

Multiverse 175

Chapter 175: The Battle That Was Stopped

"Plop..."

It was a sound like a drop of water falling.

As Byakuya Kuchiki recited the word "Bankai," he let go of the inverted Zanpakutō in his hand. With that soft sound, the blade sank vertically into the ground, sending out a ripple from the point of impact.

The ripple spread outward at a speed visible to the naked eye. Everywhere it passed, the space seemed dyed in darkness, replacing the surrounding scenery with a field of black.

Then, colossal blades the size of pillars rose up from the ground to both sides behind Byakuya, appearing one by one as though forming a formation.

"Senbonzakura Kageyoshi."

Byakuya slowly uttered the true name of his Bankai, causing the towering blades behind him to dissolve one by one into petal-like fragments.

There were an innumerable number of petals—dense, uncountable—as if the cherry blossoms from tens of thousands of trees had all been scattered into the wind and concentrated in this one place. The petals surged and fluttered like waves.

The scene was as though an emperor of cherry blossoms was being venerated by countless petals. It was far more magnificent and beautiful than his Shikai.

"Scatter."

Byakuya's lips moved slightly, and the waves of petals surrounding him immediately surged forward, like a swarm of bees drawn to nectar, racing toward Kaiser.

"Whoosh!"

Kaiser, without the slightest hesitation, activated Shunpo, vanishing from his spot and evading the oncoming waves of cherry blossoms.

"Boom!"

The petal wave missed and struck the ground, blasting it open with a thunderous impact.

This scene, far more intense than the previous Shikai, caused Kaiser's eyes to flicker slightly from his new position.

"That strike just now... the ground suffered at least hundreds of thousands, even millions of slashes."

Such a staggering number of attacks clearly indicated that Senbonzakura had now transformed not into thousands, but into hundreds of thousands—millions—possibly even more, of minute blades.

"No need for surprise."

Byakuya stood at the center of the swirling petals, his white Haori fluttering in the wind and his long hair swaying with the blossoms, making his voice echo with an ethereal chill.

"Bankai is the complete and thorough release and utilization of a Zanpakutō's ability. Even among thousands of Shinigami in an era, only a handful can achieve it."

His words carried no overt pride, yet every syllable radiated pride's essence.

"When Bankai is activated, a Shinigami's Reiatsu and combat strength undergo a qualitative leap—typically five to ten times stronger than Shikai. With continued training and enhancement, a Bankai's power can be further elevated."

"In other words, it is a power that, once achieved, grants overwhelming might, yet still holds vast potential for growth."

"Of course, it's not easy. Even among those who achieve Bankai, it takes at least ten years of training to fully master its immense power—let alone evolve it further."

"I haven't held Bankai for long. I can't claim to have fully mastered it, but to deal with you—it's more than enough."

Byakuya's Reiatsu truly surged exponentially. The rise was nothing like what he had displayed during his Shikai.

"During Shikai, Senbonzakura breaks a single blade into a thousand—allowing for thousands of strikes in an instant."

"But during Bankai, Senbonzakura Kageyoshi divides those colossal blades into up to a hundred million. The number of scattered blades increases several billion-fold over the Shikai."

"How will you deal with an uncountable swarm of blades?"

Byakuya raised his hand, extending his palm toward Kaiser.

"Even if your Shunpo is fast—how could you possibly outrun an endless torrent of blades?"

With that, the countless petals surged forward, whistling as they flew toward Kaiser.

"Whoosh!" "Whoosh!" "Whoosh!" ...

Kaiser immediately performed multiple Shunpo steps, evading the oncoming petal waves again and again. But these petals were faster than the wind, and their overwhelming numbers filled the entire visual field. No matter how Kaiser tried to create distance, they closed in rapidly—sometimes even attacking from both sides.

"Hadō #33: Sōkatsui!"

Kaiser tried casting a Hadō spell against the encroaching petal wave. Blue flames burst from his palm and blasted forward, only managing to destroy a small portion of the petals—insufficient to stop the billions of tiny blades. It wasn't even enough to slightly hinder their advance.

"In that case..."

Kaiser released his Reiatsu, raised his Zanpakutō, and slashed forward with a wave of golden sword pressure, colliding with the petals in an explosive blast.

This attack temporarily slowed the petals' advance, but more quickly followed, continuing their relentless assault.

"Even sword pressure won't do?"

Kaiser once again employed Shunpo, continuously widening the gap between himself and the petal storm.

"It's useless."

Byakuya extended both hands, personally directing the massive tide of petals to increase their speed drastically.

"Your Reiatsu is certainly powerful. That's why your sword pressure holds tremendous force."

"But in the end—it's only sword pressure."

"To think you could contend with Bankai using just that—how utterly foolish."

Byakuya then directed the petals to split into several groups, surrounding Kaiser from all directions.

Noticing this, Kaiser's eyes narrowed. As he gazed at the encroaching waves of cherry blossoms, he suddenly turned his gaze toward Byakuya.

"Whoosh!"

The next moment, Kaiser vanished—and reappeared directly before Byakuya, slashing down with a strike as cold as moonlight, so fast it was impossible to see.

"No chance!"

But Byakuya seemed to have predicted Kaiser's move. A massive cluster of petals suddenly surged forth from behind him, blocking Kaiser's path.

"Boom!"

Kaiser's blade struck the swirling petals head-on, scattering them wildly.

"If you can't defeat Senbonzakura Kageyoshi, then targeting its controller seems logical. You think I wouldn't anticipate such a basic tactic?"

Byakuya moved his hand, summoning another avalanche of petals like a waterfall crashing down on Kaiser.

"Whoosh!"

Kaiser activated Shunpo, dodging the descending petals while simultaneously reappearing behind Byakuya, slashing again.

This time, he infused sword pressure into his blade—golden Reiatsu surged around the edge like a streaming current, roaring toward Byakuya.

"Boom!"

With a thunderous crash, another vast wall of petals formed behind Byakuya, blocking the golden wave head-on. The two forces clashed fiercely, causing petals and golden Reiatsu to whirl in chaos.

A violent shockwave erupted with the sword pressure, blasting up clouds of dust and debris and spreading outward like a hurricane.

Despite avoiding a direct hit, Byakuya was still blown backward by the blast's force.

"But it's not over yet!"

Kaiser moved again, using his Shunpo speed to instantly catch up.

"Whoosh!"

He appeared on Byakuya's left. Byakuya immediately turned.

"Whoosh!"

Kaiser appeared to the right. Byakuya's eyes widened in alarm.

"Whoosh!"

Kaiser reappeared behind him—Byakuya's pupils shrank in shock.

"Whoosh!" "Whoosh!" "Whoosh!" "Whoosh!" "Whoosh!"...

In no time, countless Kaiser afterimages surrounded Byakuya, rapidly circling him.

"What...?!"

Byakuya's icy composure crumbled.

"This time, do you think I can outrun your endless wave of blades?"

Kaiser's half-smiling voice echoed from every direction, turning Byakuya's expression grim.

"Don't get cocky...!"

Byakuya then directed the full swarm of cherry blossoms—hundreds of millions of minuscule blades—to surge outward like a flood from his position.

All of Kaiser's surrounding afterimages were instantly swallowed up by the raging petal tide, subjected to tens of thousands—hundreds of millions—billions of slashes, tearing the air apart.

Unfortunately, not one of those destroyed images spilled a single drop of blood.

"Bakudō #75: Gochūtekkan!"

Just then, Kaiser's voice echoed with an incantation. Five massive iron pillars appeared in the air above Byakuya and slammed down.

"Boom!!!"

Byakuya had just enough time to widen his eyes before being struck by the five pillars.

While the attack power of the pillars wasn't high—almost negligible—they were linked by chains and landed on Byakuya's head and limbs, completely immobilizing him.

Only then did Kaiser reappear in front of him.

"Hadō #88: Hiryū Gekizoku Shinten Raihō!"

Kaiser extended his palm, his Reiatsu condensing into surging lightning shaped like a dragon, roaring forward toward Byakuya.

Hadō #88—this was a spell Kaiser had already mastered before becoming a Captain. Its power, excluding the unnumbered ultra-high-level Kidō, could be considered the most destructive—stronger even than his previous Sōren Sōkatsui.

Back then, Kaiser had been unable to cast such a spell without chanting. But now, he could do so with ease—even if the power was reduced, it was still formidable.

The thunder dragon burst forth, crashing into the restrained Byakuya.

"BOOM!!!"

The destruction erupted instantly. A deafening explosion rocked the air, obliterating hundreds of meters around them. Even the five iron pillars were shredded as if they were toy blocks.

The resulting shockwave stirred up cherry blossom petals, sweeping them into the storm—they could no longer fly freely, dragged outward by the force.

As for Byakuya, who had been pinned beneath the five pillars—he had vanished without a trace, seemingly reduced to dust in the explosion.

The thunder dragon surged with unstoppable destructive force.

"BOOM!"

At some point, a violent burst of cherry blossom petals erupted, scattering the thunder dragon.

"Whoosh!"

Byakuya reappeared, battered and bloodied, his Shihakushō in tatters. With a sword of cherry blossom petals in hand, he charged at Kaiser like a ghost, slashing down.

Kaiser's eyes gleamed. Not to be outdone, he raised his Zanpakutō, gathered immense golden Reitsu, and unleashed sword pressure toward Byakuya.

Two Captains who stood at Soul Society's summit—appointed at the same time—abandoned defense and struck directly at each other.

If this strike landed, it would undoubtedly deal a fatal wound.

"Whoosh!" "Whoosh!" "Whoosh!" "Whoosh!" "Whoosh!"...

Just as Kaiser and Byakuya's blades were about to connect, a flurry of whooshing sounds filled the air—figures appeared around them.

They were Captains in white Haori.

"Stop!"

Their simultaneous voices rang out as they appeared together, blocking Kaiser and Byakuya.

Sui-Fēng, Sajin Komamura, and Isshin Kurosaki stopped Kaiser.

Shunsui Kyōraku and Jūshirō Ukitake stopped Byakuya.

Five Captains appeared at once—some grabbing Kaiser or Byakuya's arms, others intercepting the blades mid-swing with their own Zanpakutō.

At the same time, more Captains seemed to be rushing to the scene. Though they had yet to arrive, the five already present managed to subdue the two fighters.

"What are you doing?!"

Suì-Fēng's voice rang out coldly.

"Why are you fighting so recklessly here?"

Isshin Kurosaki spoke up with a deep frown.

"As Captains, this is unacceptably careless behavior."

Komamura's voice echoed from beneath his iron helm.

Meanwhile, Shunsui and Ukitake stood in front of Kaiser and Byakuya respectively—one with a helpless smile, the other stern-faced.

"You two—come with us."

Shunsui sighed.

"To the Captain Commander."

Ukitake added flatly, eliminating all room for resistance.

The two exchanged a glance and silently sheathed their swords.

And so, the gathered Captains escorted them—heading for the Division 1 barracks.