

Ch 1

As the cold mountain air sweep through the snow covered mountain trees, there is a calm in the air. Snowflakes fall between the leafless branches, only to be disturbed by the rustle of nearby animals. Suddenly the forest explodes with excitement. Deer bounding over bushes, birds cutting between the trees, only to be followed by a young girl, clothes torn and tattered, dirtied by mud and dirt. Her arms cut, feet bruised, and tears in her eyes as she runs for her life. An explosion blows forth from behind her, knocking her to the ground. Tumbling through the snow, she is only to be stopped when she runs into a boulder. As she struggles to open her eyes, an ominous figure looms over her. Before her stands a monstrous ogre, its massive yellowed fangs bared, dripping with a green ooze. As it stares down on the helpless girl, it raises an arm, baring a grotesque club made from of some creatures bone. Seeing no escape, the little girl screams out for help, cowering in fear. Just as the ogre is about to strike down, it hesitates, only to burst apart into a flurry of dust and magic. Watching on in terror as the particles disperse, she sees the face of a boy, not much older than her

Lightning flashes as the boy's face turns into the little girl, though much older now, her resolve hardened, and trace of the fear she had that day has dissolved. The downpour of rain drenches the battlefield, water running down her leather and steel armor, the once helpless girl is now a force to be reckoned with. She leans down to pick up the sack dropped my the monster, carefully retrieving small coins and gems. As she stands, she raises her hand in the air, and with a quick Swipe, three small faces appear before her, almost as if they were holographic. With an emotionless voice, she speaks.

"That's our quota, go home."

One of the faces, a middle aged man with a bushy beard, and mud on his face responds with a sight amount of annoyance

"What? But they're on the run! If we keep pushing, then-"

Without allowing the man to finish, she swipes her hand, making a dialog box appear
[TP party to Ashiro Village warp point?]

[YES] [NO]

As she hits the yes button, she states with the same cold demeanor

"We're warping."

A white and blue light overtakes her. As it fades, she and three men appear on a platform, the men share the faces that appeared moments ago

"Seriously Rin!" The younger of the three men exclaims "You can't just tp us without warning us!"

"I did." Rin replies as she walks off the platform. as she turns her head to look back at the young man, she bears a look of disdain "And it's Yukimura to you."

Now the head hunter of Ashiro Village, she has grown to hate the creatures that nearly destroyed her village. known by her namesake, "The Ice Child, Rin Yukimura ", she rarely shows

delight. As she sits at the end of the tavern bar, drinking by herself and lost in her thoughts, drunkards begin talking

“Oy, ain’t that thur li’le icey? She shur grown up, ain’t she? *hic*”

“Yea, i t’ink it is.”

“I ‘eard she ‘as a ‘eart of ice an’ no soul!”

“Shh, don’t let ‘er ‘ear you sayin’ ‘nutin.”

“Why? Wut she gon’ do ‘bout it? Toss me out ‘da tav’rn?”

“Maybe.” an angered, yet solemn voice mutters from behind the two drunkards. As they turn their heads to see a less than amused Rin. As the two fly through the tavern door, she walks out behind them as she heads home

“Hey! You haven’t paid for your drink!” The tavern owner blurts out. Without a word, she waives her hand, as she does, a coin bag appears in front of the tavern owner. The tavern owner shouts as he stares down on the drunkards.

As Rin makes it back to her home on the edge of the village, a small wooden shack only large enough to store a small bed, stove, and cupboard. She closes the door, sheds her armor, and plops down on the bed, obviously lost in thought. As she puts her hand on her heart she sighs as she clenched her fist.

“It’s not made of ice... right?”

Rin jolts out of the thoughts as she hears a large commotion coming from the village. As she rushes to get her armor on, she notices that the screams are actually cheers. When she looks through her window, she sees a caravan. Being at the end of a mountain pass to the mainlands, traveling merchants are not too uncommon in Ashiro Village. Perplexed by the commotion, she decides to investigate. As she nears the caravan, she notices that it bears a gilded emblem on the canvas of the carts. Rounding the carriage, she realizes that it’s a traveling group of mercenaries. The group of mercenaries are huddled around a fire telling stories of their travels. Watching from a distance, Rin leans against the carriage, a small smirk starting to form on her face as she watched the children’s imaginations run wild with stories of heros. Just as she begins to relax, a younger man steps out of the carriage. As Rin sees his face, she has a flashback of that fateful day. She steps back, starting to tremble, pointing at the boy

“Y-you. I-it was you.”

The boy turns to see who is talking, only to recognize Rin

“What? ...Hey, aren’t you that girl-”

Rin drops to her knees, trembling and holding her head

“No, no, no. I had just started to move on...”

“Hey, are you okay?” he asks as he reaches his hand out, only to be swatted away by Rin, who is now backing away.

“GO AWAY!”

Now sitting on a log next to the fire, Rin has calmed down, though still a little shaken. One of the female mercenaries is sitting with her as the boy walks over, whispering to the other mercenary

“How’s she doing?”

“A little shaken, but she’s doing better.” she replies

“Good.” He turns to Rin, who looks back out of the corner of her eye, slightly embarrassed. He walks around the log to face her, as he offers his hand.

“Hey, um, i’m sorry i startled you. My name is Tsukino, Jun’ichi.”

“I remember.” Rin sheepishly replies, as she slightly lowers her head, looking away.

“You know her Jun?” the female mercenary inquires, only to have Jun dodge the subject

“Yeah. Hey, um, i’m a go back to the carriage if you need me...”

“JUN!” the mercenary blurts out as he runs back to the carriage. sighing, she looks down to the shaking Rin.

“Just what happened between you two?” she asks herself.

The next morning, Rin wakes to the sound of gentle knocking at her door. As she sluggishly gets dressed and answers the door, she see the village elder at her door

“M-master Hisakawa! Wh-Why are you here?!”

“I am here to retrieve you miss Yukimura. I have something i wish to speak with you about.”

Still half asleep, Rin tries to understand what is going on, while not falling asleep

“Y-yes sir? What do you need?”

“It is nothing that can’t wait. Meet me at the lodge in an hour, and we can discuss further.” Just as he turns to leave, he holds a finger up

“Oh, one more thing Rin...”

“Yes sir?” She replies, anxious to return to her bed

“Next time, do remember to put pants on.” He rebuttals as he chuckles to himself while he walks away. Rin’s face goes blank as she looks down, only to turn bright red, slamming the door shut before anyone sees her.

As Rin arrives at the elder’s lodge, still slightly embarrassed from the incident this morning, she can’t help but notice the other villagers eyeing her. Though not too uncommon, given her reputation, these stares were different, more un-nerving, no doubt from her outburst the night before. Rin tries to ignore the stares and gossip as she makes her way to Elder Hisakawa’s room. As she nears the door, she hears an ongoing meeting coming from it. When she peeks into the room, she sees Elder Hisakawa speaking with two of the mercenaries. As she leans in, she listens intently to the conversation

“Are you sure? I mean with everything that happened, i’m uncertain if it would work.”

“I believe there is no other alternative. Something must be done about it.”

“We understand your concern sir, but with all due respect-” The group is interrupted by a large crash as clutter falls to the ground. The group turn around to see both Rin and a young child in a heap on the floor.

“Watch where you’re going!” Rin scolds, standing up as she dusts the dirt off her clothes.

“EEE! I’m s-sorry ma’am! Please don’t turn me into ice! I promise it won’t happen again!” the child screams as she runs away

“But- I don’t...” Rin sigh to herself, knowing yet another rumor was about to spread.

“Ah, miss Yukimura! Good timing.” Elder Hisakawa interjects joyfully, trying to sway Rin’s mind from the child.

“My apologies Master Hisakawa! I didn’t intend to keep you waiting.” Rin states as she bows

"Now, now. There is no need for apologies miss Yukimura. We just sat down. Come in." Elder Hisakawa reassures her, gesturing toward a seat. As Rin takes her seat, she looks over to the other two at the meeting. One, a large man, most likely a frontline man of some caliber. The other, a tall, thin woman wearing a lightweight leather armor of sorts, a rogue of some sort. As Rin looks over the two, the woman looks over and shows a soft smile as she gestures a friendly wave, causing Rin to quickly avert her gaze. As her smile fades, the man whispers to her.

"Don't take it to heart. From what I've heard, I wouldn't expect much out of her." he reassures, looking at Rin out of the corner of his eye.

"Alright, shall we continue our discussion?" Elder Hisakawa asks, diffusing the tension in the room.

"Right, of course." The man replies, still looking toward Rin

"But as we said before, We'll accept the job, but i'm not sure it'll work out with Yukimura, given her past with Jun. If it's alright, we could just-"

"My apologies, but miss Yukimura must be there. It is a core aspect of the quest." Elder Hisakawa interjects

"Um, am I missing something?" Rin questions, obviously being left out of the group.

"Ah yes." Elder Hisakawa replies, a slight smirk forming on his face

"You are going to join this fine group of mercenaries on a simple quest i have for them."

"Is that a request, or an order sir?" Rin hesitantly questions, noticing Elder Hisakawa's smirk.

"That all depends on your willingness." Elder Hisakawa replies, eyes narrowing

"Yes sir" Rin reluctantly agrees.

The male mercenary sight

"Alright, if you insist old man."

As Elder Hisakawa bows his head, three icons appear, one in front of the two mercenaries and Rin

[Quest]

[From Elder Hisakawa]

[Accept] [Deny]

After the three touch accept, the male mercenary turns to Rin, extending his arm to greet her

"If we're going to be working together, we should get to know each other more than *Hey you!* My name is Yamamoto, Kenji. This is Takenaka, Kou."

"Hi-hi! You can call me Kou, everyone does." Kou blurts out from behind Kenji. Her cheerful greeting only met my Rin shifting her gaze.

"Yukimura, Rin." she responds, shaking Kenji's hand while continuing to advert her eyesight.

As Kenji, Kou, and Rin return to the caravan, Kenji and Kou begin to speak amongst the ever distant Rin

"I'm telling you Kou, it's not gonna work." Kenji whispers with a hushed voice, keeping an eye on Rin

"Com'on Kenji, she isn't that bad." Kou replies, always looking for the bright side of life

"I've heard some pretty impressive stories about her."

"Do tell." Kenji enticingly inquires

"I heard that she took on drag of at least 20 ghouls after getting shot in the arm by a skeleton sniper only a week ago!" Kou replies, getting exceedingly excited as she goes on

"Oh-ho! Really now?" Growing a smirk as he looks back to Rin, Kenji inquires, attempting to get any response from the ever silent Rin

Rin glances toward the two for a second before averting her gaze yet again, only to mumble out a short response

"I wasn't shot..."

"What was that Yukimura? We couldn't quite hear you from way back there." Kenji teases, flamboyantly gesturing his hand to his ear "Speak up!"

"I-" Rin pauses for a second, holding her arm before continuing, "I wasn't shot. I was bit."

"Really? Does it still hurt?" Kou turns around, excited that her new comrade was speaking, though still concerned for her well being only to be met my Rin shifting her posture, distancing herself again

"Oh, okay..." Kou comments, her chipper attitude taken down by Rin's retraction.

As the trio near the mercenary camp, excited villagers near, excitedly awaiting what was to come. Hearing the commotion, the others emerge from the caravan to greet their comrades

"Welcome back!" Jun greets, waving his arm while he rouses the others "So what's this quest about?"

"Ha! The old man just wants us to get rid of some group of bandits that have been encroaching on their hunting grounds. Nothing big."

"The Sanguine Blades." Rin speaks up, obviously unnerved by their name alone, clenching her fist, and gritting her teeth.

"And just who are you?" One of the mercenaries pokes his head our. Dressed in a black cloak, rich purple and gold decals intricately embroidered upon it. His hood pulled over to cover most of his face in shadows. As he steps out of the carriage, he walks toward Rin, staff in hand. Though seeming plain in contrast with his cloak, it's head emits a strange, faint aura. As he nears Rin, he looms over her, waiting for and answer, only to be met with silence.

"Her name is Yukimura." Kenji states, while stepping between the two "She's going to be our guide. The old man insisted." Kenji leans in and whispers "Deal with it Fumio."

"Tsk." Fumio scoffs as he turns to return to the carriage. "I find no joy in working with amateurs." he mudders before entering through the canvas drapes. the tension in the air is only dissolved by faint whimper from the other carriage

"Uh-um... Hello... M-m-my name is M-Miyamoto, Mieko..." As Rin turns to see the bearer of this innocent voice, she sees a younger aged woman, dressed in a white robe and hood. The robe had a maroon midriff and loose white belt. Her matching stole was accented by golden crosses that complimented her bronze chestplate and grieves. The finishing pieces to her armor were her ivory boots and headband. The more that Rin inspected Meiko, the more unnerved Meiko became

"I- I'm the groups cleric... so... even though I won't be fighting, and you don't know me that well yet..." Meiko trails on, slowly receding. She takes a breath, steps forward, and states with vigour "Know that I won't let you down!"

“You never have Meiko.” Jun reassures, placing his hand on Meiko’s head, causing her to blush slightly. “Now then, if we’re all set, Shall we head out?”

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