

KEEPER 231

Chapter 231: HIS VOTE

"I have not taken my vote yet," the supreme mandra said after a while, as if the whole standoff had not fazed him. His aura was calm. Deadly calm, even, and his words were even calmer.

With that statement, he waved for everyone to leave the hall.

"The council meeting is adjourned. You all may leave!" The mandra's voice was still as calm as ever. The council members seemed to deliberate what he was saying before they loosed their defensive and aggressive stances. They had already angered him once and it was wise they did not do it twice. He raised his hand to Tsaka too, and as if Tsaka could read the man's thoughts, the shadows that had been lurking in the room, making it look darker, dissipated, and the room looked even lighter. Dawn was starting to break, too. The room cleared out, and the shadows disappeared, and after a moment, only sagiri stood staring at Tsaka and the supreme mandra of Tagayia.

Tsaka had not sheathed his weapon yet, and he still looked skeptical about the safety of the mandra. The other members had left the hall, but Sagiri could still feel them lurking around the hall. Even the shadow corp was not far off.

"Putting your weapon away is in your best interest, boy," Tsaka said after a while, but Sagiri still held onto Nokai tightly. He could not trust anyone's word, and the dark and strong aura still surrounding the mandra was still heavy, and he did not know whether he could trust him yet. He also did not know if he could kill the man just yet, even with his current strength.

"I do not care what a northerner says. You want me to put away my weapon so you can kill me," Sagiri said, his hold on Nokai tightening even further.

"If I wanted to kill you, I could have done so when you were weak over the last few days. I can even kill you now. But I won't. You have friends and parents in the north. Don't you wish to know how they are and how your friends are doing?" the mandra finally spoke again. His voice was not hurried. It did not sound like a threat, yet sagiri had a feeling it was. How had the mandra known he had been weak during the last few days?

"A beast can sense another, and right now you smell even more of a beast and something bitter, and your human scent is dying," the mandra said, and even with his face completely veiled, he could tell the

man was sniffing the air. "Whatever lives inside of you will kill you before anyone kills you if you don't learn what you are," the mandra added. Thus was the second time someone had addressed the archive as someone. Sagiri still had no recollection of what he had done during the time he blacked out. He would go through that later. He had been carrying an odd feeling since then. "I don't need to kill you when you are already dying," the supreme mandra said, and sagiri froze.

"What do you mean?" Sagiri asked, feeling even more uneasy. He did not feel sick or as if he was dying.

"You have to ask yourself if the anger and rage you have been giving in to is yours. A beast is driven by one emotion. Whatever it is might not be a beast, but giving in to it makes you no less than a beast." The supreme mandra continued talking, and with each word, Sagiri's hold on his weapon tightened.

"So what are you saying? Are you going to use my parents and friends to bargain or to turn me into a weapon too?!" Sagiri Seethed. Taziraka did not seem fazed by the outburst yet again, and his calmness was beginning to anger sagiri even more.

"I have no use for a weapon that can not control their primal urges," Taziraka said, and sagiri did not know whether to be pissed or heed the advice. Well, the north had turned him into what he was now. They are the ones who had forced him into this state of always giving in to the anger, and they did not have any right to act as if he was at fault.

"Sheath your weapon and follow me," Taziraka finally said before he turned around and headed for the exit as if he expected Sagiri to follow. He did not even spare another glance, nor did he seem to mind that Sagiri could attack him while his back was still turned. Tsaka followed after the mandra. Even he kept his back straight and did not look over his shoulder.

Sagiri seethed for a while longer, feeling the rage inside of him build, then simmer, then fade in waves. He was not going to sheath Nokai, and so as the footsteps of the mandra faded away, with his right hand man beside him, Sagiri found himself following them. He could have pushed the archive out and gotten away, but the mandra and his parents and his friends. It might not have sounded like a threat, yet he felt it was a threat. He could not get a bread on the man at all. He was the ruler of the whole tagayia, and he might have been naive to think he did not have eyes everywhere, and he had a feeling he knew where his parents had always been, even under Salka's care, and he had just not made his move.

Sagiri walked slowly behind the two men, still burning with rage at having not killed Felunka and the special units general and that man. Sagiri could still feel eyes watching him from the walls as he walked behind the mandra and Tsaka.

Even so, since the mandra did not wish to make him a weapon, he could follow through and see what the man had to say. He could act calm until his parents were safely out of the north and even n'varu and the others from the south. He was sure nothing would happen to his other teammates since they are from the north.

The three walked out of the convergence hall and into the morning light. Still, Sagiri could feel eyes on him as he walked deeper and deeper into the heart of Alike City.

Just what did the man want from him now?! What did the North want!!

Chapter 232: A CHOICE TO MAKE

"How do I know that you are not lying?" Sagiri asked.

"Because I have not killed you yet," is all Taziraka said. He still carried the heaviest air of danger Sagiri had ever felt, and he could be lying if it didn't make him skeptical about the man's strength. Even the great chief of the north had called him the strongest man of Tagayia. Sagiri had witnessed part of Zaka Asakana's strength, and he was no doubt the strongest person he had seen in action, yet he had called Taziraka the strongest man in Tagayia.

Sagiri mulled over the words he had said. Tsaka and the Supreme Mandra had not hesitated before striking a bargain with him.

"But if I do that, then won't the south be the one to be a target from the Tatani? You want me to get mud on my feet for you?" Sagiri said.

"The way I see it, the supreme mandra is giving you a way out. You finish the task, and you have a free way out of the north with whoever you want to take with and if your parents choose to remain, they will be under my care. I'll give you my word." Tsaka said.

"Am I just supposed to believe the word of a northerner?" Sagiri seethed. The two were now standing on top of one of the shadow corp bases overlooking the east side of Alike City. The city was indeed a maze from above, and it looked like it was a fortress. Especially inside the inner city.

"It doesn't matter whether you believe it or not. " If you finish this task, then you get to leave the north and keep your friends safe," Tsaka said. He was an honourable man, according to the rumours, but sagiri could see the man still had a cunning bone.

Firstly, no tribe had gone against the Tatani and won. Tatani lies on the western side of Tagayia and to the far south, touching the desert, but before going further west and almost touching the state of Safaya. Tatani sat between Safaya and Tagayia and refused to be claimed by any of the countries. Tatani had grown over the past years. It is said the tribe had risen after the many wars between Safaya and Tagayia over the years. The tribes that were caught in between had been torn over the years, and year after year, they had almost gone extinct. It is said that one man had risen from the tribes and had united the wartorn tribes. They had then acquired a secret art of one of the clans, and over the past decade, they had grown from just a small tribe to become a force. Enough to cause tensions between Tagayia and Safaya.

"Why can't you send one of your chiefs to do this task? You have many capable warriors. What does this have to do with me? Why should I fight a war that I did not start?" sagiri asked. He had an idea why they wanted to send him there, but he still wanted them to admit it.

The tribes had taken a chunk of land from both Safaya and Tagayia, making it a very sensitive matter between the two states that had been at war for decades. If either Safaya or Tagayia engaged Tatani, there were chances they could touch either's lands, and so then a war could break out between Safaya and Tagayia. Only this time, Tatani won't take it lying down, and a war could only lead to the growth of Tatani. more orphans of war, more Tatani. If not now, then in the future. There would be no end to it. A tribe of the wartorn. Tatani might not be as strong as the entire state of Tagayia and Safaya, but the war could cost both countries more chunks of land. Tatani had grown up in war, and a war would be like watering. Children raised in war. Orphans of war.

"I think you are smart enough to know why that can't be. Tagayia can not go to war with Titani, and neither can Safaya," Tsaka said.

"So you want to make me, or perhaps the south, an enemy of the Safaya and Tatani?" sagiri asked. "Why can't you let them be. It is a monster you created. Perhaps it is in your nature to create monsters?" Sagiri asked. He was standing far from the two.

"Tatani can not be allowed to grow any bigger," the supreme mandra finally spoke.

"Why not merge them into a tribe of Tagayia or let them be a tribe of Safaya?" Sagiri asked. He was not into the idea of wiping out a tribe and its orphaned clans. Just thinking about it made Sagiri green with disgust for Safaya and Tagayia. Is wiping out tribes and clans all they knew?

"Will you be willing to get in bed with someone who killed your parents and entire families? Tatani was born from war. Its ruler is the most hateful of all. They are barbaric. Secondly, Tatani can not be joined with any state, even if they are willing, because they are already standing on three states. I will have you know that Safaya touches the south's outer lands. The desert belongs to the south, and soon they might be a problem for the south too," Tsaka said. Sagiri could understand the orphaned tribe Tatani. He did not want to bear staying in the north for much longer either.

"The South did not contribute to making them orphans. I don't think they have a reason to plague the south," Sagiri said. He did not want to do any dirty work for the two damned states. "So you can't go to war, nor can you merge with them. Can't you let them be?" Sagiri asked. That was the best solution.

"But if they continue to grow, then Tagayia and Safaya will at some point go to war with Tatani because they would be a threat big enough to ignore. When that happens, Tatani will surely die, but not without both sides paying the price. There will be casualties on both sides, but Tatani will die. Do you understand?" Tsaka said.

"I still don't understand what you want me to do?" Sagiri said.

"Your clan was wiped out, and I think you must relate..." Tsaka started, and sagiri saw red.

"Don't mention my clan!!" Sagiri snapped enough to make the air around them freeze. "The tribe is a result of your cruelty. They are monsters you created. They only want to live, yet you can't allow it. And now you want me to kill them!!" Sagiri was ready to fight the damned mandra to the death rather than render the same fate he had been rendered. If he killed a whole tribe, then what was the difference between him and the damned northern tribes?

"You misunderstand. My mandra only wishes to tell you about the fate that awaits them if something doesn't happen. You can push them out of Tagayia and into Safaya. Then, Tagayia could have no reason to go to war with them," Tsaka said.

"But then Safaya will have a reason to go to war with them. You are the reason they haven't gone to war. Your standoff with them is the reason," Sagiri said.

"You can push them south," Taziraka spoke again. "The choice is yours. Push them to Safaya or south, or kill them now to keep them from inevitable death in the future if their hatred and numbers keep growing." Sagiri could finally understand why they wanted him to be the one to go on the mission. If he went to war with Tatani, then Tagayia had nothing to lose. He was an enemy of Tagayia, and so Safaya could not attach him to Tagayia. If anything, Safaya could want to be friends with him. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Same as Tatani. If he pushed them to Safaya, then Tagayias still had nothing to lose since by then they would be Safaya's problem.

If he pushed south, still, Tagayia had nothing to lose because then they would cease to be a problem to them. Safaya and Tagayia had not been at war with each other even before the rise of Tatani. They would have no reason to go to war, and the two states could continue thriving as they had after the last great war between them. Tatani was close to breaking that, and both nations might have been strong, but going to war could mean many more losses that could last for decades.

Better a fragile peace than war.

How selfish of Tagayia.

Chapter 233: TO WAIT

"So you want the Tatani out of Tagayia without starting a war with Safaya," Sagiri said after a momentary pause. The two men did not answer. Taziraka did not talk much and let Tsaka read his mind and do the talking. As long as the Tatani were not in Tagayia, and Tagayia did not care much about them.

"You will be afforded an elite squad to go with you. You can say the number you want. I will hand-pick them for you," Tsaka said after a while.

"I don't trust any squad you afford me. I want my squad," Sagiri said. He did not want all of squad 25 on this, but he had a feeling they were not going to let him pick squad Salka or Seyika. He needed Kiuga for this. He did not know how he was going to complete the mission, but having someone whose head he trusted, he was sure to come up with a solution. He also needed to see nvaru.

"You can not be allowed to interact with students of the War College. Besides, they are in their homes now waiting for their college admission letters," Tsaka said.

"Then I will wait until they resume. I am doing this my way," Sagiri said, and the mandra tilted his face to look at Tsaka. Tsaka stopped whatever he wanted to say and took a step back.

"What else do you need?" the supreme mandra asked.

"I need to kill someone in your inner council," sagiri said, and the air froze for a moment. It was clear that neither of the two had expected him to say that.

"That is not possible. You get to go to the south and never return. The supreme mandra votes to send you south on condition that you never return," Tsaka said after the moment of shock passed.

"Is that supposed to be mercy? I still haven't killed the ones I want to kill most, and I will kill them. " Blood is paid by blood," sagiri said. He agreed to stop a war between two states for Tagayia. That came at a price, too. "I will not rest until he is dead," sagiri said. He was not going to back down on that.

"Child, threatening to kill a person is okay, but the inner council of the supreme mandra is untouchable," Tsaka tried to reason, but sagiri was having none of it. Taziraka did not remain silent on this, and he finally spoke.

"Well, as long as you don't return to the north and if you think yourself capable, I will not stand in your way," Taziraka said, and Tsaka's jaw hung open. They both knew what he meant. 'You are never to return north, but if you are capable enough to return and eliminate an inner council member without my knowledge, then you are welcome to try. The supreme mandra could seem like he had allowed Sagiri to settle his scales if he was capable enough, but again, if he returned north and the mandra or all the factions that wanted him dead knew of it, then he would be dead. That was, however, enough for Sagiri. It would be harder after he went south, but no matter how many years it took, he would find him and kill him.

That was good enough for sagiri. For now.

"Is that all?" the supreme mandra asked again. He was harder to read.

"I will need to visit my parents before I embark on this mission. I need to know they're still okay," Sagiri said. He wanted to talk to them and see if they would agree to go south with him. He needed to know they were alive, too. It had been almost a year since he saw them, and he was longing to see them.

"Tsaka make sure it's done." Supreme Mandra Taziraka did not hesitate to give the order.

"Now is that all?" Taziraka asked again. It seemed like the man hated talking as much as he hated hearing people bicker.

"After this, I will have nothing to do with the north, but if the north tries to follow me south, then I will not hesitate," Sagiri said, and he meant it. He was going to retreat south to let the councils cool off. When they learned about the mandra's vote, he could not be sure that the east, west, and war councils could not follow him. Not only them, but his benefactor was sure to make a move soon. If that happened, then the deal was off.

"As the supreme mandra, I will keep my side of the bargain. For the sake of all Tagayia and my people, I will not follow you south. As I said, you won't return north, and I won't go south." Taziraka said. Now the sun had risen all over, making his unnatural white hair look like clouds. The Tagan clan is also known for their white hair, and just as the red hair of the south is seen as a curse, the white hair of the Tagan is seen as a blessing.

Sagiri finally nodded in agreement.

"There will be two weeks before the colleges resume studies, and a week from now will be the orientation of the first-year college students. You will stay in this fortress till then, don't try to escape or do anything reckless," Tsaka said. He was still very much a prisoner, and as long as he had people he cared about in the north, it would be difficult to ignore all caution.

"As you wish," Sagiri said. He was led away by the shadow corp. Those closest to Tsaka and back into a room, he would be staying till he left for the war college. He still had unfinished business with Lira, too.

He's going to the war college to pick a squad he trusted was still a way to get in touch with Lira again. Even if he decided to return north after his exile, she was still an important piece in his plan.

All he could do now was wait.

Chapter 234: THE REUNION I

You don't have to work for them. If you are doing it for us, then we don't deserve it." Bakuru said. That was a week ago when they had been brought to one of the shadow corps fortresses.

"Yes, Sagi, it's parents who should protect their kids, not the other way around," Rusha agreed. She looked to have aged a little and thinned a bit since Sagiri last saw her. Bakuru looked even guiltier. He reeked of guilt so much so it was hard to ignore. She always called him by half his name. Sagiri had never understood it before, but now it made him feel warm.

"They will use you as leverage," Sagiri said.

"Even better, because they won't kill us even when you leave. They need to hold something dear over you. I am your mother, remember, and I am the toughest woman. No one can make me suffer." Rusha, even with tears in her eyes.

"I have no right to go south," Bakuru mumbled, the guilt he carried growing even bigger by the moment.

Wham!!

"Don't be the rain on this sunny day!" Rusha slapped Bakuru across the head.

"Don't mind your father, if you want us to come, I will drag him south myself," Rusha said, pulling sagiri into the sixth or seventh embrace since they met. Not that sagiri was complaining.

"You are one to talk, when you have not stopped smothering the boy. He is a man now, and your affection will make him soft." Bakuru said a little of the guilt was lifted. They were back to bickering like they always did, and the mood was much better than when they had first met. They both looked guilty and apologized over and over for failing to protect him and not telling him the truth about his origins sooner. He had told them it didn't matter anymore over and over, but it was futile to try to stop Bakuru from apologizing and Rusha from weeping. It was followed by a series of tears from Rusha and an embrace enough to squeeze the life out of him. Men are not supposed to show too much affection, and so a pat from Bakuru to his head was as far as he could go. Rusha did not allow it, however, because he

pulled them both into an embrace the second time. Perhaps it was to help Bakuru forcefully show affection.

"Are you saying he is less of a man now. And I am a bad mother for loving my child?" Rusha accused, and Bakuru gasped.

"I- stop twisting my words. Of course, you are the best mother." Bakuru had no choice but to give in and let Rusha squeeze sagiri into as many embraces as possible. Each one made him feel lighter, less angry, and more relaxed. It was perhaps good for him to see a familiar face. His parents could remain in Alika city henceforth. It was not comforting at all, but at least he knew they would be safe from other factions. If something happened to them in the city, at least he knew who to kill.

They had been allowed a day of reunion before they were taken out of the inner city to the outer city of Alika, where they would be staying. Since Rusha is a healer, an apothecary was set up as cover. Rusha still embraced him twice before she was peeled off him when it was time to part. It had to be done, however, because there was no other way. Even with her tiny form, it took Bakuru and another warrior to tear free of him. Such a fierce and feisty woman.

It was now a week since then, and it was time for another reunion. Even though they had come to an agreement that Sagiri could pick his own squad. Tsaka had still hand-picked an elite unit of thirty warriors to accompany them. They were to take instructions from him. Sagiri knew another reason they were there was to spy on him and send back intel to Tsaka.

The orientation week had elapsed, and Sagiri did not have to go all the way to the Lofekeni tribe to find Kiuga. His disguise by Tsaka was to dress him as a college instructor. A black combat suit with a red overcoat whose hood covered his head and face, and a veil to hide his face.

The four colleges are built between Ko'alsi and Alika city. The great collegium of Tagayia, involving the four colleges, is even bigger than the two cities. The four colleges are a city by themselves. They are so different yet the same. Each college is its own city, yet they are still conjoined together.

The Kavuraka war college. Its architecture is brutal and functional. Black stone walls rise in layered tiers, lined with training grounds, weapon forges, and combat arenas. The Zentara College, where historians, diplomats, and other studies outside of war, healing, and innovations took place, stood apart in both colour and structure. It is built in earthy colours. The Yakama Healing College also stood apart in its white colours to show the purity of the healers' to save lives, and lastly, the Innovation College, the Kentu Innovation College. It's an arrow symbol to show their determination to steer Tagayia to the next

stage was attached to each of its building peaks. Its architecture is the most complex, and the red walls make it look like a red city. The black, green, and brown, white, and red colleges stand apart yet together.

Sagiri just had to convince Kiuga to go with him, and Tsaka and the mandra could take it from there to get him out of the college for a few days without affecting his training and record. Kiuga was already a genius, and it could only take him a few months to grasp all there was to be taught in college. The first part could be done and executed by him. It was up to him to convince his squad, and Tsaka could take it from there.

It was midday when Sagiri made it to the Great Collegium of Tagayia. It was not hard to enter the academy with his fake identity, but it was in no way easy to find who he wanted in the big city. There was no doubt that Kiuga would be in the war college.

The collegium was huge, and it made Galka look like a baby in comparison. The place could fit four cities, and it was a wonder how cadets would get from one building to another. Of course, there were untouched places and deep woods, even the colleges being stuck between two cities. Even moving at top speed from the southern gate, where the war college was, it took sagiri an hour to break into the first building. This was much tougher than he had imagined. He was used to kiuga's presence, but finding him in the place was going to take him some time. Sagiri found himself perched on top of the tallest building of the war school a few hours later. It was as if Kiuga did not want to be found.

He stood under the now grey sky and pushed his senses out.

Come on, Kiuga! Where are you!

A few minutes later, Sagiri felt another familiar presence. Bingo!

Chapter 235: THE REUNION II

The training grounds of Kavuraka roared with motion. It should have been the advanced weaponry combat exercise, but right before supper. Blades clashed and Orders barked, yet dust hung in the air because of how advanced the arenas were. Warrior initiates were divided into sections now. Only over a hundred warrior initiates stood in the arena. There were over a hundred arenas in the war college, and at the moment, a dozen of them were littered with a small number of cadets. Kiuga and kaka were in one, and N'varu was in another, but he could go to him later.

He walked through it all without pause. The Red overcoat with the instructor's mark stitched at the shoulder made him fit right in. No one stopped him as he walked to the far back, where Kiuga and Kaka's presence was thickest. Sagiri moved past squads drilling in formation, his pace steady, controlled, trying to appear as controlled as possible.

Then he saw them.

It seemed no one wanted to spar with Kaka yet. Only the best of the best joined the war college, but still, Kaka was a force and a beast.

Formation check," he said. Standing in front of them. He felt a bit mischievous standing in a high rank as he watched the two go at each other. Is this how the instructors always felt watching them spar? Sagiri made sure to keep his voice low and slightly strict, but boredom was the spice.

The gong went by after a few minutes, and it was supper time. Kaka's favorite time is slightly before sparring. The warrior initiates went on training for a little while longer until the senior-most instructors with the most stitches decorating their soot announced.

"Warlings stop!!" his voice tore through the place. Kaka and Kiuga, together with the other, stopped instantly and fell into an easy stance.

"Dismissed!!" A second command followed. Kiuga and Kaka snapped to attention instantly.

"Sir," they saluted and waited for the instructors to leave before they turned to leave. They seemed to wonder why the one instructor in front of them was not leaving and, more so, why he seemed shorter and more slender than all the instructors, but it's not like there weren't a few instructors who did not beef up even with years of training and keeping fit. They saluted him and started to leave, but Sagiri spoke again.

"There was a flaw in your stances," he said. Kiuga and Kaka paused. He could have been right, of course, but he had only seen them train for a second. He was an instructor after all, and so they turned to him and waited expectantly for him to point out their flaws. Sagiri stood still for a moment, looking at them through the veil.

Up close now. Nothing had changed. Apart from the combat suits, which had gone from grey to black with circular stripes of white on the upper arms, collar, and thighs, nothing had changed.

"Do you not remember me?" He asked after a moment of stretched silence. Kaka frowned slightly. Kiuga's eyes narrowed, trying to see past the hood.

"Should we, sir?" Kiuga replied. Sagiri tilted his head just slightly. Of course, it could be out of the question for them to imagine him to be disguised as an instructor of a war college, and more so to dare step into the college when there was a bounty on his head. The mandra might have made a vote, but still the vote had not broken the tie. His vote still mattered most, but it was a tie of three votes across the councils. The mandra might be the most supreme power in Tagayia, but a tie was a tie, and other councils could still use it as an excuse to practice their will. There was an unsaid stalemate. Since he had not been killed or handed over to those in support of rehabilitation, or sent south. It would be assumed that no vote had been taken. The mandra had not announced his vote, but he had to, and soon, before things could go sour.

The other warrior initiates had now left the arena, and only the three stood.

"It would be fine for Kaka to forget me, but you too, kiuga?" sagiri teased a little. It was a bit entertaining to watch the two try to rake their minds to remember an instructor at the war college.

"That voice," Kiuga said, his eyebrows furrowing even deeper.

'What voice are you talking about?' Kaka had still not recognized a familiar voice.

"I know you must be hungry. I will let you do it. Meet me in the western high arena after supper. Come with N'varu," Sagiri said before he turned to leave, but a hand grabbed his upper arm to keep him from leaving. Kiuga. His expression was grave.

"I will answer your questions when we meet later. That is if you want to hear what I have to say," Sagiri said and shrugged Kiuga's hand off before he disappeared out of the arena in a flash.

"That strange person sure moves fast. It looks kind of familiar. Is it Lotaga? Did Lotaga grow short and thin?" Kaka asked, and Kiuga just sighed in defeat before the voices died down. How was he one of the best warrior initiates, but couldn't take a hint?

Sagiri returned to the high arena on the western side of the arena. The building was made of only arenas, and the high arena was just one of the many. Sagiri perched at the back wall at the very edge of it and looked outward. The healing arena was west of where he stood, and its pristine wall could be seen even from far off. It could take at least an hour to get there. Zolinka could have to train in both colleges, and Sagiri could not imagine the strain of moving between the two every few days. He had once wondered whether he would be in war college, and he would be lying if he said it did not make him a bit nostalgic.

Now that things had gone the way they had, it could be hard for him to go to college, and yet he was standing within its walls. Only that he wasn't a student but a rogue and an enemy of Tagayia.

He would never get to be a warrior initiate or a full-fledged warrior. Some part of him must have tried to hope that he would at least become a warrior before things went south. He had even been ejected from the north. Of course, he wanted to make the northern tribes pay for what they had done, but again, he had people he cared for in Tagayia.

Nothing he could do now but go south. He no longer had a home, and it made him feel more nostalgic. He had a deep longing since his fate was sealed. A longing for something he didn't quite know.

Chapter 236: THE REUNION III

It didn't take long before someone arrived, and it wasn't Kaka or Kiuga.

"You finally show up? What were you thinking, keeper?!" N'varu snapped, standing a few yards away behind Sagiri. "What are you even doing here now!!" N'varu was seething as always.

"Which question will you let me answer first?" Sagiri said, still keeping his eyes on the western side of the Tagayia Collegium.

"Don't play smart with me. You had to go and kill a warrior in front of the whole Tagayia. Showcase your right eye to the watcher's eye. Do you so badly want to die, keeper?" N'varu was trembling with rage, and Sagiri could feel it. It had been a while since he heard his lectures, and he was not mad to hear them this time.

"Was the teardrop poison neutralized?" Sagiri ignored N'varu's outburst. Silence stretched out before N'varu stepped closer a few steps.

"The teardrop was nothing. I knew they were trying to trap you. Why don't you ever listen to me?" N'varu was now standing two feet behind Sagiri. Even with his visible anger, Sagiri could feel his relief mixed with it.

"That is good," Sagiri said. It was good to know that N'varu was safe. He could get mad at him all he wanted, but he wasn't the only one who wanted to protect him. Sagiri, too, had an obligation to protect him, too. He could let him be mad all he wanted as long as he was safe. He could do the same if things were to repeat themselves.

N'varu sighed after a long moment. He must have realised he was not going to get an answer from Sagiri.

"How have you been?" he asked. Sagiri did not know what to say to that. He had been through a lot, to say the least, and he had now made a deal. He knew whatever he was about to ask of Nvaru could drive him over the edge.

"I am going south in a few days or a month," Sagiri said. He was avoiding all of N'varu's questions because he knew N'varu could tear him a new one and could beat him to a pulp.

"Why don't you go now? Why come here? You haven't answered me how you escaped. Lotaga told me you were in the custody of the warriors' guild." N'varu said. Of course, whatever Salka did, Lotaga could know. Sagiri sighed in laughter and finally turned around.

"Typical lotaga to know everything Salka does," Sagiri found himself slightly smiling. He was going to miss the man's madness so much.

"What do you mean, everything Salka does?" N'varu said tilting his head slightly.

"He is the one who dropped me off in the warriors' guild base when the shadow corps were trying to kill me," Sagiri said, and N'varu's eyes widened slightly.

"Why would he do that?" N'varu said, taking another step closer.

"Well, it was either that or they would have killed me. The archive went silent on me at that time," Sagiri said, and N'varu's eyebrows furrowed even deeper.

"What do you mean the archive went silent?" N'varu looked worried now, and some feeling passed in his eyes, but it was gone quickly.

"What did you do..." N'varu started to say, but before he could finish, another voice joined in.

"It seems mother hen beat us to it." Kiuga's voice joined in, his voice slightly out of breath. Kaka was, of course, not far behind him. "Do you know how hard it is for me to run from my wing to the second dormitory wing to find you?" Kiuga whined.

N'varu wheeled around swiftly. His look was hostile when his eyes settled on Kiuga and Kaka.

"What are you two doing here?!" N'varu asked, standing in front of Sagiri.

"When did we become bad people? We had to endure two days of questioning for him, and now mother hen is looking at us like we are bad people," Kiuga said.

"How does N'varu know that person?" Kaka asked. It seemed Kiuga had not told him anything.

"I asked them to find you and meet me here. I don't have much longer," Sagiri said with urgency, moving from his spot behind N'varu to meet the two boys. Of course, with N'varu hot on his heels.

"Don't you all think we should wait for him to tell us his identity?" Kaka said when they were all now standing in arm's reach. Kiuga and N'varu both sighed.

Kaka was truly a character. He was strong when it mattered and deadly, but he couldn't tell voices apart to save his life. Sagiri knew Kiuga had had enough of teasing him and rolling his eyes along the way, and so he didn't want to torture him further. He stepped closer. Close enough that all three could see him and no one else. Well, he had not felt anyone close, but he was not going to take any chances. Then, just slightly, he lowered the veil. Just enough for the three to see his face. Well, he was especially doing it for Kaka, but he was sure the others wanted to see his face, too.

Kaka's breath caught. "...Sagiri?"

Kiuga stiffened. It seemed he was still a little surprised, even though he already knew who he was. A beat passed, then Sagiri let the veil fall back into place.

Silence.

Kaka looked around quickly, lowering his voice. "What are you doing here?"

"Yes, sagiri, what are you doing here. N'varu told the squad you were in the custody of the guild. The guild just doesn't let its prisoners out. And is it really wise for you to come to the war college?" Kiuga asked.

It seemed that his massacre of a whole squad was kept under wraps, and no one outside the nine council knew about it. If no one knew about them, then why did the councils make it so much so that the whole of Tagayia already knew? Sagiri was beginning to think that no matter the outcome of the council meeting, the supreme mandra and tsalka already had this ending planned.

"I need your help," Sagiri threw it out there, and there was another moment of silence.

"In case you haven't noticed, we are in war college, and we can't leave this place for two years until we get the warrior's badge," Kiuga said.

"I am going on a mission for Tagayia, and when it's done, I get to go south and never return," Sagiri said, and silence and mixed feelings were flying around.

"What do you mean, go south and never return?" Kiuga asked. It was the first time Sagiri had felt that feeling reek off him. Hurt. He was hurt that he would go south and never return. It somehow made sagiri feel a bit guilty, but the matter was now out of his hands.

"Don't talk such nonsense!" Kaka said, stepping forward. Of course, the only emotion the boy was capable of was anger.

"Even if you killed one warrior. That still does not equal you getting exiled," N'varu said. Well, they had been planning to go south all the while, but exiling a capable warrior like him on account of that.

"It is not only one," Sagiri said, and everyone froze.

Chapter 237: TRUTHS AND PAINFUL REALITIES

"What did you do?" N'varu repeated the question.

Sagiri was still contemplating what to tell them. Was it right to tell them the intensity of what he had done?

"The number might have grown a little bigger," Sagiri said after a while of the three staring at him.

"Like five more or ten more?" Kiuga asked.

"A hundred and twenty more." Another voice joined in, and the three wheeled around to find the source. It was Gavina, the nephew of Nakia, the kun of the west. She looked like a younger version of her aunt, and it was a bit unsettling. "I knew my oka could still recognize your scent, Sagiri. Your team beat us in the team hunt. I have been looking for a chance to challenge you again," Gavina said, strutting closer. Her snake was curled around her neck. It seemed she had gone to another two smaller ones. One was reaped around her arm and another around her waist. They looked like the spotting image of the one sagiri had killed. Must have been its offspring.

"Now who invited the triplets?!" Kiuga groaned, getting defensive.

"And what do you mean by a hundred and twenty?" N'varu and Kaka asked at the same time.

"Your friend hasn't told you what he has done?" Gavina said, strutting close to the four. Her two friends were flanking her sides, and it seemed they already knew what she was talking about by how calm they all were. The anku clan girl, Pavire, and the teshini girl Nayira looked even colder in the new combat suit.

"What is she yapping about, Sagiri?" Kaka asked, turning to sagiri and turning him to look at him.

"He wiped out an entire seventh wing squad who were sent after him. My aunt told me this when she came back from Alike city, and the council of the west voted for him to be killed. I might not agree with my aunt on wanting to kill my marriage prospect, but what are you doing here?" Gavina said, lifting her nose to the sky. The women of Tsanka were truly something. She did not seem to bear a grudge towards her aunt for wanting to kill her prospect. She seemed to be mad about something, however. "It doesn't seem fair that you made the odds too high for me to reach, and I am here to settle the score."

And there it was. It might have been true what Kiuga said. There was no getting out of the challenge, perhaps until she won or he died.

"Sagiri, is what she says true?" Kiuga asked, and N'varu closed his eyes as if to run from the fact. Silence followed as everyone gathered and waited for him to answer.

"Yes," Sagiri said, and N'varu snapped his eyes open.

"They came after me, and I killed them," he continued, and there was even more silence. It seemed everyone had been stunned to silence, even Kaka.

"You what?!" N'varu was beside himself, eyes almost popping out of his skull.

"Is that the reason you have to go south and never return?" Kiuga asked in a small voice after a while.

"That is the deal I made with the shadow corp general and the supreme mandra. As Gavina has said, three council members voted for me to be killed. Three voted for me to be rehabilitated, and two voted for me to go south.

"Then why are you not dead or with the guild?" Pavire asked.

"The mandra's council withheld his vote. That is why I am here. I finish this mission, then I go south," Sagiri answered.

"So it's a stalemate," Nayira of the Teshini said. It seemed the ladies were as smart as they were strong. Kaka, on the other hand, had gone completely silent.

"Yes," Sagiri answered, looking at Kiuga, who was not taking the news any better than sagiri.

"Kiuga?" Sagiri called after a while.

"Is there really no way to remain in the north?" Kiuga was still not taking the information well.

"Well, not unless he kills the three councils that voted for him to die. I am going to tell you this for free. If my aunt wishes you dead, she will not let go easily. I won't tell her where you are, however, since I still wish to challenge you," Gavina said matter-of-factly. She was almost as cold as Nakia, her aunt, but her aunt was the coldest woman Sagiri had ever seen, and that score anytime soon.

"Not now. I have to go back home to the south first, perhaps in the future or never," Sagiri said, answering Kiuga, ignoring Gavina's truthful remark.

"Your home? What about the north?" Kaka asked. "What about your step-parents? Are you going to abandon them just because they are from the north?" Kaka said it with an edge.

"My parents are in the hands of the shadow general. I have no wish to abandon them," Sagiri said. They were not letting him off the hook easily, and this was perhaps going to take longer than he thought.

"So you are a prisoner," Pavire said.

"Until I finish my end of the bargain, I will not get to see them or go south," sagiri said.

"How sure are you the northerners will keep their word?" N'varu finally spoke.

"I don't," Sagiri answered honestly.

"So you think all Northerners are evil?" Kiuga asked. His question was directed at N'varu, but sagiri knew it was also directed at him.

"It is the north that wiped out his clan. So tell me why he has to do their bidding?!" N'varu snapped. It seemed he was not the news of sagiri striking a deal with the north well just as much as kiuga was not taking the news of him going south well.

"What is he talking about?" Kaka asked again. He was not taking the news well, either, it seemed.

"Yes, the north wiped out his clan. The reason he doesn't have a clan is because of the northerners, and now he has to do their bidding?!" N'varu was ready to fight.

"N'varu, let's talk about that another time. Time is running out now, and soon you will all need to be present for a head count," Sagiri said. He had never thought there would come a day when he would be the one to calm N'varu down. He was not happy to do it either, but at the moment, the only thing he had working for him was time. He had to bide his time. He now knew where to find his enemies, and he only needed to go south and regroup.

"No. You are not doing this. I as your sand shade forbid it!" N'varu said, not caring anymore.

"If I don't do it, then there are going to be more like me out there! I cannot NOT do this. They have my parents and know my friends. The faster I finish and go south, the better!" Sagiri snapped too. He did believe his own words, but something had to give at the moment.

Silence stretched in the high arena, mixed reactions and emotions flying around. Most of all, hurt and anger.

"So, Kiuga, will you help me?"

Chapter 238: AN OATH

"So, Kiuga, will you help me?" Sagiri asked, looking at Kiuga, who seemed to be out of it more than ever.

"If I help you, it will mean you never return," he said.

"Are you pouting?" Nayira asked. "That is not manly at all," she shook her head. It was true, however, that Kiuga was pouting, and he did not stop even when Nayira mocked him. Kaka should have joined too, but he seemed to be unusually silent.

Sagiri sighed. He did not know how to comfort Kiuga or make a promise he might never fulfil.

"Kiuga I..." Sagiri was at a loss for words, too

"Stop. I'd prefer not to hear it. But you have to promise that you will not stop being a member of squad 25, and if we need you in the future, you will come." Kiuga was now more serious. Even though he promised, Sagiri did not know whether he would be able to keep his word. The squads made in high school could always be kept even after college, unless the rules suddenly changed, which could mean he could still count himself as a member even in absentia. If Kiuga helped him this time, it could only be fair to give back a hand if Sagiri made the same promise back.

"I swear on my life that no matter where I go or how far I will be, even with seas between us and vast lands. If you need me or the squad needs me, I will be there to lend a hand. I will always be a member of Squad 25. I swear on my honour." Sagiri stuck a hand to his chest and made the promise. If Kiuga helped him this time, he would owe him his life.

"You are making me tear up," Gavina said, looking away. No matter which way anyone looked at the situation, this was a farewell. Farewells were not easy. If men were not allowed to show emotion in almost all tribes, the Tsanka women despised crying. It was a show of weakness to them.

"Then it is an oath. If any of us break it..." Kiuga started to say.

"If I break it, then I must be dead," Sagiri said, and everyone gasped. He owed Kiuga. Perhaps not all those of the united tribes of the north were bad, but it was starting to become clear that they were not on the same side now, and the gap could perhaps grow in the future, and even worse, they could possibly stand on different sides one day.

A moment of thick silence stretched by, and in that moment, no one dared to speak. The weight of the situation and possibilities was now clear.

"Well," Kiuga turned around and gave his back to the group. "What do you need my help with?"

Sagiri turned around to look at the ladies. It was a clear sign to ask them to leave.

"We are not leaving. You beat me once. This time I'm settling the score," Gavina said. The girls already knew what he had done. There was no point in hiding anything anymore. She looked like she did not care about the politics and just wanted to get even or whatever was running in her mind.

"I have to do something about Tatani," Sagiri said, and Kiuga wheeled around dramatically.

"What do you mean, Tatani?" His brows were pulled in a perfect arc now. "I am flattered that you think I am capable of such a fit, but that is a suicide mission, and I desire to see my grandchildren. If the Supreme Mandra wants you dead, why not just execute you?" Kiuga's voice rose an octave. Indeed, the mission was a suicide mission.

"Brain boy is right. No one has entered Tatani and come back in one piece. They have held the upper hand on the neighbouring tribes, be it from Safaya or Tagayia. Even the Anki, who are the deadliest, have been forced to abandon some of their lands." Gavina snickered. "You might have wiped out an entire seventh wing squad, but the Tatani now has its own small city, and it's not as easy to subdue them as you think." She caresses the head of Oka. The snake had grown a few inches taller and fatter, and it looked rather heavy sitting around her neck and shoulders. It melted into her touch lovingly, a contrast to its fierce eyes whenever it turned to look in Sagiri's direction.

"I dare not underestimate their strength. Tatani is a tribe formed from the orphans of war between Tagayia and Safaya for the past few decades. It is only natural that they are deadly after many years of having to fight to stay alive," Sagiri said.

"Exactly, if we even try to go there, we are not coming back alive. The tribe now has at least three thousand good fighters. That is a whole army." Kiuga said. Everyone in Tagayia, especially those in war schools and warring tribes of the north and west, knew of the existence of Tatani. After they took a chunk of the Anki tribe's lands and Tagayia in general, it is impossible not to know of them.

"Tagayia and Safaya created them. Why should they send you to clean their mess?" N'varu seethed. He was now pacing up and down. Kiuga looked like he was regretting more and more.

"I think I must just agree with N'varu. Tagayia and Safaya elite squads and special units are the ones capable of suppressing the Tatani. What are we supposed to do? Throw a drop of water at a burning house?" Kiuga said.

"But Tagayia can't fight this war, same as Safaya. Tatani had its three legs on Tagayia, Safaya, and the south," Nayira chimed in.

"So what is Sagiri supposed to do? Scratch an itch to quench the tensions between the two nations?" Kaka asked. He was indeed smart when it mattered and when it involved war. If it did not involve war, then he just couldn't make a deduction even if the facts were staring right at him.

"Tagayia doesn't care what Tatani does as long as they leave its lands," Sagiri said, and Kiuga nodded. Sagiri was sure the smart brain of his was beginning to come up with a solution.

"The supreme mandra expects you to succeed where the Anki had failed?" the anku tribe girl, Pavire, snickered. Tonight she was carrying her bird, and it seemed to follow her scorn and rolled its eyes before it shut them.

The Anki were the most powerful tribe in the southwest, especially, and they were known to be some type of nomads with the largest lands. If they had even left some of their lands, then the opponent was not someone to be taken lightly.

"I hate to agree with the Kafika triplets, but did I wrong you somewhere that you want me dead? There is no way we can touch the Tatani. Especially if we are from Tagayia. There will be no full corpse left for our clans to bury." Kiuga said before sinking to a squat.

His hands started moving on the rough ground of the arena as if he were drawing a map only he could see.

"Moving them out of Tagayia, even if you succeed, will just be sending them to their death. Safaya will have no fear of offending Tagayia, and they will fight tooth and nail to eliminate the Tatani. Tatani, after

all, is an enemy of both states." N'varu said. "Won't that just be sending them to their death. They didn't choose to be war orphans. Won't that just create more war orphans?" They were all repeating what he already knew. He did not plan to kill them unless it was necessary, and he did not plan to push them to their death.

"Then the only option is to push them south," Sagiri said, and Kiuga's hand froze on the ground.

Chapter 239: OUT THE BOX

"You are totally delusional," Gavina was the first to speak.

"Do you plan to kill their leader? The Tatani's leader is the strongest member of the tribe, and he has reigned for a decade now. He also practices a secret art which no one knows of. He is also one to create the present tatani." Kiuga said.

"Even if he kills him. Do you plan to become the new leader?" Pavire asked.

"I don't plan on killing the leader," Sagiri said. Whatever Kiuga and Pavire had said had, of course, crossed his mind, but that could be saved for last. He could not mind killing one person to save a thousand.

"What? Then you plan on waltzing in like a chief and talking them into following you south?" Nayira threw in.

"That is my first plan. Tatani has been dealt a bad hand. They have every right to be hostile. Trying to kill them will not make them follow me south," Sagiri said, and Gavina groaned.

There was no clear option in this situation. Whatever maps Kiuga was drawing on the ground did not seem to make him come up with a plan as well. He had pulled out a blade, and he had managed to draw the map of Tagayia and Safaya and added a rough map where they touched in the southwest.

"What do we know about Tatani apart from the fact that they are fierce and their leader practiced a secret art which he has taught his elite force?" Kiuga asked well, leaving out the obvious that they were stuck between Tagayia and Safaya. There was indeed a lot that they did not know about Tatani.

"Well, the tribe has managed to create an information blackout around itself. Not even the spies who had gone in were able to come out. In fact, rumor has it that whoever steps into Tatani never returns,"

Gavina said, yawning. It was now ten, and the training in the war college was tougher than that at Galka War Academy. The sleeping schedule had changed slightly, and they slept at eleven and woke up at three to start another rigorous day. It was safe to say that war college was very strenuous. In thirty minutes or so, they would have to gather for a headcount and a night drill before bed.

"So we are up against an opponent we know almost nothing about and who hasn't vomited anyone they swallowed," Kiuga said. "This keeps getting better and better." Kiuga sighed.

"Even brains here can't come up with a plan. Even the smartest man in Tagayia, Seyika, has yet to break the puzzle because of the geographic position of Tatani. Perhaps Safaya and Tagayia should get in bed together and fight a common enemy," Gavina said, yawning again. Kiuga must have been tired too, but Sagiri could see the wheels turn in his head.

"Perhaps you should first get in bed with the Bami clan." Pavire snickered. The Bami men preferred gentler women, and the Tsanka were just too feral. A marriage between a Tsanka and a Bami was as rare as someone making it out of Tatani or just seeing the sun at midnight.

"Over my dead body." Gavina paused her fingers, which were caressing her beast.

"You wish," Kaka said. He did not even spare Gavina a second-long stare before he turned to look at Sagiri. "Perhaps being smart won't help in this. If the smartest man has not broken the stalemate, then perhaps we need another way this time. What if they have a smart person too?" Kaka said there was pin-drop silence. On another day, Kiuga could have rolled his eyes and told him to stick to being aggressive, but he had, in fact, spoken something everyone had been overlooking. Perhaps Tatani was not impenetrable by chance, and there was a possibility someone had made sure it was not only impenetrable but ensured there was a total information blackout, and even their growth in strength might have been set in motion by someone.

The opponent was formidable, and if they tried to break his web, there was a chance they could get trapped in it.

"Kaka, did you suddenly grow a bigger brain than your muscles?" Kiuga paused in his movements, and Kaka hissed.

"The Bami has not managed to rule the north for decades just because we are the strongest physically." Kaka puffed his chest with pride. If his chest and neck swelled any bigger with pride, then there won't be

enough space for everyone to live. Everyone sighed, but let him have the moment. It was as if everyone was now trying to mull over his words at the moment.

Kiuga was the most silent, and his blade remained paused.

"Think!! Think Kiuga!! Think outside the box!!" Kiuga suddenly started mumbling to himself while he banged his head. This might be the biggest strategy he had ever had to come up with. Seconds ticked by, and apart from the wheels turning in everyone's head and Kiuga muttering like a mad person and slapping and banging his head slightly with his hand enough to cause a dent, the place had fallen silent.

The sound of the gong was the thing that snapped them back to earth. Seconds later, Kiuga shot up, looking to be in a trance.

"You need to go. We can pick this up tomorrow night," Sagiri said. The bunch standing around him was made of the smartest and most competitive warrior initiates, and he could tell they were taking the puzzle that had been presented to them seriously.

Moments later, they had to leave, or they would get in trouble.

"Stay safe." N'varu more chastised than advised Sagiri. Kiuga and Kaka just gave him a look before running out of the arena. Gavina gave him a weird look before she turned around, and her friends followed. Soon, the place was silent, and Sagiri felt alone, but he was not alone, and he had known that for a long time now.

"Come out!" His voice rang in the arena as he turned around to face a darkened side of the arena. Silence was prolonged before there was finally movement, and a shape stepped out. Lira stepped slowly into the light and stopped a few yards away from him.

"Are you spying on me?" Sagiri said, taking a slow step forward. The girl looked even weirder than the last time he had seen her. It could seem the shadow corp brought her back safely. Sagiri still had a bone to chew with her, and there could be no more perfect time.

"No," her voice came seconds later. It was softer now, and less robotic, and Sagiri tilted his head. What had happened to her since he last saw her?

Chapter 240: HER REQUEST

"What do you mean, no? You have been listening to all we have been saying. Do you plan to tell your master?" Sagiri said, taking another step closer. He was going to have to kill her if he had to. He was sure the mission would not be secret for long, but perhaps at one point or another, someone could find out. What better way to take him out than by making it look like the Tatani did it?

"I-I..." She kept her eyes to the ground and fiddled with her fingers. She was more unlike herself now, and it was as if someone different was standing in front of him. What had happened to her in the few weeks he had not seen her?

She was nervous.

Nervous?

She previously did not have any emotion, and Sagiri could not perceive her or her feelings. What was happening?

"Speak," Sagiri said. She had almost killed him, and that was not something he was going to overlook easily. It doesn't matter what she felt at the moment. She was still someone's pet.

"Can you touch me?" Lira asked after a few awkward moments, and Sagiri's eyes snapped wide behind the veil. That was a question a maiden could not dare ask of a man she was not married to. She fiddled with her fingers even more. Sagiri was not so naive as not to know the affairs between maidens and their betrothed, but this was not the case. It was uncouth and unheard of. Even the tsanka feral women could not as easily ask for that.

"Lira, that is inappropriate," Sagiri said, freezing in place. Women were just too complicated for him. One wanted to challenge him to the death as a marriage prospect, and another tried to kill him, yet now she was uttering taboos.

"Please... I know I tried to kill you, but I don't want to anymore," she said in a small voice. Well, Sagiri could not blame her. She had been raised in a cylinder of some lab. Her lack of social cues and weird requests could be forgiven.

"I can not do that," Sagiri said, shutting his eyes for a moment before he opened them. She had now moved a few steps closer, and she was standing in front of him. He had felt her move, but he did not feel alarmed enough to move. Only nervousness.

"Why?" Her round, unnatural, misty grey pupils stared at him, which were hidden behind the veil.

"Why? Well, Lira, you are a maiden, and I am a man. I can not take my liberties with you." Sagiri explained. He wished he did not have to explain the topic, but he had to.

"But you did last time," she tilted her head to the side as if trying to remember the ideas that had unfolded in the days Sagiri had attacked at the final exam. She placed her palm to her head as sagiri had done, and sagiri finally understood. He breathed out a bent-up breath that he had been holding.

"You wish me to go through your memories? You did not seem to like it back then." Sagiri said. So that was the reason she was nervous. She had begged him the last time not to go through them, yet now she was begging for it. She was clearly scared and nervous, yet she was begging. Sagiri could not understand what the woman he had encountered wanted. He was now even more confused than ever.

"Yes, I do not want to," she said, biting the inside of her cheeks.

"Why now? I don't understand," Sagiri said. He has spent a lot of time in the war college, and soon someone on patrol might find him odd or something might just go wrong.

"I remembered some things on my own," she said. She still carried that confused air, but she seemed to have put a few things together. She would be stupid not to know that she was different, and her upbringing was even more different.

"And you want to remember more?" Sagiri asked. She nodded vigorously.

"I want to know if I have a clan too or a tribe. I can also remember why I wish to kill you so I can make up for it," she said in anticipation. Sagiri had been there before. Wanting badly to remember his origins, and some part of him still wished he hadn't. Remembering is not always the best thing. He wished to know who sent her, but he felt reluctant to now grant her wish.

"What will you do when you remember?" Sagiri could not help but ask.

"I... I don't know," she answered honestly. Her remembering everything now could soil Sagiri's future plans.

"I have to go. Perhaps when I finish this task," Sagiri said, getting ready to leave. He did not trust her yet, not even with her own memory.

"Can I come with you then. You need a squad. I can help," she asked right when sagiri was about to turn around. Sagri paused in his step and turned his head to look at the nervous girl.

"No. You can't. I don't trust you. If you follow me, I will not hesitate to kill you." Sagiri could feel her determination, but putting an enemy on your squad was just a fit he was not willing to try. Whoever agreed to join him on this squad might be in danger, and he was not willing to take the chance. She looked dejected, but she did not argue any further. Sagiri headed for the southern gate yet again. He did not want to use the archive since it had gone silent on him.

He had finally been able to get the archives' recollection of what had happened while he had passed out, and it had left him chilled. It had bought him the fear factor Senraki had talked about, but Sagiri now knew there was a price to be paid. If he blacked out and never regained consciousness, then, just like the mandra had said, he would become just a beast. Sagiri hated to admit it, but he had not been able to sleep well ever since he remembered the ideas of that night. If Kaka had seen what had happened, he would have accused him of lacking honour, and he would be right.

It was a nightmare in his own making.