

Onlooker  
by debbiechan

Disclaimer: Kubo Tite created the world of Bleach.

Description: PG13. Mayuri's bacteria do what Ishida despises most--watch in hiding. This vignette takes place during chapter 303.

Warnings: Violence, spoilers for the Szayel battle in the Hueco Mundo arc

*thank you to Rebecca for an insight about Ishida and to SilvaNoir for her fanart which can be found at deviantart dot com. (This site doesn't allow links to show up but you can find the fanart there.)*

Kurotsuchi's not even looking at him. "Silence, reprobate."

"I told you!" Ishida doesn't have the strength to hold a fist. His fingers slap the ground. "You're the reprobate!" Nausea swells. "You're--" The intended tirade turns into coughing noises.

"Stop it, Ishida!" *Why does Abarai have to yell everything? Can't he ever use a normal voice?* He's telling Ishida not to talk anymore. *Don't **shout** anymore, Abarai. I'm right here and you're killing my ears.*

Pain lurches, fills Ishida's chest, and he vomits blood. It's a matter of pride to keep his chin off the ground. His fingers manage a fist. *There!* Upper arms shaking, he supports himself on both elbows.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck." Abarai is cursing in a whisper now. He grabs the nape of Ishida's neck.

One elbow falls. "What are you--?" Words trickle out. "Don't--" The current of retching has stopped, but the pain still courses in waves. Kurotsuchi's lieutenant has been captured by the Espada. *What is that thing going to do to her?* "I can--"

"No you can't," Abarai hisses and presses Ishida's face against the ground.

Cool earth on one cheek, Abarai's hot hand on the other.

The helplessness is so overwhelming that it takes Ishida no time to make the connection. The last time he was this paralyzed. He felt low and small and he should've been crushed like a bug. He should've been eaten, burned, blown away.

*Sensei.*

“Hold on,” says Abarai. *Is he trying to hold my hand?* Abarai can't shape a fist well either, but he runs his palm against Ishida's wrist, lower arm, elbow, shoulder ... as if to hold him down.

As if Ishida could really get up.

*I'm infected with--*

Mayuri's bacteria do what Ishida despises most. They watch, don't act, just watch. Like the little boy who stood behind a tree and took in the horror of an endless battle. An old man tiring. The arm that couldn't be hurt *that* badly, even though Sensei looked like he was holding a detached limb to his shoulder. Tree limbs waving, the smell of scorched leaves.

No longer able to shoot arrows, Sensei tossed lame pellets of blue-white energy at a Hollow. A second Hollow circled overhead like a patient predator. Another sat, arms crossed, fangs dripping Sensei's blood. What was it waiting for?

*I was watching and hiding... hiding... It's not that I wouldn't help him, I couldn't...move.*

“Ishida, hold on. Healers have come.” Abarai is capable of using a normal voice. Ishida can hear pain in it, as if Abarai is talking to himself through gritted teeth. “Healers--can't you sense them? Captain ... Unohana. I can't detect reiatsu that good but ... that's her for sure.”

Kurotsuchi has pronounced *ban kai* and the enormous baby-headed caterpillar is charging. Ishida closes his eyes but it is as if his eyelids are transparent. There's no escaping the battle. The palpable heat. Impending destruction. Like Death is glaring over the scene, sharpening it into horrible focus.

He opens his eyes.

The clarity of the moment stings: *I'm just watching.* Worse than the pain in his gut, worse than knowing you're crawling with spy bacteria. *I can't ... fight.*

“Holy shit!” Abarai is shouting again for no good reason. “It ran right over him!”

Is the Espada really finished? Ishida is coughing from dust blown up by Ashisogi Jizôu, not from blood, but Abarai seems to think Ishida is dying. “ISHIDA!”

“I’m fine!” Ishida struggles to raise himself on both elbows. If he could make his arm fly forward like Kurotsuchi’s ban kai, he would punch Abarai in the face.

Kurotsuchi’s lieutenant might be dead--the grotesque captain would have no qualms about that--but didn’t Kurotsuchi say that his creation was indestructible? The antidote to the poison--she has it under her armband. Abarai is infected. *I have to help Abarai.*

Ransoutengai might work if only Ishida can concentrate. He can’t think through the pain, push his resolve past the paralysis.

There is too much smoke. Kicked-up dust mixed with the thin miasma of odorous poison. Blindness absolves him for one moment. *I can’t see what’s going on. What’s going on?*

But the bacteria are still watching. *Do they record sound? Smell?*

“Holy ... fucking ... holy....” *Abarai is going to make himself sick if he keeps over-reacting to everything.*

Kurotsuchi laughs a low, soft laugh. It is chillingly familiar.

*The bacteria were in me when I climbed the steps of Senzaikyuu.*

“Greedy, greedy.” Kurotsuchi is chuckling at the giant caterpillar making giant slurping noises.

*The bacteria were in me when someone in the fourth division took off my clothes and dressed my wounds.*

“That is fucking disgusting.” Obviously Abarai can see something through the smoke that Ishida can’t.

*The bacteria heard my father call me a failure. They saw me mess up, drop my weapon. They were there the night I pushed away my plate and stomped away from dinner--my private business--my falling asleep.*

“Looks like Nemu survived,” Renji says.

A cloud of dust blows over, and Ishida can finally see Kurotsuchi’s lieutenant, still wrapped in a tentacle. Unperturbed, unharmed. Blinking in the dust-storm. The caterpillar is mawing the ground.

A gust of smarting wind. Ishida closes his eyes against grains of debris. He senses

shadows of reiatsu from a distant battle. Zarakī's unmistakable flaring energy, Kurosaki's failing strength... Inoue-san? She's running--a vibrant sprint, one that seems charged with purpose.

*I have to help her.*

Ishida opens his eyes, opens his fist. His fingers are steady, warm with sweat. Are the bacteria on the surface of his skin?

*I can help her.*

But he can't move.

END