

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.

FAVOR a grand castle as the OPENING THEME continues.

INT. PRINCESS'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Spacious royal bedroom dominated by a four-post bed with red linens. A stern GOVERNESS (62), silver hair pulled into a tight bun under a finely embroidered kerchief, approaches the bed and strikes a triangle to wake the princess.

PRINCESS HOLLY VERMILLION (4) emerges from the sheets, pushes long brown hair out of her eyes, blinks, and lets out a sigh. Another day in her gilded cage.

INT. PRINCESS'S BEDROOM - DAY

Princess Holly stands in her fancy red pajamas while a servant systematically combs her hair. The Governess has Holly reciting a list of names during this time.

HOLLY
Glenwood, Uva, Silverplains, Safir,
Aurentia, and our kingdom Cinnabar.

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - DAY

A fully dressed Holly, with a sprig of fresh holly in a bit of her hair not covered by a kerchief, sits at a long dining table for breakfast. The Governess directs every movement, turning the meal into a lesson on manners and etiquette.

The chef brings a plate with a pair of eggs and strips of bacon shaped into a smiley face. Holly smiles, Governess stares daggers at the chef, and Holly's smile melts away.

INT. CASTLE ROOM - DAY

Holly practices the opening theme on a flute under the watchful tutelage of her INSTRUCTOR (45), a balding man in formal attire who radiates expertise and control.

Holly looks longingly out the window at playing children.

EXT. CASTLE COURTYARD - DAY

Holly stands on a stool, brushes her pony's mane under the late morning sun. She watches with envy while her older brother PRINCE BERNARD VERMILLION (6) gets to ride his pony as a trainer walks beside him.

Holly looks through the open gate to a group of children laughing and playing along the cobblestone street. She smiles at them, but then notices the Governess's gaze. Holly sighs and loses her smile as she returns to her task.

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - DAY

Holly and Governess sit at the long dining table for lunch.

The chef brings a covered plate. Governess glares at the chef, who puts that plate back on the cart, places a second covered plate before Holly, and lifts the cover to reveal a perfectly respectable and boring bowl of chili.

INT. PRINCESS'S BEDROOM - DAY

Servants change Holly into an even fancier red dress. The Governess has Holly reciting the alphabet during this time.

HOLLY
... H, I, J, K, LMNOP, ...

INT. CASTLE HALLWAY - DAY

Governess and Instructor lead Holly down a vaulted hallway lined with red tapestries. A servant behind them carries Holly's flute on a red pillow. The Instructor looks around uncomfortably, gives the flute a last-minute inspection.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

Opening theme simplifies to Holly's flute solo for her parents KING FARREL VERMILLION (28), QUEEN ROSE VERMILLION (25) and her older brother Bernard, all of whom sit stoically upon thrones under an intricately decorated vaulted ceiling. A fourth throne - presumably Holly's - sits empty.

Governess stands next to a diplomat, SEBASTIAN ALMANDINE (37), his eyes closed to better experience the music, and a handful of other courtesans as the setting sun streams through stained glass windows. Even the colorfully dressed COURT FOOL (28) stands in respectful silence.

Holly finishes her solo to a round of APPLAUSE. She curtsies while her now extremely nervous Instructor bows. Farrel motions for them to rise.

INSTRUCTOR

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?

INSTRUCTOR

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

FARREL

We will summon him immediately.

INSTRUCTOR

Begging your pardon, Sire, but Bansi is quite advanced in age and cannot travel. Glenwood neighbors our lands, but if the princess is to remain here --

FARREL

No. This Bansi is the best, and our daughter shall have the best. 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 Instructor 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 prevents the lanterns' light from brightening the path.

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.
 (sigh)

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 her glare, but then the Governess suddenly pulls a 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 fighting Bandits. 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 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 - CONTINUOUS

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 her off her feet. Desperate grabs at branches and rocks hold her momentarily, but the swelling stream wins each time.

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 shutters on the henhouse and runs toward the mud-covered girl. Holly tries to stand but collapses.

Warrick's wife TREVA (19) dashes out of the wooden farmhouse to throw a green cloak over Holly, which soaks through instantly. They carry the girl 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
Tрева, 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 LOCAL TEEN (13), outfitted with a pitchfork and red vest, guides the Mustachioed and another Red Knight through the gloomy forest under steady rain.

LOCAL 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.

(MORE)

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT (CONT'D)

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.

TREVA

(wiping a tear)
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

We'll just 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. She follows Treva to the farmhouse, slowly carrying a tiny basket of eggs.

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

- Holly (9) practices on a simple flute as Treva plays a small wooden harp.

- 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 coulter 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

(haltingly)

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

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 (25), 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 the horse.

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.

HOLLY

Y--

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 turns to Holly.

ROLAND

Huh. Anyway, my friend here
(pats bear)
was a bit rough with my shield. Is there a blacksmith about, 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!

(MORE)

HOLLY (CONT'D)

(takes shield from Roland)
Your Highness has important
business with the mayor: there's a
bounty on that old bear you know.

Little Brother swings his sword as if fighting the bear.

Misty shows that she's interested in Thunder, they head O.S.

HOLLY

Your Highness's shield will be at
Warrick's farm and ready for you
here tomorrow morning.
(puts it in wheelbarrow)
You'd better see the mayor before
your horse gets too tired to carry
that big... strong... bear.

Little Brother staggers from an imaginary blow to his
imaginary shield, then thrusts to kill the imaginary bear.

ROLAND

But--

HOLLY

The mayor is right down the street.
Your Highness should hurry and not
worry at all about his shield.

Holly curtsies and pulls her Little Brother into a bow.

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.

ROLAND

Thank you, Miss Holly. I think I
will call on your mayor now.

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 all of a
sudden?

INT. BARN - DAY

Holly - sweaty and dirty - holds Roland's red-hot shield with tongs and lowers it into water. The steam clears, and the shield is again the correct general shape.

Holly adjusts her bun, unrolls a tool pouch. She pulls out a small hammer and chisel then strikes the crest.

EXT. GLENWOOD VILLAGE - DAY

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

ROLAND
(tongue-tied)
Hi...

Holly picks up the gleaming shield.

ROLAND
Yes, my shield. Thank you.

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

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

HOLLY
My father, Your Highness.

Roland looks back and forth between the shield and Holly's hands - admiring each for different reasons.

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

HOLLY
Oh, Your Highness, I could never
accept --

Roland is prepared for this reaction. 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.
(MORE)

ROLAND (CONT'D)

It's made for cuts and bruises, but
soothes burns too.

Holly 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 next to the horse. 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)
though it's not an appointment I'm
looking forward to.

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 SILVERPLAINS PRINCESS GALENA BISTRE (23), lissome but humorless, 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 sits in the same position. Now the guest is 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

(angst-fueled monotone)

I only came here because my parents made me.

Roland sighs.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roland sits in the same position. Now SAFIR PRINCESS SARAH GLAUCOUS (25), tall woman with long blond hair in a multi-toned blue dress and golden tiara, sits in the guest chair. She smiles brightly, but looks past Roland as she speaks.

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.

FAVOR: Intricately carved wooden case behind Roland with 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 as the
 Herald announces another name each evening.

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

The queen, whose green dress has yellow details to acknowledge that she was born Aurentian - though she happens to be half Glennish by blood - barely touches her food.

The servants are all on edge.

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
could ever be a worthy queen for
Glenwood.

LINNAEUS
You will be wed. 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.
(stands)
What if I wed
(gestures grandly)
someone that the people already
knew and loved and cheered for?

LINNAEUS

(looks at Roland)
And who is this famous young woman
of whom we are completely unaware?

ROLAND

(excitedly)
Oh, I have no idea yet.

Linnaeus goes back to looking straight ahead. Roland's arms drop to his sides.

LINNAEUS

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

ROLAND

(resumes gesturing)
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 lowers his gaze in disappointment.

LINNAEUS

You want us to pick the fairest
maiden in the land from a courtyard
full of commoners?

Roland considers this alternate plan for just a moment.

ROLAND

That would be hard, wouldn't it?
But no, I was thinking more a
contest of who would be the best at
being a princess.

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! We set up the rules, and
by the time someone wins she will
have the whole kingdom on her side.

Linnaeus ponders some more.

SYLVIA

We will think about it.

INT. SAFIR SUMMER PALACE LIBRARY - DAY

King Linnaeus stands beside a large table covered in maps,
converses with the neighboring Safir Dominion's KING DILLAN
GLAUCOUS (55), a wealthy and physically imposing man sporting
the fair complexion and blue attire common in Safir.

Off to the side of this room of blue-veined marble stand
Glenwood's BARON RUSSEL ALARIC (38) and a Safiri baron. Each
wears his finest formal attire, glares at and tries to out-
posture the other.

LINNAEUS

Perhaps we misheard Your Majesty's
messenger.

DILLAN

No. Our baron has a legitimate
claim. Not one that WE personally
would trouble with, but legitimate.

LINNAEUS

First our son and now this.
Preposterous ideas appear to be in
season. We appreciate that you want
to support your baron, but --

The four competing alpha males hear a confident young woman's
voice carry from the next room. Dillan's daughter PRINCESS
AMITY GLAUCOUS (20) overtakes the conversation even through a
closed metal door and thick marble walls.

AMITY (O.S.)

Bring me a PROPERLY weighted weapon
and we will continue.

LINNAEUS

Who --

DILLAN

Our younger daughter, Princess
Amity.

LINNAEUS

Do you want to go --

DILLAN

She has our confidence.

AMITY (O.S.)

Finally!

LINNAEUS

Would Your Majesty pardon us for a
moment?

DILLAN

(resigned)
By all means.

Linnaeus walks to the door, addresses the barons in passing.

LINNAEUS

You, sir, will agree to sell any
apples that happen to fall from
your trees onto the Glenwood side
of the border. You, Baron Russel,
will agree to pay a reasonable
price for them.

INT. SUMMER PALACE LOGGIA - CONTINUOUS

Linnaeus emerges onto a balcony extending the width of the
marble building.

The angry blond and blue-eyed princess - wearing a dark blue formal dress and golden tiara - holds a longbow. Several blue-uniformed palace guards stand with her while others stand guard at intervals along the railing.

She points the bow straight up, nocks an arrow.

AMITY

If I can put an arrow in those trees, then we must be in bow range where we stand. Does that sound "perfectly safe" to you?

Amity draws the bow as she lowers it to 45 degrees, aiming for a long arc to the distant trees.

LINNAEUS

We assure Your Highness that Glenwood will not be going to war over a few apples.

The nearby guards bow. Amity maintains her position.

AMITY

Your Majesty, that is most reassuring. But trees can also hide bandits and assassins.

Linnaeus reaches the railing, takes in the view.

LINNAEUS

Your Highness has a good eye; the clearing IS a bit short. But
(puts his hand on the bow)
we don't want anyone to get hurt.

Amity lowers the bow, removes the arrow.

AMITY

Of course, Your Majesty.
(to guards)
But I will be returning in a few days, and when I do the clearing had BETTER be further out than where my arrow falls.
(pushes the bow and arrow to the nearest guard)
Do I make myself clear?

PALACE GUARDS

Yes, Your Highness!

The guards hurry away. Linnaeus still looks at the view.

LINNAEUS

We are certain there is an interesting tale behind why a princess has studied the longbow.

AMITY

There was this archery tournament, and afterward Sarah and I took turns with a bow. I was ten and she was fifteen, so she won.

LINNAEUS

And defeat became inspiration. We are impressed, but you really should have stood with your feet further apart.

AMITY

(smirks)

It's the dress. I'll wear something appropriate next week.

LINNAEUS

We have business to attend with your father. May we call on Your Highness an hour after dinner?

AMITY

Of course, Your Majesty.

Linnaeus faces Amity, nods, and walks back to the library.

EXT. SUMMER PALACE ROOFTOP TERRACE - NIGHT

Linnaeus and Amity sit under the stars. A servant offers them a plate of sliced apples.

LINNAEUS

No, thank you. What we would really appreciate is some privacy.

Amity motions toward the stairs with her blue eyes. The servant bows, backs away. Linnaeus looks at the palace guards stationed at the corner towers.

AMITY

You too. We are "perfectly safe" here, or so the Captain tells me.

The guards salute, head toward the stairs. Linnaeus looks up to the stars and speaks as the guards exit.

LINNAEUS

Are you familiar with our eldest son Roland?

AMITY

(smirking)

I seem to recall a certain Princess Sarah failing to win his affection.

(sigh)

And I'm stuck on the sidelines until she wins SOMEONE'S.

LINNAEUS

Roland is talking about upsetting centuries of tradition. To avoid that dangerous prospect, we would be... open to some flexibility on precedence.

Amity sits bolt upright in her seat.

EXT. GLENWOOD VILLAGE - DAY

A man nails to a wooden post a notice that invites unmarried women to Roland's contest. Excited whispers spread quickly, and a couple young ladies rush home to pack. Holly and Treva hear the commotion, approach, and read the notice.

HOLLY

Should be fun to watch.

TREVA

Watch?! You aren't entering?

HOLLY

To go live in a castle?

TREVA

So you're still having nightmares about "cold stone walls" are you?

Holly shudders involuntarily.

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. GLENWOOD FARM - DAY

Warrick walks out to meet Holly and Treva before they reach the farmhouse. He wrings his hat, wears a grim face.

WARRICK

Brute snapped his ankle in a gopher hole, and... there was just no saving him. Your brother's pretty upset. He loved that horse.

TREVA

Poor thing. He was never going to be with us forever, but so sudden... we aren't ready for it.

HOLLY

We can sell my flute... and my mirror... and that bottle of salve.

WARRICK

That's nice to offer, but gettin' a horse by harvest time means puttin' a big debt on the farm.

Treva stares until Holly drops her gaze.

HOLLY

I might have another idea.

EXT. CASTLE GATE - DAY

Holly - wearing a green-trimmed dress, a green cloak, and a pack stuffed with all her belongings - walks down a wide road between the stately wooden buildings of Glenwood's capital. The castle Berylweald, while made of stone, has sloped roofs and awnings to match the surrounding architecture.

A knight in green-trimmed armor waves Holly inside. She shudders for a moment in front of the stone walls.

EXT. COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Holly halts in shock. Hundreds of CONTESTANTS create a forest of green dresses with small groups of red and yellow, plus some isolated wearers of gray or purple. Curiously, no blue.

Contestants run the gamut of body types and hairstyles, but almost all *dress* similarly to Holly.

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

Holly scans the crowd, but misses the man in front of her.

HERALD

Ahem... Welcome. And your name is?

HOLLY

(nervous rush)

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

Yes, yes. I know where it is.

He scribbles Holly's information on a scroll, 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, but misses another man in her path.

The COURT JESTER (20) - lanky and over animated and wearing a fool's costume in red, green, blue, yellow, purple and gray - holds his own scroll and a comically oversized quill.

COURT JESTER

Excuse me, miss. Did you say you came from a farm?

HOLLY

Oh, hello. Yes, I did. Why?

He makes a sweeping gesture across the courtyard, contorts his face into an overwrought mask of fake panic.

COURT JESTER

So did almost all of them!

HOLLY

Guess I'll just get lost in the crowd here --

COURT JESTER

No, you don't understand. If all the farmers are here, where are we going to get our food?!

Holly realizes this is not a serious encounter, smiles but pushes her way through the earlier arrivals, and calls back.

HOLLY

I'm sure the men can muddle through for a few days.

COURT JESTER

You give us too much credit, miss!

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, 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. The Court Jester startles her by being there first.

COURT JESTER

Upwind of the horse. A wise decision, my lady.

AMITY

Excuse me.

COURT JESTER

You don't like my Safiri accent?

AMITY

Your speech is as plainly Glennish as any I've ever heard.

(MORE)

AMITY (CONT'D)

(to HERALD)

Is he like this to everyone?

COURT JESTER

Right!

Through sleight-of-hand, Court Jester appears to pull a green ball from his mouth. With further sleight-of-hand, he appears to turn the ball blue, then seems to pop it in his mouth.

COURT JESTER

(Safiri accent)

Upwind of the horse. A wise decision, my lady.

HERALD

Actually, he is. If you'll forgive me, you seem familiar --

Fortunately for "Aimee," a new arrival distracts the Herald.

HERALD

(looks O.S. toward gate)

Oh, this simply won't do at all.

Court Jester also heads toward the new arrival.

AT THE STABLE

"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" catches sight of the Court Jester taking the pack from a Glenwood shepherd despite her protests. He immediately pratfalls as if the pack was full of anvils.

"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 realizes she's not the only one here who had impressed the prince. 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. 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...

Bored, "Aimee" 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), with a confident air and slender build, who spent her entire childhood on a stage. Her dress is rough-cloth like Holly's, but 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. So, Holly, 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 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 - NIGHT

The contestants stream into a long room lined on each side with row after row of wooden bunk beds.

Small chit-chatting groups plop their packs onto neighboring bunks. "Aimee" stakes out a bed next to the servants' entrance near the room's midpoint. She sighs when the group from the stable claim the surrounding beds.

A superstitious GLENWOOD RUSTIC (18) counts, drops her pack on a bed a few short of where "Aimee" is. A FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT (20), whose long purple gloves match the trim of her peasant dress, puts her pack on the same mattress at the same time.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
(with GLENWOOD RUSTIC)
Hey! --

The commotion attracts the attention of two guards walking the length of the room. Both girls ham for the guards.

GLENWOOD RUSTIC
-- there, welcome to Glenwood.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
Thank you. Just a simple
misunderstanding, I'm sure.

GLENWOOD RUSTIC
Well, this bed is my lucky number
away from the door, but seeing as
how you came from SO much further
away, I'll just take the top bunk.

The Rustic moves her pack, so the guards move along.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
That's nice of you. So your lucky
number is fifty-two? How often
could that POSSIBLY come up?

Holly, Dorinda and Edith pass by, chatting.

DORINDA
-- of course the trick is the deck
is stacked. It's easier to memorize
fifty-two cards than you'd think.

GLENWOOD RUSTIC
See?!

Dorinda takes a deep breath and prepares for an argument.

DORINDA

Okay, look. A stage magician puts
on a SHOW that takes a LOT of skill
and practice. Not MY fault if
someone actually believes --

The guards look back again, and the Rustic looks dumbfounded.

GLENWOOD RUSTIC

What? I was just saying that I
heard my lucky number.

EDITH

Okay then. Moving along.

Edith nudges Dorinda to resume walking. Holly catches up.

HOLLY

So this fancy dress of yours is
your 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 the rich girls' beds. 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.

The trio claim three consecutive lower beds a couple past where the rich girls had set up. A moment later, two contestants claim the beds above Edith and Holly.

One is a CALM GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (22) who has a soothing effect wherever she goes. The other TENSE GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (20) seems to have a rule of etiquette ready for any situation. Each wears a very well-maintained green-trimmed peasant dress.

CALM GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Hey everyone, it looks like we'll all be bunking together.

TENSE GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

If you will excuse me a moment, I need to arrange my bedclothes.

The Tense Glenwood Contestant proceeds to remove her bunk's sheets then remake her bed with inhuman precision, which shocks everyone around her into silence.

Holly lays in her bed, sees the stone walls and shudders, calms herself by looking straight up at the bottom of the wooden bunk above her. Finally...

HOLLY

So, I wonder what they'll have us do tomorrow.

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. Court Jester stands behind them.

In the crowd, a GLENWOOD PLAINSWOMAN (18), Plainsman by blood but in a green-trimmed peasant dress, leans close to a small group of young women from Silverplains in gray attire.

GLENWOOD PLAINSWOMAN

(mocking)

Oh, just LOVE the fur trim. So appropriate for summer, right?

She retreats to her clique of snickering Glennish friends. The ones from Silverplains look around nervously.

The Herald clears his throat, grabs everyone's attention.

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 simple 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 and Court Jester shuffle around in-place.

HERALD

Introducing His Highness, Prince
Roland Celadon!

Roland appears in the balcony, and all contestants curtsy. Court Jester performs his own exaggerated 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. Court Jester pretends to faint.

AMITY

(to herself)

Swooning for a prince? That actually happens?

Holly catches 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 a very TALL GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (19) in a typical green-trimmed peasant dress. 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.

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. Not food, it was wool stuff like coats and real winter blankets. But we had so many problems with highway bandits that 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 were behind the trees where we couldn't see them.

The Colorless women giggle that she fell for that trick.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Large interior room where the staff and soldiers eat their meals. A selection of fresh fruits and pastries greet the contestants as they enter in small groups.

Tense Glenwood Contestant enters, but unlike the others she walks straight past the food through a door to the kitchen.

TENSE GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (O.S.)

Excuse me...

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

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT

(adjusts her gloves)

There must be a small army behind the scenes here, they remembered every little...

She scans 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.

"Aimee" puts her plate down.

AMITY
Oh, this is going too far.

She storms out of the cafeteria.

Holly sees the group from Uva, then looks at the table again. The two Colorless women push past her, each loads a huge mound of food onto her plate.

HOLLY
Oh! There's been some kind of mistake. I'll be right back.

Holly hands her plate to Edith and dashes out.

EDITH
What?

INT. CASTLE HALLWAY - DAY

Holly approaches a Green Knight from behind. Much further down the passage, "Aimee" converses MOS with the Herald.

HOLLY
Excuse me, Sir Knight? There's been some mix-up with the breakfast --

The knight turns around, revealed to be Roland. Holly curtsies quickly.

HOLLY
So sorry, Your Highness. Nothing for you to worry about, I'll find the chef or the herald or someone.

ROLAND

Not at all. If there's a problem, I want to know about it.

INT. CASTLE DINING ROOM - DAY

Roland sits for breakfast with Amity, Holly, Tense Glenwood Contestant, Friendly Uva Contestant, and sixteen other contestants wearing purple trim. Thirteen of those in purple are ethnic Uvan, two ethnic Aurentian, one ethnic Glennish, and one ethnic Safiri. Everyone in purple wears gloves.

The food is the same as in the cafeteria, but with cutlery.

A BALDING SERVANT (50) flits from guest to guest. He slips "Aimee" a small note which she hides to read later.

ROLAND

I wanted to apologize personally for the error this morning. Obviously, no offense was intended.

The Herald steps in, heads toward Roland.

HERALD

I take responsibility, Your Highness, ladies. I had asked the cooks to ensure that our, eh, Colorless guests did not make off with any more silverware.

Contestants nod, they know whom he means.

HERALD

The chef would have understood, but apparently the cook today was unaware of Uvan customs. I should have checked myself this morning. I wouldn't expect ANYONE to eat with her hands anyway.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT

It was an honest mistake.

ROLAND

And it seems we have at least three contestants who understand other cultures. Our chef usually handles these things, so you'd hardly notice all the details.

AMITY

Your chef must be well-studied.

ROLAND

He seems to know how to make anything for anyone. Of course, we're in Glenwood, so he wouldn't dream of serving anything that lives in land and water.

AMITY

You really should try frogs, Your Highness. Properly prepared they can be exquisite.

Holly makes a squeamish face.

ROLAND

I'll tell you what... next time I'm in Safir, I'll come up with a NEW excuse not to eat the frogs.

Everyone except the Herald giggles.

HERALD

Your Highness, there is one other matter that requires your immediate attention. Should we retire to --

ROLAND

No, I'm not going to abandon my guests. Just show them in here.

HERALD

But --

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

HERALD

Very well, Your Highness. May I introduce Sir Douglas Sunil, Cobalt Knight of the Safir Dominion.

"Aimee's" eyes go wide at the thought of a blue knight recognizing her, but she is trapped.

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)
 And honored guests --

Douglas locks eyes with "Aimee." She shakes her head subtly with a stern expression.

DOUGLAS
 -- whom... I've never met before.

"Aimee" nods, almost imperceptibly.

DOUGLAS
 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 guests)
 -- those who didn't win this time
 around --

The contestants try not to grin, but most fail.

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 again. Roland, "Aimee" and Herald raise eyebrows at the subtle power play - not waiting to be dismissed.

Douglas backs out of the room, followed by the Herald.

Roland fumes, and a silence falls over the table.

FRIENDLY UVA CONTESTANT
 Not to change the subject... but no
 one in Glenwood eats frog's legs?

This revives the friendly chatter.

HOLLY
 Ew, no. I suppose everyplace has
 their things they won't eat.

CURIOUS UVA CONTESTANT
I heard they don't eat eggs in
Aurentia.

TENSE GLENWOOD CONTESTANT
They avoid more than just eggs.

HOLLY
They don't eat ANYTHING until it's
fully matured, plant or animal.

ROLAND
(stage whisper)
Don't tell my mother, but I sneak
eggs when she's not around.

CURIOUS UVA CONTESTANT
The queen grew up in Aurentia?

"Aimee" greets the Curious Contestant's lack of political
knowledge with a condescending smirk and eye-roll.

ROLAND
Yes, anyone you see wearing two
Colors was born in one kingdom but
lives in another.

CURIOUS UVA CONTESTANT
Huh. Didn't know about that custom.
(to AMITY, HOLLY and TENSE
GLENWOOD CONTESTANT)
So, where'd you learn so much about
food customs?

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.

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

Chuckles from everyone except "Aimee" and Roland.

MOS Governess explains something to young Holly.

HOLLY (V.O.)

And I dimly recall some old lady
who'd always have some new little
fact to make the conversation seem
proper and sophisticated.

BACK TO SCENE

TENSE GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

In my case, I've travelled to Uva,
and Aurentia, and Cinnabar.

AMITY

I had it all drilled into me by a
governess.

Roland rolls his head back in mock misery.

ROLAND

Oh, I remember mine. That is no way
to spend a childhood.

Holly, the Tense Glenwood Contestant, and the Uvans exchange
worried looks as "Aimee" seems to bond with Roland.

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 and
Linnaeus 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
the Court Jester entertains the peasants' children.

IN THE BALCONY

Roland watches with interest, 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 over at the one contestant dressed in blue.

LINNAEUS

Fine, we'll do it your way.

IN THE COURTYARD

Holly racks her brain in front of the group of men, women and teens standing before her.

HOLLY

Um... 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

Shoeing a horse?

Holly's group members stand with their arms crossed.

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.

HOLLY

And I suppose you all know how to use a forge, too?

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 indoors.

HOLLY

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

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Contestants sleep in their beds. "Aimee" tosses restlessly. The Chatty Glenwood Contestant tiptoes to the servant's entrance, opens it as "Aimee" stirs.

A well-dressed and barrel-chested MUSCULAR GREEN KNIGHT (22) stands in the hall and is slow to move out of sight.

Chatty Contestant hides behind the door rather than jump into the servant's hallway.

LINNAEUS (V.O.)

This plan of Roland's could threaten the nobility. Making them all feel threatened at the same time could be disruptive.

AMITY

(mutters in her sleep)
You can count on me. I can do it. Sarah couldn't, but I can.

LINNAEUS (V.O.)

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

(still muttering)
I can win on my own.

LINNAEUS (V.O.)

(echoing)
We cannot leave anything to chance.

"Aimee" wakes up with a start, looks around.

AMITY

(softly to herself)
I'll just have to put up with it for the good of the nobility.

"Aimee" falls asleep, then the Chatty Glenwood Contestant emerges from her hiding place. She sneaks through the door and gives Muscular Green Knight a big hug as the door shuts.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT (O.S.)

Has anyone ever told you it's hard being away from you?... So, what did you find out?

INT. DORMITORY - DAY

The contestants chit-chat or make final preparations for their morning, many fixing their hair or clothing. A young FEMALE SERVANT (14) appears at the main entrance.

FEMALE SERVANT

Good morning, ladies. His Majesty requests 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" was already sitting on her bunk, calmly switches shoes. At the next bunk, 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 move on, laughing.

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

HOLLY
I've been waiting for some riding.
Been around horses as long as I can
remember.

BLOND BANDIT
Your mother, father get you used to
them as baby. Good.

HOLLY
Not sure. As a little girl I
wandered onto a farm 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
(taken aback)
Why... would I lie?

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

The contestants around them finish changing shoes, start
milling toward the exit.

HOLLY

And?

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

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

The Blond Bandit gives Holly an uncomfortably tight hug.

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 Holly along.

EXT. STABLE - DAY

Linnaeus - dressed in the finest of riding gear - sits upon a
splendid horse near the stable doors. An audience of
thousands rings the courtyard while a VIP section sits
directly below the balcony. Several mounted Green Knights
stand 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

Two hundred twenty-five young
ladies reached this point. The one
hundred fifty of you who perform
best at managing an unruly animal
move on to the next challenge.

Linnaeus signals, and FANFARE begins.

LINNAEUS

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.

LINNAEUS

For your safety, we must remove you
from competition if you are thrown
and cannot immediately remount.

A contestant wearing a Silverplains peasant dress coaxes her
mount forward, then it bucks the moment it gets outside. Her
fierce pull on the reins re-exerts a measure of control.

LINNAEUS

Also, at any time you may request
the aid of one of the Green Knights
who will deliver you safely from
the field, but this also removes
you from competition.

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 any touch of its
reins. All three horses join the herd in the courtyard
regardless of what their riders want.

"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. The Muscular Green Knight 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 Curious Uva Contestant from the breakfast does the same in reverse. The pair haul the dazed girl to the relative safety of Holly's horse just before the rearing horse comes down.

CURIOUS UVA CONTESTANT

There you go.

HOLLY

I can't bring 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. Muscular 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 naive. Is... cute.

BLOND BANDIT
 You don't remember first years, but
 is when you learn how to see world.
 How to be in world.

The Chatty Glenwood Contestant speaks over the knots of
 conversation around the dormitory.

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
 That's the servants' entrance right
 there. Someone could head down to
 the kitchen 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.

AMITY
 (to herself)
 Huh, through all that prattle she's
 actually trying to be helpful. I
 thought she just liked to hear
 herself talk.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

One hundred fifty easels sit spaced evenly throughout the
 great hall. At each one a contestant tries to paint a
 picture. Spectators - and the Court Jester - 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

And somewhere here is our future princess.

The Glenwood Suck-Up looks over to indicate she recognizes the Master Painter. He scans the canvasses.

MASTER PAINTER

A lot of these young ladies see the beauty in the world, Your Majesty. A few feel deeply; always nice to see that. But, as Your Majesty is doubtless aware, only a handful of them have ANY idea what they're doing with a brush.

Linnaeus motions to Roland to wander around on his own. Roland passes a stressed-out Holly - who has paint smears on her hands, face and hair - with a portrait of her dog 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, points her brush toward Roland's face.

HOLLY

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

ROLAND

Okay, I'll be way over there.

Roland wanders away, paying stock compliments as he goes.

LINNAEUS

(to MASTER PAINTER)

Quite astute. There is one young Safiri here we'd like you to see. We've seen her work before, and a minute of your time might be all she needs to nurture her talent.

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

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

I am NOT a bandit. The cups in the
back are just cleaner.

The pair reach Holly's bunk, she sips the water.

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT

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

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

OLIVE-SKINNED BANDIT
 Slip of pen I can forgive. But to
 cheat? One here has no pride.

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.

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 Glenwood Plainswoman, 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

Eh, I live through worse. Learn lesson, will go back, make sure 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.

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, the 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. And that's what I'm going to do... walk away without making a fool of myself.

Holly hands her green-covered book to the 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? Name came from some stupid thing I did when I was four, don't even remember what it was.

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

Cinnabar doesn't have 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 her music Instructor holds a flute, stands very straight.

INSTRUCTOR

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

"Aimee" tosses restlessly. Chatty Glenwood Contestant tires of waiting, pretends to wake up just now.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

(fake yawn)

Hey Aimee, you still up? You could
always go to the kitchen and have
someone warm up some milk for you.

AMITY

Oh, I forgot about that.

(real yawn)

You DO realize only one person can
win, right? Why help me?

"Aimee's" feet feel around the floor for her blue slippers.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Oh, I don't think I could live with
myself if I was selfish and won at
all costs... You wait here and I'll
come back with some warm milk for
both of us.

"Aimee" gives up finding her slippers and lays back down. The Chatty Contestant exits through the servants' door - openly.

INT. SERVANTS' HALLWAY - NIGHT

Chatty Glenwood Contestant closes the door behind her, rushes to the waiting Muscular Green Knight, and hugs him tight.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Oh, I don't get to do this enough.
But at least all this sneaking
around is exciting.

MUSCULAR GREEN KNIGHT

I missed you, too. For tomorrow
you'll have to play music. You play
that big violin thing, right?

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Cello.

MUSCULAR GREEN KNIGHT

Yeah, that should do it.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Well, assuming I can live without you long enough to compete, I promise to surprise you.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

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

Roland stands where a conductor would be expected.

ROLAND

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

Holly starts a simple tune on her flute. The rest join in, sounding exactly like they never played together before.

The Chatty Glenwood Contestant fails to get any recognizable notes out of a cello, but she smiles. Muscular Green Knight's face shows shock and dismay, then turns to a smile as realization dawns.

Holly continues expertly as "Aimee" attempts to show her up with flourishes on a harp. A Glenwood contestant hits a xylophone too hard, and one of the hammers goes flying.

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.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Ten contestants pack their things. Some look angry, some look sad, but Chatty Glenwood Contestant hums the orchestra tune to herself. "Aimee" watches her pack.

AMITY

So... what happened?

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Hmmm?

AMITY

You held that cello like a pro. Why go through all those rounds then lose on purpose?

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

It took me that long to realize that the only thing worse than losing would have been winning.

"Aimee" raises an eyebrow.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Not like I could get all the way to the end then say, "I decided I really don't want to marry him."

AMITY

Well, you COULD... if you like public hangings.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Ew, those are so gross. I don't even like to HEAR about them --

AMITY

(to herself)

And the point SAILS over her head.

(aloud)

Anyway, I really appreciate how you tried to be helpful to everyone. So, who's the guy?

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

What guy?

AMITY

You must be REALLY in love with some guy to give up on the prince.

Muscular Green Knight appears at the room's main entrance. Chatty Contestant looks his way, blushes.

AMITY

Him?

"Aimee" looks him up and down approvingly then grins, eliciting a giggle from the Chatty Contestant.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

That's the one. He didn't want to stand in the way of an opportunity of a lifetime for me.

The Chatty Glenwood Contestant is the last of the ten still in the dormitory.

AMITY

Well, best of luck to you two.
You'd better get going.

CHATTY GLENWOOD CONTESTANT

Good luck, Aimee. Bye.

The Chatty Glenwood Contestant - still humming - carries her things out the main door. About half the remaining contestants sneer or mock her behind her back, meanwhile "Aimee" looks sad.

INT. ENTRY HALL - DAY

Just outside the great hall, many of the young ladies use the wall mirrors for primping as a procession of nobles pass them heading inside. Green Knights enter first.

HERALD (O.S.)

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

Some of the more sophisticated ladies try to intimidate the others with knowledge of who is who.

GLENWOOD COURTESAN

That's Sir Bailinas. He's in charge
of the prisons, so don't ever ever
EVER get on his bad side.

The young ladies studiously avoid making eye contact with him, even in a mirror. Holly uses a slight head movement to indicate another man.

HOLLY

Who is that? Haven't seen him
before. Couldn't be too important
if he's never in the castle, right?

"Aimee" rolls her eyes. The Glenwood Suck-Up widens hers.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP

That's Sir Naylor Holkata. He's a
famous general, and almost every
warhorse in Glenwood comes from his
ranch. So he's like basically the
most important man in the military
without royal blood.

Holly blushes at how naive she must have sounded.

GLENWOOD FARMER

Which one?

HERALD (O.S.)

Sir Barritious Bailinas.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP

The one wearing green.

Every contestant within earshot turns to stare at the Glenwood Suck-Up.

EDITH

(waves)

Hi, Dad!

GENERAL HOLKATA

Edith... Looking radiant, my girl!

EDITH

That one.

AMITY

(to herself)

There's more to being important than having an important father.

(to group)

That's Baron Alaric. There's some dispute over where the border is between his land and the Safir Dominion.

HERALD (O.S.)

General Sir Naylor Holkata... Baron and Baroness Russel Alaric of Binda.

The Balding Servant appears from a side door.

BALDING SERVANT

All right everyone, get in line.

HERALD (O.S.)

Baroness Ethel Edana of Towerbridge.

Everyone scurries into line. Holly, Dorinda and Edith ensure that they end up next to one another. "Aimee" works her way to the end. They move when the procession of nobles finishes.

HERALD (O.S.)
 Baron Patrick Kapena of Kavidale...
 Baron and Baroness Bradley Delling
 of Braddock Lake.

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. All three feature classic silverware, enormous candelabras, forest-themed centerpieces, and fine green linens.

A minstrel plays. Court Jester adds jingling from his fool's cap at appropriate moments in the tune.

Contestants stand behind their chairs, and wait for the royal family to enter.

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.

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, the Glenwood shepherd, and "Aimee."

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, the Tense Contestant just scowls. Dorinda smiles and glances a couple times toward the head table. The Tense Contestant sniffs then fixes her gaze on the nobles.

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.

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.

Reassuringly overweight CHEF (49) steps in from the kitchen to stand near "Aimee", ready to announce the first dish. Court Jester steps up as well, points at the salads.

COURT JESTER

For your dining pleasure... bits of
 underbrush plucked from the side of
 the road!

The soft chuckling is interrupted by the contestant to the Rustic's left.

HOLLY

Hey! You might want to eat some of
 those carrots if you can't see how
 good these vegetables are!

Roland stifles a laugh, many gasp softly, and Dorinda sighs. Court Jester takes the heckling in stride.

COURT JESTER

Do you want to marry the prince or
take my job? Because I don't think
you can do both.

His come-back elicits laughter, diffuses any tension.

HOLLY

Just defending my region's produce.

CHEF

The mixed salad is in fact from
Harrollome in eastern Glenwood.

Holly smiles, and the Court Jester gives an exaggerated bow.

A servant bringing more salad bowls hits the fork, and barely
avoids tripping. All contestants look up startled. REVEAL:
The Farmer and Smith tucked in the *tablecloth* instead of
their napkins. Candelabras rock back and forth, but the
contestants switch to napkins before anything spills.

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 fork.

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

COURT JESTER

Let's see, it's orange. Must be
that dish popular in Spessartia,
"Bitter Defeat."

Linnaeus laughs, so most everyone else joins in after a beat.
Staying silent are the rest of the Celedon family, "Aimee,"
the Tense Glenwood Contestant, and BARON PATRICK KAPENA (60) -
who has thin horizontal orange stripes on his green sleeves.

AMITY

(softly)
That was uncalled-for.

CHEF

This selection is far tastier, I
assure you. "Campfire Soup" from
Sempervirens in 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. The Smith and Tall Contestant exchange "What just happened?" glances. The Cinnabar Cook slurps up the last of her soup.

Holly looks suspiciously at the bit of paper sticking 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.

(MORE)

HOLLY (CONT'D)

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 a few beds away.

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. But now I know Aimee is the cheater.

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 Aimee notes, helping her cheat.

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

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 sad, 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.

GLENWOOD SUCK-UP

(smiling)

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
 and put them under your seat. 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 holds up a bottle of wine then pours several glasses. Court Jester lays on the ground "passed out" with an empty bottle, lets out a fake hiccup.

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. 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, but gets to her chair without spilling anything. 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?

Holly's face flashes anger for a moment, but she then forces a smile for the audience.

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)

"I don't want you to win anymore.
Don't even look for more notes."

"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 "I'm going to die"?

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

Now remember who actually picks the winner in this tournament. It's the king and queen, not the prince.

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 become king before he was old enough to compete. I'm not sure bringing up the tournament is a good idea.

AMITY

Well, does Linnaeus 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 the minute they heard a fifteen-year-old boy had taken the throne.

NEAR THE GATE

Holly and Edith lean against the wall near the great hall's main entrance.

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, 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?

IN THE SEATS

The Friendly Uva Contestant and the Tall Glenwood Contestant sit in the chairs. 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 faces away from her partner, with one hand behind her back.

DORINDA

Now after you "disappear" you have to work everything backstage. If I show you one finger --

(extends pinky on the hand behind her back)

-- or tap one foot that means "wait" because I need more time.

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.

IN THE SEATS

The other contestants sit far to house right, the Suck-Up practically has her back to them. Holly leans over to Edith.

HOLLY

(whispers)

Bet our note rattled her. And she looks ridiculous in orange.

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. Suck-Up picks up the glove and slips it on much more easily than it came off.

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 stands at house right of the temporary stage with a hammer in one hand, Edith stands at house left. Edith takes off her glasses, 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.

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

The great hall now has a large dance floor and a banner saying "Dancing Competition." "Aimee," Dorinda, Edith, Holly, Glenwood Suck-Up, and Friendly Uva Contestant stand on the dance floor. Court Jester stands like a seventh contestant.

Friendly Uva Contestant's gloves are rolled down and her right forearm is bandaged - the Tall Contestant had poor aim.

Holly and Friendly Uva Contestant eye the better-dressed contestants enviously. Dorinda and Edith keep a wary eye on "Aimee," while she keeps a wary eye on Holly.

APPLAUSE as six Green Knights enter in military uniforms, place their ceremonial sabers on a table, and line up opposite the ladies.

Court Jester is left without a partner. Hands on hips, he harrumphs and storms off the dance floor.

Linnaeus walks up to the Muscular Green Knight, and taps him on the shoulder.

LINNAEUS

(whispers)

Remember, this is not a social call. Let her show what SHE can do.

MUSCULAR GREEN KNIGHT

Understood, Your Majesty.

The king proceeds to the next Green Knight who is opposite "Aimee," and taps him on the shoulder.

LINNAEUS

(whispers)

Remember, one of these young ladies will be your next princess. We would suggest you not get on their bad side. Be helpful.

GREEN KNIGHT

Of course, Your Majesty.

Linnaeus proceeds to the next Green Knight, and taps him on the shoulder.

LINNAEUS

(whispers)

Remember, this is not a social call. Let her show what SHE can do.

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.

The Court Jester runs across the field in a fake panic.

COURT JESTER

They're not using etiquette!

He hides behind some spectators just as 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

A new group of spectators sit 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 Local 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 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 shakes her shoulders to shift 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, audience hushes as she prepares to shoot. Sebastian and Mustachioed Knight stand.

SEBASTIAN

STOP!

The interruption causes Holly's shot to miss badly.

Spectators and contestants freeze, and VIPs stare at 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 astonished, 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.

LINNAEUS

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

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 without the veil or train. 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

Prince Roland didn't seem happy.

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

Allow me. 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

(sigh)

Captain, I am not at liberty to
risk the princess's safety. Should
any harm come to her 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 as guests - one from Uva, one from Aurentia. A clerk reports figures from a scroll.

HERALD (O.S.)
Your Majesty! An urgent message --

A servant opens the door, and 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

Is everyone ready?

The Hulking Red Knight gives a brief thumbs-up, then slumps in a chair.

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.

WARDEN

Which one?

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT

The big one.

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.

Everyone else rushes 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.

A bird call O.S. distracts the guard. 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 lowering her hands from making a bird call.

Both curtsey. Roland 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 Thin 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 the 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. 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. She's "Holly" to us
 friends. 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.

(MORE)

ROLAND (CONT'D)

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.

Amity rambles incoherently. Is she arguing with the bow?

Dorinda tries to use her false bindings as bandages on Roland's chest and forearm.

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

(regaining her faculties)

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
prison?! 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 others 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.

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?

Holly and Sebastian come 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 for his trouble. 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? You could use one of these uniforms and scout out the area.

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, falls onto a large cheese wheel, and sets it in motion toward a china cabinet. Roland tackles the cheese wheel, but somehow he ends up under it.

COCKY RED KNIGHT
 Absolute silence. Got it.

Hulking Red Knight takes the lead position. The other Red Knights get the cheese wheel off of Roland.

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 engage a squad of Safiri soldiers mid-hallway in a sword-fight.

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 on the right of the first niche, which reveals dozens of arrows in storage.

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 guard 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 firmly in the center of the hallway with his 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
Hadn't noticed. Probably 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.

HOLLY

Time to earn that honor everyone
wants to give me.

Holly 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)
 It wasn't even REAL! Just some
 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 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. This time she connects with Holly's left upper arm at a particularly puffy part of the dress. Holly staggers to one knee and yelps in pain.

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 right 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

You keep making THAT face and
they'll put you away in the highest
room of the tallest tower.

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. 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

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 grows more frustrated, grunts trying to free the mace. 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.

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. 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
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 drops the mace.

Amity falls to her knees, now sobbing.

AMITY
What have I done?

After a moment's hesitation, Holly kneels down with Amity,
pushes the mace away, and hugs her. The soldiers hang back.

HOLLY
I think the contest was a lot more
stress than you bargained for.

AMITY
(sobbing)
But everyone was depending on me!
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 left 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.

AMITY

But everything will be fine if you
marry him, Holly.

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)
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 trying to make our fight last as long as possible. If I went right at you, you'd probably 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

And 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 left arm.

DOUGLAS

(to ROLAND)
And that is a wicked backhand you
have there, you should work on that
some more.

Roland stops Douglas, then both bow upon entering.

ROLAND

Your Highness.

Amity nods weakly. Both men approach.

HOLLY

What I don't understand is 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.

Amity takes a deep breath.

LINNAEUS (V.O.)

Roland is talking about upsetting
centuries of tradition.

Dorinda and Edith return with the other escapees. They bow or curtsy, and Amity motions for them to rise.

LINNAEUS (V.O.)

There is simply too much at stake.
We cannot leave anything to chance.

AMITY

I didn't think Roland should marry
a commoner, and...

LINNAEUS (V.O.)

Even after Roland learns Your
Highness's true identity, he still
cannot know we asked you to enter.

AMITY

...I wanted to show I could get the
guy that Sarah couldn't.

Roland silently mouths "wow."

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 left arm rests in a sling. Roland holds up a tattered cape.

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.

HULKING RED KNIGHT
Whew, even Prince Bernard isn't
THAT rough on his armor.

HOLLY
Who?

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT
Your Highness's older brother. Your
Highness and the whole royal family
have a LOT to catch up on. I mean,
as far as we know, no one in
Cinnabar even knows you were found.

The drums of the background music gradually grow louder.

COCKY RED KNIGHT
I'm sure once we get back someone
will write down the whole story.

MUSTACHIOED RED KNIGHT
 (slaps COCKY RED KNIGHT on
 the back)
 Thank you for volunteering.
 (looks around
 apologetically)
 What? So I don't like reporting to
 the Court Historian. The man never
 blinks. It's unnerving.

HOLLY
 Well, to me, my brother is a six-
 year-old farm boy. I just don't
 FEEL like a princess.

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.

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.

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 hundreds 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.