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II AJ TUK +BIL The kidnapping of the, Oliver Basanda

The guard was awakened at night by the sound of clanging steel. He was about to go back to sleep, but someone's hand shook him out of his slumber. He opened eyes and recognized his colleague Afashi. An absolute fear could be seen in his face.

‘Come to the main tower! Quick!’ He shouted, all terrified.

Guardian Akaf quickly stood up and raced after his friend. They ran along the winding corridors of the castle that led into the king's chambers. Only then did Akaf begin to understand what had frightened his friend. The door to the chamber was open. There were no guards standing. Stunned, they lay on the ground. And worst of all, the king had disappeared.

The tragic news reached Will the very day the King disappeared. Will was a member of the MALGAN organization. MALGAN helped all of the eight kingdoms on this earth. It helped carry money and when necessary, sent detectives from its guard to investigate special crimes. Will was one of the best detectives in that guard and he was the very one they called on for this case. As the first transport ship headed for Arif, a desert kingdom to the South, he boarded it as fast as he could. Their three-day voyage ended in the capital city of Al-Keiba. Along the way to the castle, he admired the splendid architecture of the city. There were spectacular buildings made out of marble with huge domes and various patterns painted on the walls. As he looked to the right, he saw the castle where the king of the Arif Empire resided. Like other buildings in this city, the castle was built of fine marble and gold. There were four towers about a hundred cubits high, topped with a sloping roof. The gate to the castle opened. Achif, the butler, was already waiting for him at the entrance.

‘Good morning Mr. Will. I am Achif, the royal butler,’ he introduced himself.

‘Good morning, I have heard of the tragic event that has befallen your realm. That is why I am here, to find out who kidnapped your king.’

‘Thank you. Please follow me to the study. There you can personally question people who were guarding the king that very night,’ Achif replied.

Will nodded his head in agreement and made his way over to the butler. They stopped in front of a large oak door. The butler opened them and Will stepped inside into a spacious study that

could fit a crowd. In the centre of the room there was a large oak desk with chairs. Will sat down on one of them and waited until the young men in armour entered the study.

‘Have a seat,’ Will invited them. The young men did so and they sat down.

‘So, how come this happened?’ He inquired. Determined to go straight for it.

‘I am Sarak. One of the king's guards ’ the young man introduced himself.

‘It was about midnight and literally nothing special was happening. But then something slipped under our feet. At first, we didn't know exactly what it was, but then it began to smell of a strange aroma and it stunned us all. We believe it was an ampoule with an extract of the rochan plant.’

Will had heard of the rochan plant before. It is extremely rare and only grows in the seventh month of the year in the Kingdom of Asa. Its flowers contain pheromones that can stun humans.

‘Any idea who might be responsible for doing this?’ Will asked.

‘There is a group opposed to the king,’ said another young man, ‘They want to enforce their own laws, so they plan to overthrow the king and put their leader, Kashi, on the throne instead.’

Each of them gave their name and what they were doing that night. I have nothing to learn here, Will thought.

‘I'll go check out the king's chambers. I'd like to take a look around. Perhaps I'll find out something.’

The Chamberlain, at his request, led him into the chamber. It was splendid, and everything in it was shining perfectly. Right by the door was a mirror taller than Will himself, there was a bed against the back wall and a huge chandelier of precious stones hung from the ceiling. But what caught Will's attention was the door on the far side of the room that led to the terrace. He entered the chamber and made his way to the door. He looked at them closely and saw that they were pried open. Will opened them and stepped out onto the terrace. He walked closer to the railing. It was as if something had scratched it and left a large furrow in it.

‘Well, there were definitely more of them. Look, the door's dented and there's a gouge in the railing like something's gone crooked. Like an anchor so the perpetrator could climb up here.

My guess is, that one of the offenders knocked you out and the other one climbed into the room and kidnapped the king. Now, do you know where that group might be?’

‘They don't live in this town, I am afraid. They live in desert. I can show you there if you want,’ Afashi offered.

‘That would be very kind of you,’ Will replied with a smile.

Early the next morning, they saddled their camels and set out on their journey. They had to travel this early before dawn, for whenever the sun rose in the Arif Empire, there was soon an unbearable heat that would exhaust anyone. They travelled fast with few breaks only for a drink and a short rest.

‘So this is a small group?!’ Will blurted out. The camp, which was about the size of a city, was spread out in front of him. Both headed to the tent where the main leader Kashi was.

‘Hello Kashi. You probably know already that the king has disappeared, is that correct?’ Will began.

‘Yes, I know. I understand that he disappeared. But I didn't do it! That is, if that's what you about to ask.’

‘I'm not saying you did it. But I'd like to know what you were doing that night.’

‘I slept like the rest of the camp. I have witnesses to that,’ Kashi replied.

‘All right then. Do you possess a boat?’ Will asked.

‘Why is it that you ask?’

‘Because the king's guards have been stunned by the rochan plant, which only grows in the Asa Kingdom, where it can't normally be reached except by boat.’

Kashi complied and said that he owned the sailboat Marien in the harbour.

‘Alright. That would be it for now. See you later!’ Will said goodbye and walked out. He didn't trust the man. He had the greatest motive. Along the way back, Will had an idea.

‘Does the harbour keep records of the boats?’ He asked the guard.

‘Of course,’ the guard replied.

‘I want a full list of the ships that left Al-Keibi for the Kingdom of Asa during the flowering of Rochan, a record of the castle's employees, and who exactly had time off during that period,’ Will commanded.

The next morning the guard brought him the records from the port. The most interesting thing was that Kashi's ship had sailed from Al-Keibi port during this period, and right in the middle of the blooming season. He decided to summon Kashi to the castle for questioning. Even before that, Afashi stopped by with the news.

‘Good day Mr. Will,’ he opened the speech ‘the King's cloak has been found. It was in Kashi's territory.’ ‘What a coincidence. I was just about to come in for questioning.’ Will remarked. He was curious how he would deny finding the cloak on his territory. That afternoon the prime suspect arrived and they headed to the office.

‘I called you in because I learned that your sailing ship, the Marien, sailed out of the harbour for the Kingdom of Asa during the seventh month of Rochan's flowering season.’

‘Yes, I admit, I was there. But I go there every month for business!’

‘Well, and how about this one?’ Will asked, placing a red cloak with gold trim on the table, ‘We found this in your territory.’

‘Someone must put it there!’

‘Prove it!’ Will demanded.

‘I understand that you have evidence, but look at the threatening letters I've been getting lately - they say that before long I and my group will be destroyed.’ He said it and threw a stack of letters on the table.

‘Okay, I'll go through them. But you'll have to stay here as the primary suspect. If you're innocent, I'll let you go,’ Will finished, calling for the guards to escort him away. He decided he wouldn't read the letters until he was in his room later that evening. Until then, he hid them in his suitcase so no one would find them. After dinner Will returned to his room, put the letters on the table and lit the lamp. He began to examine them carefully. The writing seemed very familiar to him. He decided to go over the crime scene one more time. As he walked around the king's chamber, something seemed so strange to him. He walked over to the cabinet by the large bed. He examined it closely and shook it. He leaned it over and that's when he saw it! Behind the locker there was a small tunnel that led to a secret room. He lay down and crawled through the narrow unlit tunnel on his stomach. At the end of it was a doorway. Will opened it and found himself outside the castle. That meant that whoever had kidnapped the king had convinced him that he was in danger. This brought Will a good insight. It had to be someone who had access to the king even late at night, knew about the

secret exit, and who he trusted very much. The next day, the required list of employees arrived. After studying it, he was more than sure who the kidnapper was. However, he needed to check out the other people on the list as well. The following morning he had all the castle servants summoned to his office.

‘I know who kidnapped your king,’ he declared importantly.

‘A total of five employees were off work while the flowering of the rochan plant during the whole month. Two of them were guardsmen, but they had sick children, so they stayed with them. This was confirmed to me by the doctors. The other two were the cook Mashī and the servant Onsor, but I checked them too. The last employee who had time off was Achif! It was only after I got the list with the full names that I realized that one boat in the harbor was listed under the name of Halash - which is Achif’s last name. It was a boat owned by his father. He took it to the kingdom of Asa. There, he obtained a rochan plant that stunned the guards. That very night he came to the king, saying he was in great danger. Together they disappeared down a secret passage behind a cabinet in the king’s chamber and the king was led away captive. Then, he made false tracks - pried open the door, scratched the railing. All just to confuse me. And the motive? I discovered that he had sent threatening letters to Kashi’s group, which I compared with a letter he had written to MALGAN informing us of the king’s disappearance. The handwriting was absolutely identical. This clearly shows that he disliked the group and was trying to get rid of them. Furthermore, the king had no descendants and so a new king would be elected. Achif had his people who would vote for him.’

‘You have no proof of that!’ protested the butler.

‘I don’t?’

Just as he finished speaking, the king entered the room. Achif’s face turned pale.

‘How did you find him?’

‘That was easy. You wanted to blame it on Kashi. So you put the cloak on his territory. But you needed to get rid of the king. I checked at the port that your father’s ship had been given permission to leave the port this morning. So I went there to check.’ Will said and smiled

The next day, Will received gifts from the king in thanks for the rescue. Immediately afterwards, he packed up and headed back to MALGAN headquarters.

When he got home, he had to admit to his colleagues that he would probably never forget this case. And he was so pleased to have solved it.