like an onion, i contain multitudes

by sinnar

Summary

Colonello falls down a rabbit hole and makes it everyone else's problem.

or: five times Colonello thought Skull was hiding something, and one time he didn't.

1.00

Today, as they did on the fifth of every month, the Arcobaleno gathered themselves together and trooped over to the Giglio Nero mansion to have their meeting with Yuni. ‘Meeting’ being, of course, a relatively poor descriptor - privately, most of the Arcobaleno regarded it in nature as nothing more than a pseudo-social gathering where they were forced to sit in one another’s company for an hour and make strained, vaguely polite conversation while Yuni looked on with a smile.

Sure, the Arcobaleno might live in the same place - all with extreme reluctance, all with the
lamentable awareness that if they wanted to grow up faster, proximity to the other Arcobaleno was, however unfortunately, the only thing that would help - but that didn’t mean that they loitered in one another’s company, or mingled, or - god forbid - enjoyed their current living circumstances.

Yuni, feasibly aware of this, had thus decided to institute the monthly meetings, and the Arcobaleno had agreed to it with a previously hitherto unheard of level of reluctance - but they had agreed, however impossibly it now seemed, looking back.

“It’s nice to have everyone in one place and getting along, isn’t it?” Yuni had said at some point during one such meeting, many months ago.

“Um.” Colonnello had said, watching as Lal’s eye began to twitch violently, her grip on her cup tightening to the point where Colonnello heard a distinct, worrying crack as Skull, next to Lal, continued to talk her ear off about makeup brands, of all things. Skull seemed perfectly oblivious to the danger he was in, the moron. “...Yes.”

At that point, Colonnello had taken a hasty drink of his coffee, avoiding Yuni’s gaze as, in a moment of brilliant timing, Lal finally lost her temper and raised her cup up, up - and then brought it smashing down on Skull’s head. The glass tinkled as it shattered, the shards tangling themselves in Skull’s hair, the remaining coffee in the cup dripping through the strands, flattening them down as they slowly drizzled their way down his face. Skull let out a loud screech, his arms flailing around as he leaned back in his seat just a tad too far and--

Colonnello let out a sigh as Skull’s chair fell backwards, crashing against the ground. Skull followed with it, his screeching becoming incrementally louder as he hit the floor.

Everyone around the table had been eyeing this spectacle with varying degrees of interest - and as such, coincidentally, no one, least of all Colonnello, had been paying attention to the way Yuni’s face turned troubled, her smile faltering, just for a split second.

No one noticed this, and no one noticed how her face quickly smoothed out, her eyes narrowing in a calculating, far off way - and since no one noticed, no one could wonder why.

Perhaps if they had noticed, and had wondered, they might have been able to predict today - for this meeting promised to be a surprising (slightly unwelcome) break from the dull monotony of poorly faked civility: Byakuran, it seemed, was in attendance.

The Arcobaleno all protested this - wasn’t this meeting supposed to be just for them, after all? What need was there for Byakuran to be anywhere near here? Also, nobody liked him.

“That’s not very nice,” Byakuran said, and he got several incredulous looks for this.

“It’s the truth,” Skull muttered, hovering cautiously behind Fon. Byakuran tilted his head curiously at that, then smiled at Skull, his eyes crinkling. Skull eep-ed and ducked more fully behind Fon.

“I want him here,” Yuni said, before any of the other Arcobaleno could jump in with more protests. Her eyes were widened beseechingly, her lips trembling just so. “Just for today. He won’t be a disturbance, I promise.”

Distrustful gazes swung over to Byakuran, who smiled wider at them and popped a sugar cube in his mouth. “Promise,” he said, the word slightly garbled around the dissolving cube in his mouth.

The Arcobaleno exchanged looks, then began to seat themselves around the circular table. A brief scuffle ensued over who would have to suffer through sitting next to Byakuran - Yuni had graciously taken the seat to his left, and somehow, impossibly, Colonnello found himself taking the
other, gripping his bleeding ear and hissing, “You *bit* me, kora!” to Skull.

“Sorry, senpai,” Skull said, looking entirely unrepentant. Colonnello narrowed his eyes at Skull, already calculating his revenge.

“Whatver,” he huffed, sullenly picking up the cup of coffee Yuni had poured for him and taking a drink.

The table fell into silence as everyone sipped their drinks and avoided meeting anyone else’s gaze, pretending to be utterly absorbed with their drinks and the very nicely arranged finger sandwiches and cookies.

“So,” Yuni said, after the silence had gone on a bit longer than was bearable. Her smile was starting to look strained around the edges. “How has your month been, everyone?”

Though it was currently only midday and the windows in the room were closed and sealed, Colonnello heard crickets.

At last, Fon cleared his throat and set his cup down on the table with a light clink.

“It’s been well,” Fon said, very tactfully not mentioning the several disasters that naturally occurred when the Arcobaleno were shoved into a living space together. “How have you been, Yuni?”

“Oh, well,” Yuni said, smiling back and relaxing slightly. Colonnello leaned forward as she began to talk, selecting several of the finger sandwiches - which really did look divine this month - and shoving them into his mouth.

*Technically* speaking, he was a growing boy - Colonnello was *well* within his rights. He chewed, swallowed, and then stuck his tongue out at Fon, who looked vaguely horrified by the display, and then leaned back in his chair after snagging and shoveling down a few more.

Byakuran chose that moment to angle himself towards Colonnello, and Colonnello stiffened, his fingers itching for the comforting weight of his rifle. Byakuran chuckled - Colonnello stiffened further, and leaned away - his eyes focused on some point beyond Colonnello. Colonnello frowned, then followed the direction of Byakuran’s gaze, his eyes settling on Skull.

“Isn’t it surprising,” Byakuran said, tone low, his voice carrying only to Colonnello’s ears, “how much there is to someone like him?”

“...I guess,” Colonnello said warily, eyeing Skull as he let out a yelp and jumped in his seat, his cup of coffee dropping out of his hands and onto the ground, the hot liquid splashing over his shoes and the bottom hem of his pants. Skull turned to squawk indignant at Reborn, who ignored him, a smug smile curling the corners of his mouth as he delicately stirred his own cup and set aside some fruit on his plate for Leon.

“So much depth,” Byakuran mused. “It’s a wonder how he keeps it concealed, don’t you think?”

“...I guess,” Colonnello said warily, eyeing Skull as he let out a yelp and jumped in his seat, his cup of coffee dropping out of his hands and onto the ground, the hot liquid splashing over his shoes and the bottom hem of his pants. Skull turned to squawk indignant at Reborn, who ignored him, a smug smile curling the corners of his mouth as he delicately stirred his own cup and set aside some fruit on his plate for Leon.

“So much depth,” Byakuran mused. “It’s a wonder how he keeps it concealed, don’t you think?”

Colonnello turned his dubious stare on Byakuran, narrowing his eyes in distrust as he not so subtly attempted to scoot his chair away. “If you say so,” Colonnello said, about five seconds from grabbing his plate and shattering it over Byakuran’s head in - what he was sure would be considered - self defense. What was Byakuran trying to hint at? Was this a threat?

Or… wait.
Could this be Byakuran’s weird way of hitting on Skull… through Colonnello…?

Inwardly, Colonnello gagged, his mind shying away from the mental image it had conjured up.

Byakuran slanted his gaze over to Colonnello, one eyebrow ticking upwards. “Ah,” he said, as though remembering something. “That’s right. Hm.”

And with that, Byakuran leaned back and settled himself comfortably in his chair, kindly granting Colonnello his personal space once more.

Despite himself, Colonnello felt his curiosity flare to life. “What?” he asked, tone decidedly unfriendly.

“Hm? Oh, don’t worry about it,” Byakuran said dismissively, somehow producing a bag of marshmallows and pulling out a handful. “I just forgot that you didn’t know - well, it doesn’t matter. Forget I said anything.”

“You--” Colonnello started, with every intent to get to the bottom of whatever the fuck Byakuran was implying, but Yuni chose, at that moment, to turn her attentions on him.

“Colonnello!” She said, smiling genuinely. “What about your month? How have you been?”

It took a split second for his mind to switch tracks, but Colonnello quickly cleared his throat and drummed his fingers on the table as he began to speak, eyes examining those around the table, trying to discern if anyone else had taken note of the - quite frankly, bizarre - conversation Byakuran had decided to initiate.

Unfortunately, it appeared not - Yuni was bouncing quite adeptly between Colonnello and the other six Arcobaleno, fielding and directing their conversations and attention with gentle nudges, while Skull was busy screeching incoherently at Reborn as Reborn’s elbow ‘accidentally’ nudged Skull’s brand new cup off the table.

Colonnello was alone with his horror.

He darted a glance at Byakuran out of the corner of his eye - Byakuran appeared to be quite content to sip his coffee and munch on his marshmallows, ignoring Colonnello completely, as though nothing had happened.

Colonnello blinked, then forcibly pushed Byakuran and his peculiar small talk skills - or lack thereof - out of his mind.

Byakuran was just being his usual creepy, aggravating self - the conversation wasn’t anything more than an attempt to unsettle Colonnello, and he refused to give Byakuran the satisfaction of it working.

The thing was, Colonnello couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Hidden depths, he thought was a scoff, watching as Skull jumped up and down, futilely attempting to grab his mug down from the highest shelf in the kitchen, loudly complaining about whoever had put it there. Again.

Colonnello had put it there.

This time, at least - he was fairly certain that it was an unspoken pact amongst most of the other
Arcobaleno: if you saw Skull’s mug, it went on the highest shelf. In this respect, at least, everyone got along.

It soothed him slightly, seeing Skull’s palpable frustration at being too short to reach it, and too prideful to grab a stool or clamber atop the countertop, let alone - god forbid - ask for help.

Byakuran didn’t know what he was talking about. Colonnello knew Skull regrettably well - personality wise, at least - and the lackey wasn’t hiding anything from them. Skull was disastrously, obnoxiously himself, in every sense of the word - he probably didn’t even know the meaning of the word ‘deception’.

Yeah, Colonnello thought, relaxing further into his seat and enjoying his free entertainment. *Hidden depths, indeed.*

1.50

The thing about being stuck in a mansion with six other people - only about one point five of which you actually *liked* - is that it didn’t leave much for you to do. Sure, there was training, and the actual *growing up* bit (which could be surprisingly painful and time consuming when a growth spurt hit), and there were plenty of books and other media entertainment - but one could only distract themselves with these things for so long before they too, grew stale, and you needed a breath of fresh air to stop you from snapping and going completely barmy.

All this to say, of course, that Colonnello was *bored*.

He suspected he wasn’t the only one - the other Arcobaleno had appeared restless lately as well, and it probably wouldn’t be too long until it grew to be too much and everyone began to demand another break so that they could revel in their individual freedoms. Still, until they reached that breaking point, that didn’t solve Colonnello’s current dilemma, which had him awake at three in the morning, restless with energy and unable to sleep, creeping down to the kitchen to see if he could find himself a snack.

One more time - *growing boy*.

To his surprise, the kitchen was already occupied - Skull sat at the table, clad in a rumpled purple pajama set, his elbows set atop the table, his head propped against his hand as he stared down at his mug contemplatively. The overhead light was turned on to its dimmest setting, casting a circle of light around the table and leaving the rest of the kitchen bathed in shifting shadows.

Colonnello flicked the other lights on pointedly, and Skull started, only then noticing Colonnello’s presence. *Someone* needed to work on being aware of their surroundings.

“Oh, Colonnello-senpai!” Skull said, his eyes flicking around nervously to the several exit points in the kitchen. “I’ll, uh, get out of your way--” the chair scraped against the floor noisily as Skull stood, clutching his mug to his chest, edging away.

“No,” Colonnello said, feeling surprisingly generous and finding himself willing to tolerate Skull’s company. Once again - *bored*. “Stay, kora.”

Skull hesitantly sat down, still clutching his mug to his chest. His face was surprisingly bare of makeup - Colonnello couldn’t quite remember the last time he had witnessed such an event. He squinted at Skull as he shuffled past, heading for the refrigerator. Were Skull’s eyes abnormally red-rimmed, or was that just his normal face…?

“Were you *crying*?” Colonnello said, opening the fridge and squinting into the depths within.
Behind him, Skull began to splutter incoherently.

Colonnello took that as a yes, then tuned Skull out and took the time to peruse his options. He could take Reborn’s tiramisu cake - pissing Reborn off was always a fun way to start the morning, and it could provide some decent entertainment…

Colonnello reached out to take the cake, shut the fridge, grabbed himself a utensil, then settled across from Skull, who was still yammering out excuses that Colonnello wasn’t the least interested in hearing.

“Yeah, alright,” Colonnello said, putting an end to the charade. “We both know you were crying, lackey. There’s no use pretending, kora.”

“I wasn’t crying!”

Colonnello stuck a piece of cake in his mouth and chewed, his gaze decidedly unimpressed. Skull deflated, then set his mug down and pushed it around the tabletop with his fingertips, avoiding Colonnello’s stare as a small pout formed on his face.

“So what were you crying about?” Colonnello asked mercilessly, slowly picking his way through the cake. “Is it the mug thing?”

Skull’s eyebrows bunched together. “The mug thing…?”

“Nevermind,” Colonnello said. If Skull hadn’t caught on yet, Colonnello wasn’t going to be the one to break it to him. “What was it?” Then, “Wait, no - let me guess.” He examined Skull critically, who shifted uncomfortably under the attention, frowning slightly.

“It’s your baby face,” Colonnello decided.

Skull spluttered. “I don’t have a baby face!”

“Sure you do,” Colonnello said. “You look like you’re still two, kora.”

Skull scowled. “I do not,” he said, voice rising into a nigh unbearable whine.

“The truth hurts,” Colonnello said, mock sympathetically. “ Enough for you to cry about it, even.”

“I wasn’t crying about that!”

“But you admit you were crying?”

Skull looked about five seconds away from attempting to bash his mug over Colonnello’s head. Colonnello raised his eyebrows at him, daring him to try it - and Skull subsided, scowling fiercer than ever, his face flushed with embarrassment.

They both went quiet, Colonnello content to sit and munch his way through Reborn’s tiramisu cake now that the temptation of taunting Skull had run its course. Skull, for his part, had settled back into his contemplative, withdrawn silence as he drank from his mug, gaze far away.

Minutes passed before Skull broke the silence. “I had a nightmare,” he said, very quietly. Colonnello glanced at him - Skull’s eyes were widened in surprise, as though he hadn’t quite expected those words to slip out, and he peered at Colonnello uncertainly.

Oh, great, Colonnello thought. Tell a guy he doesn’t have to leave you alone once and suddenly you’re his therapist.
Still, his curiosity was piqued, and it was three in the morning - Colonnello didn’t have anything better to do.

“Nightmare?” He prompted. It wasn’t like this was unusual - with everything the Arcobaleno had gone through - the curse, the mafia, the whole shebang that was the Future-That-Wasn’t - well, to put it lightly: they all had their issues. Nightmares probably came a dime a dozen around here.

“What about?”

Skull looked surprised again, as though he hadn’t expected this either.

Fair enough.

Skull spun his empty mug around between his hands, balancing it on its edge and twisting it around and around with quick fingers. “Nothing much,” he murmured, gaze drifting away, focusing on a point beyond Colonnello. “Just, uh…” Skull paused, chewing on the inside of his cheek. “…What was Byakuran talking to you about?” he asked, abruptly switching tacks. “During the meeting.”

Colonnello’s eyebrows rose as he was temporarily taken aback. “What, you noticed that, kora?”

Skull’s mug spun faster. “Yeah,” he said. “Well - kinda. And Byakuran said something to me, too, when we were leaving, is the thing, and it was kinda, uh…” Skull shuddered. “Unnerving.”

“What’d he say?”

“I asked you first!”

“And?” Colonnello pointed his fork at Skull threateningly, and Skull shrank back, raising his hands in the air defensively and letting his mug clatter onto the table, falling on its side and rolling until the handle forced it to a stop.

“Alright!” Skull yelped, and Colonnello went back to Reborn’s cake, satisfied. “It wasn’t much,” Skull continued. “He just… smiled at me, like this-” Skull demonstrated, his nose wrinkling slightly as his lips stretched upwards and his eyes crinkled closed, “-and he said-” and here Skull did an extremely poor, high pitched imitation of Byakuran’s voice, “-’good luck’.”

“Hm,” Colonnello said thoughtfully. “…That’s it?”

Skull’s cheeks puffed out indignantly. “That’s it? What’d he tell you then?”

“Nothing much,” Colonnello said dismissively. “Just something he thought might unsettle me.”

“And you’re telling me ‘that’s it’?! Yours is so vague!”

“You’ll understand one day when you’re old enough,” Colonnello said.

“I’m the same age as you!”

“Physically, sure. But spiritually? We’re leagues apart, kora.”

“Are not--”

Colonnello aimed a kick at Skull under the table, and smiled to himself when his foot connected solidly with Skull’s shin.

Skull yelped, then scooted backwards and bent down to rub at his leg, casting dark looks at Colonnello and muttering incoherently under his breath. When he straightened up, face screwed up
in a way that meant he was planning on being completely, irredeemably obnoxious for the next few minutes, Colonnello sighed.

“Have some cake,” he said, still feeling unusually gracious and merciful.

Skull paused, his irritation fading somewhat. “That’s Reborn’s cake,” he said, staring.

“And?”

Skull’s gaze flickered down to the cake, then back up at Colonnello, and after a moment he stood up and fetched himself a fork. Colonnello grinned.

Between the two of them, Reborn’s cake was swiftly demolished and consumed, and without a word, Skull took their dishes and went to wash and put them away. Colonnello watched him, tapping his fingers on the tabletop as he thought.

“Hey,” he said. “Your nightmare - you didn’t say what it was about.”

Skull shrugged as he dried and put the last dish - his mug - away. “It doesn’t matter,” he said. “It was a really long time ago. Before I met you guys.”

Colonnello frowned. Before Skull had met the Arcobaleno? What, when he was just a stuntman?

“Thanks for the cake, senpai,” Skull said, slipping over to the doorway, hesitating slightly, his hand lingering on the frame as his shoulders hunched up to rest by his ears. “…and for the company.”

Skull padded away down the hall without waiting for a response. Colonnello watched him go, questions swirling around in his mind.

So much depth, Byakuran had said, his words twisting their way through Colonnello’s mind, entirely unbidden. Oh, don’t worry about it. I just forgot you didn’t know - well, it doesn’t matter.

A small seed of doubt that had been meticulously planted by capable, careful hands began to unfurl and take root in Colonnello’s mind.

Perhaps it was the late hour, or the time he had just spent in Skull’s company - hell, maybe it was even the purloined tiramisu cake speaking - but Colonnello couldn’t help wondering…

How well did he know Skull, really?

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