

## Multiverse 207

Chapter 207: As You Can See, I'm Here

From that point on, the entire Seireitei fell into a strange calm.

The once-bustling Seireitei, for some unknown reason, suddenly entered this quiet lull.

Kaiser, who had killed Aizen, vanished without a trace—no one could find him.

The Ryoka also mysteriously disappeared, as if someone had taken them and hidden them away—not a single one could be found.

Kenpachi Zaraki searched for them for three whole days, but didn't encounter them even once, which left him in a furious rage.

On the other hand, Mayuri Kurotsuchi was reportedly said to have encountered the Ryoka and even fought with them, but by the time nearby Shinigami rushed to the scene, the Ryoka had already vanished—and so had Kurotsuchi himself.

Afterwards, someone claimed that Kurotsuchi had returned to the Division 12 barracks, but he refused to meet with anyone. Even when summoned for follow-up Gotei 13 operations, he declined by claiming he was injured, sparking widespread suspicion.

Some said Kurotsuchi had been defeated by the Ryoka and was too ashamed to show his face.

Others said Kurotsuchi had won and obtained precious research samples, and was so absorbed in his experiments that he used injury as an excuse to shut himself in the Shinigami Research and Development Institute.

Only a few knew that Kurotsuchi had indeed been defeated by a Ryoka—nearly killed—and had been holed up in his barracks since then, treating himself, and seemingly in a very foul mood.

After that, all the Ryoka mysteriously vanished, making Seireitei temporarily calm once more, as if nothing more would happen.

Of course, anyone with a discerning eye knew—the calmer it was now, the more likely a major incident was brewing.

The evidence was that besides Kaiser and the invading Ryoka, various anomalies began surfacing among the Gotei 13's Divisions.

For instance, Lieutenant Renji Abarai of Division 6 mysteriously went missing during these days and hadn't been seen since.

Also, Lieutenant Momo Hinamori of Division 3 had a violent conflict one night with the Division 10 Shinigami stationed at her barracks, then suddenly left the Division 3 barracks without a trace, leaving behind only unconscious members of Division 10.

Divisions 8 and 13 had also been acting strangely. Captains Shunsui Kyōraku and Jūshirō Ukitake no longer searched for Kaiser but seemed to be secretly discussing something, their movements suspicious.

Captain Kaname Tōsen of Division 9 and Captain Gin Ichimaru of Division 10 were even more bizarre—often disappearing without warning and never bringing their Lieutenants. When others asked where they'd been, they brushed it off with vague answers, clearly unwilling to elaborate.

Captain Sui-Fēng of Division 2, upon confirming that Kaiser couldn't be found, suddenly began asking around about a black cat. Captain Retsu Unohana of Division 4 remained hidden in her barracks and hadn't come out in days. Captain Byakuya Kuchiki of Division 6 stood watch at the Senzaikyū constantly, unwilling to leave even for a moment.

With all that, the movements of the Captains and Lieutenants of each Division grew increasingly strange. Combined with the mysterious disappearance of the Ryoka and the intense focus placed on Kaiser, the atmosphere in Seireitei became more and more bizarre—like something ominous was brewing.

In such circumstances, some people felt unease, some felt solemn, some were indifferent, and others had a knowing look in their eyes—making these short three days feel especially difficult to endure.

But no matter how difficult, those three days eventually passed.

In the blink of an eye, the day of execution arrived.

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That day, the weather in Seireitei remained bright and clear, with not a cloud in the sky, making one feel relaxed and cheerful.

Under the escort of the enforcers, Rukia was finally led out of the Senzaikyū—but not to freedom. She was being taken to the execution ground.

Sōkyoku Hill, a place like a cliff, sat at a relatively high location in Seireitei. It wasn't far from the Senzaikyū and appeared like a floating platform in midair. Atop it was nothing but barren rocky ground, and at its edge stood a single long spear and an execution scaffold.

The spear was long—at least ten meters. Its shape resembled more of a guandao than a spear, standing upright at the edge of the hill, swaying in the wind.

The scaffold was also tall, shaped somewhat like a torii gate. At its base was a platform—currently empty.

Nearby the platform, however, were many people.

Captain of Division 1 and Captain Commander of the Gotei 13, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto.

Captain of Division 2 and Commander of the Onmitsukidō,

Captain of Division 6 and current Head of the Kuchiki Clan, Byakuya Kuchiki.

Captain of Division 7, Sajin Komamura.

Captain of Division 8, Shunsui Kyōraku.

Captain of Division 9, Kaname Tōsen.

Captain of Division 10, Gin Ichimaru.

Also, Captain of Division 11, Kenpachi Zaraki, and Captain of Division 13, Jūshirō Ukitake.

Nine Captains in total—all gathered here, with their Lieutenants in tow, seemingly to witness the execution.

Aside from the deceased Captain of Division 5, Sōsuke Aizen, and the absconded Captain of Division 3, Kaiser, the only other absent Captains were Retsu Unohana of Division 4 and Mayuri Kurotsuchi of Division 12—who remained in seclusion and didn't even come to witness the Sōkyoku execution.

Looking at those Captains, each draped in their Haori, standing proudly with their Lieutenants, their presence imposing, Rukia's thoughts at this moment were unexpectedly peculiar.

"What did I ever do to deserve this?"

She, a Shinigami not even a Seated Officer, was not only sentenced to execution by the Sōkyoku—a tool said to unleash the destructive power of a million Zanpakutō—but also had nearly ten Captains coming to witness it?

Even those who had caused massive chaos and damage in Soul Society's history likely didn't receive such a reception, did they?

Rukia wasn't sure whether she had given up or was laughing bitterly, but such thoughts crossed her mind.

She glanced toward the position of Division 6 and saw her elder brother standing there with a cold expression, indifferent as ever, as if the one about to be executed wasn't his sister. It felt utterly heartless.

Then she looked toward Division 13 and saw Jūshirō Ukitake looking at her with worry—bringing her some comfort.

"Renji... isn't here?"

Rukia noticed her childhood friend was not among them.

"That idiot... he better not be doing anything stupid."

Rukia murmured softly, as if she had some premonition.

The enforcers escorting her did not stop their steps, leading her—the condemned—all the way to the platform beneath the scaffold.

Rukia was placed on that platform, standing beneath the scaffold.

"Rukia Kuchiki." Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto opened his wrinkled eyes and looked at the white-robed convict about to be executed. "Do you have anything to say?"

The attending Captains all turned toward Rukia. Some expressionless, some solemn, some indifferent, and some anxious.

As for Rukia, she was surprisingly calm. Her face showed no fear, nor any signs of resentment or grievance.

She did not wish to explain her actions or cry injustice here.

Nor did she want to leave any last words or regrets—no confessions of guilt.

Though she hadn't expected her helping that boy become a Shinigami to lead to this end, she had no regrets about what she had done.

So, she had only one thing to say.

"I have nothing I wish to say."

As if accepting her fate, she said it serenely.

Some among the Captains reacted to this.

"...I see."

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto also looked at her deeply but said nothing more.

"Buzz..."

At that moment, the restraints around Rukia's neck and wrists began to vibrate. Though connected to nothing, they seemed to move as if by remote control—spreading her arms out into a cross shape.

Then, Rukia's body began to float upward, slowly rising above the scaffold.

"Release!"

The executioners then released the seal on the spear, which suddenly burst into flames and soared into the air.

"Boom!"

Flames roared, Reiryoku surged, and under everyone's gaze, the spear transformed into a massive bird engulfed in fire—screeching as it flapped its wings and circled before Rukia.

"Oh? So that's the true form of the Sōkyoku?" Gin Ichimaru spoke with feigned curiosity.

"Kikōō, the true form of the Sōkyoku once released."

Several Captains who understood the Sōkyoku murmured.

Byakuya Kuchiki stared fixedly at the giant bird, as if gazing upon the mythic phoenix. Unknowingly, his hand tightened around his Zanpakutō's hilt.

The Captains all exchanged glances, each with a different expression.

"Begin the execution!"

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto remained stoic, like a merciless executor, shouting coldly.

"Screee!"

The firebird in front of the scaffold let out a sharp cry, flapped its wings, locked onto Rukia, and prepared to charge.

Its sharp beak was the tip of the Sōkyoku—a point said to contain the destructive power of a million Zanpakutō.

All it needed was to strike the condemned on the scaffold, and the execution would be complete.

Unfortunately...

"Can you fly past me, Firebird King?"

As that amused voice echoed and reached everyone's ears, the expressions on the Captains' faces grew even more intense.

Especially Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto—his wrinkled eyes filled with cold light, as if he had been waiting for this moment a long time, and his gaze turned toward the source of the voice.

It came from the entrance of Sōkyoku Hill—the stairs that led up from the ground.

A figure, like someone on a leisurely stroll, arrived fashionably late. Under everyone's gaze, he ascended the steps one by one, each step ringing clearly.

"I'm guessing many of you have been waiting for me to show up?"

Still wearing his Captain's Haori, Kaiser carried his Zanpakutō as he smiled at everyone.

"As you can see, I'm here."

Just like that—calmly, plainly, he came.