

KEEPER 180

Chapter 180: LATE ARRIVAL

Sagiri must have sunk into darkness again after Kaka's performance, and when he came to again, he could feel the wounds on his chest on the last legs of closing up. He was no longer in agony, but somehow he was still trapped in the same place, in the same position. He was merged with the archive, and he pushed it out with his senses.

The exam was still going on outside, but he could tell that time had passed, and he could tell they were on the last patches, and the judges looked bored but happy as they awarded marks by lifting up their tags. Kaka had gotten all tens from all the judges, and from the looks of it, not many had been able to achieve a perfect result. The current student got a cumulative result of 88. It was still high, but after watching Kaka and a few of the top students of the other school, who could be impressed by an eighty mark.

The time went by, and it was finally the second-to-last student's turn. The innkeeper recording the marks and calling names did not miss that fact. His voice sagiri could pick because the archive had grown that much. Even though he couldn't see faces, he could perceive everyone's position. Where the students sat and where the examiners sat.

"This is our second-to-last student examiner. Our last student and the suffocation chamber protegee, Sagiri, the aged student of Galka! The innkeeper looked too excited, and Sagiri wondered why he had to exaggerate his announcement when he had just been calling exam numbers and not names. What a pain.

The second last student was the girl who had tried to kill him, and he knew that because her presence was so small, he could have missed it if the archive had not burst the seal almost completely. He could almost tell why now. Her heart was on the right side of her chest, and it beat so slowly. There was something wrong with her. Even when she moved fast, her heartbeat did not increase violently but steadily till it reached a level enough to match her movements.

It did not matter what anomalies she had, but what mattered was that he had tried to kill him for absolutely no reason, and for that reason, he was not going to let it slide. She must have been a pawn set in the school, just like the hypnosis girl and the man-child, to kill him. What sagiri could not understand was why his benefactor had to wait that long to kill him when he could have just killed him instead of waiting for him to join an academy. And what were the blades the girl used to stab? Nothing up to this moment had caused him to heal.

She got a ninety-eight in total, and sagiri could see the staring in her movements. He barely remembered hitting her, but the archive had the account of the whole encounter, and she had been struck by the archive so hard it was a wonder she was able to achieve that mark instead of being bedridden for a week. She was something, and the archive warned loudly.

Enemy

That much was obvious since she had tried to kill him. It was now his turn, and he could instantly tell the position of the members of squad 25 because of how suddenly uneasy they got while everyone got excited.

"Sagiri take to the centre!" the innkeeper announced, and everyone shifted to look for him. Moments passed, and everyone started turning their heads frantically.

"Is sagiri not here?" the ink keeper announced again, and everyone looked around them again as if looking around frantically could somehow make him fall in their laps. The examiners started talking amongst each other as the place soon sank into mummers.

"Where is his squad or friends? You were strictly instructed not to leave the grounds till your turn had elapsed. That was true. Students were not allowed to leave the arena, even for a meal, until every student had performed; then and only then were they allowed to move. The examiners had the mandate to eliminate a student if he did not show up after an amount of time had passed and they did not arrive at the exam centre.

Sagiri was still being held down by an unknown force. He watched as 25 stepped forward.

"He was just here, I think I saw him go to the cleaning rooms." It was kiuga who spoke after saluting deeply. "He must have eaten something bad," kiuga said in an apologetic tone.

"Go find him. You have ten minutes to find him and bring him here, or he is disqualified.

"Yes, sir." They all saluted before they scattered to the cleaning room outside the arena. Of course, they did not know where he was, and they could just stand out of the arena to buy him time. This was bad. If Sagiri wanted to catch the attention of his benefactor, missing an exam was not the best way.

The darkness holding Sagiri prisoner was not bulging as if he did not have any control over his body. He tried to force it, but it did not bulge. If this went on any longer, he was going to be disqualified for sure. The darkness was heavy, and it felt like he was trapped under a mountain. He could not call Nokai, although he could feel her somewhere inside the archive that had now expanded widely.

"It had been five minutes," Kiuga said, pacing up and down.

"Sagiri, where are you?" N'varu said in a broken voice, sitting on the rough ground, looking as if he had lost something dear. Sagiri could perceive his grief, and it reminded him of the grief he had witnessed in his memory. The grief hit him hard again, and for some reason, he could feel it pushing at the darkness. So the darkness could be broken by strong feelings?

Well then. That was no longer hard anymore. Sagiri just had to remember and have the echo images of what he had seen flood his mind. The hopelessness, the desperation of his clan being slaughtered. He let it tear through him, sharper than any blade that had ever cut him. He let himself soak in the rage of causing pain to whoever had done it, and true to his assumption, the darkness got lighter, and he could feel the invisible ropes holding him snap. He let the rage eat him, the pain, and the coldness that came with understanding the cruelty of people. It had no end.

Only then did he realize that the archive had eaten away the water of the pool and turned it into the darkness holding him down.

"Ten minutes have gone by. If he chickened out and hid, I am going to break him in half," Kaka said, and it almost made Sagiri lose all his rage progress, but nothing could dull the pain he was feeling. He let it tear through him enough that he felt burning like a fire. The fire ate away the darkness, and as if the archive understood what had happened, it retracted instantly before it expanded to prepare for his move.

The examiners were discussing heads together to agree on eliminating him, and their hands were itching to pick the red tags to show an elimination. An elimination is worse than a zero, and it could affect any entry to college, even if a student passed in three areas. Sagiri did not need to run all the way now and just needed a thought to get where he wanted, and as the tension rose with all ten judges laying their hands on red tags and the students falling into commotion, saying different assumptions like he ran away or chickened out, or calling and wondering why he could miss an exam. His teammates could not keep their cool anymore and were turning to return. Nvaru looked pale like a ghost. Not because he Sagiri could miss the exam, but perhaps reality was beginning to sink in that something bad had

happened. Sagiri moved within the archives' reach, and the next second, he was standing in the middle of the exam podium.

"Sagiri, present," he said, and there was silence as even the cadets who had started to stand sat back down. Now one had seen him arrive or move, but somehow he was standing at the centre.

Silence tore through the place loud enough to make squad 25 alert, and they broke into a run.