

Multiverse 225

Chapter 225: How Could I Possibly Disdain the Weak

The sky gradually darkened, letting night descend upon Seireitei, casting it into darkness.

This time, there were no Ryoka rampaging through Seireitei, nor were there Shinigami holding torches wandering everywhere searching for people. So tonight's Seireitei was not bright. Even though some buildings gave off light from within, that light was not especially bright, making the stars in the night sky appear all the more brilliant.

Walking out from the Captain Commander's office, Kaiser walked forward while hesitantly muttering to himself.

"What did the Captain Commander mean by those words?"

What did he mean by saying it's time to make way for the younger generation?

What did he mean by saying don't let him down?

"Could it be... he's planning to retire?"

Kaiser had that sort of feeling.

"Well, speaking of age, the Captain Commander really should consider retiring."

As the oldest living Shinigami in the current Soul Society, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto had been active on the stage since over two thousand years ago. No matter how powerful and long-lived he was, now he already looked like an old man nearing the end of his life. He really should consider retirement.

The Gotei 13 was founded by him, and his tenure had been the longest. The other Captains and even Lieutenants of various Divisions had retired in batches—such as the former Captain of Division 6, and the former Lieutenant Chikane Iba. Their ages were far younger than Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto,

yet he, who was much older than them, had remained in office all this time. It truly seemed somewhat improper.

Yet Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto had never shown any intention of retiring. On the contrary, he carried the momentum of being ready to fight for another thousand years for the Soul Society. No one had ever believed he would retire.

Even in the original story, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto never showed the slightest inclination to retire. It wasn't until his death in battle that Shunsui Kyōraku succeeded him as Captain Commander. But now, he had suddenly expressed such thoughts—what could that mean?

"Could it be because of me?"

Kaiser began to wonder if it was because he had defeated Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto in an open battle that the old man had started to feel he was truly too old and should step down.

In fact, in that fight with Kaiser—if Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto had just a bit more stamina, and if Kaiser hadn't used abilities from Crown of Heavens or other exclusive weapons against him, the result might not have been so easily decided.

With the defense of Blade Array Matrix, Kaiser naturally wasn't afraid of Ryūjin Jakka. No matter how long they fought, he was confident he wouldn't lose. But to defeat a full-strength Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto without borrowing the power of other exclusive weapons would definitely require time and effort.

If Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto had dared to go all out and use his Bankai, then with the power of Ryūjin Jakka's Bankai, even Blade Array Matrix might have been broken.

So, Kaiser didn't know what others thought, but he himself felt that Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto, aside from a lack of stamina, was still at his peak in every other aspect. Even if he couldn't do another thousand years, staying as Captain Commander for another two or three hundred years would still be a breeze.

"Forget it. This isn't something I can control anyway."

Thinking this, Kaiser shook his head and pushed the matter aside.

Whether or not Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto retired, whether or not he planned to step down, none of that had anything to do with him.

As long as the person who took over his position wasn't an archrival who would hinder him, Kaiser didn't care.

"It's not like they're going to push me into the Captain Commander seat, right?" Kaiser muttered. "I'm the youngest in the entire Gotei 13, the literal baby of the corps."

Even that kid-looking Tōshirō Hitsugaya was older than him (in age). How could he possibly become Captain Commander and lead the entire Gotei 13?

Not to mention, his age alone was a hard flaw to overcome. It would be difficult to win people's support.

Of course, if going by strength alone, Kaiser didn't feel unqualified.

"Captain!"

While Kaiser was walking forward and letting his thoughts run wild, a familiar voice pulled him back.

"Momo."

Kaiser came back to his senses and looked at Momo Hinamori, who was jogging toward him, and couldn't help but smile.

"You're finally out, Captain." Momo Hinamori let out a sigh of relief and patted her chest. "I thought something had happened."

"What could've happened?" Kaiser smiled and continued walking forward. "It was just a chat with the Captain Commander. What could've happened?"

"But you... were you waiting here the whole time?"

"I think I told you—if it takes too long, you can go back to the Division barracks first, right?"

When Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto summoned all the Captains to the meeting, not only did all the Captains attend, some even brought their Lieutenants.

Of course, there weren't many who brought their Lieutenants. Only Kaiser, Retsu Unohana, and Mayuri Kurotsuchi brought theirs. The other Captains didn't bring any.

There was no helping it. In the previous encounter with Sōsuke Aizen, the Vice-Captains of each Division had mostly been present. Whether they had participated directly or were caught in the crossfire, they had all been severely wounded.

Especially Renji Abarai—he was clearly just a Lieutenant, yet he joined the Captains in battle. As a result, he got completely wrecked and was the most heavily injured. If he hadn't activated his Bankai and boosted his Reiatsu to endure a lot of the damage, he might have been killed on the spot.

Naturally, such Lieutenants couldn't attend the meeting. They were all recovering in the General Relief Station. Only Momo Hinamori, Isane Kotetsu, and Nemu Kurotsuchi had escaped unscathed and were able to accompany their Captains to Division 1.

Isane Kotetsu had been with Retsu Unohana at the time and hadn't been on-site. Nemu, like the reclusive Mayuri Kurotsuchi, had stayed in Division 12's barracks. Momo Hinamori had been present, but whether Sōsuke Aizen had done so intentionally or not, Momo Hinamori had barely been harmed.

Thinking back on what happened after breaking the Negacion that day, Kaiser had reason to suspect that Sōsuke Aizen had deliberately avoided touching Momo Hinamori in preparation for an emergency fallback.

Because, in the original story, Sōsuke Aizen had used Momo Hinamori more than once—causing Tōshirō Hitsugaya, under the hypnosis of Kyōka Suigetsu, to nearly kill Momo Hinamori, completely breaking his spirit and opening him to a devastating mental blow.

Thinking about that, Kaiser had every reason to suspect that Sōsuke Aizen intended to use the same method against him.

Unaware of what Kaiser was thinking, Momo Hinamori followed behind him, looking at the figure draped in the Haori marked with "3," and softly said:

"I don't want to wait for you in the barracks anymore."

Hearing this, Kaiser's steps paused slightly.

"Captain..." Momo Hinamori stopped as well and said faintly, "Why did you leave me alone in the barracks that day?"

"...Why else?" Kaiser continued walking and said as he walked, "I was going to confront Aizen—how could I possibly bring you with me?"

"Was it because you were afraid I'd hold you back?" Momo Hinamori hurried to catch up, her expression dimming. "I know Captain Aizen is a terrifying person. It's normal not to want to bring a burden in that situation."

"But I... I..."

Recalling how she had woken up in the barracks only to receive news that Kaiser had been declared a fugitive, surrounded by the Captains of the Gotei 13, and even Division 3 was under surveillance, Momo Hinamori felt an indescribable frustration.

If only she had been stronger...

"If only I were stronger, maybe I could've kept up with you and acted together," Kaiser suddenly said, "Isn't that what you were thinking?"

Momo Hinamori froze, as if she hadn't expected her innermost thoughts to be exposed.

In that moment, Kaiser continued walking and spoke without looking back.

"Let me make it clear—no matter how strong you were, in that situation, I would never have brought you along." Kaiser's tone was calm as he spoke. "Kyōka Suigetsu's ability is terrifying. Even I was affected by it. Let alone you."

"Unless you could completely avoid Kyōka Suigetsu's influence, only then would I consider bringing you."

"Otherwise, the result of bringing you might be me striking Aizen—only to have my blade land on you. Or worse, you, trying to help me, might pierce my heart with your Zanpakutō, letting me die in your arms."

"Is that what you want to see?"

Upon hearing that, Momo Hinamori shuddered violently. A chill ran up her spine.

Just imagining herself piercing Kaiser's heart and causing him to die in her arms filled her with dread.

"Now do you understand?" Kaiser sighed and said, "So this has nothing to do with your strength. In order to avoid being toyed with by Aizen, and to prevent such a horrifying outcome, I had to go alone."

"If you start pitying yourself over this, then I'll really be disappointed in you, you know?"

Momo Hinamori immediately lowered her head in shame.

"I'm sorry, Captain. I thought it was because you disliked how weak I was..."

Momo Hinamori was ashamed of her own immaturity.

"If I looked down on people for their strength, I doubt anyone in the Gotei 13 would escape my disdain." Kaiser said with a wry smile, "Besides, I climbed up from weakness myself—how could I possibly disdain the weak?"

"You, don't overthink things, alright?"

Kaiser's words dispelled the shame and self-doubt in Momo Hinamori's heart.

"Yes, Captain."

Momo Hinamori replied in a small voice, then smiled silently. She reached out and grasped the edge of Kaiser's uniform, catching up to his pace.

Feeling the gentle tug from behind, Kaiser smiled silently too, and kept walking forward.

Within Seireitei, the darkness lingered—but it wasn't cold. On the contrary, there was a faint sense of warmth.