

KEEPER 251

Chapter 251: NOT ADDING UP

"We should go back and regroup," Yoka said after a while of the men in both squads airing their distaste about what was about to happen to the ladies.

Sagiri had been sitting in silence, trying to recover his strength. It was not the breaking of the illusion that had tired him a little, but the holding of twenty-five people in the archive pocket, being stuck in the illusion madness, and breaking in had depleted a third of the archive's strength. He could still go on for days, but he wanted to regain some of that strength before he faced Tatani.

"No," Sagiri said, standing to his feet. "We keep going."

"The plan was to scout till midday and go back, then come again tomorrow," Tavora said. As a strategist, he was stiff and stuck to the plan, which could be a good thing, but if what he said happened to the ladies was true, then going back to regroup was the last thing they needed to do now.

"The plan did not involve the part where the ladies were going to be taken and bred," Sagiri said in a low tone. He was now calm. He was not going to get agitated inside Tatani lands again. Perhaps it was partly his fault that the ladies had been taken.

"Well, the plan did not involve you losing your marbles and slashing the air with your weapon and suffocating us half to death," Tavora said. He was still salty, it seemed. Sagiri did not have time to argue with him this time.

"Well, you can keep to the plan and go back to regroup. I'm going in." Sagiri said, facing the direction that led deeper into the Tatani lands. Tavora sighed loudly with irritation, but he didn't argue any further.

"What happens if you are stuck in an illusion again?" Captain asked calmly.

"The same tricks don't work on me again. If it happens, I can just break it forcefully again till there is no Tatani left for the illusion weavers to hide." Sagiri answered without missing a breath.

"We need to come up with a new plan, even so," Kiuga said silently.

"The ladies' honours could be getting tainted at the moment. The more we delay, the more chances of that happening grow. If their innocence is tainted, their lives would be ruined." Sagiri said. His voice was too calm, and everyone could feel it. He was not going to budge. He was going in whether they came with him or not.

"You can follow me after you come up with your plan," Sagiri said. It was now past midday and at least four hours before sundown. Without warning, Sagiri tore through the group and across the depression. He would soon disappear out of sight at the speed he was moving.

"I'm going after him." N'varu did not hesitate before he ran after him.

"Well, it seems I have no choice since I am the strategist he chose. Anyone who is not willing can go back with Vice Captain Tavora.

It seemed Vice Captain Tavora did not like the sentiment because he hissed in irritation.

"It seems the plan has gone up in flames. Your call, Captain." Tavora said. Captain Yoka sighed, looking at the two squads before he finally opened his mouth.

"We go after the southerner. We can't afford to go all the way back while Tatani has the girls. We move in!" Captain Yoka gave the order, and after a momentary pause, the squads followed after Sagiri. He always moved fast when he was in this state of calmness. He was still going slower than he wanted because he knew N'varu was right behind him, but even so, he was still going fast, and the squads had to move at top speed to catch up with him.

Sagiri paused at the edge of the unnatural learning he had created in his attempt to forcefully break the illusion. He had been scared to utilize the archive, fearing he could kill his friends in the process, but he had protected them this time. The archive had protected them, according to his deepest feeling, and now he was feeling more confident. him, at his current full strength, and merged with the archive, could not be touched with the mere tricks of the illusion weavers. He was also calm now. And perhaps he needed to find a way to be always as calm as the supreme mandra who practiced the art of the beast, yet he was calm as deep water.

After he was sure the squads were within range of him, Sagiri did not waste time before he darted past the tree line. The squads followed him, and he could feel their steady heartbeats behind him. This time, if it came to that, he would just move them within the archive and send them as far away as possible before he gave the tatani what was coming for them.

Surprisingly, Sagiri could feel the heartbeats of more and more small beasts after two hours of tearing through the woods at top speed. The markings on his body crawled dormant for the two hours, and they had not stirred with any warning of the illusion trap. Sagiri did not like the silence, but then he was prepared for whatever they could throw at him.

There was one more thing he could not understand. How were those who took the girls able to move that fast while carrying them? Something was not adding up; perhaps they had overlooked something. After another hour of running, Sagiri finally stopped. He perched on the ground and paused to listen for any voice.

The squads finally caught up with him after a moment, and N'varu was beside him in a moment. He must have been moving too fast because N'varu was slightly out of breath.

"What is it?" N'varu asked, looking around frantically.

"Something is wrong. I don't know what, but something is not adding up." Sagiri said as everyone caught up.

"I think so too. We should have been able to catch up to the ladies' kidnappers." Kiuga said, and Sagiri listened deeply. He pushed out his senses as far as they could go, and yet there was nothing.

"It is as if there is no one on these Tatani lands," Sagiri said.

"Are you sure you are not under an illusion again?" Tavora snickered. Sagiri ignored him and continued listening for any sign of life, but just like from miles back, there was still nothing apart from the small beasts crawling about.

"What do you think is at play here?" Kiuga asked, and Sagiri tried to think, but he could not come up with an excuse for this. He had never encountered anything like this.

"Could it be possible for an entire clan to hide their presence like the Shadow Corp?" Sagiri asked, and there was a pause as the Yoka squad shifted uncomfortably.

"Impossible!!" Tavora was the first to break the silence. For the first time, he did not sound salty and more concerned instead.

Chapter 252: PICTURE PERFECT

"I failed to accomplish the mission. I will accept any punishment you give me." Sir black was beside himself. All his plans to leave no way out for the boy and to naturally usher him to their side had failed.

There was silence between him and the general. This time, he did not have to go all the way to the hideout to meet with his general. He had managed to acquire some of the past glory. He had gotten his seat back in the inner council by the promise of the supreme mandra. He could not give any opinion to the mandra or talk yet, but even so, he had gained some of his lost glory.

"Is he dead or exiled?" sir black dared ask after a moment of silence. It was the first time he had seen his general since leaving his exile. The general was being watched closely even after his exile was lifted. The supreme mandra was no man to be underestimated. He is the kind of man to keep his enemies closer. The general was not completely out of the woods. One slip up, and the beast art master could tear him limb from bone.

"Taola, all plans don't always go as expected. You haven't grown out of that sentiment, I see." The general finally spoke. His voice was calm. He was not mad, which was surprising to sir black.

"I apologize, General. I just wish to see you take all you deserve." Sir black said. He had been mulling over his thoughts for the past few days.

"The boy is neither dead nor exiled. Tsaka and the mandra only know what has happened to him," the general said. It was true that he was in the inner council, but he was only there for show. He did not hold any real power yet. The general, after all, still had warriors loyal to him, and even before he came to strike a deal and beg to be absolved, the supreme mandra had it in mind to either reinstate him or kill him and wipe out all the forces loyal to him. The latter could have caused an uproar. The warriors' guild is still a pain in the neck to the mandra. The general showing up on time was helping the mandra calm the brewing tide. In doing so, he also allowed the mandra not to show weakness by ending his exile early.

The general had arranged it all.

"Could the supreme mandra want to use him as a secret weapon?" sir black asked frantically. He hated the gardener's attire he wore. He hated dirt of all things. He rubbed our hands against each other to get rid of a soil particle before turning to look at his general.

"The supreme mandra could not do such. My spies at the southern border have not seen any envoy cross to the south, not even a soul. Tsaka is such a cunning man. He has managed to keep me in the dark about this," the general started. "It doesn't matter. They won't keep it hidden for long. The three councils that voted for his death are not standing still."

"Does it mean he is still in Tagayia?" sir black asked. This was currently the best news he had heard ever since he reunited with his general again. Their meetings had naturally become limited.

"Indeed," the general said, "but I advise against doing anything stupid. The stalemate currently is all I need to break through to the surface. Tsaka won't keep me out of the mandra's ear for long.

"Won't it be better for us to eliminate him? As things stand, the boy now knows someone orchestrated his current situation. The chances of him coming to our side grow meager. It is better if we kill him," Sir black said.

"We can't kill him even if we want to. Your pawn failed terribly. The boy himself wiped out a full squad of the seventh wing. Without the soulless, we cannot do anything about it," the general said.

"Have you been able to acquire her?" Sir Black dared to ask. This was a sour topic for the general, and he knew it. Even so, the general had asked him to stay out of it and let him deal with the ink keepers alone. The ink keepers cut across the nation. Even under the supreme mandra, there were ink keepers tasked with writing about history under his reign. They oversaw all exams and knew every important person in Tagayia and their histories. Those under the examination council were even worse. They were older than the council itself. They were shrewd as they were tight-lipped.

Not to forget the fact that if the general rubbed them the wrong way, they could just write him down in their books as some villain and destroy his possibility of ever rising. There was only one way to deal with them, and only he could complete the task. By his silence, Taola could tell his general had not made any progress yet. His calm mood turned sour in a matter of seconds, too.

"You should think about how to eliminate your pawn. If she remembers, then your whole operation could splash mud on my feet." The general's tone was full of anger when he spoke.

"She can still be useful, or all I have to do is press the buttons I thought I could never. Perhaps she could kill the boy next time, and if she fails, I can kill her then," Sir Black said. He was still reluctant about killing his favorite and first successful subject. She was his pride and most successful subject, too.

"Don't tell me you have grown quite attached to your pawn. Do you wish to defy me just to keep her?!" the general snapped.

"I dare not," Sir Black said.

"I think you know she is in war college. Find her and kill her. " Don't fail me this time," the general gritted.

"I will do as you say," Sir Black bowed to his general.

"Don't come to see me again until she is dead. She is a loose end. I don't tolerate loose ends," the general repeated. Sir Black might have slightly fallen in love with his first functional subject, but now he knew the time had come to end her. Perhaps if she killed the boy and died in the process, then it would be picture perfect.

"As you wish."

Chapter 253: FIRST WATCH

The squads had scouted the land and patrolled for an entire night until it was almost dawn. Just four hours until daybreak, but still, there was no sight of Tatani. Even if they wanted to go on, they had to stop. They had been thinking something was wrong, but now it was clear that something was completely wrong.

"Something is definitely wrong," Tavora said. It had taken him the whole night being salty for him to admit that something was seriously wrong finally.

"Could it be that this land is only inhabited by ghosts?" Ulekai shuddered with fear. They should have been able to mock him and call his suggestion madness, but at the moment, it was almost as if they were chasing a ghost.

"Perhaps we should fire a flare and call in the others," Tavora said.

"Absolutely not. A flare will definitely make our whereabouts known not only to the squad outside but to the anki tribe and who knows who. This mission is top secret. No war objects should be used." Yoka refuted immediately. "We should eat and rest in two-hour shifts. We will mix our squads for this watch so everyone is comfortable," Yoka added, and everyone nodded. Exhaustion was starting to seep into everyone's bones, and they needed to eat and rest.

"I agree. We can resume the search early in the morning." Kiuga agreed. As much as Sagiri wanted to refute that, he knew that it was futile now to keep searching. They were missing something entirely. They were chasing ghosts just like Ulekai had said.

People don't just disappear, however. Sagiri already knew that.

They had to be somewhere.

Lighting a fire in enemy territory, even if you could not see them, was out of the question. They just had to eat the dried meat they carried, water, and rest.

"I will take the first watch. You all can sleep," Sagiri said. He really did not need anyone to watch the area with him.

"So you can kill me in my sleep? Not a chance," Tavora said under his breath.

"If I wanted to kill you, why would I wait till you are asleep. What is stopping me now?" Sagiri was starting to lose his calmness. It was hard to stay calm when he knew that the ladies could at the moment be going through something that no one could reverse. He had to remind himself to stay calm, even so. He needed to be calmer now more than ever if he wanted to have any chance of finding the ladies. "Suit yourself. You can stay awake." Sagiri said after a moment. Tavora could do whatever he wanted for all he cared.

"I am going to sleep. With blind boy taking the watch, I can sleep peacefully even in enemy territory." Kiuga said, stretching widely and yawning before he rested his back on a tree trunk and closed his eyes. He must have been tired with his mind running all day because soon he was completely passed out, and a small snore could be heard coming from him.

Most of the squad, including Kaka, started pulling closer to Kiuga. The warmer the better, after all. Even Kaka passed out soon after he ate the dried meat he carried. It was not the potion he always ate, but he had made sure to carry quite an amount. The boy couldn't function without food anyway.

Only N'varu and Banga were still awake. Banga was a bit odd most of the time, but he had come when Sagiri called. He could still be considered a friend.

"You should eat too," N'varu said, handing Sagiri a stick of dried meat. While everyone had been eating, Sagiri could not help but stay deep in thought. He could not help but think he had entirely missed something. If he could not find the tatani even with his heightened senses, then he was sure no one could.

"If this keeps on, we might never find them," Sagiri said.

"We will," N'varu said. "I believe in you," He added, patting Sagiri's shoulder.

"I don't know anymore. I can not feel anyone for hundreds of vaara." Sagiri said as he grabbed the stick of dried meat from N'varu. He took a bite of the hard piece of meat and chewed away.

"Perhaps your senses are your undoing this time," N'varu said. Sagiri could not, as usual, understand what N'varu meant by that. "Perhaps you should also rest for a while, and I will take the watch for you. Yoka and Tavora were taking the watch too, but Sagiri could not help but feel skeptical about letting N'varu take a watch. After what had happened last time, he was not going to allow him to sacrifice himself for him again.

"No. You rest now so you can watch me when I rest in the second watch," Sagiri said. He could tell that N'varu was against the idea, but if he did not sleep now, then it meant that he wouldn't be able to watch him when he slept in the second watch.

"Take care. Wake me if anything changes," N'varu said finally, yawning with tiredness.

Soon, the place was filled with slow snores. Somehow, the peaceful, relaxed breaths made him feel relaxed. Even Banga fell asleep at some point, and Tavora too. He was hurt badly when Sagiri had hit him, and even with the medicinal pill he took, he perhaps needed the most rest. He was stubborn and salty, but his body was suffering, and there was no denying that.

Yoka found a raised platform and stood on it. He indeed had the qualities of a captain, and he had managed to keep the two squads in check even with the tensions. How did a man like him even choose such a childish vice captain?

Sagiri, even without thinking, found himself walking towards Yoka. The two stood side by side, staring into the darkness. There was no need for words to be exchanged between the two of them.

"You should go easy on Tavora. He might act like a grown child, but that's only because he is. He is only twenty, and even with his talents, he is stubborn." Yoka said after a while. It seemed he cared for Tavora just like Captain Salka cared for Lotaga. Just thinking of the two brought a small smile to Sagiri's face.

"I understand," Sagiri answered. If only Lotaga were around, the man was good at tracking, and perhaps he could have been able to find the ladies. His senses might have been heightened, but Lotaga was something else. Even without sharp senses, he did not miss any detail.

What detail could he have missed?

Chapter 254: THE MISSED DETAIL

Sagiri and Yoka did not talk much in the first watch, but the watch went by peacefully. Nothing was out of the ordinary. Kiuga did not even stir when the first watch ended, and neither did Tavora. Yoka offered to take the second watch for Tavora. N'varu was among the four who woke up in Squad Sagiri.

"You rest now," N'varu said, coming to relieve Sagiri of his watch duty.

Sagiri retracted his senses and sat at the edge of the clearing. He sat in a meditative position. He was tired, but conscious meditative slumber was the best choice. Now that the archive was back to its bean

size inside Sagiri, he could feel even the steady heart beating inside of him. Perhaps he could allow himself to rest for a few minutes so he could think properly about what they missed when he woke up.

A few minutes later, Sagiri's head fell back onto the tree trunk behind him. He was indeed tired. The sound the trunk made was hollow, as if a small creature had once made its home within it, but now the trunk was empty. sagiri could not care much about it as he drifted off to slumber, not caring to even stay conscious. Sleeping outside, like when they were going north, or when he and squad ten traveled to the war headquarters, was fun. Just listening to the small beast burrowing under the earth.

burrowing under the earth.

At the blink of falling into deep slumber, Sagiri's eyes sprang open. Now that he was thinking about it, he had not heard any small beast burrowing under the earth. The squads had encountered squirrels here and there and birds after the graves, but now that sagiri was thinking about it, he had completely not felt any sign of the smaller beast burrowing under the earth. Not even crickets' mating call was heard, not even the earth toads.

How smart.

The markings on sagiri's skin stirred with his excitement at finding out the details he had missed. Someone like Lotaga could have found out this fact in a few hours, yet it had taken him a full day and night. just like Kaka had said. It seemed like the Tatani tribe had a very lethal strategist in itself. And as N'varu had said, his heightened senses had contributed to his missing an important detail.

sagiri sprang to a crouch, his one knee pressed to the earth. His hand met the earth. not in a force to split it, but right under his right eyes, he watched as the markings on his skin touched the ground. The underground must have been coated with the stone used to make the shadow colonnade. With it, his senses could be barred, but the markings on his skin couldn't. As they moved under the ground and deeper beneath the stone, he felt it. a single heartbeat. then another. then another.

a small laugh left sagiri's throat. It's sharp enough to wake everyone. It was now one hour before dawn, and the birds had woken up. The small beast who loved creating their homes under the earth should have been coming out too to bask in the sun, yet nothing moved. How had he missed such a huge detail? Whatever that stone was, it seemed to be not only used to bar him but even the hunting beast.

They could very much have realised where they were. What a stone!

Another sharp, humourless laugh left sagiri's throat. Even Tavora had finally stirred. He threw an icy glare in Sagiri's direction. Kiuga finally stirred too and yawned.

"What is happening?" he said in the middle of a yawn.

"It seems the boy from the east has gone mad," Maita said under his breath.

"What is it?" N'varu was beside him in another second. Sagiri laughed for a moment longer before he stopped.

"These little rats were hiding in plain sight after all," Sagiri said, his voice growing calm and colder. He did not know what he was excited for more. to find the illusion weaver who had pushed him into an illusion, or to find the ladies they had lost.

"Where are they?" Kiuga asked, his face growing more alert.

"Tatani is underground," sagiri said, and everyone turned to him in bewilderment.

"What?" Ulekai's eyes almost popped out of their sockets.

"Sagiri flexed his hand, ready to split the ground again, but kiuga stopped him.

"Don't do that! What if you hit the ladies?" Kiuga said. Sagiri paused for a moment. Now that he was thinking about it.

"How do you know they are underground? Why didn't I see any tunnels when you smashed the ground?" Tavora said in a doubtful voice.

"Tavora, keep quiet," Yoka warned him, and the boy went silent and pouted. "How did you know?" He asked more respectfully.

"No beasts are crawling under the ground, and I found them. " I must have missed that because I was looking for them above the surface," Sagiri said.

"It is only logical. Who could think the vermin were hiding underground?" Kaka said.

"Now, how do we get underground?" N'varu asked.

"We can't just crash into the ground. Perhaps they knew we could find them at some point, and they took the girls as a shield. They even took only the ladies to make our minds think the worst, only so we could chase ghosts for a while. They must have an excellent strategist, too." Tavora said.

"I have to take a knee of respect. They even almost outsmarted me." Kiuga said, shaking his head.

"They actually did," Kaka shot back.

"I will go first. You find a place to come in through. Find hollow tree trunks. Even if they live underground, they need air." Sagiri said.

"How do you plan to go to them now?" Tavora snickered.

sagiri did not have time to answer the manchild. His senses might have been barred by the freaking stone, but the archive wasn't. sagiri pushed the archive outwards and underground. He could move wherever he wanted within the archive. The markings on his body glowed in response.

"Let me come with you!" N'varu tried to join Sagiri, but the next instant, he was already gone.

Chapter 255: THE UNDERGROUND CITY OF TATANI

He slipped through it through the archive fast. After all, he could not breathe in that split second or seconds as he moved within it. He landed on a stone after a few seconds. Just how many years had it taken Tatani to build this city? The air was cooler underground, but not suffocating. It moved in slow currents passing through the space, carrying a faint mix of damp rock, smoke, and something cooked.

Lived-in air.

If his speculations were right, then there had to be many openings leading above ground where the fresh air was coming in through.

Sagiri straightened slowly before he finally lifted his eyes to take in the view properly.

The cavern stretched wider than he expected. It had been shaped over time, cut, reinforced, and expanded. The ceiling arched high above, held by thick stone columns. Their surfaces were smoothed by hands and tools as if they had been built by the best architects of the central plains.

Light came from mounted fixtures along the walls. innovation casings holding low-burning flames or glowstones, spaced evenly. The place was just like a well-built city, but one that was pushed underground.

Where Sagiri had landed looked like a square. The city spread across multiple levels. Terraces had been carved into the cavern walls, each one wide enough to hold clusters of structures. The structures and houses were curved from the very earth itself, sections of stone cut inward to form rooms and halls. Doorways were squared, edges reinforced with darker stone or metal frames. Some were covered with cloth or wood panels, others were left open.

It did not seem like security was the issue.

Paths connected everything.

Main walkways ran along the terraces. Narrower paths branched off into living sections. Ramps had been carved between levels instead, wide enough for groups to move without slowing.

There was order in it.

This must have taken years to build, and sagiri had to marvel at the detail of it all.

Water ran through the city in shallow channels cut into the stone floor, guided along precise lines. It flowed from an upper source Sagiri couldn't yet see, splitting into smaller streams that passed through

different sections before draining deeper underground. The city seemed to still be asleep. Well, there was an essence of day and night here. It was a long night in itself.

sagiri took a step. He pushed out his senses, and he could feel the thousands of heartbeats in the city. It was big enough to shelter a few thousand people but not more than ten thousand. He took another step to leave the square. Of course, he could feel the alert hearts all over the city. They must have been expecting an intrusion.

good. because he was about to turn Tatani upside down.

The place was silent. The silence was peaceful. Perhaps after a decade of peace, the people in Tatani had long forgotten the terrors of war, and they could now sleep peacefully even with open doors. Even so, Sagiri could not imagine having to live underground for that long, where there was no sun.

A few steps into an alley, and he paused. Something was moving rapidly towards him. It was not a person by the way it was moving. Sagiri crouched low and waited. A few moments later, something came barreling through a wall and slithered to his feet.

Oka

The damned hunting beast.

It still remembered him and gave him away at war college, and now it had come looking for him again. Only this time, it was not hissing and looking at him as if he were the enemy.

"Now you look for me to save your master. " How hypocritical, Oka," Sagiri said with a shake of his head. Perhaps it was a good thing that Gavina carried his pets everywhere. Sagiri stretched out his hand, and the beast coiled onto it. It was shuddering with fear and anxiety.

"You owe me one when I find her. " You have to stop hissing every time you look at me," Sagiri said and rubbed the beast's little head. It hissed at him but whimpered soon after. The beast was only using him and did not want his affection. It was behaving like a Tsanka woman. No one could afford affection in that clan anyway.

"Fine. behave. now take me to you, master," Sagiri said, and the beast did not hesitate to uncoil itself out of his hands and start crawling on the streets. It made sure to keep to the slightly darker parts of the street. The street was well lit anyway and did not provide much cover for hiding, but sagiri had to commend the beast's effort.

Smart beast.

The beast broke free of the street and started heading westward. They had been going on for a few minutes when the beast paused and hid away. sagiri was too big to hide anyway, and so he just stood in the middle of the street.

A few seconds later, a woman passed by. It looked like she was going to the communal bath by her manner of dressing and the things she carried. It was natural for some tribes to let women wake up first to go to the communal baths, especially in the past. It seemed that Tatani did not have many facilities, and the women could wake up at dawn to head to the communal baths, and the men could do so after dusk. This way, the two could not collide.

Sagiri was clearly a man, and when the young woman turned around and saw him, Sagiri could see the visible fear in her eyes. Of course, there were cases of men who were perverted enough to peek at the women going to the baths wearing their nightgowns, but Sagiri was not that dishonourable. Even so, at the moment, it looked like he was a pervert.

"I-I was..."

Sagiri took a step forward to explain, but that one step ruined everything. The ladies' eyes grew even rounder, and her mouth parted. sagiri knew what could happen next, but he could not just kill a woman for screaming at seeing a supposed pervert.

A night cuddling scream tore through the place, enough to wake the dead. Sagiri could not reach for his seals quickly enough, and he felt the scream in the bits of his bones. The woman proceeded to throw her necessities for a bath and turned around, bolting while she screamed.

"Why didn't you warn me, Oka I could have turned around," Sagiri sighed. Betrayal was deep in his voice. Oka popped out of its hiding a few moments later, and sagiri could have imagined it, but the beast was smiling.

I should let you master be bred by these barbarians

At the woman's scream, Sagiri could now feel commotion all over as the place stirred awake. Only one solution. to run.

"Let's go!!" Sagiri said, but Oka was already slithering his belly off. Sagiri followed quickly. He needed to at least reach the girls before he was beaten to a pulp for being a pervert.

His plan to go unnoticed till he found them was now ruined.

Stupid Oka!

Chapter 256 END OF THE ROAD

The underground city was not that huge, and soon enough, just one scream had woken half the city. The way of dressing of the Tatani tribe is definitely different, and Sagiri soon stood out like a sore thumb.

Intruder!!

The screams finally tore through the place, and Sagiri knew it was right about time. He was not going to make it to the girls in time. Not that it mattered anyway. He was not getting out of Tatani with the girls. He was not going to stop and kept following Oka.

Sagiri could hear and feel them arrive. The hostility and bitterness were so heavy he could taste it on his lips. They were closing in on him from every corner, and soon they were going to have him surrounded. The question was, however, who would be cornered at the end of it all. They were ready to kill. Their killing intent was enough to bring the whole place down. mixed with their bitterness, it was indeed. Sagiri finally reached a dead end. From there, he could feel the faint presence of the four girls.

Oka continued to a small crevice on the wall, and Sagiri just had to sigh.

Stupid Oka!

"Do you think I can fit through a crevice?" Sagiri shook his head. Well, he could have just moved within the archive to the ladies, but as things stood now, it was not going to be that easy.

"Go tell you, master, I am coming," Sagiri said before he completely stopped and turned around slowly. Anytime now, his pursuers could make an appearance. The city continued around him, but not the same way. Conversations had suddenly lowered. Movement had slowed, and the commotion was dying down. To add to the dramatic entrance, the lights that had been lighting the whole place were going out one by one, leaving only a few, so that the shadows were now prominent. What a waste since his right eye grew sharper with darkness.

When they were sure the shadows were hiding them, they stepped out from the edges of the terraces, from behind pillars, from shadows. One on the higher level. Two to his left. More behind. They were everywhere on all levels of the building surrounding him. The sound of bows groaning as the arrows they bore were pulled taut was the only sound covering the area. They held the positions in the shadows as if waiting for a command.

Sagiri didn't reach for Nokai. His eyes moved instead to take in the positions of the fighters of Tatani. They must have been anticipating his arrival. Over a thousand were scattered in the tight place.

"You have me surrounded. Don't you think it's now time to come out?" Sagiri asked, his voice tearing through the now silent place. The coordination of the fighters and their ready positions could only mean they were waiting for instructions from someone. That someone must have been among them or nearby.

"You're far from the surface," a voice said. It came from above. Sagiri looked up slightly after a pause. He was not in a hurry to find her. The highest levels of illusion mastery were mastered by women, so it was only natural to assume the head weaver and the leader was a woman.

A figure stood on the upper terrace, still, composed, looking down at him like his fate had already been decided. From her voice, it sounded as if she were just in her middle ages. late thirties or early forties. Her voice held pride and command.

"Well, I could say you have something that belongs to me, and I came to collect it," Sagiri said, purposefully opening his right eye wider.

"Red eye?" The woman's voice faltered when it came next. "So you are the southerner who has been causing havoc in Tagayia?" Her voice was still calm, but Sagiri could taste her fear.

Silence followed.

The fighters grew even more tense, and their bow string groaned with how tight they were fighting not to release their arrows.

"It seems you are well informed on things that happen on the surface," Sagiri said. Perhaps some of Tatani lived on the surface in Tagayia and perhaps Safaya, collecting intel.

"You flatter me, you killed a warrior in front of thousands of tagayia, I would be dumb not to know," the woman said, her voice still calm.

"Since you know a lot then. Can you tell if I am going to kill you and everyone here if you insist?" Sagiri said in a calm voice, but there was ice in it.

There was a pause this time, but sagiri did not move his eyes from the woman standing on the terrace above.

"We of Tatani are not afraid of death," the woman said in a prideful voice, but there was a slight tremble in her voice this time.

"Well then. I should start with you then. Tatani should be crippled without you, and after, they will be like a headless chicken waiting for Safaya and Tagayia to kill the rest." Sagiri said with slight mockery.

"How dare you threaten our kun?" the man standing to her left growled.

"Let me kill him now! Give the order!" The one to her right said. His boy now raised even higher before he lowered it, and the sharp edge pointed at sagiri. Another moment of silence stretched as the place, now cackling with hostility, waited for their kun to give the order. Sagiri could feel her seething with rage, but when she spoke again, her voice still held calmness, but with an edge this time.

"You are the ones who trespassed onto our lands. How are we wrong to defend ourselves? Tagayia had killed our parents and orphaned us for decades. We are justified in taking any Tagayian or Safayan who steps into our land prisoner. Safaya and Tagayia have no right to step into our lands!!" Her voice was so passionate and filled with emotion that Sagiri was almost moved. Even so, they had made him remember his worst memory. The illusion even twisted it, and he was not feeling too compassionate at the moment.

"Well, if you are well-informed, you'd know I am from the south. The South did not contribute to Tatani's situation. Those women you took, I happen to be responsible for them. I don't care about your animosity with Tagayia or Safaya. " If you have harmed them in any way, I will not forgive it," sagiri said.

"But they are from Tagayia..." the man on the kun's left said.

"And I am from the south. If I say they are my business, then not you, Tatani, Safaya, or Tagayia are allowed to lay a finger on them. Unless you want to make me your enemy. Do Tatani wish to make me your enemy kun of Tatani?" Sagiri said, his voice was sharp and full of ice.

"Let me kill him. He is one, and we are a thousand of us," the man to the right of the Kun said, trembling with rage.

Silence stretched thick, and sagiri held the gaze of the Kun. The decision she made next could decide if he himself flattened Tatani or if he could break its doors and let Safaya and Tagayia do the rest.

"Hold your positions!" The Kuns' voice rang after a moment.

Chapter 257 HEATED

After everyone had held their positions, the kun spoke again.

"Withdraw your weapons." She said in a strangled voice. It seemed she hated to lose, but she was smart enough not to poke a bear.

"But great Kun..." the man to her right tried to say.

"We are no match for him." The kun cut him off.

"You should listen to your kun. She seems to be wise." Sagiri said, shifting his eyes to look at the kun's right. Perhaps it was good that a woman was the ruler here. The men beside her were too busy trying to measure their manhoods against his to understand the weight of the matter. The fighters put away their weapons at her order, but they were still very much lurking in the area.

The kun was agile and a fighter by design. She jumped and landed from the high place without making a sound. Her two men landed beside her.

"Shall we talk in my kun house?" She said. Sagiri could tell she was too prideful, and she did not like that she did not have to fight him. He could have a talk with her. The two men beside her looked like they wanted to debate, but she lifted her hand to stop them once again.

The four moved into the central part of the city once again, and the fighters followed, but they still made sure to remain in the shadows. They went through a door into one of the tallest structures, curved from the earth itself. After several corridors, the door to a place that looked like a meeting room opened, and the two beside her came in with her. She showed him to a seat before she took hers at the end of the table.

"Ninoka, Tinka, you too sit," she said, referring to her right-hand man and her left-hand man.

"Shall we begin then?" Sagiri said. Now that she was properly looking at the Kun of Tatani, she was indeed a very beautiful woman. Even at her age, her skin was flawless and delicate. Perhaps from staying out of the sun for many years.

"I am Seya of Tatani," the kun introduced herself.

"And I am Sagiri of the south." Sagiri did the same.

"Sagiri of the south, I don't wish to make the South my enemy, too. But you came with Tagayians to our land. As a ruler, I have to give an account to my people and protect them from any intruders. Before I give you back your friends, the scale has to be equalized." The kun said her neck held with pride.

"The way I see it, you should be thanking me." Sagiri said, "You put me in an illusion, and I still bear a grudge."

"Your mind pushed you into the illusion, and you destroyed our lands. If our city had not gone further, you could have killed half of Tatani.

"But I didn't," sagiri said. "The same won't be said for when Safaya and Tagayia have been pushed enough and come for you. You are living a borrowed life."

"Are you here by the order of Tagayia so you can redeem yourself? If so, then I do not wish to have this talk!" Seya sneered.

"You seem to think you have a choice. I'll spell it out for you. Tagayia holds people I care about. You, Tatani, have to leave their lands either dead or alive before I get out of here. You also know what that means." Sagiri said.

"Why should we have to move? Were we born between Tagayia and Safaya? We have been pushed underground, yet we still have to move?" Ninoka snapped

"What if we refuse?" Seya's eyes flashed with anger.

"You will leave me no choice then," Sagiri answered. He knew what he was asking for was not easy, but he only wished Seya could see reason before. "I can do anything for those I care about. I just wonder if you can do the same for your fellow Tatani."

"You don't get to tell me what is good for Tatani when you are siding with Tagayia. In a sense, you are worse than Tagayia." Seya said, slamming her hands on the table. "I'd rather die than give in. The only reason we have been alive this far is that we have our feet in both states!! If we step out of Tagayia, we are dead."

"I'm glad you understand that. Tagayia holds people I care about. I will never dare side with my enemy. You and I are prisoners of it if you look at it. I have no choice, and you have no choice either. How long do you plan to live underground? How long do you think Safaya and Tagayia can allow you to grow?" Sagiri said in a calm voice, and Seya sank back to her seat in exasperation.

"Your enmity with Tagayia does not hold a candle to ours. They might want you dead because you killed one of their own, but they have wiped out our entire families, killed our parents and children. Don't presume to understand our animosity with them!" Tinka was the one to bark at Sagiri next.

"Does their wiping out my entire clan also not hold a candle. I am the last of my clan because of them. So Tinka, do tell me what I don't understand about the pain of losing loved ones." Sagiri said, anger flashing in his eyes.

Silence cut through the room as the temperatures finally lowered.

Seya took in a deep breath before she finally spoke.

"If Tagayia wiped out your clan, why are you doing their bidding? What will you explain to your ancestors when you meet them after getting in bed with their enemy?" Seya asked.

"Like I have been saying, they hold what I hold dear, and I am a prisoner. Unlike you, I don't plan on being a prisoner for long. I will not let the one who wiped my clan go." Sagiri said in an icy tone.

"Why not join us then. I have never seen anyone of your kind or someone as strong as you. With you, we are sure to win against Tagayia or Safaya." Ninoka said.

"We won't win," Sagiri said. "Even if we do, you must be ready to stand on top of a mountain of the corpses of your fellow Tatani alone at the end of the fight. I do not fight unless my chances of winning are higher than my chances of losing." Sagiri said.

"Still, if we leave Tagayia, we are dead. I refuse to move!" Seya said.

"Why not come south with me?"

Chapter 258 ESCALATE

"Why don't you come with me to the south?"

The question hung in the air as everyone turned to look at Sagiri as if he had grown another head. Well, that was Sagiri's plan, and he did not have time to beat around the bush. It was either that they moved south, or they died. Perhaps not now, but it was inevitable. Before Sagiri could answer, a fighter of Tatani broke through the door and came to Seya's ear.

Of course, Sagiri could hear what was being said properly, and he could almost feel the hostility in the room grow to a deadly level.

Damn. He almost had that in the bag.

'Tagayians have broken through the city and are engaging our fighters in the square.'

Seya's eyes took on a dangerous glint as he turned to Sagiri, and blades were unsheathed, going for his throat.

"I should have known not to trust a southerner. You are, after all, a Tagayian through and through. You come here to stall me so your men can slaughter my fighters?!" Seya snarled with venom. "Give me one reason why I shouldn't kill you right now?!" Her lower lip quivered.

She was really mad.

"Well, one is that you can't kill me even if you tried. Your illusions won't work on me again. If you try to alter my reality, I will bury us all alive. Second, it is only natural for people to look for their kidnapped teammates. What did you expect them to do? bear their throats." Sagiri said with a sigh. He was now once again back to square one.

"Keep him here. Ninoka, Tinka, follow me to the square!" Seya said, and a dozen blades were pointed at Sagiri's neck.

What a waste.

Seya departed from the room with her men, and Sagiri just waited until she was far enough before he turned to look at the fighters trying to hold him hostage. Seya must have known this was futile, but she still left her men to watch him.

"Does your kun wish you dead?" Sagiri said, and the men, even filled with fear, did not back down. Sagiri did not have time to waste, even so. He shut his eyes and pushed the archive out. The fighters watching him did not have time to blink before he disappeared out of sight. Sagiri timed his move so that he was beside Seya in the next instant.

"How... did you just kill our men?" Tinka gasped. Seya only looked startled for a moment, but she looked to have expected something of such.

"I told you you can't keep me contained," Sagiri said, already pulling ahead of the group.

An irritated voice made its way from deep inside Seya's throat. Before she pulled beside Sagiri as the four headed for the square.

"Try to keep up, great kun, or your men will surely die by mine's hand," Sagiri taunted, going even faster.

"It is your men who will die by mine hands. No one comes into Tatani and leaves." Seya said with pride, catching up with Sagiri as they jumped from roof to roof and over the narrow streets. She was quite agile, fast, and remarkable. She was not trying to lose, even in a running competition with Sagiri. Sagiri smirked as he moved even faster. Seya cursed and caught up quickly. She was feral.

The sound of weapons crushing was the first thing to reach Sagiri's ears. The battle was indeed fierce. Sagiri and Seya broke into the square, and it was a battlefield. Sagiri's squad and the shadow corp were outnumbered, but the shadow corp was moving like shadows among the Tatani fighters while squad 25 was having their back to offer support. Both Seya and Sagiri perched on a high terrace overlooking the square.

"It seems to me that your men are outnumbered, and they will be wiped out in no time." Seya gloated.

"Don't be too happy too soon. Your men may have numbers, but they have not cornered mine even after all this time." Sagiri shot back.

It was quite a sight to see the shadow corp in action. They were agile in their formations, and the fighters of Tatani could not see them coming before they were sent flying. Sagiri could tell that they were not trying to kill them for some reason. Perhaps they wanted to bargain to get the girls and him back. Sagiri was convinced that if they were intent on killing, then the Tatani fighters could have been reduced by a third.

They left no openings, and they moved like the wind. Their hits were so graceful and slight, yet whoever they touched was sent flying. Kiuga was in the back, offering air support to the shadow squad and blocking all the arrows that were raining on them. Kiuga, Bukata, and Zazarie, the trio, were going at it, not leaving any openings as usual. Kaka was his own squad, but Ulekai and Zolinka were still offering him support. N'varu, Banga, and Maita were acting as a stepping stone for each other in turns, not breaking formation. Before the other landed, the other was already in the air.

The fight went on and on for a while. It seemed Seya was not going to call it off anytime, and Sagiri did not wish to. The two were measuring their manhoods at the moment, and Sagiri could not hide the fact that this fight was interesting to watch.

Kiuga was engaged actively in the fight and still managed to give orders. Even when he faltered, Bukata and Zazarie offered him perfect support. Their trio might just be one of the best in the land.

"Keep going!" He yelled. He himself blocked three arrows at the same time before he landed, sliding a few steps back, but quickly got back into position to offer Bukata and Zazarie support.

The shadow corp, on the other hand, split on instinct as Tatani fighters dropped from the terraces. One landed directly in Captain Yoka's path, blade already mid-swing. Yoka caught it, steel grinding, and drove forward with his shoulder, forcing the man back two steps.

Another came in from the side.

"Right!" Tavora yelled. He was the eyes of the shadow corp at the moment, like Kiuga was for Squad 25.

Yoka turned late but just enough to deflect. The strike missed his shoulder, and he kicked out, creating space before the third attacker closed in. The shadow corp was clearly outnumbered, but they were holding their own

To his left, Leko and Rana of the shadow corps engaged three at once. Leko blocked high, Rana stepped under and shoved one back, but a fourth Tatani fighter slid in behind them, cutting off their retreat. Rana twisted, barely slipping the strike, boots scraping as he lost ground.

"Rotate!" Tavora yelled. He had not recovered well, but Sagiri had to give him credit. The boy was good. His attitude needed to grow, but as a fighter, he was perhaps one of the most talented and agile fighters Sagiri had ever seen.

They switched positions mid-motion, but Tatani didn't give space. The moment one shifted, another stepped in to hold the line.

Above them, a Shadow dropped. Sagiri had not seen one of the shadow corps break from the group, but then what use was their name if one did not miss their movements once in a while. He landed behind a Tatani fighter and struck once, fast and direct. Before the body hit the ground unconscious, he was already moving. He rolled past another strike and disappeared into the gap.

Yoka drove forward again, forcing one opponent back, but another replaced him instantly. A third angled in from behind. He dropped low, the strike passing over him, and slammed into the nearest fighter to break the pressure.

"Don't stop moving!" He barked. Tavora was mostly the target because he panicked every time he thought Yoka was outnumbered.

Across the square, three of squad 25 were pinned down by the number of arrows raining down. Two of the Shadow Corps dropped between them to aid. Leko cursed under his breath as more Tatani stepped down from the terraces.

"They're not breaking!" He drove forward one more time, forcing a Tatani fighter back, but the man gave ground just enough. Another stepped in behind him, blade ready.

"They're not trying to overwhelm us," Tavora said. Leko blocked another strike, glancing at him.

"Then what?" Yoka shifted his stance, watching another line of fighters take position.

"They're containing us perhaps for something worse," Kiuga said.

"I am going to fall asleep if this is all Tatani fighters have to offer. How have you all been surviving all these years?" Sagiri snickered. He could hear what Kiuga had just said, even from a distance, and perhaps he wanted to see what the kun of Tatani had under her sleeve. The statement must have ruffled the feathers of the queen of Tatani because a wicked smile took over her features, and Sagiri could feel the air around them change.

The kun of Tatani indeed had something up her sleeve.

"Open the latch!" Suddenly, Seya barked, and as if whatever had been happening till this moment was just a play. The Tatani fighters pulled back just as a million arrows were let loose.

Chapter 259 A THOUSAND ARROWS

"Open the latch!" Suddenly, Seya barked, and as if whatever had been happening till this moment was just a play, the Tatani fighters pulled back just as a million arrows were let loose.

"I win this round!!" Seya cackled in victory.

"You are a conniving woman," Sagiri said. Even so, he did not have time to hesitate. If he did not move, his teammates were going to die for sure. Even the shadow squad could not survive such a shower. He was going to make Seya pay, but that could wait. He might have pushed the woman too hard, and she had bitten back.

More latches opened in quick intervals, and with each that opened, more arrows were released in hundreds and no less.

"We are all dead." Ulekai shuddered in fear.

"Dying in battle is an honor for a man. Pull yourself together." Kaka snapped, getting into a position to defend and fight till the last moment. Typical Asakana.

The markings on Sagiri's skin stirred with the urge to protect. His killing intent grew to suffocating levels in an instant, and the air froze then surged with energy. The markings on his body stirred and ignited, making the very hairs on his skin stand with how charged he was.

The place he had been standing on curved in instantly and shattered with the force and speed he moved. He disappeared from beside Seya in an instant. He tore through the air, a blur and a flash as he headed for the square. The arrows tore through the air at the same time with so much speed that in only a second, his friends would be wiped out. He was really beginning to have a hate relationship with arrows.

In this state, however, he was faster. Everything seemed to stand still, and only he was in motion. Even the arrows seemed too slow in his eyes.

The next moment, Sagiri landed in the middle of the square with so much force that there was a small depression where he landed. In that split second, he could feel the relief of his friends wash over them.

"What took you so long?" N'varu seemed even more relieved, as if he knew Sagiri had been around the whole time.

"I was measuring manhoods with the kun of Tatani," Sagiri said, but his voice was so cold that what should have come out like a joke came out like a threat. Sagiri pushed the archive out. This time not to move within it but to shield his friends. This was going to cost him half of his strength. He could feel the archive layer. Its sigils were humming around before they tightened to form a tight, invisible shield around the two squads. Only he could see the archive after all. The massive invisible structure crackled with energy.

Time seemed to stop as the arrows closed in. The markings on Sagiri's hand crawled on his skin and accumulated on his right hand. He held his hand out as if reinforcing the connection between him and the archive in that moment to complete and strengthen the barrier.

Just as the arrows touched the invisible archive...

The arrows froze.

They came to a stop in a sequence, but in a spreading halt, like something invisible had caught them in layers. The front lines locked first, then the ones behind, then the rest followed until the artificial sky of Tatani itself seemed suspended, filled with thousands of arrows hanging in place.

Sagiri exhaled slowly. The Archive pulsed through him and around him with so much energy. He could feel the weight of the hanging arrow as if he were somehow carrying it, and they would crush him at any moment. The archive hummed and held them in place. A pressure filled the space, dense and controlled, holding every arrow exactly where it was. Some trembled slightly, their momentum still fighting against the restraint, but none moved forward.

The markings on Sagiri's body had now pushed out, changed shape, and taken circular forms. They were visible, and to those watching, it felt like his body had strings of energy around him.

"What!" Sagiri could hear Seya gasp in shock. It could seem he had won the manhood measuring duel.

"What...?" one of her fighters breathed, then many more followed. Sagiri could feel their fear.

"What is he?" Another small voice said, almost too scared to believe whatever they were witnessing.

Yoka was shocked and soon loosened his defensive stance. His eyes were fixed on the sky, on the impossible stillness of it. Arrows that should have torn through them now hovered like they had struck an invisible wall. A Shadow operative stepped forward slightly, head tilted upward.

"There's no barrier," he said, voice low. "How is he holding them?"

Ulekai let out a quiet, disbelieving laugh. "He is holding all of them?"

No one responded. Because there was no other answer.

Sagiri stood beneath it all, unmoving, as if the weight of it meant nothing. The Archive pressed outward from him, unseen but absolute, locking every arrow in place, denying gravity and motion itself.

Kiuga's grip tightened on his weapon as he moved a distance behind Sagiri slightly.

"Sagiri the blind, you really do love dramatic entries. I love it." He said in awe.

Above them, the arrows quivered. Sagiri raised his hand slowly, even in wonder at his capabilities. He twisted his hand slightly. Every eye followed the motion, and the arrows responded.

It began with the ones closest to him, their tips shifting slightly, turning away from his position. Then the movement spread outward, rippling through the entire suspended storm. One by one, then in waves, the arrows rotated mid-air, their directions changing with precise, controlled alignment.

The squad watched in silence. Thousands of weapons. Turning and Obeying.

"Fire more!!" Seya barked with panic this time. Hundreds of arrows were released in Sagiri's and the squads' direction again. The archive expanded in response to hold the new weight, and it hummed with the weight. The same thing happened again. The arrows did not have space to touch the archive this time before they froze mid-air. Sagiri pushed his hand up and held the weight before he turned them one by one. Every fighter in the square, even those hidden, had an arrow pointed at them.

A Shadow operative exhaled sharply.

"...he's aiming for them."

"Does it matter? They wanted to kill us first." Tavora said. He was staring at the scene with a mixture of horror and awe. Perhaps he was realising he did not stand a chance against Sagiri and how easily Sagiri could have killed him if he wanted.

After Sagiri was sure he was holding the weight intact, he finally turned his gaze onto Seya, who was staring in horror. Her prideful composure had been crushed.

"You celebrated too soon, Kun of Tatani. I think I am about to win this round by a landslide." Sagiri's cold voice cut through the place.

"It seems you will only leave Tagayia dead. I already told you I care about the people closest to me. And anyone who harms them has to pay." Sagiri's voice grew even colder.

"Now you watch!" Sagiri snarled.

Chapter 260 SHOWER OF ARROWS

"Now you watch!" Sagiri snarled.

At that moment, time stood still, and everyone held their breath. a moment, and the hundred arrows broke free from the others and flew in the direction of the tatani fighters who had yet to run far enough. They had stopped when Sagiri had stopped the arrows. The arrows tore through the air with so much force and speed that they did not have a moment to block.

"Let's see if you love arrow showers," Sagiri snarled.

In the next moment, a flesh-and-metal meeting, and the sound of bodies falling like ants followed.

Agonizing wails and those of fear tore through Tatani. It was clear no one had ever witnessed that, and even those of the shadow corp stared in shock. Perhaps they were wondering why their mandra could ever want to offend such a person. With the shower, a third of the fighters of Tatani now lay still.

"What do you say, Seya, since this place is underground anyway. Won't it make for a good graveyard?" Sagiri said. His voice was still ice. He had never tolerated anyone hurting those close to him. Squad 25 was his business, and if anyone dared lay a finger on them, then they would be his enemy. Even after he was banished, they still came to his aid. No one was allowed to harm them. Not even Tagayia. Not even their fathers like Chief Zaka, not even the mandra. They had accepted him without question, even after knowing he was from the south. The Kun of Tatani had gone too far this time.

Fear was visible in the area. The smell of it was almost unbearable.

As Sagiri spoke, he released another batch of hundreds of arrows. This one he released with even more force with the wave of his left hand. His anger was burning even more now. Why was everyone hellbent on taking what he cared about from him? First his clan, then his mother's sand shade, then myama, then his adoptive parents. Now his squad!

The second wave was his raw anger at everyone for trying to take what he cared for.

"Anyone who harms my squad dies!" he snarled as the metal clashed with flesh again. More bodies fell, and the smell of blood filled the place to a point where it was almost nauseating. The sound of metal and something bitter was almost enough to bring tears to anyone's eyes. Since Tatani did not have much fresh air. The fighters in the shadows were the ones to fall this time.

Seya had been frozen during the last wave, and a lone tear could be seen falling down her face this second time. Her face was a perfect picture of poking a hornet's nest and finding out the hard way. If only she hadn't opened that latch. It was clear she had too much pride and cared a little more about her pride than the well-being of her people. I mean, Sagiri had told him the cons and pros of Tatani continuing to grow under the nose of both Tagayia and Tatani. He even offered the south on a silver platter.

Her hands trembled, and her Ninoka and Tinka were no better. They had nothing to say this time. They were realising who they were up against until that moment.

"It is your turn now," Sagiri said in a cold voice.

The remainder, a thousand or so arrows, turned with his hand and pointed at Seya and the remainder of the fighters beside her. Two-thirds of her fighters were gone.

"Perhaps it would be easy to lead your people out of here when they don't have a leader. If they refuse, then this can become your graveyard. I'd rather give them a painless death than wait for Tagayia and Safaya to tear them bone from limb and leave no body to bury." Sagiri said.

A moment passed between Seya and Sagiri. Everyone could feel it. Sagiri was only giving her one choice. to submit or die. The kun of Tatani is a prideful woman, and now what remained was her choice. Would she defy him and die together with all Tatani, or would she choose to submit to him? If she chose not to submit, then she was just tagayia and Safaya.

Seya, in the face of death, paused. Her lip quivered as her eyes looked around the place, almost two thousand fighters lying there. dead. Another tear fell from her eye.

"Damn it. She is already beaten. Is he going to humiliate her?" Tavora said under his breath.

"Shut up. This is not a humiliation. We all have a choice to make." Yoka snapped, and Tavora swallowed.

kiuga was silent, watching the situation intently. No one in squad 25 held any other feelings. They all seemed to trust whatever sagiri could do.

in a moment when the tension was at almost suffocating levels. Suddenly, Seya let out a wail deep from her chest that was almost too torturous to hear. She tore the front of her dress, and her fighters immediately looked away. Even those on the sagiri squad and the Yoka squad lowered their gazes slightly. Sagiri did not even blink as Seya's half-naked body came into sight.

"I, Seya, Kun of Tatani submit. I ask that you spare the life of the remainder of Tatani. The death of my fighters here today is my fault for being short-sighted. If anyone must die today, let it be. The people of Tatani deserve to live. I have always known Tagayia, and Safaya could come for us, one day, but chose to turn a blind eye because there was nowhere else to turn. If it is still well with you, Tatani will follow you. If you swear to protect them, how you have protected your men, then I will stop being kun..."

"Cover your kun before I kill you!" Sagiri cut her off, his voice icy. Ninoka and Tinka tore their coats at the same time and laid them on their queen, covering her nakedness and protecting her decency. Only after she was completely covered did sagiri speak again.

"Did it have to come to this for you to see reason, kun of Tatani? I do not wish to be the leader of Tatani..."

"You are the only one strong enough to make Safaya and Tagayia think twice before coming for. If you don't accept this, then what is the reason? The moment we get out of this hole, they are all dead!" Seya trembled with something more than rage.

"Sagiri, she is making a point. She is giving in. You can't reject her." Kiuga stepped beside Sagiri.

"I don't plan on becoming chief," Sagiri said in a bored tone.

"If you kill a leader, you have to take her seat," Yoka said.

"I haven't killed her," Sagiri said. He could understand what they were saying.

"She has submitted to you. More or less, you are now chief of Tatani." Kaka said, and Sagiri sighed. That much he knew, but he was not planning to be responsible for thousands of people.

This was becoming complicated. It could be easier to just kill them all and burn all Tatani. The remainder of the arrows were still pointed at Seya. Sagiri sighed. He needed to make use of them first before he had this talk. The weight of them was beginning to get heavier.

"Everyone, step back first. " If you don't want to die!" Sagiri said to Seya and her fighters.

First things first.