

Multiverse 167

Chapter 167: If You Still Want to Grow Strong

Next, Kaiser and Captain Byakuya Kuchiki ceased conversing; one stood with his arms folded against the wall, while the other closed his eyes in quiet meditation, waiting for time to pass.

After waiting for more than twenty minutes, Chōjirō Sasakibe finally came to notify them, informing both that the Captain inauguration ceremony could now begin.

The two then moved toward the room where the Captains were gathered and entered after the hoisting door had risen.

The scene was just as heavy with atmosphere and Reiatsu as it had been the last time Kaiser came.

In the center stood Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto, with the Captains of Squads 2, 4, 5, and 7 lining his left, and those of Squads 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 standing on his right.

Kaiser looked at Kenpachi Zarakī standing among them, and his brows slightly rose.

The injuries of that battle-crazed man seemed completely healed; at this moment, Kenpachi Zarakī was standing in the midst of Isshin Kurosaki and Mayuri Kurotsuchi, grinning fiercely as if itching for another bout with Kaiser.

Of course, Kaiser paid him no mind; after casting a glance at him, he was immediately drawn to another person.

It was someone who had not come last time, the one absent from that meeting.

He had shoulder-length white hair, and though he looked like he was under thirty, his figure was slender, his posture refined, and his countenance—completely contrary to Kenpachi Zarakī's—was as gentle as that of Sōsuke Aizen.

He was the Captain of Division 13, Floated by Jūshirō Ukitake.

This time, the Captain of Division 13, who often missed meetings due to physical reasons, had finally made an appearance at the Captain inauguration ceremony; upon seeing that Kaiser was looking his way, he immediately returned a friendly smile that exuded a sense of closeness, making anyone who saw him at first glance think he was a very amiable person.

"Is that Jūshirō Ukitake?"

Kaiser secretly observed him for a while and found that no matter his presence or aura, he appeared rather slight, and the Reiatsu he emitted did not seem very strong, as if he might collapse if a strong wind blew upon him.

Such a person seemingly should not be present in a gathering of the top-tier Shinigamis of the entire Soul Society.

However, Kaiser, well-acquainted with the original story, knew full well that despite his feeble appearance, like Shunsui Kyōraku, he was counted among the top Captains, and there were even more special aspects about him that made him by no means one to be taken lightly.

"Thump!"

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto then struck his wooden staff against the floor as Kaiser watched Jūshirō Ukitake, producing a loud sound.

"Come forward and state your name."

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto's solemn voice elicited synchronized head-raising from both Kaiser and Captain Byakuya Kuchiki.

"I am the new Captain of Division 3 of the Gotei 13, Kaiser."

Kaiser responded calmly with a composed expression.

"I am the new Captain of Division 6 of the Gotei 13, Byakuya Kuchiki."

Captain Byakuya Kuchiki repeated in an expressionless tone.

"Excellent."

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto seemed to desire precisely that effect, nodding and saying, "From this day forth, you shall all serve as Captains of the Gotei 13. As those who stand at the pinnacle among Shinigamis, you must fulfill the responsibilities that are rightfully yours."

"Captain of Division 3, Captain Kaiser."

"Captain of Division 6, Captain Kuchiki."

"Return to your positions."

As soon as Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto finished speaking, Kaiser and Byakuya Kuchiki both proceeded to walk toward the formation on his left, taking their respective positions.

This was the proper formation: with Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto at the center as Captain Commander; six Captains standing on the left and six on the right, arranged in order by squad number.

For example, Byakuya Kuchiki, as the Captain of Division 6, stood flanked by the Captains of Squads 5 and 7—that is, Sōsuke Aizen and Sajin Komamura.

Kaiser, as the Captain of Division 3, had on his sides, respectively, the Captain of Division 2, represented by Suì-Fēng, and the Captain of Division 4, represented by Retsu Unohana.

When they took their positions, one of them only stood there coldly, giving no sign of acknowledgment toward Kaiser, while the other smiled gently at him, exuding the demeanor of a mature lady.

Of course, Kaiser was very well aware that the true natures of these two were entirely different from the images they projected.

At first glance, the seemingly cold Suì-Fēng was, in fact, a person whose exterior belied her inner warmth, not as heartless as she appeared.

Likewise, the seemingly gentle and kind Retsu Unohana actually harbored an inner demon almost impossible to subdue, liable at any moment to break free from its restraints.

There were indeed many such individuals among the Captains.

Some who appeared very gentle might actually be extremely ruthless, known only to themselves.

Some who looked very righteous might have already embarked on a crooked path without even realizing it.

Some who appeared lazy or unserious were, in truth, shrewd and adept at using their wits; some even concealed their true identities so thoroughly that they dared not reveal their faces, yet possessed a positivity greater than anyone else.

Among the Captains, a man like Kenpachi Zarakī, who laid his true character bare for all to see, was one of the few who did so.

It was a pity; this fellow was a madman, and in that respect, he was also extremely dangerous.

Not knowing what Kaiser was thinking, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto looked at the array of Captains arranged in vertical rows to his left and right, a rare expression of satisfaction and delight flickering in his eyes.

"After several decades, the positions of the Captains of the Gotei 13 have finally been filled, with all vacancies now completed," he said.

"But, gentlemen, remember not to repeat the mistakes of the past by trampling on the dignity of the Gotei 13."

"You must always remember that you are the pillars of the Soul Society; only while you stand firm will the Soul Society remain unshaken."

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto once again struck his wooden staff; its sound echoed slowly and resoundingly.

"The Captain inauguration ceremony is hereby concluded. Now..."

Next, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto mentioned several matters, such as the investigation results into the incident during the recent internship at the Shin'ō Academy, where Grade 6 and Grade 1 students were involved.

Regrettably, the results yielded nothing.

No matter how much the Squads 2 and 8 investigated or how the Division 12 tracked the source, they ultimately could not identify the culprit behind the incident; they could only deduce a few of the enemy's intentions based on the available intelligence.

The opposing party deliberately severed the connections between the Soul Society and the Academy students participating in the internship and opened the barrier at the training site to send in Hollows, clearly intending to strike the students down.

Whether this action was aimed at just one individual or at all of those present had still not been conclusively determined.

But one thing was certain: the enemy undoubtedly had a thorough understanding of the Soul Society, of Seireitei, and even of the structure of the Gotei 13; otherwise, they would not have been able to so easily sever the link between the Soul Society and the outside, thereby instigating the incident unnoticed.

Furthermore, the Hollows that appeared at the scene, after analysis by the Shinigami Research and Development Institute, were determined to have been subject to artificial modification—their ability to hide Reitsu was the result of such alterations.

Yet it remained terribly regrettable that nobody could determine what technology or theories the enemy had used to accomplish this; Division 12 could only find leftover traces that were essentially scraps, showing no sign of who was responsible.

And what the enemy hoped to achieve by this remained undetermined by the various squads.

With such a less-than-satisfactory investigation outcome, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto was naturally dissatisfied.

Yet he did not give up entirely. Instead, he urged all squads to continue cooperating with the investigation before moving on to other matters.

After raising these issues and discussing them on the spot, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto finally announced the session was adjourned.

The Captains then left the room; some chatted with each other as they departed, some left in silence, and some went over to greet the new Captain, Kaiser, while others paid him no heed—their attitudes clearly reflecting their positions.

Especially Kenpachi Zaraki, who, as expected, clung stubbornly to Kaiser.

"Let's have another bout! Kaiser!"

Kenpachi ZarakI shouted at Kaiser, his voice full of determination.

"You won't refuse, will you? Right?"

Faced with Kenpachi ZarakI's incessant prattle, Kaiser naturally grew irritated.

"No, allow me to refuse," Kaiser replied bluntly, "I do not believe that after just one month, you have grown strong enough to defeat me."

"If you want to challenge me, go back and get stronger first."

Kaiser's words did not deter Kenpachi ZarakI at all.

"In any case, such matters can only be resolved by fighting!" Kenpachi ZarakI grinned broadly.

"To grow strong, one must naturally engage in battle. What could be more conducive to strength than clashing with a formidable opponent?"

... That sort of thing—there is no one else capable of it, right?

Kaiser knew very well that Kenpachi Zarakī was a natural combat genius; the more he fought, the stronger he became—something no one else could achieve like that.

No, wait, maybe even I can do that?

Recalling his previous experiences in the High School DxD world, where he traveled the world and challenged various legendary forces, stimulated by the power of the Dragon, Kaiser realized that the more intense battles he endured, the stronger his power became.

In other words, are we not the same type?

Glancing at Kenpachi Zarakī, who stood before him grinning broadly, Kaiser narrowed his eyes.

"Forget it," he said with a dismissive flick of his tongue, "If you truly want to grow stronger, then go back and figure out a way to know the name of your Zanpakutō."

Kenpachi Zarakī froze.

"Zanpakutō?"

He seemed not to have expected Kaiser to say that.

"That kind of thing is utterly trivial, isn't it?" Kenpachi Zaraki furrowed his brows, saying, "A Zanpakutō is merely a tool for fighting; it doesn't need a name—so long as it can be used to cut, isn't that enough? That's what you've always thought, right?"

Kaiser shook his head and said, "A Zanpakutō is just a tool for battle; it doesn't need a name, as long as it can cut people—haven't you always thought so?"

"Then I ask you, Zaraki: do you like fighting?"

"Of course."

Without hesitation, Kenpachi Zaraki answered.

Then Kaiser, in the most direct manner possible, threw a sentence at him:

"Since you so love fighting, why on earth are you unwilling to even know the name of the tool that helps you fight?"

At these words, Kenpachi Zarakī was completely dumbfounded.

Seeing this, Kaiser spoke solemnly, "I'm not one to spout the old clichés about a Zanpakutō being our partner, our comrade-in-arms."

"How one treats one's Zanpakutō is a personal matter, and no one else should have a say."

"But, Zarakī, if you truly want to challenge me and if you do not unleash your Zanpakutō to release your true power, then forgive me for saying this: you will never be able to defeat me."

That was the truth.

After all, in the last battle, Kaiser did not even use Shikai, let alone Bankai;

He didn't even employ Kidō—Kaiser merely used Zanjutsu, Shunpo, and Reiatsu to confront him head-on, nearly crushing him completely.

So how could the other possibly win?

"...I still have other techniques I haven't used yet."

Kenpachi Zarakī's lips moved slightly before he spoke those words.

This, too, was true.

At the very least, Kaiser knew that Kenpachi Zarakī had once been taught by Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto—the strongest Shinigami in history—in the art of swordsmanship.

Perhaps if Kenpachi Zarakī were to use proper swordsmanship, he might not lose so quickly.

Yet whether he loses quickly or slowly, ultimately, he still loses.

In any case, at this moment, Kaiser had little interest in Kenpachi Zarakī, unless he could unleash his Zanpakutō; that would make for an interesting spectacle.

"Try doing something you've never done before, Zarakī," Kaiser said calmly, "if you truly want to become stronger."

Having said that, Kaiser ceased speaking further and turned to leave, leaving Kenpachi Zarakī in deep thought.

However, before Kaiser had gone far, he encountered another person.

"Captain."

A woman wearing a Lieutenant's Badge on her arm suddenly appeared before Kaiser.

She exuded a rugged, underworld aura, as if she were the wife of a gangster, which made people feel a subtle sense of fear.

Kaiser glanced at her badge and noticed the number "3" embroidered on it.

Indeed, she was the Lieutenant of Division 3—Kaiser's subordinate.

"Are you Chikane Iba?"

Kaiser had already learned of her existence from Chōjirō Sasakibe.

"Indeed, I am Iba."

Chikane Iba looked at Kaiser with a severe gaze, as if appraising him, and said, "I am here to escort you back to the barracks."

Upon hearing this, Kaiser nodded.

"Come on, lead me to the barracks."