

KEEPER 126

Chapter 126: LOWER DISTRICT

Night came sooner than sagiri had expected, but she had managed to memorize most of the streets in the lower district of Ko'alsi with the help of the archive. De did not see any of his teammates at the dining wing during supper. He had expected to find N'varu there and inform him about his mission and ask him to find a way to escape so they could meet. Their plan to escape was getting more and more soiled with every minute that passed, and the longer he stayed in the fortress, the more he knew his benefactor was prone to pulling a stunt. Three hours after the sun set, Chera and his team of ten men finally set out, and with sagiri being in the squad, it made them eleven.

Chera had informed the squad to carry only small blades. They were going to patrol the lower district, and carrying spears or swords would just make them stand out like a sore thumb. Sagiri had never been to the lower district of Ko'alsi, but the name itself made it sound lowly or just a hub for crime. To further hide their identity, they wore brown civilian cloaks over their combat suits. The disguise was not that good since the coats were too long and the cloaks had hoods to cover their face. They might not have looked like warriors, but they sure looked like warriors in their manner of walking.

"We continue with what we have been doing, just watching. The only difference is that we have a war school cadet with us," Chera addressed the semi circle of men that were.

"Since we go by numbers, let's just call him eleven," Chera said, and his team seemed just as bored as him. They seemed bored already, and they just looked at him with even more boredom.

"I'm one," Chera said and turned around. The other followed his lead and said their numbers, but in the cloaks and dim light, he could not tell who was who. He just hoped he did not have to call out names. The captain had said they were going to watch, so perhaps he did not need to know their numbers.

They took war carriages from the fortress to just the outskirts of the city before they alighted just at the edge of the lower district, which was on the northwest of Ko'alsi city. The city was still alive and even on the outskirts. There were fewer people on the road, however, and the streets narrowed into uneven veins of cracked pavement and packed dust as they went. They passed by a pleasure district in the lower district, and it was still very alive with men coming out of the shiny buildings. Ko'alsi was known for its pleasure districts, where slaves of war or refugees mostly went to work.

Galka city did not have it, and perhaps it had to do with the fact that the men of the north could burn such a place to ashes in one night. Yet sagiri had seen some come out of the coloured houses.

Hypocritical.

The further they went into the outskirts of the lower district, it was as if it opened up to a new place he did not know existed. It was lit by lanterns that flickered more than they lit the narrow streets, so that a man like Salka could have trouble walking. Buildings leaned into one another, and some had patched roofs, rusted balconies, and old rugs strung between windows. The air carried the mixed scent of coal smoke, stale rainwater, and overused waste. There were stalls on the street, but no vendor was selling, unlike the upper side of the city and even the pleasure district. This place was oddly weird with a strange air to it, as if it held and hid many secrets. The roofs of houses were so closely packed together that it could have been easier to walk on the roof than on the ground.

"Welcome to the dead district," number 8 said close to sagiri's ear. He had managed to remember his name because of his unnatural figure. He was very tall but so skinny as if he was suffering from some illness.

"We split up just like always and watch," Chera started saying, then stopped, as if remembering his ear, he looked at Eight, who was closest to Sagiri. "You babysit him. I will watch the wall alone," he said, and the team scattered soon after in teams of two, and Chera in a one-man squad, and sagiri was left with eight.

"Let's look for a high roof to sit on." Eight said before he jumped onto a stall too lightly for his weight and height, and sagiri followed suit. They walked softly on the roof, and sagiri managed to make as little sound as possible. He had grown more agile and swift in the past three months, and he did not have any problems jumping after eight.

This would have been a good night and a chance to escape. He just had one warrior to evade. Even so, he did not know his way around the dead district. The streets and houses were far too packed, and the book with ko'alsi maps on it that Chera had given him did not cover the dead district. The place was in such a way that it was a maze, and if they had not been walking on the roof, they would have long been lost. He did not know their purpose in such a place, but from what he had just seen from the structure and state of the place, it could not have been something good.

Eight finally stopped at a high enough roof at the centre of the dead district and sat down, letting his feet dangle on the edge. Sagiri did the same, and the two stared into the darkness. After a moment, eight retrieved a pair of goggles from his combat pocket, like the ones banga had given them in the exercise with Konate. He placed them above his eyes and watched the town below lazily.

"We were told that you rival the tamelku in sensory, that is why our captain picked you for this mission," Eight said after a while of watching. Sagiri did not know whether he was pretending to watch, but there was no way he could see anything apart from the varying roofs from where they sat.

"What are we watching?" sagiri asked. Chera had not briefed him.

"Chera did not tell you anything? So like him," Eight said. "To be honest, I don't know either. We have been watching this place for a month after the general put us on the task of finding a crack in the wall that is used by some mice to enter the city to steal young boys. Can you believe that?' eight said and sagiri was even more confused.

"Children?" Sagiri asked.