

Harry let out a deep breath as he enjoyed the ambience in the shrine dedicated to the god Raijin. The early morning sun shined its first red rays of light into the shrine, traversing through the thick fog that hung around the place. The place had a strange sense of calm and quiet, and Harry couldn't help but enjoy it. It was sad that he couldn't enjoy it for long.

Unfortunately, he was here for work.

Though majestic and peaceful, the lack of spirit energy around the place was off-putting. It was to be expected, though. Unlike Soul Society, the World of the Living was not saturated with dense spirit energy. Even if Shinigami don't consume spirit energy from the surroundings to survive like the Hollows, they prefer a spirit energy-enriched area to live. Staying in the World of the Living for too long was like an average human living in a deep mine shaft for too long.

Harry walked out of the shrine and stretched, popping the joints of his limbs.

"Such a good day." Harry smiled, looking up at the rising sun.

He felt like his zen was up because he was feeling like he should go for canoeing.

"Oh my!" Harry happily skipped over to the lake adjacent to the shrine, where he saw a small row boat on the shore.

Feeling quite giddy, he skipped over to the boat and made it ready for a small trip across the lake. Harry whistled a jolly tune as he rowed the boat across the lake with a straw hat on his head. He felt like a fisherman going about his work in the early morning. Now, if only he had a fishing pole, it'd have been a perfect day.

"Ah, what the hell. I'll ask for a fishing pole in the next mission." Harry muttered under his breath.

The foggy mist lingering on the lake surrounded him, obscuring his eyes, but his senses remained sharp even though he was in a gigai. Closing his eyes, Harry breathed in the chilly air while focusing on the slightest bit of change in the spirit energy in the area. A ripple formed on the lake's surface, and Harry opened his eyes, his green eyes sharpening with intent. A giant two-headed snake-like hollow jumped out of the lake and tried to devour Harry.

**"Bakudo 44: Sekisho."**

A wall of green energy formed before Harry, and the hollow slammed against the kido barrier he had created.

"What the...?" a snake-head muttered in surprise before shooting an accusing look at the other head. "You said that's an ordinary human."

"You can feel what I feel, you jerk. Do you feel any spiritual pressure from the human?" the second snake-head shot back.

Harry was thankful the hollow was busy distracting itself. He was always grateful to hollows that made his job easy, but this time, it was not his job to kill the hollow.

**"Bakudo 30: Shtotu Sansen."**

Three rods of light slammed into the hollow's body, disrupting the spirit energy flow within its body.

"Rhhhhaaa! Release me at once, human! Or else you'll suffer the wrath of Basilio Malvada." the hollow screamed in rage, struggling against the binding spell.

Three of his squad members rushed out of the tree line along the edge of the lake and stabbed the hollow through its mask. The hollow let out one final screech before dissolving into reishi. All the souls trapped within the body of the hollow were now released into soul society. Harry took a moment to fold his hands and prayed for their good fortune.

“Reio sama. Please grant these souls a kind life in your world.” Harry muttered.

Ever since he had a private chat with the Head Captain about the surveillance and studies conducted on his spirit energy, he found himself indebted to the Reio. Captain Mayuri of Squad 12 was quite insistent on conducting more invasive studies on his body, and the Central 46 had given that freak permission, but it was a direct order from the Royal Palace that saved his skin. According to the Head Captain, the Royal Palace had issued a direct order to the Central 46 to stop any more experimentation on his spirit energy or body. By the order of the Reio, most records pertaining to the studies conducted on his spirit energy were sealed. The less informative records were only accessible to the Captains of Gotei 13. Even Harry was denied access to the sealed records, which were supposedly stored in an underground chamber of the Central 46 building.

He was not one to look at a gift horse in the mouth. Therefore, he let the matter drop and thanked his lucky stars that the Soul King decided to save him from what was most likely an extended stay under the care of a creepy freak like Mayuri Kurotsuchi. For that reason alone, he could appreciate the existence of an all-powerful entity like the Reio. Harry was almost a century old and lost all hope of returning to his old world. But he still hoped one day he could ask the many questions deep inside his heart to the Soul King. Unfortunately, the only way Harry could access the royal palace was through his selection into Squad Zero. And that was probably not going to happen in another century.

His subordinates opened the senkaimon, and Harry happily walked through the gate to the Seireitei after completing the mission. They had three more missions like these in the World of the Living, where his physical presence was required because of the threat analysis done by Squad 12. All lieutenants were required to do these types of missions from time to time. Squad 12, working with Squad 2, develops a list of hollows that are too effective in devouring souls and eluding the usual Shinigami patrols in the human world. Once the list was developed, all thirteen squads split the missions evenly.

It was during these missions the Lieutenants usually encountered Adjuchas level hollows. It was a rarity to encounter Adjuchas level Hollows in the human world. However, such hollows often hunt for sport or escape into the human world to escape from other Adjuchas in Heuco Mundo.

By the time he cleaned up all the missions on his list, he never encountered an Adjuchas. All hollows he came across were low-level hollows, and they were quickly dispatched.

After months of perilous campaigns that took him to different places in the Asian continent, he could finally rest his back in the squad barracks and enjoy the sunny disposition of Seireitei.

A huge mountain of paperwork fell on his table with a thud, making his sweat drop.

“Umm... What is that?” Harry asked, directing a betrayed look at Kiyone.

“I’m sorry, Lieutenant. After battle actions, reports were requested by Squad 12 for updating their database.” Kyone said sheepishly.

“This is his way of getting even.” Harry muttered.

"Lieutenant?" Kiyone looked at him in askance.

"Captain Mayuri. He dislikes when squads request new equipment as it cuts into his 'research' time. Drowning us in paperwork is his method of retaliation." Harry grumbled.

"Shall I deny the request then, sir?" Kiyone asked hesitantly.

"No. That'll only make the situation worse." Harry resigned himself to long evenings filled with tedious work, all for no reason.

He knew all his reports were, at the end of the day, going to end up in a dumpster.

"There is one other thing, sir." said Kiyone before handing him a pink flyer.

"Oh, come on." Harry slammed his forehead on the table after seeing the invitation for another gathering of Lieutenants.

It was going to be both humiliating and a colossal waste of time. Suddenly, a light bulb lit up in his mind.

'Maybe I can skip this one using paperwork as an excuse.' Harry thought.

\*\*\*\*

Rukia was bleeding profusely, and she could feel her chances of survival slipping by the second.

"You fool!" Rukia winced as pain flared up when she tried to stand up and pick up her Zanpakuto.

"Did you think that Hollow would leave your sisters alone if it got your soul?" Rukia glared at the idiotic human boy who brazenly threw himself towards the Hollow.

But she admired the selflessness and the courage shown by the human who looked eerily similar to her deceased Lieutenant Kaien Shiba. It was as if fate had a sense of humour and was finding it very entertaining to torture her like this.

'If I waste more time here, everyone will become food for the Hollow. Somehow, it needs to be killed.' Rukia thought.

She once again tried to reach for her Zanpakuto, but her arms were seriously injured, making it painful even to move an inch.

Rukia slid next to a wall and rested her back against it. She looked upon the shocked visage of the human she saved today. The fact that he looked so much like her former Lieutenant made her determined to save him from the Hollow by any means necessary. If she ignored the horrid orange hair, the human was an exact replica of her former lieutenant, Kaien Shiba. It was for this reason she was determined to save the human's life by any means necessary.

'I'll not have more blood on my hands.' Rukia thought to herself.

Her eyes strayed to the Hollow, which was howling with pain of its own because her sword had cut into its mask, injuring it but not enough to kill it. Her eyes then strayed to the injured sister of the human boy.

“Do you want to save your family?” Rukia rasped, feeling the coppery tint of blood in her mouth.

“Of course, I want to save my family. Tell me how to kill that thing, and I’ll do it.” Ichigo Kurosaki claimed.

‘You’re brave for a human. I’ll give you that.’ Rukia thought as she stared into the determined brown eyes of the human before her.

“There is one way...” Rukia said, her eyes falling on her Zanpakuto.

She grasped the blade's hilt with effort and slightly pointed the tip at the human.

“You must become a soul reaper.” Rukia declared.

“What?” Ichigo gasped.

“Push the blade's tip through your heart, and I’ll pour my spirit energy into your soul. Your innate strength will temporarily absorb some of my power, giving you Shinigami powers. That should empower you to kill the hollow.” said Rukia.

“Okay. Give me the sword soul reaper.” said Ichigo after shooting a look at the hollow.

Rukia grinned at the lack of fear in the human’s voice.

‘So, you don’t just look like Kaien but even act like him.’ she thought.

“My name is not Soul Reaper. I’m Rukia Kuchiki.”

She could see the orange-haired human grin as he grasped her blade with his bare hands.

“I’m Ichigo Kurosaki.”

Rukia watched as her blade pierced human flesh for the first time, and she poured the last iota of strength left in her. There was a blinding flash of power as reitsu levels soared.

‘How can a human hold this much spiritual pressure?’ she silently wondered.

When the powerful aura died down, she saw Ichigo in the black shihakusho with a giant blade strapped to his back. She looked at herself and found herself dressed in a white robe.

‘I lost all of my powers.’ Rukia mused before looking up at Ichigo, who unsheathed the blade on his back and delivered a swift slash against the hollow.

The hollow howled in pain as one of its hands was severed by that one strike.

Meanwhile, Rukia was in a state of shock.

‘I meant only to ignite the innate power within him. But he took all my powers and assumed a full soul reaper form. How is that even possible? What is he?’ Rukia thought.

She watched, transfixed, as Ichigo proceeded to decimate the hollow all on his own with his giant sword.

“Now you die for hurting my family, monster!” Ichigo screamed before driving his sword through the hollow’s mask.

Rukia watched dispassionately as the hollow’s body broke apart into reishi.

'Who are you, Ichigo Kurosaki? A human with Shinigami-level spiritual pressure. That must be a first.' Rukia thought.

Later that night, she struggled to decide what to do next. She had left the Kurosaki family behind after helping Ichigo's soul into his body. Unfortunately, she was alone and weak in a world alien to her in most sense. Her interaction with the human world was limited and now she was expected to survive in it for a long mission.

Her eyes strayed to her phone.

Rukia knew her only option was to call for help from Squad 13. But the problem was she was not supposed to transfer her powers to a human. One look at her state would let the squad know what happened. Not only would Lieutenant Harry be disappointed with her, but there was a chance that he'd send soul reapers to forcibly extract the power she transferred to Ichigo. If that happened, there was a strong possibility that Ichigo might die.

She could not let that happen. Not on her watch. Otherwise, this whole night would become pointless.

"Perhaps I can be of some help, Kuchiki san."

Rukia was startled by the oily voice coming from the dark corner of the street. A man wearing a dark green samue with dirty blonde hair and a striped green and white bucket cap stepped out of the darkness. His footsteps echoed in the dark street as his wooden sandals clapped loudly against the paved floor.

"Who are you?" Rukia asked warily.

"My name is Kisuke Urahara." the man introduced himself before hiding his face behind a fan.

"I'm a humble shop owner and a philanthropist for lost souls. I believe I can procure a gigai for you until your powers return."

Rukia felt this guy was bad news, but she had no solution to her dilemma. In the end, her desperation made her follow the sketchy-looking guy.

\*\*\*\*

"Well...well...well... It seems your plan is working seamlessly, Captain Aizen." Gin said, with a wide smirk as he stared at the screen showing Ichigo Kurosaki becoming a soul reaper while Rukia Kuchiki lost her powers.

"Hmm... What else did you expect, Gin?" Aizen asked with a placid smile.

"I expected Urahara san to intervene."

"Who says he didn't?" Aizen smiled.

"Huh?" Gin cocked his head to the side.

"Look at Kuchiki san. Don't you find it strange that all her powers left her, and she continues to remain powerless even after many days since the incident?"

The imagery on the screen shifted showing Rukia Kuchiki in a gigai following around Ichigo Kurosaki as the duo battled hollows all over Karakura town.

“Are you saying Urahara san is responsible?” Gin asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Maybe.” Aizen said cryptically.

“To what end? How would it benefit Urahara san if Kuchiki san remains powerless?” Gin asked, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

“How indeed.” Aizen muttered.

“Well... I’ll leave it in your capable hands, Captain.”

Gin turned away from the screens and walked out of their secret hideout. He wasn’t the least bit bothered about the tug-of-war that was going on between Kisuke Urahara and Sosuke Aizen. He already knew Aizen would win all these conflicts and overcome all the hurdles in his path. What mattered was the final battle.

He knew he was nearly prepared on that front, and that was all that mattered.

\*\*\*\*

Harry let out a sigh and stretched his sore limbs. The mountain of paperwork had halved after his diligent, uninterrupted work. Most of the data he got from the Squad 13 members in their missions were subpar at best. He had to cross-check their reports with the surveillance team's reports.

It was a good thing that he did because he flagged a strange thing from the reports, and it had to do with Rukia Kuchiki. He observed an anomaly in the spirit energy readings her communication device was transmitting to their observatory. Sometimes, her energy readings were similar to a powerless soul in Rukongai, while at other times, it was half that of a seated officer. While he’d have dismissed it as Kuchiki san suppressing her spiritual pressure for stealth, the readings he received showed two charts. It was as if her communication device was picking on two Shinigami at the same time.

‘That’s strange. Did someone else accompany Rukia san on her mission? I don’t remember ordering such a thing, nor do I think there was any mission overlap with other squads of the Gotei 13.’ Harry mused.

“This has to be looked into.” Harry muttered.

Harry took the bell on his table and let it ring once. The door to his office slid open, and in a flash, Sentaro and Kiyone were there.

“Sir.” the third seat and fourth seat bowed.

“I noticed an incongruity in Rukia Kuchiki’s spirit energy readings. I want her contacted immediately through her phone and have her report anything out of the ordinary.”

“Yes, sir.”

Sentaro and Kiyone rushed out of his office in a flash.

Harry leaned back in his seat, staring at Rukia Kuchiki's file on his table. Her work was top-notch when it came to guiding human souls to Seireitei and dispatching hollows. The reason he had posted Kuchiki in Karakura Town was because souls were running around in that place in droves. He wanted to remind Kuchiki that killing hollows was not the sole duty of a soul reaper. Guiding souls into the afterlife was also an essential duty.

Harry reached across his table to pick up the teapot when a new visitor appeared on his doorstep.

'Oh no.' Harry thought in horror as the lieutenant of Squad 10 appeared in his doorway.

"Lieutenant Rangiku. What a pleasant surprise." Harry said skittishly.

"Harry kun. It was a bad idea to skip the Lieutenants' meeting. Now, you'll have to compensate it somehow."

"I was busy with paperwork..." he started to say, but he was abruptly cut off when the blonde woman unexpectedly invaded his personal space by staring into his eyes while their noses were nearly touching.

"Umm..."

"Lieutenant. (cough)"

Harry looked around the tall, shapely form of Rangiku Matsumoto to stare at Sentaro and Kiyone, standing awkwardly by his doorway with several papers in their hands.

Rangiku suddenly caught his shin with her hand and forcibly turned his eyes away from his seated officers. He was once again forced to stare into her crystal blue eyes.

"You are coming with me for deserting the meeting." Rangiku said as a matter-of-factly, dragging Harry from behind his table.

"Whe... where are we going?" Harry stuttered as he was dragged out of the Squad 13 barracks with everyone watching.

"Someplace where you will repent for your bad behaviour." Rangiku said ominously.

Half an hour later, Harry stared comically at a run-down bar on the outskirts of the fourth district of Rukongai.

"This is a bar." Harry deadpanned.

"A bar that allows soul reapers to open tabs. Isn't this a convenient way of paying back for your earlier rudeness?"

"No." Harry answered blandly.

"A beautiful woman takes you to a bar, and you're not even the least bit excited." Rangiku pouted while pushing him into the bar, forcing Harry to sit near the counter while Rangaku joined him.

"Rangiku chan."

A barmaid suddenly appeared behind the counter. Harry was taken aback by the sudden appearance of the barmaid, who had her black hair in pigtails. Her brown eyes were glimmering with excitement upon seeing Rangiku, which meant the Squad 10 lieutenant was a familiar face around these parts.

"Hana chan. Two of your strongest sake. Put that in Harry kun's tab."

“Hey – wait a minute!”

Before Harry could properly protest, a blue ochoko filled with sake was before him on the counter.

“Have at it, Harry kun.” Rangiku said before draining her bowl in one go and immediately asking for the next.

Harry took the bowl full of sake in his two hands and stared at it hesitantly.

“I...” he started to say, but Rangiku forced the bowl against his lips and made him drink the liquid.

Unfortunately, that was not the only bowl he’d drink with Rangiku that day.

When he regained his senses, Harry found darkness around him and was greeted by the sound of crickets.

‘What the hell! Where am I?’ Harry thought, blinking his eyes rapidly to clear his blurry vision.

His limbs felt heavy, and he felt like his head was resting on something soft and squishy. With some effort, Harry slightly turned his head and found himself staring at the thin golden necklace. Suddenly, he felt a pair of hands snake around the back of his neck and pull his head against the squishy surface.

“I hope you’re enjoying yourself, Harry kun.” a sweet, melodious voice whispered teasingly against his right ear.

Harry jumped when he realised where he was. He was mortified to find that he was drooling over Rangiku’s ample bosom for the entire night inside a cave of all things. For the life of him, he could not recall anything that happened for hours after he drank sake with Rangiku.

‘This could not be any more humiliating.’ Harry thought, holding his head in his hands.