

**THE LONG NIGHT
OF THE DEMON**

by

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ACT ONE

FADE IN

EXT. ENTRANCE GATE TO THE ROYAL COMPOUND IN THE JEWELLED CAPITAL CITY

Warriors line the street to the compound as Princess Nubasha's coach approaches. Inside the coach, with the princess are her special assistants and constant companions, Asha Umbuli, Lafatasha Shollos, and Lubisha Daka.

LAFATASHA

Do you think Rojiro and Khemisha will arrive tonight?

NUBASHA

It would indeed be a shame if he did not. But I do not wish to see his wife.

LUBISHA

Perhaps she will stay behind.

ASHA

Don't count on it. The bitch!

FLASHBACK

THE PALACE ROYAL GARDEN - YEARS EARLIER

Following a ceremony some years earlier Nubasha, seeking some private moments in the palace gardens, was interrupted by her sister-in-law Princess Khemisha.

KHEMISHA

Greetings, My Sister.

Nubasha does not return the greeting. She turns and faces Khemisha, her sister-in-law and long-time rival for the love of her husband Prince Kuwa, the heir to the throne. She has long suspected Kuwa's feeling for Khemisha are more than those proper for a brother and sister-in-law.

Khemisha smiles and shrugs her shoulders.

KHEMISHA

Well, I see you still have no soft feelings for me. That is too bad. And yet I still sleep well.

Khemisha walks along a row of lobelias, stroking them without feeling.

KHEMISHA

You are still without a child?

NUBASHA

Aren't you?

KHEMISHA

Yes. By choice. I leave my husband for the lesser wives. They can have him.

Khemisha pauses, leans down pretending to smell one of the flowers.

KHEMISHA

He is, after all, a lesser man. Not like Kuwa at all.

She stares into Nubasha's eyes, but fails to elicit the angry reaction she wanted. She begins slowly walking along the rows of flowers. Nubasha does not follow.

NUBASHA

And what if this lesser wife comes with child? She who bears the first born, is the first wife. You will be lessened.

She waits until Khemisha looks at her, then plucks the flower Khemisha has just sniffed and tosses it into the dirt.

KHEMISHA

Yes, I know. And I can't wait.

She looks at the flower in the dirt, smiles and turns and walks on to another bed of flowers.

KHEMISHA

By the way, I have a marvelous gift for Kuwa. Is he returned to the compound yet?

NUBASHA

You have a gift for my husband? Sister, if you have a gift for my husband, it is proper you present it me and I will give it to him.

KHEMISHA

Oh, yes, yes, of course. I completely forgot that little custom. I am not of these people, you know. I am Sombayan.

Khemisha turns her back on Nubasha and leans down and smells another flower. Then she stands, faces Nubasha and shruggs her shoulders.

NUBASHA

And I am from Sandala, but we are married into "These people" now, to the king's own sons. We are these people.

Khemisha chuckles, shakes her head no, then sighs.

KHEMISHA

Of course, if you are afraid for me to present it myself, I...

NUBASHA

I have no fear of you, Khemisha. I only thought you would want to follow proper protocol.

Khemisha plucks a flower she has just sniffed, and tucks into her hair behind her ear, then smiles at Nubasha.

KHEMISHA

I have never been a great one for that sort of thing. I just thought he is my brother-in-law, a man I love, why shouldn't I be able to...

NUBASHA

Sister, you are married to Rojiro, his brother. This is improper.

KHEMISHA

No! Rojiro is married to me! And you know it. You and I both were mere gifts from our fathers to curry favor with this king. Mere women, to be given away like cattle! Forced to add SHA to our names to fit in with the other nameless women here in Kubaka. To become some undistinguished piece of "property of". And you know it. The king did not want us, so he gave us like toys to his sons. And Kuwa favored me! He loved me! Just admit that for me. Admit it.

Nubasha sighs in frustration, staring at Khemisha and trying not to lose her temper.

NUBASHA

Why do you insist on presenting this gift to my husband yourself?

KHEMISHA

Because I know he loves horses, Nubasha. We were friends once, you know, you and me and Kuwa, before I was stolen away by that bastard brother of his.

NUBASHA

What is done is done, Sister.

Khemisha turns away, fidgeting with the flower in her hair.

KHEMISHA

No, Sister, It is not done.

NUBASHA

Do you want me to present the horse to my husband?

Khemisha spins angrily back around to face Nubasha.

KHEMISHA

No! I told you I want to present the horse to my friend myself.

Nubasha takes a second to calm so as not to respond in kind.

NUBASHA

Very well. Present the horse yourself,
Khemisha. I will let him know you would
like to see him.

KHEMISHA

Fine. Tell him I have something he's been
waiting for.

Nubasha holds her tongue, but her anger burns in her eyes.

NUBASHA

Fine, I have no fear of you.

She said the words, but her facial expression said otherwise.
Khemisha smiles triumphantly.

KHEMISHA

Good, Sister, good. Hold on to that cute
little thought. I'll be in my quarters.
Send me your husband.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE ROYAL COMPOUND - PRESENT DAY

Great cheers arise from the crowd as Princess Nubasha and her entourage exits the coach. A small boy, a palace runner, runs ahead of them as fast as his legs will carry him to the king's chambers to announce Nubasha's arrival. Upon entering the king's chambers, only Nubasha can proceed beyond the outer rooms, her companions stop just before the king's private chamber, dropping to their knees and bowing low with their arms outstretched before them until their foreheads rested on the ground. Upon entering the private chamber, Nubasha heads straight to her father-in-law, kneeling before him and bowing forward to kiss his hand.

NUBASHA

Oh, Baba Oni, Father Sweetness, I am so
happy you are returned safely.

The king smiles proudly.

THE KING

Rise, Daughter. Rise.

She rises and they share an affectionate hug.

NUBASHA

Oh, Baba Oni, we have all missed you so.
How can a body but languish when its
very heart is so far away?

THE KING

How sweet you are, My Daughter.

MOMBA

Ah yes, indeed, indeed. It is truly a
pleasure to have him back with us.

At the sound of Momba Tu Oli's voice Nubasha's smile dims. She leaves the king's embrace, and masks her displeasure with a broad smile as she turns to greet Momba and the other members of the king's royal council.

NUBASHA

Greetings, Baba Oli, and you Baba Shollos.

She approaches and gives Shobulu Shollos a warm hug.

NUBASHA

And to you, of course, Baba Umbuli.

She hugs Mudoku Umbuli, Asha's father-in-law. And, at all of these hugs, Momba grimaces a bit that he alone did not merit one.

MUDOKU

Greetings, Daughter, wherever is that
husband of yours?

MOMBA

Yes, yes, where is the prince?

But before an answer could be given, Kuwa enters with his entourage of Dada Umbuli, Makabu Shollos, and Ukwangala Daka. They, on Kuwa's orders, enters the king's private chamber as well, but only to within a few feet of the king's presence.

Then they, too, bow before him in much the same way as did Nubasha's companions.

NUBASHA

Ah! My Husband!

She gasps, clutching her breast and standing aside as Kuwa, ignoring her, makes his way to greet his father.

KUWA

Ngozi. Ngozi Boramoja! Blessings
Excellent One.

He kneels to one knee and kisses his father's hand.

KUWA

Welcome home father. Please do forgive my delay, Baba. We were detained in Muntu Munyakare, busy making preparations to celebrate your safe return. Forgive me. But I was about my business as Provincial Chief and proud heir to your throne.

The king pulls Kuwa into embrace.

THE KING

My Son! Ngozi, Balondemu! Blessings,
Chosen One! Ngozi.

As they shared their greeting, a murmur rose from the crowd of onlookers. Kuwa rises and turns to see Khemisha has arrived. She rushes to the king and prince to share in their embracing, and to greet Kuwa with a flurry of kisses as Nubasha looks on.

EXT. THE PALACE GARDENS IN THE VILLAGE - LATER SAME DAY

Alone together, Kuwa and Khemisha stroll along side by side.

KHEMISHA

The garden is beautiful. It's just like I remember it when we used to run playing through here as kids.

She stops and faces him. He stops with her, waiting to hear what she has to say. But she says nothing.

She raises her arms around his neck and leans her body into his, pressing gently into him.

KUWA

I'm very glad you came, Khemisha.
Sorry Rojiro did not, but glad, too.

They stand looking into each other's eyes for a long, silent moment. Kuwa smiles down at her as her fingers stroke the back of his neck, and her body presses with more deliberate longing against his. He gently places his arms around her waist and rests his hands on her derriere. He sighs, slowly releasing his hold on her.

KHEMISHA

No, Please?

She takes his arms, pulling them back into embrace then rests her head on his chest.

KHEMISHA

Please. Just for a moment. Please.

KUWA

Khemisha...

He places his fingers under her chin and lifts to speak more directly why this should not be, but sees her eyes moist with tears.

KUWA

Khemi.

He whispers her pet name, and as a smile begins to play upon her lips, his own lips welcome it with a full, wide kiss. She moans.

KHEMISHA

Please. Take me... In the forest. I will wait there for you, like the games we used to play, out riding.

His lips cover hers again in a blazing, wet press of passion.

KHEMISHA

Kuwi, please. Please.

KUWA

Khemi, how can we?

KHEMISHA

How can we not?

KUWA

No. No. But come, let's just go there
for a walk.

But as his embrace slowly releases, she presses against him, holding him close and burying her head into his chest.

KHEMISHA

Oh, Kuwi. This is not right. I know. I am
sorry. I swear, I am. But it is so unfair.
If we had been in Sombaya a woman has a
choice who she marries.

She reluctantly frees herself from his hold and struggles to regain her composure.

KHEMISHA

I am sorry, Kuwi. I should not have said
that. I should not have come here alone.

She cut short her sentence at the sound of voices. Off camera are heard the voices of Nubasha and her entourage, giggling among themselves. As they round the corner, coming into view, Asha is speaking.

ASHA

I would not be surprised, bitch in heat
that she is!

Asha is the only one of her group who sees them at first. She alerts the others.

ASHA

(to Kuwa)

Oh! Your Highness!

Only then does Nubasha and the others see Kuwa and Khemisha. Khemisha waits until she is seen by Nubasha, then steps back a few inches from Kuwa. Nubasha stops for a second, looking from Kuwa to Khemisha.

LUBISHA
Greetings, Sweet Prince.

Nubasha looks at her husband and smiles.

NUBASHA
I hope you won't mind our passing through,
My Husband. We are heading over to the
bathing huts.

As they speak, Nubasha's eyes dart from Khemisha to Kuwa. Asha nervously smiles and fidgets with her bracelets. Khemisha does not return Nubasha's gaze, but stares at Asha. One in Nubasha's entourage tries to break the tension.

LUBISHA
I don't suppose you would like to join
us, Khemisha?

Khemisha pauses, looking to Nubasha for reaction but reading none clearly.

KHEMISHA
I would love to, Sisters. But I really
should begin preparing for my return
home.

ASHA
Good idea since you came here alone
without your husband.

NUBASHA
(to Asha)
Silence.

Asha falls back a pace behind Nubasha.

NUBASHA
(to Khemisha)
If you must leave, so be it.

KUWA
Nonsense. There is plenty of time to
prepare.

Nubasha looks at Kuwa, then at her sister-in-law.

NUBASHA

Yes, of course.

LAFATASHA

Perhaps we can all walk together.

KUWA

Good, come, all of you.

NUBASHA

As you wish, My Husband.

She approaches Kuwa, kissing his cheek, and remaining close by his side.

NUBASHA

I am told that the bathing area is out near the stables. I assume you are going. We can all travel together at least that far. Then I will leave you to enjoy your beasts alone.

KUWA

Fine.

Kuwa wraps his arm around her shoulders and the other around Khemisha's as they head off through the forest followed by the others. They walk along through a series of narrow paths winding between clusters of houses and around patches of tilled land. Nubasha snuggles closer into Kuwa's embraces.

They proceed on their way, laughing. Kuwa walks along now with his arm around Nubasha's waist and the other over Khemisha's shoulders. As Lubisha prattles on about how spooky the forest is, they are met by the sound of speeding horses coming up the path from the village. It is Dada, Makabu, and Ukwangala with a small contingent of palace guards.

DADA

Kuwa, Sweet Prince, you must return with us to the compound immediately. All of you, come! You must return.

KUWA

For what reason?

DADA

My orders, Sweet Prince, from your own father, are simply to bring you back immediately. There is urgency, my friend. There has been a death.

THE WOMEN

A death!

DADA

A death, Sweet Prince. And talk of a hellish demon roaming the forest.

Dada hands Kuwa the reigns to a horse they brought along for him.

MAKABU

And for you, Princess.

He hands Nubasha the reigns of a horse brought for her. Asha and the others share their husband's horses, sitting behind them and clinging to them for support, but, as there was no horse for Khemisha, she rides astride Kuwa's, behind him clinging.

KUWA

Tell me, Dada, who has died?

DADA

A child, Sweet Prince. A child.

They all ride as fast as their horses could carry them back into the heart of the village.

EXT. VILLAGE COURTYARD - THE NEXT EVENING

Kuwa is seated on a stool in the center of the courtyard of the village. Princess Nubasha sits to his right, and Princess Khemisha to his left. Ukwangala and Makabu are seated on stools behind the prince. Nubasha's inner circle sit behind her. Dada Umbuli approaches leading three men. Several paces from the prince, the three men stop, drop to their knees and bow forward until their heads rest on the ground, murmuring profuse praises.

DADA

Great Prince, I present to you Chief Sobinke and Chief N'gizi, Head Man and Village Chief of the Village of Muntu Munyakare.

Kuwa merely nods his head and Dada commands the others to rise and approach the prince. They approach slowly, still bowed at the waist, and still murmuring their praises of the prince.

KUWA

Greetings to you Chief Sobinke. And to you Chief N'gizi. It is very bad that on the occasion of my father's return, and in the midst of this great festival in his honor, such a tragedy brings us together. Pray tell me now what truth is there to these stories of a demon cat?

CHIEF SOBINKE

Last evening Jaboba says he heard a crashing sound from the area of the bathing huts. He rushed to check on it and found the child, Nikkisha Udu dead. He found the tracks of a cat, tracks so big that it can not be a normal cat. It must be an evil demon in the form of a cat. Why has such an evil thing come to our peaceful village? Why, while the royal family has honored us with this great visit?

Khemisha leans over and whispers to Kuwa.

KHEMISHA

Do not answer that. It is a trick.

Just as Nubasha was about to interrupt her, Makabu leans forward.

MAKABU

She is right, Sweet Prince.

Nubasha sits staring at Khemisha for a moment, then looks to her friend Asha who shakes her head in disgust at Khemisha.

KUWA

(to the chiefs)

You ask me to answer your question why this evil has come to your village? Is that not a question that I should be asking of you?

Nubasha frowns at seeing Khemisha lean forward to address the the chiefs.

KHEMISHA

If I may speak, Kind Prince. Chiefs, if you know there is evil in your village, then why have you chiefs not acted?

The chiefs look at each other, shocked that Khemisha interrupted.

KUWA

(to chiefs)

Why bring me these questions that you yourselves should hold the answers to? I gather you here and grant you audience and all you do is grope for straws in a sea of illusion! You bring me nothing.

Then without further comment, he rises and strides off to his quarters followed by the princesses. Once out of sight of the crowd, him and Khemisha burst into laughter.

KUWA

(to Khemisha)

You were great!

She responds only by shrugging her shoulders and saying softly

KHEMISHA

For you.

Then she turns to Nubasha.

KHEMISHA

I hope you do not think I was rude, Sister, for speaking up the way I did. But somebody had to.

(to Kuwa)

Those chiefs were out of line. You acted with wisdom, as usual.

INT. KUWA AND NUBASHA'S QUARTERS

Kuwa is sitting on the bed, Nubasha stands before him, clearly upset but trying not to show it.

NUBASHA

Husband, it seems that first you told the chiefs they were blameless, and then, because of Khemisha's rudeness, you told them they were to blame.

He leans back on the bed and nods his head yes.

KUWA

I simply advised them not to lay blame elsewhere before first examining themselves. This is proper advice to any man - or woman.

She approaches and stands in front of him.

NUBASHA

Yes. Well Lafati tells me some in the medicine community wish to lay blame for this evil on Baba Oni for breaking tradition by appointing you over Rojiro. He is the elder son, after all.

He takes her hand.

KUWA

All I need do is resolve this crisis and all such talk will be seen for the superstitious fear that it is. Father has chosen me to track down this cat and kill it. And so I shall. Proving father's wisdom in naming me Chosen One.

She pauses a moment, thinking how best to say what she wants to say.

NUBASHA

Perhaps there is more to it. Perhaps these rumors are being deliberately spread to aid a plot to usurp the throne?

He releases her hand and sighes angrily.

KUWA

And who would be behind such a plot?

She nervously turns and begins pacing back and forth wringing her hands.

NUBASHA

Well it is true, is it not, that Khemisha stands to become queen if Rojiro ascends to the throne. That is a great motive, Husband. She is very jealous of me. She would do anything to hurt me.

KUWA

You are deluded if you think I will believe Khemisha is involved in this.

She stops pacing and faces him.

NUBASHA

Then do you think it is Rojiro, your own brother? Are these rumors that he plans to revolt true, you think?

He shakes her finger at her to let her know he believes she leading up to something he does not want to hear.

KUWA

What I think is that I have a great deal of work before me, and no time for these petty, women's squabbles! This has nothing to do with me and Rojiro. Remember your place, woman.

He stands and approaches her.

KUWA

Return to your quarters. I must sleep alone tonight. I have my assignment looming before me tomorrow.

She takes his hand as he starts to turn away.

KUWA

What now?

NUBASHA

Don't be angry. Forgive me. But may I place guards with Khemisha? Just in case.

KUWA

What did I just say, Nubi? Have you gone deaf?

She releases his hand and paces away before turning to face him again.

NUBASHA

I am only saying, Honey, that this way I will feel I am better serving you.

KUWA

(smiling)

Go back to your quarters, Nubi. Do not put guards on her, do you hear me?

Her shoulders sag in disappointment.

NUBASHA

Yes, Honey.

She turns to leave him alone.

KUWA

But, if you want to appoint two of your elite guards to keep her company, since she is here practically alone, with only those few servants, you may do so.

NUBASHA

(smiling)

I love you.

She comes over and lies down in the bed beside him.

NUBASHA

One other thing, Husband. This is so terrible, but why did Baba Oni pick you to go out and track down this demon?

He leans back on the bed and faces her, stroking her hair and looking into her eyes.

KUWA

Baba says the gods have chosen so simple a foe precisely because it could be easily eliminated to show the wisdom of his methods.

She rears back and looks at him doubtfully.

NUBASHA

Wisdom? Forgive me, but at sunrise you will ride off to your assigned task.

KUWA

(smiling)

Are you worried that I may not come back from this simple assignment? I am the prince of the Kubakas. I am a panther warrior, the highest of ranking. I will be back with you within a fortnight.

She sits up beside him in the bed.

NUBASHA

Oh, Husband, when you went off to earn your ranking as a warrior you were gone longer than that. The truth is you should speak to your father about this. What sense does it make for you to leave your duties at such a time as this? If you truly love me, you will refuse this task more fit for some servant!

He sits up with his back to her.

KUWA

I love you. My heart is like wax for you.
But you do not, and have never really,
understood how things are for me.

Nubasha's breasts begin heaving up and down reflecting her anger and frustration.

NUBASHA

Oh? And I guess that bitch does, right?
Well, tell me, Husband, what it is that
I do not understand. Go on tell me!

KUWA

There is logic in father's decision.

NUBASHA

Yeah? Then tell me. I am listening. I am
just a woman. What the hell else am I
allowed to do but listen and take orders!

KUWA

Now you sound like Khemisha.

She leaps from the bed and stands in front of him.

NUBASHA

How dare you!

He rolls his eyes in frustration and sighs.

KUWA

Listen, precious...

NUBASHA

Precious hell! If I am precious to you
then listen to me, not that bitch! Rebuke
your father! He is wrong to do this to me!
To send my husband off on this dangerous
mission while Rojiro sits safely in Wefe,
and his little bitch is here spying is
wrong of Baba Oni.

Long silence.

KUWA

Be still, Wife. You go too far.

NUBASHA

Fine!

She claps her hands to summon her handmaidens, who come running to kneel at the entrance awaiting instructions.

NUBASHA

(to Kuwa)

I will be still. And it will be very still in this bed. I am leaving. I will go to my private quarters.

She turns and trounces out of their bedchamber, leaving him alone. Moments later, soft footsteps are heard returning to the bedchamber. He removes his robe and hurries from the bed, naked, to hide behind the entrance so as to surprise her when she entered. As she enters, he steps from hiding and grabs her around her waist.

KUWA

Ah! Got you!

He spins her around and kisses her, only then realizing that is not Nubasha.

KHEMISHA

Kuwi! Wow! That was nice.

She takes him by the wrists to prevent him from releasing her.

KHEMISHA

I should pay you surprise visits more often.

KUWA

Khemi!

He releases her and rushes to put on his robe.

KUWA

Forgive me. I thought you were...

KHEMISHA

Shhhh!

She silences him by putting her finger to his lips

KHEMISHA

Don't spoil it. I know what you thought.

She takes her finger away and kisses it.

KHEMISHA

I saw her leaving, and thought I would come in and see if you were okay. She seemed angry.

KUWA

It's nothing. She's just worried about tomorrow, my leaving and all.

KHEMISHA

So am I. But I never interfere. I just wanted to wish you good luck in case I do not see you in the morning. You will be careful, won't you?

She advances close enough to him so that their garments touch.

KUWA

I will be fine.

He hugs her and kisses her gently on the forehead. She looks up at him, playfully puckering her lips. She is taken fully by surprise when she feels his arms encircle her waist, pulling her tightly against him and pressing his lips to hers. A soft, wisp of a moan gently escapes her lips as she goes limp in his arms.

KHEMISHA

Oh, Kuwi. You'd better take care out there. Be careful, okay? Promise me.

KUWA

I will be fine. Don't worry.

He kisses her again. She clings to him.

KHEMISHA

I hope you don't mind I sent my valets back to let Rojiro know what has happened.

KUWA

That's good, I should have thought of it myself. But there's been so much going on.

She smiles playfully up at him.

KHEMISHA

So now you needn't worry about it. I have taken care of it. I am here for you.

KUWA

Good. I'm glad you're here, Khemi.
I wish...

There is the sound of a startled gasp from two women at the entrance to the bedchamber. The two guards Nubasha has just assigned to keep Khemisha company drop to their knees immediately upon seeing the prince.

GUARD ONE

Oh, Kind Prince, we are so sorry. Please forgive us this intrusion. We thought you were out. We were only looking to see where the princess Khemisha had gone to.

Khemisha sighs, regaining her composure and pulling out of Kuwa's embrace.

KHEMISHA

(to the guards)

I was just wishing the prince a safe journey. What concern is it of yours?

GUARD ONE

Oh, none at all, Princess. We will wait outside for you. We are to keep you company.

They back out of the bedchamber, bowing and begging forgiveness.

KHEMISHA

(sighing)

Spys! Damn her. I hate this. But I really wanted to stay around here until your return from this assignment.

She takes his hand in hers.

KHEMISHA

Would that be all right with you, Kuwi?

KUWA

I would be very unhappy if you left before my return. I have already decided this.

He pulls her again into his arms.

KHEMISHA

I will do whatever you want.

KUWA

There is so much I want to say to you. We have not even gone riding yet. So, please do stay and wait for me.

KHEMISHA

I have waited this long.

Khemisha lets her robe fall to the floor, then reaches up and brushes his robe from his shoulders. Naked together, he gazes down into her eyes, strokes her hair, then presses his lips to hers again, lifting her in his arms, and lying down with her in his marital bed.

INT. ASHA'S COMPOUND - LATER

Asha and Lubisha are preparing to go and visit with Nubasha. The two guards come to the compound hoping to find Nubasha there. They arrive at the rear of Asha's compound just as Asha and Lubisha are leaving.

MOLISHA

Greetings to you, Sisters.

ASHA

What business brings you to my house?

The guard bows fearfully for forgiveness.

MAYSHA

A message, Good Sister, for the princess.
I am very sorry we have disturbed you.

She and Molisha begin backing away, bowing as they leave.

ASHA

Come back here! What is this message?

MOLISHA

We are very sorry, Good Sister.

MAYSHA

We were assigned to keep track of
Princess Khemisha. We lost track of her
but have learned that she has sent her
valets back to Wefe.

ASHA

You morons! I swear, Maysha, as a sister
of the guard you are worthless! Where
did you see her last?

The guards hesitate for a moment. Looking at each other briefly,
then bow their heads.

MAYSHA

I am sorry, Sister Umbuli. We saw her
with the Chosen One, Sister.

ASHA

Where! When!

The guards hesitate again, but only briefly this time.

MOLISHA

She was in his quarters, Sister.
In his marital bedchamber.

LUBISHA

Oh-my-god! She went to his bedchamber while our princess was not there?

MAYSHA

Yes, Sister. We had just been assigned to her and we found her there.

Asha ponders for a moment what she has just heard.

ASHA

Listen to me. Do you hear? Do not repeat a word of this to anyone else.

MAYSHA

But, Sister, we must report to princess.

ASHA

Hey! Maysha! Molisha! Look at me. Stand up straight, and look at me!

As they obey her, she walks menacingly towards them to stand face to face.

ASHA

Did you sisters hear me? I said to no one! And that is what I mean. Keep your mouths shut about this. Understood?

MOLISHA

Yes, Sister.

Asha takes Lubisha by the arm and leads her back inside the quarters.

LUBISHA

I can't believe this. Do you know what this means?

ASHA

I do not need you to draw me a picture. Listen, Lubi, if Nubasha is right about this bitch having come here as a spy to help usurp the throne from Nubi...

LUBISHA

You mean from Kuwa.

Asha waves her hand to silence Lubisha.

ASHA

I think you know what I mean, Lubi. Khemisha's getting Kuwa into a compromising position is just what she needs to help turn the people against our princess. If people find out that Kuwa made love to his brother's wife there would be no forgiving him.

LUBISHA

The sin is too great.

ASHA

Of course it is. That's why we're going to keep this to ourselves.

LUBISHA

But what about...

ASHA

But nothing! No one else, Lubi. Understood? We will tell Nubi about the valets being sent back to Wefe. That will be enough for her to see this bitch is really up to something.

Lubisha shakes her head no.

LUBISHA

I don't like this, Asha.

ASHA

Well you'd like it even less if Rojiro ascended to the throne, sent Kuwa and Nubi into exile, and forgave that bitch so they could reign as king and queen. Where would that leave us?

Lubisha ponders her friend's words for a moment.

LUBISHA

What are you saying?

ASHA

Keep your mouth shut. Tell no one. Not even our husbands. Understood?

LUBISHA

Yes! I understand, Asha. I'm not some idiot!

Asha places her arm around Lubisha's shoulder and hugs her.

LUBISHA

All I'm saying is that I don't like this.

Asha releases her hug, and kisses her friend on the cheek.

ASHA

Well you will. Don't forget, Lubi, when our princess becomes queen we all move up with her. You'll like it plenty then, trust me. I'll take care of us.

LUBISHA

Yes. But is this right, what we're doing?

ASHA

Trust me.

EXT. REAR GATE OF THE VILLAGE - SAME

A cold gust of wind swirls a small band of dust devils along the road and through the rear gate of the village where Prince Kuwa stands alone. He does not see Khenisha as she approaches him.

KHEMISHA

Forgive me if I disturb you.

He turns and greets her with a warm smile.

KUWA

You do not disturb me. I'm just waiting for the riders to return.

(Con't)

They went out to see why Ibadu's horse came back alone. I fear the demon has attacked again.

She looks around fearfully, then approaches to stand nearer to him.

KHEMISHA

Ibadu? The brother of the child who was killed? My god! Two from the same family. I'm sorry. I will leave you alone to your business. This must be very hard on you.

KUWA

No, don't go.

He takes her by the hand.

KHEMISHA

I'm sorry to bother you. It's just that I was just thinking about our time together tonight, how sweet it was, how I've longed.

He kisses her hand and pulls her closer still.

KHEMISHA

Not out here. Her spies have already seen us together earlier.

KUWA

Yes, of course.

He kisses her softly on the lips anyway. He kisses her again before releasing her, then, together they stroll hand in hand beyond the village gate.

KUWA

How are things for you in Wefe, Khemi?
Are you happy?

KHEMISHA

I regret being there.

KUWA

You deserve better.

He kisses her again and releases her hand. Then, turning and walking a few paces away, he faces her again.

KUWA

I never stopped loving you. I would love for you to be my queen. You know, Khemi, my love for Nubi was like a cloak grabbed in haste to ward off the cold of your leaving, well needed and well loved until the sun's return - until you returned.

KHEMISHA

But what about...

She starts to say, but instead she looks beyond him down the road to the village and hisses angrily.

KHEMISHA

Oh, damn it!

Kuwa turns to see Nubasha, Asha and the two guards coming toward them.

KUWA

(to Khemisha)

Relax.

On seeing the prince there with Khemisha, Asha falls back a few paces behind Nubasha, turning to Molisha and Maysha and reminding them

ASHA

Say nothing!

NUBASHA

Greetings, Husband.

Without caring for a reply, she turns her full attention to Khemisha.

NUBASHA

Why did you send those valets back to Wefe?

KHEMISHA

What, no greeting for me, Sister?

NUBASHA

On whose orders did you dispatch them?

KHEMISHA

I needed no ones orders! My husband is the Provincial Governor of Wefe, and it was my duty to inform my husband about the troubles that have befallen the central province.

Then she moves over to stand near Kuwa's side.

KHEMISHA

(to Nubasha)

A good wife would already know that! Do you know any? Go ask them!

KUWA

Enough!

KHEMISHA

Yes, it is enough.

KUWA

(to Asha)

Take those attendants and stand aside.

Without a word, she quickly obeys, moving with the two guards to a respectful distance from the three royals.

NUBASHA

(to Kuwa)

Why does she keep slipping away from the guards I assigned to her?

KHEMISHA

What do you mean 'slipping away'? I am not your damned prisoner!

KUWA

Hey! Khemisha, be silent!

She meekly lowers her eyes.

KHEMISHA

Yes. I'm sorry.

KUWA

I am going to assume all of this is the result of the terrible trouble we have all known lately. There have been two deaths, vicious attacks, in less than twenty-four hours. Khemisha is far from home, and probably homesick..

NUBASHA

Then leave!

KUWA

Silence! I will not say it again.

KHEMISHA

I will leave when Kuwa tells me!

NUBASHA

You asked her to stay? Why? Do you think, Husband, that I am not concerned about you riding off tomorrow after this damned demon, while I am stuck here to take care of this!

She he flips her hand in disgust at Khemisha.

KHEMISHA

Hey, you do not have to take care of me! I'm a grown woman. I'll take care of myself, thank you!

NUBASHA

Oh, Sister, I will take care of you. Rest assured of that. I will!

Then, without bidding farewells, she turns and storms away, followed by Asha and the guards, leaving Kuwa and Khemisha alone together again.

KHEMISHA

I think I should leave tomorrow, right after you do.

KUWA

No, I want you to stay.

KHEMISHA

I will return as soon as I hear you have returned from this assignment. I promise you. But I know that if I stay here I will know no peace.

KUWA

Do you want to go back there?

Khemisha looks at him quizzically.

KUWA

You know what I am asking. Do you want to go back to Rojiro?

She's stunned for a moment at finally hearing him ask.

KHEMISHA

Oh...Well...Of course not...I would love to stay here if that is what you want.

KUWA

I want nothing more. Nothing and no one. Listen...

He turns and paces back and forth along the road in slow, contemplative steps.

KHEMISHA

Oh, Kuwi, I have dreamed this every night. I have taken more beatings than even I can remember because of it, but still he has not known me as a woman. Whatever they will call what we did tonight, it is not so great as they might think. I swear to you, Love, I came to your bed tonight with my womanhood untouched by your brother. You have not sinned.

She steps up close to him, looking up into his eyes.

KHEMISHA

And now you ask me if I want to stay
with you. What I am telling you is that
I never left.

He takes her hand and brings it up to his lips, kissing the tips
of each finger. She sighs, as tears begin filling her eyes. As
she swoons, melting into his embrace, he pulls her up into his
arms and showers her face with hot, wet kisses, kissing away the
tears as they began to flow.

KUWA

Listen, you must return to your quarters.

He summons two of his valets to escort her.

KUWA

I will come to you before I leave in the
morning.

KHEMISHA

Come tonight, please?

She throws her arms around him.

KUWA

Tonight, then. Now go.

She reluctantly releases her hold on him and whispers softly.

Khemisha

I love you. Tonight.

He watches as she fades from view. Then into view comes a
regiment of Palace Elite Guards on horseback, led by Gosa
Obiwaye.

OBIWAYE

Would if I could, Chosen One, be but a
mindless child this night. Only then
could so many troubles of the kingdom
escape my briefest attention. But I have
lived far too long, yet not long enough,
for the troubles of my land to ride
unchallenged.

KUWA

Damn it, My Friend, tell me no more troubles have crossed our path.

OBIWAYE

Would if I could, Sweet Son, but I am wedded to truth. Illness has laid your father low. First Officer Umbuli summons you, Chosen One. He fears the worse. And it is only wisdom that if the old candle is failing the new one must be lighted.

Kuwa looks off in the direction Khemisha had gone. Then, without a word he mounts his horse, and leads the contingent back to the royal palace

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. PROVINCE OF WEFE - THE PALACE OF ROJIRO TOBALA

At the entrance into the hall, Kokulu Shamba is on hands and knees. Frightened and worried he is muttering to himself, rehearsing what he will say. He is accompanied by armed palace guards with spears pointed at him as he slowly crawls forward up a long walkway toward the throne where Prince Rojiro is seated. On the prince's face is clear disdain for the man approaching.

GUARD

Stop!

Sulimu Bojulu, First Officer to the prince, steps forward, looking down on Kokulu.

SULIMU

I am Sulimu Bojulu, First Officer of
Prince Rojiro Tobala. Speak to me!
Who are you?

Kokulu freezes in his tracks, speaking to the feet of Sulimu. He speaks very softly so that only Sulimu can hear him.

KOKULU

I am Kokulu Shamba, from our Jeweled
Capital City. I have come to inform
the first born son of our king that
there is much wrong there.

As Sulimu goes to relay this to the prince, Kokulu looks around and mutters to himself.

KOKULU

(to himself)

So much pomp! These Tobalas will get
what they deserve.

Sulimu confers with the prince for a moment, then calls out to Kokulu.

SULIMU

Is that your only purpose Shamba?

KOKULU

(to himself)

True purpose, I think not. But I'll not
lose my head to you scoundrels. I'd
sooner die by a woman's hand.

(to Sulimu)

I have come to inform His Highness on
the condition of his father's health,
and the state of things in our Jeweled
Capital City where there is much wrong.

Sulimu confers with the prince again, then returns to stand
before Kokulu.

SULIMU (OC)

Then speak it, Shamba!

KOKULU

I am a man well traveled. In my travels,
I have heard that the health of the king
is failing. He is quite ill.

Kokulu pauses waiting for some sign the news was well received.
There is none.

KOKULU

Further, Great One, there is discord
among the people with the behavior of
your brother. Many on the council say he
is unfit to rule. But rule he will even
over you, the first born of our kingdom.

Everyone knows that it is you, Prince
Rojiro, who should rule after your father,
not this younger and unworthy son, born
of a foreign mother. Only you, Great One,
can return us to that former glory. You
are the First Born, the Great One.

Sulimu returns and relays this to the prince. Then, with
a slight, dismissive flick of his hand, guards hoist Kokulu to
his feet, shove a purse of gold into his hand, and roughly
escort him from the hall. Sulimu swiftly approaches the prince
on the throne.

SULIMU

Could it be, Rojiro? Could this be it?

Prince Rojiro, trying to contain his excitement, sitting on the edge of his seat, clutches the arms of his throne.

ROJIRO

I have borne his insults long enough.
Elevating him above me! Pounding me with
one insult after another all of my life!
Yes, dear friend, perhaps.

The two men look at each other smiling triumphantly. Rojiro settles back into his throne.

ROJIRO

How ironic that a sniveling rat like
this one just removed, should come
bearing this long awaited news. Now I
shall have my revenge. Even against that
murderer Gosa Obiwaye, who stilled my
mother's hand, leaving me an orphaned
outcast even in my own fathers house.

He rises from his throne, strolls down from it, pacing back and forth for a second. Sulimu follows him with his eyes awaiting his command.

SULIMU

Can we trust him, friend? The Shambas
are maggots.

ROJIRO

We will keep him in sight. Assign a
squad of Chadass to escort him back to
Kubakasland. Tell them to keep an eye
on him.

As Sulimu turns and is leaving, Rojiro calls out

ROJIRO

And arrange that meeting with the Chada
chiefs. The leaders of that savage race
will serve us well in reclaiming my
rightful place in the griot's tale.

EXT. THE ROYAL COMPOUND IN THE VILLAGE

Kuwa and Obiwaye arrive. Surrounding the compound, are two full companies of palace elite guards. Kuwa and Obiwaye enter the compound and make their way down the halls of the palace to the king's private chambers. Two women kneel at the king's bedside. Shobulu and Mudoku are waiting for Kuwa at the entrance.

MUDOKU

Ngosi, Balondemu. There is only slight drumming in his chest. He has been ill for some time, Sweet Prince. He kept it secret so as not to have to delay his business travels.

KUWA

Even from me, Baba! Why?

SHOBULU

It was thought best, Chosen One. Once he became aware of the troubles in Wefe.

Kuwa shakes his head in disbelief.

KUWA

Troubles? There are more troubles?

OBIWAYE

Representatives from Rojiro's province have been lining up opposition forces in our Donga and Donlaga provinces. He is, most shameful of all, even brokering military alliances with Chada rulers in hopes of bringing war against his own father.

Mudoku places his arm around Kuwa's shoulders and speaks in a lowered voice.

MUDOKU

Your father has ordered Gosa Obiwaye and myself to go to Wefe immediately. We will be leaving within the hour.

Kuwa looks from Shobulu to Mudoku with a grave expression.

KUWA

Gosa is going to Wefe?

MUDOKU

What must be done must be done.

KUWA

Then I will put off leaving for this demon tomorrow. Or at least assign the task to someone else.

Shobulu looks nervously at Mudoku, who, while Kuwa is not looking, shakes his head emphatically no to Shobulu.

SHOBULU

No, you must not do that. Your father desires, and we are in agreement with him, that everything must be carried on normally. And besides, I believe your success on this mission might be the best medicine for your father.

KUWA

Can I at least stop Gosa's mission?

Shobulu

Would you want to, my son?

KUWA

He is my only brother, Baba.

SHOBULU

And his wife, what of her.

Kuwa looks at him knowingly, then sighs heavily and turns and walks away. As he turns and parts from them, exiting down the long corridor, Mudoku calls to him reassuringly

MUDOKU

I will use all my words, Chosen One, with your brother.

KUWA

(to himself)

Yes, but softly, Mudoku, softly.

INT. LAFATASHA'S COMPOUND IN THE VILLAGE - SAME.

Princess Nubasha and her companions are gathered together sharing palm wine and kola nuts in the woman's quarters of the Shollos compound.

NUBASHA

Damn it! Why did I agree to let her stay?
I should have said no. I should have
Really insisted.

LAFATASHA

You could not say no. Your husband said
she could stay. We are women. We are but
anvils. Men are the hammers.

She pours wine for each of her guests.

LUBISHA

Men!

NUBASHA

Damn that! If Kuwi died as king I would
be queen. My word would be law. A woman's
word!

Asha smiles and leads them in a toast.

ASHA

(to Nubasha)

While you are the anvil, bear. When
you are the hammer strike. The time is
near.

Lafatasha hands out a round of kola nuts and takes a seat among the others.

LAFATASHA

(to Asha)

What are you saying, Ashi?

ASHA

Only that our men will be away on
this mission soon. While they are
away we can clean house.

NUBASHA

No. No, I can't do that.

Lubisha is first to finish her wine. She goes to pour herself another.

LUBISHA

I just know it was shameful the way she kissed all over Kuwa when she was supposed to be welcoming the king. Did you all see that?

She returns with her drink.

ASHA

I also saw how the king and none on the council objected. I'm telling you they favor her over our friend.

LUBISHA

And why not? She is a Sombayan, the king's favorite wife was a Sombayan. The king's favorite who also happens to be Kuwa's mother. She even looks like her!

LAFATASHA

They all look alike. That has nothing to do with it.

Lubisha finishes her wine again.

LUBISHA

Like hell it doesn't.

She goes for another.

ASHA

She's right. I'm telling you, the men all favor her.

LUBISHA

And why not? She's a whore. Of course they favor her.

LAFATASHA

What was the story with Kuwa's mother?

Nubasha takes Lubisha's drink, having finished her own.

NUBASHA

She was poisoned by one of the other wives.

ASHA

Suspected. For all we know her own cooking could have killed her. You ever seen the gruel those people eat?

NUBASHA

She was poisoned at any rate. The king in his grief ordered them all killed.

ASHA

That's where that bastard Obiwaye comes in. Killed everyone of them.

Lafatasha shakes her head in disbelief

LAFATASHA

No!

NUBASHA

And all of the children, except Kuwa.

Lubisha, returning with her drink, shutters at the thought of Obiwaye.

LUBISHA

The king's hatchet man. He scares me.

ASHA

Well, not me. He and I have had plenty Of run-ins. He knows I hate him. Evil bastard.

LUBISHA

And he hates you. That's not good.

Asha shrugs her shoulders nonchalantly.

LAFATASHA

But what about Rojiro?

NUBASHA

He was being raised by his uncle in Wefe. That's the only reason he lives today. His uncle refused to kill the first born. Now that uncle's identity is not even known.

Lubisha returns with another refill.

ASHA

I tell you, as soon as our men leave you should take care of that bitch. Strike while you can.

NUBASHA

I couldn't do that!

Asha raises a toast to Nubasha.

ASHA

Not alone. I wouldn't let you.

EXT. THE VILLAGE COURTYARD - EARLY THE NEXT MORNING

Nubasha's royal coach and others can be seen. Many people milling around after the departure of the prince and his party. Seated in her royal coach with Asha and Lubisha, Princess Nubasha bids farewell to the council members who have gathered for the departure. Momba, the royal tax assessor, approaches the coach to curry some favor with the princess.

MOMBA

May I, kind princess, have you to breakfast, so that I might explain further about the absence of Umbuli and Obiwaye?

Nubasha tries hard to mask her disdain for the man whose haughty posture and unquestionable power she despises. Seeing her mistress' struggle to contain her disdain, Asha speaks for her.

ASHA

Dear Baba, the Princess must be about her husband's duties for now.

NUBASHA

If you could simply tell me, where is Baba Umbuli and Obiwaye? I would be glad to have you to dinner later, after my return to the Jeweled Capital City.

Slight pause. The anger over this insult sounding in Momba's tone.

MOMBA

Yes, of course. Brother Umbuli is off to Wefe with Gosa Obiwaye. There is some trouble there. Brother Shollos is with the king. That is all.

He turns and walks away.

LUBISHA

How rude!

ASHA

Yes, he is a real pig, that one. Still, why would the king send Baba Obiwaye off to Wefe?

NUBASHA

For no mission of mercy, you can be sure.

LUBISHA

Indeed not. Him and Baba Umbuli off to Wefe together bespeaks a grave situation.

NUBASHA

Yes, a family grave.

Nubasha sits back in her seat to ponder this turn of events.

NUBASHA

So, I was right. Khemisha is here to spy.

LUBISHA

But we know nothing for sure. Nothing at all. Do we?

ASHA

Why else would she have sent those valets of hers back to Wefe? Or keep sneaking away from Maysha and Molisha, who were assigned to her?

NUBASHA

Indeed, Sister. Let us go over to the palace and find Lafatasha. She will know more, I'm certain. You will see, sisters, how right I have been all along.

LUBISHA

If all the men are gone, who is in charge now?

Asha, Lubisha, and Nubasha look from one to the other as they sit alone in the coach. Outside the coach, everyone has departed. The princess' royal coach sits alone.

INT. KING'S PRIVATE QUARTERS AT THE VILLAGE PALACE

Shobulu Shollos places a thin, gold death mask over the face of the king and turns his own tearful face to the assembled mourners.

SHOBULU

All music must cease! All laughter and dance! No man may know his wife! No child may laugh.

The assembled crowd begins to weep, wailing protests of disbelief.

SHOBULU

Every warrior must slash his breast! All instruction must cease! Let the fires of every shrine be lighted! Let no one raise their eyes to the sky!

(MORE)

(con't)

The Great Bull Panther, Idi Balin Tobala,
the Breath of Kubaka, Master of Peace and
Prosperity, Keeper of the Seven Keys,
Supreme Ruler of Kubaka, is no more!

Upon hearing those final words, Lafatasha, kneeling at the king's deathbed, collapses under her grief, and Princess Khemisha rushes to assist her. Shrieks of sorrowful prayers fill the chamber as Shobulu drapes the black cerement over the dead king's body. Commanders begin exiting the chamber hurriedly.

EXT. THROUGHOUT THE KINGDOM

Drumming resounds throughout the kingdom, and thick black clouds of signal smoke fill the skies everywhere the word of the king's death arrives. A band of warriors locate princess Nubasha and her party on the road. She chats briefly with the commander.

COMMANDER

Princess, until the return of our Sweet Prince, your word alone is our law. What will you have us do?

NUBASHA

At all costs, find the princess Khemisha and arrest her.

The commander can not believe what her has heard.

COMMANDER

Arrest her, Princess?

NUBASHA

Arrest her! She is a traitor to the House of Tobala, and to our kingdom! Go now. Bring her back to me. And I want her alive! Understood?

COMMANDER

Yes, Princess.

She heads off at full speed to the king's quarters. The commander sits for a moment watching as Nubasha's coach leaves.

He shakes his head no, decided not to do as she has ordered.

COMMANDER
(to himself)

Mudoku.

The commander dashes off at the head of his troops to find Mudoku Umbuli.

EXT. THROUGHOUT THE VILLAGE

Many loyal supporters of the House of Tobala take law into their own hands as rumors of internal revolt begin to spread and fears of the impending collapse of the kingdom mount. Anyone ever heard to have uttered an unkind word about the royal family is attacked and beaten. Their houses are set afire. Their granaries are raided. And, for many, even death was meted out with no fear of legal consequence.

INT. NUBASHA'S ROYAL COACH

Nubasha and her companions race toward the palace compound to find Lafatasha.

NUBASHA
If there is a plot against the House of Tobala, rest assured those damn Shambas are involved somehow. I wager you that wherever we find Kokulu is where we'll find Khemisha. She's at the heart of it!

LUBISHA
Princess, if I may say so, there is still no clear evidence of anything yet against Khemisha. There is only fear and chaos. History's darkest hours were all born in such times.

Nubasha turns to Lubisha angrily.

NUBASHA
How dare you! Are you questioning me?

ASHA

Of course she is not, Nubi. You know we all agree with whatever you do.

Still angry, she explains to Asha.

NUBASHA

It is not my husband alone out there possibly dead, you know! Probably ambushed and slaughtered! It's all of us. We might all be widows already.

ASHA

No! Don't say that!

NUBASHA

I don't want to. But until we catch Khemisha and Kokulu, we won't know for sure. We must catch them. All of this revolves around them.

Lubisha bows in apology to the princess, then settles back in her seat.

LUBISHA

Sisters, I wonder what it was Momba wanted to discuss?

Both Nubasha and Asha yell at her at the same time.

NUBASHA

To hell with Momba!

ASHA

Will you shut up!

EXT. OUTSIDE THE GATES OF THE VILLAGE ROYAL COMPOUND

Shobulu and a band of warriors are gathered there just outside the entrance. He is just mounting his horse as Nubasha's royal coach arrives, but upon seeing her, he quickly dismounts and approaches her on foot.

Nubasha immediately exits the coach, and as soon as she does, everyone present, including Shobulu himself, bows down to her.

SHOBULU

Blessing to you, Princess. Blessings.

Still in the royal coach, both Asha and Lubisha stiffen in their seats, looking with wide-eyed amazement at each other, then out over the huge sea of male warriors bowed down before them. Neither protocol nor etiquette required a member of the king's inner circle of advisors to bow to a princess. Taken aback by the sudden shift in protocol, Nubasha stands alone there for only a moment before Asha exits the coach and stands at her side. She places her arm around Nubasha's shoulder in a subtle congratulatory embrace and whispers to her.

ASHA

My queen, command him.

Then, standing proudly at her friend's side, Asha nods her head toward Shobulu, indicating the queen should address him. Only then did the business at hand return to prominence in Nubasha's thinking.

NUBASHA

Shobulu.

She pauses, uncomfortable with the newly gained freedom to address him, an elder, by his first name. Lubisha, exiting the coach, speaks for her.

LUBISHA

Rise, Baba Shollos

Shobulu rises only to his knees. And, as Nubasha had seen others do so often before the king, he raises his eyes to hers but for a second, then lowers them to her feet again.

NUBASHA

It is true then about Baba Oni.

SHOBULU

Sadly so, Princess, sadly so.

ASHA

You have ordered proper mourning.

SHOBULU

I have, Mistress.

LUBISHA

Is there any word yet of our husbands?

SHOBULU

No, Mistress, I was just on my way now to join the men in search for them.

Frustrated at his response, but not angry at him, Nubasha looks to Asha for help.

ASHA

Have you sent for Mudoku to return?

SHOBULU

No, Daughter, he can not be recalled from his mission. It was the king's last order.

ASHA

With you out after our men and Mudoku off to Wefe, who shall brief the new queen on these last few secret goings-on.

At hearing the word "queen" Shobulu looks up in puzzelment at Asha, then lowers his eyes again and address Nubasha.

SHOBULU

Lafatasha has been at my side these last few hours, princess, expressly for that reason

NUBASHA

Where is she now?

SHOBULU

Inside, Princess, in the king's chamber.

NUBASHA

Very well then. Be about your business. And please, find my husband, Baba.

SHOBULU

I have no other purpose, Princess.

He rises and mounts his horse again.

SHOBULU

Farewell, Princess, we shall return!

Shobulu departs with a small contingent of warriors, but all around the new queen and her two companions there still remains a sea of others, bowed down in homage. Nubasha stands for a moment, wondering what, if anything, to say to them or to do. Sensing her friend's disconcert, Asha silently motions for her to enter the royal compound. Once they do that, and are out of sight of the warriors, we hear the warriors outside rising again to their feet.

As she enters the private quarters of the king, she is first struck by the absence of male warriors. Nothing but female soldiers are stationed throughout the compound. The long corridor leading to the private chamber is lined with women warriors in full ceremonial regalia.

INT. THE KING'S PRIVATE CHAMBER

Nubasha and her companions enter the late king's bedchamber and are greeted by a sight that causes the three of them to stop in their tracks and gasp in disbelief. There seated at the dead king's bedside with Lafatasha is Princess Khemisha, dabbing tears from her eyes.

ASHA

There she is!

LUBISHA

Oh my god!

NUBASHA

You two-faced bitch!

Nubasha rushes forward and grabs Khemisha at the shoulders and shoves her to the floor. Lafatasha leaps to her feet.

LAFATASHA

Nubasha! What are you doing? Have you lost your mind!

She rushes around the bed to assist Khemisha.

NUBASHA

Leave her alone! This bitch is a spy!

LAFATASHA

No, Nubi, you are wrong.

NUBASHA

Like hell I am!

ASHA

It's true, Lafati. It really is true.

Lafatasha says nothing. She looks from Asha to the queen then questioningly at Lubisha, who simply shrugs her shoulders.

KHEMISHA

This is nonsense. What the hell are you talking about?

She starts to rise to her feet, but before she could Asha following a gesture from her queen, steps forward and shoves Khemisha back to the floor.

KHEMISHA

Oh, You rude bitch. How dare you!

Then she rises again, but only half way before Asha's fist slams into her stomach, knocking the wind out of her. Despite the pain, she continues trying to rise. But, again, Asha strikes her in the stomach and, when she falls, kicks her twice in the rib cage. This time the pain makes her stay on the floor, struggling to catch her breath.

ASHA

Who's the bitch now, you sinful whore!

NUBASHA

Asha, take this traitorous bitch to the guest quarters in my compound and confine her. Better yet, Asha. Confine her in the servants quarter. Let that be her prison. Even though that, too, is too good for the likes of her.

Then Nubasha approaches Khemisha, who stands with both arms twisted behind her back in Asha's grip.

NUBASHA

You will long regret what you have done.
If any harm comes to my husband you will
regret you ever slithered out of your
whoring mother, you Sombayan slut!

Nubasha slaps her with such force she almost loses her own balance. Not yet satisfied, she uses the back of her fist to strike her so hard again that blood spurts from the corner of Khemisha's mouth.

LAFATASHA

No! Asha, take Khemisha away. Now!

Nubasha walks over and spits in Khemisha's face.

NUBASHA

It won't change what she has coming.
Take her away Asha. Lock her up, and
make that bitch talk. I don't care how!
Bring me her confession.

ASHA

Yes, My Queen.

Asha forces the princess out ahead of her, with her arms still painfully twisted behind her back.

LAFATASHA

Nubasha, what is this all about?

NUBASHA

She's a traitor in cahoots with others.
It's too much to go into now, but they
planned to take part in a revolt with the
help of the Shambas.

LAFATASHA

What! Kokulu is not even here. He's away
in...

Then she pauses and thinks.

NUBASHA

Right. Away in Wefe! And why do you think that is? I told you it's too much to go into now, but they had others in it with them, Rojiro for one. She is a spy.

LAFATASHA

Wait. Wait a minute. You know the king sent Baba Obiwaye to Wefe, don't you?

NUBASHA

Yes, but why?

Lafatashe shakes her head in doubt.

LAFATASHA

You may be right. Perhaps Baba Oni and Mudoku didn't know what you know.

NUBASHA

She must have figured out that we knew. That's why she sent her valets back ahead of Mudoku and Gosa. She sent them to warn her husband, or to waylay ours.

LUBISHA

Lafati, could this be true?

Lafatasha shakes her head again.

LAFATASHA

I don't know.

LUBISHA

Then the only way to know is to make her talk. Can she really be behind all this?

LAFATASHA

This can't be happening. Not now while we are all alone.

Nubasha stands staring down on the dead king's body.

NUBASHA

My husband.

EXT. CRANE SHOT

From the heart of the capital to the far reaches all around, enemies of the crown, both real and imagined, are being arrested, fleeing for their lives, or already rotting in shallow graves. Bands of "Sword Maidens" are swarming across the central province carrying out their queen's orders. At sight of them, marching through the countryside, residents of entire villages flee into the forest out of fear. The mere mention of the phrase, "By Word of the Queen," has become synonymous with terror.

Jaboba, the keeper of horses who first reported the appearance of the evil demon, is arrested and flogged for failing to prevent the troubles now plaguing the kingdom. Old lady Udu, the mother of the two victims of the evil demon, is arrested and charged with being cursed and causing all the troubles of the kingdom. She is tied to the funeral pyre with her dead son, Ibadu, and burned to death. And this was all done by word of the queen, a phrase we hear shouted on and off camera as the scenes of chaos are displayed.

INT. THE THRONE ROOM IN THE VILLAGE ROYAL COMPOUND - DAYS LATER

On the throne once occupied by the king, self-appointed Queen Nubasha sits surrounded by her inner circle of friends and a company of her newly created Sword Maidens. Maysha and Molisha kneel at her feet as personal attendants.

ASHA

You are the first queen to sit on the throne since the great Bongasha. She was a ruler whose wisdom and magnanimity was unparalleled. But, clearly, she went too far when she pardoned the Shambas and the Olis of old.

Nubasha is wearing the same royal garb the king wore when she greeted him on his return.

NUBASHA

That made her a poor ruler. Both the Shambas and Olis were former rulers.

ASHA

Threats. If she had exercised the strength of spirit you are now. None of this horror would be upon us now, all stirred up by those same Olis and Shambas! Let everyone know yours is not a word to challenge. Let them know that just because we are women, we will still command the same respect as men!

Off Camera we hear a commotion in the corridor. Several Sword Maidens enter and prostrate themselves before the queen as Asha points to the leader of the troop and commands her report.

ASHA

You, Javisha, come forward. Give us your report.

The woman crawls forward on knees and forearms until at the foot of the throne. Then, with head still bowed, she rises to her hands and knees and brings her head forward. Nubasha rests her foot on the girl's head. If the news is good, the messenger will be offered the queen's foot to kiss. If it is bad, the foot will shove the messenger from the queen's presence.

THE MESSENGER

Sweet Queen, there is news that Baba Umbuli and Baba Obiwaye are returning from Wefe. They were seen in our Kunje Province. They bear Rojiro's dead body. His second wife as well, My Queen. With them also, Sweetness of Our Kingdom, there is an infant, a child born to Rojiro and his second wife.

NUBASHA

A son!

THE MESSENGER

Yes, My Queen, a son.

NUBASHA

Damn you!

Nubasha shoves the messenger to the floor. Begging the queen's pardon and forgiveness, the Sword Maiden crawls backwards out of the queen's presence.

NUBASHA

Where is that monkey-eating bitch!

ASHA

She is still held prisoner in the servant's quarters, Sweet Queen.

NUBASHA

Has she told you anything yet?

ASHA

She still maintains she knows nothing of her husband's business.

LUBISHA

Damn it all! How is it we can have news all the way from Kunje, and know nothing for sure of our own husbands whereabouts right here at home?

ASHA

They are well off the roads most traveled, well beyond the beaten paths. This evil demon has, no doubt, led them into regions unknown.

LUBISHA

Yes. And where has it led us?

Asha turns an angry stare to Lubisha. Nubasha sits thinking how best to proceed. Then, in a rage she decides.

NUBASHA

Damn this village! We came here as an honor to them - the king! the prince! the council! and all this village has given us is death!

She strides petulantly down from her throne to stand in the center of the grand chamber.

NUBASHA

Asha, we are going home! Back to the Jeweled Capital City. I want no more to do with this damned village. Destroy it! Burn it. Leave nothing standing.

Then she marches out of the hall and down the long corridor, thoughtlessly kicking two of the bowed Sword Maidens lining the wall as she passes.

NUBASHA

Lafatasha, gather the remaining prisoners and bring them to the capital with us. We'll put an end to this. We must. Burn it, Asha! And kill that cursed Chief N'gizi. This is all his fault, him and his cursed village. Kill him!

As the queen storms out of the royal hall, Lubisha follows nearly at a trot to keep up with the queen's fierce strides. Asha rushes off to carry out her orders. Lafatasha remains behind.

LUBISHA

Is this wisdom, My Queen? Burning the Village and killing their chief? A heart full of fear is a nesting place for hatred. Perhaps I should go back and tell Asha you have changed your order.

NUBASHA

You think I am a coward? I thought you were on our side?

The queen turns to face Lubisha, who nearly falls backwards at the queen's sudden charge. Lubisha cowers and tries to explain.

LUBISHA

I am only saying there are but a handful of cities in our kingdom, and a heartful of villages. If you kill this village, you will sicken that heart. When the hand harms the heart, the hand harms itself. The life of our kingdom is not kept flowing by the hand, but by the heart.

NUBASHA

Lubisha, I don't even know what the hell you're talking about. What I do know is if Baba Oni had struck at the power of the village chiefs, and all the others who spoke against him, none of this trouble would be here now. What was it but fear that made Baba Oni let these chiefs take so damned much power to themselves?

LUBISHA

Chiefs do not take power, Nubasha. They give power. They gave the king what power he had. If they had not given it we would not be a kingdom. We would be a thousand tiny villages bickering with each other like...

NUBASHA

Like Sandala? Go on say it!

Lubisha tries to mask her fear with loyal agreement.

LUBISHA

No, my friend. No.

NUBASHA

I am not asking for power. I'm taking it! Because that, too, is where Baba Oni went wrong. You don't ask for power, you take it.

Lubisha stares at the princess, stunned to hear these words coming from her. Nubasha turns angrily away and leads the way to her royal coach wearing a proud, intimidating smile. As she approaches her coach, two of her sword maidens drop to their hands and knees to serve as stairs for her to climb aboard. Once inside, with Maysha and Molisha seated on the floor beside her, each cradling one of her feet in their lap, Lubisha enters and sits across from her.

NUBASHA

By the way, Lubisha, I strongly suggest you clear your mind of your doubts of me.

LUBISHA

What does that mean?

NUBASHA

Advise me, Sweet Friend. Do not question.

Nubasha pats Lubisha's cheek lovingly. Then, as her coach pulls away, she leisurely leans back in her seat as Maysha and Molisha remove her sandals and kiss and then begin massaging her feet.

NUBASHA

Now I have a dinner date with Momba Tu Oli. I will soon show them all that no one is more powerful than I am. No one!

SUPERIMPOSE

As Nubasha's coach leaves the village, Sword Maidens are seen sweeping through the village of Muntu Munyakare, setting fires and beheading anyone - man, woman, or child - who tries to resist or save any of their household possessions. Even clothing is ripped off of the backs of villagers and set afire. Horses, cows, goats, and chickens are slaughtered. And Chief N'gizi, by word of the queen, is impaled in the center of the village, with his beheaded wives piled as kindling at the foot of his impaling post, and set ablaze. All that remains standing in Muntu Munyakare is a toppled wooden statue of the late king, splattered and dripping with blood.

EXT. THE MAIN GATE INTO THE CITY - LATE EVENING

Compared to the fearsome havoc left behind in Muntu Munyakare, the Jeweled Capital City appears a perfect picture of order and calm, as the queen's royal coach, preceded by praise singers and surrounded by columns of Sword Maidens, enters the city to the cheers of thousands of well wishers.

Strung together like hogs for the slaughter, nearly two hundred prisoners, in shackles and yokes, follow behind the royal coach. And, to the shock of many in the welcoming crowd, at the head of that chain of condemned is the Princess Khemisha.

TRACKING SHOT

Stripped naked, her body battered and bearing the marks of the whip, Khemisha staggers along tethered behind Nubasha's coach. She alone is blindfolded. She alone is stripped naked. And she alone is assigned personal tormentors to prod her with spear points and to taunt her before the crowd of onlookers, all by word of the queen. Behind her we see rows of impaling posts being constructed all along the main roads of the city and homes being set ablaze by marauding bands of Sword Maidens.

INT. MOMBA TU OLI'S COMPOUND.

In his quarters, fighting to avoid panic, The Royal Tax Assessor and senior council member sits with four of his collectors, preparing for his meeting with the Queen of Blood and Fire.

MOMBA

I can not greet this woman empty handed.
I need some news to give her. What do
you have for me?

COLLECTOR ONE

We have the revenue report for this
month. The news is very good.

COLLECTOR TWO

Indeed so, Big Man. It seems Sombaya is
actually planning to join us as our
eight province.

Momba stands and begins pacing back and forth.

MOMBA

You idiot! Don't you know what she is
doing to Khemisha the Sombayan!

COLLECTOR ONE

True, and she may have already heard
that bickering in her own homeland has
led to it falling to the Crooked Moons.
Her own father has been hauled off by
those damned slavers from the desert.

Momba sits back down and thinks for a moment.

MOMBA

No. I must not mention these things. Leave that for Mudoku. What I need is news of her husband. Is there anything?

COLLECTOR FOUR

Mudoku and Obiwaye are returning. And Rojiro is dead. That might please her, if she can be pleased.

MOMBA

How to please her is the problem. I invited her to dine so that I could tell her of the men's plan. They favor that damn Sombayan. She needs to know they plan for her to overreact.

COLLECTOR ONE

Does she know the child has died?

MOMBA

What? Rojiro's son is dead?

Momba falls silent, burying his face in his hands.

MOMBA

My god. I saved his father from Obiwaye's murderous hand.

COLLECTOR ONE

Boss, I wouldn't tell her anything. The woman is mad.

Momba stares angrily at the collector.

MOMBA

Of course she's mad! Wouldn't you be if you saw your position being stolen from you and every elder who should protest it standing by doing nothing?

COLLECTOR ONE

But you tried to help her, boss.

MOMBA

Momba hangs his head sadly.

Yes, and myself. I know that boy. I raised him. Rojiro is my own sister's child. If only I could have talked to him.

COLLECTOR ONE

But the king has banned you from Wefe all these years. How could you?

The tax assessor sighes and sits up to announce his decision.

MOMBA

Very well. The child is dead. Good! That will please her. I will tell her more money is coming in, and a future rival for the throne is dead. Good. That will please her. Now, leave me, brothers. I must prepare to meet the new queen.

COLLECTOR ONE

Yes, Boss. The queen of blood and fire.

As the collectors exit, Momba drops his head into his hands. Then he calls to collector one.

MOMBA

Efosa.

Collector one turns to face Momba.

EFOSA

Yes, boss?

MOMBA

Look after my children. Will you?

EFOSA

Like my own, Boss. Like my own.

Then Efosa turns and leaves Momba to prepare.

EXT. THE ROYAL COMPOUND

Momba's coach is slowly approaching the main entrance. The surrounding area shows the havoc wreaked by word of the queen - smoldering homes, impaled bodies, dispossessed mourners aimlessly wandering and wailing, bodies strewn along the road.

INT. MOMBA'S COACH

A worried Momba sits alone muttering a rehearsal to himself of what he will say to the new queen. As his coach comes to a halt outside the palace, it is met by six Sword Maidens. Without a word or a smile, they surround him when he exits the coach and escort him into the palace.

INT. THE ROYAL PALACE - THE JEWELLED CAPITAL CITY

Momba nervously kids with the Sword Maidens as they march him down the long corridor to his meeting with the queen. They do not look at him or speak to him.

MOMBA

Come, come, Daughters, such pretty faces
and no smiles?

The Sword Maidens say nothing. He addresses the Sword Maiden to his left.

MOMBA

You know, I much preferred the old
uniforms you girls wore.

He keeps his nervous smile in place despite the uneasy feeling growing in his stomach. He swallows hard, his throat dry and tight. The Sword Maiden does not respond to his comment.

MOMBA

This new uniform conceals too much.
You are unmarried, aren't you?

Though he waits, the escort says nothing. They continue to march him briskly down the hall, never even making eye contact.

He shifts his attention to the others in hope of finding one who might acknowledge him.

MOMBA

I mean, why cover yourselves so? I think the queen's a little envious.

Then he flinches, his heart pounding, as the six Sword Maidens suddenly stop in their tracks, silent and motionless.

MOMBA

What's this! I was only kidding.
What is this?

MAYSHA (OC)

Here!

LONG SHOT

Down the corridor stands Maysha, a long sword in hand, resting menacingly on her shoulder.

MAYSHA

Come here! Her Majesty, the All Powerful Queen Nubasha, will see you now!

MOMBA

(under breath)
What the hell's going on here?

The six escort Sword Maidens remain standing as he fearfully proceeds ahead alone. After commanding him forward, Maysha turns and leaves the corridor, letting him advance alone to the queen.

INT. THRONE ROOM

When Momba enters, two Sword Maidens join him on either side and escort him toward the queen, seated on her throne, with Lubisha at her side, and Maysha rejoining Molisha on their haunches at her feet.

MOLISHA

Stop there.

He stops with unaccustomed obedience to a woman's command. The two Sword Maidens escorting him, their spears in hand, stand slightly behind him.

MOMBA

Oh, Sweet Queen, this is good. I see you prefer to talk business first, then we shall dine. I have much to tell you.

MAYSHA

Bow in the presence of my great queen!

The two Sword Maidens shove him down to his knees.

MOMBA

Of course, yes. So sorry, Sweet Queen.

He prostrates himself before her.

NUBASHA

Rise. Have you news of my husband?

MOMBA

I...uh...there is word, My Queen, that he is well. But not...found yet. But I believe he is well, My Lady.

NUBASHA

I believe you are a liar.

MOMBA

Wha... Uh... I would not.... I have been in service to the House of Tobala all of my life!

He insists, forgetting for a moment his discomforting situation.

MOMBA

Why would I lie? I have told you what I have been told. There is other news as well. Revenues are well up. And there is much I need to tell you, Daughter, much.

NUBASHA

I don't care about revenues!

The queen yells angrily. Then, seeming confused, she regains her composure somewhat and turns to Lubisha suddenly in a confusion of request and command.

NUBASHA

You will see to those things, okay?
Good. You will handle that. Understood?

LUBISHA

Yes, My Queen.

NUBASHA

What other news do you have, Tax Man?

MOMBA

Uh...the child. Yes. Yes, the child of
Rojiro is no more. It died, My Queen.

NUBASHA

Indeed?

The queen said, reflectively, a smile filling her eyes and playing under restraint across her lips.

NUBASHA

Tell me more, Tax Man.

MOMBA

They say it was a weak child. It was not
born with a full spirit.

Then, hoping to curry favor by taking advantage of the delight he saw she took in the news, he added:

MOMBA

It is a good thing. Better for us all.
For the kingdom, I mean. Only a fool
leaves trouble sitting in his road.

NUBASHA

(mockingly)

Oh, Tax Man, you are a philosopher,
are you?

Momba smiles uneasily.

MOMBA

No. no, just an old man. Wisdom comes to the aged. It is the price of years, My Queen.

NUBASHA

Price? Not gift?

MOMBA

Only if it can be gained pain free would it be a gift.

He pauses for a moment. Then, against his better judgement, he adds

MOMBA

If you live long enough, you will see it can not come pain free.

The queen chuckles, cold and humorless.

NUBASHA

Like power?

MOMBA

Except that power can be stolen.

NUBASHA

You say you have much to tell me, Momba. Let me show you what I think of your news.

There is a long pause as the queen sits upon her throne sneering down at the old man. Then she chuckles again to herself, and nods her head in signal, whereupon the two Sword Maidens step forward and plunge their spears into Momba's back, just below the shoulder blades. The queen laughs out loud as Momba drops, first to his knees, trembling in the throes of death, then falls, with an echoing thud, face first to the floor.

NUBASHA

Oh, dear, dear.

The queen yawns and stretches. Then, turning to Lubisha, she pouts.

NUBASHA

I'm famished, Honey. Let's eat.

Nubasha blithely rises from her throne, followed closely by Maysha and Molisha, and strides off toward the dining hall. Lubisha sits for a moment longer, stunned by all she has just witnessed. She sits staring as the queen walks passed Momba's dead body, pausing for a moment, like a fascinated child, to stoop and lightly trace her finger through the pool of blood collecting around his body. She looks at the blood, rubbing it between her thumb and forefinger curiously, before shrugging her shoulders nonchalantly, like a child suddenly bored with its new toy, wiping her bloody hand clean on the Sword Maiden's robe, and proceeding onward to dinner. Fearful of incurring the queen's wrath for delaying too long, Lubisha hurries, to catch up with her.

EXT. ROAD DEEP IN THE OPEN SAVANA

Prince Kuwa and his party are returning to the capital. Ukwangala and Makabu carry, slung between their horses, the dead body of a large, white leopard. As they ride along, they encounter two bedraggled travelers making their way to the Jeweled Capital City. So unkempt were they that Dada immediately takes them to be bandits seeking to waylay the prince. But upon seeing the party of four approaching, the two men drop to their knees, clasping their hands as if in prayer and crying.

VALET ONE

Ah! May the ancestors all be praised!
My Lords! Great prince and honored
comrades, our hearts are gladdened at
sight of you.

Dada draws his sword. The intentions of these two are still unclear to him.

DADA

Rise and identify yourselves, or die!

KUWA

No wait! I know these men. These two are
the valets of the Princess Khemisha, are
you not?

VALET TWO

Yes, My Lord.

VALET ONE

Yes, Great Prince. But along our way we were attacked by one of your men, Sir. He called himself, Kokulu, of the House of Shamba.

DADA

Kokulu? He is a cowardly man. He would not attempt to attack two men at once.

Makabu and Ukwangal lower the leopard to the ground, and scan the area for signs of anyone else.

VALET ONE

Indeed so, Good Brother. But he was not alone. We thought it strange when his companions turned out to be Chadas.

VALET TWO

This is true. But we learned a great deal to report to you. The Chada brought this Kokulu very bad news. At least it was so to our ears.

KUWA

Speak then. What was this news you overheard?

VALET TWO

They said, Chosen One, that our Prince Rojiro is no more. Neither is his vile business. The villains are destroyed. There was war in our province. But the men sent by the king enlisted the aid of the Sombayas and the people of Wefe, whose love for their princess is undying. Our province is safe now.

Kuwa sits silently as the news of his only brother's death sinks in. Ukwangala rides up to the valets, prancing his horse between them, and questions them.

UKWANGALA

What! Are you saying Prince Rojiro was plotting a revolt? And now he is dead?

VALET TWO

Indeed so, Great Sir. Dead.

DADA

And this uprising is ended?

The valet approaches Dada's horse and speaks in low tones as if to spare Kuwa's feelings.

VALET TWO

Surely so, son of Umbuli. He is no more.

UKWANGALA

Tell us more.

VALET TWO

We know no more but this, the Crooked Moons retreated from Wefe. And, with the help of the Chadas, they have caused the fall of Sandala.

DADA

Where is Kokulu now?

VALET ONE

We do not know, Sir.

MAKABU

Probably headed for Sandala.

Dada returns his sword to its sheath, and rides over to Kuwa.

DADA

Sweet Prince, please, allow me to go after him.

KUWA

No, we must return to the city straightway. Let's go!

Kuwa helps the valet up onto the back of his horse, while Dada pulls the other one up onto his and they race on toward the Jeweled Capital City.

INT. NUBASHA'S PRIVATE QUARTER

Nubasha sits in her quarters staring into a tiny servant's sleeping room just off from her bedchamber. A look of madness has overcome her.

From Nubasha's POV we see into the sleeping room where the naked and bruised body of Khemisha hangs by her bound wrists from the ceiling, her feet dangling inches above the floor.

Khemisha painfully opens her eyes. From Khemisha's POV we see at Nuibasha's sides Khemisha's two handmaidens, bowed, their naked backs streaked with bloody welts from the flogging rod in Nubasha's hands.

NUBASHA

(to Khemisha)

Can you hear me?

She sits at the dressing table in her chamber holding the long, stiff flogging rod. She reaches over with her other hand and picks up a small container of perfume. Khemisha, straining, tries to look up at her tormentor, but she lacks the strength to lift her head.

NUBASHA

Can you hear me!

Khemisha, giving up on raising her head, simply whimpers a groan.

NUBASHA

(with a laugh)

I'll take that as a yes. Good. I'm glad you can hear me. Did you sleep well? Or were you disturbed by this!

Then the room resounds with the sound of the rod slashing across the back of one of the handmaidens.

Their helpless cry gives Khemisha strength enough to lift her head in a pleading groan of mercy for the helpless girls.

NUBASHA

What's this? Does that bother you?

Nubasha rises and slowly approaches Khemisha.

NUBASHA

And do you think I am unbothered by this!

She yells, holding up the bottle of perfume. There is a madness in her tone, and her eyes glow with a loss of something deep within her.

NUBASHA

Did you think I wouldn't smell it on him after your sinning with him? You think I am unbothered by what you have caused?

She spat the words up into Khemisha's face. Khemisha, straining for strength to speak, painfully lifts her head and barely manages to reply.

KHEMISHA

No, nothing. I did nothing, Nubasha. Stop this, please?

Nubasha sneers at her.

NUBASHA

I found you out, didn't I! I alone saw you for what you are. I rooted you out. I found you all out! The others have paid for what they did. Paid dearly. And so shall you!

KHEMISHA

I did nothing.

NUBASHA

You lie! You are the cause! You caused all of this! It's your fault! The deaths! The deaths... death....

She pauses, staring down at the bloody flogging rod for a moment, lost in a torrent of thought that crashes over her in a sudden rush of fear and dread.

NUBASHA

All the fires... The....

Then, pausing again briefly, she shudders, flinging away the flood of confusion.

NUBASHA

Yes, you. Did you or did you not sin with my husband!

KHEMISHA

There was no sin.

NUBASHA

Liar! This proves your sin!

She yells, shoving the open perfume under Khemisha's nose.

NUBASHA

Do you deny it is your own perfume?

KHEMISHA

There was no sin, truly, Nubasha.

NUBASHA

(mockingly)

'Truly, Nubasha.' You lying whore! Here is your sin!

Then, with the rod, she lashes Khemisha's helpless body several times, and with a wild, fiendish glee in her eyes, she pauses and laughs aloud.

NUBASHA

Now, you whore feel your stinking sin!

Then she splashes some of the perfume into the newly opened wounds on Khemisha's body, causing her to kick and scream as the stinging fluid filled her body with excruciating pain.

NUBASHA

Feel it, Whore! Feel your filthy sin!

Khemisha kicks and struggles as the searing pain becomes too much for her to endure and she once again lapses into unconsciousness. Nubasha stands staring at the body swaying before her.

Behind her, a Sword Maiden enters the chamber, dropping to her knees and prostrating herself before her queen. Startled, Nubasha spins around to face her. She saw no one as she looked ahead of her, toward the door. Then, in a confusion of place, her eyes drift to the floor. The Sword Maiden lies motionless waiting for permission to speak. But Nubasha only stands staring in confused speechlessness, as her eyes wandered from the Sword Maiden to Khemisha's two handmaidens, also face down, but covered in brutal, red welts from the rod she held.

NUBASHA

What... what... why are you here?

She says to the Sword Maiden, but is staring at Khemisha's two bloodied handmaidens.

SWORD MAIDEN

Greetings, my queen, Mistress Lubisha approaches.

The queen's eyes fall shut as she tries to recall something. Reaching inside herself, grasping where something, it seems, once was. But only a disorienting daze fills her mind.

NUBASHA

(to herself)

Lubisha?

The Sword Maiden looks up at her sensing something is wrong. Then she lowers her head back to the floor and answers.

SWORD MAIDEN

Yes, My Queen.

NUBASHA

(to herself)

Lubi...

Nubasha smiles, then opens her eyes to the sight before her and the smile fades.

SERIES OF SHOTS

From Nubasha's POV: the warrior groveling at her feet, the bloody backs of Khemisha's two handmaidens, the near lifeless body of Khemisha hanging in front of her.

SUPERIMPOSE image of Kuwa embracing Khemisha, kissing her.

INSERT

THE BOTTLE OF PERFUME as Nubasha loses her grip and it crashes to the floor.

BACK TO SCENE

A frightful shudder wracks Nubasha's body.

INSERT

THE BLOODSTAINED FLOGGING ROD in Nubasha's other hand crashes to the floor.

BACK TO SCENE

Tears well up in her eyes at the sound of footsteps in the corridor, distant yet familiar. Lubisha enters the chamber and stops in her tracks.

SWISH PAN

LUBISHA'S POV - Khemisha's hanging body, the handmaidens bloody backs, the bloody flogging rod, the broken bottle of perfume, the Sword Maiden pressed fearfully to the floor.

LUBISHA (OC)

Oh-my-god! Nubi!

Nubasha bursts into tears. Lubisha rushes to catch her just before she collapses.

LUBISHA

Nubi, Oh, Sister, I'm here. I'm here.

Lubisha strokes Nubasha's back as they stand embracing, rocking back and forth. Lubisha wipes tears from her friend's eyes and replaces them with gentle kisses.

LUBISHA

Shhhhh. Stop this.

She leads Nubasha to the chair and sits her down, kissing her again, gently on the forehead. Only then does the full impact of the scene hit her.

LUBISHA

Oh dear!

She slowly regains her presence of mind looking again at Nubasha, who sits sobbing uncontrollably.

LUBISHA

(to the Sword Maiden)

You, Tetesha, rise. Come here.

The Sword Maiden leaps to her feet.

LUBISHA

You have no tongue. Have you heard me?

Frightened, the Sword maiden thinks for a second then nods in agreement.

SWORD MAIDEN

Yes, I am without speech, Mistress.

LUBISHA

Good. And your eyes don't work so well either, understood?

The Sword Maiden looks around her, taking in the scene for the first time, then eagerly nods her head in agreement.

SWORD MAIDEN

Clearly, Mistress, I have seen nothing this day.

LUBISHA

Go now and find Lafatasha. Bring her here. And find Mistress Asha. Go now. Move!

Without delay, the Sword Maiden obeys, running off happy to be away from the horror she had walked in on. Lubisha goes to Khemisha's handmaidens and stoops down to help them.

LUBISHA

Get up, Sisters. Up, up, up. Can you stand? Are you well enough?

Unconcerned for themselves, the handmaidens hurry to their feet and rush to aid Khemisha.

LUBISHA

Yes, of course. Get her down from there. Take her to the bed. Lafatasha will be here soon.

Then she returns her attentions to Nubasha. Lafatasha arrives and, without a word, goes to work immediately on Khemisha, while her assistants tend to the two handmaidens. Seconds later, Asha arrives, followed by Tetesha.

ASHA

What the hell! What happened? Nubi, are you all right?

She rushes to Nubasha's side. But the queen, hearing her friend's voice only begins to sob even harder, cringing away from Asha and clinging to Lubisha.

LUBISHA

She'll be fine. Lafati looked after her. Look what she did to Khemisha.

ASHA

To hell with with that bitch.

Then, to the queen, she says, soothingly

ASHA

It's all right now, Nubi. We're all here to help you. We're still with you. Damn! Lubisha, I leave you alone with her for a matter of hours, and this happens!

Lubisha shakes her head no, and shoves Asha on the shoulder.

LUBISHA

Oh, no, don't you dare try and dump this wormy apple into my basket! I told you we should have told what Maysha and Molisha saw. This secret mess was your idea. This might not have happened if you...

Lafatasha interrupts.

LAFATASHA

Stop it, you two! We don't have time for arguments! Asha, you're going to have to take Khemisha to your compound.

ASHA

Take her to your house, you're the doctor.

Lafatasha leaves Khemisha to her assistants and rushes to face Asha.

LAFATASHA

I told you we don't have time for this! We have to clean up this mess.

Lafatasha goes to Lubisha, who is still cradling Nubasha in her arms, and kneels down to tell her:

LAFATASHA

Lubi, I need you to see that this place is cleaned up. I have to go and look after Khemisha. Okay?

LUBISHA

Okay. You're coming back though, right?

LAFATASHA

As soon as I can. Just stay here and take care of this place. Okay?

Asha stands aside as the two assistants hurry out behind the Sword Maidens carrying Khemisha. Asha looks at Lafatasha and Lubisha.

ASHA

I don't know how we'll explain it all to the men, if they ever return. But we have to stand together, Sisters.

LAFATASHA

True, Sisters. People under orders sometimes go beyond the word's intent.

LUBISHA

The power of the word itself, Sister, is the danger. Look what it has done to our sweet friend.

She looks down at Nubasha.

ASHA

Look what it has done to all of us sisters.

The three friends stand looking at each other and to Nubasha, unconscious, and tears still flowing.

EXT. A ROAD ON THE OPEN SAVANNA

Mudoku and Gosa, with a detachment of forty warriors traveling along the road home. With them also are two dead bodies slung over horseback. Suddenly a barrage of spears come sailing out of the underbrush, felling half the small detachment in seconds. Then the remainder are surrounded by a large band of Chada warriors and ordered to drop their weapons.

MUDOKU

(to his troops)

Be still, men.

The Chada warriors surround Mudoku and his men.

MUDOKU

I am Mudoku Umbuli, in service to King Idi Balin Tobala. Why are you Chadas here in our kingdom?

The Chadas say nothing, but wait anxiously until their leader, Kokulu Shamba emerges from hiding in the brush.

KOKULU

And what was your business, Umbuli, to kill the king's own son? If these were your king's orders, then is there any wonder the gods have struck him dead?

MUDOKU

So it is you Kokulu Shamba. If our king lies dead it was by your doing. You and your band of rebels and thieves!

Kokulu laughs and approaches Mudoku's horse, grabbing it's bridle. He creeps taunting around the head of the horse to stare up into Kokulu's face.

KOKULU

The blood of Kubakas cry up from the soil this very day! Crying from the horrors of the House of Tobala and your Queen of Blood and Fire!

Gosa attempts to ride up and scare Kokulu away from Mudoku's horse, but is stopped by several Chada warriors.

GOSA

What nonsense are you talking, Shamba?

KOKULU

(to Gosa)

Silence! you murderer.

(to Mudoku)

Your own lives are in danger. All your fellow council members are dead now!

Gosa again attempts to ride up on him, but this time the Chada threaten him with spears pointed at his chest.

GOSA

We should believe you, Shamba? You who are here with our enemies to do us harm?

The Chada find this funny and laugh poking their spears at Gosa.

KOKULU

(to Mudoku)

The harm, Baba, is being carried out by your queen. I have told you truly. If you return to the Jeweled Capital City you too will die. The queen is mad! All who come near her die! Join me now and there will be no more death.

Suddenly, from the forest behind the bandits comes a woman's voice.

VOICE (OC)

Kill!

Instantly, a hail of arrows and spears come flying from the forest underbrush. Within seconds Kokulu and his entire band of Chadas lay dead or dying on the ground. A band of Sword Maidens then swarms out of the underbrush with swords and axes in hand. They ignore the presence of the king's personal assistant and advisor and all the warriors sitting stunned in their saddle. They race out of the brush and begin chopping with their swords at the writhing bodies of the Chada invaders and their dead Kubaka men as well. Their frenzied attack does not stop until one of the sword maidens triumphantly holds up Kokulu's severed head and screams.

SWORD MAIDEN

For our queen! For our queen! Victory!

Then one of them charges the horse across which Rojiro's dead body is draped, and plunges her sword into his back and into that of his dead wife. Ignoring the commands of Mudoku and Gosa, they seize the dead son of Rojiro and examine it to make sure it is dead, then cry out again.

SWORD MAIDENS

For our queen!

They drop the child's body on the ground and gather around it. A young girl steps forward amid cheers of support from her fellow Sword Maidens. She raises her sword high above her head and brings it down, slicing the dead child completely in half at the waist.

As if Mudoku and Gosa and their detachment were not even there, the platoon of Sword Maidens jubilantly salute each other.

SWORD MAIDENS

Sword Maidens! Sword Maidens! Victory!

Just as suddenly as they appeared, the platoon, carrying Kokulu's severed head and the two halves of the dead child's body, disappears back into the forest, their jubilant voices slowly dying away. Mudoku and Gosa sit stunned in their saddles, staring off after the fading voices of the sword maidens.

EXT. FURTHER ALONG THE ROAD IN THE OPEN SAVANNA

Mudoku and his men encounter Shobulu and his detachment.

SHOBULU

Greetings to you, Good Brother. Pray tell me you have word of our Sweet Prince.

MUDOKU

Sadly no, Good Brother, but word has come to me from a hellish source that our great king is no more. Pray tell me this is not so.

SHOBULU

Our good king has indeed breathed his last. Sadness reigns.

MUDOKU

Kokulu is no more. We encountered him on the road, he and his Chada trash. But they all sleep in bloody graves now. It seems what we expected from the women has come to pass.

Gosa hears what they say, but does not understand what they mean. He looks from Mudoku to Shobulu but remains silent so the warriors won't know he's out of the loop.

SHOBULU

Then we must return straightway.

As they sat in discussion, Gosa notices that same band of Sword Maidens returning. They are marching in three columns across the open savanna. At the head of each column, the lead marcher carries her spear upright. And impaled on the tip of the upraised spears are the head of Kokulu in the center, and the severed halves of the dead infant on either side of it.

They march proudly by in the distance, arrogantly ignoring the men all together. They had apparently encountered some other enemy along their route, because they had used its blood as make-up, decorating their faces with streaks and concentric circles. And on the bright yellow sash of her new uniform, that draped from shoulder to waist across her torso, each Sword Maiden had pressed her bloody hand print just between the breasts, over her heart.

GOSA

There they are, Brothers.

Following Gosa's lead, several warriors drew their swords. The Sword Maidens pause for a moment when they see the men reaching for their weapons. The women pause, debating among themselves and pointing toward the detachment of men.

SHOBULU

Put those away! These are our own women.
What is there to fear?

GOSA

Consider that we are the only remaining
members of the Royal Council, Brother.
Consider that before you assume these
are only women.

SHOBULU

Yet they are women, our women.

Seeing that the men had re-sheathed their swords, the women proceed toward them, though noticeably more cautious. They approach to within several feet of the men and stop, leaving their leader, Odesha Ode, to step forward and speak to the men.

Odesha stands for a second, eyeing the men to insure none had a weapon at the ready. Satisfied they did not, she spoke to Mudoku, pointing with her spear to the bodies of Rojiro and his second wife.

ODESHA

Give us the bodies.

Then she motions for others of her maidens to come forward and collect them.

MUDOKU

These dead are being taken to the Jeweled Capital City, Daughter. I am about the king's business, returning his dead son for burial.

The other Sword Maidens join their leader at her side. Gosa squirms nervously in his saddle, slightly brushing his hand against the hilt of his sword. Believing he is about to draw his weapon, instantly, a Sword Maiden lunges at him with her spear.

ODESHA

Stop!

The Sword Maiden's spear head pauses only inches from Gosa's chest. Gosa slowly raises his hands to show they are empty, and the Sword Maiden reluctantly lowers her spear.

ODESHA

Give us the body.

SHOBULU

This is insolence, Daughter. More than that, you are addressing the commander of the king's army. Stand aside at once. Honor your parents.

Laughter rises from the platoon of Sword Maidens as Odesah pretends to flinch at Shobulu's command to stand aside.

ODESHA

Oh please, big, strong man, do not beat me.

Her platoon roars with laughter. Then Odesah's tone becomes angry.

ODESHA

After all, I am just a simple little woman.

She walks menacingly up to Mudoku.

ODESHA

Give us the bodies, old man.

MUDOKU

Stand aside, Daughter, as ordered!

Odesha steps boldly up to him with her sword poised for attack.

ODESHA

I will not!

Then, from the tree-shrouded road, comes the voice of the prince.

KUWA (OC)

You will!

Odesha spins, with her sword still poised, to see Kuwa and his party approaching. Without hesitation, the entire platoon of Sword Maidens drop their weapons to the ground and join them their, prostrating themselves before Kuwa. Odesha, delaying only momentarily, soon join them, reluctantly releasing her spear only after she was spread on the ground before Kuwa. Mudoku's detachment, still fearful of what the women might do, do not dismount, but greet their new king by bowing low in their saddles, their eyes still on the women, and their hands resting on their swords.

MUDOKU

Oh, praise to god! Our sweet sons live!

SHOBULU

Praises! Praises!

Kuwa and his party ride up from the forest cover. Shobulu sighs, tears filling his eyes. He dismounts and races forward to kiss the hands of Kuwa and embracing his son Makabu and the rest of the party.

SHOBULU

Praises!

KUWA

What have we here?

Kuwa prances his horse up to the leader of the Sword Maidens lying face down on the ground before him.

KUWA

Do my eyes deceive me, Odesha? Or did I arrive to hear you mocking my father's trusted servants?

Odesha says nothing. But all could tell, from the tremors wracking her body, that she was sobbing, and hearing her distress, others of her contingent began to cry with her. She pounds her fist on the ground in frustration that Kuwa still lives.

KUWA

My god!

Kuwa rides among the prostrate women to look at the grisly trophies atop their spearheads.

KUWA

Is this a child's body they have? And a man's head!

MUDOKU

It is the head of Kokulu Shamba, My Lord.

Hearing that, Dada rides forward to see it for himself.

DADA

So it is. So it is.

KUWA

(to Mudoku)

And the child?

GOSA

It was your nephew, My Lord. We were returning it to the capital when it died.

KUWA

My nephew?

Then he sees the body of Rojiro draped across the horse led by Gosa. He rides over to it. He looks up into Gosa's eyes, then at Mudoku. Then, saying nothing, he sits in his saddle for a moment beside his dead brother. He sees the gaping wound in his back.

KUWA

In the back, Baba. In the back!

GOSA

God, no! My Lord. That wound was caused by these madwomen when they accosted us earlier. That is also when they stole the child from us and butchered it.

KUWA

The woman there...

Kuwa rides over to the body of Rojiro's dead wife.

KUWA

Who was she?

GOSA

A Chada woman, My Lord, his second wife, the mother of the child. They caused her wound as well, these madwomen!

KUWA

A Chada? Indeed.

Kuwa muses for a moment before turning and riding back among the women to speak to Odesha.

KUWA

Tell me, woman, how comes you to be in possession of my nephew's body? And which of you butchered it this way?

Odesha, still wracked with tears, mutters something inaudible. Then, placing her hand on the shaft of her spear, she cries out.

ODESHA

No! No! No!

Just as Odesha grips her spear as if thinking to attack, Gosa shoots an arrow that pins the sleeve of her cloak to the ground. She slowly releases her spear.

KUWA

Answer me! Which of you is responsible for doing this to my nephew?

He prances his horse among them again, coming frighteningly close to trampling some of them. But the women say nothing.

KUWA

Answer me!

GOSA

It was that one, Sire.

To indicate which one it was, Gosa lands an arrow beside the trembling body of Mosasha, the young girl who had been elected to sever the child's body. Kuwa, not knowing it is only a child, rides over to her angrily.

KUWA

You! Stand!

The child, her head bowed much more in fear and shame than respect, reluctantly approaches him.

KUWA

You did this? Come here! What is this stuff you all are wearing?

Kuwa grabs her yellow sash and rips it away.

KUWA

What kind of uniform is this! And this!

He snatches away the cloak, the bulk of the new sword maiden uniform that draped them from shoulder to ankles.

KUWA

What is all of this!

Once the child stands, trembling before him, clad only in her loincloth, and he sees it is indeed only a child, his whole demeanor changes.

KUWA

(to Shobulu)

My god! Who is responsible for this, Baba? Who is responsible for making women and children commit such acts of barbarity?

Shobulu looks to Mudoku, then to Gosa before answering.

SHOBULU

We have been away all these weeks, My Lord. We know no more than you about what has been happening at home. But clearly it is nothing good.

KUWA

But who? Who is behind this?

Gosa looks from Mudoku to Shobulu then to Kuwa, but says nothing.

SHOBULU

My Lord, we must return to the palace at once. Perhaps your wife will have the answers you seek.

Mudoku shifts uneasily in his saddle at Kuwa's insistence on knowing who is responsible.

MUDOKU

And there is much we must discuss, My Lord. The news is not good.

KUWA

What news? That my brother is no more! That his child has been butchered by one no more than a child herself! That women are cutting off men's heads?

Then Shobulu sidles his horse up to stand beside Kuwa, and whispers to him. Kuwa sits silently for a moment as the words slowly registered in his mind, and then his heart. He rides his horse over and stares down again at his dead brother's body. Then he rides back over to look at his dead nephew, and the frightened child Sword Maiden still standing there, trembling under his stare. He looks up at Shobulu, then to Mudoku and to Gosa. Seeing their friend's consternation, Dada, Makabu and Ukwangala lays the head of the demon on the ground where they stand, and ride over to be with Kuwa.

MAKABU

(to Shobulu)

What is it, Baba?

SHOBULU

My Sons, the Great King Idi Balin Tobala is no more.

Kuwa stares down at his dead brother and nephew.

KUWA

(to himself)

Family.

SHOBULU

My Lord?

KUWA

(to himself)

My wife, how is she? Is she well?

MUDOKU

We can not say, Chosen One. We must return to the capital to insure Khemisha is safe as well.

Kuwa looks at him, then at the body of Rojiro.

SHOBULU

I have been away, My Lord, on the road in search of you and your party. Might I suggest we proceed straightway to the city now. Then we will find your answer. And perhaps an explanation.

He motions to the band of Sword Maidens.

KUWA

Yes, straightway. When did father...

SHOBULU

Before the sun set on your day of departure, My Lord.

KUWA

That close?

SHOBULU

Put your heart at ease, My Lord. All of his final orders were carried out just as he would have wanted. Mudoku and Gosa have returned successful. And I see...

He points to the head of the demon the party had carried in with them.

SHOBULU

You, too, succeeded at your assignment. I am sure the great king smiles down on you, My Lord. His last words, even after death, were faithfully carried out by faithful friends and his Chosen One. A man can not be happier, during his brief while, than to have faithful friends and a worthy child.

Kuwa sighs in resignation to the situation and rides over to rejoin his party.

KUWA

See to these women, Mudoku.

Then he bends down and helps Mosasha, the child Sword Maiden, onto the back of his horse, while his party collects up the head of the evil demon and that of Kokulu, and follows their new king back toward the Jeweled Capital City.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. ASHA'S COMPOUND IN THE CITY

Asha has left Khemisha in the care of Lafatasha's two assistants while she and Maysha have retired to Ahsa's private chamber to relax.

MAYSHA

If the princess lives, when Kuwa returns she will be taken as his wife. That must be if Rojiro is dead. Who else has the responsibility but Kuwa, the dead prince's brother?

ASHA

What are you saying, Maysha?

MAYSHA

Only that it would have been better for the princess to die. Her word alone will be all the king will hear when he goes in search of the truth.

Asha pauses for moment, reflecting on Maysha's words.

ASHA

You are the only one who has thought what others have not. The queen's word will mean nothing if Khemisha's words fall hot.

MAYSHA

How can they fall otherwise, Mistress, after all we have done to her?

Asha leans forward in her seat, staring into Maysha's eyes.

ASHA

Sister Maysha, Are you saying that now we should kill Khemisha.

Maysha shakes her head no, then leans back in her seat with a sigh.

MAYSHA

I will not speak on this, Mistress. In our own ways, we all fell with our lips puckered at her feet, and in so falling, lost all reasoned speech.

Asha stands and heads for the door with Maysha following.

ASHA

Well spoken, sister, reasoned and well. For our queen, who must be spared, someone must burn for these sweet weeks of hell.

EXT. REAR GATE OF THE JEWELLED CAPITAL CITY

Mudoku and Gosa and the platoon of Sword Maidens they have taken prisoner arrive and are met by Asha and Maysha. Asha tries to hide her nervousness, and pretend all is well. Mudoku looks at her skeptically. Gosa sits in the saddle staring at her angrily.

MUDOKU

Greetings to you, Sweet Daughter. Are the princesses all well! Has there been trouble here?

ASHA

Trouble, Dear Baba, has been with us since the arrival of the evil demon.

Asha kisses his hands in welcome.

ASHA

And alone here as we were, without word of our men, we have struggled to keep things in place for your return.

She looks at the band of Sword Maidens hoping to glean some clue from Odesha as to how best to proceed. The commander just lowers her gaze in disgrace, leaving Asha to figure some stalling tactic on her own.

ASHA

Oh, pray tell me, Baba, is my husband well? Are they far behind?

MUDOKU

Not far, I am sure. We encountered them on the road. As our late king foretold, they have courageously defeated this evil demon, and return with its severed head in a handbasket for all to see.

Mudoku rides up to Asha and Maysha.

MUDOKU

(to Asha)

Daughter, I have seen many disturbing things along the road. Who has been in charge here? Who has been giving orders in our absence?

GOSA

That damned Momba Tu Oli, I'll bet.

MAYSHA

Well... Yes... There was trouble with him.

ASHA

Ah, yes indeed, the Olis and the Shambas, Sweet Baba.

MAYSHA

Many others as well, My Lords.

ASHA

Indeed so. Pray tell me, Baba, are the others far behind you? How many days before we see our dear husbands again?

MUDOKU

Does that answer my question, Daughter? Now you pray tell me, who has been in charge here?

Seeing her commander at a lost for words, Odesha swoons and falls to the ground, pretending to have fainted.

The commotion caused by her ruse is sufficient to draw Gosa's attention to her care. It distracts Mudoku for only a moment. But that moment affords Asha the opportunity to whisper to Maysha.

ASHA

Hurry to the palace, Sister, and tell the others.

Maysha slips away quietly.

MUDOKU

(to Asha)

These women, are in the service of the Princess Nubasha. They have refused to answer my questions. They are, or at least they were when I left, Palace Elite Guards assigned to the princess. Is she to blame for the horrors we have seen?

ASHA

Horrors, Baba, there have been. As I was saying earlier, there have truly been horrors. We were all alone, as you know, without our men...

MUDOKU

Silence! Daughter, why are you speaking so without talking!?

He prances his horse up to her, forcing her to draw back a few paces.

MUDOKU

Take me to the Princess Nubasha. Now!

Asha still tries to stall and lay as much defense for what has happened as she can.

ASHA

Yes. Certainly, Baba, but, with our great king dead, should we not address her as queen?

MUDOKU

Do you think, Daughter, that I am unfamiliar with the proper naming of things. While we men were away, tell me, did you women conduct a coronation and make a princess a queen?

ASHA

(nervously)

Certainly not, Baba.

MUDOKU

Then, as I said, take me to the Princess Nubasha. I must know who was behind this. The king will expect answers when he returns, and I will have them.

INT. THE ROYAL PALACE

Maysha races down the corridor and into Nubasha's private chamber yelling.

MAYSHA

They are coming! They are coming! They are coming!

Lubisha, in bed with Nubasha, wakes with a start, angry for having been so abruptly shaken from her brief sleep. Across from her, in a chair, Lafatasha slowly wakes. Nubasha does not wake.

LUBISHA

Girl, what's wrong with you! Don't you know where you are? To come screaming in hear like that! People are trying to sleep! The queen! Damn it!

Maysha rushes in, kneeling down and bowing toward Nubasha's bed. Then, remaining on her knees, head bowed, she reports.

MAYSHA

Mistress, Baba Umbuli and Obiwaye are at the rear gates. And they say your husbands are not far behind.

LUBISHA

Oh-my-god!

Lafatasha stands, thinking what to do next.

LAFATASHA

They are hungry for explanation.

LUBISHA

What shall we do?

They both look at Nubasha as if for an answer. But she stirs slightly, and sleeps on. Realizing they are on their own, they decide to handle the situation alone.

LUBISHA

They are going to want more than words, Lafati. They're going to want more.

LAFATASHA

Well it will not be our queen. Listen to me, you two, the strain of the great responsibility of running things in Kuwa's absence was too much on her, okay. She collapsed under that strain several days ago and we have been caring for her. Whatever those Sword Maidens did, they did on their own. Understood?

Wringing her hands in thought, she reaches down into her medicine bag and pulls out a handful of dried herbs.

LAFATASHA

Get some water, Maysha.

Lubisha leaps to her feet and rushes to Lafatasha.

LUBISHA

What is that? What are you going to do?

Maysha leaves and returns with the water.

LAFATASHA

I am going to make the queen sleep. When they see her, they will think she has truly been unwell.

Lafatasha removes some herbs from her bag and crushes them into the water. Maysha studies her every move.

LAFATASHA

This way they will more readily believe us when we say she has not been well for several days. That may give us some time to lay with our husbands and make them very believing of anything we say. We will quench their thirst for us with our willing bodies, while feeding their hunger for explanation with wily words.

Lubisha is doubtful.

LUBISHA

Oh, Sister, men are truly fools when between our legs, but we'll need more than womanly wiles to feed them these dark days.

INT. ASHA'S COMPOUND

Maysha and Molisha are there with an unconscious Khemisha.

MAYSHA

So far, only Asha and the band of maidens are in custody. Because she so stubbornly stalled and evaded answering any of Mudoku's questions they are now confined to the servant's quarters in Obiwaye's compound.

Maysha points to Khemisha.

MAYSHA

And with all the women sworn to silence, there lies the only breach in our stony wall of silence.

Maysha shakes her head and sighs, wagging her finger at Khemisha.

MAYSHA

One falsehood destroys a thousand truths.
If only we had not gone along with Asha's
lie when we found the princess Khemisha
alone with the prince in his bedchamber,
if only we had told our princess what we
saw none of this would have happened.

MOLISHA

Maybe.

She rises and goes over to sponge cool water on Khemisha's
forehead

MAYSHA

There is a way to save us all.

MOLISHA

How, by telling the truth?

MAYSHA

No, Sister, by killing it.

Maysha reaches under her robe at the bosom and pulls out the bag
of herbs Lafatasha had earlier.

MAYSHA

Look here, Lafati's bag of secrets.

Maysha takes a handful of the dried leaves she had seen
Lafatasha use to make the queen fall into her death-like sleep.

MAYSHA

If a handful of this will make the
queen sleep through all this questioning,
would not a double dose do a darker deed?

Molisha takes the bag from her, and says with sad resignation:

MOLISHA

Get some water. Let's be done with this
for good.

Maysha exits.

Molisha sits gently wiping Khemisha's forehead with the damp sponge, considering what she is about to do.

MOLISHA

I am sorry, Sister.

She whispers to Khemisha, bending and gently kissing her on the cheek.

MOLISHA

I hardly know you. It is not for me. What must be done is for my sweet queen, and for peace. If one sister must perish so the rest can be spared, then one must.

Outside, there is a noise of something falling, followed by a frightened squeal from Maysha. Molisha looks up toward the entrance and sees Maysha being held in Gosa Obiwaye's stern grip.

GOSA

So! What is this? By Mudoku's own command, everyone is supposed to be out welcoming the king. But what have we here? You two here hiding. What are you doing? Who is sleeping there? Who is that?

He strides forward, with Maysha in tow, and uncovers Khemisha's bruised body. Most of her severest scars and bruises have begun to heal and fade. But there are more than enough remaining to show the tortures she has endured at Nubasha's hands.

GOSA

My god! What have you done to her! Are you mad! Hiding a princess of the royal house here in...

Then his eyes light up with the full realization of what he has stumbled upon. A satisfied smile grows over his face and he continues, almost in a whisper.

GOSA

In Asha Umbuli's compound! I would like to see that stubborn monkey talk her way this! Get up, woman.

He snatches Molisha up by her arm.

GOSA

You two are coming with me.

INT. GOSA'S COMPOUND - DAYS LATER

Dada is standing before his wife, Asha who is seated. She is being held prisoner, accused responsible of the horrors that reigned in the men's absence.

We hear the rustle of the curtained entrance to the chamber. Asha stares at the person entering, anger and disappointment fill her eyes. Dada looks up and is shocked at who he sees entering.

At the entrance are Khemisha and her two handmaidens. She stands in royal garb, staring in at Dada and Asha for a second. Welts and bruises can be seen on her neck above the collar of her robe. Her two handmaidens, on either side of her, both chose to wear only the briefest loincloths so that their every scar and bruise would be visible for all to see. Khemisha lets the curtain fall closed behind her, proudly striding forward casting a victorious smile at Asha. Dada falls to his knees and bows at Khemisha's feet.

DADA

Princess! A thousand pardons, My Lady.
All the stars in the sky can not total
my regrets. A thousand pardons, My Lady.

KHEMISHA

Dada Umbuli, why do you beg forgiveness?

DADA

I pray I need never do so for myself,
Kind Princess.

KHEMISHA

Then for whom, Good Brother?

DADA

For my absence, My Lady, that which
caused my wife to inflict your suffering.

KHEMISHA

Asha? Ah! I see. I see. Brother, please leave me alone to talk to your wife for a moment. And know, Dada Umbuli, that a man so much a man as you will always have my highest regards.

Dada, rises, still bowed before Khemisha, and backs out of the room without a word or glance to his wife. The handmaidens bring a chair for Khemisha, but she declines. She approaches Asha, who is still seated. Only now is it revealed that Asha is tied down in her chair. Khemisha looks at the ropes around Asha's waist, her bound ankles, her wrists bound to the sides of the chair. Asha tries to stare down Khemisha, but gives up and drops her eyes in defeat. Khemisha smiles.

KHEMISHA

Asha, I drifted in and out of my mind during those days of torture. But still I know that when my eyes would open to see more torture coming, they never beheld you delivering the blows.

ASHA

I hear you talking, Princess. But our men were away. They know of our deeds only what we women tell them. If I say I did it, then I did it.

KHEMISHA

Do you think I have no tongue?

ASHA

Have you told him?

KHEMISHA

I have not whispered a word, except to say I love him, and to lay his ear to my stomach.

ASHA

What are you saying?

Khemisha smiles and pats her stomach.

KHEMISHA

What could I possibly do to any of you as punishment that Kuwa hasn't already done by laying his first fertile seeds in my belly? I will be the High Queen, and Nubasha... well, I guess she will have to be second queen, someone to clean up after me and my child. You Sandalas do make good cleaning women after all.

She laughs victoriously. Then, turning to exit, she pauses and looks back to say:

KHEMISHA

Fear not, Asha, not even I would wish Gosa Obiwaye on you, even though you could use a good beating. Within the hour I will give word to free you.

Then Khemisha smiles.

KHEMISHA

By word of the Queen.

Then, laughing, she turns and exits through the curtained entrance, leaving Asha staring as the curtains fall closed.

FADE OUT.

THE END