

Multiverse 185

Chapter 185: I'm Older Than You...

At this moment, Kaiser had already recognized the identity of the woman drinking in broad daylight.

She was Rangiku Matsumoto, the former Lieutenant of Division 10, currently the Third Seat of Division 10, and also Gin Ichimaru's childhood friend—the primary reason Gin Ichimaru had joined the Gotei 13 and become a close associate of Sōsuke Aizen.

She and Gin Ichimaru had entered the Shin'ō Academy together, but Gin Ichimaru graduated and left after only one year, and later deliberately distanced himself from her, leaving her confused even now as to why her childhood friend had become like that.

Now seeing her drinking during the day, Kaiser knew that while she appeared cheerful on the surface, there was always a faint flash of complexity and pain in her eyes.

"Shiro, Rangiku-san."

At this moment, Momo Hinamori spoke up, calling out to the two who were arguing.

"Momo?" Tōshirō Hitsugaya turned around. Seeing Kaiser and Momo Hinamori, he was first stunned, then exclaimed in surprise, "And Captain Kaiser? Why are you two here?"

Not only did Tōshirō Hitsugaya see Kaiser and Momo Hinamori—Rangiku Matsumoto also saw them.

"Isn't this little Momo?" Rangiku Matsumoto seemed truly drunk, raising the bottle in her hand with a smile and saying to them, "Even Captain Kaiser came? Wanna have a few drinks with me?"

Before Kaiser and Momo Hinamori could even respond, Tōshirō Hitsugaya couldn't stand it anymore.

"Stop being a drunken fool, Matsumoto! That's a Captain—watch your attitude!"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya scolded Rangiku Matsumoto like a little adult.

"Yes, yes." Rangiku Matsumoto casually said to Kaiser, "Greetings, Captain Kaiser. I'm the demoted Third Seat of Division 10, Rangiku Matsumoto. Please take care of me."

"You..." Tōshirō Hitsugaya's veins popped on his forehead.

"Alright, you two don't need to mind me." Seeing that they were about to argue again, Kaiser quickly spoke up, "I just came with Momo to check on Hitsugaya. It's not for anything official, so there's no need to be formal."

"You hear that, Lieutenant Hitsugaya?" Rangiku Matsumoto immediately burst into laughter, joyfully saying, "Even Captain Kaiser doesn't mind, but you're still being all uptight."

"That's because you're too unreliable!" Tōshirō Hitsugaya snapped angrily. "Captain Shiba was already unreliable, and you, the Lieutenant, were also unreliable. If even I started slacking off, Division 10 would've collapsed long ago!"

From those words, one could tell just how hard Tōshirō Hitsugaya had been working all this time.

"Isn't this all to help you grow stronger?" Rangiku Matsumoto didn't reflect on it at all and instead laughed drunkenly, "You're someone both the Captain and I have high hopes for. If it weren't for Captain Kaiser shining so brightly, you'd definitely be the most talented Shinigami in the entire Gotei 13."

"Really, if you hadn't lost to that bastard... you'd be a Captain by now."

"That's what they call it, right? The capable bear more burden?"

Rangiku Matsumoto's messy words made Tōshirō Hitsugaya visibly more agitated.

Even Momo Hinamori gave a wry smile. Looking at the floor full of empty bottles, she said in mild shock, "Just how much did you drink, Rangiku-san?"

"How much?" Rangiku Matsumoto raised the bottle, her mind a bit foggy, and muttered, "Probably not that much?"

"Not that much?" Tōshirō Hitsugaya said coldly from the side, "Since Captain Ichimaru took office and I became Lieutenant, every time I see her, she always has a bottle in her hand."

"Rangiku-san, please drink a little less," Momo Hinamori said worriedly, "If you keep drinking like this, even a Shinigami could get into trouble."

"What trouble?" Rangiku Matsumoto said dismissively, "Worst case, I'll go to Division 4 and ask Captain Unohana to treat me."

With that, she continued drinking, and Momo Hinamori quickly moved closer to try to dissuade her.

"Sigh..."

Tōshirō Hitsugaya could only sigh and stop paying attention to Rangiku Matsumoto. Instead, he turned to Kaiser.

"Captain Kaiser, you came to see me?" Tōshirō Hitsugaya returned to the main topic, saying, "Don't worry, I'm doing fine."

Tōshirō Hitsugaya assumed that Kaiser and Momo Hinamori had come because of his promotion to Lieutenant.

Unfortunately, he guessed wrong.

"Just like you said yourself—your former Captain and former Lieutenant were both unreliable. As the former Third Seat of Division 10, you were taking on responsibilities far beyond your position. For someone like you, even after becoming Lieutenant, it shouldn't feel like much of an adjustment."

Kaiser smiled at Tōshirō Hitsugaya and got straight to the point.

"We didn't come because we were worried about whether you could adapt to the Lieutenant's duties. Momo said your condition hasn't been great lately, so we came to check in."

Upon hearing this, Tōshirō Hitsugaya fell silent.

"Still thinking about the last match against Gin Ichimaru?"

Kaiser sat cross-legged and asked Tōshirō Hitsugaya.

"...I was just wondering—if I'd had a little more time, could I have done better in that battle?"

That was what Tōshirō Hitsugaya said.

"Probably not," Kaiser replied bluntly, showing no concern for Hitsugaya's feelings, "As long as you can't skillfully wield Hyōrinmaru, it'll be nearly impossible for you to defeat Gin Ichimaru."

Kaiser's blunt words didn't upset Tōshirō Hitsugaya.

"Captain Kaiser also believes my defeat was due to my lack of proficiency with Hyōrinmaru?"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya sat upright in front of Kaiser, his expression serious as he asked.

"Of course," Kaiser replied without hesitation, "Hyōrinmaru is the strongest Ice-type Zanpakutō. Do you know who holds the previous strongest Zanpakutō?"

Of course, Tōshirō Hitsugaya knew.

Though he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, the tales about that person and that Zanpakutō had already become an indelible part of Soul Society's history.

"Ryūjin Jakka—the strongest and oldest Fire-type Zanpakutō," Tōshirō Hitsugaya murmured.

"The wielder of that Zanpakutō is the strongest Shinigami in a thousand years—the Captain Commander and founder of the Gotei 13, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto."

That's right—Ryūjin Jakka's original owner was Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto, the current strongest Shinigami.

"Hyōrinmaru, as the strongest Ice/Snow-type Zanpakutō, should be on par with Ryūjin Jakka, the strongest Fire-type Zanpakutō," Kaiser said calmly. "With Ryūjin Jakka, the Captain Commander has become the strongest and is recognized as having the greatest offensive power in the Soul Society."

"Do you think you can compare to him?"

Faced with this question, Tōshirō Hitsugaya shook his head without hesitation.

Same as before—though he'd never seen him in action, just the stories alone had already elevated the man to legend. Even a brief understanding was enough to keep Hitsugaya from ever claiming he could match him.

Bluntly put, that man could probably defeat him with a single strike—even if he used Bankai.

Captain-level?

Ordinary Captains in front of that man were like toddlers who had just learned to walk—there was no need for any drawn-out fight. One strike, maybe two, at most three—problem solved.

Let alone a newly promoted Captain-level Shinigami like Tōshirō Hitsugaya—even the veteran Captains would struggle to survive three moves against Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto.

Only those at the very top among the Captains might be able to trade blows with him—but the odds of defeat were still enormous.

It could be said that Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto wasn't even in the same tier as the other Captains. He had already transcended the level of a Captain entirely.

Compared to someone like that, even if Tōshirō Hitsugaya had his head slammed in a door, he wouldn't think he was qualified.

"If you could completely master Hyōrinmaru's power, then you'd absolutely be qualified to face someone like him," Kaiser looked at Tōshirō Hitsugaya and said. "But unfortunately, you're too young, and your use of Hyōrinmaru is still shallow. That's why you couldn't even beat Gin Ichimaru."

"Young..." Tōshirō Hitsugaya muttered with some dissatisfaction, "I'm actually older than you..."

Kaiser twitched at the corner of his mouth.

If speaking purely in terms of age, then yes, Tōshirō Hitsugaya was indeed older than Kaiser.

Tōshirō Hitsugaya was definitely over a hundred years old, while Kaiser, who looked older, probably hadn't even lived half as long when combining his past and present life.

Calling someone over a hundred "too young" ... something was off here.

But... this was the norm in Soul Society.

"So, just tell me—am I right or not?" Kaiser said unreasonably. "Do you really think you've already mastered Hyōrinmaru's power?"

"Of course not," Tōshirō Hitsugaya shook his head and said, "If I had fully mastered Hyōrinmaru, there's no way I'd have lost to Captain Ichimaru—I still have that much confidence."

"Exactly." Kaiser curled his lips and said, "In my opinion, you've progressed way too smoothly and become too eager for results. That's why you're in this situation."

"Normally, someone capable of achieving Bankai would've already fully mastered their Shikai."

"But you?"

"In my view, you haven't even figured out Hyōrinmaru's Shikai properly, yet you rushed into mastering Bankai—how could you not lose?"

Kaiser spoke calmly and with authority.

"Gin Ichimaru's Zanpakutō ability isn't particularly impressive, but his Bankai is quite powerful."

"From the look of it, he has already mastered both Shikai and Bankai. You, on the other hand, haven't even gotten a passing grade with either."

"That's why, before releasing your Zanpakutō, you could still fight evenly. But once you released it, you fell behind immediately—and the gap only widened after Bankai. It would've been strange not to lose."

Those words gave Tōshirō Hitsugaya some new insight.

"So, if I want to master Hyōrinmaru's power, I should start from Shikai instead of Bankai?"

That question made Kaiser smile.

"Come with me."

Saying this, Kaiser stood up and walked out of the room.

"Captain!"

Momo Hinamori moved as if to follow.

"You stay here, Momo," Kaiser stopped her and pointed at Rangiku Matsumoto, "Take care of her."

Rangiku Matsumoto was already completely drunk—barely able to speak.

"Alright..."

Momo Hinamori hesitated for a moment, then nodded.

Only then did Kaiser leave the room.

"...Matsumoto is yours to look after, Momo."

Tōshirō Hitsugaya took a deep breath and said to Momo Hinamori, then stood up and followed after Kaiser.

As he stepped out, Kaiser subtly glanced toward a nearby corner, a faint smile curling at the edge of his lips before he continued walking toward the exit of the barracks.

Inside the room, only Momo Hinamori and Rangiku Matsumoto remained.

"Rangiku-san, you should rest. Don't drink anymore."

Momo Hinamori's voice of concern came from within.

But Rangiku Matsumoto acted as if she hadn't heard. Holding the bottle, she mumbled blankly.

"Why... Gin..."

Those words were not heard by Momo Hinamori, nor by the one outside the door.

He merely leaned against the door, listened for a moment, and quietly left.

The air grew noticeably more melancholic.

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North Rukongai, District 80, Zarakī.

At the edge of Zarakī, the same border area where Kaiser had once encountered an Adjuchas that broke into Soul Society, two figures appeared one after another via Shunpo.

"Not bad." Kaiser landed and glanced at the out-of-breath Tōshirō Hitsugaya who had followed him, and praised, "To follow me all the way here without falling behind, your Shunpo level is higher than I expected."

Tōshirō Hitsugaya couldn't even speak back. He stood there staggering, gasping heavily for breath.

No surprise—after leaving Division 10's barracks, Kaiser had been using Shunpo nonstop, heading straight here, making it extremely difficult for Tōshirō Hitsugaya to keep up.

This was the border of Soul Society!

And Seireitei was in the center of Soul Society!

Traveling from Seireitei all the way here was essentially running across half of Soul Society in a straight line!

That kind of distance, all by Shunpo—was simply brutal!

"Want me to give you more time to rest?"

Seeing Tōshirō Hitsugaya still gasping for breath, Kaiser kindly offered.

"...No need," Tōshirō Hitsugaya took several deep breaths, working to steady himself, and asked, "Why did you bring me here?"

"You'll know very soon," Kaiser smiled and said, "Draw your sword first."

Draw his sword?

Tōshirō Hitsugaya frowned.

Then, he slowly drew the Zanpakutō from his back—but did not assume a battle stance.

However, in the next second, Tōshirō Hitsugaya's pupils shrank to the size of needlepoints.

Because he saw a very familiar Zanpakutō.