

KEEPER 157

Chapter 157: NOTHINGNESS

She was sitting in silence yet again. Just as always she did not have thoughts of anything past or future. She knew she was in the academy for a reason, but, like everything else, she did not know why. She could not remember her life before she came to the academy. All she knew was her name. She did not know her clan name or tribe name.

It was another morning at the academy. Morning mist drifted between the towering trees of Yalami Forest School, weaving through wooden walkways and moss-covered training grounds. Students moved in groups, their voices low, careful. It was just after breakfast, and students were left to roam free, practice weaponry, or read before classes began for the day. The curriculum at Yalami was not as harsh as Galka or Kafaka and Konate, but it was still tedious.

No one spoke loudly in this part of the courtyard. And she always loved to sit under the same tree. A thick book rested open in her hands, its pages filled with complex battle formations and monster behavior diagrams. Her eyes moved across the text quickly, absorbing every detail. She had already read it a couple of times and knew every word by heart, yet just reading again did not bore her. She always did the same things every day, and she did not break her own schedule.

No one dared sit near her. Two students passed by the bench. One of them slowed.

"That's her." They always said such things when they passed by her, but she had never understood why. What about her? What did they mean? The other immediately lowered his voice.

"Don't stare," she whispered, but she heard it. Her hearing, she had realized, was more heightened, and she had realized it might have been a good thing when they did hunting exercises in the forest on some days, but for some reason, it made her classmates uncomfortable, and she did not know why either. She did not know the reason for anything. The only thing she knew was that she had to train, read, eat, and repeat.

"But she's just reading..." the first one asked. She must have been from the lower years. Unlike Galka, where students from different years did not mix.

"Last week, someone tried to challenge her during tactical trials," the second whispered again. Lira wondered why they could talk about that. It was a request, and he fulfilled it. The first student blinked, curious to know more.

"What happened?" she asked her curiosity piqued. The second swallowed.

"She solved the entire battlefield simulation before he even placed his first unit," they said as if they were surprised. Was it supposed to be a thing? Wasn't solving the entire thing easy and what was required of them? The two walked away quickly.

Lira turned a page. She had heard every word. She simply didn't care, or rather, she did not know how to care. She had always wanted to ask why everyone was always surprised that she scored everything in her exams, but she never cared enough to wonder why they behaved that way. She opened another page to see that everything was how it always was. She knew in a minute and a half that the gong could go off, and they would be required to be in simulation class. She stood up from her position so that she could be there on time.

The training hall was silent. No one had arrived yet, since she ran and was there in only a minute. She was always early to her classes, and she could not understand why the others were always surprised. Wasn't it what everyone was supposed to do? A massive whiteboard hovered above the floor, displaying a simulated battlefield filled with monsters and scattered warrior units.

Instructor Valena folded his arms, looking at the board as he waited for everyone to arrive. He had gotten used to arriving. He already knew Lira had arrived, but he did not turn around. He only turned around when everyone arrived.

"Today's exercise," he said, "is survival command. Your task is to evacuate your units while containing the monster outbreak." he started. The beasts in most of the Yalami forest academy simulations were mostly werewolves tamed and kept for this purpose, yet sometimes they release some feral big cats and wolves.

The first team went into the simulation chamber, and they barely managed to finish in ten minutes.

"Next," Valena said, and Lira stepped forward with her team. She always worked alone, sometimes even when she was in a team. She might have been odd, but when it came to completing tasks, it was as if a

rare spark always ignited, and she did it to perfection. Perfection is the only way she knew, even though she did not know why. Whispers spread immediately.

"This won't last long. Her team is going to win again," someone whispered.

The simulation began again. They were placed at the centre of the simulation chamber, and the cats were released. Half the team was to act as civilians, and they were supposed to evacuate the.

Lira didn't rush. She watched the battlefield quietly and studied it as always, as if she had not done it a hundred times before. Ten seconds passed. Then she began issuing commands.

"Unit three, withdraw to the northern ridge."

"Unit five, lure the beasts toward the ravine."

"Collapse the bridge in twenty seconds."

Her voice was calm.

Precise.

The monsters moved exactly where she wanted them. The battlefield shifted like a chessboard under her control. A feral cat must have been released among the tamed, and she went for it. It was no new occurrence that she had so much strength for her small body. The wolf, the black lion, jumped at him. It was weaker than the brown lion, but to a human, it was still ten times stronger. The cat jumped right when she jumped. They landed at the same time, Lira barely evading its claws before she fell on the floor under the lion and slid on her knee. Her blades were drawn out, and she cut as she went. Blood splattered on her, and by the time she was done sliding, the big cat fell in agony and drew its last breath. Three minutes later, the simulation ended, and the monsters had been trapped and contained. The hall fell silent.

Instructor Valena stared at the results.

"Perfect Lira and your squad," he said. It was obvious that she was his favorite student, and that was not a fact he could hide.