

Multiverse 205

Chapter 205: The Origin of the Matter

A restless night slowly passed as all of Seireitei remained shaken.

By the time morning came and sunlight once again shone upon the earth and Seireitei, the atmosphere throughout Seireitei had not relaxed in the slightest. On the contrary, it had grown even heavier.

There was no helping it. After a whole night of effort, all the Shinigami had returned empty-handed— not a single one managed to locate Kaiser, not even any of the intruding Ryoka were captured, which worsened Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto's mood.

The six Captains who had gone so far as to dive into the sewers to find Kaiser were the first to return in vain, helplessly heading back to their own barracks, intending to rest before acting again.

The Shinigami who had been searching for the Ryoka were also exhausted and could only return to their quarters for a temporary rest.

Of course, there were still some who had no leisure for rest, still searching for the Ryoka—or rather, for Kaiser.

Renji Abarai was one of those people.

He had spent the entire night looking for Kaiser, yet hadn't found even the slightest trace of him. With Rukia's execution drawing near, his mood had become increasingly agitated, as if he'd fallen into a dazed state. Even with morning breaking, he didn't think to rest and continued wandering aimlessly.

After wandering for quite a while, Renji Abarai suddenly stopped walking.

Because he realized he had arrived at a very nostalgic place.

"Shin'ō Academy..."

Yes, Renji Abarai had arrived in front of the main gates of the Shin'ō Academy.

At this moment, the academy gates were tightly shut, with no one entering or exiting, and not a single sign of life.

Because all of Seireitei had entered a state of lockdown, the Shin'ō Academy had closed its doors for safety reasons, publicly announcing a temporary suspension of visitation, and internally issuing orders that no students were to leave the dormitory buildings to avoid unexpected incidents.

Staring at the academy he hadn't seen in decades, Renji Abarai stood frozen for a long time before suddenly launching into Shunpo, flashing into the academy and sprinting at full speed in a particular direction.

He had a premonition that the person he was looking for might be here.

So, guided by a sudden inspiration, Renji used Shunpo all the way until he reached a training hall.

This was none other than the kendō hall they had used back when they took swordsmanship classes.

Upon arriving, Renji finally slowed his steps and walked inside.

Not long after, he entered the kendō hall and saw the person he had searched for endlessly without finding.

"I knew it. If I waited here, I figured you'd show up."

That person was seated cross-legged on the floor, his Zanpakutō, usually tied to his waist, placed beside him. In his hand, he held a small bottle, sipping from it slowly as he smiled and greeted Renji.

A faint scent of alcohol lingered in the air, letting Renji know that the other had already been waiting here for quite some time—enough to leisurely have a drink.

Seeing that familiar smiling face, the restlessness that had filled Renji's heart suddenly began to calm.

He sat down cross-legged in front of the other person and snatched the bottle from his hand, tilting it back and gulping it down.

"Hey hey hey, could you slow down a bit?" Kaiser complained with some displeasure. "That's a bottle I've had stashed away for a long time. I didn't even dare to keep it in the barracks for fear that Hinamori would find it."

"...Hinamori even controls your drinking now?" Renji responded dully, not acknowledging Kaiser's dissatisfaction. "I thought she wasn't the kind of person who hated alcohol that much."

"She wasn't, but that's not necessarily true anymore." Kaiser replied helplessly. "She's close friends with Lieutenant Ise Nanao of Division 8, and it seems that Lieutenant Ise frequently vents to her about Captain Kyōraku's drinking habits and how she ends up having to handle most of his paperwork."

"Plus, she's also quite close with Third Seat Matsumoto from Division 10—another drunkard. Because of her drinking, her childhood friend has been driven to his wit's end. So now that girl has started managing my drinking too."

"If she found out I was secretly stashing alcohol, I bet her cheeks would puff up in anger for a whole day."

Hearing this, Renji couldn't help but smile, and his irritation eased a little more.

"I always thought Hinamori would be totally obedient to you."

Renji voiced what he'd always believed.

"Well, most of the time she is." Kaiser didn't deny it. He shrugged and said, "But sometimes, that girl can be strangely stubborn—it makes it hard not to give in."

"Isn't that a good thing?" Renji said honestly. "You're way too easygoing. It's good to have someone keep you in check!"

"Guess that's the downside of being too familiar." Kaiser said with a sigh. "Before Hinamori became my Lieutenant, Lieutenant Iba's style was much stricter than hers, and even she didn't dare interfere with me."

Someone with the demeanor of a yakuza wife like Chikane Iba didn't dare manage Kaiser, yet the gentle Momo Hinamori was bold enough to firmly keep him in line—it truly defied explanation.

But...

"The barracks of Division 3 are being watched now," Renji said in a low voice. "Hinamori has also been banned from leaving. She's probably worried sick about you right now—she may have even cried several times."

That single sentence made the mood on-site grow heavier.

Kaiser didn't respond to it. He just took the bottle back from Renji and drank calmly.

"Why did you kill Captain Aizen?"

Renji couldn't hold back anymore and asked the question.

"What will you do once you know the reason?"

Kaiser didn't answer—instead, he posed a question of his own.

"...I don't know," Renji said in confusion. "I really don't know what to do."

In the Gotei 13, and even across all of Soul Society, there were only two people Renji Abarai could truly consider "important."

One was Rukia Kuchiki, the childhood friend he had grown up with, whom he'd drifted apart from due to various circumstances.

The other was Kaiser, who, after Renji enrolled in the Shin'ō Academy, had treated him as an equal regardless of status and never looked down on him because of his background.

Though Izuru Kira and Momo Hinamori were also classmates and comrades, when it came to importance, Kaiser and Rukia held a higher place.

And now... in just a matter of days?

His important childhood friend was sentenced to execution and would soon be put to death.

His important friend had suddenly killed a Captain and was now wanted by the Gotei 13.

It was as if both of them were being ripped away from him, their situations worsening, the future uncertain—they might never see each other again. This reality tormented Renji.

He didn't know what to do anymore. He didn't know how to help Kaiser. He didn't know how to save Rukia. He didn't know how to ensure both could survive.

"Have you met Ichigo Kurosaki?"

Seeing the lost expression on Renji's face, Kaiser suddenly asked this.

"Ichigo Kurosaki..."

Renji's gaze sharpened immediately.

Of course he had met Ichigo Kurosaki.

When they went to the World of the Living to bring Rukia back, Renji had crossed paths with that human and even fought him fiercely—nearly a life-and-death battle.

He remembered that human well. His Reiryoku was unbelievably strong. Even though he had only become a Shinigami thanks to borrowed power, after being knocked down by Renji, he had suddenly unleashed terrifying strength and nearly defeated him.

Renji was both shocked and resentful.

"If it weren't for him, Rukia wouldn't be in this situation."

Renji clenched his fists tightly.

But Kaiser poured cold water over him.

"No. Even without him, Rukia wouldn't have escaped this fate."

At those words, Renji immediately raised his head.

"What do you mean?" Renji's voice grew anxious as he asked quickly, "Why would Rukia still face this fate even without him?"

"What exactly do you know? Tell me everything, Kaiser!"

Renji no longer wanted to keep muddling through in ignorance.

He suddenly remembered—Kaiser had seemed to know a lot from the very beginning. When he went to visit Rukia, he had said many strange things. He even knew she would be sentenced to execution before Central 46 made the announcement.

This convinced Renji that Kaiser must know some inside information.

This matter not only concerned Rukia's life—it might also be related to why Kaiser had killed Captain Aizen.

"Stop hiding it from me!"

Renji shouted and even started to rise to his feet.

Facing such a Renji, Kaiser remained calm, still sipping the sake unhurriedly, showing not the slightest hint of urgency.

Just as Renji was about to explode from anxiety, Kaiser finally spoke.

"Someone wants something inside Rukia's body."

Kaiser's words stunned Renji.

"Something... inside Rukia's body?"

Renji couldn't comprehend what that meant.

"Yes," Kaiser continued calmly. "It's something created by the former Captain of Division 12—implanted in her body without her consent."

The former Captain of Division 12.

Renji had, of course, heard of this individual.

It was said that this person was the founder of the Shinigami Research and Development Institute, possessing an incredibly brilliant mind, and had developed many unbelievable inventions and strange techniques, contributing greatly to Soul Society's technological advancement.

However, over a century ago, he had committed taboo acts and caused a major incident, leading to his defection from Soul Society.

Renji remembered—the former Captain's name was...

"Kisuke Urahara."

Kaiser stated the name that left a deep impression on many people.

"He's now settled in the World of the Living, running a shop that provides goods and services for stationed Shinigami—living quite comfortably."

"Of course, that's only on the surface."

"In truth, he's always known that his situation isn't secure."

Here, the "not secure" didn't refer to being an enemy of the Gotei 13 due to defection—but rather that someone had always been watching him.

"Over a century ago, forbidden Hollowfication experiments suddenly emerged."

"Someone used Rukongai residents and even Shinigami from Seireitei for experiments—trying to Hollowfy them and develop a way to break the limits of Shinigami."

"This experiment drew great attention from the Gotei 13, and many Captains and Lieutenants were sent to investigate. But they were all secretly targeted by the mastermind and became test subjects—losing control and going berserk."

Kaiser narrated these hidden truths in a calm tone—truths that no ordinary person could possibly know.

"At that time, former Division 12 Captain Kisuke Urahara had developed similar technology. His research closely overlapped with the mastermind's and their creations complemented each other."

"In order to save the many Captains and Lieutenants who were undergoing Hollowfication and on the verge of becoming Hollows, Urahara used his inventions."

"But what he didn't know was that he had already been marked by the mastermind."

This was how the incident began—and why Kisuke Urahara was ultimately drawn into it.

Though he fled Soul Society, he had always known that the mastermind was searching for him, aiming to obtain the key to breaking Shinigami limits—to combine it with their own research and complete the technology.

So, Urahara constantly monitored Soul Society and remained vigilant against the mastermind.

"To prevent the item from being stolen, Urahara chose to hide it somewhere the enemy wouldn't easily retrieve."

"That place was the inside of a Soul."

"And the soul he chose was Rukia."

Kaiser's calm voice nearly destroyed Renji's sanity.

"Why Rukia?!"

Renji finally couldn't hold back and stood up.

"Circumstance and coincidence, I suppose? She just happened to be in the World of the Living at that time." Kaiser replied indifferently. "Anyway, his plan worked. That item really was hidden inside Rukia. Even I couldn't extract it."

"Remember what I did back in the prison?"

"At that time, I was trying to extract that item."

Hearing this, Renji was stunned again.

"Wait—weren't you just trying to take advantage of Rukia back then?!"

Renji blurted out what he had always thought.

"Bam!"

Kaiser instantly had dark lines across his face and kicked Renji over.

"Take advantage of Rukia? What is there to take advantage of?!"

Kaiser cursed harshly.

Just that little bit of flesh—what's there to take advantage of?

You really haven't seen the world. One day, I'll show you what it really means to take advantage of someone!

(Kirin Toudou, Rias, Kuroka: ???)