

## [Adam POV]

For the next few days, the words Zanryuzuki had left me with lingered in my mind like an echo that wouldn't die out.

Doubt.

Was I truly clouded by self-doubt?

Was I truly rejecting myself?

I sighed, it wasn't easy to answer any of those questions. I didn't feel like I was doubting myself, or rejecting anything about me, but that apparently wasn't the case.

My inner world was a mess without a shape, and while I wasn't an expert in the subject, I had reasons to strongly believe an inner world like mine didn't bode well for the workings of the soul as a whole.

Makarov who was entering my room to check on me seemed to notice my inner turmoil. His brows were furrowed with concern as he extended his arm and asked in a soft, grandfatherly tone. "Is everything okay?"

I looked at him, and for a moment hesitated. I wasn't sure if it was a good idea to waste his time with my questions, that even to me they made no sense.

Eventually, however, I caved under his worried expression and asked. "How can one fight self-doubt and self-acceptance?"

Makarov's eyes were unreadable as he stared at me, his gaze lingering on me for what felt like an eternity. His voice was soft and quiet when he spoke. "To accept oneself is to wholly admit you are imperfect, permanently and inevitably flawed. And that that makes you beautiful."

That was surprisingly profound.

But not something I didn't know.

Perfection was a fool's errand. An impossibility to achieve.

"And what about doubt?" I asked.

Makarov looked at me with a warm smile and placed his hand on my shoulder reassuringly. "Doubt is inevitable, but it must not be left to linger," he said with a chuckle. "If you hear a voice within you saying you cannot do something, then by all means do that and that voice will be silenced."

Another surprisingly profound bit of advice, but once again not something I didn't know.

Makarov's shoulders slumped, and his eyes glistened with held-back tears "I know you feel like you failed. I know that you feel that in some manner you have done something wrong by surviving what you did when others could not. But you have to accept there was nothing you could've done."

Survivor's guilt?

Was I truly going through that?

"I think that's the thing, Master," I sighed, looking at the floor. "I don't feel guilty, or in doubt of myself. Yet everyone seems to see that in me, so how can you fix something you can see?"

Makarov's kind eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled, and he spoke in a soft yet confident tone. "Sometimes all you need to do is tell yourself that everything is okay," he said reassuringly. "Not all doubt, guilt or similar is apparent to us, sometimes it is our subconscious self that is dealing with it."

That... actually makes a lot of sense.

I leaned forward and clasped my hands together in a gesture of respect. "Thank you for your time, master," I said, as I stood up, my joints creaking as I straightened my legs and pushed off the bed. "I have much to think about now."

Makarov's eyes sparkled as he smiled warmly at me. "It was my pleasure. A father is always ready to impart some wisdom!"

I smiled before exiting the room, I had much to think about.

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By Makarov's words, a part of me, the part we rarely have control over, wasn't accepting my situation and it was in turn clouding my mind with doubt.

I wasn't sure how to deal with that, but I knew that waiting for the situation to fix itself would do me no favors.

I had to talk with Zanryuzuki, that much I knew.

"I don't know if you can hear me," I whispered, my heart pounding. "I don't know if whatever is happening to me is damaging us, but if you can hear me, I wish to talk with you," I added, aching for some type of response.

For a few moments, I felt nothing. Normally I would feel a faint pulse coming from within me, or a nudge of some kind, but this time, I felt nothing.

Eventually, however, I felt a small nudge.

That was good, she could still hear me.

"I won't say I see all the problems I have," I said, taking a small pause. "But, I will say I know I have them. I still haven't completely accepted everything, my new life, my new world, it's all so fantastical that I can't help but wonder why me?"

I chuckled.

"I remember you asked me who I was. Well, I'm no kid, but that doesn't mean I'm the man I used to be," I replied, my hands closing. "I'm just me, I don't know what that entails, but that's all I can say."

I sighed.

"I know these answers aren't all that satisfactory," I chuckled again. "But an old man told me that sometimes all one needs is to say everything will be okay, and I choose to believe his words. I believe, no, I KNOW, everything will be okay."

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**[Adam POV - Inner World]**

Without time to process, I was suddenly transported to my inner world, which was now a world full of water that I could somehow walk on without sinking.

These crystalline waters lapped against the sturdy structures of glistening buildings around and lush green forests that somehow seemed to be standing above the water.

Looking down tentatively as the water undulated under my feet, I could see the dark, calm surface of this world was lit up by the reflection of a thousand stars.

Then, as I was staring at the reflection of the stars a sparkle of light flashed and rippled as Zanryuzuki materialized in front of me, using some of the surrounding water to fashion her body.

Looking at me, she smiled and said "I like this."

"Was that really all I had to do?" I asked with a chuckle. "To say everything would be okay?"

Zanryuzuki's eyes locked with mine, her gaze unwavering. Her face remained serene as she spoke with a steady voice. "Such a small gesture can be a powerful thing for the soul, Adam. You finally allowed yourself to acknowledge there was something

wrong, even when you couldn't see it. That alone changed how you perceived yourself."

Well, that was cheesy. But not untrue.

I remember a friend of mine used to say that someone can only change if they admit they need to change.

That wasn't exactly my case, but it was similar enough I reckoned.

Zanryuzuki's kind gaze met mine as she smiled and her eyes glimmered like the sun on a lake. "Sometimes the solutions we seek are more simple than we think, and is because of that we often struggle to find them."

That was incredibly wise.

"So, is everything good now?" I asked, tilting my head.

Zanryuzuki's lips curled up in a soft smile as she said, "It is. I won't go out and say that other difficulties won't arise in the future, but if you continue to think the same way you have, then things will be alright."

I guess I can understand Ichigo a lot better now.

No wonder the Shinigami have to train for hundreds of years to fully overcome these inner problems.

"So, why is my inner world a massive sea in the middle of the stars that happen to have forests and a massive city above the water?" I asked, wondering if Zanryuzuki knew.

I mean, the inner world of someone was supposed to be a representation of the person itself.

I didn't feel very represented. The buildings made sense, I lived most of my life in a metropolitan city, but the forest, the seas, and the stars? I couldn't figure out how or why they were there.

"Everything you see here is something that marked you as a person throughout your life," Zanryuzuki replied. "The seas represent your spiritual power, which is seemingly endless. The forest represents a time in your life you were innocent and how simple things were, the city represents the part of your past life that remains with you, and the stars... they represent what you expect for your future."

My brow furrowed as I looked around me, taking in the sights and sounds of my surroundings with thoughtful consideration. Then I nodded slowly and said, "I think I understand."

"I know most of these things will be confusing for you," Zanryuzuki replied kindly. "This world and even me were fiction at some point in your life. It can be hard to fully grasp



something that is so out of the norm but don't worry. I will be here to aid you along the way."

"In that case, I'm lucky to have you by my side," I beamed at her. "I can't imagine how hard it would've been without you."