

KEEPER 170

Chapter 170: PUNISHMENT AND ASSASSINATION

Sweat dripped on sagiri's brows. It did not matter how many times the boys of Galka had been punished, standing on their hands for hours; it was still never pleasant. All the schools, even Daziko Sun School, which had only three students watching the beast match, had incurred their whole class punishment. All six schools, even those that had not been involved, were getting punished. They were to stand on their hands till dawn. It was only just midnight, and they had a few hours on them.

Being punished together and the game ending in a draw had dwelled some tension, and right now everyone was trying to hold on till dawn. Cadets like Kaka were not showing any signs of tiredness even after two hours, and he still looked as if he was asleep. The handstand punishment soon became a competition, and every school was trying to act as if it were the most powerful.

At five, they were all released from the punishment and allowed an hour of sleep as punishment. There was no exam till the day after, and so the cadets had some relief. The one hour of sleep was barely enough, and sagiri could feel the impact after waking up. He had not rested well. He tried to train with squad 25 to warm up for the weapon dances the following day, but he could not hold out his tiredness after lunch, and he went to the shadow colonnade to his spot to get some meditative slumber to help him recover his strength.

Even with the three schools in the fourth year pentagon being allowed to mingle now, there was still no one wandering in the broken pillar and shadow arena. He jumped over the broken pillars and debris of the place and sank deeper into the place. He was soon at one of his hidden dark spots, and he sat on his knees, his back to a pillar, and immediately shut his eyes. He must have fallen completely asleep after speaking point because when he snapped awake again, he was lying in a curled position, his knees pushed to his stomach to give him more warmth. Damn it.

Sagiri looked at his watch, and it was now an hour to supper. He had really gone and slept. Well, it was too late to regret. He knew, however, that was the reason he had suddenly jolted awake. The archive had stirred violently, jolting him awake, and the hairs at the back of his neck stood to attention. He could not sense a presence immediately, but he knew she was there, and she was close. Sagiri drew out his blades on instinct and closed his eyes. He did not need his eyes in the dark, and shutting them helped him push out his other senses to take in the whole arena. He felt her now. She was less than ten feet away, perched on a broken pillar and watching his position. He was still submerged in the dark, but somehow he knew she knew he was there.

Her eyes locked onto him, calm, unreadable. She did not carry any hatred like the tamelku twins, but sagiri knew she had not searched for him for any good intention. Whatever clan she had come from,

that she was able to hide her presence, something was wrong. Could she be the one sent to kill him by his benefactor? If so, then even better. He could just capture her and ask her to talk.

The two blades on sagiri's hand felt light. He wanted to use Nokai, but he did not want to kill her yet. He could question her after and then kill her. Sagiri's grip tightened slightly.

"You!" Sagiri called in her direction, and as if responding to his call like some magnet, she moved without warning and no sound whatsoever. She was as agile as Kiuga in her movements. Sagiri could feel her movements now that she was diving for him, and he sidestepped as quickly as Salka had taught him. Her blade flashed through the dark, cutting straight for his chest. Sagiri blocked, the impact ringing sharply through his daggers and shattering them in half. The impact sent sliding back across the ground.

She pressed immediately, barely allowing time for him to call Nokai. Fast and Precise. Each movement was aimed at his vital organs, especially his throat. Each strike aimed to kill. Sagiri parried, stepped, twisted between the pillars, his movements fluid to avoid her attacks. She was so fast that she could rival kaka in speed. She was both agile and fast, and if he had not sparred with Salka many times, then he could have been cut a few times.

"Nokai!" sagiri said, and the blades cut through the air, already extracted. She stepped back but attacked again. Sagiri was not channeling any power of the archive, but the blades in the girl's hand must have been made from a very special material to be able to cut through the steel used to make the daggers. Sagiri maintained his position on the defense. He wasn't striking back fully with Nokai because he did not want to kill her yet. The girl propelled through the air, her braids swiping the air behind her, before she landed a kick to sagiri's chest, sending him sliding back again. He stitched Nokai to the ground and stopped himself and used it to propel himself to kick her back and push her back slightly, creating space.

"Who sent you?" he asked. She was pretty strong, and pretty soon, he was going to have to fight at his current full strength. No answer, she did not care to answer, as if she only cared to kill him. She came again. Even faster this time. Her movements were clean with no wasted motion. Every angle calculated.

They had joined high schools together as older students, yet she fought like she had been doing for a few years.

Sagiri felt it then. Even without visible emotion from her, she was here to kill him, and she meant it. The realization sharpened everything. He pushed himself to his full strength with little fusion with the archive. Underestimating an opponent who wants to kill you was, after all, a foolish mistake. He moved harder now, weaving between the pillars as her blades chased him through shadow and stone. Their footsteps echoed, quick and uneven, circling, cutting, vanishing, reappearing.

They had been going at it for a while, and neither of them had managed to get the upper hand. Sagiri had been able to repulse her this far, but suddenly it was as if he started fighting his mirror. The girl began to move like him, as if she had been memorizing all his attacks and defenses all the while, and suddenly she was even stronger, as if she had not been going at her full strength. Fighting your mirror is the worst thing, and to imagine the mirror had been holding back and now it kept growing stronger. She suddenly stopped using sagiri moves right when sagiri was starting to get used to her mimicking him. She changed her attack, and in a style she had never seen before, she moved so quickly he did not have time to defend.

She slipped inside his guard. Her movement Different and unfamiliar now. Sagiri's eyes narrowed at the sudden style of movement.

What?

Too late. Before he could react. Her blade drove forward, straight into his chest. The impact was deep, but he had managed to angle his body away at the last moment, and the attack missed his heart by a finger width. Sagiri's body jerked as the steel buried itself into him. For a moment, everything stilled. He had been stabbed before Many times, and he was realizing there was no getting used to the feeling of a blade tearing into your skin and the crippling pain that came with it. He might have healed faster now, and the wound could most likely close in a few minutes.

Within a split second of the knife going into his chest, however, Sagiri knew something was wrong, and this was different. The pain should have gotten worse before it got better, but the pain had somehow gone from bad to worse from the second the knife made contact with his inner organs. The wound started to burn.

No

It rotted.

A spreading, festering heat tore through his chest, twisting unnaturally, eating at the flesh instead of closing it. Sagiri's breath hitched. His grip faltered. Lira pulled the blade free. Blood spilled. Dark and Thick. She stepped in again and pulled the knife back. In sagiri's current state, with the festering wound and agonizing pain, he was not able to step back quickly, and the second strike came faster and Deeper. The blade drove into him again, this time directly to his heart.

And the Archive snapped more violently than it ever had in the past. A surge of force exploded outward from Sagiri's body. Invisible, Raw, and Uncontrolled. Lira's eyes widened for the first time, then she was gone.

Thrown.

Her body slammed into a distant pillar with a brutal crack, the impact echoing across the arena as stone fractured behind her. She did not stop, and the force drove her into more pillars, dust rising with it and debris flying before everything went silent.

Silence followed.