

KHAN

Written by

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EXT. GENGHIS' WAR TENT - NIGHT

Two ARMED MONGOLIAN GUARDS stand outside a YURT, light dancing across the plain cloth from the candlelight within.

SUPER: **OUTSIDE KASHGAR, MONGOL EMPIRE, 1217**

INT. GENGHIS' WAR TENT - NIGHT

A MAP of ASIA is stretched out across a large table.

Small TOKENS rest on the map, different symbols for cavalry, ground troops and camps.

The camera pans eastward across the enormous map, tokens of the MONGOL EMPIRE lined up along their own border but *facing outwards*, ready to conquer new territory in every direction.

A BOY'S HAND SNATCHES a CAVALRY TOKEN and dances it across the map, making battle sounds, playing at war, his token knocking over others on the map.

TANI (O.S.)

Tolui? Are you listening?

TANI, 12, holds a book to her chest under crossed arms. She is dressed simply in cloth but holds herself like a queen.

TOLUI, 6, dressed in silks with faux-military stitching, hangs his head.

TOLUI

Sorry, Tani.

TANI

No more playing. Sit down.

Tani returns the cavalry token precisely with the small MAP BROOM used to move pieces.

Tolui slumps in his seat.

TOLUI

Why do I have lessons while my brothers get to fight?

TANI

Anyone can learn how to fight. It's the duty of the youngest to inherit their father's land and property. One day, this Empire will be yours.

TOLUI

Then I will be its protector. I should learn to fight, not read.

TANI

Who will follow a Khan that cannot write? Why listen to a Khan who cannot speak properly? That is why you read. To learn how to rule.

Tani passes Tolui the book.

TANI (cont'd)

Read.

Tolui opens the book but pauses before reading.

TOLUI

Tani, why do you read? You're a girl. You're never going to be a general or a Khan.

Tani has been told this her entire life. She's never believed it, not even for a second.

TANI

I read because I am not permitted to fight.

Tani taps the book and Tolui rolls his eyes before trying again, struggling with his reading.

TOLUI

"The cattle farmers of the Altai mountains never raised an army. The Tu- Tu-"

TANI

"The Tuva"

TOLUI

"The Tuva people were-"

Behind Tolui, a tall, slender SOLDIER enters the tent, a LONG KNIFE sheathed in the belt of his military uniform.

Tolui notices and stops reading. Tani stands and bows before the soldier.

MAN

I have a message to relay to the Supreme Khan.

TANI
 He's meeting with General Subutai
 in his quarters. You can find him
 there.

The soldier nods and turns away.

TOLUI
 Take me with you!

TANI
 Shhh, Tolui. Finish reading.

The soldier pauses, halfway out of the tent. He turns back.

MAN
 Tolui?

Tani notices the man's hand move to his KNIFE as he eyes
 Tolui. It's now clear to Tani - this man is an ASSASSIN.

TANI
 Tolui, come stand behind me.

TOLUI
 You said to keep reading-

TANI
 Now.

Tolui can tell Tani is serious. He complies.

The assassin approaches the two, unsheathing his knife.

TANI (cont'd)
 (whispered to Tolui)
 When I say run, run.

Tani reaches on to the map table and grabs hold of the MAP
 BROOM, wielding it like a sword.

The assassin brandishes the knife.

MAN
 Little girl, stay out of the way
 and I won't hurt you.

TANI
 RUN!

Tolui bolts out the back of the tent. The assassin goes
 after him.

Tani swings the broom and it SNAPS in two as it hits the assassin's arm, sending his knife tumbling to the ground.

She drops the broken broom and launches herself at the assassin but he easily snatches her up in his arms.

Tani SCREAMS, the assassin frantically trying to muffle her cries with his hands.

Tani kicks and scratches, writhing in the man's grip. Finally, she BITES his hand - the man cries out and drops her.

Tani pushes herself off the ground, BLOOD tricking down her chin.

ASSASSIN
Filthy Mongol beast.

Tani spits at his feet.

A SOLDIER enters through the rear of the tent, weapon drawn. The assassin sprints out the front and the soldier follows.

Tani grabs the KNIFE from the ground and sprints after them.

EXT. GENGHIS' WAR TENT - NIGHT

Tani, knife in hand, exits between the BODIES of the two dead GUARDS dispatched by the assassin before he entered.

To her LEFT, running between the tents, the soldier gives chase. Tani sprints STRAIGHT ahead.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

Tani darts between tents, using pathways only a child could.

INT. STEAM TENT - NIGHT

A DOZEN SOLDIERS sit naked in the steam, covered in sweat.

Tani bursts in, leaps the HOT STONES in the center of the tent and straight out again, not missing a step.

The soldiers don't bat an eyelid.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

There's screaming and yelling now. The camp is stirring.

The ASSASSIN sprints for his life, blowing past ill-prepared soldiers until finally he takes a turn and comes to a stop.

His pathway to safety lit by the LANTERNS nearby, the assassin is faced with a dozen, fully-armed Mongol soldiers. There's no getting past any of them.

The assassin looks around, he's surrounded by tents, CRATES and SWORD RACKS. Behind him, the soldiers in pursuit have blocked his exit.

The assassin snatches two SWORDS from a rack next to him and prepares to fight his way out.

ASSASSIN

Come, you filthy beasts. Come die
by my hand!

As if conjured by his taunt, the FIRES of the lanterns nearby FLASH brightly, the flames doubling in size.

The Mongol soldiers all step back, wide-eyed.

TAP-TAP-TAP.

Three barely audible footfalls before a FIGURE leaps from the top of a nearby crate, straight towards the assassin.

TANI

AAAAAAAAGH!

The knife catches the moonlight above Tani's head before she PLUNGES it right in to the assassin's throat.

He falls back, Tani resting on his chest, panting. Blood sprays out of his mouth, less volume with each dying breath. Tani stares in to his eyes as the shock and life fade away.

The lanterns slowly die down until they've returned to normal.

The knife stands unassisted in the assassin's throat.

Peeking out from underneath his stolen military uniform is the corner of A SCAR. Tani pulls back the shirt and sees it:

A BRANDING that has left a nasty scar. A SPOKED-WHEEL with a FLAME inside. The symbol of the TATAR people.

Soldiers approach Tani.

INT. GENGHIS' TENT - NIGHT

Tani stands, blood and mud stains all down her cloth rags. Her head bowed - not out of shame - but out of respect.

GENGHIS (O.S.)

Do you know who I am? Look at me.

Tani raises her gaze. Sitting on a small throne, dressed in a well-worn military uniform, sits GENGHIS KHAN, 50's. A terrifying presence. You could swear he conquered Asia by sheer force of will.

Assembled in the room are a dozen advisers and soldiers. Among them are HOELUN (Genghis' mother) and GENERAL SUBUTAI.

Tani keeps her head bowed.

TANI

Genghis, Supreme Khan of the Mongol Empire.

GENGHIS

And what more than this? What am I to you?

Tani meets Genghis' gaze.

TANI

My father.

Genghis nods. He gestures at Hoelun as he explains:

GENGHIS

Altani. Of all those I have sired, my mother speaks of you most often. I now see why.

Hoelun smiles towards Tani.

GENGHIS (cont'd)

You have done me a great service here today, saving my heir. What would you ask of me in return?

TANI

Nothing.

GENGHIS

Nothing?

TANI

Acting in service of the Empire is reward enough. I have been honored by my opportunity to serve.

Genghis smiles, the reflex ill-suited to his harsh face.

GENGHIS

This girl is my daughter. She is to be treated as my own. She is 'Baatar', a Hero of the Empire.

Tani looks around as, one after another, the dozen adults around her KNEEL and BOW their heads. Genghis nods almost imperceptibly.

Tani lifts her chin and stands taller.

Genghis gestures for Subutai, who nods and exits the tent.

GENGHIS (cont'd)

To be deemed Baatar is a privilege. Privilege comes with duty.

Subutai re-enters, pushing ahead of him a GAGGED AND BLINDFOLDED MAN, his arms tied behind his back and, strangely, SOAKING WET.

Subutai kicks the man's legs and he falls to his knees in front of Tani and Genghis.

GENGHIS (cont'd)

This man was found outside of camp. Another Tatar assassin, sent to kill me and my family. Subutai?

Subutai holds out the ASSASSIN'S KNIFE to Tani.

GENGHIS (cont'd)

Kill him.

Tani doesn't move. Genghis stands and approaches Tani.

GENGHIS (cont'd)

You're covered in the blood of his collaborator. You did not hesitate to kill before, why do you hesitate now?

TANI

The other man would have killed Tolui.

Genghis gets down to eye level with Tani.

GENGHIS

Given the chance, they would not hesitate to kill all of us. These men threaten his life with their continued existence. If they will not bow to my Golden Horde, they must be wiped out.

Tani glances at Hoelun, who stands stoic.

Genghis grabs the knife from Subutai and puts it in Tani's hand.

GENGHIS (cont'd)

No true daughter of mine would show them mercy.

Tani takes a deep breath and grips the knife.

Genghis takes the blindfold off the man, revealing GREEN EYES that are FIXED on Tani. Then... the knife she's holding right at his chest.

Tani SLASHES.

The room murmurs disapprovingly.

Tani has only cut the man's clothes.

Hoelun looks down, disappointed.

Genghis' intense gaze never wavers from Tani's face.

Tani draws back the man's slashed clothes and reveals the TATAR BRANDING on the skin over his heart.

Tani presses the knife-point to the middle of the flame.

TANI

I am no beast.

Tani thrusts with all her might and the knife bursts out of the Tatar assassin's back.

TITLE CARD: **KHAN**

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

A dirt path snakes between two enormous ROCK WALLS on each side of the valley.

Along this path travels an ornately decorated RED CARAVAN, pulled by two horses. It is accompanied by a soldier at each corner and one ADVANCE SOLDIER, all on horseback.

Visible through the curtains of the caravan is a lone figure in elaborate, regal robes.

SUPER: OUTSIDE YINCHUAN, XI XIA EMPIRE, 1227

The soldiers keep an eye on the tops of the rock faces, scouting for archers.

The caravan rounds a corner and the advance soldier squints to look forward.

ADVANCE SOLDIER

Halt!

The horses and the whole caravan comes to a halt.

Visible further down the canyon is a lone BANDIT, face covered against the elements, standing in their path.

ADVANCE SOLDIER (cont'd)

Reveal yourself!

From behind their back, the bandit draws a SWORD - a lightly curved scimitar - and holds it at their side.

The bandit begins to walk towards them, alone against five soldiers on horseback. The SOLDIERS all draw their swords in return.

The advance soldier KICKS his horse in to action and rides toward the bandit.

The bandit LIFTS their sword into the sky and... points at the oncoming soldier.

FLIT!

A SINGLE ARROW hits the advance soldier in the side of his neck and he slumps to the side, eventually falling off the horse to the ground, dead.

The other soldiers look around but there's nobody to be seen.

The bandit PATS the first soldier's horse affectionately as it chews lazily on some nearby branches, indifferent to the death of its rider.

At the urging of their counterparts, the front two soldiers now set off towards the bandit at a gallop.

Once again, the bandit POINTS at the two soldiers with their sword and *FLIT! FLIT!* they're both taken down by arrows.

ON THE TOP OF THE RIDGE, we see that other bandits are aiming arrows between the rocks, expertly disguising themselves.

The two remaining soldiers share a look and dismount. They stand in front of the caravan and throw down their weapons.

As the bandit approaches, they fall to their knees.

The bandit reaches up to take off their headscarf, revealing LONG, FLOWING HAIR.

This is TANI, 22, grown in to a fierce, flinty young woman.

The soldiers are surprised to see a woman. Tani smiles.

They're even more surprised when, in one motion, Tani IMPALES one of the soldiers with her sword.

She kicks his body back and draws the sword back out.

The other pulls a DAGGER out from their belt and LAUNCHES at TANI, screaming!

Tani spins and swings her sword at the lunging soldier but STOPS before it connects.

The soldier's eyes BULGE as he looks at the sword that rests right near his face. He is stopped dead in his tracks.

We ZOOM OUT to see that the soldier is *probably* stopped dead due to an ARROW in his back.

He falls on top of his slain compatriot, revealing behind him is BOROGHUL, late 20s, stone-faced with a square frame.

TANI

We agreed these two were mine.

BOROGHUL

He could have killed you.

Tani shoots Boroghul an angry look as she plants her sword through the two soldiers and moves to the caravan.

We stay with Boroghul as Tani wrenches open the caravan door.

EMISSARY (O.S.)

No! Please! Don't kill me!

Boroghul pats down the soldiers and assesses their blades.

Other BANDITS come down from the ridges into the valley, check the other soldiers' bodies and take the horses' reins.

With a shove from Tani, the EMISSARY careens into the dirt. In his forties and sniveling, the man is dressed in robes and a headdress as garish as the caravan.

Tani retrieves her sword from the bodies and holds it at the emissary.

MESSENGER

Please! Don't kill me! I travel on behalf of Emperor Mozhu of the Xi Xia Empire. We request - ah, we *humbly* request an audience with the Khan.

TANI

Boroghul, how close is the camp?

BOROGHUL

Over the next ridge.

Tani lets her sword arm relax and looks at the bodies.

TANI

On your feet.

The emissary slowly stands.

EXT. TOLUI'S CAMP - DAY

Tani leads her team of bandits, all on horseback, to the edge of camp, the caravan trailing behind them.

The caravan is covered with the BODIES OF THE SOLDIERS killed in the valley, each hanging from their feet and hitting against the frame of the caravan as it moves.

Tani brings her horse to rest right in front of GENERAL SUBUTAI, 50s, athletic and battle-scarred, wearing light armor.

SUBUTAI

I used to have a cat that brought me dead things. Now I have Altani, Bataar of the Empire, dressed as a bandit. Quite an improvement.

TANI

General. I have come with a present
for my brother.

SUBUTAI

Nothing for me? Hm. I prefer the
cat.

Subutai feigns disappointment and walks in to the camp. Tani
smiles, dismounts and follows him.

INT. TOLUI'S WAR TENT - DAY

TOLUI, 16 and barely holding together a false bravado,
stands in front of a map, echoing the last time we saw him.
Only now, he doesn't play with the tokens, he stares at them
intently.

Tolui misses seeing Subutai enter, followed by Tani.

SUBUTAI

Khan Tolui.

TOLUI

Subutai, a scout has reported
soldiers moving through the valley.
We should dispatch a team to meet
them.

TANI

I took care of them.

Tolui turns and smiles.

TOLUI

Tani! You've returned!

The two embrace.

TOLUI (cont'd)

Why have you come? As I recall, the
siege bored you terribly.

TANI

Father sent me back to assist you.
I started by intercepting those
soldiers for you.

Tani beams but Tolui's face falls.

TOLUI

No...

Tolui exits the tent, setting off at a run.

EXT. TOLUI'S CAMP - DAY

Tolui's run comes to an end in view of the caravan, littered with corpses. Other Mongol soldiers admire it but Tolui is mortified.

Tani and Subutai catch up to Tolui.

TANI

Don't worry, I left one for you.

Tolui rushes to the door and flings it open.

INSIDE THE CARAVAN: The emissary, curled into a ball, yelps with fear at the door being opened.

TOLUI

There has been a grave
misunderstanding, my friend. Come
out and let us take care of you.

Tolui helps the emissary out of the caravan, avoiding the swinging bodies, and guides him to a soldier.

TOLUI (cont'd)

See that he is washed and fed. We
will negotiate when he is calmed.

Tolui returns to Tani and Subutai.

TANI

Negotiate? I brought him here for
you to execute.

TOLUI

I received a message from Emperor
Mozhu that he wished to negotiate.
I *allowed* him to send an emissary.

Tani is incredulous.

TANI

The city has been under siege for
months. They will break soon and we
will storm the city. What is there
to negotiate?

TOLUI

They extend a hand from his people
and you suggest that we cut it off?

TANI

Not his hand. His head.

TOLUI

This is an opportunity to end things peacefully and bring the Xi Xia in to the Mongol Empire. Another Khan to pledge themselves to our father. Yinchuan can become a southern capital for the Mongol Empire.

TANI

And after we leave, another rebellion to quash. Our father has fought the Xi Xia for decades. We kill the Emperor and lay waste to the city. That was his plan.

TOLUI

(yelling)

I am not our father.

His rehearsed self-assurance suddenly falling away, this protest makes Tolui sound every bit as juvenile as his sixteen years might suggest.

Aware that his nearby soldiers might hear them, he becomes quiet once more.

TOLUI (cont'd)

I have led this siege alone for months. I appreciate your counsel but this is a decision for a Khan.

TANI

Very well, Khan Tolui.

Tolui walks back towards his tent.

Subutai, having stepped aside for the family quarrel, re-engages with Tani.

TANI (cont'd)

My father was right to send me. Tolui is no Khan. Not yet.

SUBUTAI

He has come far since your father left him this post. He has a keen eye for strategy and the men grow to respect him.

TANI

They should *fear* him. If he is not ready to inherit the Empire when the time comes, his brothers will see fit to take his lands. Or worse.

SUBUTAI

I knew your father in his youth and I have trained each of his sons. We all change given time. He will be ready when his time comes.

A MONGOL SOLDIER approaches the two, out of breath.

MONGOL SOLDIER

General, an urgent message.

EXT. MILITARY STAGING AREA - DAY

Tani and Subutai are brought by the soldier to a shady area beneath a tree where a MESSENGER, 20's, lips cracked, hands raw and bloody, is given water by other soldiers.

SUBUTAI

Soldier, what's your message?

MESSENGER

It's for Tolui, son of Genghis.

SUBUTAI

I am Subutai, the General of his armies and this is Altani, Baatar of the Empire. Tell us.

Subutai looks at the soldiers, who nod and leave.

MESSENGER

The Supreme Khan was wounded at Longde and taken to Ogedei's palace in Karakorum for treatment.

Tani kneels in close to the man.

TANI

Wounded? Is it fatal?

MESSENGER

I don't know. I was sent two nights ago, before the shamans could see to him. I rode without rest.

TANI
We leave immediately.

Tani runs back to the camp. Subutai kneels down to the messenger.

SUBUTAI
You rode quickly and without rest.
You have served the Empire bravely.

MESSENGER
Thank you General.

SUBUTAI
You retain knowledge meant only for
the Khan. You know what this means?

MESSENGER
I have served.

Subutai unsheathes his longsword.

The messenger closes his eyes.

INT. TOLUI'S TENT - DAY

Tani stands with Tolui, who looks at his map once more.

Subutai enters the tent, his hands wet with blood.

TOLUI
If our father is injured, my
brothers will be riding for
Karakorum. I must join them.

SUBUTAI
I will stay and command.

TOLUI
No, I want you with me. Both of
you. Chagaan will take command and
continue the siege until we return.
We leave for Karakorum at sundown.

TANI
Our father is injured. We leave
now, Tolui.

TOLUI
Karakorum is west. If we set off in
to the sun, we'll need to rest at
night. We ride at sundown and we'll
be there after dark tomorrow.

Tani looks to Subutai, who pays her no attention.

SUBUTAI

Well considered, Tolui Khan. We
ride at sundown. I'll prepare the
horses.

Tani hurries out of the tent.

EXT. STABLES - DAY

A dozen horses are all tied to posts behind a small tent as
Tani, dressed for riding, grabs a bag of feed from a hutch.

Tani takes the reins of a horse and turns it around -
straight into the path of Subutai.

SUBUTAI

Leave the feed. Travel light. The
horse will hold out until you
arrive. Not much longer, mind you.
But long enough.

Tani throws the feed back towards the hutch.

SUBUTAI (cont'd)

Make sure your father lives until
we get there.

TANI

Thank you, General.

SUBUTAI

Defiant and foolish with no regard
for your own wellbeing? You're more
his child than any of them.

Tani mounts her horse and Subutai watches as she rides past
him and out of camp.

EXT. MONGOLIA - DAY/NIGHT

Tani rides tirelessly across the stunning, diverse landscape
of the Ancient Mongol Empire.

Through deserts and over dried salt lakes.

Across green grass plains that stretch for miles.

In the valleys between snow-capped mountains.

Night falls.

Day breaks.

Tani's eyes narrow against the harsh sun as she races to her ailing father.

EXT. KARAKORUM PALACE - LOOKOUT - DAY

Emerging from the grass plains, behind fortified walls, is the enormous Karakorum Palace.

From a balcony that overlooks the flat landscape stands ALTALUN, 30s, serene and ethereal, looks out to see Tani approach on horseback.

Altalun gathers up her silk dress and exits.

EXT. KARAKORUM PALACE - ENTRANCE - DAY

Tani leaps from her haggard horse and embraces Altalun.

Tani's hands, bloody from gripping the reins tight for days, clap to her sister's back but Altalun pays no mind.

TANI

Am I too late?

ALTALUN

He's alive.

INT. KARAKORUM PALACE - GENGHIS' QUARTERS - DAY

Lanterns light the weapons and furs that adorn the walls. A large bed in the center of the room holds GENGHIS, soaked with sweat and unconscious, his leg bandaged and raised.

A HEALER dabs at Genghis' forehead with a damp cloth.

Altalun and Tani enter and rush to Genghis' bedside.

TANI

Has he spoken?

ALTALUN

Barely a word in days.

TANI

Father? It's me, Tani. Can you hear me?

Tani squeezes Genghis' hand but there's no response.

TANI (cont'd)
What does the shaman say?

ALTALUN
The wound weeps but he fights. He
may yet recover.

Altalun attempts a smile for Tani's sake.

Altalun pours water from a WOODEN JUG in to a bowl and
brings it to Tani at their father's bedside.

ALTALUN (cont'd)
You have come from Yinchuan? Where
is Tolui?

TANI
He will arrive before nightfall.

ALTALUN
You should tend to your wounds. I
will bring you to the shaman.

TANI
I will stay with him until he
wakes. He will fight this, Altalun.
And he will win.

Altalun takes Tani's hand from their father's and washes it.
Tani winces in pain.

INT. OGEDEI'S QUARTERS - DAY

OGEDEI, 20s, cunning and formal, sits in a dark room
littered with candles, every last bit of natural light
blocked out by curtains. It's a dark, dungeon of a space.

Ogedei's personal servant HISHEH, all business, approaches
and waits for Ogedei to wave at him before speaking.

HISHEH
Bataar Altani has arrived.

OGEDEI
Thank you Hisheh. Send for me when
Tolui arrives.

Hisheh nods and exits.

EXT. KARAKORUM PALACE - SUNSET

Tolui and Subutai ride up to the palace, Tolui a few lengths ahead, dismounting before coming to a full stop.

Subutai struggles off his horse, feeling every part of his advanced age.

INT. GENGHIS' QUARTERS - NIGHT

Tani, her outer riding clothes removed, sits with Genghis. She HUMS a TUNE.

TANI
(whispered)
Come on, father. Fight.

Tolui enters silently and joins Tani by taking his father's other arm.

INT. PALACE HALLWAY - DAY

Altalun swishes down the hallway in her silk, joining Subutai, posted outside Genghis' door. He doesn't notice her.

ALTALUN
Has it been so long that you have forgotten me, General?

SUBUTAI
(narrowing his eyes)
Altalun.

Subutai bows his head in respect. Altalun puts a finger against his chin and lifts it back up. She hugs Subutai and then pulls back.

ALTALUN
You smell awful.

SUBUTAI
And you are more beautiful every day. How, in this great Empire, is there still no husband for you?

Altalun smiles. Tolui exits in to the hallway with Tani.

Tolui sees Altalun and they embrace.

TOLUI
Glad you are safe, sister.

ALTALUN

Ogedei waits for us in his quarters.

TOLUI

Chagatai?

ALTALUN

Arrived this morning.

TOLUI

Together again. Join us, Tani.

TANI

I am not a true heir. My place is here with our father.

TOLUI

If you won't come as family, you'll come as an adviser to me.

Tani nods and sets off down the hallway. Altalun and Tolui follow. Tolui pauses and gestures to Subutai.

TOLUI (cont'd)

You too, Subutai. I refuse to be the worst smelling person in the room.

Tolui follows the women. Subutai smells his armpit and cringes, following anyway.

INT. OGEDEI'S LOUNGE - DAY

The True Heirs, the children of Börte, are assembled on lounges around a central RUG marked with the IMPERIAL SEAL.

Subutai stands against the wall, close to the door. Tani sits furthest, hiding herself away. Altalun and Tolui sit centrally, as do the other two brothers.

CHAGATAI, 30s, arrogant and brutal, has a cup of wine in his hand and a bottle lying on its side at his feet. He sits with his legs up, observing his siblings.

Ogedei sits centrally.

OGEDEI

Shaman Chiquan believes it will be any day now.

ALTALUN

He has held on for days. This is premature of you, Ogedei. He could still recover.

OGEDEI

His leg rots, his pulse is weak. Chiquan believes the arrow may have been poisoned. We cannot afford to be unprepared.

ALTALUN

There is always hope.

Chagatai barks out a laugh. His bottle empty, he moves to a table to grab another, filling his cup.

CHAGATAI

Are you a shaman, Altalun? Or perhaps you're deaf. He's as good as gone.

ALTALUN

Our father still breathes and you would have us give up?

CHAGATAI

What's wrong with that? He gave up on me years ago.

Altalun snatches Chagatai's cup from him.

ALTALUN

I can see why.

Chagatai stares her down as he drinks from the bottle.

OGEDEI

The Empire is in delicate balance. If he is to die without a plan for succession, we may have to endure rebellion in addition to our war efforts.

ALTALUN

There is a plan. Tolui is the youngest, he inherits the lands.

OGEDEI

I fear that although he is an heir, the Khans may not pledge fealty to one so young and untested in battle.

TOLUI

I have led the siege of Yinchuan for months. When they finally break, word will spread that I conquered the enemy's capital. That will suffice.

OGEDEI

What do you think, General? Will the armies pledge fealty?

SUBUTAI

You will be a great leader some day, Tolui. You may even be already.

CHAGATAI

Get to the point.

SUBUTAI

Until you come back from a campaign victorious, I fear the Khans may not unite under you.

TOLUI

I see. What do you suggest, Ogedei?

OGEDEI

Only a select few know of our father's injuries. Members of my trusted inner circle or people that can be easily dispatched. We keep our father's condition secret until we can determine a path forward.

TANI

Ridiculous.

All eyes turn to Tani.

TANI (cont'd)

The people of Karakorum are not fools. They've seen the Royal Guard at the gates, they know that Genghis Khan is here and, given the lack of ceremony, I'm sure they've deduced he is ill. Ask any beggar on the street, they'll tell you Genghis Khan is already dead. If you all pledge to cede the lands to Tolui at the Kurultai, the Khans there will have no choice but to support him.

CHAGATAI

The great and powerful Genghis Khan replaced by a child? We'll have a dozen rebellions declared by morning.

TANI

And we'll crush them.

CHAGATAI

You speak as though you've known battle. I'm sure it feels dangerous, sparring with your suitors in the Royal Guard while we fight the wars.

TANI

Let's spar now and see who wins.

Each of them reaches for their weapon of choice - Tani, her knife. Chagatai, his bottle.

Tolui stands, putting himself between everyone.

TOLUI

Let me think on this.

OGEDEI

I think that would be best. It has been a trying time for us all. Tomorrow?

TOLUI

Tomorrow.

CHAGATAI

And next time, let's leave the women outside.

Chagatai flops down onto a lounge.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Tani and Tolui exit together, followed by Subutai.

TOLUI

You shouldn't let him anger you. He's a fool and a drunk.

TANI

Perhaps you should listen more closely.

(MORE)

TANI (cont'd)

What they're proposing is betrayal.
Of you. Of our father. Of our
traditions.

TOLUI

It is practical. I have not yet
proven myself in battle.

TANI

Of course not. You'd rather
negotiate a surrender than do what
must be done. Return to Yinchuan
and demand allegiance or destroy.
That's what a Supreme Khan would
do.

Tani exits.

INT. GENGHIS' QUARTERS - NIGHT

Tani sits by her father's bedside, toying with her knife.

Tani is startled when a HEALER enters but relaxes when she
sees her holding a TALL GOLDEN PITCHER. The healer puts the
pitcher on Genghis' bedside and exits.

GENGHIS (O.S.)

Always so cautious.

Tani turns to see her father is awake and watching her. She
leaps to his side.

TANI

I have reason to be cautious. Years
by your side and the moment you
send me off, you're wounded.

GENGHIS

Where am I?

TANI

Karakorum. You don't remember?

Genghis tries to shove off his blankets.

TANI (cont'd)

Father, you're not well. The shaman
said-

GENGHIS

Fuck the shaman.

TANI
Father, you need rest.

GENGHIS
I'm fine.

Genghis throws off the blanket covering his leg. It's bad. Necrotic flesh, weeping pus, turning black.

Genghis and Tani both take in the sight before Genghis heaves his leg off the bed, readying himself to stand.

GENGHIS (cont'd)
If this is Karakorum, take me to Ogedei.

TANI
No.

Genghis pushes Tani away and she falls to the ground.

Genghis stands tall, towering over Tani.

GENGHIS
I am your Supreme Khan. You will do as I say. Take me to my son.

Tani slowly stands to face her father, who is unsteady on his feet. She comes right up to him and they square off.

TANI
No.

Genghis' bad leg gives way and he stumbles back onto the bed. He breathes heavily.

GENGHIS
I am not well.

Tani helps a sweating, panting Genghis to lie down. She sits by his side.

TANI
We've both seen men recover from worse on the battlefield. Stay here, I will send for Ogedei.

Tani stands but Genghis grabs her arm tightly.

GENGHIS
No. Stay.

TANI
Father.

GENGHIS

While I still have time.

Genghis loosens his grip and Tani grabs a soaked towel and wipes at her father's head.

GENGHIS (cont'd)

Never conquered. Never defeated.
And yet here I lie. Death from a
single arrow.

Genghis laughs until he coughs.

TANI

You must have known this day would
come. Even Genghis Khan can not
conquer death.

Tani pours water from the golden pitcher and brings her father a cup. He sips from it slowly.

GENGHIS

Oh, but I have conquered death. Why
else does a man have children?

She pours herself a cup and sits with him.

TANI

So you'd have someone to bring you
water on your deathbed.

GENGHIS

All the battles and I am to waste
away surrounded by pillows.

Genghis picks up a pillow and throws it across the room.

TANI

And your sons will continue to
fight in your name.

GENGHIS

My sons? Jochi, dead. Chagatai, a
drunk. Ogedei, too timid to leave
the palace, and Tolui, a child. My
sons will not carry my name, they
will befoul it. Only one of my
children is fit to rule.

TANI

Tolui is still young. He will learn
in time

GENGHIS
Not Tolui. You.

Tani scans her father's face. He may be sick but he's alert and self-assured as ever. He means it.

TANI
I cannot.

GENGHIS
Perhaps the clans will rebel,
perhaps they will follow you. Of
all my children, I trust that you
will earn their allegiance or bring
them destruction. You are my
greatest legacy, Tani.

Genghis coughs again and Tani forces the water to his lips.

TANI
Drink. Rest. I will assemble your
children and we will all discuss.

GENGHIS
I have so much to tell you. There
are things I have kept hidden...
things I have protected you from.
Great threats to the Empire. To
my...

Genghis' eyes begin to flutter and he falls unconscious.

TANI
Father?

Tani holds her father's face and checks for breathing. His breaths are slow and shallow.

Tani stands but STUMBLES, clutching at the bed for stability. She staggers, spilling from her cup.

Her vision blurring and body shutting down, Tani looks back at the pitcher and down in to the cup.

She smells the water and throws the cup to the ground. The water spills across the floor.

TANI (cont'd)
(slurred)
Help! Someone!

Tani collapses in to the pooling water.

TANI (cont'd)

Help!

Genghis' breath gets softer and softer before finally - it stops.

Tani's eyes close.

INT. TANI'S QUARTERS - DAY

Sun streams through the open windows, curtains blowing in the wind. Tani lies on a bed, atop the blankets in a silk dress.

Tani groggily opens her eyes and sees her hand on the bed. She manages to twitch it a little and eventually forms a fist.

Altalun enters and sees Tani awake.

ALTALUN

I knew you couldn't fight the
fatigue from your ride forever.

Tani manages to sit up and notices her dress for the first time. She pulls at it, ill-fitting and uncomfortable.

ALTALUN (cont'd)

I had some servants change you out
of your road clothes. Don't worry,
all women.

TANI

I was with father. We were talking
before he...

ALTALUN

You should regain your strength for
the days ahead. I'll have someone
bring you some food and water.

The mention of water snaps Tani back to reality.

TANI

What happened last night?

ALTALUN

I've never liked Karakorum but
there's no denying the food is
exceptional.

Tani stands and grabs Altalun, to stop her blabbering.

TANI
Altalun. Tell me.

ALTALUN
The wounds were too severe. He did
not survive the night. I'm sorry.

Tani goes to the wardrobe and finds nothing of use.

ALTALUN (cont'd)
We met this morning to discuss
plans. Everything has been
arranged, you don't need to worry.
The shaman is preparing his body.
He died peacefully.

Tani gives up finding appropriate clothes.

TANI
He was murdered.

Tani exits the room, leaving Altalun with her mouth agape.

EXT. TEMPLE - DAY

Tani walks up to half a dozen ROYAL GUARD SOLDIERS standing
outside the temple. As she tries to enter, one soldier
blocks her path. This is UNACH, 20's and filled with smug
authority.

TANI
Stand aside.

The soldiers say nothing. Do nothing.

TANI (cont'd)
I wish to see the body. I command
you to stand aside.

UNACH
Nobody is to be let inside.

TANI
I am Tani, Baatar of the Mongol
Empire, Daughter of the Supreme
Khan.

UNACH
There is no Supreme Khan.

TANI
Then there is no Royal Guard. You
will let me pass.

Tani walks to the door and Unach puts his arm on her.

Unach has a moment to consider how terrible an idea that was before Tani strikes at his face, the heel of her palm hitting him in the nose blindingly fast.

Unach falls back, Tani's hand prying his sword from his hand as he tumbles.

The others surround Tani and she turns slowly. She readies herself to fight them all.

HOELUN (O.S.)

Enough!

The soldiers turn to look at HOELUN, 70's, a lithe woman with silver hair, Commander of the Royal Guard, and mother of Genghis Khan.

Unach stands, blood pouring from his nose.

UNACH

Hoelun, she demanded to be let in and she attacked us.

HOELUN

And in return you would have killed my granddaughter?

TANI

They would have tried.

UNACH

Of course not.

HOELUN

Unach, you will guard my son's body until every drop of your blood dries.

Unach nods.

HOELUN (cont'd)

Tani, come with me.

Tani hands Unach his sword and follows Hoelun.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Hoelun confirms they're alone before rounding on Tani.

HOELUN

Sparring as a child is one thing.
Fighting six trained guards? In
those silks?

TANI

I was with him last night. There
was something in the water.
Something that made me sleep. Worm
venom, perhaps. Not enough to kill
me but enough to kill someone...
someone already weakened.

HOELUN

And you sought to rectify this by
fighting the Royal Guard?

Tani doesn't have an answer for this. She frantically
pivots.

TANI

There was a healer. A woman I had
never seen. She brought the water!
I can identify her if I find her.

HOELUN

You truly believe he was murdered?

Tani stares at Hoelun and gives a curt nod.

HOELUN (cont'd)

Then I will uncover what I can
about this healer.

TANI

Leave her to me and I'll make her
talk.

HOELUN

Tani, before your father made you
Bataar, I made you read every day.
Do you know why?

TANI

To teach Tolui.

HOELUN

No. To learn there are some
problems that cannot be fixed with
swords and arrows.

Hoelun comes close to Tani, lowering her voice to a whisper.

HOELUN (cont'd)

You are a strong, brave woman. But this palace is teeming with secrets. If you truly believe there was foul play, you can't fight your way through this. I will find this healer and bring her to you. Go back to your quarters and wait. Speak nothing of your suspicions. To anyone.

Tani breathes a sigh of relief and acquiesces.

INT. TANI'S QUARTERS - DAY

Tani enters her quarters to find Boroghul standing over her bed, delicately arranging clothes on the bed.

TANI

Boroghul. You rode from Yinchuan?

BOROGHUL

You left without your armor. I have come to return it and assist in whatever else you need.

TANI

That won't be necessary.

Tani waves Boroghul away.

BOROGHUL

I understand that the Supreme Khan has-- my condolences for your father.

TANI

Please, I wish to be alone.

BOROGHUL

Of course. If there is anything I can do for you. I am here for you.

Tani sits on the bed, exhaustion catching up to her.

BOROGHUL (cont'd)

I wanted to tell you that I care for you a great deal, Altani.

Tani is stirred from her daze by this.

Boroghul has never used her name before.

Oh. She realizes what he is saying. What he *means*.

Suddenly, Tani's cheeks flush red. She immediately looks down at her feet and her voice softens to a whisper.

TANI

Boroghul, perhaps another time?

BOROGHUL

I only wish to tell you that
whatever needs you may-- I am in
your service.

Boroghul bows his head and exits.

As the door closes, Tani looks up and lets out a laugh. Just for a moment, despite everything that has happened.

Tani picks up her armor, shaking her head in disbelief.

INT. TEMPLE - DAY

Candles flicker in the dark room as SHAMANS wash the body of Genghis Khan, lying on a slate of rock.

The sounds of MONGOLIAN THROAT SINGING echo through the temple, singing a lament for the loss of the Supreme Khan.

When they're done, they paint his body with preserving oils.

Finally, they dress him in CEREMONIAL BATTLE ARMOR. In death, he's still a warrior king.

INT. TANI'S QUARTERS - DAY

Matching her father's body in death, Tani ties the last knot that affixes her light armor to her body - a second skin.

She opens the door to her room and almost barrels straight into Ogedei's servant Hisheh.

HISHEH

Baatar, the Khan wishes to see you
in his quarters.

Tani nods and lets the servant lead.

INT. OGEDEI'S QUARTERS - DAY

Ogedei lights more candles in his own darkened room. Hisheh opens the door and lets Tani inside.

Ogedei approaches her and places a commiserating hand on her shoulder.

OGEDEI

Altani, thank you for coming. I heard you were not feeling well. Fatigued from the road, no doubt.

TANI

No doubt. It appears I missed an important decision.

OGEDEI

We sent riders out to every corner of the Empire this morning to call for a Kurultai. I wanted to tell you personally that Chagatai and I have pledged our support for Tolui's leadership and the messengers will relay that to every Khan. It will take months, perhaps years, to assemble the Kurultai. Until then, Tolui will return to the front and I will act as steward of the Empire from here in Karakorum.

TANI

Why did you summon me, Ogedei?

OGEDEI

Our father has hundreds of children. Maybe thousands. Some are even here in the city. His children by my mother are designated heirs yet, of all his children, he favored you most of all. Do you know why?

Tani shifts, uncomfortable with the question. She never liked to consider why her father took such a liking.

OGEDEI (cont'd)

I suspect my father saw in you something that he wished to nurture. Something of himself. A certain *hunger*. It made our father an incredible conqueror but when it came to uniting the conquered, inspiring allegiance, it lacked a certain... nuance. Now he has left us at a time of enormous upheaval in the Empire.

(MORE)

OGEDEI (cont'd)

Wars on five fronts and inevitable rebellions under such a young Supreme Khan, the Empire needs us to work together more than ever. All of us. You served alongside our father on every front, your insight would be invaluable.

TANI

If you want a General, take Subutai.

OGEDEI

I don't want a General. I want an ally. I want to know that you support our plan. My stewardship until Tolui is of age. That your *hunger* won't disrupt this delicate situation.

TANI

My allegiance is to the Empire and the Supreme Khan. Not to a Steward. To Tolui.

OGEDEI

As is mine.

Ogedei moves away from her, his questions answered.

TANI

What do I call you? Steward? Khan?

OGEDEI

Call me brother.

TANI

Then, *brother*, I have a request. I wish to accompany our father to his final resting place.

OGEDEI

You don't wish to stay?

TANI

Karakorum is no place for me.

OGEDEI

Not enough battles?

TANI

Too many lies. And liars.

OGEDEI

Is this about your suspicions
surrounding our father's death?

Tani is taken aback. How could he know?

OGEDEI (cont'd)

I'd be a poor steward of an empire
if I didn't even know what happened
in my own palace. What is it you
suspect?

TANI

A healer woman brought him water.
One I had never seen before. He,
and I, both slept after drinking
it.

OGEDEI

Worm venom.

TANI

I suspect.

OGEDEI

Our father's procession will be
leaving shortly. I will find this
woman for you before you leave,
Tani. I promise. I will make her
answer whatever questions will put
your mind at ease.

TANI

Thank you.

OGEDEI

Chagatai will be accompanying the
procession but I am sure you would
be welcome. I'll send word to him
and the Royal Guard will make
arrangements.

Tani nods and exits quickly. Ogedei scribbles a note with a
small quill and looks towards the open door.

OGEDEI (cont'd)

Hisheh!

Nobody answers.

Ogedei, impatient, moves to the door.

OGEDEI (cont'd)

HISHEH!!

Nobody answers.

Ogedei looks fearfully at the outside.

He readies himself and reaches out of the door with one foot. He places it on the ground. He moves his weight onto it, follows with the other foot.

He sighs in relief. Nothing happened.

Then he takes another step away from the door and looks up.

Suddenly, it feels like the world is rushing at him.

The WALLS of the hallway stretch up in to the sky and CRASH down on him, all at once.

The COLORS of the outside world saturate until they're BLINDING.

He CRUSHES the note in his fist as it CLENCHES, turning white.

In a few hundred years, they'll call this agoraphobia.

Ogedei falls to a knee and CRIES OUT once more, this time in pure terror.

OGEDEI (cont'd)
HISHEH!!

Ogedei manages to fall back and pulls himself back through the threshold - to safety.

Finally, Hishe arrives in the doorway, enters and closes the door behind him immediately.

Hishe speaks but it's muffled. Ogedei's ears are ringing.

OGEDEI (cont'd)
Take this to Chagatai. NOW!

Ogedei thrusts the crushed note in to Hishe's hand.

Hishe opens the door as little as possible and moves through it quickly.

Ogedei lies back on the ground, staring at the blackness of the ceiling.

INT. TANI'S QUARTERS - DAY

Tani collects her gear, dressing for the road.

Tolui enters, knocking at the open door.

TOLUI
Going somewhere?

TANI
To see our father's body put to rest. Unless you would have me do otherwise, Supreme Khan?

Tolui stands straighter, trying to act as commanding as his new title implies.

TOLUI
Of course not. You are allowed to do as you wish.

TANI
Is that so? It seems all the decisions are being made without me.

TOLUI
When he died, we had to act quickly. There had to be a plan in place. He is... He was our father and there will be time for grief but right now we honor him by keeping his Empire together. By looking forward.

Tani slides her dagger in to her belt scabbard.

TOLUI (cont'd)
I came to say farewell. Subutai and I leave for Yinchuan tonight.

TANI
Of course. The Emperor will be waiting for you to sign your treaty.

TOLUI
If we allow the people some autonomy, some self-governance, they will submit to us. We can turn their soldiers into our own and expand the Empire further, faster than our father ever could.

TANI
The moment our back is turned, they will turn against us. What then?

TOLUI

We wipe them out. Just as father would have done.

TANI

You're taking a great risk.

TOLUI

In pursuit of great reward. The armies of Yinchuan, ours to command.

TANI

Ours?

TOLUI

I want you to join me in Yinchuan. Now more than ever, my actions there will be scrutinized. I need someone who will challenge me, advise me, even protect me as you have always done.

TANI

Subutai will-

TOLUI

Subutai will be a General in my army one day. He will do as I tell him. You have proven time and again that you will not. That, too, has value for a Khan. I am offering you a place by my side, advisor to the future Supreme Khan of the expanding empire. Where else would you go?

Tani stops putting on her shoes. She has nowhere else to go.

TOLUI (cont'd)

Take our father to his final resting place. Then join me in Yinchuan. Please.

Tani takes her brothers hand.

TANI

Promise you won't start the fighting without me.

Tolui smiles.

INT. STEAM ROOM - DAY

A servant pulls rocks from a fire and lays them along a bed of sand lining the perimeter of the room.

Another servant follows, pouring water on the stones to help them spew forth steam.

Altalun enters, wearing only a robe. She lets it fall to the ground behind her and lays down in the center of the room.

Two female MASSEURS enter the room, also naked, and kneel next to her. They scoop oils from small cups and spread it all over Altalun, massaging her.

Altalun begins to cry as the massage continues, her body heaving with sobs as it is covered in oil.

One of the masseurs, MANYA, dabs at Altalun's tears with a cloth and Altalun grabs her wrist and locks eyes with her.

Manya leans in to Altalun and kisses her lips. Altalun kisses back passionately. The other masseur exits quietly.

INT. THE BATHS - DAY

Altalun exits from the steam room in her robe and sees Tani waiting there for her, prepped for the road.

Manya passes them both, carrying the cups and oils.

ALTALUN

You're leaving.

TANI

With the procession.

ALTALUN

Good. Father would be furious if he knew his body was left in Chagatai's care alone. Will you return to Karakorum afterwards?

TANI

Tolui has asked me to advise him in Yinchaun. I accepted.

ALTALUN

A wise choice. You are both destined for great things.

TANI

Will you join us?

ALTALUN

Father is dead. Things are different now. I am a daughter of a Supreme Khan, I am long past due to be married.

TANI

You agreed to this?

ALTALUN

Alliances our father forged will weaken with his death. We all agreed that this must be done.

TANI

Ogedei can't ask this of you. He is only steward, Tolui will instruct him otherwise.

ALTALUN

A Khan in Ugur has already been sent for. He has two wives already but I would be first among them.

TANI

Refuse him.

ALTALUN

They live well in Ugur. My children will ride through the Tianshin Mountains and our family keeps hold on the Silk Route. Father knew I have never desired a husband but my time has come. I am fortunate that he kept me as long as he did.

TANI

There must be another way.

ALTALUN

Better I go than my sister.

Altalun takes Tani's hands, feeling the callouses.

ALTALUN (cont'd)

I expect the leisure of Ugur would suit you even less. You will come and visit me, won't you?

TANI

Of course.

ALTALUN

Good. Do not worry for me, Tani.
This is my choice and I choose to
do this for my family. For you.

Tani squeezes her hand back. Their look interrupted by--

A SCREAM from outside and crash of plates.

Tani pulls her dagger and moves to the door without
hesitation, Altalun close behind.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - DAY

Manya stands aghast in the corner, her massage materials
scattered on the floor.

In front of them is a LARGE WICKER BASKET on its side, the
limp arm of a dead body falling out.

Altalun takes Manya in her arms and comforts her.

Tani kneels down to inspect the body.

ALTALUN

Who is it?

Tani pulls the body out further until she sees a face:

It's the HEALER that Tani suspected of poisoning Genghis,
her eyes glassy and her throat slit.

INT. ROYAL GUARD BARRACKS - DAY

Tani stands with Altalun among racks of armor. Across the
room, Unach and some of the other slighted guards that Tani
dispatched watch her and mutter to one another.

Hoelun enters and the guards quieten down.

HOELUN

The woman in the basket. Who is
she?

Tani eyes Unach and the group across the room. Hoelun sees.

HOELUN (cont'd)

You can speak. They're fools but
they're *my* fools.

TANI

The woman I suspected of the poisoning.

HOELUN

Did you identify her to anyone?

TANI

No. Ogedei knows I suspect foul play but nothing more.

ALTALUN

Why wouldn't her killer have removed the body from the palace?

HOELUN

The guard has been doubled at every exit since our arrival. Everything inspected, nobody allowed to leave.

TANI

The killer is still in the palace.

HOELUN

You were right to come to me. We don't know who can be trusted.

At that moment, Boroghul enters. He sees the women assembled and bows his head.

BOROGHUL

My apologies. I did not mean to interrupt.

HOELUN

What did you discover, Boroghul?

BOROGHUL

The woman lived in the servant's quarters. I asked after her and she was seen speaking with a soldier earlier today.

HOELUN

One of the guard?

BOROGHUL

One of Chagatai's men.

The news washes over everyone. *Chagatai. Of course.*

TANI

Where is he?

Tani steps towards Boroghul.

HOELUN

(to Tani and Altalun)

Both of you will remain here. If he is willing to kill, you are both at great risk.

TANI

I will not wait. Chagatai poisoned the Supreme Khan.

HOELUN

Boroghul, don't let them out of your sight.

Boroghul moves to block Tani from Hoelun.

TANI

You cannot make us wait here.

HOELUN

For your own protection. If what we suspect is proven true, I'll already lose one grandchild today.

(to the other guards)

With me!

Hoelun exits and Tani fumes.

INT. STABLES - DAY

Chagatai's soldier, TSUBI, a real bruiser type, packs a horse with feed and adjusts the bridle. Chagatai comes up and inspects the horse.

CHAGATAI

An excellent horse. How did you come by her?

TSUBI

Sir?

CHAGATAI

My men have been known to steal horses in the wake of battle.

TSUBI

Outside Gorlos.

CHAGATAI

Quite a battle. A very lucky horse to have survived it.

TSUBI

I thought so. A good omen, sir.

CHAGATAI

Yes, very good. You have served me well for how many years?

TSUBI

Twelve years, sir.

CHAGATAI

It's funny. All this time and yet I don't know your name.

TSUBI

Tsubi, sir.

Tsubi is beginning to worry. This much attention from Chagatai can't be a good thing.

CHAGATAI

Tsubi. Tsu-bi-tsu-bi-tsu-bi. An interesting name.

TSUBI

It was my father's also.

CHAGATAI

Then I suppose you're stuck with it, aren't you?

TSUBI

Yes, sir.

Chagatai strokes the horse's head affectionately.

TSUBI (cont'd)

We'll be riding soon, sir. If there's nothing else, I'll prepare your horse.

CHAGATAI

That won't be necessary, I think I will take this one.

Tsubi nods and steps away from the horse.

TSUBI

Of course, sir. She's yours.

CHAGATAI

Good. I think I'll call her Tsubi. Keep the name alive.

(MORE)

CHAGATAI (cont'd)
After all, it's not your father's
fault you failed me.

Chagatai draws his sword.

Tsubi backs away, looking at his sword resting in the bag
aside his horse.

CHAGATAI (cont'd)
You did me a great service killing
that servant. But you did it
poorly.

CLOSE ON: The EYE of the HORSE now known as Tsubi reflects
an enraged Chagatai hacking away at his previous owner.

INT. ROYAL GUARD BARRACKS - DAY

Tani stands across from Boroghul, staring him down.

TANI
Chagatai killed your Supreme Khan.
Don't you want to see him suffer
for what he has done? Come with me
and he will suffer.

Boroghul doesn't react. Tani sits with Altalun.

TANI (cont'd)
I should be out there, holding a
blade to his neck.

ALTALUN
If people heard he was even
suspected of murdering our father,
this would fracture the Empire. We
need to be sure.

TANI
Instead of waiting for him to
return to his loyal armies, we
confront him here in the palace,
force him to confess and execute
him. I'll tell Ogedei not to let
him leave with the procession.

Tani stands up to Boroghul.

TANI (cont'd)
You said you would do anything for
me. All I want is for you to move.

Tani's not great at using men's affection for gain. Boroghul blinks twice, the only sign that Tani is having any effect.

Altalun stands.

ALTALUN

I just can't stand this waiting!

Tani and Boroghul watch her as she moves across the room.

ALTALUN (cont'd)

Waiting here under guard, as though we did something wrong. All I want is justice for my father.

Altalun turns back to Tani and winks.

ALTALUN (cont'd)

I want...

She staggers.

ALTALUN (cont'd)

I...

Altalun collapses dramatically.

Boroghul leaps to his feet, too late to catch her, but kneels over her, checking to see if she is alright.

Altalun flutters her eyelids and opens her eyes.

ALTALUN (cont'd)

Sorry.

Boroghul looks around and sees that Tani has disappeared.

INT. OGEDEI'S LOUNGE - DAY

Chagatai enters holding Ogedei's note.

CHAGATAI

Summoning me to say farewell. What a touching sentiment, brother.

OGEDEI

I summoned you here because one of my healers met with a gruesome end. I want to make sure you had nothing to do with it.

CHAGATAI

I swear it.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Tani hears Ogedei and Chagatai before she sees them, slowing to a creep and listening intently.

OGEDEI (O.S.)

Tani came and spoke to me. She suspects foul play in our father's death.

CHAGATAI (O.S.)

By me?

OGEDEI (O.S.)

And I've just had to reassure our grandmother and the entire Royal Guard of your innocence. Clearly I'm not the only one in this city who learns of foul play and thinks your name.

Tani pushes the door open slightly and sees the two facing away from her. She unsheathes her dagger.

INT. OGEDEI'S LOUNGE - DAY

Back inside with the brothers.

CHAGATAI

I'm a perfect gentleman. Just ask my whores. They'll tell you I tip exceedingly well. Perhaps they could pass that message to Tani.

OGEDEI

If we are to keep the Empire from collapsing, perhaps antagonizing your family is not the best idea.

Tani takes this moment to rush from her position. Ogedei sees her but before he has a moment to react, Tani has her dagger at Chagatai's throat from behind.

TANI

I disagree.

Chagatai is wide-eyed but keeps still.

OGEDEI

Tani, let him go.

CHAGATAI

She won't kill me.

Tani moves the dagger away from Chagatai's throat.

CHAGATAI (cont'd)

See?

Tani plunges the knife in and out of Chagatai's thigh and he screams in pain, dropping to his knee.

Tani grabs Chagatai's sword from his belt and unsheathes it from his scabbard as she pushes him in to the dirt.

Tani holds the sword out at Chagatai, the dagger in her other hand dripping blood.

TANI

He killed our father.

OGEDEI

Whatever you think he did, this is not the answer. It will only lead to more suffering.

TANI

I want him to say it.

Tani puts the sword right up against Chagatai as he holds his leg tightly, putting pressure on the wound.

TANI (cont'd)

Say it! Confess.

CHAGATAI

So you can kill me?

TANI

Killing your own father. A man who made you everything you are. Why? Did you see a weakness and strike? You must've known you'd never be Supreme Khan.

Chagatai starts laughing.

CHAGATAI

You think I wanted to be Supreme Khan? Stupid girl.

A sword tip presses against Tani's neck.

She turns and Ogedei has drawn his sword on her.

Of course. Poisoning was too wily for Chagatai.

OGEDEI

I told you, this way would lead to more suffering.

TANI

You were never going to let Tolui become Supreme Khan.

OGEDEI

Why should he? I trained for this my whole life. I fought for this Empire, secured the west. I won't let anyone take what's mine.

Chagatai staggers to his feet and grabs Tani's sword and dagger from her.

Chagatai kicks at the back of Tani's legs, forcing her to her knees. He puts the dagger, still dripping with his blood, against Tani's throat.

OGEDEI (cont'd)

Not here. Tie her up, get her out of my palace. Dispose of her there.

Chagatai steps back and delivers a swift punch with the sword hilt to Tani's head. She falls to the ground, knocked out cold.

CHAGATAI

Have your man bundle her up and take her to the procession. I'm getting one last drink. And one for my leg.

Chagatai winces from his bleeding leg as he sheathes his sword and hobbles out the door into the hallway.

OGEDEI

You can't just leave her here.

CHAGATAI

What are you gonna do? Come out here and stop me?

Chagatai laughs. Ogedei swallows his anger at being taunted. He walks up to the doorway and... closes the door.

As he does, he hears Chagatai's ROARING LAUGHTER.

INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Temple Shamans carry Genghis' body, still resting on slate, to TWO COFFINS.

One is GOLD, engraved, clearly ceremonial and created for this exact purpose. They move the body *past* this coffin.

The body is instead lowered tenderly by the shamans and placed in a LARGE WOODEN COFFIN with no markings. A simple coffin but one designed to preserve his dignity.

Then, the shamans retreat and members of the Royal Guard, overseen by Hoelun, enter the temple. They stand either side of the coffin and lift.

INT. STABLES - NIGHT

Partially bundled in cloth, Tani stirs while lying on straw.

CHAGATAI

I understand why he favored you.

Chagatai sits atop a basket next to Tani.

TANI

Wh- where-

CHAGATAI

Truly, I understand. You are *relentless*.

Chagatai gestures to his bandaged leg.

CHAGATAI (cont'd)

Brutal. Ruthless. Everything he wanted his children to be.

Right now, Tani isn't even strong enough to unwrap herself from the cloth she is writhing against.

CHAGATAI (cont'd)

I trained to be the son he wanted. Then, when I came of age, I killed for him until killing meant nothing to me. Even then he saw me as a disgrace. And I felt nothing. When Ogedei suggested we poison him, he said it would save the Empire. Perhaps it will. For my part, I wondered if it would mean anything to me. Killing my own father.

Chagatai stands, favoring his good leg.

CHAGATAI (cont'd)

Nothing.

Chagatai moves to Tani's feet.

CHAGATAI (cont'd)

I don't know how you both did it.
Killing brutally. Relentlessly. Yet
still caring for one another. I
think that's why he loved you.
Because you could still love him
back.

Chagatai grabs at Tani's bound legs as she weakly tries to kick him away.

CHAGATAI (cont'd)

Come on, I'm helping you.

TANI

(mumbled)

No. No.

He lifts her over his shoulder and walks over to a wooden carriage.

CHAGATAI

I am to lead a grand procession
west. A hundred men, big gold
coffin, all of it. We'll make noise
so everyone knows where Genghis
Khan was laid to rest. Meanwhile, a
dozen of the Royal Guard will take
the Supreme Khan back to his
birthplace. Leaving in the middle
of the night, unnoticed,
undisturbed. Keeping his true grave
secret. Rather smart, isn't it. We
all came up with it while you were
asleep. Just the family.

Chagatai drops Tani just in the door of the carriage. He retrieves a small vial from his belt and brings it to Tani's lips.

CHAGATAI (cont'd)

Worm venom. To make the trip much
easier for everyone.

Tani tries to squirm away but she's too feeble to stop him from forcing the liquid down her throat.

Chagatai enters the carriage and drags Tani toward the COFFIN, now secured inside. He opens the top, revealing their father's corpse in his ceremonial armor.

Chagatai lifts Tani and drops her next to the corpse.

CHAGATAI (cont'd)
You two belong together.

Tani loses consciousness as Chagatai places the coffin lid back on.

INT. STABLES - NIGHT

Chagatai opens the door to the stables and lets in members of the Royal Guard.

CHAGATAI
Have a safe journey.

They nod as Chagatai exits.

A dozen members of the Royal Guard, led by Unach, remove their official armor and dress in unmarked armor.

They close the carriage door, prepare the horses and leave the stables.

INT. COFFIN - DAY

...or is it night? Barely any light can make it into the coffin but Tani groans as she awakens.

The sound of shuffling as she pushes against the coffin lid.

INT. CARRIAGE - DAY

There's slightly more light in the carriage, making it through the gaps in the wood. The carriage rocks from side to side, the wheels creaking as it moves.

The coffin lid barely moves, several nails keeping it attached to the coffin. Then, suddenly there's a THUD as the bottom panel budes. Again. Again.

A few more kicks loosens it up and then BAM! The bottom panel of the coffin opens and Tani slowly squeezes her way out.

She stands slowly, holding the shifting walls to stay steady.

There are doors ahead of her. As she readies herself to kick at the doors, she's THROWN against the carriage walls as it lurches to a stop.

The creaking of the wheels stopped, Tani can hear a murmur of voices outside.

Suddenly, the voices start SHOUTING and there's panic outside. Horses WHINNYING, men screaming out WAR CRIES, other voices WAILING IN AGONY.

The panic lasts mere moments and is punctuated by one final sound - a **THWACK!** - as an arrow bursts through one carriage wall and lodges in the other, right near Tani's head.

She moves to the newly-created hole and sees bodies on the ground. The entire escort wiped out.

More importantly, MEN with DARK GREEN CLOTH up to their cheekbones are making their way to the carriage.

Tani steps back from the doors, readying herself to attack when they open.

Sounds of WOOD BREAKING outside and then the doors SWING OPEN.

EXT. GRASS PLAIN - DAY

Tani launches out of the carriage, SCREAMING and swinging her fists wildly. The MASKED MEN, no more than a dozen, all step back.

One nocks an arrow and aims it at Tani.

SEMUI

Wait!

One of the men steps toward Tani and removes the cloth from his face. SEMUI, 25, smiles at Tani and raises his hands. His GREEN EYES shine through the accumulated dirt from weeks of travel.

He gestures at the blood around Tani's arms.

SEMUI (cont'd)

Are you hurt?

Tani looks from man to man as they lower their weapons. She backs away from them, ready to run.

SEMUI (cont'd)
 You don't have to run. We won't
 hurt you...

While Semui has pulled her focus, one of the men approaches Tani from behind. He reaches out - and Tani grabs his arm and spins to lock his own arm behind his back.

With her other hand, she grabs a dagger from the man's hilt and brings it to his neck.

It all happens in a blur of instinct and training.

SEMUI (cont'd)
 ...as long as you don't hurt us. I
 see why the soldiers locked you up.

Semui only has a moment to be impressed before his attention is drawn to a BODY among the dead soldiers that is MOVING.

Unach of the Royal Guard, playing dead and biding his time, chose this moment to make a run for it.

As he runs, his back to the masked men, an archer aims. Semui stops him.

SEMUI (cont'd)
 Let him share what happened here.

Semui turns his attention back to Tani.

SEMUI (cont'd)
 See? We can be merciful. Even to
 Mongol soldiers. What is your name?

TANI
 Kali.

SEMUI
 Kali, will you please let my friend
 go?

Tani only holds him tighter.

SEMUI (cont'd)
 Very well. I am Semui. The man in
 your arms is Aydar. We only killed
 these men because they are Mongols.

Semui gestures to the carriage.

SEMUI (cont'd)
Your enemies also, it seems. We
have no disagreement with you, you
may leave freely.

Tani backs away, keeping Aydar in her arms.

SEMUI (cont'd)
It'd be best if you left us with
Aydar, of course.

Tani weighs her options. She pushes Aydar forward and starts
to back away, making sure no archers are readying.

SEMUI (cont'd)
We tracked these men and ambushed
where we knew there would be no
others for some distance. You will
need supplies.

Semui offers a hand-stitched WATER BLADDER.

SEMUI (cont'd)
Which way are you going?

TANI
West.

SEMUI
As are we. Let me make you an
offer. We camp here tonight and
tomorrow you may continue west with
us.

Tani looks around, sees Unach still running in the distance.

She moves forward and snatches Semui's water bladder.

Semui smiles and turns to his men.

SEMUI (cont'd)
Set a fire, we camp here tonight.

Tani takes a cautious sip of water, then gulps the rest
down. Semui watches with interest.

EXT. GRASS PLAIN - NIGHT

The masked men all talk and laugh around a CAMPFIRE set near
the abandoned carriage.

Barely lit by the fire, Tani sits away from them in the relative darkness. The scavenged, unmarked ARMOR of the slain Royal Guard laying next to her.

Tani hears a sound and reaches for her dagger. She looks to see Semui approach with another WATER BLADDER.

SEMUI

I've told the men that they're not to speak with you. We leave at first light. When we join our people, we can give you the supplies you need to travel further. There's one more thing.

Semui drops the water bladder at her feet and pulls out HIS OWN DAGGER.

Tani readies herself to fight but Semui holds the dagger out to her, hilt first.

SEMUI (cont'd)

Aydar wanted to know if could have his dagger back. Trade?

Tani turns Aydar's dagger over in her hands.

SEMUI (cont'd)

Mine is better anyway.

They trade daggers, their hands touching as they do.

Semui smiles broadly, Tani barely even at all. But she does.

TANI

Do you always... *smile* so much?

Semui smiles even wider and laughs too.

SEMUI

Yes. Some think it marks me a fool. In recent days, I certainly have been smiling more.

TANI

Why?

SEMUI

Genghis Khan is dead.

Tani glances at the carriage that still holds the corpse of her father, the man whose death Semui is celebrating.

Semui begins to untie his shirt. Tani moves back.

Semui lifts his shirt, revealing a battle-scarred but well-muscled frame but more notably, over his heart:

A BRANDING that has left a nasty scar. A SPOKED-WHEEL with a FLAME inside. The symbol of the TATAR people.

The symbol of the assassins that had tried to kill Tolui all those years ago.

SEMUI (cont'd)

Genghis Khan almost wiped out my people. Those of us that survived have wandered in exile ever since. Now that he is dead, his Empire will be weak, his children fighting for their share of his lands. Now is the time for all the tribes of this land to unite and strike back against the Mongols.

Tani grips tightly to her dagger. It would be so easy to plunge it in his heart, right through the branding that labels him an enemy.

Semui grabs an undershirt from the pile of scavenged Royal Guard gear. He puts it on and tests the fit.

SEMUI (cont'd)

We head west to join our people and any others who wish to fight the Mongols.

TANI

The Mongols are conquerors. You think you will succeed where countless others have fallen?

SEMUI

Of all the tribes he conquered, Genghis Khan was most vicious with the Tatar people. My people. He tried to kill us because he feared us.

TANI

The Supreme Khan feared you?

SEMUI

He feared a power he could not understand.

With that, Semui crouches down to the pile of Royal Guard armor and fabrics.

He closes his eyes and places his hand flat on the earth.

Semui lifts his hand and a FLAME skitters across the earth and ENGULFS the pile of clothes.

Tani drops Semui's dagger and steps back, eyes wide.

Semui smiles at her reaction, his normally charming smile made menacing by the flickering flames dancing across his face. *Flames he somehow called forth from the earth.*

SEMUI (cont'd)

First, we take Karakorum. Then, all
our lands and cities, one by one.

Semui leaves and Tani watches him go, speechless. She kneels down and inspects Semui's dagger by the firelight.

The hilt is adorned with the symbol of the Tatar people - she runs her finger over the flame.

INT. CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Tani struggles and finally takes off the coffin lid, revealing her father's corpse. She looks down at him and her eyes shine in the flickering light from the nearby campfire.

TANI

I will keep the Empire safe from
all our enemies. I swear it.
Goodbye, Father.

Tani places one hand on her father's chest then exits.

EXT. GRASS PLAIN - NIGHT

Semui is sitting with his fellow Tatar men when Tani strides out of the darkness to their fire. The men stop talking as she steps over them, grabs a burning log from the fire and turns around.

They all watch with interest as she pauses outside the carriage, steels herself, then throws the log in.

Semui and the other men stand to see her better as the log catches the carriage on fire.

It's not long before the whole carriage is alight and Tani is fully visible. No tears running down her cheeks, no fear or quivering lip, only resolve.

END OF PILOT