sleep over. And, through some strange twist of fate, they ended up kissing each other. Again. And again. Until no more clothes were left to strip and bodies were tangled and panting mingled with moaning was heard. And even through all of this, they couldn't stop kissing. Somewhere in the back of their mind, they knew something was off, simultaneously blaming the sake for whatever it was. Or they simply didn't care.

The next morning, Byakuya woke up because someone pounded on his door. He grumbled, swearing to whatever god was listening he would let the servant pay for this rude method of waking him up. Then he opened his eyes, just to close them again. Had the sun always been this bright, bright enough to hurt his eyes and head? And

there it was again, this rude servant pounding on his door. And to make matters worse, he even started yelling.

"Renji! Wake up! Taichou's missing! Renji!"

Wait a... Renji?

Byakuya turned his head slightly to the right, where he sensed another reiatsu beside his own which was so familiar he hadn't been aware of it a moment ago. And it really was Renji, in the process of waking up. Stupefied, Byakuya watched Renji sitting up, eyes still closed, blanket sliding down revealing tanned skin, taut muscles and... hickeys. And while his mind was struggling to remember what had happened last night, Renji opened his eyes and let his gaze fall on his taichou. Perplexed, he blinked.

"Eh? What are you doing here, taichou?"

"I don't know." He saw another hickey on his fukutaichou's neck. A pretty bad one, too. "To be honest, I don't want to know, either." Renji just blinked with his eyes again. The pounding started anew.

"Renji! Come on up, you sleepyhead! Want me to break into your room?"

"Wait a sec, I'm coming already!" Grumbling, Renji stood up and grabbed his shihakusho.

"You should teach your underlings some manners."

"Eh?" Another eloquent response from Renji. Today, he seemed to be even more idiotic than any other day. Byakuya sighed.

"You are their fukutaichou and they should address you as such."

"Oh this." Renji scratched his head. "I don't really care, 'cause they're my buddies. Rank doesn't really matter when you're friends with someone else." He shrugged and finally opened the door.

"What's the matter so early in the morning?"

"Early in the morning? It's nearly noon! And taichou still isn't in his office! Do you have any idea, where... oh." Renji's friend noticed the missing taichou sitting on Renji's futon, glaring as annoyed and cold as always. His gaze shifted to Renji, or rather to Renji's neck where the hickey was presenting itself to the whole world. "Oh." He shifted nervously from one foot to the other. "I guess I'll see you in the office, then?"

"Probably, yes." With a last nervous smile Renji's friend hurried away. Confused, Renji stared after the retreating man. "What was up with him?"

"He probably came to a most unpleasant conclusion."

"Conclusion?" Another sigh escaped Byakuya. He pointed at Renji's neck. "What's wrong with my neck?" Sometimes, Renji's slowness was even worse than Zaraki and Yachiru's sense of direction combined.

"Love bite." Byakuya simply answered. At first, Renji clearly didn't understand. But then he noticed his taichou's state of clothing, or better lack thereof. And finally comprehension could be seen on his face.

"Y-you mean he... thinks we..." Renji stuttered.

"We most probably did."

"Most probably?"

"I do not remember. But as both you and me are in a state of undress and those marks on your body are a clear sign, I am of the opinion that we did indulge in the act called intercourse."

"Pardon me?" And yet another sigh escaped Byakuya's lips. Renji's cheeks reddened at the thought that those lips were – probably – responsible for the hickeys on his body.

"There is a high probability that we had sex," Byakuya stated.

"We as in you and me?" Could this get any worse?

"Yes, we as in you and me," Byakuya replied clearly annoyed. Now the redness of Renji's cheeks definitely competed with the redness of his hair. He didn't know if he could live through the day.

Fortunately – or unfortunately, depending on your point of view – Byakuya decided to drop the topic and get up, letting the blanket slide down his body. Renji couldn't help but stare at his taichou while he was getting ready to go to his office. The way those muscles moved somehow fascinated Renji very much and the heat of his cheeks was beginning to spread all over his body, warming him up quite well.

"I do hope you plan to get up and accompany me to the division. There will be a high amount of work to do as we slept in today." Renji startled, a confused look on his face, then hurried to get properly dressed as well. Some minutes later, they were quietly working in their joint office, hurrying to finish the paperwork which was occupying their desks. Luck seemed to be on their side, because no one bothered them even once and they were able to finish their work by dusk. Their silence continued even as they walked home. Suddenly Renji realized that his taichou was taking the same way as he was, although it was in the opposite direction of the Kuchiki manor. The question clearly written all over his face, he turned to look his taichou in the eyes. Quite untypical for him, Byakuya avoided Renji's stare. After a few seconds, he gave up and let out a sigh. Now Renji was starting to worry.

"Although this does not concern you in any way, I do not wish to return..." He paused for a millisecond, carefully schooling his face. "...home, not yet at least."

"As you wish," Renji replied, shrugging his shoulders. And so they resumed their way to Renji's, where he set up a cup of tea and offered his taichou some sweets he had only just bought the day before in lunch break. And although Byakuya didn't like sweets very much (at least not those – they were too cheap for his standards.) he gladly took them. While they were eating and drinking, they began talking and they didn't stop for a long time. It was near midnight when Byakuya sighed.

"Renji," he interrupted his fukutaichou who immediately stopped saying whatever it was he was saying. It wasn't so important anyway, not when his taichou sounded so... defeated. Why was that? "It is late, I need to go back." Byakuya's gaze locked with Renji's who felt lost somehow. What was his taichou expecting him to say? Why was there a small ray of hope in these cold, grey eyes?

"Oh. Alright. Shall I accompany you?" Byakuya's shoulders seemed to slump a little, but that was impossible, right?

Byakuya shook his head. "It will not be necessary." He got to his feet, nodded in Renji's direction and turned towards the door. Renji felt horrible seeing his taichou heading for the door. And in the few seconds he had before Byakuya could reach the exit, he made a decision.

"Stay," he said, still sitting where he had been all evening long. Surprised, Byakuya turned around, confusion clearly written all over his face. "I know it's late and you need to go back and stuff, but please stay. I have a feeling I cannot be alone tonight." Slowly, Renji got up and went to stand in front of Byakuya. His hand moved to cup Byakuya's cheek. "So I beg of you: Stay." And instead of reprimanding Renji for overstepping his boundaries, Byakuya closed his eyes and leant into the touch. Something inside Renji snapped when he saw his taichou so trusting and he pressed his lips to Byakuya's, expecting rejection. But almost immediately those lips answered his with the same fervour and need. While Renji carefully tried to remove the kenseikan, Byakuya opened the tie which held Renji's mane in check. It fell around them like a curtain, tickling Byakuya's cheeks. Byakuya grabbed Renji by the neck,

pulling him closer while opening his mouth. Renji happily followed the invitation and started exploring the hot, moist cavern which was Byakuya's mouth. He groaned as contentment washed through him. His taichou tasted so unbelievably *good* he could barely contain himself from not just ravishing the mouth, but also the body before him. It got even harder to resist when Byakuya decided to stop being passive and playfully challenged Renji's tongue with his own. And as soon as the noble slipped his hands inside Renji's shihakushou, caressing the muscular chest, he couldn't control himself any longer. A feral growl left his throat, causing Byakuya to moan. In no time at all, clothes lay scattered across the floor, the table was turned upside down and the sitting mats were used as a makeshift bed. Byakuya helplessly held on to Renji's hair as his fukutaichou hungrily devoured him. Never had he felt this powerless before and never had he thought it would feel this *good*. He moaned out loud as Renji began suckling his already sensitive left nipple while teasing the other, not caring whether he could be heard. Heck, he couldn't even remember there were other people living somewhere in Soul Society besides Renji and him. His mind completely shut down as Renji continued his ministrations *elsewhere* and his baser instincts took over.

This time they woke up in time and quickly made their way to the office, having silently agreed to talk about this thing later. Although later normally meant after work in the evening and not during lunch break. But normally, you wouldn't expect a stoic, seemingly cold taichou to start a conversation like this, either. Lately, Renji's life had been full of surprises.

"Explain," ordered Byakuya as soon as they were sitting in the gardens with their lunch. Renji knew immediately what his taichou was asking about, but he didn't know an answer, at least not one that would satisfy his taichou. So he sighed and set his chopsticks down.

"I don't know," he murmured. "I truly don't know." At least he was being honest and he hoped his taichou would appreciate it. But the only thing he got for an answer was "Hm." And then silence reigned once again. Renji gathered his courage and took a deep breath before asking: "What...what do you think?" He didn't receive an answer straight away, but when it came, it greatly surprised him. "I...don't know, either."

"Oh."

At least he was not the only one who didn't have an answer, but Byakuya admitting to something he didn't know was reason to worry. Renji watched Byakuya closely, noticing little changes in his posture which so did not fit the noble. His eyes looked almost haunted and he seemed tired enough to let go of his rigid posture if even for a bit. And instead of reprimanding Renji, which he did more often than not, for his lack of manners or his not-so-perfect-anymore dressing state (he always unconsciously scratched all over his body, a bad habit of his), his taichou was watching silently the sky. Renji was sure something was wrong, terribly so.

"Taichou? Is... is everything alright?"

"Yes, Renji, everything is fine," Byakuya answered monotone. Although this wasn't something abnormal in itself – Byakuya did that often enough – it was the sort of monotony that troubled Renji. This monotony had been purely lifeless.

"I am sorry, taichou, but I can't believe you." Shocked, Byakuya looked up, directly into the determined eyes of his subordinate. "Your behaviour is so unlike your usual self, it's totally worrying. I mean, I know I'm not the most intelligent person there is, but I am your lieutenant and you can trust me. So..." Suddenly having lost the courage to speak any further, Renji stopped mid-sentence. Byakuya regarded him silently.

"Renji?"

"Yes?" Only now did he realize that his taichou had started calling him by his given name for a while now. His confusion doubled.

"Let's continue."

"Continue?"

"Yes, continue. It appears we both need to... relief stress from time to time." He hesitated shortly, letting his gaze wander for a few seconds. "Except you do not wish to do so, of course."

This time, Renji understood what Byakuya meant. He thought about Rukia and Ichigo, how it hurt to have lost his long-lasting love. He was about to accept, but felt a pang of guilt. Wouldn't this be like using his captain? Said captain was starting to believe he had been rejected. He slowly stood up and wiped invisible dust of his shihakusho.

"In this case, let us pretend this has never happened. Now come, break is over."

"Wait, taichou, I accept! I mean, I wish to! But are you sure you want this? I mean, I don't want to somehow take advantage of you or something..."

"I was the one who suggested this. Why do you think you would hurt me by accepting my proposal?"

Feeling like a complete idiot, Renji just kept silent and stared at the ground. His cheeks felt warm; was he blushing?

As he heard his captain walking back to the office, he hurried to follow him.

All afternoon long he couldn't stop worrying about taking advantage of Byakuya. He felt guilty for accepting, but couldn't shake off the feeling that maybe the noble himself was in a way taking advantage of him. Somehow, that thought calmed Renji just the slightest bit, and they could always stop when one of them wouldn't feel up to it anymore, right?

Kapitel 2: Better

It was early in the morning and Byakuya stared up at the ceiling of his bedroom. Just thinking about today's work gave him a headache, so he chose to not think about anything for the moment and to just relax. Well, for some minutes it worked, but then again his thoughts began to drift to his daily duties. As a captain, you had no quiet minute. Either your subordinates were bothering you or the stack of paperwork you had to do did not decrease, no matter how hard and fast you were writing. In fact, it even increased the longer you worked. And the higher the stack got, the more painful the cramp in your hand got. And every time you had nearly finished, another bothersome subordinate would come rushing into your room and with him another painful stack of paperwork. Sometimes the 6th Division's Captain really loathed being in his position. Always working, always trying to sort complicated matters out, always being the one to be bothered with the tiniest bit of a disagreement within his division, always being the one to take the responsibility when something bad happened. And he wished he would not have become a Shinigami and just stayed in his position as a leader of the Kuchiki clan. It clearly would have been more boring, but he wouldn't have to do half as much paperwork as he had to do now. And of course the complicated rules would cause him headache, too, but only when confronted with them.

Byakuya sighed and closed his eyes to shut his thoughts out. It even worked, but in a different way. His thoughts now drifted to more pleasant matters, like the short-tempered, ill-mannered redhead beside him and the way said redhead snuggled closer to his form. A small smile stole its way to the captain's lips as he remembered the first night he had woken up and seen this man sleep by his side. He remembered the way his eyes had widened in shock and his body had automatically started to move away from the pleasant heat beside him, only to move back some seconds later, already missing the warmth. He remembered thinking about how he had got in this position, then decided it didn't really matter but at the same time regretted to not remember at least some details of the previous night. He remembered cursing the alcohol for making him forget, but simultaneously thanking it for even bringing him in this position. He had been pretty positive then – and still was – that if it hadn't been for this devilish beverage, if he had been sober, he never would have given this relationship a chance.

The sun slowly rose from behind the horizon, shining gently but brightly in Byakuya's room, forcing him to open his eyes. And the moment his eyes were open, all the thoughts about his work and what could have been flooded back into his mind. Stretching his hand, he still felt a slight pain; a reminder of the cramp he had had the day before. And once again his thoughts drifted to those hypothetical sentences. If he had not become a Shinigami, he would still be sleeping, he would have nothing to worry about but those envious to his position, and he would have some annoying kids and a rich, beautiful and boring wife beside him in his bed...

Byakuya shook his head at that thought. A rich, beautiful and boring wife beside him in his bed? Well, he had something – or someone – much better...

Abarai Renji, 6th Division's Vice-Captain, was clearly annoyed. This was the 13th time this day that someone interrupted him in his work and he had only begun an hour earlier, meaning every five minutes another stack of annoying paperwork came crashing down on his desk. And of course every one of his subordinates thought his stack was the most important of all and should be done first. And if it weren't enough, every subordinate thought he should talk about some minor worries he had and as soon as he finished his boring monologue, another one came rushing in and crushed Renji's hopes of a nice, productive morning. To be honest, he wasn't that eager to work himself through those tons of papers, but since he had only come from his nice fighting holiday in Hueco Mundo he thought he should work more as a sign of his gratitude. Well, of course it had been exhausting to fight against this pink-haired, subordinate-eating weirdo under such circumstances and he had been greatly injured, but that was way more relaxing than doing this damnable paperwork! Sighing he lay his head on his desk, closing his eyes and wishing he would be anywhere else but there. Preferable in strong, muscular arms, leaned against an equally strong and muscular chest with long, slender fingers stroking his hair...

His little daydream was harshly interrupted by yet another annoying subordinate, at least this time without a skyscraper of paperwork to do. And so Renji was forced to listen to some boring story again.

Groaning Renji let his spine crack. Sitting all day long in some stupid chair really got to his bones – and nerves. Just like the morning started, the evening ended, and while everyone else already finished work, Renji stayed till late in the night to finish those gigantic amounts of paperwork. It wasn't fair, really. Still fuming about his annoying subordinates he stared straight ahead where normally his captain would sit and write seemingly effortless. However, today Captain Kuchiki had a mission and probably wouldn't come home for another day or two. Why the Captain-Commander absolutely had to send his captain on this pathetic mission Renji did not know. In his opinion every Shinigami could have gone to exterminate some low-level Hollows. And, to top it off, Ichigo could have done the job perfectly well for he lived in Karakura Town where all of those Hollows popped out. And Rukia was there, too.

Rukia... Thinking about her still made his heart hurt a bit. He had crushed on her since forever, so naturally it broke his heart when she and Ichigo told him they were a couple. This fateful night he went and got drunk with his friends at a party the 6th division had held. He could not recall how and why he ended up in his captain's bed but he did not complain. At first he would only get together with his captain to get his mind off of Rukia and Ichigo, feeling guiltier each time but trying to soothe his consciousness with sentences like: "Kuchiki-taichou is old enough to decide himself with whom he wants to be." or "As if he'd ever love me, he only needs a way to forget about Hisana, just like I want to forget about Rukia." Slowly but steadily Renji's feelings began to change. At first he didn't realize, or maybe he did and just did not want to accept it, but when he found his captain unconscious for the first time, out cold because of complete exhaustion, he finally acknowledged his feelings. From then on it didn't take him long to confess to his captain. "I know," his captain had answered. No "I love you, too", but somehow Renji just knew the feeling was mutual. And so the whole story had begun...

Thinking about it again, Renji just had to smile. He looked to his captain's desk again and decided to do some of the annoying paperwork so his captain could relax a bit

more when he'd finally come home again. But after some minutes, exhaustion took over and Renji fell asleep, surrounded by his beloved's fading smell.

"If you want to have a captain's seat, you just have to ask the Captain-Commander. I'm sure there is still one free to occupy."

Sleepily Renji opened his eyes and was greeted with the sight of his captain's stoic face. Or at least it looked like that for everyone else, but Renji could tell his captain was tired. He wasn't standing as straight as normally, and a tiny little bit of that arrogant aura was missing.

"So you're back," Renji mumbled and stood up, stumbling right into his captain's arms. "Sorry 'bout that, 'm still half sleeping," the redhead apologized. His captain just stayed silent. Surprised Renji looked him in the eyes, seeing something he couldn't really place. And just like that soft lips were pressing against his own, letting every question Renji would have liked to ask just die. "The heck with Rukia, I've got someone better..." Renji thought before closing his eyes and letting his feelings take over. "Missed you," he mumbled between kisses, only getting soft humming in reply. Soon the kisses were beginning to become heated and Kuchiki-taichou let his hands wander on Renji's back, causing him to groan slightly. "Hell, I've got someone way better," were Renji's last thoughts for the day before the two lovers celebrated their reuniting.

Kapitel 3: Best

Their relationship lasted around five years. Never had they said „I love you“, not even an „I like you“ had passed between them. They both weren't the types to openly communicate feelings like love. Annoyance, yes, even anger and sometimes sadness, but never love. It was too fragile an emotion to be said so easily, too deep a feeling to just lightly express it. And sometimes they wondered: would it have changed something, anything? Three simple words and both – though strong warriors they certainly were – could not get over themselves and say them out loud. Sometimes they wondered. And sometimes they wished.

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It had started with alcohol, back then. Rukia had told Renji of her relationship with Ichigo and him harbouring secretly feelings for her had led him to drink himself into a stupor. That evening, their division had held a party and miraculously their taichou had decided to participate. They'd had sex that night, Renji and Byakuya. Both didn't know why it had come to it, but neither regretted their actions. And, being lonely as they were, they started to pursue this strange thing they had. It went well, to their surprise. Dividing private with work life was a bit difficult at first, but they handled it fairly well. Keeping it secret wasn't that big of a problem too. With Byakuya being noble and they being taichou and fukutaichou they hadn't even needed to discuss that particular part of their relationship, it was clear to them both. Simple sex with no strings attached, a stress reliever much needed and wanted.

Sometime later it had started to get complicated. Feelings arose, feelings that made the lines blur. At first, it had made everything feel brighter. Every mission done separately was the longest hours or days they had thus far experienced, every second spent together made breathing that much easier. Everything was better, everything went better. But somehow, things had gone downhill somewhere. Working got more exhausting than ever, every disagreement they had in the office directly transferred into their private life. Gone was the stress reliever, gone was the relaxation – they were more exhausted, both in private and at work, than they ever were before. They needed to cut it off, for their own sake and for the division's sake. And so they did. Sober and clean, they discussed it one evening, deciding like adults what was best. It was awkward at first, going back to the way things were before, but it got better. They missed each other, of course they did – often one of them found himself waking up in the middle of the night reaching for the other's warmth, only to discover that it was no longer there. In Byakuya's case, he spent the lonely nights with stargazing and remembering. Renji however covered everything up through going out with his friends and drinking sake like there was no tomorrow. With time, the pain got less and less. Byakuya started working late again, Renji discarded his nights out and changed them to training till exhaustion took over. He got better and better still, until Central 46 decided it was time for him to undergo the Captain's test. He succeeded with flying colours and accepted the white haori of fifth division.

And that was the moment where everything started changing again.

Sighing, Renji lay down his pen to stretch his stiff back. Paperwork had never been his forte and – in his humble opinion – it would never be. He grinned down at his scrawl, imagining the exasperated sigh of the poor person who had to read his report. It didn't matter how much he wanted to, he simply couldn't change the way he was writing. No amount of calligraphy lessons would ever change that. He knew that, and everyone else knew it, too. That didn't stop them from complaining, however. Just another thing Renji had gotten used to.

He closed his eyes, letting his thoughts wander. He knew he should stop working and go to sleep for it was late. The candle scarcely lit the room, flickering ever so often because of the wind the open window left through. No sound could be heard but the slight shuffling of the guard out front trying to stay awake. To no avail, Renji noticed, as soft snoring was heard shortly after. "Ah, those were the days," he thought grinning, fondly remembering his own beginnings. Many a time he was kicked awake by his superiors, always being screamed at, never listening. And now he was here, an officer himself, leading a division. Sometimes even he himself could hardly believe it, no wonder others stared incredulously at him when he was walking the streets in full attire. Especially some of his old teachers had unbelievably shaken their heads when they had heard of his promotion. Renji didn't care about those old douchebags; the ones who mattered always had known he would someday make taichou. And they had gladly celebrated along with him. Even Byakuya had congratulated him and participated in the celebration, though it was only for a short while. It...had stirred up some old memories best forgotten, memories both good and bad – memories that still hurt once in a while.

Renji's grin faded. Though it had been some years ago, the wound was still fresh from that day, and thinking about their break-up still hurt. Badly. For a long time Renji never admitted it, not even to himself, but now he believed he had loved his Captain. Maybe he still did. But it was over now, never to be talked about, never to be started again. He hardly saw Byakuya these days, with both of them being busy with their divisions. The threat of Aizen was long gone and no one even closely as dangerous had shown up, but nowadays it was more the citizens of Soul Society itself who caused problems. Fighting against them was harder, in a way; hollows you could just cleave through, but shinigami had to protect the other souls and not kill them. Killing shinigami, however, didn't seem to pose much of a problem for their enemy. Unfortunately, those trouble makers got better and better with fighting which made defending all the harder. And so the incidents increased as did the workload and consequently the paperwork.

Another sigh escaped Renji's lips as he stretched once more and finally stood up. It was time to go back home and take a quick nap before he had to be in the office again. Napping in the office chair was not healthy, as he had had to experience in his early days as a leading officer. It was better to stay awake those few minutes for the walk home than to directly go to sleep in the office. A few minutes wouldn't kill.

He slipped into his haori and left the office, fully intent on reaching home as quickly as

possible to hit the hay.

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Byakuya slowly nipped his tea while reading yet another report his new fukutaichou had written. It was uncomfortably easy to read and as uncomfortably faultless – no scrawny handwriting, no careless mistakes and misplaced vocabulary, no ink stains, nothing. Byakuya missed having Renji as his subordinate – it had always livened up his days. As annoying as the redhead sometimes was, he had always been full of life and energy, a fact that transferred even into his most private life as Byakuya himself had experienced many times. Hopeless when it came to paperwork, talented in fighting and absolutely gifted with...other skills. Once in a while, when they had had an especially long and hard day in the office, Renji would help soothe his muscles with a simple back rub. Having those strong big hands on his back, even through all of his clothes, had forced Byakuya to suppress his moans and whimpers on a regular basis. It was worse when skin directly met skin and downright impossible when those long-fingered, oh-so-gifted hands had other things in mind than a simple massage.

That was something Byakuya missed the most – Renji's hands. No matter what they were doing – preparing tea, wielding a sword, writing, massaging, stripping – they had always fascinated Byakuya. Often his gaze would linger on the hands, then slowly travel up the muscled arms where it would start to follow the tattoos down, down, always down, ignoring at first Renji's male pride in favour of the legs, tattooed and muscled as well – and strong, so unbelievably strong – while turning at the feet and wandering upwards again. It had become sort of a ritual for Byakuya, a path first travelled with eyes, then with hands and lips and teeth and skin and oh so much more...

After the hands, it was the hair. A vibrant red, wild and stubborn, they exactly described their owner's personality. But they were soft to the touch, contrasting nicely with everything they stood for. Burying his nose into that mane, grabbing those tresses with his own hands – whether in the throes of passion or thereafter – had been another one of Byakuya's favourite pastimes.

But most of all, it was simple things. A small smile after a stressful day, an innocent kiss placed into neatly arranged hair, a soft touch of their hands, fingers brushing when accepting a mug of tea. Kind words of comfort after a lonely day. Silent discussions when everything else was too loud. Just sitting next to each other, silently, comfortably, when everything else was just too much. A strong shoulder to grab onto when everything seemed to fall apart, equally as strong hands to reach for in times of need.

And now, nothing.

Seemingly calm, Byakuya placed his tea upon the table and reached for his haori to exit the office, fleeing one place full of memories to reach another. But there he could at least escape reality to dream of better times.

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It was as if fate had carefully planned out the meeting that night – placing thoughts of each other in their minds, letting it hurt just that much, making them go home at the same time. If fate were a person, it would happily be smiling now. Everything went as planned.

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It was on the first corner Renji needed to take on his way home. He could sense his former captain's reiatsu, but somehow doubted Byakuya could sense him – he seemed lost in thoughts, oblivious to his surroundings. It didn't come as a surprise to Renji, then, that Byakuya bumped into him quite forcefully. To Byakuya, however, it was a surprise, big enough for him to lose his balance. The very hands he had been thinking about that night were the ones which now steadied him, saving him the embarrassment of landing on his fine bottom.

"Are you alright?" Renji asked, worry clearly visible in his eyes. Byakuya seemed tired, more so than when he had last seen him during the captain's meeting a few days ago. His normally regal composure seemed slumped, almost defeated. It made Renji's nerves stand on end.

"Renji..." Byakuya breathed astounded. He caught himself, however, and nodded his head. "Yes, I am fine. Thank you."

"You don't look so fine to me," Renji disagreed, furrowing his brows.

"I am fine," hissed Byakuya. "Now will you be so kind as to let me go. My presence in the office will be needed as soon as the sun rises, and rise it will soon." The noble began trying to get out of Renji's grasp.

"No."

The simple response, spoken with such resolution, stunned Byakuya into halting his efforts. "No?" he asked; maybe he had heard wrong?

"No," Renji confirmed, tugging Byakuya in direction of his own home. "You are not fine, and you will not go home. You will talk."

Surprisingly, Byakuya didn't object and simply followed Renji – maybe he was too perplexed by this obvious act of insubordination (he still viewed Renji as his fukutaichou in a way, though they were now equals), maybe it was because he was too tired. Renji didn't care, he was just glad he didn't have to fight Byakuya any longer. Neither said anything, for fear it might be overheard, and silently they reached Renji's home where Byakuya sat on one of the cushions while waiting on Renji who made the tea. The furniture and decorations were different now than they were back then, and Byakuya couldn't help but wonder if Renji had had help in furnishing his new home. It was tasteful, elegant even. It somehow didn't fit the redheaded, short-tempered Renji – on the other hand, it fit him perfectly. During their time together Byakuya had made many a discovery about his fukutaichou which had left him wondering – such as the

redhead's love for bonsai, or his quite interesting though small library. Apart from the almost obligational books on fighting and tactics, including the musings of the greatest generals of time, one could find small jewels on meditation, astrology and even some lovely romance novels on the shelves. And from what the noble could see from his position, the collection had grown notably. Before he could muster up the courage to rummage through the books, however, Renji entered with the tea and pastry, ready to question his former taichou.

Strangely, though, the silence continued to hang heavily in the air. Only the small sounds of porcelain scrapping against porcelain when setting down the tea were heard, or the faint crumbling of eating pastry.

"Look," Renji finally began, "I don't know what happened to make you look like this, nor do you have to tell me if you don't want to. But you do need to get some serious rest – you look at least five decades older than you are with those bags under your eyes." He took a break to sip his tea, ignoring Byakuya's incredulous looks. "And I, for one, would gladly kick the asses of those scumbags who made you look like this. It's fine, though, if you want to do it yourself. I strongly suggest it."

"You do not cease to amaze me, Abarai-taichou," Byakuya murmured quietly, placing his cup upon the table. "It surprises me how well you have learned to express yourself – with some exceptions, of course."

"Ah, well, can't help but pick up something or other from all those formal meetings now, can I?" Renji dismissed the topic with some sort of hand gesture, almost making his tea spill. Some quiet curses escaped his sinful mouth, granting a smile of Byakuya's an appearance. Still the same at heart, I see. "However," Renji continued after saving his cup, "my newfound eloquence is not the matter at hand." Suddenly, he threw his hands in the air. "Oh, for the love of... I know this is a serious matter, taichou" – Byakuya couldn't help the small smile from appearing once again – "but ya know me an' talking like tha's not my style. So please jus' tell me who made you work so hard tha' ya're visibly tired so I can beat the shit outta them."

It might be quite difficult to do that to yourself, I fear. But Byakuya just shook his head. "That will not be necessary, especially since you are no longer part of my division." At that, Renji flinched slightly. If Byakuya hadn't paid so much attention to the redhead, he'd have missed it. "You may have noticed this yourself, the incidents within Seireitei are increasing and so is the amount of reports we..."

"Don' shit with me, taichou," Renji rudely interrupted. "Paperwork's not tiring ya out so fast. Ya sometimes even did my share when I screwed up again, an' ya always did it as effortlessly as everything else. I know, I know," he added when the noble made to protest, "'s not as easy as it looks. Am a captain myself now, yanno? I know this shit." A deep sigh escaped him. "But 's not the paperwork, that I know. Ya can talk to me, Byakuya. We're equals now. At least in title and in the Gotei 13. Whatever's bothering ya, I can probably somehow relate if it's not clan-related..."

With this, silence once again reigned. Not for long, though.

"The reports written by Sugita-fukutaichou are comfortable to read. His handwriting is excellent, as is his structure. He is an intelligent fighter and a master of kidou."

"Hey now, if ya only want to insult me..." Renji protested heatedly, knowing of his weaknesses as well – if not better – as his former taichou.

"I miss it," interrupted, for once, Byakuya.

"Eh?" The redhead stared intelligently at the noble. "Sorry, might have heard ya wrong. What didcha say?"

"I said," Byakuya impatiently folded his hands in his lap, "I miss it."

"Um, sorry, 'm afraid I still don't quite follow." Renji felt stupid and useless and lost and whatnot not understanding what his once-lover wanted to tell him. Him – Byakuya – missing something? What could that possibly be? And what did that have to do with his new fukutaichou, or Renji?

It was Byakuya's turn to sigh. "I miss your scrawny handwriting," he silently confessed, "and those annoying ink stains and creases you always got on every single paper."

"Wha? But I thou..."

"I am not finished, Abarai." The accosted quickly shut his mouth. "I miss your horrible structure, your endless nagging, your impromptu outbursts, your tardiness. I miss the way you made me tea, our quiet conversations, how you always went over the top while training, your sudden chatter about random, unimportant things. I miss the life you brought into my office, and the fire you bright into my life." Never once did the noble raise his voice, letting his confessions silently float the room. Sometime during his monologue he had grabbed his tea, watching the ripples form on its surface. "I miss your hands, your hair, your voice, your presence. I miss you." Only now did the raven raise his head to meet Renji's gaze. It didn't shock him to find the redhead speechless – he himself did not really know why he had said what he did. But he felt better now, like a weight was lifted of his shoulders. Regret would make itself known come morning.

"I'm a bit at a loss here," Renji finally murmured, lowering his gaze. "Didn't expect tha'."

"You are not alone in that aspect, Abarai. I will turn in for the night. Thank you for the tea." With that, Byakuya made his way to the door, intent on leaving the house and forget this ever happened.

"Oh, for fuck's..wait, taichou, waitwaitwait!" He had learned the art of ignoring Renji quite fast and quite well, so it did not take much to do it now and open the door. "Hey, I said to wait!" It did not help, however, to ignore the hand now firmly holding the door closed, strong as it had always been. "Don't be a fucking coward!"

How dare he...! "I am no coward!" Byakuya hissed turning around, eyes dangerously narrowed. Steel grey met reddish brown, one heated in anger, the other still confused

but determined.

"Well, you jus' attempted to flee from my reaction, right? Tha' makes ya a coward!"

"You already reacted and now let me through!"

"Tha' don't count and no, I won't!"

"You stubborn, irritating..." Lips met, successfully silencing whatever insult may have been on Byakuya's tongue, the very same which was now entangled with Renji's. Effortlessly they fell back into their old rhythm, grasping whatever came into the vicinity of their hands. Clothes were shed, skin met skin, passion erupted once again. It had been too long, too lonely. They simply could not take this slow. At least not the first round.

Morning came and though they both had not slept one minute that night, neither had felt so rested and refreshed in a very long time.

Sugita Kou was confused, to say the least. His taichou, known as an unemotional, stoic leader, had a fairly agreeable air around him, his normally stiff form looking almost relaxed. His pen just seemed to flow over the reports, the stack of completed paperwork growing unusually fast. Even a semblance of a smile – a smile! By the Kuchiki Byakuya! – appeared irregularly throughout the day.

It had already begun weird that morning. When Kou entered the office, already fearing a reprimand because he was slightly later than normal, he had been shocked to find it empty. It had worried him greatly and he had looked for his taichou throughout the whole division but nothing. Kuchiki-taichou had not even been in his quarters. Deciding to wait some more until he continued his search in a more serious manner, he had begun his share of work. Some time later, the noble had appeared, nodding in his direction, not losing one single word about his tardiness. Kou had been set on brushing it off, had his taichou not looked slightly...ruffled, in a way. Well, as ruffled as a Kuchiki could look. His level of worry had gone up a few levels, but having worked under the raven for a few months already he knew when to keep quiet. And so he did.

He was glad, now, that he had decided to keep quiet. Kuchiki-taichou seemed to be in a good mood and unnecessary questions might have destroyed that. Kou had to silently confess that he liked this atmosphere way better – even his already fast working seemed to be slightly faster.

Afternoon came and with that the time for tea. Before he could get up to prepare some, however, his taichou stopped him with a gesture.

"Keep working. A friend of mine has decided to come over to discuss some work. He will bring the beverage. You can make some for yourself though, if you want to do so."

"Not necessary!" Startled, both shinigami turned their heads toward the door, where a bright grin greeted them. "Hullo there, busy people! I brought some distraction with me!" With that, Abarai Renji entered the office as though he owned it, paper bags in hand. And somehow, Kou got the feeling he would never have to make tea again. The smile on Kuchiki-taichou's face said it all.