

KEEPER 175

Chapter 175: DANCE

The drums went wild as more and more outsiders, guests, and blade-dance lovers arrived. The Lokuza boys took to the stage to open the beginning of the exams. Most outsiders considered this the beginning of the exam. They danced gracefully, much to Kaka's dismay, and he hated to admit that he had not looked away at the gracefulness of their dance. They were dancing with wooden blades since it was the blade day exam, and they managed to make the blades look like an accessory more than a lethal weapon.

The place suddenly spiked with tension, so much so that Sagiri could feel it pressing on him. Even so, he could yet move his limbs or escape the darkness that was imprisoning him. Heb could feel himself healing slowly. Too slow than usual. The pain from the wound had lessened, but that was nothing compared to how he felt after remembering. He was burning with blazing rage. Someone had to pay for what he had done, and he was beginning to get the feeling his benefactor was behind, and that is why he knew so much about him. He knew his clan had markings on their skin. Their markings were not drawn by iron, but they were born with them. Only his were many and covered his entire body, a side effect of the echo archive being locked inside of him.

The students were not arranged according to school but according to exam numbers. When each student is called, they are required to perform all the blade dances. The dagger has three dances. Well, those learned in high school. There could be more in college. The first involved a student wielding one blade in each hand. The second two blades and the third three blades in each hand, throw them, catch them without letting even one fall. The moves had always been tedious, even after training, so a blade could fall at some point.

The third week of final high school exams was in mission, and the inkkeepers were still present. Well, the exam could not be conducted inside the exam headquarters because of the four-week requirements of the exam, and though big, it was still not equipped for such large-scale rigorous exercises.

Sagiri could perceive the movements of the first candidate to step into the exam arena. Whoever it was good they did an amazing performance. One dance after the other. The first, then the second, the third, then the fourth. The dances were performed simultaneously and with no hitch. The bar had been set pretty high. The next person was no doubt Kaka, and sagiri could feel his aggressiveness all the way.

Kaka stepped forward. Sagiri could smell the pride even still trapped in the archives' prison of darkness. Sagiri concentrated on his movements even harder. Even as his need to burn the north to ashes burned, he could still not bring himself to hate his teammates. They were the only ones who had noticed his

absence and perhaps reported it. A dagger rested in each hand. He exhaled once, looking at the panel of examiners before he moved.

He announced the first dance with a roar. The blade in each had seemed smaller, swallowed by his aggressive aura. His arms moved in clean, controlled arcs, left, right, crossing, separating. The blades cut through the air before striking in quick succession. Each hit landed with precision. A forward step, a turn, a low cut followed by a rising slash. Everything flowed into the next without pause.

The rhythm was steady, deliberate, yet it was deadly and aggressive. Each movement ended exactly where the next began. The first dance closed with a sharp crossing strike, both blades driving in at once before he pulled them free in the same motion. There was no break as he moved to the second one. He was going to be hard to beat, and everyone knew that. He only paused to retrieve two more blades from thigh straps. The pace changed immediately. With each dance, it grew more aggressive and more defined, like a beginner moving from amateur to skillful.

It was Faster and Layered. One blade struck while another followed a split second later, creating overlapping patterns of attack. His hands no longer moved as single units; they split, working independently while his body turned through the sequence. He released a blade, throwing it in the air, then another. He threw his body back on two, twisting through the air before he caught them both. He released the other two, then the two he had caught. Span around and caught them, none meeting the ground.

A high strike followed, then A low cut. Then A reverse thrust. Four impacts landed in rapid succession. He stepped through, pivoting, the blades flashing as he wove the pattern tighter, faster, sharper. The rhythm built but never broke. Every strike connected, and every motion flowed. He transitioned again without stopping. To the three blades by retrieving two more. Performing with three blades was even harder, and even the slightest mistake could send all six flying carelessly.

Three blades in each hand, he paused, pulling his stance low before he started the third dance. For a brief moment, there was stillness. Then it erupted. The third dance was aggressive. Not meant for beauty but to kill. Six blades moved at once. His arms blurred into layered arcs, each dagger striking from a different angle, high, mid, or low, without interfering with the others. His body turned sharply, feet shifting to keep balance as the pattern intensified. The strikes came faster now. Relentless and Precise. Each impact landed clean despite the speed, the blades driving in and pulling free in one continuous motion. There was no pause, no break in rhythm, just a seamless flow of movement from start to finish. Kaka stepped forward one final time. Before he willed around twice. By the time he stopped, his blades had disappeared into the muddy dummies. The dance had come to an end. He saluted the examiners before he went to withdraw his blades.