

KEEPER 193

Chapter 193: THE SWAN BLADE

The third week finally came to an end, and sagiri's score in weaponry had ranged from ninety to ninetyfive in all the remaining weapons, with the sword ranking the lowest at ninety. He could see the examiners had grown a bit biased towards him after hearing praises about him after the six-blade dances. He had worked hard to deserve the marks. He had even grown stronger and more agile because of the rapid growth in the past months. He might not have merged with the archive in the last three, but somehow he could not keep the archive out of it completely because they were one after all. His blade exam was still under discussion, and the answer could be decided by the end of the fourth week or the month that followed.

It was after supper on the rest day, after the exam ended the previous day, and N'varu was pacing after sagiri told him of his plan.

"Don't you think it's careless?" N'varu asked.

He always thought everything sagiri did was careless, so it wasn't new, but sagiri had not told him to ask for an opinion, but to bring him up to speed on what he planned.

"Would you prefer if I were caught off guard and forced to fight with the poison residue still in my system?" sagiri said. It was almost time for the meeting, and Nvaru was still pacing.

"You know that is not what I mean. You will be telling your current weakness to a stranger. What if he is the enemy?" N'varu said.

"I know that, but he is a poison lover. We have to find an antidote somehow," Sagiri said. He could understand where N'varu was coming from, but he did not have many choices. He knew Sikuwa wanted something from him to get back at Senraki. Senraki was Sikuwa's target.

"If he is an enemy, I will kill him even though the north has weakened me," N'varu said. It was the first time he had spoken about his weakness loudly. After sagiri had remembered his journey north by his mother's sandshade, he had seen the strength and agility of the man. If nvaru was one, then the strength he now possessed had been reduced greatly by staying in the north. He knew he would be weakened yet still chose to come.

"Don't put yourself in harm's way. We will be long gone south by the end of next week if it all works out," sagiri said strictly, and he meant it. No more southerners were going to die in the hands of the northerners. Not under his watch. Sagiri did not yet know how to completely separate himself from the north when the parents who raised him were Northerners, and his squad was full of them, even Salka, Lotaga, and Senraki. He did not suddenly feel animosity towards them, nor had they shown animosity towards him because he was clearly different. Squad 25 did not know he was from the south yet, and he did not know how they would take the news when they realised he was the descendant of the red-eyed woman in their legend. Many things were already out of his control, and he could only control what he could before it all spilled over.

N'varu finally gave in with a sigh, and the two started their walk to the central pentagon. They made it to the top of the pentagon, and two figures were already standing at the far end. One in pristine white and another in a full black combat suit with a combat coat on top. Salka and senraki. They looked to be in deep conversation and only turned around when they heard the two approach.

"Captain Salka. Grand marshal senraki." The two saluted each other before they walked further.

"Salka, tell me you are poisoned. I assume that is the reason for this meeting. I have to say, Sagiri, shouldn't we be in the healing wing instead of here?" Senraki said his gaze landed on Salka.

"The healing wing can not do anything about this one," N'varu said reluctantly.

"I hope I am not late to the festivities," another voice suddenly joined, and tension spiked. The roof of the central pentagon was a huge place, yet it suddenly felt tight with tension.

"What are you doing here?"

"What is he doing here?!" Senraki and Salka said at the same time

"I invited him," Sagiri said, and two pairs of eyes bore a hole into him. It was not Senraki's Sagiri who was worried about, but Salka in this situation. Senraki could play pretend till he killed you one day, but Salka did not have that. With the Asakana, what you see is what you get.

"I can not stand in the same place with men with no honour. I shall take my leave," Salka said, already turning to leave.

"Yet you stand beside a man without any," Sikuwa said, and the tension crackled enough to spark the air.

"I dare you to say that again," Salka said, and it was not a question of whether things could go bad but of when.

"I need all your help," Sagiri said, trying to diffuse the situation. "Principal Sikuwa is a lover of poison, and I need him to derive the poison in my system," sagiri said, but Salka's hand was tight on the bow in his left hand. Sagiri knew how fast the man was, and with the bow, he was lethal. He had also learned he was in the shadow unit under the supreme mandra once. If the tensions rose any higher, then blood would surely be shed.

"Zazami, you didn't tell the boy you are an expert in poisons?" Sikuwa said, diverting his gaze from Salka first.

"You flatter me, Principal Sikuwa. I can barely hold a candle to the poison principal," Senraki said with a wide smile on his face that could have fooled anyone. It was so perfect and warm to the eye, but his aura was cold as stone with no hint of warmth.

"Nvaru," sagiri said as the staring match between the three continued. He stretched his hand out, and N'varu understood. He pulled the blade out and handed it to sagiri carefully. Sagiri handed the blade to Senraki, and that might have broken the tension. Salka turned around to look at the blade, and his eyes furrowed.

"A swan blade?" Salka said, "Where is its twin?" He grabbed the blade from Salka's hand and looked at them intently.

"I only have one. The other is still with my attacker," Sagiri said carefully, not to give anything away to Sikuwa.

"Swan blades are not so rare, but they are not common either," Sikuwa said, taking a few steps closer but still keeping a good distance between him and the duo, who clearly did not see eye to eye with him. "Your attacker must have used a blade that is hard to pinpoint back to the source since it's not that rare," Sikuwa continued.

"I know who stabbed me, it's the poison in it I don't know," Sagiri said.

"Interesting. Why don't you ask whoever stabbed you what poison it was? I have ways to make people talk," Sikuwa offered the excitement in his voice, becoming blatantly obvious at his desire to torture answers out of someone.

"We can not torture them. At least not yet." Sagiri answered.

"Can I see the blade?" Sikuwa said, stretching his hand out. Salka looked reluctant to even do the small act, but finally handed it over quickly and retracted his hand.

Sikuwa pulled the blade close to his eyes for a long moment before he pushed it close to his nose and sniffed. He pulled it away instantly, his eyes widening slightly behind the mask.

"The black rot?!" he said with surprise. "How are you still alive after being stabbed by this? "No one survives the black rot unless they cut off the limb touched by it," Sikuwa said, his voice grave for the first time, and even sagiri had to stand in awe at how the man could tell the poison after just one sniff.

"Can you create an antidote?" Sagiri asked.