

Hail to the King

Episode 1

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INT. CHECKMATE STUDIOS - DAY

A flashy opening credits sequence. Footage of professional chess matches edited to fast, bombastic music. This is the chess equivalent of Match of the Day.

We cut to the small studio and the show's host MAX SINCLAIR (30s, jovial, professional).

MAX

Hello and welcome to Check Mate. We start tonight's program with the breaking news of Tabitha King's return to the world of chess.

Series of photos of TABITHA as a toddler holding a chess piece, putting it in her mouth, then a final shot revealing that she's playing a match against a middle aged man.

MAX (V.O)

A childhood prodigy, King arrived a seemingly fully formed player, dominating junior tournaments before turning professional at 14.

News footage of a teenage TABITHA playing 5 matches simultaneously.

MAX (V.O)

Her strong performances in major tournaments caught everyone's attention but it was her unorthodox behaviour and tendency to speak her mind that won her legions of fans.

A chess tournament, TABITHA (23) checkmates her opponent.

TABITHA

Boom!

A chess tournament, TABITHA (24) checkmates her opponent.

TABITHA

Bang!

A chess tournament, TABITHA (25) checkmates her opponent.

TABITHA

Woop! Woop! Woop!

A pre-tournament press conference, TABITHA (25) fields questions from journalists.

(CONTINUED)

JOURNALIST

Tabitha, your previous manager recently described you as "rude, ignorant and dismissive." How would you respond to that?

TABITHA

I don't know what the fuck you're talking about. Next!

MAX (V.O)

However, her confidence on the board seemed to implode two years ago after a disastrous performance during the Linares tournament.

An infographic of TABITHA's chess rating plummeting.

MAX (V.O)

King seemed to struggle to shake off this defeat and over the proceeding 18 months she failed to progress past the initial rounds of any tournament.

TABITHA loses a match.

TABITHA

Shit!

TABITHA loses another match.

TABITHA

Arse!

TABITHA loses another match.

TABITHA

Tits!

MAX (V.O)

Before announcing her retirement a 6 months ago.

Back to the studio.

MAX

However, this decision seems to have been short lived as on Monday she announced she will be competing in next week's Foster cup. Well, I'm delighted to say that Tabitha joins me in the Check Mate studio

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAX (cont'd)
this evening. Tabitha, thanks for
being here.

Cut out to show TABITHA (32, perpetual adolescent) sitting
next to MAX. She spins back and forth in her chair, clearly
a bit bored.

TABITHA
Yeah, great.

MAX has a series of cards with prepared questions.

MAX
So, Tabitha, let's start with the
million dollar question - what made
you decide to return?

TABITHA
Well, it was always a question of
"when" not "if." Chess is my life
really. I can't imagine a time when
I won't be playing it. Plus I need
to pay the rent somehow. I mean why
do you think I'm doing this show?

MAX
...Err we don't pay our guests.

TABITHA
What? George?

She looks off camera at her manager GEORGE (45, crumpled),
he avoids eye contact. MAX moves on to the next question.

MAX
Looking forward to the Foster cup-

TABITHA
Not really.

MAX
No, sorry, that wasn't a question.

TABITHA shrugs. MAX ploughs ahead.

MAX
Looking forward to the Foster cup,
world number 4 Nikolai Kravchenko
declared today that his victory is,
and I quote, "a foregone
conclusion." Given your form of
late how confident do you feel

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAX (cont'd)
going against these top seeded
players

SLOW CREEP IN on TABITHA, a slowly rising hum, the sound of
pressure building...

TABITHA
Listen, Kravchenko and the rest of
them talk a big game but
fundamentally they're afraid of me.
The headline news is that Tabitha
King is back and she's hungry. I
don't even know who I'm playing
tomorrow but it doesn't matter
because I'm going to annihilate
them and anybody else who stands in
my way, I've never felt more
prepared for anything in my life,
my mind is a steel trap and I feel
nothing but pity for any poor soul
who has to pla-

INT. FOSTER CUP HALL - DAY

The 1st round of the Foster Cup. TABITHA sits across the
board from a player, he checkmates Tabitha.

PLAYER
Check mate.

TABITHA
(beat)
Fuck!!!

SMASH CUT TO:

OPENING CREDITS

EXT. WORLD CHESS LONDON HQ - MORNING

An imposing victorian building.

Title " World Chess Federation, London"

JERRY (PRE-LAP)
I've got a lot of memories tied up
with this place.

INT. - WORLD CHESS LONDON HQ - MORNING

Open plan office, with banks of computers. All the employees are gathered round JERRY (40s, obnoxious). Some are eating cake, others have drinks. JERRY is mid-speech:

JERRY

Five world cups, hosting in 2018, the school outreach programmes. I'm so proud of the work we've accomplished together. Y'know when you work with people for a long time they stop being colleagues and start to become your family. That's what you guys mean to me, you're family.

THEO (O.S)

Jesus Christ I hate this place.

We cut to the back of the crowd where THEO (27, cynical) and YURI (25, labrador in human form) are standing. YURI is devouring a slice of cake.

THEO

I land the CTC contract and nobody even says "good job", but when Jerry gets promoted there's champagne and two kinds of cake.

YURI

There's two kinds?

THEO

Why do we even have to listen to this? We get it, you're moving to the head office. A 6 figure salary and all the duty free toblerone he can eat.

YURI

God, rather him than me.

THEO

You want to be stuck here forever?

YURI

No, I don't want to go to Switzerland. Ghastly place. I had an uncle who was really ill, so he went to a special clinic out there, and they just killed him.

THEO takes a second to process this.

(CONTINUED)

THEO
Are you talking about Dignitas?

YURI
Worst. Hospital. Ever.

THEO opens his mouth to reply then realises he doesn't have the energy to get into it.

THEO
I've got to talk to Hussman.

INT. GEORGE'S OFFICE - MORNING

A run down office. GEORGE sits behind a messy desk. TABITHA enters sipping a coffee.

TABITHA
Sorry I'm late I went to get a coffee but then I forgot my purse so I had to go to another cafe and pretend to be this guy.
(shows him her coffee it has "Dave" written on it)
I would have got you one but taking two would have been pushing it.

She takes a seat.

TABITHA
So, what's up?

GEORGE
OK, so, I've got something to tell you and it's not great news I'm afraid.

He takes a deep breath as if he's going to speak and then stops. He picks up a piece of paper.

GEORGE
I've written it down actually. This isn't easy to say.
(reads)
"I'm re..sig...re-sig-ning?"

TABITHA
You're resigning?

GEORGE
That's the one. I can't manage you anymore. I'm sorry, it's been
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE (cont'd)
great. No, actually it's been sort
of terrible for the most part
that's why I'm...
(reads)
"resigging?"

TABITHA
Resigning!

GEORGE
I'll get it next time.

TABITHA
We're 2 days into the tournament.
You can't just leave. This is it.
This is the big comeback. What do
you think I'm paying you for?

GEORGE
You haven't paid me since March.

TABITHA
Only because I don't have any
money. Jesus, selfish much?

GEORGE
I just can't afford to represent
you anymore. I need to have clients
that can pay my salary. Look at the
state of this place. This isn't
even a desk, this is just 4 stacks
of books with an old door on top.

Wide shot, reveals that this is indeed the case.

TABITHA
Well, I mean, fuck, George. How is
this going to look? Couldn't you
have at least done this before the
tournament started?

GEORGE
I tried to tell you loads of times
but you didn't listen. It's like
you mentally tune out if you hear
something you don't like.

A long silence.

TABITHA
Well, are you going to answer me?

INT. HUSSMAN'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

THEO sits alone in a grand office - all wood panelling and vintage leather. Paintings of chess players adorn the walls and a ornate chess set in one corner.

He gets up and starts looking around. He picks up a framed photo on the desk. It's of a young man in a hot tub with Margaret Thatcher. Both are naked as the day they were born.

THEO

The fuck?

Sounds of footsteps approaching. THEO quickly replaces the photo before HUSSMAN (60s, old money) strides in on his phone. We recognise him as the man from the photograph.

HUSSMAN

(on phone)

Listen Jack, I don't want to hear your excuses anymore. This conversation is over.

(hangs up)

Sorry about that.

THEO

Everything OK?

HUSSMAN sits behind his desk, THEO takes a seat.

HUSSMAN

My son, he doesn't think school is worth his time anymore. I don't know why, hormones probably. You got kids?

THEO

Yes, a daughter, she's five. I'm not looking forward to her teenage years.

HUSSMAN

Jack's four. From the way he conducts himself you think he was two. Kid's a joke.

HUSSMAN stares off into the middle distance for a second. THEO isn't sure what to do. HUSSMAN snaps back to reality.

HUSSMAN

So, David, you wanted to discuss something?

(CONTINUED)

THEO

It's Theo, David left two years ago.

HUSSMAN

Are you sure?

THEO

Err yes.

(ploughs ahead)

So I've been here two years and in that time I think I've really proved myself. I've been involved in some of the big campaigns and I think I'm more than ready to take the next step, and now that Jerry's gone, I think I should repl-

HUSSMAN

Jerry's gone? I thought that was next month.

HUSSMAN consults a diary on his desk

THEO

No, he left this morning.

HUSSMAN

Bugger! Novatek's people are coming in Wednesday. Do you know about the ad campaign?

THEO

Yeah, like I was saying I've worked very closely with Jerr-

HUSSMAN

Great, I need you to get a presentation together. Roll out, TV, social media, merchandise etc. Have a hard copy on my desk at noon tomorrow.

THEO

Yeah absolutely, but about the vacancy-

HUSSMAN

Listen, Dave, can I call you Dave?

THEO

It's Theo.

(CONTINUED)

HUSSMAN

This job is all about strategy. Sometimes you have to make sacrifices in order to get a good position and move forward. It's like a game of...

THEO looks around the room adorned with chess paraphernalia.

Monopoly.

HUSSMAN

THEO
Chess?

HUSSMAN

I suppose that works. It's like a game of chess. Make the right move now, you could find yourself somewhere you like very soon. I need people around me that I can rely on.

He gives THEO a conspiratorial wink.

TABITHA (PRE-LAP)

I'm cursed, Vassy. It's the only explanation for it.

INT. VASSY'S CAFE - AFTERNOON

TABITHA plays chess against her coach, ALIK 'VASSY' VASILEV (50s, gentle, zen) in his half empty cafe.

TABITHA

Honestly, these past two years have been one thing after another. I think the universe is trying to tell me something.

VASSY

Tabby, you are a very strong player. You just need to get your head in the game.

TABITHA

I know, I know. When I'm with you, like this, I see the moves. But when the pressure's on it feels like there's a 400 pound gorilla on my back, y'know? I mean what if I'm not in a rut? What if this is it forever?

She puts her head on the table and groans.

(CONTINUED)

TABITHA

Why do bad things happen to good people?

VASSY

When I was young there was a player I greatly admired, Sidorov. Incredible talent. No one could play the endgame like him. Then one day, out of nowhere, his game started to get weaker. He would lose to people that he used to vanquish in a few moves. His rating got worse and worse and he spent his days worrying that he would never get back to the level he had been playing at. Then he got hit by a bus and died.

TABITHA waits for the story to continue. It doesn't.

TABITHA

...was that supposed to cheer me up?

VASSY

Yes. Stop worrying about these things. You could be dead tomorrow, concentrate on the now.

TABITHA

Vassy, "now" I need to get a manager and "now" I need money and "now" I don't have money to get a manager.

(beat)

Can I borrow some money?

VASSY

No, you haven't paid me since March.

They play a bit in silence.

TABITHA

Do you think Shipova would manage me?

VASSY

No way.

(CONTINUED)

TABITHA

Balsai?

VASSY

Balsai hates you, and you hate him.

TABITHA

Yeah, good point.

(beat)

Ivanov?

VASSY

Ivanov's on Kravchenko's team.

TABITHA

Seriously? Kravchenko? Fucking typical.

VASSY

You know who could manage you?

(off her look)

Theo. He's very good with numbers, he got this place registered as a charity.

TABITHA

I'm not sure that's a good idea.

VASSY

No, it's fine. I just have to hire people with criminal records. Angela strangled her brother-in-law.

He gestures to ANGELA (70s) a sweet old lady making coffees behind the bar.

TABITHA

I mean me and Theo. We haven't really spoken since Linares.

VASSY

You haven't played well since Linares.

TABITHA puts her head on the table again and gives an exasperated groan.

VASSY

Listen, Tabby; managers, coaches, boyfriends, girlfriends - they come, they go, but family? Family is forever.

(CONTINUED)

ANGELA puts two coffees down on their table.

ANGELA
He's right, you know. There's
nothing more important than family.

EXT. PRIMARY SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

It's the end of school and parents are collecting their children from the playground.

TABITHA sees a little girl (5) by herself. She goes over with a brand new toy doll.

TABITHA
Hey, Emily.

The little girl looks at her.

TABITHA
It's been a while. I'm your aunt
Tabby. This is for you.

She gives the girl the doll.

TABITHA
Sorry I missed your last couple of
birthdays and Christmases. It
wasn't personal I just had other
stuff on y'know?

The girl looks at her with a blank expression.

TABITHA
How could you? How old are you now?
7? 8? Life's just complicated
sometimes. You think it's going to
be one thing and then it becomes
something else...It's hard to
explain. Anyway, where's your dad?

THEO (O.S)
Tabby?

She turns round to see THEO at the school gates holding the hand of his daughter EMILY (5).

TABITHA
Oh shit.

She grabs the doll out of the little girl's hands.

TABITHA
Sorry love.

She heads over.

INT. GYM HALL - AFTERNOON

A judo lesson for young children is in full swing. The coach demonstrates moves which EMILY and the other students copy.

On one side of the hall are plastic chairs where a few parents sit.

THEO works on his phone. TABITHA sits next to him. Their chairs are about a meter apart.

TABITHA
Soooo, how've you been?

THEO
Fine.

TABITHA
You visited d-

THEO
Nope.

TABITHA scooches her chair over to look at his screen.

TABITHA
Watcha doing?

THEO
I'm working.

TABITHA
Can it wait.

THEO
Nope.

Silence. TABITHA considers how to pitch her job offer.

TABITHA
Hey, do you remember when we used to go down to the chess sets in Holland Park? I'd beat the hustlers and then you'd collect the winnings? We made a great team.

THEO

I remember they figured out who you were.

TABITHA

(laughing)

Oh my God, yes! They got so angry! We had to hide in that bush.

THEO

You hid in a bush, they beat me up.

TABITHA

Well I thought you could handle yourself.

THEO

I was 12.

TABITHA

Well there was no point us both getting hurt. Jeez, way to ruin a story.

THEO

What are you doing here, Tabby? We don't speak for two years and now you're gatecrashing my daughter's judo class. What do you want?

TABITHA takes a breath. Is this it? The overdue apology?

TABITHA

I know I said some things before and I just wanted to say...

THEO

...

TABITHA

...that you should be my manager. What do you reckon?

THEO starts laughing.

TABITHA

Why are you laughing? I'm serious.

THEO

I know you're serious. That's why I'm laughing. I take it George quit?

(CONTINUED)

TABITHA

No, I fired him. You know what?
Offer rescinded. You should be
flattered I would consider you.

THEO

The only reason you're asking me is
because you know nobody else would
give you the time of day.

TABITHA

Shut up.

THEO

Here's some managerial advice -
just quit. Your career ended two
years ago, you're just in denial.

Silence.

TABITHA reaches over and twists one of THEO's nipples.

THEO

Ow! Fuck!

THEO shoves her. TABITHA leaps on him and the two start
wrestling on the ground. The other parents aren't sure how
to react.

The judo coach rushes over blowing his whistle.

EXT. GYM HALL. AFTERNOON

TABITHA and THEO lean on the wall. TABITHA vapes, THEO holds
an ice pack to his face with one hand and works on his phone
with the other.

TABITHA

So, are you free tomorrow? Can you
come watch my game?

THEO

You serious?
(off her look)
I can't, I've got work.

TABITHA

No worries.

Awkward silence.

(CONTINUED)

THEO
Are you OK?

TABITHA
Fuck you. Yes.

EMILY exits the gym with some other kids and walks over. She is carrying her new doll.

TABITHA
I'm gonna bounce, gotta go practice.

She pats EMILY's head like a dog.

TABITHA
Good to see you kiddo.
(to Theo)
Don't work so hard.

She starts leaving. He watches her walk off.

EMILY
Who was that?

INT. CHECK MATE STUDIOS - MORNING

A flashy credit sequence showing a highlight of the Foster Cup so far before cutting to the studio.

MAX
Day 3 of the Foster Cup. Can Mihara hold on to his lead? Can Sivanathan give him a run for his money? And, after a dismal start to the tournament, can the once great Tabitha King redeem herself against Poland's Mariusk Dabrowska and escape elimination? One person who thinks so is King herself who tweeted this morning -

The tweet is superimposed next to him.

MAX
-"My chess playing will be so brutal that the Geneva Convention will condemn it as a war crime. Hashtag Chess." Confident words.

INT. CAB - MORNING

TABITHA sits in the back with VASSY. She is visibly nervous.

VASSY

You OK?

TABITHA

I'm fine.

She takes out her phone and types "How to do deal with crippling sense of self doubt?" into Google.

The first result is entitled "It Could Be Worse..."

She clicks on it. It's an article entitled "It could be worse..you could be Tabitha King" accompanied with a photo of her losing her opening round match.

TABITHA

The fuck?

DRIVER

We're here.

INT. FIDE HQ ACCOUNTS DEPARTMENT - MORNING

The office TV is trailing TABITHA's upcoming match. THEO is at his desk, binding his report. He whistles as he works.

YURI

Someone's in a good mood.

THEO doesn't look up from his work.

THEO

Two years of being overlooked is about to pay off big time my friend.

YURI

Awesome!

(beat)

How come?

THEO

Jerry got promoted, right? Which means somebody is moving up.

YURI

Ah gotcha. Jerry is.

(CONTINUED)

THEO

No, me. I'm moving up.
(he looks up)
What are you doing?

YURI's desk is covered in shredded paper which he's trying to tape back together.

YURI

Oh this? Mad story. I went to scan in those contracts from the other day and the scanner just shredded them. Crazy, right?

THEO

You think that maybe you might have used the shredder by mistake?

YURI

No, I don't think so.

THEO picks up his report.

THEO

I'm going to miss these chats Yuri.

INT. FOSTER CUP HALL - AFTERNOON

The hall is full of chess games in progress. Tables spaced out. The atmosphere is tense. The only sound is the clicking as players press the chess clocks.

TABITHA is in the middle of a game against DABROWSKA (35, intense). They both make their moves quickly hitting the chess clock after each move.

DABROWSKA moves, hits the chess clock.

TABITHA moves, hits the chess clock.

DABROWSKA quickly responds, hits the chess clock.

TABITHA goes to move then stops. She starts to hear a low buzzing noise.

TABITHA'S P.O.V - She looks at the board and then around the rest of the room of people. Her vision starts blurring, everything starts to slow down and the buzzing sound gets louder

and louder

and LOUDER.

INT. HUSSMAN'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

HUSSMAN sits with his feet on his desk. He's reading Thatcher's autobiography.

HUSSMAN
(chuckling)
I bet you did you filthy minx.

A knock at the door.

HUSSMAN
Come in.

He puts the book away as THEO enters.

THEO
Morning, sir, here are the numbers
you wanted.

HUSSMAN takes THEO'S report and dumps it on his desk.

HUSSMAN
Good man. Take a seat.

THEO takes a seat.

HUSSMAN
We're doing some restructuring and
I wanted to know if you are keen to
take on more responsibility.

THEO
Yeah, absolutely, I'd love to.

HUSSMAN
Great because I need you to take
over Yuri's desk while he's
stepping up to investor relations.

THEO
...I'm sorry?

HUSSMAN
Yuri's replacing Jerry, you're
replacing Yuri. Well, you're
absorbing his role.

THEO
Yuri? Are you serious? He's a nice
guy and everything but the man's an
idiot. I've seen him eat a Soreen
loaf with the wrapper still on.

(CONTINUED)

YURI
How'd it go?

THEO
Yeah great.
(beat)
Actually-

He hands YURI the report.

THEO
Can you do me a favour and scan
these for me?

YURI
Sure thing man.

THEO starts to leave. His phone rings. It's VASSY.

THEO
Vassy?

INT. FOSTER CUP CORRIDOR - AFTERNOON

VASSY in a corridor. Sound of other chess games going on in the background.

VASSY (V.O)
Theo, have you spoken to your
sister?

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

THEO
Yeah she came by yesterday.

VASSY
No, I mean today.

THEO
No, why?

VASSY
You didn't see the match?

THEO becomes aware of a few of his colleagues watching the office TV. Someone has put "Checkmate" on.

MAX
As you can see scenes of
unprecedented chaos at the Foster
cup.

(CONTINUED)

The hall is full of people quietly playing chess. A judge speaks to DABROWSKA.

MAX

If you're just joining us everyone's reacting Tabitha King's abrupt exit from her match with Mariusk Dabrowska. Paul, do we have the clip ready?

They play a clip of TABITHA as she slowly sinks to the ground and curls up into a ball. She attempts to roll out of the tournament hall before giving up and just running off.

MAX

Grim stuff.

VASSY

She's not answering her phone. I thought she might've called you.

THEO

I'll call you back.

INT. HOLLAND PARK - AFTERNOON.

Stone chess tables where hustlers and tourists gather to play each other.

THEO turns up and scans the area. A while off he sees TABITHA with her back to the camera staring into a nearby pond. He goes over and puts his hand on her shoulder.

THEO

Thought you might be here.

STRANGER

What?!

It isn't TABITHA but an old man who looks exactly like her from behind.

THEO

Oh sorry, I thought-

STRANGER

Get the fuck away from me!

EXT. TABITHA'S FLAT - AFTERNOON

TABITHA, opens the door.

TABITHA
Oh it's you.

THEO
Hey.

TABITHA
Shouldn't you be at work?

THEO
I quit.

TABITHA
Hey, me too.

EXT. TABITHA'S GARDEN. AFTERNOON

TABITHA and THEO sit in old garden chairs drinking tea in a dilapidated back garden - cracked paving stones, overgrown grass. TABITHA vapes.

TABITHA
Do you think they'd want to as a coach

THEO
Whose "they"?

TABITHA
I dunno, the people who employ coaches.

THEO
This the new career plan?

TABITHA
What am I supposed to do, work in a bank or something?
(adopts weird accent)
"Hi, I'd like some money please."
(adopts even weirder accent)
"Here's some money, please come again"

THEO
That's not how banks work.

(CONTINUED)

TABITHA

Well I don't know, do I? I've only done one thing my whole life and now I can't do it anymore.

She clicks her vape but it's run out of fluid. She chucks it in frustration.

THEO

Tabby, it's going to be OK.

TABITHA

Listen, I should have said this yesterday but, for what it's worth...at Linares...I'm sorry.

THEO

(it isn't really)

It's fine.

Silence. Neither sibling knows how to behave in this situation of genuine emotional vulnerability.

THEO

You got any booze?

TABITHA

Vassy left some vodka in the freezer.

THEO heads into the house.

TABITHA looks around. Is this how it ends?

PING! She gets a text.

She checks her phone, it's from an unknown number.

UNKNOWN NUMBER: Sorry to see you go

UNKNOWN NUMBER: You were the best

UNKNOWN NUMBER: At losing LMAO

She types back.

TABITHA: Who is this?

UNKNOWN NUMBER: The person you fear the most.

TABITHA considers this. It can't be? That's impossible. She goes to reply then stops. Then types:

TABITHA: Dad?

(CONTINUED)

UNKNOWN NUMBER: No

KRAVCHENKO: It's Kravchenko

KRAVCHENKO: Moron.

TABITHA: How did you get this number?

KRAVCHENKO: I can do what I want

KRAVCHENKO: Sorry we won't be playing each other ever again

KRAVCHENKO: Loser

INT. TABITHA'S KITCHEN. EVENING

THEO looks through the freezer. He opens a drawer it's full of ice cream.

He opens the second drawer. It's full of more ice cream and a bottle of Russian Vodka - the label is a bear in lingerie.

As he looks for a glass THEO notices a stack of unopened envelopes. He flips through it and sees that many of them are final notices for unpaid bills.

TABITHA (O.S)

Hey.

THEO turns round to find TABITHA behind him.

TABITHA

Are you banned from Uber?

THEO

No, of course not.

TABITHA

Cool, yeah, me neither.

(beat)

Can you book me an Uber?

EXT. KRAVCHENKO'S MANSION - NIGHT

TABITHA knocks on a huge front door an elaborate iron "K" is mounted in the center. FRANK, a security guard, opens it.

TABITHA

I'm here to see Kravchenko. He's expecting me.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Who are you?

TABITHA

Who am I? I'm his worse fucking nightmare.

FRANK

No, sorry. I need your name.

TABITHA

Oh. It's Tabitha King.

INT. KRAVCHENKO'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

FRANK shows THEO and TABITHA into a lavishly decorated living room. In one corner three members of KRAVCHENKO's entourage work at a bank of laptops. An ornate chess board is set up on a coffee table in the middle of the room.

All the staff look at TABITHA and THEO.

TABITHA

Well, where is the cunt?

A door to the adjoining room swings open and a man in his 40s enters the room.

This is HENRIK, he steps aside to reveal the diminutive form of his son NIKOLAI KRAVCHENKO (9, shit eating grin).

KRAVCHENKO

Tabitha, you actually came.
(indicating THEO)
Whose this? Your boyfriend?

TABITHA

Eurgh no! That's my brother.

He looks THEO up and down.

KRAVCHENKO

Nice shirt. Do they make them for men?

THEO

Huh?

TABITHA

Hey, he is a man!

(CONTINUED)

THEO

Sorry, what is this?

KRAVCHENKO walks towards the chess set.

KRAVCHENKO

This is the end of a tedious argument. Tabitha and I are going to play one more match to finally settle our...well rivalry would be overstating it.

TABITHA

10 minutes on the clock? Or will that take us past your bedtime?

KRAVCHENKO

Perfect.

HENRIK

Actually Nicky, we should really be getting to-

KRAVCHENKO

Shut up! Don't talk to me in front of people! Never do that! Never ever do that!
(regains composure)
Shall we?

CUT TO:

TABITHA and KRAVCHENKO sits on either side of the board. KRAVCHENKO has the white pieces, TABITHA the black. The whole of KRAVCHENKO's entourage is gathered round to watch.

KRAVCHENKO moves his first piece and presses the clock. TABITHA instantly responds and presses the clock. So on and so forth, both of them making moves almost instantly after the other has.

KRAVCHENKO

So, what are you going to do? Now that your career is over.

TABITHA

Might start a nursery. You wanna enrol? We could probably get you potty trained in a few weeks.

KRAVCHENKO

I'm sure you could. You're the expert in shitting yourself.

(CONTINUED)

THEO watches from a few feet away he is joined by HENRIK.

HENRIK

Hey, Henrik, pleased to meet you.

THEO

Theo.

HENRIK

Sorry about his comment earlier, he gets a little testy when he's overtired.

KRAVCHENKO (O.S)

Hey, you talking about me?

HENRIK

No, Nicky.

TABITHA blunders one of her pawns. KRAVCHENKO seizes on it.

KRAVCHENKO

Oh dear.

TABITHA thinks for a bit, before settling on a move. She makes it and KRAVCHENKO instantly responds.

She thinks again, then moves a piece. KRAVCHENKO instantly responds, slamming down his piece with unnecessary force.

A bit rattled TABITHA goes to pick up a piece but then stops. She starts to hear the low buzzing noise.

TABITHA'S P.O.V - It's like she's underwater. Everything is in slow motion. She looks from KRAVCHENKO'S grinning face to his entourage who are all leaning in for the kill. The buzzing noise getting louder

and louder

and louder

and...then she sees THEO.

THEO isn't sure why she's looking at him. He gives her a tentative thumbs up.

Everything suddenly snaps back to the normal. TABITHA looks back at the board, and studies it.

KRAVCHENKO

Come along Tabitha. I haven't got all night. Tick tock, tick tock.

(CONTINUED)

TABITHA makes a move. KRAVCHENKO makes a move and now TABITHA instantly responds. The momentum of the game shifts with TABITHA responding as soon as KRAVCHENKO makes a move.

There's a flurry of moves as KRAVCHENKO tries to fend TABITHA off but it's no good. She goes in for the kill.

Gasolina by Daddy Yankee or some similarly obnoxious but more affordable club banger starts playing.

TABITHA

You want to know how I got good at chess?

She picks up her queen. The beat starts building.

TABITHA

I practice every time I fuck your mum.

The beat drops as TABITHA puts her queen on the G3 square.

*(For reference this -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEILTYGSQFA>)*

KRAVCHENKO is dumbstruck. His entourage can't disguise the fact they're impressed. KRAVCHENKO reluctantly tips over his king.

TABITHA leaps to her feet and starts doing a victory dance in time with the music. It starts off triumphant but gets weirdly aggressive and sexually inappropriate.

KRAVCHENKO sweeps his hand across the board sending the pieces flying, the song cuts out. He storms out of the room. HENRIK chases after him.

HENRIK

Nicky darling, it's OK.

Nobody is sure what to say.

THEO

Wanna get out of here?

TABITHA

Yeah, let's bounce.

They leave.

INT. MAX STUDIOS - MORNING

MAX

The saga of Tabitha King's chess career continues with her tweeting today that she is unretiring having announced her retirement yesterday a week after announcing her unritirement which followed the announcement that she ws retiring 6 months previously. Well I'm delighted to say that Tabitha joins me in the studio.

Wide shot reveals TABITHA is in the chair next to him.

MAX

Good morning.

TABITHA

Great to be here, Max. Though I do have to correct you. I never said I was retiring yesterday. I don't know where people are getting this idea but it's completely untrue.

MAX

You tweeted yesterday, "Fuck chess. Never again."

TABITHA

That was a typo, what I meant to say was "Fuck chess? Never. Again!" Because I love chess.

MAX

...Right. A lot of our viewers are curious to know what happened in the match with Dabrow--

TABITHA

It's painful for me to revisit those memories Max. I was in a very dark place then and it was impossible for me to perform to the best of my abilities.

MAX

This was yesterday.

TABITHA

What can I say? Life moves pretty fast, but I now have a brand new

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TABITHA (cont'd)
management team and I'm feeling
very positive about the future.

THEO stands with VASSY next to the cameraman.

MAX
So we can expect to see you playing
more professional games?

SLOW CREEP IN on TABITHA, a slowly rising hum, the sound of
pressure building...

TABITHA
Listen Max I'm back. I know I said
that like last week ago but now I
mean it. I'm hungry, I'm fierce,
I'm going to literally kill anybody
dumb enough to play me. Not
literally obviously, but you know
what I mean. Every game I play will
just be formality, because I've
already won. I have perfect clarity
now, people talk about seeing 30,
40, 50 moves ahead. Well I can see
thousands of moves ahead. I think I
might be God. Well, not God
obviously but the closest thing to
it in terms of chess. Unless I am
God and I don't know I am? I mean
that's possible. It would explain
why there's so much evil in the
world...so, yeah, to conclude - I'm
back.

The camera freezes, the hum stops, TABITHA clears her
throat.

MAX
Are you finished?

TABITHA
I'm just getting started.