

**Rule Breaker, Deal Maker**  
**by debbiechan**

Disclaimer: I don't own Bleach. I didn't create the characters of Ishida Uryuu and Abarai Renji. I slashed this pair a couple of years before Kubo-sensei made Renji clutch Ishida in canon in chapter 293 "Urge for Unite," but since that moment this pair has owned *me*.

Description: RenIshi, yaoi, NC-17. Closest thing to a song-fic I've done, but I was listening to "Wild Horses" and thinking of Renji and Rukia one afternoon and before I knew it, the Stones had captured me. They seem like the band to express Renji's barely contained wildness, his patience that totters utter frustration and some sort of elegant longing. This fic can be read as a sequel to "Satisfaction" (<http://community.livejournal.com/bleachness/tag/satisfaction>) and "Unravel Me" ( [HYPERLINK "http://community.livejournal.com/bleachness/90504.html#cutid1"](http://community.livejournal.com/bleachness/90504.html#cutid1) <http://community.livejournal.com/bleachness/90504.html#cutid1>)

and was written to the Stones, mostly live versions of "Bitch."

*The Rolling Stones "Little Red Rooster"* [HYPERLINK "http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2\\_ROO\\_hGcY&NR=1"](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2_ROO_hGcY&NR=1)  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2\\_ROO\\_hGcY&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2_ROO_hGcY&NR=1)

*The Rolling Stones "Let It Bleed"*  
[HYPERLINK "http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UDpPo8u\\_hA"](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UDpPo8u_hA) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UDpPo8u\\_hA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UDpPo8u_hA)

*The Rolling Stones "Bitch"* [HYPERLINK "http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgqogVTN1PM"](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgqogVTN1PM)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgqogVTN1PM>

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*Feeling so tired, can't understand it  
Just had a fortnight's sleep  
I'm feeling so tired, I'm so distracted  
Ain't touched a thing all week*

*I'm feeling drunk, juiced up and sloppy  
Ain't touched a drink all night  
I'm feeling hungry, can't see the reason  
Just ate a horse meat pie....*

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Yumchika figured out what was eating at Renji before Renji did.

“Love is misery.” Yumi winked and the two yellow feathers on his eyelid bounced. “What’s the worse that can happen?” His voice was playful. “Kid gets killed in the war. With the spiritual power he’s got, he’ll make Shinigami in no time. We’ll find him, sign him up for the Eleventh. You can come over and play with him *any time* you want.”

Ikkaku looked over his shoulder. “Pipe down! Think Renji wants all of Soul Society to know he’s chopping the sashimi with a human?”

“Quit it.” Renji slapped the nape of Ikkaku’s baldness before sitting down to join him and Yumi on the grassy knoll overlooking the Eleventh Division’s training area.

Renji knew there would be no afternoon sparring. The Eleventh rarely trained; its recent gatherings were just for show, a display responding to commands to step up preparations for battle. He had been asked to check on the wayward squad and had arrived just in time for the day’s first beer. Ikkaku held a giant vessel of the dark, smelly stuff in his lap. He tipped the jug to fill the cup of a passing Shinigami who said *thanks* and wandered off into the meadow of black hakama.

Yumichika was pink-cheeked and beaming drunk already.

“Not just a human,” Yumi cooed. “A *Quincy*.”

“Human’s a human,” Ikkaku said.

“You’re one to talk, man.” Renji elbowed Ikkaku. “Look at what *you’re* dating.”

Yumi covered his throat with his palm and made strangled noises. The little whines didn’t dwindle until Renji made it clear that the “date” he was talking about was the half-a-person-sized beer jug nestled on Ikkaku’s lap.

“Stacked.” Renji palmed the jug’s voluptuous curve. “I give this relationship an hour at most. *Less* if you don’t get up to piss five or six times.”

“Oh Abarai-kun.” With a little grunt of effort, Yumi took the enormous bottle from Ikkaku. “Here, come between them. You’re strung *so* tight today.” He poured a cup for Renji. “A lot of very cheap, very horrible beer will make you fearless and dumb like Ikkaku here.”

One cup then another didn’t help Renji’s anxiety. He downed a third and felt a vague warmth behind his eyes.

“Am I right?” asked Yumi. “You’re fretting over Ishida Uryuu?”

It took a while--Ikkaku lay on his back and smiled at the noonday sun and Yumi tipped the jug to fill another passing Shinigami's cup--before Renji was able to answer.

"It's just--" Renji shook his head. "It's not fretting. It's just--"

"Spit it out," said Yumi.

"I don't fret, Yumichika."

"Pfft. You're always worrying after Kira and Momo and checking up on every last baby who went to Academy with you. Babies all over the Seireitei see you as their beloved sempai--"

"Quit making it sound like he's a mother duck," Ikkaku said. "Part of an officer's job is to look after his soldiers."

"That's just it," Renji said. "Ishida's not my soldier. He's not even Shinigami. He's...."

The three Shinigami, having spent days and nights among the Living, understood that a human was not an inferior being, yet they whispered the word in unison like an epithet: "*human*."

Renji slammed his cup against the ground. "Fuck human. He's a Quincy."

"Still human." Yumi made a *cluck* sound with his tongue. The sound reminded Renji of a duck--not a mother duck, for the sound was being made by a strange, vain he-duck trying to analyze his friends' problems, but definitely a duck. He almost expected to hear Yumi start quacking, rather than continue speaking. "Being human means being useless in this war. Yamamoto wants civilians kept clear, but civilians always get involved. He knows that."

"Ichigo will protect the humans," Ikkaku said. "He's half-human right? He protects his friends."

"You're missing the point as always, Mr. Brilliant," said Yumi to Ikkaku. "Ishida Uryuu doesn't want to be protected. He's a very powerful warrior in his own right with no authority whatsoever--unlike the Shinigami Substitute--to be involved in this war. Sado-kun too. The General doesn't recognize him as a combatant either."

"Humans can protect themselves." Ikkaku shrugged. "No law against that."

"Humans aren't supposed to protect themselves," Renji muttered. "Why do you think the Quincy were all killed off two hundred years ago? Ishida's got no role in our army, but he's been fighting our fight since...." Renji avoided his comrades' stares and looked into the murky depths of his beer. "Since he stood up to me on that bridge to defend Rukia."

"Yes, yes," cooed Yumichika. "Very noble and all. I like how he answers to his own code of justice instead of a human commander. That's very attractive."

“The humans will be fine,” said Ikkaku to Renji. Another Shinigami passed and Ikkaku filled the passerby’s cup.

“Tell Captain Ukitake that Zaraki made you stay here.” Ikkaku stifled a laugh. “That he made you practice kendo until you bled. Ha, ha.” He let the laugh go, and Renji appreciated the confidence in it--Madarame Ikkaku had a laugh as warm and resonant and comforting as cheap beer. “Listen, Renji--do what you want. You think the humans need looking after, not us.” Ikkaku gestured left with his shiny head to his left but he was indicating an unseen dimension. “Now scam while you’ve got the chance.”

Renji stared past Ikkaku, as if he could see the Living World if he just focused long enough. *Slacker*, he called himself. *Horny bastard. There’s no one for you to look after in the Living World. What makes Ishida any of your business except for the fact that you’re ... Oh damn it to Hell and reincarnate it and damn it to Hell again, you’re worried that he’s going to die and you’ll never see him again. All you want is to see him again.*

“If you get the chance, confer with him about his uniform,” Yumi suggested. “If the Quincy are an army of one answering to no superior, then that gold braid and military thing he’s got going isn’t ... *right*.” Yumi’s feathers fluttered as pondered. “He needs something more rebellious. Short sleeves? Archers have wonderfully developed biceps.”

“Renji?” Ikkaku shook his old friend’s shoulder. “Remember you told me not to let you make an ass out of yourself this time.”

“You did ask him,” Yumi said. “You did.”

“Sitting around and waiting for stuff to happen,” Ikkaku went on. “You said no more to that. Seize the day, man.”

*You waited forty years too long for Rukia. It’s the sad story your friends know you by. How much more of a loser can you be?*

A frantic attachment to a human didn’t make him a loser, exactly. Renji felt afraid of losing, though. Of losing what? Common sense told him that a smart warrior like Ishida didn’t need battle advice, comfort or protection....

“Who are you supposed to give the report about us to?” Yumi asked. “I’ll write it up for you. I’ll even make grammatical errors so it sounds like you.”

Renji was supposed to give the report to Rukia. The Thirteenth was in charge of coordinating officers from various squads into one cooperating battalion in the event of a full-scale invasion from Hueco Mundo. Every squad but the Eleventh had done exercises under Ukitake’s supervision. Every squad but the Eleventh had submitted detailed logs of their war preparations.

“You used to belong to that ... pack of hooligans,” Rukia had explained, “so Captain Ukitake wants you to convince them to cooperate. No one’s in the mood for court-martials and bother like that. Just get the Eleventh to follow war prep protocol.”

Although he felt like he was taking orders from too many superiors lately, Renji liked the idea of doing Rukia a favor. He didn’t have to be the one to check up on the Eleventh, but *Rukia* had asked. Rukia, the girl he’d blown off for forty years. Rukia, the girl he’d failed to impress all his life in the Rukongai, Seireitei and Living World. Rukia...

“Did you hear me, hmm?” Yumi’s melodious voice. “I’ll write your report.”

Renji was a slacker but no liar; he couldn’t make Yumi lie for him either. He imagined two violet eyes flashing with rage when Rukia found out that there was no report.

“Forget it.” Renji put his hands on his knees and stood up with a groan. He’d just made his mind up to do something he wanted to do with all his baboon insides, but he didn’t like messing with rules. Consequences, lectures, a hard look from either Kuchiki--his captain or Rukia--none of these things mattered as much as the feeling that he was betraying his job just to scratch an itch.

But Ishida. He had to see Ishida.

“There won’t be any report. I won’t make you guys lie for me, but it’s not like anyone’s going to give a damn. If Yamamoto wants to bring Zaraki to trial then he can just kiss my ass.” He boomed the last words again for effect. “KISS MY ASS.”

The Shinigami wandering the meadow didn’t know what Renji was talking about, but they raised their cups and smiled at him. Blue sky, warm air, a world at peace. Sunlight dazzled from dew on the grass and from drops of beer on Shinigami lips.

Planning for tomorrow, worrying about tomorrow--that’s all Renji had done since he and Rukia had stood among their friends’ graves and sworn that they would find a better life in the Seireitei.

“Don’t waste time,” Yumi advised. “When you get there don’t argue with him about stupid things.”

“Nyah.” On his way to lying on the ground again, Ikkaku kicked Yumi’s knee with the heel of his sandal. He crossed his arms behind his head and closed his eyes. “Arguing about stupid things is half the fun.”

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Karakura was one of those cramped cities that had grown inside a town that had tethered around a village that had sprung up near a railroad with no particular plan. Its random areas of houses, wildwood, commercial warehouses, scattered dead ends reminded Renji of the

Rukongai.

He'd never gotten used to the symmetry inside the Seireitei. One had to rely on one's ability to sense subtle variations in spirit pressure to figure out where the hell was where, and Renji's reiatsu detecting had never been that great so sometimes he got lost. North gate, south gate, they looked the same. Getting lost inside his own home, imagine that.

*You're a loser.*

Moments ago the tip of Zabimaru had cut a rectangle into space and Renji had slid back the screen door into the Living World where it was already night.

There were only really a few discrepancies between the Living World and Soul Society--a matter of hours, the clothes people wore and phrases they used to express themselves. The freaky preponderance of vending machines in modern-day Japan, the vast dusty unpopulated areas of nothingness in the Rukongai. Souls were souls were souls, living or dead.

He leapt from roof to roof. This was the town with the one hundred thousand souls Yamamoto was so busy to protect. A bunch of souls didn't matter to Renji as much as individual ones did--he knew that now. He'd learned that fighting for Rukia.

Ishida Uryuu was just a kid like so many Renji had known growing up. Skinny, arrogant, unloved kids. Ishida Uryuu was smart, though. Damn smart. And there was something else about him--something purebred like he came from a dynasty of superior souls. Even if he'd grown up in the Rukongai, Ishida wouldn't have become a bully or a whore like so many kids Renji had known. *Hooligans?* Rukia had grown up among them too--guys who'd just as soon fight you or fuck you for a bowl of rice--but she had been leagues above them.

Usually on a tree limb, sitting ankles crossed, beautiful eyes watching ugliness happen.

*Where are you, Ishida?*

Renji knew he was shit at detecting reiatsu but still, he should've felt Ishida's presence by this time. He flew in one leap to the second story bedroom window that was always open and perched on the sill.

*Nope. Not here. Not a scent of you anywhere.*

Where was he at this hour?

Renji had barely turned his head to the street when he saw the slim figure on the sidewalk, a gym bag of some sort over his shoulder, the unmistakable perfect posture and hair that shone blue-black under the mercury lamps.

Ishida must have already sensed Renji's presence because as the walking figure moved closer to the apartment building, Renji could see that Ishida was looking towards the window.

Renji waved.

He felt stupid. He stuck his legs outside the window and dangled them there, waiting for Ishida. Ishida had paused, come to a second's standstill in his steps, but not waved back when Renji had flapped his big paw in the air. Of course not--why would a human wave to an empty window in the middle of the night? Still, he *could've* waved. What was wrong with gesturing hello?

By degrees, as Ishida approached, Renji got a handle on his reiatsu--it was always muted, under control, not easy to detect. It was exhausted--had he been fighting?

Ishida's hair looked wet--had he just taken a shower? Where?

Gym bag. Gym thing. That was it. Midnight martial arts competition or something.

Renji considered speeding over and tackling the kid in a rowdy welcome and maybe landing a giant kiss on his mouth for good measure but the urge to harass him--usually half the fun of everything--wasn't that strong tonight. Renji felt awkward and sad, not quite himself, not in the mood for goading Ishida into wrestling with a ghost in public ... even though it was night, even though there was no one around.

For all intents and purposes Renji was invisible to the Living World. Only this human could see him now... and feel the touch of his spirit body.

Renji swerved back into the bedroom and flopped onto the bed. He'd wait here for the guy who seemed to have forever and a day to take to walk down a street and greet an unexpected visitor.

*You're the one who has lived and can continue to live for centuries in this form. You're the Shinigami and he's the ... HUMAN. Why do he act like he's the one with all the time in the world?*

Renji lay on the mattress of the Living World bed with his Shinigami body and tried not to feel engulfed by the strangeness of the situation.

*What is it about him? He likes you? Are you that easy, Abarai Renji?*

Ishida's reiatsu reached the apartment building, hovered near the mailboxes.

*Or is he just **that** pretty?*

Pretty as a girl except for the fact that Ishida plainly wasn't a girl. He had that sharp, strong jawline like Captain Kuchiki's and just like the captain, he pointed that chin up in the air all the time. As if Ishida had something to be snotty about. Human. *Human.*

Sometimes when that human head was thrown back and that chin was pointing at the ceiling and Renji was pounding Ishida's ass, Renji felt ashamed because the prettiness of that face reminded him of Rukia. Pounding a boy, thinking of a girl.

So much alike. So pretty, snotty, hearts steelier than whatever crazy spiritual stuff walled the Seireitei. No getting through but you wanted to *so damn much*.

Rukia cut the mold for him then. Because there was nothing more beautiful than black hair and blue eyes narrowed with passion. Only Renji had never made Rukia's eyes and mouth rage from how his hips were moving. God, the kid loved it.

No one had ever loved anything Renji offered.

Stuck-up, wound-tight, social snob Ishida Uryuu. Renji still couldn't believe that such a person tolerated Renji's grubby presence in this personal living space let alone his Shinigami cock in his Quincy ass.

*You're making yourself right at home here.* Renji pulled the pillow out from under his head because it was too accommodating. *Modern pillows--made for the necks of old people and invalids.*

There was a turn of a key and the door downstairs opened.

*Come and get laid, Ishida.*

Renji wondered if there would be much bickering tonight--he really wasn't up for it, but there was always the pleasure of physical conquest. And that rare thrill of feeling those skinny human limbs, the ones usually so busy holding in a self-satisfied loner, loosen up and embrace some other purpose.

There was a moment you could see Ishida fight it. Swallow hard and pitch his head from side to side with a jerky rhythm. But when he caved, he was gone. Lost to depths of pure feeling.

*He's so damn smooth.*

Renji himself always felt a struggle in his own body as he maneuvered sex and nakedness and unexpected surges of sensation, but Ishida rolled in the bed like a person moving underwater--there was a natural elegance to every gesture.

Renji half-closed his eyes. *Your mouth is watering already.*

The door opened and there was the human himself.

"Did you take an unofficial leave of absence?" Ishida's voice was soft, composed. "You're supposed to training recruits from other squads this week." Damn, the kid was too smart, remembered everything.

“Let’s just say I’m on a little vacation. Aren’t you glad to see me?”

“Abarai, are you drunk? You should see your face.”

“What are *you* doing out at this hour? You’re not exactly the partying type.”

“I was training.” Ishida dropped his shoulder bag and sat on the bed close, very close to Renji.

“Training? Where?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Ishida took off his glasses and folded them on the nightstand.

“Yes it does. If you’re training that means you’re getting ready to fight in the war, right? I thought you said that this wasn’t your war?”

“Did I say anything about a Shinigami war? I’m training. I train weekday evenings with my father.”

Ishida was leaning forward, bare-faced with no glasses and his eyes were a crystal-blue challenge. His lips didn’t reveal any emotion either--they were just very close to Renji’s face.

“Wait. Your *father*? I thought you were the Last Quincy? That’s what Ichigo said. Didn’t you say something about being the last one?”

They were kissing, and the question was lost. It was always like this and had been so since the first time--a natural connection, this one simple expectation of kissing, and being kissed. Fucking, and being fucked.

Renji’s hair was coming down and Ishida’s shirt was coming off.

“You *have* been drinking. You smell like the Eleventh division.”

They lay on the bed--one human body and one spirit one--in a tangle of clothes and mixing scents. Renji pushed against the Living World and felt resistance--even as Ishida’s chest offered itself and began to heave with impatience under Renji’s mouth and hands.

Renji inhaled one nipple whole and held the other lightly between his thumb and forefinger. The skin tasted freshly bathed, like minty soap. He rolled the nipple in his mouth until it grew to the size of an over-cooked red bean, ripe and ready to split and until Ishida’s hands were scrambling all over the sheets from the agony.

He straddled Ishida’s squirming hips. Each of Renji’s broad thighs were the size of the kid’s torso so it was so easy to hold Ishida like this, but the power gathering in the human’s body was superhuman. Super-stressed. In lots of ways, the kid was a maniac on a hair-trigger only no one could tell from ordinary interactions with him. Renji recognized this emotional

commotion.

*Let go, Ishida.*

Renji knew how to relish the impatience but Ishida hadn't learned how yet. He was always crazy-uptight at first. Renji's mouth slid across Ishida's chest and slurped up the other nipple.

*Let go, damn it. Here, touch some Shinigami hair.*

He took one of Ishida's grabbing hands by the wrist, swept the fingers through his long hair. That helped--Ishida's fingers found a hold there, followed through the waves and waves of hair without any awkward pulling.

Once Ishida had his hands in Renji's mane, he went seme. The kid did that time to time--it amused Renji that Ishida believed he could land the first fuck, but a sudden burst of enthusiasm let Ishida roll Renji over with no trouble. Ishida kissed Renji hard on the neck.

Then Ishida shook out of his sleeves and began to take off his belt. Renji pulled Ishida down by the elbow before the belt was out of its loops.

It was a familiar scuffle. It always went one way--with Ishida trying to get the upper hand but Renji, who had a modicum of experience, disarming Ishida and rendering him paralyzed with good feelings and the anticipation of more.

"Abarai, don't..." meant just the opposite and that Renji, when it came to withstanding fingers pushing all the right buttons and stroking all the right spots, had the greater endurance.

Once stripped and on his back, the kid was always ready with minimum of spit and fingering. Renji tried not to get carried away with grunting and eagerness but the sight of Ishida's mouthing noiseless moans was enough to make Renji act all the coarser. He actually dribbled a little drool on Ishida's neck as he filled him. He wiped the drop away with the back of his hand, but Ishida, eyes clenched shut for those first opening thrusts, didn't seem to notice having been slobbered on.

*Got you now Ishida* is what it felt like. *Take that and that.* Wanting him to come but at the same time not wanting to drive so hard that his head hit the nightstand. *Uh oh, hold back Renji.* Wanting him to come was like wanting to have the advantage in a fight but even when the kid came, it wasn't a done deal. Renji still didn't feel like he'd won anything.

The near-empty room had thin, resonant walls, and Ishida's low hard moan, when he finally gave voice to it, had an echo that made it sound lower and harder and longer.

And even when Renji came, which was always very soon after because the sight of Ishida's blissed-out face--half-open blue eyes and parted lips--was always crazy-making, it wasn't a done deal. They'd done this enough times now that the strangeness of fucking a friend no longer had erotic power. They weren't shocked into wanting to erase the moment while at the

same time wanting it all over again and again. Nothing felt wrong, but it wasn't a done deal.

"You never told me you had a father."

Ishida was breathing hard. "Didn't they teach you this stuff at the Academy? All humans have *a mother and a father*. It's a biological given."

Renji would have to have him lots of times tonight to try to rid himself of this feeling of incompleteness. There was so much about the kid he didn't know.

"Training, huh? Guess you're all worn out already. Good night." Renji pulled the covers to his chin and pretended to fall asleep.

Ishida rose to the bait. They did it again.

Then the sex acts started to dissipate into exhausted sucking and groping with long lulls of just lying there aware of the darkness outside the window and still, not a done deal.

The quiet aftermath made Renji feel protective of Ishida--he knew that if war happened this very moment they'd be fighting together, but tomorrow Renji wouldn't be here so why was he here right now?

Why had he come here anyway?

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*Sometimes I'm sexy, move like a stud  
Kicking the stall all night  
Sometimes I'm so shy, got to be worked on  
Don't have no bark or bite, alright*

*Yeah, you got to mix it child  
You got to fix it must be love  
It's a bitch  
You got to mix it child  
You got to fix it but love  
It's a bitch, alright*

"How come you don't have a television like Ichigo and the other kids?" Renji knew that Ishida's room was Spartan by human teenager standards, but he figured there'd be a music box somewhere.

Not in this bedroom. The rock and roll was a muted, frustrated sound coming from another apartment. It kept time with Renji's breathing.

“Stop staring at me.” Ishida was wearing his glasses again and the frames added another line of severity to his frown. He still didn’t look all that tough, though, sitting there naked at his desk with the delicate fingertips of one hand holding a cookie and another hand cupped beneath it to catch the crumbs.

“How long does it take you to eat a damn cookie?” Renji asked.

“You can’t have it.” Two graceful bites and the cookie was gone. How was it that everything he did was so refined? Butt-naked and eating vending machine food and looking like a prince. Rukia had been like that in her Rukongai days--some ragged starved kid in a tree chomping on an apple--her ankles crossed, somehow a vision of dignity, eyes cool and purple-blue.

Renji could never even pretend to be noble and pure; he just wasn’t made that way.

Like right now he was feeling nasty and low, delinquent and wrong just because he was lying there, physically satiated but still full of fear over a nameless, frustrating something. Knowing that he wasn’t where he was supposed to be. Feeling his muscles twitch, feeling like maybe he could fuck again, because Ishida hadn’t finished off that goddamned cookie--his pretty mouth was kissing the last crumbs off his pretty palm.

“I’m still hungry,” Ishida said, getting up. “I could cook some rice.”

“You don’t have to do it for me--I--” Great gods, he didn’t want the kid acting like a wife. “Seriously, I always look starved. You don’t have to cook anything in the middle of the night.”

Ishida turned a startled face to Renji. For a second it was an exposed, embarrassed face, and then it recomposed its usual snobbery. “I said *I’m* hungry.”

Renji stared at Ishida; the kid stared back. Dinner, there was an idea.

“What do you want?” asked Ishida.

More vending machine food, those little salty chips that come in bags, a sweet drink.

“You,” said Renji.

Ishida didn’t blink. “I’ll have to eat something first.”

“I didn’t mean it like that. You--why don’t you talk to me more?” Renji didn’t know what he himself was talking about but as the words came out, the feeling started to make sense. “We fought together--we had one another’s backs. We...” Renji took his half-hard cock in his cupped hand and pointed it at Ishida. “We *do this*.”

“And what?” Ishida was amused now. He was smiling in that thin-lipped way he did when he was the most fond of Renji. Renji felt encouraged, even though Ishida was dressing himself in a robe and appearing to mark a distance. “What? I owe you my life story now?”

“Sure.”

Ishida tossed a shitagi at Renji and the white coarse fabric fell hard against Renji’s lap. It was the first layer of the Shinigami uniform he’d shed earlier.

He put it on and followed Ishida into the kitchen.

“You don’t like spicy, right?” Ishida was standing before the open refrigerator. He picked up a plastic bowl, popped the top and sniffed the contents. “Pork okay?”

Renji nodded.

*So many little plastic containers. Does he ever finish eating anything he cooks? How can people leave food for later?*

Renji considered grabbing the Ishida’s ass while the kid was bending over searching for pots, but he knew that his real appetite wasn’t for sex or pork leftovers. He folded his arms and demanded conversation instead. “Tell me about your father.”

Ishida gave Renji a suspicious look and a celery stick to crunch on. After the insistence that there was not much to tell and after Ishida had described his father as a doctor, a hard humorless person, and someone Renji probably wouldn’t like, there was a long quiet in the room. The quiet turned out to be just enough space to tell the story of how Ishida had discovered Ryuken’s powers. It was a good story--a fight scene--and Ishida told it simply. How a Quincy father saved his son’s life by taking out a self-replicating Menos with a single shot from a crossbow.

“So I lost my powers in Soul Society,” Ishida said as he was measuring the water. He actually had a glass cup with little lines on it for that purpose. “My father agreed to restore them under the condition that I never associate with Shinigami again.” He poured the water cup by cup into a pot. “I made a vow. He trained me; I swore I’d never mess with your kind.”

“My kind.” Gods with power over where souls end up? Renji thought it was weird that anyone would look down on Shinigami; he could understand Quincy archer humans holding a major grudge but...

“I broke the agreement.” Ishida’s fingers crushed a wad of ramen over the boiling pot. “I told myself that Ichigo was a Substitute Shinigami and that it really wasn’t breaking the rules to go with him to rescue Inoue-san, but once we met up with you and Kuchiki-san...”

“Hey, Rukia and I broke the rules of Soul Society to follow Ichigo too. You do something like that for...” There was a word for it. “Friends.”

Steam from the ramen pot was clouding the air. “It was the right thing to do,” Ishida said. “I broke my word to my father for Inoue-san’s sake.” The kid took his glasses off to wipe the

lenses. His face was serious and handsome behind the broiler fog. “There’s no other way to look at it.”

“What did your father do?”

“I didn’t tell him, but what could he do? Take my powers away? He’s not that kind of a deal-breaker. He’s stuck training me because he’s my father.” A nervous flutter of lashes and Ishida put the glasses back on. “I’m stuck being the son who went back on my word.”

“You don’t strike me as the agreement-breaking type.” Renji was honestly shocked. “He trains you now--does he still care if you associate with Shinigami?”

“He probably I assumes I don’t.”

“Like hell you don’t.”

Ishida served two bowls of meat and noodles with freshly chopped onions and boiled egg. Of the meals Renji had eaten in his life--banquets of stolen fruit in the Rukongai days, courses of exotic dishes one right after another in the Kuchiki mansion, all the sake and pickles from those great Eleventh division bashes--he knew already that this simple meal was going to be his most memorable.

There had been moments in his life defining him as a loser. Rukia’s turning away from him the day she announced she’d been adopted by the Kuchiki clan. Renji had waited and hoped that things would turn out okay--he’d maintained that same lame attitude when he came to arrest Rukia in the Living World. He had hoped Byakuya would save her, that fate would intervene.

It did. Fate in the form of Kurosaki Ichigo who had the balls to defy Soul Society and fight for Rukia. Renji had fought for Rukia too--but too late. He’d fallen before Byakuya, beaten again, put in his place. A loser, a washout, a stray dog who’d been dumb enough to sit up and beg for ... *acceptance?*

All Renji wanted to know now was where he stood with this strange, spiritually talented human.

“Ishida.” Renji wanted to call him *Uryuu*, but ... not yet. The kid just wasn’t one of those people you called by his first name too soon, even if you were fucking him.

The kid looked up, ready for further interrogation. *The way he holds his chopsticks. Like the captain. Like he’s got all the time in the world to eat because he’s that bad-ass. Like he can just sit there and be pretty. Like he’s better than everyone else--*

“Why are you with me right now?” The sound of Renji’s own voice surprised him. It was steady and clear and not to be ignored. “Me, the big bad rule-breaking Shinigami. Why are you with me?”

Renji wanted him to say *because it's the right thing to do*. He didn't expect to hear that, but for a moment he imagined Ishida's voice saying the words. *I'm with you right now because it's the right thing to do* spoken in that virtuous, pure voice. Chin in the air, all noble confidence.

Instead the kid looked down at his noodles. A little shy, kind of annoyed. "Because I want to be," he said. "I'm with you because I want to be."

And strangely, that was enough.

Because in the night's blackness, in a fog of food smells and the anticipation of further mindless sexing and earnest sweating and groping around for a handhold in the slipperiness, it was as if some deal had been sealed.

And Renji felt like he belonged. A spirit in the Living World, he felt like belonged here--at least, with the part of the Living World who was Ishida Uryuu.

"Yeah, I want to be with you too. Chucked an assignment to come here and it wasn't just for your cooking."

Renji bit into the last piece of pork and didn't look at Ishida. He grinned, though, just in case Ishida was staring at him.

END

*The Rolling Stones "You Can't Always Get What You Want"*

HYPERLINK "http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzz1VEN1SEk" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzz1VEN1SEk>