

START EPISODE TWO

PALACE SOUND

A.

UNDERSCORING TO NARRATION. THEME
"DREAMING OF A CHANCE"

NARRATOR

November 768 Common Era. The Golden Hall in the Imperial Palace. The most important families in the Empire have gathered to see if their daughter will be chosen. The young Caesars, Leo's half-brothers, stand close to their military heroes, the Argyros brothers, trying to engage them in conversation. But the Argyros aren't interested in anyone who isn't a direct heir to the throne. They're keeping their eyes closely trained on their baby sister Cyra, watching her wait for the bride show to start.

THE SOUND OF A LARGE GROUP OF
WOMEN WAITING.

REPRISE OF "DREAMING OF A CHANCE
ENDING"

CYRA
(singing slowly)

I HAVE NO SHELL

I HAVE NO SHELL,

NO HIDDEN HEART,

I AM HERE

PLAINLY

IN
THIS
WORLD.

COURT 1

CYRA.

STONEY
EYED.

COURT 2

OF THE
ARGYROS,

ICONOCLASTS.

CYRA

I PRAY
WITH EMPTY
HANDS.

AND
CLOSED EYES.

THEY CALL ME
TO THE BRIDE SHOW

COURT 1

THEY CALL HER
TO THE BRIDE SHOW.

STAURAKIOS

SHE FEELS
ALREADY
CHOSEN

COURT 1

FOR HER FAMILY
AND HER FAITH/

B.

Cyra is annoyed to be cut off by
Staurakios.

STAURAKIOS

/May I introduce myself? I am Staurakios, chief
eunuch to the Caesar Leo. I am in charge of
organizing his Bride Show.

Cyra stares straight ahead, as if
she has heard nothing.

CYRA

Go away.

STAURAKIOS

I would like to move you to another part of the
room.

CYRA

No.

Forgive me, I know it must be strange to be in
public unveiled. Especially with your brothers
across the room watching/

CYRA (CONT'D)

I do not talk to Hyacinths!

STAUAKIOS

That's unfortunate. You must at least listen to the eunuchs on matters of etiquette.

Silence.

STAUAKIOS (CONT'D)

You will get used to us. We are in and out of the Women's Quarters every hour of the day. But what I must do now is move you so that you are the first in line/

CYRA

/This is the spot to be first on the line.

Another CEREMONIAL SOUND. THE SOUND OF A CROWD OF WOMEN WALKING IN A PROCESSION INTO THE ROOM.

MEGARIS

Irene, where are we meant to stand? How do I know if we've reached the right place?

IRENE

Megar, shush, keep going!... Ah, we're right at the end of the line, this is the worst spot!

THE SOUND OF MORE PEOPLE COMING IN.

CALLED (PART 3)

CLASTS

VENUSES COME
SAILING IN
ON OTHER SHIPS*

IRENE AND CYRA

* TO RIVAL ME.

CLASTS 2

[FROM AVIGNON,
AND SYRIA.]

CLASTS 1

[FACES DARK.
FACES LIGHT.]

IRENE

I DON'T FEAR
OTHER WOMEN'S
BEAUTY.

CLASTS 1

SHE'S
A PEARL.

IRENE

AND A PEARL
KNOWS THERE
ARE OTHER PEARLS
HIDDEN
IN OTHER SHELLS
THAT DON'T OPEN
IN TIME.

I WALK
IN THE ROOM

THE LAST
ON A LINE.

CYRA

I WALK
IN THE ROOM

FIRST
OF THE BRIDES.

An attendant CLAPS -- a call to
attention. Everyone is expecting
the Emperor to come in from the
Main Door.

IRENE

A THOUSAND
PEOPLE
IN THE ROOM.

A LINE
OF WOMEN *

CYRA

* GOOD AND BAD.

IRENE

HOLD MY FACE
STILL AND QUIET.

IRENE

Eyes
moving,
over me.

CYRA

Eyes
moving
over me.

CYRA (CONT'D)

IN MY BODY
A SHAKING
OF DESIRE
TO BE *

IRENE
[* CHOSEN]

CYRA
[* CHOSEN.]

C.

CUT TO CONSTANTINE V AND LEO

NARRATOR
Outside the Golden Hall, unseen, the Emperor
limps along, leaning on his son, Leo.

CONSTANTINE V
No! I can't go through the main door!

LEO
Father, we must go in now.

CONSTANTINE V
(angrily)
There are too many people!

NARRATOR
And there is Staurakios, as ever quickly
solving the problem, whispering the solution
into Leo's grateful ear.

LEO
Father, apparently we can go in the other door.

CUT BACK TO MAIN ACTION

Constantine V nods. They walk to
the lesser entrance and slip in to
the crowd unannounced.

They watch the girls walking.

Suddenly, Constantine V points.

CONSTANTINE V
Who is this?

STAURAKIOS
Irene Sarantapechos.

CONSTANTINE V
What a pearl!

NARRATOR
Suddenly the crowd realizes that the Emperor is
there already.

IRENE
(whispering)
Megaris! Megaris get down. Kneel.

MEGARIS
(whispering)
Why? It's not time.

IRENE
(whispering)
Can't you see? The Emperor has come in the back door. He's right there?

MEGARIS
Oh Irene he's staring at us. What have we done wrong?

STAUAKIOS
(to himself)
The Emperor who hates icons is staring at the girl who looks like a purple Madonna....

and she's no idea what to do!

MEGARIS
Oh, a eunuch is coming over.

Staurakios goes up to Irene and whispers in her ear.

STAUAKIOS
(whispering)
First kiss his knees.

THE SOUND OF IRENE GRASPING THE EMPEROR'S LEGS. THE SOUND OF THICK FABRIC BEING KISSED.

Irene kisses Constantine V's knees.

STAUAKIOS (CONT'D)
Don't let him go!

Irene firmly holds on to Constantine V's legs, keeping her forehead burrowed into his robes.

IRENE
(whispering.)
His body
is purple. This man
is full of power.

LEO

Father, this is not the girl you wanted.
This is not Cyra of the Argyros.

STAUAKIOS

This is Irene of Athens.

CONSTANTINE V

Your dear Mother was also called Irene!

LEO

Let's keep going/

CONSTANTINE V

Shhh... I can feel her hands on my legs.
She looks like an Empress!
A purple bride!

I have an oath
Irene, a promise
I ask of all.

IRENE

(whispering to herself)

My tongue will
say any lie
to give my
heart a home.

CONSTANTINE V

Sworn on the
Holy Gospels.

An INTAKE OF BREATH from the
Court.

THE SOUND OF A BIBLE BEING OPENED.

MEGARIS

Irene,
this lie will be
your life!

Constantine V holds out the BIBLE.

Irene raises her hand and touches
the tips of the book.

THE SOUND OF HANDS TOUCHING PAPER.

IRENE

I worship
no images.

I wish harm
on those
that do.

CONSTANTINE V

I worship
no images.

I wish harm
on those
that do.

MEGARIS

(whispering.)

Would you harm yourself?

Silence.

CONSTANTINE V

Perfect.

NARRATOR

Her first mention in the books comes in the
Eighth Indiction.

From Nikopheros.

Constantine the Fifth brought Irene from Greece
to be the wife of his son Leo;
And, in December,
he crowned her Augusta
and married her to his son.

And then the histories
ignore her,

leaving us, alone,
thinking
her thoughts.

LEO

I looked at your picture
and couldn't see
your heart.

IRENE

I didn't like being painted...

no that's not true,
and it's wrong to lie.

I did like being painted,
because I knew...

I don't want to be looked at
by just anyone

She sings.

I WANT TO BE LOOKED AT BY YOU.

I WANT TO BE LOOKED AT BY YOU.

I WANT TO BE LOOKED AT BY YOU.

I know you didn't choose me, why would you? I'm not famous, but...

... my heart tells me
I was born to be your wife.

NARRATOR

And Cyra, to her brothers' fury, is left behind.

CYRA

EYES GLIDING OVER ME

EYES GLIDING OVER ME

PAINFULLY

REJECTING ME.

TAINTING ME.

I CAN SERVE
THE WOMAN
CHOSEN

OR
TAKE MY VOWS.

NOW I
MUST BE
UNSEEN

WHY WAS SHE CHOSEN
THIS ORPHAN GIRL
FROM GREECE?

IS A PAINTED FACE
EVERYTHING

OR ARE THERE REASONS
I DON'T KNOW?

BAD INTENT
OR MAGIC

STEALING

MY FATE?

NOT YET TWENTY
BUT MADE TOO OLD
FOR OTHER PATHS.

NOW
I MUST BE
UNSEEN.

WATCH ME
BEND
MY KNEE
TO HER.

PAINFULLY.

NARRATOR

In just a few months, as if by magic, Irene Sarantepechos has gone from being a hanger on in her uncle's house to being dressed for her own coronation as a junior royal.

Perhaps in her head, perhaps? Only perhaps. She's thinking, "if this can happen, what else can I do?"

CEREMONIAL SOUND

MOVEMENT PIECE WITH CHANTING: KISSING KNEES

COURT
(chanting.)

THIS IS THE GREAT DAY OF THE LORD,
THIS IS THE DAY OF THE SALVATION OF THE ROMANS,
THIS DAY IS THE JOY AND GLORY OF THE WORLD,
ON WHICH THE CROWN OF THE EMPIRE
HAS BEEN CORRECTLY PUT UPON YOUR HEAD.

GLORY TO GOD WHO IS THE MASTER OF ALL THINGS!
GLORY TO GOD WHO HAS MADE YOU KAISARISSA!
GLORY TO GOD WHO HAS CROWNED YOUR HEAD,
MAY HE WHO HAS CROWNED YOU, IRENE, BY HIS OWN HAND
KEEP YOU IN THE PURPLE FOR MANY YEARS,
FOR THE GLORY AND THE EXULTATION OF THE ROMANS.

DEvised SOUNDSCAPE. The Court kiss each others' knees.

COURT 2

BENE! BENE!
KAISARISSA!

COURT 1

BENE! BENE!
KAISARISSA!

LEO

BENE. BENE.
KAISARISSA!

COURT

BENE! BENE!
KAISARISSA!

D.

Staurakios watches Cyra looking at
Irene and Leo.

CYRA

She lies with him.
Look how
they make a son within her
out of duty
instead of love.

STAUAKIOS

(to himself)

Oh... and if it had been you, Cyra, your son
would have been made of pure "love"?

CYRA

A woman
not born in the purple
allowed to make
an imperial family.

A woman
not born in the purple
given half a palace
and allowed to rise.

STAUAKIOS

I see how your brothers are looking at her.

I don't think she's going
to be allowed to rise.

END OF AUDIO EPISODE TWO