

KEEPER 190

Chapter 190: POISONED

The rest day came sooner. Ever since Sagiri got access to almost the entire archive's power, he had been more tired, and he slept through the night yet again. Every time he learnt something new or gained a new ability, it did take a toll on his body. He should have been rested, but somehow he was tired. He thought about going to the shadow and pillar arena, but quickly decided against it. If he somehow passed out in slumber while he was there, he knew he might be stabbed with another blade, and he did not know yet what that would cause.

Even before he couldn't think of another plan, he was pulled into the combat arena by Kaka and Kiuga to continue teaching them the fourth dance. Sagiri could need the two in the near future, especially Kiuga's ability to come up with a strategy, and so he could not say no to the two. They were not going to be teammates for long anyway, and this was his way of saying goodbye before he left for the south. Bukata and Zazarie joined later on, making them five because N'varu was already attached to Sagiri's side.

Halfway through the training, however, the archive stirred. It was as if something Sagiri did not already know was causing the unrest, just like the time Myama was calling to him. Sagiri had not realised it, but there had been tension in the air for some time, as if a cold war was going on, and the tension was getting stretched tighter and tighter. Many factions were at war, and something was going to give. Sagiri paused mid-stride for a long moment. Before anyone could ask him what was wrong, he beat them to it.

"Watch me rest," Sagiri said and did not wait for anyone to reply before he moved out of the arena. He was restless now, deep inside, and with more power, the more restless he had become. The shadow colonnade was his first choice, even though it now held bad memories. The team was puzzled by what he meant, but the five followed him quickly. After his disappearance and stabbing again, no one questioned his need to be watched.

Sagiri found the tallest untouched pillar at the centre of the broken pillars and shadow arena and went for it. Even with his squadmates watching his back, he still wanted to have the advantage of position this time. He used the broken pillars around it to propel himself from one pillar to another before he finally stood at the tallest. He had been walking around with the sash tied to his eyes since he got out of the pool, yet with his right eye, he could see even clearer around him through the soft material of the sash. He had done the spear dance with the sash covering his eyes, and although he had just performed the required three, the sash over his eyes had drawn another set of attention. No one besides Nvaru and Lotaga had seen his eye, and he wanted to keep it that way for now.

After ensuring no one else was in the place apart from the five with him, Sagiri finally sat cross-legged on top of the pillar and shut his eyes. The restlessness he was feeling was growing even bigger. The process

to fall into unconscious meditative slumber was even harder because the archive wanted to stay awake, but it was growing too restless, and a moment longer, the markings could have started glowing. The five chose strategic broken pillars around Sagiri and positioned themselves to watch the place without question. An hour went by, and sagiri was finally able to fall into a state of slumber and rest. Somehow, meditative slumber always left him more rested than sleeping.

An hour ticked by, and then another, and then another, and it was finally time for lunch. Sagiri remained still in his state, unmoving. Everyone knew Kaka hated to miss his meals. They were his second love, right after training, yet he did not move from his position where he had been standing watch for three hours, watching the shadows intently. Kaka took every duty seriously, and he did not complain. Kiuga was sitting cross-legged, but he was alert as well.

Lunch time passed, and evening came, but Sagiri did not move from his position. Inside him, however, a lot was happening. The archive was stirred violently at some point, but he had managed to keep it down. He was holding on with everything he had till sweat dripped on his forehead, and finally, it had started to stir normally. Sagiri did not move, however, even long after it started to still until it had calmed down like the bottom of the sea. If he had doubts that something was wrong before now, he was sure that something was completely wrong. In his meditative state, he had realised something like a separation between him and the archive. The poison from the blades was choking the harmony between him and the archive. He had not noticed it before when he was immediately stabbed, but now he could see it. The effect was wearing off, but it could still take days to weeks for the poison to wear off, and those were days he didn't have. The lack of harmony is what had caused him to burn up after he exerted himself in the blade dance.

He needed to be on his best legs now more than ever, and he could not afford any time to return the harmony that had been choked. Sagiri's eyes finally snapped open a few minutes before supper, and the boys, though good warriors, sighed with relief when he finally stood up. They could not abandon him to go eat, and missing both meals could have affected their performance during the two consecutive days of exams that followed. The bow and arrow and sword dance days did not have a rest day in between, and they, after all, needed to be on their best game.

"Thank goodness you are finally awake, Kaka was about to start crying." Kiuga stood up and stretched his stiff limbs like a cat. Kaka was still watching the darkness intently, and he only turned around when kiuga accused him.

"You'd better have figured out whatever you wanted, or I'll kill you for making an Asakana man go hungry just to watch you sleep." Kaka snapped back to his normal self. He jumped down from his pillar and landed on the uneven surface below. The other joined him, even Sagiri.

Sagiri could prefer being watched by Kaka than anyone, anyway, even with his bad attitude. The boy took his duties seriously and his honour even more seriously. Other than that, he was also a powerhouse. Watching his squadmates now, he could not help but think that one day they might stand on opposite sides if he went to war with the entire Tagayia if his killing the girl, as he planned to, caused a domino effect. He did not yet know how the situation would turn out or if they could end up standing on opposite sides, but everyone had a role to play, and some things had to come to an end, too.

"Thank you for watching my back. I might have been poisoned by the blades used to stab me," Sagiri said. They had watched him, and at least he could tell them the truth.

"Poisoned? How do you know that? You look fine to me." Kiuga asked, looking him up and down.

"The poison will fade away, but it might take a few days," Sagiri said.

"How were you claiming to fight everyone when you need us to babysit you?" Kaka said with a deep sigh. "You keep growing strong, but worse at the same time. It's appalling."

"Be nice, Bami king, it's not like he chose to be poisoned?" Kiuga said, catching up to Kaka. The man was walking way too fast, trying not to miss another meal.

"He was stabbed by a girl, yet he can do all six blade dances like a maniac." Kaka retorted. He put emphasis on the word girl.

"How are you feeling now?" N'varu asked when they were left far behind.

"Much better. But I need more days in seclusion to let my body and the archive expel all the poison," Sagiri said, only loud enough for N'varu to hear.

"You know that's not possible. What happens if you are attacked before all the poison is out of your system?" N'varu asked with worry. "Just allow the nine to fight with us. They wish to meet you, but they are waiting on your word."

"No. Stay out of it. I don't want any more southerners to die. Especially in the north," Sagiri said, and he meant it. He was going to fight this battle alone, and he was not going to drag innocent kids into it in the name of sworn protectors for him.