**AMAZONE**

EXT THE AEGEAN DAY

October, 2040 on the Turkish Riviera near Izmir, a gulet rigged for diving and salvage heads out flying a blue and green flag with a white crescent moon. The boat stops at an oyster bed. On deck are baskets of sponges. CREW WOMAN JINJI wears her black hair straight, red lipstick and matching nail polish, and dark glasses. Prying an oyster open, she takes out a pearl and offers it to a dark-skinned diver, NEITH in black swimsuit, SCUBA gear and flippers.

JINJI

Hey, Neith. [pronounced "Night"] Here's a black pearl to protect you in the sea.

NEITH

Thanks, Jinji.

Standing poised on the platform, takes the pearl and tucks it down in her cleavage. Steps back and plunges in.

Underwater. NEITH is on the bottom 100 feet down. Sunlight streams into the coral canyon. Schools of clown fish and harlequin shrimp, nodding red tubeworms make it look like a garden. Sharks and the sole that secretes shark repellant swim by. Gliding manrays make the seaweed wave.

NEITH searches a bank of rubble, pulling out objects with her hands, examining them and placing them in a waiting basket connected by a line to the boat.

AIR BUBBLES. Her hand touches gold. She brushes away sediment, revealing huge carved fingers encrusted with sand.

The diver freezes all motion, then stoops down to examine the fragment, knuckles and fingers the size of a basketball, grasping a broken-off spear.

Her eyes, through her mask, widen with astonishment. She pulls a knife from her belt and starts to clear away the object. Debris falls out of the coral bank. A jet of black ink swirls through the water.

A giant octopus flows out from the rocks and tangles up her arm and leg. The diver struggles and yanks the rope. The basket rises up toward the boat as she wrestles with the octopus, slashing a tentacle with her knife. Black ink in the water as the creature propels itself away. Free, NEITH picks up a gold coin and looks for the basket, sees it gone, and swims rapidly to the surface.

Anxious, JINJI administers first aid to the diver, collapsed on deck with "the bends".

NEITH

(thrashing wildly)

The statue—I saw the hand—

JINJI

Are you all right, Neith?

NEITH

The octopus behaved strangely. Like it was guarding the statue.

JINJI

You'd better take a rest.

Lifting her, half carrying her, JINJI helps NEITH into a recompression chamber, a metal casket with a small porthole. NEITH smiles through the porthole.

EXT COURTYARD OF IZMIR CAFÉ THE FOLLOWING DAY

A woman ARCHAEOLOGIST at rustic café table under a palm tree, overlooking the Aegean. AGNES is an old woman with a knobby walking stick, thick glasses and a slouch hat. NEITH walks up in a black jogging suit, soaked, striding along. Takes a huge blue Afro comb from her backpack and runs it through her hair, which is slicked back. A color with Egyptian features, strong thighs, she speaks Turkish to the WAITRESS.

NEITH

Raki. Ice on the side.

AGNES

What have you got for me, Neith?

NEITH hands her a jar of gold coins in brine.

AGNES

(studying the contents of jar)

These coins were common a thousand years ago. The curator won't pay much for them.

Neith shrugs, looking dreamily out to sea.

NEITH

Look, Agnes.

She points to the seacoast where a blue and green flag flies.

AGNES

(looks through binoculars)

The Ionian flag is flying on a corner of Turkey. I bet you swam across and planted it, right, Neith?

Neith arches her brows, eyes sparkling. Waitress arrives with a drink. Neith takes an ice cube and rubs it on the sores left on her leg by octopus suckers.

NEITH

What would you say if I told you I found a statue. The hand was this big.

NEITH spreads her cupped hands a foot wide. Skeptical, AGNES leans her chin on the knob of her walking stick.

AGNES

(gesturing, swings the stick high)

I'd say you have rapture of the deep. That statue would be about…13 meters tall. As big as the Athena that used to stand in the Parthenon.

NEITH

(nods)

What happened to that statue?

AGNES

It has been missing since the Emperor Theodosius removed it to Constantinople in the year 550.

NEITH

What did the statue look like?

Failing to hide her excitement, Agnes thumps the stick on the paving stones.

AGNES

Gold and ivory. Athena wears a helmet and holds a spear in one hand. On her shield is the face of Medusa.

(exclaims)

What did you see down there?

NEITH

Gold on the hand. The spear was broken off.

AGNES

(jumping with excitement)

What a find!

(lowering her voice)

We must recover it, and no one must know until we're well underway. How soon can you organize a salvage expedition?

NEITH

I am going away tomorrow to the United States. For the inauguration of President Maxine Waters.

AGNES

That can't be as important.

NEITH

I am under orders to accompany General Sekhmet.

AGNES

Why are you really going?

NEITH

It's a summit council to seek Western aid for Ionia.

AGNES

(pensive)

Oh. Then I'll organize the salvage expedition. Call me when you get back.

Neith slips into a pleasant reverie.

INT ISTANBUL NIGHTCLUB NIGHT

January, 2041. A nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey. Small tables and chairs, juke-box, bar. Beside the jukebox is a wanted poster in Arabic characters with English underneath. The drawing is of a dark woman with a radiating afro. It reads "TARAKAWANTED FOR MURDER."

Outside the doorway a glowing streetlamp with Arabic street sign. In the background the Bosphorus channel. Neith, Jinji, LA GORGON, and ILONA are out on the town having a good time. Slightly tipsy, they pile into the bar from Left, arms linked and hanging onto each other. They take over a table in the bar, noisily fooling around. Ilona is dressed as a gypsy, wearing silver necklaces and bracelets with blue beads. She takes a Tarot deck from a silk cloth and starts shuffling. Her Amazon companions are dressed in jacket, blouse and slacks, like emancipated Turkish women.

JINJI

(to La Gorgon)

Did we have to come here? O beneficent one!

From the back room three people emerge, two MEN and a woman, USHA. The men are a bartender in Turkish clothing, who goes behind the bar, and Abdul, a young Mideast gangster in a dark suit, who stands along the wall.

LA GORGON

(in a jive French accent)

You see, Jinji? You called upon the Papa and he sent two of his reps.

Neith checks out the men and Usha.

ILONA

(smiling at Abdul, cuts the cards)

One more drink and we will call it a night.

JINJI

(loudly, to Bartender)

Can we get some service please?

Jinji strides across to jukebox, with a derisive smile at Abdul, pops in a coin. Mideast music, oud and flute with a woman singing, comes on. Jinji tears the wanted poster off the wall and shows it to her friends. Neith smirks. Jinji wads it up and tosses it in the corner.

JINJI

(to La Gorgon)

Want to dance?

La Gorgon gets up to dance with her. Neith lights a bidi.

JINJI

I miss Brenda. No sooner did we get back from the—

La Gorgon jabs her in the ribs.

LA GORGON

*Ferm la* blabbermouth!

JINJI

(rubbing her side)

—back from Macashi—She went to the front and she hasn't radioed in!

LA GORGON

Forget her. *J’ai soif!* [I’m thirsty.]

La Gorgon tries to pull Jinji toward the bar, stumbles and steps on her foot.

JINJI

(rubbing her toes, razzes La Gorgon)

If we drink any more you might fall down.

Ilona lays out tarot cards upon the table. Neith gives

them a glance but continues to smoke thoughtfully.

Bartender becomes curious and approaches the table.

Ilona slips the cards back into the deck just as he arrives. He looks at her with familiarity and suspicion.

Ilona cuts the deck and shows him a card.

ILONA

Fortune. Who knows what kind.

Bartender stares at Neith, searches her up and down with his eyes. She raises her face to return his glare.

BARTENDER

(knowingly)

Uh huh!

JINJI

(calls over to Neith)

Want to dance?

LA GORGON

(extending her hand)

Yes, let's be the three Graces.

NEITH

I don't like this song.

Usha stands afraid to move, looks at the two men and then Neith, who is looking back at her.

USHA

Shall I get them drinks?

Usha looks belatedly at bartender, who waves her off.

BARTENDER

(giving Neith the fish eye)

What do you women do for a living?

ILONA

I am a tradeswoman.

Ilona holds up an armful of silver jewelry with blue beads.

BARTENDER

Oh yes, I have seen you in the marketplace, selling junk that is supposed to ward off evil.

ILONA

(offended)

You have to believe in it.

BARTENDER

(to Neith)

And what do you do?

NEITH

Underwater salvage.

BARTENDER

What do you dive for, pearls?

Bartender snorts crudely and walks back to bar. Abdul follows him, and bartender shares the joke with him.

BARTENDER

Get a better price on the street.

They both laugh. Neith gives him the finger.

ILONA

My friend is priceless.

Usha approaches the women at the table.

USHA

Would you like to order?

NEITH

*Humra* [Date wine].

JINJI

(calls over)

Two beers for us, please.

ILONA

Humra for two.

Ilona stares at the gangster, appearing attracted to him.

ILONA

I wonder why Abdul has not noticed me.

NEITH

(good-humored)

Ilona, please do not stare at the hoodlum.

ILONA

(confidentially, to Neith)

The way you regiment my life, I might as well be in the Army.

Usha overhears, and smiles tremulously.

NEITH

(indulgently)

Quiet.

Usha gives a quick, desperate glance toward the menacing men. Leaning close to Neith, she whispers.

USHA

Can I—?

Bartender and Abdul walk over to the table, giving Jinji a shove on the way. Jinji belligerently raises her fists, but La Gorgon eases her. As the men approach, Usha glides away to fill the orders.

BARTENDER

(to Neith)

Let me see your papers.

NEITH

(groping in her pockets)

I am out of papers.

She pulls out a carved clay pipe.

NEITH

You will have to use a pipe.

Her friends laugh.

BARTENDER

(beckoning)

Come on, hurry up.

Neith hands over a passport, and after lengthy inspection, bartender hands it back.

BARTENDER

(gruffly)

We will talk.

He saunters away, satisfied. Neith makes a horrible face behind his back. The women laugh.

NEITH

(jeers)

Ottoman Turkey-ass.

Usha, serving Neith’s drink, leans over to whisper to her.

USHA

Can we talk outside?

Neith gives her a wink. Usha serves the last drink and goes outside. Music ends and Jinji returns to table.

JINJI

What's so great about that man, Ilona? Some priestess you are.

ILONA

I refuse to give up pleasure.

JINJI

You associate pleasure with a man?

LA GORGON

(accompanies Jinji)

Would you let one touch you?

ILONA

He happens to be my lover.

NEITH

We know your problems, Ilona. You cannot help this craving.

ILONA

Any more than you can resist anybody in a skirt.

ABDUL

Is this seat taken?

Abdul sits down next to Ilona. Jinji and La Gorgon grimace and shift their chairs away. Ilona ogles him, enjoying his company.

ABDUL

Good evening, Ilona.

ILONA

(flirtatiously)

Hello Abdul.

She waves her arm so that the jewelry rattles.

ILONA (cont’d)

Pay no attention to my friends. They are rude country women with no manners. This is their first visit to the city, and they are not used to being out of the house.

LA GORGON

Especially without our abayahs.

She mockingly gestures as if pulling a veil over her face.

NEITH

(gulps her drink)

I need a breath of air.

Neith runs to the door, pauses dramatically.

NEITH (cont’d)

When I get back, he had better be gone.

Ilona laughs. Abdul signals for a drink and bartender pours date wine in a shot glass, brings it. Neith exits.

ILONA

(shuffling the deck)

Shall I tell your fortune, Abdul?

Abdul rapidly drinks his wine. He appears superstitious.

ABDUL

No.

ILONA

I have been watching you.

Abdul sits back and stares at her, intrigued.

ABDUL

All right then, what do the cards say are my chances tonight?

Ilona studies an elaborate layout.

ILONA

Not good if you drink too much humra.

The women laugh.

EXT STREET NIGHT

Outside the wall and doorway, Neith contemplates Usha with grave concern. As Ilona flirted with Abdul, Usha flirts subtly with Neith.

USHA

(masking her urgency with a soft tone)

I hope I can trust you.

NEITH

You can. What is the matter?

USHA

I am being held against my will.

NEITH

Who are the men?

USHA

They kidnapped me off a train and brought me here. The Turk is a pimp and the young one works for a syndicate. They have guns. Another woman was killed.

Neith holds up her jacket to show Usha a shoulder holster.

NEITH

We have guns, too.

Usha's eyes bulge out.

USHA

They will kill me for trying to escape. Tonight there is an Arab…

(more)

USHA (cont’d)

I am supposed to go with him. In the past three months it has been drugs, beatings and threats…I have seen things I…If I could leave with you and your friends. But they would track us down. No, it is too dangerous.

NEITH

We will take care of them for you.

USHA

You mean…shoot them?

NEITH

If we have to—

She shrugs.

USHA

Does it have to be…killing?

NEITH

If we don't they will pursue us.

Usha looks at her searchingly.

USHA

Are you a criminal too? I must go back inside.

She is poised to flee. Neith detains her with a hand lightly on the arm.

NEITH

When I say the word TARAKA, dive for the floor.

Usha stops, turns.

USHA

Taraka? Where have I heard that before?

Neith grins at her.

INT NIGHTCLUB NIGHT

Usha goes back inside, just as bartender goes to the doorway to see what's taking so long. He looks over all the women, while Usha stares at him nervously.

EXT STREET NIGHT

Neith pulls her gun, checks her ammunition.

INT NIGHTCLUB NIGHT

Ilona kisses Abdul and holds onto him a while, then reluctantly lets him go. She crosses, out the doorway, almost bumping into Neith on the other side.

EXT STREET NIGHT

Seeing the gun, Ilona gives Neith a pleading look and shakes her head. Neith sheathes the gun as she goes back inside and sits down at the table.

INT NIGHTCLUB NIGHT

JINJI

(to Neith)

Ilona had to leave. She will see us

back at the place.

LA GORGON

(to Jinji)

Can we go now?

NEITH

As soon as I get the slavers.

Jinji reaches for her gun.

JINJI

I will get the bartender.

NEITH

Ready? TARAKA!

Usha ducks down as Neith shoots Abdul and Jinji the bartender, riddling them with automatic fire. Smoke rises and the men are covered with blood. Usha rises cautiously. La Gorgon systematically strips the bodies of weapons, keys, wallets. She hands keys to Neith, who runs over to Usha.

NEITH

Show me their car.

The women run out, leaving the two men dead amid smoke.

EXT MOUNTAIN NIGHT

Late night, half an hour after the women escaped. On a mountainside overlooking the Aegean near Izmir.

Jinji is playing a recorder. Bird calls and blowing wind. A spiny agave or olive tree suggests grasslands of Turkey.

Neith and Usha, Jinji and La Gorgon sit eating desert food (pocket bread, dried dates, etc.) with their hands, while Neith makes tea over a small fire, using a blue teapot.

USHA

(to Neith)

Where are we?

NEITH

At the olive press.

LA GORGON

(to Usha)

This place is beautiful during the day. The olive trees look like smoke toward the south. That is our city of Izmir.

La Gorgon indicates where, and Usha peers into the darkness.

LA GORGON

The forest has palms, eucalyptus, cypress and umbrella pines. There are rice fields, orchards of cherry and plum—

Jinji stops playing to tease the newcomer, Usha.

JINJI

—and wild animals. Wolves and bears.

LA GORGON

Foxes and rabbits, more likely.

NEITH

(summing up)

We are close to the hydroelectric plant we took over from the Turks.

USHA

I smell cedars. And the ocean.

JINJI

(stands up)

We should be on our way.

USHA

The demon wind is blowing. The khamsin.

Neith gives a start of recognition that Usha doesn't miss.

NEITH

We have no sandstorms here.

USHA

Still, it is…ominous. Do you have earthquakes?

NEITH

Sometimes.

JINJI

How is the tea coming along, Neith?

Jinji holds out a cup and Neith fills it with tea. Jinji tops it off with liquor from a flask she keeps in her backpack.

JINJI

(toasting)

Here's to the date palm and other hermaphrodites!

She gulps it down.

LA GORGON

You have had enough to drink, Jinji.

JINJI

(smiling, ignores the reproach)

Usha, how do you like our little country?

USHA

(smiling)

Very much like Turkey.

Jinji laughs.

NEITH

(to Usha, casually)

You know you are free to go now.

USHA

(surprised, she looks around, wryly)

Go where, back to Istanbul? Perhaps I could arrange to be deported.

Jinji puts the recorder in her pants pocket.

JINJI

(to Usha)

Stay with us in Ionia!

Neith looks covertly from Jinji to Usha.

USHA

(hesitant)

I need a few days to think. I did not intend to be involved in the war.

Usha turns her head, listening intently.

USHA

There it was again—a distant thundering. Did you say this area has earthquakes?

NEITH

*Malish.* [Don't worry.] You probably heard a land mine.

JINJI

It's time we went back to Izmir. I'll drive the car we commandeered. Neith, you take the truck.

La Gorgon stands up, dusts off her pants.

LA GORGON

How about my tea before we leave?

Neith hands it up to her in a cup and she tries to drink it fast, but it is too hot. La Gorgon sputters and takes a step back.

LA GORGON

It's been an interesting evening. Nice meeting you, Usha.

She and Jinji put their cups down.

USHA

Thank you for rescuing me from those men.

LA GORGON

(smiles)

*Bienvenue.* You are welcome to stay with us in Ionia as long as you like.

USHA

Thank you. I accept your offer of refuge, for the time being.

Jinji reaches for Neith, who stands up. They bump their raised fists in a revolutionary salute. Neith repeats the salute with La Gorgon.

LA GORGON

(expansively)

May the long time sun shine upon you, and your inner beauty light the way wherever you go. And keep your bolline keen.

JINJI

Are we going away, or dying?

Jinji giggles and the others join in.

LA GORGON

(stung)

That's how Ilona says farewell.

NEITH

I would not want to be hexed like that every day.

She hugs them both, and Jinji and La Gorgon depart.

NEITH

We will catch up with you in Izmir.

Neith and Usha wave and say Bye. Neith sits back down next to Usha. Neith is content to linger where she is.

Jinji returns, laughing noisily.

JINJI

I forgot my pack.

Jinji picks up her pack, with a knowing, wide-eyed stare at Neith.

JINJI

Be good.

She smiles and indicates Usha, then trots off.

NEITH

(reflecting before she answers)

Naturally.

Neith pours Usha a cup of tea and gazes at her.

NEITH

What do you do, study at school?

USHA

No, I took a year off to do sculpture. I am an artist. I was on my way to Diyarbakir when I was abducted.

NEITH

You must be familiar with the sculpture of ancient Egypt, coming from the Sudan.

USHA

How did you know I am from the Sudan? I grew up in Dongola, as a matter of fact.

NEITH

I knew you were from the upper Nile.

USHA

(studies Neith)

Where are you from?

NEITH

(drinks her tea, stalling)

Cairo.

Usha looks at her closely and listens to her inflection. Confronts her, catching Neith's eye.

USHA

You lie. You are from the Blue Nile.

Neith flushes guiltily, squirms a bit, then shrugs.

NEITH

Yes, I am Sudanese.

A silence ensues. Usha gives her a piercing look, then resumes the conversation, taking a different approach.

USHA

Is there a way I can get word to my friends in Diyarbakir?

Neith takes out a shortwave radio transmitter from her pack.

NEITH

The only communication is by shortwave radio. For some reason, the Turks refuse to deliver our mail.

(humorously)

Anything from Ionia, they keep for voodoo.

USHA

(interrupts)

Why are you hiding your color? Do you deny that you are a tribal woman?

NEITH

(coldly)

I lived most of my life in Egypt.

USHA

(corrects her)

A bit south of there, I would say.

NEITH

What difference does it make? I am hardly a credit to my race.

USHA

What do you mean?

NEITH

I am known as a cannibal in the Gev Dench propaganda.

USHA

(with revulsion)

Why?

NEITH

(tuning in the radio)

My raiding parties take trophies from their dead. For psychic warfare, we let it be known that we…

A loud burst of static.

NEITH

The stupid squawkbox…that we… There it goes…

(almost inaudible)

…trample their corpses and drink blood.

Neith hands Usha the radio.

NEITH

It is set to transmit. Here is the mike…Sometimes if the man makes his living from selling women, or if he has misused it, we relieve him of his problem.

She makes a sweeping gesture below the waist. Usha holds up a hand for Neith to desist, repulsed at her savagery.

USHA

I have heard enough.

Neith shrugs indifferently, tunes the radio to a newscast, and begins packing up the camp. Usha changes the subject.

USHA

Are you really a skindiver, like you said in the bar?

Neith pauses in what she is doing to answer, but without looking directly at Usha.

NEITH

When I was a student we demonstrated for the opening of the Aswan Dam, so that the Isis temple at Philae could be saved. I helped excavate Cleopatra's palace off Alexandria. That is how I met the archaeologists who restored the Goddess temples here in Tur—Ionia.

USHA

Do you go diving in the Aegean?

NEITH

(smiling at her)

Yes.

(whispers confidentially)

The Athena stolen from the Parthenon 1,600 years ago. I know where She is.

USHA

You mean the big statue that was supposed to be—

NEITH

(enthused)

Thirteen meters tall.

USHA

(skeptically)

Oh, did you take a picture? Or did your camera get wet?

Neith absorbs the mockery, then resumes her excited tone.

NEITH

I found the place where they sank Her but I was grabbed by an octopus—

Neith illustrates by laying hold of Usha's leg, wrapping her fingers around it like tentacles.

NEITH (cont’d)

—I had to cut it off me with a knife.

She releases Usha to slash the air with an imaginary dagger. Usha studies her leg where Neith grabbed her and strokes the spot, giving Neith an intrigued took. Neith flops on her back to stare up at the stars.

USHA

What do you see up there?

NEITH

"The Pleides have set, and alas I lie alone."

USHA

Aren't there any men in your…Amazon city?

NEITH

(makes a face)

I should think you would have had enough of men for a while.

USHA

There aren't any, then?

NEITH

Only matriarchists. Not many.

Both fall silent for a while. Neith fills a pipe with tobacco and tries to light it, but a gust of wind blows out the match.

USHA

This wind is like the khamsin. Once a sand-storm in Dongola dried up the rice and trees. Afterward, when I

walked into the desert, I found a sphinx half-buried in the sand. She had a woman's face. In the scorching sun. And her expression was dreamy, romantic and far-away.

Usha looks at Neith, who has just that expression on her face, and whose hand is slowly but steadily advancing toward Usha's hand. When Neith sees she is observed, she pulls back her hand and converses.

NEITH

Have you been to the Avenue of Sphinxes?

USHA

At Dendera? The shrine of Hathor?

NEITH

(nods)

I saw one of the sphinxes at a museum in New York.

USHA

Who do you know in New York?

NEITH

A…friend of mine, Anath. What became of the sphinx you found in the desert?

USHA

(sadly)

It was bought by Russian tourists.

Looking at Usha, not sure whether she is joking, Neith nods.

NEITH

Someday we will recover the Athena.

Usha looks in Neith's pack.

USHA

I am still hungry.

She finds a bag of shredded coconut and begins to eat, then, seeing Neith watching her amorously, sprinkles it down her neck and tries to entice Neith to nibble it off her. Usha lies back to accommodate her, makes eyes and reaches for her.

USHA

Are you hungry too?

Neith bends over Usha and nibbles at the coconut on her neck.

NEITH

(dreamily)

Only for you.

Neith pauses as she nears Usha's breast.

USHA

Does it bother you? Killing and bloodshed?

NEITH

(mockingly)

No, turtledove, I enjoy it.

USHA

You like having the power of life or death? Does it excite you?

Neith raises her head to see if Usha is joking. Usha resumes, stroking her hair.

USHA

Does it make you passionate?

NEITH

(lightly)

Such interest in my pashes.

Usha pulls away, feels to see if her face is hot. Pushes Neith away and brushes off the coconut. In a voice loaded with contempt, charges:

USHA

You act uncircumcised!

Neith jumps up angrily and strides back and forth with hostile looks at Usha. Usha ignores the tantrum. Neith calms down and drops to a squatting position in Usha's line of vision.

NEITH

(softly and gently)

I am not circumcised. When the griz mother came looking for me, I was gone.

She stands up, walks a few paces, while Usha hides her face.

USHA

How did you escape?

NEITH

(reluctant to answer)

Disguised as a boy. My sister went through it, she screamed for a whole day…I was twelve and I took a felucca up the Nile.

USHA

(depressed)

I could not leave my family.

NEITH

I could not face the knife.

Neith reflects for a moment and tries to inject some humor.

NEITH (cont’d)

I was wild. I did not care what they said about me.

USHA

(enjoying the thought)

"Half boy. A disgrace to her family."

(elaborating, in a scornful tone)

A twisted woman.

NEITH

(interrupts sharply)

Enough about me. What about you?

Usha looks down at her hands in her lap, turns them palm upward.

USHA

I enjoy loving.

NEITH

(heavenward)

May I add to your enjoyment.

USHA

I am far more likely to please you.

Neith hides her face in embarrassment, but Usha pursues her, turns Neith's face, then pulls back her hand.

USHA

Your skin is hot!

Neith pretends alarm, feels her forehead.

NEITH

What—I must have cholera!

USHA

(indulgently)

I think good health is the cause of your fever.

The engine roar of a jet bomber is heard, followed by a series of explosions. Neith and Usha crouch down protectively, and Neith tunes in the radio to Amazon communiqués.

FEMALE VOICE O.S.

—government troops attacked from the East, shelling Izmir with tanks and rockets—

A burst of static and more bombing. Neith stamps out the fire and grabs her gear.

NEITH

That is my base command! We must go immediately.

EXT IZMIR NIGHT

An hour later at the Aegean port of Izmir. Amid smoke and devastation, Usha and Neith approach a twin-barreled anti-aircraft gun. Usha walks along a path past the corpse of a WOMAN in colorful robes. A few feet further another body, a woman SOLDIER.

Usha looks over at Neith, dragging herself from one fallen comrade to the next. Dropping her pack, Neith bends to feel for a pulse at the throat of the woman soldier. Sees Usha looking, stands up and returns her gaze. Emotion belies her military restraint—a storm rages across her forehead. She pulls the corpse out of the trench.

USHA

We must save the living.

She throws out this platitude, which is buffeted by the storm of rage into which Neith has transformed.

NEITH

(shouts)

They're dead! They're all dead, mowed down in their tracks!

USHA

Some are injured. We must help them.

Neith holds a hand up for silence. Roar of an engine above.

NEITH

The Turks are coming back!

Wildcat screech of jet bombers firing missiles. Moving fireworks roar across. Neith runs over to grab Usha, and leads her swiftly to the dugout. A short distance away, a spatter of anti-aircraft fire. As they crouch in the foxhole, Usha looks off in the distance.

USHA

There is someone still fighting.

The jets pull away. Their thunder grows distant. A bloodied and weeping Selkis GUERRILLA runs in and takes charge of the gun turret. Wailing, explosions and red flashes.

SELKIS

*Yia! Herete!* Here I am, Turks! *Tee-kan-eess!* [How ya doing?]

Neith scrambles toward the wounded guerrilla, who doesn't see her. Loud explosion. Neith and Usha drop down, taking cover. The Selkis behaves as though in shock, doesn't protect herself. Neith walks over and puts an arm around her.

NEITH

Take cover!

SELKIS

I will not leave my post!

NEITH

(softening her voice)

I am Neith of the Selkis, Lieutenant Commander of the city. We must evacuate. Come with us, into the truck.

SELKIS

I wish to remain.

NEITH

(looking around again)

Where are Jinji and La Gorgon? Have you seen them?

SELKIS

Captured.

NEITH

(devastated)

No!

(aside to Usha)

They are better off dead.

Engine noise from an approaching bomber. Usha looks up and runs over to pull Neith toward the trench.

USHA

We can only save ourselves! Your friends will manage!

NEITH

(to Selkis)

Did you see them taken prisoner?

SELKIS

The whole patrol party, Ma'am.

NEITH

You are wounded. Come on, it is no use to stay here.

SELKIS

I refuse to abandon my post.

She pulls an automatic pistol on Neith, who with a quick karate chop, knocks it out of her hand. Usha kicks the gun aside.

SELKIS

(screams)

MARDUK WILL DIE FOR THIS! MARDUK WILL DIE!

NEITH

Come along, soldier.

She and Usha assist the wounded woman away from the gun position. Neith half-carries the Selkis, lays her down. The bombing stops. Silence falls.

NEITH

(to USHA)

Help me get her into the truck.

Usha goes over to the wounded woman. Neith retrieves the pistol and puts it into her pack. She pulls out a two-way radio, turns it on and stretches out the antenna.

FEMALE VOICE

—Cease fire violations. In Izmir four hundred women killed in a tank and rocket attack. Gev Dench bombing Izmir from the air. Occupants advised to evacuate the city.

As Neith leaves with the Selkis, she hands Usha the radio. Usha puts the radio in the pack, feels something. She opens the pack to look, and pulls out plastic squares, wiring, and dry cell batteries. Looks for Neith, who is out of view.

USHA

She is thinking of making a bomb!

Usha jumps as Neith returns. Usha repacks everything and hands it to Neith, who hoists the pack on her shoulder.

NEITH

Come on, little one.

USHA

Not so fast, Lieutenant. What are you planning to do with the plastic?

NEITH

(arrogantly)

Do not concern yourself.

Neith starts walking.

USHA

More killing? This hasn't been enough for you?

NEITH

(turns on her impatiently)

This wasn't for me. Izmir is lost, and the Turks will reabsorb us unless we hit them hard.

USHA

What are you going to blow up?

NEITH

I was thinking, how can I kill the most men without killing any women? You know in the mosque, they have a segregated section for the men…

USHA

You repulse me. Can we go?

NEITH

Good, you are too inexperienced for my commando.

They leave. Their voices fade O.S.

USHA

Commando? You mean terrorist group?

(with a gasp of recognition)

You are that Taraka, from the wanted posters!

NEITH

For Goddess' sake be quiet!

EXT EPHESUS AFTERNOON

Ephesus is the capital city of Ionia. Neith shows Usha into a room at the Amazon garrison. Usha sits down on the bed next to the window. Neith stretches out next to her. Jungle leaves drip. Rain patters on foliage outside the screen. Peals of organ music reverberate through the trees. The trill of a flute mimics the birds. A rich, deep woman's voice swells in a song of praise.

LA GORGON

(O.S.)

*Ah bon bon!*

Calliope throbs and higher voices join in a call and response.

LA GORGON (cont’d)

Shakti is a flame to burn away all bad things.

SOPRANOS

Devi is a powerful Goddess of goodness.

USHA

What is the music?

NEITH

A religious service.

USHA

Can anyone go to it?

NEITH

Yes. (grinning) You can go. I will be along later.

Neith leaves.

LA GORGON

Shakti is a flame to burn away all bad things.

SOPRANOS

Devi is a powerful Goddess of goodness.

Usha remains lying on the bed, listening at the window, then she rises and goes.

EXT EPHESUS SUNSET

In the distance is the city's ancient temple of Diana, along with the ruins of a mosque and a basilica, both bombed earlier in the day by Neith and the Selkis. Smoke drifts across. Ilona, wearing a face mask, sits on a three-legged stool, smoking from a hookah.

Two Amazons of different tribes (La Gorgon, in Ionian corporal uniform and TIAMAT, in Turkish native dress) sit on both sides of the Oracle, who is in deep trance, puffing on the hookah. While waiting for her to speak, they talk between themselves.

Usha approaches, looks around curiously, and sits down to listen.

TIAMAT

I can understand the Selkis wanting revenge, but to blow up the mosque and the basilica—The people won't stand for it!

LA GORGON

(inscrutable behind dark shades)

High chime we blasted papa church.

TIAMAT

The Christians and Moslems will hate us for this. Those were their sacred shrines! We are making enemies of the people!

LA GORGON

Go throw a grenade in the rubble. Throw around the bones of the so-called saints. *Ah bon bon!*

TIAMAT

That is not the way to make friends!

USHA

(shyly, to La Gorgon)

*Yia.* [hi]

LA GORGON

(jocular)

Yaybo.

USHA

(to Tiamat)

Excuse me, but I am not familiar with your customs here. Are you having a ritual?

TIAMAT

(sardonically)

A ritual? Our only custom is anarchy. Here, women act without constraints.

USHA

(jokingly)

Like occupants of a madhouse?

LA GORGON

(squeals with hilarity)

And girlfriend, the treatment is freedom! You want to join my tribe?

USHA

The Gorgons?

LA GORGON

Yes, we're African and I think you qualify.

USHA

I accept. Neith says I am too moderate to join the Selkis tribe.

TIAMAT

Neith makes me sick. I cannot stomach her.

La Gorgon stands up and stretches, then points at Usha, leans down to clasp her hand and pull her up, while making a mystic gesture with her other hand.

LA GORGON

Poof, you a Gorgon!

(smiles)

I'm going to get Jinji. What's keeping that girl?

La Gorgon leaves.

TIAMAT

(to Usha)

She and Neith belong to the Sect Rouge. Out in the woods is a stone table the size of a man. The ground around it is soaked with blood

USHA

(horrified)

Neith said it was all for show.

TIAMAT

Neith is a notorious killer. She gets drunk, smokes hashish and raids brothels, freeing the captive women. Among the rescued ones, some go to her willingly. She chooses the most beautiful to be her lover. She saved our general's life in battle, and ever since has been out of control, with more women than a sheik has wives.

Usha nods, holding up a hand for silence.

TIAMAT (cont’d)

(oblivous)

She does no different than the henchman of a dictator. And she acts with the unofficial approval of General Sekhmet.

USHA

Neith said she must hit them hard or Ionia will be reabsorbed.

TIAMAT

War never solved anything! We must find a better way!

Usha nods vigorously, but holds a finger in front of her lips.

USHA

I am interested in hearing what the priestess has to say.

Ilona mutters to herself. Jinji comes up to them wearing Ionian corporal uniform, with La Gorgon.

USHA

I find that people who mutter to themselves have something important to say.

Jinji laughs, but Ilona is in a deep trance and does not respond. Usha looks at her with skepticism, then renews her determination to participate in the ritual.

USHA

How does the ritual begin?

TIAMAT

(standing, faces Ilona)

O Mighty Mother of us all, by life and love do I invoke Thee. I call upon Thee to descend upon the body of Thy servant and priestess, Ilona.

LA GORGON

Say it!

TIAMAT

(reaching up with her arms)

Oh Mother, hear us. Grant us your wisdom. Queen of Heaven, protect us.

LA GORGON

Thank you!

TIAMAT

Three hundred and five women joined you yesterday in eternity. Fourteen were taken prisoner by the cruel Turks. Teach us how to free our women from the enemy. Teach us how to protect ourselves.

GORGON and JINJI

Behold the Great Mother, who brings forth the light of the world. Blessed be the Great Mother, without beginning, without end, ever- lasting to eternity!

Wailing, they raise their arms in supplication and Usha self-consciously follows their example.

ILONA

(in a trance)

My daughters, your home is safe. Why do you cry?

Neith approaches with Selkis survivor, who has one arm in a sling. Their faces, hands and feet are stained red with henna, the color of mourning, and they carry human bones, which they bang together and on the ground. Sinking down near the others, they lean on each other. Wailing, they beat their breasts and throw dirt on their heads.

TIAMAT

(ignoring them, to Ilona)

How can we defend ourselves?

ILONA

(unaware of her surroundings)

Your fury and hatred will free you.

The women gasp in astonishment and look at each other. Ilona sits, blind to anything going on around her.

SELKIS

Our tribe was hundreds. Now our number is few. Our sisters are being raped in the Turkish prison.

Selkis begins to weep. Neith leaps up, swinging a thigh bone around her head.

NEITH

KALI, hear me!

Ilona gives a violent start as the name penetrates.

NEITH

Dread Goddess, I call upon You to send Your Fury! Inspire us with Your bloody rage!

Ilona rips the mask off with such ferocity that everyone except Neith shrinks in fear. Her face is red, contorted with deep black lines in a fearsome grimace, froth spewing from her mouth. She convulses, hair flying. Neith throws her head back with a smile of triumph, then drops to her knees before the Oracle.

ILONA

(as KALI)

WHO CALLS UPON ME?

KALI the Death Goddess regards Neith and the others fiercely, while they crouch in terror.

NEITH

I seek your counsel, Great Mother.

ILONA

AVENGE THE QUEENS! STRIKE AT THE HEART OF MEN'S BELIEFS!

Neith prostrates herself at the feet of the Oracle.

NEITH

Mother, I shall obey.

The spell is broken. Ilona collapses off the three-legged stool and pulls her veil over her face. Tiamat rushes to minister to her. The others leap up, babbling excitedly. Neith slowly rises, searching her friends’ faces for reaffirmation, which is not forthcoming.

SELKIS

Incredible!

LA GORGON

Incroyable!

SELKIS

Did you see that?

LA GORGON

I had painpitations!

USHA

Who was that?

NEITH

(to anyone listening, self-mocking)

Any recruits for a raid on Marduk?

Selkis, La Gorgon and Jinji surround her.

SELKIS

How did you do that, Neith?

Tiamat cradles Ilona on her shoulder. Ilona is sobbing.

TIAMAT

Neith is in touch with demons!

USHA

(to Neith)

How could you do that to the priestess?

TIAMAT

(jumps up, to Neith)

Neith, how dare you! Ilona uses magik to heal, not kill. And you used her for your own evil games!

(sputters, furious)

Get out! Go!

LA GORGON

(sheepishly)

We got problems now!

Neith, Selkis and La Gorgon march out in a body, the first two pointedly kicking bones out of their path. Usha kneels down to console Ilona.

ILONA

(face veiled)

I am left with the image of a killing Goddess. My mind recoils at her bloodlust. Disregard it, my Sisters. The Selkis tribe has made the massacre into a personal

(more)

ILONA (cont’d)

vendetta. Wait for the war council. Obey General Sekhmet. Only in this way can we unify.

(to Usha)

You are an artist. When you sicken of destruction, we will talk.

Usha and Tiamat help her rise and she walks away, slumped over with fatigue.

INT GENERAL SEKHMET's HEADQUARTERS MORNING

The flag of Ionia on the wall above a table with maps and a military dagger. A file of war documents, and a suitcase of clothes stand open. Tiamat takes folds clothing and places it in suitcase, helping Gen. Sekhmet pack for a trip.

TIAMAT

Because of the Selkis massacre, Neith invoked a spirit of vengeance. Ilona was in a trance when suddenly she was possessed by a demon!

GEN. SEKHMET

Oh, cowshit!

La Gorgon and Selkis come in dressed like Turkish civilians, with Neith, wearing Ionian army jacket with lieutenant's chevrons on the sleeve and medals on the chest pockets. She salutes and Sekhmet returns the salute crisply, unsmiling.

NEITH

Permission to confer with you about tactics.

SEKHMET

(covers her ears, glaring at Neith)

So you victimized the priestess, yet you expect me to listen to another one of your crazy schemes!

NEITH

(looking at Tiamat)

Someone blabbed?

Tiamat leaves the room.

NEITH

(bluntly)

Marduk is in Izmir, surveying the slaughter. We are going to take him prisoner. We will secure the release of our women held prisoner at Istanbul, Brenda and the others…

SEKHMET

Very ambitious, but it won't work. Marduk is a world leader. If we kill him, world opinion will turn on us. I order you to wait until I return from Washington before taking any further action.

Neith touches Sekhmet on the arm, trying to persuade her.

NEITH

General Sekhmet, listen to me! It's the perfect opportunity! We can set it up to look like a rival Turk assassinated him.

SEKHMET

Forget this plan of yours. You bombed a mosque and a basilica, directly against orders. Wait for the decision of the council before taking any further action, or you will be relieved of your command. I order you to remain in Ephesus.

NEITH

(considers her answer)

Then I must be insubordinate.

SEKHMET

Then I demote you to private!

Picking up the dagger, she clips the chevrons from Neith's sleeve. Neith pulls away and tears the threads.

NEITH

(defiantly)

A professional guerrilla needs no rank! What good is a command of a battalion of ghosts!

SEKHMET

(flinging the chevrons to the floor)

We shall see! As of today, you have no authority in Ionia. And as for you Corporals, remain in Ephesus until my return or all three of you will be court-martialed. Dismissed!

Disgruntled, the guerrillas leave, muttering conspiratorially.

SEKHMET

(grumbling)

That upstart will not undermine my authority any longer! Let her go ahead with her mad plan and be killed. That will show them I was right!

INT BARRACKS AT EPHESUS NIGHT

Three cots and sleeping bags, gear hanging on hooks. A table with a lamp, and four chairs. A window with no curtain, a shelf with canned goods, and a hot plate on a small table next to a bowl of couscous. La Gorgon and Selkis are sitting at the table playing backgammon. Usha, in a cotton dress, stands at the hotplate cooking falafil. Neith enters, barefoot, wearing fatigues with her bemedaled army shirt hanging open. She carries a duffle bag in one hand, a sleeping bag, and a snorkel and flippers over her shoulder. The other three nudge one another and hide their smiles.

LA GORGON

Welcome to our boudoir. Hope you find it as comfy as the officers' quarters—!

She laughs at Neith's mocking scowl.

LA GORGON (cont’d)

So you made a faux pas. We ain't fussy. Just tell me somethin', Neit'. Now you a third looie, do we still got to salute?

Neith makes a rude gesture.

LA GORGON

Don't blow no fuse.

NEITH

Where's Jinji?

SELKIS

She went with her unit. They are storming Izmir.

NEITH

(to Usha)

What are you doing?

USHA

I thought you might be hungry.

Neith hangs her snorkel and flippers on a hook, drops her gear on an empty cot.

NEITH

(mutters)

I can cook.

USHA

(humoring Neith)

I know you can cook, but I made plenty for everybody.

LA GORGON

(sniffs approvingly. To Selkis)

*J'ai faim.* [I‘m hungry.] What chime is it, cuz?

SELKIS

(checks watch)

21 hundred hours.

Usha fills a plate with couscous and falafil. Neith sits at the table, and the others move the game over and take some food. As Neith eats hungrily, Usha pats her shoulder and massages her neck.

USHA

You are tense.

Neith, enjoying the massage, lets her head wag.

USHA (cont’d)

I want to be a soldier, too. I am studying with the best teacher around, General Sekhmet. Don't you think she is an expert in military strategy?

Neith chokes on the food and coughs. La Gorgon pounds Neith on the back.

LA GORGON

(smiling at Usha)

You hit a nerve, baby.

SELKIS

(to Neith)

Usha has learned a key component of strategy, Neith—the best defense is attack. Are we still planning a raid on Marduk?

NEITH

(hoarsely)

Yes. Meet at the usual time and place.

LA GORGON

That's a kicker. Count me in!

USHA

Can I come too?

Neith gives her a measuring glance and is won over, nods. Tiamat enters, sees Neith's gear on her bunk and rudely dumps it on the floor. Neith springs up with fiery eyes, but thinks better of attacking her. Swallows her anger, smiles and spreads her sleeping bag out on the floor.

NEITH

I see we have a real commando among us. Excuse me, I did not know that was your bunk.

TIAMAT

It is, and I plan to be sleeping in it momentarily. I go on furlough tomorrow, and I want to get an early start.

Tiamat throws herself on the cot. Neith mimicks her, throwing herself on her sleeping bag on the floor. She holds her arms out to Usha, who laughs and pretends to kick her. Neith grabs her ankle and pulls her down on the sleeping bag. They tussle, and Neith pins Usha by the shoulders.

NEITH

(releasing her)

I have you now.

Usha stands up and dusts herself off, followed by Neith.

USHA

So Neith, is there really a gold statue of Athena? Thirty meters tall! When you win the war, you will restore Her to the Parthenon.

Serious again, Neith shakes her head, a finger across her lips for silence.

TIAMAT

(grouchy)

I am trying to get some sleep.

LA GORGON

Is it that late already?

(shoves Selkis)

What chime is it?

SELKIS

Just add a minute to the last chime.

Usha clears away the dishes. Neith crawls inside her sleeping bag and slips out of her army shirt. Usha joins her and they settle down inside. Neith pulls her duffle bag close and takes her pistol out of it, checking to see if it is loaded. Selkis and La Gorgon settle into their bunks, turning off the lamp.

USHA

Neith?

NEITH

Huh?

USHA

Do you get aroused lying next to a woman?

NEITH

You have nothing to fear from me.

USHA

What happens when you rescue women from a house?

NEITH

(holding her forehead)

I keep telling them, "You are free, come with us," but they are afraid. Finally a few of them step forward and we drive them to our territory. As we drive away, there is a blank look on the faces of those left behind.

USHA

The rescued ones, do they become soldiers?

NEITH

Some of them.

USHA

Do they become your lovers?

NEITH

(balks)

Someone has been blabbing a lot!

USHA

Ah, the notorious terrorist who rescues women for sport. I am jealous. I thought I was the only one.

NEITH

(softly)

You are the only one.

USHA

Is it okay if we cuddle?

NEITH

People treat their friends better than their lovers.

USHA

It is okay for friends to hug, isn't it?

They snuggle together. Suddenly Usha squeals.

USHA

Oo, your gun is cold!

Neith hoots with laughter so loudly the other three grumble.

TIAMAT

Be silent!

SELKIS

We need some sleep.

A hard thump as Neith drops her gun on the floor outside the sleeping bag. Usha holds Neith and strokes her hair.

USHA

You do not need that tonight*, Sitt Hilwa*. Beautiful lady, let me hold you next to my heart. I will take care of you.

INT THE HUMBLE HUT OF HORUS NIGHT

On a mountainside overlooking Izmir. The Amazons are storming the junta-controlled city on the dark moon. HORUS, the old goatherd, and the boy TARAK are sitting around a table, with their ears glued to a shortwave radio for news of the battle. They're eating a snack. The radio buzzes with static. They quarrel over which band to listen to.

TARAK

I want to hear the Amazon communiqués!

Tarak spins the radio dial.

HORUS

The BBC has complete reports.

Horus grabs the radio and spins the dial.

TARAK

They just blew up a compound or something.

Tarak runs to the window.

TARAK

I can see the fire from here!

(more)

Horus looks askance.

TARAK (cont’d)

Just get anything! Even Gev Dench propaganda!

Horus fiddles with the dials.

HORUS

Shh! I can't hear.

VOICE OF BBC RADIO

A Gev Dench installation has just been destroyed by Amazon rockets. We are waiting for casualty figures. Fighting has intensified in the West and North. Unconfirmed reports—

Static interrupts.

TARAK

Oh Selkis of Egypt, protect my mother and her guerrillas in battle tonight.

HORUS

Blessed Be! Though Neith is too mean to die. She'll probably stop by for breakfast on her way home.

A commotion and Neith bursts in with guns, cartridge belts, and gear. Horus cowers, giving the crescent salute.

HORUS

O Lady, do not harm me, I am New Order!

NEITH

(laughs)

No, Horus, you are old.

HORUS

(miffed)

Oh, it is you! Why didn't you knock?

NEITH

My hands are full.

She sets down her gear.

TARAK

(jumping for joy)

You're all right!

(runs to her)

NEITH

(hugging him)

Sekhmet ordered me out of combat. We Selkis have been through so much, you know.

HORUS

I know. When I saw you after the massacre, you were so thin I thought you had rocks in your pockets, only it was your hipbones!

He pushes food toward her.

HORUS

Have something to eat. So western troops are on their way! Soon we'll be rid of the dictator once and for all! Try this cheese, Neith. If you don't like it, just take the holes. Try the bread.

NEITH

Got any yogurt?

HORUS

(pushes a bowl toward her)

May your culture grow.

Neith and Tarak groan and laugh.

HORUS

So how goes the fighting?

NEITH

It's taking us a while to crush them.

HORUS

And how are you relating to what's her name, Anath?

NEITH

These days, only as sisters.

Horus nods knowingly. Neith checks her watch.

NEITH

(to Tarak)

How have you been, Tarak?

TARAK

Good, I guess.

There is a knock on the door.

HORUS

Another visitation! Come in!

Usha comes in.

USHA

(to Neith)

Hello, Neith!

NEITH

(stunned, looks around in disbelief)

Usha!

Recovering her poise, Neith offers Usha a chair.

NEITH

(to Horus and Tarak)

This is Usha Tefnut. She is Sudanese, like me.

(to Usha)

Usha, this is Horus and this is Tarak.

Usha looks curiously at the boy as she sits down.

USHA

Hello, Horus. Hello, Tarak.

They nod politely.

NEITH

(to Usha)

How did you know I was here?

USHA

I consulted an oracle.

NEITH

Oh, that Ilona! She has a big mouth.

USHA

When you sneaked off in the middle of the night I was worried! I thought we were friends.

HORUS

You want to be friends with a notorious outlaw? You're too nice, you're too young, you're too gentle for this Taraka.

USHA

I agree. She's too bad, too old, and too rough for me, but I adore her anyway.

HORUS

Bad, old, rough, and with more notches on her bed than on her gun.

NEITH

Shut up, Horus, or I’ll have one more on my gun.

HORUS

(scoffs)

Hah! Then who would take care of Tarak? Your women won't have him around.

Neith gets up to feel Tarak's ribs. It tickles and he smiles and squirms away.

NEITH

He's skinny.

HORUS

He's growing fast. He eats like a horse!

Neith pulls bills from her shirt pocket.

NEITH

Take this and get him some decent clothes.

She gives Horus the money. He pockets it.

HORUS

He's doing well in school. Tarak, show Neith your school work.

Tarak shows her school papers and she looks through them. Usha watches this interaction intently.

NEITH

Very good drawings, Tarak, but you need to work on your arithmetic.

She gives the papers back and Tarak puts them on the table. Usha leans over to put an arm around Neith and kiss her. Clowning, Neith sinks to the floor and holds her arms out to Usha. Usha falls on top of her and they hug.

NEITH

Now I have faith in our friendship.

USHA

Sure. And there's really a gold statue of Athena sunk in the Aegean. Fifty feet tall!

NEITH

Forty feet. And not solid gold, ivory bonded with gold.

USHA

When you win the war, you will make it a national priority to restore Her to the Parthenon. Is that why you're going into Izmir?

NEITH

(jumps)

Shh! What's wrong with you?

HORUS

(throws hands up)

I did not hear anything!

TARAK

(anxiously)

Mother, are you going to Izmir?

Neith stands up and rumples his hair.

NEITH

No, Tarak, just to Troy.

She glares at Usha as Usha rises.

HORUS

Sure. And you also love men.

NEITH

Hey—I have to fight them. It's the only way I feel strong.

HORUS

Score one for you.

USHA

How did you ever manage to have a child?

Horus and Tarak look expectantly at Neith and she gets defensive.

NEITH

(to herself)

Ilona has really been talking a lot!

USHA

It wasn't parthenogenesis. He's male.

NEITH

It couldn't be helped.

(aside to Usha)

Can you keep a secret? I went to bed with a man.

USHA

Who was this fortunate person?

TARAK

(butts in, to Usha)

Hassan Khalil.

NEITH

(shrugs)

An Algerian sailor I met in Port Said. I only knew him for a week before he shipped out.

TARAK

He was handsome and a lot of fun.

NEITH

After Tarak was born I did skin- diving, retrieving treasures from shipwrecks. And the sponge harvest.

(sigh)

And then we moved to Ionia.

USHA

But the Amazons didn't want him around.

NEITH

Even Ilona, who sneaks off to Istanbul to meet men, insisted there be no males in the tribal lands. I had no alternative.

HORUS

(shaking a finger)

That's right. There was nothing but trouble till Neith met Horus the goatherd—

(striking his chest)

—who always wanted a little son. And Tarak came to live with Horus.

Horus hugs Tarak.

NEITH

—who has given Neith a pain in the neck ever since.

HORUS

—cause he knows how soft she is under that hard shell.

NEITH

(can't think of a comeback)

Your goats are calling. Maaaa!

She sticks out her tongue at him.

HORUS

I can take a hint.

(yawns)

It is late. Sleep here if you like. Good to meet you, Usha. Come on Tarak, let's go to bed.

Tarak kisses Neith good night. Tarak goes into the next room with Horus. Neith spreads out her sleeping bag. She and Usha settle down on it, close together. Neith assures herself that her guns are nearby and loaded, then tries to go to sleep.

USHA

Neith?

NEITH

Hm?

USHA

Do you always sleep next to loaded guns?

NEITH

Don't worry, I won't slip up.

(tosses and turns)

USHA

Neith?

NEITH

Huh?

USHA

Tell me a story. Is it okay if we get in and snuggle up? I am cold.

They get into the sleeping bag. They hug. Neith plays with Usha's hair.

NEITH

I'll tell you a story. There was a woman, one of four wives. Her husband was a no-account who hung out under the baobab tree, drinking beer with the men of the village. She had two daughters and two sons. She was pregnant, but had to carry heavy water jugs to the hut where they lived. She went into labor. The midwife said she had a fistula. A rupture. Griz scars obstructed the labor. The baby was Caesarian. The mother died.

USHA

(absorbs the information)

That used to be common in the villages. It must have been horrible …for you.

NEITH

I held her as she died. My sister took care of the boys and the baby. But with the bride price, the father saw a chance to make some money. Within a year, my sister was married off to an old man who already had three wives, and children older than she was. He was Moslem so they did the griz and the tahara. They sewed her up for him. She was to be married to him and cut open. So she hanged herself. I had no one to take care of me. Sometimes I had to look for food in the trash. But my brothers— the father and his senior wife adopted them. They went to school and got new clothes and plenty to eat.

Neith sinks her head onto Usha's breast. Usha strokes her hair, soothing her as Neith hides her face, shaking.

USHA

Never mind. *May khallif, sitt hilwa.*

They lie still for a moment. Someone knocks. Horus creeps past in the dark to answer it.

HORUS

My dear lady!

Selkis comes in. She looks curiously at Neith, who gathers herself up with an averted face.

SELKIS

Sorry to interrupt.

Neith glances at watch on underside of her wrist.

NEITH

I did not realize it was so late.

SELKIS

Our Gorgon friend had to convince Sekhmet she couldn't go in with the advance shock troops. She got a medical excuse.

Neith picks up her cartridge belts and guns.

NEITH

(casually)

Are you coming, *Sitt Hilwa?*

Neith puts her arm around Usha and kisses her cheek. The three women leave.

EXT IZMIR, AT THE CITADEL PRISON SUNDOWN

Tropical flowers in a courtyard, with a statue of Selkis, the Scorpion Goddess next to a smashed statue of Poseidon and his trident. Bars of the prison, which the Amazons have recaptured from the Gev Dench. ABHU MARDUK and his OFFICER sit handcuffed and guarded by heavily-armed La Gorgon and Selkis, disguised in Turkish peasant dresses with scarves around their faces. Usha studies the Selkis statue and picks up the Poseidon fragments.

MARDUK

Allow me to compliment you ladies on your clever disguises. The donkey loaded with grapes was a stroke of genius.

SELKIS

Shut up, squid.

Usha has a sudden idea, but no one responds to her enthusiasm.

USHA

I shall design totem armbands for the tribes. A scorpion for the Selkis, a sphinx for the Gorgons--

Neith enters in khaki jacket and pants, stops near Marduk. He regards her with fear and adoration, finding her exotic and dangerous. She taunts him.

NEITH

Coming here over-confident, with a tiny squad of men, thinking the Amazons stupid and unprepared. We will mash you underfoot.

MARDUK

Most gracious Taraka—

NEITH

We will execute your men one every quarter hour until we receive word that the Selkis prisoners held at Ankara have been released at our border.

She checks her watch.

MARDUK

(trying to be funny)

But my dear Taraka, I cannot accomplish their release.

NEITH

What did you call me?

Neith grabs him by the collar and twists it, half-choking him.

NEITH

You will release them, liar.

She takes Marduk's officer, stalks O.S. with him and a shot rings out. Marduk quails, and his head sinks forward.

Neith returns with “the officer's head,” holding it up by the hair. Usha looks on in revulsion as Neith displays the blood-dripping head to Marduk and the Amazons. Usha averts her face, sickened, but the Amazons scream shrilly and fire their guns in the air.

MARDUK

(gasping)

This is nothing new. I know what harpies you are.

NEITH

Leave him for the vultures.

Neith places the head as an offering before the Selkis statue, signals to La Gorgon to dispose of the body. La Gorgon goes off.

NEITH

(to Marduk)

Three men are left, and then you.

USHA

Oh mercy—

Usha runs off in the other direction. Neith takes a matchbox from her pocket and walks over to Marduk.

NEITH

My pet scorpion.

She opens the box and releases the eight-legged creature with coiled tail. It drops on Marduk's leg.

MARDUK

(panicky)

Get it off!

(shakes violently)

NEITH

Don't hurt it!

The scorpion falls on the ground. Neith scoops it up, into the box. La Gorgon returns, blood on her dress.

NEITH

(to La Gorgon and Selkis)

Hold him.

MARDUK

No!

Selkis and La Gorgon pin him back in the chair. Neith puts the scorpion on his neck and he becomes very still, stretches his head back, eyeing it fearfully. Talking to him quietly, she smiles, watching the scorpion.

NEITH

Marduk, you walked into a trap and you must make the best of it. Let the Selkis women go. You have to release them. There is no other choice.

She scoops it up and returns the box to her pocket.

NEITH

We are wasting time.

She leaves. There is an interval of waiting, during which the women guards check their watches, whistle as though bored, and study their fingernails. Marduk's head sinks onto his chest. The sunlight slants and becomes dusk. They light torches. Finally Usha returns, carrying the walkie-talkie, and confronts Marduk.

USHA

Radio your garrison and order the release. I cannot reason with her. She is taking another man out of his cell. Please—no more bloodshed!

MARDUK

(shaking his head, fazed)

Call her.

Selkis goes and returns with Neith, her bloody machete swinging on her hip, a pistol in her hand. Neith stops directly in front of Marduk and looks down at him, waiting.

MARDUK

(half-choked and terrified)

Let me go and I will do as you say. Just let me leave. You can reoccupy your—your—blasted necropolis.

NEITH

(pleased)

That is more like it.

She activates the radio and holds the transmitter to his mouth.

MARDUK

(in choked voice)

This is General Marduk calling headquarters. Come in, Ankara.

MALE VOICE

(broken by static)

This is Ankara headquarters. (static) We read you, General. What is your location?

MARDUK

Release the Selkis prisoners. Fly them to the border checkpoint and turn them over to the Amazons. Acknowledge.

MALE VOICE

That is your order?

MARDUK

Release them.

MALE VOICE

As you say, General.

Neith clicks off the radio and hands it back to Usha.

MARDUK

(to Neith)

Now I am free to go?

Neith points her pistol between his eyes.

NEITH

Go west.

USHA

Neith, no!

NEITH

(to Marduk)

Your transport has one hour to reach the border, or I spill your worthless brains in this court.

Marduk squirms with fear. Neith gives Usha a scathing look and walks away, signaling to the Selkis, who follows her. They talk softly together.

MARDUK

(to Usha)

Gentle lady, I do not know who you are, but you know the meaning of mercy and compassion for human life. I will reward you with safe conduct throughout Turkey—

Selkis looks up from her conversation with Neith.

SELKIS

(to Marduk)

Be still, Marduk.

Selkis also looks annoyed with Usha.

USHA

(to Marduk)

Don't assume I am on your side. I saw what you did at Izmir, and I hate everything you stand for. But the quickest way to achieve peace is for you to sit down at the bargaining table with General Sekhmet and negotiate.

MARDUK

I will take your ideas under advisement.

Neith has been chewing on a bidi, listening to the exchange. She signals to La Gorgon.

NEITH

Put him in a cell.

LA GORGON

(to Marduk)

Come to school, fool.

Neith watches inscrutably as La Gorgon removes Marduk, roughly. La Gorgon returns.

NEITH

(to La Gorgon)

Radio for reinforcements to fortify the town.

La Gorgon takes the radio from Usha, transmits a message in French.

LA GORGON

*Les soeurs de la matrie…*

[sisters of the motherland]

Neith walks up to Usha and glowers at her.

NEITH

(to Usha)

Stop fraternizing. If you soften him up I will have to kill more of his men to make him cooperate.

USHA

Power to kill is all you have, Neith. Do you ever get mixed up who you're shooting?

Neith loses composure for a moment and hangs her head. Usha presses her advantage.

USHA

If you would take a creative approach and talk to him like a human being—

NEITH

(straightening up)

You coddle and encourage him.

USHA

I want to create, not kill.

NEITH

(sarcastic)

Terrific. Get on the donkey and go back to Ephesus. Create some art—

because you are no fighter!

USHA

(stung)

That's right! I'm not like you and I don't want to be!

She walks away.

LA GORGON

(switching off the radio)

The moderates are dissing us.

NEITH

(to La Gorgon)

Let the thumb-twiddlers talk all they like. That's what they're good at.

(glancing at the grisly head)

If we return now, Sekhmet will have us locked up.

SELKIS

Let's stay here and run wild for a time.

NEITH

Agreed.

(calls after Usha)

See you at the Equinox celebration!

USHA

Thanks for the warning!

Usha leaves. Neith holds her forehead at the parting blow. La Gorgon walks over to Neith, puts an arm around her shoulder.

LA GORGON

Ilona has a crib in Ankara. Maybe we can con her into giving us the key. I'll get us a jeep for our next action.

EXT IZMIR, CITADEL COURTYARD MORNING

Six weeks later. A skull at the base of the Selkis statue. Seated on a bench is Anath, pensively smoking a pipe. Jill stands peering out into the distance with binoculars. Three U.S. WOMEN SOLDIERS (Elena, Claire, and Theodora) cross the courtyard carrying suitcases and duffle bags. Gawking around like tourists, they elbow each other and mutter a few comments. Gen. Nancy crosses carrying a duffle bag, sees Anath and Jill. Gen. Nancy puts her gear down for a moment to mop her brow with an olive drab handkerchief, stares at the locale. Noticing the skull, she gives a start.

GEN. NANCY

Oh my God! Did you notice that skull?

ANATH

(satirically)

It's the cannibals.

She puffs her pipe with averted eyes.

GEN. NANCY

(moans)

I feel like I drank some bad water.

She heaves her duffle bag onto her shoulder and follows the others. Jill glances briefly at the skull, then resumes gazing at the view.

JILL

(to Anath)

I can't get over it, Anath. This is the life! Look at the women laying pipe in the ground. Not one of them has a shirt on!

ANATH

It's too hot.

JILL

I'm going native.

She unbuttons her shirt, raises the binoculars again, smiles.

JILL

Look at 'em, playing in the waterfall.

(frowns)

Hey. A man.

ANATH

Let me see.

Rising to join her, Anath looks through the binoculars.

ANATH

It's only an old goatherd.

(drily)

I'm sure he's matriarchist.

Anath returns binoculars to Jill and starts to light pipe again, but it's empty.

ANATH

We're out of cake-box.

JILL

(looking through binoculars)

Neith has cake-box.

ANATH

Then I suppose we’ll have to contend with her. She's…obstreperous, since winning another victory.

JILL

Obs—what? Look at the crew of women building a barracks. Sweating in the sun.

ANATH

Sweating and swaggering.

JILL

Swaggering.

She catches sight of something.

JILL

Look at the woman riding bareback!

Anath takes the binoculars and looks where Jill indicates.

ANATH

(poker-faced)

What a gorgeous horse!

Jill pans once more with the binoculars, then drops them to hang by their strap.

JILL

I guess we'll be living in a tent till they finish the barracks.

ANATH

There could be lodgings for another battalion here.

Brenda comes in. She sees Anath and comes over to shake hands.

BRENDA

Hello, Anath. We met in New York.

Anath clasps Brenda's hand.

ANATH

I remember you. Brenda from Berlin, right?

BRENDA

I was born there, but I am Selkis now. From Ionia…I hope you are both coming to the celebration in Ephesus tomorrow.

ANATH

What's the occasion?

BRENDA

The Equinox. We always have a big party for Equinox. Everybody's going.

Looking off to the side, Brenda hangs her head. Anath sits down and indicates the bench beside her.

ANATH

Sit down for a minute.

Brenda sits next to her.

ANATH

It must have been horrible in the Ankara prison.

Brenda forces back tears.

BRENDA

We were raped and tortured by Marduk’s inquisitors. Watching the other women suffer was worse than my own pain. The weak ones died.

ANATH

Thank the Goddess you escaped.

BRENDA

Thank Taraka. Or we would all be dead.

Leaning back, Brenda closes her eyes.

BRENDA

Thank Goddess for Taraka! She saved us!

Anath absorbs this information silently. Gen. Sekhmet enters with Gen. Nancy. Immediately she notices the skull with an exclamation of disgust.

SEKHMET

Corporal!

(calling O.S.)

Corporal!

La Gorgon enters, salutes the generals.

SEKHMET

(with controlled displeasure)

Remove that…thing.

La Gorgon picks up the skull with a slight smile, fingers in the eye-holes, acts out bowling with it, then notices Sekhmet glaring at her, exits rapidly. Gen. Nancy reels with nausea, catches the back of the bench to steady herself.

GEN. NANCY

I don't think the climate here agrees with me. Where's the medical unit?

ANATH

(to Sekhmet)

Is this part of Ionia really plagued with cannibals, Your Excellency?

SEKHMET

It's plagued with TARAKA.

Jill sits down on the bench, crowding the other two. She reaches an arm to grasp Anath. Brenda composes herself, wiping her eyes with a tissue.

GEN. NANCY

(anxiously)

Is Taraka some kind of native disease? Maybe that's what I have.

Anath hoots with laughter. Jill joins in. Brenda smiles wanly. Gen. Nancy snorts.

GEN. NANCY

(to Jill)

Aw, go button your shirt.

Jill and Anath crack up laughing. Brenda chuckles.

SEKHMET

(to Gen. Nancy)

A Turk was executed so the Selkis prisoners would be freed.

ANATH

Who knows, perhaps Selkis will receive more offerings in the weeks ahead.

SEKHMET

(to Gen. Nancy)

This action was not authorized and when I find the persons responsible, they will be chastised.

Anath stands up, forcing Sekhmet to see her.

ANATH

Any act that furthers our cause is to some degree excusable. Even terror is a tactic—if done with finesse—

SEKHMET

I disagree. Every government in the civilized world has condemned terrorism—Ionia included. Desecrating corpses makes us look like barbarians in the public eye.

ANATH

Taraka does tend to dramatize this war.

SEKHMET

(flaring up at the name)

If so-called Taraka and her friends do not begin to respect protocol, they will be court-martialed and locked up for the duration of the war.

ANATH

You have Taraka under your command?

GEN. NANCY

(dumbfounded)

Taraka is that terrorist who—

Dismayed at Nancy's reaction, Sekhmet knows she has let something slip.

SEKHMET

(to Anath)

As you know, Anath, I am not accountable for her actions.

(to Gen. Nancy)

When we were understaffed we had to accommodate…violent tactics…for security reasons. Taraka is the code name of…one of my officers who was uniquely…But the war is… (stammers)

Our goal is recognition from the United Nations. A renegade like that…

ANATH

Her activities have broken morale in the Gev Dench.

(smiles)

Not unrelated, they're having an attack of cholera. If we attack them now, we can stage a coup.

SEKHMET

(to Anath)

You are here to learn, Anath. Now be realistic. Our best hope is a retaliatory drive to the northeast, to knock out their build-up and restore security to Izmir. Don't argue with me!

Elena, Claire and Theodora walk past wearing bermuda shorts and tank tops, tossing a volleyball around. They salute the generals and Sekhmet beams, basking in the attention.

SEKHMET

(to the U.S. women soldiers)

How do you troops like it so far?

ELENA

*Chevarez*! [Cool.]

THEODORA

That goes double for me!

ANATH

(agreeably)

Palm trees and the Aegean are hard to beat.

JILL

(mutters)

Let's hope we are.

CLAIRE

Where's the party?

SEKHMET

Into the troop carriers, and head for Ephesus! We have a festival to attend.

EXT EPHESUS NIGHT

Evening of the following day. Half-buried ancient Earth Mother with lotus crown. Torches burn from posts. La Gorgon and Selkis set up drums and bells. They wear tunics, clasped at the arm by totem armlets. Elena, Claire and Theodora stand out in their bermuda shorts and tank tops. A loudspeaker plays women’s music and the three of them sing along.

TIAMAT

What kind of music is that?

Jinji and Brenda walk up dressed in Amazon tunics. Tiamat mixes war paint (red clay). They take some and stripe their cheeks. Usha walks over in a white tunic. She carries wine jugs and places them on a table. Usha scratches her stomach, her newly-protruding waistline. Neith comes over in a blue tunic, scorpion armlet on one arm, feathers in her afro.

USHA

(aside to Neith)

You are looking well tonight. You would be beautiful if it weren't for your bad ways.

Neith helps herself to a glass of wine and downs it rapidly.

NEITH

After a month, that is all you say to me?

USHA

I want to see children playing in the streets, not craters from bombs. You show death to children, and I am carrying a child—

Neith smiles, glances down at her.

USHA

—whose father you killed. Abdul.

Jill walks past wearing slacks and a velour top, pauses to look curiously at Tiamat’s pot of red clay. Neith is frowning at Usha's remark, puzzled.

NEITH

(to Usha, sotto voce)

How can you blame me for shooting a rapist?

USHA

(aside)

I suppose it never occurred to you —that I might have been willing at the time? I did not know he would kidnap me.

Neith wheels away abruptly, with a fierce look at Usha, who chides her.

USHA

Crazy, dangerous woman! Everyone is afraid of you.

NEITH

Ilona's boy? And you fancied him? He got you in this condition—?

Usha stamps her foot in exasperation. Neith pours herself another glass of wine. With a grim face, she walks away, to her Selkis friends at the drums. La Gorgon, seeing Neith's expression, tries to kid her out of it.

LA GORGON

You having a *boeuf?*

Anath comes over, dressed in a tailored suit. She beckons to Jill and they sit down. Sekhmet walks up wearing a uniform with a sphinx armlet. She raises a hand for order, and everyone seats herself except for Neith, who remains standing. Sekhmet walks up to her and Neith gives her a level, resolute look, then looks out into the distance.

SEKHMET

You will be confined to quarters following this meeting.

Curling her lip, Neith struggles to remain dignified and tough, but her comrades La Gorgon and Selkis whisper conspiratorially. Sekhmet returns to central spot. Neith sits down next to Selkis and hand signals are exchanged. Jinji and Brenda join them.

SEKHMET

(raising a hand for silence)

We of Ionia greet our Western sisters, who have responded in our time of need. We invite you Aquazons to make Ionia your home. May the Goddess further your purpose here.

Amazons raise both hands at arms’ length in a gesture of reverence. Aquazons half-heartedly imitate the gesture. Anath fills her pipe and begins puffing pensively.

SEKHMET

We are here tonight to discuss strategy. First let's review our history in this country.

The Amazons groan and stretch out for a long harangue.

LA GORGON

(to Anath)

Gimme some of that long green.

ANATH

Mazuma?

LA GORGON

No, cake-box.

Brenda produces a bag of tobacco and asks around for papers. Theodora takes out a tampon and tears off the wrapper, flattening it out. Brenda looks aghast at this barbarism.

BRENDA

Don't you have sponges yet?

SEKHMET

(loudly)

Our history in this country!

Everyone snaps to attention, except for Brenda, intent on rolling a cigarette. Jill produces a lighter, and La Gorgon takes a puff.

SEKHMET

It all began when archaeologists rediscovered women's glorious past. Educated women spread the word about ancient matriarchy to their sisters in Egypt, Africa, Turkey, Greece…

The women groan as the list drags on.

SEKHMET

…Italy, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, India, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Russia, China…

They laugh as the list appears endless.

SEKHMET

Mexico, Honduras, Java, Japan…

(sonorously)

And in all these countries there were Goddesses.

Gen. Nancy comes rushing up, out of breath.

GEN. NANCY

Am I late?

ANATH

You missed the entire world!

La Gorgon takes a long smoke and passes the cake-box.

LA GORGON

Well this has been a sensay chivoo, but…

JILL

Yeah, some party!

La Gorgon ambles off as Gen. Nancy seats herself next to Sekhmet with great ceremony.

GEN. NANCY

I rushed over from the medical tent for the strategy session.

SEKHMET

(pompously hems and haws)

Where was I?

TIAMAT

Japan.

SEKHMET

When the Turkish women got busy, the Mideast Feminist Alliance was ready to help. We seized the Goddess temple ruins in Yazilikaya, Sardis, Boghazkoy, Alaca Huyuk, Beycesultan…

(more)

The women move about restlessly, whisper among themselves and she speeds up.

SEKHMET (cont’d)

…Catal Huyuk, Karatepe, Kultepe and Troy. It was then the Gev Dench took action to drive us out of Turkey.

Jill dozes off. Anath gives her a push and everyone laughs.

SEKHMET

Five years ago, Ionia declared sovereignty and went to war against the dictator. We consolidated control of the West by taking over Izmir…

ANATH

(to Jill, sotto voce)

I have to urinate.

SEKHMET

The Selkis tribe occupied Izmir and it became our strategic base on the Aegean.

(fiercely)

A short time ago, the military junta took Izmir away from us.

Everyone sobers up.

SEKHMET

…killing over three hundred women, many Turkish civilians, and taking fourteen prisoners. The prisoners were subsequently released…

BRENDA

(leaps up)

After being raped and tortured in the Ankara prison.

SEKHMET

—in violation of international law—and Izmir was won back.

BRENDA

I demand to be recognized.

SEKHMET

(sternly)

You have the floor.

BRENDA

As one of the prisoners taken at Izmir, at this time I extend our collective thanks to the women who gained our freedom—Neith and her cadre who kidnapped Marduk!

Cheers and applause until Neith stands and basks in the ovation, arms flung wide, turning from side to side. Brenda kisses her on both cheeks. Jill claps her on the back. Sekhmet looks displeased, raises a hand for order and waits till everyone is seated and silent.

BRENDA

The avenging angel, who protects women with her rage.

She kisses Neith warmly. Usha looks chagrined. Selkis stands up to address the meeting.

SELKIS

I would like to report myself for helping Neith rescue the prisoners.

SEKHMET

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss regulations. Any tactics used without the sanction of this council endanger our cause. We are vying for recognition by the United Nations—

Selkis and La Gorgon boo and hiss.

SEKHMET

We have moved beyond impulsive violence. We now have a military in the proper sense of the word. At this time I would like to announce that Anath Nammu will be acting as Minister of State for Ionia. I present Anath.

Cheers and applause. Anath stands up.

ANATH

Thank you, President Sekhmet. We pledge our loyalty to Ionia. My country. Our country.

(to the women)

After reviewing the situation, we are planning an all-out drive on

(more)

ANATH (cont’d)

Istanbul, with the intent of storming Ankara next month. What we are planning is a coup d’etat.

Her words are received with an excited uproar.

SEKHMET

We will meet tomorrow at headquarters for a detailed briefing.

(with a wave of dismissal)

That will be all.

Everyone rises. Ilona appears wearing black robes and a black, peaked hat. Selkis starts drumming and Elena joins in on the bells. Brenda and Jinji start an aggressive war dance, stamping their feet, slapping their thighs, yelling and waving machetes. Anath walks with Neith, over to Usha. Tiamat streaks the Aquazons’ faces with red and blue war paint and they whirl around the Goddess statue. Usha moves with the rhythm but doesn't join in the dance.

ANATH

(to Neith)

Congratulations on retaking Izmir and freeing the Selkis women. I'll be back in a sec.

(turns in parting, emphatically)

That was brilliant, Neith, really.

Anath leaves.

NEITH

(calls after her)

Thank you.

Neith stares at Usha. Usha pretends not to notice. Sekhmet turns to Ilona.

SEKHMET

I now turn the meeting over to the high priestess, Ilona.

(gives Ilona the nod)

In time with the drums, Ilona begins shouting a chant.

ILONA

SOVEREIGN OF THE HEAVENS—

AMAZONS

(picking up the refrain)

GIVE US LAND, THAT KNOWS NOT THE TREAD OF MAN.

ILONA

Overturn his weight upon us.

AMAZONS

Let the wind caress our breasts. Let us walk in pride and dignity, and ride free.

ILONA

We shall reinvent society.

AMAZONS

We shall be free.

ILONA

Convene O Goddesses of War!

The Aquazons watch the Amazons battle rage, with alarm. Jill approaches Sekhmet.

JILL

(to Sekhmet)

Do they always get this worked up before a battle?

SEKHMET

They are still angry about the massacre.

ILONA

THEY CALLED THE GODDESS--

AMAZONS

OUT OF THE STONE.

ILONA

TWO THOUSAND YEARS HER PRISON AND HOME. They called Her—

AMAZONS

Devi, mighty Isis! Shala, Queen! Rhea Ininni!

ILONA

AWAKEN FROM YOUR SLEEP!

Anath returns, zipping her fly, clowns a little as she walks up to Neith. Neith and Anath laugh and bump their hips together to the drumbeat, stamping and yelling with the rest. Usha watches them darkly. Ilona blesses the Amazons and Aquazons with a mystical sign.

ILONA

(smiles)

Keep your bollines keen!

Ilona walks away. Sekhmet watches the war dance approvingly. Jill starts stamping her foot in time with the beat.

JILL

I guess it's healthy for us.

Jill gets caught up in the war dance, rips her shirt open and joins in. Gen. Nancy stares, astounded at the violence of the chanting and dancing. Tiamat goes for a glass of wine, puts her arm around Usha. Neith sips wine with her eyes on Usha, who flirts with Tiamat. Suddenly Neith flings her wine on the ground and roughly knocks Tiamat's arm away from Usha.

NEITH

TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF! SHE IS MINE!

Collective gasp from everyone. Tiamat angrily raises her fists at Neith. The drummers stop playing.

ANATH

(breezily)

How unsisterly of you, Neith. How… male.

NEITH

It's my pride, and males have no premium on that.

USHA

(sarcastic)

You aren't this selfish with your donkey.

Everyone laughs. Neith flushes with embarrassment.

TIAMAT

Hit me, will you!

NEITH

(contemptuously)

Save it for the Turks.

Tiamat lunges for Neith and they scuffle. Usha cries out with anger, pulling at Neith to make her stop. Neith lights into Tiamat. Selkis and Brenda cheer Neith on.

SEKHMET

Break it up!

ANATH

(to Neith and Tiamat)

Quarreling over a woman is politico inco!

(lights her pipe)

Jill and Theodora grab Neith by the arms and restrain her.

SEKHMET

(to Neith)

I place you under arrest for direct violation of your orders.

(to Jill and Theodora)

Take her to headquarters.

Neith is led off. Usha watches sadly but holds her ground. Selkis and Brenda prepare to follow Neith, but Sekhmet catches them up short.

SEKHMET

You two are confined to your quarters.

Grumbling, Selkis and Brenda leave.

ANATH

(to Sekhmet)

Don't be too hard on Neith.

SEKHMET

I have heard enough! I must restore some semblance of discipline!

Signaling to Gen. Nancy, stalks away.

EXT EPHESUS NIGHT

Five minutes later, on the path to Headquarters. Ferns, bushes and palm trees, dense undergrowth. Neith struggles with her captors, Jill and Theodora. La Gorgon leaps out from behind the ferns in battle fatigues. With a yell, Selkis, Brenda and Jinji spring out from the bushes and overpower the others. Neith wrenches herself free, and the newly-reunited Taraka gang grabs packs of gear and takes to their heels.

NEITH

My avenging angels!

Running, the Taraka members escape. Sekhmet shouts after them furiously.

THEODORA

Anarchists! Traitors! You will be exiled from Ionia!

JILL

(disgusted)

Oh, let them go.

INT ANKARA, ILONA's APARTMENT NIGHT

April, the New Moon (Ramadan, the Moslem Holy Day). Carpets, cushions, sleeping bags. Weapons piled on the floor. Window with windowseat, showing silhouette of mosque minaret and a crescent moon in the sky, horns facing left. Candles burning.

The Taraka gang, three dressed Turkish style in loose-fitting pants and long tops. Brenda wears a dress and lapis earrings. Selkis and La Gorgon play backgammon while Brenda catalogs the grenades, plastic explosives, automatic rifles, handguns and cartridge belts. Neith sits at the window, staring off at the dark street and the stars. Withdrawn, she rubs her forehead and holds her head in her hand. La Gorgon stands up, puts away the game.

LA GORGON

Our getaway—*quelle vitesse!* [What speed!] The moderates almost had us! Ilona's true blue.

BRENDA

This makes an ideal hiding place.

SELKIS

The coup cannot succeed unless we strike hard.

BRENDA

Let's plan a diversion.

SELKIS

They are all in the mosque for Ramadan. The men in their segregated section.

BRENDA

Great idea!

Brenda stands up and walks over to embrace Neith. Her long hair trails over Neith. Neith ignores her.

BRENDA

Don't you love us any more?

Neith puts her arm around Brenda.

NEITH

Yes.

BRENDA

I hope you approve of our plan.

Neith resumes staring out at the sky.

SELKIS

Neith, I hope you are not losing your nerve.

BRENDA

If we succeed we’ll get a Hera’s welcome in Ionia. All will be forgiven. And the ones who criticized us will look the fools.

SELKIS

If we succeed, this will be Ionia.

LA GORGON

And if we fail, oh-la-la.

BRENDA

I suppose you could call us a suicide squad.

SELKIS

If we die for our cause, we go direct to paradise. I shall fast and make atonement.

The others stare at her.

LA GORGON

I don't feel guilty over killing Papa Man. My heart's light as a feather!

BRENDA

It's agreed then. In the morning, we each take a target, split up, and rendezvous here at dusk. We wait until midnight. Anyone who hasn't returned by then is presumed dead. We must get out fast.

LA GORGON

*Mais oui!*

SELKIS

On my faith.

They wait for Neith to speak, but she is silent.

BRENDA

There should be one more of us. Still, I am glad Jinji stayed in Ephesus to plead for our cause.

(to Neith)

Do you miss Usha?

NEITH

(with a heavy sigh)

My sisters, I accept the mission. But after this I am giving up violence.

The other three groan.

SELKIS

You are soft.

Selkis and the two others lie down in sleeping bags. Neith blows out one candle and places the other at her head. She lies down on the floor cushions and wraps up in blankets.

BRENDA

Sleep well, sisters.

The three of them go to sleep. Neith lies awake, face in hands. Sound of soft chimes. Door opens by itself. Neith feels around for a gun and aims it at the door. Ilona floats in, wearing a black dress with silver sparkles. She stands illuminated in the candlelight. Neith softly lays the gun on the floor. Ilona gazes down on the sleeping women.

NEITH

Shut the door.

Door closes by itself.

ILONA

I was fetched here to tell you there has been a change. You may come home now.

Ilona sits down on the windowseat and Neith draws close to her. Ilona cradles Neith’s head in her lap.

NEITH

I want to come home and be with Usha and raise our children. My past has led to this. Now I must face my destiny. I fear tomorrow!

ILONA

Are you sorry for all the souls you have sent beyond?

(reproachfully)

You could have spared Abdul.

NEITH

I am afraid of what I am about to do.

ILONA

As you contemplate tomorrow, you are sorry for the souls you will send beyond. But you have protection. Your conscience is clear.

She places her hand on Neith’s head in a benediction, then rises to leave.

ILONA

Blessings on your goal, my liberator. Keep your hearth-rock clean and your bolline keen.

Door opens by itself. Ilona departs.

INT ANKARA, ILONA'S APARTMENT NIGHT

The flat is deserted. Outside, the minaret is gone and a plume of smoke rises against the sunset. A scurry in the hallway. La Gorgon and Selkis limp through the door, bruised and bloody, their clothing sooty and tattered. Locking the door, they crouch together.

SELKIS

I did not expect the police to react so quickly!

LA GORGON

I never thought they would throw a grenade at a crowded bus!

SELKIS

Because of our stupidity, women and children were injured.

LA GORGON

We were lucky to get out alive.

There is a triple knock on the door.

LA GORGON

Neith!

BRENDA

It is I, Brenda.

La Gorgon lets her in. Brenda comes in wearing a long dress and sweater. She carries shopping bags and a heavy package. She is laughing.

BRENDA

I had to check my package in the marketplace. I waited for the policeman to staple my bag, then bought us food and clothing. When I got back, my package was still there. He turned it over without question. But I couldn't get near the Aslanhane mosque. All the mosques were evacuated after the first bomb.

Brenda notices her comrades' sorry state for the first time.

BRENDA

(concerned)

What happened to you?

SELKIS

Police nearly caught us and we threw the bomb at them and jumped on a bus. But the bus driver started off so slowly, the police threw a grenade at us just as I detonated the bomb. The grenade went off and we were trapped in the bus, but we escaped in the confusion.

LA GORGON

We got the cop car.

BRENDA

(looking out the window)

Neith got the Haci Bayram mosque.

LA GORGON

(nodding, grimly)

She's still out there!

BRENDA

(after a pause)

We should claim credit, and be on our way.

LA GORGON

We said we would wait until midnight.

SELKIS

She would have returned by now, if she could.

LA GORGON

(shakes her head, sadly)

They have her.

INT ANKARA, MARDUK'S HEADQUARTERS SUNSET

The same evening, in the Citadel Fortress, Marduk, in Middle Eastern uniform with beribboned cap and epaulets, sits at a large desk. A barred window. Two chairs, one empty. Marduk's male secretary JALIL sits with pen and steno pad, taking notes. The desk is cluttered with maps, old coffee cups, a bottle of liquor and glasses, and books, including the Koran. A desktop flag of Turkey. TV set is tuned to a newscast.

MALE VOICE O.S.

(British Accent)

I am speaking with Anath Nammu, Ionia's Minister of State, following yesterday's victory over government troups north of Izmir.

VOICE OF ANATH

The junta has relinquished our territory. To ensure security we will continue the advance on Istanbul.

Marduk signals Jalil to turn it down. He mutes it with a remote. Marduk looks at the ceiling, motioning grandly as he dictates a press release.

MARDUK

Because of Western intervention, what began as a tribal insurrection has escalated into all-out war.

(more)

MARDUK (cont’d)

We deplore the continued slaughter of civilians. We despise the terrorists who kill innocent—Jalil, turn it up!

Jalil clicks the remote and the voices resume.

MALE VOICE-O.S. (BRITISH JOURNALIST)

—today's bombings in Ankara. The historic Haci Bayram mosque was leveled when a blast ripped through the minbar, killing the Imam and scores of male worshippers in a segregated area. The terrorist “Taraka gang” claimed credit. Bomb threats were received at two other mosques, which were evacuated. In a separate incident, several people were injured when a bomb exploded on a bus.

VOICE OF ANATH

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families of the victims.

Marduk signals to Jalil to mute the sound, then takes out his prayer rug, spreads it on the floor and kneels down to bow to the East. He touches his forehead to the floor.

JALIL

(unctuous)

You bear permanently on your brow, the mark of the truly devoted.

Marduk slowly rises, folds the prayer rug and puts it away, sits down at his desk.

MARDUK

*Wen-Nabi*—by the Prophet, I pray that my devotion is rewarded.

He squints out the window. A dim rose light from the West.

MARDUK

Has the sun set?

Pouring a glass of liquor, he lights a thin cigar.

MARDUK

If I ever get my hands on Taraka…

(gloomily)

Imam Ali was an old friend of my family. He was Sunni. A direct descendent of Mohammed. This is worse than the fiasco at Izmir.

JALIL

Was there more to the press release, your Excellency? Something about elections?

MARDUK

Elections will be held after Eid el-Fitr unless the national crisis—

Sudden commotion. A rumpled, out of breath armed POLICEMAN rushes in, salutes Marduk.

MARDUK

At ease. What is it, Hussein?

HUSSEIN

We are bringing in a North African woman we caught at the Haci Bayram mosque.

MARDUK

*Mashallah!* God's wonders!

HUSSEIN

We saw her in the crowd outside the mosque. She had her hand on a loaded automatic, but she wouldn't fire into the crowd, so we got her. She fought like a trapped animal. It got rough. We had to beat her senseless to get her into the armored car.

MARDUK

(his face falls)

She is unconscious?

HUSSEIN

(shrugs)

Just about.

MARDUK

Bring her in. Let me have a look at her.

HUSSEIN

Yes, Your Excellency.

Salutes, goes out. Marduk sips his liquor with a happy grin, paces up and down with growing excitement, hugging himself with glee. After a moment, Hussein and another police guard come in pulling Neith between them. Her wrists are handcuffed in front. Her clothing is soiled and torn. She has bruises and blood on her face and arms. Dissheveled hair hangs in her face and she appears dazed. GUARDS throw her into the room and she lands at Marduk's feet. Neith looks around and rises slowly, as it hurts to move.

MARDUK

(approvingly)

You gave her a pounding.

HUSSEIN

(in a hushed voice)

This woman is programmed to fight until she is comatose.

Standing, Neith faces Marduk indifferently. Marduk reaches to lift her hair away from her face and she fiercely wrenches away from him.

MARDUK

(chuckling with delight)

It is she, it is she. Taraka!

HUSSEIN

(startled, to other guard)

Mahmoud! We have captured Taraka herself!

MARDUK

(to Neith)

Neith Selkis I believe is your real name.

Neith ignores him.

MAHMOUD

She refuses to talk, Your Excellency.

Marduk approaches Neith, who scowls and edges away.

MARDUK

We know you did the bombings. You murdered many of the devout. Imam Ali was my dear friend.

Marduk returns to his desk and sits down to contemplate his prisoner with satisfaction. Opens the Koran.

MARDUK

(reads)

"She Who Is Tried."

(flashes with anger)

By rights, I should take the sword of Islam and run you through!

Jalil and the guards laugh.

NEITH

God is dead. Long live the Goddess!

Angered, Marduk stands up and approaches her. Leaning forward, she glares back at him with defiant eyes.

MARDUK

Why, look at you, Neith. My insensitive guards have bruised your beauty.

Guards snicker.

MARDUK

(to the guards)

Do not hesitate to disturb her sleep.

MAHMOUD

No, please, Your Excellency. I would rather get near a tiger.

HUSSEIN

She is like a man.

(giggles uncomfortably)

MARDUK

(to NEITH)

Your tribe is wiped out, and soon you will join them in the hereafter, if a murdering woman can be said to have a soul.

He raises his voice gradually to a shout.

MARDUK

Vile witch, I will show you as much mercy as you showed my officer. You will be chained in a dungeon crawling with rats. If your general negotiates for your release, the world will know what pathological liars you are. If she doesn't, we will ship your body home in small packages.

He indicates a chair beside his desk.

MARDUK (cont’d)

Be seated.

In one swift move, Neith kicks over the chair.

MARDUK (cont’d)

(enraged)

We will try again.

He signals guards to put her in the chair. After a fight the guards force her down.

MARDUK (cont’d)

I will have a few words alone with her.

He dismisses the guards and Jalil with a wave and they file out, Mahmoud last.

MAHMOUD

Watch her, sir. She is dangerous.

MARDUK

Wait outside.

Mahmoud departs.

MARDUK

(to Neith)

Would you care for a drink?

He pours her a glass of raki and moves it toward her. She knocks it off the desk, onto the floor. Marduk pulls back his hand to strike her and she watches impassively. He stops.

MARDUK (cont’d)

I admire your spirit, Neith. It is a rare quality in a female.

(in a leading tone)

What a waste if the Amazons lost their legendary Taraka to a firing squad. I am sure you want to live, and I mean to bargain with you. Tell me what the rebels are planning.

NEITH

I don't want anything you have to offer.

MARDUK

You want to die, and I want you, but only you will get what you want. You will talk soon enough, under interrogation. And one day you will lie very still for me.

Neith slowly stands up and looks down at him impassively.

NEITH

I should have killed you when I had the chance.

MARDUK

(hissing)

That was your mistake. Now you are mine and I can do anything I want to you. Anything at all.

NEITH

(bored)

Get it over with.

Marduk leaps up and grabs her by the arms, shaking her. She is so weak she staggers.

MARDUK

(impatient, shouting)

I offer you clemency for the slightest cooperation, but you prefer to antagonize me. Guards!

Guards rush in and take Neith by the arms. Jalil comes in, stands next to Marduk.

MARDUK

(to Neith)

I find you guilty of crimes against the Turkish people. You have

(more)

MARDUK (cont’d)

violated the sanctity of a mosque at Ramadan. We will deal with you accordingly.

(to the guards)

Two men watching her cell at all times, and she is to be chained. No food or water and no sleep. With Taraka in my dungeon, at last I will sleep.

He stares after Neith as guards remove her.

MARDUK (cont’d)

(to Jalil)

Send a communiqué to General Sun Sekhmet.

Jalil picks up his note-pad.

MARDUK (cont’d)

We have Taraka and want the Amazons to negotiate.

INT COUNCIL CHAMBER, EPHESUS DAY

The flag of Ionia hangs on the far wall. Anath, Gen. Sekhmet and Gen. Nancy sit at a conference table, working out the details of negotiations for Neith's release, after a long session of the Amazon War Council.

ANATH

The Gev Dench tried and condemned her. They presented us with her death warrant!

GEN. NANCY

By negotiating for her release we are admitting responsibility for her crimes!

ANATH

(snorts)

Crimes?

Anath swings her head, giving Nancy a weird look.

ANATH

That is for the international tribunal to decide.

(to Sekhmet)

When can we move on Ankara? Neith isn't the only prisoner in that fortress.

SEKHMET

(wearily)

You won a vote of confidence, Anath. You are the president now. You make the decisions.

ANATH

But doesn't it make sense militarily? There's no time to lose! We can topple the junta with finesse, and inconvenience as few civilians as possible.

SEKHMET

It would be a mistake for us to storm the capital after what the terrorists did. We will be hated universally.

Ilona comes in with Brenda. Sekhmet leaps up with a cry of outrage and a shocked expression.

SEKHMET

You dare show your face in Ionia again!

BRENDA

We are turning ourselves in. To Anath.

ANATH

(gratified)

I don't know quite what to do with you.

BRENDA

I would like to assist with the coup. I know the terrain. Let me take the point.

SEKHMET

This is outrageous!

BRENDA

We have located the cellblock where Neith is being held. With an air strike we could destroy the wall. A battalion must storm the presidential palace—

SEKHMET

I refuse to discuss strategy with renegades.

Jill comes in looking pale and grim, carrying a telegram.

JILL

You can stop arguing. Neith has just been shot.

Absolute silence as the news penetrates. Brenda grieves with her face in her hands.

BRENDA

Oh Neith, what have we done?

Jill hangs her head, reads.

JILL

"News Agency, Ankara. Eighteen condemned prisoners, including convicted terrorist Neith Selkis, also known as Taraka, were executed by firing squad at dawn today."

Anath looks at Ilona for confirmation. Ilona's eyes are closed.

ANATH

(fighting back tears)

It won't be for nothing, Neith!

Struggling for composure, Anath gives orders to Sekhmet.

ANATH

(crisply)

Deploy the teams to Ankara. The A-target team to the presidential palace. Two teams for Army headquarters and the central police station. What is the first thing we have to do?

SEKHMET

(grudgingly)

Set up roadblocks and move in with tanks.

EXT ANKARA DAY

May Eve, outside the Citadel Fortress, the flag of Ionia is a canopy over the street. Following their victory the women are dancing to music of flutes and drums. Ilona and the pregnant, solemn-faced Usha sit at a café table beneath a palm tree. The hubbub of Amazon revelers nearly drowns out their conversation. Ilona raises her wine glass to toast four women parading by. Two hold up six-foot wands of victory ornamented with ribbons and streamers, stretching out a blue-gold-green banner between them. Beneath the banner march two victorious Amazon soldiers in festive dress.

ILONA

Fortuna bless you!

CAMERAWOMAN crosses carrying a HoloGraph Camcorder. She pans the parade, then backs up, aiming her camera as NEWSWOMAN and Anath approach, wending their way through the celebration.

NEWSWOMAN

FEMALE STATE PROCLAIMED AT ANKARA!

(more)

NEWSWOMAN (cont’d)

This is a truly hystoric—spelled with a Y—day for womonkind—spelled with an O! We're here on the scene—

(yelling to be heard)

—speaking with President Anath Nammu! President Nammu, how does it feel to be the leader of the first matriarchy in 2500 years? Are you excited?

ANATH

I'm ecstatic.

NEWSWOMAN

Can you comment on the proposals worked out by the United States and the Moslem bloc in Geneva?

ANATH

The question of Turkish refugees is top priority. An unconditional cease-fire is in effect. No more threats or attacks from either side.

NEWSWOMAN

Have you found the Turkish minister Ibn Khaal easier to deal with than Abhu Marduk?

ANATH

Ibn Khaal is a great statesman. He has the people's interests at heart.

NEWSWOMAN

Any findings on the death of Marduk?

ANATH

He died during the siege, apparently from holding a grenade too long.

NEWSWOMAN

How are you dealing with the immigration of female settlers?

ANATH

We welcome large numbers of women, but we also encourage matriarchists to consider alternatives for living space in their own lands.

NEWSWOMAN

Well, you heard it here!

Anath moves on, followed by newswoman and camerawoman. Some of the Amazon revelers follow them. Others drift away until Ilona and Usha are left alone in comparative quiet.

USHA

I was just thinking how sad it is that Tiamat died in the battle for Ankara.

ILONA

Rumor has it, Neith is alive.

USHA

(tremulously)

Alive?

Ilona puts an arm around Usha to console her.

ILONA

The war is over! Blessed Be!

USHA

But the execution.

ILONA

They fired past Neith, to break her down.

USHA

And she was rescued?

ILONA

The proud one…after being starved in a filthy dungeon, with wounds from

(more)

ILONA (cont’d)

the leg-irons…She would go away to the mountains. She would not show herself until she was healed.

Brenda approaches carrying crutches, followed by Neith, supported with her arms around Selkis and La Gorgon. Neith is smiling and so are her friends. The Taraka gang sees Usha and Ilona and they stop. Usha rises in a daze. Neith releases herself from her friends’ embrace. La Gorgon helps her into a chair, and Brenda props the crutches against the table.

Neith gazes fixedly at Usha, moving her head to watch her as Usha walks close with a happy smile. With a cry of joy, she embraces Neith and holds her to her breast.

LA GORGON

Zee lovers want to be alone. *Allons-nous, mes amies.*

The Taraka gang walks away, Brenda staring back at Neith before departing.

USHA

(weeping for joy, to Neith)

You have come back to me!

Usha sits down, still hanging onto Neith's arm. Neith stares into her eyes with a soft, receptive look on her face. Her whole body twitches with the longing to move, but she can't get up and walk.

Ilona pours Neith a tropical potion.

ILONA

We'll bathe you in Kashmir ki Kali, and flowers in the water. You'll feel like a Goddess!

USHA

(claps her hands happily)

We will live together, Neith. We will be a family.

NEITH

Live together?

USHA

We will be a family!

NEITH

Then you will be mine. And the child—!

(mocking)

Suppose I allow you to play on my weakness. You want to get married? What woman gives up her life for another woman? No one promises to stay with me forever!

USHA

(nettled)

Why do you doubt me, *Sitt Hilwa*? I want to know you completely.

NEITH

(taking her hand)

Go on with your promises.

Usha is spilling over with happiness.

USHA

(to Ilona)

She is the same!