

## Multiverse 209

Chapter 209: A Situation Spiraling into Chaos

As Renji Abarai formally declared war on Byakuya Kuchiki, the other Captains likewise began to move.

For instance, Sajin Komamura and Kaname Tōsen—these two stepped forward simultaneously when Byakuya attacked Kaiser but was intercepted by Renji, intending to charge toward Kaiser's position.

But standing in their way were two others.

And those two were none other than the colleagues who had just been standing with them.

"Captain Kyōraku? Captain Ukitake?"

"...What are you doing?"

Sajin Komamura voiced in surprise, while the more direct Kaname Tōsen questioned sternly.

Standing in their path were Shunsui Kyōraku and Jūshirō Ukitake.

"Sorry, you two," Kyōraku removed the straw hat from his head, smiled at them, and said, "Things are rather lively over there right now, so how about we don't go disturbing them? What do you say?"

Ukitake didn't speak but silently stood forward, clearly expressing his resolve.

"What is the meaning of this?"

Komamura's expression changed on the spot.

"Have you two fallen as well? Captain Kyōraku! Captain Ukitake!"

Tōsen gripped his Zanpakutō, looking as though he'd been betrayed.

Kyōraku and Ukitake exchanged a glance, then each spoke in turn.

"There are some things we need to verify."

"Before that, let's not act rashly."

As they spoke, the two of them couldn't help but recall the messages they had found in their squad barracks two days ago.

The messages were different.

"Sōsuke Aizen is not dead."

This was what Kyōraku received.

"Rukia Kuchiki has been caught in a conspiracy."

This was what Ukitake received.

Naturally, both messages had been left by Kaiser.

He knew who would be willing to trust him and who wouldn't. So, while awaiting the day of execution, he left messages in the barracks of Squad 8 and Squad 13.

Of course, neither Kyōraku nor Ukitake fully believed them, though they did harbor suspicions.

Unlike the other Captains, they had already become doubtful when Kaiser spoke of all the anomalies he had encountered over the past century during the Captain's meeting—doubts about Rukia being sentenced to execution.

Moreover, Rukia, a Shinigami not even ranked among the seated officers, was sentenced to death by Sōkyoku, and the execution was hastily moved forward—so many oddities made the two even more suspicious, suspecting there might be some hidden truth.

But at the time, they had not taken any action.

It wasn't until Kaiser suddenly attacked Aizen for no apparent reason—openly declaring he had come for Aizen—that the suspicions in Kyōraku and Ukitake's hearts reached their peak.

Thus, after receiving Kaiser's messages, their behavior began to change.

They began verifying the matter on their own.

Kyōraku went to Squad 4's barracks to follow up on Retsu Unohana's autopsy results.

Ukitake went to the Special Detention Building and, with Byakuya Kuchiki's permission, spoke with Rukia several times face-to-face.

Together with other investigations, they indeed discovered some suspicious points.

So today, the two were not here to witness the execution—but to protect Rukia, for now.

However, before they could act, Kaiser appeared first, turning the situation chaotic.

Seeing it as a good opportunity, they had no hesitation stepping in to prevent Komamura and Tōsen from interfering.

Komamura and Tōsen, unaware of all this, were naturally unwilling to back down.

"As Captains, how can you stand by and watch justice be trampled like this?" Tōsen was first to press forward, his expression grim. "Do you still consider yourselves Captains of the Gotei 13?"

"This is not a situation the Captain Commander wishes to see," Komamura added bluntly. "I hope you will reconsider your actions."

Despite this, Kyōraku and Ukitake remained still, continuing to block the path.

"In that case..."

Komamura's anger surged as he slowly drew his Zanpakutō and released his Reiatsu.

"Stand aside!"

Tōsen went a step further and charged directly.

Kyōraku and Ukitake drew their Zanpakutō at once and met the attack, engaging the two Captains in battle.

"This is getting interesting."

Gin Ichimaru looked on at the four Captains clashing, laughing—whether in schadenfreude or bitter amusement was hard to tell.

He also drew his Zanpakutō, gripping the hilt with both hands and pointing the blade tip toward Kaiser, seemingly intending to snipe him with Shinsō.

"...I suggest you don't do that, Captain Ichimaru."

A slightly youthful voice suddenly spoke from behind Gin, causing his ever-narrowed eyes to open a sliver.

"Well, if it isn't Lieutenant Hitsugaya," Gin turned and looked at the familiar figure, smiling meaningfully. "I thought you were out pursuing the escaped Lieutenant of Squad 3? What are you doing here?"

"You mean Momo?" Tōshirō Hitsugaya had somehow appeared behind Gin and was staring closely at his own Captain. Pointing in a direction, he said, "She's over there."

Gin followed his gaze and saw a chaotic battlefield.

At this point, not only were Captains fighting each other, but Lieutenants were also locked in fierce combat.

Lieutenant Nanao Ise of Squad 8 was dueling Lieutenant Tetsuzaemon Iba of Squad 7; Lieutenant Izuru Kira of Squad 13 was clashing with Lieutenant Shūhei Hisagi of Squad 9—the battle was intense.

Especially the latter pair—having once been classmates at Shin'ō Academy and sharing a past encounter during an incident, both now found themselves on opposing sides. Unable to talk things out, they came to blows, nearly releasing their Zanpakutō.

Lieutenant Marechiyo Ōmaeda of Squad 2 had apparently been ordered by Suì-Fēng to help—but he was intercepted by Rangiku Matsumoto, who had appeared out of nowhere.

In such circumstances, Momo Hinamori used Shunpo to rush up Sōkyoku Hill. Upon seeing Kaiser, she appeared overjoyed and tearful, about to run toward him when she was stopped by Lieutenant Chōjirō Sasakibe of Squad 1.

The Lieutenants had now fully joined the fray. Though their battles weren't as intense as the Captains', the scene became even more chaotic.

Gin couldn't help but glance toward Rangiku Matsumoto, who was fighting with Ōmaeda, then sighed theatrically and said to Hitsugaya:

"So, you've decided to defect too, huh?"

This subordinate of his stood in his way—Gin never thought he'd receive the same treatment as Byakuya Kuchiki.

"...When I found her, she was crying."

Tōshirō was silent for a while, then spoke—not quite answering the question.

"She's always been quick to cry, but this time was different."

"As her childhood friend, I know—this time, that bedwetting Momo is truly panicked."

"To her, Captain Kaiser is special—different—and even I can see that."

Saying this, Hitsugaya slowly drew the Zanpakutō from his back.

"Sorry, Captain Ichimaru. This time, I have to help my childhood friend."

These words made Gin's usual smile fade slightly.

"Childhood friend... huh?"

He glanced once more toward Rangiku Matsumoto, a complex look flickering briefly in his slit-like eyes.

"True. One's childhood friend should be protected by oneself," Gin said—whether to Hitsugaya or to himself was unclear. "But can you really protect her from a powerful enemy you can't defeat?"

Hitsugaya couldn't grasp the deeper meaning in Gin's words. He raised his Zanpakutō and spoke seriously:

"You're strong, no doubt. But I haven't been standing still."

Cold air began to emanate from Hitsugaya's body.

"This time, I won't lose so easily."

Facing Hitsugaya's declaration, Gin smiled wordlessly and released his Reiatsu.

Just like when they once competed for the Captain's seat of Squad 10, the two first stood off—then charged, clashing together.

At the same time, Sui-Fēng was also intercepted.

She had been emotionally unstable for some time, so when Kaiser appeared and destroyed the Sōkyoku, she, like Byakuya, immediately wanted to strike.

But just as she moved, a figure blocked her with shocking speed, contorting her face.

"Well, it's been a while,

A foreign-style beauty dressed in form-fitting attire stood elegantly before her.

That casual tone, the familiar voice, face, and manner—all caused Sui-Fēng's clenched hand to bleed.

"Yoruichi Shihōin!!"

As if releasing a century's worth of pent-up emotion, Sui-Fēng shouted that name, one word at a time.

"You're not holding back, huh?" Yoruichi grinned boldly. "You used to call me Lady Yoruichi, remember?"

"You're no longer worthy of that title!" Sui-Fēng shouted, as if grinding her teeth into dust. "You're just a traitor who abandoned everyone!"

"Can't argue with that," Yoruichi calmly accepted the rebuke. "So? What do you want to say to a traitor like me? Go on—let's hear it."

"I have nothing to say to traitors," Sui-Fēng suppressed her emotions coldly. "There's only one thing I do with traitors."

Sui-Fēng drew her Zanpakutō and released it directly.

"Kill!"

Bearing the weight of years of emotion, Sui-Fēng charged toward Yoruichi, launching into battle with her...