

KEEPER 159

Chapter 159: DANCE AND PRECAUTIONS

Unlike back at the war headquarters of Tagayia, in the war headquarters of Galka, Squad 25 was not separated. They slept together and trained together with the junior warriors who had just graduated from college to finally join the warrior ranks. They were only separated during patrols, and all of them were inside the headquarters. After sagiri's attempted assassination, Salka and Senraki had made it clear that cadets would not be allowed outside the gates, fearing another attack. Senraki and Salka, after all, could not stay away from the academy for long. Fuwuka had joined them on the way back, and perhaps he had been assigned some duty by Senraki, or perhaps he had left fast to go back to the academy. Both captains and the grand marshal being away from an academy for long after all could be detrimental.

The air in the headquarters was not as heavy as that at Ko'alsi. After duty was over and early mornings, cadets were even allowed time to roam and read in the library or train with their seniors. Even more so with the absence of the chief zaka, the place was easy to stay in. A week had gone by since their arrival, and that made it barely more than a week since Myama died. Nvaru had told him that his body would have disintegrated into dust a few moments after death when he had had another rage fit at the idea that his myama's dead body would be kept in a jar as a souvenir.

Night had settled softly over the Galka war headquarters drill grounds. Most of the fortress had slept. Torches along the outer walls burned low, their flames flickering in the quiet wind that carried the distant scent of sand. Apart from the patrol squads who passed by. Not many were outside.

Sagiri stood alone on the empty training field. Above him, the sky stretched wide and endless, filled with cold silver stars. Nvaru had told him about a dance under the stars to send off those close. As Nokai was listening to his feelings, she slipped out of the archive and materialized on his hand. The weapon pulsed softly, and so did the archive. He did not move, even so, taking his time to look up at the stars. The arena he stood on was lit, but it felt like the stars were the ones lighting it. For a long time, he did not move. His eyes lingered on the heavens as if searching for something among the distant lights.

"Myama..." he whispered, grief overpowering him again. The name left his lips like a fragile breath. The memory of her final whisper still echoed in his mind.

Farewell... child.

His chest tightened. Slowly, Sagiri carelessly the spine of Nokai. He did not have to call her name this time and just whispered her name. "Nokai" and the blades responded with a sharp snap, cutting through

the silent night. For a moment, they caught the starlight, gleaming faintly like two slivers of moonlight. They had managed to grow even longer.

Sagiri lowered his head for a second, then began to move. At first, the motions were slow, Careful, unsure, as if he was just dancing, but he did not yet know his next move. His feet slid softly across the ground as the blades traced quiet arcs through the air. The movements were soft and yet aggressive, as if telling of the perfect feeling that described his grief.

Then, as he danced, he suddenly did not have to think anymore. As if his body knew how to dance to the rhythm of his heart, grief, longing, and loss. Each turn of his body flowed into the next like wind across the desert dunes. The blades rose toward the sky, then fell. He caught them before they touched the ground. Again and again, Sagiri moved beneath the stars, the steel singing softly as it cut through the night air.

His breathing steadied with each motion instead of getting laboured. The grief inside him found shape in the dance. A step forward. A turn, then a sweeping strike that curved like the coil of a serpent. His blades crossed above his head, and for a moment he stood perfectly still, the twin edges forming the shape of a crescent beneath the stars. He did not stop and spun again, faster now. The dance grew stronger, faster, and more fluid as if he were no stranger to it. Nokai flashed through the darkness like silver lightning, the arcs of steel weaving patterns that almost resembled the movement of a great serpent through the sand.

Sagiri could almost see her. Myama's massive body gliding across endless dunes. Her golden yellow eyes were watching him. The thought struck his chest like a blade, and his movements faltered for a moment. Grief surged again, more violently this time, and with it his dance became faster and more violent. He did not push it away. The dance continued. Faster now, the moves are harsher. The blades whistled through the air as he spun, stepped, and struck invisible shapes around him. The rhythm was no longer calm but raw. A storm of steel and sorrow beneath the silent stars. He could not help, but his grief was somehow bigger than just myama's death.

Then, suddenly, Sagiri stopped. As if the dance was complete yet incomplete. The last movement carried him forward onto one knee, one side of the blades plunged into the earth before him, and His head bowed. His chest rose and fell heavily. The training field fell silent again. Only the wind moved. Sagiri rested his hands on the hilt of Nokai. Then he whispered to the night.

"Thank you... Myama."

Above him, the stars burned steadily in the dark sky.

"That is something worth remembering." A voice suddenly jolted him, and he might have been deep in the dance to notice an additional presence, or he had and did not care. Sagiri jolted his head to look up, and Seyika Faraku was standing at the end of the drill grounds. "That is something even my eyes have not seen," he added, and that was the first time sagiri had heard the man talk. His voice was surprisingly very deep. Sagiri remained silent and looked at the only man who might have experience living a life like his.

"What clan is the dance from?" Seyika asked, walking closer.

"I don't know," sagiri answered the man. He somehow felt compelled to answer whatever he asked. He held an air about him that was slightly cold and intimidating.

"I see. When you are different, it is easy for others to fear, and fear is the worst form of envy. I hear you were assassinated down at the headquarters." It was a statement. As if he himself had had many assassination attempts on him.

"Yes," sagiri said, feeling understood a bit.

"You should choose those who are not intimidated by you to be close to you. Don't trust anyone, or you will die. And that weapon?" Seyika asked, stretching out his hand.

"The only thing I have of my clan," sagiri answered. The blades had not snapped back yet. He felt reluctant to hand them over but finally did. Seyika looked at the weapon for a moment as if he was trying to bury the image in his mind before he handed it back.

"That weapon is not from the north. Have you ever heard of the South?" Seyika said, and he was the first person who had talked to sagiri about the south. No one ever spoke of it, and he had not cared to know why.

"Yes," sagiri answered. He had, of course, heard of it.

"They are the only people known for having such a weapon as the one you have. I only know this because the chief knows, and his tongue slipped once. If you are from the south, then you should leave tagayia," Seyika said, but sagiri could not sense any malice from him, more like precaution.

"Why?" sagiri asked, his interest piqued.

"I don't know, but in my experience, things kept as top secrets are either bad or very bad. I'm not saying you are from there, but if you find out you are, you leave. Even my eyes make the supreme mandra weary. " It's because of Chief Zaka that he lets me be," Seyika said, and sagiri understood what he meant. He had tried being assassinated, and he knew his benefactor wanted something from him. The fact that whatever he wanted from him was not good had been glaring in front of him for a while, and he had ignored it.

He had experienced firsthand the Tamelku twins' hate for him. He would be naive to think they were the first and last to want him eliminated. If only he could remember more. He had seen the man in myama telepathy carry him across a desert. It was perhaps time for him and N'varu to talk. He needed to know where he was from so he could protect himself and those who depended on him before it was too late. There was no time to waste.