

Multiverse 168

Chapter 168: There Must Not Be a Next Time

Division 3, Squad Barracks.

This was a structure built beside the water.

Next to the building was a grove of trees, and in front of the gate, a wooden path was laid down. Though its location lacked the idyllic environment of Division 4's barracks and did not possess the grandeur and majesty of Division 1's barracks, it still gave off a refreshing and serene feeling.

Under Chikane Iba's lead, Kaiser arrived at this barracks and met the Shinigami belonging to Division 3.

They were all gathered in front of Division 3's barracks gate, uniformly dressed in black Shihakushō, Zanpakutōs hanging from their waists, arrayed like a military formation—disciplined and orderly.

"Oh?"

Seeing this, Kaiser stopped walking.

"Is this a welcome party?"

Sensing the Reiatsu diffused in the air, Kaiser cast a half-smile toward Chikane Iba.

"Of course," Chikane Iba replied without changing expression. "This is a necessary ceremony."

"Is that so?" Kaiser replied with a calm expression. "Then why are they all blocking the entrance like this, and releasing their Reiatsu without restraint?"

Rather than a welcoming ceremony, this looked more like a gathering of yakuza preparing to start a turf war.

"I ask for your understanding, Captain," Chikane Iba looked at Kaiser solemnly and said. "The position of Division 3's Captain has been vacant for decades now."

"In other words, we've had no Captain for decades."

"Though I've done my best to maintain Division 3's operations and prevent it from falling apart, the absence of a Captain ultimately left Division 3 inferior among the Gotei 13, bringing us considerable hardship."

"Now that we've finally welcomed a Captain who can lead us—if that person proves to be incompetent, wouldn't it make things even more unbearable for us?"

Chikane Iba spoke these words with exceptional frankness, fully displaying the fearlessness and domineering aura of a yakuza matron.

"So, this is a necessary ceremony."

"Captain, I ask that you prove yourself to them."

"Prove that you have the power to lead them."

This was a bold act.

To dare challenge a Captain—such a thing was no small matter in the hierarchy-obsessed Soul Society.

But Chikane Iba had done it without hesitation, fully proving how desperately Division 3 wanted a truly strong Captain, and demonstrating their doubt toward Kaiser.

They must have known about Kaiser's background, right?

Not yet eighteen even combining life and afterlife, graduated from the Shin'ō Academy after just half a year—such a figure may indeed be a prodigy who shook the history of the Soul Society, but he was still far too young—so young it cast doubt on whether he truly had what it took to be a Captain.

Such doubt—if it were in a combat squad like Division 11—wouldn't end with mere posturing like this. In Division 11, without a real fight to prove yourself, you'd never be accepted by those battle-crazed maniacs.

Though Division 3 wasn't quite like that, under Chikane Iba's command it had taken on some similar yakuza-like qualities. Unless you proved yourself to them, there was no way they would acknowledge you as their boss.

Kaiser could tell that this wasn't spontaneous—it was a test someone had deliberately arranged.

That person was undoubtedly Chikane Iba.

"As expected of someone whom Lieutenant Sasakibe praises highly, Lieutenant Iba," Kaiser said with a smile. "I heard that you often used forceful methods to keep the previous Division 3 Captain in line. Looks like your spirit hasn't changed one bit."

"...That man was too wishy-washy, always timid and spineless. If I hadn't put pressure on him, he'd have never gotten anything done." Chikane Iba was silent for a moment, then said expressionlessly, "It's because of that that idiot met such an end. What a fool."

To speak of her own Captain like this—clearly, this Lieutenant was no pushover.

Too bad, this time, she picked the wrong person to pressure.

"I'm not like Zarakī—I won't draw my blade and cut you down."

Kaiser spoke as he slowly walked forward.

"If, by the time I reach the gate, there's still anyone standing—then let's say I'm unfit to be this squad's Captain."

As he spoke, golden Reiatu surged from his body.

That Reiatu wasn't unleashed in a sudden burst like when facing Kenpachi Zarakī, but rather rose slowly like a rising tide, gradually filling the heavens and the earth.

Thus, while Division 3's members remained at the ready, they suddenly found their vision starting to tremble.

The sky was trembling.

The earth was trembling.

Space itself was trembling.

Even the Reishi in the air trembled, as if scorched by blazing heat, fluctuating violently.

"-----!"

In that moment, every single Division 3 Shinigami—including Chikane Iba—changed expression.

They instinctively activated their Reiatsu, attempting to resist the golden Reiatsu that filled the entire realm. But the moment their Reiatsu began to rise, the golden wave crushed them like an avalanche, utterly overwhelming their spiritual pressure in an instant.

"Thud!"

"Thud!"

"Thud!"

One by one, the Division 3 Shinigami collapsed to the ground as though struck by lightning.

The first to fall were, naturally, the ordinary squad members—unable to muster even a sliver of resistance, they instantly dropped to the ground, their faces frozen in terror.

Next came the Seated Officers—from the lowest rank upward, all the way to Third Seat—they fell or knelt in succession, faces pale, foreheads drenched in sweat.

And last, of course, was Chikane Iba—standing closest to Kaiser and therefore suffering the brunt of it. Yet she was also the last to collapse. Her gaze upon Kaiser's back brimmed with astonishment.

"What an unbelievable Reiatsu..."

Chikane Iba's entire body trembled.

As the Lieutenant of Division 3, she had seen Captain-class Reiatsu before. But to her, this Reiatsu surpassed that of other Captains by a wide margin.

At the very least, the Reiatsu of the previous Captain didn't come close to this.

They weren't even on the same level—leaving Chikane Iba utterly shocked, utterly stunned.

"To think... both are Captains... but his Reiatsu is this much stronger?"

"How... how could this be?"

"Didn't he just graduate from the Academy?"

Could this be the true might of Second-Class Spiritual Power?

Normally, Third-Class Spiritual Power was already enough to be considered Captain-level. Second-Class was only one step above that—but the gap between the two was this vast?

While Chikane Iba was still reeling, Kaiser had already strolled calmly past the Division 3 gate, walking through the rows of collapsed Shinigami.

Along the way, not a single person remained standing. Not a single one could stop him.

"I'm not someone who puts on airs, but if anyone thinks that makes me easy to push around—then I don't mind showing them what temper really looks like."

Without turning around, Kaiser spoke to them with his back facing the crowd.

"So I'll only say this once. All of you, listen carefully."

As he stepped into the barracks, he left them with a single sentence.

"There must not be a next time."

Leaving those words behind, Kaiser vanished into the squad barracks.

And with his departure, the overwhelming Reiatu that had filled heaven and earth dispersed—allowing the Division 3 members to gasp for breath, looking as if they had just survived a great calamity.

Seeing this, Chikane Iba trembled once more.

But this time, it was not from shock.

It was from comfort and exhilaration.

"Looks like Division 3 finally has an incredible Captain."

Thinking back on her hardships over the past decades, Chikane Iba felt like her suffering had finally borne fruit.

"You have ten minutes to pull yourselves together!"

Chikane Iba stood, glaring at the still-collapsed Division 3 Shinigami and bellowed with fury.

"In ten minutes, I want everyone back at their posts!"

"If our Captain sees you in even the slightest disheveled state again—you'd best prepare to commit seppuku on the spot!"

"Is that clear!?"

At her words, the entire Division 3 jolted to attention and rose swiftly to their feet.

""""""Yes!""""""

Leaving their resounding response behind her, Chikane Iba strode quickly into the barracks, chasing after Kaiser.

As Lieutenant, she would not allow herself to fail in her duties.

...

Each Gotei 13 squad's barracks was equipped with an office and a private rest area for the Captain. Division 3's barracks was no exception.

Now that he was officially on duty and back on his home turf, Kaiser went straight to the office, where he received a report from the newly-arrived Chikane Iba.

"Because the Captain's position has been vacant for decades, our Division 3 has lost much of its competitiveness compared to the other squads."

"During those years, some Shinigami originally assigned to Division 3 transferred to other squads, and due to the lack of a Captain, Division 3 became an unpopular choice for new recruits—leading to very few volunteers."

"As a result, we currently have only 147 squad members and officers, with several seated officer positions vacant. We are now the squad with the fewest personnel in the entire Gotei 13."

Chikane Iba reported all of this to Kaiser—not just internal personnel matters, but also operational ones.

"Over the years, I've done my best to keep things running, solving most of the tasks assigned to Division 3, but some matters can only be handled by the Captain. Those items have piled up. Except for expired requests, everything else is here."

Chikane Iba placed a large stack of documents on Kaiser's desk.

"...This really is..."

Looking at the thick stack, Kaiser's eye twitched.

He had anticipated some internal issues within Division 3—but not this many.

There was no helping it. After all, no one had filled the Captain's seat for decades. Even though Chikane Iba was highly capable and had kept everything in order, as she said—some things could only be resolved by a Captain, and otherwise would remain piled up, waiting to be addressed.

Kaiser rubbed his temples and picked up one of the documents to read.

Division 3 was a support squad—their duty was to provide assistance to the operations of the other squads.

No matter which squad encountered difficulties beyond their capabilities, Division 3 was obligated to assist them in resolving the issue.

Because of this, Division 3's responsibilities were the broadest in the Gotei 13.

If Division 11 lacked manpower and needed help in combat, Division 3 had to provide fighters.

If Division 8 needed help gathering intelligence, Division 3 had to provide personnel.

Even if Division 4 was short-staffed and needed help tending to the wounded or patients, Division 3 had to send support.

In such a situation, Division 3 had the most extensive range of duties in the Gotei 13.

Unfortunately, due to the absence of a Captain, Division 3 had suffered a drop in numbers—resulting in all kinds of tasks being delayed.

And that was only the primary tasks. Division 3 also had to deal with secondary operations.

Building maintenance, inventory of supplies, logistics and back-end coordination—all of these also fell under Division 3's responsibilities.

These secondary responsibilities were not unique to Division 3.

For instance, Division 4, in addition to medical duties, was responsible for cleaning all of Seireitei.

Or Division 9, which had an editorial department tasked with reporting duties—and other functions.

Division 6 handled disputes among noble families. Division 5 dealt with educational matters. Division 12 handled communications and similar tasks. Division 2's duties included assassination, surveillance of Shinigami activity, guarding the surveillance towers, searching for missing Shinigamis, and rapidly conveying orders across squads.

Each squad had side jobs like this.

These matters, stacked up over decades—how could there not be a mountain of them?

Had Chikane Iba not been so competent, solving most matters despite the vacancy at the top, Kaiser's desk would have surely been buried beneath paperwork today.

"In other words, the two most urgent issues I need to solve after taking office are the shortage of squad members and the backlog of old administrative tasks?"

Kaiser put down the file and looked at Chikane Iba.

"Yes," Chikane Iba nodded firmly and said. "Especially the latter—it must be addressed no matter what."

Hearing that, Kaiser knew it.

His days ahead were going to be busy indeed.