

Impossible Chance

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An shinigami's forbidden love and an evil plot to kill all of the shinigami. What must Kiptcha face before her promise with Aizen can be fulfilled?

Will she accept her promise's fate?

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1 - Her Last Assignment

Kiptcha took a deep bow to Aizen and she rose slowly before turning to go. Aizen looked smug with the grin on his face. He rested his head on one hand with his elbow propped on the arm of his throne. Gin stood behind him, smile as wide as ever.

“Good luck, Kiptcha,” Aizen’s icy voice echoed after her and she turned, surprised at the comment. The rest of the Espada snickered and laughed at the remark.

Kiptcha looked at the rest of the Espada carefully and she realized that none of them would ever give her solace. She had managed to get in the Espada ranked as four. Since Halibel’s death; however, she had once again been reduced to the only female in the Espada. She wore a uniform that resembled Halibel’s, but she had modified it to her own taste. It had a high collar that came up to hide her mouth and it stopped just under her breasts, leaving her midriff bare. It had long bell sleeves as well to hide her arms. A floor length white skirt, long blonde hair that nearly swept the ground, and the number four on the right side of her midriff, under her ribs, finished up her clothing. Her hollow hole was not visible, but it had been moved to her upper chest, just below her collarbone. Her sword hung from her right shoulder diagonally across her back, reaching to about her left knee. The blade was thin and excruciatingly sharp. No matter the pressure, it refused to break. What completed her look was the remnants of her mask that curled up from her left eye and grew thicker until it was an ear, resembling that of a cat, over her own left ear.

She finally turned and left, hearing the rest of the Espada dismissed behind her. She walked at her normal speed, which was faster than the average walking speed for most. It was well known that those in the Espada were cruel and easily provoked into fighting with each other, so she knew after being granted such an assignment as she had now, they would kill at their first chance. She continued to walk until she came to a window. She stepped up to it and she looked out, aware of the approaching Espada.

“Hey Kipt. Got anything to say to us?” a cold voice said behind her. It belonged to Grimmjow, the 5th in the Espada.

Kiptcha did not respond, and she stayed still trying to seem fearless of the one who stood behind her. Grimmjow was a seat below her, and he wanted more than anything to take her seat away from her. She fingered her black sash, but she didn’t make any other move.

“I’m talking to you, dog,” the angered Grimmjow hissed, leaping forward and putting Kiptcha into a headlock. She was tall, but Grimmjow had the advantage of being that much taller than her. He tilted her back and leaned forward a bit to whisper, “Just because you got an assignment doesn’t mean you can get stuck up, Kipt.”

Kiptcha let her body relax, knowing there was no way that she could answer and keep the fear out of her voice. She spoke anyway, breaking her silence. “Tell me nothing ever counts, lashing out or breaking down. Still somebody loses 'cause there's no way to turn around, is there?”

“Grimmjow, let her go. I’m surprised she hasn’t already seriously injured you,” Szayel commented. He was the 8th Espada, and he couldn’t beat either one of the two.

Noitora, Stark, Ulquiorra, and Yammy had gathered as well. The first three had no interest in letting Grimmjow kill Kiptcha, while the lower ranks were in favor.

Grimmjow let her go however, and Kiptcha turned to face him, no resentment in her face. It was a rare expression for her not to have a glare or something akin to that. A faint smile played on her lips, making her features softer. She looked like a beautiful woman, instead of the ice maiden she normally was. It surprised the arrancar who were standing around watching the scene. Even Grimmjow looked taken aback.

Kiptcha let it play wider and she unzipped the collar down until the point that her hollow hole showed. She looked fine, despite what she thought, which she always was fully protective of her inner feelings and moods. She had never had more than two, or three in rare occasions, of the Espada really pay attention to her. Today she had all nine plus Aizen and Gin watching her. And now she had five. This was certainly a new feeling for her.

“I’ll be leaving then,” Kiptcha said softly, her normal un-talkative nature not gone. She walked past Grimmjow, brushing her shoulder against him. It was a soft-spoken warning that she used. It was also a tempting dare to follow her and find out what kind of power she held that earned her the rank she had.

Grimmjow took her bait and grabbed her shoulder after she had passed.

“Grimmjow!” Ulquiorra commanded and Grimmjow released her.

Kiptcha turned her head slightly to look at Grimmjow and laughed. She startled herself at it, and the smile faded from her lips. She turned back to face forward and she bowed slightly to the three higher ranked Espada, taking her eyes off of them only momentarily. Stark, the 2nd Espada, was the only one who returned it.

Kiptcha opened the door of her new apartment, and she closed the door behind her. She walked to the bed and collapsed. She had found a gigai before anyone had been attracted to her reiatsu, and now she was suppressing it as best she could. To a shinigami she would seem like a talented human, not an arrancar at first pass. She had thrown the school uniform on the bed beside her and she got up and put it away in the closet along with some other cloths. Two pairs of jeans and a few T-shirts were folded and placed on the shelf above, three dresses and the school uniform hung neatly. A pair of three-inch heels also had been thrown in, as it was the part of the school uniform, if the girls didn’t want tennis shoes.

She wore a light blue dress with a butterfly pattern on it. They were like illusions, really, since they were lighter shades of blue. The dress had a low neck line and she had panicked at first. It was so much unlike the arrancar uniform that she usually wore.

The day had been fine so far, except for the nagging feeling that someone had been following her all day from a distance. A knock on her door startled her and she dashed over to the door and opened it.

Grimmjow stood there in a gigai. This time she couldn't keep the look of total confusion and fear off her face.

"Oy," Grimmjow said, enjoying the look of fear in her eyes. He pushed the door wider and let himself in.

Kiptcha didn't bother to close the door behind him and she turned to look at him. "Why are you here?!" she demanded, trying to look fierce in a blue dress with a butterfly pattern on it. It didn't really work.

"That's a nice look for you, why don't you keep it?" Grimmjow commented, turning from her small window. "Of course I don't think that you could really be taken seriously then . . ."

Kiptcha turned red and she turned to face the door. She felt strange, a feeling that she had never had under Aizen's watchful eyes. "Why are you here, Grimmjow? This is my mission."

"I'm here to make sure you do what you're supposed to. I've appointed myself."

"I'll do it! I don't need a guardian. Not like you! You'll only get in the way. You'll try to kill him won't you, Grimmjow? I can't allow that."

"Excuse me, I hope I'm not interrupting anything," a voice said, and there was a tap on the open door. "I'm Isredel, Isredel Shimazaki. I heard that you're the new student. Pleasure to meet you."

Kiptcha looked up at him, startled. "Ah. Same here. I'm Kiptcha Munae," she said in the normal polite voice she reserved for Aizen alone. He sounded so much like Aizen . . .

"And you?" Isredel questioned Grimmjow. "I heard you're new too."

Grimmjow looked at the newcomer and he frowned, realizing what he was in an instant. This was the shinigami that was Kiptcha's target. He had no interest in doing anything polite, including introducing himself unless they were in a battle.

Kiptcha looked at Grimmjow, who was about to snap. She was worried, but she couldn't do anything. Nothing would move. Her body was stiff. Then, out of the blue, she realized it. She had put all of her reiatsu out of the light to seem normal, yet both of these two were letting out an enormous amount. They were competing, but Kiptcha daren't do the same. She stood above Grimmjow usually. That was enough. Kiptcha got the same feeling when standing in front of Aizen. This breathlessness and sweat beading up on her forehead.

Dust started to twirl around Isredel's legs, like a miniature tornado. His eyes were blank and he had strayed far from the kind man he had started out as. "You want to fight this out?" he laughed casually, refusing to notice Kiptcha's stricken face.

Kiptcha stood in Hueco Mundo with a humiliated face. She had left her gigai in the apartment, laying on the bed, while Grimmjow and Isredel had exited and let their gigais just lay on the roof of the apartment building. Aizen looked down at her with an unhappy look.

“Why are you back here so fast, Kiptcha? The next time you were to come in front of me, you were to have the target: Isredel Shimazaki. What happened?”

Kiptcha still had her collar unzipped and it showed the rest of the mask that went down to her jaw, and it showed her mouth. Her emotions were clear: She no way turn. Some of the Espada snickered in the background, as she always had it fully zipped up. “Grimmjow followed me. He’s engaged in a quarrel with the target and I am in no place to break it up and destroy my cover,” Kiptcha reported. With a bit of difficulty she said the next two words. “Requesting assistance.”

Ulquiorra stood with Kiptcha looking down at the fight. No words were exchanged between the two frowning arrancar, but they understood what the other was thinking. They were very much alike after all, and they rarely changed their expressions. Kiptcha was back in her gigai already, and she had already warned silently about making a comment about it.

“Those two might just kill each other, but it would seem that Grimmjow is playing with him — why?” Ulquiorra commented quietly.

“Shinigami captains and vice-captains have a restriction,” Kiptcha said. Her dress was blown in front of her with the wind, and she felt self-conscious around Ulquiorra as she wasn’t wearing her normal uniform. He was her superior, and she already felt bad about causing something like this. “Sorry for causing you trouble —”

“Relax. You can’t do anything if you’re to do as planned,” he said and Kiptcha was shocked as he left.

She raced down to the ground and up to the roof of the other building via stairs. She emerged panting to find Isredel in front of her, sword drawn. Ulquiorra held Grimmjow by the collar. Grimmjow had not drawn his sword though.

“Do you intend to screw up everything, Grimmjow?” Ulquiorra asked icily.

Kiptcha was suffocated by the sheer amount of reiatsu, and she felt sweat dripping down her face “S-stop. Stop!” Kiptcha yelled, stuttering a bit. Her act was perfect. She slumped to her knees as planned and she tried to look convincing. The only one who didn’t buy it was Grimmjow.

“Damn, Kiptcha. Why don’t you just get up and help me? I could use it,” he said, and he pulled away from Ulquiorra and he looked down at her. “This stupid shinigami isn’t what’s the problem, he’s a fly. Just get Ulquiorra out of here. He doesn’t need to be here!”

“Neither do you, Grimmjow,” Kiptcha spat, standing unsteadily. She reminded herself that only half of it need be an act. “you were never invited, were you?”

There was a static sound and Kiptcha felt Grimmjow behind her. Her eyes went wide and she spun, just in time to catch a kick than propelled her back. As she flew through the air everything slowed down. Isredel looked shocked that his opponent had attacked a seemingly human girl. Ulquiorra had let the

frown slip and he looked a bit shocked and furious at the same time. Kiptcha flight was punctuated with her hitting a brick wall. She slumped down and fell to her knees. She couldn't stand anymore, and she fell to her hands. Blood trickled out of her mouth, and she winced out of pain. She spat on the ground, just more blood pooling on the concrete.

"I've never been able to do that to her! This feels nice," Grimmjow commented, bouncing lightly on his feet. "Now —" he said softly, and there was another burst of static. He appeared before Kiptcha, but he stood proud over her. Kiptcha seemed broken, but she raised her face and she slowly started to rise. She would not bow to the 5th Espada, known as Grimmjow Jaggerjack.

"You bastard. Can't you let me carry out my last mission and then die in peace?" she spat, now standing. She leaned heavily on the cracked wall behind her, but she stood none the less.

Grimmjow smirked evilly and his sword had been drawn and was flashing towards her abdomen before she could react in her gigai. She screamed right before his blade hit and she caught the flashing metal in her left hand with the tip barely off her stomach. Blood ran down her arm and she felt the blade sliding through her grip. Then her hand wouldn't obey her, pain making it loosen and pull away.

The blade went through her stomach and pinned her to the wall. Blood started to soak the blue dress she wore. Kiptcha was fading, but she dimly felt Grimmjow touch the side of her face. She pulled away. Words didn't make sense in her mind. She saw both Ulquiorra and Isredel moving towards her, but Ulquiorra stopped. His frown was deeper than ever. Kiptcha felt things becoming clearer again and she looked up at Grimmjow. She grabbed the sword and pulled it out, stepping forward and clutching the blade. It felt heavy compared with her own sword.

The sword was out to her right, and the blade was angled towards her target. With her left hand, she looked at her wound. The sword had impaled her tattooed number, 4. "You have nice aim, Grimmjow, for stabbing a certain spot, but it's not yours quite yet. This is where you belong. I'm where I belong," Kiptcha said softly. She tensed her right arm and she spun the sword on her palm, stopping it so the blade was angled up her arm. With the rest of her strength she brought the blade up in front of her and then down into the ground. It stood vertical in front of her, between her and Grimmjow. She then turned and walked to the edge of the building, only stumbling once.

2 - The Promise

Kiptcha stood over Grimmjow, already dressed in the school uniform. It consisted of a knee length skirt and a white blouse that she had fussed over earlier. She hadn't put on her shoes yet, instead standing around in her socks. She was upset about actually showing that much skin, usually not having to show her mouth, neck, no cleavage, her arms, and her legs.

"Hey! We're going to be late if you don't get your @\$ moving!"

Grimmjow rolled over on the floor, regarding Kiptcha with cold eyes. She had forbidden him to sleep with her on the bed, since she still didn't appreciate the gaping hole in her stomach. She remained steadfast in her opinion that she might forgive him someday, but it wasn't today and it probably wouldn't be tomorrow. He had helped her put the bandage on, but that hadn't helped her mood, since he had tried to clean it out with antiseptic.

"Your vision of late is messed up," Grimmjow snapped.

Kiptcha raised an eyebrow and smirked. Her nerves were frayed from yesterday, and the snippiness of Grimmjow's mood enlightened Kiptcha enough to provoke her to laugh. She sat down on the bed and sighed. "It's been a day since your encounter with the target, and he might forgive you, considering he mightn't still want to kill you." She leaned down and supported her head with her hands. She certainly seemed better natured, as if she had decided she was going to be nice just this once so as to put Grimmjow at ease.

He looked at her. It wasn't natural for her to smile like that. It just wasn't right at all. The fastest way to figure out something was wrong was if the subject in question didn't act themselves. Without making a reply, he grabbed his school uniform off the only chair that the apartment had and stalked over to the bathroom, for he did need to change out of the jeans and punk T-shirt that he had picked up. He paused beside her, and she sat up straight, aware he wasn't joking.

"What did you tell Ulquiorra?"

Kiptcha looked a bit concerned, and she looked away. She didn't speak for a while, but finally she did, "I requested him let you stay here."

Lunch break at school seemed to be the only bearable part of the day, since the boring classes in the morning had put her back into her sullen, untalkative mood again. Grimmjow stood above her, as she was slumped down, sitting against a wall. They were both on the roof of the school, and it was deserted, except for those two.

"We should get some lunch, ya know," Kiptcha commented dryly.

Grimmjow didn't look at her; he didn't even flinch. Kiptcha hadn't been expecting him to reply, but she was shocked when he did.

"Why did you say this was your last mission? Was it some kind of crude joke?"

It was Kiptcha's turn to not respond. She didn't make any try at responding. Instead, she got up and walked to the stairwell, the one that led back to the classroom. She paused, just long enough for Grimmjow to catch up and grab her.

He slammed her against the brick wall and lifted her off the ground. She tried not to show any fear, but somehow her body betrayed her and she shivered.

"I asked you question," he hissed.

"I gathered that, Grimmjow. I am disinclined to answer it. So get with the bigger picture: I won't."

He brought his fist in fast and hard, connecting with the wound that he had inflicted with his zampaku-to. Blood seeped to the surface of the wrap, clearly visible because she had tied her shirt up to expose her midriff. Her eyes went wide with pain and she went limp in his grasp. "Just think, Kipt. I'll take your place in the Espada. If I can kill you —"

"No. Not like this. Grimmjow, stop," Kiptcha gasped out. She raised a hand and placed it on the hand that was holding her to the wall, his hand gripping the cloth that made up her shirt collar.

He chuckled and pulled his hand back for another punch. Kiptcha hung limply, blood spreading again she closed her eyes, tensing for the pain.

"Aizen-sama made a promise to me that when I captured a shinigami that let the arrancar, led by the Espada, into the soul society, he would allow me to commit and honorable seppku*."

[*seppku: honorable suicide involving cutting open your stomach and bleeding to death. Really painful. Don't ever do it. >:]

Grimmjow's eyes widened and he let her drop, her shirt settling around her figure. Her job of tying it up had come undone.

"You're kidding. 4th in the Espada, and you can think to do is commit suicide?!"

Kiptcha was limp and the blood from her reopened injury had been obscured. She couldn't reply. Words wouldn't form in her mind, slipping out of her reach as she blacked out.

Grimmjow leaned down and he picked up her limp body, taking it back down to the teacher. Halfway down the steps he saw Isredel, and he tensed. A glare formed and he thought about what had last happened between them.

"What happened?" Isredel asked flatly.

"Nothing," Grimmjow answered, and he tried to push past Isredel.

“You’re pretty bad at lying,” Isredel commented, and he touched Kiptcha’s stomach, drawing up the hem of the blouse until the blood soaked bandages were visible. “She’ll die if you don’t do something about that.”

There was an uncomfortable silence that had descended on the small apartment. Isredel had just finished re-wrapping the katana wound, and Grimmjow was sitting haughtily in the one chair the decorated the bare room.

“What kind of person is Kiptcha?” Isredel asked stonily, concealing his anger.

“How would I know?” Grimmjow spat. “She’s never been all that close to me.”

“Because she let you stay with her here,” Isredel answered. “She trusts enough that way.”

“She has no real friends, and she seldom speaks. Nobody really speaks to her either because she’s not friendly and she’s — a bit different. I doubt she trusts me as much as you think. She was awake all last night, watching me for any false move. She even kicked me off the bed to the floor. You call that trusting?!” Grimmjow snarled, standing and leaving the apartment.

Kiptcha woke a few minutes after he left and the first thing that she jumped at was the feel of hand on the side of her face. Her vision was blurry and she nearly panicked at the thought of Grimmjow doing that. She held back until her vision became clearer. Instead it was the target. Isredel! She froze, wondering what she could do in this situation.

“Hey. Comin’ around much?” a kind voice said. It drifted through her consciousness lazily and she instantly reacted.

“What the hell do you think you’re d — ?” Kiptcha nearly yelled at the top of her voice. She was cut off by the return of the pain and her senses sharpened.

“It’s just me. Who were you expecting?”

“I kind of expected Grimmjow, actually,” Kiptcha said, taking hold of his hand. She pulled it away from her face slightly. She looked up at his fine features, realizing that he had lighter hair than she did. Her’s was a blonde, after all. His eyes were a blue-green, with a kind look to them. She hadn’t imagined her target like this at all. Not kind — rough and evil.

“You should be careful with somebody like that, because they are more than they seem. He’s not exactly — alive and human.”

“Neither are you,” Kiptcha countered. “You’re a shinigami. So he’s an arrancar, right? And you two are the enemies that can kill each other, if given the chance.”

“How do you know that?” Isredel asked contemptuously. He looked down at the thin frame of the supposed human, feeling like there was something a bit wrong with her. He couldn’t place it, but he

decided that he was going to watch her every move. Maybe Grimmjow's reiatsu had bled over into her — it was too hard to tell. But, it felt like the same type of reiatsu, which worried him.

Kiptcha had fallen asleep again, and Isredel was watching over her, waiting for Grimmjow to come back. He got up, checking on Kiptcha again, for the last time. He was hungry, and Isredel had planned to go and get dinner now. He sat down on the edge of the bed and he looked down at her.

A frown crossed her face and she opened her eyes again, to find Isredel looking at her again. She blinked, confusion taking over. She opened her mouth to ask, but she was silenced with a look.

Isredel leaned over Kiptcha, lacing the fingers of his right hand into her left. Carefully he lowered himself down, aware of her injury. And he kissed her.

Kiptcha's eyes went wide, but she didn't turn away. She felt a hand on the side of her face, keeping her there. Her body had naturally tensed, but she relaxed intentionally, letting reality slip away. She had never experienced a kiss as an arrancar, and she was determined to enjoy the only one she ever got.

Isredel pulled away slowly, and Kiptcha panted for breath a bit. He looked at her and smiled. With that, he got up and left, closing the door to the apartment behind him.

"You enjoyed that, didn't you?" Grimmjow asked icily, stepping out from the door that enclosed the bathroom. He had on a sober expression, but it was laced with anger. He walked closer to the bed, and he stopped at the side that Isredel had just left.

Kiptcha sat up and looked up at Grimmjow. Her face flushed and she turned away, climbing out of the bed in the other direction. She stood unsteadily, but she decided that she seemed to be stable and started towards the door.

"Wait a second, there," Grimmjow breathed in her ear. He had an arm across her front, but not choking her. He held her back, even as she struggled to leave. "When did you say you would be returning with the target?"

"Two more days. I can always return early though," Kiptcha said, turning away from his direction. She didn't know what to do, since facing him would only remind her of her mission. She wanted to run away from it all, just forget Aizen and everything she was with that one kiss. She didn't want to lock him up in a cell. She didn't want to have to watch his execution —

"And what happens then?" Grimmjow prompted.

"He opens the portal to Seiretei. After that he will be of no further use, and he will be killed."

"Quite unlike that Orihime girl, huh? She's being kept by Aizen-sama."

Kiptcha frowned. Isredel would be witness to the downfall of Seiretei, and then she would be ordered to kill him . . . "We'll be returning tomorrow."

After their conversation, Kiptcha had excused herself and she had gone out to 'think'. She taken her gigai with her, but quickly discarded it when she had reached the roof of the building. Grimmjow now watched her as she went through her fourth sword form. It involved twisting and other fancy moves that were completely useless on the battlefield. But she didn't use these on the battlefield at all. These were the forms from her zampaku-to, the forms that improved her skills. There were four forms so far, but there wouldn't be for long.

3 - The Prowess of the 4th Espada

Kiptcha froze. Her form that she had just been running through vanished. She never repeated forms, so it didn't matter. She found what had been placed in front of her now was certainly impossible. She couldn't do such a thing, could she?

Grimmjow watched with horror as Kiptcha stopped and returned to a readying stance. Then she looked directly at him, as if she were beckoning him to come closer. He accepted, not really knowing what was going to happen. He landed softly in front of her, and he winced mentally at the sight of the bandage having been removed from her wound. It looked sickly and painful.

Do you know how the attacks went for my first form?" Kiptcha asked softly. She was in her outfit again, and she had zipped up the collar. She had the same amount of emotion as a statue or a tree, at this point.

He nodded, and he drew his zampaku-to in preparation. He watched as she sliced her hand on her own sword, coating the katana with her blood. It glistened, and it dripped slowly. She let the layer thicken, before nodding to Grimmjow to start.

Her first form had been at high speed, but with simple moves. As he attacked, she twirled and danced even faster. He could feel the droplets of blood hit him, and he realized that it was marking where she would have cut him. Her moves were swift, and almost too fast for Grimmjow to watch, but he followed through with his part of the form.

It came suddenly, a cut that appeared out of nowhere on his arm then. Kiptcha landed a few feet away and she looked at him. Her hand was bleeding freely after the many times she had renewed the coating of blood. Grimmjow was splattered in clean, long lines all over. He looked at Kiptcha and the blood that marked where she could have easily killed him.

"The Fifth Form, Cortar a Cintas," Kiptcha said slowly, relishing the new form and name.
[Cortar a Cintas: Slicing to Ribbons]

Both back in their gigais and washed, Grimmjow made a point of not talking to Kiptcha about her forms. They were all deadly, but that had been the first that could actually be used in battle. He reviewed all of them, but he came up blank.

"The First Form," Kiptcha said behind him with coldness. "Baile Resonante."
[Baile Resonante: Resounding Dance]

"The Second Form, La Agilidad de Aire."

[La Agilidad de Aire: Agility of Air]

"The Third Form, La Impredictibilidad de Nubes"

[La Impredictibilidad de Nubes: Unpredictability of Clouds]

“The Forth Form, Llevar con Hojas.”
[Llevar con Hojas: Drifting with Leaves]

Grimmjow was startled and he whipped around to face her. She looked at him, the cold fire that had always burned in her eyes returned. It was how she could stand up to all of the males in the Espada. She needed no help, no sympathy. Her nerves were stronger than steel. She would carry out what she was meant to do without question.

“Get some sleep,” Kiptcha commanded, and she got up from sitting on the edge of the bed. With a powerful shove, she threw Grimmjow at the bed and she turned and left.

She found Isredel in the hallway, and she stopped behind him. She didn’t want to say anything, but to just let it be silently understood, but it didn’t work that way. “How far would you follow me?”

“Not quite to the end of the world,” Isredel replied, turning.

Kiptcha nodded and she looked directly into his eyes. “How far would you go to defeat the arrancar?”

He met her gaze with ease, and being taller than her, easily imposed his pride. “I’d go to any lengths.”

“And, how much do you love Seiretei? Even after they exiled you out here?”

“I’d protect it with my life,” Isredel replied, sincerity and self-confidence putting strength behind the statement.

“‘With your life’ . . .” Kiptcha repeated. She turned swiftly and retreated to her own apartment.

It was dark after Kiptcha shut the door, but she found her way over to her side of the bed and she sat down. With practiced slowness she brought her legs up behind her and she started to lay down. She felt a rough hand grab her arm, and she jumped, hoping she hadn’t wakened him when she had come in. The hand pulled her back, and she landed hard, laying horizontal on the bed. Her head rested on Grimmjow’s stomach.

Embarrassment made her struggle to sit back up. Embarrassment and her own worthless pride. The hand — Grimmjow’s hand, Kiptcha realized, held her down and she looked up at the ceiling. She was tired, and the rise and fall of his chest didn’t disturb her enough to try to move again. She felt warm, and she allowed her eyes to close.

Grimmjow reached down, and he placed one hand on the side of her face that faced away from him, slowly tilting her head to look at him. Her eyes shot open, but she couldn’t resist now, since he already had done it. She looked at him with sorrow.

“I can’t carry through, Grimmjow. I can’t — no, I won’t. Have I forsaken the path?” Kiptcha whispered. She turned over, burying her tears in his chest. She couldn’t let him see it.

He put a hand on top of her head and gently stroked her hair. Every warrior broke. Every warrior tried to climb back up. They had to. But at least Aizen hadn't seen this . . .

Grimmjow pulled her head up to face him again and she fought at first, tears staining her cheeks. They shone in the dim light that shone through the curtains, like a purity. She relaxed, and she closed her eyes. Her stresses melted away as she faded, leaving Grimmjow with her peacefully sleeping form.

Kiptcha awoke to find herself in the same position, except Grimmjow had turned on a light, propped himself up, and he was reading a book of some type. She sat up and rubbed the sleep out of her eyes. Today there wasn't school, but she had still woken up before the dawn.

"Good morning, sleepy head," he said, not taking his eyes off the pages.

"Good morrow to you as well," Kiptcha said warily, smoothing down her hair a bit. It wasn't tangled, but some of it stuck up at weird angles. She slipped out of the bed and headed towards the bathroom for a hot shower.

The door latched behind her and she undressed. The water felt good, washing away her stresses about completing her mission. Her resolve had returned, after being momentarily upset by Isredel's kiss.

She stepped out of the shower and towed herself dry. With careful strokes, she combed her hair out and dried it with a provided hairdryer. Her hair in her gigai form was only a hindrance though, and a knife flashed out, cutting off almost all of it. She touched the back of her head, finding it so much different, but it was better. The problem she had faced earlier with her hair was completely gone. Even though it didn't affect her arrancar form, she felt anxious. She did some more trimming to her bangs and she nodded in approval. She should so totally carry it over to arrancar form.

She walked out of the bathroom fully dressed, and she walked to the closet and she picked out different cloths, a knee-length white skirt, a black sash, a sports bra, and a long sleeved jacket of white as well. She changed in the closet and she stepped out, leaving the jacket open after it was below her white sports bra. It was her human version of her arrancar form.

Grimmjow looked up, and he gasped at her hair. "Why —?" he asked.

Kiptcha turned and strode to the door. "Get up. We're leaving."

"How much does it take to make you answer a question?" Grimmjow snarled.

"My hair is of no concern to you. It shouldn't make a difference," Kiptcha replied shortly. "You may stop masking your reiatsu, we need to draw the target out. And you can drop your gigai, unless you want to take it back to Hueco Mundo with us."

"Have you given up on the persuasive idea already?"

"We're good enough friends, I suppose. He'll understand, even if I have to carve it into his body with his

own sword,” Kiptcha hissed, turning to face Grimmjow.

Isredel leapt out and up, using shun-po. He was heading towards the spot that his phone had reported a hollow. But he had felt its reiatsu change to a harsher from, that of an arrancar. He suddenly stopped on the top of a taller building to look out and spot his target.

Grimmjow looked up, and he saw Isredel. Kiptcha nodded, and the two walked out into a clear patch of green field, in plain sight. Grimmjow laughed, spotting the shinigami searching.

“No sense of direction!”

“No Grimmjow. He’s trying to get a step ahead by plotting out what’s around us. Look closer.”

Isredel finished his appraisal, and he leapt off in their direction. They had picked the worst spot for them to fight, as he couldn’t harm anyone else. But, he gritted his teeth and sailed into their trap.

“We can’t fight here,” Isredel said unhappily as he landed.

“Quite right,” Kiptcha agreed. “but we have the sky.”

“Get outta the way! A human like you will be killed!” Isredel warned.

“Killed? You’ve got to be kidding me, right?” Kiptcha laughed, as she drifted out of her gigai. She arranged nicely on the ground, like she had lain down. She pulled the collar up around her nose and she turned. There was a staccato of static, and she re-appeared behind Isredel. Kiptcha’s reiatsu had gone up and she seemed more at ease. “Grimmjow! Please open the garganta. We’ll be leaving soon, and I want it to be ready.”

Grimmjow nodded and flicked at the air. It opened, and Kiptcha smiled.

“Won’t you come with us, shinigami?” she asked Isredel plainly and straight forward.

Isredel laughed and he drew his zampaku-to. It wasn’t long, about normal actually, and it had a hilt made of metal as well. “Senkou! Raikou Kami!”
[Flash! Lightning God!]

“Put your zampaku-to down, shinigami. We have no use for it against us.”

“No, Kiptcha. You can’t tell me that,” Isredel whispered. “I’ll kill you!”

Kiptcha sidestepped his attack and in one clean movement, took both his sword and his scabbard away from him. After sheathing the sword she nodded to Grimmjow and walked toward the garganta.

Grimmjow followed with Isredel’s fighting form.

4 - Her Report

Kiptcha strode into the throne room proudly and she looked behind her to Grimmjow for an instant before facing Aizen again and walking forward more

“Welcome home, Kiptcha. Grimmjow,” Aizen said in his usual manner. He smiled slightly, and the irony in his seemingly easygoing manner apparent to the arrancar who stood around the throne room. It was subtle, but he was displeased by Grimmjow’s actions, though it seemed that Kiptcha had made use of him after all.

“Thank you, Aizen-sama,” Kiptcha replied, bowing. Grimmjow nodded his head, as he was incapable of bowing while restraining the upset Isredel.

“You may release him, Grimmjow,” Aizen’s commanding voice echoed.

Grimmjow smirked and pushed the shinigami toward Aizen, paying no heed when Isredel tripped and fell to his knees.

Aizen looked down at Isredel, “My successor, I see. Welcome to our castle, Las Noches. You are the 5th squad captain of Gotei 13, am I correct?”

Isredel looked up in hatred at Aizen, regaining his feet. “So what if it is?” he spat.

“Kiptcha! Your report please.”

“Yes, Aizen-sama,” Kiptcha answered, startled. She listed out the events, justified her excuse to keep Grimmjow in the real world, and carefully explained why she had not left her gigai, as a matter of what she looked like to a shinigami. “I do not want to be considered an enemy, if I am to do as told. This is also why I still suppress my reiatsu.”

“Aren’t you leaving something else out, Kiptcha?” Grimmjow remarked snidely, just loud enough for Aizen to hear. Isredel smirked, turning to face Kiptcha

“It was irrelevant!” Kiptcha said sharply, turning a violent shade of red. “There’s no point in reporting it ___”

“Kiptcha please share it with your brothers and sisters here,” Aizen commanded softly.

Kiptcha wheeled to face Aizen, and she was planted to the spot. Isredel suddenly caught on to what she wasn’t sharing. “Hey, Kipt! Why don’t you tell your superior what happened?” Isredel hissed. He spotted his zampakū stuck in next to Grimmjow’s own sword and he turned completely around. With calm sure step he closed the gap between him and Kiptcha, pulling on spirit glove. Then he lunged, driving his gloved hand first, into her chest.

Kiptcha watched her gigai crumple without her spirit within it, and she staggered back a few steps, falling into Grimmjow. He caught her, while looking unhappy about it, helped her to her feet again. He also handed her Isredel's sword, seeming unhappy to have had it in the first place. Kiptcha took it and she slung it next her own, the blade much shorter and wider though. She pulled her collar up around her nose, and she zipped it up.

Kiptcha once again walked forward, and she kicked her gigai a bit to the side and raised her hand, pointing a finger at it. A cero formed and the gigai was vaporized.

Isredel turned to face Aizen again, and he called out loudly, "You wanted to know what she didn't report? Here-"

There was a flash, and Isredel appeared in front of Kiptcha. He grabbed her arm, not tightly, but firm. He then put his hand on the right side of her face, the side without the remnants of her mask. And he kissed her. Again. In front of Aizen, and all of the Espada.

Kiptcha's eyes went wide and she tried to pull back a bit, but she was incapable of just pulling out of his grip without harming him. Aizen needed him unharmed. She gave up and relaxed, thinking of her next move. It was strange for her to be held, to be close. She felt tears form in her eyes and she closed them, letting the tears drip down her face. This is how she was. She was alone, and she was lonely. To be given something like this was torture for her, because she could never hold on to it and keep it for her own.

Before she realized it though, Isredel had drawn his sword and had moved behind her, the sword's blade lightly resting on her neck. She hung her head, letting her long hair cover her tears. Isredel looked up at Aizen, smirking. Nobody moved, until Kiptcha raised her face to Aizen.

"Permission to injure him?" she asked cautiously. "Your pet can fix him once I'm through."

"I can't let you do that, Kiptcha," Aizen answered.

Kiptcha grabbed the blade of Isredel's zampaku-to and she pulled it away from her neck. Her reiatsu burst out in a flood and forced Isredel back.

"Ban-kai," Isredel whispered. Lightning seemed to light up everything, bringing stark white light into the darkness of the throne room. Wings formed on his back and he lifted up, sparks flying.

Kiptcha spun, looking at the bright figure and instinctively shielded her eyes from the sparks. She didn't notice a bolt of lightning coming at her until it was almost too late. She deflected it with her hand and she launched her self up, encountering the heat of the energy, and she fell back.

Grimmjow made to move, but Kiptcha stopped him with a soft touch on the shoulder. She once again went up, drawing her zampaku-to.

"The First Form, Baile Resonante," she said, although soft, it carried. Like any form, it had a starting position, so she brought her left hand up in front of her face, sideways, and brought her sword up to meet it, hilt first. She then drew the blade across the palm of her left hand, slicing in and bringing blood

to whet the blade. There was a static sound and blood hung in the air around Isredel. It was a combination of hers and his own.

“The Second Form, La Agilidad de Aire,” she continued. The position started with the same as the first, but she rotated it down, so it was parallel to the tiled floor beneath her.

Isredel was in shock as she completed the forms, one by one. He felt his wings crack, and he fell to the floor, but Kiptcha continued. She reached her fifth form, but she didn't stop. She could no longer say the names of the forms, but she did them anyway, each time drawing her blade across her palm for blood.

She went through nine, and she stepped back and looked up at Aizen. He didn't show any real interest, and Kiptcha realized that she had probably shed more blood than her target. She started all of the starting positions, until she reached nine, where she skewered her left hand on the blade. The cut burned, her zampaku-to's power an illusion of pain.

Isredel winced from the cuts that seemed to be in the exact same place. The burned like fire, or ice. He couldn't quite tell. Every time that she cut again, the pain worsened, but it wouldn't go away. He gritted his teeth and prepared to try and block as many as he could again, but Kiptcha had stopped. She drew her hand off the blade and she whipped it around, and she plunged it into her abdomen, close to the place that Grimmjow had done the same.

Kiptcha winced as she drew it out and she sailed straight at Isredel, engaging in combat. She dodged, not caring if she was cut. Then she saw an opening,, and she plunged her sword through the same spot in Isredel's abdomen.

Isredel looked surprised, but Kiptcha instantly leapt back.

“The Final Form,” she cried, holding out her bloodied left hand. The back of her right hand was coated in her blood as well, and she placed it on the top of her left arm, bracing it. “Encuadernación Eterna!” Her blood glowed on both of them, even brighter than the remains of Isredel's bankai.
[Encuadernación Eterna: Eternal Binding]

Isredel's bankai disappeared and he felt his wounds closing. Kiptcha's wounds also started to disappear. Except for her hand. It stayed bloody and she pulled her sword from Isredel, letting his wound completely heal.

Isredel sat in white cell, with one window. It had three bars, and it offered a view to the sky. He was slumped against a wall.

Kiptcha stood in the doorway, with one of the Número that served her standing behind her with a tray of food. “Will you eat, Res?”

“What the hell do you arrancar want from me? Hell no. I won't eat your food,” Isredel hissed. “Did you poison it? No, because you need me for some purpose. I'm not inclined to help now.”

“Res, please! You must eat.”

“I will not, Kipt!” Isredel snapped.

“Tatyana, please set the tray down and leave us,” Kiptcha commanded, watching the girl do as she was told. The door shut after her, and Kiptcha walked closer to Isredel. Reaching him, she bent down and kneeled.

“What’re you doing, Arrancar?” Isredel hissed at her vehemently. He lashed out, and Kiptcha let herself hit the other wall.

“I’ll come back later, Shinigami. If you haven’t eaten, I’ll be sure to tell Aizen-sama.”

Isredel watched Kiptcha leave, and he felt bad. He had hit her, and she hadn’t struck back or even given him a threat. She had seemed so calm.

Kiptcha, true to her word, returned later. The food was untouched, as she expected. Isredel was sprawled out in the far corner, the only movement was him turning his head to watch her. Kiptcha looked pained as she silently crossed the room, waving a dismissal to the arrancar who had accompanied her. It hurt her to move, Isredel noticed, with her wounds.

“I took your wounds from you. That’s what the Eternal Binding does. It allows me to give or take wounds from me to you. Why won’t you eat? Why do you just lay there?” Kiptcha asked. She sunk to her knees and she looked up at him with an expression of what she was going through. “Why?”

Isredel sat up, but he didn’t go closer to his captor. “What the hell do you want from me?!”

“I want to do what is in Aizen-sama’s interests. That is my goal,” Kiptcha replied, standing slowly again. She took a step forward and then turned, swiftly reaching the door. “Please eat, Res. I will go and tell Aizen-sama that you have not eaten. Please don’t make my job harder. I don’t want cruel punishment.”

5 - Trust Where None Should Be

Isredel found his confinement quite dull after some time, and he resigned himself to doing mindless fiddling. He tried to ignore the aching in his stomach, but it didn't work. The arrancar girl who had come in that morning had asked him if he had wanted food, but he had refused. She had looked concerned, but she had nodded in understanding and left without any other conversation.

Kiptcha had accepted the report, it seemed, because she hadn't been back. He vaguely remembered that she had his zampaku-to somewhere, but he couldn't get out . . .

Isredel rolled over again on the floor, decidedly not using the provided chair. He glanced out the small window, and looked at the bright sun.

Kiptcha finished oiling Isredel's sword and she placed it on a sword rack. Now the metal of the guard and blade shone like the power it possessed. She looked around her room, soon spotting Nastassiya standing in the doorway.

"Come in, Nastassiya. What is the shinigami's condition?"

"He is not eating, mistress. Would you like to go talk to him again?"

"No. Bring some tea here. And then fetch him here, we'll talk here," Kiptcha said quietly. "Then you are to keep everyone away from here. We're to talk alone. There's no way he can escape from Las Noches though so we should have no fear of that."

The young female arrancar bowed and she left with her orders. Her strides were swift and she went about fulfilling her mistress's wish.

Isredel was woken with a start as the same girl came in and walked up to him. He sat up and moved away.

"Now what?!" he cried in desperation.

"My mistress has given me my orders. You are to come with me," Nastassiya said coldly. "Though I do not know why you would be of much interest to her, as you are so weak. And you call yourself a captain?!"

Isredel stood, and he shuddered in anger, but made no move to strike the girl. "I do. I wasn't expecting her to attack."

“It is my mistress’s way. She looks peaceful at times, but she’ll rip anyone to shreds if she crosses her.”

Isredel nodded hesitantly, and he followed the girl out of his confinement and down a few corridors. He tried in vain to memorize the route, but he found that all the corridors met in exactly the same way, and here were no landmarks. He looked at the girl that led him, and he saw no hesitation in where she was heading. She walked forth without a second thought because she knew the corridors. He needed to persuade somebody like her to help him get out, or he’d be lost.

Nastassiya stopped as she reached a door and she turned. “Please enter. It will become clear to you what you must do once you enter. It has certainly been a pleasure to escort you.”

“You were told to say that, weren’t you?” Isredel asked.

“My mistress is very firm in her orders. I was asked to be respectful to you, even though without your zampaku-to you are no match for any of those here.”

“Nastassiya!” a voice said sharply. It belonged to Kiptcha, but it sounded nothing like what she had while in the real world. Her speech was emotionless, to the point of unreality. “Now is no time to be chatting.”

The girl turned a bright shade of pink and she bowed to Isredel. Turning towards the door she started to apologize, “I’m terribly sorry mistress, it won’t —”

Isredel frowned and whacked the girl over the head, cutting her off. “I deal with her; just go do whatever you’re supposed to be doing . . . not that I’d know.”

Nastassiya looked at him for a sheer second before dashing off. Isredel watched her disappear from sight with a sigh and he opened the door, stepping into the dimly lit room. Kiptcha sat facing away from him as he walked in, and she seemed to be watching a candle flame. His sword was directly behind her, and a pot of tea sat between him and his zampaku-to.

“Won’t you close the door and sit down now?” Kiptcha asked softly, much different than before when she had commanded Nastassiya. It had a hint of emotion in it.

Isredel closed the door and walked closer to his zampaku-to wary for any trap that this might be.

“I also recall asking you to sit,” Kiptcha said stiffly, turning slightly so she could fix him with a piercing stare. Her spiritual pressure increased to an outrageously high point, and she was only dimly aware that she had just extinguished her candle.

Isredel increased his as well, competing with her for a moment. He finally gave in and sat down, his back altogether to upright and his face too taut.

“Relax. Have some tea, Res. It’s calming,” Kiptcha spoke, breaking the concentration of the reiatsu. She turned all the way around, looking tired all of a sudden.

“I’ll ask again. What do you want from me?” Isredel repeated, quoting himself.

“Something that you’ll find you probably would never give us. It is what we must have.”

“What is it?!”

“You must permit us to enter Seiretei and kill all of the shinigami. That is Aizen-sama’s wish.”

“Go to hell. It ain’t happening,” Isredel laughed. “You can’t expect me to do such a thing!”

“Are you hungry?”

“Don’t change the subject so fast, dog,” Isredel swore, becoming serious. He grabbed his zampaku-to and unsheathed it in a second, pointing the newly oiled blade at Kiptcha’s neck.

“Do it,” Kiptcha whispered. “If you do you can escape, return.”

Isredel hesitated. Her own zampaku-to was far enough away from her that she couldn’t reach it. It had all been done purposely. All planned out, because she knew it would play out this way. It was her strategy.

“I don’t want to die now, Res. I must live for Aizen-sama. I cannot allow you to kill me here.”

“Then why did you set it up in this way?!”

“I didn’t. It is the way things played out. I quite expected the reaction, but not as severe. Yet I am disappointed that you have not made a decision yet.”

Isredel sunk back, and he re-sheathed his sword. He gave no comment but anger. Kiptcha picked up her cup of tea and drank the sweet liquid. It calmed her somewhat, making her sleepy.

Isredel noticed the tea again, and picked up his as well, sipping it slowly. After a day without food it tasted great, and he drank the rest of his cup as well.

“May I have some food then?” he asked quietly, aware that Nastassiya had told him that Kiptcha had a short temper.

Kiptcha stood, walking over to her zampaku-to. Isredel tensed, but all she did was sling it over her shoulder and walk towards the door. She paused there, as Isredel was still sitting.

“Are you coming, or not?” she asked, sounding more like the self she had been in the real world.

Kiptcha stood above Isredel on a ledge. She had taken Isredel out of her quarters and showed him Las Noches. None of the Número dare contradict her, and none of the Espada had shown up.

“Why are you doing this?” Isredel asked finally.

Kiptcha sat down next to him, removing the long awkward sword. "I have my own reasons, as you can guess." She paused. "Shall I tell you about the arrancar?"

Isredel looked over at her for an instant, and he seemed surprised. "Why would you share something like that?"

"You, yourself, do not have much knowledge about us. We are hollows that have gain shinigami powers, correct? But why do we serve Aizen-sama? Why don't we go against Aizen-sama?"

Isredel was in disbelief. She knew exactly what he knew about the arrancar. "Yeah, something like that."

"It goes both ways, my friend. Hollows can gain shinigami powers and shinigami can gain hollow powers," Kiptcha said quietly. "You could become quite like us, just by gaining hollow powers. You would have to master them before your inner hollow devoured you."

Isredel gasped at the thought. Him? Become a hollow?

Kiptcha continued, "We arrancar serve Aizen-sama because he is fearless. We do not always agree with him, but we are powerless against him. Not all of us like Aizen-sama. Even some of the Espada dislike him.

"The Espada are the top-ranked arrancar in Aizen-sama's army. Each Espada member is chosen for their superior combat ability and then assigned a number from 1 to 10 that indicates their rank and relative power level, which is tattooed somewhere on their body. We Espada are given control over the Números. Espada are the most powerful fighters of the arrancar and our strength far surpasses the average Número, similar to the power gap between the captains and lieutenants in Gotei 13."

Isredel stared at Kiptcha for a brief second. "What number are you again?"

Kiptcha looked at him, and she leaned back exposing her tattooed number. The black number '4' stood out starkly against her pale white skin. Isredel looked at it, unhappy.

"So you have three that are stronger than you? And your reiatsu is huge —"

Kiptcha ignored his comments and continued with the summary of the arrancar. "The Números are arrancar who were formerly menos. They are assigned a two-digit number at birth from 11 to 99 to indicate their age. The fighting ability of Números is thought to be superior to all other arrancar, except for the Espada, current and former.

"The Fracción are a subsection of the Números that directly serve a specific Espada. The number of Fracción for any given Espada varies, for example I have exactly 14. I've never seen any of Ulquiorra's subordinates, though.

"The Privaron are former Espada who have lost their rank and are assigned a three-digit number. Being former Espada, they are far stronger than the normal Números. They reside in Tres Cifras."

“So Espada can be kicked out?”

“Of course!” Kiptcha exclaimed. “If we lose limbs, die, or become obsolete, we are replaced. It is how it works.”

Isredel turned his head back to its forward position, and he slowly moved his right hand to the hilt of his zampaku-to. He drew it and the blade gleamed in the sunlight. “All I’d have to do is remove a limb, huh? And what would happen to you then? Would you still be my captor?”

“Ulquiorra would probably take care of you,” Kiptcha said with disdain. “And he’s far less forgiving when it comes to you not eating.”

Isredel tensed and he simultaneously unsheathed his sword and brought it around to the point where Kiptcha’s neck had been a second before. He looked over to find that she wasn’t there anymore. Instead, she was standing a short ways away. Her sword was hung across her back and she looked a bit upset.

“How —?” Isredel stuttered.

“Do you think I’m going to sit there?!” Kiptcha exploded. She drew her own zampaku-to and there was a brief static sound. Kiptcha reappeared behind Isredel, her katana aimed directly at the point in the spine where all the nerves are grouped closest — the top of the neck.

Isredel felt the tip of her blade against his skin and he tensed.

“I’m not going to kill you, idiot. Relax, you can be sure of your life – for now. However, you are in no position to strike at me. Please remember that. Even if you defeat me, there are three that are stronger, and they will kill you without the hesitation I have.”

Isredel re-sheathed his katana, and he slowly stood, aware that the sword moved with him. He then turned, and looked at Kiptcha. She held her long katana perfectly still. “Quite a lot of speed you’ve got there, Kipt. Lower your sword, and we’ll talk.”

“Talk? We’ll talk about what? And what could you possibly do? I don’t need my sword to beat you at your present state. Don’t joke with me!” Kiptcha laughed.

Kiptcha awoke in her own quarters. She leapt to her feet in surprise, then seeing Isredel sitting behind her. She whirled, not finding any weapons close by. Her head flicked around, observing everything.

Both zampaku-to s were placed it the katana stand across the room. Nastassiya sat by them, a grim look on her face. Kiptcha felt her face flush when she realized what must have happened.

“Did I fall asleep?” she mumbled, turning to Isredel.

He nodded, and he glanced over to Nastassiya. “She had a fit when she realized you’d been asleep with no protection and me for over two hours.”

“My god —,” Kiptcha whispered.

Kiptcha woke up, startled to find that waking up the first time had been a dream. She sat up and rubbed her eyes clear of sleep. She then realized that she was still outside. Which meant—!

Isredel placed a hand on her shoulder. “What’s wrong with you?”

Kiptcha jumped and she leapt to her feet with speed and accuracy. Her zampaku-to lay in front of her feet, and she hurriedly reached to grab it.

“Woah, Kipt. Calm down!” Isredel commanded, jumping and grabbing his own katana hilt. Kiptcha sprang, and he dodged, blocking the attack with his sword still in its scabbard.

Kiptcha touched the ground only briefly, launching another attack. Her eyes were cloudy, and she seemed to be in a mode that did not allow any individual thought. Was she still asleep? No, she was in a bloodlust. All she wanted to do right now would be to kill. She had to be stopped . . .

Isredel unsheathed his sword and carefully calculated what she was going to do.

Blood dripped from Kiptcha’s left cheek, and she felt the searing pain that accompanied blood. She regained her grasp on reality, and she turned slowly, sensing Isredel. She blinked and stowed her zampaku-to on her back.

“What just happened, Res?” she asked quietly. “Did I fall asleep on you? I don’t remember— anything about it. How long was I asleep?”

6 - Consequences

Isredel frowned at Kiptcha's lack of memory. She had just tried to attack him. She had fallen asleep . . . and she had been sleep walking. Scary. Seriously scary. Attacking another in one's sleep could be deadly . . .

"You were asleep for several hours. Look. The sun's already set," Isredel pointed out.

Kiptcha blinked and she realized that that meant over five hours. She saw Isredel's zampaku-to was unsheathed. She was startled, and she instantly reached for her own, again.

Isredel rolled his eyes, but when she had drawn her sword, it became quite serious. "Look, I'm not going to attack you, so why don't we just go back"

Kiptcha laughed. "The gauntlet's been thrown down, Res. Your challenge is accepted."

"It was your challenge first of all," Isredel muttered. He didn't back down though. Kiptcha could easily overpower him if he wasn't careful, her speed almost too fast for him to follow.

Kiptcha snickered. "Aren't you going to release your zampaku-to?"

Isredel seemed angered by the notion, and he sprang at Kiptcha, anger taking away any reasoning. His katana made a flashing arc as it was swung towards Kiptcha.

Kiptcha blocked the attack with her hand and she sighed. "I thought I told you to release your zampaku-to. You're not too great at listening, are you?"

Isredel stepped back. Fury showed plain on his face. "Senkou! Raikou Kami!"

"Ah. Now we get to business," Kiptcha whispered. She laughed and sheathed her sword.

Isredel blinked. He didn't understand what was going on at all. "Wha-?"

"It was a joke that. Attacking people just because they have their zampaku-to out isn't my style," Kiptcha said, walking towards Isredel. "Unless they were serious about killing me."

Isredel put away his sword, and he watched Kiptcha jump over the edge of the building and look back up. He jumped after her and they both started back to Kiptcha's palace, of sorts.

As Kiptcha stepped in, Nastassiya seemed to appear out of nowhere. The young arrancar girl seemed to be troubled, and Kiptcha instinctively tried to jump to the side, crashing into Isredel. Isredel caught her, but it only sent Nastassiya into more of a fit.

“You’re late! You’re late mistress! And the shinigami has his zampaku-to! You could have been attacked! Why have you done this?!”

Kiptcha sighed and looked at Isredel. “You might as well surrender your sword to her. She won’t rest until you do.”

Isredel complied, although hesitantly. “I’ve got to go back to that cell too, don’t I?”

Seija, Tatyana, Yuliya, and Alyona appeared as Nastassiya scurried off. These were Kiptcha’s fracción. They were all concerned, and with the normal girlish annoyance at Isredel, started to pester Kiptcha of why she had thought it was okay to take him and leave without escort. Another appeared, and the girls moved out of his way. He looked remarkably like Isredel, except his features were harder, sharper. His eyes glinted with cold intention, and his movements were stiff and controlled.

“Mistress Kiptcha.”

“A-Aleksei!” Kiptcha stammered.

“What do you think you were doing, Mistress?” Aleksei asked coldly, regarding Isredel as someone who might try and kill anyone in sight.

“I went for a short walk. That’s all,” Kiptcha hissed distastefully. She grimaced under Aleksei’s stare and she stepped forward, letting the others crowd around Isredel and start to drag him back to his cell. It couldn’t bother her in the least whether Isredel bore audience to the coming conversation.

“Aleksei, you really needn’t worry about me. I just went for a walk,” Kiptcha explained.

“You went for a walk with an armed shinigami! Alone!” Aleksei exploded. “And judging by how energetic you are, you fell asleep. How could you even think about doing such a thing?!”

Kiptcha was a bit taken back at the outburst, and she looked away from Aleksei. “Serve the shinigami some dinner, and then leave him to himself,” Kiptcha ordered, sidestepping Aleksei and walking off, down the corridor opposite the one Isredel had just been dragged down. It led to her quarters, and she was determined on not taking out her outrage on her poor little subordinates.

Kiptcha slid down the wall of the corridor, sitting on the cool white floor. She sat there for some time, pondering what she should do. Could shinigami open portals from Heuco Mundo? Was it even remotely possible? Could the arrancar open a garganta in Seiretei? Of course . . . so Isredel could get out anytime he wanted, if he had his zampaku-to.

Reima ran up the corridor towards her, one of Kiptcha’s fracción that she rarely saw. Kiptcha blinked and stood up, wondering what the rush was for.

“Kiptcha-dono! Aizen-sama requests your audience concerning the shinigami. You must —” Reima reported hurriedly.

“Reima, calm down! Am I to take the shinigami as well?” Kiptcha assured.

The male arrancar shook his head negatively and ran off. Kiptcha sighed and she retraced her steps down the corridor.

Kiptcha entered into Aizen’s study, nervous a hell. She didn’t know why though, so she made herself gain some composure and relax. The doors were closed behind her and she was left alone with Aizen, who sat in the chair facing away from her. The orb of distortion was kept in the pillar beside him. Kiptcha knew this, but it didn’t help her mood.

“How are you Kiptcha?” Aizen quiet, calm voice asked.

Kiptcha smiled a bit, “I’m fine, Aizen-sama.”

“Did you have a nice nap?”

Kiptcha jumped, suddenly aware that Aizen had noticed her falling asleep. She didn’t reply, not knowing what one could say to the occasion.

“I’m not mad at you, Kiptcha. There’s no reason for you to be afraid, but I can’t allow you to do it any longer.”

Kiptcha nodded and she lowered her eyes as Aizen turned around. She felt ashamed. She could have released the target! Then what would happen?

“Please bring Isredel to the throne room tomorrow. He needs to demonstrate his worth to the entire assembled Espada,” Aizen commanded, although soft.

Kiptcha nodded. “I understand, Aizen-sama. It will be done.”

Isredel laid on the floor, watching for any movement, any noise. There were none, as he expected. But, if he listened, he could hear soft footsteps. They were getting closer, he realized. They passed, not stopping. Isredel shrugged.

Kiptcha retraced her steps a few minutes later and opened the door to Isredel’s cell, closing it after herself. She quietly walked over to where Isredel lie sleeping, and she was careful not to make any noise that might disturb him.

Isredel’s hand shot out and grabbed the intruder’s ankle, pulling it out from under them. When they hit the ground there was the sound of air escaping. A small moan followed. After that, there was silence. His target didn’t get back up. He rolled over to see the door closed partially, as if to make everyone outside think that it was closed. He looked down at his target. It was Kiptcha.

“Res, was there any particular reason for that?” Kiptcha asked stiffly, struggling back to her feet.

“I was going to knock out whoever came in her and escape, of course. You ruined that plan,” Isredel hissed.

Kiptcha managed to get to her feet, and she walked over to the lone chair that sat in the middle of the room. She sat down heavily and began her report.

“Res, I’m really sorry about today. I suppose I’ve put you in a horrible position, since Aizen can figure out most things quite easily. You’ve been summoned to perform your only use. You’ve got to open a portal to Seiretei. If you don’t, you’ll be killed.”

Isredel looked at Kiptcha’s thin figure sitting there, and he stood. He walked over to her and grabbed her collar. With his strength he lifted her up to his eyes level. “I don’t want your goddamned pity. I’d rather die than let the arrancar into Seiretei.”

Kiptcha face contorted into a mask of pain. “Then I’ll never be able to find my peace, finish my promise with Aizen-sama! I must finish my last task, Isredel. I’ve been promised a final resting place. I was promised. I was promised!”

Isredel scoffed, his laughter rang in Kiptcha’s ears. “You’ve been promised what exactly? What has Aizen promised you that you’d actually want?”

“A honorable seppku,” Kiptcha whispered.

[Seppku - a form of suicide that involves slicing one’s stomach open and dying of blood loss.]

“Seppku?!” Isredel repeated, dropping Kiptcha. “Why would you do that?”

“That’s what I want. You needn’t interfere,” Kiptcha said calmly, readjusting her uniform. She stood and turned towards the door. “Have a nice night, shinigami.”

“Don’t go!” Isredel yelled, leaping after her. He grabbed her arm and pulled back, pulling her into him. It would have worked that way, but Kiptcha brushed his hand off and continued out the door. The door closed, and Isredel was left alone in his cell.

Isredel pounded on the door, but to no avail. Nothing happened. He let out a frustrated shriek of rage and sunk to the floor. He heard sounds from outside, but they weren’t footsteps. They were muffled sobs. They were Kiptcha’s as she built up the resolve to do what must be done.

After awhile, the sobs faded away, followed by quickly retreating footsteps.

Isredel stood in front of Aizen the next day, with Kiptcha standing by his side. She was emotionless, a doll that obeyed the puppet-master. She had dragged him in here in chains, and she held his zampakū-to. She now stood erect and facing completely forward.

He hadn't been paying attention to the conversation though, and he was surprised when Kiptcha removed the shackles, and thrust his sword into his hands. He was startled, and he stood there blankly, staring back at Kiptcha.

"What?" he asked, slightly annoyed.

"The portal." Kiptcha said harshly, unfeelingly.

Isredel unsheathed his sword, hung it horizontally in the air. Like one might turn a key in a lock, Isredel turned his sword and a portal opened. He smirked up at Aizen briefly, grabbed Kiptcha around the waist, and darted into Seiretei, back home and free. The portal closed behind him, but he paid no heed.

Kiptcha struggled, and he set her down, smiling at the rooftops that made up Seiretei. Kiptcha immediately swung a kick at him, catching him in the side with a spinning kick. He flew off the ground, and watched in horror as Kiptcha reappeared in front of him, sending out more strikes.

"What the hell are you doing, Kiptcha?! Think through this!" Isredel yelled, blocking the last strike.

"I have thought it out. And I'm going to render you incapacitated so I can open a garganta," Kiptcha replied softly. She was dispassionate and cold. She was the arrancar she had been made to be by Aizen, a part of his fighting army.

Isredel spat out some blood, and he felt his side where her first kick had caught him. The 4th squad would have to do some repair later. "Get a hold of yourself, Kipt. There's no reason for this."

Kiptcha didn't respond, except for launching another series of attacks. They were powerful, and Isredel found that the only way he could come close to blocking them would be to use his zampakū-to. The arrancar had tons of power, and Kiptcha only seemed to use hers to mix the blood she drew from her own hand with that of her victim. Then she could complete a binding spell that tied the two lifelines together, in one direction.

Isredel finally landed a blow and Kiptcha retreated to examine the cut. With satisfaction, she passed her hand over it and looked up at Isredel. "You should be more careful, shinigami," she cackled. The cut that had been across her stomach disappeared, and Isredel felt a searing pain, followed by the wetness of blood. Concern flitted across his face when he realized what she had done.

"Yes, my dear shinigami, you cannot kill me, because all of your wounds will be reflected back to you. Do you get it now?" Kiptcha asked. She held up a hand to rip the fabric of the world, going to return to Las Noches.

Isredel moved quickly, launching a hopeless offense to stop her. He then noticed that she was wearing finger-less gloves of grey, hiding the still cut and bloody hand. The glove was soaked, as if it still bled like the time she cut it. Blood ran down her arm, and she looked at it, alarm. Isredel understood. The binding reopened the wound.

7 - Encuadernación Eterna

Kiptcha had been thrown into a cell roughly, and she hadn't bothered to move from the spot she had been thrown. A collar with pieces of deathstone in it had been fastened around her neck, slowly leeching out her reiatsu.

Kiptcha looked at her left hand with the bandages wound around it tightly. Even though she was an intruder, she was permitted to have her hand bandaged by the 4th squad. She sighed heavily and closed her eyes. This is just what she needed. Perfectly horrible, now she couldn't serve Aizen, her master. Kiptcha shivered at the thought, sorrow and self-pity welling up inside her. She had failed Aizen. Again.

Isredel looked at Kiptcha from the other side of the bars, her sprawled figure unmoving. She was slowly going to make herself sick, like a caged animal. Isredel knew the feeling very well. As he looked upon Kiptcha, he realized how she must have felt that night when she had come to speak with him.

Guards were posted, and his lieutenant stood nearby. She was a young girl, with a brilliant mind. Her name was Tamara, and although somewhat young, had proved useful. She was much like the 10th squad captain, Hitsugaya-san. Her black hair wasn't really long, but it reached past her shoulders. Her eyes were a brilliant blue that seemed to shine with an inner light. However, she was not a happy person, and she often became depressed, even at the slightest wrong word or action. She took things too seriously. And she seemed cold and unapproachable half the time.

Isredel sighed. This was turning into a nightmare. A nightmare that was all too real.

"Tamara, please take care of her. You're to report directly to me, got it? If anything goes wrong —" Isredel said, and he cut himself off, turning and leaving in a rush.

Kiptcha listened, and she opened her eyes briefly to look at the wall. Isredel didn't want to be around the one who attacked him, did he? Understandable . . . She was horrible. An arrancar! An arrancar and a shinigami! What was she thinking? It could never happen, ever. It was forbidden. Absolutely forbidden! She cleared her mind again, and she slowly closed her eyes. Her death was coming soon anyway.

So much for Aizen's plan to sneak into Seiretei and kill their king silently. Now he would have to create a commotion so he could do it! Damn.

Kiptcha woke up a few hours later, still in the same position. She felt his presence, and she refused to turn over and look at him. She would never look for comfort in such a place. She would die! They would get nothing from her.

It finally hit Kiptcha. If she committed suicide, she would kill Isredel, as the Encuadernación Eterna linked him to herself. It was her plan to die, but she would not kill him in the process. She knew that it

was in fact a Eternal spell, that would last between them as long as they both lived. She couldn't break it, but she had to try and find a way. However, if they tried to extract information, she would be forced to stop her own life before that could happen. All she would have to do is go inside herself and slowly flick off the switches. Then she would die.

Isredel looked at Kiptcha's still form, anxiety somehow present. Something was wrong, but it seemed that no matter how long they pushed her, it could not be fixed. They had the 4th squad look at her, but nothing seemed to be wrong.

"Kiptcha, I was told you weren't responding to anything, but I really need to talk to you! You've got to cooperate with us," Isredel explained.

Tamara stood in the shadows, watching the girl. A slight movement! She had moved.

Kiptcha sat up, her muscles sore and her joints stiff. Blood had formed a small puddle where her hand had been, and the bandages were soaked with blood. By trying to deactivate the bond, she had reopened the wound. Her left hand was useless, dragging on the ground.

"I don't need you lectures. You and that small girl that is obviously your subordinate will get nothing from me. You can do nothing."

"Kiptcha!" Isredel said, shocked. He turned to the guards. "Let me in."

The guards refused, "She dangerous, Shimazaki-sama. We will not put you in that kind of danger!"

Isredel was infuriated. "That wasn't a request, damn you! I said let me in!"

They complied, closing the door after him. Isredel walked toward Kiptcha slowly, and he started to bend down to look at her hand.

"Get away from me. Just stay away!" Kiptcha yelled, trying to move away.

Isredel ignored the noise, and he reached out for her left hand, slowly removing the bandages. After the final form and binding, he hadn't seen her hand, instead it had been wrapped or inside a glove. He looked at it now, and he realized what the price she paid for such a connection was. Continual bleeding and the complete uselessness of one arm. When it wasn't activated though it must have been normal.

Isredel looked at the myriad of cuts with distaste. "How will you be able to heal this?" he asked quietly.

"When you die," Kiptcha replied in her usual emotionless way. The data she provided was extremely clear and to the point, with no extra conversation.

Isredel looked at the arrancar who had been responsible for his grief in the last few days. She wasn't all bad after all, but she was an arrancar.

"Can you tell me about the Eternal binding that you used?"

Kiptcha had sat there for some time, not responding, not even turning to meet his gaze. It was somehow strange, and the silence was uncomfortable. Isredel's hands were covered in Kiptcha's blood, since her hand was bleeding profusely again. Kiptcha had carefully kept all the blood off her uniform though.

"Kiptcha," Isredel whispered. "Kiptcha! Please acknowledge that I asked you a question!"

The reply came soft and short. "No. I cannot tell you anything about it."

Isredel was a bit startled. "Yes you can. Kiptcha, you've got no other choice."

Kiptcha turned slightly to look at him, her face taught with pain. Her mind felt broken and useless after trying to break the bond. Her eyes were dark and cloudy, giving them a strange appearance. Her eyes were usually a bright red, but now they weren't. A dark violet.

Isredel was a bit concerned,, and he looked over to one of the guards. "Fetch a 4th squad member immediately!" The guard rushed out with his orders, but Tamara came up to the bars, looking at the arrancar that her captain was trying to talk to.

A week later, Kiptcha sat perfectly still in the chair that the cell contained, unresponsive to Tamara's questioning. Isredel had already been notified about her not eating, but her reiatsu was low. She wanted to reach through the binding, and take some of Isredel's. She wanted out of this collar.

Isredel surged into the room, and he talked quietly talked with Tamara. She looked stricken.

"You can't!" she screamed. "She would . . . she would —!"

Isredel silenced her with a look and Tamara ran out. "Open the cell," Isredel commanded, watching the guards jump. They did as he asked though, and stepped back.

Kiptcha raised her head briefly, looking at what was going on. She lost interest quickly, and resumed her normal appearance. She was going to die so far away from Aizen-sama! She was going to die for nothing!

"Kiptcha? Would you like to go for a walk?" Isredel asked nicely.

Kiptcha sat bolt upright. She let the bond between them open more, and she looked at him, trying to read his side of the story. "Are you inviting me to walk to my death, by chance?" she asked coldly.

Isredel looked a bit offended. "Why would I do that?!"

"You aren't going to," Kiptcha added, and she stood. Her steps were shaky, but she still commanded respect and even though her zampaku-to had been removed, she didn't look defenseless. Tamara

gasped as she exited the cell and walked towards Isredel.

“And what could you do if I was?” Isredel retorted.

“I wouldn’t have come out. Now, can you take off the collar as well?”

Isredel complied, much to the horror of Tamara. “Isredel-sama! What do you think you’re doing by removing the deathstone collar? She could attack you!”

“Calm down, Tamara,” Isredel reassured the girl. “It’s not like I’m going to give her zampaku-to back!”

“You don’t need to,” Kiptcha commented, slinging her sword across her back. She smiled evilly and started towards the door. One of the guards tried to stop her, but he was gently pushed out of the way by a tired Kiptcha. She looked kindly at the guard. “If I wanted to kill Isredel, I would have already done so. But that would not suit my purpose at all.”

The guards looked scared, since the arrancar that now faced him was smiling, where days ago she wouldn’t eat, sleep, or talk. Now she was perfectly at ease because she had the deathstone collar off and her zampaku-to in her possession.

Tamara took out her sword and charged at Kiptcha, intent on killing her. Kiptcha caught her blade with her bare hand, like she might an annoying fly.

“Oh please. Is that the best you can do?” Kiptcha taunted. She smiled, and she dashed out the door, her smile letting her fly free.

Isredel rushed after her, swearing. “What does she think she’s doing, running off free in Seiretei?! She’ll be killed!” He had trouble keeping her in sight though, as she was a bit faster than him. He panted heavily, but he soon realized what she was heading toward. He sped up as much as he could, seeing her start to head toward Rukongai.

“Kiptcha!” Isredel yelled.

She stopped and turned around. Her eyes were innocent and her smile untroubled. “Yes?”

It gave Isredel the chance, and he slammed into her, hugging her tightly. “I can’t let you go there.”

“Why not? I want to go there Res,” Kiptcha said softly, trying to pull away.

“No. You must stay here.”

“Isredel!” Kiptcha suddenly snarled, and he impulsively let go. “We’re enemies! You and I should care less what the other does! The only way we should regard each other is at sword point!”

“Are you lying to yourself again Kipt?” Isredel asked kindly, stepping towards her. “You never told me how the binding worked.”

“Encuadración Eterna, Eternal binding. Allows physical harm to pass from one to the other. If the original form dies, so must all that are tied to them. I cannot be undone once cast. To try to do so would be to commit suicide.”

Isredel laughed quietly. “So that’s what you been doing all week, trying to unweave it.”

Kiptcha continued. “Multiple bonds can be forged, and each time one is activated, the designated spot for the binding blood will open and bleed. This cut will only heal when the one who it was bound by dies.”

Isredel looked at her sharply. “Quit that!. We’re going to go have fun with the rest of my squad, in a,” he paused, “friendly type of combat.”

Kiptcha let herself fly across the practice room again, upset that she had to be doing this. There were whispers going around the room about the ‘weak arrancar’. Kiptcha suddenly exploded at the nearest one, picking him by his collar. “You want to see if I’m weak, you bastard?”

“Kiptcha! Kiptcha stop it!” Isredel commanded, walking toward her.

Kiptcha dropped the shinigami and turned to Isredel. “What could you possibly do? I don’t need my zampaku-to to defeat you!” she hissed.

Some of the shinigami in the room laughed. “She can’t do that, not to Isredel-sama,” the same one commented behind her. Isredel tried to calm Kiptcha down, but she lashed out, catching his unsuspecting arm and flipping him onto his back in one graceful movement.

“Weakling shiniagmi!” Kiptcha spat, turning on the one who had just insulted her for the second time. “If I’m so easy to defeat, get out with your damn zampaku-to and show me!”

Isredel nodded to the shinigami and got up with some effort. “Kiptcha, don’t take it personally. Be nice to him.”

Kiptcha laughed and she turned away from her opponent. “Release your zampaku-to, if you can,” she said to him. She turned to Isredel, and put a hand on his shoulder. “Hey. Sorry about that, okay? I’ll —”

“No Kiptcha,” Isredel responded, cutting off her offer to take away his damage and injury from the fall. “It’s just a loss of breath, okay?”

Kiptcha sighed and she moved directly to the left, dodging the attack sent against her. “If you say so.”

A minute later, Kiptcha sat on top of the offending shinigami, twirling his sword around her finger. “That was easier than I expected, Res. How do you train them?”

“Kiptcha, you did pick on one of the lowest seated shinigami here . . .” Isredel replied shortly.

“Then shall I challenge you, the highest?” Kiptcha asked quietly. She stood up and caught the twirling katana by the blade. She handed it back to the defeated shinigami and turned toward Isredel, crossing her arms. “Since you’re acting all high and mighty—”

Isredel cut her off by putting a finger over her lips. “No. I don’t want to fight you. It would have to be a fair fight, and you would kill me without hesitation, wouldn’t you?”

Kiptcha was a bit offended, but there was truth to what he was saying. She would do anything so she could return. Her calm expression turned into a snarl. “ Don’t screw with me, Isredel. Get out of the way.”

Isredel was shocked and he moved out of her way, allowing her to leave. Kiptcha swept past, no pausing to shut the door. Isredel came to a second later, and he ran out after her.

8 - Long Lost and the Return

Kiptcha sat inside her cell, and she didn't notice Isredel's arrival. Silent tears of rage and sadness slipped down her cheeks.

She had also snatched her zampaku-to up as she had left, and it lay beside her. Its long blade was firmly in its sheath, but because of the long blade, it was never unsheathed by pulling the entire blade up and out. Instead it was pulled to the side; where there was a thin line that showed that there was a break in the fabric. With the blade as thin as it was, it could easily be pulled out from this direction.

Isredel looked at the weeping girl, and he walked over to her, putting a foot on her zampaku-to to prevent her from using it. This didn't work, however, since the way it was unsheathed was quite different.

Kiptcha twirled the thin katana against her hand and charged Isredel, aiming for a lethal strike. He had no sword to defend himself with at all. She stopped, the point of her blade just barely drawing blood from Isredel's chest. She seemed surprised, and she dropped her sword and backed away.

"Kiptcha—?" Isredel asked softly, walking towards the girl.

Kiptcha looked at him, her eyes accusing. "What? What do you want?!"

Isredel made no reply, instead he walked closer and embraced her, even as Kiptcha fought and shook with confusion. "Come back, won't you? We can have a match. Just like you wanted."

Kiptcha stopped and she pushed away, with no affect. She stayed in the same position, as did Isredel. "Fine. You're on."

Both Isredel and Kiptcha had wooden swords, and they weren't sharp at all. All of the shinigami hadn't moved from earlier, and now they sat attentive, watching the match between their captain and the arrancar girl.

Kiptcha bowed, and she gestured to Isredel. "Go ahead and make the first move, Res."

Isredel shook his head. "No, you're out guest."

"If you don't at least do something, I'm going to beat you in the first strike."

Isredel lunged, and he made contact, but he realized too late that Kiptcha had blocked it. Her hand caught him square in the chest, making Isredel stumble back. It had been a dry hit, without any reiatsu.

Kiptcha went this time, using Sonido. Her movements were almost too fast for Isredel, but he managed.

The rest of the shinigami were left in awe with the speed. Kiptcha's attacks rained down on Isredel, each stronger than the last.

Isredel saw an opening, and he caught Kiptcha in the abdomen, stopping her for a split second. She seemed shocked, and she found herself powerless to stop herself from going anywhere. She flew backwards through the air, landing on the mat hard. Before she could move, Isredel activated one of the pressure points on the side of her neck, immobilizing her for seconds. Pain blossomed from the activated nerve, and Kiptcha struggled to get up.

Isredel stood above Kiptcha, relaxed now that she was disoriented and partially paralyzed. She struggled and made it to her feet. Holding the side of her neck that Isredel had pained, she clenched the wooden sword in her right hand. It had splintered from her last attack, but she didn't notice.

Kiptcha jumped, twirling in the air. She freed her paralyzed limbs and swung at Isredel. It struck him across his cheekbone up to his forehead. Blood started to seep from the wound, the splinters slicing the skin. Isredel was surprised. He stumbled and his world started to go black.

Kiptcha caught Isredel before he hit the ground, panic spreading through her body. "No! Isredel! Re-chan, please!" she yelled. Tears rolled down her cheeks, and she looked at the wound. "What have I done to you, Re-chan? What have I done?"

Kiptcha wiped away her tears and she took a deep breath. "I must not fear. Fear is the Mind-killer. I will face my fear. I will let it pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain."

Her hand split open and blood dripped from it. A bruise blossomed on her forehead, followed by blood. Isredel's was gone, and Kiptcha smiled, she had done it. Then she slumped down next to him, blood running onto her mask stark against the pure white bone.

Kiptcha awoke in her cell, not to her surprise. Her head was bandaged tightly and her hand was as well. She sat up, aware that she was utterly alone, not even guards stood there, watching her.

She thought about what had last happened and she stood up, taking off the bandages. Her head was healed, but her hand still oozed blood, so she decided to leave the bandage. Her zampaku-to sat right outside her cell, and Kiptcha laughed at their impertinence. A cero formed at her fingertip, blasting away the bars of her cell. With a flashy exit, she also blasted a hole in the outer wall and surged up into the sky of Seireitei.

She danced toward the opening garganta, completely ignoring the shinigami who surged up to intercept her. She reached Sokuyaku hill, where the giant zampaku-to used to stand.

"Ulquiorra-san!" Kiptcha laughed, smiling at him. She felt somehow energetic, after her nap. She looked closer at Ulquiorra as she drew closer. "A-ah!" Kiptcha's tone became more serious almost instantly. "G-grimmjow!" she stuttered. "Yammy!"

Two more arrancar stepped forward, and the garganta closed behind them. “Kiptcha-sama!” they said in unison, bowing.

Kiptcha looked at them, and her expression softened. “Hello Nastassiya, Aleksei. Why are you two here?”

A sword point disturbed Kiptcha’s thoughts, and she whirled, facing Isredel. “Kiptcha, I’m warning you. Don’t even think about attacking Seiretei.”

Kiptcha laughed, brushing away his sword. “Give me a break! I’m not going to attack this miserable place. It wouldn’t even be a fight! It would be SLAUGHTER!”

Grimmjow stepped forward. “If you don’t mind, I have a score to settle with him.”

Kiptcha nodded, turning away. “I won’t mess with your prey, Grimmjow.”

Kiptcha reported to Ulquiorra while Grimmjow fought with Isredel. She talked with Nastassiya and Aleksei as well, smiling at their relieved faces. She nodded and turned to tell Grimmjow they were leaving, now. She was stunned by what she saw, and she was unable to move.

“The Ultimate cero!” Grimmjow laughed. “Royal Hollow Flash!” Light engulfed Isredel.

Kiptcha turned away. Hatred for Grimmjow’s act burned inside her, and her loss of Isredel was a fresh wound. Grimmjow came up behind her, clearly finished with his battle. Kiptcha realized that the cut on her hand was sealing itself. She swallowed and put on a smile. She didn’t look back as she passed through the garganta, and it closed after her.

Kiptcha lay in her personal quarters, on a futon. It had been laid on the ground for her, with a small pillow. She hadn’t been eating or sleeping since she got back from Seiretei, and she felt as if part of her was missing. She couldn’t describe it at all.

She sat up, slowly standing. All of her Fraccion were worried about her, she knew. She walked the corridors silently, contemplating what she was going to do. She made an instant decision. She was going to go back. She could at least offer condolences, right?

With ease she rounded up four of her subordinates, Nastassiya, Aleksei, Reima, and Seija. They were the strongest in her Fraccion, and she knew she’d need them if she was going to do what she planned. Aizen would punish her, for sure, but that didn’t matter right now, not at all.

Since it had been deprived of her to commit seppuku, she would do the next best thing. She would go down fighting her battles, or by Aizen’s hand. She didn’t mind if Aizen cut her down. Aizen was fearless. Kiptcha would always serve Aizen without hesitation.

The four arrancar Numero stood unquestioningly behind her, loyal. None of them spoke as she led them back to her quarters. Each understood that if this worked, their mistress would return to normal.

Yuliya burst into Kiptcha's room, out of breath. "Grimmjow. Grimmjow's here. He demands to —!"

Grimmjow cut the girl off, by placing a hand on her shoulder. She sweated, dropping to her knees at the amount of spiritual pressure. Kiptcha got to her feet, upset at being disturbed so unceremoniously. While she had been bright and carefree for a while, she easily went back to the clod unapproachable nature that she had always held so close.

"What do you think you're doing, Grimmjow?"

He laughed and looked at the assembled arrancar. "I would ask you the same thing."

Kiptcha's frown turned into a snarl, and she lashed out at Grimmjow, pinning him against the wall. She held him by the collar of his arrancar uniform. "Damn you, Grimmjow! Damn you! You killed him! You didn't need to do that, you bastard, but you and your fracking logic made you do it. Don't you get it? He needed to live, so I could complete the binding release!"

Grimmjow laughed. "I like that expression of yours, Kiptcha."

Kiptcha punched him in the cheek, and she dropped his shirt collar, and turned away from him. She pulled up her collar and zipped it up. It covered her mouth and nose, just like it always did. Hair fell in front of her face to hide her tears. "Get out Grimmjow. Just leave."

Grimmjow massaged his jaw, and a sadistic smile formed on his face. He laughed, as if to ridicule Kiptcha's order. "Or what?"

Kiptcha was taken aback that he had refused. She nodded to her Fraccion and she walked out the door, the others in close pursuit.

Seiretei was in an uproar with the arrival of arrancar, and a few captains surged towards the problem. Kiptcha did not see Isredel among them, and she sighed.

Kailea ran towards where they were reported, and put on a grim face. She was the replacement for Gin. Now the 3rd squad captain, she knew that she had fulfill her duty and exterminate these things that the deserter captains had created.

She reached Sokuyaku hill, and she flew up the steps that led up its side. Emerging from the stairs and small forest, she saw five figures. They weren't putting out much reiatsu, but it didn't matter. She charged with her zampaku-to drawn at them.

Kiptcha turned seeing the shinigami charging her. She blocked the sword with her bare hand, her reiatsu escalating. Kiptcha didn't make a counter-attack, even though she could have. Reima jumped up and came to her side, but Kiptcha waved him down. "We're not going to seriously fight anyone, you hear?!"

"Yes mistress!" they answered in unison.

“Don’t let them hurt you, but be considerate. We don’t want to be like our friend Grimmjow. I’m just looking for one of these damned shinigami!” Kiptcha finished, grabbing the sword and twisting it. The shinigami easily flipped over, helping the motion.

“You’re not going to take us seriously, huh?” Kailea asked mockingly. She drew back and she laughed, clenching her sword. She swung it around for another attack, which Reima deflected. His sword had been used.

Reima understood that he had just showed the shinigami in front of him how much weaker he was though. He gritted his teeth and prepared for the next attack. “Mistress, permission to defeat? We can’t just come in here and try to pretend that we can convince everyone that you don’t want to fight.”

Kiptcha nodded and she turned reluctantly. “Give her your name, Reima. Out of respect.”

“Wait right there, girl!” Kailea yelled at Kiptcha. “You’re my opponent!”

“My name isn’t ‘girl’, nor am I your opponent,” Kiptcha replied, turning slightly.

“I am the 3rd squad captain, Kailea Munæ. And you?”

“I am Kiptcha Munæ, Espada 4.”

The shinigami stared at Kiptcha. “You- you’ve got to be — I was always told at least — you’re my sister.”

9 - No Mercy

Kiptcha froze. "Kai-chan?"

The girl nodded. "However, I still got to kill you."

"Reima, Nastassiya. Catch up when you can. We're going a head," Kiptcha said, turning and leaping out of sight with Seija and Aleksei. She felt bad about not getting to know her sister, but she needed to press on.

As they ran down one of the streets though, shinigami started to pursue, and it was only a matter of time before they encountered another captain or high ranking officer.

Aleksei offered to stay behind, his eyes trying to follow the hundreds of thin blades that glinted in the light like petals. The little blades were deadly, he knew but nevertheless, Aleksei was determined to beat such an enemy. Kuchiki Byakuya. The sixth squad captain.

"Seija, stay ere with him. I don't want be losing any of you!" Kiptcha ordered.

"But you, mistress. What will you do if you encounter any more?" Seija asked, concerned.

"I'll fight. Just take care of yourself," Kiptcha said, dashing off. She left them far behind in a matter of minutes. Her feet flew in a flurry, and she glanced up and down, trying to find her way back to Isredel' squad house. It was the fifth squad.

She took a left and then a right and then another left. A dead end. She turned around to look back at where she had come from. With all the speed and strength she could muster, she launched herself in another direction.

She turned a corner, and Kiptcha saw the building she had searching for so hard. She smiled and walked toward it.

"Wait there, Arrancar," a voice said behind her. Kiptcha whirled to face them. "I am Yamada Hanako, the captain of special unit zero."

Kiptcha swallowed hard and turned to look back at the fifth squad building. So damn close. First things first, though.

Reima dodged another attack, wary of the tips of Kailea's fingers. It was her shikai. Dark black metal coated her arms up to her elbows and long claws were in place of her fingernails. He didn't want to find out what happened when he was scratched by one of the claws though.

Nastassiya screamed. Blood dripped from her arm, staining the white uniform she wore. Her eyes were partially glazed over with pain, but she drew her zampaku-to and looked over at Reima. She nodded and they looked at Kailea, Kiptcha's sister.

Kailea stepped back, and she focused her mind, bending the space-time continuum. There was no in between transit, she appeared next to Reima, claws at the ready. She had modified time slightly so that she had gone back. She sliced Reima's side, but she couldn't catch the sword that was swung at her abdomen, and she staggered back, blood dripping from her shoulder and stomach.

"Ban-kai," she whispered. The metal that coated her arms spread up and all over her body, forming a barrier. She twirled the hilt in her hands, letting it lengthen and thin out. Her skin was a black color, and even though it was metal, it didn't seem to hold the same properties.

Reima clenched his teeth and held out his left, unused hand. He coaxed a cero to form. It blasted away everything in its path. He dust cleared and Kailea stood there, unharmed. Her stick was scorched though, and the tassel that had been at the base of the black blade at one end had been burnt off.

"Nastassiya, we should complete Resurrección. That's probably the only way," Reima whispered, and both arrancar held out their zampaku-tos, and they yelled out their release phrases. Resurrección was when the release is called out. The arrancar release: restoration of their hollow forms.

Aleksei was having a hard time as well, but he didn't show it at all, deflecting the little blades or running away from them. He was tired already, like playing dodge with Kiptcha, and they were only halfway through. Seija had helped him a little, but she had only been drawn into the battle. Even though she provided a bit of a distraction, it wasn't enough.

Another burst of Sonido let him escape the little petal-shaped blades. He wondered momentarily what was happening to mistress Kiptcha, just enough for Byakuya to close in and engulf the two arrancar in the blades.

The two fell limply to the ground, bleeding. Aleksei looked up at the sky. "I'm sorry, Kiptcha-sama," he whispered. He got to his feet noticing that Seija had gotten cut up worse. "Kiptcha-sama. You can't come into Seiretei, and then try to convince the shinigami that you don't want to kill them! They'll never believe you!" he yelled, having trouble keeping his feet.

Aleksei turned to the captain. "I don't want to die. I want to serve Kiptcha-sama. I wanted to follow our orders. We weren't to kill or injure without reason. We were to just to let her find one of you. Find him and make sure that he was still alive. And then we would return. Kiptcha would serve Aizen-sama. She would do as he said. But just this once, she went against him and came here." Aleksei collapsed next to Seija, his breathing ragged.

Kiptcha stared at the captain class shinigami in front of her. She looked down at her healed hand, and

glanced back at the building that she wanted to explore, the whole complex. In there somewhere Isredel might be sitting, reading a book. She looked back at her challenger.

“I don’t want to fight you. I don’t any of these damn fights. That’s not what I came here for,” she muttered. She sighed heavily, and started to turn away.

“Are you running away?” Hanako paused. “Are the arrancar that weak?” she asked mockingly.

Kiptcha stopped. She gritted her teeth and turned back, deciding that there was no way around it. “Come then,” she said in a commanding voice. “I’ll show what the 4th Espada can do. My mission was to be bloodless. But it can’t be helped.”

Hanako unsheathed her zampaku-to, and she readied herself quickly. “Let’s do this then!” she said, charging at the arrancar. Kiptcha easily dodged with Sonido, setting her foot down behind the shinigami. She had her thumbs hung on her sash. Her hair floated down around her.

Hanako whirled, swinging her sword as well. Kiptcha nearly had her hair cut off at a short level, but she pulled it out of the way, flowing like a dancer. Kiptcha seemed to be taking it easy, enjoying a dance that no one had planned.

The shinigami was furious at her indifference though, and she tried to swing at Kiptcha, recklessly. Kiptcha had given up at the prospect of avoiding the battle entirely. She stopped, and Hanako took the opportunity to stab at her again. Kiptcha caught the blade with her left hand, the finger-less glove still there, as if she didn’t want to see the fully healed hand. She had worn a glove on her right hand as well, though, just to balance it out.

Hanako gasped and tried to pull her blade away. Kiptcha laughed and pulled it toward her, kicking out at the same time. It caught Hanako in the stomach, and Kiptcha released the blade, letting the shinigami stagger back.

“Are you making fun of me, arrancar?” Hanako asked pointedly.

“No. I don’t want to fight,” Kiptcha answered plainly.

“Well, that was obvious,” Hanako snarled. She stood and looked at her opponent. Kiptcha’s back faced her. She leapt, driving her sword into Kiptcha’s abdomen, just as Kiptcha spun around. The blade slid into her stomach, but Kiptcha didn’t care, and she didn’t even flinch. Her facial expression remained calm and untroubled, and Kiptcha gripped the sword, slowly pulling it out.

Reima gripped his sword tightly, after reverting to arrancar form. Nastassiya lay on the ground near his feet, but Reima wasn’t about to give up. The shinigami danced around him, bending time itself to her will.

Another strike made Reima sink to his knees and he looked up at the shinigami. “You damn dog. How dare you do something like this?”

Kiptcha had carefully kept blood off her uniform from her wound, and even though the battle continued, she easily applied a makeshift bandage and stemmed the flow. She now danced around the attacking Hanako, who was enraged by the Espada's lack of interest in the battle.

Kiptcha stopped again, and she watched Hanako swing wildly at her. Hanako seemed surprised, though, when Kiptcha blocked her zampaku-to with her bare hand. She frowned, pushing the blade away.

"I don't have time for your petty games, shinigami," Kiptcha hissed, dashing back towards the fifth squad building. She didn't pay attention to the shinigami's yelling, just dashing forward.

She found her cell in fairly short order, and she looked around for an indication to which way she was to go. She dashed toward the practice room, and finding nobody, she emerged into a courtyard. She glanced around, trying to find her way.

Tamara rushed out of one of the rooms, and seeing Kiptcha, unsheathed her sword in panic. Recognition dawned and she lowered her sword marginally.

"Why the hell are you here, Kiptcha?" she yelled.

"Where's Isredel?!" Kiptcha asked, trying to force her panic down.

"Probably with Captain Unohana. Last we heard, he was badly injured by the arrancar attack, probably going to die."

Kiptcha jumped onto the roof and she quickly disappeared.

Hanako watched Kiptcha race away, and she followed with stealth, anger at the interrupted battle. Kiptcha was looking around for something, obviously. She landed in an open courtyard, and Hanako took the opportunity to continue their earlier fight.

"Jigoku o Motarasu, Chiyo Tsubasa!" Hanako Yamada yelled, descending on Kiptcha unexpectedly.
[Bring Hell, 100 year wings]

Kiptcha whipped around, watching the wind swirl around the shinigami. The wind helped her attack strength, and Kiptcha drew her own zampaku-to from its sheath. The thin blade glimmered in the sunlight, looking impossibly thin.

Kiptcha smirked evilly, pulling down her collar to reveal a sadistic grin. "I don't think you fully comprehend my power, do you?"

Hanako lurched up and landed behind Kiptcha, sending gust of shredding wind at her exposed back. Dust filled the air, and Hanako looked up to see Kiptcha aiming a cero at her head. A draft of wind

carried her away, but Kiptcha followed, and the cero blasted out.

Hanako wiped a bit of blood off the side of her mouth, most of her body scratched and bleeding. The wall behind her was gone. Hanako realized that dealing with this one would be more of a task than dispatching one of her subordinates.

Kiptcha looked at her thin sword, and she put it away. With a faster time than the cero, she fired a bala, a hollow bullet. It hit the shinigami, and Kiptcha circled for another attack with a cero. It would be the finishing blow.

The cero formed and Kiptcha sighed, such an opponent . . .

A flash of color flew towards the wounded shinigami, and Kiptcha paused, holding the attack. The thing stopped in front of Hanako, and Kiptcha let the cero fire, obliterating everything that it touched, once again.

The dust settled, and Kiptcha hid her surprise at the sight. The shinigami that had interfered hadn't even been hurt slightly. She looked at hard at him, balancing on the peak of the roof. It dawned on her.

"Is-re-del?" she asked tentatively "Is it really you?"

The shinigami turned around revealing a hollow mask with livid black designs and red scratches. Kiptcha took a step back pausing at the sight. He removed his mask though, and Kiptcha looked at Isredel, the shinigami she had been ordered to capture not too long ago.

The mask disintegrated, and Kiptcha jumped off the roof and walked calmly towards him. Her joy wasn't hidden, showing plain. Kiptcha felt her own brittle mask, but she didn't dare try to remove it like that.

"What are you doing, arrancar?" Isredel asked dispassionately. He drew his sword, and looked at Kiptcha. "Are trying to kill us now?"

Kiptcha saw the movement, and she warily took a step back. Her emotions faded back into a blank stare. "Are you also going to pick a fight with me, shinigami?" She showed no recognition whatsoever after Isredel had called her 'arrancar'.

"You bet," he hissed. He took a breath and whispered the one word that released his zampaku-to to the fullest extent. "Ban-kai."

Jumped into the air as wings unfolded from his back, of a dark grey, like storm clouds. His sword glittered and shone brightly. Kiptcha unsheathed her sword.

"So be it," she yelled. "Kiritateru, Iten!"
[Slash, Destroyer!]

10 - Finale

Kiptcha's features morphed, Her mask spread to the other side and of her face and covered it completely. Her eyes were slitted and malevolent. Iten. The Destroyer. Demise.

Isredel watched the transition with distaste, watching the perfectly respectable girl turn into a monster with no emotions. Just the incentive to kill him. He readied himself for her attack, but she didn't even seem to move. Kiptcha seemed to be contemplating what she was going to do, how best to attack. Her head had elongated a bit, and a tail and a set of wings had sprouted.

He didn't see her movements, but he saw her disappear. Claws ripped at his back and wings, and Isredel spun, slashing out with his sword. Laughter sounded close to his ear, and he turned again, searching for any hint of her.

The thought of donning his mask again crossed his mind, but he reminded himself of where he was. "I am the 5th squad captain. I am a shinigami. This is Seiretei, my home. All arrancar are enemies. They are to be killed to protect my home."

Kiptcha laughed, and she appeared in front of him. "You are not just a shinigami. You're like us, aren't you? But all arrancar are certainly not your enemies. They might be the enemies of the foolish shinigami, but you've attained higher powers." Kiptcha paused, stepping closer.

"You're mistaken, arrancar. The shinigami are by no means foolish," Isredel countered.

"You're the 5th captain, successor to Aizen-sama. You are a combination and hollow and shinigami. This is in fact Seiretei, a place you can stay until they find out who you really are, but by no means can this be a permanent home for you. All shinigami and arrancar may be your enemies, yet you don't know until you've talked with one side—allied with none. All beings that could expose you are to be killed in order for you to be able to stay here."

Isredel looked at Kiptcha in horror. After one glance at his mask, she had known. "I'm a vizard." Isredel said it with a hiss, and he raised his zampakū-to with a flash and a blot of lightning hit Kiptcha full force in the chest. She skidded back some, but she didn't sustain much damage.

"I've got better things to do, *Isredel*." A cero formed from her claws, and she was just about to fire it.

Grimmjow held Kiptcha and Ulquiorra stood in front of Isredel, effectively stopping the fight. Kiptcha noted that other subordinates of hers were taking back the wounded.

"This was not ordered by Aizen-sama, Kiptcha," Ulquiorra said coldly, facing her. Grimmjow tightened his grip, as Kiptcha's figure thinned and returned to a normal state. The spike tail and wings disappeared as well.

Kiptcha bowed her head as she felt the sudden weight of her zampakū-to on her back. With crisp, polite

words, she addressed Ulquiorra. “ I respect your decision to stop our battle, and I will return to Las Noches to fully atone, but I question your decision to restrain me.”

Grimmjow snickered, and he brought her arms behind her, into a double hammer-lock. Kiptcha didn't fight, but she noticed with grim observation that he was able to hold both of her arms in place with one hand.

“Am I not a respectable member of the Espada?” Kiptcha spat, tightening her arms. The muscles rippled with exertion, as she tried to fight her way out of the hold.

Isredel finally snapped, upset at the interruption. “My friend, Kiptcha,” He spoke her name, though she had sworn that he would sever all ties with her. “has been respectable here, no matter the consequences. She only questions half of what you're doing, but I'm not so easy on you method.” He used his sword to point, waving around the sharp blade.

The arrancar looked at him with a bit of surprise. Ulquiorra reached another decision. “Grimmjow, you are free to finish the job. He is just,” Ulquiorra paused, “*trash*.”

Kiptcha was released from the vice-like grip, and she sprang forward faster than Grimmjow. She would have reached Isredel first too, had it not been Ulquiorra stopping her as she passed.

“Why are you trying to save him, Kiptcha?” Ulquiorra asked, his frown almost intimidating.

Kiptcha snarled at Ulquiorra, unwise as her position was lower than his. “He's not just trash to me, Ulquiorra, maybe I went a bit too far on my mission.”

“You certainly did,” Ulquiorra muttered, letting Kiptcha surge past.

While Kiptcha didn't dare attack Grimmjow, she knew that it would be against no rules for her to defend. She unsheathed her katana, and easily sliced the forming cero. With a desperate leap, she put herself in front of the shinigami, now effectively fighting Grimmjow herself. No offense.

A series of blows rained on Kiptcha, and she had sheathed her sword as well. Several made contact, knocking the breath out of her.

“Leave him. He's not yours to kill.”

Grimmjow snarled at the comment, and he flung her out of range of Isredel. “He's mine.” With a final kick to Kiptcha's abdomen, Grimmjow turned back to his original target.

Blood seeped through the bandage around Kiptcha abdomen, and blood trickled out of her mouth. Her eyes closed in pain, and she started to fall, racing towards the ground. She hit the ground hard and more blood went everywhere. Kiptcha's zampakuto hit the ground beside her, clanging a bit.

Hanako, still standing by walked over, barely hurt. Kiptcha noticed that Isredel didn't have to protect her, as the shinigami probably could deflect it again. Isredel had just wanted to draw her away. Kiptcha groaned and tried to move, but her body felt weak. She saw Isredel pull his hollow mask on, and Kiptcha

faded into the sweet darkness, away from pain.

Kiptcha wasn't surprised when she woke up in a cell, since she had been out cold, they could not have organized an immediate audience with Aizen. She understood, and she picked herself up and walked to the chair. A small table sat in front of it, and cold food was laid out. Kiptcha sat down, and she picked at it, not really eating much. She recognized the preparation style, Ulquiorra's *fracción*.

A moan behind her startled her, and Kiptcha jumped visibly. She spun the chair to stare at Isredel.

"Not now . . ." she muttered.

Isredel looked at her, bleeding in some spots, bruised in others. His condition was horrible. He had no *zampaku-to*, but Kiptcha felt hers on her back, pressing into her almost painfully.

The door to the cell opened to reveal Ulquiorra, and Kiptcha automatically stood. It was her summons to Aizen-sama. Ulquiorra let her pass, and he hauled Isredel out as well. Kiptcha looked back, and she dropped back a few steps to help Isredel, though Ulquiorra was already doing something like it by dragging him.

Kiptcha couldn't walk well either, but she managed to make into the throne room, where she shrugged off Isredel's arm, and she let him drop. She bowed low, but somehow she didn't feel it was enough. Tosen and Gin stood nearby in the shadows.

"Would you care to explain your actions, Kiptcha?" Aizen asked.

Kiptcha rose, and she looked stricken with guilt. Her mouth was slightly parted, and she fumbled for words. "Perhaps . . ." she paused, aware of Isredel struggling to stand beside her. ". . . I grew a bit too attached, Aizen-sama."

There was a soft chuckle, and Aizen leaned forward. "You did as I asked, but he was troublesome to control, wasn't he? You fulfilled your half. I'll complete our promise now, if you wish."

Kiptcha took a step back, and she hesitated, looking over at Isredel. "I'm sorry," she whispered. "This is goodbye now."

Kiptcha took a step forward, and she reached down, using a fingernail to rip her skirt from the knee down. Then she tore it off, and looked at the white cloth. She then took the strip and ripped in half. She bowed again, and kneeled on the floor of the Throne room.

With deft movements, Kiptcha tied her ankles and took the other strip in her hands. She tied this one just above the knees, around her thighs. She then sat back and took her sword off her back. She placed it in front of herself, and she then ripped off her collar, ignoring the fact that she had removed quite a bit of the fabric that covered her shoulders as well.

Taking the stiff collar, he unsheathed her sword and wound the fabric around the blade so she could

hold on to it.

With a final glance up at Aizen, Kiptcha aimed the blade at her abdomen and she closed her eyes, readying herself for death. A peace came over her, and she relaxed.

A ripple. Isredel lunged for the sword, tearing it from her grasp and cutting her hand. Kiptcha swore, and she opened her eyes, looking at Isredel. Pain crossed her face and a tear rolled down her cheek. Isredel stumbled and fell to his hands and knees.

Kiptcha removed a stiletto dagger from inside her black sash. Isredel saw it glint, and a drop of blood rolled down the thin blade.

“No, damn it, Kiptcha! Don’t!” Isredel managed to pant out, his injuries now reopened. He tried to stand, trying to reach her and yank the blade out of her hands. He stumbled again, and he fell, unable to reach her.

Kiptcha looked at him, and she felt the ripples trying to stir her will to live. She pushed them out of her mind. She had to do this.

Her eyes rested on Aizen. She positioned the dagger at her throat and calmed herself again. She did not blink.

The sharp dagger easily pushed through, and the long blade showed glistening red, out of the back of her neck.

Kiptcha felt pain only for a second, and it flashed across her face. It was then replaced by an expression of pure happiness. Pure peace. She no longer saw clearly. Her vision started to fade to Black, and a detached feeling of everything going limp. She didn’t hear Isredel’s scream.

Her body fell limp, flopping to the side. The white strips of her skirt held her legs together. Her eyes glassed over and a pool of dark crimson leaked out, soaking her blonde hair and staining her pure white uniform. Blood had ran down her neck and onto her lap and chest. Only the number four remained on her abdomen.

Isredel stared at the sight of Kiptcha’s limp body. It scared him. Did Aizen really have this much power over the arrancar? He got up and moved closer, placing her zampakū-to next to her quickly cooling corpse.

He touched the side of her face. It was cold and clammy. He withdrew his hand abruptly. Then he shook her shoulder. She didn’t move. She didn’t acknowledge anything. He closed her lifeless eyes, ignorant that his hands had her blood smeared all over them.

Her mask fell, and it cracked. A thin mark of blue ran under eye, once hidden by the mask. It startled Isredel, and he picked it up, running his fingers over the delicate cat-ear shape. Kiptcha was truly dead.

He had fled from the room, only pausing to find his zampaku-to. He had returned to Seiretei, but he felt dead inside. Totally dead. Days, weeks, maybe even months had passed since he returned. His gloom slowly ate at him, and he carried half of the cracked mask with him everywhere. He was consumed with grief almost at all times, and his lieutenant, Tamara, had been doing most of the things he usually did just to keep everything running.

Today was just like yesterday, and Isredel silently cursed the sun for being so bright. There was no reason for anything to be happy. He looked down at the half of the mask. What was his reason to live anymore?

He had eaten in the past months, but it had been sparse and he had only picked at his food today as well. His face was gaunt and he looked desperately tired. He hadn't really been sleeping much either.

How long had he sat here now? Isredel started to wonder, but it didn't really matter. Tamara entered, and Isredel didn't even bother to look up.

"Captain? We have a new member being added to our squad. She will occupy 4th seat. She's fresh from the Academy—"

"That's fine Tamara. Just leave me, please," Isredel replied, his voice tired. He was startled at the sound though, as he hadn't spoken for the last few days.

"She wanted to see you," Tamara explained.

"She's seen me. Now leave."

He heard the whisper, but he didn't care. Tamara had been trying to explain it to most anyone who had come to see him these days. Isredel looked down at his hand, realizing a pain in his palm. It was his left palm. A deep cut had suddenly opened.

'I'm sorry, but Isredel-sama hasn't been feeling well'

The new recruit stepped forward, and she hammered a fist down on his desk, causing the mask-ear to drop onto the surface.

"Hey. Pleased to meet you, *Res.*"

Isredel muttered something about it not being funny to poke fun and he glanced up. The girl was lean with pale white skin. Her hair was tied back, but it still hung down past her waist. It was a blonde color with a red coloration towards the tips. Her zampaku-to was long, and she had slung it on her back. Her eyes were crimson, *and there was a thin blue line that ran under her left eye.*

"You forgot something, ya know?" she said dryly, placing the other half of a broken hollow mask on the desk under the ear that Isredel had brought back from Las Noches. It fit perfectly.

Isredel looked at the mask, and his gaze drifted over the blue line, and resting on her limp left hand, with was slowly dripping blood. A cut on her palm.

“Kiptcha?” Isredel asked, disbelieving. He stood up, and walked to the other side of the desk.

“Yo.” Kiptcha smiled broadly. “Missed me much?”