

Aesthetics and Identity
by debbiechan

Disclaimer: Kubo Tite created Bleach, but I am responsible for my own obsession with it.

(Pretentious) description: PG, two drabbles. Despite taking its title from the Bleach Beat Ichilshi duet, this piece isn't shounen ai. There's not even any Ishida in here.

watches mouths drop open

Besides Death and Love, what is Bleach about? I dunno. Our dear Kubo-sensei appears to have a thing for Fashion. Hidden identities. Not just Aizen and Isshin, but even our hero Ichigo isn't who he looks like. Yet Kon is always Kon whether in the body of a plushie or inside Ichigo. Kubo's color spreads are all about the clothes, but is there poesy in the posery? "All Peoples Are Vampires." Doesn't that phrase ring like an album title more than a vodka commercial? We're all the Living Dead. Everyone, quick--grab a black cape.

One day I had no plots but I did have some little ideas so I wrote these.

The featured characters are Chad, Ichigo, and Rukia.

for laurie_bunter

1. Aesthetics

"In old American westerns you can tell the good guys from the bad guys by the clothes they wear. Mexicans have thick mustaches and are the bad guys--but if they wear giant sombreros, they're the funny guys."

So said Abuelo, but Chad never saw such a movie. After moving back to Okinawa, he missed Mexican telenovelas about women who wore party dresses even to the market. He learned to like Japanese shows about talking animals, and he read about cowboy movies in an American culture textbook.

This book said bad guys fingered their mustaches and wore black capes.

Not wanting to forget his Spanish, Chad read Latino poetry outside class assignments. A Latino poet told him the truth about aesthetics. Pretty kittens, the guy said, get homes. The ugly kittens end up in a bag in a river.

The guys in the band told Chad to get a tattoo. Bass players should cultivate an image, and Chad needed something to offset those loud floral shirts.

The guy at the tattoo shop showed Chad snakes and puppies and alarm clocks. Gorgeous swirling arts, cute and simple arts. Skulls and koi fish and a disembodied female breast.

Chad wanted something cool, a lyric from a song he liked. *God is maimed; come let us prey* was too depressing. *I licked her wounds and ate her rare* might get him kicked out of school. He decided on the song's title, *Amor e Morte*, but the tattoo artist messed up the spelling and wrote *Amore* instead of *Amor*.

Italian instead of Latin.

That was fine.

The meanings mattered and not so much the little shapes that made the letters, but Italian was cool. Italian was sexy....

Chad held up the hand mirror and told himself that the knuckles grasping the handle belonged to a kind person. Even though he could kill you with a strong slap, Chad was more likely to reach out and pull you out of the gutter if you were down and out. Offer you his big sexy tattooed-in-Italian strength.

More than cool, Chad wanted to be ... good and decent. Because Abuelo had wanted him to be that.

When he checked out his new tattoo with the hand mirror, the mirror behind the vanity table was reflected in it, and in that mirror there was another reflection and another and another....

Lots of Sado Yasutoras. Lots of Good Guys.

Identity

"Dead bodies have been hard to find recently." ~ Ichigo, chapter 17

It's not that Ichigo *forgot* the weight of his dead mother's body on top of him, it's just that he didn't feel it anymore. In fact, he would wake up every morning and think, *I'm not dreaming about her. I don't feel her blood on my shirt.*

Her blood ... a wetness that had been distinctly warm. The other wetness, an icy cold rain, had washed warmth away.

How long had he lain there under his mother's body?

His thoughts dissolved into blurs with the passing cars.

How long had he been sitting curbside with Rukia?

"Stupid cat!" Rukia slapped her knee. "You're supposed to cross the street!"

Ichigo and Rukia had been waiting for an hour, *at least an hour*, for a dog or cat to be run over.

"Venture forth and meet your destiny!" Rukia called to the hesitant tabby sniffing the gutter. "Heeere, kitty, kitty, we have mackerel on this side!"

"It can't even hear you," Ichigo grumbled. "You're a ghost."

"You said this corner was littered with bodies! You said a cat was killed every hour!"

Ichigo stood up and put his hands in his pockets. "Maybe I was exaggerating. The pet store--maybe they throw away old fish and sick hamsters. We could look in their dumpster."

The body didn't need to be alive, only freshly dead, but watching a geriatric gerbil breathe its last seemed ... easier ... than watching a cat go splat at a busy intersection.

This is for the sake of that mod-soul, Ichigo reminded himself. This is so it can have a body and a life. This is so I can feel good about myself because I'd be a real jerk if I just forgot about the whole thing now....

"Rukia! Can't you just kill the next hungry cat we see? It will go to Soul Society anyway."

"What? Does that sound like something that would be *allowed*? YOU kill it."

That's when they saw the plushie by the roadside.

Kneeling over the matted orange thing, Ichigo wondered if its apparent loss of stuffing would in any way affect its accommodating a mod-soul. Rukia knelt beside him, and their eyes met.

"Let's do it," she said.

Ichigo reached into his pocket and pulled out the soul candy. He held it between his thumb and forefinger where it glinted in the afternoon sun.

Like the moment before Rukia stabbed him with her zanpakutou and gave him her Shinigami powers, he felt weightless but full of purpose.

Sunlight. Warmth. A tickly feeling under his nose and the certainty that whatever was coming next was as inevitable as a sneeze.

Anything and everything was possible since Rukia.

END