

# Crossing Over

Von konpaku

## Kapitel 8: Information Gathering

### Chapter 8 - Information Gathering

#### *In the Yamanaka Household*

It had been a long day when the three Shinigami were finally able to sit down and take a breath in Rangiku's room.

When they had arrived in Konoha the female had brought them to the Hokage for a formal introduction. Even though Tsunade was still suspicious as to why Matsumoto had left that fast and how she found her friends right when there was a fluctuation of Chakra not that far away from the village, they somehow managed to convince her that Renji and Ikkaku had nothing to do with it.

Their in-adeptness with the Deamon Arts came in handy with this. Even though Matsumoto had tried to explain the concept of Chakra to her colleagues they had failed at understanding it. Therefore they did not understand Tsunade's questions as to whether they were responsible for the incident either.

Still, the Hokage made sure they would stay at the Yamanaka household as well. For this Ino had to share her room with Rangiku – not without complaining about losing her privacy, but she was assured that this was only a temporary measure – while the guys used Rangiku's room.

And that was where they currently were sitting and discussing what they should do next.

Pulling out the map she had made from below the bed Matsumoto urged the men to come closer.

"This is the map of this land. And these things are where everyone is last time I checked." She explained pointing at the flags.

She then reached underneath the bed once more to get two more flags.

"And these two are for you." She handed them theirs.

"An ape?" Renji asked with a frown.

"And I got a moon..." Ikkaku noted dully.

"Well...it seemed fitting..." Rangiku defended herself.

"How does that seem fitting? I have nothing in common with an ape and if you go for fitting images then a snake or even a tiger would be more fitting than an ape." Renji complained.

"Or a pineapple." His bald colleague mocked him.

Glaring at him Renji grumbled: "Shut it Panchiko-Head." Using the much despised nickname given to the Third Seat by his Lieutenant.

As both men seemed to be ready to get into another fight Rangiku intervened.

"Well, well, boys. Keep it low." She ordered them.

"Besides Renji isn't your Zanpakutou spirit a baboon?"

"A baboon with a snake as tail, but baboons are monkeys not apes." He explained still a little mad at her.

"Well, can't you try seeing this drawing as that of a monkey?" She asked him innocently.

"It does look like an ape so, no." He told her flatly.

"Then you have to live with that..." Rangiku gave in rubbing her temples.

She was about to explain some more as someone knocked on the door.

"Yeah?" She asked innocently.

Inoichi slowly opened the door and looked inside.

"I just wanted to tell you that dinner will be ready any minute. So if you would like to come down..." He informed them smiling.

"Dinner!" Both males echoed joyfully raising their fists, their anger already forgotten.

Rolling her eyes Rangiku answered, smiling as well: "We will be there."

With a nod he exited the room, closing the door behind him.

"Let's go get some food!" Madarame exclaimed his mouth already watering.

"No. Didn't you listen? They aren't ready yet."

"But they will be soon, so why waste time?"

With a sigh Rangiku could not really argue with that.

"Just wait until I put away the map..."

"Sure. Hurry up." He agreed, crossing his arms.

"Do they know about the map and how you are able to locate everyone?" Renji wondered.

He had seen the way the blond male had looked at it and tried to figure out what it meant.

"Well, Ino saw me making the flags and came in when I put the first few into place. But she never really asked how I was able to tell where everyone was....I mean she asked if I could sense you, which I replied to with yes, but that was it."

"But you couldn't have actually sensed anyone that far away." He said pointing at the flags made for Kira and Hisagi that were the farthest away from their location.

"Well, she believed me and didn't dig any further. So I guess they have people that are able to sense others that far away." Matsumoto answered with a shrug.

"Could you hurry up? I'm starving..." Madarame interrupted the conversation.

"Alright, alright I'll move the map. No need to fuss about it..." Rangiku complained as well carefully tugging away the map.

On the other side of the door Inoichi had waited for a moment to hear what the strangers were talking about. Even though the woman had stayed here for several days he hadn't been able to get any kind of intel on her. Only what she was willing to give.

Hearing that Ino had not asked further questions made him cringe a little. She'd had a good opportunity to find out about some of Matsumoto's techniques and failed to use it. He would have to discuss that with her later.

When he heard them get ready to move out he used the Shunshin no Jutsu to get to the dining room before them.

"Everything alright?" Shikaku Nara asked him alarmed.

"Yes, they're coming." Inoichi informed his old friend, sitting down beside him.

As the Hokage hadn't been convinced of the men's innocence regarding the Chakra occurrence, she had asked the Ino-Shika-Chou formation to have a look at them. Therefore the Yamanaka had decided to hold a dinner for his friend's families and their guests. This would be a good opportunity for Shikaku and Shikamaru to analyze the strangers.

While the women were preparing the table the Shinigami entered the room.

"Woah, are you throwing a feast for us?" Ikkaku asked astonished seeing all the food already lined up on the table.

"Haha, well, you can see it as feast, but it is an annual feast we hold with our befriended families and you happen to be our special guests." The Yamanaka explained with laughter in his voice.

"Guess we have good timing then." The Shinigami grinned, rubbing his belly.

"Don't you want to introduce us?" A man with a scar across his face and a high black ponytail asked their host.

"Yes, yes of course." The blond man stood up again a little flustered.

"These are Nara Shikaku, his son Shikamaru and Akamichi Chouza and his son Chouji." He introduced his friends pointing at the scarred man, a young boy with a similar hairstyle and keen eyes, a bulky man with wavy streaks on his cheeks and long, spiky red hair and an equally chubby boy with swirls instead of streaks and brown hair instead of red, respectively.

"Nice to meet you I'm Matsumoto Rangiku and these are Abarai Renji and Madarame Ikkaku." Rangiku introduced them as well, waving at the males.

"Why don't you have a seat?" Inoichi's wife suggested moving one of the chairs away from the table for one the guests to be able to sit at it.

"Thank you." Rangiku cooed and took the seat.

Renji and Ikkaku sat down on either side of her.

When they waited for the remaining food to be placed Renji couldn't resist asking something that has been on his mind.

"Rangiku-san said that this is a village of Ninjas, does that mean you guys are Ninjas too?" He asked pointing at Inoichi, Shikaku and Chouza.

"Not just them. All of us." The boy with the swirly cheeks piped in waving at the rest of them as well.

"What? But...You're kids. You're not older than 16." Renji exclaimed confused.

He couldn't grasp that children that young would have to lead a life of assassinations and dirty work.

"It's an honor to serve your village and clan as a fine Shinobi." Chouji told him proudly.

"You're brainwashed." The Shinigami concluded.

"I am not!" The boy objected.

"He really isn't. That's just how it is here." The other boy defended him as well.

"Are you insane? You voluntarily teach your children how to kill people? What kind of childhood is that?" He angrily asked the older Shinobi, rising from his seat.

"Renji!" Matsumoto tried to stop him rising as well, but she knew how he felt.

Both of them grew up in Rukongai, a place where they had to learn killing and stealing to survive. But these kids seemed to live a good life, without the need to do so. Yet, their parents had decided to turn them into stealthy killers nevertheless.

"I – I don't understand how you can do something like that. Robbing them of their childhood and –" He started another complain, using his arms and hands for emphasis.

"What is your problem? We had a great childhood. With the best of parents and the best friends you can wish for. Being taught how to be a Shinobi is our way of living. That's who we are. And to learn the traditions and techniques of our clans is an honor!" Chouji yelled, interrupting him.

Usually he was meek and quiet and usually only when someone called him fat did he rise up in anger. But this time, this stranger, this man that didn't know anything about them had just insulted the childhood he had loved so much. His family's efforts of making sure he would grow up to be a good man, have a good heart, and love the people closest to him. He could not let that stand. He stared directly into the eyes of the other guy, waiting for him to continue.

Surprised at his friend's outburst Shikamaru stood up as well standing beside him. Looking from Chouji to the other on full alert.

"Why do you agree to do all this? Why continue with this way of living?" Renji demanded to know, still unconvinced at the boy's reasoning.

"Because I want to protect my friends. And my family. And my village." He sternly told him, not breaking eye contact.

"To protect and to die for the children and the people close to us, that is the Will of Fire. We inherited it from our parents and our teachers and we will pass it on to the next generations." His friend explained putting a hand on the other boy's shoulder.

"To protect..." Renji repeated, looking at the boys once more before he sat down again.

'To protect my friends.' That was what the boy had said. And that was the reason why he himself had gathered strength, improved his skills and fought the worst battles of his life. To protect. He couldn't argue with that reason. Resigned he looked up again.

"I'm sorry." He only said nearly whispering.

Rangiku sat down as well looking at her colleague. She knew how protective Renji was of his friends. When she sighed in relief she could feel the tension of the room loosening up.

Throughout the ordeal Ikkaku was watching the Shinobi in distrust. He saw the men move their hands together into weird gestures and remembered that Rangiku had told them that these people used techniques like their Kidou. And Kidou, he knew, used hand signs. These people didn't trust them at all.

After a moment of silence Chouji asked: "Why the change of heart?"

"Because you have a good reason to seek strength." Renji told the boy with a genuine smile.

"You think so?" He asked sitting down as well.

"Gaining strength to protect your friends is always a good reason. And if you've chosen this path yourself then you weren't pushed into it. There is no more reason for me to be mad." Abarai continued.

And it was right. He didn't know where this conversation would have gone if their parents had forced them to become what they were. But a self-chosen path is something to be respected. Besides he couldn't be mad at anyone for long. He always found a way to change his view on what the person had done. Heck, he even wasn't mad at the Kuchiki anymore for taking Rukia away. He respected him as his captain and as someone he would one day defeat, but he had put all the blame on himself. He wasn't able to offer Rukia a proper life, but Kuchiki Byakuya was. And he was grateful for the chance that she got with that. Though it still bugged him how he had treated her all those years, yet even this was understandable to some extent. Renji had seen a picture of Hisana-sama and Rukia looked that close to her that he didn't know how he

would react if he was in his captain's shoes. Hopefully he would never have to make a decision like he had. Abarai only hoped that both of them were fine, wherever they were right now.

Rangiku placed her hand on her fellow lieutenant's shoulder and got him out of his thoughts.

"Sorry...I was..." He tried but didn't really want to continue.

"Worried about Rukia-chan?" Matsumoto teased, nailing it.

Blushing a little Renji averted his gaze, causing the Third Seat to break out in laughter.

"That's so typical. First you yell for some weird-ass reason and next you're all mushy worried about the little missy."

"Shut it." Renji grumbled, blushing even more.

Not knowing what to say or do Chouji and the other Konoha Nin just watched the strangers.

"Renji has a big heart. Clearly you wouldn't understand his worries in your pea brain."

Rangiku defended her friend, poking Madarame's forehead with the insult.

"Hey!" He complained, but was ignored.

"A big heart is a good thing." Chouji commented.

"Yeah, but gets ya into lots of trouble at times." Renji agreed grinning widely.

"Yeah..." The young Akimichi agreed as well.

He now was sure: This guy was a good guy. Despite his bold attitude and fearsome appearance he had a good heart. He cared for his friends and would do anything for them. He thought that maybe he'd even be someone he would be willing to share his last chips. But just maybe. Smiling Chouji was glad that they would stay for a while. Regardless of what they hid from them, they had to be good people.

"You're sooo cute with kids." Rangiku teased her colleague pinching his cheek.

"St-stop that!" He tried to get away from her.

"I can't wait for you and Rukia-chan to have some little ones."

"RA-RA-RANGIKU-SAN!" He screamed frightened – as if either of the Kuchikis could hear her words.

"Relax, that was just a joke!" She laughed at his reaction.

With this lightened mood they indulged in comfortable conversations and later the food that just waited for them on the plates.

### *Later that night*

It was late when they finally entered the boy's room.

Dropping on one of the beds Ikkaku exclaimed: "Man I'm stuffed!"

"Yeah, me too." Renji acknowledged rubbing his belly.

During the meal they had learned more about the village and the life of the Shinobi. As sad as it was it seemed reasonable for them to teach their children the skills of their family while they were children, as the average dying age of a Shinobi was pretty young. So teaching them when the age would be appropriate was not always possible. The lieutenant kind of regretted getting mad earlier without really explaining why. But he didn't really want to ruin the mood again.

Hearing his colleague starting to snore he lied down as well. Rukia would arrive soon and they would gather enough information until then to be able to return home by that time. Closing his eyes he drifted off into a light slumber.

When he heard the door opening Renji rose alarmed, only to see Rangiku enter the

room.

Puzzled he watched her when she moved closer and motioned for him to be silent.

"What's wrong?" He asked her whispering as she sat down on his bed.

"Ino's asleep. I think now would be a good time to have a look into that library."

"You think so?"

"Yeah, everyone's tired from the meal, so they will assume we are all sleeping off all the food."

"Sleeping off all the food....Guess you're right." He agreed.

"Of course I'm right." She huffed with a smile.

"And how do we leave without waking anyone?"

"Duh, the window?" She responded rhetorically waving at said exit.

"Right...sorry..." Abarai agreed slightly embarrassed.

"What about Ikkaku-san?"

"Guess we need to wake him..." Matsumoto offered with a sigh.

After they had managed to wake the Third Seat they sneaked out through the window and made their way to the library. Being able to use Shunpo and other techniques it was easy for them to reach their destination without being seen.

"So, how do we enter?" Ikkaku asked annoyed at having to be up this late.

"Let's see if we can find a conveniently opened window..." Rangiku thought out loud and started searching.

Being able to stand in thin air was rather helpful for this task.

And indeed there was a window that was unlocked and just leaning in its frame.

"You think this is a trap?" Renji asked suspiciously.

"Might be. Maybe they want us to get the information we want to see what we looked for and figure out what we want from that." She acknowledged his thoughts.

"But maybe they really only have lazy librarians." She then said carefully opening the window.

"This place is huge. How are we supposed to find anything? I mean, what are we even looking for?" Madarame complained as he entered the room.

The sight that greeted them was a long room with long lines of shelves filled with books, scrolls and randomly some artifacts.

"We are looking if they have anything about us. Us as in Shinigami, not us, us." Rangiku explained, clarifying the latter as she wasn't sure her comrade would understand it right away.

"Still, how are we supposed to do that? It's nearly pitch black in here." The bald man exaggerated.

In reality they could see well what was in front of them, but wouldn't be able to read any titles or papers.

"I knew I forgot something..." Rangiku reluctantly admitted.

"So you didn't bring torches?" Renji asked skeptical about his comrade's preparations.

"Weeeell...we could use Kidou!" She then tried to give an alternative, hiding her embarrassment.

She had wanted to sneak into the library for some time now, but she hadn't thought it would be this dark in here.

"I mean even you two should be able to do this." She assumed and opened her palm to gather some Reiatsu into a Kidou-ball.

"Nope." Ikkaku stated and folded his arms behind his head.

"I'm not sure if I really should do that." Mumbled Renji and tried to avoid the other's eyes.

"How so?" Madarame wondered, lowering his arms.

"Last time I did that we ended up here..." He reminded them.

"Guess this wouldn't be a good moment to risk that..." Rangiku concluded dissolving the ball.

"Maybe we can find candles or torches at the librarian's desk..." She then wondered, moving forward to said location.

The men looked at each other for a moment, then shrugged and followed their comrade.

And indeed they found several candles and holders in one of the drawers. After they managed to light them, they walked through the rows of shelves. Careful to not drop any wax or burn something by accident.

It felt like hours had past when Rangiku exclaimed: "It think I've found something!"

Hearing this the others rushed to her side.

"Hold this." She ordered Renji handing him her candle holder.

Cautiously, so as to not let all the other scrolls fall down, she took out a leather tube that had the Kanji for "Shinigami" carved into its top.

"What do you think?" She asked the men showing them the carving.

"Jackpot" Stated Renji grinning at her.

"Open up!" Ikkaku urged her, trying to grab it.

"Wait, wait!" She reprimanded him and backed away.

This caused the Third Seat to move his candle holder in a way that the wax spilled over the foot of the candle holder and landed on the floor.

"Crap. Look what you've done!" He cursed.

"I? You did this!" She hissed back.

"Calm down!" Renji tried and earned angered looks for this.

"I mean: Let's get to a table to look into this thing and then get rid of the wax. We can't get it off right now anyway." He explained and nodded in the direction of the reading tables and tried to not get any more wax on the ground.

"Guess you're right..." Rangiku agreed and walked off.

Grumbling Ikakku followed her and Renji.

It took them a while to open the tube as it had been closed with several ties and knots. Inside was a large and thick scroll. Rangiku took it out and unreeled it onto the table. As it wanted to curl up again she put one of the books that already laid there onto the top of the pages. When she had fastened the paper, she shed some light onto it and they knew that she had found what they'd been looking for.

The page showed a rough sketch of the Court of Pure Souls and its symbol in the corner. Flipping through the other pages they saw notes and other sketches about the Court and the Squads, even some on the Zankensoki, the combat techniques of the Soul Reapers. But the most interesting part of the scroll came at its end. A formal document composed by none other than the Sou-Taicho himself.

"This is a contract." Rangiku told them skimming through the page.

"What does it say?" Ikkaku asked unable to read it from the angle he looked at it.

"It says that this realm has a natural defense against Hollows so we don't need to watch it that closely. They are appointing some research every ten years to make sure this hasn't changed. The Hokage has to make sure that the responsible Shinigami gets

every bit of information he asks for. Well, and that this is not to be publicly known." She summarized.

"So Tsunade-sama knows about us?" Renji asked.

"I doubt it. If she did this would probably be in her office or somewhere else hidden from public view not in a library where everyone can enter." Matsumoto hypothesized.

"What does that mean for us?" Madarame wanted to know.

"I don't...wait..." Started Rangiku but was distracted by something.

"Look at this." She said pointing on the name of the contracts witness.

"Kuchiki Ginrei? Who's that?" Renji asked.

"You don't know?" Rangiku asked him surprised.

When he replied by shaking his head, she told him: "Kuchiki Ginrei is Byakuya's grandfather and well, Rukia's too."

"You think the captain knows something about this?" Abarai continued asking questions, processing the new information.

"We will find out when we tell him." Matsumoto simply said and rolled the scroll.

"But first we have to take this back to where we got it from AND remove the wax." The last part was directed at the bald man beside her that just snorted at her comment.

"And then we will contact them?" Renji inquired.

"You are full of questions today..." Rangiku concluded, raising an eyebrow at her fellow Shinigami. "But yes, I think we should try that right away. It's still dark, so we are able to get to the secure place I've been able to sneak off to before without being noticed."

With a slight smile Renji lowered his head and looked forward to hearing Rukia and the others.

### *Even later that night*

Even though it was still dark it wouldn't take long for the sun to rise, so they had to hurry to get to the secure place Rangiku had found after they had cleaned up the wax-mess. Fortunately it wasn't that far away from the library and they were still able to use Flash Steps to get there.

The "secure place" ended up being on the top of the mountainside that towered over the village.

"This is what you call secure?" Ikkaku asked skeptically when they had stopped.

"Sure. No one expects you to be here as it is too open to be secluded." Rangiku told him with a grin.

"What now?" Renji continued looking around.

They had a good view on the village from up here. Still they couldn't be seen that easily thanks to the stone carvings and natural stone shields. It was open, yet no one would take this place as a hideout. It reminded him a little bit of the Soukyoku Hill in Sereitei. Shaking away the saddening thoughts that accompanied this place, he wondered if there were any caverns in this mountain as well.

"Are you listening?" Matsumoto asked the other lieutenant after she had answered his question and didn't get a reply from him.

"I'm sorry..." He sheepishly told her, rubbing the back of his neck and looking down with a light blush on his cheek.

"You two sit down as well and I'll cast the Kidou." Rangiku repeated with a sigh.



With a nod the red head did as he was told and sat down next to his comrades. Matsumoto took a small round tin out of her sleeves and opened it. Within it was a black powder that she put onto her fingertips. She then drew lines on the ground and edgy ones on her arms before she put her palms in front of her in a swift motion, causing a glowing rectangle to appear and started the incantation. While reciting she moved her arms to weave a root-like network with which she would connect to everyone in her chosen perimeter. Once more she put her flat hand against the rectangle and caused it to glow even brighter as the spell was activated by her final word "Tenteikuura".

Throughout the realm several people felt the connection and woke up from their slumber.

"Everyone! This is Rangiku! I'm using Tenteikuura and I think it'd be better if you make a respective connection so we can catch up!" She joyfully told her comrades and then added the perimeter she was using, so they would be able to establish their own connection. A little worried if the Kidou could be seen in the village they hoped it wouldn't take too long for the others to establish their connections.

In their camp the Kuchikis and Ayasegawa silently decided to leave it. Without much ado they Shunpoed away, nearly unnoticed by their companions.

At the same time in a far off desert of the Land of Wind and the icy mountains of the Land of Iron Hitsugaya and Hinamori, as well as Hisagi and Kira shortly discussed who should set up the communication Kidou.

Nearly simultaneously Byakuya, Momo and Izuru incanted: "Black and white net. Twenty-two bridges, sixty-six crowns and belts. Footprints, distant thunder, sharp peak, engulfing land, hidden in the night, sea of clouds, blue line. Form a circle and fly though the heavens. Tenteikuura."

When the connection was set Rangiku cheerfully greeted everyone again and gave them a heads up on what she had figured out so far.

With the help of Rukia and Byakuya she told them about the structure and Ninja system of this land, as well as where everyone was right now and where her position was, so they would be able to get there.

Yet why exactly they had ended up here and why their Zanpakutous had been sealed was a mystery to all of them. Rangiku's captain volunteered in investigating the latter, so they would have to wait for his word. Who knew how long this could take.

Another thing she told them about was what they just had found out in the library. Surprised at the revelation the Kuchiki said he would think about this, if he could remember his grandfather ever telling him anything about the contract.

Deciding to contact each other again when they figured out something new they bid their farewell and closed the connection.

"This realm is another of our responsibilities? But why isn't it more widely known?" Rukia wondered.

"I...don't...know." Byakuya answered, uncomfortable with admitting this.

"Yet." Rukia assured him with a smile, which he returned with a slight smile of his own.

"There is so much we don't know..." Yumichika complained, touching his forehead with his fingers as if he was having a headache.

"But we will figure it out. I'm certain." The younger Kuchiki tried to assure him as well. They continued to talk about what their next steps would be, not noticing the sandy

eye that hovered between the branches. Gaara would have preferred to have a sense of hearing included in this spying technique, but being there himself would have been fatal, as they would have certainly sensed him. From what he saw of that technique it must have been how that friend of Rukia had contacted her. It was different than every communication Jutsu he knew, adding to the differences between their abilities. If they really could use pure Spiritual Energy then he wasn't sure if he really wanted to know how powerful they were compared to them. After all the others were not physically bound like they were, if they really were only souls.

Back in the desert Hitsugaya Toshiro and Hinamori Momo used the coldness of the night to advance farther into less heated areas. It would be better to not constantly fear for the Captain to lose consciousness while moving through the never-ending sand. And now they even knew the direction which they had to head to.

In a mountain-cave Hisagi Shuhei put another branch into their fire. He wanted to head out right away to make sure Rangiku was alright, but Kira reasoned him into staying in their shelter and continuing when the sun had risen. It would be a little less cold then. He also convinced him that if Renji was there he would take care of their friend. He still couldn't wait for the damn sun to rise.