

KEEPER 173

Chapter 173: HER MEMORY

The force hit her like a wall. Lira's body left the ground. Air tore from her lungs as she slammed into the pillar, stone cracked behind her, dust bursting outward in a dull cloud. For a second, she couldn't hear anything. She had not seen what hit her. She did not know why she wanted to fight the boy. All she knew was that it was necessary and that he had to die. Just like the beast in training, he needed to be put down like one. She also knew that the blades she had were meant to kill him and that she had to stab the heart. She had few reasons to do things, and no feeling of revenge toward the boy, but she knew it was her mission to eliminate him.

She had never felt such a sense of purpose until she saw him for the first time. Back then, she had known it wasn't time yet, but now she knew it was time. She had never had a real goal or purpose in life, but seeing him again, she knew that her purpose was to eliminate him.

The hit was like nothing she had ever experienced, and it was painful. She never experienced pain, but the hit had made her feel pain enough to have her groan in pain. She could not move even a limb when finally she was done moving through the air and pillars. Then silence suddenly fell. Her vision blurred, and in a moment she was in a place that she could not remember but somehow it felt familiar.

The place was made of many glass cylinders. It was cold and dark, so cold that she shivered. She stood, no, she floated inside one glass cylinder. Blue light filled the space around her, and Liquid pressed against her skin. Her limbs felt heavy and unreal. Shapes drifted around her. There was a maze of tubes fused into the cylinder she was floating in. Past her cylinder to other cylinders there were

Other children.

Small bodies suspended in the same blue fluid, eyes closed, unmoving. They were alive because she could see their transparent masks covering their noses and mouths connected to the outside of the cylinder by a tube condensed with moisture. Alive. Her chest tightened. It was as if she were in that cylinder, and what she was experiencing was happening in real time. She suddenly couldn't breathe for some reason, even with the help of the tube. She convulsed for a moment, but suddenly a sharp pain stabbed into her back. A Needle, Long. Thin was driven into her spine. Wires trailing from them, pulsing faintly with light. Her body twitched in the fluid. The figures moving beyond the glass suddenly became blurry, and she closed her eyes and was gone just like the other children.

She woke up moments later, or days or months, because she had grown a few inches from the last time, and she was now in a larger cylinder. People dressed in white overalls were walking between the

cylinders. They were talking in indistinct tones and watching a cylinder at a time while taking notes. One of them stepped closer to her cylinder and looked into her open eyes. He was a middle-aged man. He stared at her for a long time before his hand pressed against the surface of her chamber.

"Subject stable." The voice echoed strangely.

Another child convulsed in a nearby tube. The fluid she was submerged in churned violently, then she stilled. There was no more movement nor a breath.

"Subject ninety-one is gone," the man standing in front of the child's tube announced before he started writing down on the clipboard in his hand. Lira's mind fractured. This was not something she knew, yet she had not been able to remember. She had never remembered anything before. Nothing before the academy. Nothing before that force from that boy hit her.

"Adjust the sequence," another voice said, sounding distant again. "Her response is higher than expected."

The memory twisted, and suddenly shattered, and the arena slammed back into place. Sound returned in a rush, the Dust, broken pillars were there, plus the pain. Lira sucked in a sharp breath as her body jerked forward, dropping from the cracked pillar to the ground. Her eyes widened slightly, and her hand moved to her back quickly. Every movement was agony, but she had to move. She had never experienced panic, but somehow was experiencing fear of that place. Of being trapped in a tube. Her hands only touched her back. There was nothing there. No needles or wires. But somehow she could still feel it. The state of being in that tube and in that fluid.

Her gaze lifted. The boy was no longer there. After she stabbed him, he knew the wound was going to fester in seconds, and he would die in minutes. She staggered to the place where she had last seen him and stabbed him before she was thrown back violently, but he wasn't there. There was blood on the ground, but he wasn't there. There was no trail of blood to follow, and after circling the place a few times, she could not understand how he got out without leaving a trail of blood behind him.

She did not know whether she was looking for him to finish him or to know what he had hit her with, and that lab. She turned around and limped out of the place. She had a weapon dance to prepare for, and she would think about what had just happened to her another time. She walked out of the broken pillar and shadow arena and did not realize how badly she had been hit until she stepped out into the light. Her body ached with every step she took. She pushed herself to move even faster, but at some

point, she just couldn't. Her hand was lying in a weird position, and his ankle was swollen to the size of a fist.

She slid down the wall, unable to move a step further, and passed out