THE SELECTION 2.0

"Pilot"

Written by
Elizabeth Craft & Sarah Fain

Based on the novel by Kiera Cass

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ACT ONE

OVER BLACK -- We hear the sounds of GIGGLING and GRUNTING. There's sex happening, folks. We're just not seeing it... yet.

A **CHYRON** fades up, reading: SOMEDAY, IN THE FUTURE.

EXT. PALACE - DAY 1

And we're outside.... zooming toward a MAJESTIC PALACE. The sexy sex sounds continue as we travel through a window into...

INT. PALACE - MAXON'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

...a decadent, masculine bedroom where PRINCE MAXON SHREAVE (25, handsome and knows it, wickedly charming) fucks the breath out of LUCY (20, pretty, half-wearing a MAID'S UNIFORM). Lucy hangs onto Maxon's unmade FOUR POSTER BED as he does her from behind.

LUCY
(panting, loving it)
Your highness... I'm supposed to be changing the sheets --

MAXON
Messing them up is way more fun.

Maxon SPANKS Lucy, hard enough to sting but not so hard that she doesn't like it. She giggles. As Maxon SPANKS HER AGAIN, the bedroom door opens --

REVEAL QUEEN AMBERLY (40's, beautiful, regal) as she takes in the scene. She strides over to Maxon, GRABS HIM BY THE EAR. As she pulls him off Lucy --

QUEEN AMBERLY
Maxon. The maids aren't here for your pleasure.

Lucy squeals, DIVES UNDER THE COVERS. Maxon grabs a sheet to cover himself, gives Queen Amberly a grin.

MAXON
Don't worry, Mother. I always give more than I receive.

Queen Amberly ignores that, gets to the matter at hand --

QUEEN AMBERLY
I want you dressed and presentable in ten minutes.

Maxon leans over, gives the Queen a kiss on the cheek.

MAXON
Whatever you say.

As Queen Amberly exits, Maxon grabs a shirt, heads toward his bathroom. Lucy pops her head out of the covers, pouts --

LUCY
But -- we weren't finished!

MAXON
Duty calls. And Lucy -- those sheets aren't going to change themselves.

As Maxon disappears into the bathroom and the door SHUTS, OFF Lucy, put in her place --

INT. PALACE - GREEN ROOM - DAY

A lavish Green Room. HUGE TAPESTRIES, adorned with the letter "I" for Illea, on the walls. Queen Amberly enters to find KING CLARKSON (50's, once hale and hearty, now fragile) and PRINCE RAFE (23, a more reserved version of Maxon, in MILITARY DRESS).

QUEEN AMBERLY
Maxon will be here any second.
(off Rafe)
Don't look so disappointed, Rafe.

Rafe turns to his father.

RAFE
It's not too late to call this off.

KING CLARKSON
Never.

RAFE
Now's not the time for a huge national event like The Selection. With Rebel activity on the rise --

KING CLARKSON
-- with Rebel activity on the rise, now is the <u>perfect</u> time for The Selection.

RAFE
We're painting targets on our backs, and the backs of everyone involved.

Rafe looks to his mother for help, but none is forthcoming.

QUEEN AMBERLY
Your father knows what's best for Illea.

MAXON
(entering)
Of course he does.

Maxon now wears a sleek suit and a CROWN on his head.

MAXON (CONT'D)
Morning, all. Shall we get on with it?

King Clarkson gives Maxon a chilly nod.

KING CLARKSON
Nice of you to join us.

As Maxon grabs a GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE off a tray...

RAFE
(to Maxon)
I bet Sylvan a week's pay you wouldn't show.

MAXON
Bad bet, little brother. This is Christmas morning only better. All the gifts have breasts.

QUEEN AMBERLY
A little respect. One of these twenty-five girls will be your wife.

MAXON
(grins)
They won't be girls when I'm done with them.

Rafe rolls his eyes as an ATTENDANT steps up.

ATTENDANT
It's time, Your Majesty.

As the family exits, OFF Maxon...

MAXON
Cuz everybody needs to see <u>this</u> thing again.

CUT TO:

AGAINST BLACK -- We see a GRAPHIC of the EARTH, big and blue and green, spinning on its axis. OVER THIS, we hear narrator Sylvan Santos...

SYLVAN (V.O.)
Centuries ago, our globe was divided into hundreds of countries, populated by billions of people.

We pull back to REVEAL --

INT. PALACE - THEATER - DAY

A large, ornate theater. The seats are filled with THOUSANDS OF ILLEANS watching a DOCUMENTARY on an ENORMOUS MOVIE SCREEN. On stage, SYLVAN SANTOS (35, Social Secretary to the Royal Family) stands behind a podium, also watching.

On the screen, the Earth disappears...

SYLVAN (V.O.)
These people were greedy, obsessed with progress and technology.

... replaced with quick pops: DOZENS OF IMAGES OF TECHNOLOGY, from the TELEGRAPH MACHINE to the TELEPHONE to the COMPUTER to the FAX MACHINE, to the iPHONE to HIGH TECH WEAPONS, etc...

SYLVAN (V.O.)
Until technology led to their destruction. Cyber attacks created chaos. The Global War began.

... On the screen, we watch simulations of New York, Paris, and Tokyo being hit with NUCLEAR BOMBS...

SYLVAN (V.O.)
Disease and famine spread. Billions died. Civilization collapsed.

... The images change to STARVING PEOPLE, REFUGEE CAMPS, and VAST WASTELANDS, sprawling masses of CRUMBLED STRUCTURES and SCORCHED EARTH.

SYLVAN (V.O.)
Survivors migrated to the one and only land that could still sustain life...

... Now we see ROLLING GREEN FIELDS.

SYLVAN (V.O.)
A new nation was born. Illea.

... The screen changes to the ILLEAN FLAG.

SYLVAN (V.O.)
Under the Monarchy of the Shreave Family, all technology -- except that deemed absolutely necessary by the King -- was banished. Order was restored.

... The documentary cuts to King Clarkson and Queen Amberly, sitting side by side on their thrones.

KING CLARKSON (ON SCREEN)
The Class System my ancestors created has kept us at peace.

... We cut to a DIAGRAM of the Class System that lays out the Classes -- Royal Class, Noble Class, Learned Class, Military Class, Merchant Class, Labor Class.

KING CLARKSON (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
Everyone has a purpose. Everyone has a place.

QUEEN AMBERLY (ON SCREEN)
And in order to keep the Monarchy in the hands and hearts of the people, it was declared by our first King, Mateus Shreave, that the Queen shall be chosen from among the people. And thus began our most treasured tradition:
(she beams)
The Selection.

... King Clarkson and Queen Amberly disappear from the screen and are replaced by the WORDS of a DECLARATION. Sylvan leaves the podium, addresses the crowd from CENTER STAGE.

SYLVAN
And now for the reading of The Declaration:
(reads)
When the eldest son of an Illean King comes of age, every young lady in Illea of marriageable age, regardless of Class, will be invited to enter a lottery. One young lady from each of Illea's twenty-five provinces will be chosen to take residence at the Palace and vie for the Prince's hand in marriage. This will be called The Selection!

As the crowd goes nuts...

INT. PALACE - THEATER - BACKSTAGE - DAY

FIND Maxon, Rafe, the King, and the Queen waiting at the edge of the stage. Rafe can't help asking his dad one more time --

RAFE
Last chance to change your mind, Father.

King Clarkson indicates the cheering crowd beyond the curtain.

KING CLARKSON
Look at them, Rafe. This is why The Selection is important.

As the King moves away, Maxon and Rafe have a private moment.

MAXON
Why are you so determined to keep a horde of hotties out of the Palace? Afraid you can't control yourself?

RAFE
Lack of self-control is your department.

MAXON
And tedium is yours. Just be careful. Keep fighting The Selection, you'll lose favored son status.

RAFE
Our father respects me because, unlike you, I actually give a damn about this country --

MAXON
While I only give a damn about myself.
(smiles)
And yet I'm going to be King. Stings, doesn't it?

Rafe's blood boils. On stage, Sylvan announces to the crowd --

SYLVAN
Ladies and gentleman, I present to you King Clarkson, Queen Amberly, Prince Maxon, and Prince Rafe! Please welcome our Royal Family!

King Clarkson stands straighter, assuming the air of a much healthier man. Maxon grins --

MAXON
Show time.

As the CROWD GOES WILD, the King, Queen, Maxon, and Rafe head onto the Stage...

INT. PALACE - THEATER - STAGE - DAY

The Royal family walks onto Stage amid the ROAR OF THE CROWD. They wave to the citizens, the picture of the perfect family...

KING CLARKSON
Hello, fellow Illeans....!

AS the King begins his speech...

EXT. - LABOR CLASS GHETTO - NEIGHBORHOOD SQUARE - DAY

A poor neighborhood. Nearly deserted. Although we're in the future, it feels like the past. Sad-looking HORSES pull carts over pitted dirt streets lined with hand-constructed STALLS that sell everything from RAW WOOL to SKINNED RABBITS to homemade HERBAL REMEDIES.

A few members of the Labor Class, dressed in DRAB CLOTHES made for durability rather than fashion, move through the streets with purpose, as VENDORS shutter their stalls despite it being the middle of the day. A MOTHER, carrying a baby, hurries along her other CHILD --

MOTHER
(to Child)
Come on! We don't want to miss it!

-- who stares at a YOUNG MAN (25, muscular, cut, hot as hell) suspended between TWO TALL WOODEN POSTS, each of his wrists tied to a post, his toes barely touching the ground. This is ASPEN LEDGER.

Nearby, an ENFORCEMENT OFFICER (30's, bad teeth, cold eyes, WEARING A BADGE) stands watch.

As the Mother takes her Child's hand, pulls him away... FIND AMERICA SINGER (23, fresh-faced beauty) striding toward the Enforcement Officer, her eyes fiery.

AMERICA
(re: Aspen)
Cut him down.

ENFORCEMENT OFFICER
And why would I do that?

AMERICA
You've had him strung up there since yesterday.

On the Poles, Aspen lifts his head.

ENFORCEMENT OFFICER
He failed to bow to the King --

AMERICA
It was the King's carriage. And I'm sure it was an oversight --

ASPEN
Not exactly.

America shoots Aspen a look. Not helping.

ENFORCEMENT OFFICER
As many infractions as he's had, you're lucky he's just on the poles. He coulda been tried on suspicion of being a Rebel.

ASPEN
Don't have to be a Rebel to think the King is full of sh--

AMERICA
(cuts him off)
Aspen.

America turns to the Officer.

AMERICA (CONT'D)
You've had him up there so long he's delirious. Now, cut him down.

ENFORCEMENT OFFICER
Get outta my face. Last warning.

But getting out of his face isn't part of America's plan. Just the opposite. She goads --

AMERICA
That badge... it makes you feel powerful, doesn't it? But you're still a Labor classer, just like the rest of us.

The Enforcement Officer's eyes fill with fury. On the pole, Aspen watches, grinning -- he's enjoying this.

ENFORCEMENT OFFICER
That's it. You're under arrest.

He goes to grab her, but America dodges his grasp.

AMERICA
Good luck with that.

She TAKES OFF down an alley. The Enforcement Officer takes off after her.

ENFORCEMENT OFFICER
Hey! Get back here!

OFF Aspen -- yep, that's his girl -- as America disappears...

EXT. LABOR CLASS GHETTO - DAY

America races through the streets and alleys of her neighborhood. She knows these streets like the back of her hand, and we see her athleticism as she darts around corners, barrels over obstacles, and scales makeshift fences.

The Enforcement Officer doesn't stand a chance. He loses her as America -- with a satisfied sparkle in her eye -- dashes through a sea of CLOTHESLINES drying the ragged clothes of the Labor Class.

The Enforcement Officer gives up, panting, hands on his knees. AS the Enforcement Officer looks around, no clue which way to go...

EXT. LABOR CLASS GHETTO - NEIGHOBORHOOD SQUARE - DAY

A KNIFE slices through the ropes binding Aspen's arms. GO WIDE to find America cutting the ropes.

ASPEN
You're sexy when you're being an action hero.

AMERICA
What's an action hero?

ASPEN
Something from the old days. People in funny clothes, acting all righteous.

As the last rope gives way --

AMERICA
Let's get out of here.

America helps Aspen walk, glancing over her shoulder to make sure the Enforcement Officer is still gone.

AMERICA (CONT'D)
You know they're going to whip you next time.

ASPEN
I can take it.

AMERICA
No! Aspen, what you're supposed to say is "there's not going to be a next time."

Aspen just looks at her. He'd love to say that, but he can't.

AMERICA (CONT'D)
Explain it to me. Why can't you just... bow?

A beat, then --

ASPEN
Because if I bow it says that I'm okay with things the way they are. But I'm not, and I never will be.

AMERICA
Then I guess I better brush up on my action hero skills.
(then)
Are you okay? Really.

ASPEN
Okay enough to do this.

With a deft move, he pins her to a wall, KISSES her. Their passion is raw, intense.

Aspen pulls away, grins at her --

ASPEN (CONT'D)
Now this is the way to spend a holiday.

AMERICA
The Selection is not a holiday. It's monarchy propaganda.

ASPEN
Careful. Or I'll be the one cutting you down from the poles.

AMERICA
I'm counting on it.

Aspen pulls America close again, gets serious.

ASPEN
Someday, somehow, I'm gonna get you out of here.

AMERICA
Not if I get you out of here first.

AS they KISS --

INT. AMERICA'S HOUSE - LIVING AREA - DAY

A small, cramped living room. America's sister MAY (18, pretty), as well as parents CALLA and MYLAN (both 40's, attractive but worn from years of hard labor), watch The Selection on a SMALL SCREEN embedded in the wall.

America and Aspen enter.

MYLAN
They finally let you off the poles?

ASPEN
Something like that.

Mylan senses something went down but doesn't press. As America gets some SALVE to treat Aspen's rope-burned wrists, on TV, King Clarkson finishes his speech --

KING CLARKSON (ON TV)
... and I have no doubt this year's Selection will be the most profound in our nation's history.

AMERICA
Profoundly stupid.

CALLA
America --

MAY
Be quiet.

MYLAN
Don't spoil this for your sister.

AMERICA
I'm sorry, but The Selection makes girls like May believe Illea is some land of opportunity. When really, aside from this one time, the Class system keeps us all in our neat little boxes, and it always will.

MAY
Can you please shut up?

As King Clarkson heads for his THRONE, Sylvan takes over --

SYLVAN (ON TV)
... Thank you, King Clarkson.

America shakes her head as Aspen puts his arm around her.

SYLVAN (ON TV) (CONT'D)
The following names were drawn at random earlier today. And now it is my pleasure to announce... our Selection candidates! From the Acadia Province, a young lady from the Merchant Class, Ashley Brouillette...!

AS the Singer family settles in to watch the names get called...

ASHLEY (PRELAP)
(squeal of joy)
Aaaaahhhhhh!

INT. BROUILLETTE HOME - DAY

A modest house. Nothing's fancy, but it's a big step up from where America lives. FIND ASHLEY BROUILLETE (23, cute and perky, plainly dressed) jumping with joy.

ASHLEY
Ohmygodohmygodohmygod!

Ashley and her family are gathered around a SCREEN that looks just like the one in America's house, but slightly larger. Ashley hugs her MOTHER --

ASHLEY (CONT'D)
(can't believe it)
They picked me! They really picked me!

ON THE SCREEN, Sylvan announces the next name --

SYLVAN (ON TV)
From the Paloma Province, a member of the Noble Class...

INT. CASTLEY ESTATE - DAY

An extravagant but tasteful home. The sophisticated and well-dressed Castley family is gathered around their (much larger) SCREEN.

SYLVAN (ON TV)
.... Fiona Castley!

MRS. CASTLEY smiles at daughter FIONA (25, lovely, kind).

MRS. CASTLEY
Congratulations, honey.

FIONA
Thank you, Mother.

Fiona smiles and hugs her mother... but we sense some reserve to her joy.

MRS. CASTLEY
I know you're nervous. But think what an advantage it is that you already know the Royal family.

MR. CASTLEY speaks up --

MR. CASTLEY
The King would give a limb to have you for a daughter-in-law.

Fiona gives her father an affectionate but knowing look.

FIONA
Only because it gets him closer to you and your business.

MRS. CASTLEY
Why isn't important. What matters is that you could be Queen!

As Fiona musters a smile, in the b.g., Sylvan continues --

SYLVAN (ON TV)
Now, for our next lucky lady...

EXT. NEWSOME MANSION - DAY

An enormous mansion in lush countryside. To establish.

SYLVAN (V.O.)
From the Orleans Province....

INT. NEWSOME MANSION - FENCING HALL - DAY

FIND CELESTE NEWSOME (25, drop dead gorgeous) in a sleek body suit and fencing mask as she wields an EPEE with precision against a male SPARRING PARTNER. On the wall behind her, The Selection plays on an ENORMOUS SCREEN.

SYLVAN (ON TV)
... another member of the Noble Class. Celeste Newsome!

As the crowd cheers on TV, Celeste parries, then executes an advance-lunge against her partner, winning the point. She whips off her fencing mask and smiles at her father, ELLIS NEWSOME (40's, ruthless, oozes money) who watches from the door.

ELLIS
Congratulations, my dear. Your mother would have been so proud.

CELESTE
Thank you, Daddy.

As Celeste's personal maid, ONDINE (23, quietly beautiful), dabs Celeste's brow, we FOLLOW ELLIS into...

INT. NEWSOME MANSION - STUDY - DAY

Ellis enters his study, where FREDERICK MARREN (30's) waits. In the b.g., The Selection, on mute, continues to play on a SCREEN.

MARREN
Celeste will make a beautiful Selection candidate.

ELLIS
She'll make a beautiful <u>Queen</u>.
(then)
Thank you for your efforts.

MARREN
It was an honor to use my connections in the Palace to assure your daughter's place in The Selection.

ELLIS
And now you want your money.

Ellis opens a desk drawer, removes a THICK ENVELOPE filled with CASH.

Ellis carries the envelope to Marren, but as he goes to hand it to him -- Ellis WHIPS OUT A BLADE and SLITS MARREN'S THROAT! Marren falls to the floor, DEAD. Then --

CELESTE (O.S.)
Was that necessary?

REVEAL CELESTE, the picture of calm, standing in the doorway to the study. She regards Marren's dead body.

ELLIS
No one can know what we did to get you into the Palace.

CELESTE
Or what I plan to do when I get there?

Ellis' gaze moves to a GIANT PORTRAIT OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN. She's an older version of Celeste.

ELLIS
Your mother's family ruled this land before it became Illea, and I promised her --

CELESTE
-- that you would make sure I got the throne that should rightfully have been hers. And you will. We will.

ELLIS
The only reason the Shreaves are in that Palace is because three hundred years ago they had the military on the their side.

CELESTE
They still do.

ELLIS
I'd put one of you up against an army of men any day, my darling.

CELESTE
It's not the men I'm worried about.

ELLIS
We have to right this wrong now, Celeste, before the Rebels gain power and there's no throne left.

Celeste glances at the portrait of her mother, her eyes burning with intention.

CELESTE
I'm going to make sure our family gets what's ours. I promise. Then we'll deal with the Rebels.

Ellis smiles, pleased. She's her father's daughter.

ELLIS
Now go get ready. The Royal Guard will be here before the last candidate is announced to escort you to the Palace.

Celeste start to leave, then turns back.

CELESTE
I'll need to take my maid to the Palace. Ondine is the only one who can do my hair.

Ellis nods. Whatever she wants. AS Celeste exits --

INT. NEWSOME MANSION - ENTRY HALL - DAY

Celeste sweeps through the hall toward a GRAND STAIRCASE, Ondine trailing behind her. As Celeste begins to climb the stairs, the FRONT DOORBELL RINGS.

Another MAID rushes to open the door. TWO ROYAL GUARDS enter --

ROYAL GUARD #1
We're here to escort Miss Celeste Newsome to the Palace.

CELESTE
You'll have to wait. I haven't packed my things yet.

ROYAL GUARD #1
Prince Maxon will provide whatever your heart desires.

CELESTE
How nice for the other twenty-four girls. I, however, won't be leaving home without my jewelry.

AS Celeste heads upstairs, already a Queen in her own mind --

SYLVAN (PRELAP)
... And now for our final Selection candidate!

INT. AMERICA'S HOUSE - LIVING AREA - DAY

America, Aspen, Calla, Mylan, and May continue to watch The Selection. May can hardly breathe --

MAY
This is it. Our province.

SYLVAN (ON TV)
... From the Royal Province, a girl who lives in a town just beyond these Palace walls... A member of the Labor Class...

May SQUEALS as Calla and Mylan hold their breath. America and Aspen exchange looks. Is it possible? Could May be chosen?

SYLVAN (ON TV) (CONT'D)
... America Singer!

America can't believe her ears. Aspens's jaw drops. May gasps. Calla and Mylan look shocked but thrilled.

MAY
You entered the lottery? How could you?

America turns to Aspen --

AMERICA
I didn't.

Before Aspen can respond, there's LOUD KNOCKING at the front door. The Royal Guard. America's father goes to answer --

ASPEN
Don't open that!

MYLAN
This isn't some local Enforcement Officer. This is the Monarchy.

Mylan opens the door. TWO ROYAL GUARDS enter.

ROYAL GUARD #1
We're here to escort Miss America Singer to the Palace.

AMERICA
(tries to explain)
This is a mistake. I didn't even enter The Selection --

Calla speaks up --

CALLA
It's not a mistake. I entered your name.

America looks like she's been punched in the gut.

AMERICA
Why would you do that? You know I'm with Aspen --

CALLA
When was the last time our family had enough to eat? I have two daughters. I wanted two chances to change our future.

AMERICA
You had no right --

CALLA
(implores)
If there's even a possibility you could be Queen... some things are more important than love.

AMERICA
I'm sorry. I'm not going.

Royal Guard #1 steps forward, takes America's arm.

ROYAL GUARD #1
We'll sort this out at the Palace.

Aspen shoves Royal Guard #1 away --

ASPEN
She said she's not going --

Royal Guard #2 SMASHES HIS BILLY CLUB against Aspen's forehead. Aspen fights back, but the Guard HITS him again, then STOMPS him to the ground.

AMERICA
Aspen!

Blood pours from Aspen's head and nose. America tries to WRENCH FREE from Guard #1, but he holds her fast.

ROYAL GUARD #1
You're coming with us. Now.

As Aspen struggles against Royal Guard #2 --

MYLAN
America. You don't have a choice.

A beat. America knows he's right. She turns to Aspen --

AMERICA
I'll make them send me home. I promise.

As Guard #1 leads her from the room, America's eyes lock with Aspen's. OFF America and Aspen, torn apart --

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. PALACE - WAR ROOM - DAY

The Palace War Room. A LARGE THREE-DIMENSIONAL MAP of ILLEA occupies the center of the room. Around it, the King, Queen, and Rafe consult with CAPTAIN SHANE (40's, battle-scarred, military through and through).

CAPTAIN SHANE
Should I wait for Prince Maxon?

KING CLARKSON
(pissed)
My eldest son doesn't bother with matters of national security. He's busy with important things like skirt-chasing and whiskey.

The Queen puts a quieting hand on the King's arm.

QUEEN AMBERLY
Don't upset yourself, love.

KING CLARKSON
He's the heir to the throne. He knows damn well he should be here.

RAFE
I'll fill Maxon in, Father.

This calms the King. Rafe is his favorite. He nods, turns to the Captain.

KING CLARKSON
Just begin, Captain.

CAPTAIN SHANE
As you ordered, with the approach of The Selection the Royal Army has been particularly aggressive in our pursuit of the Rebels. Over the last month, we've been able to push the Rebel command base back to the border of the neutral zone.

Captain Shane indicates a MARKER printed with a RED SNAKE at the far end of the country.

KING CLARKSON
What about splinter units?

CAPTAIN SHANE
We've taken out most of them.

RAFE
Most doesn't exactly inspire confidence.

CAPTAIN SHANE
(admits)
There's one particularly wily unit led by Rebel Commander Gaia Woods.

The Captain indicates a photo of GAIA on a wall covered with the Command structure of the Rebels. Gaia is near the top.

RAFE
She pulled off that raid last year on the grain depot. Killed twelve Guardsmen. Managed to deplete most of our winter stores. She's fearless.

CAPTAIN SHANE
And smart. But we've been all over her. The last report I got from the field had her...

The Captain indicates a RED SNAKE MARKER on the other side of some pretty intense looking mountains.

CAPTAIN SHANE (CONT'D)
... over the mountains. At this point, it looks like Gaia Woods and her Rebel forces are far, far away.

EXT. PALACE - DAY

A long shot of the Palace. PULL BACK to find we're looking at the Palace through...

EXT. WOODS - DAY

... a TELESCOPIC LENS held by GAIA WOODS herself. She's strong, focused, beautiful. With her is a force of twenty leather-clad, weather-beaten REBELS, including lieutenants PAZE (20's, brash) and WALLACK (30's, smart). And we realize... she and her Rebel squad are not far, far away at all.

As Gaia watches, a line of sleek, horse-drawn carriages enter the front gates of the Palace. Her eyes narrow.

GAIA
Lambs to the slaughter...

We PUSH IN on the carriages...

EXT. PALACE - DAY

... and MOVE PAST the carriage windows, each occupied by a beaming Selection candidate, every girl more thrilled than the last...

... until we LAND ON America's carriage. America's face (framed by her well-worn CLOAK) is a stark contrast to the other girls'. She regards the looming Palace with dread.

When her carriage comes to a stop, a Royal Guard opens the door and helps America alight. (In the b.g., we see a Palace servant, PETER, 20's, gentle-eyed, helping to carry Celeste's luggage. We'll meet him later.) Around America, the other candidates chatter and laugh excitedly -- we see Ashley, Fiona, and Celeste, mingling in the giddy crowd. And then we're...

INT. PALACE - INTERCUT

... watching from inside the Palace, where Maxon stands at a high window. His eyes are amused, predatory, as they take in the scene.

Maxon's gaze moves from girl to girl -- Fiona, Ashley, Celeste, others -- until he settles on America. While her manner of dress sets her apart, it's her demeanor that makes her stand out. She holds herself separately from the other girls, taking in everything with serious eyes. As Maxon watches America, intrigued, Rafe walks up behind him.

RAFE
You bailed on the War Council. Again.

MAXON
I was busy.

Rafe follows Maxon's look out the window --

RAFE
Trying to decide which one you're going to defile first?

MAXON
Don't be absurd.

As if she knows she's being watched, America looks up and meets Maxon's eye. Their look holds for a minute, then America looks away. Maxon grins, eyes still on her.

MAXON (CONT'D)
I've already decided.

OFF Maxon, reveling in being in the catbird seat, as America follows the other girls into the Palace.

INT. PALACE - STEAM BATHS - DAY

CLOSE ON America's shirt coming off, revealing her bare back. As she slips into a silk robe, go WIDE to find she's being assisted by Lucy (the maid we met fucking Maxon), and we're in a huge, pillared room with an enormous marble thermal pool steaming in its center.

AMERICA
Really, I'm perfectly capable of getting undressed.

LUCY
I'm your personal attendant, Miss. It's my pleasure to help you. And you'll need me. Etiquette lessons, dance lessons, state dinners... you're going to be very busy.

Throughout the room, the twenty-five Selection candidates are being stripped to their skivvies by an army of MAIDS, and pampered with various spa treatments. The luxury and decadence is like nothing America has ever seen before -- and it doesn't sit easily with her.

As America ties her robe, Lucy handles America's discarded clothes as if she's afraid she might get lice. As she hands off the clothes to a chamber maid:

LUCY (CONT'D)
Burn these.

AMERICA
No, don't!

Lucy leans close, drops her obsequious maid demeanor.

LUCY
Look, the Prince is gonna set you up with a whole new wardrobe. One Labor classer to another...? Go with it.

AMERICA
Still. I want to keep my own clothes.

LUCY
(shrugs)
Whatever.

She dismisses the other maid with a nod.

LUCY (CONT'D)
(to America)
This way.

She guides America to an area where several girls -- including Celeste, Fiona, and Ashley -- get pedicures. America notes the overflowing bowls of fresh fruit scattered through the room.

AMERICA
Is there always so much food?

LUCY
This is just a snack. Wait 'til you see the spread at the festival tomorrow.

Lucy settles America into a chair and hands her a cold glass of cucumber water, while another attendant brings a copper pail of hot water and starts massaging her feet. America listens to the conversation already in progress among the other girls.

CELESTE
(to Fiona)
I know why you're here. I mean, really, you're probably the most obvious choice to make it all the way. They might as well just put the crown on your head now.

FIONA
I'm sure we've all got an equal chance.

CELESTE
Please. The King would love to get access to your daddy's iron ore mines. All that steel could make a lot of weapons to fight the Rebels.

She's right, and Fiona knows it.

ASHLEY
I don't understand. Weren't we all picked randomly?

Celeste gives Fiona a look. Plebeians. Turns to Ashley.

CELESTE
Let me guess. You're a Merchant classer?

ASHLEY
What difference does that make?

FIONA
(kindly)
Among the Noble Class, it's widely believed that the lottery is a sham.
(beat)
That the Palace has really picked each of us for a particular strategic reason.

America is really listening now.

CELESTE
(nods at Fiona)
Her daddy's iron ore, my family's sea access...
(points around the room)
Ramona's mother has about a million head of cattle, Tressa's dad's in the gold trade...
(nods at America)
And then there's the token worker bee.

AMERICA
What did you call me?

Celeste rolls her eyes.

CELESTE
Isn't that what you Labor classers do? Work work work like busy little bees?

FIONA
Celeste.

CELESTE
Oh, don't be so sensitive, Fiona. I'm just saying, we all know the Palace had to pick one Labor classer to keep "the People" happy.
(looks at America, thoughtful)
But there must be something more to you. Something that makes you special.

AMERICA
Even if there is, I won't be here long enough find out.

FIONA
I'm sure the Prince will love you and you'll be here a long time.

That's not what America meant at all, but she smiles at Fiona's kindness. Ashley's still confused.

ASHLEY
But... my parents run a hardware store. If you're right, why would the Palace pick me?

CELESTE
That's easy. You're filler.

ASHLEY
Filler?

CELESTE
Cute, sweet, from one of the middle classes. In short, nothing special. The Prince has to have someone to send home early.

Ashley's face falls. She's crushed, but hangs onto hope --

ASHLEY
But... in the last Selection, Queen Amberly was from the Merchant class. And the King fell madly in love with her.

America, always one to champion the underdog, smiles at Ashley.

AMERICA
See? I'm sure you've got just as good a chance of winning the Prince's heart as anyone.

CELESTE
(laughs)
We're talking about Prince Maxon. It's not his heart you should be worried about.

As Ashley considers this, a murmur goes through the room -- Sylvan has arrived.

SYLVAN
Ladies... when your treatments are done, please join me in the day room.

INT. PALACE - DAY ROOM - DAY

An elegant lounge. All twenty-five girls are assembled, fresh from the spa, dressed in silk robes. America sits on a couch with Fiona and Ashley. Celeste is draped across a chaise lounge. Sylvan addresses them from the front of the room.

SYLVAN
Welcome. I am Sylvan Santos, Social Secretary to the Royal Family and your guide in all things related to The Selection.

The candidates clap. Sylvan raises a hand to hush them.

SYLVAN (CONT'D)
You are now the twenty-five most famous young women in Illea. That distinction brings many perks, but it's also a great responsibility. Much will be expected of you.

The girls exchange glances. This just got real.

SYLVAN (CONT'D)
(smiles)
Tomorrow, Prince Maxon will officially welcome you at the Winter Festival. From that point on, it will be up to him to decide who he will send home and when. I imagine the first dismissals will come tomorrow evening after the Festival.

The girls look around the room, all wondering -- who will he send home first?

SYLVAN (CONT'D)
That is all for now. Get settled, get some rest. You're dismissed.
(then, to America)
Except you. You come with me.

As America leaves with Sylvan, Celeste leans in to the girl next to her --

CELESTE
Flea check.

INT. PALACE - HALLWAY - DAY

Sylvan and America walk and talk. Sylvan keeps a brisk pace.

SYLVAN
I'm told you made quite a scene when your Royal escort showed up.
(beat)
Any other young woman from the Labor Class would be thrilled to participate in The Selection.

AMERICA
I'm more than just my class.

SYLVAN
(amused)
Indeed. You're a bit of a pain in the ass, aren't you?

AMERICA
(ventures)
Then send me home. Replace me with someone else. My sister would love --

SYLVAN
Not a possibility.

AMERICA
Why? Just let me --

America and Sylvan turn a corner --

INT. PALACE - VESTIBULE - NIGHT

-- and she is struck speechless. The entire vestibule of the Palace is FULL OF FLOWERS! Piles of them, of every size and color, are stacked against the walls, flowing over the floor. ATTENDANTS enter with arms laden, drop their bounty, and exit to get more.

SYLVAN
<u>This</u> is why.

It takes America to process what he means. Then, stunned --

AMERICA
These are... for me?

SYLVAN
More arrive every moment, delivered to the Palace gate by your people.

AMERICA
I don't have "people."

SYLVAN
Oh, you have “people.”
(beat)
America, you are the sole representative of the Labor Class chosen to vie for the Prince’s hand. You’re the girl the populace will rally around -- they already are. Because you’re one of them. Is it so hard to see that as a good thing?

America looks at the flowers, overwhelmed.

AMERICA
But... I don’t want to be some... symbol. I just want... my life. The one I woke up to this morning, the one where, if nothing else, I can at least make my own choice about who I marry.

SYLVAN
Ah, yes. I heard about your young man.

AMERICA
I could demand to leave.

SYLVAN
(not without sympathy)
America. The life you thought you were going to have... it’s gone. The sooner you accept that, the better.

A beat. Then America shakes her head.

AMERICA
What if I can’t?

Sylvan gives her a long look. Long enough to impart the seriousness of what he’s saying.

SYLVAN
Just trust me. You don’t want to make an enemy of the Palace.

OFF America --

INT. PALACE - AMERICA'S ROOM - NIGHT

America, disturbed after her conversation with Sylvan, enters to find Maxon, casually lounging on her bed. She's surprised, confused.

AMERICA
Sorry, I must be in the wrong room--

But she sees a nightgown laid out on the bed, her old clothes hanging in the wardrobe... and puts the pieces together.

AMERICA (CONT'D)
Or you are.

MAXON
I'd introduce myself, but... why state the obvious?

AMERICA
Prince Maxon... what're you doing here?

MAXON
(grins)
Or maybe I should state the obvious.

It's all just too much. Despite Sylvan's warning not to make enemies, America takes a deep breath, and --

AMERICA
I want you to leave.

Maxon raises a skeptical eyebrow. He gets off the bed, approaches America.

MAXON
Really?

AMERICA
Definitely.

MAXON
Interesting.

Not the response she expected.

AMERICA
Really?

MAXON
Definitely.

AMERICA
Why?

He's got her backed against a wall now.

MAXON
To start with, women don't usually talk to me like that. Men either, for that matter. And from a Labor classer, no less. I'm impressed.
(beat, leans in)
The question is... what am I going to do about -- OUCH!

America's foot has just connected with Maxon's shin.

MAXON (CONT'D)
What the hell?

America realizes what she's done.

AMERICA
I'm sorry. I know you're the Prince, but... will you just go?

MAXON
You're serious. <u>Fascinating.</u>

AMERICA
Or... you could send me home.

Maxon assesses her, truly assesses her, for the first time.

MAXON
No... I don't think so.
(beat)
I haven't had this much fun with a girl who wasn't naked in... ever. Imagine how much fun we'll have when I finally get you into bed.

AMERICA
That's not gonna happen.

Maxon tucks a stray hair behind America's ear.

MAXON
Your certainty is adorable.

AMERICA
And you, Prince Maxon, have no shame.

MAXON
None at all. Sleep tight.

Maxon heads for the door. OFF America, fuming, as he exits --

INT. WOODS - REBEL CAMP - NIGHT

Under the canopy of the woods, with the lights of the Palace in the distance, Gaia listens as Paze and Wallack argue.

PAZE
I'm telling you: Fiona Castley. The Royals know her. We nab her, we're hitting 'em where it hurts.

GAIA
Not good enough.

A beat, then:

WALLACK
The one from the Hampton Province. We don't have a lot of support there. The plan goes right, we could win some people over --

GAIA
America Singer.

PAZE
The Labor classer? She has even less power than we do --

Gaia shuts him up with a look.

GAIA
Her name. America. It's the most revered of the Old Countries. It represents everything we're fighting for: a land where everyone has a voice, where every citizen can choose their own destiny, not be defined by class. A land with no monarchy.

WALLACK
(gets it)
And when she disappears, the masses will care. She's one of them. We'll have their attention.

GAIA
Then, when she comes out publicly in support of our cause... think how powerful that will be.

PAZE
Yeah, but how do we know she'll do that?

Gaia chills him with a look.

GAIA
She won't have a choice.

AS Gaia turns her plotting eyes to the Palace...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. PALACE - AMERICA'S ROOM - NIGHT

The moon shines into America's room, casting shadows as she tosses and turns in her sleep.

The FIGURE of a MAN steps from the shadows, CREEPING toward America! Suddenly, there's a HAND over her mouth! America jolts awake, tries to scream, but --

MAN
Aspen sent me.

America blinks. As the figure leans into a beam of moonlight, we see Peter, the gentle-eyed Palace servant we saw in Act Two.

PETER
Just don't scream, okay?

America nods, and Peter takes his hand from her mouth.

PETER (CONT'D)
I'm Peter. Come with me.

INT. PALACE - SERVANTS' QUARTERS - NIGHT

Peter leads America on a circuitous route through the Palace's back hallways and secluded stairwells.

AMERICA
(quietly)
Where are we going?

PETER
Somewhere no one important is likely to see us. The servants' quarters.

AMERICA
Isn't this dangerous? You helping us?

PETER
I could lose my job, probably spend the rest of my life in the dungeon.
(beat)
But Aspen's my oldest friend, and I'm a sucker for star-crossed love.

As they turn a corner into...

INT. PALACE - SERVANT'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A dark, cavernous space, where Aspen waits. America flies into his arms --

AMERICA
They won't let me leave. I tried, but --

Aspen silences her with a kiss. Then --

ASPEN
It doesn't matter. I'm getting you out of here.

AMERICA
What are you talking about?

ASPEN
We can't wait for you to get sent home. I got drafted. Army says I have to report day after tomorrow.

AMERICA
But there's not a draft right now.
(realizes)
This is because of what happened at my house. They're punishing you for fighting back.

ASPEN
(wry)
And I'm not exactly the Army type.

AMERICA
You'll keep fighting back, and they'll keep trying to break you. You won't survive.

ASPEN
Which is why... this is it. Someday is now. You in?

AMERICA
(smiles)
When do we leave?

Peter speaks up.

PETER
The Winter Festival is tomorrow night. The guard at the South Gate is always plastered after big events. I can get you out then.

Aspen takes America's hand. He wants her to be sure.

ASPEN
You'll be giving up a lot, leaving The Selection. You'd be famous, rich.

AMERICA
I don't care about that.

ASPEN
You care about your family --

AMERICA
And we'll help them. When we get where we're going, wherever that is, we'll send my family whatever money we can, and I'll always love them. But Aspen...
(beat)
The only thing I'm not willing to give up is you.

He looks into her eyes. She means it. He smiles.

ASPEN
Okay, then.

AMERICA
Okay, then.

They kiss, lost in each other.

PETER
And... I'm still here.

OFF America and Aspen --

INT. PALACE - MAXON'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

PAN UP a pool cue to FIND Ashley, wearing only her bra and a pair of tight pants. She giggles as she pulls back the cue...

ASHLEY
I hope I can make it go straight...

Prince Maxon (wearing only boxers) saunters up to Ashley, gives her a little bump. As the shot goes wide, we GO WIDE too... and find that Maxon is hosting a strip-pool party with a small group of Selection candidates.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)
Prince Maxon! Not fair!

Maxon takes a slug from his glass of brandy. Smiles wryly.

MAXON
Pants.

Ashley flirtatiously removes her pants, revealing lace panties... but Maxon's attention is already on to the next girl-- Tressa, who we saw in the Spa scene.

MAXON (CONT'D)
My turn. Think I'll need a little help lining up my shot...

Ashley's face falls in disappointment as Maxon picks up TRESSA, sets her on the edge of the pool table, then stands between her legs as he lines up his shot.

MAXON (CONT'D)
I could use a little good luck.

As Tressa leans in to give him a kiss, THWAK! The pool cue is ripped from Maxon's hands and CRACKED in half against the edge of the pool table! A beat, then Maxon sighs.

MAXON (CONT'D)
Hello, Father.

KING CLARKSON
(to the girls)
Out. Now.

The girls flee as Maxon turns to face the King, who glares at him, livid.

MAXON
(re: the cue)
That was my best stick, by the way. Had it custom made by --

KING CLARKSON
Shut up.

Maxon does. A long beat, as father and son face off. Then --

KING CLARKSON (CONT'D)
God forbid I should die. This country would fall to ruin.

The King's words are meant to hurt -- and they do. But Maxon would never show it.

MAXON
Just doing my duty, Father. Trying to find a suitable wife.

The King gives Maxon a long stare. Then BACKHANDS him across the face.

KING CLARKSON
Do you think I don't hear about your antics with the servants? That it escapes me when you shirk your responsibilities?

The King looks around the room, disgusted.

KING CLARKSON (CONT'D)
And now this. This is how you go about finding a Queen?
(beat)
Grow up, Maxon. Show me you deserve my crown.
(beat)
Or I'll make sure you never get it.

OFF Maxon, seething, as the King exits --

INT. PALACE - CELESTE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Celeste sits at her dressing table, meticulously laying out her extensive jewelry collection. In the b.g., her maid, Ondine, enters. Celeste's attention stays on her jewelry.

CELESTE
Did you get it?

Ondine approaches, hands Celeste a piece of paper.

ONDINE
As you asked. The rotation schedule for the King's personal guards.

Celeste surveys the paper.

CELESTE
Good.

ONDINE
I had to blow half a dozen soldiers for that. All you can say is "good?"

Celeste gives her a look.

CELESTE
What would you like me to say? "Have a mint?"

Celeste picks up a particularly elaborate bracelet.

CELESTE (CONT'D)
Or perhaps you think you deserve a gift for your trouble? A little something pretty?

She rises, holds out the bracelet. But as Ondine approaches, Celeste hits a secret latch on the bracelet, and a small DAGGER shoots out!

AS Celeste holds the dagger to Ondine's neck...

CELESTE (CONT'D)
Ah, yes... this should do quite nicely to kill a King.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. PALACE - COURTYARD - DAY 2

An elaborate WINTER FESTIVAL in the Palace Courtyard. Prominently on display is the ENGAGEMENT RING that Prince Maxon will eventually present to the last girl standing. The Selection candidates subtly circle the ring like ballgown-clad sharks, trying not to look too eager.

Overflowing trays of food cover enormous banquet tables. ORNATE SCULPTURES decorate the perimeter, each one labeled with the name of the Province it represents -- i.e., an OAK TREE, a basket of GOLD PEACHES, an ICE CARVING of a SALMON leaping, an ENORMOUS SHIP surging through WOOD-CARVED WAVES.

FIND Prince Maxon, looking his most regal (and on his best behavior after the encounter with the King), standing in front of the assembled guests. As the King, Queen, Rafe, and Sylvan look on, Maxon clinks his champagne glass. The Selection Candidates move to the front of the crowd -- America among them -- as all faces turn toward the Prince --

MAXON
Ladies, gentlemen, Selection candidates... Welcome. I have looked forward to this moment for most of my life, since I was a small boy hearing the romantic story of how my father selected his Queen, my mother.

The crowd applauds the Queen and King, who gives Maxon an approving nod. The Selection candidates beam with excitement, each one hoping to catch Maxon's eye.

MAXON (CONT'D)
It has recently been pointed out to me that I have no shame...

A ripple of jealousy passes through the girls as Maxon locks eyes with America.

MAXON (CONT'D)
And that is true. When it comes to the future of my country...

Now Maxon looks at his father, intent.

MAXON (CONT'D)
... there is nothing I will not do.
(then, droll)
(MORE)

MAXON (CONT'D)
For my country, for example, I will suffer through hours in the company of these gorgeous women. Wining and dining them, wooing them... how will I ever survive?

The crowd laughs. Maxon addresses the Selection candidates.

MAXON (CONT'D)
And ultimately, I have no doubt that this Selection will be as successful as the last, and that among you is the love of my life, the next Queen of Illea!

The crowd claps. The women cheer. Maxon raises his glass to the candidates, then turns and raises it to his father.

MAXON (CONT'D)
Now... let's get this party started!

Maxon SMASHES the champagne glass to the ground. The BAND STRIKES UP a song, and Maxon pulls the closest Selection candidate -- who happens to be Celeste -- into a dance.

CELESTE
Nice speech. I think some of these girls actually bought that "love of your life" line.

Maxon raises an eyebrow.

MAXON
Beautiful and cynical, too. You might be the perfect woman. Where were <u>you</u> last night?

CELESTE
(smiles)
I skipped your little unofficial welcome party. And if I were you, I'd send home every girl who showed up.

MAXON
(droll)
Oh, would you?

CELESTE
Too desperate.
(then)
And to be clear, I'm not cynical. Just honest.
(MORE)

CELESTE (CONT'D)
(beat)
I want to marry you. Who you love... well, that's your business.

OFF Maxon, liking this one...

INT. PALACE - COURTYARD - DAY

FIND America, who eyes the extravagant diamond engagement ring, which is mounted on a pedestal for all to see. This is what all the other girls are after... but she doesn't want it at all. Fiona approaches.

FIONA
(re: the diamond ring)
Picturing it on your finger?

AMERICA
Not exactly.

Fiona gives her a look, sensing a kindred spirit.

FIONA
In that case... you and I might be the only two girls here who wouldn't die to wear that ring.

America is surprised.

AMERICA
You don't want to marry the Prince?

On the other side of the party, Rafe crosses. He and Fiona lock eyes for a beat. Then Fiona looks away. (NOTE: America doesn't see this.)

FIONA
No, I do. Of course I do. It's just... complicated.
(then)
Ignore me.

But Fiona seems like she needs to talk --

AMERICA
Are you sure? You can trust me, if you want to talk --

FIONA
(kindly)
America, this is The Selection. As long as that ring is in contention, no one can be trusted.

Fiona gives her an apologetic smile, walks away. OFF America --

INT. PALACE - COURTYARD - DAY

FIND the King and Queen, on the periphery of the crowd. They watch Maxon, who now dances with a fawning Tressa.

KING CLARKSON
How many bastards do you suppose he'll spawn before this Selection is through?

QUEEN AMBERLY
Clarkson, don't be --
(off him, admits with a smile)
One or two.

But her smile fades instantly as the King FALTERS on his feet. Quickly, the Queen steps close to him, holding his weight for a beat until he regains his strength. She looks around to make sure no one noticed. Quietly, concerned --

QUEEN AMBERLY (CONT'D)
Darling, this keeps happening. I want you to see a doctor --

KING CLARKSON
I'm fine.

He pulls her in for a dance, forces a smile.

KING CLARKSON (CONT'D)
Don't worry, my dear. I'm going to be around a long, long time.

OFF the Queen, worried --

INT. PALACE - HALLWAY - DAY

Rafe enters an empty corridor. We hear footsteps ahead of him -- he's following someone. But who? Rafe turns a corner, and...

There's Fiona! Immediately, we feel the chemistry between them.

FIONA
You shouldn't have followed me.

RAFE
You knew I would.

A loaded beat, and then they're kissing. It's hot, intense. And then Fiona pulls away.

FIONA
We can't do this.

RAFE
Because you might be marrying my brother in a few months?

FIONA
(bristles)
You're the one who's basically engaged to the ambassador's daughter.

RAFE
My father made an agreement with the ambassador, I'm not beholden to it --

FIONA
We both know that's not true.
(then, kindly)
It's okay. What happened between us... it was one night. It didn't mean... anything.

Of course, it's clear from her tone that it did.

RAFE
Is that why you stopped accompanying your father when he comes to the Palace on business?

FIONA
It didn't seem... prudent.

A beat.

RAFE
You do know, if my parents have any sway over Maxon at all... he'll choose you.

FIONA
(pains her)
And I'll accept. If I didn't, my father would disown me.

RAFE
Fiona...

Fiona cuts him off with a bright smile.

FIONA
At least we can be friends.

RAFE
(wry)
The line every man dreams of hearing.
(then)
It's not enough --

He reaches for her, but Fiona pushes him away.

FIONA
It has to be.

As Fiona flees, OFF Rafe, frustrated --

INT. PALACE - COURTYARD - NIGHT

It's evening now. Near the giant SHIP SCULPTURE, FIND America. She picks up an apple from an overly laden table, slips it in a pocket hidden in the folds of her dress.

Suddenly, she finds herself being swept into Prince Maxon's arms. As they spin onto the dance floor:

MAXON
(re: the apple)
You know, I can have a whole crate of those sent to your room. There's no need to sneak them.
(then)
So... are you in love with me yet?

AMERICA
No.

Maxon laughs.

AMERICA (CONT'D)
Why is that funny?

MAXON
Every other girl here is falling all over herself to tell me how wonderful I am. But you...

Over Maxon's shoulder, America's eyes search the party. Maxon notices.

MAXON (CONT'D)
You act like I'm keeping you from something important.

America can't tell him the truth -- that she's looking for Peter -- so she covers.

AMERICA
I'm just a little overwhelmed. The party, the food, the wine...
(beat)
The food on that table alone would feed my family for a year. And when this party's done, you're probably just going to throw it away.

Maxon gives her a look.

MAXON
What should we do? Bronze it?
(then)
Whatever issues you may have with the Monarchy, we make sure no one starves.

America sees Peter standing on the fringes of the party.

AMERICA
You should get outside these walls once in a while. See for yourself. Now if you'll excuse me. I'm sure there are other girls you want to dance with.

America walks away, leaving a stunned Maxon --

INT. PALACE - COURTYARD - NIGHT

America approaches Peter, who puts wood on a fire in a massive fireplace. America pretends to warm her hands --

AMERICA
Did you get it?

PETER
(nods)
One maid's uniform, as requested. Wrapped in the back of your closet. Can you get to the servants' quarters on your own?
(off her nod)
Meet me there at midnight. I'll take you down the path to the South Gate. You'll have to wear something to cover your face.

AMERICA
I have the cloak I was wearing when I got here.
(MORE)

AMERICA (CONT'D)
(beat)
And Aspen. He'll be waiting.

Peter nods toward a window with a view of a nearby hill.

PETER
There.
(beat)
And then you're on your own.

AMERICA
We'll never be able to thank you enough --

Suddenly, America hears a SCREAM! SHOTS ring out! Guests scatter as the giant SHIP SCULPTURE SPLITS OPEN! REBELS, led by Gaia Woods, pour out! And we realize... the Rebels used the ship as a Trojan Horse -- they've been at the party all along!

CHAOS erupts! A contingent of Royal Guards ushers the King and Queen to safety. Another contingent rushes for Maxon, surrounds him and shoves him out of harm's way.

Rafe, soldier that he is, pulls out a gun as the Rebels -- including Paze and Wallack -- SHOOT AND KILL as many Royal Guards as they can while they still have the element of surprise. Rafe SHOOTS a Rebel, then shouts at a terrified Fiona --

RAFE
Get down!

But the Rebels aren't interested in Fiona. Led by Paze, they're headed for America!

PAZE
Grab her!

Two Rebels lunge for her, but Peter sees what's going down, throws himself in front of her.

PETER
Run!

As a frightened America makes a break for it, Peter TACKLES one Rebel just as a Royal Guard SHOOTS the other, but Paze is still coming! Peter grabs a piece of wood, knocks the first Rebel out, as Paze raises his gun --

AMERICA
Peter!

BAM! Peter goes down.

AMERICA (CONT'D)
No!

Paze grabs her, but America fights back. He loses his grip, and she scrambles away as the Royal Guard finally regroups and starts taking back the Courtyard.

Gaia, engaged in a gun battle with a new cadre of Guards that's pouring into the Courtyard, sees Paze lose his grip on America. She also sees Ashley, cowering, alone and unprotected.

GAIA
(to Paze)
Forget her! Let's go!

Gaia GRABS Ashley, and runs for the exit. The other Rebels follow. As they disappear into the darkness, pursued by Royal Guards, America scrambles to Peter, who's bleeding from a shot to the stomach.

AMERICA
You're gonna be okay. You're gonna be okay. You're gonna be okay.

OFF America, a bleeding Peter in her arms --

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. PALACE - COURTYARD - NIGHT

America tries to staunch the blood from Peter's wound with her hands. Peter struggles to stay conscious.

AMERICA
I need help!

PETER
I'm sorry...

AMERICA
Somebody help me!

Peter grabs America's arm, weak.

PETER
Promise me... you won't go. Too dangerous without me...

Peter can barely breathe. America tries to smile at him, but her eyes are filling with tears.

AMERICA
We'll talk later, when you're better --

PETER
No. Listen. There will be... more guards now.

Peter coughs, his lungs filling with blood.

PETER (CONT'D)
You won't make it...

AMERICA
Peter...

OFF America, devastated, as Peter takes his last breath...

INT. PALACE - WAR ROOM - NIGHT

The King, Queen, Maxon, Rafe, and Captain Shane are gathered in the War Room. Tension is high. King Clarkson thunders --

KING CLARKSON
HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

CAPTAIN SHANE
There was a breach in our intelligence, Your Majesty --

KING CLARKSON
You promised me that Rebel forces were nowhere near the Palace --

King Clarkson breaks off as he's overcome by a pain in his head. Queen Amberly places a calming hand on his arm.

QUEEN AMBERLY
This isn't the time to lay blame.

MAXON
(droll)
Of course it is. That was a disaster.

CAPTAIN SHANE
We have teams searching the rooms of everyone in the Palace, including the Selection candidates. In case the Rebels had help from the inside.

RAFE
Six guards are dead. One girl is missing. Are you ready to halt The Selection now?

KING CLARKSON
Enough! I will not give the Rebels that satisfaction.

A beat as Rafe comes to a conclusion --

RAFE
Then we've got to crush them, Father. We've got to make them pay.

CAPTAIN SHANE
I sent scouts after the Rebels. They've tracked Gaia Woods and her unit to a spot about ten kilometers from here.

QUEEN AMBERLY
Do we think Ashley Brouillette is alive?

MAXON
She's not of much use dead.

KING CLARKSON
Gather our best soldiers. Attack at midnight. Rafe will lead.
(MORE)

KING CLARKSON (CONT'D)
(to Rafe)
Do what you will to the Rebels. Except Gaia Woods -- bring her to me.

As Rafe nods, the door opens. A SOLDIER enters, face grim.

SOLDIER
We found something.

INT. PALACE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Rafe and Captain Shane walk and talk with the Soldier --

SOLDIER
Our teams were searching the girls' rooms, looking for evidence of Rebel activity.

RAFE
And?

SOLDIER
We found none. But we discovered something much worse. Evidence that one of the Selection candidates intends to assassinate King Clarkson.

RAFE
What kind of evidence?

SOLDIER
A schedule of the King's personal guard rotation. And this --

The Soldier shows Rafe a BRACELET, then reveals how the bracelet transforms into a SMALL DAGGER. We realize -- it's the one Celeste had at the end of Act Three. AS Rafe reacts --

INT. PALACE - GIRLS' WING - BEDROOM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Rafe and Captain Shane stride toward the Selection candidates, who stand with their MAIDS outside their bedroom doors...

ON AMERICA, who stands with Lucy. As the men walk toward her, America's eyes dart to the open door of her room. Is it possible they found the hidden maid's uniform? America breathes a sigh of relief as Rafe and Captain Shane pass by.

Now we're ON CELESTE, who exchanges a glance with Ondine as the men approach. But they walk past Celeste -- and SEIZE FIONA!

FIONA
(struggling)
What is this? What's going on?

As America watches, horrified, Captain Shane HANDCUFFS Fiona.

CAPTAIN SHANE
Fiona Castley, you're suspected of plotting harm against His Majesty the King.

RAFE
Don't resist. You'll make it worse.

FIONA
This is insane --

As Captain Shane leads Fiona down the hall, Celeste flashes a subtle smile at Ondine. She was behind this.

CAPTAIN SHANE
You'll have every opportunity to explain yourself, Miss Castley.

FIONA
But I didn't do anything! Rafe! You have to believe me --

Rafe leans into Fiona, whispers for only her ears --

RAFE
I believe you. Just -- be strong.

Rafe steps back, nods to Captain Shane who continues on with Fiona. As Fiona is dragged away, Ondine leans close to Celeste.

ONDINE
There goes your biggest rival. Well done.

CELESTE
(smiles, quietly)
I knew having you plant the dagger in her room would pay off at some point... but so soon? Daddy will be so proud.

OFF Celeste --

INT. PALACE - AMERICA'S ROOM - NIGHT

America paces in her room, shaken and scared. What is she going to do now? Lucy enters with a TEA TRAY --

LUCY
I thought some tea might calm your nerves --

AMERICA
I don't want tea. Just leave me alone.

Lucy turns to go. America realizes she's being a bitch.

AMERICA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Lucy. I didn't mean it that way.

LUCY
(chilly)
No problem. I'll come back for the tray.

AMERICA
It'll wait 'til tomorrow. I really just want to sleep.

As Lucy exits, America gazes out her WINDOW. Aspen is out there. Despite Peter's warning, she has to go to him. America goes to her closet and finds the MAID'S UNIFORM, hidden just as Peter promised. AS America begins to change into the uniform --

INT. PALACE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

America, dressed as a maid and wearing her HOODED CLOAK, carries a HALF-FILLED PILLOWCASE as she hurries through the maze of Palace hallways. She pulls the cloak hood over her head, HIDING HER FACE, as she passes an unsuspecting ROYAL GUARD...

EXT. PALACE GROUNDS - NIGHT

PALACE SERVANTS scurry back and forth, cleaning up after the Winter Festival. Other servants head toward PALACE GATES, going home for the night. America keeps her head down, joins a group of Servants walking toward the South Gate...

EXT. PALACE - SOUTH GATE - NIGHT

... as America approaches the gate, she sees FOUR ROYAL GUARDS checking and re-checking the ID of each Servant as he/she exits. Shit. America melts back into the shadows... she needs a plan.

America looks over, sees TWO SERVANTS loading TRASH CANS onto a HORSE-DRAWN CART. One of the servants signals a nearby Guard.

SERVANT
We're loaded.

America watches as the Guard carefully checks the cart and its contents. As the Guard does his work, America notes a TARP on the back of the cart. When the Guard is finished, he signals another Guard at the gate.

GUARD.
They're cleared.

When the two Male Servants get in the cart to leave, America waits for the split second when no guards are looking... and SPRINGS into ACTION. She darts from the shadows, and JUMPS onto the back of the cart, covering herself with the tarp.

EXT. PALACE - MOVING TRASH CART - NIGHT

America crouches under the tarp as the Cart heads for the South Gate. She clutches her pillowcase, holding her breath as the Cart moves through the Gate, toward freedom...

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - MOVING TRASH CART - A BIT LATER

Outside Palace walls. Deserted country road. The trash cart makes its way to the landfill. America pulls back the tarp and stares at the ground moving beneath her. It's now or never. She braces herself, then JUMPS.

America falls in a heap on the ground, but quickly recovers, RUNNING for cover behind a tree. Moments later, the Trash Cart turns a corner, disappearing from view. She's free!

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

America RUNS across hills, exhilarated. In the distance, America sees a hill. Smiles. That's where Aspen is waiting.

AMERICA
Aspen.

She starts SPRINTING toward the hill. Then... we hear GALLOPING. Suddenly -- America is SCOOPED OFF THE GROUND and dropped onto a horse. Shocked, she twists around to see who grabbed her. It's Prince Maxon!

MAXON
Going somewhere?

OFF America, totally fucked --

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

A secluded spot. We're back with Maxon and America as he jumps off his horse and pulls her down beside him.

AMERICA
Just let me go --

Maxon grabs the pillowcase --

MAXON
Looks like I've caught a thief, as well as a deserter...

He DUMPS the contents. ORANGES and APPLES spill out.

MAXON (CONT'D)
(genuinely confused)
Apples? You stole apples?

AMERICA
They're worth a lot to people who can't get them.

MAXON
What people would that be? People like... Aspen?
(off America)
I made some inquiries, found out all about your heart-wrenching good-bye.

America stares him down, doesn't respond.

MAXON (CONT'D)
(lightly)
And now you're going to run off, live happily ever after, surviving only on love and... apples?

AMERICA
That fruit will pay our way to somewhere far away from here.

Maxon sighs. With a nod toward the Palace, in the distance.

MAXON
Listen. I may be ignorant of what goes on outside the Palace walls, but you know nothing about what goes on inside. If you run tonight, you won't make it to the next town.
(MORE)

MAXON (CONT'D)
By morning, the entire Palace will know you're gone and the Royal Guards will hunt you down.
(beat)
And when they find you -- which they will -- they'll beat your boyfriend to a bloody pulp for absconding with a Selection candidate. And they'll put you both in jail for subversion.

AMERICA
No --

Suddenly, America is terrified for Aspen. Maxon steps away.

MAXON
But be my guest. Run. Take your chances.

America is frozen, doesn't know what to do. But she can't risk Aspen's safety.

AMERICA
No, I'll -- I'll go back.

MAXON
(beat, then)
Oh, you'll deign to return. Lucky me. I'm starting to think you're not worth the trouble.

America's wheels are turning.

AMERICA
But... you need me.

MAXON
Trust me, I don't.

AMERICA
(beat, then)
I have a deal to propose.

MAXON
You're in no position to negotiate.

AMERICA
So you don't care about defeating the Rebels?

MAXON
What do you know about the Rebels?

AMERICA
I know about the people.
(beat)
Think about it. There are more Labor classers than the other five classes put together. They're going to support the Monarchy or they're going to support the Rebels. And whoever wins their support... that's who will rule Illea.

MAXON
Keep talking.

AMERICA
Take me back, and I'll be the perfect Selection candidate. I'll tell anyone who will listen how wonderful the Monarchy is, how you will be an even greater leader than your father.

Maxon likes the sound of that.

AMERICA (CONT'D)
I'll make it seem like you care about us.
(beat)
I will give you the Labor Class.

A beat.

MAXON
You make a compelling argument.

America's eyes fill with tears.

AMERICA
I only want one thing. Aspen. He was drafted because of me, because I didn't want to come here.
(beat)
Promise me he won't have to go into the Army.

Maxon considers. Then --

MAXON
We have a deal.

OFF America, her fate sealed --

EXT. WOODS - REBEL CAMP - NIGHT

Dark woods. Near silence. Rafe and Captain Shane, on horseback, lead a group of elite Royal Guard. As they approach the Rebel Camp, Rafe gives a SIGNAL --

THREE ROYAL FOOT SOLDIERS spread out. In a STYLIZED SEQUENCE, each Foot Soldier sneaks up on a REBEL LOOKOUT, then STABS the Lookout from behind through the heart with a SWORD. As the Rebels fall dead...

Rafe, Captain Shane, and the Royal Guardsmen advance into the camp, where FIFTEEN REBELS, including Paze and Wallack, lie sleeping around dying fires. Rafe nods to Captain Shane. Let the killing begin. As Rafe, still on his horse, leans over a sleeping Rebel -- it's Paze -- and CUTS HIS THROAT...

INT. PALACE - THEATER - NIGHT

Queen Amberly and King Clarkson sit on their thrones in the empty theater, surrounded by a skeleton CAMERA CREW. King Clarkson addresses the CAMERA --

KING CLARKSON
Good evening, Citizens of Illea. Forgive us for this late evening broadcast, but we have important news to share. The Selection began in earnest today, but it did <u>not</u> go as planned. Something... shocking has occurred.

We think he's going to speak of the Rebel attack. Instead --

KING CLARKSON (CONT'D)
Prince Maxon has broken with tradition! He has decided <u>not</u> to send home a candidate following the Winter Festival.

QUEEN AMBERLY
The girls are so impressive that our son finds himself unable to part ways with even one.

The King and Queen are now all smiles, the propaganda machine in full swing. We begin a MUSIC MONTAGE...

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. HILLTOP - NIGHT

Aspen waits for America. He holds a SIMPLE SILVER BAND, which we can only assume is an engagement ring. As Aspen turns the band over and over in his hands, his face filled with hope...

KING CLARKSON (V.O.)
Maxon's dilemma reminds us once again what a strong nation we have...

INT. PALACE - DUNGEON - NIGHT

A ROYAL GUARD shoves a tear-streaked Fiona into a dank CELL --

KING CLARKSON (V.O.)
... All six Classes are populated by the best people in the world.

INT. PALACE - CELESTE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Celeste watches the King and Queen's report as her maid, Ondine, pulls pins from Celeste's hair, letting it fall down her back...

QUEEN AMBERLY (ON TV)
As we wish you good night, please know that all is well in Illea. Long live the King.

Ondine UNZIPS Celeste's dress --

CELESTE
(wry)
Long live the King.

Celeste leans over, SWITCHES OFF the screen as her dress falls to the floor. In her bra and panties, she turns to face Ondine.

CELESTE (CONT'D)
Your turn.

Celeste UNZIPS Ondine's maid's uniform... They KISS. We realize -- these two are LOVERS. As the MUSIC MONTAGE continues...

INT. PALACE - KING AND QUEEN'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

FIND QUEEN AMBERLY as she prepares the King's nightly tea. King Clarkson, frail and tired, rests on their bed in the b.g.

QUEEN AMBERLY
Word of the attack <u>will</u> leak out.

KING CLARKSON
Maybe. But we'll deny it.

QUEEN AMBERLY
With all of this Rebel activity... maybe you should consider opening The Vault.

KING CLARKSON
Amberly. We've discussed this.

QUEEN AMBERLY
It's just -- there's so much technology that's been sealed up for so long... There must be tools we could use against the Rebels.

KING CLARKSON
Dependence on technology is what led to The War, to the death of billions of people. I'm not going to take Illea down that path. We will not become vulnerable like our ancestors.

QUEEN AMBERLY
But you agreed to install the communications screens, and they've been a success --

KING CLARKSON
The answer is no. Now come to bed.

ON QUEEN AMBERLY as she slides a SMALL VIAL OF LIQUID out of her pocket.

QUEEN AMBERLY
Of course, dear. You know best.

She puts a FEW DROPS of the liquid into King Clarkson's tea, then hides the vial back in her pocket. We realize -- the Queen is POISONING the King....

EXT. HILLTOP - NIGHT

As Aspen waits, his hope fading, he hears APPROACHING HORSES. He turns to find SOLDIERS from the Royal Guard SURROUNDING HIM.

ASPEN
What is this?

Two Soldiers jump off their horses and approach. They reach for their billy clubs.

SOLDIER
(danger in his eyes)
Welcome to the Army, scum. Basic training starts now.

We realize -- Maxon broke his promise to America and informed on Aspen. The Soldiers SEIZE HIM, begin to BEAT HIM. As America's engagement ring is trampled in the mud, we're OFF Aspen fighting for his life...

INT. PALACE - AMERICA'S ROOM - NIGHT

America enters to find an anxious Lucy waiting for her.

LUCY
Miss! Where have you been? I was about to call the Guards --
(notices America's outfit)
And what are you wearing?

America, her heart broken, can barely muster words.

AMERICA
I'm sorry I worried you. It won't happen again.

As Lucy exits, America goes to the window. Somewhere out there Aspen's heart is breaking. OFF America, devastated but resigned...

INT. PALACE - MAXON'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

CLOSE ON A FIST as it flies into a PUNCHING BAG. FIND MAXON, shirtless, pounding away the day's events. Lucy enters --

LUCY
America is tucked away safe in her room, Your Highness.

Maxon PUNCHES the bag again --

MAXON
Good.

Lucy approaches him, runs her hands over his chest.

LUCY
So what's my reward for telling you about the maid's uniform I found hidden in her closet? Was I right? Did she try to escape?

But Maxon looks at her coldly.

MAXON
Get out.

Lucy backs away, then hastily exits. ON MAXON... is there shame in his eyes after all? He betrayed America, and he knows it... what surprises him is that it bothers him.

AS Maxon beats the shit out of the bag --

EXT. WOODS - REBEL CAMP - NIGHT

As the slaughter of the Rebels continues in the b.g., FIND RAFE approaching Gaia's tent. He enters --

INT. WOODS - GAIA'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

Rafe looks around, expecting to find Gaia and Ashley. But the tent is empty. They're gone. Fuck! OFF Rafe's fury --

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

As the MUSIC MONTAGE ENDS... FIND GAIA astride a horse, a blindfolded Ashley in front of her in the saddle. Gaia stops the horse near a ROUGH HEWN SHELTER. She jumps to the ground, pulls Ashley down beside her --

ASHLEY
Where are we going?

GAIA
To meet my boss.

INT. SHELTER - NIGHT

Two rooms, sparsely furnished. A Rebel safe house. Gaia leads in Ashley, then pulls off her blindfold.

ASHLEY
Please -- just tell me. What are you going to do with me now...?

REVEAL SYLVAN SANTOS as he steps out of the other room.

SYLVAN
Now you're going to help us overthrow the King.

We realize -- Palace insider Sylvan is actually a Rebel. He is Gaia's "boss." OFF this revelation --

END OF SHOW