

Multiverse 176

Chapter 176: A Special Zanpakutō

Division 1 barracks, Captain's conference room...

"Don!"

A loud thud from a wooden staff rang out, fully expressing the fury in its wielder's heart.

"What disgraceful conduct!"

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto's face was filled with anger as he looked at Kaiser and Byakuya Kuchiki standing before him. His voice was heavy and brimming with authority.

"As those who stand at the peak of the Shinigami, as Captains of the Gotei 13, you two should be setting an example for others!"

"And the result?"

"You actually engaged in battle inside Seireitei, a place we are meant to protect—and you did so without even issuing a lockdown!"

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto truly appeared enraged, or rather, deeply disappointed, to the point that his tone grew heavier with each word.

"Even if your tenures as Captains are short, that is no excuse for your wanton behavior!"

"Especially you, Byakuya Kuchiki!"

"To cross blades with a comrade who is not your enemy, and even use your Bankai—were you intending to kill him!?"

Throughout Yamamoto's reprimand, Byakuya did not utter a single rebuttal. He simply lowered his eyes, expressionless, and listened in silence—whether or not he felt regret was unclear.

His Shihakushō had already been restored, and his injuries had been healed by Retsu Unohana, who arrived later. Only the bandage wrapped around his forehead signaled he'd been hurt. Other than that, he showed no trace of his previous disheveled state.

Kaiser, in contrast, had remained uninjured from start to finish, and his Captain's Haori was still completely intact. Though he stood beside Byakuya and accepted the scolding, his unconcerned, aloof attitude made it clear how little he cared.

Who was Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto? How could he possibly fail to notice that these two had not the slightest trace of remorse?

And so, Yamamoto grew even angrier.

"Shunsui! Jūshirō!"

He called for the Captains of Division 8 and Division 13.

"Yes, yes."

"Sensei?"

Shunsui Kyōraku and Jūshirō Ukitake responded—one lazily, the other with puzzlement.

It's worth noting that both were Yamamoto's former students.

They were among the first generation of students admitted when the Shin'ō Academy was founded—seniors to Kaiser.

At that time, Yamamoto himself was both the Academy's founder and headmaster, often giving lectures. Thus, he was their instructor, and the two sometimes addressed him as "sensei."

Naturally, they were also the ones Yamamoto trusted most—his personally guided students.

Now, Yamamoto summoned them.

"Take their Zanpakutō. Until they've reflected deeply, neither of them is permitted to carry their swords!"

This punishment could be considered severe—or not.

Severe, because the Zanpakutō is a Shinigami's other half. To take it away is akin to removing half their body and power. The impact is no small matter.

But not severe, because many areas within Seireitei forbid the carrying of Zanpakutō. Ordinary Shinigami are often required to leave theirs behind during important events. So removing one's Zanpakutō is not unheard of within the Gotei 13.

Captains did enjoy more leeway—except for highly important occasions, they were generally permitted to carry their blades, even during Captain meetings in Division 1's barracks. But they, too, had moments when they couldn't carry them—so this wasn't completely unacceptable.

Yamamoto likely issued this punishment as a means of reflection. He wasn't about to confiscate their Zanpakutō permanently. Such a punishment was reserved for Shinigami guilty of serious crimes. Even those imprisoned for minor infractions could still keep their swords.

The incident with Kaiser and Byakuya wasn't considered serious. Yamamoto had only said they were "disgraceful," not "criminal." So there was no question of permanent confiscation.

Byakuya, understanding this, voiced no objections and handed his Zanpakutō to Jūshirō Ukitake.

Kaiser likewise removed his sheathed Zanpakutō and handed it to Shunsui Kyōraku, looking utterly indifferent.

He truly didn't care—because his Zanpakutō couldn't be taken from him.

As a designated exclusive weapon recognized by authority, as long as Kaiser willed it, he could summon it back with a single thought. Even if it were sealed or thrown into the Dangai, it would instantly return to his side.

Only if it were placed in another fantasy world—or inside the Fantasy Library—might its return be hindered. Otherwise, no matter what method was used or what state it fell into, Kaiser could instantly recall it without delay.

Even if someone had ill intent and tried to destroy it, Kaiser's Zanpakutō would regenerate within him, perfectly restored.

With that in mind, Kaiser cared little about the fate of his Zanpakutō—it would always return when he needed it.

However, while Kaiser didn't care—his Zanpakutō did.

Even the Ser-Veresta disliked being touched by anyone other than Kaiser, let alone the blade that stood above all others.

It acknowledged only Kaiser. It would acknowledge no one else.

So, when Kaiser removed his Zanpakutō and handed it to Shunsui Kyōraku, the blade erupted.

"BOOM!"

A golden Reiatsu, even more terrifying and overwhelming than when Kaiser released his full power, exploded from the Zanpakutō, sweeping across everyone in the room.

"Wha...?!"

Shunsui Kyōraku, who had just reached out to receive the sword, was the first to be engulfed by the Reiatsu. His expression changed drastically, and his knees buckled—he dropped to the floor, kneeling.

"This is bad!"

The other Captains, who had remained silent until now, watching Yamamoto reprimand Kaiser and Byakuya, all turned pale when the monstrous Reiatsu burst forth. One by one, they dropped to a knee without exception.

Even Byakuya, kneeling from the pressure of the overwhelming Reiatsu surging beside him, widened his eyes in disbelief as he looked at Kaiser's Zanpakutō.

Even Sōsuke Aizen, who had stood quietly with a warm smile behind his glasses throughout the meeting, finally showed a shift in expression. His body bent under the oppressive spiritual force, and though he resisted, even unleashing hidden power in secret, he could not stop his knees from touching the floor. His signature smile vanished for the first time.

Among everyone present, only two remained standing.

One was Kaiser himself, who still held out the sword, momentarily stunned by what had happened, yet unaffected by the Reiatsu.

The other was Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto.

He immediately opened his eyes, muscles tensed, resisting the overwhelming Reiatsu with sheer force of will while staring intently at the blade in Kaiser's hand, his eyes gleaming.

The overwhelming Reiatsu, though causing no tangible damage, affected everything in its reach, enveloping the entire Division 1 barracks and surrounding area.

Every Shinigami within the vicinity—from ordinary Division Members to high-ranking Seated Officers—fell unconscious the moment the Reiatsu appeared. Even Vice-Captains, closest in strength to Captains, were no exception.

"Enough!"

Finally, Kaiser came to his senses. Seeing all the kneeling Captains with grim expressions, he hurriedly spoke to his Zanpakutō.

"Stop releasing your Reiatsu!"

At his words, the blade in Kaiser's hand slowly ceased its output, withdrawing its Reiatsu until it vanished completely.

The Captains finally felt the pressure ease. But each of them stared at Kaiser's Zanpakutō with astonishment.

The room grew unnaturally silent, oppressively heavy, and eerily strange. Kaiser, bathed in their gazes, scratched his head with an innocent look.

"This isn't my doing. You all saw it."

No one responded—but their gazes toward Kaiser's Zanpakutō changed.

That blade was still just as ornate, still exuding its noble aura, and still, like before, had not been released. It remained in its Asauchi state.

And yet, in a form that should not reveal any power or special traits, it had broken convention—releasing Reiatsu that even Captains could not withstand.

It was... unbelievable.

Even Yamamoto gave Kaiser a long look and said:

"Your Zanpakutō is indeed quite special."

The Captains had noticed something during Kaiser's earlier battle with Kenpachi Zaraki—but no one had expected it to be this special.

For a Zanpakutō in its unreleased state to emit Reiatsu... to express will... and even force Captains to kneel with its aura—this went beyond "special." It was terrifying.

Holding such a Zanpakutō... just how powerful was this man?

Several Captains stared at Kaiser, that question growing in their hearts.

Even Sōsuke Aizen lowered his head, the glint on his glasses hiding his expression.

Byakuya, remembering their duel, unconsciously clenched his hand.

He suddenly realized—Kaiser may not have used Bankai, but he could use Shikai.

And during their fight, he had never once released his Zanpakutō.

Despite that, Byakuya had been forced to use Bankai... and nearly lost.

If it were an ordinary Zanpakutō, even releasing it wouldn't add much strength.

But... could Kaiser's Zanpakutō possibly be ordinary?

Quite the opposite. That blade was undoubtedly powerful—so powerful it could suppress Captain-level Shinigami with Reiatsu alone, even without being released.

And if it were released... how strong would it become?

Thinking of this, Byakuya's grip only tightened further.

On a side note, not all Captains were present.

Kenpachi Zaraki, it was said, had gotten lost halfway and was still wandering.

Mayuri Kurotsuchi, having detected Kaiser and Byakuya's Reiatsu from the Shinigami Research and Development Institute, apparently had no interest in what they were doing—and thus didn't come.

Had those two been here, their reactions would surely have been intense.

One, a battle maniac, would be drawn to the power Kaiser's blade displayed.

The other, a mad scientist, would undoubtedly be fascinated by the sword's uniqueness.

Fortunately, they weren't here—and Kaiser avoided being harassed by two lunatics.

"Let it be."

Yamamoto seemed to have calmed down. He glanced once more at Kaiser's Zanpakutō and said:

"You two will return to your barracks for reflection. For one month, you are not permitted to leave."

"Dismissed."

With that, Yamamoto turned and departed.

The others looked at one another for a moment, then stood and left, each giving Kaiser a meaningful look as they passed.

"...Interesting."

Sōsuke Aizen, who would normally stay to chat with Kaiser after meetings, didn't linger this time. He adjusted his glasses, smiled, and turned away.

Only Byakuya remained, still staring at Kaiser even after standing.

"What?" Kaiser stroked his Zanpakutō's hilt, calming it down, and snapped at him. "Still want to fight?"

Byakuya didn't answer right away. He stared at Kaiser for a while, then finally said:

"If there's a chance... show me your Zanpakutō's true power and form."

His words closely echoed what he had said during their joint inauguration.

Only now, his interest had shifted—from Kaiser's reputation as a genius to his Zanpakutō.

Leaving those words behind, Byakuya turned and walked away without hesitation.

"Take care of Rukia."

Kaiser's voice floated after him.

"If you don't want to regret it one day."

Byakuya's footsteps faltered slightly, then resumed—he left the room.

The room was left with only Kaiser, who continued to gently stroke the hilt of his Zanpakutō and murmured to himself.

"I've done all I can. I've said all that needed to be said."

"If you still want to know about Rukia... come ask yourself."

"Renji..."

With that, Kaiser sheathed his Zanpakutō at his waist and left.

After all, he still had to return to his barracks and serve his confinement.