

KEEPER 182

Chapter 182: THE UNTAUGHT

The crowd of cadets was already so impressed by his dance, and some from Galka were cheering him for bringing more honor to the Galka War Academy, but when he withdrew eight blades and held them so effortlessly between his fingers. The place went deathly silent. Before mummers broke out.

"Aren't we supposed to stop at the third?"

"The fifth and the sixth taught in the war college. Aren't they?"

"Are students from Galka being taught ahead of the required syllabus?" another groaned with accusation.

"I am from Galka and have been here for four years. How dare you slander us with such a lie?" another defended. The place fell into chaos for a moment. The ink keepers seemed stunned but did not stop Sagiri. Sagiri was not sure that he could have stopped even if the man had stopped him. The dances were never meant to be separated into levels. It was dishonourable to the blade. Each blade handle sat between his fingers. For this dance, he closed his eyes. He did not need them anyway. He now knew his surroundings like the back of his hand.

He sank much lower this time and crossed his hands above his chest before he opened them slowly, spreading them above his head, facing out with the blades pointing at his head. That was the only slow move in the dance that was to follow. His foreign stance to the other cadets paused all the murmurs, and pindrop silence fell. He was now somehow able to shut out the feeling of everyone with the cold in his heart.

He moved suddenly after two beats of the heart. His fingers adjusted to the blades as he moved. The air around him changed with the intensity of the dance. The fourth blade dance did not start off easy or end with easy like the first three. It was fast through and through. The rhythm fractured, no longer steady, no longer predictable. It did not look like the first three dances, and no move was predictable. It was the moves of someone who had finally achieved complete understanding of the blade. Bekuro was on the blade examiner's panel, and even he looked surprised.

"Bekuro? I hear you are the boys' teacher? Did you teach him this?" an examiner turned to Bekuro. Bekuri did not even turn his head to acknowledge him when he answered.

"I never taught that," Bekuro said, and all the examiners were now bewildered. Bekuro had been the one to teach Sagiri to even wield a blade, and he could not believe what he was seeing.

The blades moved in irregular patterns, breaking symmetry, reforming mid-motion. His body turned sharply, feet shifting in tighter, more complex steps as the strikes became more calculated, but even with the intensity, he did not drop one blade. The dust at the centre rose with how fast he was moving.

The instructors fiddled with the tags yet again when the dance came to an end. There was no way the boy could know the fifth?

Right before everyone's eyes, however, Sagiri retrieved two more blades and sank even lower, hands crossed to his chest, blades barely protruding from under his elbows at the slight change in stance from the second opening stance. The environment turned tense instantly. He still had his eyes closed, and whispers broke out.

"So that is the suffocation chamber protege," one said.

"He is dancing with his eyes closed. How many times must he have practiced to be this perfect?" another wondered.

Sagiri had never practiced the dance before however, this was the first time he was doing it. He did not know whether he was doing it because he could or because he wanted to draw out his enemies as much as possible. His benefactor was going to put him in the spotlight anyway. This time, he was going to do it himself.

The fifth dance followed. Sagiri held the blades between each finger and two between the index and middle fingers. It was impossible to move the blades at this dance gracefully or follow a certain rhythm.

The fifth was a chaotic dance. The blades no longer moved in sequence, but they moved in layers. Strikes overlapped completely, creating a continuous storm of motion where one action became three, then four, then more.

Sagiri's form blurred. He could not even keep up with how fast he had to move, and to think the person who created the dance did not have an archive inside of him to boost his speed and agility. The fifth

dance demanded the warrior move violently. Not from speed alone, but from the complexity of each execution. Each movement fed the next before it finished, building a chain that never broke, never slowed, or repeated. He threw the blades in the air, and this time it required him to throw and catch and repeat the throwing and catching five consecutive times with all ten blades. The movement alone was nauseating, and many graduated from war college without ever mastering the dance completely. Only the best of the best, like Salka with their speed, agility, and blessed genetics, could keep up with such without dropping a blade. The dust rose, and the cadets could barely manage to see Sagiri move or keep up with his movements.

"He is so fast," one said.

"How are we supposed to compete with such?"

"And to imagine he has been in the academy for less than a year," another said with envy and awe. It was impossible not to be intimidated by such a display of skill from a cadet. The dance came to an end, and by now the cadets watching did not know where and when he could stop till he spread his arm, the blades back where they had been at the start of the dance.

The examiners had now sat back. They were amazed by the display, and even Bekuro, the master of the blade, seemed to be in awe. He could wonder later about where the boy learned to master the blade to such a level. Now, however, he was absorbed in watching it. At the moment, he could only see someone who understood the blade and mastered it. It was enough to push any lover of the blade to tears. It was the most magnificent display of the blade he had ever seen for almost half a decade.

Sagiri might have pushed his body to the limit because he was starting to feel a little tired. Well, considering he had not eaten for more than a day now, and the archive had not stopped powering his heart to allow him to heal in the pool. He might have pushed himself a bit far. Even so, he still had the strength to finish the sixth dance. He could feel his chest throbbing from the residual wound. Even so, he had to finish what he had started. The sixth dance was by far the most complex, and it was going to take everything he had.

He did not sink low this time but stood still after withdrawing another pair of blades, taking six in each hand. He let his hands lie limp by his sides with the blades held in them, with an additional blade between the middle finger and the ring finger.