



ZOOMOONDA TODAY

Africa's Most Trusted Newspaper-Royal Associated Press



THE KING AND QUEEN DEAD!

Yesterday, a tragic plane accident killed Zoomoonda's beloved king and queen.



Most of the royal cabinet was also aboard the ill-fated flight that crashed at Majestic International Airport.

The lone survivor was the royal pair's lovely teenage daughter, Princess Akeema.

The departed king also leaves behind two younger brothers. Prince Fayeem, is the younger of the two. Then there's the internationally renowned 'player' Prince Ajeem, the king's eldest surviving brother. He inherits the wealthy, powerful throne and care of his niece Princess Akeema. Prince Ajeem promoted his long-time friend, Timmie, as the new Minister of Oil and Diamond. Petals, former rose-bearer, will remain Zoomoonda's National Security Adviser. Only the future will tell who King Ajeem eventually selects as Zoomoonda's new queen. If he ever decides to settle down, that is.

Nonetheless, the royal monarchy is not exempt from the wave of demand for democracy that has swept through the continent of Africa. Call him an opportunist, but General Moammur Gadhafur has challenged Prince Ajeem for the seat on the throne. He insists he should serve as Zoomoonda's first President. Certain that the people of Zoomoonda will be loyal to his family's reign, Prince Ajeem agreed to an election. Critics consider this a naïve and cowering submission to the head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

To add the royal monarch's woes, the Patriarch, the Royal Emperor, is scheduled for open heart surgery in the U.S. Although not under favorable circumstances, enthusiasm is running high that the majestic dynasty is once again 'Coming to America.'



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THRONE: Royal Millennium Trilogy
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THRONE

special executive dedication to

The 44th President of the

United States of America

President Barack Obama

*an exemplary family man **and** world leader*

(Royal Review Edition)

(THRONE- first installment of the “Royal Millennium Trilogy”)

KeKe Palmer dream cast as “Princess Akeema” and

Forest Whitaker as “General Moammur Gadhafur”

riddle to readers:

“Fancy” (formerly a rose-bearer) is now “Petals.” Is she destined for greatness?

*“In the game of chess a king is merely an authority figurehead. The real power lies with
the queen.”-CD Newton*

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Chapter 1

Democracy vs. Monarchy

“NOW IS THE TIME,” the voice, with its thick, African accent, bellowed from the TV. “It is time we join our Arab and African brothers and demand the end to totalitarian rule. Zoomoonda, too, is ready for 21st-century rule. It is time for democracy. Your fellow Africans said ‘no’ in Libya to oppressive family rule. Your African brothers in Egypt said ‘no’ to Mubarak. Your brothers in Tunisia forced an obstructionist of democracy into exile. Zoomoondans, it is your destiny to elect me, General Moammur Gadhafur, as your new visionary for democracy.”

The assuming African general stood fully clad in military regalia. He was flanked by his beaming wife and young teenage son, who looked like a mini-me version of his father. Also present was his slightly older daughter, who seemed less enthusiastic than her family. The general’s grin grew wider as an unseen crowd cheered him on.

Those spirited words emanated from halfway around the world and echoed through the private hospital room reserved for only the most important dignitaries, leaving an uneasy still in the air.

“Your brother never would have agreed to this ridiculous notion of a general election,” my mother, the Queen Mother of Zoomoonda, said to me.

“Turn that TV off,” I ordered my teenage niece, Princess Akeema. She snapped,

“Are you my daddy?”

“Akeema, you mind your manners, young lady,” Queen Mother said.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“*Why does she disrespect me and not the others?*” It irked me, yet I really felt for her. Losing both parents in a single blow had to be awfully hard. These past couple of weeks, I hadn’t been able to connect with her as I once did. Nonetheless, I didn’t know how much more of her sassy mouth I could take. Thank goodness Petals had agreed to come along and help me with my niece. After all these years, she was still very devoted to the royal family.

“Mom, you need not worry. The people of Zoomoonda are extremely loyal. They know

that, unlike the various toppled African regimes, *we* have been generous and compassionate rulers,” I assured her.

“D-d-don’t...”

I turned and watched helplessly as my father struggled to speak.

“D-d-don’t let that madman ascend to the throne of Zoomoonda,” my father said.

Due to Dad’s ailing health, my wise older brother had replaced him on the throne nearly a decade before. My father had resigned and transferred all royal duties to him.

As a sign of respect and courtesy, my brother had bestowed on my father the title of Royal Emperor. My older brother had taken over the throne out of necessity, but he wanted Zoomoondans never to forget my father’s royal reign. Yes, my brother had been a good man. I wished I had half his discernment and wisdom.

Especially now.

Since his untimely death, I was beginning to feel more and more as though I was in over my head.

“Please, father—relax,” I said.

“Dear, you lie still. You know you’re not supposed to get upset,” Queen Mother said.

I watched as my mother hovered over my father, making sure he rested easy. Her gentle hands soothed his shoulders, calming him.

We were all placed strategically around my sickly father’s hospital bed. Even my smart-mouth niece was attending to her grandfather. Timmie, my best friend since childhood, stood next to me, and there were two burly African security guards inside and outside the exclusive hospital room.

The cable news network had been on because my dad loved watching world news, but, at that moment, I wished his room didn’t have a TV.

That was not the only thing I was wishing at the moment.

I wished I could take back the tragedy that had happened just weeks before.

As selfish as this may sound, I wished I could go back to my simple, carefree life of women, wine and pleasure. Timmie and I were known globally as affluent international players; not only was I a client, I was the chairman of the *Trillionaire Boys Club*, which boasted a who’s who roster of rich and powerful men. Sean “Diddy” Combs, Johnny Depp and the Prince of Monaco, to name just a few.

Zoomoonda was by far Africa's wealthiest nation. It was regarded as the crown jewel of Africa. Our country was blessed with an inexhaustible supply of premium oil and boasted the world's leading non-conflict diamond mines.

Our royal heritage could be traced back to the great kings and queens of the days of the Pyramids.

Yet, with such wealth and power at the disposal of my whims, I had no interest in rule or governance. That was for people like my older brother and his wife. They were the most beloved king and queen. Our nation will mourn their loss for many years to come.

And now, *I*, of all people, had to give Zoomoondans hope and inspiration.

Until now, Timmie and I had only had token titles in the royal court. We shamelessly sidestepped any real responsibilities and delegated our duties to flunkies while we enjoyed ourselves to excess. No princess or daughter of a wealthy dignitary was off limits to us. No celebrity, whether she was an actress or just famous for being rich, was beyond our reach.

I'll never forget the American pop star Janet Jackson's 21st birthday. I took *control* and showed her my *velvet rope* for several erotic days. Oh, well—that's the way lust goes.

Back in her younger days, another pop icon, Madonna, and I would secretly jet to the most exotic places to explore our insatiable fantasies.

If only kings, shahs, presidents and world rulers really knew the freaks their privileged daughters were. But each of their daughters knew and respected the international players' code. What happens inside my private jet, the royal *Diamond G-Spot*, stays there.

Slowly, the contents of my father's IV began to take effect. He drifted into a state of unconsciousness. The Queen Mother used this opportunity to leave his side. I could immediately tell from her familiar, stern glare that she was in scold mode.

Timmie and I both straightened up.

"Come here. I want to speak to the three of you."

We dutifully followed her as we stepped into her imaginary royal court.

"Ajeem, you are not your older brother. But it is time for you not only to man up, but son, to *king up*."

"I know, Mom. I w—"

"You know your African history. Remember what happened to King Idris?"

"Who?" I said, as I glared at Timmie for an answer.

He mirrored back an “I don’t know either” glare.

“He was King of Libya till 1969. One of his army commanders led a military coup against him and took over the government,” Petals said.

Once again, she’d come to my rescue.

“Yes,” the Queen Mother said, impressed.

Petals, to her credit, no pun intended, had risen from royal rose-bearer to Zoomoonda’s National Security Adviser. She attended Ivy Leagues schools in the West. Petals graduated with honors, obtaining master’s degrees in Political Science and African Anthropology, and a PhD. in Psychology. When she returned to Zoomoonda, my brother wisely included her as part of the Royal Staff.

In time, Petals had become the only trusted adviser who had the king’s direct ear. She had demonstrated since the tragedy that I would have the same loyal support. Though middle-aged, Petals was still a very lovely woman. With the sturdy legs of a gazelle and shapely as a sleek cheetah, she had a commanding regal presence when she entered a room.

I never understood why she’d never married.

I’d never tried anything with her like I had with all the others. We grew up together, so she felt too much like a sister. But now I was grateful for her support. Seamlessly, she served as a wonderful adviser and now royal nanny to my angry niece.

“That must not happen in Zoomoonda. Do you hear me, Ajeem? Whatever it takes, you must make sure the royal throne remains in our family. Do you hear me, son?”

I know my mother had never approved of my playboy lifestyle. However, she didn’t protest as much as she could have, because my older brother was her pride and joy. But now that he was gone, her disappointing son had to fill his shoes and accept this huge responsibility.

I stared into my mother’s eyes and held her by the shoulders. “Mom, Queen Mother, I will not disappoint you. Besides, Prince Fayeem promised me he will keep an eye on General Ghadafur. I *promise* you the royal throne shall remain in our family.”

“It had better. Or I will disown you till the day I die,” Queen Mother said. I watched as she turned and gracefully returned to my ailing father’s bedside.

Excluding my younger brother back at home, I was left with my royal cabinet. Petals and Timmie tried not to have their eyes meet mine. However, Timmie blurted out, “Do you think the general will launch a military coup, AJ—uh, Your Majesty?”

“I don’t know. He’s obviously ambitious, but hopefully not crazy. The secret security forces, the *Black Panthers*, won’t allow it.” That was the best answer I could deliver to save face. Each passing day, I was beginning to wonder whether I had naively enabled the general in his insane quest for the throne.

“If it’s any consolation, Your Majesty, you may have unwittingly prevented a military coup,” Petals said.

“Explain, my Security Adviser,” I said.

“General Moammur Gadhafur had clashes with your elder brother. The general isn’t simply an ambitious man; he is also a skilled tactical one. He knows your reputation as a—” Petals hesitated and dropped her eyes.

“Say it, Petals. I need your insight. Give it to me straight,” I said.

“Your reputation as a player precedes you. No offense, Your Highness.”

“None taken. Continue.”

“Why take the throne by force and alienate its subjects and risk gaining the disapproval of the international community? He’s counting on the fact that you’re an unqualified... *whore*, and that he’ll be able to convince the people of Zoomoonda he is a better option as a strong, proven military ruler.”

I get the ‘unqualified’ part. But did she just call me a ‘whore?’

“That way, the man with the delusions of grandeur, that chest-pounding gorilla, has the best of both worlds. The general would have the royal throne, and Zoomoondans’ favor,” Timmie chimed in.

I took a deep breath and said, “When we return home, I have much work to do. I can’t allow my past to ruin Zoomoonda’s future.”

“There is something you can do to reverse your image and public perception,” Petals said. I gave Petals my full attention. She continued, “It is a bit radical, yet it could prove to be effective in the long run.”

I let out a heavy sigh and said, “At this point, I’m game for almost anything.”

“You can install hidden cameras throughout the palace. In the common areas, of course. Provide your Zoomoondan subjects a real day-to-day glimpse of you, their new king. Also, take to social media and communicate directly with your supporters,” Petals said.

“Yes! We can host *The Royal Groom*, seeking a queen for Zoomoonda. This could be huge, AJ! Beautiful, sexy, women from all over the wo—” Timmie said enthusiastically. But Petals interrupted his lascivious vision.

“We need to stay clear of any objectifying of women.”

“Petals is right, Timmie. We need to start thinking above the waist rather than below it. Nonetheless, Petals, as you said, that is rather radical.”

“Your Highness, perception is everything,” Petals said.

“*Royal Reality TV?*” I said.

“Your Highness, need I remind you that in eighteen days, social media played a significant factor in deposing Egypt’s longtime ruler. If used properly, it can aid in promoting a good public perception,” Petals affirmed. I thought about it. Petals might have been right. I could always pull the plug if I didn’t get the desired results.

“Okay. Make it happen when we return, Petals. Get me the best producer and public relations consultants on the planet.”

“So shall it be done, Your Majesty.”

Timmie however, shrugged and said, “No royal bachelor booty. No chance to properly *test* the contestants. So sad. Such a missed opportunity.”

“Using recorded cheering crowds won’t be enough.” General Moammur Gadhafur said.

“You’re right, my husband, my lord. The peaceful peasants of Zoomoonda need to be convinced that they need to jump aboard the democracy bandwagon. Their loyalty to the monarchy runs deeper than the Nile River.”

“Yes, but given the prince’s well known womanizing ways, it will be easy to assassinate his character and turn the people against him,” General Gadhafur said.

“Yes, but to secure the throne you need some additional, sure-fire ammunition in your arsenal, my husband, my lord,” his wife Nefertiti said.

“Please enlighten me, my beguiling, cunning campaign manager. No one in all of Zoomoonda is more ambitious than me but *you*.”

“We need to incorporate in your quest for the throne all the circumstances, tactics and maneuvers that toppled the other regimes in our region.”

“I had considered that. But go on. I like it when you articulate evil schemes,” the general said. Nefertiti offered a coy smile before she replied, “This has to be a major *propaganda* war on both fronts. The international community must believe that the newly appointed king, the former player, is just like the oppressive rulers who have been resisted in our region.”

“But in those sovereign states, the disgruntled citizens protested and demanded democracy,” the general said.

“So, my husband, my lord, hire *fake* pro-democracy Zoomoondans to stage protests and demonstrations all over the country. The world, looking on through sound bites and YouTube videos, won’t know the difference.”

“I’m sure I can get some from Uganda for the right price.”

“Yes, my husband, my lord. After the fake protesters get the demand for democracy in full tilt, we can next create the illusion of a military crackdown. We’ll make the Syria ‘cleansing’ look like child’s play.”

“But I’m the head of the Armed Forces. I don’t want—” the general stopped mid-sentence. “Hey, wait a minute...” the general’s eyes narrowed and he surrendered a beaming smile to his wife. “We can hire mercenaries, too. Claim that they’re—”

“*Zoomoondan Loyalist Army*,” they said in unison.

“Yes—a rogue, special branch of soldiers loyal to the throne. They’ll be so rogue they’ll refuse to listen to the military counsel. You’ll tell everyone they take direct orders from the king,” Nefertiti said.

“But they’ll actually be *my* hired mercenaries.”

“The international community, along with the United Nations Security Council, will be clamoring for King Ajeem to abdicate rule of Zoomoonda,” Nefertiti said.

“Wait till that naïve little lamb returns to Zoomoonda. He won’t know what hit him. My precious wife and queen-to-be, that’s why I love you. You’re amazing.”

“Oh, my husband, my lord, I want what’s best for you. Let me hear you call me queen again,” Nefertiti cooed. The general sauntered over to his wife and took her into his arms. He tenderly kissed her.

“My Queen Nefertiti. It has such a regal ring. I can see it now. Once I’m Zoomoonda’s new dictator—oops, I mean democratically elected president, I will be in control of its inexhaustible oil fields,” the general said.

“And it’s abundantly yielding diamond mines. A queen’s best friend,” Nefertiti said.

“Ah, yes. It will be a glorious new day. I’ll establish new allies; alliances with China, Russia, Iran and North Korea,” the general gushed.

“Yes, my husband, my lord.” Nefertiti’s voice echoed his enthusiasm. “Yes, the stakes are high. So you must be strong and unwavering in your ascent to the throne. By any means necessary. *Nothing is inconceivable*. You must be willing to spill Zoomoondan blood if need be to usurp the royal monarchy. Are you willing to spill Zoomoondan blood, my husband, my lord?” Nefertiti said with a sly grin.

For a brief moment, General Moammur Gadhafur and his beloved wife of many years exchanged sustained silent gazes.

Spontaneously they burst out into laughter.

“My precious better half, you *already know*.” The general grinned.

“Yes, *Taraji*, we’re all getting ready for the fundraiser dinner with the president and the vice president of the United States, along with their wives,” Petals replied to her sister’s image, which was displayed on the tablet device.

“Well, Big Sis, I will keep you apprised as to what’s going on here in Zoomoonda. I’m shocked at King Ajeem allowing General Moammur Gadhafur to campaign for the throne. It’s so ludicrous. Does not that mad dog know that Zoomoondans are quite content with royal family rule?”

“I don’t know what our new king was thinking. Not to worry—this will all blow over,” Petals said.

“So, let’s finish our discussion about Zoomoonda’s *future* queen,” Petals’ sister Taraji said with a definite hint of sarcasm in her voice. “You had better not allow this one to bring home *another* African-American. Don’t get me wrong, we loved our dearly departed queen. She grew on us and we came to adore her. But you know you’ve loved him all your life. Now is the perfect opportunity to get your man, your king and...for you to rule beside him. Stop being so—”

“Taraji, how many times have I told you? I’m fulfilled just being a servant to Zoomoonda.”

“Petals, you’re such a stubborn goat. You’ll be more ‘fulfilled’ where it counts when you can wrap your legs around him. Your ‘service’ can’t satisfy you on chilly Zoomoondan nights.”

“Sister, you are so crass. Sometimes I wonder if you were either switched at birth or dropped on your head.”

“Oh my, did my well mannered big sister just throw a verbal spear at me? I’m so proud of *you*. There might be hope for you yet.”

Petals simply chuckled. “I have to go. I’ll chat with you later.”

“Petals,” Taraji yelled from the small screen, “Get your man. Love you.”

“Bye, Taraji. I have to get ready. Love you, too.”

Chapter 2

A General vs. a King

“DIDN’T I TELL YOU, General, to wait until I returned before you could start this absurd campaign?” I said. I glared with much disapproval at the tablet device. Staring back at me in full military regalia was an arrogantly smiling General Moammur Gadhafur.

“All is fair in love, war and politics.” the general’s voice echoed with sarcasm.

“Let me make this clear to you. I was only patronizing you. Don’t take my poor judgment for granted. You will *never* sit on the throne of Zoomoonda.”

“Allow me to share this with you. Go do what playboys do best...play. Why don’t you leave rule and governance to the grown-ups? I’m talking about *men* with real experience in leadership and vision.”

“Do not disrespect me. I am still the king. I am still *your* king.”

“Please forgive me, Your Majesty. You’re right. However, I’m sure you’re well aware of what’s happening with the Arab Spring and within the continent of Africa. There is a sweeping push for democracy. Not even Zoomoonda can escape it. It’s inevitable.”

“Zoomoonda is not Egypt, Libya or Syria. My family’s royal rule has been very kind and generous for Zoomoondans.”

“If you’re that confident in your family’s monarchical rule, then let the people decide if they still want it or not. You might be surprised, as were the other rulers. Democracy might be what they truly desire, Your Highness,” the general said.

“I’m confident Zoomoondans will show their loyalty to the monarchy and retain me as their king.”

“Then when you return let’s have a public debate, along with a *Jamaa-Kita* exhibition. Shall we?”

Granted, the general was a vibrant speaker, so a debate would be interesting.

But a “*Jamaa-Kita*?” That literally meant, in Swahili, *Family-War*.

It was more of a showy symbol of might and strength. It was an ancient Zoomoondan tradition where two competing tribal elders would select two males and two females from their respective families and battle it out. Including the tribal elders, the goal was to knock the

opponent off his or her feet in five separate contests. A win would be a point for the tribal elder they represented. Whoever had the most points out of the five battles was considered the victor.

“Looks like I’ll have to pull my great-grandfather’s chariot, sword and spear out of storage,” I said.

“So I take it that’s a ‘yes.’”

“Anytime. Anywhere,” I said.

“Good. The old *Pyramid Arena*. Give my regards to your father, the Royal Emperor. I wish him a speedy recovery. As you know, I have a campaign to run. Let me give you some sound advice, *AJ*.”

The general’s voice echoed with mockery.

“Any time you wish to do as the ruler of Tunisia, no one will fault you.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“*Exile* is not such a bad thing. But if not, have a safe flight back home. Zoomoondans couldn’t bear another tragedy.” With that snide remark, the general disappeared from the screen.

Our motorcade of limousines joined the other limousines of influential Americans waiting in line. When we finally reached the entrance of the luxury *Ritz Carlton* in Cleveland, we temporarily parked and exited the vehicle. In usual ceremonious African fashion, lovely rose bearers threw petals at the feet of the entire royal cabinet.

There were throngs of screaming and yelling people barricaded around the entrance of the hotel. There were young, old, black and white, curious viewers. All these excited faces were apparently anxious to get a peek at the visiting African royalty.

“Lion-King! Hey Lion-King,” a young man from the crowd yelled furiously.

I turned to see the source of the voice. I thought to myself, maybe he’s calling me that because of the symbol of a lion and the continent of Africa on the flags mounted on each of our limousines. Or maybe he was just being a typical smart-mouthed teenager. Perhaps the young man was trying to mock me by associating me with what used to be princess Akeema’s and my favorite animated movie, *The Lion King*.

“Lion-King, can I get your autograph? Please?”

I stopped. I glanced at Timmie. He nodded. So we left the red carpet and went over to the young man. His grinned widened. His crew of friends was beside themselves with excitement.

“Wow. You’re a real king. I’ve never seen one before.

“Well, Your Highness, King Ajeem, is very real,” Timmie assured him.

“Man, do you bling, bling like this all the time?” I winked at Timmie and answered, “African-American young blood, my chariots have platinum spinners. That’s how I roll.”

The surrounding crowd responded with a spontaneous laugh.

“Now *that’s* what’s up,” the young man said.

“Why do I see many African-American males with sagging pants exposing their underwear?” I asked.

“That’s how *we* roll, King Ajeem. You know, show our swag, our swagger.”

I signed his and a few others posters, T- shirts and caps.

“Whether you know it or not, you are the descendants of mighty kings and queens. *We rise and never sag*. That’s coming from the king of bling bling,” I said with a smile.

“I feel you. Thanks,” the young man said.

“Your Majesty, we must go inside,” Petals said. I acknowledged Petals with a nod. I turned my attention to the smiling faces. They watched as Timmie and I raised our arms above our heads. With open palms facing the crowd and thumbs and first two finger tips joined, we shared the traditional Zoomoondan departure greeting. It represented the Zoomoondan diamond symbol.

“Oh look, they’re doing the *Jay-Z* Illuminati thing,” the African-American young man said.

“No. It’s a Zoomoondan swagger thing,” I grinned and said.

“This is our traditional departure greeting. It’s a symbolic jewel. Like a diamond,” Timmie said.

“It means you are all jewels and we wish you peace and prosperity,” I said.

I watched the crowd imitate our departing gesture and say back to us in unison, “Peace and prosperity.”

We joined Petals and my royal entourage and entered the luxury hotel.

After many pep speeches and a rousing one delivered by the President of the United States himself, I got my wish. I always wanted to speak to the most powerful man on earth. Here

was this country's first African-American president. It had to be both exciting and challenging for this man of color to lead this vibrant nation.

What was the real source of his strength? From where did his obvious need for courage come? Was it from his lovely wife, the first lady? Or did he surround himself with the most capable members in his administration? Perhaps both.

Without my brother to encourage me at this most difficult time in my life, maybe this young president could say something to impart fortitude to me as Zoomoonda's newly appointed king.

I desperately needed it.

"We're truly sorry for your loss, Your Majesty, King Ajeem," the first lady said.

"Yes, we truly are. If there is anything we can do, let us know," the president said.

"The same goes for us," the vice-president and his wife said.

"You are all too kind. We appreciate your sympathy and support."

"How is the Royal Emperor recovering?" the first lady asked.

"Fine. He's as strong as an ox. The surgery went very well," Timmie said.

"Good. King Ajeem, how are you holding up?" the president asked.

"I've seen better days. But I'm trying to rise to the occasion and make my brother and people proud," I said.

"Your brother was a good man and wonderful king. But keep in mind that you are not your brother," the president said.

"Excuse me?" I said.

"What I mean is, you could end up disappointing yourself if you try to be just like him. If you're discouraged, that will impair your governance."

"So what do you suggest that I do, Mr. President?"

"King Ajeem, if you don't mind my saying so, you should try to establish your *own* legacy of leadership. Ignore your detractors or rivals. Be your own man and king. Do what's in the best interest of your people and you will succeed."

"Thank you, Mr. President. I needed to hear those words more than you know," I said.

"You're welcome. Just look in the mirror every morning and say—"

"Yes I can," the first lady interrupted.

"Don't let doubt consume you," the vice president chimed in.

“I’m working on it. But I admit I don’t have my brother’s keen decisiveness.”

“You should take a page out of the president’s leadership playbook,” the vice president said enthusiastically.

“What do you mean?” Petals asked.

Judging from the vice president’s eagerness, I sensed a great story was coming.

“Don’t let his cool demeanor fool you. This president can make the tough calls when he has to. When it came time to get our country’s most notorious foreign terrorist, he gave the command. Against my and other senior officials’ call, he gave the go-ahead. He pulled the trigger. This president doesn’t lead from the rear, he’s right out front. Our Navy Seals got the job done. The world was a safer place, thanks to him.”

“An amazing example of leadership,” Petals said, staring at me.

“It doesn’t stop there. Remember the Somali pirates who kidnapped the relief aid workers?” the vice president asked.

“Yes,” I said.

“That was another example of courage and leadership. This president gave the order to the Navy Seals to take them out and rescue the aid workers.”

“Fascinating,” Petals said with more-than-necessary enthusiasm.

The president chuckled before saying, “My vice president obviously is my biggest supporter.”

“I call it as I see it, King Ajeem. He’s being modest. I’m sure you see what I mean, Your Majesty. The president is cool like that. *You* can be that same type of ruler.”

“I am deeply inspired. Thank you for the amazing stories.”

Petals shot me a reminding glare, followed by a nod.

“Oh, I almost forgot. Mr. President, I’m aware our countries have excellent relations. That will continue.”

“To add to that, Zoomoonda had an excellent production year with our oil refineries. As our Minister of Oil, I am pleased to inform you, the price per export barrel will be reduced at a substantial cost savings to your country,” Timmie said.

“Well, that’s wonderful news,” the president said.

“And, in an election year,” the vice president chimed in again.

“And to the first lady, and the vice president’s wife, I would like to offer these gifts.”

I nodded to my attendants. Two of them dutifully came over to our table. Each of them removed from gift boxes radiant diamond necklaces. They placed one on each of the ladies.

“Oh my, they are exquisite,” the first lady said.

“They’re absolutely gorgeous. We can’t accept such a generous offer,” the vice president’s wife said.

“Please, I insist,” I said. “Also, for the fine personal pep talk, allow me to show my gratitude and purchase your entire debt from China at *no cost* to you. Would you have a problem with that, Mr. President?”

The president, first lady, vice president and his wife all exchanged speechless gazes.

Finally, the president spoke up, “Uh, we’ll discuss your generous offer at another time.”

Judging from Petals’ beaming smile, I must have done well in my first official act of foreign diplomacy.

Before I retired to the Jacuzzi to try out my new, lovely imported Ethiopian royal bathers, I wanted to have a private, one-on-one discussion with Princess Akeema. She had been through so much. Originally, I thought it would be best if she remained in Zoomoonda to recuperate, but she insisted that she come to America. Since the plane accident, our sweet uncle-and-niece relationship had unexpectedly deteriorated. Akeema and Petals were sharing a suite just down the hall from the Executive Suite Timmie and I shared. These were not the opulent accommodations we were all used to back at the Palace. However, we didn’t mind the downgrade for now. I gently knocked on their door.

“Hello. It’s me. Are you ladies decent?”

Princess Akeema’s voice from behind the door said, “Come in.”

I stepped in. To my surprise, there she was.

Boldly standing there, almost nude.

With her hands on her hips, she glared back at me. Akeema had on only her bra and panties. I quickly turned away from her.

“Akeema! I asked if you were decent. What kind of game are you playing?”

Akeema snickered before saying, “I thought you liked seeing women scantily clad.”

“If you don’t cover yourself up...” I began.

“What? What are *you* going to do? You’re not my daddy.”

“Akeema. My sweet Akeema, why do you insist on giving me a hard time? We used to have the best relationship. Don’t you remember?”

Akeema must have felt a little ashamed. She put on a posh pink robe that had a large letter “A” on the front. I turned around and watched her saunter over to the sofa and plop herself down on it.

“Don’t you remember when you were about ten years old? We used to have the best of times together.”

“That was a long time ago. Things change. As you noticed, I’m not a kid anymore,” Akeema said.

“You used to love it when we watched the movie *Lion King* over and over again. You were Simba and I was Mustafa. We would recite the lines verbatim. Don’t you remember that?”

Akeema didn’t answer me.

“I miss those times. I want my sweet little princess back.”

“I want my father and mother back. But we don’t always get what we want, now do we?” Akeema said.

I could see where this was headed. The last thing I wanted was for her to become even more upset. At least for now we were talking. I decided to change the subject.

“I’ll tell you what else I noticed about you.”

Princess Akeema shot me a suspicious glare.

“I noticed that you have a new tattoo. It’s on your right shoulder. May I see it again? Only don’t take off that robe.”

“You’re silly, Uncle. But I don’t care if you see it. Look.”

Akeema pulled her robe down over her shoulder just enough to expose her tattoo. It was a very artistic and elegant head shot of a regal, ancient queen.

“Wow. Very nice. One of the ancient queens of the Pyramids,” I said.

“Yes.”

“What do the letters 'N-P-R' mean underneath the image?” I asked.

“*Nubian Princesses Rock*,” Princess Akeema said, proudly.

I smiled and said, “Oh really? Interesting name. So you’re part of some all-girl group?”

“I actually founded an elite underground group of teenage girls of color from around the world,” Princess Akeema said.

We exchanged silent glares. I’m sure she could tell I doubted her story. But I figured I would humor her.

“So what does your all ‘elite’ girl group do?”

“You remember when that oil tycoon in Nigeria’s daughter was kidnapped by bandits, demanding a ten-million dollar ransom?”

“Uh, yes. But she mysteriously returned home unharmed.

“*We* did that,” Akeema said.

I smiled and shook my head. But we were talking, so I asked,

“Do you have any other current operations in development?” I joked.

“If I tell you, I would have to kill you,” Akeema said.

That wiped the silly grin off my face. Conversation time was now over. No “let’s have a good cry and make up” session tonight.

“O-kay Princess Akeema. I just wanted to see how you were doing.” I stood up and gently kissed her on her forehead. “You have a good night, sweetie. Love you.”

I left her suite thinking *Nubian Princesses Rock*. That girl will say just about anything to me.

Now that this day was practically over, I couldn’t get to the Jacuzzi fast enough.

It had been a long and demanding day. Timmie and I felt the best way to end the day was with our new royal bathers. We each had a pair, so the six of us were enjoying ourselves inside a large, heated, bubbly Jacuzzi. However, our royal relaxation session was cut short.

Petals *burst* into our private gathering.

“Your Majesty, I’m terribly sorry to intrude, but I *must* have a word with you. It is most urgent.”

I didn’t wish to be bothered with any official business, so kindly I said,

“Not now, Petals. I am officially off duty. Now is my private time for carnal desires.”

But Petals’ tone took on more insistence.

“Your Highness, please, this is a matter of national security. It requires your *immediate* attention.”

Did she not hear me? Surely it could wait until the morning. Couldn't she see that I was busy at the moment?

Well, actually, I was on the receiving end of oral royal service, provided by a very attractive and large-lunged young bather below the surface.

“Petals, not now. Later,” I said as my eyes rolled to the back of my head.

“No. You need to read this analysis report from the plane accident.”

“Petals,” I yelled before I realized what I was doing, “I’m not interested in seeing photos of the wreckage or reading an inspector’s analysis right now. You’re dismissed. I’ll review them in the morning.”

Petals stood there in her wrapped robe and slippers with a glare of resentment.

She didn’t budge.

That I took as an act of defiance.

I removed my organ from the bather’s mouth. I returned the stoic gaze.

“Why are you still here? Am I not your king? If I command you to bark like a dog and hop on one leg, *you do it.*”

Petals eyelids narrowed and she turned to leave.

“AJ, my brother, don’t you think you’re being too harsh to Petals? Maybe it’s important.”

“She’ll get over it, Timmie. Now let’s resume your kingly duties, my lovely gem,” I said to my sexy young royal bather.

I watched as Petals took a few steps, and then froze in place.

She hesitated. Little did I know, those brief seconds of reflection were actually the calm before Hurricane Petals.

Petals turned and sauntered to the Jacuzzi. She stood directly over me.

“No, I won’t get over it. Queen Mother was right about you. You need to stop being an irresponsible little boy and be a man. Whether you like it or not, you’re Zoomoonda’s appointed king. That privilege and duty is not to be put on and taken off like a discarded condom. You cannot always seek solace between the legs of silly little giggling hyenas when you get stressed out or things get difficult... *Your Majesty.*”

“Your Majesty, are you going to let that old maid talk to you like that?” my royal bather said.

“You little gazelle fit only for slaughter, until the king puts something in your mouth, keep it closed,” Petals said.

“Why, you barren Sahara Desert old maid. You need to—”

“Enough!” I barked, never taking my eyes off Petals.

“She is right,” my attractive royal bather smiled. “You are here for your oral skills, not your oratorical ones.”

Petals smirked.

I gave the official royal double clap.

“*Clap, Clap.*”

“Everyone...leave us. Now.”

The four sexy topless bathers swiftly exited the large, heated Jacuzzi. To his chagrin, Timmie watched as they grabbed their robes and left the three of us alone.

“You too, Timmie. I wish to be alone with my National Security Adviser.”

“Are you sure, AJ? You may need a witness,” Timmie said.

“I’ll be fine, my brother. See you in the morning.”

“Good night, Your Majesty. Good night, Petals.”

“Good night, Timmie,” Petals flatly said.

I watched as Timmie put on his robe and slippers and left me and Petals alone.

I had a feeling the tongue-lashing was going to continue. But I was unnecessarily rude to Petals, so I had it coming.

“The next time you treat me with such blatant disrespect and command that I hop on one leg like some mindless kangaroo it will be your last. I will terminate my services to the monarchy. Effective immediately,” Petals said.

“I’m sorry, Petals. I’ve been under a lot of stress lately. But you’re right, that in no way excuses my behavior towards you. You have not only been loyal to my family but a trusted friend all these many years. I don’t know where I’d be without you. Could you please forgive me?” By this time, I had climbed out of the Jacuzzi and robed myself.

Petals turned her head away and didn’t respond. She simply handed me the urgent report.

“AJ, this is terrible. I am so sorry.”

Ordinarily it would have stunned me to hear Petals call me by my name. She was always so formal. She hadn’t called me AJ since we were kids.

I didn't understand all the technical terms. The sight of the charred wreckage in the photos did make me cringe at first. But what brought me to my knees with tears rolling down my cheeks was the statement.

"Our investigation reveals the plane crash was not accidental but deliberate. The cause of the explosion was induced by the highly explosive component C4. Substantial trace amounts were found throughout the cargo area."

"Who else knows about this?" I finally asked.

"No one. Just you, me and the two investigators. I've known them all my life. They're sworn to secrecy." Petals said.

"You and the Queen Mother are right. It is time for me to 'king up.' My brother, his wife, Zoomoonda's king and queen were...*murdered*. And I know who is capable of such heinous deed."

"What are you going to do Your Highness?" Petals asked.

"I don't know. But one thing I do know. *Whatever it takes I will protect Zoomoonda's throne.*"

to be continued...

The battle for the **THRONE** continues summer 2012.