

START EPISODE THREE

A.

THE SOUND OF LADIES SITTING
TOGETHER. MUTED CONVERSATION.

NARRATOR

769 Common Era. Irene's chamber in the Women's
Quarters of the palace. The women's quarters
are a mirror to the men's. The ladies take off
their veils and hold office.

LADY 1

She's so tasteless,
you can see what's she's thinking.

CYRA

"I was chosen!"

IRENE

So why do these women look at me as if I'm not
a real princess?

LADY 2

Did you see her ogling the workshops? Thinking
about how to make some money on the side.

Irene smiles at the ladies in
front of her.

IRENE

I'm given this group of ladies
with so many talents,
tell me what you can each do.

CYRA

I don't make things, but I sing and play the
kithara.

LADY 2

I can dance to her melodies.

MEGARIS

I have spent a lot of time with children
so I know all their lullabies.

Irene rolls her eyes.

IRENE

I hope one of you knows how silk worms live on
wood. I want us to make things here.

LADY 1

(whispering)

Look, look, look, there's that eunuch again.

CYRA

Which one?

LADY 1

Leo's chief one. I bet he's been sent by Leo,
so he doesn't have to come himself!

Irene sees that some of her ladies
are looking at Staurakios waiting
in the doorway.

He bows deeply to her.

STAUAKIOS

Kaiserissa,

this is a little gift from the library,

I've stolen it for you, but only if you want
it?

It's about crafting golden things.

Staurakios hands the book to one
of her ladies to hand to her. She
looks at it with pleasure.

STAUAKIOS (CONT'D)

When I was traveling as a soldier, I saw many
different crafts. I bought a lot of unusual
things.

IRENE

You were a soldier? I'd like to hear about
that!

Staurakios looks at Cyra.

STAUAKIOS

I don't want to keep your ladies from their
tasks.

IRENE

They can go.

THE SOUND OF PEOPLE EXITING AND
STAUAKIOS FINDING A SEAT.

Staurakios takes a seat.

STRAURAKIOS

Can you see, I have one arm bigger than the other?

IRENE

Were you an archer?

STRAURAKIOS

I could stand at your window right now and shoot a man half a mile away in the city.

IRENE

But you're a bureaucrat now, why doesn't your arm go back to its old size?

Staurakios LAUGHS.

STRAURAKIOS

The other side of the palace is its own battlefield... you understand that? This side you have your workshops, and your beautiful gardens, but the men's side is crowds and noise/

IRENE

/But there are hundreds of eunuchs. Don't you organize everything?

STRAURAKIOS

We'd need much more power again to do that. No, we give advice, we run the offices, we set out interpretations of the rules but... something happens and everyone reacts their own way.

Irene is not quite listening.

IRENE

I want to use the old workshops. The silk ones. Am I allowed to?

STRAURAKIOS

The Empress Theodora had a whole fleet trading her silk around the seas. Someday you'll do that.

IRENE

I want to do it now. Why not? Or is that not allowed? Everything this week seems to be a squabble over who gets what.

STRAURAKIOS

Of course. People are waiting, hoping for scraps to fall in their own mouths. Remember there are so many people here on the same path as you.... do you understand that?

(MORE)

STAURAKIOS (CONT'D)

Now you are Kaiserissa. You think you'll be Basilissa. But you could be pushed aside.

IRENE

I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS

I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS

I WANT TO ASK YOU NOW!

I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS

I WANT TO ASK YOU NOW!

STAURAKIOS

OH MY. WHAT HAVE I DONE?

OPENED THE DOOR,
LET A PUPPY SPRING IN.

IRENE

I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS

I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS

I WANT TO ASK YOU NOW!

I DON'T FEAR THAT THERE
ARE OTHERS IN MY PATH,

I'LL SPRINT TO GET AHEAD,

TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO KNOW.

STAURAKIOS

I FIND IT HARD TO ANSWER
A CHILD TALKING TOUGH.

I FIND IT HARD TO ANSWER
THIS LITTLE GREEK.

IRENE

I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS,
FOR LEO AND FOR ME.

I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS,
I LOOKED AT THE EMPEROR
AND SAW HE WAS ILL/

Staurakios firmly cuts her off
with a warning finger

STAURAKIOS

/SOFTLY, SOFTLY. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
IS SOMETHING ONLY AN ANKLE-BITER WOULD ASK!//

IRENE

/TELL ME, WHAT ARE YOU TELLING LEO,
HOW DO WE GET AHEAD?

IRENE AND STAURAKIOS
HOW DO WE GET AHEAD?

IRENE
HOW DO WE GET AHEAD?

STAURAKIOS
FIND YOUR SOLDIERS,
MAKE THEM LOVE YOU,

LADIES
(underneath)
WHAT'S THE EUNUCH TELLING HER?

CYRA
FIND YOUR SOLDIERS,
MAKE THEM LOVE YOU.

IRENE
I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS
I NEED TO ASK YOU NOW.

TELL ME, WHO ARE THESE ALLIES!
TELL ME, WHAT ARE THEIR NAMES!

STAURAKIOS
UGH, OVER-EXCITED,
DON'T LIKE HER LITTLE PAWS
SCRABBLING AT MY LEGS.

IRENE
TELL/

STAURAKIOS
/WHAT I'M SAYING

ALL I'M SAYING

WHAT I'M SAYING

KAISERISSA

IS

LOVE ALL YOUR LADIES,

MAKE ALL YOUR LADIES
LOVE YOU TOO.

Aii.

IRENE
All my ladies? They're my soldiers?

LADIES
LOVE ALL YOUR LADIES.

IRENE
And if I've met them and can only love one or
two?

STAUAKIOS
Didn't you say your tongue can say any lie?

I'd tell your lady Cyra she'll
make a wonderful nurse.

LADIES 2
Cyra is an unlit pearl
closed in her shell.

LADIES
Cyra doesn't sing *

CYRA
* lullabies.

STAUAKIOS
Because your lady Cyra
has brothers
who are military fiends.

Staurakios bows and leaves.

LADIES 1
She wants Cyra, quickly,
No-one else.

MEGARIS
Wait, why? No, I'm meant to be going in next.

Cyra sits in front of Irene.

CYRA
Kaiserissa,
I am honored

when you have been
thinking on it so long

but

I am not the lady
to be your son's nurse.

MEGARIS
I'm going to be your nurse!

IRENE

Megariss has my love,
but thinking about it,
I've realized she could weaken
a kid by treating him
like a child.

IRENE (CONT'D)

I've been reading about it.
How a prince needs
to be a puer senex;

COURT

(whispering)

an old man boy.

IRENE

We should only let him have
games and toys
that are lessons
in themselves.

MEGARIS

Well that's stupid!
Kids need to have fun!

CYRA

Like wooden weapons?

IRENE

Yes play swords, but also,
things like a pull along horse;
knucklebones; balls and hoops.

What do you remember
your brothers playing with?

CYRA

My brothers were sent away young.
I played alone...
Simple games.

IRENE

I had dolls.
And a loom.
Nothing useful,
no real mirror to teach me how to be a
princess.

Beat. IRENE smiles then takes
Cyra's hands.

I want him to grow as skilled as your father
and brothers. I've heard they are amazing
soldiers.

Beat.

You know the Emperor is very ill?

CYRA
(fiercely)
The Emperor is not ill.

IRENE
(whispering)
But how my son will need you if he is.

CYRA
EYES GLIDING OVER ME (REPRISE)

EYES GLIDING OVER ME,

PAINFULLY
REJECTING ME,

BUT I'VE BENT
MY KNEE TO YOU

I'VE BENT
MY KNEE TO YOU

BENT MY KNEE...

LESSENERD
MY PRIDE,

CYRA OF THE ARGYROS
ALWAYS LOOKS AT THINGS
WITH STONE COLD EYES

IF YOU'RE CHOSEN
THERE'S A REASON

IF YOU'RE CHOSEN
THEN IT'S SIMPLE

IF YOU'RE CHOSEN
OBVIOUSLY
YOU'RE BETTER
SOMEHOW THAN ME,

AND LOOK...

HER EYES AREN'T GLIDING OVER ME
HER EYES AREN'T REJECTING ME,

SHE SEEKS ME EVEN AS HER FRIEND,

WELL THEN CYRA
MUST LEARN TO LOVE IRENE,

LEARN TO LOVE IRENE

LOVE IRENE

WHILE SHE BENDS HER KNEE
AND SERVES.

B.

Cyra nods and departs, quite
pleased at her new role. Megaris
storms in.

LADIES

Look! It's the other one storming in, the other
Greek girl, she's not even bowing!

MEGARIS

I'M YOUR NURSE!

IRENE

Look,
the eunuchs can see my mistakes
and they tell me
that I need to make my ladies
all feel equally close to me.

MEGARIS

Only if you can trust them as much as me!

IRENE

I can't be Irene Sarantapechos
I can't be always with Greeks.

Irene stops. She sees how hurt
Megaris is. She hugs Megaris.

Leo's step-brothers are already forcing *their*
children on the Emperor for recognition before/

MEGARIS

Before what?

IRENE

(whispering)

The Emperor is very ill. He's/

MEGARIS

/Yes, I know he's going to die! And you're
going to be Basilissa! I get it/

IRENE

Megaris, shhhh!

COURT

(whispering on repeat)

She's the first person to say it! The Emperor
is going to die!

IRENE

Ah... We've had the door closed too long.

Megariss gets up to open the door.
The whispering settles.

MEGARIS

If you don't need me anymore, send me back to
Greece.

IRENE

(distractedly, waiting for people to come
in.)

No. I do need you here.
Always.

C.

CUT TO CONSTANTINE V

NARRATOR

Summer 770 Common Era. Constantine V is in his
rooms. Last night unexpectedly he dismissed all
his eunuchs from his personal service. All his
attendants now are drawn from the military.
Their main task is to prepare his face. Each
open sore is very slow to be covered. They've
started powdering his face in addition to using
paint.

COURT

An Emperor
is a mirror of
heavenly authority
and God
is unblemished.

Constantine V holds his face up to
be powdered.

The attendant works slowly,
looking to see that each open sore
is covered.

NARRATOR

Oh Constantine... Your doctor begs you to stop
powdering your sores.

They won't heal smothered in lead paint.

CONSTANTINE V

I still have to look like a son of God.

(whispering)

How strange to have two bodies.

My own and the Emperor's.

Constantine V holds out his HANDS
to be powdered too.

POWDER SOUND

CONSTANTINE V (CONT'D)

Let them in.

The attendant leads Leo and Irene
in front of Constantine V.

Irene gets down and kisses
Constantine V's knees.

CONSTANTINE V (CONT'D)

How do I look to you?

IRENE

Father...

CONSTANTINE V

I hear you have asked your eunuchs about my
health.

LEO

We are/

CONSTANTINE V raises his hand to
silence LEO.

CONSTANTINE V (CONT'D)

/Leo claims you are overwhelmed
and ask the eunuchs questions
out of ignorance.
He admits that he failed to curtail
Stauvrakios.

So remember,
the eunuchs are your tutors
for precedent and dance,
but don't cultivate
closeness or favor with them.

Don't ever
ask the eunuchs about my health.
It is treachery to have my name
so carelessly,
so viciously on your/

SOUND OF KNEES FALLING TO GROUND

LEO

/Father,
we think she is
growing.

CONSTANTINE V (CONT'D)

Oh.

A CHUCKLE breaks through the
powder.

Good.

Constantine V holds out a powdered
hand.

IRENE

He holds a hand out to me.
There's so much powder on it...

Irene takes the hand and makes
herself kiss it.

SOUND OF A KISS

CONSTANTINE V

Do they tell you that you're vulnerable
without their little tricks?

Irene nods.

Don't talk to the eunuchs, Irene,
a kaiserissa keeps her dignity
in silence.

Loyalty keeps you safe.

LEO

Anything they tell her,
I will tell you, but I have to ask... why have
you sent away your eunuchs?

NARRATOR

There is no answer, and Leo is surprised to see
what looks like a path wetting through the
powder on his father's face from his eye to the
tip of his nose. He guesses that a eunuch
always tells you the reality of the situation,
what will most likely happen, and it's hard to
be told to prepare the bureaucratic handover
needed for your own death. He tries to imagine
his own eunuch, Staurakios telling him he's
very ill, he needs to go to the official purple
room to die. Leo finds his own eyes watering.

(MORE)

"ICONS/IDOLS: IRENE (PODCAST EP3)"

13.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Are we all traitors, Father, because we can't
keep you alive?

END OF AUDIO EPISODE THREE