

**START EPISODE 1**

OPENING SOUND/SOUNDSCAPE

A.

NARRATOR

Byzantium. The end of the eighth century.

An okay time in Byzantium. We might call it the mid-point. The point where gravity starts to pull an Empire down. Constantine V has been ruling for over twenty-five years, but I can't see Irene anywhere yet in the histories. Not even a whisper of her name.

HUM SOUND

THE OPENING CHANT: I LOOK ON MY LADY

I.

PHILES

I LOOK ON MY LADY AND  
LOVE COMES OUT HER EYES.

CLASTS

AN ICON.

PHILES

THERE SHE LIVES  
CLOSE IN THE PAINT  
AND GOLD.

CLASTS

A THING SEEN \*

PHILES

HELPING ME  
SEE THINGS I CANNOT SEE.

CLASTS

\* IN A FALLING WORLD.

PHILES

MY LORD  
IS MY LADY  
IS MY LORD.

II.

PHILES (CONT'D)

I LOOK ON MY LADY AND  
LOVE COMES OUT HER EYES.

CLASTS  
AN IDOL.

PHILES  
THERE SHE LIVES  
CLOSE IN THE PAINT  
AND GOLD.

CLASTS  
IMAGES I MUST NOT SEE \*

PHILES  
MY LORD  
IS MY LADY  
IS MY LORD.

CLASTS  
\* IN A FALLEN WORLD.

III.

PHILES  
HANG GOD'S SON,  
AND MEN AND WOMEN  
HIGH IN BEAUTY ON THE WALLS.  
THIS EMPRESS LOVES  
HER GOLDEN LADY UP ABOVE YOU ALL.

PHILES AND CLASTS  
IN THE PAINT ARE MAGIC VOICES.  
IN HER EYES \*

PHILES (SOLO)  
\* ARE MAGIC WORDS.

The PHILES sing magical VOWEL  
SOUNDS that get out of control.

IV.

PHILES (CONT'D)  
IN MY WORLD I HOLD HIM DEAR.

CLASTS  
I HOLD HIM OUT THIS WORLD  
SO DEAR.

PHILES  
I HOLD HIM DEAR  
THROUGHOUT THE FIGHT.

CLASTS  
I HOLD HIM DEAR.

PHILES  
I HOLD HIM DEAR.

ALL  
I HOLD HIM DEAR.

PHILES  
I LOOK ON MY LADY AND  
LOVE COMES OUT HER EYES.

CLASTS  
AN ICON.

PHILES  
THERE SHE LIVES  
CLOSE IN THE PAINT  
AND GOLD.

CLASTS  
A THING SEEN \*

PHILES  
HELPING ME  
SEE THINGS I CANNOT SEE.

CLASTS  
\* IN A FALLING WORLD.

PHILES  
MY LORD  
IS MY LADY  
IS MY LORD.

CLASTS  
[AN I-DOL.]

PHILES  
[AN I-CON.]

ATHENS/RURAL SOUND

B.

NARRATOR  
Summer 768 Common Era. A general's country  
villa outside Athens.

I imagine a teenage Irene sitting with her  
friend Megaris, waiting...

MEGARIS

So who are you competing against?  
Are they all famous?

IRENE shrugs her shoulders. I  
don't know.

MEGARIS (CONT'D)

They're not famous? So any woman can send a  
painting and sail there for the show?

IRENE

No, not everyone is called.  
It's up to the Emperor.  
Whoever he thinks is beautiful gets to go.

MEGARIS

Oh... then I bet they've already chosen  
someone.  
Someone with a name.  
Or important brothers.

Beat.

No, you're right, everyone who is beautiful has  
a chance, because they need someone who looks  
like an Empress.

You'll get to go, Irene, without a doubt,  
you're so gorgeous.

IRENE

And will you come with me?

MEGARIS

I don't know...  
I mean, what would it be like? You hear about  
all the books of rules. We haven't been taught  
how to live at court/

\*

IRENE

Who needs to be taught?/

She breaks off and listens.  
FOOTSTEPS. The painter is coming.

That's him...

with my uncle.

A RUSTLE OF THEIR CLOTHES AS THEY  
PREPARE THEMSELVES.

MEGARIS

And it makes my stomach hurt. I mean, how many  
men are going to end up looking at you, once  
they've got this picture of you?

IRENE

Megarıs!

MEGARIS

I'm sorry, but, me personally, that's what I don't like. Being looked at without a veil!

IRENE

I don't care.

THE SOUND OF SEVERAL PEOPLE  
ENTERING THE ROOM. THE PAINTER IS  
SETTING UP HIS EQUIPMENT.

IRENE (CONT'D)

*I'm* being painted.

COURT 1

A call's gone out  
mix your blood  
with power.

COURT 2

Constantine wants paintings  
of pretty girls.  
There's going to  
be a bride show.

COURT 1

Her uncle wants  
her chosen as an  
imperial bride.

COURT 2

Is she pretty enough  
for scornful  
eunuch eyes?

IRENE

The painter's looking in my eyes  
longer  
than anyone  
has ever looked at me.  
He puts me by the window  
to see my true complexion  
in the light.  
When they put a doll in my hand  
he laughs and says  
"ha child-bride,  
better for the man!".  
and everybody smiles,  
but I see his eyes  
are sad.

I look straight at him  
so he can see

(MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)

that the bones in my face  
are perfect.

I'm ready  
to be plucked.

PAINT ME

MEGARIS

HE'S COME TO PAINT HER!

COURT 2

THE ORPHAN CHILD.

IRENE

HE'S COME TO PAINT ME.

MEGARIS

IRENE OF ATHENS.

IRENE

THOUGH NO-ONE KNOWS WHO I AM.

MEGARIS AND COURT 1

HE'S COME TO PAINT HER,  
MAKE HER  
SHINE LIKE GOLD.

IRENE

HE'S COME TO PAINT ME,  
MAKE THEM CHOOSE ME,  
MAKE THEM WANT ME  
FROM AFAR.

COURT 2

THIS PAINTER  
PAINTS ICONS  
IN SECRET  
IN THE DARK.

WOMEN PAINTED  
FOR MONEY  
IN THE DAY \*

ALL

\* TURN INTO SAINTS  
AT NIGHT.

COURT 1

IRENE'S HIS PURPLE MADONNA.

COURT 2

REGAL AND PROUD.

MEGARIS AND COURT 1  
MOTHER-TO-BE \*

COURT 2  
\*OF AN IMPORTANT  
CHILD.

IRENE  
HE PAINTS MY LIPS RED,  
HE PAINTS MY EYES BLUE.

THE PICTURE BECOMES ME,  
TAKING MY EYES  
TO COURT.

EYES PAINTED OPEN,  
ETCHED WITH KOHL.

WATCHING  
THE EUNUCHS  
JUDGING

MEGARIS AND COURT 1  
JUDGING

COURT 2  
JUDGING

IRENE  
JUDGING ME.

SO PAINT ME.

IT'S GORGEOUS  
TO BE SEEN.

PAINT ME,  
GIVE ME EYES  
THAT TRAVEL FAR.

PAINT ME.

PAINT ME!

COURT 2  
AND FAR AWAY.

COURT 1  
FAR AWAY.

ALL  
FAR AWAY\*

IRENE AND MEGARIS  
\* IN CONSTANTINOPE

ALL

LEO LOOKS AT GIRLS  
PAINTED LIKE DOLLS.

COURT 2

HE LOOKS IN THEIR EYES,  
AND SAYS  
"I CAN'T SEE  
YOUR HEART".

LEO LOOKS AT HER PICTURE \*

IRENE

\* AND IF HE TURNS  
HIS GAZE AWAY,  
ALL IS LOST FOR ME.

AN ORPHAN GIRL  
IN GREECE.

COURT 1

SHE'S SEEMS SO PRETTY,  
SHE SEEMS TO HAVE  
A HEART.

COURT 2

BUT THEY'VE PAINTED HER  
LIKE AN ICON,  
LIKE A  
PURPLE MADONNA \*

COURT 1

\* HE DESTROYS  
ICONS.

COURT 2

LIKE FATHER,  
LIKE SON.

COURT 1

HE LOOKS AT HER EYES  
CIRCLES OF BLUE \*

COURT 2

\* AND WONDERS  
WHAT SHE SEES  
WHEN SHE'S  
ON HER KNEES  
WITH GOD.

IRENE

I FEEL THEM  
LOOK AT ME.

I FEEL THEM  
WANT ME.



AND SEE ME  
FINALLY.

[SO PAINT ME,  
SEND MY FACE AFAR!]

MEGARIS  
(delay)

[PAINT HER,  
SEND HER FACE AFAR!]

IRENE  
PAINT ME,  
GIVE ME EYES  
THAT TRAVEL FAR.

MEGARIS  
(partial delay)

PAINT HER,  
.....  
[FAR].

IRENE  
PAINT ME  
SO HE WANTS ME!

PALACE SOUND

C.

CUT TO STAURAKIOS AND LEO

NARRATOR

In the Imperial Palace in Constantinople,  
paintings are tacked across the empty walls of  
the young Caesar Leo's room. It's been a day's  
work for his eunuch Staurakios to sort through  
the best of them.

THE SOUND OF DRINKING. And  
ATTENDANTS TALKING.

STAURAKIOS  
You don't like *any* of them?

LEO  
They look like dolls.

STAURAKIOS  
But they're beautiful. Every single painting is  
like a\*

ATTENDANTS (COURT 1 AND 2)

\* Venus.

The whisper goes round the room  
"Venus" on repeat.

LEO

That's what you imagine I want? Blond hair and blue eyes? How can I think about paintings? My father can barely walk. That's what's on my mind... What's happening to him?

STAUAKIOS

If you don't want a bride show you have to tell your father now.

LEO

(guiltily)

I know.

STAUAKIOS

And it could be good to be seen saying no to him. Everyone's looking for someone strong to take charge of the situ/

LEO

/WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? People shouldn't think like that!

STAUAKIOS

What if he falls over in public?

LEO

That's not why I don't want a bride show. I just don't like these women. They've all let themselves be painted!

Beat.

NARRATOR

Lots of people working in institutions can identify with Staurakios. He looks like he's made it, he's secured a position, he's Leo's chief advisor, people value him as an ex-soldier, as an administrator, as a bureaucrat.

But turn a corner in this palace and suddenly he can meet someone who treats him like he's nothing. He needs Leo, even if Leo has no real idea who Staurakios is, how wildly and happily his eunuch parties in the city at night; how much he likes these painted women and how much he admires them taking a chance.

LEO

(whispering)

How sick do you think he really is? Maybe if we wait a few weeks his legs will recover.

STOURAKIOS

(also whispering)

I heard they took a pin to your father's leg  
yesterday and pricked him from toe to thigh.

COURT

He felt nothing.

LEO

You know I trust your advice, Staurakios, you  
never tell me anything but the truth, but if  
people are starting to say things like that,  
I've got to do what he wants, haven't I?

THE SOUND OF LEO WALKING AWAY TO  
LOOK AT THE PAINTINGS AGAIN.

SAY GOODBYE TO THE ETERNAL BOY

STOURAKIOS

I LIKE YOUR SAINTLINESS,  
FOR NOW IT MAKES YOU CUTE,  
THERE'S SOMETHING THAT GETS ME  
ABOUT THE BODY TRAINED FOR WAR,  
TOPPED BY LIPS TALKING PEACE.

I'LL KEEP THIS MEMORY, THANKS, IT'S NICE,  
YOU POUTING, ALL HOLY SPIRIT,  
SAYING NO TO A BRIDE,  
BECAUSE SERIOUSLY YOU CAN'T SEE  
IN HER HEART. BUT...

I'VE GOT TO CLOSE MY EYES,  
SAY GOODBYE TO THE ETERNAL BOY  
AND HIS LOVELY FEARS  
ABOUT OTHERS' SINS...

... BLIND, LUST MASKED, I CAN SEE,

WHEN YOUR FATHER DIES,  
THERE ARE MANY BEARDED MEN  
WHO COULD BE HIS HEIR.

SO SAY GOODBYE TO THE ETERNAL BOY  
AND HIS LOVELY FEARS  
ABOUT OTHERS' SINS  
I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU  
PICK A BRIDE, GET IN THE FIGHT.

SEE, RIGHT NOW, I'M DRY AND  
DEFENCELESS, AN UNARMED EUNUCH,  
THAT'S NOT CUTE.

WHEN YOUR FATHER DIES,  
THERE WON'T BE TIME FOR GRIEF  
WHEN YOUR FATHER DIES,  
THERE WON'T BE TIME FOR LOVE

WHEN YOUR FATHER DIES,  
HONESTLY, BOTH OF US WILL NEED  
TO USE YOUR SWORD  
TO SURVIVE.

Cii.

LEO  
(his voice echoing from the other side of  
the room)

Which paintings would you pick?

THE SOUND OF STAURAKIOS' FOOTSTEPS  
AS HE WALKS OVER TO JOIN LEO

STOURAKIOS

So you don't want a doll.... okay that one...  
her name is \*

COURT

\* Cyra of the Argyros

STOURAKIOS

Her brothers control the army and that one...  
Her name is...

COURT

Er....

STOURAKIOS

Irene Sarantapechos. I'm not sure I'd choose  
her, but she's beautiful.

Beat.

Staurakios is looking at what the  
painted Irene is holding in her  
hand. He LAUGHS.

Look at what she's holding! A doll!

CALLED [PART 1]

IRENE

THEY CALL ME  
TO THE BRIDE SHOW.  
I CAN'T WAIT  
TO GO!

COURT 1

[THEY CALL HER  
TO THE BRIDE SHOW]

COURT 2

[SHE CAN'T WAIT  
TO GO]

COURT

CALLING OUT  
"YOU'RE WANTED"

COURT 2

[SOMEWHERE  
THAT MATTERS.]

COURT 1

[BY PEOPLE  
WITH POWER.]

COURT 2

IRENE  
SARANTAPECHOS

IRENE

[ IS WANTED ]

COURT

IRENE SARANTAPECHOS  
IS WANTED

IS CALLED  
TO THE SHOW.

LINKING SONG THEME

D.

CUT TO IRENE AND MEGARIS

ATHENS SOUND

THE SOUND OF TWO GIRLS SITTING  
CROSS-LEGGED ON THE FLOOR.

THE SOUND OF THINGS BEING PUT INTO  
BAGS AND WOODEN BOXES.

IRENE

Wrap these carefully please.

MEGARIS

We can't take them.  
We can't!  
Someone will find them  
in our bags.

THE SOUND OF SOMETHING NOT FITTING  
WELL.

Can you not just say your prayers without them?

IRENE

They're how my mother taught me to say my  
prayers.

MEGARIS

Oh.

IRENE

Don't you believe me?

MEGARIS

...

IRENE

It's true.  
I screamed in church,  
because I thought I saw one of the wooden  
ladies move its eyes,  
so my mother  
taught me  
how to kiss it like a doll.

Then when she died  
it was my icon  
for me alone  
to say my prayers to her.

But then your lot came/

MEGARIS

Not my lot!

IRENE

People from your family.

MEGARIS

No.  
Not my close family.  
We all had icons as well.

IRENE

Did they make you smash them?

MEGARIS

We burnt them.  
Outside. So the mob could see.

IRENE

Well anyway... so... I couldn't keep it,  
another thing to kiss goodbye.

\*

A COLD PAIN

IRENE (CONT'D)

A COLD KISS,  
WITH A COLD PAIN  
HIDDEN BEHIND  
MY FACE.

COURT 1

A COLD KISS,  
WITH A COLD PAIN.  
A COLD KISS  
GOODBYE.

COURT  
A COLD PAIN  
FOR A  
A SMALL  
HEART.

IRENE  
I SEE THEM  
THROW  
THE ICON  
TO THE FLOOR.

COURT 2  
(whispering)  
SAVAGE HER  
FOR WOOD.

IRENE  
(whispering)  
NOTHING  
LEFT TO KISS.

COURT 1  
A COLD KISS,  
WITH A COLD PAIN,

IRENE  
A COLD KISS  
GOODBYE.  
THEY GIVE ME  
A TINY PAINTED LADY

COURT 2  
CARVED SMALL  
FOR A GIRL'S POCKET.

IRENE  
THEY SAY  
PROMISE US

COURT 1  
PROMISE US!

IRENE  
YOU NEVER  
TELL, \*

COURT 1  
\* YOU NEVER  
SHOW, \*

IRENE  
\* YOU KEEP  
HER HIDDEN\*



COURT 1  
\* CLOSE TO YOU.

COURT  
BURDENING HER

COURT 1  
[COLD TIMES.]

COURT 2  
[DANGEROUS TIMES.]

COURT  
FULL OF LIES.

COURT 1  
KEEP US SAFE \*

IRENE  
\* KISS HER IN THE  
DARK.

I KEEP  
HER SAFE, I  
KISS HER  
IN THE DARK.

A COLD KISS,  
WITH A COLD PAIN,  
HIDDEN  
IN MY HEART.

A COLD KISS,  
WITH A COLD PAIN.  
A COLD KISS  
TO GET BY.

COURT 1  
A COLD KISS,  
WITH A COLD PAIN.

IRENE  
A COLD KISS  
GOODBYE.

Dii.

Megar is picks up the pocket icon.

MEGARIS  
Are you lying to me, to make me take it?

Irene looks at her with a  
completely inscrutable face.

MEGARIS (CONT'D)

Irene, I can't tell if you're lying to me.

IRENE

If I'm chosen, I want you there to help me teach my baby their prayers.

MEGARIS

Would you make me their nurse?

IRENE

Of course. Who else would I trust with my kid?

MEGARIS

But would you give me the official title and everything?

IRENE

Yes.

MEGARIS

I would be "The Nurse"?

IRENE

I just said that.

MEGARIS

What about later? When you go from just being a Princess to being Empress? I'd still be nurse? Because that's a big thing.

IRENE

How many different ways do I need to say it? If I'm chosen, you'll look after my kid. And we'll make sure he gets to say his prayers our way. So pack my icon. We're going to need it.

Megarlis hesitates, then packs the icon into the bags.

PALACE SOUND

E.

CUT TO CONSTANTINE V, STAURAKIOS  
AND LEO

NARRATOR

Back in Constantinople, in the Emperor's private chambers, the lighting is being kept very dim. Leo can barely see his father.

CONSTANTINE V

Come in, come in,  
I want to talk to you.

He looks at Staurakios standing  
behind Leo.

No. Send that eunuch away!

STAURAKIOS

(whispering)

I will wait for you outside.

Staurakios melts away.

LEO

Father... what is that on your face?

CONSTANTINE V

Lead paint.

THE COURT

You don't want to see  
what's underneath.

His private face,

hidden  
as it decays.

CONSTANTINE V

My doctor wants me to spend some time resting  
away from the palace.

LEO

You should!

CONSTANTINE V

That's interesting. All my sons are telling me  
to go!

LEO

I haven't spoken with my half brothers, I don't  
know what they're saying, but I wonder if it  
would be better for people to not see you like  
this, with paint on your face? To let them  
remember your face before...

(piously)

... We do not see our Lord in Heaven and yet we  
obey his rule.

CONSTANTINE V

Hiding won't cure me!  
Listen,

(MORE)

CONSTANTINE V (CONT'D)

I started as a weak Emperor,  
very weak  
until I learnt to strip the images from our  
churches, and stop the plague coming,  
but no Emperor ever becomes strong.  
People still use images against me  
to signal their rebellion.  
So I've never done enough and I'm...

Can't say it. But I know I'm  
dying.

My limbs seem already dead....

CONSTANTINE V (CONT'D)

I am meant to feel this punishment for being  
weak.

LEO

You haven't been weak.

CONSTANTINE V

I regret this peace! Letting the iconophiles  
crawl back in.

LEO

You have been very clear. If they are seen with  
an icon, even once, they know they are done.

CONSTANTINE V

THE DEVIL DECEIVES WITH DEVICES OF THE FEMALE HEART.

THE DEVIL DECEIVES  
WITH DEVICES  
OF THE FEMALE HEART.

SOMEPLACE, SOMEWHERE  
A WOMAN PAINTS  
HER LADY'S FACE,  
MAKES ME PAINT MINE,

DRAGGING  
HER HUSBAND, AND ME,  
ALL OF US,  
DRAGGING US DOWN  
WITH HER LITTLE SHRINES  
AND ICONS, DRAGGING US  
BACK DOWN TO HELL.

AND IN THE NIGHT,  
GOD TOUCHES MY FACE,  
HOT FINGERS  
DEGRADING ME  
WITH  
DISAPPOINTMENT:

"CONSTANTINE.  
YOU'VE BEEN WEAK  
AND LAZY".

"YOU PULLED OUT  
THE EASY THREATS,

BUT LEFT THE WORST  
IDOLATRY  
STILL THERE  
IN THE GROUND"

LOOK AT MY FACE,  
LOOK AT MY NOSE,

SOMEPLACE,  
SOMEWHERE THE ICONS GROW AGAIN,

BE DILIGENT!  
BE DELIBERATE!  
BE AWARE THE DEVIL DECEIVES,  
LEAVES US CORRUPTED AND BROKEN!

SOMEPLACE,  
SOMEWHERE THE ICONS GROW AGAIN,  
SOMEPLACE, SOMEWHERE  
A WOMAN CURSES ME  
WITH GOLD,

WHEN I FINALLY CRUSH THEM,  
MY FACE WILL  
BE RESTORED, ELEVATED,  
I'LL BE FIT  
TO BE SEEN.

Breathless he stops singing.

F.

FOOTSTEPS as LEO walks away from  
his father.

And the SOUND OF STAUAKIOS  
falling into step behind him.

Staurakios catches Leo as he  
leaves his father.

STAUAKIOS

What happened?

LEO

I wish he'd let you stay in the room! What was  
that about? You always come to our meetings...  
I've never heard him rant like that.

Leo takes a deep breath.

I got close to his face, he has no skin on this side of his nose.

STAUAKIOS

Then there can't be a Bride Show.

LEO

He's already decided that Cyra of the Argyros will win!

Staurakios processes that, leaping through every pro and con in his head.

STAUAKIOS

Cyra? No. She has too many brothers. You've already got that problem.

LEO

He sees her brothers as useful. He wants to be able to ride out with their calvary troops. He's convinced all the icon shops are open again.

STAUAKIOS

I hope not. We've had a lot of wasted years on that. My worry, and please listen to me, isn't "icon worshippers", it's how do we/

LEO

/I'm not disagreeing with you, but this is what he believes is making him ill!

STAUAKIOS

And what do his doctors say?

Leo doesn't bother to reply.

STAUAKIOS (CONT'D)

I'm suspicious of this Bride Show. It seems strange to be organizing one when the bride is already chosen.

LEO

He wants to be seen! It's the start of some kind of campaign...

A DISBELIEVING SOUND from Staurakios.

No I'm serious, instead of going to the springs, he's looking for a war to bring back his health!

CALLED [PART 2]

COURT 1  
IRENE SARANTAPECHOS SAILS

COURT 2  
WITH A WARDROBE FULL OF SILKS

IRENE  
DREAMING OF A CHANCE.

COURT 1  
OLD ROME FELL  
LEAVING NEW ROME  
IN THE EAST.

COURT  
CONSTANTINOPLE.

COURT 2  
A CITY FILLED  
WITH CLEVER MINDS,  
AND FAITH AND TRADE.

COURT  
A CITADEL BETWEEN TWO SEAS.

COURT 1  
ROMANS  
SPEAKING GREEK.

COURT 1 (CONT'D)  
IRENE  
SARANTAPECHOS.  
SEES THE CITY.

COURT 2  
SHE SEES  
PEOPLE, POLITICS \*

IRENE  
\*MUSIC AND ART.

COURT 1  
THINGS TO FILL  
THE EMPTY  
SPACES.

COURT 2  
A COMING HOME  
IN NEW ROME.

COURT  
AT THE CENTER  
IS A PALACE.

COURT 1  
[DARK.]

COURT 2  
[UNKNOWN.]

IRENE AND MEGARIS  
MY HEART JUMPS.

COURT 2  
EMPRESSES HAVE DIED.

IRENE  
IN THIS PALACE.

COURT 1 AND MEGARIS  
[DIED OF VIOLENCE]

COURT 2  
[WITH SHATTERED HEARTS.]

COURT 1  
IRENE SARANTAPECHOS.  
SAILS

COURT 2  
WITH A WARDROBE  
FULL OF SILKS

COURT 1  
DREAMING  
OF A CHANCE.

SAILING SOUNDS

G.

NARRATOR

She sails, taking with her the most dangerous thing to own in Byzantium at the end of the eighth century. She takes *an icon* right into Constantine's palace. A little icon carved small for a girl's pocket.

**END OF AUDIO EPISODE ONE**