

KEEPER 194

Chapter 194: THE BLACK ROT

"Can you create an antidote?" Sagiri asked.

"No," Sukuwa did not even hesitate before saying that. There was a uniform sigh of disappointment.

"So this was a waste of time," Salka said. He was in a pretty bad mood, even being in proximity to Sikuwa.

"I did not say that, you, Asakana, never change. The black rot, just like its name, rots everything it touches, eating it until only black remains. The black rot was used mostly in warring times in the past between superior tribes, kingdoms, and nations. It was not made for killing men. It was made to kill land.

"During the old wars, when armies could not break walls or outlast sieges, they turned to the soil itself. Black Rot was poured into enemy farmlands in the dead of night. Just by sneaking small portions of it by small groups, they would pour it at the edge of farmlands. At first, nothing happened. Then, suddenly hell could break loose. Then the fields began to die violently. The green faded to a sickly grey, then to black. Stalks collapsed in on themselves as if drained from within. Whatever the rot touched, there was nothing left behind, no fibers, not even the roots. It ate the very ground itself, leaving behind barren lands. The decay and soil turned dark and brittle. The ground could remain dead for years, not giving life to anything. This is how kingdoms used to win wars without raising a weapon or throwing an arrow.

"Even the strongest of kingdoms were defeated in this way. The black rot was once the deadliest weapon of war. Kingdoms later made a treaty not to use it because of the havoc it caused and how much famine came with it. The black rot, yes, could eat the lands of enemy nations, but then it did not know when to stop. It could continue moving in all directions, and most of the time, if it did not find a river or a sea to cut its claws, then it could just keep moving.

"What does this history lesson have to do with anything?" Salka asked when Sikuwa finally fell silent. Sagiri knew firsthand the effect of the black rot and how fast it had festered in his body. It even ate an entire pool of what the archive expelled from his body.

"I was getting there. Soon, the poison was used by an assassin to kill an important figure in the state of Tagayia, which was one of the reasons for its ban. Warriors were taught against using poisons in battle. I

know why you are all wondering why I say this, yet Daziko uses poisons. The poison our cadets use is only meant to slow down an opponent before killing them. It's an added advantage, especially when dealing with stronger opponents," Sikuwa said, looking at Salka up and down. "Senraki, you should know this, it's not like you haven't used poison for this purpose before," Sikuwa said with meaning, looking at Senraki.

"If you need poison to slow an opponent down like a damned spider, then you shouldn't be a warrior in the first place," Salka said. Senraki just yawned at the history lesson, or perhaps whatever Sikuwa spoke of.

"Well, only a fool goes to battle with a stronger opponent without a countermeasure," Sikuwa said.

"Well, are you going to get to the point or are you going to put me to sleep?" Lotaga suddenly said. He was sitting a distance away. Everyone had heard him coming, but not even Salka bothered to rectify it. Lotaga eavesdropped on everything, and even though Salka was a strict captain, punishing a person daily could become tiresome.

"Shut up before I test this blade on you!" Salka chastised. It was better while the man eavesdropped in silence in plain sight, but daring to even chip in to a conversation he was not invited to was just too shameless.

"So much for not using poisoned blades," Sikuwa muttered under his breath. Sagiri and N'varu could only watch the exchange in silence, waiting for Sikuwa to get to the point. "As I was saying, when you are going up against a lethal opponent, you need to slow them down. The black rot does not have a cure, yes, but it can be slowed down. When thousands and thousands of vaara of land had turned barren, nations quickly realised their mistake. A remedy was needed, but whatever the innovators and poison experts came up with did not work, and most of it even acted as a catalyst. Imagine the distress knowing that a poison without a cure existed, and even worse, someone had used it to kill. What then could happen in such a time?"

"Ban the meaning of the poison," N'varu said skeptically.

"Yes, that and kill everyone who knew how to make it," Sikuwa said, and there was pindrop silence.

"Kill? Kill people who had helped them win battles?" Sagiri could not help but ask, and it brought a foul taste to his mouth to imagine that yet another set of people had been killed for such a reason.

"An important figure had died, someone needed to pay," Sikuwa said.

"So the nation turned on a hand that had fed them?" Sagiri said, not believing the obnoxious behaviour of humans. The more he knew about people, the colder he started to be. Just how deep does the cruelty, selfishness, and wickedness of people go?

"Well, when something is too good, sometimes it suffers the probability of going bad. We, humans, love the strong, but when they get too strong, we get scared of them. When something becomes too strong or too lethal, it ceases to become a weapon and becomes a threat. For example, look at the Asakana clan. They are loved for their prowess in war. In times of war, people praise them, but now they are scared of them," Sikuwa said, and Salka's chest swelled with pride. "The only reason the Bami tribe has not gone extinct is that they serve with honour, or perhaps someone has not found a way to eliminate them."

"The weak can never eliminate the Bami," Salka said as if that were impossible.

"Can we get back to how they stopped the poison? The Asakanas' necks are already too swollen with pride. Can you not brush his feathers even more?" Lotaga groaned.

"The only thing that can stop the black rot is water," Sikuwa said, and there was uniform bewilderment. Water?

"Water? I listened to all that history just for you to say water?" Senraki said.

"Well, Senraki, it's not anyone's fault that you lack knowledge. A flood had occurred back then, and it affected some places, where the rot had taken root for months, not allowing even crops to grow. The flood lasted three months, and when the water finally went down, the rot had died with it. Later, dams and rivers were directed to affected lands for months, and the epidemic was finally over. Water is the main ingredient, even when the rot is used to poison someone, but it needs the shyflower as another ingredient. The affected limb needed to stay in water that had to be changed again and again.

"Can you make the antidote?" Sagiri asked.

"Still a no. Even making an antidote to the black rot will mean we know about its existence, and I don't want to join the people who first made it. I love my life, and so I will not make it." Sikuwa said.

"What Sikuwa means is that this never happened," Lotaga said, and Sagiri finally understood.

"I trust everyone gathered here," Sagiri said.

"Well, I don't trust Zazami," Sikuwa said, and Senraki rolled his eyes.

"The shy flowers are probably blooming in two nights since it will be a full moon. Sikuwa acting as if you are not dreaming of carrying favour with the boy is just pitiful." Senraki said.

"Will you get it done? This thing that never happened?" Sagiri asked.

"What thing?" Sikuwa asked, already in the act. "If you give me the blade and a drop of your blood, I will make..."

"Not happening!"

"Absolutely not!" Salka and Senraki answered at the same time.

"I was talking to the boy. Well, Sagiri thinks about it. I can always offer you more than those two. In the meantime, don't get your blood running too much. However, you managed to survive, it will take time for the rot to completely get out of your system. The antidote will only slow its effects down until that time." Sikuwa said before he turned to leave. "See you soon, Sagiri. Don't forget our talk."