

EXT. NIGHT. A CAMP.

The night is calm and clear and the camp still and quiet but for the crackle of small, scattered fires.

Rustling comes from the trees that form a circle around the settlement, a dark figure emerges, moving quickly.

INT. NIGHT. HENWEN'S TENT.

A modestly decorated tent, everything appears heavy and slightly worn.

HENWEN, a tall, strongly built woman in her 40s, with dusky blonde hair tied back tightly in a knot, stands cleaning her sword. Her actions are smooth, practised and patient.

ADITI, around ten years younger and of slighter build, with dark hair plaited down to her waist sits on a stool, bothering a small piece of wood with her knife. She sighs impatiently and looks to Henwen, when suddenly the figure that emerged from the trees bursts into the tent.

Aditi flies from the stool to the entrance of the tent, and in one motion has her knife at the intruder's throat. She does not notice that Henwen has barely reacted.

Aditi uses her other hand to lift the hood of the cloaked stranger. She recoils in shock to see JUNO, Henwen's daughter, beneath. Juno is 20, tall and lithe with hair a lighter blonde than her mother's.

Henwen turns to face her daughter.

HENWEN

Daughter, it has been two days. The rest of us are preparing for battle, this was an inconvenient time for a holiday..

JUNO

I had no time to explain. We intercepted a map; it shows the enemy camp. I took three others and we traced them. I know how many they are, how well armed, this is good for us. If you spent any time outside your tent, you would know that some of us are impatient to strike.

Juno proffers the map to Aditi who looks it over, still confused.

At that moment, NAMMU, the eldest of the group, thin and wiry with greying brown hair and a faint scar running across her left cheek, enters the tent, a frown across her face.

HENWEN

Yes?

NAMMU

One of our scouts has spotted movement from the east, it seems we have been discovered. They will be upon us by daybreak.

Henwen's face sets into a familiar expression of resignation. She turns from Nammu to her daughter.

HENWEN

You led them right to us. Had you come to me first, I could have told you this would happen. You think we are the only ones who have scouts?

Juno's eyes dart between the older women. Aditi softens with understanding for her young friend and she puts a hand on Juno's shoulder. Nammu casts her gaze to the ground.

JUNO

They couldn't have seen us, I was so careful, I...

NAMMU

Enough. This is where we are now.

Aditi turns her attention to Henwen.

ADITI

She's right, all we can do now is prepare. I will go and speak to the others, Juno is right that morale has been low, perhaps this isn't such a bad thing...

HENWEN

Well, we will soon find out.

Aditi exits the tent followed by Juno.

Henwen has gone back to cleaning her weapon. She addresses Nammu.

HENWEN

I suppose that this suits you perfectly? You seem to thrive when there is discord between myself and Juno.

NAMMU

You act as if I were somehow to blame?

HENWEN

That wasn't my meaning at all, how could you possibly have known what Juno was planning?

NAMMU

Indeed. If her own mother and captain had no idea, then how could any of us lowly followers?

HENWEN

You are excused.

EXT. CAMP. NIGHT.

Nammu exits the tent and makes her way to a nearby fire, where Juno is crouched, staring into the licking flames, the edge of the burning map in one hand. The younger woman does not stir as Nammu slowly takes a seat beside her.

JUNO

And once again, my mother will come out of this the hero. I thought this was a chance to change things. You should never have given me the damned map.

NAMMU

I simply passed along information; it was your choice what to do with it. Henwen was young and impulsive too once. We all were.

JUNO

I never know if you are a mentor to me, or whether your whispers in my ear will be my downfall.

Juno turns her attention from the fire, but Nammu has gone.

Aditi has been standing nearby, watching the scene. She steps from the shadows and cuts off Nammu's path.

ADITI

You were once someone to be admired, Nammu,
now I fear you are someone to be wary of.

NAMMU

You want to see the good in everyone, Aditi,
this makes you weak. Would you truly want to
serve under that impulsive child?

ADITI

She won't be a child forever. But for now, I
am loyal to Henwen, she has earned it.

NAMMU

You think that your virtuous captain cares
about your blind loyalty? She barely knows
you exist.

ADITI

I pity you, Nammu.

Aditi leaves the older woman, who casts her gaze back towards
the camp, then up at the blanket of stars above.

INT. HENWEN'S TENT. NIGHT.

Aditi enters the tent and approaches Henwen who is sitting
behind her table, staring at a map.

ADITI

That map is identical to the one Juno found.

HENWEN

Yes, I made a copy.

ADITI

You planted it for her to find? You wanted
the fight to come to us?

HENWEN

This is as good a place as any, you know it
is better to defend a position, even if my
daughter would have us strike first. The map,
I left for Nammu to find.

ADITI

You knew she would share it with Juno?

HENWEN

I wasn't sure what she would do. She has
shown her hand now.

ADITI

Juno is young, she likes getting her own way,
she isn't to blame.

HENWEN

She can't trust herself yet, so I cannot
trust her either. It is how she picks herself
up from this that matters. I need to know
whether she has the stuff of a true leader...

ADITI

I would not want to have to make the
decisions you do.

HENWEN (with a wry smile)

Then I think you are the only one who feels
that way.

(A BEAT.)

How long until sunrise?

ADITI

Not long, we will be ready.

EXT. THE EDGE OF THE CAMP. NIGHT.

The four women stand at the head of their camp, in a battle
stance they know all too well. They face the mountain in the
distance and wait for the dawn to break, each has her eyes
fixed on that single point. The only sound is their breathing.

ADITI

I have another one...

NAMMU

Honestly, is now really the time?

Henwen drops her shoulders for a moment.

HENWEN (with an indulgent sigh)

Go on then...

ADITI

How many male gladiators does it take to
build a fire?

(A BEAT.)

JUNO

Alright, how many?

ADITI

None. They just sit in the dark and cry.

Juno snorts with laughter. A smile twitches at the edges of Henwen's mouth. Nammu shakes her head.

The first light creeps over the mountain. The women tense again. And wait...