

KEEPER 169

Chapter 169: THE BEAST FIGHT

The final day of the exam had gone by without a hitch, and since it was on weaponry, innovation, and world calculation, it ran till after dusk. The following day and the day after, the cadets did not have anything to do in particular, and they had been allowed to move around, practice their weapon dances, and interact, but no fighting was involved.

The news of 'Kaka's beast' and the Tsanka princes' snake fighting had spread, and students had started betting. Beast fighting was not unfamiliar, and many were excited. Sagiri had not encountered the girl from Yalami, but he knew now she was up to something, and he stayed alert at all times. He wanted to avoid the beast fight match, but since he was the one who had killed the snake, he needed to be there when the supposed kaka's beast beat Gavina's snake, which was her name. At the end of their last meeting, Kiuga had made them introduce themselves. The Teshini tribe girl's name is Nayira, and the one from the Anku tribe's name is Pavire.

The two trios had agreed on a temporary truce, but later it was a truce of squads, and then it had escalated to a competition between the schools. It had escalated from a duel of honour to something out of control. Kiuga had brought in Lotaga on the team, and coincidentally, he was on pet tending duty to care for Salka's big cats. Lotaga was scared of dealing with some of Salka's cats. They were too feral and reserved for battle with their master, so he could only spare a black panther. He was more excited to join the fun than he should have been, and he did not even try to hide it.

"Sagiri, look at what you have made me do. You should never kill a girl's beast. Now, I have no choice." That is what he said in a fake serious tone, but sagiri could tell the man was beside himself with excitement to make the bad decision. They had not talked about the rules, and sagiri did not know if it was a fight to the death or dominance anymore. The match did not happen, however till the night after the last sitting exam.

Dust rose in slow clouds under the heat as cadets packed the stone stands, their voices loud, restless, hungry for blood. They were gathered in the arena above the first-year pentagon. It was needed at night, and the cadets, mostly from the war academies, had sneaked into the arena to watch.

At the center of the pit, iron cages stood opposite each other. Lotaga had outdone himself in arranging for the fight. The success of the fight could be said to have rested entirely on him. Kiuga was the one to announce the beginning of the match, and the Galka and Kafika cadets had the best seats. Every school's dignity was on the line, and even a beast fight was as serious as a true fight between the schools. Gavina was the one to open her cage, and Lotaga was the one to open the panther's cage.

"Cages open!" Kiuga said with too much enthusiasm. He and Lotaga were a bad mixture. The panther's muscles rolled beneath its coat as it padded forward, head low, golden eyes scanning the arena. The dim light in the arena under the stars and the moon in the arena made it look even more deadly and beautiful.

Across the pit, the second gate opened, and a snake slid out. It was bigger than the one sagiri had killed, but it was not massive. Its body dragged across the ground in a slow, deliberate motion, scales catching the light like dull metal. Its head rose slightly, tongue flicking as it tasted the air.

The crowd quieted down as the two predators faced each other. For a moment, nothing moved. No cat almost always does not coexist with a snake. Most people keep housecats in an area with many snakes to keep out the snakes. They were sworn enemies, whether trained or not. Nothing moved as the two beasts stared at each other. Nature's sworn enemies. The panther circled first, light on its paws, keeping distance. Its tail flicked once, twice. Its eyes never left the serpent's head.

The snake followed the movement. Slow. Measured. Waiting.

Then it struck fast, and it struck fast. It was even faster than an untrained snake. It was a blur of muscle and scales, its jaws snapping forward with explosive speed. The panther's reaction time was fast. It was only natural since its trained by Salka. The panther twisted aside just in time, and the bite missed by inches.

The crowd roared, not caring that they were being sneaky. The panther didn't counter immediately. It moved again, circling, faster now, testing angles. The snake adjusted its stance, preparing for another strike. It attacked again, faster and closer now. The panther leapt back, sand spraying beneath its paws.

A third strike followed in quick succession. The panther not only moved back this time, but it moved in just as fast. Claws flashed as it swiped across the snake's face, and impact snapped the serpent's head to the side. A thin line of blood marked its scales.

The crowd surged to its feet, and cheering broke out. The fight had just gotten more intense.

The snake recoiled and then surged forward again. This time it didn't strike. It lunged with its full body. The panther tried to evade, but it was too late. Gavina's smile grew even wider in triumph, and her neck

rose in pride. Most of the Kafika cadets cheered louder this time. The coils of the snake wrapped around the panther's midsection. The snake tightened slowly but crushing. The snake was the sly queen. It was not called sly for no reason. It could carry a whole person and swallow prey ten times its size. The panther snarled, twisting violently as the pressure built. Its claws raked into the thick body, tearing scales free, drawing dark blood.

The snake hissed, tightening further. The panther's movements slowed for a moment but then changed. Instead of pulling away, it lunged forward, straight toward the snake's head. Its jaws clamped down hard on the serpent's neck. The snake convulsed, but its coils tightened violently in response.

A sickening pressure filled the air. The panther held on, and claws dug deeper. Its teeth sank further. Blood spread across both bodies. The crowd had gone wild now. Shouting, stamping. And demanding a kill. Sagiri had thought things would escalate, but either beast dying was detrimental. He did not know what was worse. A girl losing both her beast and plotting endless revenge, or Salka's panther dying. The snake thrashed, its massive body slamming into the sand again and again, trying to shake the panther loose. The panther had been poisoned, and any minute now it could collapse. Both beasts were almost at the end. The snake was bleeding badly, and for the panther, the poison was about to take hold. Both beasts dying could be the best option, but the panther belonged to Salka.

What to do?

The panther was not letting go. It tore deeper into the snake's body

The snake was tightening its coil, trying to crush the lungs of the big cat. Suddenly, however, a blur tore through the air, and when it finally stopped in the middle of the arena, the panther had been torn away from the beast. Salka. He was now holding the panther by the neck in one hand and the snake by the other.

The whole place froze as dozens of instructors from all schools flooded the place.

Sagiri should have been disappointed, but somehow he took a sigh of relief. This was also a good ending.

One thing was really bad, however. Sagiri had never seen Salka so mad, but now, watching his poised panther, his expression was deadly, and he reeked of killing intent. Lotaga was really dead this time. Salka loved his beast and cared for them like a child. This was bad and bad.