

## **Multiverse 171**

### Chapter 171: The Adopted Childhood Friend

Division 3, Office.

At the moment, seated upright before the desk was an Academy student in a Shin'ō Academy uniform, appearing somewhat restless and uneasy.

"So this is Kaiser's office?"

Renji Abarai looked around the spacious and well-lit room, feeling as though his horizons had been broadened.

It was hard for him to imagine that such a wide and stylish place was now the private office of his former "rival."

He was still just an Academy student, while the other party already had a personal office like this. Truly, comparing oneself to others only leads to frustration...

As Renji Abarai's thoughts drifted toward such musings, a set of footsteps echoed from outside.

"How long have you been waiting?"

That familiar teasing voice reached Renji Abarai's ears, prompting him to quickly look up.

There, Kaiser walked in alongside Chikane Iba, wearing his familiar smile but dressed in a Shihakushō and sleeveless white Haori.

That silhouette, emblematic of standing atop the Soul Society, made Renji Abarai feel slightly dazed—like the person before him was both familiar and unfamiliar, as if he had become the most familiar stranger.

Of course, that was just Renji Abarai's illusion.

Kaiser was still Kaiser—he had never changed from beginning to end.

"Look at you, still making that dumb expression." Kaiser sat down in front of Renji Abarai and looked at his dazed face with feigned annoyance. "How long has it been? And you're still the same as ever?"

"...It hasn't been that long, right?" Renji Abarai returned to his senses and replied with a wry smile. "I haven't even graduated yet. This little bit of time shouldn't count for much for us souls with spiritual power, right?"

The stronger a soul's Reiryoku, the slower they age—this was a foundational truth of the Soul Society.

"Not bad. You actually used reason to talk back. Seems like you're not completely unchanged—there's been some growth."

Kaiser chuckled as he gestured for Chikane Iba to prepare tea for the two of them.

"Th-thank you."

Seeing Chikane Iba pour tea for him made Renji Abarai visibly tense up.

He couldn't help it. The aura of a yakuza matriarch was too strong on her, making Renji feel like he had walked into a gang boss's lair. He was honestly afraid that if he made one wrong move, he might have a finger chopped off.

Kaiser, of course, understood this feeling. Chikane Iba was known to have used violence to "motivate" the previous Division 3 Captain, and she definitely gave off the vibe of someone who'd seen a lot on the streets.

Unfortunately for her, Kaiser was not the former Captain of Division 3. He didn't tolerate being pushed around and could be quite forceful when needed. Chikane Iba, knowing this, usually held herself back in front of him—otherwise, conflict would have been inevitable.

"So, what brings you here today?" Kaiser sipped his tea casually, looking at the nervous Renji Abarai with that same teasing smile. "Don't tell me you just dropped by to chat. I've been Captain for a while now, and this is the first time you've come to visit."

...How could an Academy student like me just walk into a Gotei 13 barracks to have tea with a Captain?

Renji Abarai complained in his heart.

"By the way, where are Kira and Hinamori?" Kaiser asked, noticing that Renji came alone. "How are they doing now?"

"They're doing great," Renji Abarai answered without hesitation. "After you graduated, Class One finally wasn't ruled by just you. Everyone started excelling in their own areas."

"Hinamori is now ranked first in Kidō among students of the same year, with a huge lead over second place."

"Kira has excellent grades across all subjects—top-tier in every class."

"As for me, in Kendō, I'm number one across the entire year. Even the sixth-years can't beat me."

As he said this, Renji Abarai seemed rather proud.

After Kaiser left, the atmosphere in Class One changed quite a bit—it wasn't as harmonious anymore.

Those noble brats who used to keep their heads down because of Kaiser's presence began to reveal their true colors after his departure, resuming their discrimination against Rukongai-born commoners like him.

While no one directly targeted them, Renji still felt the sting of being looked down upon.

That made him quite frustrated. So together with Kira, Hinamori, and others, they took the top spots across the board, thoroughly suppressing the noble students and forcing them to grit their teeth in frustration.

Thinking about that made Renji Abarai feel quite pleased, though he didn't realize that Chikane Iba was already eyeing him.

To score number one in Zanjutsu across all year levels—even beating sixth-years—this was undoubtedly a promising talent worth focusing on.

"Is that so?" Kaiser remarked, a bit sentimental. "Seems like you've all been working hard."

"Of course." Renji Abarai finally found his rhythm again. Looking at Kaiser wearing that white Captain's Haori, he said solemnly, "We didn't want to be left behind, not even from your shadow. So we had no choice but to push ourselves."

The things Kaiser said that day had left a deep impression on them.

Because of that, they all worked harder—Renji, Kira, even Momo Hinamori.

Especially Hinamori. Though she was a small girl, she worked even harder than he and Kira. It was like she had found a crucial life goal. She hardly even went home during breaks, often training alone in the Academy.

To be honest, Renji Abarai deeply admired Hinamori—she was even more driven than him.

In terms of Kidō, Hinamori truly had talent. Even the Kidō Corps had started paying attention to her and were considering recruiting her.

Renji Abarai himself had almost zero talent in Kidō. To this day, he was still the worst in his year, and even underclassmen were better than him in that area.

But Renji no longer felt bitter. He had confirmed his own gift lay in Zanjutsu—he was destined to be a swordsman and would walk the path of a blade wielder.

Lately, Renji had even been hearing a voice in his dreams—faint, but seemingly trying to tell him something.

He naturally knew what this phenomenon signified, and it thrilled him.

If Kaiser knew about this, he would surely be amazed again, right?

Among all six years of Shin'ō Academy students, hardly anyone managed to reach Shikai before graduating. Even in the Gotei 13, only Seated Officers typically attained it. Yet Renji Abarai already showed signs of hearing his Zanpakutō's voice. No wonder he'd go on to master Bankai and become a Captain-level Shinigami.

"That's good."

Kaiser smiled and nodded, then returned to the main point.

"So, tell me—why did you come looking for me?"

At those words, Renji Abarai put away his smile, and his expression turned hesitant.

"Hurry up and say it." Kaiser rolled his eyes. "When did you become such a wishy-washy person?"

"...I just don't know how to say it," Renji sighed, then seemed to steel himself as he looked at Kaiser. "Did you know that Rukia was adopted?"

Those words left Kaiser momentarily stunned.

"Rukia was adopted?"

Kaiser met Renji Abarai's gaze.

"Yeah." Renji Abarai nodded firmly. "And she was adopted by the Kuchiki Clan, the head of the Four Great Noble Clans."

Kaiser turned to look at Chikane Iba.

"I've heard about this," she said immediately, catching on. "The Captain of Division 6 visited Shin'ō Academy and formally adopted a student on behalf of the Kuchiki Clan as his younger sister."

"I believe the name was Kuchiki Rukia?"

"This happened quite a while ago."

Upon hearing this, Kaiser nodded and muttered to himself.

"So Rukia was finally adopted by the Kuchiki Clan, huh..."

Kuchiki Rukia—that was the full name of the Rukia Kaiser remembered.

"How is she doing now?" Kaiser asked, turning back to Renji.

"Rukia already graduated from Shin'ō Academy," Renji said gloomily. "Now that she's the Kuchiki Clan's daughter, she didn't need to waste time in the Academy. The Kuchiki family arranged elite Shinigami instructors for her and secured her placement in the Gotei 13."

"I see." Kaiser now understood why Renji had come to see him. "So you came to me because you want to know how your childhood friend is doing now?"

"...Something like that." Renji Abarai hung his head. "Ever since Rukia was adopted by the Kuchiki Clan, I haven't been able to get any news about her. I had no choice but to come to you and ask for help."

It really was a rather pitiful situation.

Even though it was only an adoption, Rukia was now a bona fide member of the Kuchiki Clan—a noble, no longer just a Rukongai-born commoner like Renji.

She was now the daughter of the most prestigious noble house. If Renji tried to approach her, he'd probably be blocked—or worse, treated unfairly.

They were childhood friends who grew up together, but now it had come to this. No wonder Renji had come looking for him.

Still, this was probably Renji's own fault, wasn't it?

Kaiser vaguely remembered that in the original story, when Rukia was adopted, she asked Renji what he thought. And this guy not only gave her his blessing but also deliberately distanced himself from her afterward.

So now he was just reaping what he sowed?

Thinking that, Kaiser rolled his eyes at Renji again, making the latter feel both confused and lost in thought.