

Your Enemy's Name

by debbiechan

Disclaimer: No, I don't own Bleach; Kubo Tite, Viz Comics, and Studio Perriot do.

Description: What does it mean for a human to die while in Soul Society? This one-shot takes place after Mayuri escapes in liquid form to his lab and before Ishida wakes up in the cell with Ganju and Chad.

Warnings: *MANGA AND ANIME SPOILERS ALL OVER THE PLACE*; if you're not caught up to episode 42 or so in the anime, don't read this fic. Also, Mayuri's in this fic, and he's a freak, so expect references to incest, sadism and dominance. I don't write torture, but there's eroticized helplessness here. Don't worry, I won't hurt Ishida.

A/N: Mayuri quotes from the Bleach manga are italicized in the fourth part of this fic; Ishida is remembering them.

My illustration for this fic is here: <http://www.deviantart.com/deviation/22282890/>

*"I have forgotten the pain of not having a name."--Captain Zaraki Kenpachi, manga chapter 114:11*

The green figure appeared at the doorway, vanished in the blink of an eye, and re-appeared right in front of the Seireitei Fourth Division information desk. The receptionist put her hand to her heart. She was used to the flash movements of higher ranked Shinigami, but she had never seen this one before.

The figure didn't look normal. It was wearing a loose-fitting kimono under what was unmistakably a captain's robe, but....

"I was told that the Quincy was brought here," said the figure. The scratchy, slightly effeminate male voice was familiar, but it was coming from the strangest face. Its features were elegant--a long nose and full lips--but the skin was green and glistening, almost *gelatinous*. Huge yellow-pupiled eyes protruded from sunken sockets. Green hair hung in wet tendrils to the figure's broad shoulders.

"You don't recognize me?" The figure smiled. The two rows of blinding white teeth could only belong to one person: *Captain Kurotsuchi*.

“Pardon me for appearing before you like this,” continued the figure in a delicate tone, “but I recently engaged one of the drifters in battle and assumed this form.”

The receptionist had always thought that Kurotshuchi exuded a weird charm. His face--green and drippy as it was--looked surprisingly handsome without its metallic mask.

“I will not be returning to my optimum configuration for a few days,” the strange figure went on, “but I can assure you that I am indeed your Twelfth Division Captain and Chief of Research and Technology.” The figure held out one hand and upturned the palm perpendicular to the desk. From the middle finger extended a black nail twice as long as the hand itself. “Do you require a blood test? Go ahead, prick me.”

The receptionist felt a shadow pass over her shoulder and heard the mild voice of her superior behind her. “No, no, Mayuri-sama, there is no need for that.”

“Ah, Officer Iemura.” The long fingernail retracted into its cuticle with a loud click, and the slimy hand disappeared into the folds of the captain’s robe. “You’re looking a bit peaked. Busy days in the fourth division, I take it?”

“I’m presuming,” said Iemura in a deliberately apathetic voice, “that you’re here for specimens? Captain Unohana specifically requested that none of the drifters be released to you until after interrogation.”

“I only want *one*.” Captain Kurotshuchi was the most polite of all the captains, but his power insinuated itself through a humble demeanor. “I want the Quincy.”

“Captain Unohana said--”

“Captain Unohana has always appreciated my medical evaluations. If she knew I was here--”

“Mayuri-sama,” Iemura interrupted, not disguising his irritation. “I’m afraid that the investigation into Captain Aizen’s murder supercedes any of your scientific investigations.”

“Very well,” said Captain Kurotshuchi. His smile fell, and his wet eyebrows furrowed. “Put me down as a visitor then. I won’t examine him. I only want...” The captain’s robes billowed for a moment, and then the green figure was already across the room, standing at the threshold of the hallway. The golden eyes cast one last look back at the information desk. “I only want to take a peek at his chart.”

Then the captain disappeared.

Iemura’s shoulders slumped. “Why do I even bother?” he sighed. “They do whatever they want.”

“Iemura-san? Shall I call someone?” The receptionist could not understand why her superior acted so jaded so often. Wasn’t the primary role of the fourth division to offer healing and hope? Wasn’t it the duty of all seated Shinigami officers to manage order? “Captain Kurotshuchi is breaking the rules,” she said in an apprehensive voice. “Unohana-san said--”

“Don’t worry,” Iemura said. “That green fellow is in his weakest form and won’t do anything to rattle her. Why, as long as he’s all slimy like this, she could pour him into a kettle and serve him to the whole fourth division like tea. Trust me.”

The receptionist gave her superior a doubtful look. “Are you sure the drifter and Kurotshuchi are not going to fight again? This particular drifter must have been very powerful to force a captain to--*go liquid.*”

“Nonsense. Mayuri probably just transformed for the hell of it. He’s quite the character. No interest in military affairs whatsoever. It was probably more important for him *to test the drifter’s reactions* than to actually win the battle. Mayuri’s all about the testing.”

“But what if the subject wakes up?” The receptionist folded her arms. Her superior was not the most reassuring of people. She had the feeling he was only showing off, that he had no real insight into the powers and personalities of the higher-ranked Shinigami. “To tell you the truth, Iemura-san, I’m not at all comfortable with drifters in the building. The reiatsu restraints they’re wearing have never been tested on their kind.”

“Really, don’t worry about this.” Iemura heaved a sigh of profound impatience. “Mayuri can handle drifters. And if the captain wants to do some ... um, illicit *experimenting*....” Iemura wrinkled his nose in disgust. “Well, we’ll just call in the clean-up crews, that’s all.”

The receptionist didn’t ask any more questions. She glanced towards the corridor where Kurotshuchi had gone and wondered if she should alert security--just in case.

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Mayuri did not know if it was because his own sensing ability was diminished or because the drifter no longer had powers, but he could not detect the Quincy. Mayuri was obliged to ask unseated fourth division peons as they went about their business in the corridors: “*Where is the Quincy? Where is the Quincy?*” And the miserable little healers didn’t even know what a Quincy was.

“I should know your name,” the captain muttered to himself as he stalked through the corridors. “Your grandfather screamed it enough, and you told it to me when we fought. But regrettably....” Mayuri turned his eyes upwards. From the ceiling hung rows of paper lanterns; the orbs cast a cool glow over doorways hung with fluid drapery. He was entering the most peacefully lit area of the fourth division--the burn unit. “I have no memory for names. Meaningless trivia--*names.*”

When Mayuri had named his daughter, he had chosen a kanji that had no meaning: *Nemu*. He had also given her his own surname Kurotshuchi, which means *black soil*. To his ears, *black soil* had a pleasant connotation--fertility and possibility--but in Shinigami academy, Mayuri had been called "feces face." The teasing had not bothered him but his inability to get the joke had. At any rate, Mayuri knew that he was not a poet. The things he invented did not have connotations; they had clear and specific purposes. *Nemu* was one of those things; her purpose was to honor her maker.

"*Nemu*." Mayuri made a slight snorting sound as he rounded a corner. The stupid girl had allowed a half-blind and poisoned Quincy to find the antidote on her person. He would have to punish her later, when he had his strength back and could properly execute a severe castigation. It was the Council of Elders' fault, though, that the enemy was alive. They were the ones who had stipulated that Vice Captains carry antidotes to Mayuri's poisons at all time, in case allies were ever stricken in battle.

"Damn fool council. They never listen to me. The first time my ban kai is released in a hundred years, and the enemy, *a miserable Quincy*, is saved by their stupid stipulation!"

Mayuri turned into a large circular annex and saw that only one doorway in a carousel of doorways was draped closed. That had to be the Quincy's room. Burns took longer for fourth division healers to treat than ordinary sword lacerations, and Mayuri knew that the Quincy had managed to burn himself with his own power during their battle. The moment just before the Quincy had released the final arrow into the golden face of Ashisogi Jizou, Mayuri had smelled the boy's flesh igniting.

And sure enough, there he was.

The Quincy lay unconscious on a futon in the dimly lit room. He was barefoot, dressed in a white kimono that was open to the waist. Handcuffs bound his wrists above his head, and a healer was kneeling beside him, hands suspended over the naked chest.

The healer didn't say a word but looked at the captain with a question in her eyes: *what do you want?*

"The Quincy's clothes and personal items," Mayuri answered. "Your Captain said that they were to be turned over to my division for testing."

The healer looked confused. "But there's nothing left," she said in a whisper. Her hands dropped their healing stance and picked a pair of silver-framed glasses from the floor. "Unless you mean these?" Her voice seemed reverent--towards the captain in the doorway but also towards the patient on the futon and even towards the glasses she held.

"Everything else the drifter was wearing disintegrated," she continued. "The Shinigami robe, the weapon he carried on his back--everything seemed lit with a strange power and began to burn out as soon as we undressed him."

She rose from her kneeling position and walked to the figure of indisputable authority. Mayuri felt himself inwardly sneer at her trusting nature as she placed the glasses, without hesitation, in his palm. "I'm sorry, Captain, but there weren't even cinders left."

"The drifter's chart?" Mayuri asked.

The healer waved her hand and a black butterfly materialized before her face. It hovered there, its large wings not even flapping, until the healer nudged the air with her fingertips--sending the butterfly flying.

It landed on the heel of Mayuri's outstretched hand, and the captain stood, expressionless, as he read the information.

"The antidote," he said at last. "The antidote he took from Nemu is still--?"

"Fascinating, isn't it?" said the healer in her feathery voice. "The antidote you invented works thoroughly, not only against the zanpakutou's poison but also towards strengthening torn tissues. You have my admiration, Captain Kurotshuchi."

Mayuri gestured the butterfly off his hand. "Leave us," he said to the healer.

She nodded. As the butterfly settled on her forehead, she drew back the curtain at the room's entrance. "Be careful of his right arm," she said. "The burn is worse than it looks, and I haven't finished treating it."

Then the healer dropped the curtain. Its folds fell with the same measured gentleness as her last words: "I'll return very soon, Captain Kurotshuchi."

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Mayuri still held the silver-framed glasses. They were ordinary glasses, he deduced, or else they would've have dissolved along with the Quincy's bow. The strange surge that had seemed to issue from the Quincy's right glove during the last moments of the battle--was it a self-destructive power?

Mayuri held the lenses to the overhead light. "Blind as a bat, aren't you?" His gaze dropped to the figure on the bed. "And just as sensitive to what others can't see."

He walked closer. "I always suspected that the Quincy aim was due to something other than sharp eye-hand coordination. Two thousand six hundred and sixty one subjects I studied, and most of them wore glasses."

He knelt by the futon and slipped the legs of the glasses over the Quincy's ears. Black locks of hair brushed his fingers as he adjusted the glasses just so. "There. So you will be able to recognize me."

Did the boy already sense his presence? Mayuri knew that Tousen had hit the Quincy hard. Tousen's *suzumushi*, even on its first draw, blinded and deafened most victims but could it paralyze *Quincy* senses? And this Quincy was a prodigy.

Still, even if this Quincy could sense spirit power, Mayuri's was changed--at least for the moment.

Mayuri leaned back and settled himself into a cross-legged position on the floor. His limbs still ached from his recent transformation. The pain, like all other perceptions, registered in an analytical part of his brain and was hardly felt as a visceral sensation. He told himself as he sat: *I am not strong. My zanpakutou lies recovering in refrigeration at the lab. I come before you, Quincy, armed only with my curiosity.*

Battle didn't move him, never had. Curiosity was all that could lead him to feeling.

And Mayuri *felt* as he sat there. Staring at the prostrate Quincy, he felt very, very glad. Despite the ignominy of having had to transform in battle, it was a good thing that Nemu had been carrying the antidote. He had never wanted the Quincy dead.

"It appears," Mayuri said in a tone as quiet and reverent as the healer's had been, "that this is really the best of all possible outcomes."

A loud clicking sound broke the peacefulness of the room. Mayuri's fingernail extended from its sheath.

"Perhaps I will not punish Nemu after all. Does that make you happy, Quincy? You were so intent on defending her from her father and creator during our battle." The memory sparked Mayuri's anger, but his voice did not rise in pitch. "Why is that you Quincy are so presumptuous? Why is that you are all so proud?"

Something was stirring inside the captain. It had been so long since a test subject worthy of his interest had lain before him this way.

"*Hu-man.*" Mayuri spoke the word as if the two syllables had an exotic taste. "You are truly a prize, Quincy. The Hell butterfly confirmed it--you are *hu-man*, with a soul bound to another world. All the Quincy subjects I studied here in Soul Society had already died in your world. I killed them *here* one by one, and they left my lab to be recycled back into the land of the living. I lost all my test subjects that way."

Mayuri breathed in with a sense of anticipation and let out the breath slowly. "But *you* can't go back, can you?"

He reached across the futon with his black fingernail. His other nails were capable of turning into measuring devices and spoons of all shapes and sizes, but he favored this

one, even when it was not the best tool for a specific task. All he needed was to deliver a small shock of energy. He could do it with an exhalation of air; he didn't need the nail.

"I can experiment on you until you break."

The fingernail came to rest above the bridge of the Quincy's glasses. It began to tap, gently, on the silver frames.

"I can break you until you die. And even then, you will not leave me: *your soul will stay here in Soul Society.*"

The fingernail jabbed the skin between the Quincy's eyebrows. It was a slight prick but it sparked a flash of energy there. The Quincy's glasses glared white.

"Wake up, boy!"

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Because there was no pain, *no pain at all*, Ishida was sure that he was dead--even though he had been vaguely sensing movement ever since the goggled captain at the top of the stairs had drawn a blade and killed him.

He felt the prick of energy between his eyes and felt his eyelids open. He couldn't see anything, so he was quite certain: *I am dead.*

"So, you have purple eyes."

Ishida could hear sound quite clearly now. The scratchy voice was speaking not far from him.

"Purple, not dark blue. That color is closer to the red spectrum than to the blue one. I know your clan, Quincy. I saw a few of your kind with these purple eyes."

Ishida knew that voice. It had seared unforgettable words into his consciousness:

***I observed the result of all kinds of mental and physical stimuli...  
I studied them until they were rendered into piles of lifeless limbs.***

"You can't see me, can you, Quincy? Are you deaf as well?"

If these dreams were a punishment, Ishida was ready to bear them. He had not avenged his grandfather's desecration. He had not fulfilled his purpose as the Last of the Quincy. He waited for the guilt and shame to rise in his chest, but, oddly, he did not feel those things. He set his jaw and braced himself for... *whatever.*

"You confronted two captains and survived, but do not consider yourself lucky yet."

“You’re just a dream!” said Ishida through gritted teeth.

“Oh?” The Shinigami’s voice sounded delighted. “You can hear! Ah then, you will regain your pitiful sight soon, and you will see what miserable shape you are in, Quincy.”

Ishida *wanted* to be dead. If he was alive, that meant he no longer had his Quincy powers. *Unless Grandfather had been wrong about the glove--?*

“Tousen’s zanpakutou deadens all the senses for days, usually. It and whatever magic these fourth division weaklings have used on you--well, let’s just say that you’ve been rendered a useless test subject for the time being. I prefer my specimens to be able to feel pain....”

Had Inoue-san escaped? Had he been able to at least save *her*?

“Pain and pleasure. Two important indicators of a subject’s research desirability. The more acutely a subject can *feel*, the more valuable he is to me.”

Ishida felt something thin and sharp trace his jawline. Was the Shinigami touching him with the point of a sword?

“If you can sense my reiatsu,” said the Shinigami captain in a voice that was barely above a whisper but supremely confident, “you know that I am changed. Never fear, I will regain all my power, but you will not. If you had any of the strength that you displayed in our battle left, you would have broken these cuffs by now.”

There was no other sound in the room. Not a scent, not a stirring of reiatsu, nothing.

“You’re quite powerless, aren’t you, Quincy?”

Ishida felt his pupils search the room. *Blackness*. He couldn’t sense anything. *Not even his own spirit power*. Was no one else here? Was the Shinigami even here?

“I--” Ishida’s voice sounded more frightened than he thought he was. “Dead or alive, I have my Quincy pride.”

The Shinigami laughed a soft, derisive laugh. “You Quincy always say that.”

Ishida felt the pointy thing against his neck now. It followed a vein at his throat then dipped against his clavicle.

“The bravado--it doesn’t fool me. I know that you Quincy feel fear just as strongly as all other beings, maybe even more acutely--given your inherent sensitivities. I was able to chart a spectrum of responses, but I could not gather any substantial neurological evidence of a superior awareness.”

***I've finished studying the Quincy. Finished studying! Chopped up bodies, ground up bodies.***

“You’re a talented one. I suspect that *your* reactions to pain and pleasure will reveal data I was unable to quantify in previous subjects....”

***The last one I got was a dirty old man. He kept screaming the name of either his grandson or student. Revolting.***

The revelation that the Shinigami captain had been projecting his own vileness onto Grandfather did not shock Ishida. Why did he feel so detached from the scratchy voice and from the most disturbing of possibilities?

There was a strange warmth on his face and chest. The room was full of ... some anesthetizing light? He *was* dead. Or was he, as the scratchy voice insisted, paralyzed by Soul Society forces?

The cold pointy thing was skimming down the middle of his chest.

“Your body is young and smooth ... Like Nemu’s, only not so yielding. If I manage to keep this body intact after my experiments, perhaps I will fill it with some soul more *submissive* than a Quincy’s. You people are very troublesome subjects.”

The cold point was circling Ishida’s navel.

“You know what?” The Shinigami’s voice was as thin and pointed as whatever was touching Ishida’s belly. “I believe that my daughter fancies you. Not that I blame her after what she witnessed. She’s a very impressionable girl, and that was quite a majestic transformation you managed before my golden Ashisogi Jizou.”

Ishida felt his eyes squint and his head begin to hurt. The Shinigami wasn’t making sense anymore. The warmth in the room was receding; a tingling feeling had started traveling up the length of his right arm.

But wasn’t it his *left* arm that the Shinigami had stabbed?

***A man’s scream is really lacking in comparison to a woman’s ... nowhere as lustful.***

His left arm had been stabbed in the battle, *but the glove coming off had burned the right*. The certainty of knowing that the glove was gone pained Ishida more than the pinpricks of feeling returning to his limbs.

The scratchy voice spoke its next words with measured intent: “Nemu is my vice.”

The phrase jolted Ishida. He was sure that the voice meant *vice-captain* and nothing else. The subtlety of a pun seemed beyond this base, depraved Shinigami.

“She’s got absolutely no talent for science, but as my second, Nemu attends every one of my surgeries.” The voice had a bitter quality now. “She’s going to watch your humiliation, Quincy. She’s going to see you *transformed* again.”

Ishida could hear the Shinigami swallow and moisten his lips.

“She’s going to hear you *whimper like a baby*.”

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Eleventh division Shinigami never stayed in the fourth division building for long. They were short-range fighters who carried their own blood caulking powders and disinfectants, and they hated lingering under treatment by healers. Captain Unohana never thought she would see the day when the great leader of the eleventh division stood in need of her medical attention. These drifters were *something*. One of them had felled Zarak Kenpachi.

The spikey-haired, eye-patched captain towered over her.

“I feel strong. I am ready to fight again.” Kenpachi spoke in a deep, fierce voice, but his eyes were avoiding her gaze. “Give me one good reason why I should not leave.”

“For one thing, your wounds will re-open in battle if not properly sealed. For another thing--” Captain Unohana did not want to reveal that she was worried about him killing drifters and messing up the murder investigation. “If your wounds are opened again, you’ll scar.”

“What eleventh division soldier cares about scarring? Scars mean one survived!”

“Yumichika cares about scars,” said a girlish voice behind Kenpachi’s shoulder. The pink-haired Shinigami was hanging on her captain’s back like a burr. “Yumichika is scheduled for three more treatments in the burn unit!”

“Yumichika!” bellowed the giant captain. “Even *that* peacock cares more about fighting that prettifying his face! Sorry, Captain Unohana, but my squad is finished with this place. Yachiru, find Yumichika and tell him to report to headquarters.”

“Hai!” chirped the tiny vice-captain. In a blur of pinkness, she bounced off Kenpachi’s shoulder. She moved so fast that she was gone before her goodbye, and the voice squealing “byyyyye Ken-chan!” echoed through the fourth division corridors.

Captain Unohana sighed. The great warrior standing before her in bloody bandages was ready to bolt. There would be no convincing Kenpachi to seek further medical treatment,

but maybe she could keep him within the building, away from killing people, and under the healing lights for another hour or so.

“Ken,” she said. “Please. I need your assistance with a public relations issue.”

The giant captain stared at her with one amazed eye.

“Captain Kurotshuchi is in the building,” she went on. “You know how much he ... *unnerves* my staff. I’m scheduled for intensive healing sessions with many of our wounded, and I can’t be bothered with chasing Kurotshuchi around, trying to keep him from gathering body parts for his experiments. Could you please--?”

“Toss him out on his ass for you?”

Unohana smiled.

“Where is the freaky bastard?”

“He was looking for a Quincy in the burn unit.”

“What’s a Quincy?”

Unohana was going to answer but Captain Zaraki was already heading down the corridors, looking bloodthirsty.

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Kenpachi didn’t like Mayuri, but it had never escaped him that the two of them shared a similar single-mindedness. Mayuri didn’t care for fighting; *all* Kenpachi cared for was fighting. Kenpachi wasn’t sure exactly what it was that Mayuri was obsessed with, but it involved building freaky little appendages to his armor, writing down observations in a tiny notepad, and collecting odds and ends from the fourth division building--with or without Unohana’s permission.

Then he remembered: *That’s right! The freak wants to build the perfect robot Shinigami.* Kenpachi never paid attention during captains meetings, especially during Mayuri’s long reports in that old lady voice of his.

The disdain that Kenpachi had for warriors who fought with the aid of science--or fought with anything but their own brute power--had been a greater disdain yesterday than today. Today Kenpachi had fought with a drifter, and his mind was opening to new ways. Fighting with *the spirit of one’s own zanpakutou*--hell, that was a new one. Ichigo had won not merely because the drifter was crazy-strong, but because--?

Kenpachi struggled to find a name for what he was looking for.

*Names, meanings, names, NAMES! What is the point of them? What is the purpose?*

Kenpachi would give anything to be stronger, but he had learned today that unless he attached a meaning to his fighting and *a name to his zanpakutou*, he would not win another battle with Ichigo.

He found the burn unit hallway hung with the glowing paper lanterns.

*Stronger, stronger--I WILL get stronger. But for the moment, I'm still strong enough to pluck Mayuri's head off with no effort at all if he's doing anything to bother Captain Unohana's business.*

Kenpachi pushed back a doorway curtain with such force that the drapery fell off its hinge.

The two figures on the floor visibly startled. Kenpachi saw right away that the drifter on the mattress was blind, and that this drifter, like Ichigo, was skinny and very un-warrior-like.

Mayuri was kneeling beside the figure. Mayuri was ... *green*.

"Mayuri," said Kenpachi in a low, amazed voice. "*That's* the opponent that made you transform?"

Mayuri was holding up his hand so that the disgusting black fingernail pointed to the ceiling. Kenpachi always took the gesture as an insult, even if he knew Mayuri didn't mean it to be one.

"Captain Zaraki," said Mayuri. "You're not looking too healthy yourself. I heard that *your* opponent got away."

The fallen curtain lay draped across Kenpachi's shoulder. He pulled it off, rolled the fabric into a ball and tossed it, rather gingerly, into the room.

The ball landed by Mayuri's knee.

"Ken?" Mayuri spoke in a soft, threatening tone. "Do you want to *play*?"

Kenpachi blinked. Did the twelfth division captain really think he was a match in that freaky green form? "Let's get out of here, Mayuri. This is no place for able soldiers."

Mayuri rose, retracting his black nail and burying his hands in his robe pockets.

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Ishida arms were stinging horribly now. The pain in his head had amplified too, but he wanted to know: Which drifter got away? Kurosaki? Sado-kun? Surely Inoue-san hadn't confronted anyone--had she?

The voices in the room had started to merge; they were no longer distinguishable voices but one aching sound. He kept catching only one word, *Quincy*, as the Shinigami talked. It seemed that the one captain was explaining to the other what a Quincy was. Why didn't they all know?

Had the legacy of the Quincy died even before Ishida himself had died, on the top of those horrible stairs?

Ishida still wanted to believe that he was dead; if he *wasn't* dead, then the Shinigami were keeping him alive to torture. These were the beneficent great gods of the afterlife? Why had Grandfather ever defended their ways? They were the enemies of the Quincy and of all things decent and just.

"I can see you thinking," said a deep voice. The second captain, the one who had entered the room with the clumsy tearing of a curtain, was standing very close to Ishida's ear. "You must be smart to still be alive, because you really don't look strong enough to have taken on both Mayuri *and* Tosen."

Ishida grimaced as pain, irrefutable pain, gripped him. Was it going to start now? The torture?

"Easy there," said the deep voice. "Your healer is here."

One cool palm landed on Ishida's forehead and another spread its fingers across his chest. There was a third voice--a woman's. It was making a humming sound, one very much like the delicate singing that had come from the goggled captain's sword--the blade that had killed him?

"Sayonara, Quincy," came the scratchy voice from further away.

"Don't call him that," said the other captain. "He has a name. Don't you know anything about honor, Mayuri? It's first year academy stuff--tell your name to the enemy and make it your business to know his."

*Death. This is the realm of Death. Why am I even doubting that I am not already dead?*

"What's your name, boy?" asked the deep-voiced captain.

"Ishida." The relief from pain as tiny hands swept over his body was no less confusing than the Shinigami's question. "Ishida Uryuu."

Ishida felt coolness, and then he felt warmth, and then he felt... *mercy?* He was losing consciousness fast, and there was no time to speculate about the strangeness of the Shinigami.

They weren't *all* despicable.

Kurosaki and his desire to save "mountains and mountains of souls."

Nemu who had willingly given him the antidote to her father's poison.

The goggled captain who had drawn the singing blade.

Then the memory of the goggled captain's words rose, and with it, the end of all pain and doubt:

***Forgive me, drifter.... Sleep. Your battle is over.***

*End*

Eternal thanks to LisaB who betas my work and keeps me writing.

For the newbie Bleach readers and watchers:

*Seireitei*: the walled city in Soul Society where the Shinigami live

*Shinigami*: death gods

*Zanpakutou*: a soul-cutting sword used by Shinigami

*Ban kai*: the second release of a zanpakutou, a technique achieved only by Shinigami of captain status

*Ashisogi Jizou*: "limb-paralyzer" and Mayuri's zanpakutou

*Reiatsu*: spirit power

*Suzumushi*: "pure insect" and Tousen's zanpakutou

A/N: The manga is currently at chapter 192. I hope that Kubo-san gives his readers another Mayuri-Ishida battle eventually; Ishida needs to avenge his grandfather!