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Pharaoh Serket and the Lost Stone of Fire

A Mystery of Ancient Egypt

By
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Cast of Characters:

- Serket (Pharaoh of Egypt, teens)
- Akana (his older sister, 20s)
- Harkhuf (the high priest of Amun-Re, 40s)
- Tau (Pharaoh Serket's chief bodyguard, 20s)
- Zalira (teens)
- Bakneb (a scribe, teens)
- Tessay (a bedouin, 40s)
- Palace Guard
- Asteth (a caravan captain, 40s)
- Thesh (an ancient Pharaoh)

This play was originally performed by a company of seven actors

The action takes place in Thebes, capital of the Upper Kingdom of Egypt, and in the surrounding desert, ca. 1700 B.C.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

PHARAOH SERKET's private quarters, in a large palace in Thebes. Night. The room contains a bed, but little furniture otherwise. An arch leads to a balcony, and we can see the starswept Saharan sky. Another door leads to an antechamber. The room is lit with flickering oil lamps.

In the darkness: loud MUSIC, crashing, violent. Then lights fade up quickly to reveal: PHARAOH SERKET on the bed, covered with a thin linen sheet. He is writhing weakly, sweating, gasping for breath – dying. His older sister, AKANA, is next to him, wiping his face with cloths dipped in a bowl of water)

SERKET:
Water...

AKANA:
No, brother, I'm sorry, the priests say that water will only feed your fever.

SERKET:
Water...

AKANA:
Sleep. Sleep.

(On the balcony behind AKANA, unseen, a FIGURE appears, clad in a black Bedouin-style hooded cloak, a silhouette, silent. He/she moves toward the room. HARKHUF, the High Priest of Amun-Re, enters. The FIGURE retreats into the shadows, but remains visible, crouching, waiting)

HARKHUF:
Any change?

AKANA (slightly startled):
Oh. High Priest Harkhuf.

HARKHUF:

I beg your pardon, Princess, I didn't mean to startle you. How is he?

AKANA (shakes her head, on the verge of tears)

HARKHUF:

I thought I should notify you: the Council is meeting tonight in emergency session to decide what to do if our beloved Pharaoh... does not recover.

AKANA:

And you are made ruler.

HARKHUF:

If it is the pleasure of the Council that I serve as regent then naturally I will obey.

AKANA:

You wasted no time.

(HARKHUF approaches the bed and looks at SERKET, who is writhing, struggling to breathe)

HARKHUF:

The fever is consuming him. Captain Tau.

(TAU, PHARAOH SERKET's chief bodyguard, enters)

Bring in the coals.

(TAU bows, exits. He returns carrying a small brazier, with tongs resting in the glowing coals)

AKANA:

What, what are you doing?

(HARKHUF picks up the tongs; they glow, red-hot)

HARKHUF:

Heat is the only thing strong enough to drive this fever away. Princess, perhaps you would be happier to wait in the antechamber with the servants.

AKANA:

I'm not leaving my brother.

HARKHUF:

Then would you be so good as to pull back Pharaoh's coverlet?

(AKANA slowly pulls back the thin linen sheet.
HARKHUF approaches with the tongs)

SERKET:
Nooooooooooooooooooooo...

HARKHUF:
I'm sorry, your majesty, but the great god Amun-Re demands that I attend you with all the means at my disposal.

(He moves to SERKET's bedside. As he does the FIGURE on the balcony moves into the room. HARKHUF starts to apply the tongs to SERKET's chest. AKANA turns away, weeping)

SERKET:
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh....

FIGURE:
He doesn't have to die!

HARKHUF (hugely startled):
Aaaaagggggghhhhh!!!

(TAU grabs the FIGURE, pulls out a dagger and holds her)

TAU:
Who are you?!

(Yanks back the FIGURE's hood, revealing a young woman, skin sun-dark, fiery piercing eyes, face filled with strange tattoos, hair long and braided – ZALIRA)

Where did you come from?!

ZALIRA:
Pharaoh doesn't have to die. I have medicine. I can save him.

TAU:
This is Pharaoh Serket's private bedchamber. How did you get in here?

ZALIRA (nods toward the balcony):
Palm tree.

HARKHUF:
Captain Tau, take this girl outside and kill her.

TAU:

With pleasure.

AKANA:

No.

HARKHUF:

Anyone who can slip past the guards and into Pharaoh's private apartments is dangerous. Do it.

AKANA:

No.

HARKHUF:

I insist.

AKANA:

You are not regent yet. I am Pharaoh's sister, and you will obey me.

HARKHUF (hesitates, then bows)

(AKANA goes to ZALIRA, looks at her carefully)

AKANA:

You say you have medicine?

ZALIRA:

In my cloak.

(TAU reaches into ZALIRA's robe and takes out a small stone vial)

It's a tea made from the dried flowers of the brightweed plant. It grows in shaded canyons after the rain. Thanks be to the one true god that it rained last month. It can cure red lotus fever.

AKANA:

Red lotus fever?

ZALIRA:

It's what my people call this illness. Because of the red stigmata on the skin.

(AKANA holds out her hand. TAU gives her the vial. She removes the stopper, smells the medicine, reacts)

It's a bitter tea.

(HARKHUF smells the vial, also reacts. AKANA takes the vial)

AKANA:

What will this do?

ZALIRA:

It will ease the fever and give Pharaoh's body a chance to heal itself.

HARKHUF:

Princess, this is madness.

AKANA (after a pause):

Captain Tau, let her go. Let her go.

(TAU obeys, but holds his dagger, ready to strike)

ZALIRA:

I have not come to harm Pharaoh Serket.

AKANA (looks at ZALIRA for a moment, then turns to TAU):

Taste it, Captain.

TAU:

What?

AKANA:

You are Pharaoh's chief bodyguard. It's your job to keep him from being poisoned. Taste the potion.

(Moment. Then TAU takes the vial, hesitates, then takes a swallow. He grimaces)

TAU:

It is... very bitter.

AKANA:

But not immediately poisonous.

ZALIRA:

Pharaoh doesn't have much time.

(AKANA takes the vial from TAU. To ZALIRA:)

AKANA:

If anything happens to my brother I'll have you roasted alive.

(Goes to SERKET's bed)

Brother? Can you hear me? I have something for you to drink.

(Holds the vial to his mouth)

ZALIRA:

Small sips only.

SERKET (gags on the bitter tea):

Aaaaaaggggggghhhhhhhh....

AKANA:

Drink. Drink.

(SERKET weakly takes in the liquid)

ZALIRA:

Permission to touch Pharaoh.

TAU:

Princess, no.

HARKHUF:

No.

AKANA:

Granted.

(ZALIRA goes to SERKET. Strange, magical SFX and music as ZALIRA gently places her hands on SERKET's face)

ZALIRA:

Look at me, Pharaoh Serket. Look at me.

(SERKET looks at ZALIRA. SFX builds. In a soft altered voice:)

You are going to live. You are going to live.

(Moves away from the bed. Music and SFX disappear. To HARKHUF)

Bring water for Pharaoh.

HARKHUF:

Water will aggravate the fever.

ZALIRA:

If we don't give him water he will die of thirst.

AKANA:

You heard her.

(HARKHUF hesitates, then starts to exit)

ZALIRA:

Well water. No River water for Pharaoh.

(HARKHUF glares at her, then exits)

AKANA:

What is your name?

ZALIRA:

Zalira.

(TAU approaches ZALIRA, dagger drawn)

AKANA:

Nothing must happen to her, Captain.

TAU:

Yes, Princess.

(TAU grabs ZALIRA and pulls her away from SERKET's bedside. Exeunt. Moment, as AKANA stands next to her brother's bed, looking down at him.

Transition: slow, leisurely. The lights of the stars fade into rosy dawn. SFX up: the sound of River water flowing close by. SERKET remains in bed, sleeping, as SERVANTS bring in the props needed for the next scene)

SCENE TWO

(SERKET's bedchamber again. Morning. PHARAOH SERKET sleeps. Suddenly, he wakes:)

SERKET:
Oh.

(He sits up, pale and wobbly, dark haunted eyes. He struggles to his feet, takes a few steps, then staggers, knocking over a table, sending it crashing to the floor. TAU rushes in)

TAU:
Your majesty, what are you doing out of bed?

SERKET:
I want... I want to look at the River.

(Begins lurching toward the balcony)

TAU:
Please. You should rest. Pharaoh.

(SERKET reaches the balcony, out of breath)

SERKET:
The inundation has begun.

TAU:
It started yesterday. The beginning of the floods and your recovery came on the same day. Everyone says it's a wonderful omen.

AKANA (offstage):
Is it true? Pharaoh is awake?

(PRINCESS AKANA rushes into the room, goes to SERKET and kneels)

That you are alive, your majesty, is a miracle beyond anything I've ever dared to hope for. Who can doubt that the gods love Egypt more than any other king—

(SERKET pulls her to her feet and embraces her.
TAU and AKANA are both surprised by this
physical display)

SERKET:

I almost died, sister. I almost died.

AKANA:

And, and we give thanks to the gods that you still live.

SERKET:

My reign barely begun and I nearly died.

(Breaks the embrace. He is trembling)

AKANA:

You should sit.

SERKET:

Yes.

(TAU brings him a chair; he sits)

AKANA:

Will you take a bowl of honey water?

SERKET (nods)

(AKANA pours water into a bowl, brings it to
SERKET, who drinks)

Just now I had the most powerful dream. There was a strange girl
bending over me, with dark swirling eyes. At her chest there was a ball of
cold blue fire. I could feel something flowing into me when she touched
me.

AKANA:

There was a girl, a... desert urchin, who came into your quarters and gave
you a bitter potion.

(Glances at TAU)

I believe it saved your life.

SERKET (stands, eyes flashing):

Where is she?

TAU:

Imprisoned.

SERKET:
Why?

She stole into the palace grounds, into your quarters. She touched your body.

SERKET:
You haven't had her killed, have you?

TAU:
No.

SERKET:
Bring her here.

TAU:
Now?

SERKET:
Pharaoh will see her now. Bring her immediately.

(TAU bows, and exits)

What is her name?

AKANA:
Zalira.

SERKET:
Zalira.

AKANA:
Captain Tau thinks she's dangerous.

SERKET:
Do you?

AKANA:
I think she saved your life. But, yes, I think she may also be dangerous.

(AKANA hears something, goes to the balcony,
looks out)

Brother, palace workers are gathering in the garden. They want to see you. Will you...?

SERKET:
No. I can't face them, not now. Father could, he could rise from his sickbed and face anyone. But not me.

(The sound outside grows louder)

AKANA:
You must.

SERKET (hesitates):
I... I will wear my lapis lazuli neck piece.

(AKANA goes to a table, opens a case, and brings out a necklace with a spectacular blue stone. She fastens it around SERKET's neck. SERKET takes another shaky sip of water. Then he stands, and goes to the balcony. AKANA joins him)

AKANA:
May Pharaoh live a thousand years!

VOICES:
May Pharaoh live a thousand years! May Pharaoh live a thousand years!

(SERKET waves. The shouts from outside build. SERKET moves away from the balcony, staggering, light-headed. AKANA rushes to him)

AKANA:
Are you all right?

SERKET (nods)

AKANA:
Sit.

(SERKET sits again)

Brother, I know you are ill, but there is something I must tell you. There have been... developments. Scouts have reported that Hyksosian soldiers, several hundred of them, have crossed the Eastern Sea. They are in Egyptian territory.

SERKET:
Does General Setep know?

AKANA:
Of course.

SERKET:
Good.

AKANA:
You should—

(TAU enters)

SERKET:
Is she here?

TAU:
Yes.

SERKET:
Send her in.

AKANA:
Brother, there is more I must tell you.

SERKET:
Not now!

TAU (goes to the door, to someone offstage):
Send her in.

(ZALIRA is shoved into the room. Her wrists are bound and she looks haggard, disheveled – but still defiant. TAU pushes her down)

Kneel before your Pharaoh.

(ZALIRA kneels, bows her head)

SERKET:
You may look at me.

(She does. Intense charged moment. For a moment we hear soft MUSIC and SFX; then it fades. SERKET swallows)

My sister says that I owe you my life. Is it true?

ZALIRA:
Yes.

TAU:
You owe this girl nothing. It was simple coincidence that she came into your room just as your fever was about to break.

SERKET:
Unbind her.

TAU (hesitates)

SERKET (looks at him)

(TAU takes out his dagger and slices the bonds holding ZALIRA's wrists)

SERKET, con't:

Why, why would you risk your life to sneak onto the palace grounds, and into Pharaoh's quarters?

ZALIRA:

I have a gift for you. I couldn't very well give it to you if you were dead, so when I learned you had red lotus fever I made some brightweed tea and I came into your room.

TAU:

Where is this gift?

ZALIRA:

I will tell Pharaoh about it, privately.

SERKET:

You can speak in front of Captain Tau and Princess Akana.

ZALIRA:

No.

TAU:

No one says no to Pharaoh.

(SERKET looks at ZALIRA. Another charged moment)

SERKET:

Captain Tau. Sister. I will speak alone with this girl.

TAU:

I cannot allow this.

AKANA:

Brother.

SERKET:

You may wait just outside, if you wish.

TAU:

My life is dedicated to keeping you safe. If I leave you with this girl I may as well cut out my heart.

SERKET:

Nevertheless, you will. Pharaoh orders it.

(With great reluctance, AKANA and TAU exit)

SERKET:
Tell me.

ZALIRA:
You have it in you to be a great Pharaoh. I could see it, the other night, as you lay in your bed. Even though you were dying, I could see it. Greater even than your father.

SERKET:
No Pharaoh could be as great as my father.

(ZALIRA moves toward him. SERKET stiffens,
moves back)

ZALIRA:
I won't hurt you.

(Gently touches his face. Moment)

I can feel it.

(Moves away)

There is a legend. About a Stone. A jewel, a powerful jewel. It contains a piece of the sun – what you Egyptians call the great god Ra's – fire. This fire gives great power. Any kingdom that possesses the Stone thrives.

(Beat)

It belonged to an ancient city, Shogali. A warlord named Thesh attacked Shogali. Destroyed the city. He was after the Stone.

SERKET:
And if I had this... Stone of Fire, I could be... as great as my father?

ZALIRA (says nothing)

SERKET:
Where is it?

ZALIRA:
There is a man in your dungeons, an old Bedouin. Tessay. A few months ago Tessay broke into a tomb in the Gebel Negara Mountains. It's possible that the tomb he broke into belongs to Thesh. According to the legend his city was in those mountains.

SERKET:
Did this... Tessay find the Stone?

ZALIRA:

No. But perhaps there is something on the tomb walls that can tell us where the Stone is.

SERKET:

Inscriptions.

(A charged moment. Then SERKET suddenly stands)

SERKET:

Captain Tau!

(TAU enters hurriedly)

We are holding a, a, a Bedouin in the dungeons.

ZALIRA:

Tessay.

SERKET:

Tessay. Have him brought here.

TAU:

You wish to have a prisoner brought here from the dungeons?

SERKET:

Immediately! And send one of my scribes. Someone who can keep a secret, not one of these insufferable palace gossips. Someone new.

(TAU exits)

ZALIRA:

There is something else I must tell you. When I gave you the brightweed tea, I saw angry red marks on your body, on your neck and in your armpit. I see a fresh one, there.

SERKET (uncomfortable):

They are... fever eruptions.

ZALIRA:

Flea bites. Red lotus fever is caused by fleas.

SERKET:

How do you know this?

ZALIRA:

My people have always known this.

SERKET:

Are you suggesting that a flea nearly killed the Pharaoh of Egypt?

ZALIRA:
Yes.

SERKET:
That isn't possible. And besides, the palace is kept scrupulously clean.
Fleas are not allowed.

ZALIRA (points at his bed):
There. And there.

(SERKET stands abruptly and staggers away
from his bed)

SERKET:
Did someone put flea-infested bedding in my room?

(TAU enters with BAKNEB, a young scribe.
BAKNEB prostrates himself in front of SERKET,
forehead touching the floor)

TAU:
Bakneb the scribe, your majesty.

BAKNEB (voice squeaks from pure terror):
May Pharaoh live... a thousand, a thousand years!

(TAU notices SERKET's agitation, goes to him)

TAU:
You should go back to bed.

SERKET:
No! This is the scribe?

TAU:
Yes.

SERKET (to BAKNEB):
You may rise.

BAKNEB (doesn't move)

TAU (nudges him with his foot):
Stand up.

(BAKNEB jumps up)

SERKET:
You may look at me.

(BAKNEB does. Suddenly BAKNEB's face is contorted with spasms)

SERKET, con't:
What is wrong with you?

BAKNEB (lets fly a series of percussive sneezes):
Choo! Choo! Choo! Choo!

TAU:
You're not ill, are you?

BAKNEB:
When I'm nervous I— Choo! Choo! Choo! Sneeze.

(TAU unsheathes his dagger, approaches BAKNEB)

TAU:
You will stop.

BAKNEB:
Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

SERKET:
You are young to be a scribe.

BAKNEB:
I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm...

SERKET:
Yes...?

BAKNEB:
I'm the youngest scribe ever to complete the Instructions.

SERKET:
You are skilled, then.

BAKNEB:
Yes!

ZALIRA:
Can you read—?

BAKNEB (jumps, startled, whirls to face her):
Oh!

ZALIRA:
—ancient tomb writing?

BAKNEB:
I can read anything!

SERKET:
You are very sure of yourself.

BAKNEB:
Yes!

TAU:
Yes, your majesty.

BAKNEB:
Yes, your majesty!

(AKANA enters)

AKANA:
They have brought a prisoner up from the dungeons.

SERKET:
Tell them to send him in.

(TAU goes to the door, nods to someone
offstage)

AKANA (looks at BAKNEB and ZALIRA):
Shouldn't you be resting?

SERKET:
No.

(TESSAY enters. He shuffles unsteadily, and his
clothes are dirty and ragged. TAU shoves him.
TESSAY sprawls, weak)

Help him up.

(TAU pulls TESSAY to his feet)

You may look at me.

(TESSAY does – and his expression seethes with
hatred. ZALIRA pours water into SERKET's bowl
and brings it to him.)

TAU:
That is Pharaoh's bowl!

SERKET:
It's all right.

TESSAY (sees her, reacts):
Zalira.

ZALIRA:
Hello, Tessay.

(TESSAY drinks thirstily)

SERKET:
You know this man?

ZALIRA:
Everyone in the desert knows Tessay. He's a liar and a thief and he knows those mountains like the back of his hand.

SERKET (approaches TESSAY):
You broke into a tomb.

TESSAY :
Oh, no. No.

ZALIRA:
It's all right, Tessay. You won't be harmed.

TAU:
Breaking into a tomb is the greatest sacrilege there is. We feed tomb-robbers to the crocodiles.

SERKET (goes to TESSAY):
Was there a stone, a jewel in it?

TESSAY:
The tomb was empty.

ZALIRA:
Was there a body?

TESSAY:
No.

ZALIRA:
How did you find it?

TESSAY:
I noticed pieces of carved limestone in a hidden canyon. I followed the canyon to a place where a shelf of rock had collapsed. I pulled the loose rock away, and there was the entrance.

ZALIRA:
Had it been broken into before?

TESSAY:
No.

SERKET:
How can you know that?

TESSAY:
I could taste it.

ZALIRA:
Are there inscriptions on the tomb wall?

TESSAY:
Yes.

(ZALIRA and SERKET look at each other, their eyes shining. Charged moment)

SERKET:
Captain Tau. You will prepare a caravan for your Pharaoh.

TAU:
A caravan?

SERKET:
I'm going to that tomb.

TAU:
What?

SERKET:
We will travel in disguise and with great secrecy. I trust you to protect us, Captain. Scribe.

BAKNEB:
Yes, your majesty!

SERKET:
You will translate the inscriptions on the tomb walls. Thief, you will guide us.

TAU:
You are in no condition to travel.

SERKET:
It will take you a day or two to outfit the caravan. By then I will be fine. Look.

SERKET:
Are you refusing to go?

BAKNEB:
No, no. Oh, no. No.

SERKET:
Do you live in Thebes?

BAKNEB:
I have a room near the wharves.

SERKET:
You will be given a house here on the palace grounds. You'll stay here until we leave. We'll send someone for your things. You must tell no one about this.

TAU:
What about...?

(Nods toward ZALIRA and TESSAY)

SERKET:
Put the thief in a clean room. Feed him. Keep him carefully guarded.

TAU:
And the girl?

SERKET (looks at ZALIRA for a beat):
Give her anything she wants. That will be all.

(Exeunt AKANA, BAKNEB, TESSAY)

Zalira. A word.

(TAU stops, looks at her)

Excuse us, please, Captain.

(TAU exits)

I want you to take my bedding, all my linens, everything, into the desert, and burn it.

ZALIRA:
All right.

SERKET:
You will buy new bedding in the market but you will tell no one it's for Pharaoh. Here.

(Takes off a bracelet, gives it to her)

SERKET, con't:

This bracelet is set with turquoise from the Western Desert. It's very valuable.

(Exit ZALIRA. SERKET claps his hands)

Pharaoh will eat.

(Transition: a big shift. Majestic MUSIC and loud SFX: the heavy sound of stone on stone as the walls of SERKET's room disappear and the tomb walls are brought in. In dumb-show: SERKET, TAU, TESSAY, BAKNEB and ZALIRA enter, wearing desert clothes, consulting a map. When the tomb is in place, they disappear)

SCENE THREE

(An ancient tomb in the Gebel Negara Mountains.
Dim lights illuminate beautiful inscriptions.
Moment.

Then TAU enters, holding a flickering oil lamp.
One by one, SERKET, TESSAY, ZALIRA and,
finally, BAKNEB enter, looking at the paintings.
TESSAY is bound. BAKNEB, with a lamp, goes
to the tomb walls, excited, awed:)

BAKNEB:
Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

TAU:
You're lucky, thief, that you didn't make this all up.

BAKNEB:
It's exquisite.

SERKET:
It looks new.

BAKNEB:
Judging from the writing, it's two thousand years old.

SERKET:
Captain, get the thief out of here. He's desecrated this place enough.

TAU:
Should I...?

(Makes a throat cutting motion)

SERKET:
Not yet. He may still be useful.

(TAU leads TESSAY out of the tomb. BAKNEB
brings his lamp closer to the wall, looks at the
hieroglyphs)

Can you read it?

BAKNEB:

Not easily. It's not Egyptian. Some of the hieroglyphs are similar to Egyptian glyphs, but these are intended to be beautiful, rather than easy to read.

(Studies the inscriptions for a moment, then points)

Here. This means king. And these symbols tell you how to pronounce the name. Th. Esh.

SERKET:

Thesh.

BAKNEB:

Yes.

(Reading)

There was a city in these mountains. But something happened. This glyph means well.

SERKET:

Water wells?

BAKNEB:

Yes. But I think this means the wells dried up. The city died.

SERKET:

And the people?

BAKNEB:

They must have died, or scattered. The glyphs say nothing.

(Looks at a new set)

Oh. Here. Sho. Ga. Li.

SERKET:

Shogali! Did they go there?

BAKNEB:

Just Thesh, and a few dozen warriors.

SERKET:

Where was it?

BAKNEB:

On, I believe, an island. This is the glyph for the River. It's identical to the Egyptian. And this must mean island.

SERKET:

There is no island in the River big enough for a city.

BAKNEB (reading):

Pyramids. A big central one and two smaller ones. There is a drawing of them. Look.

(ZALIRA is trembling)

Are you all right?

SERKET:

What else, scribe? Why did he go to Shogali?

(BAKNEB turns his attention back to the inscriptions. He reads for a moment)

BAKNEB:

Oh.

SERKET and ZALIRA:

What.

BAKNEB:

If I'm reading this correctly... This means fire, and inundation. It seems that Thesh and his men flooded the River with fire and destroyed Shogali.

ZALIRA (reacts):

Aaaaaggggghhhh!

BAKNEB:

What's the matter with you?

SERKET (quietly):

He wanted the Stone of Fire.

BAKNEB:

Yes. Here.

(Reads)

Stone. Fire.

SERKET:

Did he find it? Did he?!

BAKNEB:

I don't know.

SERKET:

Keep reading!

BAKNEB:

There's nothing else to read. The inscriptions just stop. It's as if they were waiting for the story to be finished.

SERKET:

But they sealed the tomb.

BAKNEB (notices something):

What is this?

(To ZALIRA)

Can you bring the lamp closer?

(ZALIRA does. BAKNEB examines the wall)

SERKET:

What is it?

BAKNEB:

There's something here. It was carved, not painted. It's crude. It must have been done later, by someone else.

ZALIRA:

What does it say?

BAKNEB:

It's a kind of writing I don't recognize. I'll make a rubbing.

(Opens his pouch, takes out a piece of papyrus and charcoal and makes a rubbing of the inscription)

SERKET:

If we find Shogali, we can find the Stone.

BAKNEB:

Well, I can look in the Hall of Scrolls. A few months ago an old masonry wall collapsed. There was a room behind it, full of ancient scrolls.

SERKET:

We're going to find that stone, I know we are. We'll start back to Thebes at first light.

ZALIRA:

Serket.

(SERKET looks at her, shocked that she used his first name. She goes to him. MUSIC ad SFX,

strange and eerie, fade up. ZALIRA's is soft, altered:)

ZALIRA, con't:

Tell Captain Tau to cut Tessay's bonds and let the old scoundrel go. We don't need him any more. We have to get back to Thebes as quickly as possible and he'll only slow us down.

(Makes a small, but unmistakable gesture. Then she steps back. The MUSIC and SFX fade. SERKET stares at her for a long beat. Then, wordlessly, he nods and exits. BAKNEB is staring at her. A sneeze begins to build:)

BAKNEB:

Ahhhhhhhh—! Ahhhhhhhhhhh—!

(Another gesture from ZALIRA. BAKNEB's sneeze stops. He gives her a fearful, look, then rushes out.

Transition: as before, another big shift, as the tomb walls are taken out and the walls and columns of SERKET's palace are brought in. Forceful MUSIC. In dumb-show: TAU, cuts TESSAY's bonds and shoves him. ZALIRA goes to him, gives him a waterskin. BAKNEB and SERKET are walking, faces bent against the desert wind. When the palace is in place we see HARKHUF, looking around. He withdraws)