

Truthseeker

cloud9stories

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by *cloud9stories*

OC not SI in the world of Bleach, adventures and exploration of the MC's psychology and its relationship with the Zampakutō. Full summary inside, AU.

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1. Ashborn

This is a Bleach-OC, I won't pretend that the manga is something different from a giant plot hole where plot armor guarantees that one has simply to be named Ichigo Kurosaki to be able to do everything he wants. I wanted a character that worked with the growth curve typical of a shinigami, so no learning bankai in three days 'just because'. From my understanding, souls age much slower than humans do, if one thinks that Yamamoto has been around for more than 1000 years... Time is wobbly in the manga, so I'll just work with the idea that time in Seireitei isn't exactly matched with Human world.

Having said that, the whole concept of Zanpakuto is extra cool, and like 95% of people on this site, I like swords, so... There it is. I am avoiding my usual SI story in which the MC tries to discover the whys and hows of the world along with his adventures, and I'll leave eventual understandings to my OC. Now, I clearly thought the MC based upon what I want his sword to be able to do, and then I remembered one of the more metal historical characters that I've ever known.

My starting point is Giordano Bruno, original name Filippo Bruno, byname Il Nolano, (born 1548, Nola, near Naples [Italy]—died February 17, 1600, Rome): he was an Italian philosopher, astronomer, mathematician, and occultist whose theories anticipated modern science. The most notable of these were his theories of the infinite universe and the multiplicity of worlds, in which he rejected the traditional geocentric (Earth-centred) astronomy and intuitively went beyond the Copernican heliocentric (Sun-centred) theory, which still maintained a finite universe with a sphere of fixed stars. Bruno is, perhaps, chiefly remembered for the tragic death he suffered at the stake because of the tenacity with which he maintained his unorthodox ideas at a time when both the Roman Catholic and

Reformed churches were reaffirming rigid Aristotelian and Scholastic principles in their struggle for the evangelization of Europe. The psychology is relevant for the shape the sword will assume, so there we go.

Giordano is my OC, who will retain a somewhat hazy memory of his life, but (hopefully) I'll be able to keep the core of his character, at least from the little that it's known, and only until the life as a Shinigami doesn't manage to actually influence his modus operandi.

I don't think I will put lemons in it, because quite frankly I don't think writing what the MC thinks about anal sex is character building. There is a fuckton of smut out there if you need to wank, use a bloody porn site. And I don't know if I'll ever get around to finish the story, but I will likely try. I'll write what I can when I want, so there it is.

P.S.

I said it on my profile already, but I shall repeat: suggestions and constructive comments and reviews are welcome. If you don't like what a character does or does not, save yourself time and don't tell me since the characters will do what the hell I want them to (that's the whole point of fanfiction).

I need a beta-reader for this fanfic, and it would be better if he or she had some kind of working understanding of Japanese, if only because I don't wish to change the name of each single magic sword I stumble upon during the story.

I don't own Bleach, only the shinigami-OC I've chosen. Have fun!

ASHBORN

February 17, 1600 Campo dei Fiori (Rome)

The sun was shining merrily over Rome, the sky was of a stark blue, unmarried by even the slightest nimbus, and the wind was almost completely absent, only a shy breeze still had the courage of trying to raise to the sky the pollen of the premature flowers that had chosen February to be warm enough to bloom. The plaza was filled to the brim with both merchants and commoners, their clothes either brand new or worn, their eyes hungry and burning, eagerly anticipating the spectacle that was soon going to lighten their day, so sure that belonging to the group that claimed 'righteousness' would grant them a form of blessing in their lives. The lives that they were happy to spend staring in the muddy ground that they plowed when I had freely gifted them the skies. *Keep your pig food, let me keep my wings.* I thought almost sardonically when I was pushed through the streets, I eyed disgusted the holy countenance and superior attitude of those that actually believed that the strength of their steel could change Truth.

I knew where I had failed myself. *Pride.* I snorted through my gag, remembering with sad resignation my foolish faith in the uncultured blind pigs that managed to rule a piece of land. Like the land itself cared for its 'owner'. It had been there long before us, it would be there long after the fall of the current powers that I shared the world with.

In August 1591, at the invitation of the Venetian patrician Giovanni Mocenigo, I made the fatal move of returning to Italy. At the time, such a move did not seem to be too much of a risk: Venice was by far the more liberal of the Italian states; the European tension had been temporarily eased after the death of the power-hungry Pope Sixtus V in 1590, at the same time the Protestant Henry of Bourbon was sitting on the throne of France, and a religious pacification seemed to be imminent. The situation looked optimal to return home. I had tried to obtain an academic platform from which to expound my theories, and the chair of mathematics at the University of Padua had been then vacant. Indeed, I remembered almost with affection

reaching Padua during the late summer of 1591, and starting a private course of lectures for German students. I had been so sure of myself then, I composed the *Praelectiones Geometricae* ("Lectures on Geometry") and *Ars Deformationum* ("Art of Deformation").

Then they just *had to* offer the chair to Galileo, which I couldn't deny had been another of the few I actually respected. He was one of the only ones that tried to understand the world by himself instead of blindly walking the paved road of an illogical faith. I returned to Venice, as the guest of Mocenigo, and took part in the discussions of progressive Venetian aristocrats who appeared to favor philosophical investigation irrespective of its theological implications. It had been a temporary solution, I was waited for a Frankfurt to have my last work published, and apparently that had been enough to send me to ruin. Mocenigo had money and political clout, which surprisingly went hand in hand, and more than everything he enjoyed perhaps too much the reflected glory of being my patron. He wanted to show off his wit in the meetings with his friends, but he was born as sharp as a clump of dirt, so the not dimwitted among us had been careful to hide our scorn and spite. Apparently, it hadn't been enough, or someone else tipped him off, or he decided that he wanted to take care of his immortal soul, and the traitor denounced me to the Venetian Inquisition. I still remembered the day: 12th of May 1592, for my heretical theories. *That blind fool.*

With the alacrity that in my opinion defined bureaucracies that had outlived their usefulness, Rome had obtained extradition, and started my process. *Seven years.* I shook my head minutely: *how quickly disappears the time you've left when you're running out of it.* I knew what they hoped to hear from me, they hadn't been able to do it with Galileo yet, so that tried it with me. If I acted as spokesperson for the theologic madness that the Church wanted the world to believe, I would be free to go, undoubtedly, and whatever respect I had for myself would be killed in my stead.

I had tried to work around their restrictions, disclaiming any particular interest in theological matters, and reaffirming the philosophical

character of my speculation. This distinction sadly did not satisfy the inquisitors, who demanded an unconditional retraction of my theories. *Theories*. I snorted once more, how could they try and take away the *Truth* I had painstakingly dragged to life? I had been weak, and I made a desperate attempt to demonstrate that my views were not incompatible with the Christian conception of God and creation. The inquisitors rejected my arguments with the eagerness that I had expected of them and pressed me for a formal retraction. *Retraction, falsehood, lie, not-truth. Truth is unmerciful, it can be hidden but only for so long, but never broken.*

Pope Clement VIII ordered that I was to be sentenced as an impenitent and pertinacious heretic. Which wasn't exactly untrue either. When judgment had been passed on me, and the irony wasn't lost on me that to judge one had to be able to see objectively, unburdened by the weights of society... *No, to see the truth, one must be free from law and faith, but to judge a fellow man, I believe it had been proved soundly, enough voices can drown a single one, it doesn't matter how bright and defiant it is.* I smiled grimly when they chose to damn me on the 8 of February: "Perhaps your fear in passing judgment on me is greater than mine in receiving it." I told them, enjoying seeing the minute tremble of a couple of them. I had lied, obviously, I was terrified, and I was almost glad that my rouse had worked and they had felt forced to gag me, because surely the slow walk to the waiting pyre would have pushed me into breaking, shattering, begging for being allowed to declare not the truth as my own.

I was walked into the Campo dei Fiori, a simple rectangular meadow south of Piazza Navona, at the border between rione Parione and rione Regola, and every ounce of my will clamped on my instinct of fight back, of reacting, of trying *anything* only to be able to live a single day more. A single minute, a single breath. When I felt safely bound to the wood, logically, paradoxically, I felt *relief*. I was no longer in the position of denying Truth, of being unworthy of myself. *Every star is a sun, and each holds multiple worlds, we are not unique, we do not sit at the center of the universe. And when even*

the blind, the unwilling, the deaf, the holy, the damned, and those in between will find the Truth I had tried to show them, they will say that I didn't bow. They will say that when the choice had been between renouncing myself or denying Truth, I chose rightfully, and they'll learn from this death of mine more than I've ever been able to teach in life.

Then the fire made itself known, and I knew only agony. My skin splintering and my blood boiling, my iron bonds feeling almost cold against the churning muscles that saw the light of the day without skin to protect them, I howled in my gag, hoping that the smoke would soon cut off my lungs, sending me into unconsciousness until death came to free me. I hoped in vain, they had been careful to choose only dried wood, the little smoke it provided was light enough to be blown away by the light breeze. In those infinite moments, I glared at the sun with the same intensity he tried to hit me with, and I knew that if there was indeed a God, I wanted nothing to do with it. *How beautiful it would be, to sail amongst the stars, seeing the worlds they keep warm and find out if others face what I am facing.* My thoughts were fire themselves... and then,... nothing.

Darkness took me. And I strayed out of thought and time. I felt myself becoming a realm of stars, ending in white light, stars wheeled overhead, and every day was as long as the life age of the earth. Every time I was offered a threshold, I sidestepped it, wandering with the unconscious determination of a falling rock, and when someone tried to force me to take a ticket once in Rukongai, he didn't succeed, I lost myself as easily as one blinks, but it was not the end. I felt light in me again, and cold dirt under my back.

-Scrap of parchment, collected among the 'Words for the Seeker', Author: Unknown, Provenience: Unknown.

The first thing that made me properly *aware*, was a nagging feeling of cold coupled with an uncomfortable harshness against my back.

Opening my eyes, I discovered that I had them, and breathing, I found out that air moved in and out of me with a slow and steady rhythm. In my mind, concept and ideas found themselves unmistakably matched with parts of the reality I was aware of. Images and flashes of what I intuitively named memories appearing ephemerally, making me realize that perhaps the discomfort would be lessened if I were to move. Muscles stretched sinew answered to the call of duty, and I slowly seated myself, blinking even slower to my surroundings, which looked dreary and unwelcoming as the ground felt on my back.

I was sitting in what looked like a tundra where plants didn't make the barest attempt to grow, only an occasional blade of grass tilted for a faint wind that I almost couldn't perceive. My nostrils flared picking up the smell of dust and endlessness, leaving me more confused than I had felt at the beginning of my evaluation. The sky existed, something in the back of my mind told me that I shouldn't take it for granted, and the sun was upon its trail. While it was impossible to look at, I didn't feel the warmth I expected on my skin, and it caused me to briefly frown. *Why?* was my first conscious thought, before my mind returned to its first task: assessment of surroundings. Following a gut instinct that I was unfamiliar with, I rose to my feet, watching myself over the best I could. The diminutive form of a child wearing plain gray clothes didn't really stand out over the greyish ground of the almost lifeless tundra, and I found that my hands were perhaps smaller than what I was used to, and I felt like, once standing, I should have seen the ground from a height of 1,60 meters, not from around a single meter of height. *Six years old child.* My mind provided, and I accepted the concept and the surrounding ideas with indifference, choosing that, since I had nothing better to do, I might as well start walking into a random direction.

South. my mind provided, and I thoughtfully nodded, keeping the descending arc of the sun on my right while I strode determinedly towards the empty horizon.

One year later.

District 62 was a place I didn't particularly enjoy, nor one I should have had any right to feel safe sleeping in, and yet, I had nothing worth stealing, my own clothes had long since become a tattered mess, and I wasn't any good either at stealing or begging. Begging for what? Stealing what? I rarely felt the need to eat, it had happened only three times, and each time it had passed after I waited long enough. I knew it wasn't supposed to work this way, that food was important in a way that the people around me didn't really understand, the more powerful thugs seemed to measure their worth in terms of how much they had accumulated. Be it food, water, wares, or coin. I frowned at the whole 'possess' concept. It wasn't like it was necessary, how did holding your hands over something you didn't need to translate into prestige or power? I couldn't seem to figure it out. Maybe it was the language barrier between me and the rest of the world. After a year, I had learned names and little more. Even so, the sounds were alien in my mouth and rolled uncomfortably on my tongue.

Six months later.

I scrambled with all the quiet grace a child of my dimensions was capable of under a wooden, battered warehouse, a jute sack held against my chest. Three days before, it had happened again: what I recognized as hunger had made itself known. Just to see what would happen if I were to complete the association that appeared in my head, the one that explained that hunger was linked with eating food, I had found a way to steal my prize. I opened the sack and ate the stale bread, frowning at the feeling in my gut. *Satisfaction*. I recognized. With an expectant look on my face, I kept eating until only the crumbs were left. And then I ate them too, before dropping the sack and leaving the place where I had consumed my prize, feeling something else in my chest: *Pride*. This time I felt like I had been the one to make the association, not like it had been dropped in my lap.

A year later.

It was strange that the more I ate, the more I seemed to want? I recognized the difference between need and wish, realizing that I had no real needs beyond those dictated by what I allowed myself to wish for, nothing beyond what I planned to obtain. Stealing sat ill with me, but I knew that an alternative didn't exist, not until I became strong. But how to become strong? Did I need it, or was another of my avoidable *wishes*? I couldn't seem to figure it out, but I distinctly recognized that the world was becoming sharper than I thought it capable to be, and my thoughts flowed more easily. My silent skills had grown, and I ate twice every week, planting evidence of the theft in an area controlled by another gang, taking advantage of the following conflict in order to steal more food. Even while I feasted on my ill-gotten goods, I found myself growing restless more often than not, feeling that something was amiss. *Solitude*. My mind provided a name for the worrying feeling.

I didn't like it.

years later.

I recognized that maybe I wasn't dreaming about it and that my clothes were not only worn but actually maybe too small for me. I frowned, considering that maybe I had grown a palm in height since I had found myself into that strange world. It was with that strange revelation that I discovered again the idea of growing up. The trousers that once reached to my calves were now resting just below my knees, with holes and tears that let in an uncomfortably cold breeze every time I walked. My shirt had been ripped open on the front at some point so that I could drape it around me at night. I knew that I could have stolen some kind of clothes lately, but why broadcast that you were a successful thief? It didn't make sense at all, and I had seen many being ganged up exactly for that reason.

Days before, I managed to see my reflection in a pond of surprisingly clear water, and I had studied myself with a curiosity that I didn't quite understand: a mop of dark hair, dark eyes, a small nose, low cheekbones and a sharp chin. I didn't like how wide my lips looked on my face, but I couldn't pinpoint why would it be important. On the

whole, I was somewhat gangly, and I felt uncomfortable since I believed my limbs to be too long. My hunched posture made me look like some kind of spider, and more than once I had to abandon a theft only because I had knocked something off-balance. I looked at myself once more, determining that I looked like a thirteen years old kid, perhaps 1,35 meters tall. I sighed, readily recognizing that I had saved me more than once in a straight fight.

Killing another soul had been another strange occurrence in the otherwise monotony of my gray existence. Not because it had caused extraordinary discomfort or pain, even if I had been wounded. No, it had been because in a lifetime of grey and absent-minded hunger, I had become alive, my mind razor-sharp intent on finding ways for me to survive. And blood. Red. Rich. Different from the rest of District 62. It made me... *curious*.

A year later.

Confirming that my limbs had grown entirely too much for me to keep stealing how I had always been doing, during a night raid, I made a pot fall over from its half, causing a ruckus that brought on me the sole, new owner of the warehouse. It used to be home of a gang, but a week before a single man holding a sword had slaughtered them and started enjoying their loot of sake and frankly terrible bread.

I stood ramrod still when the man walked closer, the promise of death echoing from the steel of the sword scraping against the scabbard: "Do you know what is this brat?" he taunted me, smiling madly in the dark: "This is an actual Zanpakutō, the trademark weapons of the Shinigami, a group of academy recruits had tried to fly too high and ventured into the 80th district to clean up the filch. But it seems that only being born with the right of being given a sword didn't prepare them to face an angry mob. Ahahahahah!" He swung it randomly, forcing me to take several steps back. My eyes never left the center of his chest, I had seen too many people focus entirely on the arms of someone only to not notice the feet kicking them. I wouldn't make the same mistake. "I even heard they name

them! Ahahahahah! Perhaps I should call this beauty filth-killer, because with it I will conquer this District!"

When he followed with a two-handed downward slash I moved on the side, the sword coming down less than a foot from my chest, and my right arm moved towards its target with a hook. With unerring precision, the rock I had clutched with my fingers crushed the orbital bone of the man. And I didn't let up, as he staggered, I stepped closer, fighting against the instinct that told me to run, and rammed again the rock into his head. Satisfaction ran in my veins as the hit landed on the bloody pulp that once was a human head. With my heart hammering triumphantly in my chest, I rose from my position over my defeated opponent and carefully pried the sword free from his cooling corpse, freeing the scabbard and using it to poke the body, a strange fascination rising in me when I watched the cold gleam of the moon shining from the mirror-like surface of the sword: "Hello sword." I said, words that only I could understand slipped from my lips. Feeling safer with the weapon in my hands, and placed it back into its scabbard, holding it in my left hand since I wasn't tall enough to hold it at my waist.

With a single hand, since I wasn't going to drop Sword anytime soon, I ate and drank to my heart content, going as far as donning new clothes that I found in the warehouse, before dropping tiredly on a futon the man had likely set for himself. As I hugged the sword, draping ourselves with a proper blanket, The uncomfortable feeling that had been nagging me for years lessened as my words for the weapon had left my mouth. *Companionship*. my mind provided.

For the first time since I could remember, I smiled.

2. The power of a name

THE POWER OF A NAME

5 years later

I was walking dejectedly along an empty 'road' in the middle of nowhere: "I know *how* everything is bound to the ground, but I still don't know why." I grumbled furiously. *I know.* the reply rose to my mind with the flash of an unexpressed smile.

"How would you know?" I wondered out loud, *that* was an interesting question. *I know everything you know, and more.* the voice was clear and every word was spelled carefully. *Every star is another sun.* The voice reminded me. I blinked, taking the hint for what it was and trying to figure out an answer to my conundrum starting from that Truth. It was something I loved: every Truth could lead to another, it was beautiful. "Why doesn't the sun fall on us like a rock?" I frowned, reframing my query. *Why doesn't the world fall into the sun?* The question led me further into my reasoning, showing me that I was getting closer to the proper trail towards Truth. I blinked, pushing away the question for my mind to get a new perspective once I returned on the problem.

"Why do I feel hunger every two days?" I chose carefully my next question. It was among the ones I had shelved long before, and now it finally seemed like it was the right moment to figure it out. *Purpose?* the voice was more hesitant, as it didn't know how to tackle the problem. *'First thing first: the reason is likely linked to the change from here and now to there and then, when I didn't need sustenance.'* I thought, knowing that changes seldom came without reason, and that said reason, once one discarded the act of a higher being, which instinctively repulsed me, was likely in my grasp.

My actions had changed since back then. Then I existed, roaming the empty planes until I met District 62. At the time I didn't understand the local language and didn't need to, it wasn't necessary to sustain my existence, so learning it had no true purpose. *Curiosity is a reason for itself.* The voice offered, following me on my reasoning with the unerring precision I had come to expect from it. "So, food was necessary for me to learn the local language? No, how can the two be related?" I pondered the conundrum with a heavy frown. "Which came first then, eating or learning the language?" I looked for a cause between the two, hoping in for the same spark of intuition that had allowed me to discern the true nature of the stars. "I wanted to learn first," I recalled, "But I became hungry before I managed to start talking in a comprehensible way." I nodded, feeling that the puzzle was coming together, a small shard of Truth soon to become my prize. "My mind worked better after eating." I speculated, my memories of the years in this world were hazy and unfocused, almost as if I wasn't actually alive then, only a shadow cast by my thoughts... *Existing and living are two different concepts.* The voice trilled, grasping the thought I had been walking towards just as I reached it: "Food allowed me clearer thoughts," I spoke quickly, fearful of losing the string of interconnected truths that were falling in line one after another: "Clearer thoughts allowed me to learn the tongue, and I remember better those days because the shadow of disjointed thoughts I once was had become more real." But then why...? *'Why did I exist before I ever ate?'* I asked in the safe boundaries of my mind, knowing that the voice wouldn't interrupt my reasoning unless I conducted it out loud. *'Existing... living.'* the two were sibling ideas, but not even remotely the same. Didn't I kill several others since then? Did I end their existence or only their lives? Did they return to the gray numbness of my first years here?

My mind returned to the first days after I started talking with Sword, and Voice that I started hearing after another year. Objects weren't alive I knew that, and I had just proved that simple existing didn't allow me to talk. I had become alive before I was finally able to talk. So maybe, since it couldn't be happenstance, Voice and Sword were

one and the same, I had simply met Sword when it existed, and before it was alive. I frowned, remembering that I had never felt so at ease before hugging Sword, and that since then I could recall more and more of my actions, and I became more aware of my own thoughts with each passing day. Recently, I had come to the revelation that I missed a name: but it wasn't necessary, the only one that spoke with me was Sword/Voice, and from what I understood it didn't speak with others, even if it seemed to appreciate when I fought with it. I *wanted* a name, but I didn't understand why.

"I don't understand being alive." I complained, the more I tried to understand, the more I became aware of what else there was to be understood, learned, discovered.

To live is to be perceived, and so to know thyself is only possible through the eyes of the other. The Voice rang with the song of Truth, and I found myself nodding immediately, my back straightening as an heavy weight had been lifted from my shoulders. A smile blossomed on my face: "To live is to act, and life is in the consequences of our words, thoughts, and deeds." I completed the reasoning and walked with a spring to my step, my straw sandals scraping the dry ground and lifting small clouds of dust as I walked.

10 years later

'*I am too fast.*' I realized as I moved.

'Power is inert without action and choice.' didn't come into my mind as words, but it was more like I could tell the blue sky from the stars. I frowned lightly, recognizing the thought that belonged to me without being originated by my brain. It had been happening more and more often in recent times, and as my thoughts took to walking unexpected paths without my conscious direction, I felt the Voice/Sword clearer and clearer.

I jumped high, completing a cartwheel over the head off one thug and letting my right foot crash upon the skull of another man,

causing the previously unaware men to turn in my direction, while the man that clearly was in charge unsheathed his own sword. I kept moving, my heart thundering but my thoughts surprisingly clear. While the head under my foot was halfway towards the ground, I bent on my right, Sword falling like a ton of bricks on the juncture between neck and shoulder of another thug, making him crumble with a spray of brilliantly red blood. At the same time, my left leg had lashed out, the underfoot of my straw sandal crushing the nose of another gang member. *You need my name for the man with the sword.* Voice/Sword almost made me lose my focus.

The head of the first man impacted against the ground and I rolled on my right, and I forcibly kept myself from standing still to evaluate the situation, instead rising to my feet a second later, I tugged at the closest arm, my momentum working together with my enemy's surprise to unbalance the gang member and successfully pulling him in the line of another man's descending wooden club. My right arm whipped upwards, Sword slashing open a man from the hip to his unprotected armpit.

While he was crumbling to the ground with a pained scream, my left leg straightened with a snap, my toes pivoting on the asphalt allowing my right leg to move in a high sweep that hit the wrist of a man that was about to jump me in the temple, knocking him out cold. *My name, you fool!*

In the surprisingly bright moonlight, everything looked like it was being painted with a strange brush, and I stilled for a moment or two admiring my work before the wooden club that almost hit me forced me to keep moving. It was almost thoughtless, I moved in a counterclockwise circle, taking down a man after another. The one with the unsheathed sword kept turning on himself, keeping an eye on me but making no attempt to attack, seemingly content with just watching me kill. It was... exhilarating and underwhelming at the same time. The first because I was having fun in organizing my attacks in order to cause a reaction that I could always predict and counter with minimal movements, the latter because the puzzle

pieces were falling together without any need for a Truth to reveal itself. *My name is part of Truth! You know it!*

I bent out of melee attacks, using the limbs I could grasp as leverage to turn my opponent into shields, twisting my wrists in order to slash, tear, cut, end, kill, terminate. I spun, ducked, punched and kicked in moves that were part of dance without rhythm, a flow full of obstacles. While I was moving, I realized that the music of the song I was playing was dictated by the attackers, the crescendo of a cocked back fist here, the taut violing string of a wooden bat swinging down on me, the light drumming of panic and rage all around me. The Truths in play were all known ones: People die, Sword works better than everything else in order to kill, and the last one, the one that left me with something of a bad taste in my mouth: I was too fast. Then, maybe too soon, it ended, and something hit me. I felt it coming, but for the first time that night, I couldn't move out of the way quickly enough. A blade bit deep into my back, making me drop on the ground a roll out of the following slash.

I rose to my feet quickly, my left arm rising behind my back to assess the damage made to me while I held the sword threateningly in front of me. "Why waiting until now?" I curiously asked through the pain, causing the man to grin.

"I wanted to see if you were strong or simply had a fancy sword. You use it like some sort of hatchet." he sneered at me, and then he charged. I took a step back and raised the sword, instinctively trying to parry, but the downward slash had been a feint, and I was flung off my feet by a kick that slammed into my chest. I rolled back up in time to rise my sword, only to feel the cold bite of steel on my shoulders. I shot forward, low on the ground trying to keep some distance from me and my last opponent. In that moment, the Truth 'I am too fast' revealed itself to be nothing more than a simple wish on my part.

"You've no idea of how using your reiatsu, boy." He laughed: "Before coming in this backwater District, I was in the actual Academy to become Shinigami, there is no way you can survive a fight with a katana." he walked forward with a swagger, while my mind archived

the interesting information he had given me. "Katana." I tasted the unfamiliar word on my tongue, eyeing warily his. *You need my name.* I shook my head, ignoring the buzzing in my ears as I didn't leave the man out of my sight.

He came at me again, playing with me, tearing apart my defense and laughing when he kicked me. He was too strong, too fast, and even when I managed to keep up, his technique was simply better than mine. Soon enough, I found myself panting on the ground, my eyes open without really seeing the starlit sky. The last Truth made its way into my mind: I was dying. I was falling, the world turning black, my heart staying still far too long between a beat and the following for it to be healthy, when I heard it: "My name, call my name!"

I was still on the ground, but my eyes fell on the arm that was holding Sword/Voice, and I knew what to do: I rose to my feet, I would not stay crumpled on the ground when she was freed. I took a deep breath, some Force making itself known inside me, and words that I felt were just as part of me as my eyes and heart came forth in a shout: "Veritates Mundorum Mihi Ostendis, Olethea!" I called, and in a rush that surged from deep inside me, I *saw everything*.

I saw how the man shifted his weight in order to recoil from his surprise, the jaw going slack for the fear he suddenly found himself feeling. I saw the blades of grass rustling and being flattened by the pressure that left my body, the pools of blood of the men I had killed before being shaken and spraying away from me, like I was the center of an explosion. The sheath at my side unraveled like it was made black bandages that climbed on my hands on their own, wrapping my palms and wrists tightly, as if they wanted to strengthen them, and Sword, no, Olethea, she had changed. From the regular katana with a single edge, the blade had turned into a work of art, and I knew that it was as beautiful as Truth would have been if it assumed a shape discernible with my senses.

Before I could properly admire her, the man surged towards me with an unholy scream of panic and horror, it seemed like he wanted to cut me down before I could understand my bearings and properly

fight back. I saw him ran faster than I could follow, but I had seen where his eyes had been aiming, and I remembered how he had been moving during our fight, I knew that he wanted to make sure he killed me. So I took a single step to my right, my right hand clasped on the hilt and my left arm straight behind the pommel, and took the second step, lowering myself halfway to the ground. A strong impact reverberated on my bones, and the body of my opponent was slumped over Olethea, her blade ran straight into his heart, and I felt the breeze of his attempt at beheading me.

I stepped back from the dead opponent and watched as the blood fell from the white blade without leaving a single stain, like it was instinctively repulsed by the idea of marring such beauty. Finally, I was able to admire her properly: a crimson tassel was attached to the end of the hilt and it moved slowly, like caressed by a breeze, while between tassel and hilt there was a small round pommel that worked for balance, to prevent the handle from sliding through the hand if the hand's grip should be loosened, and for striking or trapping the opponent as opportunity required, the shape of the guard could be described as short wings pointing forward, and with the same clarity I had when looking at the world, I could see each small feather of the guard, and their sharp edge, ready to tear whoever ended up being too close to my hands. At the junction of the wings, there was a small round mirror that was capturing the moon's reflection. The handle between the guard and the pommel could accommodate the grip of both of my hands, and the blade itself was... beautiful. With sharp edges on both sides and 70 cm of blade-length, the edge was so sharp that it looked like it turned transparent. And while the black wrappings around my hands matched the dark hilt of the Jian, the blade itself looked like it was made of white jade or porcelain.

A sharp stab of pain in my left side caused me to release an outraged hiss, while I moved faster than ever before, twirling on myself while Olethea left the cradle of my arms with a swirling motion and white jade sung under the moonlight. The edge of the blade found the neck of my opponent, severing it without meeting any

resistance. While his head fell, I recognized him as the one man that I hadn't killed during the fight, the one I had kicked in the head and left for dead. *'Not killing him almost killed me'* I thought frowning, my eyes having finally left the beautiful shape of Olethea.

I agree. Her voice sang, and while I was reminded that Truth was unmerciful, I fell into myself.

AN

For those that do not munch latin: Ostendis means 'to show' albeit with an aggressive connotation, from the verb ostendo [ostendis, ostendi, ostentum, ostendĕre]. Veritates is the plural-accusative of Vĕritās-Veritatis, which instead means truth. Mundorum is the genitive-plural of Munds-Mundi, which can mean universe, heavens, world, and mankind. Finally, Olethea is derived from Alethea, which is an English language female first name derived from the ancient and modern Greek feminine noun ἀλήθεια (pronounced "al-ee-thia"), meaning "truth". The name Olethea means 'the one who is honest', or 'one who is very truthful'. As a name, it follows the declination of Rosa-ae, and the evocative singular of that declinations ends in ă.

Thusly, 'Veritates Mundorum Mihi Ostendis, Oletheă!' is latin form to say 'Show to me (to me is the translation of Mihi) the truths of the universes (or 'of the worlds', or 'of the heavens', or 'of mankind'), oh The One Who Is Honest!' the 'oh' is to indicate that the use of the vocative case is used to give a direct address. This can be an order, request, announcement, in this context is an invocation.

I chose latin for the soul-language of the MC, because its a strong tie to his past life. While in Italy of 1500 dialects were not only spoken, but also used in writing since the early 16th century saw the dialect used by Dante in his work replace Latin as the language of culture, however Bruno was a philosopher, astronomer, mathematician, and occultist, and like it was 'rule'

at the time, used latin for the title of his works, because it granted it the status of an official document that was to be respected.

3. Worlds

WORLDS

The sea was almost as flat as the surface of a mirror, and just as a mirror, it reflected the starry sky. There was no moon or cloud to obstruct the view of the vast infinity that was the universe, and I almost felt sorry for my inability to reach over and grab one of the celestial bodies that shone delicately over me. The black sand of the beach gleamed wetly at my feet, the quiet waves climbing up and down the shore regularly tickling my feet. I turned on myself, taking in the place: behind me, a few hundred meters from the edge of the water, started a small forest with low trees, a calm breeze making the canopy rustle like it was whispering sweet nothings to me. It had a distinctly Mediterranean feel: myrtle, elderflower, laurel trees, I easily recognized a couple of olive trees.

And under the starlit sky, I could make out a dark shape against the horizon: instinctively, I knew it was something I once called Vesuvius, and that I should be alarmed by its destructive potential. Yet, there was a reason for its presence, a Truth that was either purpose for its existence or the result of it, either way, it wasn't up to me refute it, only investigate and find the why behind it all.

"I told you that you needed my name." Voice said from behind me, causing me to turn and look at her. She looked like a four or five years old child, maybe 50 cm tall, skin as white as the jade that was my blade, with crimson, spiky hair, and black wrappings that acted as clothes for her diminutive form. She was barefoot and was holding her hands behind her back, a mischievous expression etched on her face, but above everything, her eyes were her most striking feature: instead of pupils and eyes, they were black. Not black like her wrappings, not black like the wet volcanic sand, but black lack the distance between the stars, ready to swallow everything in the endless abyss that was her never-ending curiosity.

Because who better than a child can understand the constant wonder for everything around them? I knew that it was a property reflected in the small circular mirror placed at the junction of the wings that acted as a handguard. Who better than a child is instinctively uncaring in her answers, ignoring whatever pain her words could inflict? I felt that it mirrored the properties of the blade itself, candid and unyielding. Who better than a child at that age is sure of what she immediately wants? That peculiarity was the straightforwardness of the blade. And which child wasn't easily distracted? The crimson tassel attached to the pommel embodied that characteristic, even if it could distract my enemies as well. Looking at her shining white dress, I could make out that it was made of the same small feathers that composed the wings on her hilt, and I knew that each of them was as sharp as the volatile mood of a child could be.

She giggled, spinning on herself to give me a complete view of her. I wasn't surprised to spot a pair of small alabaster like wings sprouting from her shoulder blades: "I can feel you understanding my name!" she was ecstatic, and ran to me skipping over the crest of the small waves. "Olethea." I greeted her with a smile, mindful of her numerous sharp edges, she ignored my careful approach and hugged my waist, causing me to suppress a pained hiss when I felt numerous sharp stabs of pain dig where her hands closed around me. I smiled and patted her head, knowing that at least her tassel shouldn't be immediately lethal.

She wasn't warm, nor cold. She carried with her the same ethereal quality of starlight. While she could inspire and guide, she would never console and nurture as the Sun did. I knew it, in the same way I knew I had ten toes without needing to look at them. I knew it, and I accepted it. After a while, she jumped back, a wide smile on her face. I could tell that she couldn't care less that her hug had cut me. *Unmerciful as the Truths she unveils.* I reminded myself: "I've been waiting soo long for you to come here!"

I sat on the black sand, and she quickly joined me, both our eyes turned towards the starry sky: "Where, exactly, is here?"

"This is my home." She explained to me after a while: "A manifestation of your mind, and all it contains, the known and the unknown." I rested an arm over her shoulders, carefully and slowly in order to not harm myself. She noticed the motion and snuggled closer, mimicking the slowness of my movements and taking care in not harming me: "I'm sorry if I cut you, but Truth hits everything in the same way, and I reflect that trait with my general sharpness, this is why you have wrappings on your arms and wrists, a Seeker shouldn't be harmed by what he tries to understand..."

"Thank you." I blinked surprised at her sly declaration of affection, but quickly zeroed in on my curiosity, and given where I was and who I was talking to, I asked: "You seem very at home here." I held my breath, fearing that I had pointed out something that could offend her.

She giggled, shaking her spiky crimson hair as she answered: "I've awoken here, in the same way you awoke in the desert tundra, years ago."

I frowned: "How do you know about that?" It didn't make sense, Sword/Voice was Olethea, and it stood to reason that she had some form of limited knowledge over what had happened to me since I started talking to her. "Every leaf of the trees behind us is one of your memories, many are difficult to read, I think those are the ones of Before."

With every answer, I have more questions. I cursed briefly as the waves climbed higher over the black beach, the water suddenly hitting me in the navel as I scampered to my feet: "What happened?"

"This is for you to find out, don't you think?." she answered like I was being deliberately obtuse, and slowly, I put together what she had told me, finding a connection. *Chaotic emotions and thoughts are*

reflected by the sea? I speculated as I calmed down and the sea quieted itself.

My next question should have perhaps been my first: "Why are we meeting... here?"

She shook her head slowly, an impish smile on her face as she took a step back and folded her arms behind her back, pretending to not know the answer or just flat out refusing to tell me: "I don't know everything. But now you need to go, 'til the next time, Bruno."

As my name echoed from her lips, I fell upwards and found myself standing with the plain form of my katana in hand, a now cold and clotted pool of blood at my feet. I blinked a couple of times, looking around and recognizing that I was standing over the band of people I had killed. With a slight frown, I bent forward and picked up the katana of my harshest opponent until now, only for it to feel *wrong* in my hands. I dropped it without a care, observing how it became chipped and blatantly frail just a second before it hit the ground, where it shattered in many dull fragments.

I shrugged and sheathed the asleep form of Olethea before turning on myself, and walking away from the bloody mess that I recognized had been my first actual battle.

The nature of our immortal lives is in the consequences of our words and deeds, that go on and are pushing themselves throughout all time. Our lives are not our own. From womb to tomb, we are bound to others, past and present, and by each crime and every kindness, we birth our future.

Two years later

Rukongai, that was what the place that was composed of the Districts was called, and given that it should have been the infamous heaven promised by the same people that had burned me alive, I

was hardly impressed. I had known that something was strange as soon as I had regained my senses, even if then I wasn't really able to name them. But I remembered the eternal sense of waiting, the rain that had fallen on me as I huddled near others to beg for scraps of bread I didn't really need.

And now that I realized the actual truth of my current circumstances, I knew that the many times I had been looking for a word to describe the Rukongai, I was hoping to stumble on the word Hell, because there had been nothing in all those years roaming aimlessly the land. I now knew that I had been looking for familiar faces without even realizing it, and I knew that something set me apart from all the others.

I knew, since every soul spoke the same language that I now knew was called Japanese, that something had gone differently with me when I entered the Rukongai. Nobody, among the few with whom I had actually exchanged words, gave me any sign of knowing something outside of our eternal sense of aimless waiting. I stared at the rain with flat eyes, even the drops of water looked like they couldn't be bothered to fall with the speed proper for their weight. They appeared to be as bored as everyone that failed to grasp the strange life available to those that started eating with some kind of regularity.

The only actual piece of evidence in favour of me being dead was that I had finally learned the name of the people 'in charge' of this world: Shinigami. Gods of Death.

I didn't enjoy the thought of being dead, or at least, alive in this eternal purgatory, I remembered the sea, the breeze, a sun hot enough that in the summers I looked for any shade available to rest under. I remembered a vibrant colouring that was utterly absent in Rukongai. Birds and foxes, boars and horses. I remembered, and I missed it. I knew that if not for my inner world I would have fallen to despair a long ago.

Olethea had been my only companion for years now, I was well aware that it was strange, talking swords, or katana, as they were called in the cursed place I lived in, were a not-Truth. It was obvious, I remembered myself demonstrating that as I had to become alive before properly starting to think. And thought came before the spoken word, even more so when said object had declared it had a proper name.

Afterlife was strange in many ways, I had come to know, and while separating myself from Olethea was unthinkable, I disliked this world, I missed my old one, and if the training sessions in my hidden world meant anything, nobody could stop me from learning more Truth once back on the previous world. During one of my self-discovery chats with Olethea had shown me that I no longer cared about sharing the Truth I discovered to those that didn't look for them in the first place. Oh, I knew that many people often didn't bother to look beyond their nose simply because they never considered it, and that more people knew truths, more likely it was that someone would find out more Truth, and it was a beautiful dream, but after that, I had sacrificed everything for Truth, I could no longer be bothered to put myself in deliberate danger in order to share it with others.

I would walk my path, learn, and grow, without having to answer to other people' expectations.

"This is a good choice!" Olethea singsonged in my head, stealing a grin out of me and successfully tearing through my gloomy mood: *"Are you ready?"* she then asked. I snorted, Olethea may have looked like a sword, or even had the shape of one, but it was obvious that there was something more afoot: in this eternal purgatory, I had demonstrated time and time again that only living being, proper living beings, had the ability to speak. Which pointed me towards the idea that my katana was a soul by itself. And yet, she told me she had awoken in the Insulă Inter Caela, the Island Between Skyes, as I had taken to call the place where I met with Olethea.

That place was undoubtedly tied to me, it couldn't be a coincidence that the sea was without waves so that it could complement the beautiful starry night, that the trees and bushes held the unorganized mass of my memories, thoughts, beliefs, and dreams. How could it be a coincidence that the beach itself slowly dragged itself uphill until it became a familiar forest that led to what I had found out was the volcano of my native home... Olethea was alive, and she was somehow linked to me. That much was undeniable.

Not only that, but which were the odds that a living being could assume the shape of a sword, come to consciousness into a place that was the collection of hat made me, *me*, and be such an exact expression of what I would have looked for in a companion? Her curiosity matched mine, her endless hunger for more knowledge was the same as mine, her sudden changes of focus reminded me of my own before I had managed to direct them in an orderly manner once I had entered adulthood.

There were too many questions that circulated around my relationship with Olethea and the sword itself for me to ignore them. The unruly child wasn't a liar, I didn't think she could even conceive the idea of living in a lie outside of the rare chance of finding a Truth that later revealed itself to be wrong. Not that it happened often, or even with some form of regularity, but some things that I had once believed absolute had turned out to be true only in some circumstances, while others were built on a correct intuition but had led me towards a wrong result.

It was one of the reasons why I had come to distrust my hunches since my youth. Logic was the longer way to reach Truth, but undoubtedly the safest one. Intuition had helped me here and there, I couldn't deny that my suspicions about the stars being suns were born out of the blue, but a rigorous thought process had hammered on my hunch until I had become truly convinced of my first idea. Aristarco had already stated that the sun was in the centre of the sky, and that the world circled it, long before the advent of Jesus.

I closed my eyes, abandoning my musings, and found myself back on Insŭlă Inter Caela, Olethea greeting me with a squealing laughter and sharp hug. "Are you ready?" she asked again, and once I nodded, matching her grin, she came at me straight like an arrow, her diminutive body holding onto her white sword form.

I raised the straight white blade that I found in my hands and simply deflected her stabbing motion, flicking my wrist briefly in order to make the crimson tassel swing in front of her eyes for a moment, blocking her sight and trying to punch her with my free hand. My eyes were lowered, looking at her form, when I spotted the black emptiness of her orbs reflected into the small mirror at the centre of 'her Olethea's' handguard.

She used the mirror as easily as I used my own eyes, seeing through my attempt to blindside her and attack from the cover of the crimson tassel. She dug one foot into the smooth black sand and redirected her forward momentum in an upwards flip, the straight length of the white blade forcing me to sidestep the cutting whirlwind that was her cartwheeling.

I tried to kick her whirlwind-like form once I saw her slow down only to be rebuffed by her forearm, hard and unyielding as the rest of her form. I staggered back, quickly recovering my balance and keeping up my defence long enough to properly find my rhythm again, but as I did so, I saw her eyelid slam open, and the endless dark among stars paradoxically shone from her empty eye sockets. She took a step back, her sword leisurely held at her side, just long enough for my swing to go empty, before taking two half-running steps forward and coming into my guard, twirling on her left to avoid my kick and forcing me to parry her slash with the pommel of my hilt, and I was once more on the backfoot.

She wasn't faster than me, not really, and her technique was as good as mine, even if she used the features of the blade more smoothly than me, it shouldn't have been enough for her to keep me from accomplishing even a single meaningful attack, and yet it did. She knew exactly my range, how could she not, but she managed to

dance in a position that forced me to wield the sword with two hands just to use my superior strength in closer quarters, before shifting in long swipes in which I held only one hand at the bottom of the hilt, just above the pommel, in order to make use of my longer limbs.

It wouldn't have been a problem if I had the time of adjusting between one hold and the following one, the point being, obviously, that she didn't let me have that time. Adjusting the grip meant not being able to properly move the sword for a fraction of a second, and in that shard of time, she lunged, forcing me to retreat further in along the beach. I kicked up sand in the hope of distracting her, tried to suddenly lower myself and strike with the pommel of the sword, I punched, kicked, ducked, weaved, jumped and always failed to touch her: "You are not understanding." She reprimanded me after a while.

I jumped back and rose my sword, blinking surprised when I saw it shimmer and return to looking like an ordinary katana: "What?" I asked dumbfounded. "It's been too long since when you called my name for the first time..." Olethea whined: "I wasn't sure, but now... you've forgotten haven't you?"

And as I was about to answer, or better yet, ask for more clarifications, she once more charged me. Once more lunging straight as an arrow: familiar with her opening, I chose to answer in a new way, sidestepping and bringing down my nameless katana in a slash meant to cut through her torso once she overextended. She came into striking distance and plunged the tip of her sword into the glossy black sand, throwing it up with a negligent flick of her wrists while she spun on herself.

Her kick rammed into my stomach with all the strength of a block of jade falling from a cliff, throwing me clean off my feet. I didn't have the time to recover. I rolled over the sand, my neck feeling the air itself moving from her last swing: "Are you trying to kill me!?" I shouted enraged while I jumped back to my feet, slashing upwards and forcing her to deflect my blow.

She had to parry another swing of my blade, this time a horizontal one. She took a casual step back and flexed her arms, before straightening them as she spun on her right heel, causing me to make my katana follow on its trajectory meeting 0 resistance. "Swords are not for fighting." she said condescendingly, implying that they were for killing.

She coiled again her arms, bringing back her sword and cutting on my side before I could react. Even with the bright flare of pain, I kept moving, following the now too exposing attack with my whole body as my left foot left the ground and landed on her hip, using it to augment my own momentum and spin on myself, turning my exposed position in the starting point for another horizontal slash.

While Olethea, with an unconcerned expression, took another step back to repeat the previous interaction, I pushed on the forefront of my feet as I used my core muscles to torque myself as much as I could while falling on my knees. She had to jump back, unable to counter me again because her white blade was too high to reach me: "Expect only what happens, in this way, you'll never be surprised." she calmly spoke while she pressed forward, exploiting my minute delay as much as she could.

And she went ahead in this way, cutting, stabbing, plunging and kicking, every time she landed a blow, she gave me what I identified as the equivalent of 'commandments of the swordsman' or something akin to it, and each of her words resonated with Truth, causing the trees at the edge of the beach to shiver and the agitated sea to still minutely. And for all my efforts, she was a step beyond me, like she... "Can you see the future?" I stammered out while I dragged myself up again, avoiding her deadly swipes with all my skill.

"Any road followed precisely to its end leads precisely nowhere. Climb the mountain just a little bit to test that it's a mountain. From the top of the mountain, you cannot see the mountain." She laughed, leaving me gasping for meaning in her words while I felt her blade nick away over my cheekbones, less than a centimetre away from

my left eye: "Prophecy and prescience, how can they be put to the test in the face of the unanswered questions? Consider: how much of my choices are based on what I foresee? How much is the future a lake of events, and how much is the prophet shaping the future to fit the prophecy? What of the consequences inherent in the act of seeing the future? Does the prophet see the future or does he see the line of events caused by his act of divining what is yet to be?"

Her crystalline voice, maybe for the first time, scared me to the bone. I always knew that she was unmerciful, that he couldn't care less of my survival, that she cared only for Truth. Maybe she had grown used to me, but given that our understanding of the world had grown exponentially since I first fought to the death with her after having called her Name, I knew that whatever affection she might have come to nurture for me wouldn't stop her from going forward and looking for more, unsatisfied with the knowledge she already had: "I don't see the future." she revealed while her blade dragged its edge over my shin, almost cutting bone-deep: "But I see through your eyes, and I see you contracting muscles, I see how the sand reacts to your shift in weight, I see, and I can tell what will follow after so many battles fought together, it saddens me that you can't do the same... but then again, you've forgotten what you had understood when you first called my Name." she scolded me again, unrelenting in her pursuit.

What happened then that it's different from my battle now? I asked myself, and the answer clicked together from the hints Olethea had kept giving me: back then, I had been fighting to kill, and recently, I had failed to recognize that simple truth: swords were not made to fight, but to kill, and lacking that understanding, lacking the possibility of calling on that resolve, how could I wield Olethea properly?

Without needing my input, the nameless katana changed, whitening, straightening, becoming heavier and gaining a low glow that resembled starlight itself. I didn't need to look to know that Olethea had found its way back into my hands.

Parry, duck, slash, kick, retreat, swipe, punch, scream, rage, lunge, punch. Again, and again, and again. My blade started landing on her form, resonating with a crystalline sound that would have made me cry, while I quickly became bruised and deeply cut in several places. In exchange for letting me land the pommel of my blade on her eyebrow, she had slashed along my whole left arm, weakening my grip and making me bleed profusely. For allowing me to slam my blade on her shoulder with the intent of cutting it open, she cut behind my right knee, forbidding me from using that leg to move. When I managed to land a slash that would have outrightly cut her sharp wings off, she leveraged her diminutive torso against me and slashed vertically on the left side of my torso, leaving a shallow cut that nonetheless stung and leaving me reeling from the pain.

My will was to survive, no, to be utterly untouchable by her. But no, it was incorrect: my will, was to kill: as I had done once before, I let go. There was no sword, no thoughts about Thruth, no necessity of keeping myself from getting hurt, only one purpose, aim, objective, a necessary condition, goal: my opponent was going to die. So we clashed again and again. And with every wound I received, the childlike form of my opponent received a blow that should have maimed or outright killed, there was no aiming for her arm, no higher technique or plan to weaken her, only deadly blows.

I ducked under a horizontal slash, feeling the edge of her blade graze the upper part of my back, while I managed to stab mine right over her knee, and I felt the blade bit the bone, even if when I retreated it, only a crystalline sound was left to demonstrate that I had landed a blow. I pushed with my right leg in order to follow up with another attack, but it gave out, and I fell with a wet thump over my own blood while she hopped back.

As I laid in a pool of my own blood, my left arm broken in two parts, a large gnash open over my thigh, and the miscellanea of wounds on my torso, both superficial and internal, something slowly changed, it was faint, less than the shadow of a wisp of smoke, but I knew what I had to do. Calling my revelation a fruit of logic applied to my

observations of my opponent would have meant doing it a disservice. I simply *knew*.

I slowly got back to my feet, knowing what was going to happen before Olethea did, and that knowledge made me want to stay still, or retreat, or run away, but those actions too, had consequences: so I didn't think, didn't follow a plan, I simply stabbed my sword in the neck of her throat once she came close enough, and I saw her explode in a thunder of sharp, white feathers as I felt my grip on her handle strengthen instinctively, as the black wrappings around my hands tightened on their own. It felt exactly like one of her hugs, and once more, I fell upwards, my sight going black.

I awoke slowly, feeling acutely the absurd amount of abuse that Olethea had put me through reverberate through my body. Everything throbbed, itched, twinged, or a combination of the three. *I didn't know that the wounds suffered on Insŭlă Inter Caela would follow me to the* . I thought briefly, before realizing that it should have been obvious: I had died burning alive, so my current body was likely my soul, and if Olethea had awakened into my mind, or inside my own soul, then it made sense that she was a soul of some kind too: meaning that the wounds she inflicted on me were as real as the lessons she imparted.

I blinked my bleary eyes only to immediately freeze when I saw a figure hovering above me, lit by a green sheen: "I am Unohana Retsu." the figure introduced herself while I felt my wounds close under what I could only assume was her care. And I was about to ask her what that fascinating green light was when she *smiled*. "How does a soul that has never crossed the Academy walls end up with a Zanpakutō?"

For some reason, I felt like my life was more in danger now than it was when Olethea had been trying to kill me.

AN

The last part of the chapter is a sum up of what happened to Ichigo to get him to consider that fighting meant to kill, from his if you hesitate you'll die spiel, which I feel is a necessary step that a civilian needs to make once he becomes a shinigami. Consider this, Bruno had always been an academic, never fought in his life if not with words, and what he had done against other souls had always been caused by the necessity of survival.

When he called Olethea for the first time, he was focused not on surviving, but on killing the opponent, which, as I said, I feel is a necessary step for all the shinigami.

The chapter contains quotes from Dune, by Frank Herbert:

Prophecy and prescience, How can they be put to the test in the face of the unanswered questions? Consider: How much is actual prediction of the "wave form" (as Muad'Dib referred to his vision-image) and how much is the prophet shaping the future to fit the prophecy? What of the harmonics inherent in the act of prophecy? Does the prophet see the future or does he see a line of weakness, a fault or cleavage that he may shatter with words or decisions as a diamond-cutter shatters his gem with a blow of a knife?

Expect only what happens, in this way, you'll never be surprised.

The vision made him want to freeze into immobility, but this, too, was action with its consequences