

Beautiful Oblivion

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Ishida Uryuu has discovered that he is truly not the last Quincy. There is another, a female, Takisaki Hikawa. Ishida insists that Hikawa remain a secret.

But what will happen when a certain pretty boy shinigami falls unwittingly for the Quincy?

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1 - Vanity meets Quincy

It was a warm spring day in Karakura Town when they met. Two lives separated by fate, brought together by destiny. They were from different worlds, different cultures, different beliefs but one goal was the same. Protect the people from the Hollow.

Hikawa Takisaki felt the Hollow appear before she saw it looming high above her head. Uryu Ishida stood beside her and instantly drew his blazing blue bow. The male Quincy had fought hundreds of Hollow and this one was one of the more stronger.

"There isn't anyone around, Hikawa." Ishida said pulling back an arrow. "Go ahead and release your bow."

"Right." Hikawa nodded then flicked her left wrist out. A small Quincy cross charm revealed itself from her sleeve and shimmered the instant before her own Quincy bow formed in her hand. "I'll flank left. Ishida, go right." She yelled before disappearing then reappearing above the Hollow's left shoulder.

Ishida appeared apposite her seconds later and both fired their arrows into the Hollow's skull. The despaired soul roared and swung at Hikawa. She reacted quickly and dodged to the monster's front firing again. The Hollow disintegrated and both Quincy settled on the ground.

"Great job, Hikawa." Ishida smiled. " I love having another Quincy to fight with instead of shinigami."

Hikawa sighed. "I wish you'd get over that dumb anti-shinigami philosophy of yours."

"I wish you'd believe-"

Both Quincy started at a new reitsu in the area. Hikawa quickly retracted her bow, tucking her bracelet back into her sleeve cuff. Two shinigami flash-stepped in front of them. One stood with his sheathed katana over one shoulder. His head shined from the sun. "Oi, why'd ya take out my hollow?"

Ishida retracted his bow and crossed his arms. "So you're claiming hollow now, shinigami?"

"Heh, better than a damn Quincy killing one."

"Ikkaku," the other shinigami said. "You shouldn't curs in from of a lady. It isn't beautiful."

" Ch. Like she can even see us, Yumichika."

Hikawa blushed when Yumichika's eyes rested on her. "Actually...I can sirs." She spoke quietly.

Ikkaku's eyes widened a moment causing his partner to chuckle behind him.

"Way to go, genius." Ishida taunted.

"Oi, you wanna fight, Quincy?"

"Ikkaku, we don't really have time for something like that." Yumichika said flipping his hair.

"You insulting me?"

"Ishida, please don't start a fight." Hikawa put her hand on the younger man's arm. "We don't want to cause unnecessary damage."

Yumichika smiled and stepped closer causing Hikawa's face to flush. "I like how you think. May I ask your name?"

Hikawa dipped her head shyly and responded in a quiet voice. "Hikawa Takisaki."

Yumichika smiled again. "Hikawa, what a beautiful name for an even more beautiful woman."

"T-thank you, sir." Hikawa blushed a deeper shade of pink.

"My name is Yumichika Ayasegawa, Squad 11, fifth seat." He took Hikawa's hand in his and lifted it to his lips. "Pleasure to meet you."

"Hey! Get your hand off her pretty boy!" Ishida grabbed Hikawa's shoulders and pulled her backwards toward him.

"I-Ishida!" Hikawa said surprised.

"I was only introducing myself to the beautiful lady." Yumichika said smiling.

"Say, why ya hanging around with the Quincy, Hikawa?" Ikkaku Madarame asked smirking at Ishida.

"I uh-"

"I just saved her from the hollow." Ishida interrupted. Hikawa sent him a mental glare.

"I can see why one would attack. Your reitsu is a lot stronger than a normal human's." Yumichika said.

"That's because she's with me all the time. " Ishida grinned. Hikawa elbowed him in the stomach.
"Ow...hey!"

Yumichika chuckled. " I wouldn't like that answer either."

"Yeah, yeah. Well time to go, Yumichika. We have ta get ta the Hollow before the Quincy."

"Alright." Yumichika nodded. "I'll find you again later, Hikawa."

Ikkaku rolled his eyes and disappeared followed by Yumichika.

"Like Hell you will!" Ishida shouted after them. He turned to face Hikawa with a scowl on his face. "Just like those shinigami always showing up and annoying people. And why the heck is your face red?"

"No it's not." Hikawa said looking down.

"Yes it is. You're blushing aren't you?" Ishida crossed his arms.

"Shut-up. I'm guy shy okay?" Hikawa said in defense.

"Oh sure. Not around me you aren't."

"Ishida, I'm six years older than you. Of course I'm not." Hikawa put one hand on her hip. " And why did you tell them you saved me from that hollow. What's so wrong with people knowing I'm-"

"Sh!" Ishida covered her mouth with his hand. "Not so loud!"

"Mgh!" Hikawa shoved his hand away. Get off me!"

"Sorry, Hikawa. It's just not safe right now." Ishida explained.

"Not safe? Everyone knows you're a Quincy."

"That was before I knew there was another on. It's safer if everyone thinks there is only one left."

"That's because you tell everyone you're the last!"

"Well I was at the time!"

"So you thought. It's different now. There are two of us, that's a fact."

"And I want to keep it that way. If word got out," Ishida said with a shudder. "That crazy 12th squad captain would come after you."

Hikawa sighed shaking her head. She'd heard the horror stories about Mayuri Kurotsuchi Taicho and his laboratory. She also knew why Ishida would be worried. He'd already tried to capture Ishida alive. There was no doubt he would try and do the same with her.

"I just want you to be safe, Hikawa." Ishida said resting his hand on her shoulder.

"I realize that, Ishida." Hikawa said. "Let's just say it's a mutual feeling. Neither of us wants to lose the other. You're the pesky little brother I never had." She grinned.

Ishida scowled. "Well you're the perfectionist older sister I never had."

Hikawa laughed. "Too true. So in other words you're my only family. I have to protect my family." Without warning, Hikawa threw her arms around Ishida's torso.

"Gah! What are you doing?"

"Showing you some sister love." Hikawa pulled away with a cute smile on her face.

Ishida blushed slightly and smiled patting her head reminding Hikawa of how much taller he was.

"Quit that." She said shoving his hand away. This time Ishida laughed and put his arm around her shoulders propelling her forward.

"Come on. Let's get out of here. The area reeks of shinigami."

Hikawa allowed herself to be moved forward. She bit her bottom lip a moment then spoke again. "Ishida, what was that shinigami's name again?" She asked pink tingeing her cheeks.

"Why?" Ishida asked suddenly defensive again.

"I...kind of...liked him." Hikawa admitted.

Ishida stopped in his tracks. "You liked Ayasegawa Yumichika? That pretty boy shinigami?"

Hikawa blushed deeper. "Yes, I do. Is there something wrong with that?" She asked innocently.

"Uh yeah! He's a shinigami! Of course there's something wrong with that!"

Hikawa frowned. "I'm not going to base my opinions of people on your biased views. I can like who I want." Hikawa crossed her arms.

"Is that so? Well what happens when he finds out what you are? You can't just tell a shinigami something like that."

"Well...I just won't tell him...I've done just fine with keeping my ability a secret from everyone else."

"Still. I can't believe you like him. He's so full of himself and his aesthetic appearance."

"Well...he thought I was beautiful..." Hikawa said shyly.

"So you like him because he called you beautiful?"

"No, there is just something about him. I'm not sure why. I just like him."

"Cheh. Whatever." Ishida waved his hand.

"Do you think he likes me?"

"How should I know? I'm not about to go ask him for you either. He was probably just saying that to be polite." Ishida said irritably.

"Oh I see." Hikawa's face saddened and she bent her head down slightly. "Yeah, you're probably right. I-I mean he only just met me. He was just being polite." Hikawa started walking again, slowly.

Ishida sighed instantly regretting what he had just said. "Hikawa wait up." Ishida grabbed the girl's shoulder and moved around to face her. "Hikawa...are you crying?" Ishida said shocked.

"No." Hikawa shook her head wiping her eyes. When she looked at him tears formed in her eyes again.

Surprised, Ishida put his arms around her. "Hey, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." Ishida said soothingly. "Any guy would be an idiot not to like you."

Hikawa looked up. "Really? Or are you just saying that?"

Ishida leaned his forehead against hers. "Really Hikawa. You are a very special, one-of-a-kind girl." Ishida smiled. "And not just because you're a Quincy."

Hikawa smiled and hugged the younger boy. "Thanks, Ishida."

"Sure. Now do you mind if we get out of here?"

Hikawa giggled and nodded. "Sure."

"Good." Ishida took her by the arm and lead her from the park.

Yumichika leaned against a tree inspection his nails absently as Ikkaku fought the current Hollow. He didn't mind being left out of the action. Ikkaku could handle himself and Yumichika was glad to let him. Though, the other man tended to get rather loud when he fought. Shouting his name so the Hollow would know who had beaten it.

Yumichika looked up as the Hollow's roaring died down. "That's your seventh today, Ikkaku. Why do you suppose so many have shown up?"

"Hell if I know." Ikkaku responded. " I just care about getting them beat and going back to Soul Society."

"I don't really want to go back just yet." Yumichika pushed himself away from the tree. "There was something interesting about that girl, Hikawa Takisaki."

"Ya mean besides how she could see us?" Ikkaku slung his sheathed katana over his shoulder.

"That's a bit odd isn't it? And her reitsu is different too." Yumichika said.

"So what? She's different. Big deal." Ikkaku said changing his weight from one foot to the other. "What of it?"

"She's beautiful don't you think? Her long black hair was perfectly straight down her back. Soft gray eyes and fair skin. She was born to match." Yumichika smiled. "Her cute little petite form coming up to my

chest-

"Yeah, yeah. Keep it to yourself, Yumichika." Ikkaku started walking. "Daydream all ya want but I got stuff to do."

"Slow down, Ikkaku. Rushing isn't a beautiful thing. It'll mess up my hair."

"Yeah, well I ain't beautiful ta begin with. Now ya comin' or not?"

"Yes, I'm coming." Yumichika followed after his friend. "I still want to see her again."

"Enough already! She's human and she ain't goin' nowhere."

"How can you be certain?"

"If it'll make ya shut yer trap about it, I'll personally make sure she doesn't leave."

Yumichika laughed. " You don't have to go that far, Ikkaku."

"Whatever. Let's just get this mission over with."

"Alright, I suppose so." Yumichika sighed.

"Then ya can do whatever ya feel like." Ikkaku started toward a newly appeared Hollow.

Yumichika smiled putting one hand on his hip. "Excellent."

2 - Past Remembered

Hikawa stood by the forest river waiting patiently for Ishida. Since parting yesterday, he has insisted on some practice. Not that either of them really needed it. Both were excellent shots with a bow. Ishida just felt that they needed to be on top of their game with the increased amount of Hollow appearances in the area. Both Quincy had spent that night fighting Hollow one right after the other. Even the increased number of shinigami hadn't deterred the numbers at all. They just kept coming. The shinigami presence had caused a problem for Hikawa though.

She didn't mind at all that they were in Karakura Town. In fact, she welcomed their presence. However, she had to constantly monitor their reitsu in order to avoid exposing herself as a Quincy. The only shinigami who knew were those in Urahara's shop. Not even Kurosaki Ichigo knew.

Urahara Kisuke had been the first to discover the second Quincy ten years ago.

Urahara Kisuke sat in his shop eating with the small black cat whom he called Yoruichi. He looked up, sensing a strange new reitsu that seemed very unstable. He looked across the table at Yoruichi. "That reitsu has a familiar feel to it. Perhaps we should check on it."

"Yes, I agree." Yoruichi nodded lapping up the last of her milk from the saucer. She padded out the door with Urahara close behind her. They hurried across the town towards the higher end. The houses became larger and more extravagant. "There." Yoruichi darted toward a large house with the front door ajar.

"The reitsu is really out of control." Urahara kept his hand on his Katana as he entered the yard.

Yoruichi slipped inside quickly before calling Urahara in after her. The air was filled with the stench of newly spilt blood. Urahara coughed covering his mouth. He moved to the living room where Yoruichi was and stopped at the door. Two human, one male, one female, lay on the floor. Pools of their own blood still spreading about them. Urahara walked inside feeling a faint reitsu from the male still fighting to stay alive.

"Yoruichi, he's alive." Urahara knelt down next to the man and carefully turned him over. A jagged knife wound bled profusely from his chest and one from his stomach. "Hang in there, sir. We'll get you some help." Urahara felt another reitsu flare violently and looked up.

"P-please....my...daughter....." The man spoke harshly. His voice barely audible. "Quincy....save her...."

Urahara looked at the man confused. He wasn't a Quincy but...what could this man be talking about?

"Save....her..." The man breathed the finally word. His reitsu died out and the other flared violently again.

Urahara looked towards the stronger reitsu. "Yoruichi...someone else is here." He gently closed the man's eyes and stood. Blood covered him but he didn't care. "I need to find this man's daughter."

"That reitsu may be hers, Kisuke. Find her. I'll stay here and let you know if whoever did this comes back." Yoruichi jumped up on the table.

Urahara nodded and followed the ebbing reitsu. If I don't find her quick, Hollows will appear all over. Urahara thought as he ascended the stairs. He heard a small gasp and the girl's reitsu flared again. He saw a small glowing light coming from down the hall. He walked toward it and slowly pushed open the door.

"Stay away!" A small girl cried out. She held a glowing blue bow composed of spirit particles. Her arrow positioned towards his heart. She was covered in blood and tears left trails down her face. She was frightened and shaking against the wall.

"Sh...it's alright. I won't hurt you." Urahara held up his sheathed katana before setting it on the floor. "See? I've come to help you." He took a step forward into the room.

"W-who are you?" The girl never dropped her bow from his heart. "I don't know you."

So she's the Quincy. I understand now. Urahara thought to himself. He looked at the frightened girl. "My name is Urahara Kisuke. I own a shop across town. I sensed your reitsu." Urahara looked at her kindly. "I promise, I will not hurt you." He knelt on the floor several paces from the shivering child. "Don't be afraid. It's alright. You can drop your bow, child."

"But...my parents...he...he killed them!" The girl's reitsu flared higher this time.

A Hollow is sure to show now...Urahara leaned forward. "Please, you need to hide your reitsu. You'll attract Hollow."

This seemed to frighten the girl more. She started shaking violently and lost control of the spirit particles. Her bow disappeared and Urahara rushed forward scooping her up in his arms. He stopped long enough to pick up his katana and used shunpo to find Yoruichi. The girl curled up in his arms and clung tightly to his blood stained shirt.

"I see you've found her." The small cat said darting from the house after Urahara. "Her reitsu isn't subsiding though. We'll need to calm her down."

"I know." Urahara held the trembling girl to his chest as he went. "We'll hide her at the shop for a while."

"You're going to help a Quincy?"

"Yes, Yoruichi. We're going to help a Quincy."

"Hikawa! Sorry I'm late! I got held up!" Ishida said running up to her. He stopped and looked at her face. "Are you alright?"

"Hmm?" Hikawa wiped her eyes. "Yes, I'm fine, Ishida. I didn't notice." She stood up and dusted the back of her pants off. "Well, practice then?"

Ishida regarded her a moment then set his school satchel on the ground. "Yeah. Are you ready?"

"Yeah." Hikawa summoned her bow and waited. "What'll it be this time? Shoot until our hands bleed?"

"No, no. Nothing extreme. Just perfecting our aim."

Hikawa pulled back an arrow and let it fly separating a falling leaf. "Like that?"

Ishida stared. "Yes...like that..." He shifted slightly embarrassed.

"Don't feel bad, Ishida. I've been an active Quincy longer than you have." Hikawa let her bow arm hang at her side.

"Yeah, yeah...so you've said." Ishida raised his bow and shot several arrows at the trees. A few caught leaves but two flew free. "Hmm...."

Hikawa shook her head and smiled. "Don't worry. The Hollow are always bigger than a leaf."

"Heh, right." Ishida adjusted his glasses. "Hey, Hikawa...um...when I came up you were crying..."

Hikawa nodded. "I was thinking about my parents..."

Ishida nodded. "I'm sorry to have brought it up."

Hikawa shook her head. "No, it's okay."

Ishida looked up at her and gasped. "Hikawa look out!"

"Huh?" Hikawa said startled. "Ah!" A large hand reached around her waist lifting her from the ground.

Ishida took up his bow and aimed it at the new Hollow. "How did we not see it coming?"

"Just kill it, Ishida!" Hikawa yelled. She tried twisting in the Hollow's grip to fire at it but another reitsu in the area caused her to dissipate the bow. "Shinigami are coming!"

"I know!" Ishida fired twice at the Hollow hitting his mark. The beast roared but kept its grip on the girl Quincy. "I swear these things are after you!"

"Not now, Ishida! Gah!" Hikawa winced as the Hollow tightened its grip on her. "Sh-shoot it!"

"I'm trying!" Ishida fired again cracking the Hollow's mask. "Die already!" He fired again and the mask shattered.

The Hollow cried out in final agony as he disappeared. Hikawa screamed from high up in the air as the hand holding her disappeared.

"Hikawa!" Ishida tried to use Hirenyaku but a hand at his collar held him back.

"Oi, where you goin', Quincy?" A voice behind him said.

"Idiot! Can't you see she's falling?" Ishida tried to wrench free.

"Ishida!" Hikawa screamed again. She could see the shinigami standing behind him. "Ishi- huh?" Hikawa felt herself stop falling as strong arms supported her.

"Are you alright, Hikawa?" Yumichika asked. He flashed to the ground several feet from Ishida. Yumichika seemed to glow in the sunlight causing Hikawa to blush.

"Y-yes...thank you..." Hikawa managed to say.

"Put her down already! She's safe!" Ishida yelled struggling against his apparent capture. Ikkaku d

"Oh but I don't think she'll be able to stand." Yumichika met Hikawa's eyes. Violet looking into gray and catching in the moment. Each stared at the other for a moment. Yumichika felt something he hadn't felt for another person. He was confused for a moment but when he saw the spark in Hikawa's eyes he understood it.

"You're even more beautiful than I remembered." Yumichika spoke softly.

"Thank you." Hikawa whispered. She blinked surprised at his statement.

"Oi! Put her down!" Ishida shook his fist.

Ikkaku slapped the back of his head. "Can't ya see they're havin' a moment?"

"Ow..." Ishida rubbed the back of his head.

Hikawa bite her bottom lip never taking her gaze from the shinigami's face. "Thank you for saving me."

"I would never let you fall." Yumichika smiled setting her gently on her feet. "Are you going to be alright?"

Hikawa nodded. "Yes, thank you." Her face remained flushed and warm.

Yumichika watched her a moment to make sure she was stable before turning to Ishida. "What happened?"

"Ch. What does it look like? A Hollow happened." Ishida stomped forward. "We were just fine until you showed up." A scowl plastered across his face.

"Didn't look like it ta me." Ikkaku scoffed.

"Please don't fight again." Hikawa said. "It's not really decent behavior."

"I would have to agree, Ikkaku." Yumichika stood behind Hikawa.

"What're you a couple now?" Ikkaku asked.

"No!" Ishida yelled.

"It ain't up ta you, Quincy." Ikkaku smirked.

Hikawa blushed. "We've only just met..."

"See? She's right. You cannot rush into these types of things." Yumichika smiled. "More pressing at the moment though, Hikawa. I've noticed something with these Hollows and their behavior."

Hikawa turned to look at him. "Oh? What would that be?"

Ikkaku let go of Ishida's collar and spoke. "They seem ta show up around ya a lot."

"What?" Hikawa said. "They do?"

Ishida nodded. "I've noticed, too. I wanted to talk to you about it earlier but..."

"The question is why?" Ikkaku interrupted.

"I-I don't know." Hikawa shook her head. "I just thought I was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"Almost every time a Hollow appears, you are nearby." Ishida said. "It can't be just a coincidence, Hikawa. For whatever reason, these Hollow are after you. As if someone were leading them. Keep in mind this is coming from Urahara. He stopped me on the way here."

"What's so special about ya, Hikawa? Why're they after ya?" Ikkaku asked with a scowl.

Hikawa sat down on a nearby rock. She shook her head silently and pulled one leg up to her chest. She hadn't noticed they were popping up around her and she usually kept her reitsu well hidden. It just didn't make sense to her at all. She was a Quincy, the same as Ishida. He wasn't being attacked so why her?

"Hikawa." Yumichika knelt on one knee in front of her. "Is there something we should know about you? About any abilities you have that a normal human wouldn't?" His face was concerned, something that Ikkaku rarely saw on his best friend's face.

Hikawa's breath caught in her throat a moment. Urahara's voice from years ago echoed in her ears. Never let anyone know you are a Quincy. She looked at Yumichika and opened her mouth to respond.

"What makes you think she does?" Ishida interjected. "If so, wouldn't she have used them to fend off the Hollow?"

"Don't talk as if I'm not here, Ishida." Hikawa said before returning her attention to Yumichika. "I've none to mention."

Yumichika nodded. "Alright then, it's decided." He stood up and looked at Ikkaku as if to confirm it.

Ikkaku sighed and nodded. "Seems like it. I'll report in ta Soul Society and see if Hitsugaya Taicho's taskforce will leave early."

"Wait, what are you talking about?" Ishida asked.

Ikkaku disappeared without another word leaving Ishida gaping after him.

"What is he doing?" Hikawa asked quietly. "You don't need to call more shinigami here..."

"My mission was to investigate the cause of the Hollow appearances. Now that we know that, it has to be reported. Since the cause is you, Hikawa, we have to act fast." Yumichika took the girl's hands in his. "We'll need the taskforce to find the one leading the Hollow."

Hikawa blushed, looking down at her pale hands in the shinigami's. She was unable to resist a shiver that crept up her spine. Yumichika's brows furrowed and he moved closer, much to Ishida's chagrin. Hikawa looked up again meeting his eyes. She thought she saw something in them she recognized. The desire to keep a secret at all costs. It was something she had grown to understand in the years since Urahara had saved her. Without her knowledge or consent, a single tear slipped down her cheek.

Yumichika tilted his head to one side and gently moved to brush the tear away with his thumb. "What was that for?" He asked in a quiet, calming voice. He rested his palm against her cheek and waited for an answer.

"I-it's nothing. I'm sorry for the inconvenience." Hikawa almost whispered.

Yumichika gave her a soft smile and tucked some of her loose hair behind her ear. "Hey, don't say that. You are not an inconvenience."

"Whoa, hey. Hands of the sister, pretty boy." Ishida said grasping the shinigami's arm.

Yumichika turned and looked at him in surprise. "Sister?" He then looked back at Hikawa. I never noticed before...they have the same hair. Could it be?

"That's right, sister. Now hands off." Ishida crossed his arms impatiently.

"Th-then you're-" Yumichika backed a few feet away.

"No!" Hikawa jumped up. "I-I mean...he's kind of like a brother but...we're not related. Not by blood at all."

Yumichika relaxed. "Oh, good. Then you're not one." Yumichika smiled and put one hand on his hip.

"One what?" Hikawa asked.

"You've no idea how relieved I am that you aren't a Quincy. I was afraid I was falling for a member of the

lower race."

"O-oh..." Hikawa said. She bit her lip trying to hid the pain she felt from his response. Ishida looked at her worriedly. The sting on Yumichika's comment was sure to bring tears later. Ishida turned a glare at the shinigami.

"How rude of you to refer to the proud Quincy race in that way." Ishida said angrily. "You've no right to judge a people you don't know." The teen put an arm around Hikawa's waist. "We're leaving." Then without a moment's notice he used his Hirenyaku to transport both Hikawa and himself away.

Yumichika stared after them confused. "That Quincy is an interesting one..." He shook his head and turned to face the town. "He doesn't usually react like that. Oh well, I suppose it's nothing. But...what was that look I saw on Hikawa's face just before they left? I swear I saw a flicker of pain. No, I must have been imagining it. She must've felt bad for the Quincy or something." He looked out over Karakura Town and sighed.

Ikkaku wouldn't be back until well into the evening so Yumichika had to do the fighting during his absence. A new Hollow's reitsu pressed itself upon him and he flash stepped towards it. "If these things are after Hikawa, I'd better defeat them before they get to her." Yumichika said to himself, disappearing into the forest.

3 - Lurking Evil

He watched from his perch high up the mountain as the two Quincy left and the last Shinigami disappeared. The last Hollow had failed in its mission to grab the girl and he was getting frustrated. It had taken three days and countless Hollow to get that close and still, Takisaki Hikawa had eluded him.

"So the Shinigami are helping her." He said to himself. "This will make things more difficult but perhaps I can use him against her. That flashy shinigami may just be my chance at success."

He had seen Yumichika catch Hikawa mid-fall and how Ishida reacted to it. He had seen Hikawa hide her abilities countless times from the shinigami and ever her friends. He knew her Quincy powers were going to be her downfall. He just had to be patient and wait.

"I'll see you soon, Takisaki Hikawa. This time, I won't fail." He laughed to himself then disappeared.

Ishida stopped at Urahara's shop and set Hikawa down next to him. She hadn't said anything the whole way there and it worried him. Hikawa sat on the porch letting her legs dangle and stared at the ground. Ishida watched her for a moment unsure if he should say anything.

Urahara slid the door open and peered out. "You're both unusually quiet today." He said.

Hikawa didn't respond but pulled one knee up to her chest, resting her chin on it. Ishida crossed his arms and pulled his eyes from her to look at the shopkeeper.

"She's been like that since we parted with the fifth seat of Squad Eleven." Ishida sighed and adjusted his glasses.

"Oh?" Urahara opened his fan and moved it back and forth. "Having boy trouble, I see?" His voice took on a light-hearted sound.

"You could call it that, I suppose." Ishida responded. "He complimented Hikawa and slapped her in the face at the same time. Metaphorically speaking of course."

"You can't take what Ayasegawa Yumichika says to heart. He's vain and narcissistic." Urahara sat behind Hikawa with his legs folded.

"He'll hate me." Hikawa whispered.

"Hmm?" Urahara stopped his fan.

Hikawa lifted her head. "He'll hate me if he finds out what I am." Her face was dry and free from tear stains.

She didn't cry. Ishida thought. I thought for sure she would.

"Then what are you going to do?" Ishida said out loud.

Hikawa shrugged and stood up stretching her arms above her head. "I don't know. I guess I'll just roll with the punches."

Urahara raised his fan in the air and smiled. "That's a girl!"

"But Hikawa, what if he does find out?" Ishida asked.

"Who knows? Maybe I can change his viewpoint before then." Hikawa smiled. In truth she was scared to death of the possibility but she hoped she could help Yumichika see and understand that Quincy were not all that different from shinigami. They had the same end goal, to protect those souls in the mortal realm and those in the Soul Society.

Urahara grinned. "Perhaps you can, Hikawa-chan. Maybe you are the only one that can change his mind."

"I'm going to try. Show him I'm a normal person." Hikawa giggled. "Or as normal as a Quincy can be."

"I still don't like it." Ishida kicked at a rock on the ground. "I mean, he's still a stuck up, self-centered, not-good-enough-for-my-sister, shinigami."

Hikawa smiled and hugged the younger Quincy from behind. "You worry too much, Ishida. I'll be okay. I can handle anything he throws my way."

Ishida sighed, nodding his head. "I know, I know. But I don't promise I'll be happy about it."

"Keep in mind, Hikawa, that you will be having someone with you at all times." Urahara interjected. Once again his fan moved back and forth in front of his face.

Hikawa sighed. "Somehow I knew you were going to say that."

"Outside of school hours it will more than likely be Ishida-kun. Therefore you will be able to use your powers most of the time. Otherwise, a shinigami will be accompanying you."

Ishida adjusted his glasses and smirked. "So I get to be your babysitter."

Hikawa scowled and smacked the back of his head. "You don't have to say it like that."

Urahara chuckled behind his fan. "I'd swear you two were related if I didn't know better." His eyes closed as a huge grin spread across his face.

Hikawa put her hands on her hips and smiled. Ishida rubbed the sore on his head glaring at her. Anyone would assume they were brother and sister both by appearance and behavior. Ishida still had a father but he chose not to live with him. Thus by the circumstances, both appeared to be parentless.

Yoruichi lazily walked out onto the porch, disguised as a black cat. She stretched letting out a small mew then sat next to Urahara. "Hitsugaya Taicho and his task team has just arrived. They are already fighting the Hollow."

"So they are, Yoruichi-san. I can sense their reitsu." Hikawa sighed. "How will I ever use my powers with this many around?"

Urahara closed his fan and tapped it on his knee. "You'll just have to use extreme caution and only when Ishida is around." The shopkeeper smiled. "Then you can blame any misfires on him."

Ishida frowned. "Yeah, right. Like I'd misfire."

Hikawa laughed. "Will do, Urahara-san."

"Oi, Ishida. Why're you here?" Kurosaki Ichigo said appearing behind them.

"If you must know, Kurosaki, I'm protecting Hikawa."

"Huh?" Ichigo's face turned to confusion. "What's going on?"

"Yoruichi and I have discovered that for some reason, these Hollow appearances are directly connected to Hikawa-chan. Until we find out why, she'll need protecting." Urahara said leaning an elbow on his knee.

"Isn't it a little strange that that many Hollow would be after a single human? No offense, Hikawa."" Ichigo said. He was in his substitute shinigami form with Zangetsu strapped to his back.

"That's what the taskforce is here for, Kurosaki."

Ichigo spun around in surprise. "Toshirou!"

The Tenth Squad captain folded his arms. "It's Hitsugaya Taicho to you, Kurosaki."

"Ah Hitsugaya Taicho, it's a pleasure as always." Urahara waved.

Hikawa turned around and bowed her head respectfully. "Thank you for your help in the matter, Hitsugaya Taicho."

Hitsugaya looked at her a moment then closed his eyes, nodding once. "I take it you are Takisaki Hikawa then."

"Mmmhmm." Hikawa nodded.

The young captain opened his eyes again. "Urahara, I've brought with me a four member taskforce. We will be a base of operation to rendezvous."

Urahara nodded. "My shop is always open, Hitsugaya Taicho."

"Good." Hitsugaya then turned to Ichigo. "Why are you standing there, Kurosaki? You should be out there fighting the Hollow."

"Yeah, yeah. I'm going. See ya later Hikawa, Ishida." The orange-haired shinigami disappeared in a flash.

"I've heard that Squad Eleven's third and fifth seat are here as well as Kuchiki Rukia. Is that correct?" Hitsugaya asked.

"Taicho, you are on top of things as always I see. Yes, it's correct." Urahara said.

"Third seat Madarame went back to Soul Society to being the taskforce." Ishida said. "Did you not see him?"

Hitsugaya shook his head. "I did not."

"Maybe you left before he found you. Either way the taskforce is here to investigate." Yoruichi stood up and stretched. "Hopefully the problem will be dealt with quickly and you can return to your normal life, Hikawa."

"I would love that, Yoruichi-san." Hikawa responded. Ishida nodded his agreement.

Urahara looked up. "The Hollows seem to be increasing. You'd better get out there."

Hitsugaya nodded. "The taskforce will convene as soon as we've taken care of the Hollow." The youngest captain disappeared without another word.

"We'll be going, too." Ishida said. "Are you ready, Hikawa?"

"Yes. I'd love to do some fighting." Hikawa held up two fists in a fighter's stance.

Ishida laughed and grabbed her arm. "Come on crazy lady."

Both Quincy disappeared leaving Urahara and Yoruichi sitting on the front porch. Urahara once again flared out his fan and moved it back and forth.

"It seems that no one knows she's a Quincy." Urahara said.

"There's no telling how long that will last." Yoruichi responded. "Someone is bound to see her."

Urahara nodded. "We can only keep her father's wishes for so long. I hope he understands the situation and forgives us if we fail his final request."

Yoruichi nodded and padded inside. "I think I'll go out and help them" Her voice change to a more feminine one. A few minutes later, Yoruichi walked back out in her human form, fully clothed.

"Keep an eye on our girl, then." Urahara stood.

"Mm." Yoruichi took a few steps before using Shunpo to find the Quincy.

Urahara looked after her a moment. The sun was setting and the Hollow numbers would increase. He pointed his cane at the sun. "Forgive me, Takisaki-san, I may not be able to keep my promise." He dropped the end of his cane letting it hit the wooden porch. Urahara nodded once and turned to go back inside.

4 - Return

Ikkaku stepped back through the Senkaimon Gate near the river. He grumbled to himself, irritated that the task-force had left before he got there. He sighed and used Shunpo to find his best friend.

Yumichika sheathed his katana flipping his hair. He smiled to himself as he watched the Hollow disintegrate in front of him. "Another beautiful victory." He said.

"Cheh. That's rare ta see ya fightin', Yumichika." Ikkaku landed beside him. Yumichika turned and smiled. "I do my share of the work, Ikkaku. Besides I know how much you like fighting. I wouldn't step in to fight then."

"Heh. Right."

Both shinigami looked up, hearing the distant roaring of a group of Hollow. Ikkaku was the first to take off, already yelling his battle cry. Yumichika shook his head before following him. He landed at the edge of a clearing in the forest.

"Ack!" He ducked quickly, dodging a rouge blue spirit arrow. "Watch it, Quincy! You almost messed up my beautiful hair!"

"Don't get in my way then!" Ishida yelled back. He dodged a Hollow's fist and fired a spray of arrows. "Find Hikawa!"

"What?" Yumichika yelled. He couldn't hear Ishida over the chaos. More Hollow appeared and even three Menos stepped from a garganta in the sky.

"Find Hikawa!" Ishida yelled zipping passed the fifth seat.

Yumichika looked around, unable to see her. He jumped up into the air in hopes of a better view.

"Yumichika, move!" Ikkaku yelled. Yumichika turned just as Ikkaku appeared in front of him, holding up his shikai sword horizontally. A Hollow's fist connected with it shoving Ikkaku hard into Yumichika. Both men grunted from the force and Yumichika grimaced.

"Argh!" Ikkaku pushed the Hollow's fist away and moved quickly to slash its chest. "Whaddya think you're doin? Draw your Zanpakutou!"

"Where's Hikawa?" Yumichika yelled at his friend.

"Hell if I know!" Ikkaku yelled back.

Yumichika let out a frustrated sigh. He saw someone with long dark hair duck into the trees. "There!" He yelled and took off after the shadow.

Hikawa hid just beyond the tree line. She'd had to hide her bow after only defeating one Hollow because the shinigami showed up. She chose to hide in the trees rather than stand out in the open. She hated

hiding her true self and she hating having to depend on everyone else. However, years ago, Urahara had told her that her father had asked him to keep her safe and secret. He'd said it with his dying breath, even. She respected those wishes then and she was trying as hard as she could to respect them now. However, she was finding it more and more difficult as the years passed.

She tried to get Ishida's attention but he couldn't hear her. Neither could anyone else. They were all busy with the Hollow. Every once in a while she would catch a glimpse of someone's Zanpakutou glinting in the setting sun.

"Lookout!" A man's voice yelled just before Hikawa felt his strong arms wrap around her from behind. He lifted her, using Shunpo to move both of them safely away as a Menos' cero burned through the trees she's been standing under. She couldn't see who the shinigami was but she saw two double scythes crossed in front of her. The shinigami stopped and released her, turning around to leap back into action. Hikawa only saw him in a blur when she regained her senses. She hadn't recognized his voice and she stood confused.

"Hikawa are you alright?" Yumichika appeared in front of her. His Zanpakutou was in his hand pointed at the ground. A worried expression on his face.

"Huh?" She blinked a few times before she realized what he had said. "Oh, yes, I'm fine." She nodded tucking her hair behind her ear. "When um...when did you get here?"

Yumichika looked at her in shock. "You almost get hit by a cero and that's what you think to say?" He sheathed his katana.

Hikawa shrugged. "It's fine."

Not knowing what else to say, Yumichika pulled her to him and put his arms around her. Hikawa's arms moved up in front of her and were now pressed between their bodies on his chest. His hand moved to the back of her head and gently pressed her forehead to his shoulder. Hikawa blushed feeling very small next to him.

"Please, be more careful." Yumichika said quietly. "I never imagined that I would fall for a human but now that I have," He lifted her face up to look at him. "I find myself concerned with someone other than myself."

"I'm sorry." Hikawa said.

"Don't be. I care about you. There's nothing wrong with that."

Hikawa blushed again and ducked her head. She bit her lower lip in thought.

"Come, let's get you somewhere safe." Yumichika said.

"Oh. Okay." Hikawa responded, not looking up.

Yumichika nodded and turns, swinging her onto his back. "Hold on." He waited to feel Hikawa's hands on

his shoulders before he took off. Yoruichi appeared beside them and motioned for Yumichika to follow her. He nodded and turned in the direction she indicated. Hikawa recognized the area they entered as her neighborhood. She watched as they neared her home. She'd only moved back into it six years ago. Urahara helped her fix her house to hid her reitsu just like at the shop.

Yoruichi stopped on the front porch followed by Yumichika. Hikawa helped herself down and stood facing them.

"Yoruichi-san , why did you bring me here?" Hikawa asked.

Yoruichi put one hand on her hip before answering. "The concentrated amount of Hollow was just too dangerous for you with all the shinigami fighting. You should be safe here."

Hikawa sighed and nodded. She understood what Yoruichi couldn't say in front of Yumichika. She reached inside her pocket for the house keys. Yoruichi slapped Yumichika on the back.

"Stay with her." The female shinigami said then disappeared off the porch.

Hikawa sighed again. "Come on in, then, Yumichika-san." She opened the door and stepped inside.

Yumichika didn't hear her. He stared up at the three story house in amazement. The front door was guarded by two vine-wrapped, white columns. The house stood out among others not just because of its size but because it was American styled in nature. It was white all around except for the vines climbing the east side wall.

"Yumichika-san, are you coming in or are you going to stay out there?" Hikawa stood just inside the door, waiting.

Yumichika jumped and looked at her sheepishly. "Sorry, I was just..."

Hikawa nodded. "I know. Everyone is surprised by it. Not many three-storied, American-styled houses in Japan." She stepped back and gestured for him to enter.

Yumichika walked inside looking about him in awe. He's been inside a human's house before but Hikawa's was certainly different. Everything was pristine, in perfect condition as if the house wasn't lived in at all. The living room walls were sage green with white moldings around the doors and along the floor. The mantle was also white and lined with fake ivy along the top. The two couches were dark brown suede divided by a glass-top, oak coffee table.

The shinigami handed Hikawa his katana as per her request and she laid it on the coffee table.

"Welcome to my home." Hikawa plopped down on one of the couches and tucked her feet under her.

"Go ahead and have a seat, Yumichika-san. No use just standing around."

"I'm sorry...your house is beautiful." Yumichika said taking a seat on the other end of the couch. " I didn't expect it to look quite like this."

Hikawa nodded. "As I said, everyone is surprised the first time. I don't like to brag about my inheritance."

"Inheritance?" Yumichika asked.

Mmmhmm." Hikawa responded. "My parents left behind a fortune, the company and this house when they died. All of it was left to me."

"I didn't know. I apologize for asking." Yumichika said.

"Don't worry about it. It's not your fault." Hikawa smiled.

Yumichika nodded silently. Hikawa was turning out like him. Her parents were gone and she had a best friend she could count on. Just like him. Yet, she smiled. Even when speaking of her loss, she smiled. She was strong, beautiful and intelligent. Yumichika was surprised to find himself falling for her. He'd never felt like that before. At least as far as he could remember. After a few minutes, Yumichika felt Hikawa's arm hit the couch beside him. He turned, startled and looked at her. She's fallen asleep. He thought to himself.

Yumichika stood from the couch and picked up a blanket, laying it over her gently. He left his Zanpakutou on the table and started exploring the living room. Photographs lined the mantle above the fireplace. Yumichika moved closer and looked at them. Most of them were of a young black haired girl. Yumichika guessed it was Hikawa as a small child. She was smiling and laughing with her parents at the park. Hikawa's father appeared Japanese but her mother was blonde and blue eyed. Yumichika looked at each photo on the mantle. Her parents ceased to be in them when she reached age 10. She seemed sad even though she was smiling in them. Urahara Kisuke appeared beside her in one of the latter photos along with Yoruichi and Tessai.

"Very interesting." Yumichika said to himself. He moved away from the mantle and to the bookshelf. Most of the books looked like they belonged to a university professor. He scrunched his nose at the high level math books. He was an intelligent man but he had a hard time comprehending what the books covered. "Very interesting, indeed."

The shinigami abandoned the bookshelf and examined the little items around the room. Vases, pictures, and other figurines stood about the room. One vase had several cracks in it and looked like it had been glued back together. A small paper sat next to it. "Fixed by Keigo." Yumichika read. He chuckled. "It was probably broken by Keigo first. Obnoxious kid." He shook his head, one hand on his hip. He heard a noise behind him and turned to see Hikawa looking at him. She blushed catching his eye and looked down.

"S-sorry." She said. "I didn't mean to disturb you."

Yumichika smiled. "Don't apologize, it's quite alright. I don't mind it at all."

Hikawa nodded minutely and bit her lip. She looked back up at him. "Keigo didn't break it," she said. "I did."

Yumichika looked at her a moment. "You broke the vase? Forgive me but you seem far too...put together to do something like that."

Hikawa nodded again. " I was in a moment of distress. Luckily that vase was the only casualty."

Yumichika nodded once in understanding. He didn't ask her why or what the problem had been. He thought it best to let the subject drop. Hikawa hugged herself then stood up. She turned and smiled at the shinigami.

"I apologize if I have bored you. I'm not much of an entertainer."

Yumichika sighed. "You seem to apologize for quite a lot of things when you really don't need to. It's fine, Hikawa, really it is." He took her hand and pulled her toward the back of the house. "Please if you feel that way, show me your garden. I noticed it as we approached the property earlier."

"You did? Oh...s-sure." Hikawa blushed. "I can show you." She took the lead and guided Yumichika through the kitchen and out the back door. The entire yard was filled with roses of all shapes and sizes, species and colors. Hikawa led him along the winding path describing each individual rose bush in turn. Yumichika marveled at the vast amount of colors and types of roses. Some even bore two or more colors within the same bud.

"But my most prized and precious roses are these." Hikawa stopped in the center of the garden. The shinigami stared. He'd never seen a rose such as the one he faced now.

"But they are black." Yumichika stated confused.

"Not quite, a very deep purple. It is impossible to breed a truly black rose." Hikawa smiled. "I worked hard to get these to this shade and they are precious to me. They are extremely rare and hard to find."

"Like you." Yumichika said.

Hikawa's breath caught in her throat. "W-what?"

"I think you are rare. I've never met anyone quite like you."

"Oh. Thank you." Hikawa blushed, a faint smile played across her lips.

Yumichika nodded and reached out to touch one of the buds. He was surprised by the velvety soft texture that brushed his fingertips.

"You can pick one if you'd like." Hikawa said from behind him.

"Thank you. I think I will. I should like to treasure it. Yumichika moved his hand down the stem to pluck the rose from its bush. A sharp, hidden thorn bit into his palm. "Ah!" Yumichika jerked his hand back in surprise and looked at the new bleeding wound.

"Oh dear. Roses do have thorns. Here let me see it." Hikawa took his hand in hers and examined it. "You seem to have gotten yourself pretty good. Wait here. I'll go and get the first aid kit."

"I'm terribly sorry for this." Yumichika said. "How careless of me."

Hikawa smiled. "It's quite alright. It couldn't be helped. I will return shortly." She turned and headed for the door.

Yumichika watches her as she disappeared within the house. Once she was gone he looked back at his injured hand. The cut seemed to go deeper than he originally thought. He chided himself for his carelessness. "How unbeautiful of me to be caught in such a situation."

"Your situation is about to worsen, shinigami."

Yumichika spun around to face the source of the new, sinister voice behind him. He never felt the man approach and was startled to see him standing there. The Arrancar's reitsu flared violently, the force weighed heavily upon Yumichika's body. He struggled to stay standing.

"Who are you?" Yumichika managed to ask.

The Arrancar smirked. "All in due time, 11th squad fifth seat Ayasegawa. But for now you must come with me."

Yumichika shook his head. "I don't know how you know me but I must decline."

"It wasn't an invitation." The Arrancar took one sonido step towards the shinigami. Yumichika's eyes widen and he reached for his Zanpakutou grasping only air. "Shimatta!" He yelled in surprise.

The Arrancar laughed and another step brought him face to face with the shinigami. Before Yumichika could react the Arrancar's long fingers wrapped around his throat and slammed him hard into the house's brick wall.

"Ack!" Yumichika exclaimed grimacing. He grasped the Arrancar's wrist with both hands and tried to free himself. He was quickly running out of air, struggling against the ache in the back of his head propelling him towards unconsciousness.

"Yumichika!" Hikawa yelled, running outside.

"No...Hikawa...stay away...chk!"

The Arrancar tightened his hold around the shinigami's throat. Yumichika strained for breath, glaring at his attacker. "Goodnight, shinigami." The Arrancar pulled Yumichika from the wall then slammed his head back into it again. Yumichika's hands dropped to his sides and his head lolled sideways.

Hikawa screamed. "Yumichika! Let him go!" She ran toward the two men.

"Careful, Quincy girl, you wouldn't want to harm him now would you?" The Arrancar flung Yumichika's limp body over his shoulder and turned. "You've grown since I last saw you, Takisaki Hikawa."

Hikawa stopped dead in her tracks, unable to move further. Her breath caught in her throat and she stared in horror at the Arrancar. "You..." She breathed.

"Until we meet again." The Arrancar disappeared taking Yumichika with him.

Hikawa stood unable to move. Unable to fully comprehend what she had just seen. Who she had just seen. "No...it can't be." She whispered. She never thought she'd see that man again in her life. And yet there he had been...and he'd taken Yumichika. She began shaking and dropped to the ground as the realization struck her. She had failed to save him because she hesitated. Hikawa noticed something laying on the ground and picked it up. A small red feather lay in her open palm. "Yumichika..." She said to herself closing her fingers around it as another presence entered her garden.

"Hikawa are you alright? Where's the shinigami?" Ishida looked around at the damaged garden.

"He's gone." Hikawa answered quietly.

"What? He left you here all alone? What if something happened to you? I'll kill him when I find him!" Ishida clenched his fist in anger.

Hikawa jumped up still clutching the feather in her hand. "He didn't leave, Ishida!" She yelled. "Yumichika was taken! I've got to help him!" Hikawa turned and ran inside the house.

"Hikawa, wait! Where are you going?" Ishida yelled chasing after her.

"Urahara's." Hikawa stopped and picked up Yumichika's Zanpakutou, lashing it to her waist. "He'll be able to help us." She disappeared out the front door, moving at a pace no human could perceive.