

KEEPER 187

Chapter 187: THE CONDEMNED MAN'S MOVE

"You are not allowed in the inner city. You know that," the high-ranking warden said. Wardens in the inner city were the same rank as division commanders. Only the solid gold sashes and above were allowed to serve the supreme ruler of Tagayia. Alik City could be called a military city. Only warriors lived in the city, and the higher the rank, the closer to the inner city they lived. Inside the inner city, only the special combat units lived, highly trusted diplomats, and those trusted by the supreme mandra.

"Even if this matter threatens the life of the supreme mandra?" the man outside the gate asked. He had been sitting on his news outside the gate. He had once been burned for entering the inner city, and he was not welcome in the outer. Now he is in the inner city gate, which could be seen as treason. His instructions were to stay out of the inner city to show his loyalty to the king for three decades. Showing up now was a clear sign of disobedience,

"You have already committed treason by defying the order of the mandra by coming here. Do you wish to commit more treason by speaking such words over the life of the mandra?" the warden spoke. His voice was level, but it was full of intent.

"I merely speak the truth. I have something of importance to tell the mandra," the man outside the gate insisted. They had let him kneel outside the gate the whole night, but his failure to leave was the mere reason the warden was talking to him.

"And you think the mandra has time to speak to traitors?" the warden asked. It was well-known that the man was a traitor. Even those who did not know his face knew it by the mark of the traitor on his forehead. The mark of a traitor.

"I am willing to die for this. I am a condemned man, and I could not have come here. I will only speak to General Tsaka or the mandra." The man outside the gate bowed his head with such practiced humility that his head almost touched the ground.

"You want to even see the man closest to the mandra and the man in charge of all the shadow units? Just what is your plan?" the warden said in irritation. He must have been tired of seeing the face of the man kneeling at the gate. The shadow unit is a unit tasked with protecting the supreme mandra. They only take orders from the Supreme Mandra, and the man is afforded with the mandra's token, a man like Tsaka, who is the mandra's most trusted man.

"Send a message to the shadow general's fortress," the warden finally said. "Tell him the traitor wishes to see him. He claims it's a matter of life and death, and he is willing to wager his life on it." The warden

said. He had been put in a hard spot. If the matter indeed was so serious that it could threaten the life and death of the mandra, then naturally one was already in a hard spot. If he refused to lend an ear and something went wrong, he would be the one with the chain mark of the condemned and traitors on his head. It was easier to inform Tsaka and wash his hands of the situation.

Tsaka was a man honored by the supreme mandra, and he was truly worthy of his name and position.

Just to show how diligent he was at his work, an hour later, the condemned man was called into the outermost fortress of the shadow fortress. The two men already had a history, and so perhaps Tsaka squeezed the schedule to give him a chance to redeem himself. Was truly a man as diligent and honourable as the man honoured by the mandra himself.

"Nalek, what matter of urgency do I have to forfeit my duties to hear?" Tsaka spoke as soon as the condemned man was brought before him.

"It is only meant for the mandra's ears." Nalek bowed yet again.

"I am the ears of the supreme mandra. What reaches my ears has reached the mandra's ears," Tsaka said. The statement was not meant to be prideful, but it was a fact that the man was the hands, eyes, and ears of the mandra, and for the fifteen years he had sat on that chair, everyone knew that he and the mandra worked perfectly.

"I apologize for my bluntness, but you might be his eyes and his ears, but you are not his brain. Or do you presume to think that?" Nalek asked. Even long before he became a traitor they two had never mixed or seen eye to eye. One was as crooked as they come, and one was as straight as a rod. It would be impossible for the two to mix.

"Nalek. You are still as twisted. I cleared my schedule not for you to insult me," tsaka said. He was not a prideful man, but working under the mandra had stretched the man thin to tolerate any nonsense, and he did not have time to go in circles even with an old 'friend'.

"I dare not insult the man who branded this mark on my face," Nalek said. "Or do you wish to hide something from the mandra and take all the glory again?" Nalek said. He was still not qualified to stand before Tsaka, the general of the shadows, and the man who was like the mandra in stature and power, and ranking. Even kneeling before Tsaka, Nalek was not willing to show humility.

"You accuse me again. Just like the last time. Perhaps you should go back and wait for the fourteen years to elapse, and your ban will be lifted. You have already served sixteen. Now, if you'll excuse me." Tsaka said, preparing to stand on his high seat and leave. "Take him out of the city," Tsaka said to no one in particular, but Nalek knew the men under the shadow general and the supreme mandra were somewhere watching like the shadows they were.

"Please tsaka, it is of great importance. It involves the south." Nalek rushed to say after realising that Tsaka was indeed going to leave. The man did not say any word that he did not wish to follow through on. A word made a man, and Tsaka was known for keeping his word. If Tsaka truly left, then he would forget about talking to the mandra or being allowed into the city again. Nalek was a patient man, but fourteen years were too long, and his patience had run thin.

"What about the south?" Tsaka stopped mid-stride and lifted his hand to tame his shadows in the walls.

"I will only speak to the supreme mandra about it. You and I know I have desired to break the ban, and this is my chance to get out and get this mark removed." Nalek's lips trembled. He had always been a prideful man, and the mark had reduced him to nothing. Being in seclusion for sixteen years for a man like him was torture. Even so, he also knew that the only way to get his way with a man like Tsaka was to be honest. If he played games or went in circles with Tsaka, he would only dream of ever meeting the supreme mandra. Only those approved by Tsaka were allowed to meet the supreme mandra of the vast lands of Tagayia.