

WHO WANTS TO BE A PRINCESS?

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FADE IN:

EXT. MEDIEVAL CAPITAL CITY - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Morning in a bustling city of arched stone buildings and cobblestone streets, the capital of Cinnabar, where nearly everything and everyone is accented with something red.

Everything except for one blue carriage drawn by white horses toward a grand castle as the OPENING THEME continues.

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - DAY

Morning light shines through narrow windows onto walls lined with red tapestries and a long table of polished granite.

At the table sits PRINCESS HOLLY VERMILLION (4) in a red dress, kerchief, and golden tiara, with a sprig of fresh holly near the base of her long brown braid.

A stern GOVERNESS (52), silver hair pulled into a tight bun under a finely embroidered kerchief, sits next to Holly.

GOVERNESS

His Majesty will be receiving the
Safir Dominion's King Dillon today.
As princess, you will host his
younger daughter Princess Amity.

The chef brings a plate with a pair of eggs and strips of bacon shaped into a smiley face.

Holly's brown eyes brighten in an excited smile. Governess stares daggers at the chef, and Holly's smile melts away.

Chef glumly replaces the plate with respectable, boring fare.

EXT. CASTLE COURTYARD - DAY

Holly strolls down the path through a manicured garden.

Next to her strides the taller and haughtier PRINCESS AMITY GLAUCOUS (5) in a blue dress and her own golden tiara. Amity has the fair complexion and blue eyes common in Safir. Holly's Governess follows behind.

HOLLY

These are zinnias and azaleas.

All of the flowers are bright red.

GOVERNESS

Perhaps you'd both like to come in
out of this strong sun?

AMITY

I don't need anyone telling me
where to go.

EXT. CASTLE EXTERIOR - DAY

Holly walks along a dense hedge of red-flowered cacti
extending ten feet from the castle walls. She's obviously
bored by now, but does her best to remain cordial.

HOLLY

These prickly pears go all the way
around the castle.

She spots children playing in a nearby cobblestone street.

HOLLY

Could we join them, Governess? It's
a special occasion and all.

AMITY (O.S.)

I want to go inside now.

REVEAL: Amity is red with sunburn.

AMITY

Besides, you can't like them AND
proper society.

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Holly and Amity sit at the long dining table. Next to Amity
sits her older, unsunburnt sister PRINCESS SARAH GLAUCOUS
(9). At one end of the table sits their father, the
physically imposing KING DILLAN GLAUCOUS (31).

Next to Holly sits PRINCE BENARD VERMILLION (6), QUEEN ROSE
VERMILLION (25), and KING FARREL VERMILLION (28) at the other
end of the table.

The other side of the table sits empty allowing access by
servants and an unobstructed view of a chamber orchestra
playing the opening theme. Holly waves at them.

AMITY

Oh, you like the musicians, too?
You must just be pretending to get
along with the nobility.

HOLLY
I can like you, too.

AMITY
Well if you're just pretending,
you're never going to be happy.

The CONDUCTOR (55) beckons to a door with his baton.

The COURT FOOL (28) strides up with an exaggerated march. He pulls out a flute, waits for the right moment, and blows.

Instead of a flute's tweet, the CRASH of cymbals. The royals and servants LAUGH as he shakes the flute. He blows again.

The BLAST of a trumpet. More LAUGHING as he looks in the holes of the flute, prepares again, and blows.

The BOOM of a drum, and more LAUGHS. He feigns shock, holds the flute away from him.

COURT FOOL
Princess Holly, maybe you can make
it work?

A giddy Holly scampers down to the Court Fool, takes the flute, and joins the tune. The Conductor draws down the orchestra until Holly plays solo.

As the opening them comes to a finish, Holly curtsies and the Conductor bows to APPLAUSE.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

Farrel, Rose, and Bernard sit stoically upon thrones under an intricately decorated vaulted ceiling as sunlight streams through stained-glass windows.

A fourth throne - presumably Holly's - sits empty.

Governess stands next to a diplomat, SEBASTIAN ALMANDINE (37), a handful of other courtesans, and the Court Fool.

Holly and the Conductor stand before the thrones.

FARREL
Now that our guests have departed,
we can say that your performance
last evening was extraordinary.

Court Fool puffs up his chest in pride, mouths "Oh, you meant her?" and slinks behind the courtesans. Holly smiles, but the Conductor grows nervous that Farrel might not get the joke.

CONDUCTOR

Princess Holly's talent is undeniable, Your Majesty. I humbly suggest she is ready for intensive study under a grand master.

ROSE

Whom did you have in mind?

CONDUCTOR

Grand Master Banshi of Glenwood is the world's greatest tutor of wind instruments, Your Majesty.

FARREL

We will summon him immediately.

CONDUCTOR

Begging your pardon, Sire, but Banshi is quite advanced in age and cannot travel. If the princess is to remain here --

FARREL

No. This Banshi is the best, and our daughter shall have the best. How long does "intensive study" last?

CONDUCTOR

It takes many years --

FARREL

She has other things to learn. Tradition requires royals to be wed before age twenty-five.

Sweat beads on the Conductor's forehead.

ROSE

Farrel... she's four.

HOLLY

(quietly)

Four and a half.

CONDUCTOR

I am certain that Grand Master Banshi will respect Her Highness's other duties.

ROSE

Seriously, do you have her entire life planned out already for the next twenty-one years?

FARREL
Of course not.

Rose smiles, which relaxes the Conductor slightly.

FARREL
There are several princes roughly
her age. She'll be wed by twenty.

Rose throws up her hands in frustration. Farrel looks puzzled for a moment, then puts on his confident façade.

FARREL
Grand Master Bansi it is.
Sebastian, make the arrangements.

SEBASTIAN
(bows deeply)
Instantly, Your Majesty.

ROSE
Try not to involve King Linnaeus
personally; he'll just
overcomplicate things.

Sebastian smiles, points to his ear then his heart.

SEBASTIAN
Excellent advice. I shall also
arrange for an armed escort as Her
Highness crosses the frontier.

FARREL
Very good. See that Holly is
prepared to travel.

GOVERNESS
(curtsies deeply)
Of course, Your Majesty.

The Conductor starts breathing again, and the Court Fool crouches down to give the gleeful Holly a high five.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

An ornate carriage drives quickly through a gloomy forest of tangled trees working their way around innumerable rocks and boulders. A heavy mist overpowers the lanterns' light.

Four armed HORSEMEN accompany the carriage with the emblem of Cinnabar prominent on its door. A large treasure chest is secured behind the carriage's DRIVER. Carriage, Driver and Horsemen have red trim.

The lanterns' light reflects off the eyes and drawn blades of BANDITS hiding in the woods a short way down the road.

INT. MOVING CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

The carriage contains many comfortable pillows, but Holly and her Governess sit upright and proper. Holly practices a scale on her flute, she misses a note because the carriage jostled.

GOVERNESS

Do you want to embarrass the King
and Queen?

HOLLY

No, Governess.

GOVERNESS

Do you have any idea how much gold
is in that chest? Your parents take
your studies very seriously.

Holly plays another scale. Odd reflections appear outside the window, catching the Governess's eye.

HOLLY

Oh, no! I forgot to bring --

The Governess swings to look at Holly, who cowers under the glare, but then the Governess suddenly pulls a winged fairy queen doll out of her bag. Holly grabs and hugs the doll.

HOLLY

Miss Gossamer!

Governess lets out a rare smile, quite possibly for the first time in Holly's presence.

O.S. THUD. Carriage stops, and Holly bumps her head. O.S. FIGHTING AND SHOUTING.

Holly looks out the window to see the Horsemen and Bandits fighting. The Bandits' clothing lacks any trim color to indicate their nationality, but they are brunettes like about 80% of both Cinnabar and Glenwood.

HOLLY

(dazed)

Look! They're fighting!

Governess leads Holly out of the carriage by the hand, and weaves through a break in the fighting to the forest.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Fighting continues. Horsemen are outnumbered four to one.

Governess runs away down the road carrying Holly wrapped in a cloak. BANDIT LEADER (40) spots her with his one good eye.

BANDIT LEADER

There! The princess! You get the gold, and we'll get the brat!

All of the Horsemen have fallen. Three Bandits give chase.

BANDIT LEADER

(labored)

Stop running you old hag!

The Bandits catch up to the Governess, grab her, turn her around. REVEAL: She holds Holly's cloak wrapped around a pillow. Her eyes widen as the Bandits roar in frustration.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Holly runs terrified through the forest.

GOVERNESS (V.O.)

Princess, run that way. Keep running no matter what you hear, do you understand me?

O.S. WOMAN'S SCREAM. Holly looks back but keeps running through branches and mud. Her red-and-white clothes deteriorate, the holly sprig gets hopelessly tangled in her hair, and the kerchief snags on a low-hanging branch.

Rain begins. Holly crosses a felled tree over a small stream, but the trunk shifts and she falls into the water.

Holly stands, slowly. The movement reveals a distinct birthmark on her right shoulder blade - a jagged line and a couple round spots - that resembles an abstract holly sprig.

The water rises quickly, sweeps Holly off her feet. Desperate grabs at branches and rocks fail to steady her.

Holly washes onto rocks in shallow water, again stands slowly, this time barefoot. The last distinctly red frilly bit of her clothing floats over to a large rock.

She bends over for the fabric just as a new rush of storm surge arrives. Holly collides with the large rock.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. GLENWOOD FARM - NIGHT

Miles from the attack site, the trees are straighter, the rocks are fewer, and the exhausted and injured Holly crawls from the streambed onto a plowed field.

This humble family farm rests on the borderlands of Glenwood, where nearly everything and everyone is accented with something green.

The burly farmer WARRICK (20) stops closing the farmhouse shutters against the rain, runs toward the mud-covered girl. She collapses and he scoops her up.

Warrick's wife TREVA (19) dashes out to throw a green cloak over the girl, which soaks through instantly. They carry her toward the farmhouse.

TREVA

Where's your mama, dear?

HOLLY

I... don't remember. My head hurts.

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Treva blots the unconscious girl's head wound and tries to pick the holly sprig out of her hair. Warrick throws an extra log on the fire then brings the girl a dry blanket.

TREVA

Now don't you worry, dear. I'm Treva, and this is Warrick, and we're going to make you all better.

EXT. CINNABAR TOWN - DAY

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT (27), a wiry man in red-trimmed armor, stands in a paved town square addressing many townsfolk mustered with simple weapons. The Red Knight seems oblivious to the ongoing thunderstorm.

Behind the knight, the Bandit Leader stands chained to a corner post. He is acutely aware of the ongoing thunderstorm as water runs off the roof and onto his head.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

Find the princess!

The townsfolk split into several search parties as they head into the nearby forest.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

An overconfident COCKY TEEN (13), outfitted with a pitchfork and red vest, guides the Mustachioed and another Red Knight through the gloomy forest under steady rain.

COCKY TEEN

There used to be a felled tree here, but it's gone now.

O.S. THUNDER AND LIGHTNING. Mustachioed Knight picks up a broken gold and ruby necklace partially buried in the mud.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

No bandit would leave this behind. She was here.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

The Mustachioed Red Knight presents the broken necklace to the king and queen.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

The bandits hit just before the storm. All six with her gave their lives to secure her escape. We searched for miles on both sides of the border. But...

(voice breaking)

she didn't survive the storm.

King Farrel grips the arms of his throne, turns as red as his coat, launches himself upright.

FARREL

NO-O-O-O!

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Holly, dressed in green homespun overalls, overwaters a potted flower on the windowsill. Warrick stands just outside fixing the shutter.

TREVA (O.S.)

Are you hungry, dear?

HOLLY

No, Mama.

Treva rushes in from the kitchen, wiping away a tear.

TREVA
What did you call me?

HOLLY
Why are you crying?

Treva rummages through several baskets, pulls out a worn quill pen, some ink, and a long paper.

TREVA
It's... It's okay, dear. You still don't remember where you were before the water?

HOLLY
(sheepish)
No. I'm sorry.

Treva flattens the paper, signs it under Warrick's signature, hands it to Warrick through the window. REVEAL: The paper's title reads "Petition for Adoption."

TREVA
Warrick, it's time.

WARRICK
That's what I said six months ago, but you were worried someone would come and take her home.

TREVA
She is home.

WARRICK
She'll need a name for the books.

TREVA
I'm going to keep calling her "Holly." Took a week to get that stuff out of her hair.

EXT/INT. MONTAGE - GLENWOOD FARM/GLENWOOD VILLAGE - DAY

- Holly (5), shadows Treva gathering eggs as Warrick uses a horse-drawn plow in the fields nearby.

- Holly (7) kicks a ball in some game with about a dozen other children ranging in age from 5 to 15.

- Holly (9) sits on her bed at bedtime, plays a simple flute.

- Holly (11) works the bellows as Warrick pounds a red-hot horseshoe back into shape.

He motions her over to take the hammer. She puts her hair in the bun that her Governess always had, then tucks her sprig of holly at the base of it.

- Holly (13) has her hair in the bun again as she cooks eggs and bacon. Holly lets her hair drop to her shoulders before she serves the meal to a seated and very pregnant Treva.

- Holly (15) plays the flute in a small band at a rustic shindig. No one cares that half a dozen dogs are jumping amongst the dancing townsfolk. A little reddish-brown puppy jumps at Holly's feet as she plays.

- Holly (17) pulls hard to get a new coultter knife in place for the plow. Once in position, she ties it in place with a rope her dog was holding in his mouth.

END MONTAGE

EXT. GLENWOOD VILLAGE - DAY

Holly, now 19, bends over to repair a wheelbarrow. Her reddish-brown farm dog Thunder sits beside her, holding in his mouth what he thinks is the next tool Holly might need.

Holly's LITTLE BROTHER (6), a brown-haired boy armed with a wooden toy sword and an overactive imagination, struggles to read a posted notice.

LITTLE BROTHER

"Prince Roland saved the people of Riverfork Village when he hunted down the wild boar that was..."

Holly turns around momentarily to glance at the notice.

HOLLY

"Ravaging."

LITTLE BROTHER

"...ravaging the farms and ah-tack-ing attacking livestock."

Someone walking a heavily-laden horse rounds a corner into view, sees Holly, stops in his tracks, then approaches with a big grin on his face.

He is PRINCE ROLAND CELADON (24), impossibly fit, tanned to a perfect shade of ruggedly handsome, and instantly recognizable anywhere in Glenwood.

The prince has a bear slung over his horse, wears expensive-but-dented green-trimmed armor, and holds a badly bent shield. Roland's gray hunting dog, Misty, follows behind.

LITTLE BROTHER

"...After three days stalking the wild beast, Prince Roland brought the boar's head to the mayor..."
Oh, like anyone's scared of a little old boar.

The Little Brother swings his toy sword.

Holly hears someone approach, conceals a hammer behind her in case she needs to defend herself. She looks at Roland, catches her breath, then recognizes the prince and curtsies.

Roland playfully signals for Holly to rise but remain quiet. Thunder and Misty watch each other intently.

LITTLE BROTHER

I'd'a gotten that boar all by myself, and I wouldn't take three whole days either.

Holly turns as Roland tip-toes up behind the Little Brother.

ROLAND

I'm sure that boar would be no match for your mighty sword.

He spins around with wide eyes then bows. Holly smiles.

LITTLE BROTHER

Your Highness!

Roland motions for the boy to rise.

ROLAND

Wow, that was two years ago. You JUST got this?

HOLLY

It hasn't been rained on, Your Highness, so it must be new here.

ROLAND

Huh. My father has them write these things as if I did it all alone. Now, my friend here surprised me.
(pats bear)
Would have been nice to have another blade on my side.

Little Brother smiles brightly, brandishes his toy sword.
Roland holds up the badly bent shield.

ROLAND

All I had was my shield, which...
tried to help. Does your village
have a blacksmith, miss...?

HOLLY

Holly, Your Highness. And yes we
do. Why, right now he and his sons
are making stirrups for the army.

ROLAND

For the army? Then I won't disturb
him. All I REALLY need is a minute
with a hammer.

Holly furtively drops her hammer into the wheelbarrow.
Thunder goes after it, but Holly shoos him away. He then
decides to go meet Misty.

HOLLY

But hammering like that would ruin
this beautiful crest!

Holly takes the shield from Roland. Little Brother swings his
sword as if fighting the bear, but stops.

LITTLE BROTHER

You have to fix the wheelbarrow.

Holly shoots her Little Brother an annoyed glance.

HOLLY

This is more important.

Misty shows that she's interested in Thunder, they head O.S.
Little Brother staggers from an imaginary blow to his
imaginary shield.

LITTLE BROTHER

Hey, sneaky bear!

HOLLY

Your Highness's shield will be at
Warrick's farm and ready for you
here tomorrow morning.

Little Brother thrusts to kill the imaginary bear.

ROLAND

O-O-Okay. I take it my shield is in
good hands with Warrick?

HOLLY
Warrick? Oh yes, his hands. Very
good hands, Your Highness.

Holly curtsies and pulls her Little Brother into a bow.

ROLAND
Thank you, Miss Holly.

Roland leads his horse up the street. Holly, starry-eyed,
pushes the wheelbarrow in the opposite direction. Her Little
Brother follows, still playing with his toy sword.

LITTLE BROTHER
Why are you so happy?

INT. BARN - DAY

Holly - sweaty and dirty - lowers Roland's red-hot shield
into water. When the steam clears, Holly adjusts her bun and
unrolls a tool pouch. She pulls out a small hammer and chisel
then strikes the crest with precision.

EXT. GLENWOOD VILLAGE - DAY

Holly - now spotless and made-up in her best green-trimmed
peasant dress - curtsies to a tongue-tied Roland.

ROLAND
Hi...

Holly picks up the gleaming shield.

ROLAND
Yes, my shield. Thank you.

Roland takes the shield and notices several burns on Holly's
hands and forearms.

ROLAND
It's as good as new! So this
Warrick is...?

HOLLY
My father, Your Highness.

ROLAND
Well, your "father" has done
excellent work here.
(pulls out a small pouch)
Easily worth ten --

HOLLY

Oh, Your Highness, I could never --

He puts the pouch away, pulls out a small jar.

ROLAND

Well in that case I'm sure "he"
could use a salve for "his" hands.
It's made for cuts and bruises, but
soothes burns too.

Holly brightens at Roland's verbal quote-marks, reluctantly accepts the jar of aloe. Roland swings onto the horse in one fluid motion. The dogs Misty and Thunder come into view.

ROLAND

And where have you been?

Misty comes to heel. Thunder wanders happily toward Holly.

ROLAND

Thank you again, Miss Holly, and
convey my appreciation to your
father. I must be off now.
(suddenly less cheery)
There's a long, tedious show at the
castle I must attend.

Holly curtsies as Roland bids farewell and rides off.

EXT/INT. CASTLE COURTYARD - DAY

Roland rides past saluting guards into the courtyard, then smoothly dismounts in front of the waiting HERALD (48), who looks completely at home in the ridiculously elaborate formal green garb of his office. They walk into the entry hall.

HERALD

Your Highness's dinner with
Princess Galena starts in less than
an hour.

HERALD (PRE-LAP)

Her Highness, Princess Galena
Bistre of Silverplains!

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Prince Roland, now in formal attire complete with a ceremonial saber and golden circlet, sits at an elaborately set mahogany table in an ornate wood-paneled dining room.

Opposite him sits the humorless SILVERPLAINS PRINCESS GALENA BISTRE (23) dressed in a silvery dress, silver tiara, and a pair of ceremonial butterfly swords. She has the tanned skin, straight black hair and high cheekbones typical of Plainsmen.

ROLAND

Are there any sights you'd like to see while you're in Glenwood?

SILVERPLAINS PRINCESS

No.

Her dress would shimmer as she moves. Except she doesn't.

ROLAND

Oh... How's your soup?

The princess lifts a spoonful of soup, sips it stiffly.

SILVERPLAINS PRINCESS

Fine.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roland now sits with UVA PRINCESS REGINA AMETHYST (17), a dark-skinned and dark-haired teen who looks incredibly uncomfortable in her formal purple dress and platinum tiara.

HERALD (V.O.)

Her Highness, Princess Regina Amethyst of Uva!

UVA PRINCESS

I only came here because my parents made me.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roland sits with Safir Princess Sarah Glaucous (now 24), tall woman with long blond hair in a multi-toned blue dress and golden tiara. She smiles merrily, but looks past Roland.

HERALD (V.O.)

Her Highness, Princess Sarah Glaucous of the Safir Dominion!

SAFIR PRINCESS
 ...and this spring Sir Douglas won
 the Grand Tournament.

ROLAND
 Come now, you've barely touched
 your food.

Roland glances at an intricately carved wooden case
 displaying a second-place trophy from the Grand Tournament.

SAFIR PRINCESS
 Douglas really showed up his
 opponent in the final match. Do you
 remember who that was...?

ROLAND
 It was me.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roland sits in the same position. The guest is GLENWOOD LADY
 ELLA PRAT (19), the immature daughter of a Glenwood duke.

HERALD (V.O.)
 Lady Ella Prat of the Glenwood
 Duchy of Loba!

GLENWOOD LADY
 (hyperventilating)
 It's Prince Roland! A-a-a-a-h!
 Pinch me!

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Series of nearly identical shots of a bored Roland.

HERALD (V.O.)
 Lady Damia Bauzan of the Cinnabar
 Barony of Sempervirens!

HERALD (V.O.)
 Her Highness, Princess Vanna
 Icterine of Aurentia!

HERALD (V.O.)
 Baroness Penelope Tanis of Latrode!

HERALD (V.O.)
 Lady Denise Overhaven of the
 Aurentian Duchy of Gonen!

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roland sits at the same table, except this time he dines with his parents KING LINNAEUS CELADON (46) and QUEEN SYLVIA CELADON (44) who are giving him an earful. The servants are all on edge.

The king eats his meal steadily, expertly avoiding his long nose. He rarely even glances at whomever he addresses.

The queen - whose green dress has prominent yellow details - barely touches her food. She is tanner than either of the men, being half Aurentian and half Glennish by blood.

SYLVIA
 These were very important guests in
 our castle, Roland.

ROLAND
 They acted like spoiled prin --

Sylvia narrows her eyes at Roland.

ROLAND
 Anyway, I don't think ANY of them
 is worthy to be queen of Glenwood,
 or truly wants to be her queen.

LINNAEUS
 Your twenty-fifth birthday will not
 wait. Do you intend to abdicate?

ROLAND
 Of course not, Sire. It's just --

LINNAEUS
 Then you will find your queen to
 continue your line.

ROLAND
 But why do I need a queen for that?

LINNAEUS
 Didn't we have that conversation
 when you were thirteen?

Roland blushes and nearly chokes on his food.

ROLAND

No, no, that's not what I meant. No problems there. No, Sire.

The queen smiles to herself. This calms the servants, several of whom stifle or hide smiles of their own.

ROLAND

I meant: Why a noblewoman to become a queen?

Sylvia's smile fades, then the servants'.

SYLVIA

She would always have the title Princess, never becoming Queen.

Impatience creeps into Linnaeus's voice.

LINNAEUS

We suggested that you become known to the commoners, not marry one.

ROLAND

I've thought about this a lot. What if I wed
(stands, gestures grandly)
someone that the people already knew and loved and cheered for?

LINNAEUS

And who is this famous young woman of whom we are completely unaware?

ROLAND

Oh, I have no idea yet.

LINNAEUS

And this is AFTER you've thought about it a lot.

Roland's arms drop to his sides, but then resumes gesturing.

ROLAND

That's only because YOU haven't chosen her yet! You see, we need a big contest to see who you pick to be the next Princess of Glenwood.

Linnaeus ponders for a moment. The room falls deathly silent.

LINNAEUS

This sounds like a terrible idea. But you would abide by our choice?

ROLAND

Of course! No one's going to be able to fake her way through ten rounds of a contest, and by the time someone wins she'll have the whole kingdom on her side.

Linnaeus ponders some more.

SYLVIA

We will think about it.

EXT. GLENWOOD VILLAGE - DAY

A man nails to a wooden post a notice that invites unmarried women to Roland's contest. The villagers wearing green-trimmed clothes are mostly Glennish brunettes with a sprinkling of other ethnic groups.

EXT. AURENTIA CITY - DAY

Sun-bleached brick roadway winds between adobe buildings with inlaid geometric patterns of yellow with the occasional maroon flair. Citizens crowd in the town square, all dressed head-to-toe in long flowing yellow attire.

About three quarters are olive-skinned ethnic Aurentians.

The green seal on Roland's announcement stands out among the other papers tacked to a wooden bulletin board. Elders huff in derision, but young ladies sneak away to hurry home.

EXT. GLENWOOD VILLAGE - DAY

Holly and Treva happen upon the posted notice.

HOLLY

Should be fun to watch.

TREVA

Watch?! You aren't entering?

HOLLY

To go live in a castle? Who wants to wear uncomfortable dresses and fake smiles all the time?

TREVA

I think the only reason our village got this notice at all is 'cause he was impressed by your mending.

HOLLY

I didn't fix his shield to get
something in return.

EXT. CINNABAR CITY - DAY

Arched stone buildings loom over a cobblestone thoroughfare. The courthouse fence functions as both horse hitch and space for notices.

Citizens in red or red-trimmed clothing walk past the widely-spaced notices. Most are Glennish brunettes, and many do a double-take on Roland's green-sealed announcement.

EXT. SAFIR CITY - DAY

August columned buildings of blue-veined marble stand on either side of a wide street paved with crushed stone.

A group in blue or blue-trimmed clothing stand near the city hall's wooden doors covered in notices. Most of them are blond ethnic Safiri with a handful of red-headed Safiri alongside some members of the other ethnic groups.

An ornate blue carriage drawn by a white horse arrives, stops before the city hall. A footman opens the door for Princess Sarah Glaucous, who proceeds toward the commotion in her formal blue dress and golden tiara. The citizens bow.

After Sarah follows Amity (now 20), in her own fabulous blue dress and golden tiara, who moves gracefully enough to upstage her older sister.

SAFIR PRINCESS

Come Amity, let's see what all the
excitement is.

Sarah finds Roland's notice and scowls. Amity catches up, skims the notice, smirks.

Sarah's chin trembles a bit, but she summons the remainder of her dignity and marches back to the carriage.

Amity takes a moment to read the poster more closely.

O.S. MUFFLED SCREAM into a pillow.

Amity whirls around, practically floats back to the carriage on a cloud of schadenfreude. She consciously wipes the smirk off her face before climbing inside.

EXT. GLENWOOD FARM - DAY

Warrick and Holly hitch their horse to a cart while the Little Brother carries a basket of eggs to Treva who loads them into a barrel between layers of sawdust. A load of early-summer crops sits beside the barrel.

WARRICK

All right, hold that tight.

HOLLY

I still don't understand why we have to bring the tax THERE.

Little Brother takes an empty basket back to the farmhouse.

HOLLY

So many farmers trucking wares at once, all to the same place. It brings out all the bandits.

TREVA

It's not all to the same place. Harrollome's just one barony, dear.

HOLLY

It's enough.

Warrick picks up a crutch, uses it to hobble to the front of the horse.

WARRICK

It's the law. Now I'm no fool, that's why I'm going a couple days early this time.

Holly and Warrick finish.

HOLLY

Did you know in Uva and Silverplains they send a tax collector to each town? The king should make barons here do that.

Treva tops off the barrel with the last of the sawdust.

TREVA

Now, if only someone here were invited to the king's castle... maybe she could say something.

Holly looks thoughtful for a moment, turns towards Treva, then raises the corners of her mouth into a fake smile.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Treva combs out Holly's hair before a plate-sized mirror.

HOLLY

I don't have to win, but I have to
look like I want to be there.

INT. SAFIR CASTLE - DAY

A servant tries to mend a loose fastener on Amity's dress,
but she keeps stepping away as she talks.

AMITY

As much as it pains me to admit it,
Sarah might have a point. Roland
can't go marrying a commoner when
there are nobles in waiting. I just
have to enter and win it.

INTERCUT BETWEEN HOLLY AND AMITY

Holly squares her shoulders, puts her nose up.

HOLLY

I'll have to look noble.

Amity squares her shoulders, takes off her tiara.

AMITY

I'll have to look common.

Holly parodies a dainty wave.

HOLLY

But not a thin-blooded waif.

Amity looks down her nose at the city outside her window.

AMITY

But not an unwashed peasant.

Holly holds up a beaten-up, muddy shoelace.

HOLLY

I'll need presentable stuff that
(frayed end falls off)
won't do that.

Amity pulls pin after pin from her hair.

AMITY

I'll need hair I can put up on my own. Something simple but elegant
(points at a servant)
like hers.

Holly and Treva fold clothing into a worn backpack.

HOLLY

I'll ride with Papa as far as the barony's capital, then go the rest on foot. I'm sure others will be going the same way.

Amity supervises half a dozen servants packing several bags.

AMITY

Tell the king that I'm...

She pulls a bow and quiver off the wall, hands them to one of the packing servants.

AMITY

...on a "hunting" trip.

EXT. CASTLE GATE - DAY

Holly walks near the end of a group of about twenty fellow CONTESTANTS down a wide road between the stately wooden buildings of Glenwood's capital. The castle Berylweald has sloped roofs to match the surrounding architecture.

The Contestants run the gamut of body types and hairstyles, but each *dresses* similarly in a green-trimmed peasant dress, green cloak, and a pack stuffed with all her belongings.

A knight in green-trimmed armor waves the group inside.

Holly pauses as the rest of her group enters. She straightens her posture, puts on a fake smile, and steps inside.

EXT. COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Holly halts in shock. Her smile fades as she beholds a THOUSAND CONTESTANTS forming a forest of green dresses with small groups of blue, gray, red, purple, and yellow.

Off to Holly's left near a stable, a dozen urbanites cluster together in fancier dress, along with small carts of luggage.

Holly doesn't see the man standing in front of her.

HERALD

Ahem... Welcome. And your name is?

Holly's eyes remain on the crowd.

HOLLY

(slowly)

Holly...

She faces the Herald, and the rest of her words spill out in a nervous rush.

HOLLY

Oh, sorry. Didn't mean to be rude. I just didn't see you there since I'm new here and really REALLY nervous. You can tell that, can't you? My name is Holly, of Warrick's Farm in Bosky Village. That's a little town in Harrollome Barony a few miles south of --

HERALD

I am the royal herald. I know of EVERY village in Glenwood.

He scribbles Holly's information on a scroll, hands Holly a small wooden chit, then sweeps his hand toward a distant corner of the courtyard.

HERALD

Please make yourself comfortable somewhere in... that area.

HOLLY

Thank you, sir. Have a great day!

Holly sets off just as Amity enters the courtyard with a horse-drawn cart. She wears an impressively expensive blue dress, but not her tiara.

HERALD

Ahem... Welcome. And your name is?

Amity gives the herald a false name.

AMITY

Miss Aimee Idina of Azure City in the Safir Dominion.

He scribbles "Aimee's" information on the same scroll, hands her a wooden chit, then sweeps his hand toward the stable.

HERALD

I see. You'll want to bring your things to the stable there.

AMITY

Thank you... sir.

The herald's face shows a glimmer of recognition, so "Aimee" positions herself on the far side of her horse. Fortunately for "Aimee," a new arrival distracts the Herald.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

"Aimee" reaches the stable and hands her reins to a green-clad servant. She scans the ladies' faces, sighs in relief.

AMITY

(to herself)

Good, no one here I know.

"Aimee" then looks into the courtyard and spots one Glenwood girl picking her way through the large crowd of peasants.

IN THE COURTYARD

Holly picks her way through the chatting crowd, where she overhears a GLENWOOD FARMER (19), in yet another green-trimmed peasant dress, boasting to the girls near her.

GLENWOOD FARMER

...and Prince Roland said it was the best meal he'd ever eaten.

HOLLY

(to herself)

I'm... not the only one who impressed the prince? Oh, no.

Her confidence shaken, she looks toward the rich girls who probably have even better stories.

AT THE STABLE

"Aimee" sits next to a self-centered CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (22) in a green courtesan dress who imagines that everyone is interested in everything she says.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

...though Queen Sylvia was born in Aurentia, she takes Glenwood's traditions VERY seriously.

(MORE)

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (CONT'D)

Everything from holiday meals to how we treat prisoners, even the Colorless ones. Like that time I helped Prince Roland locate a gang of Colorless bandits...

"Aimee" sighs, looks again at the sea of peasant contestants.

AMITY

(to herself)

I wonder if they're bragging to each other out there.

IN THE COURTYARD

Holly passes a rowdy CINNABAR RANCHER (19) in a red-trimmed peasant dress and kerchief on her head, who boasts loudly.

CINNABAR RANCHER

...Yes! I showed his hunting party where the river was, both for water and a path back to town.

HOLLY

Oh, whose hunting party?

CINNABAR RANCHER

Prince Roland's, of course!

Holly lets out a dejected sigh, looks ahead to her goal in the back corner of the courtyard. Two contestants sit there.

EDITH (18) raises her bespectacled face from deep within a book. Her long dress with matching earrings and satchel betray an urban lifestyle. She is Uvan by blood but wears the green of someone born in Glenwood.

Near her sits DORINDA (21), a confident young woman of slender build who spent her entire childhood on a stage. She bears the olive skin and wavy black hair of Aurentian blood, but like Edith she wears green.

Dorinda's dress is rough-cloth like Holly's, though dyed fully green and accented with sequins.

EDITH

(dryly)

Welcome to exile in the corner of the courtyard. What did YOU do to annoy the herald?

HOLLY

I'm not sure. I almost bumped into him at first because I was nervous, but after that everything seemed to be going just fine. I was about to tell him --

EDITH

Yeah, you talked too much. Let's try this: Hi, I'm Edith.

HOLLY

Hi Edith, happy to meet you. I'm Holly from Bosky Village.

Edith winces slightly. Dorinda chuckles.

EDITH

Try short and sweet with the herald. Actually just short, he doesn't like sweet.

HOLLY

So you can't just be yourself.

EDITH

Of course not, Holly. So, this
(sweeping gesture)
is the corner. It has no amenities of any kind, but go ahead and make yourself at home.

Holly drops her pack, sits next to Dorinda.

HOLLY

Hi. I'm Holly from Bosky Village.

DORINDA

Dorinda. So, what's with the village? Are you afraid you're going to get lost?

TRUMPET blares, and everyone looks toward the gate. Two more contestants scurry in just before the castle is sealed.

INT. DORMITORY - DAY

The contestants stream into a long room lined on each side with row after row of wooden bunk beds. Each pair of beds has a number, and Contestants match their chits to the numbers.

Holly, Dorinda and Edith approach the bunk where "Aimee" unpacks several pairs of shoes.

HOLLY

So this fancy dress of yours is your stage magician costume?

DORINDA

Fancy? It's the same thing you're wearing. My mom just worked in more dye and sewed some sequins onto it.

HOLLY

Yeah, fancy for me. I'm pretty useless with a needle and thread.

EDITH

Don't look at me, I bought this off a rack.

The trio pass "Aimee's" bed. A well-dressed GLENWOOD SUCK-UP (21) who stands about shoulder-height to everyone else here, prattles MOS at "Aimee."

HOLLY

You didn't have it custom made by a dozen maids you happened to have laying around the house?

"Aimee" - bored by whatever the Suck-Up is saying - glares at Holly. Edith notices this but Holly does not.

EDITH

Holly!

"Aimee's" glare intensifies into a snarl.

DORINDA

Okay then. Moving along.

Dorinda nudges Holly to continue. "Aimee" regains her composure, and resumes not paying attention to the Suck-Up.

Dorinda and Edith claim consecutive lower beds a few past where they passed "Aimee." Holly looks at her chit.

HOLLY

Oh, I'm back there a bit. See you later.

Holly heads back the way she came. She passes a very TALL GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (19) in a typical green-trimmed peasant dress. Holly tilts her head up to meet the other young woman's eyes, finds her bed number at just that moment.

A displeased "Aimee" stands next to it. Holly's gaze switches from the bed label to "Aimee," but still with that awkward head-tilt so it appears Holly is looking down her nose.

AMITY

Doesn't look natural yet, but keep practicing.

HOLLY

Didn't you see that really tall...
oh, never mind. Hi, I'm Holly from
Bosky Village.

"Aimee" fights back a snarl, but can't help sounding haughty.

AMITY

Charmed. I am Aimee Idina.

HOLLY

Let me guess, from Safir.

AMITY

Azure City, storied capital of the
Safir Dominion.

HOLLY

Right. So, you want the bottom bunk
to be closer to all your shoes, or
the top bunk so you can look down
on everybody?

"Aimee" leans on the bunk, narrows her eyes at Holly.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Holly sits cross-legged on the top bunk as several teen-girl servants in green uniforms blow out the lamps and candles. Many of the contestants are like Holly - too stressed to sleep in an unfamiliar place.

Holly takes out her flute, starts to play a lullaby. Six other contestants pull out small instruments and join in.

INSERT: Soft images of Holly's bedroom from her POV, then of her family: Warrick, Treva, Little Brother, and Thunder.

Holly relaxes as a smile crosses her face.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

A banner across the castle balcony reads "Welcome!" The contestants - all as highly made-up as they can manage - wait as the Herald approaches.

Contestants of different ethnic groups mingle freely, but those wearing different colors do not.

One GLENWOOD RUSTIC (18) openly stares at ethnic groups she's never seen before. Her current target, a FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT (20), whose long purple gloves match the trim of her peasant dress, shifts uncomfortably.

HERALD

Ahem. Good morning, ladies.
Glenwood's King Linnaeus and Queen
Sylvia welcome you to the royal
castle Berylweald.

"Aimee" scans the hundreds of faces around her, smirking. Holly also scans the hundreds of faces, frowning.

HOLLY

(to herself)
And I bet they all have stories.

HERALD

About one-third of you will be
eliminated after each challenge.
You will also be sent home if you
start a fight, or
(looks directly at a pair
of contestants)
if you steal anything.

The women on the receiving end of the Herald's glare, an OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT (22) and a BLOND BANDIT (18), both wearing sturdy dresses with no color trim at all, grimace back at him.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

Can you believe he singles us out
like that!

BLOND BANDIT

Uncalled-for, that is, from that
overdressed Glennish dandy-man.
(whispers)
So, you gonna put silverware back?

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

(whispers)
Well, OF COURSE.

HERALD

But I'm certain that won't be necessary. There are no spectators today, but we do have our first challenge. If you would all direct your attention to the balcony behind you.

Contestants shuffle around in-place.

HERALD

Introducing His Highness, Prince Roland Celadon!

Roland appears in the balcony, and all contestants curtsy.

ROLAND

Good morning! I would like to add my personal welcome to the king and queen's.

Roland motions for everyone to rise. Some do so unsteadily.

AMITY

(to herself)

Swooning for a prince? That actually happens?

Holly steadies the contestant in front of her who slipped.

HOLLY

Oops. There you go.

That catches Roland's eye. He smiles, Holly smiles back, and "Aimee" glares at the exchange.

ROLAND

Your first challenge will be to display poise and proper etiquette. We'll test you in groups of about thirty. Good luck everyone!

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Thirty contestants line up outside the elaborately carved doors to the great hall. First in line is the Tall Glenwood Contestant. Holly stands second, feeling very short.

A pair of guards open the doors from the inside.

HERALD (O.S.)

Ladies, if each of you would please enter and introduce yourself?

The Tall Glenwood Contestant enters, then Holly after a beat.

HOLLY (O.S.)
Hi. I'm Holly from Bosky Village.

HERALD (O.S.)
What?

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Contestants file out into the courtyard, where the next group of thirty line up to file in.

The exiting contestants relax as soon as they are out of the judges' sight, massing at the right of the doorway.

TALL GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
That was excruciating!

HOLLY
I thought it'd never end!

The entering contestants grow increasingly nervous. Fortunately, next to Holly stands a CALM GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (22) who has a soothing effect wherever she goes.

CALM GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
(to the entering group)
Oh, I'm sure you'll all do fine.

A furious AURENTIAN PEASANT (21) in a bright yellow peasant dress complains to no one in particular.

AURENTIAN PEASANT
In my country the herald ANNOUNCES people, not interrogates them.

CALM GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
(to the entering group)
There's no need to be nervous.

The new group files in, then the doors close.

CALM GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
Poor things.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Several contestants gather in the middle area to trade stories. Others in the background pack their things.

A CINNABAR COOK (27) discusses food. Her head kerchief and red-trimmed peasant dress make her home country obvious.

CINNABAR COOK

Of course the food here is amazing,
but sometimes you just miss the
taste of home, you know? That's why
I brought these.

(produces a small box)

We call these little wraps "winter
blankets." Go ahead, try one.

GLENWOOD FARMER

(takes one, bites it)

Oh, mmmm... these are good!

(to the group)

Just be careful, they're spicy.

A few of the girls foolishly take big bites then scramble to find water except for a GLENWOOD SMITH (18), beefy young woman in a green-trimmed peasant dress and the second-tallest there, who remains calm through sheer willpower.

Meanwhile a number of younger Cinnabar natives - dressed almost identically to the Cook - savor their mini-burrito-like "winter blankets." Holly eats hers without trouble.

The panicked girls gulp water but find no relief. A pitcher of milk does the trick.

HOLLY

These are great! You should sell
these in Glenwood as, you know,
pricey "exotic food."

A SILVERPLAINS WEAVER (19), in a simple dress trimmed with gray fur, approaches. She nibbles one of the snacks.

SILVERPLAINS WEAVER

We tried selling stuff across the
border like coats and blankets. But
we had so many problems with
highway bandits, we just gave up.

The mention of bandits rouses Edith, who puts her book down in the lap of her green pajamas and adjusts her spectacles.

EDITH

There aren't any highway bandits
between Cinnabar and Glenwood.

SILVERPLAINS WEAVER

Oh, really?

In the background, the two Colorless women nod.

EDITH

Not for the last fifteen years or
so, since Cinnabar started
executing every bandit they caught.

Edith glances at her book... she wants to resume reading it.

EDITH

But that's a story for another
time. On your highway, did bandits
just ride up to your wagon?

SILVERPLAINS WEAVER

That's exactly what they did the
first time! Got us on our way back
home and took our money.

Edith looks at Holly for a long moment, shakes her head, and
dives once again into her book.

SILVERPLAINS WEAVER

The next time, they got us on the
way home again, but it was only the
one bandit we could see.

Holly loses interest in the bandit tale and turns to Dorinda
who happens to be next to her nursing a cup of milk.

HOLLY

Want another "winter blanket?"

DORINDA

No, one was MORE than enough.

SILVERPLAINS WEAVER (O.S.)

He said the others bandits were
behind the trees where we couldn't
see them.

The Colorless women giggle that she fell for that trick.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Holly and the other musician-contestants play a different
lullaby than last night's. A couple contestants bury their
heads under pillows, but most appreciate the soothing sound.

INSERT: FLASHBACK

Soft, hazy moments of Cinnabar's Court Fool entertaining a
group of children outdoors. Colors are muted.

Holly's POV looks around. She is near a handful of children in costumes who sit in the front row of a throng of peasant children in simpler "costumes" that might be little more than a grown-up's hat.

Next to Holly sits a young Plainswoman (7) dressed as a lion. Next to the lion sits an Aurentian girl (6) in a unicorn costume. Past her sits a Safiri girl (4) dressed as a dragon, her face visible through the dragon's "mouth."

The Safiri girl turns and meets Holly's gaze. She just might be "Aimee."

COURT FOOL
(picks up a fire-
breather's torch)
And in honor of our fearsome
dragon, I shall now breath FIRE!

Children CHEER.

BACK TO SCENE

The lullaby finishes. Holly pops her head down to see if "Aimee" is still awake. She is.

AMITY
Are you going to waste your time
doing that every night?

HOLLY
Everything is so strange here, it
helps to keep a bit of my routine.

AMITY
Princesses are expected to sing.
Can't do that with a flute.

HOLLY
I bet you sing. Want to join us?
(AMITY glares at HOLLY)
Fine. But I was wondering... have
we met before? Like when some Fool
was giving a show for some rich
kids and... not-so-rich kids.

INSERT: FLASHBACK

The same scene, less hazy. The young Amity's POV has some dragon fangs protruding in from the edges.

POV looks next to her at young Princess Vanna (6) dressed as a unicorn and Princess Galena (7) dressed in a lion costume.

POV then meets the gaze of a young Princess Holly (3) in a winged fairy queen costume. A birthmark is visible on this girl's right shoulder blade through the sheer back.

COURT FOOL

And in honor of our fearsome
dragon, I shall now breath FIRE!

Children CHEER.

RETURN TO SCENE

AMITY

I've been dragged to my share of
Fool shows. And I even met a girl
named Holly before. But as far as
fools named Holly: you're the first
I've met, and that was yesterday.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Large interior room where the staff and soldiers eat their meals. A selection of fresh fruits, pastries, eggs, and beverages greet the contestants as they enter.

A very TENSE GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (20) enters, but unlike the others she walks straight past the food to the kitchen.

TENSE GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (O.S.)

Excuse me...

Holly enters chatting with Dorinda, Edith, and the Friendly Uva Contestant. "Aimee" follows, separately.

HOLLY

Early morning and my face is
already tired from fake smiling.
How do princesses do this?

"Aimee" smirks behind Holly's back.

Dorinda places several eggs on her plate, earning raised eyebrows from a couple servants and stares from nearby contestants wearing yellow.

HOLLY

What was that all about?

A minstrel starts playing a mealtime tune on his lute.

DORINDA
They don't eat eggs in Aurentia.

HOLLY
Oh yeah, I remember...

INSERT: FLASHBACK

Distorted, hazy image of the Cinnabar dining room from young Holly's POV. Colors are muted. Her Governess sits to one side, the fairy queen doll Miss Gossamer to the other.

GOVERNESS
Each culture has its own rules for civilized dining.

BACK TO SCENE

HOLLY
...nothing until it's fully mature, plant or animal. So why are you--?

DORINDA
(tugs green sleeve)
I'm not from Aurentia.

Holly smiles, puts an egg on her plate.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
(adjusts her gloves)
There must be a small army behind the scenes here, they remembered every little...

She looks up and down the food table. Her smile fades.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
...detail.

She spots a knot of people off to the side wearing purple, sitting with glasses of juice but not eating.

EDITH
Is something wrong?

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
Just not very hungry.

Holly and "Aimee" halt at different points along the table.

GOVERNESS (V.O.)

It's all too easy to give offense
if one is not careful.

The two Colorless women push past Holly, breaking her reverie. Each loads a huge mound of food onto her plate.

Holly and "Aimee" put down their plates.

AMITY

(with HOLLY)

I'll be right back.

Each rushes out a different door.

EDITH

What?

The Friendly Uva Contestant shrugs while pouring juice.

The Herald - with Holly in tow - barges into the cafeteria, almost bumps into a frazzled COOK (40) hurrying from the kitchen carrying a large basket of silverware. Tense Glenwood Contestant follows the Cook at a civilized pace.

HERALD

Good... put it over there.

COOK

But you said to not let the
(lowers voice)
Colorless steal any silverware.

Cook puts the basket where diners can reach it easily.

HERALD

Uvan customs forbid eating with
one's hands. Now go to that table
and apologize before any of the --

ROLAND (O.S.)

I want to personally apologize for
the error.

REVEAL: Roland stands at the table of contestants in purple, with "Aimee" a bit behind him.

HERALD

-- royal family hear of this.
(to that table)
The unfortunate delay with the
layout has been resolved, and the
ladies are invited to return at
their leisure.

The contestants from Uva line up to get their breakfasts. Roland encourages "Aimee," Holly and the Tense Glenwood Contestant to get in line, then follows himself.

ROLAND

So, where did you three learn about foreign customs?

HOLLY

Well, as a little girl I had these really fancy tea parties... or at least they were in my head.

Chuckles from everyone nearby except "Aimee" and Roland.

HOLLY

This old lady always had a new little fact to make things seem... proper and sophisticated.

TENSE GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

I've travelled to Uva, Aurentia, and Cinnabar, Your Highness.

AMITY

I had it all drilled into me by a governess.

Roland rolls his head back in mock agony.

ROLAND

Oh, I remember mine.

Holly, the Tense Glenwood Contestant, and the Uvans exchange worried looks on their way back to the dining table.

Just before they sit down again, Holly comes alongside Roland and speaks quietly.

HOLLY

There is one OTHER Uvan custom I'd like to discuss, though Your Highness might prefer to have that conversation less publicly.

Roland keeps his head straight but looks sidelong at Holly.

ROLAND

That... sounds...

HOLLY

About how taxes are collected.

The group sits, with Holly and "Aimee" getting the seats on either side of Roland.

ROLAND

Right. Of course. Later perhaps.
 (turns to AMITY)
 I'm curious how your governess
 described how we eat in Glenwood.

AMITY

Glenwood is known to divide things
 into earth, water, and air, Your
 Highness, and anything crossing
 realms is not eaten.

TENSE GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Officially, there's also a realm of
 fire, but nothing you can eat
 actually lives in a volcano.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT

So... no one here eats frogs?

The squeamish faces on Holly, Roland and the Tense Contestant answer that question.

AMITY

If properly prepared --

HOLLY

I'm trying to eat here.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Banner across the balcony reads "Teaching Challenge."
 Contestants stand with the Herald near the balcony.
 SPECTATORS file in through the gates, and servants direct the
 ones in peasant garb into groups of about twenty.

Roland, Linnaeus, and Sylvia look on from the balcony.

HERALD

Good morning, ladies. Part of being
 a princess is helping the people
 improve their lives. To that end,
 today you will teach a useful skill
 to a group of Glenwood's commoners.

The majority of contestants who are *themselves* in peasant
 garb look at each other nervously.

HERALD

You may use the resources of the castle to aid in your class, within reason of course.

Reluctantly, the girls fan out to their assigned groups while a court jester entertains the peasants' children.

IN THE BALCONY

Roland and Sylvia watch with interest, while Linnaeus stares into infinity.

ROLAND

A bump or two on the road, but I think things are going pretty well.

LINNAEUS

We are beginning to think you would marry ANYONE, so long as we didn't choose her for you.

ROLAND

I stand by my word, and will marry whoever wins the tournament.

Linnaeus looks at the courtyard. FAVOR "Aimee" in the crowd.

LINNAEUS

Fine, we'll do it your way.

IN THE COURTYARD

Holly stands tall before the group of men, women and teens assigned to her, but her voice is rushed.

HOLLY

Hello, everyone. I'm Holly from Bosky Village, and I'll be your teacher today. Because I have, um, something to teach you. Obviously.

(snaps fingers)

Hey... I know. I can teach you how to get more food out of your vegetable gardens.

GLENWOOD MAN

(raises hand)

Uh, we're farmers.

Holly grins nervously. A short distance away, the Cinnabar Cook leads her group indoors.

The Aurentian Peasant leads her group out of the castle, her bright yellow dress contrasting with the drab locals.

Near the gate, "Aimee" passes out shortbows to her students.

HOLLY

I grew up on a farm, too, which is why I know you'll find my lesson really useful. Uh, shoeing a horse?

Holly's group members stand with their hands on their hips.

The Friendly Uva Contestant draws dog tracks and wolf tracks for her students.

The Blond Bandit guides one of her students through picking the lock on a door. A Green Knight stands next to her, arms crossed, scowling. The bandit speaks loudly, audible all the way over where Holly is.

BLOND BANDIT

Remember class, this only for child safety. In case they lock selves in house. Child very upset.

Panic sets in, and Holly's "teacher" façade cracks.

HOLLY

Oh, how am I supposed to know something you don't? We all do plowing, sowing, foaling, wood-splitting --

GLENWOOD TEEN BOY

YOU split wood?

HOLLY

These look like debutante hands?

Murmurs of support from the female students.

HOLLY

Seriously, what DON'T we do? You all use a forge, too, right?

The students look at each other then shake their heads.

HOLLY

Right, 'cause you live near a city. Let's go to the smithy!

Holly leads the group toward a door.

HOLLY
When you're from an itty bitty town
like Bosky Village...

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roland stands next to the table as the Herald shows Holly through the door.

HERALD
Miss Holly, of Bosky Village in
Harrolome, Your Highness.

ROLAND
Yes, please sit.

Holly heads toward the offered seat, but the Herald lingers.

HERALD
There is one other visitor. Should
I show him to another room?

ROLAND
No, just show him in. There's
nothing untoward happening here.

HERALD
But --

Roland puts on an overly-serious face for the Herald.

HERALD
Very well, Your Highness.

The Herald bows out, closes the door. Roland smiles at Holly.

HOLLY
Thank you for seeing me. I think I
have an idea for making it easier
and safer to pay taxes.

She unrolls a map of Glenwood onto the table.

ROLAND
This was the Uvan thing you
mentioned?

HOLLY
Uva and Silverplains, actually.

Herald opens the door.

HERALD

May I introduce Sir Douglas Sunil,
Cobalt Knight of the Safir
Dominion.

Roland's smile vanishes. He mouths "Why didn't you tell me?"

SIR DOUGLAS SUNIL (28), a brawny red-head in blue finery and a ceremonial longsword, strides into the room. He performs a deep bow with a devilish grin, almost mocking the prince.

ROLAND

Sir Douglas, what a... surprise.

DOUGLAS

Good morning, Your Highness.

(turns to HOLLY)

And honored guest.

(back to ROLAND)

As this year's victor of the Grand
Tournament, I will be officiating
next year. I thought I'd ask those
who will be competing next year --

(winks to HOLLY)

-- those who didn't win this time
around --

Holly tries not to grin, but fails.

DOUGLAS

-- if they'd like to suggest any
changes.

ROLAND

Things are... pretty fair as they
are. Nice of you to come all this
way to ask.

DOUGLAS

Excellent. I've taken up too much
of Your Highness's time already.

Douglas bows then backs out of the room, followed by the Herald. Roland glowers at the door.

HOLLY

Oh, don't let him bother you. He's
just sore he doesn't have any
subjects to make happy with a brand
new law.

Some combination of Holly's words and her entering Roland's personal space to position the map lightens his mood.

INT. DORMITORY - DAY

The contestants chit-chat or make final preparations for their morning, many fixing their hair or clothing. "Aimee" struggles to tie her dress's laces behind her back. Holly gently takes the laces.

HOLLY

Here, let me help. That's just too painful to watch. Got any that lace in the front for next time?

Today Holly wears a front-lacing dress and green bodice.

AMITY

I'm afraid not...

INSERT: FLASHBACK

"Aimee's" POV sitting in the formal dining room with Linnaeus pacing and a BALDING SERVANT (57) standing near the door. She follows the king to and fro, he does not meet her gaze.

LINNAEUS

Did Your Highness really think she would go unrecognized?

"Aimee" gets out barely a sound before Linnaeus continues.

LINNAEUS

We admire your initiative. This plan of Roland's could make the nobility feel threatened, and your actions may just salvage the situation.

Linnaeus stops, looks toward "Aimee." POV raises a bit.

AMITY

Your Majesty can count on me. Sarah couldn't do it, but I can.

Linnaeus resumes pacing and looking away from her.

LINNAEUS

Your Highness is obviously the most fit to win the contest, but there is simply too much at stake. We cannot leave anything to chance.

Amity's POV slowly droops with a sigh of disappointment.

RETURN TO SCENE

AMITY

It turns out there were a number of problems I didn't foresee.

A young FEMALE SERVANT (14) appears at the main entrance.

FEMALE SERVANT

Good morning, ladies. His and Her Majesties request your presence at the stables in one quarter hour.

The roughly one-fifth of the contestants in high heels dash back to their bunks. The two Colorless women find the panic amusing, stroll down the length of the room.

"Aimee" switches from her blue shoes to blue boots. Three beds over, a panicking AURENTIAN COURTESAN (22) paws through a row of fancy yellow shoes under her bunk.

AURENTIAN COURTESAN

But I did not bring riding boots!

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

I must know: How did you get here?

AURENTIAN COURTESAN

By carriage, like a civilized person.

EDITH

Just break the heels off one pair.

AURENTIAN COURTESAN

This is a good idea.

Now she frets over which pair to sacrifice. The Colorless women double over laughing.

Holly re-ties the laces on her only pair of shoes.

HOLLY

Finally. Been around horses long as I can remember, and it's about time I got to show my stuff.

BLOND BANDIT

Your mother, father get you used to beast as baby. Good.

HOLLY

Not sure. As a little girl I wandered onto a farm in Bosky Village. That's on the eastern edge of Glenwood. They adopted me.

The two Bandits exchange shocked looks.

BLOND BANDIT

This thing you say, it is true?

HOLLY

Why... would I make that up?

BLOND BANDIT

You will be too young then to get tribal mark.

(shows tattoo on wrist)

But time is right. Place is right.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

East-of-Glenwood is near west-of-Cinnabar. This is time that Cinnabar hunts bandit tribes.

"Aimee" finishes tying her boots, but hesitates to leave because it would require passing close by the Bandits.

HOLLY

And?

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

You are bandit girl. Mother, father save you from Cinnabar.

The Blond Bandit gives Holly an uncomfortably tight hug.

AMITY

Aww. Maybe now she'll stop saying
(overly peppy)
"Hi, I'm Holly from Bosky Village."

HOLLY

Wait. No. I grew up on a farm, not a... tribe. I'm from Glenwood.

The Blond Bandit releases her hug, plucks at the green trim on Holly's peasant dress.

BLOND BANDIT

This color on outside is not what makes you who you are.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT
 Let us show prince how real women
 handle beasts!

The two Colorless women scoot a speechless Holly along.

EXT. STABLE - DAY

Linnaeus and Sylvia - dressed in the finest of riding gear - sit upon splendid horses near the stable doors. An audience of thousands rings the courtyard while a VIP section sits directly below the balcony.

Several mounted Green Knights are posted at intervals just inside the cordon.

LINNAEUS
 One never sees a royal thrown from
 a horse because we have the same
 trainer as the Green Knights.

A round of APPLAUSE for the Green Knights.

LINNAEUS
 Today we will skip ahead to one of
 the advanced topics.

O.S. Sound of RESTLESS HORSES grows steadily louder.

LINNAEUS
 Those of you who perform best at
 managing an unruly animal will move
 on to the next challenge.

Sylvia signals, and FANFARE begins.

SYLVIA
 Ladies, if you would please join us
 in the courtyard.

Gate opens, and several horses bolt the stable with contestants barely hanging onto them. The two bandit women follow, struggle to steer their horses but succeed.

The Glenwood Suck-Up emerges on a gigantic warhorse, the Tall Contestant on a small but very irritated horse, and Holly on a spirited horse that shakes its head at the slightest touch of its reins.

All three horses join the herd in the courtyard.

"Aimee" rides out on a perfectly tame horse. She shoots an annoyed glance at Linnaeus, then has the horse jump for show.

The Calm Glenwood Contestant's horse rears as soon as it gets outside. Riding very forward to keep her balance, she whispers something in its ear that calms it.

In the background, a contestant exits the courtyard clinging to the back of a Green Knight. He deposits her outside the cordon, returns to his station. A second Green Knight wrangles the horse to the stable.

The Cinnabar Rancher emerges on a jumpy horse, all smiles.

CINNABAR RANCHER

Yee-haw!

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

A few horses have been tamed, but most still run wild in the courtyard. Crowd cheers contestants' skill and grit. Holly tries her horse's reins, but it shakes its head violently.

HOLLY

Fine. Go where you want, but you're not getting rid of me.

A rearing horse throws its rider in front of Holly. One of the Green Knights charges to the area.

Holly grabs the horn of her saddle with her left hand, then grabs the thrown rider with her right. Nearby the Friendly Uva Contestant does the same in reverse. The pair haul the dazed girl to the relative safety of Holly's horse.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT

There you go.

HOLLY

I can't take you to the edge, but at least you won't get trampled.

The Olive-skinned Bandit gives Holly a thumbs-up. In the background, Roland points out this rescue to Linnaeus. A Green Knight takes the thrown rider. Holly picks up her reins, but the horse shakes its head again.

HOLLY

Be that way.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

About two thirds of the dormitory's bunks lay empty. Many contestants walk gingerly or hold their backs.

SILVERPLAINS WEAVER
It's like he's trying to kill us.

CALM GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
They weren't really untrained.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
She's right; somehow no one got
kicked or trampled.

Edith walks to her bed, lays down very stiffly. Holly rubs a
knee while the two Colorless women stand next to her.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT
You ride like bandit, one with your
beast. Not even need reins.

HOLLY
I was only a few years old when I
got to the farm. Even if I WAS born
a bandit, it wouldn't matter.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT
(to BLOND BANDIT)
She so naïve. Is... cute.

BLOND BANDIT
You don't remember first years, but
most important time. Is when learn
how to see world, be in world.

The Chatty Glenwood Contestant speaks up.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
You know what would make everyone
feel better? Some nice hot towels.

GLENWOOD SMITH
Well, yeah, but I don't see any.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
Someone could head down to the
kitchens and bring some back.

GLENWOOD SMITH
We can do that? Hey, who's with me?

The Smith leaves with a couple of the less-injured girls.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Holly and the other contestants with instruments play a
different calming tune. Holly's eyes dart under her eyelids.

INSERT: FLASHBACK

Fragmentary, color-muted images from the bandit attack on Holly's carriage from her POV.

- Cinnabar Horsemen swinging swords at bandits.
- View into the forest of tangled trees.

GOVERNESS (O.S.)

Keep running no matter what you
hear, do you understand me?

- Running through tangled trees. O.S. Woman's scream.
- A vividly red bit of cloth floats down a rushing stream.

BACK TO SCENE

Holly startles a bit as the music ends.

HOLLY

I was a bandit?

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

Easels sit spaced evenly throughout the space. At each one a contestant tries to paint a picture. Spectators walk the hall freely to ask contestants questions or give advice.

Linnaeus and Roland enter the hall with a MASTER PAINTER (71), white-haired bohemian who leans on a cane. Arthritis has taken his ability to paint, but his mind remains sharp. Linnaeus motions to Roland to wander around on his own.

MASTER PAINTER

Hmmm, a few of these young ladies
feel deeply, but - as Your Majesty
is doubtless aware - only a handful
of them have ANY idea what they're
doing with a brush.

Roland passes a stressed-out Holly - who has paint smears on her hands, face and hair - with a stereotypical bandit on her canvas. Her neighbor, a GLENWOOD COURTESAN (21), is well on her way to expertly painting a complex mountain landscape.

ROLAND

(playfully to HOLLY)

Just in case the rules weren't
clear, we only plan on judging the
paint that ends up on your canvas.

Holly smiles a bit, waves her brush toward Roland's face. A big drop of paint falls to the floor.

HOLLY

So it'd be all right if some ended
up on a prince?

ROLAND

Okay, I'll be way over there.

Roland slips on the drop of wet paint, throws his arms out wide to regain his balance, ends up leaning forward an inch from Holly's face. Both blush. He carefully gets upright without getting any paint on himself.

HOLLY

Over there.

ROLAND

Right.

Linnaeus steers the master to "Aimee's" attempt to paint a scene from one of the tapestries - a Green Knight in a battle crown dueling a knight in orange as two armies look on.

"Aimee" turns from scowling at Holly to smile at the king.

LINNAEUS

This one looks promising.

MASTER PAINTER

This one feels deeply.

(to AMITY)

My girl, you don't need to paint
the whole scene. Just focus on
those two fools in the center.

He winks at Linnaeus, knowing full well that the "fool" in green with a long nose is a young Linnaeus.

AMITY

I'm going for a sense of duty.

MASTER PAINTER

I see that. I also see you're
repressing something. Something you
want to shout, but feel you can't.

"Aimee" looks sheepishly at Linnaeus.

AMITY

Uh... no, I'm fine.

MASTER PAINTER

Don't worry, I won't ask. But art is good for saying things you can't say. Your feelings can feed your art. Or they can feed on you if you keep them cooped up.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Holly picks up a water pitcher from the table near the main entrance. She picks a wooden cup from the very back row. REVEAL: a folded paper was under that cup. She grabs the paper, pours her water, heads back toward bed.

Holly senses she's being followed, turns around suddenly.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

Good feel for where loot hides. Not so good actual stealing part.

HOLLY

There has to be more to being a bandit than stealing things.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

In bandit tribe, all the people to learn all the skills. If only one person know how to bring foal, guess who get sick when time to bring foal, eh?

HOLLY

Sounds kinda like living on a farm.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

Ha. Blood will tell. So, what is this? What does it say?

Holly relaxes, unfolds the note.

HOLLY

"Y.H. will have no trouble with tomorrow's test. Sleep well." This person can't even spell "you."

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

One here cheats? Take pride.
(thumps chest)
Rely on self.

HOLLY

Still sounds like farming with a funny accent.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT
 See? You understand. Rely on self,
 but of course no one can do all
 things. One thing bandit must do:
 be able to TAKE what needed.

Holly tenses up, keeps a wary eye on the Bandit.

HOLLY
 (unconvincing)
 Right. Well, I'm going to the
 kitchens to "take" some warm milk.

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roland sits with a pile of maps and other papers. Holly
 rushes through the door, closes it behind her. She ends up
 cutting off the Herald from announcing her.

Holly leans against the door. Roland playfully looks at each
 doorway and window, then under the table.

ROLAND
 I think we're safe.

HOLLY
 Did you ever sit and listen to
 someone give their side of the
 story and realize they're... crazy?

ROLAND
 Oh, come on. Your tax collector
 idea is a little different, but I
 wouldn't call it "crazy."

HOLLY
 What? No, not me.

ROLAND
 Oh, so me then.

HOLLY
 (flustered)
 Oh, no. Of course not!

ROLAND
 Well, now that THAT'S settled, come
 on over here and explain how we're
 going to pay these tax collectors.

Roland smiles brightly, strides up to take the blushing Holly
 by the hand, and leads her to the seat next to his.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

Roland stands at a lectern under a banner that reads "Math Challenge." One hundred contestants arrange paper, ink and quill pens at their seats.

ROLAND

An important part of running the kingdom is keeping track of everything, with mathematics.

Holly scans the other contestants' faces with suspicion.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

About twenty dazed contestants cluster just outside the great hall's door. Others leave by ones and twos.

AURENTIAN PEASANT

Okay, this was worse than that first day with the herald.

DORINDA

Hey, what did everybody get for Roland's combination problem?

The Calm and Tense Contestants arrive.

EDITH

One, two, three, four, five.

HOLLY

Oh good, I thought that was too simple to be right.

Most of those present look relieved to hear Edith's answer. The two bandit women march straight out the doors, pointedly avoiding everyone else.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Several contestants - including both Colorless women - pack up. Bandits' packs look overstuffed. Holly, the Silverplains Weaver, and the Friendly Uva Contestant linger nearby.

HOLLY

I... just assumed you knew reading and figuring like the rest of us.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

Learn lesson. Will go back, tell chief teach children this things.

The Bandits team up to fasten a particularly taut strap.

SILVERPLAINS WEAVER

Good... and... uh... they're going to search your bags, you know.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

(to BLOND BANDIT)

Isn't she nice girl?

(to SILVERPLAINS WEAVER)

Don't worry, you nice girl. Not my first time in a castle. Her first time, not mine.

The girls watch agape as the Blond Bandit takes a hunting knife out from under her pillow and slides it into a hidden sheath in her long boot.

BLOND BANDIT

We just keep bed sheets. Glennish think we're dirty, would burn them anyway.

She then hefts the oversized pack onto her back, shrugs it into place.

HOLLY

Yeah... they probably would. I'll keep up the fight here as the honorary bandit in the group.

Blond Bandit smiles, play-punches Holly on the arm, pulls her knife partly out of its sheath.

BLOND BANDIT

You need blade to keep you safe?

HOLLY

Thanks, but no. I'm better with a hammer or throwing a chair.

Blond Bandit re-sheathes her knife, nudges Holly with a wink and a smile.

SILVERPLAINS WEAVER

Good luck on your way home... wherever.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

I like you.

(conspiratorial whisper)

Hey, you still want to sell wooly-clothes in Safir? This how you pay off highway bandits...

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

Contestants walk heel-to-toe from one side of the great hall to the other balancing books on their heads. Banner on the wall reads "Balance and Grace Challenge." The girls compete in heats of ten for this slow-motion race.

Holly drops her book twice just waiting for her group's turn.

HOLLY

Oh, what's the point?

In the current heat, a Glenwood Plainswoman drops her book, rushes back to the start line, starts again.

DORINDA

Just stand straight up and down
like you're hanging from a string.

HOLLY

I saw a horse thief hanging from a
rope. He didn't look graceful.

DORINDA

Walking graceful is mostly not
looking down at your feet. It's a
clean floor; there aren't going to
be any rocks or roots in the way.

The Glenwood Plainswoman loses her book again, tries to catch it, falls awkwardly.

DORINDA

Though there might be the
occasional contestant.

HOLLY

Look, in my town, "grace" is losing
at a game without flipping over the
table. I'm done pretending I belong
here. I'm going home where I know
who I am and what to do.

Holly hands her green-covered book to the 14-year-old Female Servant behind her. Edith steps into Holly's path.

EDITH

Holly, your mom named you after a
princess. She must have seen grace
and poise and dignity in you.

HOLLY

What princess? I was adopted,
remember?

(MORE)

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Name came from getting tangled up
in a holly bush when I was four.

EDITH

Princess Holly Vermillion of
Cinnabar. You REALLY had no idea?

Holly looks over at the Cook and the Rancher who fidget and
adjust their red-trimmed dresses in an unfeminine manner.

HOLLY

I don't think Cinnabar has a
princess. I'm not even sure they
have any ladies.

Dorinda and the nearby Friendly Uva Contestant chuckle.

EDITH

Short version: she died in a
battle. Now do her memory proud and
give this your best shot.

Holly picks up her book again. Its title is *Advanced
Compositions for the Flute* by Grand Master Bansi.

INSERT: FLASHBACK

Distorted, color-muted view of a room in the Cinnabar castle.
Young Holly's POV as the castle's Conductor - her music
teacher - holds a flute, stands very straight.

CONDUCTOR

To play properly, one must BREATHE
properly. To breathe properly, one
must STAND properly.

The POV raises by about an inch.

RETURN TO SCENE

Holly takes a deep breath, straightens her posture, and
balances the book on her head.

HOLLY

Guess it's better than being named
after a bandit.

Holly's heat begins. Her progress is slow but steady.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Holly plays a soothing song along with the other musicians. Fade through three nights, each time a few more bunks are empty. On the third night, there is one fewer musician.

INT. ENTRY HALL - DAY

The contestants file past wall mirrors toward the great hall. Holly spots a folded bit of paper peeking out from behind one mirror. She palms the note, reads it.

HOLLY
(softly to herself)
"Y.H.'s favorite instrument is on
the right, far from the door. Claim
it before someone else does."

Holly, angry, balls up the note.

"Aimee" passes the same mirror, feels for the note, doesn't find anything. She looks around frantically for a moment.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

The contestants pour into the great hall where various instruments sit on chairs arranged for an orchestra.

Most walk quickly toward an instrument they know, though the Chatty Glenwood Contestant almost breaks into a run to claim a cello at the far right. Holly eyes her suspiciously.

"Aimee" takes a moment at the entrance, then makes a beeline for a harp at the far right.

Roland stands at the conductor's podium.

ROLAND
Today each of you will demonstrate
your musical talent. The twenty who
perform the best advance to
tomorrow's challenge.

Holly starts one of the lullabies on her flute, and all the rest join in. Almost all... the Chatty Glenwood Contestant freezes with her cello like a deer caught in carriage lamps.

Holly grins with schadenfreude as Roland points his conductor's wand at her and she steps away. A Glenwood contestant hits a xylophone too hard, and one of the hammers goes flying. Roland points, she nods glumly and walks away.

The Glenwood Rustic holds a violin and launches into an energetic fiddle solo, finishes with a dramatic flourish. The nobles in the audience stare in shocked silence, but a moment later the commoners in the audience give a rowdy CHEER.

AMITY

Well, this is easy so far.

Holly glowers at "Aimee," lays down her flute, cracks her knuckles, re-aligns her flute, and launches into a proper orchestral tune - the opening theme.

Roland points at contestants who falter while Holly and "Aimee" lock eyes, alternate trying to dominate the melody.

Their stare-down grows more intense. Roland ejects the tenth contestant, he taps the podium, but Holly and "Aimee" continue their musical duel.

ROLAND

Thank you.

After a wordless exchange of three nods in sync, both cease playing simultaneously, winded by the sustained exertion.

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Holly sits, reads a scroll as Roland stands over her shoulder. By now they are quite comfortable being close to one another.

HOLLY

Ah. You misspelled "route."

ROLAND

I did not. That's a drop of ink on the page.

Holly smirks, skims the last few lines, puts the scroll down.

ROLAND

I think we have an excellent plan here. I'll bring it to the king when he's in a good mood.

HOLLY

Thank you! You have no idea what this means to people out in the villages!

Holly gives Roland a quick peck on the cheek. He smiles. Her eyes widen with the realization of what she just did. She scrambles out of the chair.

HOLLY
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done
that, Your Highness.

ROLAND
It's okay.

Holly blushes brightly.

HOLLY
No... No... It's not okay. I'm all
mad at these girls for trying to
cheat, and here I am... This
wouldn't have happened if you were
a bit less... perfect.

ROLAND
There's nothing to worry about.

HOLLY
(nervous rush)
I'm sure it's some kind of crime to
touch a royal. You know what? I got
you to listen to me, there's a plan
for the new law, and being out of
my routine is making me to do
stupid things. Maybe I'll just
withdraw from the contest.

ROLAND
Don't do that.

HOLLY
(hangs head)
Of course I wouldn't dream of
defying Your Highness's orders.

Roland takes Holly's hand.

ROLAND
PLEASE don't do that.

Holly's lips turn up into a slight smile. Roland puts a
finger on her lips, gives a lop-sided self-deprecating smile.

ROLAND
I was hoping you'd like to stay.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

Long mahogany tables convert the great hall into a grand
dining hall. The head table rests on a dais, and the two
contestant tables stand perpendicular to it.

The tables feature classic silverware, enormous candelabras, forest-themed centerpieces, and fine green linens.

A minstrel plays. Contestants stand behind their chairs as a procession of knights and nobles enter to stand behind seats at the head table. All of the contestants - but especially the peasants - look around at the opulent decor.

HERALD

Sir Thane Standar... Sir Sylvester
Cianil... Dame Viridiana
Emiliana... Sir Oran Rannan.

The Cinnabar Rancher, Edith, Dorinda, Holly, and the Glenwood Rustic stand at the far left from the gate, far right from the head table's POV.

Opposite them stand the Tall Glenwood Contestant, Glenwood Farmer, Glenwood Suck-Up, Tense Glenwood Contestant, and Friendly Uva Contestant.

HERALD

Sir Barritious Bailinas... General
Sir Naylor Holkata... Baron Russel
Alaric of Binda.

At the other table stand a Silverplains contestant, the Cinnabar Cook, Glenwood Smith, Calm Glenwood Contestant, and Aurentian Peasant.

Opposite them - at the gate's far right - stand the Silverplains Weaver, the Aurentian Courtesan, the Glenwood Courtesan, a Glenwood shepherd, and "Aimee."

HERALD

Baroness Ethel Edana of
Towerbridge... Baron Patrick Kapena
of Kavidale.

Holly notices a bit of paper under "Aimee's" plate.

HOLLY

(tries not to move lips)
Dorinda, do you see that?

DORINDA

(without moving lips)
No. Talking.

The Tense Glenwood Contestant - who stands directly opposite Holly - widens her eyes with anger. Dorinda shrugs slightly, Tense Contestant sniffs then fixes her gaze on the nobles.

HERALD

Baron and Baroness Bradley Delling
of Braddock Lake.

FANFARE begins. The last to enter are the royal family, including PRINCE CONRAD CELADON (11) and PRINCE ORAN CELADON (16), coming to their places at the head table.

HERALD

His Highness, Prince Conrad
Celadon... His Highness, Prince
Oran Celadon... His Highness,
Prince Roland Celadon... Her
Majesty, Queen Sylvia Celadon...
His Majesty, King Linnaeus Celadon.

Holly steals a glance at Roland, blushes briefly.

Fanfare ends when Linnaeus reaches his place. The king sits first, then everyone else sits. He raises a glass of wine, and everyone follows suit.

LINNAEUS

Welcome all to a meal to celebrate
these twenty young ladies who have
accomplished much to come this far.

Everyone drinks to the king's toast. Servants begin placing bowls of salad at each seat.

The Glenwood Rustic imitates her neighbors tucking a napkin in her neckline... then stares blankly at the dizzying array of plates, glasses, forks, knives and spoons confronting her.

In the background at the other table, "Aimee" uses her napkin to cover reading the note.

The Rustic looks up, but it's too late: everyone else already picked up one of the many forks. She grabs a fork at random, but it doesn't look like the others'.

She flings it down onto the floor behind her, and the tongs dig into the floor so the fork stands straight up. She picks out a second, more likely, fork to await her salad.

A reassuringly overweight CHEF (49) steps in from the kitchen to stand near "Aimee", ready to announce the first dish.

CHEF

Mixed salad from Harrollome in
eastern Glenwood.

Holly smiles and gives the Chef a thumb's up. Dorinda and Edith each roll their eyes. The Tense Contestant scowls.

A servant bringing more salad bowls hits the Rustic's fork, and barely avoids tripping. All contestants look up startled. REVEAL: The Farmer and Smith tucked in the *tablecloth* instead of their napkins.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

"Aimee" slowly reaches for a spoon - as several contestants mimic her move - only to snatch a different one at the end.

At "Aimee's" table, the Cinnabar Cook and Glenwood Smith grab the correct spoon, while the Aurentian Peasant grabs the decoy then switches. At the other table, Holly grabs the correct spoon, while the Glenwood Rustic grabs a knife.

Servants place a bowl of bright orange soup before each contestant. The Rustic eventually gets the correct spoon.

CHEF

"Campfire Soup" from Sempervirens
in south-western Cinnabar.

A couple ladies' eyes widen as they catch the soup's scent.

Linnaeus holds up a spoon of the soup, and everyone follows suit. He eats the entire spoonful at once, and everyone else does the same. Pandemonium erupts because the habanero-and-pumpkin soup is incredibly spicy.

Almost simultaneously:

- The Cinnabar natives - Holly, the Rancher, and the Cook - eat the soup without trouble.
- "Aimee," Edith, Tall Contestant, Glenwood Farmer, Glenwood Smith, and Aurentian Peasant muscle through the spiciness.
- Dorinda and the Glenwood Suck-Up lunge for bread.
- The Friendly Uva Contestant lunges for a pitcher of milk.
- The Tense Contestant and the Rustic jump for where the milk was, collide on the table, and spill everything near them.
- The Glenwood and Aurentian Courtesans, the Calm Contestant, and the Glenwood shepherd involuntarily spit out the soup.
- The two Silverplains natives grab the same loaf of bread, causing an explosion of crumbs across the table.
- The nobles at the head table fare better because each has a personal loaf of bread and pitcher of milk.

The moment passes. Several girls slide back to their seats with stained outfits. Those movements yank the tablecloth from the Glenwood Farmer and Glenwood Smith, causing even more glasses and silverware to crash to the floor.

The Cinnabar Cook slurps up the last of her soup.

Holly looks suspiciously at the bit of paper that shifted out from under "Aimee's" plate.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Holly holds the note in her hand. The Glenwood Rustic and shepherd, the Calm and Tense Glenwood Contestants, the Glenwood and Aurentian Courtesans, and both Silverplains contestants silently pack their things.

The remaining contestants, just as subdued, prepare for bed.

HOLLY

(reading to herself)

"The soup is very spicy for everyone else. Y.H.'s will be mild. Pretend to handle the spice in a dignified way."

A furious Holly shoves the note down to her lap, then stares daggers at "Aimee's" back over by the water table.

AMITY

(to herself)

I didn't need any help with a state dinner. What was he thinking?

HOLLY

(to herself)

This person still can't spell, and they're helping Aimee. Not sure which one is worse.

Holly shudders with anger.

AMITY

(to herself)

He... he must not think I'm up to the task.

"Aimee's" eye twitches a bit.

Dorinda accidentally startles the self-absorbed Holly.

DORINDA
Whatcha got there?

HOLLY
(quietly)
Someone's been leaving notes to help a cheater. I thought I knew who it was, but turns out that it was Aimee.

Dorinda pulls Edith into the hushed conversation.

DORINDA
We should report her.

EDITH
To whom? We don't know who's helping her. Talk to the wrong person and WE could get in trouble.

DORINDA
The prince.

HOLLY
(softly)
I can't go to him again.
(aloud)
I mean, I'm not even sure about him. He seemed pretty friendly with Aimee at that breakfast.

The trio take turns furtively glancing toward "Aimee."

EDITH
I'd be disappointed, but not exactly surprised, if this whole thing was rigged from the start.

HOLLY
We can still do something about it.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

A banner across the castle balcony reads "Foot Race." The remaining contestants file into the courtyard. Servants direct them to sit in chairs near a start line.

ROLAND
Welcome everyone. This morning's challenge is a race, but not an ordinary one.

Servants set a pair of appropriately colored lace-up high-heels before each contestant. "Aimee," wearing nearly identical shoes anyway, smirks. Edith and the Glenwood Farmer look at the shoes with dread. The Suck-Up grins broadly.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP

Oh... I got this.

Holly cocks an eyebrow at Roland that says, "Seriously?"

Roland gives the contestants an apologetic look.

ROLAND

Tradition requires that ladies wear these... things... at royal functions. Though Dames -- female knights -- can get away with wearing boots.

DAME VIRIDIANA EMILIANA (29), athletic woman near Roland on the balcony, wearing a ceremonial saber and a decidedly non-puffy formal green dress, holds one booted leg up. LAUGHS AND CHEERS from the audience.

EDITH

(during the cheers)

Speaking of Dames, I think there'd be fewer injuries if he had us fighting with swords instead of running in heels.

Holly uses Edith and the cheers as a distraction to slip her own note under "Aimee's" seat cushion.

HOLLY

(to herself)

Doing one sneaky thing does not make me a bandit.

ROLAND

Ladies, please remove your shoes. At the signal, put on the dress shoes before you and hurry to the opposite end of the courtyard.

(points)

There you will get a glass of wine.

The Balding Servant stands at a table at the far end of the courtyard. He pours several glasses of wine.

ROLAND

The first eight to return with a full glass of wine will advance to the next challenge.

The contestants, now in their stocking feet, wait anxiously in the chairs.

HORN SOUNDS, and everyone grabs their assigned shoes. The Farmer struggles to tie a knot. "Aimee" and Tall Contestant are off, with Dorinda and the Suck-Up close behind.

Edith starts down the lane, slowly and unsteadily. Everyone else besides the Farmer overtakes Edith quickly. Holly looks back with some pity in her eyes. Finally, the Farmer finishes her knots and plods down the lane.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Six contestants sit at the finish area. Aurentian Peasant rubs her stocking feet. The others already wear their shoes.

TALL GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
(to GLENWOOD SUCK-UP)
That was a sight to behold.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP
Eh, I pretty much live in heels.

"Aimee," Dorinda, and the Friendly Uva Contestant chuckle and sip their wine. O.S. SUSTAINED CHEERING.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP
(looks toward race course)
Now THAT is a sight...

Edith barrels toward the finish on her tippy-toes, barely maintaining her balance, swinging the wine glass to keep the contents inside. Holly strides behind, urging Edith on.

HOLLY
Come on, don't give up on me now.

EDITH
Whoa, whoa, whoa...

Edith crosses the finish line sideways, slams her back into her chair. Her wine sloshes up out of her glass, but Edith is able to catch it again. Holly gives her a high-five.

"Aimee" notices the note under her seat cushion. She finishes her wine, puts the glass on the ground, and uses that motion to hide stashing the note in her sleeve.

HOLLY
(to herself)
Got a lot of practice doing that,
don't you?

"Aimee" sits up, all smiles. Holly's face flashes anger for a moment, but she then forces a smile for the audience.

HOLLY
 (to herself)
 And fake smiles all around. There
 is NO WAY I'm letting you win.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

The Cook, the Farmer, the Rancher, and the Smith pack their things as the others prepare for or lay in bed.

GLENWOOD FARMER
 I am SO taking these shoes with me.

She shoves the green heels deep into her very worn backpack.

CINNABAR RANCHER
 (confused)
 To wear?

GLENWOOD FARMER
 To SELL!

CINNABAR RANCHER
 Hey, good idea.

GLENWOOD SMITH
 I'll be setting mine on fire.

In the background, "Aimee" sneaks a peek at the note that Holly left.

AMITY
 (quietly to herself)
 "Y.H. and I must meet in the
 stables two hours past midnight."

"Aimee" quickly hides the note and looks warily around the room. Her eye twitches. She startles at a small noise.

AMITY
 (quietly to herself)
 It's not his handwriting. Obviously
 a prank, but someone knows. Who?

O.S. LOUD KNOCK. "Aimee" jumps at the sound.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
 (with HOLLY)
 Come on in!

Door opens, Dame Viridiana enters - still wearing the same formal outfit with the same boots.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP
 Dame Viridiana, welcome!

Just in case anyone doubted that she knew who this VIP was.

VIRIDIANA
 Thank you. So, this is when someone usually pops in here and tells you something really vague about what's happening tomorrow.

The Green Knight makes a point of making eye contact with all twelve of the girls.

VIRIDIANA
 I asked if I could do it today because I wanted to let you know that each and every one of you were OUTSTANDING today. And if it was me out there, I'd be packing my bags right now.

Most of the girls smile. The Smith manages a smirk. The Suck-Up overreacts by laughing. "Aimee" stares into oblivion.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
 So what happens tomorrow?

VIRIDIANA
 Nothing official. You'll have two days to prepare for a talent show.

DORINDA
 Oh, that sounds like fun.

TALL GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
 Is that fun as in "Yea!" or fun as in "my living nightmare"?

DORINDA
 I've been on a stage since I can remember, so I guess --

TALL GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
 (deadpan)
 "Yea."
 (to VIRIDIANA)
 But don't get me wrong, I totally love that you're being straight with us.

VIRIDIANA

I hope the king has seen enough of
how you respond to surprises.

AMITY

No more surprises would be nice.

VIRIDIANA

So, you'll do the talent show in
pairs...

Holly and Edith trade glances at each other then Dorinda then
back to each other, nonverbally calling dibs.

VIRIDIANA

... based on the order you finished
the race.

HOLLY

(with EDITH)

Aww.

VIRIDIANA

So that means you two...
(AMITY and the GLENWOOD
SUCK-UP)
... and you two...
(the TALL GLENWOOD
CONTESTANT and the
FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT)
... and you two...
(DORINDA and the AURENTIAN
PEASANT)
... and you two.
(HOLLY and EDITH)

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

The contestants sit in pairs as widely spaced throughout the
great hall as they can manage. Carpenters construct a
temporary stage as the girls plan their acts.

"Aimee" and the Suck-Up sit on the steps near the thrones.

AMITY

We're trying to win Roland, but
remember the King and Queen are in
charge here.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP

So?

AMITY

We put on a little play that flatters THEM. I know Sylvia fought in the Grand Tournament --

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP

But Linnaeus became king before he was old enough to compete. Bringing up the tournament is a bad idea.

AMITY

Does he have a favorite story?

The short Glenwood Suck-Up smiles, then points at the tapestry of a young Linnaeus dueling with a knight in orange.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP

Oh yeah: Spessartia marched on our border when they heard a fifteen-year-old boy had taken the throne.

IN THE SEATS

Holly and Edith sit in the audience seats.

HOLLY

It seems everyone here has a story about how they impressed the prince. Do you?

EDITH

I warned him he was about to walk into a bandit ambush. Not the most flattering tale.

HOLLY

Fine. Can't use what we did before, but our show still has to be something special. Do you know anything about fighting?

It's Edith's turn to cock an eyebrow that says, "Seriously?"

EDITH

Youngest of three and a general's daughter. What do you think?

NEAR THE GATE

The Friendly Uva Contestant and the Tall Glenwood Contestant lean against the wall near the great hall's main entrance. Tall Contestant pantomimes as she speaks.

TALL GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
I can do trick shots with a set of
throwing knives.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
Hey, could you hit something I was
juggling?

TALL GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
No problem! That'll be great!

UNDER THE TAPESTRIES

Dorinda and the Aurentian Peasant stand under the tapestries
hanging along the side of the great hall.

DORINDA
Now after you "disappear" you have
to work everything backstage. I'll
practice imitating your voice to
make it seem like you're invisible.

IN THE SEATS

Holly gestures excitedly as she plots their act, but Edith
stops her with an arm on the shoulder.

EDITH
Being on stage will require, you
know, smiling for the audience. You
okay with that?

Holly puts on an unconvincing smile.

EDITH
Not inspiring confidence. I'm sure
being friendly helps get things
done on a farm.

Holly half-smiles, half-shrugs in agreement.

EDITH
Same thing in a castle. Just be
yourself. Smiling isn't the
problem, trying to "be someone
else" is.

Holly nods, and her face slowly reveals a real smile.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

"Aimee" and Glenwood Suck-Up perform their talent show on a temporary stage in the great hall. The Suck-Up wears a low-budget costume including a green crown, a prop sword, and a long fake nose that refers to a young King Linnaeus.

"Aimee" wears an orange cape and crown that refer to the historical figure EARL OF SPESSARTIA. She looks warily at the other contestants seated far to house right. The Suck-Up practically has her back to them.

IN THE SEATS

Holly leans over to Edith.

HOLLY
(whispers)
I knew our note would rattle her.
She looks ridiculous in orange...

Holly holds the green cuff of her peasant dress up to occlude "Aimee's" body, showing roughly what she'd look like wearing something green.

HOLLY
(whispers)
... or green.

ON STAGE

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP
(as Linnaeus, in a very
fake deep voice)
... I can't let this go unanswered.
(struggles to take off
glove)
So I challenge you,
(slow progress on the
glove)
or any Tiger Knight you choose,
(glove finally comes off)
to single combat to settle this.

She throws down the gauntlet at "Aimee's" feet, except this is a thin cotton glove that flutters pathetically.

AMITY
(as Earl, in a deep voice)
With what stakes?

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP

(as Linnaeus)

If you win, all you need to do is sign a peace treaty and I will give you High Pass. It's strategic, would help you defend against Uva. But if you lose, Spessartia joins Glenwood and YOU become MY baron.

AMITY

(as Earl)

Duke.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP

(as Linnaeus)

Count.

AMITY

(as Earl)

Deal!

They shake hands.

IN THE SEATS

Linnaeus comments quietly to no one in particular.

LINNAEUS

We recall the negotiations being more complicated than that.

SYLVIA

Shhh.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

Holly curtsies at house right of the temporary stage with a hammer in one hand, Edith curtsies at house left. Edith takes off her spectacles, folds them, slips them into a pocket.

HOLLY

Wait, you have POCKETS? No one told me a dress could have pockets!

LAUGHTER from the audience, primarily the women.

EDITH

Calm down. Can we do our show now?

HOLLY

Fine. Your Majesty, we really liked the Teaching Challenge --

EDITH
 -- and thought it was time for a
 lesson EVERYONE could use.

Edith pulls a sheathed dagger out of her other pocket.

HOLLY
 Now THIS is the kind of thing that
 a lady is expected to carry.

EDITH
 And we had to get special
 permission to do this
 (pulls off sheath)
 in the presence of His Majesty.

IN THE SEATS

"Aimee" - far to house right with the other contestants -
 removes a dagger from her belt, hides it inside a belt pouch.

ON STAGE

HOLLY
 It's great to have. Looks nice.
 Easy to hide. Can slice fruit. But
 if someone starts a fight --

Edith assumes a fighting pose with the dagger. Holly faces
 her from house right with a hammer behind her back.

HOLLY
 -- they probably have their own
 knife, and probably know more about
 using it.

Holly hefts her hammer up high.

HOLLY
 But one of these can be a lot more
 intimidating.

Holly lowers the hammer. The right shoulder of her dress
 drops, reveals her birthmark to people at far house right.

IN THE SEATS

"Aimee" blanches.

AMITY
 I... I need some air.

"Aimee" pushes past other spectators to the exit.

EDITH (O.S.)

And no one thinks twice about you
having one. But what if YOU'RE the
one with the smaller weapon...?

INT. CASTLE HALLWAY - DAY

"Aimee" leans against the wall - panting, paler than usual,
hand over her heart, eye twitching.

AMITY

It can't possibly be real.

"Aimee" sinks to sit on the floor.

AMITY

It's some kind of mean trick to
mess with me.

She balls her fists, and shock turns to anger.

AMITY

Who put her up to this? Really, all
I need to know is she's in on it.

She closes her eyes, grits her teeth, and pounds the floor.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Banner hanging from the balcony reads "Defense Challenge."

Linnaeus and Sylvia appear at the balcony with their sons
Roland, Oran, and Conrad. Audience falls silent.

LINNAEUS

As you know, the nobility's most
solemn duty is to protect the
people. When a commoner marries
into a noble family, the year
between the announcement and the
wedding is spent training on
etiquette and combat.

IN THE COURTYARD

Spectators ring three sides of the courtyard while four
archery targets sit on the empty side to the balcony's right.

HERALD

Lords, ladies, and gentlemen,
 please welcome the victors of last
 night's formal dance challenge:
 Miss Dorinda Corizon of Braddock
 Lake, Miss Aimee Idina of Azure
 City, Miss Holly O'Warrick of Bosky
 Village, and Miss Edith Holkata of
 Holkata Ranch.

Dorinda, "Aimee," Holly, and Edith walk onto the field each
 with a shortbow, quiver, light helmet, and leather greaves.

The contestants' dresses look out of place under the archery
 gear, but Dorinda's sequin dress looks especially silly.

LINNAEUS (O.S.)

A trainer eventually discovers each
 person's talent, but everyone is
 expected to learn a hand weapon and
 the shortbow.

Dorinda wears an Aurentian jambiva (curved knife) on her
 belt, "Aimee" a dagger, Holly a hammer, and Edith a mace.

IN THE STANDS

In the VIP section, Envoy Sebastian Almandine (now 52), in a
 red skirted doublet crossed with a white sash, sits with
 three Red Knights: the Mustachioed Red Knight (now 42), a
 COCKY RED KNIGHT (28) - previously the Cocky Teen - and
 HULKING RED KNIGHT (22), a very tall and muscular man.

SEBASTIAN

I had hoped to miss this entire
 spectacle, but King Farrel wants
 the trade agreement settled
 expeditiously.

IN THE COURTYARD

Dorinda struggles to pull back the bowstring, but once she
 does she is able to hold it steady. Her shot hits the target
 a couple rings from the bull's eye, earning APPLAUSE.

IN THE STANDS

The Cocky Red Knight looks at the contestants then around at
 the crowd.

COCKY RED KNIGHT

Putting them out there without any
real training... it's humiliating.
Is this really how they treat women
around here?

IN THE COURTYARD

"Aimee" looses a shot directly into the bull's eye to gasps
of appreciation that roll into APPLAUSE.

IN THE STANDS

Sebastian motions to the balcony above.

SEBASTIAN

Oh, believe me, King Linnaeus looks
down on all commoners equally.

IN THE COURTYARD

Holly pulls back the bowstring easily, but struggles to hold
it steady. She slides the arrow forward, swings her arms and
shifts her dress into a more comfortable position.

SEBASTIAN (O.S.)

If His Majesty had a daughter, we
would be watching a parade of young
men making fools of --

Holly's dress dislodges from her right shoulder. FOCUS: her
birthmark becomes visible.

INSERT: FLASHBACK MONTAGE

Sebastian recalls a rapid series of images of a young
Princess Holly from behind

- in diapers
- in a sleeveless toddler outfit
- in a sheer-backed fairy queen costume
- the girl turns around, her face similar to this woman's

BACK TO SCENE

Holly pulls the bowstring back again, and the crowd hushes.

Sebastian and the Mustachioed Knight stand.

SEBASTIAN

STOP!

The interruption causes Holly's shot to miss badly.

All eyes are on Sebastian - who already pushes his way through the crowd to Holly. The Mustachioed Red Knight follows close behind.

HOLLY

That's not fair!

SEBASTIAN

This woman is coming with me to Cinnabar this instant!

Linnaeus rises slowly. Holly flushes with anger.

SEBASTIAN

(holding back tears)
Princess Holly.

"Aimee" drops her bow and boils with rage, eye twitching.

AMITY

WHAT?!

HOLLY

Why doesn't anyone believe I'm a farmer?!

Sebastian bows deeply to Holly. Anger turns to embarrassment as Holly stands unsure how to respond, looks around as if someone might help. Dorinda and Edith shrug.

SEBASTIAN

Minister Plenipotentiary Sebastian
Almandine at your service, Your
Highness.

Holly looks to the balcony.

HOLLY

I-I have no idea who he is. I'm not going with him.

LINNAEUS

Yes, you are.

The other two Red Knights arrive at Sebastian's side.

LINNAEUS

(to ROLAND)

It doesn't matter if she really is or not. We are not going to create a diplomatic incident over your contest idea.

(to everyone)

It appears that events have overtaken us, and one of our honored contestants must regrettably withdraw.

HOLLY

Withdraw? More like kidnapped.

Sebastian rises, looks Holly up and down, then tosses a coin pouch to the Cocky Red Knight.

SEBASTIAN

On second thought, we shall leave first thing in the morning. Here, go to the dormitory and fetch Her Highness's other... dress. We shall require a proper red dress of the same size by morning.

COCKY RED KNIGHT

A red dress? In Glenwood?

Sebastian shoos the Red Knight away.

HOLLY

I just figured out the smiling, so now comes the uncomfortable dress?

LINNAEUS

We shall reconvene as scheduled in three days with Miss Aimee, Miss Dorinda and Miss Edith... Where is Miss Aimee?

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - DAY

Linnaeus, Sylvia, and Roland sit at the table with a wide selection of snacks that no one is eating.

O.S. Sebastian and Holly argue outside the door. Their conversation ceases the moment the Herald opens the door.

HERALD

Her Highness, Princess Holly
Vermillion of Cinnabar, and
Minister Plenipotentiary Sebastian
Almandine of Cinnabar.

Sebastian in his finery and Holly still in her peasant dress enter. They bow and curtsy, respectively. Linnaeus motions for them to rise.

HOLLY

He can't MAKE me leave, can he,
Your Majesties?

SYLVIA

The minister's voice carries the
royal authority of Cinnabar while
he is in Glenwood. We suppose he
can.

SEBASTIAN

(to HOLLY)

A moment, Your Highness?

(to LINNAEUS and SYLVIA)

Your Majesties' generous
understanding at this most unusual
hour is greatly appreciated. And to
Her Highness's question, I would
never take her anywhere against her
will, as I know His Majesty King
Farrel would not.

Roland looks back and forth between his parents and Sebastian throughout the monologue.

LINNAEUS

Get used to this. You will be
dealing with diplomats once you
marry and become the heir-apparent.

HOLLY

So the contest is still on.

Roland looks down.

HOLLY

Whether I'm here or not.

Roland glances at Linnaeus, then slowly nods his head.

HOLLY

You're just going to let that
condescending brat Aimee win?

ROLAND

She... just happens to be really good at all of this stuff.

Holly narrows her eyes at Roland.

HOLLY

(steely to ROLAND)

Much less perfect. Well done.

(respectfully to LINNAEUS)

Thank you for the room tonight, Your Majesty. I need to go to Cinnabar and see if I can get them to stop hunting down the Colorless.

LINNAEUS

It is our pleasure. And we suspect that Your Highness's presence will have an immediate impact on King Farrel's attitude toward bandits.

Holly glowers at Roland, turns briefly to Sebastian.

HOLLY

Take me home.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

An ornate red carriage drives quickly down a bright forest road - escorted by the Red Knights.

HULKING RED KNIGHT

Where DID you find a red dress in Glenwood?

COCKY RED KNIGHT

It's actually a white wedding dress. Had 'em toss the veil and make a kerchief out of the train. Then the dyer did what he could in one night.

HULKING RED KNIGHT

Clever.

INT. MOVING CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Holly sits in her new puffy dress with each of its fine materials a slightly different shade of red. Next to her sits Treva. On the opposite side sits Sebastian, and next to him sits Warrick and Holly's Little Brother.

Warrick wrings his hat nervously while the boy fixates on the passing scenery.

WARRICK

Begging your pardon, sir. No news of a missing princess ever reached our village.

SEBASTIAN

(pats Warrick on shoulder)
Please, no need to apologize. Her Highness has informed me about Bosky Village and its news problem.

TREVA

I don't recall ever hearing that Cinnabar had a princess at all.

Little Brother stands on the seat, peering out the window.

SEBASTIAN

I assure you, sir and madam, no one is upset.

HOLLY

I'm upset. At Roland.

SEBASTIAN

Well, if His Highness calls off his demeaning contest, he can court Your Highness properly --

Carriage rounds a bend then halts. Holly reflexively protects her head. Warrick catches the boy.

LITTLE BROTHER

Look!

EXT. FOREST ROAD - CONTINUOUS

A platoon of soldiers in blue Safiri uniforms block the road, and more emerge from the woods behind the carriage. The SAFIRI CAPTAIN (36) and two lieutenants are mounted.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

What is the meaning of this?! Have you gone mad?!

Holly's dog Thunder barks at the soldiers from the carriage roof. Sebastian emerges with his white sash clearly visible.

SEBASTIAN

This requires a diplomat's touch...
What is the meaning of this?! Have
you gone mad?!

SAFIRI CAPTAIN

We are to take into custody the
Glennish woman impersonating
Princess Holly of Cinnabar.

SEBASTIAN

Of what CONCEIVABLE interest is
this to the Safir Dominion?

SAFIRI CAPTAIN

My orders were quite specific, sir.

Several Safiri archers ready their bows.

SEBASTIAN

I entreat upon you as an officer
and a gentleman to cede your
IMAGINED authority in this matter
to the Royal House of Cinnabar, who
will determine who is and is not a
member of their own household.

SAFIRI CAPTAIN

With all due respect, Sir, I
cannot.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

(quietly)

If we run for it, I wouldn't be
able to guarantee all of our
charges' safety.

Sebastian sighs heavily.

SEBASTIAN

Captain, should any harm come to
the princess in your custody, King
Farrel's response will be beyond
your imagining.

(to carriage occupants)

We are going to accompany these
soldiers to Safir until this entire
affair can be sorted properly.

SAFIRI CAPTAIN

If everyone would kindly dismount.

HOLLY

No, no, no, no. Wait!

Holly scribbles a note, tucks it inside a green pouch, and drops in her holly sprig. She guides her adoptive family out of the carriage. Thunder hops down to join the family.

HOLLY

This family just happened to be traveling the same way.

(to WARRICK)

I'm terribly sorry, but it looks like we won't be able to give you a ride to Cinnabar after all.

Treva covers the Little Brother's mouth before he can say anything. Holly hands Warrick the pouch.

HOLLY

Here is your payment back.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

Can't be helped, sir. We're just outside Glenwood, so best to go back and get a carriage there.

SEBASTIAN

You have no cause to detain them, Captain.

The Captain dismisses the family with a hand wave. The Red Knights dismount from their horses.

HULKING RED KNIGHT

Not right to strand you in the woods. Here, take these two horses and ride back into town. Just take good care, 'cause I'll be coming back for 'em.

Soldiers behind the group start to pick up caltrops so the horses can pass. Thunder follows behind.

SAFIRI CAPTAIN

Pick up ALL the caltrops from the front, back and sides.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

(quietly to SEBASTIAN)

Good thing we didn't run for it.

SAFIRI CAPTAIN

This way...

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - DAY

Linnaeus, Sylvia and Roland eat dinner with two diplomats - one from Uva, one from Aurentia - wearing white sashes. A clerk reports figures from a scroll.

HERALD (O.S.)

Your Majesty! An urgent message --

A servant opens the door, and a MESSENGER (18) dashes in barely avoiding the servant and clerk. Everyone stops eating except Linnaeus. The Messenger - out of breath and covered in mud - bows as mud puddles on the floor.

HERALD

-- from Bosky Village.

Roland starts at the mention of Holly's "home" town. Linnaeus motions for the Messenger to rise.

LINNAEUS

What is so urgent?

Messenger presents the note and holly sprig.

MESSENGER

(out of breath)

That Cinnabar diplomat carriage... was intercepted by... Safiri soldiers in the borderlands. Seems they were taken prisoner.

LINNAEUS

Thank you for bringing this to our attention in such haste.

(to servant)

See that this man is cared for.

(turns to table)

Roland...

Roland is no longer there.

Linnaeus looks out the window, sees Roland already riding hard out of the courtyard with his armor strapped to the back of the horse. Two other riders in green cloaks follow.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

Roland - now in his armor - rides quickly down a twisting forest road. The two cloaked riders hang back far enough to avoid detection.

INT. FORTRESS PRISON CELL - DAY

The morning light striking the blue-veined marble walls makes for an unusually cheery-looking cell in this Safiri fort. The Blond Bandit sits on a bench with her hands shackled.

Keys rattle and door opens O.S. The Red Knights and driver enter without their weapons or armor.

Blond Bandit yelps, leaps to her feet.

BLOND BANDIT

Blue cowards! Send Cinnabar scum to
do your dirty work!

Holly and Sebastian enter the cell, door closes behind them.

HOLLY

Hey, calm down. No one's going to
hurt anyone.

(to knights)

She's okay. I know her.

Blond Bandit and the Red Knights eye each other icily.

SEBASTIAN

My good sirs, I believe that
constitutes an order.

The knights and driver relax, but the bandit simply turns her attention to Holly.

BLOND BANDIT

Now you wear RED?!

HOLLY

A lot happened after you left.

BLOND BANDIT

You tell me later. Right now,
(holds up shackles)
get me out of this things. I have
plan to escape this place.

INT. FORTRESS PRISON CELL - DAY

The prisoners mull around and peek out windows.

BLOND BANDIT

Everyone is ready?

The Hulking Red Knight gives a brief thumbs-up, then slumps on the bench.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

(shouts)

Help! Warden! Someone's sick! I think we got some bad food!

Keys rattle in the door's lock. A grouchy WARDEN (58) pokes his head in the cell.

Hulking Knight moans and holds his belly.

WARDEN

Well, I'm not going to carry him.

Hulking Knight grabs the unsuspecting Warden, tosses the keys to his allies. Holly produces a strip of red cloth from somewhere within her dress and gags the Warden. The Red Knights use the Warden's belt to bind his hands.

All the prisoners rush from the cell. The door swings shut.

INT. FORTRESS PRISON CELL - DAY

Holly, Sebastian, Red Knights, driver and Blond Bandit sit in the cell again, tied up in chairs by a huge number of blue bedsheets and curtains. Blond Bandit smiles.

EXT. NEAR SAFIRI FORTRESS - NIGHT

Roland approaches the Safiri fort using what little cover is available from stray bushes, then crouches behind a fairly large bush. O.S. TWIG SNAPS. He turns around as a Safiri guard walks up to Roland's hiding place, bow drawn.

Someone strikes the guard in the helmet from behind with a rock. Guard falls, and Roland catches him to muffle the sound. INTO VIEW: Edith holding a grapefruit-sized rock, Dorinda right beside her.

Both curtsey. Roland shakes a look of shock from his face, signals them to hide next to him, then offers them a mace and a sheathed dagger from his pack.

ROLAND

(quietly)

Thank you... We need a plan to get in there. Waiting for the army would mean a siege and lots of people getting hurt on both sides.

EDITH

(quietly)

Definitely don't want THAT.

ROLAND

It's too bad you can't make us disappear like your partner in the talent show.

DORINDA

Well, part of selling that illusion, Your Highness, was that I imitated her voice.

EXT. NEAR SAFIRI FORTRESS - NIGHT

Three SAFIRI GUARDS (20s) sit around a campfire outside the fort, using a large bush as shelter from the wind. Roland, Dorinda, and Edith hide on the far side of it.

THIN SAFIRI GUARD

Autumn sure came fast this year, seems like last week it was scorching.

DORINDA

(to herself, imitates THIN SAFIRI GUARD's voice)

"Autumn sure came fast this year."

There is some movement inside one of the fort's high windows, but no one in the foreground notices.

CHUBBY SAFIRI GUARD

Last week it was raining.

THIN SAFIRI GUARD

You know what I mean.

In the background, the Blond Bandit emerges from the fort window and scales up the wall toward the battlements.

DORINDA

(to herself, imitates THIN SAFIRI GUARD's voice)

"You know what I mean."

Dorinda nods to Roland, who rolls a small rock toward the imitated guard. Dorinda makes some squeaking noises.

Meanwhile, in the background, the Cocky Red Knight emerges from the fort window and rappels down the wall using a makeshift rope of blue bedsheets.

THIN SAFIRI GUARD

(jumps to feet)

What is that, a rat?

Edith rustles the branches a bit. Thin Guard draws his sword, then pushes through the bush. Edith grabs the sword-hand. Roland overwhelms the guard silently, knocks him out.

CHUBBY SAFIRI GUARD
Hey, you okay back there?

DORINDA
(imitates THIS SAFIRI
GUARD's voice)
Just taking care of this rat. Might
take a while.

CHUBBY SAFIRI GUARD
If you had a call of nature, all
you had to do was say so.

DORINDA
(to herself, tries to
imitate CHUBBY SAFIRI
GUARD's voice)
"All you had to do was say so."

CHUBBY SAFIRI GUARD
Anyways, the peace won't last long.

In the background, Holly pokes her head out the fort window. She sees the Cocky Knight on the ground, Blond Bandit at the battlements, and no patrols in sight. She disappears inside. Sebastian emerges and carefully climbs down the rope.

DORINDA
(whispers to Roland)
I'm sorry, his voice is too deep.
We'll need a new plan.

In the background, Cocky Knight hides Sebastian in a bush. Mustachioed Knight looks out the window, positions the rope to blend in with the fort's blue trim as a patrol walks by.

CHUBBY SAFIRI GUARD
Princess Amity had a FIT when she
saw these bushes out here. Any
minute now she's gonna order us to
rip 'em all down.

ROLAND
(whispers)
So Princess Amity is behind all of
this, but why?

TALL SAFIRI GUARD
Oh, great.

In the background, the foot patrol passes, and Cocky Knight sends Sebastian out to a bush some distance from the fort. A guard on the roof notices the movement, looks over the battlements. Blond Bandit clocks him.

Holly checks for patrols, then the driver emerges and starts down the rope.

DORINDA
 (imitates THIN SAFIRI
 GUARD's voice)
 Why not take this one down now and
 impress her before she gets mad?

CHUBBY SAFIRI GUARD
 Hey, good thinking.

DORINDA
 (imitates THIN SAFIRI
 GUARD's voice)
 Come on over on this side.

Chubby Guard pushes through the bush and meets the same fate as the thin one. Roland checks both blue helmets, but each is too small for him. He motions toward the larger third guard.

In the background, the driver runs to where Sebastian is hiding. Holly emerges from the window, climbs down the rope.

DORINDA
 (imitates THIN SAFIRI
 GUARD's voice)
 Okay, this is taking too long. Can
 you come and help, too?

TALL SAFIRI GUARD
 Yeah, if she gets mad she'd
 probably make us clean the stables
 or something. Be right there.

Tall Guard meets the same fate as the other two. Roland slides the blue tunic over his armor, plops the blue helmet on his head, and hefts a blue shield. Edith hides Roland's green gear under the bush.

In the background, Holly reaches the ground. Mustachioed Knight checks for patrols, sees one. Cocky Knight hides Holly then himself in the bush.

ROLAND
 I'll pretend to arrest you Dorinda,
 which should get us all the way to
 the cells.

(MORE)

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Edith, you'll need to get the horses as close as possible without getting caught.

DORINDA

(gesturing)

Why can't I do the sneaking and Edith be the prisoner?

EDITH

Sequins.

Dorinda looks down at her glittery dress, drops her arms.

EDITH

There are three Glenwood strongholds about the same distance from here, and we have three horses. I think: split up with one rider with Holly --

DORINDA

It's "Her Highness."

EDITH

Whatever. We knew her before she was famous. One with the diplomat, and a third with Your Highness.

ROLAND

You know your maps well. The two with the princess and diplomat ride due south to Baron Alaric's castle.

In the background, Cocky Knight and Holly emerge, but have to hide again when a patrol comes from the opposite direction.

ROLAND

To keep the soldiers off your trail, I'll take a Red Knight and ride south-east as if we were making for Cinnabar. The others will escape on foot.

DORINDA

Sounds daring and all, but Your Highness does realize that he has a REALLY famous face?

EDITH

And that he doesn't look the least bit Safiri?

Holly dashes to where Sebastian and the driver hide.

ROLAND

No one questions that YOU'RE from Glenwood. They'll see the blue uniform, probably won't even notice the person wearing it.

Mustachioed Red Knight starts out the window, but Blond Bandit sees about a dozen guards exit the main gate. She waves him back inside, and he again camouflages the rope.

EDITH

They'll notice that you aren't from this unit.

ROLAND

I'll say I'm from a border patrol.

EDITH

Okay... if Your Highness is sure.
(whispers to DORINDA)
I hope I'm wrong.

Dorinda lightly wraps her wrists in a binding. Roland and Dorinda stand up and walk around the bush toward the fort. Edith remains hidden, furrows her brow in worry.

INTO VIEW: Amity walks toward them with the dozen guards. She wears her golden tiara and other customary jewelry.

AMITY

All of these bushes. Gone! Do I make myself --
(sees ROLAND and DORINDA)
ROLAND?!

Amity stands in shock for a moment, and gradually her eye twitch returns with a vengeance.

ROLAND

Princess Amity, Your Highness, I had no idea --

DORINDA

Aimee?

AMITY

(trembling with rage)
Why...? Why are you here?
(grabs a bow from one of the guards)
Are you trying to rescue that, that, that, that deranged IMPOSTER up there?

Roland drops his sword, raises his hands to shoulder level.

In the background, Holly stands from her hiding place.

ROLAND

She --

AMITY

(raises bow)

I don't believe this! You were in
on this sick Princess Holly joke
the whole time?

ROLAND

I don't --

AMITY

(aims bow at Roland)

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?!

Amity fires the bow at point-blank range. The arrow pierces the blue shield, and Roland's breastplate barely stops it. Roland yells more in disbelief than in pain.

Edith's GASP gives away her position, guards capture her.

In the background, Holly collapses to her knees.

Dorinda uses her false bindings as bandages on Roland.

ROLAND

I'm fine, just a scratch.

(knocks on breastplate)

This works.

In the background, Holly argues with Sebastian. She points at Roland then her chest where Roland was hit. She cuts off Sebastian's reply by dashing back toward the rope.

AMITY

What are you waiting for? Put them
in the cells.

In the background, Holly goes around the Cocky Knight, climbs the rope. Sebastian and the driver hurry back as well.

INT. FORTRESS PRISON CELL - NIGHT

The empty cell's marble walls that seemed so cheery during the day glow eerily in the moonlight. Light falls on the wooden floor from the cell door opening O.S.

Blond Bandit's head is visible for just a moment through the window, then whisks out of view. She gives up trying to remove the make-shift rope or replace the window bars.

Dorinda, Edith, and Roland - stripped of arms and armor - stumble into the cell. Amity storms into the cell.

AMITY
Where are they?!

She spots the missing window bars, pokes her head out the window, and looks down.

EXT. OUTSIDE CELL WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

Amity looks down, shakes the rope, and screams in rage. She disappears inside, then berates the guards.

AMITY (O.S.)
(yelling)
Who put LINENS in the cell? And no
one ever checks the masonry?

INTO VIEW: The escaped prisoners cling to the wall just above the window.

AMITY (O.S.)
Isn't this supposed to be a
FORTRESS?!

Someone pulls the rope back inside.

HULKING RED KNIGHT
(quietly)
Do you think we can all get up to
the top before more guards arrive
up there?

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT
(quietly)
No choice. Can't go down. They'll
have patrols out searching those
bushes any minute.

Amity's yelling grows more distant.

AMITY (O.S.)
You want to see a properly run
cell?! From the INSIDE?!

The Blond Bandit and Cocky Red Knight climb upwards, but the others struggle to move without losing their grip. Mortar crumbles under Sebastian's fingers.

HOLLY

I have something that can help.

Holly pulls several large pins from her hair, which swooshes dramatically Rapunzel-style... but only comes down to her lower back.

HOLLY

Use these to get a better grip.

Everyone uses the pins as pitons to climb the wall.

EXT. FORTRESS TOWER - NIGHT

Mustachioed Knight assists Sebastian through the battlements, joins the other escapees on the tower roof near a catapult.

A Safiri soldier emerges from a trap door, the escapees stay behind the catapult till the door closes. Hulking Knight jumps the soldier from behind, knocking him out O.S.

The group enter the trap door - Hulking Knight with a blue-trimmed sword, Cocky Knight with a blue-trimmed dagger, Mustachioed Knight with a blue helmet, and the driver with a blue shield.

INT. FORTRESS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Flickering torchlight gives this narrow marble hallway a claustrophobic feel.

Holly and the driver drag an unconscious Safiri soldier into a side room. All three Red Knights wield blue-trimmed swords, the driver a dagger and shield. Mustachioed Knight remains the only one wearing a helmet.

Safiri soldiers come upon their position from two directions. Hulking Knight heads one way, the other knights the other.

Cocky and Mustachioed Knights quickly dispatch the two soldiers at their end, drag them out of sight, and bring their weapons back.

Mustachioed Knight offers a sword to the driver and daggers to the women. Blond Bandit snatches the other sword.

Meanwhile, Hulking Knight takes on six soldiers single-handedly, knocking them into each other, using his sword to pin one against a wooden door. The other Red Knights rush to assist, but the Hulking Knight is already done.

He radiates calm under fire and brushes imagined dust off his clothes as the final soldier falls unconscious.

A spider crawls into view. The Hulking Knight yelps and jumps into the Mustachioed Knight's arms.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT
Okay, big fella.

INT. OUTSIDE PRISON CELL - NIGHT

The Warden and two guards gamble with dice at a table near the cell. The non-blond guard laughs, then rakes in coins.

The Red Knights and driver get the jump on the guards, forcing them away from the cell at swordpoint while motioning for them to stay silent.

Holly and Blond Bandit - blades drawn - block their exit. The Warden dives for a warning bell. Blond Bandit slices the pull-cord with her sword and cups her hand over his mouth.

BLOND BANDIT
Nice to see you again, yes?

Sebastian steps into view. O.S. THUD from the cell.

DORINDA (O.S.)
Help! Roland's bleeding again!

Mustachioed Knight snatches the Warden's keys, flings the door open, and gets clocked by Roland. Roland leaps out expecting more guards, then realizes who is actually there.

ROLAND
Oh, wow. Sorry, Sir Knight, all I saw was the blue helmet.

Dorinda and Edith step out of the cell. Mustachioed Knight takes off the Safiri helmet, shakes his head, inspects the bent nose guard, then puts the helmet on the table.

EDITH
You came back to rescue us? We were supposed to be rescuing you.

Cocky Knight tosses Roland a sword, and the driver hands blue-trimmed daggers to Dorinda and Edith. Red Knights guide the bound-and-gagged guards into the cell, then close the door.

ROLAND
(to BLOND BANDIT)
You were in the contest, right?
(MORE)

ROLAND (CONT'D)

You could use one of these uniforms and scout out the area without attracting any attention.

BLOND BANDIT

With all due respect, allow me to say the many, many problems with your plan. THIS is boy clothes; I am not boy. Will not fit.

Roland concedes the point with a half-grin, half shrug.

BLOND BANDIT

ALSO, soldiers here know each other; I am not soldier here.

Edith holds an upturned palm toward the Blond Bandit in a "that's what I said" gesture.

BLOND BANDIT

ALSO, bandits do not wear Colors.

Roland can't get a word in edge-wise.

BLOND BANDIT

ALSO, I already know way out of this place. ALSO, bandits do not wear Colors.

HOLLY

You already said that one.

BLOND BANDIT

Is important. Making sure bandit wearing red hear me.

Holly opens her mouth, but can't figure out what to say.

INT. FORTRESS KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roland leads the group sneaking single-file through the fortress's darkened kitchen. Moonlight casts bizarre shadows from the huge array of knives and pans hanging here.

The floor CREAKS under Cocky Knight's foot. Roland turns.

ROLAND

(whispers)

Shhh. We need absolute silence.

Roland turns back around and BASHES his head into a pan. Everyone cringes. The pan falls into a set of hanging pots and pans, creates a HUGE RACKET. Everyone cringes again.

One of the pots comes loose, knocks over a partially-filled barrel, and sets it in motion toward a china cabinet. Roland tackles the barrel, but a multitude of frogs escape from it.

COCKY RED KNIGHT
Absolute silence. Got it.

Hulking Red Knight takes the lead position. The other Red Knights right the barrel. Dorinda, Edith, Holly and Roland step gingerly to avoid the ribbiting frogs.

Distant shouts - the alarm has been raised.

INT. FORTRESS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Hulking Knight rushes the group down a torch-lit hall but pauses at a fork. Left path has the sounds and shadows of many onrushing soldiers, right path seems quiet. FOCUS on a spider in a corner of the right path.

Hulking Knight takes a deep breath, chooses the left path.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT
Escape is not going to be possible,
but if Prince Roland found us --

The escapees fight a squad of Safiri soldiers mid-hallway.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT
-- then Glenwood is certain to send
help. Priority must be --

Mustachioed Knight dodges a lunge and disarms his opponent. Safiri soldiers fall unconscious or retreat wounded, but serious blows always land off-screen.

ROLAND
To keep them from moving us to
another fort.

No Safiri soldiers remain for the moment. Distant sound of the gate opening.

SAFIRI HERALD (O.S.)
Sir Douglas Sunil, Knight of the
Cobalt Order, requests permission
to enter!

HULKING RED KNIGHT
We need to move. Now.

ROLAND
I've got an idea.

INT. STORE ROOM - NIGHT

A dusty store room full of books and scrolls recently disturbed by the addition of the escapees' possessions. Roland and the Red Knights put on their armor, Blond Bandit reclaims her long knife, Edith and the driver sort out which sword is whose.

BLOND BANDIT

(to ROLAND)

This plan better.

EDITH

(holds up two swords)

Hey, which of these is yours?

COCKY RED KNIGHT

The one with the little pitchfork emblem on the blade.

(to ROLAND)

You sure you want to do your part alone?

ROLAND

That's the only way it'll work.

INT. FORTRESS STAIRWELL - NIGHT

The band of escapees arrive at a door on a landing in a set of marble stairs. Mustachioed Red Knight looks outside through a loophole in the wall.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

Good news: Sir Douglas came alone.

SEBASTIAN

(to ROLAND)

A diplomat cannot act against his hosts, but ...

Sebastian unfastens his white sash, puts it in a belt pouch.

SEBASTIAN

I will keep the fort commander occupied, which should disrupt any organized response to your activities.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

Great, but don't put yourself in danger on our account.

Sebastian smiles, points to his ear then his heart.

Mustachioed Knight opens the door and bows. Holly, Dorinda, and Edith go through and turn left, Sebastian goes through and turns right. Meanwhile Red Knights, driver, and Blond Bandit rush downstairs, and Roland rushes upstairs.

SEBASTIAN (O.S.)
Who is in charge here?

INT. FORTRESS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Roland walks down an empty torch-lit hallway lined with loopholes, each with a niche for an archer. Roland opens a small door in the first niche, reveals dozens of arrows.

ROLAND
Can't have that.

Roland closes the door, bends the handle, tests it cannot be opened, and moves to the next niche.

Roland hears guards approach. He ducks into the niche, leaps at two guards as they pass. O.S. THUD, THUD.

Roland returns, bends the handle, piles knocked-out soldiers in the niche, then moves on to the next one.

INT. FORTRESS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Roland drags an unconscious soldier into a side room and closes the door. O.S. FOOTSTEPS of many soldiers approaching. Roland opens the door to duck into the side room, but pauses upon hearing a familiar voice.

DOUGLAS (O.S.)
Go over every inch of this fortress
top to bottom.

Roland closes the door and remains in the hall. Douglas - wearing blue-trimmed armor - rounds the corner into view.

DOUGLAS
Check every door, make sure that no
one --

Douglas locks eyes with Roland. Fifteen Safiri soldiers round the corner.

DOUGLAS
-- is --

Roland stands in the center of the hallway, arms crossed.

DOUGLAS

-- hiding.

Roland points at himself and Douglas.

ROLAND

You and I have a score to settle.

Douglas breaks into a devilish grin.

DOUGLAS

(to soldiers)

Continue the search. It appears
that His Highness wishes to be
humiliated again.

The soldiers file past Roland - forgetting to check the door
next to him.

ROLAND

Have you ever wondered why no royal
has EVER won the Grand Tournament?

DOUGLAS

Maybe all the never-doing-a-day's-
work-in-your-life?

ROLAND

(counting on his fingers)

Prince Blaine has to be the fastest
young man I ever met. Princess
Galena can hit even the tiniest
weak spot. Every. Time.

Roland winces with some remembered pain.

ROLAND

Prince Ethan is, well, made of iron
or something. Prince --

DOUGLAS

What's your point?

ROLAND

The Tournament is for you knights.
Any royal there isn't trying to
win. I wasn't even supposed to be
in the finals, except Sir Ajani
slipped and fell in our match.

DOUGLAS

(enraged)

Are you claiming I didn't deserve
the title?

Roland waves reassuringly.

ROLAND

I saw you fight Sir Ajani last
year. Title's in the right hands.
What I'm saying is...
(thumb to own chest)
You didn't beat the real ME.

Douglas draws his sword.

DOUGLAS

We'll see about that!

Roland grins, then draws his sword.

INT. FORTRESS KITCHEN - NIGHT

Holly walks gingerly across the kitchen floor near the door to the great hall. She avoids the fallen pots, but one false step and the floor CREAKS.

SAFIRI SERGEANT (O.S.)

What was that?

Holly hides behind a stack of firewood.

AMITY (O.S.)

I didn't hear anything.

Holly perks up at Amity's voice, looks slyly toward the door, and pushes over the entire wood pile. Safiri soldiers burst into the kitchen, and Holly passes them into the great hall.

INT. FORTRESS GREAT HALL - CONTINUOUS

The fort's large central room serves as a dining area with many plain wooden tables and chairs. Amity barks orders at a couple squads of guards, but stops mid-syllable when Holly enters. Amity's eye twitches.

HOLLY

Hi, Aimee Idina from Azure City.
I'm Holly from Bosky Village. I
heard you were looking for me?

Amity pulls her dagger half-way from its sheath, lets it fall back in, and grabs a soldier's mace instead. Amity advances on Holly.

AMITY

YOU!

The soldiers back away. Holly gulps, but stands her ground.

INT. FORTRESS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Roland and Douglas sword-fight skillfully, using the occasional torch or tapestry as an improvised weapon. Both shields are battered, but neither fighter is injured. They happen upon a double door labeled "Armory."

ROLAND

Okay, this is getting boring.

Roland opens the doors, maneuvers the fight into that room.

INT. FORTRESS ARMORY - CONTINUOUS

A windowless room filled with rack after rack of various weapons. Douglas's strike causes Roland to fall against a rack which topples over, starting a domino effect. Roland's sword lays within easy reach, but instead he grabs a whip.

Roland entangles Douglas's sword, causes both weapons to drop. Douglas drops his bent shield, grabs a halberd, and strikes Roland's shield. Roland grabs a small hand-axe, tucks it in his belt, then grabs a war hammer.

ROLAND

This is more like it.

Roland breaks the halberd's staff with his hammer, but Douglas uses the broken handle to trip Roland, disarming him. Roland grabs a mace. Douglas knocks this away using a quarterstaff.

DOUGLAS

I see your knighthood isn't merely honorary.

The pair progress through a series of pole-arm weapons - spear, glaive, trident, fauchard, guisarme, spetum, ranseur - as Roland continues to knock over and break things.

ROLAND

(to himself)

Okay, can't do much more damage to THIS room.

Roland grabs a bec-de-corbin on his way back to his sword and shield, then looks at the weapon for a moment.

ROLAND

A bec-de-corbin. Never seen one of
THESE before outside of a book.

Roland takes a wild swing with the pole-arm's spike and disarms Douglas. Roland makes a diving roll, retrieves his sword and shield, and stands up in the hallway. Douglas picks up his sword and shield, then follows Roland.

INT. FORTRESS GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Amity has a white-knuckle grip on her mace as she walks menacingly toward Holly.

HOLLY

I see you heard what I said about
hammers and daggers.

Amity swings, breaks a chair, and stops a pace from Holly.

AMITY

(hysterical)

Farrell's little girl couldn't have
a fever or something. No! It had to
be a BATTLE! Turned it into a scary
bedtime story to keep royals from
going outside the walls!

HOLLY

What story? Sorry, stuff like that
takes its time getting to Bosky
Village. And sometimes it forgets
to come at all.

Amity takes a wild backhand swing at Holly, who dodges easily at this range. Holly grabs her dagger, looks at all the soldiers behind Amity, then leaves her dagger sheathed.

AMITY

You're just trying to drive me
crazy so I can't win the contest!

HOLLY

Why would you even enter? You're
ALREADY a princess.

AMITY

Any time I ever wanted to do
ANYTHING, all I'd ever hear about
is poor Princess Holly. A stupid
story ruins my life and you pretend
to be her?!

Amity swings again, less wild but still missing badly.

HOLLY

It won't work until you say, "For
the Honor of Grays--"

Amity's next backhand swing connects with Holly's right upper arm at a particularly puffy part of the dress. Holly staggers to one knee and yelps in pain.

Holly's eyes dart from her dagger, to the soldiers, to Amity.

AMITY

If you're going to be the Princess
Holly from the story, you could at
least ACTUALLY be dead.

Holly pushes herself back to standing with her left arm.

HOLLY

Ruined your life? You have a life
of luxury! What, next you're going
to complain there was a pea under
your bed?

Amity swings again, misses, and screams in frustration.

Holly gets a table between herself and Amity. They spend a moment trading feints to see which side Amity will take.

EXT. FORTRESS TOWER - NIGHT

Roland trades sword blows with Douglas next to a catapult. Roland knocks Douglas into the pile of ammunition, uses the hand-axe in his shield hand to cut one of the catapult's important ropes.

Douglas regains his feet, drives Roland backward down the battlement walkway toward the next tower.

DOUGLAS

What's the matter? Getting tired?

INT. FORTRESS GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Amity and Holly still face off across a table.

AMITY

Who would play such a cruel joke?!
Did you even know I was there, or
just have a sick sense of humor?

HOLLY

Come on, Princess, why not use your
Lasso of Truth on me? See if I
really am who I say I am.

Amity swings from across the table, and the mace gets stuck in the wood. She struggles to free it as Roland launches from a second-floor balcony and grabs a chandelier like a trapeze. Douglas leaps to grab the rope supporting that chandelier.

HOLLY

You keep making THAT face and
they'll put you away in the highest
room of the tallest tower.

Amity grows more frustrated, grunts trying to free the mace. Holly taps her chin, has an "a-ha" moment.

HOLLY

Given my new job, I guess I should
ask you about all the "hardships"
of being a princess. You know, like
always having to watch out for old
hags offering poisoned apples.

Amity's pulls grow more frantic, but Holly looks up at the antics now off-screen. O.S. SWORDS CLASHING. She looks right, then in an arc to her left, then swiftly to the right again.

ROLAND (O.S.)

Ha HA!

A fragment of Douglas's blue cape flutters into view and lands on the floor. Holly follows their O.S. movements until the men exit through a different balcony.

DOUGLAS (O.S.)

(distant)

Take THAT!

Amity finally frees her weapon, stumbles back a step.

HOLLY

So, have you ever been kidnapped by
a dragon?

AMITY

Grrrrr!

Amity hits the table again, which collapses it. She advances carefully to avoid stepping on jagged bits of wood with her high heels. Holly starts to pick up a chair, eyes the soldiers again, and settles for getting behind the chair.

HOLLY

Gotta be careful, wouldn't want to
prick your finger on a spinning
wheel!

AMITY

SHUT UP!

Amity winds up for a two-handed swing of her mace. Holly steps into the swing, grabs the mace's shaft with her left hand, and gets up in Amity's face.

HOLLY

If you want to marry a prince so
badly, GO KISS A FROG!

Amity's mouth twitches, then finally breaks into a smile. A laugh saps her adrenalin, and she lets the mace drop into Holly's grip.

Amity falls to her knees, now sobbing.

AMITY

What have I done?

After a moment's hesitation, Holly tosses the mace away, kneels down with Amity, and hugs her. The soldiers hang back.

HOLLY

I think the contest was a lot more
stress than you bargained for.

With two fingers, Holly surreptitiously lifts Amity's dagger from its sheath and tosses it near the mace.

AMITY

(sobbing)

But Roland can't marry a commoner
when there are nobles in waiting.
He would ruin --

Holly pats the back of Amity's head.

HOLLY

Hush now.

AMITY

And a stupid fairy tale sent me all
(shakes hands on either
side of head)
hysterical.
(wiping tears)
That's no way for a royal to act.

HOLLY
 (looks at soldiers)
 Well, good thing that NO ONE was
 here to see that.

The soldiers back out the door as quietly as they can.

AMITY
 (regains composure)
 Wait, I hit your arm. Are you
 bleeding?

HOLLY
 (looks at the red sleeve)
 Who can tell in this dress? Don't
 worry, I can move all of my --
 (flexes right hand)
 I can move most of my fingers.
 Anyway, I have, like, this whole
 other arm I can use.

AMITY
 I'm so sorry.

Dorinda bursts into the room, chased by a separate group of
 several soldiers. She runs atop a long table to get away.

HOLLY
 It's okay. And Roland won't be
 marrying a commoner. See, he came
 to rescue me, and I came back to
 rescue him. So...
 (smiles)
 I'm keeping him. And it turns out
 I'm not a commoner.

AMITY
 Oh! Everything is fine now.

Edith rushes in, chased by a third group. She stops herself
 with the door handle, the soldiers skid into the tables.

DORINDA
 (stops)
 What? Did I miss something?

The original group of soldiers re-enter the hall.

HOLLY
 Everything is fine now.

EDITH
 How? I mean, great news. Way to go.
 (bellows out door)

(MORE)

EDITH (CONT'D)
 Roland, you can stop playing!
 Everything is fine now!

INT. FORTRESS DRAWBRIDGE ROOM - NIGHT

Roland and Douglas trade blows. Roland looks for some way to foul the machinery here, then both hear Edith's call.

DOUGLAS
 What is THAT supposed to mean?

ROLAND
 It means I was making our fight
 last as long as possible. If I went
 right at you, you'd have won.

Roland holds up a hand and sheathes his sword.

ROLAND
 Walk with me; let's see what the
 princesses are up to.

Douglas warily sheathes his sword. They head down stairs.

DOUGLAS
 What happened?

INSERT: FLASHBACK MONTAGE

- Driver and Blond Bandit enter an unlit basement stable full of the fort's sleeping horses. She quietly unhitches each gate while he takes two sacks of nails. They step out, Blond Bandit whistles, and the horses bolt.

ROLAND (V.O.)
 You, Sir Douglas, were outnumbered.

- Dorinda flashes a piece of Holly's red dress around a corner to be seen by Safiri soldiers, leads them on a chase, and hides behind a blue tapestry to avoid them. Edith flashes another red piece, drawing the soldiers away.

ROLAND (V.O.)
 We knew we couldn't escape, so we
 turned to disrupting the fort.

- Sebastian berates the fort commander in the map room, and "accidentally" knocks a bottle of ink over onto papers.

ROLAND (V.O.)
 Keeping anyone who could organize
 the soldiers occupied.

- Holly taunts Amity into embedding her mace in a table, while Roland and Douglas swing overhead.

ROLAND (V.O.)

While our friends ruined the fort's ability to withstand a siege.

- The Red Knights roll barrels into a large grain storage room and pour water onto the pile. The driver enters, pours his nails onto the grain, mixes them in with a shovel.

RETURN TO SCENE

Roland and Douglas walk down a long torch-lit hallway.

ROLAND

By the way, that thing I said about royals in the Grand Tournament?

DOUGLAS

Yes?

ROLAND

(sweeping gesture)

COMPLETELY untrue. Our parents send us there to get our butts kicked and learn some humility.

Douglas grins.

INT. FORTRESS GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Roland and Douglas walk up to the great hall, back to sporting rivals rather than mortal enemies. Amity sits in one of the chairs. Holly stands nearby cradling her right arm.

DOUGLAS

(to ROLAND)

And that is a wicked backhand you have there, you should work on it.

Roland stops Douglas, then both bow upon entering.

ROLAND

Your Highness.

Amity nods weakly. Both men approach.

HOLLY

I don't understand why you entered the contest at all. Just to prove you were better than everyone else?

ROLAND

I was a bit unclear on that myself.

Dorinda and Edith return with the other escapees. They bow or curtsy, and Amity motions for them to rise.

AMITY

I didn't think Roland should marry a commoner, and... I wanted to show I could get the guy that Sarah couldn't.

Roland silently mouths "wow."

AMITY

But of course things never go exactly to plan.

LINNAEUS (V.O.)

There is simply too much at stake. We cannot leave anything to chance.

Holly snaps Amity out of her annoyed recollection.

HOLLY

Then you should have been happy I was pulled out of the contest.

AMITY

After a couple weeks of living with Princess Holly's ghost, I might have been a LITTLE on edge.

Holly shoots Roland a confused look.

ROLAND

It's kind of a famous story.

Blond Bandit nods.

HOLLY

But I never --

EDITH

Bosky Village, we know.

Holly shoots Edith a brief grumpy look.

SEBASTIAN

Enlightening, but we should be getting Her Highness back to Cinnabar as soon as possible.

AMITY

Oh, of course! Sergeant, see that they have horses.

Amity remains seated while the others file out.

BLOND BANDIT (O.S.)

I always say green is wrong on you.

INTO VIEW: A frog hops next to Amity.

AMITY

It's not happening.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Holly, Roland, Sebastian, Red Knights and driver ride horses up a hill, still wearing the damaged outfits they had at the fort, though Sebastian has replaced his white sash. Holly's right arm rests in a sling with her pinky permanently curled.

Roland holds up a handful of green tatters.

ROLAND

...by the way, do any of you know someone who could mend a very expensive cape?

HOLLY

No, but I could fix your shield if you'd like.

Roland pulls out a badly mangled shield, hands it to Holly.

ROLAND

Good luck with that.

Holly inspects the shield as if seriously intending to fix it, notices the Red Knights' quizzical gaze.

HOLLY

Well, I don't know what else I'm supposed to do right now. I don't FEEL like a princess.

The drums of the background music gradually grow louder.

ROLAND

You think the Red Knights do this kind of thing for just anyone?

HOLLY

Oh please, you knight-types would rescue a squirrel if you knew it was in trouble.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

Just be yourself, that'll make a great first impression. I mean, as far as we know, no one in Cinnabar even knows you were found.

The group crests the hill. The drums turn out to be the war drums for a FIFTY-THOUSAND-STRONG ARMY of Cinnabar troops heading toward them - or more precisely, toward Safir.

A mounted Red Knight leads each brigade of infantry. Prince Bernard (now 21) leads the cavalry regiment at the head of the column. King Farrel (now 43) rides at the very front of the army with a color guard of additional Red Knights.

Holly's mouth drops open. A tear rolls down her cheek.

HOLLY

(voice breaking)

Do you people have any idea how many lives you saved?

ROLAND

We should probably tell your father that we have his squirrel.

Mustachioed Red Knight waves his shield as a signal to the army. The king raises his arm, and the drummers sound a call to halt. Drum portion of the background music ceases.

Holly's group charges ahead and dismounts before the king. Farrel does not wait for them to finish bowing before he dismounts and embraces Holly.

INT. CINNABAR GREAT HALL - DAY

Holly and Roland stand facing each other in Cinnabar's great hall, Holly in an overly elaborate pure-white bridal gown, Roland in his green military uniform. POV from the altar out across the guests.

Most of the groom's side dress in green, obviously, while some of Queen Sylvia's relatives from Aurentia wear yellow.

Most on the bride's side dress in red, of course, with three important exceptions in green: Holly's adoptive mother, father and Little Brother.

Distinguished guests from Safir, Silverplains and Uva sit evenly divided between the sides.

FARREL
(whispers to ROSE)
See? She was wed by twenty, just
like I said.

Queen Rose jokingly elbows King Farrel.

Roland places a woven red-and-green necklace around Holly's neck, then they kiss. "BRIDAL MARCH" begins.

As Holly leans forward into the kiss, INTO VIEW: the Miss Gossamer doll sits next to the Cinnabar royal family, where Holly imagines her Governess would have been sitting.

The couple turn toward the guests. FAVOR: in the rear of the great hall, Holly's and Roland's dogs - Thunder and Misty - sit on a large cushion with a litter of puppies.

EXT. COURTYARD BALCONY - DAY

O.S. BELLS RINGING. Smiling newlyweds Roland and Holly walk to the balcony railing hand-in-hand. O.S. CHEERS. They raise their clasped hands. O.S. CHEERS. Holly holds up her bouquet. O.S. LOUDER CHEERS.

INTO VIEW: All of the original contestants - from a Safiri princess to a couple Bandits and a thousand in between - wait in the courtyard below for the bouquet toss.

Holly turns around and throws the bouquet behind her. CLOSING CREDITS roll as the prize bounces from maiden's hand to maiden's hand in a fierce but friendly competition.

FADE OUT.