

Crossing Over

Von konpaku

Kapitel 10: Progress

Chapter 10 – Progress

At night

With the arrival of the others they couldn't all stay at the Yamanaka household anymore. Renji had been relocated to the Akamichi's, while Yumichika had taken his place and the Kuchiki's were brought to the Nara's. Thinking about it, the accommodations couldn't be more fitting. He and the chubby kid got along well after their first argument, Ayasegawa would enjoy the beauty of the flower shop and his captain had fellow strategic thinkers with Shikaku and his son. It was well chosen and he had no doubt that this way they would not just try to gain more intel from them, but also let them believe they were safe. He also had no doubt that none of the Shinigami would fall for it.

With a sigh he got out of his bed and walked outside to sit on the porch. He couldn't sleep anyway, so he might as well have a good think in the night air.

The trip to the bathhouse had been supposed to be relaxing, but instead it left him more stressed than anything else. Some weird sign-thing was on his back and he had no idea how it got there and what it meant. As soon as this had been revealed the others had checked if any of them had a similar mark, but no one had and it was again him being the odd one out. Grumbling he rubbed his temples and eyes, this whole mess was giving him headaches.

"What are you doing out here?" A timid voice asked him.

Looking up he found Chouji standing there in his night gowns, holding what looked like a midnight snack in his hands.

"Could ask you the same thing." Renji replied, disguising his thoughts behind a grin.

"Was hungry." The kid replied shortly and presented the bowl.

"Couldn't sleep." The lieutenant answered truthfully, motioning for the other to sit with him.

"It's the different bed, isn't it? I always have trouble falling asleep on missions when we are constantly changing sleeping quarters." The Akamichi contemplated, while sitting down on the porch.

"Not really. I could always sleep in the weirdest of places." Renji explained with a laugh.

"It's the thing on my back." He added more seriously.

"You've probably slept with it the last few nights already, why should that be any different now?" Chouji wondered.

Looking at him, Abarai could only agree with the boy. If it was the case then there was no need for him to worry about anything happening while he slept.

"Guess you're right. I still don't like it." He gave in with a smile.

"Taiyaki?" The Shinobi offered him the content of his bowl.

"I love Taiyaki!" Renji exclaimed and took a pair of cakes out.

When they had finished the snack Chouji went to bed again while Renji had decided to walk around a bit until he felt more sleepy. He was strolling through the streets until he reached the training area and noticed someone sitting there.

"Looks like I'm not the only one who can't sleep." He greeted the other person cheerfully.

"I am still not used to sleeping..."

"Huh?" Renji didn't understand the answer and sat down beside the other one, taking his reply as an invitation.

"I used to bear a demon within me. Whenever I fell asleep or lost consciousness it would take over my mind and cause mayhem." Gaara explained flatly, looking straight ahead and remembering the thrill of the Shukaku.

"Wow...must have been hell for you to be so close to harm your family every night...", the lieutenant concluded studying the young man's features, whom he recognized as one of the kids that had brought Rukia to the village.

After a pause of consideration Gaara told him:

"At that time I would have killed my siblings myself without falling asleep."

"You...what?" Shocked, this was the only thing Renji could come up with.

"I was consumed by hatred. I killed everyone who just as much as looked at me the wrong way. I was a monster."

Not knowing what to say Renji simply listened.

"I became the monster everyone always feared and saw in me. I was obsessed with the thought of having to prove my existence through killing the strongest that would cross my path."

Pausing for a while the Kazekage thought about his own words, about his past and why he was telling this again to a total stranger. He wasn't sure whether he wanted to get an approval of some sort or to simply talk about it. Indulged in the comfortable silence he decided telling the rest of his story wouldn't hurt either.

"When I first met him, I thought Naruto was just a no-one. Someone not worth killing, but as time passed by my view on him changed. I wanted to kill him. I fully released the Shukaku to defeat, no to kill him, once and for all. But I failed. He instead showed me that bonds with other people are important. That you can share feelings and have faith in each other." Again he paused turning his look at Renji who was still studying him with an unreadable expression.

"This war we are having right now is to protect him and the other Jinchuuriki. For everything he did for me, I will not fail to protect my friend." He ended his explanation, determination in his eyes.

Renji looked at him for a moment before he let a grin spread on his face.

"I'm sure you won't." He said before leaning back in the grass.

"But to do so you need to rest beside training and everything." He continued, stretching his arms and yawning.

He didn't really understand much of what the boy had said, but he perfectly

understood the need to protect ones friend. Gaara did not reply anything and just sat there silently while Renji drifted off to much needed sleep as a shadow approached the two.

Looking up at the arrival the Shinobi recognized the man to be Rukia's elder brother. Upon looking at his lieutenant the Kuchiki sighed inwardly.

"You are accustomed to the streets of this village I assume?" He asked after a moment.

"Yes I am."

"Would you prefer joining me on a walk, rather than sitting here waiting for him to start snoring?" He offered then.

Looking at the sleeping man Gaara decided it would be better to let him rest rather than steer him awake by staying. So he carefully stood up to accompany Byakuya on his night walk.

"Can we let him sleep like that?" Gaara asked when they were out of earshot looking back at Renji.

"Do not worry. He is more than used to sleeping without cover." The Kuchiki promptly assured him.

Remembering what Rukia had told him about her childhood the Kazekage assumed the other was right and the two of them settled into a comfortable silence.

After a while Byakuya broke it by asking: "What does your enemy want with these Jinchuuriki?"

Gaara looked at the older man trying to figure out if he wanted to know it to take advantage of it, but he simply couldn't read him. Over the years he had learned to do that with pretty much every person he came across, but this man had perfected a solemn, emotionless facial expression. He now understood Rukia's description of him even better. The things she and her friend had said to him during these past days, however, caused him to decide that telling this man might even help the Shinobi in their predicament. Though a part of him still worried that these strangers were here to gather information on them and betray them when they had enough.

"They want what is inside of them." He started his explanation, knowing it would only lead to more questions.

Just as he anticipated the other wouldn't ask them directly but wait for him to continue. Gaara hadn't completely explained the concept of Jinchuuriki to Rukia before and assumed her brother didn't know about it either, so he did it this time.

"Jinchuuriki are Shinobi chosen to be the host of a Tailed Beast, powerful Chakra that was turned into a living form with a mind of its own."

"You used to be such a host?" Byakuya had to ask when the Kazekage refused to say more.

"Yes, they extracted the One Tail from me and I barely survived it." Gaara told him, fully knowing the second part was a lie, as he had indeed died and only the sacrifice of the village elder had brought him back.

"How are these beasts sealed?" The Shinigami inquired next.

Raising an eyebrow at his company Gaara wondered again why he wanted to know these things.

"Every village uses a different technique, but they all require enormous amounts of Chakra."

Unsatisfied with the insufficient answer the Kuchiki tried a different approach to get the information he wanted to hear.

"Yet you still could gain access from its energy and even release the creature?"

With this question Gaara was certain that the other had either overheard his conversation with Renji or had spoken to Rukia about it. He, however, couldn't tell why he wanted to know about it so persistently. For a moment he contemplated how much he should tell him, but hoped that with an elaborate answer the other would stop bugging him about it and see that having a Tailed Beast inside you isn't a good thing.

"Yes, as Jinchuuriki you at some point gain access to the part of your mind you are sharing with the beast. For the beast to grant you it's power you have to establish some kind of connection with it. To fully release the beast you have to make a deal with it and voluntarily open the seals put on its cage. Depending on the deal you made, you keep your own mind awake or the beast takes over completely and turns your body into his. Alternatively you lose control and it breaks out to wreak havoc, killing you in the process, if it isn't stopped before that."

Contemplating this information Byakuya discontinued his interrogation for now. The way the boy had described the beasts and the sealing sounded much like how he had found Zenbonsakura within his own mind and if it was possible for the Jinchuuriki to release them, then it would only be a matter of time before they managed to do the same with their Zanpakutou Spirits. He would inform Hitsugaya about this as the younger Captain was in charge of figuring this out.

Walking in silence once more the men soon parted ways when they had reached a fork in the street. Gaara was still unsure what the conversation meant to the other and grew a bit more suspicious of this behaviour. The Kuchiki on the other hand felt like they were two steps closer to figuring this whole mess out. With the prospect of his lieutenant's examination leading to a reveal about their arrival and the knowledge he had gained about the Jinchuuriki, they would soon be in Soul Society again.

The next morning

Renji awoke to something wet on his cheek and it felt as if something was licking his face. Slowing opening his eyes he saw a long tongue and sharp teeth far too close to him. Scurrying away he sat up to his elbows recognizing the features to belong to the dog from the day before.

"Mornin'" A voice greeted him.

Puzzled he looked at the dog, only to realize that the voice came from the boy standing beside him. Snorting at the thought of a speaking dog, Renji sat up, wiping his face with his sleeve.

"Mornin'" He then replied the greeting.

"Chouji's been lookin' for ya for hours and you've been snoring away here all the time." The boy explained with a laugh.

"I didn't plan on fallin' asleep here." Abarai tried as an excuse rubbing the back of his neck.

"Ah, never mind there he is." Kiba told him and the three of them turned around as the other boy and his friend came stalking towards them.

"Where have you been?" Chouji asked after catching his breath.

"Sorry, I went for a walk and fell asleep..." He explained embarrassed.

First night in a different place and he wanders off without telling anyone.

"Baka Renji, not even capable of staying in a bed at night." An all too familiar voice teased from behind the boys.

Glowering at her when she emerged between them Renji struggled to find a proper reply and settled for a grunt. It was far too early for him to start another banter with her. Stretching his arms above his head he instead asked: "Where's Ikkaku-san? I wouldn't mind a little morning exercise..."

"He is probably still lying in his bed sleeping, like you were supposed to be." Rukia scolded him, folding her arms across her chest.

Grumbling again Renji rose from the ground to stretch some more and easily towered over the others. The boys seemed a bit intimidated while the Kuchiki held her ground, she after all knew their height difference since they were teenagers.

"Guess I hav'ta wake 'im then." He concluded with a feral grin, receiving a warning glare from his childhood friend.

"I don't think that is necessary. Ino will probably bring them here soon anyway." Shikamaru revealed in a matter of fact tone.

Noticing Renji's confused look he added: "Your friend is a fighting freak and after what happened yesterday he probably wants to have a re-match with Tenten or at least fight someone else. As the Yamanaka's get up quite early to open the shop it is highly likely that they will come here any time now."

Nodding in agreement Renji accepted the explanation. What he described sounded like something Madarame would do.

It didn't take long for Shikamaru's prediction to come true. As Tenten wasn't in the mood to comply with the Shinigami's wish for a re-match, Renji took the opportunity and talked his colleague into a training match with him. The Kunoichi provided them with the necessary weapon's, a Bou.

The match was in full progress, the kids from the day before and the remaining Shinigami set on the side of their battlefield; watching as either of them attacked and dodged in a swirling dance of movements. With each strike the lieutenant could feel Zabimaru welling up inside him. His desire to fight a foe, the lust for his enemy's blood. Each of Renji's blows got more and more ferocious until Ikkaku couldn't bring in an attack of his own any more. His friend yelled something at him, as he retreated and dodged, but it was like Abarai was in a trance, his mind synchronizing with the spirit's. He wanted, no, he needed to finish this fight with the next blow. The Zanpakutou Spirits energy latched onto his own and settled around the staff, creating an image of his spiked, snakelike sword. Swinging the weapon behind his head, like he usually did, he launched it towards the other Shinigami. With a last jump Madarame managed to avoid the energy blade by mere centimeters, as it buried into the ground before him. Bits of the pasture flew to each side as energy surged into it like little lightning bolts. Still captivated by the attack he didn't see the next one coming: Another stream of energy heading straight for his upper leg. A deep howl emitted from Renji's throat and caused Ikkaku to look up, but it was too late. The attack went into his thigh and it felt like sharp teeth made its way into his muscles. His cry of pain caused the older Kuchiki to now fully stand and grab his second in command by the shoulder.

"It's enough." He stated and pushed some of his Reiatsu into the younger man to calm him down.

Renji shook his head and dropped the weapon almost immediately, the red energy fading. Looking up he saw Ikkaku clench his leg with bloodied fingers.

"What the hell, Renji?" The other asked him, but only caused more confusion.

Not understanding what had happened the lieutenant moved his head to the side, to see if something had attacked the others as well. Instead he saw some of the Shinobi stand there with Kunai and Shuriken in their hands, ready to attack. Each of them, as well as his fellow Shinigami had a frightened look on their face. Turning again he looked at his other side if the foe was hiding beside him, but there was only the remaining part of the training field.

"Abarai." A solemn voice behind him, broke him out of his wandering thoughts.

Turning around he met his superiors eyes and understood that there was no foe. It was him. He, Abarai Renji, had attacked his fellow Shinigami in a way that had terrified everyone.

"What happened?" He asked in a raspy voice.

Calmly the Kuchiki bestowed him with a calculating gaze and explained what they saw from the outside. He told him about the blazing, red energy that had engulfed him and the changes in his features that made his already prominent canines look like fangs and his brown eyes turn into deep yellow. He also described how the wooden weapon gained a spiritual blade, resembling his Shikai and a snake like creature rising from the energy to attack Madarame. Renji could only stare in disbelief. Part of it explained what he had felt earlier, but he still didn't understand how it was possible.

"Is that why you asked me about the Jinchuuriki last night? Because your friend is one as well?" The Kazekage asked as he approached the scene, alongside the Hokage.

They had felt the raised and strange Chakra and wanted to see for themselves what had caused it.

Diverting his gaze from his lieutenant to the new arrivals Byakuya simply replied: "Yes and no."

"You kiddin'? What the boy just did looked like a Tailed Beast striking out to me." The Hokage interjected.

Closing his eyes, to not tell her that *the boy* was nearly twice her age he contemplated how he could describe this as best as he could. Renji on the other hand simply slumped down, this was too much for him. Faintly hearing his name, he barely noticed Rukia approaching his side before he passed out.

After checking the red heads condition Tsunade stood up and crossed her arms underneath her bosom.

"Care to explain?" She demanded from the Kuchiki.

"He is no Jinchuuriki." Was his direct answer.

Byakuya still didn't know how to understandably explain what they were and tried stalling a more elaborate answer by watching Rangiku and Ayasegawa treat Madarame's wound. The Hokage followed his gaze and went to examine him as well.

"Nii-sama?" Rukia asked from her kneeling position beside her childhood friend.

Her brother replied with a reassuring nod. He would find a way to make the others understand their predicament. Their interaction was closely followed by several pairs of eyes. The Shinobi had retracted their weapons, but were still highly alert for everything happening around them.

As the Hokage returned from patching up the Third Seat it was the Kazekage who spoke first.

"What he did looked like the Sabre Technique used by the Samurai. But also like a Tailed Beast trying to break free."

"Sabre Technique?" The Kuchiki only asked, while the remaining spectators moved closer.

"It is their way of enhancing their blades with Chakra." Gaara shortly explained so they could get to the more important point.

"So, how is he able to use that technique on a staff and produce a snake from Chakra that doesn't feel like him and is surrounding him, if he is not a Jinchuuriki?" The Hokage asked again, waving in the direction of the lieutenant.

"It's not a snake..." Renji mumbled, while slowly propping himself on his elbows.

He had regained consciousness, but was still feeling dizzy.

"Let me tell you boy, I have seen many snake bites in my day and what your friend has on his thigh is definitely one." Tsunade reprimanded him.

"It's..." Abarai started and looked up at his captain, to see if he was allowed to continue.

He realized that if he said 'snake tail' it would sound even more like he had a Tailed Beast within him. The Kuchiki nodded curtly, giving his approval. Renji cleared his throat and sat up more properly, but still leaned against Rukia for support.

"It's a snake, with the actual tail being attached to a baboons ass." He described and added a bit more quietly: "Or the other way round..."

Looking at him with confusion clearly on their face, they didn't quite know what to make of this information. They claimed he was no Jinchuuriki, yet there still seemed to be a creature inside of him.

"In our realm the people, who are capable of molding Spiritual Energy meet a spirit that reflects their power and soul at some point in their life. These spirits, whilst having their own form and mind, become one with the...person. They grant them more abilities through inhabiting a special sword; turning it into an extension of the persons soul." Byakuya explained solemnly.

Even though he had nearly used 'Shinigami' and 'Zanpakutou' he was quite satisfied with his phrasing. He just had to add one more thought:

"The way it looks to us the spirits inside of us got sealed similarly to the Tailed Beasts on our arrival. Abarai's outburst, your descriptions and assessments prove this point even further."

Contemplating the new information the group stood in silence for a few moments. Renji felt uncomfortable whenever someones attention fell on him and just wanted anyone to say something.

"I think it is about time I examine you more thoroughly." The Hokage finally decided, offering the Shinigami a hand.

Again waiting for his superiors approval Renji let her help him up. At least this way they would find out more about the sign on his back.

Later that Day

After the Hokage and Renji had left the children started questioning the Shinigami about the spirit within them. While Rangiku and Rukia went into great detail describing the different Sword Spirits Ikkaku tried gaining access to Houzukimaru the

way his colleague did with Zabimaru. Though Ayasegawa wasn't as good a sparring partner as the red head

Byakuya sat a bit outside their circle, his legs folded underneath him and his mind focused. With everyone occupied in their different ways of research he had managed to send a message to his fellow captain. Hitsugaya had gladly accepted the input and assured to look into it, as soon as they had found protection from the desert heat again. Since then he had reflected his own thoughts on the matter with Zenbonzakura and came to the conclusion that they needed to inform Soul Society as well.

On missions in the human world they usually were assigned to it wasn't hard to summon a Jigokuchou, but here it proved difficulty. As soon as he had focused on the sense of one of the creatures he lost it again, as if it was playing hide and seek with him. He didn't like that at all. Creasing his eyebrows he made another attempt. Blocking out everything and everyone around him, his sole attention was on the delicate butterfly. In his head he could feel a headache forming, but he ignored it. Even though he was a Kuchiki, THE Kuchiki and defeat wasn't officially a part of his vocabulary he was about to give up his trial. Just as he released his focus and loosened his concentration he heard the faint chiming of bells. The signal of the arrival of the tiny messenger. With a relieved sigh he mentally called it to him, lifting his index finger for the bug to sit on and receive what it should be delivering.

Sixth Squad Captain Kuchiki Byakuya speaking. Several high ranked officers including myself, the Captain of Squad Ten, the Lieutenants of Squad Six, Ten, Five and Three and other members of the Court of Pure Souls are currently trapped in an unfamiliar mortal realm. Association with it is known only through documents compiled by Sou-Taicho Yamamoto Ginryuusai-dono and signed by former Sixth Squad Captain Kuchiki Ginrei, declaring it a realm of high natural Hollow protection. It's inhabitants are capable of combining Spiritual and Physical Energy into techniques similar to the Demon Arts. The arrival in this realm caused the group to be scattered, but uninjured. Entering the realm furthermore caused the Zanpakutou Spirits to be sealed and its powers to be nearly inaccessible. The chosen place for regrouping is called Konoha Gakure, a Shinobi village whose leader has not yet posed a threat to us. Six of Ten officers already reached the village, the rest is said to arrive within the week. Assistance for a safe return to Soul Society is required.'

When he was finished with the formulation Byakuya gave the Jigokuchou the information as to whom the message was for and was about to send it off when he noticed a boy staring at it.

"It's beautiful." The boy with the sunglasses commented, leaning a bit closer.

Slightly moving his finger the Shinigami send the messenger on its way, before the boy would somehow interfere with it.

"What a pity. I would have liked to get a closer look at it..." The other rose up again, with pout in his voice, leaving the Kuchiki alone again.

Instead of worrying about the boy Byakuya caught his sisters gaze and told her with a short nod that he indeed had managed to summon the Hell Butterfly and send it of with information on their whereabouts. He just hoped it would reach home safely.