

# Pine and Strawberry

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Submitted: July 9, 2010

Updated: July 9, 2010

*Ukitake is being driven off the wall by the increase in fighting between his two third seats. Shunsui comes up with a plan to give his best friend some peace and quiet, but it might work better than he thought. Sentarou/Kiyone*

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# 1 - Headaches

Winter was upon Soul Society, and a thick layer of the fluffy white snow now covered the ground in Seireitei. Ukitake Juushiro sat in his office on this snowy afternoon, working on the day's paperwork. Or he was trying to.

Crash!

"Ugh, look what you did, Sentaro, you moron! You made me spill the tea I made for the Captain!"

"Pssh! As if our Captain would ever want to drink that poison, Kiyone!"

"Why you...!"

Ukitake sighed and set down his pen, putting his elbows on his desk as he gently massaged his temples. He had been having massive headaches lately, but they were not caused by his tuberculosis acting up. No, his two third seats were to blame for this. Lately, their usual bickering had become more frequent, and their fights seemed to always take place right outside his office. It was driving the normally calm captain of the thirteenth division up the wall.

After a few more minutes of shouting at each other, Ukitake heard Sentaro and Kiyone both storm off down the hallway in opposite directions. The captain class shinigami sighed again and picked up his pen, resuming the massive pile of paperwork that sat in front of him. He managed to get through three sheets before his door was swung open. Ukitake winced, ready to endure another argument between his two third seats.

"Hey Juu-chan! How're ya feeling?" Ukitake's best friend, Shunsui Kyoraku said cheerfully as he strode into the room, his signature pink flowered kimono draped over his shoulders. Ukitake breathed a sigh of relief as the eighth division captain dropped himself into the couch against the wall, pushing his straw hat up so that his eyes were uncovered.

"I'm just fine, Shun." Ukitake lied as he smiled, trying to ignore the pulsing pain in his head. Shunsui just grinned and laughed.

"You're not fooling me, Juu-chan. What's up, Kiyone and Sentaro giving you headaches again?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. Ukitake sighed; there was no fooling Shunsui.

"Yeah, you got it. Those two seem to be arguing more lately, and it's driving me nuts." Ukitake said as he finished another sheet of paperwork. Shunsui laughed, and the loud sound made Ukitake's headache flare up, causing him to wince.

"Those two bicker like an old married couple," Shunsui said, chuckling as he pulled himself into a sitting position. Silence followed for a moment and Ukitake watched his old friend, wondering what he was thinking.

"Well, Juu-chan, I've gotta go. Something came up." Shunsui said, hopping up from the couch and prancing to the door, a mischievous grin on his face. Ukitake didn't like that look.

"What are you planning?" he asked nervously, for Shunsui's plans usually involved crazy pranks, drinking, or weird stunts, and Ukitake almost always had to help his friend deal with the consequences.

"Now, now, Juu-chan, don't you worry about a thing." Shunsui said, pausing in the doorway, "You just enjoy some peace and quiet for the rest of the day." And with that, he disappeared.

Ukitake sighed and massaged his temples again before getting back to his paperwork. He had a feeling that Shunsui's plan involved his unfortunate third seats, but the thought of some peace and quiet made him not feel so bad. Still, as he filled out another form, Ukitake couldn't help but wonder what his old friend had in store for his third seats. He sighed as he placed the form with the other finished ones.

"I just hope they come back alive..." Ukitake said as he massaged his temples once more and prayed Shunsui returned them in once piece.

He prayed *hard*.

## 2 - The Plan

Kiyone was having a bad day.

The third seat glared at the wall of the shed from where she sat on the floor, her knees pulled up against her chest as she tried to stay warm. She tried to figure out what she had done to Shunsui to deserve this punishment, or better yet, why she had to be punished with him.

'I am never listening to Shunsui again.' She thought bitterly, turning her head just enough so that her eyes caught a glimpse of Sentarou, who sat about eight feet away, facing the opposite wall.

Her ordeal began when Shunsui came prancing into the 13th squad's break room, where Kiyone had been making another batch of tea for her captain. He had looked innocent enough, but she should have known better.

"Hello Kiyone-chan! How are you on this lovely, winter day?" Shunsui said, practically skipping across the room to stand beside her. Kiyone smiled as she finished making the tea and set the pot and a few cups on a tray.

"Hey Captain Kyoraku. I'm fine, thanks. Do you need something?" Kiyone asked, turning her attention from the tea to the tall captain.

Shunsui grinned and said, "Ah, yes, actually. I need your opinion on something, a little project I'm working on for Juu-chan. You know him just as much as I do, so I thought you'd be the perfect person to ask."

Kiyone blinked before smiling proudly. She did know a lot about her captain, obviously much more than that idiot Sentarou if Shunsui wanted her help instead of his.

"Sure, I'd love to help you out! What are you working on?" Kiyone asked, hoping that she could give some good advice. But Shunsui just chuckled and strode to the doorway, stopping at the frame.

"It's a secret. I'll tell you when we get to its location. We wouldn't want to be eavesdropped on, now would we?" he said, his back to Kiyone so that she couldn't see the evil smirk plastered on his face. The third seat stared at Shunsui for a moment, but her curiosity got the better of her as she began to follow him.

After a few minutes of walking, the pair ended up outside, in Ukitake's private garden, which was currently covered in a thick layer of fluffy snow. Kiyone hadn't expected to be going outside, so she didn't have any winter clothes on, causing her to shiver. Shunsui continued walking until he stopped at a small shed, where her captain kept all of his gardening supplies.

"This is where the project is?" Kiyone asked, wondering why Shunsui would keep such a secret hidden so close to Ukitake if he didn't want her captain to find out.

"Yup, this is it." He said, before he suddenly began sneezing violently.

"Yar, yar! Kiyone-chan! Could you - achoo! - open it for me? It - achoo! - seems I have a slight tickle in my nose!" Shunsui said between sneezes. He turned around and continued sneezing loudly. Kiyone raised an eyebrow at his odd behavior, but she undid the lock on the door and opened it. She then screamed as she was shoved hard from behind, falling face-first onto the cold floor of the shed. She jumped quickly back to her feet as she heard the door slam shut and lock.

"What the hell, Shunsui?!?" Kiyone yelled, grabbing the door handle and twisted, but it didn't budge. Shunsui's loud laughter reached her ears as she banged on the door.

"I'm sorry, Kiyone-chan! This is for Juu-chan's own good! You two have fun in there!" Shunsui said, his voice getting fainter. Silence followed as Kiyone stood, staring at the door. She was trying to contemplate what just happened.

'Damn...He is so dead...' Kiyone thought, narrowing her eyes as she shivered. What was he thinking, locking two people in a shed in the middle of winter?

Wait, two?

"So, Shunsui tricked you too, huh?"

Kiyone spun around to see Sentarou sitting on the floor about eight feet away, his back leaning up against the wall opposite of the door. Kiyone ignored him for a moment as she tried breaking the door down, but she got nowhere. She sighed and dropped to the floor, her back against the door and her knees hugged to her chest.

"Do you know what he's planning?" Kiyone asked, her eyes narrowing into a glare.

"Not a clue. And don't give me that look, short stuff, 'cause I had nothing to do with this. I'd rather be anywhere but here right now." Sentarou sneered, as he returned her glare. They had a stare down for a minute before Kiyone snorted and turned around, facing the door.

"Whatever. I'd rather stare at this door than look at you're ugly face." She hissed, her deadly glare burrowing into the wooden door.

"My thoughts exactly." He retorted, and she heard him shift positions, turning to face the wall like she had.

And here Kiyone was, cold and miserable, and locked in a shed with her idiot counterpart. Only one thought repeated over and over in her head at this point:

'I'm going to *kill* Shunsui.'

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"You did WHAT?"

Ukitake groaned and face-palmed as Shunsui laughed at his best friend's reaction.

"C'mon, Juu-chan! What's the big deal?"

"You locked my two third seats outside in a shed, in the middle of winter! What if they freeze to death?" Ukitake was usually a very calm and mellow person, but his day wasn't going so well, and Shunsui had just made it worse. "I'm going to let them out. What if they kill each other?" He stood up, but Shunsui grabbed his shoulders and pushed him back into his seat.

"Juu-chan, relax. It's only about 30 degrees outside, and there are ways to keep warm when there are two people involved." Shunsui said, winking at Ukitake, who face-palmed again.

"But Shun, they don't exactly like each other..." Ukitake started, but Shunsui cut him off.

"So? Love works in mysterious ways. And they say opposites attract." He said, plopping himself down on the couch and pulling his straw hat over his eyes.

"I don't know...I don't think it'll work..." Ukitake said, his lack of confidence in his friend's plan evident in his voice. Shunsui just shrugged as he sprawled out on the couch, resting the back of his head on his hands.

"Wake me up in an hour, Juu-chan, and we'll go check on them. Finish your paperwork, chill out, and we'll see who's right soon enough." Shunsui said, chuckling before drifting off to sleep, his snoring filling the small office quickly.

Ukitake groaned and looked out of his window, seeing that the snow had begun to fall faster. His friend's plan was actually backfiring, for it was just making Ukitake more and more restless. He tapped his pen on the desk, contemplating making a run for the shed, but he knew that Shunsui was probably ready to catch him, despite being asleep. The sickly captain sighed and resumed his paperwork, his mind drifting off as he worried about what his two third seats were doing, and he hoped to hell that they wouldn't come across the various sharp gardening tools that were stored in that shed.

### 3 - Sweet Smells

Kiyone shivered violently as she continued to stare at a crack in the shed's wall. It had felt like a long time since she had been locked in this stupid shed, but in reality it had only been about ten or twenty minutes. Another chill jolted through her small frame, causing her teeth to chatter loudly. Kiyone stole another glance at Sentarou, and she scowled.

Sentarou must have been already outside when Shunsui found him, because he was dressed rather warmly. Over his normal attire, he had on a brown fur coat and a white scarf around his neck. Kiyone's eyes burned with envy as she turned back to the door, glaring daggers at it as another shiver coursed through her body, her teeth chattering louder than ever.

A moment of silence followed before she heard Sentarou's gruff voice say, "'Hey, Kiyone.'" She gritted her teeth and narrowed her eyes. He was probably going to rub it in her face about her being cold and miserable, while he was warm and comfortable. She wasn't going to let him make fun of her like that, so she turned around to send a nasty retort at him, but before she could, something hit her in the face.

"Sentarou! What-" Kiyone began angrily, but she cut herself off as she pulled the object off of her face, which turned out to be Sentarou's jacket. She stared at it for a moment before looking up at Sentarou, who was already staring at the wall again.

"Wha-" Kiyone began, a confused look crossing her face, but she was cut off.

"Your teeth's chattering is annoying. Put it on." Sentarou said quickly, not turning around. Kiyone blinked a few times, for this was definitely not what she expected. She then glowered at his back and turned around, crossing her arms over her chest stubbornly.

"I don't need help from you." She growled, glaring at the wall so intensely she thought she'd burn a hole through it. Another string of shivers coursed through her body, and Kiyone clenched her teeth so hard that she was surprised they didn't shatter. She turned her head just enough to glance at Sentarou's jacket, which was lying on the floor behind her. She could see the heat rising from it, and that was enough to convince her to throw her pride away for the time being. Kiyone grumbled as she grabbed the coat and threw it over her shoulders.

Kiyone sighed deeply as warmth spread through her freezing body. She inhaled and was overwhelmed by the wonderful scent of fresh pine needles.

'Wow, he smells good...' Kiyone thought, a small smile crossing her face. She then blinked with confusion. Kiyone rarely complimented Sentarou, and she had never said a nice thing about how he smelled before. It was...weird...But then again, she had never gotten close enough to that idiot to smell him before, unless they were physically fighting, and at those times she wasn't really paying attention to how he smelled.

Kiyone shook her head and mentally slapped herself. Why was she thinking about him so much? She

hated that annoying moron. He was rude, idiotic, and a complete jerk to her. He had always been, ever since they first met a long time ago at the Shinigami Academy. That day, their very first argument had been over something as pointless as a front row seat for a lecture on Zanpakuto spirits. That argument had ignited the intense rivalry between Kiyone and Sentarou that still raged on today. She didn't like him at all.

Kiyone thought about that for a moment, and remembered that he would do something nice for her very rarely. She recalled that time when they were racing to see who could deliver their paperwork to Captain Ukitake first. Kiyone had been in the lead when she tripped and fell, but before she hit the ground, Sentarou had grabbed her arm and helped her regain her balance. He had been genuinely concerned and had asked if she was okay, but as soon as she said she was fine, he had ran off and beat her to their captain. Kiyone glowered, because he had mocked and teased her for a week after that defeat.

Kiyone recalled another moment of Sentarou being nice. They both shared the same birthday, and as she shared a rank with him, Kiyone felt obligated to grudgingly get him a gift. She was very surprised when he also presented her with a gift. He had gotten her a book that she had wanted to read for a while, and she had gotten him a bottle of cologne that he had talked about before. Kiyone was pleasantly surprised with the gift, and was glad to see that Sentarou liked his. She then remembered that they hadn't argued once that day, and Sentarou had even taken her out to dinner at a nice restaurant.

Kiyone felt herself blush at this memory. She remembered that he had laughed at the shocked look on her face when he proposed the 'date'. Kiyone had then agreed and Sentarou had picked out a very fancy restaurant. The night had actually gone quite well, and Kiyone enjoyed conversing with her rival without constant arguing. Then came the time to pay for dinner, and all hell broke loose. Kiyone stubbornly refused to let Sentarou pay for her, but he wouldn't let it go, so their night had ended with a massive food fight and getting kicked out of that restaurant for good.

Kiyone chuckled to herself as she stared at the wall before her. She hated to admit it, but that night was one of the best that she'd had in a while, even though Sentarou acted like a prick at the end. Kiyone suddenly found herself wishing that they didn't argue so much, because he really wasn't such a bad person.

'You like him.' A voice said inside of Kiyone's head. Her eyes widened as she shook her head.

'No! He's nice sometimes, but he always fights with me.' She silently told the voice in her head. Even if she did like him, there was no way in hell that he liked her. Or even if he did, he didn't show it very well.

'Have you tried being nice to him? It's not like your innocent in instigating these arguments.' The voice retorted. Kiyone frowned as she folded her arms across her chest. That stupid voice was right; Kiyone started just as many of their arguments as Sentarou did. She had often made some nasty comments on how ugly his hair was or how he couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag or how big of an idiot he was. But Kiyone really didn't mean half of the thing that she said. Sentarou was actually a skilled fighter, pretty intelligent, and there was really no problem with his hair. Kiyone really only said those things out of habit, or so that she got a comment in before he could say something nasty about her.

'Maybe I could be nicer...' Kiyone thought, but she was dragged from her thoughts as a loud sneeze



erupted from the other side of the shed. Kiyone turned her head to look at Sentarou, who was still facing the wall, but he was now shivering slightly and sniffed every few seconds. Kiyone felt guilty as she looked down at Sentarou's coat, which was wrapped snugly around her tiny frame. She looked from the coat to Sentarou as an idea formed in her head. She winced slightly, for she didn't know how she felt about it, and was afraid at how Sentarou would react.

'Well, only one way to find out...!' Kiyone thought as she stood up. She walked over to Sentarou and sat down next to him without a word. Sentarou jumped slightly, for her sudden appearance startled him.

"What are you doing?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. There was no nasty undertone to his voice like Kiyone expected, so she was caught off guard for a moment as an awkward silence passed. Kiyone then cleared her throat as she slipped her right arm out of the sleeve and handed the edge of the coat to Sentarou.

"Here. Your sneezing is annoying. We can share so that we don't drive each other crazy." She said, a funny feeling forming in her gut. Sentarou stared at her for a moment before bursting out laughing, which caused Kiyone to blush.

"You are a strange woman." He said as he covered himself with one half of the coat. They sat in silence for a while, and Kiyone felt like she was going to explode from the anxiety that filled her thoughts. She felt a mixture of confusion and relief when Sentarou accepted her offer without a rude comment. She then shivered, because the coat wasn't big enough to cover them both, causing their fronts to be exposed to the cold.

'Damn...Now we'll both freeze anyway...!' Kiyone thought bitterly, a frown crossing her face. She saw Sentarou staring at her from the corner of her eye. She blushed again as she looked at him. She opened her mouth to ask what was wrong, but he spoke first.

"Don't kill me for this." He said. Before Kiyone could process what he said, Sentarou grabbed her by the waist with his strong arms and pulled her onto his lap. She froze with shock as her face flushed as she now sat on his lap. Sentarou then wrapped his coat around both of them, his arms gently resting on her knees. Kiyone was speechless. She had thought that just sitting next to him and sharing a coat was crossing the line, but Sentarou had completely destroyed that line with this move. But Kiyone found herself liking it, to her surprise.

They sat in silence once more as Kiyone tried to sort out her feelings. She was really happy with the way this situation was playing out, but she was hesitant to start a conversation for fear of starting an argument. She tried to think of something to say that wouldn't sound really dumb or mean, when she heard Sentarou inhale deeply through his nose. A confused look crossed Kiyone's face, and then she froze as she felt Sentarou's face press to the back of her head as he inhaled again. In the silence that followed, Kiyone wondered what the hell he was up to.

"Err, your hair...It smells nice. Like strawberries." Sentarou said suddenly. Kiyone blinked as she turned her head up to look at his face. He looked nervous and unsure of what he said, but Kiyone smiled, because compliments from him were rare, but she now realized that she loved his compliments the most.

"Um, thanks. You smell good too. Like a pine tree." Kiyone said locking her gray eyes with his, and she couldn't help but grin as his face turned as red as a tomato.

"Heh, thanks. Actually, I'm wearing that cologne that you got me for my birthday. You have good taste." He said, taking a daring move as he rested his chin on Kiyone's head. But Kiyone let herself relax in his arms as she leaned back against his chest and closed her eyes.

'Yeah, I have great taste indeed.' Kiyone thought, a smile crossing her face. She opened one eye as she glanced at the door of the shed before shutting it again. She would have to thank Shunsui later.

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"They'd better be okay Shunsui, or you get to find me some new subordinates." Ukitake said to Shunsui as they both entered the private garden.

"Aw, I'm sure they're fine, Juu-chan. And you managed to get caught up on your paperwork without them driving you crazy. And it's all thanks to my brilliant plan." Shunsui said, a smug grin crossing his face. Ukitake couldn't help but smile and nod in agreement. He had been able to finish his paperwork, and his headache had disappeared. But he was still worried about how his two third seats were dealing with their situation.

"Ugh, Shun, it's freezing out here. We'll be lucky if they didn't freeze to death." Ukitake said, shivering as they approached the shed. Shunsui rolled his eyes at his worrying friend as she walked up to the door and undid the kido lock. He cracked open the door and peeked his head inside. A moment later, his head reappeared and he looked at Ukitake, a satisfied smirk on his face.

"Well, Juu, I hate to say I told you so, but I told you so." Shunsui said, walking passed Ukitake, who had a confused look on his face, "See for yourself," he continued, "And then you can meet me at my office; we need to celebrate the success of my plan." Before Ukitake could say anything, Shunsui shunpoed away to his office, leaving his best friend alone to investigate the shed. Ukitake walked up to the shed and opened the door, now more curious than worried to see the fate of his third seats. The captain of the thirteenth division smiled at what he saw.

Kiyone sat in Sentarou's lap, his arms wrapped snugly around her, and Sentarou's coat was draped over the two of them. Both were fast asleep, with content looks on their faces. Ukitake was relieved that they hadn't torn each other to pieces, but he was very surprised at this outcome. He silently closed the door to the shed and shunpoed after his friend, ready to celebrate the plan's success. Ukitake owed Shunsui big time for this.