

KEEPER 183

Chapter 183: THE SIXTH DANCE

His grip shifted, blades angled inward, his stance lowering instantly, so that he was almost sitting with how far his legs stood apart, and his hips dropped. The stance was hard to hold, and he might have been powered by the archive, but his body had not fully recovered from the wound and the energy it took to heal it. Sweat ran down his temple, cutting through the dust already clinging to his skin.

Then he moved. And the sweat that had gathered on his brows flew around him like raindrops, which quickly disappeared into the thirsty sand. The sixth dance was mastered by even fewer, and he doubted even some of the examiners sitting on the high school panel knew it. After all, they only needed to judge three. Perhaps examiners in the college examiners' council could have an idea on this one. Even college students were not tested on it.

It snapped. The dance was hard to follow, even from the start. It was the definition of violence. There was nothing soft about it, and it somehow resonated with what Sagiri was feeling deep inside. It spoke fluently of how he felt. The echo images of his clan filled his memory, drawing the violence deep within him that was enough to burn down whatever stood in his way to get to the bottom of it.

Sagiri drove forward and dropped suddenly, throwing himself to the ground, shoulders first. Dust burst upward as he rolled, his body turning through it while the blades never stopped moving. In this dance, the warrior had to move on his own, and the blades had to move on their own as well, and neither of them could stop until the end. The rules for no blade touching the ground remained, and with twelve blades in the air moving simultaneously while a warrior made sure to catch each one while still dancing to the fullest was something very few had seen. Most masters of the blade mastered it in later stages of their life after practicing for ages. One wrong move and it would fall apart, or the blades would turn on the wielder. It was a few minutes of extreme difficulty and exertion, and even with the archive powering his limbs, Sagiri knew he was pushing himself to the limit.

As the images of the violence done to his clan flashed in his memory, so did the blades. At this point, most of the other schools had long finished their practical exams in their arenas and had come to watch the war school performances. They were the most exciting after all. Between the fourth and fifth dance, even instructors who had finished their duties had finally gathered.

His movements were a blur now, and Bekuro had stood up to watch the display at some point. He was one of the few who could do the sixth dance, and even he had taken decades to get where he was. A

boy at sixteen moving with such speed, agility, and perfection was something he had surely never seen. Such brutality that did not look practiced, and violence that did not look like an act.

Each dagger struck out as he rolled past, cutting into the imaginary targets at ground level before he twisted up again in one fluid motion. The dance did not allow a pause. He immediately rose into a spin, then fell again, his time deliberately harder and harsher as if he was punishing himself. His back hit the ground as his legs kicked upward, flipping his body over.

For a heartbeat, he balanced on his head. He maintained the inverted and still stance for two more heartbeats, perhaps the only pause in the dance.

Then the blades moved. Six strikes exploded outward from that impossible position downward, sideways to hit the mud dummies. He crossed his hands to his chest before he twisted out of it, slamming his feet back into the ground. Dust surged around him. His breath came in sharp rasps now. He heaved with the difficulty he was putting his already battered and bruised body through. It almost felt like when he had danced to say goodbye to Myama. Only this time it was not a goodbye but a promise of violence.

He moved faster now, his cuts deeper. The dance lost all softness it did not have in the first place, but as it accelerated, it made the prior violence displayed look softer. Every movement was impactful and required every inch of his body and limbs to perform. He drove forward, slamming into the space between the dummies, before he fell back and rolled on his knees, causing the dust around him to rise in a circle.

He dropped low against the ground again and slid across the ground as both arms moved in rapid succession of strike after strike, with each hit landing before the last had fully finished. He rolled again. To continue the violent display of art, perhaps mixed with a little grief. His body twisted mid-roll, blades lashing outward in a tight circle that tore through everything around him before he came up on one knee to catch them finally. He did not pause, and after the last handle touched his hand, he exploded forward.

The strikes came faster now. More relentless. Six blades moving in close, brutal patterns, then he retrieved six more to replace the ones he had released. Each impact drove deep, each withdrawal immediate, the rhythm building into something almost violent in its intent. Sweat dripped from his jaw, and his chest heaved, making the residual wound burst with pain, but he didn't slow.

He stepped in again, then dropped, catching himself on one hand as his body pivoted low, legs sweeping while the blades struck upward from beneath, reversing angles mid-motion. He rose sharply and spun so

fast it was a wonder he could still maintain his footing. He released the twelve simultaneously, three at a time, just to show the mastery of the weapon by releasing half what you hold in one hand before releasing the rest. The impacts landed together with so much force, tearing through the mud dummies that had been assaulted all day, sending them into a pile of dust.

Dust hung thick in the air around him, slowly settling. Sagiri stayed in the same position for a second to catch his breath. He had used all his blades in this performance, and he stood naked without a weapon. He finished the dance in the stance he had started the first dance in, but this time he did not have a blade. Like a warrior who had been stripped of all he held dear. or a boy whose clan had been wiped out in one night. That was one of the reasons for the dance. You don't stop until all the two dozen blades are gone.

The archive retracted violently. All the strength from Sagiri's body had been used, and he did not have the strength to even stand. He fell forward on one knee, but he did not touch the ground before a hand held him around the waist to keep him up.

Bekuro.

He somehow had understood the violent display and the grief from the blade wilder, and a tear had dropped from his eye. Leave alone the fact that a sixteen-year-old could achieve the perfect six dances of the blade. But how could he possibly have witnessed such violence and grief at a young age? And understood it. The crowd that had gone silent soon burst into cheering. Others cheered, especially from the non-war academies, but for the war academies and instructors present, they were too stunned to speak, and they could only remain silent.