**Monochrome no Kiss**
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**Summary**

The life of the queen of Hueco Mundo.
Long spiky orange hair trailed behind the solitary figure is originated from, swaying to and fro against bone-white skin. Black markings trailed from the back of the helmet-like mask, down her eyes, disappearing into a collar of red fur and reappearing around the hole in between her breasts. She bent down and picked up the Gillian she had killed not long ago. It had been far away but she took it down with a single cero. It wasn’t necessary for her to devour it. Being at the last stage of hollow evolution, a Vasto Lorde, she had no need to eat.

Little scavenger Hollows rose from the ground, looking at the body of the Gillian but refused to go any closer because of her very presence. She concealed her reiatsu and, one by one, the slowly crawled and slithered towards the Gillian carcass and started devouring it. It was gone within seconds, and the moment it was gone so was she.

She made her way to the Menos Forest where she resided when she wasn’t wandering. Hollows never stayed in one place for too long. Reiryoku would accumulate and attract other, more powerful Hollows. That put them at risk of being eaten so their instinct told them to never be in one place longer than necessary. She, however, had no such need. Hollows, including other Vasto Lorde, stayed away from her because of her immense amount reiryoku.

When she got to her own personal cave in the Menos Forest she stopped. She sensed someone within her sanctuary but didn’t know exactly what it was. She could instantly tell it wasn’t a hollow since its reishi was pure which meant it could only be one thing:

“Shinigami,” she deduced. She heard clapping from inside her dark cave but refused to move. Instead, whoever invaded her space came out to her. He was a young Shinigami, shorter than her but not by much. He was in the standard shihakushou with a taichou haori still on his arms. His curly hair was slicked back with a single strand between his eyes, menacing eyes and a charming smile that could sway people any way he wanted but she saw through it. At first she thought nothing of his reiryoku levels but she could tell just by the way he held himself in front of her, a Vasto Lorde, that he was hiding something.

“You don’t belong in this world Shinigami,” she said, her golden-brown eyes not leaving his brown ones. “I will send you back.” She moved her claw up to tear a rip between dimensions to send him back from where he came but stopped when he held up his hand.

“That isn’t necessary,” he said, his voice as charming as his smile. “I have a purpose here and I intend to fulfil it.” The word ‘purpose’ piqued her interest and finally entered her cave, sitting on a bed of furs salvaged from hollows she killed over the years. He kneeled down in front of her in seiza on the cold floor. “Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Aizen Sousuke.” He waited for her to say her name but she said nothing.

“Don’t waste my time with trivial matters such as names. Get to the point and leave before hollows invade my territory.”

“Very well then.” He reached into his kosode and pulled out a small bluish-purple orb. She didn’t have to touch it to know how it pulsed with power. It even glowed slightly at Aizen’s touch. “This is the Hougyoku. It has the capability to dissolve the boundaries between Shinigami and Hollow and manifest the desires of those around it.”

“What exactly are you going to do with such a thing?” She even tilted her horned head to the side, showing genuine curiosity in the little thing that radiated power.
“I’m going to create an army.” It was a simple answer but she only had one question.

“Why would you need an army, of hollows at that?” He chuckled at her. She instantly knew that he had earlier doubted her intelligence. The chuckle also answered her question. “You plan a rebellion.”

“Not just a rebellion but a war. I plan to become ruler of all four realms.” His eyes shined.

“You want me to be your first test dummy.”

“Not a test dummy but a success. Become my first soldier and you will know what it is like to be a ruler. All you need to do is follow my every command.”

She looked down at his outstretched hand. In it he held the orb that could shatter the barrier separating the two warring races: Shinigami and Hollows. Her instincts told her to run, open a garganta and send him back to Soul Society, kill him, anything to get away from him. His very presence gave her bad feelings yet, oddly enough, she was drawn to his words and the orb. She noticed how he gazed at her, his eyes blazing with an emotion she had never seen before.

She touched the orb and everything turned white.

Mirrors surrounded her, reflecting her appearance at every possible angle. One by one the mirrors cracked and she could see something else in each reflection but knew it was still her. She retained the long orange hair that touched her waist, and the markings that were around where her hollow hole used to be. Her mask was fractured, the only portion of it left being the horns. Her skin went from pure white to a sun kissed version of Aizen’s. Her eyes were now chocolate brown instead of golden-brown and her sclera was white instead of black. Her clawed hands and feet were normal like Aizen’s.

The mirrors finally broke and her new form was now revealed to Aizen who smirked with satisfaction.

“Beautiful. Your power will know no limits,” his eyes fell to the gothic number in the center of her back which she kept turned to him, “my Cero. Now stand and tell me your name.”

She did as ordered by her own will which surprised her. She clenched her hands into fists and curled her toes, getting used to the new features only to see they weren’t that much different than her claws. She turned to face him fully, not at all fazed by the fact that she was completely naked in front of a man.

“Kurosaki Ichigo.”
Ichigo could see the castle in the distance, Las Noches, where the current king of Hueco Mundo resided. She had never met the Vasto Lorde that ruled over the vast land of white, black and gray but it was better late than never. It was much farther than it appeared, an illusion cast by the sands of Hueco Mundo. She had no use sonido to get there but she had nary an idea as to how long it took. Only the moon occupied the black sky. On the way there she passed a group off Adjuchas, a few larger ones surrounding a smaller one. When she stopped to observe them they stopped whatever they were doing to look at her.

“We should get out of here,” one said. “She’s a Vasto Lorde. She’ll kill us.”

“If we kill her we could become Vasto Lorde,” another said; the smallest of the group.

“Even with all of us it would be impossible.”

“I’m standing right here,” she said, slightly annoyed. The larger Adjuchas made way for the smaller one a panther with blue eyes. He circled her in a predatory fashion, observing her. “Get out of my way Adjuchas. I have business to take care of.”

“It’s not Adjuchas. It’s Grimmjow Jaegerjaquez. That is the name of the hollow that is going to kill you.” He pounced on her, his weight pushing her to the ground. He went to bite her neck but stopped short with his teeth close to her skin. He could already tell her skin was too hard for his teeth to pierce, not without his teeth breaking. Grimmjow stepped away from her, still watching her. “Why didn’t you dodge or fight back? Are you looking down on me because I’m an Adjuchas?”

“I don’t look down on my opponents. I had no reason to fight you so I didn’t.” Ichigo looked over to the castle in the distance. They all followed her gaze and connected the dots. She stood and started walking instead of using sonido when she felt them follow her. It was clear they couldn’t leave her be, probably going to watch her execute her task.

“You’re insane for a Vasto Lorde, taking the place of the king of Hueco Mundo,” the Adjuchas, whose name she learned was Di Roy Rinker, said.

“I’m not taking his place. I’m paving the way for the new king and every king needs a castle.”

They passed many hollows on the way. They would stay away from the group because of Ichigo but the Adjuchas who followed her hunted them down and devoured them before catching up to her. When they passed a cave Ichigo decided to stop there to regain her energy. She leaned up against the wall and kept her eyes on the mouth of the cave. There wasn’t much to see but she preferred to keep an eye on the entrance on the unlikely chance her ability to sense reiatsu should fail her. Grimmjow laid down a distance from her while the others lined up against the opposite wall.

“Who are you doing this for?” Shawlong asked her once they settled. “With your level of reiryoku you could easily take the throne for yourself.”

“I had no prior reason to. I prefer to be alone and to occasionally kill a hollow or two to help out the smaller hollows who wander into my territory. Menos who don’t heed my warning to leave are killed.”

“Self-righteous bitch aren’t you?” Yylfordt said sarcastically.

“I see no reason to allow them to starve.”
“You still didn’t answer my question,” Shawlong pointed out.

“For Aizen-sama, I will do anything.”

“Disgraceful,” Grimmjow growled, “blindly following someone.”

Ichigo looked at him with a thoughtful look in her eyes. “It is always dark in Hueco Mundo, Grimmjow. He was the only light I had seen that drew me away from my monotonous routine and gave me a purpose. I have always sought a purpose, something to call my own. I want to protect that light despite it being so dim.”

Ichigo decided she had taken enough time to rest and continued on her way to Las Noches. Again she only walked so they could keep up. She couldn’t sonido slowly even if she tried. It had taken an especially long time but when they got there they were instantly confronted by an army, Gillian and Adjuchas just wandering around the castle. About thirty Adjuchas surrounded them to keep them from entering the castle. Usually they wouldn’t even get near her because of her crushing reiatsu but they were doing her job just as she was doing hers.

She charged reiatsu between her horns, not releasing it as a warning. “Retreat now while you have a chance to live another day.” They said nothing, getting closer and itching to attack. She charged even more reiatsu and released it in a powerful light blue cero. With a single sweep they were all decimated. The few able to get out of the way were killed by Grimmjow.

Afterwards it didn’t take long to find the king. He was sitting on his throne, resting his head in his bony palm with a bored expression on his skeletal face. Despite not having eyes she knew that his attention was on her. “Why have you destroyed my army Vasto Lorde?” He asked, sounding like he wasn’t shocked his army fell so quickly.

“A gave them the chance to stand down but they refused,” she replied. “I am here to take your throne.” He let out a deep but loud laugh.

“A woman cannot rule over this wasteland.”

“I wouldn’t want to either though I am slightly insulted. Unfortunately I am not asking for your submission. I am taking it, by force if necessary.” Baraggan stood from his throne and walked the few steps down to where she stood, only a few inches between them.

“Die.” He touched her arm but nothing happened. Her arm didn’t decay like it should have, shocking him immensely, even more so when she grabbed him by the face and slammed him onto the ground. “H-how did you…?” One of his guards tried to attack her but when he got to close she used her claws to destroy his mask.

“I will destroy you Baraggan if you defy me again. Or you can do something interesting for once.”

“Interesting?” Baraggan may have been the king but there was very little he did. He had an army without anything to conquer. Its only purpose was if someone attempted to overthrow him but it was decimated not long ago save a few of his subjects.

“Aizen-sama wants to rule every realm but, unfortunately, he cannot do it without a little help.” She turned to Grimmjow and his group. “The offer is extended to you as well. He can’t have an army without soldiers. Even a supreme commander needs his generals. Give me your answer Baraggan Louisenbairn.”

He gave it little thought. It was a change from his boring life as king, ruling with nothing to take over. “I…we have a deal.” She helped him up and stepped back. “I never caught your name.”
“Kurosaki Ichigo.” A group of Gillian congregated a few hundred yards from their position. She stopped them from attacking them when it was obvious they had no interest in them. “Right on time.” They all watched as they ripped open a garganta and crawled inside.

“Why isn’t it closing?” Shawlong asked.

“They’re coming right back.” As she said they came right back through the garganta.

“What the hell?” A Gillian put his hand down and three people stepped off. They approached the group at their own pace. Ichigo got down to one knee in respect.

“Welcome to Las Noches Aizen-sama,” she said with more energy than she usually had. Ichigo felt a hand atop her head and looked up. He had a smile on his face, slightly different than the one she had seen on their first meeting.

“Thank you Ichigo,” he said. “What, Gin doesn’t get any love?”

“I don’t know you but nice to meet you Gin-sama.”

“Where’d you find this one taichou? She’s so polite.” Gin started fawning over Ichigo but Grimmjow was getting irritated. His patience with the talking drew thin until the line snapped. He jumped at the Shinigami but Ichigo grabbed him by the torso and wrestled him to the ground. “Someone’s been a bad kitty.”

Aizen walked around them into the castle flanked by Gin and Tousen. Baraggan, his group and Grimmjow’s group followed as well leaving Ichigo to calm him down which involved them fighting, Ichigo obviously holding back so she didn’t accidentally kill him. In the time they spent together she found that Grimmjow, despite his bad attitude, was tolerable and pleasant to be around when he wanted to.

“That smug bastard pisses me off,” he said once he stopped fighting her.

“He hasn’t said much of anything.”

“It’s his face, that smile of his. It sends a chill down my spine.” Ichigo could relate. The first time she had seen that smile she got bad vibes from him. Still she wanted to see the man behind that fake smile, the true goal behind the lies she knows he will spin.

“I don’t like it either but there’s always more underneath, something that can’t be seen with only a few feet of digging.” He didn’t say anything in response to follow her into Las Noches. They were gone longer than they initially thought. Gin and Aizen were looking for them. Gin grabbed Grimmjow by the tail and dragged him away, the panther hollow clawing at the floor trying to escape. Aizen put an arm around her waist and led her in another direction.

“I have a present for you Ichigo,” There were a few servants walking around. They were in a spot away from everyone else, away from prying eyes. Without being asked to she reverted back to her pre-release form. He pulled a package from his haori and handed it to her. She opened it with curiosity and pulled out a uniform. He watched her put it on, the sleeveless, backless white bodysuit going on first before stepping into the white hakama with a slit going down each side. Lastly she put on the black tabi and waraji. “Perfect. You’re just missing one more thing. Turn around for me.”

He reached back into his haori and pulled out a collar. Aizen connected it around her neck, making sure not to catch her hair. Ichigo touched the charm hanging from the collar, running her finger over the kanji. “What is the meaning of this Aizen-sama?”
“Exactly as it says, my Queen.” He held her shoulders. “Only one as powerful as you deserves to stand by my side.” He slid one hand up to meet her cheek and the other down to her waist. The intimate touch was unfamiliar but not uncomfortable. She leaned into it, more out of curiosity towards the warm sensations flooding her body. “What say you?”

“Aizen-sama,” she said breathlessly. That was all he needed to proceed and kiss her neck. He left a little red mark on her skin but it disappeared with her instant healing. He forced her body closer to him and she rested her head on his shoulder. “It would be an honor.”
The Espada were already sitting at the table, waiting for Aizen with a cup of tea in front of them. The seat at the head of the table remained empty after about ten minutes but they waited, some more patiently than others. Nnoitra looked like he was about to explode when a door on the opposite side of the room slid open. Ichigo sat in the empty seat with her legs crossed. She picked up the cup of tea in front of her and sniffed it with a small smile. "Mm, chamomile with honey," she said to herself.

"Who the fuck is this bitch?" Nnoitra questioned rudely. All eyes turned to him, some glaring, others silently scolding him.

"Now would probably be a good time to shut that giant trap of yours," Grimmjow advised with a smirk. Nnoitra shrieked before he could retort. Ichigo was sitting on the table in front of him in the same manner as she was before, still with her legs crossed and sipping her tea.

"Even Grimmjow knows he shouldn't mess with me. The results are never pretty. Fortunately I'm a nice girl and decided not to break you for your disrespect."

"As if a woman could take me." His hand shot out and he grabbed her by the throat, picked her up and slammed her onto the floor behind his seat causing it to break and dust to billow around them. When it cleared they could all see Nnoitra unconscious, body balanced on her toes. She was still on the ground but she made sure her tea didn't spill, not a single drop. She stood and shifted him to her arm and sat him in his seat. She sat back on the table in front of him. Her cup of tea was set on the table and she grabbed his arm.

"Let this serve as a reminder," Ichigo had one hand on his wrist, holding up his arm while the other was at his elbow, "of what will happen to loudmouthes like him who disrespect the hierarchy." Slowly she added pressure to his elbow, pushing it inwards. He regained consciousness and tried to fight back but she kept him pinned with her foot. With a sickening crack his bone was visible to all, sticking from his skin.

Silence filled the hall except Nnoitra's pained screams. Clapping silenced them even further as Aizen made his appearance. "Excellent demonstration," he said proudly. "Weakness and disobedience will not be tolerated in my castle. The proper punishment will be administered swiftly."

Aizen sat at the head of the table and tapped his leg twice. Ichigo abandoned her spot on the table for his lap, her legs hanging over the arm. "Ichigo, show them."

She changed her position so she was straddling him and put her hands under her hair. With a single flick of her wrists her hair parted exposing the number underneath. Even Grimmjow, who had known her the longest, after Aizen of course, was shocked to see a zero on her back and that she lacked a hollow hole. The surprised trace ended when her hair fell back into place.

She stood and bowed to the group before leaving the hall since her presence was no longer required. Instead she found herself going to the garden. It was as artificial as the sun. Still she enjoyed the colors. There were beautiful flowers of green, yellow, red, blue, pink and other colors she had never seen before. Even though the fragrances they released were false she enjoyed being amongst the varying scents. She lie in the artificial grass, the soil beneath warming her skin.

It was hard to ignore the call of sleep, the flowers swaying with the non-existent breeze. They tickled her neck and arms every time they swayed.
When Ichigo next opened her eyes someone was standing over her. It was Nelliel, her sea foam green hair cascading around her face.

"Hello Nel," she said, blinking away the glaze of sleep.

"Hello Itsygo-chan!" Nel greeted loudly. Ichigo sat up as Nel sat down next to her. "That was amazing what you did to Nnoitra!" She only raised an eyebrow in confusion. "He's really rude to all the females here, especially me. He doesn’t like it when women are stronger than him. You put him in his place real good! Therefore I have decided to make you best friend number three!"

"Number three? Who're one and two?"

"Dondochakka and Pesche of course!"

"You called Nelliel?!" Her two fraccion burst into the room, skidding to a halt next to the tercer Espada. They left deep skid marks in the dirt and parting a bed of flowers. None of them noticed the annoyed look on Ichigo's face.

"Great timing! I was going to invite Ichigo-chan for a game of hide and seek!"

"Great! The more, the better!" Dondochakka cheered, dancing back and forth.

"Hide and seek?" The trio gasped in horror.

"You don't know how to play hide and seek?! It's the best game ever!" They yelled in unison.

"Everyone hides and one person has to find the others. Whoever gets found has to help the seeker. So are you gonna play?"

"Sure," Ichigo replied reluctantly.

"Good! You will be the seeker. Turn around and count to a thousand." Ichigo turned around, closed her eyes and started counting. She heard then leave the garden but didn't turn around.

At one thousand she turned around and almost ran into Aizen. "What are you doing?" He asked his queen.

"Playing hide and seek with Nel and her fraccion," she answered.

"Well then, find me when you're done." Ichigo bowed before she roamed Las Noches, deciding not to search for their reiryoku but she did use sonido to get around faster. She found Pesche first, trying to squeeze into a hole in the floor. She pulled him out by the leg and he groaned.

"No fair! I always get caught first!" He complained, arms crossed as she dragged him through Las Noches. Next they found Dondochakka who was looking for a place to hide, going in and out of rooms. He turned around and ran right into Ichigo.

It had taken them longer to find Nel. She took a more active approach to the game, moving quietly whenever she thought Ichigo was near. She messed up, however, stepping out right in front of them.

She stayed there for a few moments before sticking her tongue out and ran away. Ichigo chased after her, avoiding Arrancar that got in her way. Nel tried to play her by pivoting and changing direction but she caught her by the collar. She puffed out her cheeks in defeat before she put on a big smile.

"Ready for another round?" She asked, still excited.
"Sorry," Ichigo said, "but I must go to Aizen-sama." Nel started pouting but conceded and went to continue playing with Pesche and Dondochakka. The game brought her on the opposite side of the castle. Instead of using sonido she decided to walk so she could explore the plethora of rooms.

She found herself in Grimmjow's room at some point. He was sleeping, legs bent, one hand on his stomach and the other somewhere off to the side. He was snoring too, very loudly. The deep sound vibrated through her chest like a drum.

She left his room and proceeded the rest of the way to Aizen's. He was sitting on the foot of the bed reading a book. He looked up when she shut the door softly behind her. "You wanted me?"

"I had other things to discuss but it's late," he said before putting his book to the side.

"The sun was up when the meeting started."

"You must have had a good time." He rested his chin on his palm and sighed. "You didn't ask if I wanted to play."

"A-Aizen-sama! I-I..." Her cheeks turned bright red in horror but she calmed down when he started chuckling.

"I'm only teasing Ichigo. Come to bed now." She removed her waraji, tabi and hakama so she was only in the bodysuit. He had pulled back the covers while she neatly folded what she took off and set them on a chair. He picked her up and laid her down in the bed, climbing in next to her and covering them with the white duvet.

They had been sleeping in the same bed since the walls of Las Noches were built and the rooms were furnished which had lasted two or three months. Before then they would relax on the top of one of the many pillars. Aizen would sleep but Ichigo would stay up just to watch him sleep.

She laid her head close to his chest to hear his strong heartbeat. The rhythm easily lulled her to a light sleep.
Chapter 4

Ichigo was searching all over Las Noches for Nel, Dondochakka and Pesche. They were playing Nel's newest version of hide and seek in which everybody was the seeker and forced them to use stealth. She had been looking all over for the past hour so she started looking outside the castle. She called their names over and over again while keeping a 400 meter radius from the castle.

From a distance she found three large dots amongst the white landscape. She felt their weak reiatsu and rushed over to them. Nel was in the form of a child, her mask cracked. Dondochakka and Pesche were also in bad shape, their masks completely removed and whatever was underwear was covered by the hoods of their brown cloaks. "Ichigo," Pesche said lowly. "Nel was..." "What happened to you? Who did this?" Ichigo picked up Nel, her form small and fragile. She clutched her tightly against her chest, body trembling with anger.

"Nnoitra tricked her and cracked her mask."

"What about you two?" They tried the best they could to explain what had happened but they were more worried about Nel. "You're no longer safe here. I will take you to my old den, in the Forest."

"If we go there...we won't be able to protect her!"

"My reiryoku covers it and the area around it. They won't go near." The fracción nodded and followed her. It would take a long while to get to her old den but it was definitely worth it. She made sure not to jostle Nel unnecessarily as she walked. Thankfully they didn't encounter any hollows along the way so it shortened the trip immensely.

Before they were only a while from her den Nel opened her eyes. She rubbed them with the backs of her tiny hand and yawned. "Who are you?"

If Ichigo had a heart she knew it would split right in to. Her surprise kept her from giving the girl an answer. Pesche spoke up instead. "This is your...mama Ichigo! We're your brothers! I'm Pesche!"

"Don't forget about Dondochakka!" The fracción brightened up when Nel started laughing and giggling, especially when they made fools out of themselves. They loved seeing her smile. She had fallen asleep by the time they made it to her den. The pelts she made of the furs of some of the hollows she had slain in the past were still there, exactly where she left them. She laid Nel on one and covered her with another.

"Thank you," Pesche said, getting into his knees and pressing his face to the floor. Dondochakka did the same. "Thank you so much! I didn't know what we'd do if you hadn't found us!"

"You don't have to thank me do stand." They did as told quickly. "I know you two are more than capable of protecting her. I just need to make sure you can make a hasty retreat if you get in a fight you're unable to won."

She stepped out of her den and made a loud call. Not long after the sand beneath their feet started shaking. The sand started parting as a large snake-like hollow emerged from below. He moved as if he was going to run them over but he stopped in front of Ichigo. She reached out to touch the mask on his head. "This is Bawabawa. He is a good friend of mine and has served me well." She picked up Nel along with the furs and held her up to him. This is Nelliel tu Odelschwancck and the two are Pesche and Dondochakka. I want you to play with them and keep them safe." He sniffed the trio and nodded in approval. She painfully bid them a temporary farewell as she made her way to Las
Aizen had been in the middle of a meeting when he heard regress m the angry footsteps coming down the hall. A smirk found itself planted on his lips as the steps grew closer and faster. Why none of his Espada felt the deadly reiryoku was unknown to him but he knew his queen was going to hurt someone and bad.

The door slid open behind him and Ichigo walked in, strides long and footfalls heavy. She grabbed Grimmjow by the collar and threw him across the table at Nnoitra who never seemed to move in enough time.

"Damnit Ichigo! Why the fuck did you throw me you crazy bitch?!" Grimmjow yelled, rubbing the back of his head.

"You were closer," she stated as if it was completely justified. Nnoitra pushed him to the side as he stood. He drew his zanpakutou and swung it at her. She didn't move when the blade met her skin and she didn't bleed. She reminded him of their first encounter by grabbing him by the throat, her claws digging into his neck and drawing blood. Being that he had the toughest hierro it startled him how easily he was injured.

"A true warrior doesn't resort to such cowardly tactics to win a fight," she started, digging her claws in deeper as he fought for breath. "Strategically it was brilliant but I know a coward when I see one. Running away with your tail between your legs because you can't be weaker than a woman." She brought him closer to whisper in his ear. "If not for Aizen you'd be dead already." She slashed his throat but not deep enough to kill and left him gasping for air on the floor. "You might want to get Szayel to fix that before you die choking on your blood."

"Ichigo," Aizen said, stopping her before she could leave, "what is the status of Nelliel tu Oderschwanck?" She stayed silent for a few moments.

"She is unable to fight. Pesche and Dondochakka are looking after her. I also put Bawabawa on guard duty." He only hummed in approval before dismissing the others. Nnoitra had gotten up and dragged himself away, more than likely to Szayel's lab to get him fixed.
Chapter 5

When Ichigo woke up Aizen wasn’t next to her like he usually was. She put on her uniform and followed his reiryoku signature to Szayel’s lab. Not one to just intrude in someone’s space she knocked and waited for the affirmative reply. She passed by odd things in tubes and Szayel’s fracción.

“Excellent timing Ichigo,” Aizen said. He gestured for her to come over she did, relishing in the warmth of the arm around her waist. “I have a special job just for you.”

“Anything for you Aizen-sama,” she said. Szayel directed her attention to a tube containing a body that closely resembled hers without the horns.

“Aizen-sama had me modify the gigai design to suit an Espada of your power,” he said as he released the gigai from the tube. The water had drained from the tube and it fell into his arms. “Its purpose is to interact allow you to interact with humans. Should you need to leave it for whatever reason it will dissolve until you need it again. I also made a few tweaks here and there so you can retain a portion of your physical strength.”

They allowed her privacy while she entered the gigai and put on the clothes folded on the table. She found it harder to move her limbs and could barely feel her own reiryoku, but otherwise, there was hardly a difference. “I want you to watch Arisawa Tatsuki. She came very close to foiling my plans and she defeated Kuchiki Byakuya in single combat. Make sure she doesn’t interfere with my plans. The first time I send someone to Gense I want you back here.”

“How am I supposed to watch her?”

“You look like a teenage girl. I enrolled you in her school so you shouldn’t have too much of a problem.” It was much more of a problem than he thought, the biggest being that she is a hollow. She’s never even been to the world of the living since becoming one. She spent all her time in Hueco Mundo, just trying to pass time by. She hadn’t the slightest idea of human customs or what a school was exactly. Plus there was how she was going to get there undetected where she was going to live once she got there.

Of course Aizen always seemed to have the answer to everything. He pulled her out into the halls and started addressing her concerns patiently. She listened intently, mentally taking notes. Then he started talking about school, an institution for learning that allows the younger generation to integrate and succeed in society. He made it sound so complicated her head actually started hurting. Then he started going on about human customs, their weird moving machines called cars, the tall buildings the lit up the sky with lights and the hundreds of stores.

“Have you been there before?” She asked suddenly. The question actually caught him off guard.

“I was stationed there a few times.”

“Do you want to go back?”

“Why would I?” She just shrugged her shoulders.

“I don’t know. It just sounds like…when you were explaining it to me it sounded more like a memory you want to grasp instead of what you learned from a book. Did you like it when you were there?”
“It…it was interesting.” He said nothing else about it. Instead he changed the subject to how she was going to get there. He was going to open a garganta somewhere near Urahara Shoten but far enough away so there wouldn’t be time for anyone to react to anything. He wanted Urahara to be aware of her presence in Karakura. It was then that they had made their way outside of Las Noches to the sands of Hueco Mundo.

It was a new feeling. Sousuke had actually pressed his lips against hers. When he pulled back they tingled in a good way. She reached up so her fingers ghosted over them and she could feel the warmth radiating from them. “What…”

“It’s called a kiss. It’s a sign of affection between humans and Shinigami.”

“I’ve never experienced that before. It’s…warm.”

“You are to only experience it with me.” With a snap a garganta opened and that smile of his replaced the earlier possessiveness. “Be good while you’re away.” Ichigo could only nod as she turned and stepped through the portal.

As she exited the other side it closed immediately. It was only a few seconds later did a man wearing green clothes appear looking around but only found her standing there, watching him like he was watching her. “I’ve never seen you in Karakura before,” he said suddenly.

“I just moved here,” she said. “I got lost trying to find my new home.” She distinctly remembers Sousuke slipping a sheet of paper into her pocket as well as a key and to ask for that address. He handed the slip of paper to her and he nodded. “It’s only a few blocks away. Follow me.”

They were walking down the dark street quietly, the only sounds being the passing cars, the wind and the tapping of his cane. “My name is Urahara Kisuke by the way.”

“Kurosaki Ichigo.” The tapping stopped and she had to stop as well to keep from running into him. He glanced at her from the corner of his eye. “Is something wrong?” he just put on a fake smile.

“No, not at all! I was just surprised! You have the same name as the daughter of a good friend of mine!” She could tell he left off the ‘but she’s not here anymore’ but she didn’t ask for him to elaborate. The unspoken words hung in the air. They started walking again until they reached a nice two story house.

“Thank you Urahara-san.” She stopped to bow like Sousuke taught her with her hand folded in her lap and bent at the waist.

“No need for that Kurosaki-san! It’s my pleasure! Stop by the Shoten any time and we can chat over tea! It’s so nice to see a teenager with manners! Are you from Japan or just new to the area?” She found his questions a bit unnerving but Sousuke had prompted her for questions like these.

“I was born in Egypt but my parents were Japanese. They were architects.”

“Why are you here alone?”

“They thought it was better I continue my education and they believed Japan had better schools. They wanted to continue their adventures without having to worry about me living in an unstable environment.”

“You were in a stable environment before? I heard there were a lot of uprisings over there.”

“They weren’t very good at their secondary job.” Urahara could tell she was lying but he didn’t say
anything about it. As much as she hated to admit she had walked right into his trap. She just gave him reason to watch her. How she cursed not having Sousuke’s silver tongue.

“You’re a bad liar,” he said easily. He wasn’t one to hide his intentions when they were so very clear to the other party.

“I know.”

“Why don’t you tell me the truth? I would hate to get violent against such a polite young lady.”

“Unfortunately it’s late and I have to go to school tomorrow. I will speak with you afterwards. Over tea?”

“Over tea. Don’t try to avoid it.”

“I am a woman of my word.” Ichigo watched him leave before opening the door. She had no idea how to use a key but it wasn’t hard to figure out. The house was elegant, something Sousuke made sure everything he did was. She made sure to leave her shoes neatly in the genkan before stepping onto the polished wooden floors. As she moved throughout the house she made sure to admire the mix between traditional and modern Japanese furnishings.

She found her bedroom which was painted an immaculate white while the bed sheets were black and red like her reiatsu. On the bed was a single wooden box. She opened it without a thought. Inside was a choker with a pendant in the shape of the number on her back. It lay in soft satin with intricate embroidery.
Chapter 6

Her first day of school was...interesting. She met Tatsuki and her group, a ragtag band of vigilantes in her opinion. They were so young but they fight like experienced Shinigami. Arisawa Tatsuki was the fire that drew them all together. They fed off her warmth and became stronger because of it, because of her. Chad is a gentle giant who only fought to protect his friends and innocents. She liked him the most, partially because his voice reminded her of Sousuke. Then there was Uryuu, the Quincy. He is a stubborn individual who refuses to be weak even though he’s as small as Luppi. She thought his fashion sense was impeccable, something Sousuke would appreciate.

Then there was Orihime.

Orihime is a sweet, soft-spoken young girl with beautiful eyes and an even more beautiful personality. She’s the type of girl boys would fall head-over-heels for. She doesn’t even seem conscious as to what her body does to the boys in the school. They watch her when they pass her in the hallway and make lewd gestures about her to their friends. While Ichigo liked the girl she couldn’t stand how innocent she was. She’s not stupid but she would be an easy target of manipulation. Sometimes Ichigo wanted to punch her and Tatsuki. Tatsuki is too busy protecting Orihime from Chizuru and everything else she doesn’t notice how she looks at her and Orihime is too shy to confess. Every interaction between them is irritating.

School itself was something new. Ichigo didn’t know at all what the teachers were teaching. She didn’t have a clue what Algebra was except that it’s a form of math, and she was pretty good at math. They were diligent in their explanations of new subjects and made sure everyone was on the same page.

When she got home Urahara was waiting at her gate, arms crossed and leaning against the metal. “Kurosaki-san, I see you found your way home alright,” he said, standing up straight. She just nodded and he followed her into her home. “Wow, everything’s white!” He took a seat on the cushions around the low table and waited patiently for her to brew the tea that was promised (although, she thought she would go over to the Shoten and he would brew the tea). When she set his cup in front of him he tasted it and hummed in approval. It didn’t last long. His eyes turned serious when he looked at her from the rim of the cup.

“I promised you a truth,” she said the moment she noticed his eyes.

“You won’t tell the entire truth.” She just nodded. His silence prompted her to continue.

“I was sent here to monitor the activities of Arisawa Tatsuki. I’m under no orders to report her movements or her capabilities. I’m just an observer making sure she doesn’t become a nuisance to my king.”

“If she becomes a nuisance, will you take her down?”

“I’m just an observer.”

“Then someone else will?”

“Only when she becomes a nuisance.” He nodded and took another sip of tea. “I have no intention of harming her, her friends or the people of this town. Unless my king directly orders it of me you needn’t worry about my presence.”

“Where are you from?”
“I’m not at liberty to say, but I’m not a Shinigami. I am only in the service of my king.”

“Did your king give you that necklace?” Ichigo didn’t know that her cheeks turned red. She wasn’t embarrassed, shocked but not embarrassed. “Oho? You look just like your name! So cute!” Now she was blushing from embarrassment. "Don't worry Ichigo-chan, I won't tell!" He hid a smirk behind his fan. "Actually, I was wondering if you could tell me what you are."

"Just another spiritual being." Urahara finished his tea before leaving with a backwards wave of his hand. Ichigo stayed at the table until she felt his reiryoku get further away from her house. She touched the choker around her neck and sighed. Such a strange world she was stuck in. How long before Aizen was satisfied with his forces? Only until then could she leave the wretched place.

It has its good points, she could admit. The sky is a beautiful blue and the sun warmed her skin. She had never seen the sun before this morning. It is beautiful, almost as beautiful as the moon of Hueco Mundo. She loves the grass too, the vibrant trees and flowers as well as the lights at night. The only bad thing she could think of so far would be the foul odor that cars emitted. Otherwise, it was a pretty okay place in her opinion. As much as she had wanted to be away with the sands of Hueco Mundo, she missed them the moment the stepped on the grass. Not even the beautiful home she is staying in could compare to Las Noches. The space behind her remained empty and she didn’t have to deal with everyone’s shenanigans. She missed her king and she missed her friends (family, even if she would never admit it) more than she thought.

If she missed the comforts of Hueco Mundo and Las Noches this much in one day, how could she last for, possibly, months?

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