

Multiverse 190

Chapter 190: Chosen by Fate? Death Penalty!

It was a gem that glimmered with a blue-black radiance.

The gem was dazzling, and the light it emitted seemed capable of enchanting the heart, filled with a mysterious, hazy beauty. Surrounding it were polygonal crystals that enveloped it, locking that mysterious allure in place—not weakening it, but instead making it even more intoxicating.

Such a gem quietly lay within Rukia Kuchiki's body—or rather, parasitized within her Reitai, fused tightly with every strand of her Reiryoku and Reiatsu, difficult to touch and even harder to detect.

If not for his own authority at work, Kaiser believed he definitely wouldn't have discovered its existence, let alone "see" its form.

"So this is..."

Kaiser's heart stirred slightly, and the golden-hot patterns on his body shimmered once again.

He was attempting to extract the gem.

But he failed.

Although he could sense the gem's presence, it was inside Rukia Kuchiki's body. Even though Kaiser was physically touching Rukia, it didn't count as touching the gem itself.

Since he hadn't touched it, he naturally couldn't trigger the effect of his authority to fully seize it.

Therefore, Kaiser couldn't retrieve the gem. Regretfully, he opened his eyes and withdrew his hand.

Only then did he see the dumbfounded, flushed faces of those around him.

Kaiser immediately found it amusing.

"What's wrong with all of you? Is it too hot today or something? Why are all your faces so red?"

With that, the whole group exploded.

"Y-y-you... what are you doing, Captain Kaiser?!"

Rukia Kuchiki cried out in embarrassment and fury, completely shedding her earlier melancholy.

"What did you do to Rukia, you bastard?!"

Renji Abarai, even more agitated, drew his Zanpakutō and charged straight at Kaiser, slashing down toward his head.

"Clang!"

Kaiser extended a single finger, pressing the blade down with just the pad of his fingertip.

The sharp Zanpakutō didn't even leave a mark on Kaiser's finger, leaving Rukia—who had been outraged—stunned in place.

"What are you getting so worked up for?" Kaiser kept his finger against the blade's edge, smiling cheerfully. "Your childhood friend's been flirting with some random guy in the World of the Living for so long, and I didn't see you this fired up. So why the big reaction now that it's me?"

Kaiser's words completely broke both Rukia and Renji.

"W-who was flirting with some random guy?!"

"Who's fired up?!"

The two of them shouted, but their flustered, red-faced reactions completely undermined their protests.

"...What were you doing, Captain?"

Momo Hinamori's quiet voice came through. For some reason, it sounded a little scary.

"Nothing much. Just confirming a few things," Kaiser shrugged, pushing aside Renji's Zanpakutō, and said, "As I suspected, Rukia's been dragged into someone else's scheme."

That one sentence instantly redirected everyone's attention.

"A scheme?"

Rukia froze.

"What do you mean?" Renji immediately grew serious, his entire demeanor shifting to one of alertness.
"Who's scheming against Rukia?"

"More or less," Kaiser didn't elaborate, simply stating, "This won't be resolved so easily. If nothing unexpected happens, Rukia's going to suffer some hardship."

"If it goes badly... she could lose her life."

Everyone's expressions changed at once.

Renji wanted to ask more, but Kaiser stopped him.

Looking closer, Kaiser's hand was already resting on his Zanpakutō at his waist. It seemed casual, but he had clearly gripped the hilt.

In that moment, Kaiser could distinctly feel it—the sense of being watched and the subtle discomfort had returned.

As a result, Kaiser took the initiative to end the conversation.

"Central 46 should announce their verdict soon. We'll just wait for that moment to come."

With that, Kaiser turned and left the cell, heading outside.

"Captain!"

Momo reacted quickly and followed after him.

"Wait! Kai—!"

Naturally, Renji wasn't about to let it go, and chased after him without hesitation.

Rukia Kuchiki was left standing there alone, dazed.

"Ichigo..."

Unconsciously, she murmured that name, as if calling out to him, or relying on him, her voice filled with complicated emotion.

...

"Hey! Kai! What the hell were you talking about?! Explain it before you go!"

Elsewhere, in the corridor of Division 6's barracks, Renji was walking quickly after Kaiser, pestering him nonstop.

"Don't ask me. I'm not the protagonist of this incident," Kaiser kept walking without looking back.
"Instead of worrying about what I said, why don't you think hard about what you're going to do?"

What I'm going to do?

What does that even mean?

Renji was confused.

"You..."

Kaiser finally stopped walking, prompting Momo Hinamori behind him to stop as well.

Kaiser turned around and looked at Renji.

"Let me ask you this." Kaiser cut to the point. "If Rukia is sentenced to death in the end—what will you do?"

Death penalty!

The term visibly shook Renji Abarai.

"T-that's impossible!" Renji instinctively protested, raising his voice. "All she did was turn a human into a Shinigami! Even if it's a serious crime, it can't be worth a death sentence, right?"

But all Renji got in return was Kaiser's cold, calm question.

"What if it is?" Kaiser said bluntly. "If she really is sentenced to death—what will you do?"

The question completely stunned Renji.

What would he do?

What could he do?

He was the Lieutenant of Division 6 of the Gotei 13, a Shinigami tasked with protecting Seireitei and the Soul Society. Moreover, he was part of the noble-affiliated Division—a kind of personal guard for the aristocracy. In the face of a sentence handed down by the highest judiciary body composed of those very aristocrats... could he really do anything but obey?

Even the Captain Commander had no authority to object to a Central 46 verdict—what could a mere Lieutenant do?

So?

So... if Rukia were sentenced to death, would he just have to accept it?

Renji stood frozen, unable to react for a long time.

"Think it over for yourself," Kaiser patted Renji on the shoulder. "Just don't let yourself live to regret it."

Leaving those words behind, Kaiser turned once more and walked away, with Momo silently following after him, distancing herself from Renji.

Renji could only stand there in a daze. After a while, he clenched his fists and turned to run back toward Rukia's cell.

"Captain..."

Momo heard his footsteps growing distant behind her and seemed to hesitate, as if she wanted to say something.

"I know what you want to ask," Kaiser said, already guessing Momo's thoughts. "You want to ask why I said all that, right?"

Momo silently nodded.

She didn't think Kaiser was just trying to scare anyone.

After all these years at Kaiser's side, Momo had come to understand the man she worried over in everything. She knew that while he could be unserious at times, he never treated serious matters lightly.

His words just now may have sounded like scare tactics, but judging by his demeanor—familiar to Momo—he had definitely discovered something.

Considering Kaiser's prior behavior, like asking her to monitor Rukia's whereabouts in advance, and his total lack of surprise when it was revealed that Rukia gave her powers to a human—it felt more like he'd been expecting it...

Momo was certain Kaiser knew something no one else did.

"Just take it as me talking nonsense," Kaiser glanced at her and smiled. "Anyway, the show's just begun. When the true protagonist appears, that'll be when it really gets exciting."

"True protagonist?" Momo asked in confusion. "Who is that?"

Kaiser narrowed his eyes slightly, a faint glint shining within, a smile on his lips as he stepped through the gate of Division 6's barracks.

Then his voice slowly drifted into Momo's ears.

"Someone destined to reshape this world's future... the one chosen by fate."

...

A few days later, the verdict from Central 46 was announced.

"For the unforgivable crime of granting a human spiritual power, Rukia Kuchiki is hereby sentenced... to death!"

When that verdict came down, all of Seireitei was shaken.

"Death penalty?"

"A death sentence?!"

"They sentenced the daughter of the Kuchiki Clan to death?!"

"This is..."

Many people began murmuring noisily, clearly never expecting such an outcome.

Especially those in the Thirteenth Division who had close ties to Rukia Kuchiki—they could hardly believe their ears. That the Central 46 would pass such a sentence left them stunned.

"How could this happen..."

Jūshirō Ukitake's face turned grim.

"Rukia..."

Even Izuru Kira and the other Shinigami who had strong ties to Rukia were left at a loss.

"..."

Byakuya Kuchiki stood in the highest chamber of Division 6's barracks, staring out the window, slowly closing his eyes.

"No way! There's no way...!"

Renji Abarai fell to his knees, his pupils trembling violently.

"Captain..."

In the captain's office of Division 3, Momo Hinamori looked at Kaiser, at a loss for words.

"Let's go," Kaiser was the calmest of all. After hearing the news, he wasn't shaken in the slightest. He stood up and said, "To Division 1's barracks."

"It should be very lively over there right now."

...

Division 1's barracks were indeed lively.

At the very least, all the captains of the Gotei 13 had gathered—some with their lieutenants, others alone—arriving one after another at the captain's meeting chamber.

Those with lieutenants had them wait outside. Those without went straight in. Soon, all the captains were assembled.

Surprisingly, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto was already present, as if he'd expected their arrival, waiting calmly as if for a long time.

"Now this is quite a sight."

Kenpachi Zaraki grinned as he watched the captains arrive one by one, as if he could smell the gunpowder in the air.

"The captains at the top of the Shinigami world, gathering because of a single, ordinary Division Member—this must be a first, huh?"

Clearly, they had all come because of Rukia Kuchiki.

"You never know, Captain Zaraki."

Wearing the haori of Division 10's captain, Gin Ichimaru also spoke up, participating as a captain this time.

"Didn't Captain Kaiser have all the captains gather when he was still a student at the Shin'ō Academy?"

Gin's smiling comment didn't distract anyone from the matter at hand.

"Stop changing the subject, Captain Ichimaru," Sōsuke Aizen pushed up his black-rimmed glasses and addressed his former lieutenant. "We didn't gather here to reminisce—we can't waste the captains' time."

"Yes, yes," Gin raised his hands in mock surrender. "We're all here for Rukia Kuchiki, right? So let's talk about her."

"How ironic," Mayuri Kurotsuchi tilted his head. "As much as I hate to agree with Zarakī, so many captains gathering for a mere Division Member... When did everyone get so free?"

"It's not about having free time," Sajin Komamura said in a muffled voice. "We have doubts in our hearts that we must resolve."

"Indeed," Kaname Tōsen added, head lowered. "This verdict—whatever the process—the outcome is certainly suspicious."

"So we're all thinking the same thing, huh?" Shunsui Kyōraku chuckled casually. "That's great. I thought I was the only one who found it strange."

Sui-Fēng and Retsu Unohana didn't speak, but their expressions clearly showed they too had questions.

Kaiser and Byakuya Kuchiki, by contrast, remained expressionless—as if none of this mattered—unusually calm.

"Captain Commander."

Jūshirō Ukitake finally couldn't hold back and stepped forward to speak to the one sitting at the head: Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto.

"Why did the Central 46 sentence Rukia Kuchiki to death? Surely this isn't a crime worthy of capital punishment?"

That was the question Renji Abarai had, and clearly, the others shared it as well.

In everyone's minds, though Rukia had committed a serious offense, it wasn't one deserving of death.

At the very least, no one had imagined she would be sentenced to death.

Even if the Central 46 lacked compassion, surely they wouldn't target the daughter of the Kuchiki Clan.

In short—something was clearly wrong with this verdict.