

The Book of Teshan



By Hitana

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Prologue

The soft blue light of the fire marbles filled the room of devotion with dim light. The priestess swung the burning incense in front of the statue of Yahvo and chanted a few verses.

She didn't hear the steps behind her nor did she recognize the shadow of the approaching man, as she was deep in thought. Only when a cold hand clamped her mouth and suffocated her prayers, did Jolantha know that she was in danger.

She wanted to scream but her voice only sounded faint because of the fear and the hand which stifled her shout. Then she felt a dagger sliced into her side and heard a well known voice whisper: "You should have given in to me. Then you would have been spared this!"

She tried to escape from his grasp but failed. Instead she only made him angrier, so that he finally clubbed her into unconsciousness by hitting her on the head and in the back. When she woke up, she felt two things that made her wish she had stayed unconscious.

Blood was running down her legs as he violently thrust into her and she wanted to scream again but he had put a gag in her mouth. Tears of pain and shame filled her eyes and for a short moment she asked herself, why wasn't the maker to whom she had devoted her life here now to help her.

Then at the peak of his ecstasy, he dragged her head back and bared her throat then looked down at her with an evil smile on his face and casually slit her throat. She gave a stifled tone through the gag, slipped out of his arms and was dead before she touched the cold, hard ground.

He stood up from her and took the gag out. Then he put a seed of the Lingura bush between her lips. He checked whether he had left anything behind that could identify him, then nodded contentedly when he saw that this wasn't the case, and left the temple as surreptitiously as he had entered it.

Around the same time in the Guild Hall of Maintainers

"Welcome my dear students, parents and Guild Members! Today we celebrate a grand event. We have taken young unskilled boys and turned them into men, who are worthy to be called Guildsmen of the Maintainers.

It's been quite a long time since the present graduates sat here for the first time and were greeted by me. At that time they had just left the age of infants and taken their first steps into the huge world of the Guild. Some were afraid of what might come and others were just curious.

They have all been affected by what they have learnt and experienced and today we can proudly look at them and say with certainty that they will fulfil their duties for the Guild and D'ni to the best of their abilities.

Every one of them was a good student but as always some have stood above the rest and the tradition of the Guild is to honour them for their good efforts.

I therefore ask Teshan, Son of Airem to come to the front first and receive his insignia and a special charter for exceptional efforts”, Grandmaster Besharen shouted. The assembled applauded, while a young man with short curly hair and a moustache came to the podium. His demeanour told that he had expected this award and he also seemed to be surrounded by an aura of confidence.

He bowed low in front of the Grandmaster and accepted what he was given. The applause died away and the people seemed to expect him saying something. He smiled a bit unsure now and said: “Thank you very much, Grandmaster Besharen. I won’t forget this award and will fulfil my duties to the best of my abilities.”

Again the people applauded and the Grandmaster nodded to Teshan again before he shouted out: “And now the other graduates may come to the Guild Masters standing ready to give them their insignia and when this has concluded I declare the buffet to be opened!”

The audience sat in impatient attendance until the last one had received their insignia then assembled guests scattered to get some of the delicious food that the Guild of Caterers had supplied. Teshan only took a glass of wine and some *chor bahkh* and then went to his parents. His father was talking to Teshan’s mentor and friend Guild Master Corlam. When he joined them Corlam looked at him with shining eyes and shouted: “Ah Teshan! Congratulations on your award, you have really earned it!”

“Thank you very much, Master”, Teshan said modestly. Corlam’s smile widened when he said: “This is really a well-behaved young man! Now tell me my friend, what are you going to do next? Which group will you join?”

“I want to join the police, Master. I want to participate in keeping D’ni a city safe and worthy to live in. And maybe I will even write an Age in later years.”

“Great and creditable plans. Well, I’m sure you’re going to make the best of it. And now, if you please excuse me, there are other people I really have to talk to and above all I should check the buffet a few times!”

With these words and a wink of the eye he nodded to them and went away. Teshan watched him, smiling to himself and then talked with his parents, whom he hadn’t seen for quite a while. They had only been allowed to see each other on the visiting days.

Finally Teshan joined a group in which his friend Namis stood as well. He soon realized that they had lowered the tone from his previous conversation. The men joked about how many women they now could get and seemed to look more forward to doubtful pleasures than to work. Teshan wasn’t really open minded in that respect. For him the thought of a woman was more bound with *taygahn* and starting a family than with mere pleasure. Yet he stood with the group only because of Namis and drank more than he wanted to.

When the group finally went off to celebrate at another place, Teshan declined to join them. He was really tired now and his head droned, as he wasn’t used to so much alcohol. Slowly the other guests went away and so Teshan decided to go home as well. He would stay at his parents until he could afford it to buy his own house.

On the way home he suddenly heard a bloodcurdling scream that tore the silence of the night and made his flesh crawl. He looked around but couldn’t say where the scream had come

from. Too afraid to find it out, he went on and had calmed down when he finally arrived home. He barely had undressed before he toppled onto the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

A case for two

The next day his head still hurt a bit but it was tolerable. His father was already out of the house and so Teshan went to the Guild House. There was a lot going on but he which believed had to do with the new Guildsmen having to find their places. He had to go to Grandmaster Besharen first, to get to know the number of his study.

When he entered the room, he realized that there must be another reason for the rush in the house. The Grandmaster looked very serious and greeted him rather distractedly.

“Has something happened”, Teshan asked curiously after he had sat down.

The Grandmaster nodded grimly and said: “I received news from the Temple of Yahvo this morning. A priestess has been cruelly murdered.”

Teshan looked shocked and exclaimed: “By the Maker!” “Do you already have some insight” he asked.

“No, I didn’t determine the investigation to start yet. There’s way too much going on here right now! There are riots in the city, the organisation here in the house was already chaotic and now this!”

“Yes, its hard work but I’m confident you can do it! Would it be possible for me to have the number of my study, please, as I would like to report to my Guild Master and start my shift?”

“One moment, Teshan! There is another reason why I didn’t start the investigation yet: I want you to take part in it as an observer!”

“ME!??? I’m not able to do such a thing already!”

“You don’t feel capable? I wouldn’t have expected that. You are usually so confident. After all you have just interrupted Guild Master Corlam on one of his excursions and it was your statement that made the Guild Master follow a line of inquiries in a case he hadn’t thought about before. So in the end the case was solved!

Furthermore you won’t be alone! I have advised Guildsman Yena to investigate this case with you. You may see this as a test and as a possibility to make your mark. I hope you won’t disappoint me, Guildsman Teshan!”

“Of course not, Grandmaster” Teshan stammered. “Thank you very much for that chance. Where can I find Guildsman Yena?”

“He’s already on the way here. Ah, I hear a knock on the door that should be him now!”

An elderly, stocky man with a tight-lipped face entered the room. The Grandmaster introduced both men to each other. Yena’s glance and his hands were both cold and Teshan had the vague feeling that working with this man wouldn’t be pleasant.

Then the Grandmaster said goodbye to them as he still had much to do. Teshan looked at Yena unsure and asked: "Are we going straight to the temple now?"

"Yes. You have a problem with that?!" Yena grunted and left. He stepped out so fast that Teshan could hardly follow him. At the entrance of the temple the First Priestess was already waiting. She was pale and calm and greeted them with a nod. Then she led them through the halls and to the room of devotion.

When Teshan saw the corpse he felt ill. He just made it to the next censer and threw up in it. The Priestess looked at him sympathetically but Yena just glanced at him disparagingly and turned around to the corpse.

The head of the priestess lay in a huge pool of blood. Her once beautiful, blond hair was caked with blood. The lower part of her body was naked and here a little bloodspot had remained as well. "Alright, what do we have here? Write this down Teshan!" Yena grunted and bent down to the corpse without turning a hair.

Teshan took his notepad out unwillingly and waited for Yena's statements. "Death by slitting of the throat. Evidences of violence in the form of blows and desecration of the body. Hold on...what's that?"

Yena bent low over the face of the corpse and took something out of the mouth of the woman with a pincer. Then he straightened up and held the object to the light. "The seed of a Lingura bush. Do you know what that means, Teshan?"

Teshan frowned and thought about it for a moment. Then he answered: "The seed of the Lingura bush is also seen as a stone, because it is almost that hard. This sign has usually been connected to the sect of the holy stone."

Yena nodded and said: "So we can assume that it was a religiously motivated action. Who found the woman and when?", he asked the First Priestess.

"Sister Leshena found poor sister Jolantha here at around midnight. However she is deeply shocked and not able to talk now."

"No problem, we can talk to her later! Let the healers now come please, so that they can take care of the corpse. After that we would like to ask you some further questions."

The First Priestess nodded and went away to find a messenger. Teshan was happy that this didn't take too long as he didn't feel well in company with an unpleasant man and a corpse. After the healers had taken the corpse with them the First Priestess took the two men to a common room. There they sat down. This time Yena surprisingly looked at Teshan expectantly and said: "Ask your questions, Teshan!"

Teshan took it with surprise, looked at his notes and asked a bit unsure: "Did priestess Jolantha show any signs of uncertainty or fear in the past time?"

"No, not that I know of. Well – she seemed to be deep in thought at times but only when she was together with the other sisters, never when it was time for the prayers and rituals."

"Have there been any threats by the sects recently?"

“We always have to face the danger from the sects. But nothing special happened. It’s however a mystery to me, why the sects not finally-“, she stopped and looked at Teshan nervously. His gaze fell upon Yena, who pulled a strange face which Teshan felt looked threatening.

“What did you want to say?” Teshan asked the First Priestess.

“Oh yes, excuse me...It’s a mystery to me why the sects not finally given up fighting against us. The maintainers arrest them so often and stop them doing their petty actions!”

“Some things aren’t stopped easily” Yena grunted and then said: “I think that’s enough for now, but we may come back again.” He made a sign to Teshan, who was a bit confused that the interrogation was already over but he followed Yena having said goodbye to the First Priestess. Out on the street Yena said, that they would call it a day and just left. Teshan shook his head, still a bit confused then finally went home as well.

An arrogant colleague

The next day Teshan thought he should show Yena what a good investigator he was and so he went straight to the Guild House of Healers to get the forensic information from the examination of the corpse. As he didn’t really know where to go, he went through the whole ward till he came to the room of the Grandmaster.

He approached two healers who were talking and asked: “Can I speak to the Grandmaster of your Guild, please?” The older one of them turned to him and replied: “What do you want from the Grandmaster, maintainer?” “I just want some information about the dead woman who was brought here yesterday” Teshan said a bit hesitantly.

“Then you’re in the wrong block! The room for corpses is on the lowest floor” the other one said briefly. Then they turned their backs on Teshan who realized that they wouldn’t give him any further information. So he went all the way back downstairs and finally found the autopsy room. The healer there was bent over the corpse of a man, studying his intestines.

Teshan fought down his queasiness and called out for the healer: “Excuse me? Do you have a moment, I just need some information!” The man at the table cringed slightly, rose up and looked at Teshan sharply. “Pipe down if you respect the peace of the dead” he whispered.

Then he put his scalpel down and went to Teshan slowly. “You’re coming because of the priestess, right?” Teshan nodded a bit surprised. The healer curled up the corner of his mouth into something that probably should be a smile and pointed to another stone bench on which a covered figure was laying.

Teshan went slowly to the bench and nodded when the healer looked at him. He lifted the cover so that the face could be seen. The woman didn’t look as bad as at the site of crime any more. Teshan turned to the healer and asked: “Do you have a report?”

The healer nodded and said: “It’s really awful. The murderer has committed a true sacrilege by desecrating the body but and by shedding so much blood. I hope Jakooth will torment him as he tormented this woman!”

Teshan took the report and went to the Guild House of Maintainers. He entered Yena's study after not having heard an answer to his knock. Yena sat at his table bent over the seed of the Lingura bush. When Teshan sat down he looked up testily. "Where have you been?" he grunted.

"I thought I could do something to help this morning and so I went to the Guild House of Healers to get the report" Teshan replied.

"Who has authorized you to proceed on your own?" Yena asked.

Teshan frowned. "But Yena, this isn't something you needed to participate in!"

"It doesn't matter how unimportant it may seem to you! I'm in charge of this investigation and I say what you do!"

Slowly Teshan became angry. Yena didn't have the right to boss him around like that. He bit his tongue and asked calmly: "And what are we going to do next?"

Yena held the seed up to the light and said: "You will search through the archives and see what you can find about the sect of the holy stone. Meanwhile I will pay the victims family a visit and interrogate them."

"Don't you think they need a bit more time to mourn?"

"We don't have time for that! The murderer could strike again."

Teshan looked at Yena sharply. He didn't agree with doing this boring archive work and thought about going to Grandmaster Besharen to complain about Yena's behaviour but decided against it.

So he went through the huge complex of the Guild House until he had reached the archives. Another Guildsman helped him to find the information he needed and then he sat down to look through the records. Officially the Sect of the Holy Stone didn't exist anymore, just like every other sect. Long before the end of the Era of Kings they had been eradicated or disbanded. Now it seemed that people were getting re-interested in their views again and some sects had been re-established. The "Judges of Yahvo" now existed again as well and there had been conflicts between them and the Sect of the Holy Stone in the last years.

It was the same every time: Whenever a crime happened and the sects got in the spotlight, they tried to put the blame on another sect and in many cases it couldn't be clarified who had done it. It was difficult to eradicate the sects again because their members maintained a low profile.

Something in the last paragraph made Teshan's ears prick. They had assumed that the Sect of the Holy Stone had committed the crime as they had found the seed of the Lingura bush at the scene of the crime. But what if one of the other sects had tried to blame on the Sect of the Holy Stone?

Yena returned quickly and Teshan told him about his insight immediately. "I have found out that the sects tried to put the blame on each other for crimes they have committed. That means we possibly not only have to search at the Sect of the Holy Stone."

“That’s not necessary anymore. The parents of priestess Jolantha have confirmed that their daughter told them that she had been pursued by a man from the Sect of the Holy Stone. I want to return to them with you tomorrow and you can try and make a sketch of the culprit. We’re done for today!”

Teshan tried to prepare himself better for the forthcoming interrogation. He also intended to be more confident with regard to Yena and not let himself be put down by his arrogant manner. The case was far too important for his future to let that happen!

The evidence are growing

The next day they met at the house of Jolantha’s family. Her mother greeted them and led them into the living room. They sat down and Yena looked at Teshan in expectation again. This time he nodded confidently and started. “We would like to offer our condolences again and we are also very sorry that we have to interrogate you right after the death of your daughter, but you’ll certainly understand that we want to arrest the murderer as soon as possible.”

The woman only nodded. She was very pale and looked careworn, but seemed to be calm. Teshan took a deep breath and then asked: “Did Jolantha have many admirers?”

“Well, she really was a beautiful girl and so many liked her. But there was no one who had been after her that much as the man, who has probably killed her!”

“Tell me more about this man. Since when was he after her and what do you know about him?”

“They must have met the first time shortly before Jolantha became a priestess of Yahvo. It was on a feast shortly after she had reached her maturity. She told me about this later and came back to me when she had worries as well, so I know pretty well all about it.

First of he seemed to be nice to her. Then she realized that he was trying to woo her and told him that she was very sorry but would become a priestess soon and live in celibacy then. He was very upset and said something bad about Yahvo. That’s also the reason why we think he’s a member of a sect.

Even when she started her service in the Temple, he came to visit her and beseeched her to give up her priestly duties for him. He sent love letters and presents to her, as he believed he could buy her love! She always felt sorry for him but refused point blank his requests. She had given her love only to Yahvo and it never could be different.

More recently she was pretty frightened. He still sent her letters but now full of hatred and bitterness. She was afraid of him and didn’t like to leave the Temple. She believed she was only safe there and now it turns out that this wasn’t the case!”

“Thank you for this exact description of the events. I would like to create a sketch of this man now. Have you seen him before or has your daughter just described him to you?”

“No, he was here as well. He walked around the house, as he had obviously found out that she lived here when she wasn’t in the Temple.”

Teshan nodded and asked her questions about his appearance for a while till he had a good sketch. Fortunately he didn't have a non-descript face but had a few features that would make it easier to find him. Teshan was now pretty sure as well, that this man could be the killer. So he had no objections when Yena said that he would make an appeal for information about the murderer.

Then their work for today was over. If Teshan had known that he would have so much time to spare, he would have found himself a hobby. So he now decided to play a few rounds of Gemedet against his father and then pay his friend Namis a visit.

He had gone to the Age Inspectors – the most important class of Maintainers in D'ni. Teshan wasn't too sure if Namis, who was a bit of a joker and a party person, was the right one for such an important and critical task but Namis didn't have a choice, his father had been an Inspector as well and so he had to become one. Teshan was glad that his father had not dictated to him about his career. In fact Airem had been very happy about his decision.

Namis greeted Teshan and let him in. Both their families knew each other very well and so they were always glad to see Teshan. But instead of staying there, Namis took his cloak and dragged Teshan out of the house. "Let's go into a tavern. We can talk better there and have more fun!"

Although Teshan didn't like this very much he gave in. Anyway he liked Namis too much to upset him. So they went into the next tavern and Namis ordered strong ale for them right away.

"Right, now tell me what you're doing, Teshan" Namis said after he had taken a drink.

"Have you heard of the dead priestess? I'm investigating that case."

"Wow, that's pretty huge for a beginner! Only the best of the year gets that honour, right? Well, I'm sure you get it solved. How are things going with it right now?"

"We already have a main suspect who seems to have been after the priestess for quite a while."

"Sounds good to me. With whom are you working?"

"Guildsman Yena. Waste of space if you ask me" Teshan said and grimaced.

Namis grinned and said: "Oh yeah, I've already heard of him. Seems to be one of the more unfriendly members. Is he treating you badly?"

"Pretty much. But I keep my mouth shut. I don't want to talk about it with the Grandmaster because he may think I can't cope with him."

"That's understandable. The case is way too important for that. But why don't you talk to your old friend Corlam? He can surely give you advice. Maybe he knows Yena better and can give you tips how to get along better with him?"

"Good idea man! I'll drink to that!"

Namis laughed and they talked a while about his work as Inspector. Teshan gave his fancy full scope and imagined how Namis would inspect his age one day. Teshan had this dream mainly because his father was a Writer and had taken him into some of the most incredible ages.

Finally Namis got distracted by one of the bar maidens and Teshan said goodbye, as he knew that Namis wouldn't get away from her too soon. He seemed like a magnet to women. Teshan wasn't jealous because of this. He just asked himself why women still fell for Namis lines.

Seeds of Doubt

Guildsman Yena didn't want to proceed further until they had some clues about the culprit. With the help of the Guild of Messengers they had circulated pictures of the suspect everywhere in the city and the patrolling Maintainers also carried the picture with them.

During that time Teshan got on with the routine aspects of his job. He wrote another report about the progress of the case and left the minor offences till later. He hoped that the investigation would progress quickly but he estimated that it would take longer, although they had offered a high reward for significant evidence about the perpetrator.

So he was rather surprised when Yena came to him on the same day and said that there was a man who had seen the suspect and even knew where he lived. After they had re interviewed the man and heard his statement, Yena called a guard of Maintainers together and then they went out to arrest the suspect.

Teshan suddenly felt elated. He had never experienced anything like this first hand and found it very exiting. All the people on the street turned around to them or stared at them, when they passed. The house of the suspect was in the trader's district and – as Teshan realized – not too far away from Jolantha's parents' house.

The maintainers entered the house without knocking on the door. A man jumped off his seat surprised and a woman in another seat looked at the Maintainers with fear in her eyes. Yena went to the man and said: "Guildsman Hamil, I arrest you the on suspicion of having killed the priestess Jolantha." He gave a nod to the other Maintainers, who handcuffed Hamil.

Teshan watched this felt confused. Shouldn't they look for evidence to establish if the man really was in the Sect of the Holy Stone and to find the weapon used? But everything just happened so fast before he could say anything. Then Yena took him out of the house and they returned to the Guild House.

Yena interrogated the Guildsman alone. It took a long while and Teshan was worried by aspects of the case that didn't seem right to him. But he couldn't do much about it. The only thing he could do was to speak with Corlam.

Finally Yena came out of the interrogation room, smiled and said: "Guildsman Hamil has made his confession. You can return to his house and remove the evidence, which he has told me is there."

When he rubbed his hands together, Teshan could see that the bones of the right hand were red...as if he had punched someone. Despite of the strong suspicion that something was really wrong in this case, Teshan did what Yena had told him. Hamil's wife let Teshan in and didn't

interfere while he was searching for the evidence Yena had mentioned. Under a layer of clothes in the bedroom he found a sharp dagger and a pack full of Lingura bush seeds.

He was about to leave when Hamil's wife pulled him back. He turned around and frowned at her. "My husband hasn't killed anyone" she shouted desperately. Teshan looked at her sadly and said: "I'm sorry but the evidence is overwhelming. And your husband has confessed."

He saw the surprise in her face. Following an instinct he asked: "Did your husband know the priestess Jolantha?"

"No. He didn't want to have anything to do with the religion of Yahvo."

"So, he is a member of the Sect of the Holy Stone?"

"That's right but he doesn't belong to their violent faction. He just believes in different things. Is that forbidden as well?"

"Not necessarily. But why did he have a dagger?"

"A friend of the sect had given it to him. He was a bit surprised about this and had hidden it. This friend said a member of a sect is never safe."

"That friend was right there! Listen to me: I don't know if I can believe you or not, but I promise you I will investigate thoroughly and leave no stone unturned. Maybe everything will turn out for the best then."

She looked at him gratefully and squeezed his hand as he turned to go. Teshan wasn't sure if he had done the correct thing but felt it was right to do what he had promised and follow his own feelings about the case and find out what really had happened.

First of all he brought the pieces of evidence back to Yena, but couldn't tell him what he was planning to do. Yena was content and said that he would ask the Grandmaster to request the Council to gather together for the hearing in the next days. Teshan knew he would have to hurry...

Confusion and loss

He went to see Guild Master Corlam that same evening. His mentor was a bit surprised but happy as always to see him, he offered Teshan a glass of wine before they sat down. Teshan refused and came to the point immediately:

“Master, I have the feeling there’s something wrong with my first case.”

“The case of the dead priestess, right? I have heard of it. Tell me how you have fared so far with it.”

“On the day after the murder we interviewed the First Priestess. Everything seemed to be all right until she hesitated a moment. I somehow had the feeling Yena was putting pressure on her.

Then I hardly was allowed to investigate myself. Yena wanted to do everything alone. Suddenly we had a suspect and everything move so fast! We have arrested a Guildsman named Hamil and he’s a member of the Sect of the Holy Stone, but after a conversation with his wife and my general impression of the case I don’t feel he can be the murderer. There’s much more about this case!”

Corlam nodded slowly and then said with a bittersweet smile: “You know Teshan, the apprenticeship of a maintainer shows a man a lot of things, but it doesn’t show him how reality can be. There’s Violence, Injustice, Lies, Intrigues and corrupt officials who debase their Guilds. You wonder why we didn’t tell any of you about that? Well, that’s how it goes with education! D’ni should be a Pure, Good city, the Guilds should be incorruptible, the world a good one. But this isn’t the case.

I’m sure one day you will look back on your life and say: “How naive I was!” That’s no offence. It was the same when I started and when I look back today to the man I once was, I can’t believe it was really me.

Your apprenticeship doesn’t teach you what you really have to know but experience will! Be always vigilant. Trust your feelings no matter how vague they are. Don’t trust anyone else. Question everything. Consider even the impossible as being possible.

The more light that shines on something, the darker shadows exist. Sometimes even the most powerful are powerless because the rules tie them up. Always remember that rules are made for the obedience of fools and the guidance of wise men. Only the one, who opposes the shadow, will be truly powerful.”

Teshan looked at his Master for a long while. He had never heard him talk like this before. Corlam had sounded bitter and then there were those cryptic statements with their double meanings...

He didn’t know what he should make of those but he would use what he had understood. After he had said goodbye to Corlam and had left the house, he heard something rumble. But as he thought it had been an animal, he didn’t care about it and went home.

Two days later Corlam was dead. Teshan received the news shortly after he had arrived at the Guild House. The Guild Master had been murdered; possibly by the Sect of the Holy Stone.

Teshan now knew that someone had overheard their conversation and he realized he had to solve the case as quickly as possible. He was certain that there was a link between the death of Jolantha and Corlam!

As the case was officially solved and they only had to wait until the Council passed sentence on the accused, Teshan could finally go everywhere he wished without having Yena checking on what he was doing. So Teshan decided to return to the Temple of Yahvo again to talk with the First Priestess.

On every floor of the temple hung a wind chime made of cavern crystals that gently rang in the breeze from the great ventilators. From far away he could hear the monotone singing of the priests. On every floor also was a censer in which sweet smelling incenses were burning.

Teshan found it disconcerting to go through these halls. His steps sounded too loud and the place had an unreal feel to it. When he reached the main room, through a small window he could see inside. The First Priestess was occupied with the rites while the rest of the priesthood intoned verses.

He waited till prayer time was over then went to the First Priestess. She was surprised to see him again and on his own. "Guildsman Teshan, if I remember rightly. What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to come back and ask you something. It's about the case of your dead sister."

"Jolantha? But that case is solved. Praise to the Maker the culprit has been arrested!"

"I know but I had the impression that you...were somewhat constrained in our first conversation."

"I don't know what you mean. I was just sad and depressed that such horrible things can happen."

"Listen to me: Guildsman Yena isn't here. No one will hear us. You may speak to me freely!"

She looked at him for a long time then nodded: "Yes you are right. I...don't know how he did it but suddenly I could feel a threat emanating from him. And this threat was directed at me. And I found myself saying something different to what I had intended."

"And what did you want to say?"

"That I don't understand why the maintainers still have to take care of the sects. They could eliminate them with a single stroke!"

"I think I understand...He wished to prevent you from saying something bad about the maintainers. Well thank you. You have really helped me and don't feel guilty about anything! Firstly you're right about the maintainers and secondly you were powerless to stop his influence over you!"

Helplessness

Next to be interviewed was Jolantha's family but only her little sister Kisha was at home. She almost an adult but still seemed a bit childish and so Teshan initially had problems talking to her.

"Have your parents told you what happened to your sister?"

"They said she has gone to Yahvo, Sir. But I also know that it wasn't nice before she got there."

"Yes, you can say that. Kisha, has this man ever been near your house" he asked and showed her the picture of Guildsman Hamil.

"No, I have never seen him here, Sir."

"Thank you. Now listen: Have you seen a man here some time ago, who was a bit smaller and older than me?"

"Yes and he was ugly as well! Mother has said we will be rich when we do what the man tells us."

Teshan smiled and asked: "And do you also know what the man said?"

"He showed us a picture like this and told my mother how to describe the man you would ask for."

"Very good, you have a brilliant memory! Have you received the money yet?"

"Oh yes! That's why mother isn't at home. She went shopping right after we got it."

"Well I hope she will get something nice for you as well! Can you promise me not to tell your parents that I have been here?"

"What will you give me for that?"

Teshan frowned and rifled through his pockets. Then he smiled and asked: "How about a kiss?"

Kisha immediately went red. It was obvious that she liked Teshan and already knew what could happen between men and women. He softly kissed her and she giggled and said: "Your moustache tickles me!"

He grinned and asked: "So, do I have your word?"

She gave him a kiss on the cheek and said: "Sure!"

Teshan now had a problem: All he had was the statements of the two women and that wasn't enough to convict Yena of tampering with the evidence. Furthermore he still didn't understand why Yena had done this. Could he have more involvement with the case?

At the moment Teshan didn't know what else to do. He went home and sifted through the evidence in his mind. When he thought about Corlam again he realized how sad he was about his loss. Grandmaster Besharen had instructed another Guild Master to work on the mystery of Corlam's death. Teshan felt uneasy as he couldn't stop thinking Yena had something to do with this case as well.

His parents woke him up from his reverie. They came down the stairs dressed to go out. He looked at them surprised and asked: "Where are you going?"

His mother smiled and said: "To the Concert Hall. Airem was so nice to buy us tickets for the concert of Guild Master Turjan. It's totally sold out!"

"Turjan? Isn't he highly controversial?"

"Oh Teshan! What do you know about music!? Guild Master Turjan is the best musician I have ever heard!"

Teshan had to agree on this. He really had no knowledge of music.

"Look after everything while we're gone" his father said.

Teshan nodded and watched while they left. He never had been alone at home and wondered to himself what he should do. He considered visiting Namis but decided to go to bed instead as he was pretty tired.

The kidnapping

But he would remember this night very well for a long time. He was fast asleep when one of the glass windows splintered and someone entered the room through it. Teshan opened his eyes confused and saw a figure in the dark. "Hey, who's- he shouted but a cold hand over his mouth stopped him. The figure pushed him up roughly and forced him to the window. Teshan climbed through it and cut his arm. In the street other figures were waiting, someone put a sack over his head and they took him with them. Teshan was frightened and disorientated.

After what seemed a long time of stumbling through the streets they stopped and took the sack off his head. He blinked but couldn't see much in the dark room. In front of him sat a man, whose face he was barely able to make out but who wore a necklace on which a little sack was tied. Teshan recognized it as the sign of the Sect of the Holy Stone. They had kidnapped him! But...why?

The man in front of him smiled and said: "I see you know to whom we belong. Don't be afraid. We will do you no harm. The reason why you are here is we're offering you our help!"

"What? How could you be of help to me? You're law-breakers!"

"The law only forbids violence not different religious opinions. We haven't actually done anything and won't do anything. Well least not, if we don't have to!"

Somewhere behind Teshan another man started to speak: "We want to protest against the crimes we were blamed for. We neither killed priestess Jolantha nor Guild Master Corlam. We believe the Judges of Yahvo have done both of these murders and wanted to make it look as if we are the culprits."

“Hamil’s wife told us you wished to find more information about the case of the dead priestess. That attracted our attention. We think you already know that something isn’t right in this case. That’s why you are here now.” Then man in front of Teshan said:

“We can help you filling the missing parts of the puzzle. We can find out for you who it really was and maybe even how Guildsman Yena is involved in it!”

“We make only two conditions: “You are not allowed to talk about this to anyone and you have to back when something comes out. We will proceed as inconspicuously as possible but if we get evidence that implicates the Judges, we cannot guarantee for anything!”

“The third condition is that I accept to work with men who fight against the only true belief”, Teshan said.

“That’s surely right from your point of view! Well, we will give you enough time to make your decision. You will however remain here to protect our own safety of course.”

Teshan grimaced and pondered about the situation. His answer seemed quite clear. Then he remembered what Corlam had said to him and suddenly he understood his mentor’s words. Sometimes you had to go crooked ways to reach your target!

He looked at the man in front of him and said: “I’m game!”

“Then it’s settled”, said their leader. “We trust you with our life.”

Soon he was at home again. His parents had obviously not been aware of his absence. They must have come home late and hadn’t looked in to see him. He told his father the next day that some maniac had broken his window. Airem believed it and let a glazier come. In the meantime Teshan went for a walk to arrange his thoughts.

The men from the Sect of the Holy Stone had only told him briefly what they would do now: They would send out spies and ask around. Maybe they would find more about everything that way. However they didn’t say what they would do with those who were involved in the cases of Jolantha and Corlam. Teshan didn’t like that aspect. He wasn’t sure if they would become violent or not. But unfortunately they were right: Without them he probably wouldn’t get any further.

The essential mistake

For the moment he could only wait and hope that nothing bad would happen. As far as he knew the council would convene next week to condemn Guildsman Hamil. Teshan had to find out who the real culprit was before then.

For a few days it was pretty quiet. Then the news about riots in many parts of the city increased. Teshan knew the sect was involved with it. He didn’t like what he heard: People had been raided and burglaries had happened. Obviously they knew who belonged to the Judges of Yahvo!

Grandmaster Besharen hadn’t seen such a disorderly time for a long while. Finally he sent the first teams out to catch the trouble makers. Teshan could only hope that the people of the sect

wouldn't let themselves get caught. It was pretty weird for him to think like this about his enemies.

On the other hand he felt guilty for what he had done and thought about either going to the sect and telling them to stop or to drop the whole case. He couldn't allow other people to suffer!

He had come back to the scene of his crime, although he had been told not to do so. He just had liked it too much. It didn't only satisfy his appetite but also was a wonderful way to show what he thought of the teachings of Yahvo. If he had his own way more blood of priests could soil the holy ground of the temple!

Actually it would have had more impact for the priesthood if he could kill the First Priestess but she was too old for him. He wanted fresh, young blood! So he decided to kill Priestess Leshena, who had found the beautiful Jolantha. He came upon her while she was praying. He was fast, hard and cruel and he loved it. But when he had finished, he heard steps. He stood up abruptly but felt something holding him back. The priestess had constrained one of her hands around his while she was dying. He tore apart from her and ran away without realising that his signet ring had fallen off.

He disappeared just in the right moment because the First Priestess came around the corner. She suppressed a loud scream when she saw the dead priestess lying there. In the flickering light of the censer she saw something shining on the ground. She picked it up and looked at it.

A short while later she was on the way to the only person of whom she knew she could trust...

The heavy knocking on the door startled the whole house. Airem grumbled something and scuffled to the door, only dressed in a sleeping suit. He however was immediately awake when he saw the frightened priestess. He let her in and asked what he could do for her.

"I must talk with your son, Guildsman Teshan" she said.

Airem nodded and mumbled that he would have to try to wake him up first. But Teshan was sleeping lightly and so he woke up when his father came and told him that the First Priestess of Yahvo wanted to talk with him.

Airem left them alone in the living room. Teshan looked concernedly at the pale priestess and asked: "Did something happen?"

She nodded and said: "Priestess Leshena has been killed. I have heard foot steps. The murderer must have vanished shortly before I arrived. The reason why I come to you is that I trust you and think you know more about the case. That's why I also want to give you this."

She handed him the item she had held in her hand the whole time. Teshan looked at it and immediately knew what it was, as he had seen a picture of it in the archives. It was the signet ring of the Judges of Yahvo!

“You have done the right thing, high Priestess. If you would excuse me now, there are people who have to see this piece of evidence. And don’t worry this whole case will be over soon!”

She thanked him and left to report the murder in the Guild House of Maintainers. Teshan got dressed and wanted to leave the house when his father shouted: “Where are you going at this time?”

Teshan turned around and said: “I have to get through a case, rescue an innocent and convict the real culprit!” And with this he left Airem speechless. His way led to the house of the Sect of the Holy Stone. They opened the door immediately and he told them what had happened and showed them the ring. They looked at it closely and one said: “The Judges of Yahvo are using a secret sign, which is carved in the ring and tells the name of the owner.

Unfortunately we don’t know enough about them to decrypt it but we know how to find it out. We’ve been observing a man called Gish for a while. He met with Yena and another Guildsman. His name is Veshar and he obviously likes to go to Ravena’s tavern often. If you could talk to him and make him think new with the Judges and would need to learn their signs then we could find out who it was” he said to Teshan.

He looked at the man in surprise. “Why do I have to do that?!” “We know everyone of them and they know everyone of us. But new members are barely noticed at the Judges because they only concentrate on us. That’s why you are the right man for it!”

Teshan sighed and nodded acceptance. They handed him a forged signet ring and introduced him a bit in the rites of the Judges. Then he was sent off. He had no idea how to do this thing and he was tired. Somehow his feet led him to Namis, who opened the door although he was drowsy as well and let Teshan sleep on a sofa.

One drink too many

A few hours later he was doing better. Namis was awake as well and ate breakfast. “Don’t you have to work” Teshan asked him. “They gave me two days of vacation just because I had a little accident at the last inspection. Anyway what are you doing here? You’re looking pretty careworn.”

“I was outside for a long time yesterday. The case I’m working on has become even more gruesome than it already was.”

“Yes, I heard about Corlam. I’m sorry, I know you were good friends.”

Teshan just nodded, took a deep breath and said: “I need your help, Namis. I can’t tell you exactly what this is all about but I have to make somebody talk. His name is Veshar and he often goes to Ravena’s tavern. You know where that is, don’t you?”

“Sure. And I also know how to make someone so drunk that he’ll talk about everything! You can count on me, pal! Whatever you’re planning to do.”

Teshan smiled thankfully. They played Gemedet for a while until the evening had come and then went to the tavern. Teshan had told Namis that they had to pretend to be members or at least aspirants of the Judges of Yahvo. Namis said that this wouldn’t be a problem for him. They found the man, who had been described to Teshan easily and sat down near to him.

They started to drink and talk. “You’re really with the Judges? Man, I want to be one as well” Namis said to Teshan. “That won’t be too easy. We have a lot of rules and tests” Teshan answered. So they went on until they seemed to have got the man interested. “Hey you! You’re interested in the Judges? I’m one of them” he whispered.

Teshan smiled at him and said: “Shorah, brother. I have joined not long ago and my friend here is really interested.” Veshar smiled and joined them at their table. They started to talk and when Veshar promised Namis to put a good word in for him, Namis ordered a round of the best schnapps. They made it to get Veshar drunk pretty fast. Teshan took a cloth out and drew a few of the secret signs of the Judges on it. Then he said: “You know brother, I can still barely remember those signs. What stands for whom again?”

Veshar grinned and answered: “It’s actually quite easy. Look, those signs are just the old script written bottom up! That sign here for example stands for my good friend Gish!” He pointed to a sign that seen bottom up would really be something like Gish. After a few more glasses Veshar was so drunk that he probably didn’t realize that Teshan and Namis had said goodbye to him and left the tavern. “That was a total success! Thank you very much, Namis” Teshan said to his friend. Namis being fairly drunk just grinned and said: “Have fun with your case!”

They said goodbye to each other and Teshan went to the people of the Sect of the Holy Stone to tell them about his success. They were very pleased and even said he should think about changing his profession. He just smiled and asked: “What are you going to do now with this Gish?”

“Oh, we will pay him a visit, shake down his house a bit and then see what comes out.”

Teshan frowned but didn’t say anything. At last he could return home, where he dropped on his bed. On the next morning there was trouble in the Guild House of Maintainers again. It was said that they would assume the offensive towards the sects. Teshan was sent out with a squad to stop the riots.

To his surprise their way led them to the district in which he knew that Gish was living. He asked the Guild Master who led the squad about this and he told Teshan that there had been screams heard coming from that house. When they entered the house they found Gish half conscious and chained up. Another surprise for Teshan was to see a member of the Sect of the Holy Stone standing next to him and smiling at the maintainers.

The solution

“About time. You really have to improve your work rate, boys! We can’t arrest every murderer for you” said the man with laughingly.

The Guild Master looked at him sharply and said: “What’s that supposed to mean?!”

“This man has made a confession last night. He has killed the priestesses Jolantha and Leshena. And he also knows who killed Guild Master Corlam!”

“Is that true” the Guild Master asked Gish.

“Yes” said Gish with a faintly.

The Guild Master turned to Teshan. “Interrogate this man, Guildsman Teshan!” Teshan sat down next to Gish. The man looked at him for a long time and then said: “Yena has told me a lot about you.”

“So you have worked with Guildsman Yena? Explain the whole thing to me from the beginning to the end!”

“We both belong to the Judges of Yahvo. Our hatred for the religion of Yahvo is overwhelming. And I had a passion for the virginal priestesses as well. I was after priestess Jolantha for a while but she dropped me and for that she had to die. Yena understood this and helped me draw the suspicion onto the Sect of the Holy Stone. He has done everything in his power to fool you.

For quite a while we suspected that Guild Master Corlam knew about the dark men within the Guild of Maintainers and as one of our spies listened to your conversation with him, Yena acted quickly and killed him. We met soon after that and I told him I wanted to shake the priesthood of Yahvo to its core. He had always been for inflicting damage on them yet he tried to dissuade me from another murder. But I couldn’t stop!”

“I see. So where do I find the items you have used?”

Gish pointed to a small chest. Teshan went through it until he found a dagger wrapped into a bloody cloth and a sack full of seeds of the Lingura bush. He nodded happily and went to his squad, who arrested the member of the Sect of the Holy Stone. The man shrugged when he caught Teshan’s glance. Then Gish was arrested as well and both were led away.

Teshan followed them to the Guild House. When the Guild Master asked him what he had found out, he shook his head and told him he would only talk to the Grand Master about it. Besharen looked very tired and Teshan felt sorry for having to deliver bad news but he had no other choice. He sat down, took the pieces of evidence out and started his report.

Epilogue

Yena was arrested soon after. He also made a confession after incriminating material had been found in his house. Grand Master Besharen had to listen to a lot of criticism by the council and resigned not long after that. Guildsman Hamil was set free and even received compensation for his wrongful arrest.

A few days later the funeral of Guild Master Corlam took place and Teshan finally had time to mourn.

In the following weeks searches for the members of sects would take place then after a court hearing they would disappear once and for all. Yet there was a still lot of work to be done.

Teshan had a few days off so Namis arranged a party for him with plenty of drink and lots of women. Teshan wasn't too happy about this but then he hadn't been really happy about the award he had received from the new Guild Master.

He had to think about what Corlam told him the last time. Now he understood the mysterious statements about light and shadow. And he knew that it was his duty to make a stand against those shadows.

This case had already changed his view about his guild. Even with the high status the guild held there still could be corrupt Guildsmen within. You couldn't trust anybody and the city was much worse than you would have thought.

His plans to write his own age would have to wait. The reality of the situation with all its viciousness and cruelty had caught up with him and the time to dream was past.

His sombre thoughts were interrupted when his glance fell upon a beautiful woman, who just looked over to him. When their eyes met she blushed and looked away. Teshan nudged Namis who sat next to him smoking a pipe and asked him pointing with the head to the woman: "Who's that?"

"I think her name is Shama. A looker, eh?"

Teshan nodded and stood up to go to her. She was talking to another woman, who walked away smiling to herself when Teshan approached Shama. She looked after her friend a bit frightened and helpless and then smiled at Teshan shyly.

"Hello. I'm Teshan. Would you like to dance with me?"

He stretched his hand out. For a while nothing happened. Then she put her hand into his and looked at him directly for the first time. And in this moment he already knew that he liked her very much.

The End