

## Night Shift

by debbiechan

Disclaimer: I do not own Bleach, but as the kids say, I am “pwned” by Bleach. Please, Kubo-san, allow dorks all over the world to rejoice in an eventual love match between uber-dorks Ishida and Orihime--for our little fanfics are no substitute for your great story.

Warnings: Mild sexual innuendo, references to masturbation, and *SPOILERS FOR SOUL SOCIETY ARC*.

Description: I couldn't help it; I *had* to flesh out yet more canon Ishihime. This ficlet was inspired by the manga panel where Ishida is shown drawing back a curtain and telling Orihime she needs to sleep. It struck me as very “It Happened One Night.” ^\_^

“Sorry. *I'm not Kurosaki.*”—*Ishida to Orihime, Bleach manga 86:4*

Ishida's fingers absently tied and untied knots in the sash of his stolen Shinigami robe.

At this late hour, he was accustomed to being alone with his imagination, but for the second night in a row, a girl had fallen asleep in his proximity. Not just any girl, but *Inoue Orihime*, the star of his fantasies since way back in middle school when (here Ishida sighed at the memory) Inoue-san had modeled a too-small crocheted vest!

Only the handicrafts club had taken notice of Inoue's precocious bosom that afternoon, but soon the girl became the most ogled and desired in the whole province. Ishida, however, having admired his sewing comrade's unassuming good character *before* recognizing her physical assets, was one of the few Karakura boys, men, or lesbians who did not turn into a lecherous predator in Inoue's presence.

That idea made him feel ennobled at the moment. If destiny had deemed him the travelling partner of Inoue Orihime, the most curvaceous girl in Karakura Town, it was because he, Ishida Uryuu, was a perfect gentleman!

A perfect gentleman who was perfectly miserable at the moment ... Inoue, he had discovered, had a very sexy way of snoring.

Last night a curtained partition between them had made the situation tolerable. Tonight, her cheek resting on two folded hands, Inoue lay curled only inches from where Ishida sat, supposedly keeping vigil for enemies. The girl was fully clothed in a black robe, white socks, and straw sandals. Even that quaint hair comb, the one lifted from the poor Shinigami whose neck Inoue had karate chopped, was still clipped in place, holding back her usually flowing locks. There was a string of drool at the corner of her mouth, but Inoue could not have looked more entrancing.

Moonlight streaming from a high window lit the tiny pearls of saliva on her parted lips, and when she wasn't mumbling in her dreams, she was *snoring*. Who could have imagined the loveliness of such a sound? It was a light, sensual suspiration that stirred Ishida's hormones, and his longing to touch himself was surpassed only by a longing to touch *her*.

On the makeshift futon of burlap over wood shavings, Ishida hugged his knees. He wished, for the first time since landing in the middle of this enormous adventure, that he could be back in his own bedroom.

Compared to other teenaged boys, Ishida did not own a particularly vast store of erotic manga. Sure, he had browsed the computer for calendar girls on many a lonely night, but he prided himself on his respect for women and gentle aesthetics. He kept a half dozen Edo-period art books under his bed back home. He had borrowed them from the family study at age thirteen, and Ishida Senior--somewhat relieved when little Uryuu showed an interest in nudie art--had offered to supplement his son's staid erotic tastes with some age-appropriate hentai. Mortified that his father had shown concern over his burgeoning sexual identity, the younger Ishida had been suspect of glossy girlie magazines ever since. How truly hentai could they be if *Ryuuken* liked them? Besides, who needs pictures when you've got a strong visual imagination?

Ishida looked at the sleeping girl next to him and decided--once and forever--that live, clothed, softly snoring girls were sexier than wood-block prints of naked ones.

If only Inoue-san would stop making those little sighing noises in her sleep!

She moved her lips again. "Kuro--" she mumbled. "Kurosaki-kun."

The name was like a bucket of ice water thrown on Ishida's wound-up body. His hands unclenched, and his attention shifted. *Oh that's right--she dreams about him.*

Everyone knew about Inoue's crush on Kurosaki except for the oblivious Kurosaki himself. A Quincy with exceptionally honed perceptions, Ishida had probably known about the foolish infatuation long before the rest of the school. Or had there actually ever been a time (here Ishida frowned as his mind plumbed the ancient history that was two years ago in middle school) when Inoue *didn't* get all dewy-eyed in Kurosaki's presence?

For some reason, Inoue's crush had never bothered him until recently.

"Kurosaki-kun," Inoue continued to mumble. Her voice sounded agitated now.

Ever since Kurosaki's grand display of chasing off the Menos Grande, Ishida had felt his rivalry with the orange-haired boy phenomenon intensifying. More than anything else, Ishida wished he could beat Kurosaki to the tower to rescue Kuchiki-san. It wasn't an issue of Shinigami versus Quincy anymore--it was more personal than that. *Why?* Was it because Kurosaki had begun to see Ishida as a "friend," one of those stragglers who needed protecting?

Ishida stood up and reached for his knapsack. His hand rummaging through it made a loud rustling, but he could still hear Inoue. *No...* Surely, that had not been that a little moan of *pleasure?*

"Kurosaki-kun, lower! *Lower!*"

Ishida dropped the sack.

"Wind, gorilla, spoon, cane..."

Ishida blinked. Wasn't that Ganjyu's incantation?

"Kurosaki-kun, *please*, Ganjyu-kun said..."

Was she dreaming about trying to maintain an equilibrium of energy within the Shiba cannonball?

"Lower! Lower your spirit power--it's *so strong*."

There had to be something in the knapsack to rescue him from all this! If he could plug his ears against these distractions (*Kuso! The girl even babbles in her sleep!*), he could keep his other Quincy senses alert for Shinigami.

Ishida's knees dropped with a soft thud against the storage room floor, and he began to pick up items that had spilled out of the knapsack earlier. "*Kurosaki*," he muttered, more loudly than he intended. "Kurosaki, you are a hopeless moron. *A big dumb wad of reiatzu who can't even see spirit threads. A clueless--* "

Inoue's eyes fluttered open and then closed again.

The sight made Ishida wince. As much as he wanted her to stop her babbling, he really didn't want her to wake up. She had slept so little the past couple days, and from what he

could hear last night, she had spent most of her allotted sleep time fully awake, practicing her magic shield technique.

The irony struck him; last night, he had been straining to hear her voice behind the curtain partition, and tonight he would give anything to silence it.

Screwdriver, antiseptic towelettes, matchbooks...*there!* The roll of gauze he had been looking for! He wound a strip around his finger and remembered the last time he had used the roll--

When Inoue had been rousing herself to consciousness after crash-landing in the Seireitei, hadn't she been murmuring Kurosaki's name then too?

Ishida snapped a piece of gauze off the roll with more force than necessary.

"Ishida-kun?"

Damn, she was awake. The tone she used to speak his name was markedly different from the one she had been using to murmur *Kurosaki-kun*.

Ishida looked up and met her eyes. She was batting her lashes sleepily, and when she spoke again, it was in the sweetest, most solicitous voice: "Did you hurt yourself? Why do you need bandages? You could've woken me up! Let me summon--"

"No!" Ishida held up his hand. "Please, no fairies!"

"Did you hurt your *finger*, Ishida-kun?"

"I'm fine, really, Inoue-san." Ishida felt his hand waving too spastically and froze the gesture mid-air. "I was just picking up things that spilled out of the bag."

"Oh..." Inoue smiled one her fetching smiles and sat up. "Is it my turn to keep watch now?"

"You don't remember?" Ishida felt his composure return all at once, and he slung the knapsack over his shoulder. "I already took my turn sleeping. Uh, Inoue-san, you don't look very awake. Maybe you should lie down again. Last night you were up--"

"AH!" Inoue smacked her forehead with her palm. "Thanks for reminding me. I really need to be practicing *Shun Shun Rikka*. Yoruichi-san said that I needed to learn to summon the shield without the incantation." She swept her gaze around the storage room and looked more perplexed than sleepy. "I do wish Yoruichi-san hadn't been separated from us, but I suppose he's helping Kurosaki-kun. Do you suppose they've gotten to the tower

already? Gosh, I wonder how much longer it will take to get there....”

The weird-looking shopkeeper and the talking black cat may have trained Inoue, Sado, and Kurosaki to use spirit power, but Ishida was baffled that these mysterious sensei hadn't told them very much about what Soul Society was actually like.

“I suppose we'll find out,” said Ishida in a hushed voice. “The Shinigami we've encountered so far seem to be foot soldiers of the lowest type. I'm sure that the tower is more heavily guarded, by stronger Shinigami most likely. We'll just have to keep thinking on our feet, Inoue-san. We're in such ... a strange world.”

Yes, what a strange place they were discovering ... a world both futuristic and antiquated ... rooms illuminated by phosphorous plants instead of electricity ... a society without running water but sealed off by an intangible force shield ... a maze of corridors populated by swordsmen wearing medieval hakama-type clothes....

Inoue was adjusting the comb in her hair. In the severe contrast of moonlight and shadow, she looked almost like one of those wood-cut women in the art books under his bed--

“Are you comfortable?” he asked her. His voice sounded hoarser than it should.

She tilted her head at him, looking confused, and he realized he needed to clarify the lame question.

“Do you need to freshen up or something? I know this room is smaller than the one we found last night, but I can step outside for a moment if you--” Ishida looked at his sandals. “If you need to bathe or something like that, I saw a well not far from here, and I could get--”

Ishida stopped talking because Inoue had started *stretching*, her black sleeves falling away from her arms as she raised them. He knew he must have seen the pink crooks of her arms a thousand times before in short-sleeved school blouses, but ... *moonlight made her skin so luminous.*

“I *do* feel sort of grimy,” Inoue said. “Don't you still have a whole bunch of those wet wipe things?” She rubbed the drool off her chin with the heel of her hand--how she managed to make the gesture so feminine was beyond Ishida.

He was combing through the bag again. “Yes, yes, of course. I have lots of them. And rubbing alcohol too.”

“You're so clever, Ishida-kun.” Inoue took the packet of towelettes from Ishida's outstretched hand. “No one else thought to bring all these practical things.”

No one else, *especially Kurosaki-kun*, had half a brain.

At that moment, Ishida found himself worrying if the more mentally deficient members of their party were managing alright. He had received a fair knowledge of Shinigami lore from Grandfather, but there was no telling what to expect next in the Realm of the Dead. The best Ishida could figure was that Shinigami, the most skilled and practiced warriors among all dead people, were very old spirits, so *maybe this world was a spiritual manifestation of a bygone Samurai-era these warriors had known while alive?* And what was the deal with all the velvety black lepidoptera fluttering about? They seemed to carry encrypted spirit communications accessible only to certain Shinigami.

Even stranger than Soul Society, though, was being alone in the middle of the night with a beautiful girl.

Inoue finished wiping her face, and then, in one quick gesture, tucked the towelette into her bodice front and appeared to be cleaning under her arms. She was done before Ishida could even be shocked that she'd attempted such a thing right in front of him. She wadded up the wipe and wiggled her toes in her white socks.

“Are you sure you're not sleepy, Ishida-kun?”

Ishida didn't answer. Had he or hadn't he glimpsed a bit of cleavage a moment ago?

“Poor Rukia-chan locked away in that tower,” Inoue continued. “I wonder if she's sleeping half as comfortably as we are. I think we should just get moving, don't you?”

“I don't know.” Ishida found himself staring at his sandals again and trying to consider their predicament. Inoue-san's only offensive, the spikey-haired fairy named Tsubaki, had been injured in the battle with the projectiles expert, and Inoue's best defensive, the magic shield, still needed some work. As much as Ishida wanted to show up Kurosaki, he didn't want to go into the open too soon and expose Inoue to battle.

“Listen!” said Inoue.

Ishida didn't understand. “What do you mean? It's perfectly quiet outside--*oh!*” He then remembered that before Inoue had fallen asleep, soldiers on night shift had been making loud carousing noises nearby. At some point Ishida must have stopped paying attention to them because he was trying so hard not to listen to Inoue's alluring sleeping sounds.

“They're not partying anymore,” Inoue said. “They seemed to be drinking a lot earlier. What do you want to bet they're all passed out by now?” She folded her arms and grinned in triumph.

She was... *perfect*. Not just buxom but *smart*! Long before the crocheted vest had caught Ishida's attention, he had noticed that her name usually trailed two or three places behind his on annual test score postings. This year she had even tied him for first place in math! She lacked the snobby affectations that ruined the desirability of most schoolgirls, and... and...

"Ishida-kun? Why are you looking like that? Are you worried about something?"

"No, no, it's nothing, Inoue-san. You're perfectly right. We could probably make a lot of progress if we headed out now."

Inoue walked to the high window, raised herself on her toes, and peered outside. "All clear and quiet and dead of night," she said. "What are we waiting for?"

Ishida didn't answer but started out the door, Inoue behind him.

Then they were running, side by side, through the warm night, away from the overwrought tension of the little storage room and into who knows what. *What are we waiting for?* Ishida couldn't shake the feeling that he was still counting down minutes.

Kuchiki Rukia was going to be executed. Ishida knew, with a Quincy-sort of certainty, that despite how stupid the boy was, Kurosaki Ichigo could save her. Kurosaki was the *only one* who could save Kuchiki-san, and Ishida was going to be upstaged by that hothead Shinigami again.

*Yes, but....* He cast a glance at the lovely girl keeping pace with him down the corridors of the Seireitei. *I'm with Inoue-san now.*

*End*

Yes, they step out only to confront Mayuri and the twelfth division!

Thanks as always to my beta-reader, LisaB.

Thanks too to all the Ishihime fans in the Bleach fandom who encourage my writing. Here's a challenge for you all: is it possible to write an Ishihime that is devoid of WAFF and sap? Hey, don't get me wrong, I write WAFF and love sap--but I'm wondering, especially as the manga enters into angsty territory, if we shippers can't explore more of the serious, coming-of-age drama? (*Whispers: although hyper-realism is truly impossible with*

*this magical pair, the Princess and her Knight in Shining Glasses ^\_^*). At current writing, Kubo-san is at chapter 199, with Orihime spilling tears and curling toes and fretting about how she doesn't measure up to Rukia. There are wonderful dynamics being set-up here among all the young characters, and since I can't wait for Kubo-san, I want to read more Ishihime fanfic! \* Gets on knees and begs for fic \*

Notes:

*Menos Grande*: a Hollow formed by the merging of a hundred or more Hollows.

*Shiba cannonball*: a transport, designed by explosives expert Shiba Kuukaku, that is composed of spirit energy and used to launch our heroes into the impenetrable walled city, the Seireitei.

*Shun Shun Rikka*: the shield of six dancing flowers, Orihime's special power.

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