

If I Were Rain

by debbiechan

Disclaimer: I don't own Bleach or the characters of Orihime, Ishida, and Ichigo. Their story is as old as time, though, and fixed in the stars. The Original Author was one before Kubo Tite, I presume? ~.^

Description: Kubo Tite plays with symbol and metaphor, ancient myth and modern song lyrics, in a way that delights his readers. His manga *Bleach* is named after Nirvana's first album, and there's been lots of speculation as to why his second leading lady of Bleach, Orihime, is named after the heroine of the Tanabata myth. (* see note at end of fic for the basic rundown on that myth). Ah, who knows? This drabble series explores some possibilities. It was inspired by a drawing by the wonderful Dragonboy MT here:

HYPERLINK http://i3.photobucket.com/albums/y80/mt_commissions/LJ/

15hugs_Holdmetight.jpg http://i3.photobucket.com/albums/y80/mt_commissions/LJ/15hugs_Holdmetight.jpg

And this drawing was in turn inspired by angels requiem's short fic here:

HYPERLINK "http://www.livejournal.com/community/20_souls/4546.html#cutid1"

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Warning: a few spoilers up to the Arrancar arc

If I were Rain, could I connect to another's Heart the way Rain connects eternally separated Earth and Sky?--Kubo Tite, Bleach poem, Volume III

1.

At Orihime's first Tanabata festival in preschool, she thinks everyone is celebrating her birthday. Every year after, even in high school, folks will make such a fuss over her because she is named after the weaving princess of legend.

For Orihime's first Tanabata parade, Sora dresses her in a tiny pink yukata robe that will last her until second grade when her arms and legs grow past the flower-embroidered hems. Pink goes surprisingly well with her ginger-orange hair.

When the giant supplies box is passed around the crafts table, Orihime begins to hoard orange crayons; she lays claim to them all ("Orange MINE!") because she needs orange for portraits of herself. She colors every paper Orihime on Tanabata activity sheets with hair

like her own--orange, brown, a few streaks of yellow. She gives Kengyuu, the myth-Orihime's estranged lover, all orange hair.

2.

Orihime never meets another girl who shares her unusual name, but in middle school she comes across a boy with orange hair. He is the one who answers the door the morning she carries her injured brother to a building she has passed so many times, a place she knows will help him. The sign on the building reads "Kurosaki Clinic." While the resident doctor tries to arrange Sora's transfer to a large hospital, the orange-haired boy introduces himself as Kurosaki Ichigo. During the minute that Orihime is talking to Kurosaki Ichigo, Sora dies.

At night I always went to bed before Onii-chan, and mornings he rose very early to cook rice and then walk me to school. What did Onii-chan dream about? What sort of things does a young man dream about?

Orihime will never forget the ordinary look on her dead brother's face. For many years, she will try to remember if she ever saw Sora asleep. What sort of close relationship can one have with a person if one has never seen the other asleep?

Orihime will never forget the boy who, looking like the Tanabata lover in her childhood drawings, is holding Sora's wallet, calling out her street address to the doctor filling out the death report while Sora lies, looking fast asleep, in the same room.

3.

Kurosaki forgets all about the little girl who carried her dying brother on her back. Three years later, Keigo points out Orihime during lunch as the "biggest breasted of the whole class." Keigo says something about her brother having died at Kurosaki Clinic, and Ichigo looks again, squinting, at the radiant beauty who is Inoue Orihime. "Hmph," he says, shrugging. "She looks different."

4.

It rains so much in Kurosaki Ichigo's soul because it was raining the day his mother died. Zangetsu mutters that if he were a weaker sort of sword spirit, he would rust into orange crumbles from so much rain.

5.

Tanabata decorations were never taken down from the house across Ishida's street because the old woman died alone, and her relatives thought it would bring bad luck to remove the two bamboo poles jutting from the second story window.

It's been months. The colored streamers have all been bleached white by sun and rain. What sorts of wishes did the old woman write on colored papers every year of her life? That would have been a lot of wishes, Ishida thinks. Did Orihime, that deity of patience and devotion, grant any of them?

Looking at the drooping decorations, Ishida remembers being a small child who wept freely because he could not understand his father's coldness.

Ishida's sole Tanabata wish years ago was: *I will be a very strong Quincy, and then Father will see.*

6.

When grilling Orihime for information about that strange boy Ishida, Ichigo keeps mispronouncing Ishida's first name. "No, no, no," Orihime keeps saying. "It's Uryuu, Uryuu. Dragon rain." She tells Ichigo that Ishida Uryuu seems gloomy but is a very kind person. "And so *talented*. He wove his own cloth this year in handicrafts club." Orihime shows Ichigo the fabric square hanging on the classroom wall. It is thick cotton broadcloth that looks pearly for some reason. "It sorta glows," Ichigo says. Upon inspecting the square more closely, Ichigo notices that skinny blue and silver threads crisscross the material.

Then Ichigo remembers Ishida's white get-up with the blue cross. "Does this guy make his own clothes?" Ichigo remarks to Orihime. "That's ... *scary*."

7.

Ishida is standing behind Ichigo's back and the two of them are surrounded by Hollows. "My mother was killed by a Hollow," Ichigo shouts, and Ishida feels himself startle. Why does it surprise him every time he discovers another person who knows separation and grief? Is there a human alive who won't be touched by death sooner or later?

"I don't want anyone to go through that," Ichigo says of grief and lifts that ridiculous oversized weapon of his. In the next moment, his blade and Ishida's arrows are slicing through air like lightning. Rage, envy, fear. These feelings fuel destructive power and cleanse the

landscape of monsters.

But Death itself? Only a Quincy can eliminate it. Ichigo's sword cleanses the beast and sends it to Soul Society; Ishida's arrow eliminates the cycle of reincarnation.

Although Kurosaki is the clear winner in today's competition, Ishida is fully aware of the power that he, the last Quincy, has over Death itself. Yet, on his knees, in a rain of dying sparks from his golden arrows, that knowledge is no consolation.

8.

Rain is falling the night Rukia is taken away, and the two boys, the Quincy and the Shinigami, lie defeated in the street. Urahara, carrying his largest umbrella, steps in the puddle where Quincy and Shinigami blood is mixing. "The Quincy's wound is superficial," says the black cat on Urahara's shoulder.

"The physical wound, yes," says Urahara. "There's been a great blow to his pride, I imagine."

After he heals the Quincy, Urahara is surprised by the boy's concern for his rival Kurosaki. "You have to help him," says Ishida. "He's the only one who can save Kuchiki-san."

"See?" says Urahara bending over the unconscious Kurosaki. "We are all depending on you."

"That's a lot of pressure," says the black cat, "on a half-dead boy."

The rain stops. Clouds part to reveal the boat-shaped moon. Hope is everywhere.

9.

The Shiba cannonball flying over the Seireitei has melted and human bodies are swirling in space. Orihime flashes on the idea that she is really the Orihime of legend now, a constant in the heavens.

"Stay together!" yells Yoruichi.

Orihime reaches for Kurosaki, and he reaches for her, and the distance between their hands is less than one finger when--suddenly--whatever force holding everyone aloft gives, and the bodies fall away.

Orihime is still holding onto Ishida-kun as the two spin to Earth. Ishida, and not Kurosaki, is the one whom Destiny has thrown against Orihime in the sky.

10.

Her breath heavy, stolen Shinigami sandals slapping, running and running towards the Tower of Penitence, Orihime imagines that she is love with Kurosaki, with everything about him--his flamboyant hair, his scowling face, his determination to make things right.

After an hour in a dark cell, Ishida imagines that he *might* be in love with the idea of a girl who is too pure to kill, even in self-defense, and who weeps for her enemies.

Kurosaki can not imagine being in love with anyone or anything. The sweetest love he ever knew died in a rainy street with his mother, and the kids at school can tease him if they want, but he just doesn't have an interest in girls. Not more than a fraction of a decimal of a tiny bit of a passing interest anyway....

All Kurosaki knows is that Rukia, like his mother, tried to protect him, and he is going to be damned if he lets Rukia die.

11.

Everyone survives horrible battles, the true enemies are unveiled, and Rukia's execution is stopped! Yet, like the Hollow that lives inside Kurosaki Ichigo, there is a sense of failure within every achievement, a wild disappointment inside every triumph.

Could Ishida have made a greater sacrifice? Remembering the time he stood behind a tree and watched his grandfather being killed, Ishida believes that he could have done something differently in Soul Society. He wasn't selfless enough.

Orihime wonders what part of her *self* is left to sacrifice. After all, Orihime wanted so badly to help Kurosaki-kun and would have given her life several times over to help him, but Rukia was the one who helped Kurosaki-kun, and all Orihime has left to lose is her jealousy of Rukia. She loosens the feeling, and tears fall.

Meanwhile into the empty space where Ishida's Quincy powers resided, a longing for Orihime enters. This longing throws down a futon, cooks up some weird food, and makes itself at home. It calls "Kurosaki-kun! Kurosaki-kun!" until Ishida starts to feel the stirrings of an old rivalry, sparks of a new fire, the return of an ancient Quincy art.

12.

It is autumn, and the days are never predictably hot or cold. Ishida wears his beige scarf to school, and it is tied around his waist on the walk home. If Ishida were to make one wish at this moment it would be *I don't want to choose again*. He's sick of choices. To kill or not to kill, to get back his powers or to keep his friends, to walk down the busier route to the hospital and risk seeing a classmate or--? Damn choices to Hell, he chooses to walk that path anyway, head lowered, pretending to be a bastard.

Kurosaki doesn't make wishes. He doesn't allow chance or beautiful deities in the stars to determine his future. He learned from Urahara to never hold the option of failure in his mind: *If you dodge, do not tell yourself "I am afraid of being cut," tell yourself "I won't let him cut me."*

Sorrow, joy, death, love--these concepts are as tiny as fireflies when your own will determines your future. Orihime has no such strong will, so she walks with Death and Love bowing their heads over her like giant flowers. She herself is fairy-sized when it comes to self-esteem. Orihime is wishing all the time; she feels like her every breath is a wish for things to get better.

One starless evening, over a midnight snack of ice cream, when Orihime notices that there's a dull longing inside her and that she *misses Ishida*, it does not occur to her to choose between loving Ishida or loving Ichigo. So for the moment, she loves them both.

13.

Orihime does not even suspect that she is as far away from being a grown-up woman as pebbles on the street are from stars in the sky. When the time comes, though, she can make the leap. She's traveled greater distances before.

14.

The handicrafts club enters wall hangings, dolls, and throw pillows in the Tanabata competition. Orihime's Shinigami Teddy Bear wins first prize. Ishida wins the "fastest sewer" competition, both in single needle and sewing machine categories.

Kurosaki wonders how it is that so much can happen in a single year.

Orihime sends Ishida to fetch pretzels from the vendor.

Sado, who is more sensitive than one would guess, writes on a pink piece of paper: *Let Orihime turn around and notice how much Ishida cares for her.*

15.

“It will start up again soon,” says Orihime looking at the sky. Kurosaki knows that she is right. It’s been raining off and on all day, even though it’s not monsoon season.

Ugly miserable weather.

Orihime gives her umbrella handle a little twirl and throws it over her shoulder and doesn’t even seem to notice that her tennis shoes are sopping wet from puddles.

“Stupid rain,” says Kurosaki for the lack of anything else to say.

“It means the angels are sharing their problems and crying about them.” (Kurosaki wonders is he crazy or does Orihime’s voice seems even more cheery than usual?) “But it’s all okay, because crying brings them closer together!”

Kurosaki has long since quit wondering from where in Hell Orihime comes up with this sort of stuff, but sometimes he worries about her being on her own like this, so scatter-brained and vulnerable.

16.

When Orihime tells Tatsuki that she keeps having these dreams about Ishida, Tatsuki is chewing an egg roll and not even listening. When Orihime says that she’s been having these dreams because she and Ishida slept together those two days, Tatsuki drops her fork. Her jaw drops too, and a bite of cabbage falls out. “You and Ishida *what?*”

“Oh, not like that. Not ‘slept together’ like in the television sense.” Orihime pauses for a moment to collect words to express herself better, but Tatsuki already understands what *in the television sense* means. She’s been Orihime’s best friend for too long.

“In the Seireitei,” Orihime continues. “It wasn’t even like camping, because we took turns watching out for Shinigami, and so I got to watch him sleep.”

“So?” Tatsuki begins to eat what’s left of her egg roll. “Did he do something weird?”

“No,” says Orihime, “but maybe I picked up on his dreams or something. I don’t know.”

17.

Sometimes Orihime knows that she had a past with Kurosaki-kun, another life in a different era, but she is beginning to suspect that she has a future with Ishida-kun.

In the dream, it is a spring day or a fall day or one of those days between seasons because the grass is brown but the air is warm. Sometimes she is wearing a pink skirt, and sometimes she is wearing blue jeans, but Ishida is always resting his head in her lap and looking into her eyes through those big, rectangular glasses of his.

That's it. A perfectly ordinary moment. Yet the intimacy of it makes Orihime catch her breath.

18.

Who will have learned new skills for the next Tanabata festival? And the one after that? And the one after that? Townsfolk will parade in bright clothes before the deity of patience and devotion and lift their bamboo poles decked with paper ribbons towards Orihime. *Pick me! Pick me!*

Every year, Orihime delights in accomplished children and scatters good fortune over them. She tosses candies like a springtime rain over the town of Karakura.

For once, Ishida's choice will be easy for him. *I choose for her to be happy.* Everything, even his Quincy pride, is worth sacrificing for Inoue-san. Because Ishida's choice is also a Tanabata wish, the deity in the stars will reach across the river, the river flooded with tears, reach across time and space to gather into her arms the one who learned his heart so well this year.

19.

Orihime has always known it is a very intimate thing to watch someone sleep. Ishida looks younger without his glasses.

20.

From losing her brother, Orihime has learned that people are never really separated. Not even in Death is Love destroyed.

Orihime has learned to be a Magical Girl from Ichigo Kurosaki. His power engendered hers, and even though his power looks like a mighty tower and hers looks like a flower petal, both can save the world.

Orihime has learned to how to be a human woman from Ishida Uryuu. Tonight, she is so enraptured looking at festival fireworks that Ishida takes her by surprise when he wraps his arm across her shoulders. “Oh,” she says smiling at him. “Where were you? I was looking all through the crowd. Did you get the pretzels? With lots of mustard?”

Their faces reach toward one another, and when their lips are the breadth of one finger apart, Ishida whispers, “I was here all along.”

END

** The Tanabata Festival on July 7 in Japan celebrates the myth of Orihime, the weaver girl separated from her lover and allowed to meet him only on this day. If it rains and floods, the moon’s boatman can not ferry Orihime across the giant trench that separates the lovers (the trench is the Milky Way and it was dug by Orihime’s mother’s hairpin). Sometimes when it rains, magpies will make a bridge for Orihime to cross. Because Orihime is a skilled artisan who works hard at her loom all year in order to earn her parents’ permission to visit her lover, typical celebrations in Japan include decoration and crafts competitions. People write wishes to Orihime on colored papers strung from bamboo stalks raised to the sky. Will she show sympathy and grant the wishes?*

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