

Multiverse 224

Chapter 224: Don't Let Me Down

A single meeting lasted from morning until dusk, only ending after receiving permission from Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto.

Bathed in the glow of the setting sun, one Captain after another exited the Captain's Meeting Room—some returned to their Division barracks, others headed to the General Relief Station to continue receiving treatment.

After all, they were still injured. Until those injuries were fully healed, no important operations could be launched.

Therefore, under the strict order of Retsu Unohana, the most heavily wounded Captains had no choice but to return to the General Relief Station for continued treatment—including Kenpachi Zarakī, whose excitement had caused his wounds to reopen and his entire body to start gushing blood.

As for Kaiser, among all the Captains—aside from Retsu Unohana and Mayuri Kurotsuchi—he was the only one without any injuries. However, he didn't leave the Division 1 barracks immediately. Instead, he was retained by Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto.

"Please enjoy."

Inside the Captain Commander's Office of Division 1, Chōjirō Sasakibe sat beside the low tea table, respectfully pouring tea for Kaiser and Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto who sat opposite each other.

Looking at the properly seated Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto on the left, and Kaiser, who sat cross-legged directly on the floor in a casual manner, Chōjirō Sasakibe was briefly reminded of the scene from when Kaiser was about to assume the position of Division 3 Captain.

At that time, Kaiser had also sat like this—very casually—across from Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto.

Even though he had only just graduated from the Shin'ō Academy, having studied there for merely half a year, and even though his total age—before and after death—had yet to reach eighteen, this young man had shown no nervousness or formality whatsoever when facing the strongest and oldest Shinigami in the current Soul Society. His etiquette had been so lax that even Chōjirō Sasakibe had furrowed his brows back then.

Now, decades had passed.

This amount of time might be long for a human, but for a Shinigami, it wasn't much. For some long-lived Captain-class Shinigami, it could even be considered short.

Chōjirō Sasakibe was precisely the kind of Shinigami who would think so.

Because he had been by Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto's side for a full two thousand years.

Yes, two thousand years ago, Chōjirō Sasakibe had already been following Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto. His experience as a Shinigami even exceeded that of any current Captain.

In his eyes, a few decades was far too short—not even equal to a single year in human terms.

Yet it was in such a short span of time that someone stronger than the Captain Commander he had followed, respected, and revered all these years had emerged.

This young and powerful Shinigami once again sat cross-legged before Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto, and Chōjirō Sasakibe could no longer even entertain the thought of "impropriety."

Instead, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto himself behaved as if nothing unusual had happened, his demeanor completely unchanged.

"I plan to appoint Tōshirō Hitsugaya as the Captain of Division 10."

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto opened with this statement, prompting Kaiser to raise an eyebrow.

"Lieutenant Hitsugaya indeed qualifies to become a Captain," Kaiser acknowledged first, then said, "But this isn't something you need to consult me about, is it?"

The methods for becoming a Captain had already been explained—there were only three.

And based on Tōshirō Hitsugaya's strength, no matter which method he chose, he could successfully become a Captain.

As long as Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto had no objections, the inauguration ceremony could even be scheduled for just a few days later.

Though Kaiser was the Captain of Division 3, he was only the Captain of Division 3—not the Captain Commander, and certainly not Tōshirō Hitsugaya's superior. There was no reason to come consult him just because Tōshirō Hitsugaya was becoming a Captain, right?

While Kaiser was thinking this, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto calmly said:

"Though he is not your subordinate, he did grow under your guidance, so I want to know your stance."

At this, Kaiser couldn't help but chuckle.

"That's too much. Though I've guided him before, it's not enough to say he grew up under my guidance."

Strictly speaking, Kaiser had only guided Tōshirō Hitsugaya twice.

The first time was when Hitsugaya was still enrolled in the Shin'ō Academy.

Back then, it was Momo Hinamori who pulled Kaiser along to watch Hitsugaya. When Kaiser saw him trying to master Shikai, he casually gave him some pointers.

The second time was when Hitsugaya lost to Gin Ichimaru and was trying to better control Hyōrinmaru's power.

That time, Kaiser simply sparred with him, demonstrated the proper use of Hyōrinmaru, and gave him a direction afterward—suggesting he try communicating with Hyōrinmaru.

So, while Kaiser had indeed guided Hitsugaya, it was far from being a case of nurturing him.

Surely Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto knew this?

Or perhaps, he knew it full well but was hinting at something for another reason?

Like... discovering that Kaiser also possessed a Hyōrinmaru?

Kaiser couldn't help but fall into thought.

"So you have no objection to Tōshirō Hitsugaya becoming the Captain of Division 10?"

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto lifted his eyes and asked.

"Of course." Seeing that Genryūsai didn't seem to have discovered anything, Kaiser nodded and said, "Though Lieutenant Hitsugaya is still young..."

At those words, Kaiser noticed that both Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto and Chōjirō Sasakibe showed subtle expressions.

This made him twitch his lips slightly and cough.

"Let's not talk about my age—just say whether or not he's young."

At this, although Genryūsai and Sasakibe still wore strange expressions, they both nodded.

Excluding Kaiser, the anomaly, Tōshirō Hitsugaya was indeed among the very young generation of Shinigami.

At just over a hundred years old, for Shinigami who often lived several centuries or even millennia, he was, like his appearance, undoubtedly still a child.

As long as one didn't compare him to Kaiser, not only was Hitsugaya young compared to Captain-class Shinigami—even when compared to ordinary Shinigami, he was excessively young.

"Young as he may be, Lieutenant Hitsugaya's strength is quite impressive. Compared to before, he's also achieved deeper control over his Bankai."

Recalling the scene where Hitsugaya attacked Sōsuke Aizen with his Bankai, Kaiser nodded to himself.

Though Hitsugaya had been swiftly defeated by Sōsuke Aizen, that was because Aizen was too strong—not because Hitsugaya was too weak.

At the very least, Kaiser had noticed that Hitsugaya's control over Hyōrinmaru had risen to another level, and his use of Bankai had begun to mature.

Previously, if he used Bankai, Hitsugaya would definitely charge in with his sword. But now, he opened with an Ice/Snow-type attack.

To be honest, watching Hitsugaya using his Bankai just to rush in and slash people always made Kaiser lose composure a bit.

As the strongest Ice/Snow-type Zanpakutō, Hyōrinmaru's ability was clear: manipulating weather and freezing moisture in the air.

From any angle, Hyōrinmaru was a ranged, spell-based weapon—but Hitsugaya had forced it into close-range white blade combat. It was like making the Giant of Light use a Happy-type form to break horns off.

Hitsugaya seemed to have slowly realized this too, and was gradually changing his combat style. That was a good thing.

"Though he's still a little inexperienced, he's definitely a genuine Captain-level Shinigami now. Letting him become a Captain earlier is a good move."

By contrast, Renji Abarai didn't quite measure up.

His Bankai was still incomplete, and his strength was insufficient. Without using Bankai, he was still at Lieutenant level. Unless something special happened, it was still too early for him to become a Captain.

Clearly, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto thought the same, since he hadn't even mentioned Renji Abarai, despite him having achieved Bankai. Evidently, he still felt Renji wasn't ready for the responsibilities of a Captain.

"In that case, before launching the operation against Sōsuke Aizen, let Tōshirō Hitsugaya officially take the position of Captain of Division 10."

After finalizing this matter, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto finally looked at Kaiser with a solemn expression.

"When did you first suspect Aizen?"

So this was the real topic for today?

Kaiser thought so and didn't hide anything.

"From the beginning." Holding his hot tea, Kaiser took a sip and said, "Ever since I met him, I knew—this man was no ordinary person."

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto immediately recalled the matter of Kaiser being able to partially see through the hypnosis of Kyōka Suigetsu, and suddenly realized something.

He had assumed that Kaiser had only noticed Aizen's problem after uncovering the hypnosis of Kyōka Suigetsu.

Little did he know, Kaiser had the advantage of foreknowledge—he already knew Aizen's true face before even arriving in this world.

"This time, it was our misstep." Genryūsai looked at Kaiser and said, "Though what you did may have been a bit extreme, it was all correct."

"I wish to apologize for previously misunderstanding you."

With those words, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto actually bowed his head and apologized to Kaiser.

"G-Genryūsai-sama...!?"

Chōjirō Sasakibe was instantly shocked.

Even Kaiser hadn't expected Genryūsai to do that. After a moment of surprise, he finally said:

"You really didn't have to do that."

To this, Genryūsai simply shook his head.

"I'm already old. Sooner or later, this Soul Society must be entrusted to your generation—to be protected by you." Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto said, "You are someone I hold in special regard. Everything you've shown in this incident far exceeded my expectations. I'm truly gratified."

"Perhaps it's time for me to step aside and make way for the younger generation."

"I hope... you don't let me down."