

Multiverse 173

Chapter 173: The True Essence of a Shinigami

Within Seireitei, at a spot some distance away from the Division 6 barracks...

There stood a hill, neither too tall nor too short, neither too large nor too small.

The hill seemed to have been deliberately preserved to blend with the landscape. Around it grew many cherry blossom trees. When the wind blew, countless petals would flutter down, creating a strikingly beautiful scene.

"Whoosh!"

At a certain moment, two figures suddenly appeared midair above the hill, and each struck out with a palm, landing hits on one another.

"Boom!"

A pair of muffled impacts sounded simultaneously. The two entwined figures separated midair and fell to the ground, landing within the grove of cherry blossoms.

Kaiser and Byakuya Kuchiki faced each other at a distance, one with a smiling face, the other with cold frost, creating a stark contrast.

"You're that worked up over it?" Kaiser chuckled and said, "It's not even that big a secret, is it? I didn't think you'd get so riled up that you'd attack me outright!"

Kaiser's words did nothing to change Byakuya Kuchiki's stance.

He continued to glare coldly at Kaiser, and only after a pause did he speak.

"You talk too much, Kaiser."

This time, it was no mere statement of fact—it was clearly a displeased warning.

"You just talk too little," Kaiser retorted bluntly. "If you truly had Rukia's best interests at heart, you'd have told her everything instead of keeping it all bottled up. You clearly see how miserable she is, yet pretend like nothing's wrong, like nothing ever happened."

Kaiser's pointed criticism prompted Byakuya Kuchiki to silently draw his Zanpakutō from beneath his Captain's Haori.

Seeing this, Kaiser raised a brow and let his mouth curl upward.

"Planning to silence me with murder?"

Kaiser's teasing words were met with Byakuya's cold voice.

"On the day of the Captain Appointment Ceremony, I said that if the chance arises, I'd have you show me your strength," Byakuya said flatly. "Seems today is just that opportunity."

"I don't mind at all." Kaiser placed his hand on the hilt of his Zanpakutō at his waist, unfazed by the swelling Reiatsu coming from Byakuya, and smiled calmly. "If I win, I suppose I'll have the right to say whatever I want, huh?"

"You won't have that chance." Byakuya declared without hesitation, "A so-called genius from Rukongai can't possibly defeat me."

As his words fell, Byakuya's figure vanished from his original spot.

"_____"

In the slowed passage of time, Byakuya's body moved like a gliding blur through space, trailing afterimages as he passed by Kaiser's side and appeared behind him.

"Clang!"

At an unknown moment, a silver blade shot out—Byakuya's Zanpakutō thrust toward Kaiser's back, but struck against a circular shield that had also appeared at some unknown moment.

"Bakudō #39: Enkōsen."

Only then did Kaiser's incantation resound, as if belatedly, causing Byakuya's pupils to contract.

"Hadō #4: Byakurai."

The next moment, from Kaiser's side, still facing away from Byakuya, a beam of lightning tore through his Haori and shot forth toward Byakuya, forcing him to vanish with Shunpo to evade the incoming white lightning.

"That was Senka, right?"

Kaiser finally turned around, withdrew his hand from beneath his arm, dispersing the crackling lightning at his fingertips, and looked toward Byakuya who had reappeared some distance away.

"Senka—flashing blossom—is a special type of Shunpo that allows one to instantly reposition behind the opponent and pierce and destroy their Saketsu and Hakusui. It's a variant enhanced with rotation, one that only a very few Shinigami can master."

Kaiser recited the technique Byakuya had just used and continued:

"It may be special, but it's not that impressive. It might be useful against those far beneath you in strength, but to use it against another Captain-level opponent— isn't that a bit overconfident?"

Byakuya's eyes narrowed slightly at Kaiser's assessment.

"To see through Senka is the minimum requirement to be my opponent," he said coldly. "Or did you think that was my true strength?"

"Whether it was or not doesn't matter. Either way, it didn't work," Kaiser replied, his tone cooling. "One good turn deserves another—your turn to take a hit from me."

With that, Kaiser's figure vanished from where he stood.

Byakuya's expression shifted as he swiftly retreated.

"Shing!"

A cold gleam of a blade grazed Byakuya's chin, flashing past the spot he had stood just a second ago.

Kaiser's figure appeared before Byakuya like a flash, swinging his Zanpakutō in a sudden draw cut that sliced through the air—but struck nothing.

"Hadō #4: Byakurai!"

Byakuya immediately cast a Kidō, thrusting out his finger, and just like Kaiser earlier, fired a beam of white lightning toward Kaiser's chest.

But as the bolt surged forth, Kaiser didn't dodge. He slapped it aside with his palm.

"Boom!"

The lightning exploded in a brilliant flash against Kaiser's palm.

Kaiser had smacked away Byakuya's Byakurai with a single slap, dispersing the lightning.

"What?!"

This astonishing scene finally cracked Byakuya's frozen expression.

Kaiser took the chance to close in on Byakuya, his Zanpakutō cutting through the air in a wide arc, aiming for Byakuya's chest.

"Slash!"

As the blade flashed, a spray of blood followed.

Kaiser's lightning-quick strike ultimately didn't hit Byakuya's chest—but his hand instead.

At the very last moment, Byakuya raised his arm to block Kaiser's Zanpakutō, avoiding a fatal wound to the chest. However, blood splattered profusely from his arm.

"Whoosh!"

Byakuya used Shunpo again to put distance between them.

"You..."

Feeling the stinging pain in his arm, and watching the blood drip onto the ground, Byakuya stared at Kaiser with a grim and sharp expression.

"So? My Shunpo's not bad, right?" Kaiser swung his Zanpakutō, flinging the blood from the blade. "I may not have any fancy tricks like you, but when it comes to pure speed, I think I'm faster. What do you think?"

After all, since becoming a Captain, Shunpo was one of the techniques Kaiser had focused on relentlessly. Outside of Kidō, it was the one thing he had trained constantly. After so long, how could he not have improved?

"...You think Shunpo alone will allow you to defeat me?"

Byakuya clenched his bleeding hand, his voice cold enough to make one's skin crawl.

"What do you think?" Kaiser smirked. "All I know is that if this keeps up, you'll never win."

Byakuya didn't retort—he only slowly began to speak.

"Zan-Ken-Sō-Ki—Zanjutsu, Hakuda, Hohō, and Kidō—these are only the most basic combat arts of a Shinigami."

He slowly raised his Zanpakutō before him.

"The true essence of a Shinigami lies in their Zanpakutō," Byakuya declared in a chilling tone. "It's a power that people like you and Kenpachi Zarakī will never understand."

Because only Kaiser and Kenpachi Zarakī had become Captains without using Bankai.

"Allow me to show you a glimpse of that power."

Byakuya lowered his eyes. The Reiatsu surrounding him suddenly surged.

"It's coming now?"

Kaiser naturally understood what Byakuya was about to do. His gaze flashed faintly, a flicker of anticipation stirring in his heart.

Then, he heard Byakuya's voice.

"Scatter, Senbonzakura."

As those words were spoken, the blade of Byakuya's Zanpakutō changed.

It gleamed with a pink hue, and then, like cherry blossoms scattered by the wind, the blade turned into countless petals drifting through the air.

The petals danced like they were carried by the breeze, drifting forward toward Kaiser—beautiful and serene.

Yet, to Kaiser's eyes, this beautiful and serene scenery looked more like a ferocious beast.

"Whoosh!"

Kaiser suddenly used Shunpo to distance himself, letting the petals fall where he had stood moments before.

An unbelievable sight followed.

"Slash!" "Slash!" "Slash!"...

The petals that struck the ground cut it to shreds as if assaulted by hundreds, even thousands, of blades—leaving countless slash marks in an instant.

Dust flew, stones scattered, and the graceful petals rose once more, swarming toward Kaiser like an unending horde of bees.

"Hadō #31: Shakkahō!"

Kaiser extended his palm and cast a Hadō spell. Crimson fire exploded from his hand like a cannonball, blasting toward the incoming petals.

"Boom!"

With a burst of flame, the petals were scattered and blown away.

But soon, the petals returned with the breeze, clustering together again, flying toward Kaiser once more.

"Boom!"

Kaiser fired another Shakkahō, blasting them away again, only to watch them regroup and descend once more.

"It's useless."

Byakuya's voice floated over.

"Though Senbonzakura's blades are small, they're extremely difficult to destroy. That level of Hadō can't possibly scatter a thousand blades, nor can it help you evade a thousand strikes at such close range."

Senbonzakura—the name of Byakuya Kuchiki's Zanpakutō—after release, its blade disintegrated into thousands of tiny blades invisible to the naked eye. These blades were under Byakuya's control, cutting the enemy from all directions, reducing them to pieces.

When these blades reflected the light while fluttering, they looked like falling cherry blossoms—thus the name, Senbonzakura.

The petals appearing before Kaiser were in fact thousands of blades—thousands of invisible swords.

"Fade away alongside the cherry blossoms."

Byakuya controlled Senbonzakura and sent the petals surging toward Kaiser.

"Boom!"

Just as Senbonzakura was about to engulf him, an overwhelming Reiatsu erupted from Kaiser.