

Multiverse 187

Chapter 187: Don't Disappoint Me

Cold...

That was the only sensation Tōshirō Hitsugaya felt while unconscious.

It was as if he had been thrown into an icy river while sleeping—an endless cold seemed to envelop him, invade him, consume him, dragging both his life and soul into a constant downward spiral.

Tōshirō Hitsugaya had no idea how long this cold would stay with him, or how long it had already lasted.

He only knew that once the chill faded and warmth began returning to his body, his consciousness finally began to rise, allowing him to slowly regain awareness.

"Crackle... crackle crackle..."

Suddenly, Tōshirō Hitsugaya heard this sound, like something burning, like something snapping.

"Awake?"

Then, he heard the voice of a familiar person.

"Since you're awake, hurry and get up."

Hearing that, Tōshirō Hitsugaya opened his eyes and abruptly sat up.

"Hyōrinmaru!"

The first thing he shouted upon waking was this.

Because his last memory was of Hyōrinmaru's Bankai being forcibly undone, so it was natural that this was the first thing on his mind when regaining consciousness.

But the battle had long since ended.

"What are you panicking for? No one stole it from you!"

That familiar voice came from nearby again, followed by a Zanpakutō being tossed over.

"Here, giving it back to you."

Hearing those casual words, Tōshirō Hitsugaya hurriedly caught the Zanpakutō thrown to him.

That was his Hyōrinmaru.

Having recovered Hyōrinmaru, Tōshirō Hitsugaya felt at ease, finally able to spare attention to look around.

He was surprised to find that he was still in the same place—on the border of the Zarakī District, North Rukongai, District 80.

But there was no snow and ice here anymore, no dark sky; the ground and trees were just as they had been when he arrived—completely unfrozen.

The blizzard was gone, the chill had vanished without a trace, and a gentle warmth flowed through the world. It was a clear and pleasant day, as if nothing had happened.

Kaiser sat beside him, a small campfire lit in front of him. The firelight shone onto Tōshirō Hitsugaya's body, letting him understand where that initial feeling of warmth had come from.

He had been lying by the fire, very close to it, his body warmed by the flames, completely free of the previous cold.

"Feeling alright?" Kaiser looked at Tōshirō Hitsugaya while warming his hands, smiling mischievously. "Feels like waking up from a long dream, doesn't it?"

"I..." Tōshirō Hitsugaya furrowed his brows, holding his Zanpakutō. After a moment of silence, he muttered, "Was all of that just a dream?"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya had actually started to wonder.

"So, how did the dream taste?" Kaiser neither confirmed nor denied it—he simply said offhandedly, "Did it inspire anything?"

Upon hearing that, Tōshirō Hitsugaya looked at Kaiser and finally asked the most important question.

"Captain Kaiser, why do you have a second Hyōrinmaru?"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya asked with an extremely complicated tone.

However, Kaiser blinked.

"A second Hyōrinmaru? What second Hyōrinmaru?" Kaiser said innocently. "How could I have Hyōrinmaru? My Zanpakutō is right here."

Kaiser pulled aside his sleeveless white haori and showed the Zanpakutō tied at his waist to Tōshirō Hitsugaya.

But Tōshirō Hitsugaya became agitated.

"You clearly used Hyōrinmaru just now—and even froze me!"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya's accusation was met only with a more exaggeratedly innocent look from Kaiser.

"Kid, you can eat whatever you want, but you can't say whatever you want," Kaiser said seriously. "My Zanpakutō has no freezing ability, and it's definitely not named Hyōrinmaru. If you got frozen, don't blame me—blame Hyōrinmaru, right?"

At that, how could Tōshirō Hitsugaya not understand what was going on?

The man in front of him had no intention of acknowledging anything that just happened. He wasn't going to admit to using Hyōrinmaru!

"You... how could you do this?"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya was dumbfounded.

"So I ask you—what are you talking about?" Kaiser shrugged helplessly and said, "Wasn't it you who said you wanted to come here to practice with Hyōrinmaru? Then you accidentally messed up and froze yourself?"

"I didn't do anything. Forget a second Hyōrinmaru—I don't even have a second Ryūjin Jakka."

"A Shinigami can only have one Zanpakutō. That's common sense. Didn't they teach you that at the Shin'ō Academy, Lieutenant Hitsugaya?"

Seeing Kaiser's outright denial, Tōshirō Hitsugaya's eye twitched. He nearly drew his Zanpakutō to slash him.

But recalling his miserable defeat earlier, Tōshirō Hitsugaya knew—even if he did fight, he'd still be the one at a disadvantage.

"...Fine, you don't want to admit it, that's fine."

Tōshirō Hitsugaya took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down as he spoke to Kaiser.

"But you have to teach me how to use Hyōrinmaru."

The battle with Kaiser had made Tōshirō Hitsugaya completely realize what he was lacking and why he had never been able to fully master Hyōrinmaru.

Just as Kaiser had said—he had been too eager for results, trying to rush down a path that even a Shinigami could spend their whole life exploring and still never master. He had taken strides too big, too fast, overlooking the scenery and lessons he was supposed to encounter along the way.

Even before he had a Zanpakutō, he was already hearing its voice, preparing to call its name. Once he got a Zanpakutō, he soon achieved Shikai. And right after that, he began studying Bankai, never pausing to truly familiarize himself with Hyōrinmaru's power.

Looking back at his life, everything had gone smoothly. He had never been stumped like most Shinigami by Shikai, nor had he been stalled at Bankai like ninety-nine percent of others. But in truth, all he had done was unlock those powers—not mastered them.

To achieve a transformation is just the beginning. But he had mistaken it for the end, rushing to the next stage before he had even grasped the first. How could that ever lead to true mastery?

"I'll start again from Shikai," Tōshirō Hitsugaya looked seriously at Kaiser and said, "Please teach me what to do."

Kaiser gave a barely perceptible smile at those words, then said:

"I don't mind helping you out—but honestly, instead of asking me, why not go ask Hyōrinmaru?"

That left Tōshirō Hitsugaya stunned.

"Ask Hyōrinmaru?"

It was something that had never occurred to him, and he was so taken aback, he couldn't respond right away.

Seeing this, Kaiser continued warming his hands by the fire and spoke at leisure.

"The one who understands your Zanpakutō best isn't me, and it's not you either—it's the blade itself."

"It knows better than anyone how strong it is, and it knows better than anyone how its power is supposed to be used."

"Whether Shikai or Bankai, aren't both of them dependent on the blade's own consent?"

Shikai requires hearing the Zanpakutō's voice and learning its name from it.

Bankai requires the blade to be materialized and forced into submission.

Both forms depend on the Zanpakutō itself.

So why not ask the Zanpakutō's opinion?

"If you want to master a Zanpakutō's power, you must first understand the Zanpakutō itself," Kaiser glanced at Tōshirō Hitsugaya and asked, "Tell me—how many times have you actually spoken with your Zanpakutō?"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya had no answer to that.

So he fell silent.

"It's better to rely on yourself than others. Start by talking to Hyōrinmaru—step by step, come to understand it."

After saying that, even Kaiser grew a little introspective.

Thinking about it, he realized that he and his Zanpakutō had rarely spoken either.

Because they were of one mind and body. After recognizing him as master, they had become one entity. No dialogue was needed—they understood each other instinctively, without ever misunderstanding.

All of his exclusive weapons submitted equally to him, followed his will, and entrusted everything to him without reservation.

Thanks to that, Kaiser didn't need to hear the Zanpakutō's voice to know its name. He didn't need to materialize the blade to make it submit. Whether Shikai or Bankai, the moment ownership was established, he could fully master them instantly—no acclimation, no training required.

In other words, even though Kaiser knew how to gradually master a Zanpakutō, and what the best process was, he had never actually done it himself.

The moment he made contact with a Zanpakutō, he understood everything he needed to do—but that process had been completely bypassed due to his own authority, leading him straight to the result.

"This cheat is pretty satisfying, but I've missed out on the pleasure of the process," Kaiser shamelessly thought to himself.

And the clueless Tōshirō Hitsugaya, unaware that the man sitting before him was such a ridiculous cheat, simply fell into deep thought.

"I know what I need to do now."

A moment later, Tōshirō Hitsugaya gripped his Zanpakutō tightly and nodded solemnly toward Kaiser.

"Good." Kaiser smiled. "Now I can report back to Momo."

"Momo?" Tōshirō Hitsugaya blinked in surprise.

"What, you thought I went all the way to your Division 10 barracks just to drag you out and train you because I was bored? Or because Division 3's workload is too light?" Kaiser rolled his eyes and said irritably, "It was because my Lieutenant was so worried about her childhood friend, afraid he'd fall into despair, that she begged me to help."

"She used to do the same thing back when you were still in the Shin'ō Academy."

"What, did you forget already?"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya pursed his lips, thinking of his childhood friend, and felt a complicated mix of emotions. Yet strangely, his body felt even warmer.

"Now that you understand, get ready to head back."

Kaiser finally stood up, prompting Tōshirō Hitsugaya to snap out of his thoughts and quickly rise as well.

"Thank you for your guidance, Captain Kaiser." Tōshirō Hitsugaya looked Kaiser in the eye and bowed seriously. "I will remember everything you said today."

"Don't be like that—you're older than me, remember? How could you say something like that?" Kaiser teased jokingly, then suddenly shifted tone and said, "If you really remember what I said, then hurry up and take care of what needs to be done."

"In a little while, there might not be any time left for it."

These words caught Tōshirō Hitsugaya off guard again.

"What do you mean?"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya looked puzzled.

"Don't ask. Even if you did, I wouldn't know how to explain," Kaiser shook his head. "Just know this—very soon, the Soul Society will fall into chaos."

Now that Isshin Shiba had gone missing, and a new Captain had been appointed for Division 10, the original storyline should be about to begin, right?

Others didn't know where Isshin Shiba had gone, but Kaiser knew all too well—and what his disappearance meant.

After all, the protagonist of this world was none other than Isshin Shiba's son.

Now that Isshin Shiba had been missing for a while, his son should be old enough to buy soy sauce on the street by now, right?

Maybe in a few years, Rukia Kuchiki would be sent to the World of the Living and have that fated encounter with the main character.

At that time, in order to defeat the Hollow attacking him, Rukia Kuchiki would be forced to transfer her powers to him, turning him into a Shinigami.

And from that moment on, the true brilliance—and danger—of this world would begin to reveal itself.

"I've been in the Soul Society long enough. I've gained the fame, earned the position. If I want this life experience to be even more thrilling, I'll need those who stir things up to show themselves soon."

Kaiser looked toward the horizon and smiled.

"I've put up with you long enough, you know? Don't disappoint me now..."

Kaiser's muttering was heard by Tōshirō Hitsugaya—but he didn't understand it at all.

"Captain Kaiser?"

He could only call out tentatively.

"Let's go. Time to get back and eat."

Kaiser withdrew his gaze and all his wandering thoughts, stretched lazily.

"I wonder what Momo made for me this time..."

"Tempura? Or hamburger steak?"

"I'm kind of looking forward to it."

With that, Kaiser stepped forward, activated Shunpo, and vanished.

"Cooking? The Lieutenant does that too?"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya was stunned. Seeing Kaiser disappear via Shunpo, he quickly followed, using Shunpo himself while thinking silently:

"Maybe I should try cooking for Captain Ichimaru too..."

At that moment, in the Division 10 captain's office, a certain handsome guy suddenly shivered.

"...Was Rangiku still scolding me?"

He muttered in confusion.

Unfortunately, the answer to that question... would never come.