

UNTITLED BRIDGERTON PROJECT

"Diamond of the First Water"

Episode #101

by
Chris Van Dusen

Revisions by
Chris Van Dusen

Based on
The Bridgerton Series by Julia Quinn

Revision - Fourth Draft CLEAN - 1/14/19

Copyright © 2018 Storybuilders, LLC. All Rights Reserved. No portion of this script may be performed, published, reproduced, sold, or distributed by any means or quoted or published in any medium, including on any website, without the prior written consent of Storybuilders, LLC. Disposal of this script copy does not alter any of the restrictions set forth above.

EXT. MAYFAIR, LONDON - DAY

We're SOARING over this illustrious neighborhood in all of its splendid, 1813 REGENCY GLORY! Horses draw their carriages. Distinguished gentlemen tip their hats. Fashionable ladies take their strolls. And it's all vibrance and gaiety, *swagger and style*, as we alight on A BOY (12), satchel on his shoulder, hurrying through these cobblestone lanes, handing out NEWSPAPERS to highfalutin inhabitants everywhere...

EXT. HYDE PARK/ROTTEN ROW - DAY

To the CHIC LORDS AND LADIES promenading this lively scene.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
According to the much heralded poet
Lord Byron: Of all bitches, dead or
alive, a *scribbling* woman is the
most canine.

And as they all open their papers, curious, our boy continues--

EXT. BOND STREET/DRESS SHOP - DAY

To the SOCIETY MATRONS AND THEIR DAUGHTERS shopping about.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
If that should be true, then *this*
author would like to show you her
teeth...

And as a mama GASPS at what she reads, our boy soldiers on--

EXT. PARK LANE/DANBURY HOUSE - DAY

To the tart-looking, cane-wielding *lioness* of a dowager known as LADY DANBURY (70s), stepping from her ornate carriage. She eyes the paper in her hands. We catch the headline: *Lady Whistledown's Society Papers*.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
My name is Lady Whistledown. You do
not know me, and you never shall.
But if you are currently reading
these papers of record, then rest
assured: *I* certainly know you...

And as an amused smile creeps over Lady Danbury's lips...

EXT. GROSVENOR SQUARE - DAY

Delivery Boy leaves papers at the doors of every last stately home lining this beautiful square. The center of our glittering world, *this* is London society at its very best.

He reaches one especially GAUDY residence, tosses a paper at its brightly-colored door, moves along...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

Perhaps one resides within the household of a certain Lord Featherington. Should one have a *bracket* for a face?

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME - DAY

On a perspiring PRUDENCE FEATHERINGTON (21), as TWO MAIDS work *furiously* on her corset. Yanking and tugging the strings to pull it closed. Sisters PHILIPA (19) and PENELOPE (17) -- in their court dresses -- look on, *horrified*.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

Three misses. Foisted upon the marriage market this season like sorrowful sows by their tasteless, tactless dear mama -- the luckless souls...

Find a dissatisfied LADY PORTIA FEATHERINGTON (40s, busybody) hovering over Prudence. As she glares at the maids:

LADY FEATHERINGTON

Tighter. *Tighter.*

And the maids *tighten the shit* out of Prudence's corset.

PENELOPE

Is she *to breathe*, mama?

LADY FEATHERINGTON

I was able to squeeze my waist into the size of *an orange and a half* when I was Prudence's age. Your sister shall do the same if she's to impress the Queen.

Penelope comes over to her sister, all encouraging...

PENELOPE

Do not worry, Prudence. It will all be over in a matter of... *hours*.

PRUDENCE

The only thing I shall worry about, Penelope, is if I am to go before Her Majesty looking anything like you in that ill-fitting frock.

(to the maids)

TIGHTER!

EXT. GROSVENOR SQUARE - DAY

Back with our boy, now approaching THE GRANDEST HOME. All English roses and wisteria out here, as even *his* eyes go wide at the sheer beauty and luxury of the place, too.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

Though, perhaps one is more fortunate.
Admirably proportioned, impressively
refined? Then perhaps... One is a
Bridgerton...

A BUMBLEBEE lands on the gold-plated knocker affixed to this home's glossy green door. As our boy drops his paper, goes...

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/GRAND HALL - DAY

Who. The fuck. Lives here?? All gilded elegance and dazzling opulence, in the most *astounding* of ways. As we move past THE BRIDGERTON FAMILY PORTRAITS suspended above a grand, central staircase spanning two levels (a la Althorp)...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

A total of *eight* children in this most prolific of broods. The rather industrious viscountess and late viscount having produced four perfectly handsome sons and four perfectly beautiful daughters. Yes. *Perfect*, indeed.

Find ELOISE (17), FRANCESCA (16) AND HYACINTH BRIDGERTON (10), on the ground floor, in heavy-looking, elaborate gowns of their own. As Eloise scratches at her getup...

ELOISE

I am already roasting!

FRANCESCA

Are you to complain the *entire* day, Eloise?

ELOISE

Surely I cannot be expected to bear these fashions the *entire* day.

HYACINTH

I feel like a princess. Do I look like one?

And Eloise just scoffs, when GREGORY BRIDGERTON (12) comes running past, grabbing Hyacinth's HAIR RIBBON--

HYACINTH (CONT'D)

Gregory!!

And she runs after him. When BENEDICT (26) and COLIN BRIDGERTON (19) approach Eloise and Francesca.

BENEDICT
Is our dear sister still not ready?

COLIN
I shall run up and hasten her along.

BENEDICT
No. Colin. Allow me.

COLIN
She likes *me* much better than *you*,
Benedict.

BENEDICT
Did she say that?

COLIN
Everyone says that.

When a frustrated Eloise suddenly turns, yelling upstairs:

ELOISE
DAPHNE! *YOU MUST MAKE HASTE!!*

She turns to her siblings, all staring at their brazen sister.

ELOISE (CONT'D)
Should you think she heard me?

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DAPHNE'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

DAPHNE BRIDGERTON (18) stands in the middle of this elegant room. With her back to us, we can't quite see her face, just her ELABORATE ensemble: Extra wide HOOP SKIRT, plumes of FEATHERS in her hair, DIAMONDS AND JEWELS shimmering in the light. She curtsies. She bows. *She practices*. When we spot VIOLET BRIDGERTON (late 40s, all warmth, wisdom and love) watching from the doorway.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
Unlike Lady Featherington, the widowed Lady Bridgerton shrewdly chose to allow just *one* of her daughters to make her debut this year. Her eldest miss, the season's forthcoming diamond -- Miss Daphne Bridgerton...

And that's when Daphne finally turns toward us. We revel in this girl's unmistakable beauty a beat -- all delicacy, grace and refinement -- before Daphne offers her mother, who now dabs at her eyes, a confident smile:

DAPHNE
I am ready, mama.

EXT. GROSVENOR SQUARE - DAY

As the front doors of both the Bridgertons *and* Featheringtons simultaneously SWING OPEN, our families begin to spill out of their homes. Their liveried FOOTMEN, MAIDS and OTHER STAFF joining the whole raucous scene as well...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
Grosvenor Square. The sixth of April,
1813. A frenzied sight outside the
Bridgerton and Featherington homes
on this most momentous of occasions...

Colin and Gregory mount their HORSES. Francesca and Hyacinth board their GRAND CARRIAGE. Eloise peers several residences down to see Penelope. The girls wave, friends. When Eloise spots the paper left on the doorstep. And as she picks it up, Violet and Daphne emerge with Daphne's train-carrying maid, ROSE (20s). Daphne eagerly heads for the carriage as Violet peers over to meet the gaze of Lady Featherington. An over-it LORD FEATHERINGTON (60s) beside her. The mamas trade *the tightest* of smiles, as Violet sidles up to Benedict.

VIOLET
No sign of him yet?
(off Benedict's nod)
Should your brother wish to be obeyed
as Lord Bridgerton, he must *act* as
Lord Bridgerton. Where IS he,
Benedict?

BENEDICT
(lying)
I do not know.

EXT. GRASSY WOODLAND - DAY

Find a ravenous ANTHONY BRIDGERTON (28), along with a lady friend -- SIENA ROSSO (20s) -- up against a tree. His breeches, down around his boots. Her skirts, bunched around her waist. When Anthony suddenly catches the eye of a beleaguered-looking VALET (40s) standing on the other side of the tree. The Valet holds up his hand. Anthony sighs, checking his POCKET-WATCH. Unhappy, he tosses the watch aside. And as his movements grow a *tad bit faster*, and our Valet lets out an exasperated sigh, we move...

EXT. MAYFAIR - DAY

Horses RUMBLE through these early 19th century streets...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
 For today is the day London's marriage-
 minded misses shall be presented to
 Her Majesty the Queen...

CARRIAGES wind their ways past grand, scenic architecture:
 CARLTON HOUSE. PICCADILLY. An UNDER-CONSTRUCTION BUCKINGHAM
 HOUSE (not yet Palace)...

INT. BRIDGERTON CARRIAGE/EXT. MAYFAIR - DAY

As a beaming Daphne eyes the beautiful scenery that passes...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
 A much anticipated day, when dreams
 shall finally be achieved. Hopes,
 fully realized.

Violet smiles, next to a giddy Hyacinth, a reserved Francesca
 and a Whistledown-reading Eloise.

INT. FEATHERINGTON CARRIAGE/EXT. MAYFAIR - DAY

As Prudence and Philipa vie for space in their seats and an
 indifferent Penelope plays with her HAIR RIBBON.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
 And courses of lives, changed. For
 the better. *One hopes.*

Lady F scoffs at Penelope, adjusts her ribbon.

EXT. ST. JAMES PALACE - DAY

PRACTICALLY ALL OF SOCIETY, in their glittering gowns and
 luxurious finery, passes beneath the majestic arches of this
 palace. Benedict, Colin and Gregory arrive on horse, trailed
 by the family's carriage. As FOOTMEN help the ladies down,
 Daphne takes it all in, when a breathless Anthony approaches.

DAPHNE
 Brother! You are here.

ANTHONY
 Where ever else would I be, sister?
 Few days are more important than
 today. Our family's good name should
 depend on it, as father would say.

VIOLET
 I wonder what your father would say
 about your tardiness then.

ANTHONY
 Good morning, mother. Shall we?

VIOLET

Now that you have arrived, we shall.

And as Violet shoots Anthony a look before she takes hold of Daphne's arm and heads inside, Benedict and Colin snicker--

ANTHONY

Quiet.

And now we're:

INT. ST. JAMES PALACE/PRESENTATION CHAMBER - DAY

Pure decadence up in here. A LORD-IN-WAITING reads a card:

LORD-IN-WAITING

Miss Daphne Bridgerton. Presented
by her mother. The Dowager
Viscountess Bridgerton.

All eyes turn to QUEEN CHARLOTTE (68), sitting at the end of a long aisle. She nods. As MASSIVE DOORS swing open to reveal Daphne, standing with Violet. As we CUT, OUT OT TIME:

INT. ST. JAMES PALACE/PRESENTATION CHAMBER - DAY

LORD-IN-WAITING

Miss Prudence Featherington.
(another card)
Miss Philipa Featherington.
(another card)
And... Miss Penelope Featherington.
All presented by their mother. *Lady
Featherington.*

Reveal the Featherington girls, on the arm of their mother. All eyeing the Queen, who's already irritated. BACK TO:

INT. ST. JAMES PALACE/PRESENTATION CHAMBER - DAY

Daphne and Violet step forward, as TWO OTHER LORDS-IN-WAITING spread out Daphne's train. The Bridgerton siblings watch from the sidelines, where Eloise covertly reads Whistledown...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

One's triumph at the palace today
invariably signifies one's success
on the marriage mart tomorrow...

Daphne locks eyes with Her Majesty, moving -- *slowly, carefully* -- until she finally reaches the end of the aisle. A mere inches from the Queen. She curtsies. So deep she's practically kneeling. Like she practiced. She's got this.

INT. ST. JAMES PALACE/PRESENTATION CHAMBER - DAY

The Featheringtons move down the aisle. Looking quite uncomfortable. Because Prudence's dress is awfully tight, and Philipa is way too nervous, and Penelope's not even *looking* at the Queen right now. She's too busy taking in this amazing space. Portia elbows her. HARD.

INT. ST. JAMES PALACE/PRESENTATION CHAMBER - DAY

Her Majesty tilts her head at Daphne. *Judging*. It's tense.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
Pray, it is *the Queen* who shall keep
the fashionable world apprised of a
lady's single most valuable and
desirable asset: her reputation.

QUEEN CHARLOTTE
Flawless, my dear.

And she kisses Daphne on the forehead. An impressed Anthony smiles, watching as Daphne and Violet begin to back away.

INT. ST. JAMES PALACE/PRESENTATION CHAMBER - DAY

On Prudence, attempting her curtsy. It ain't happening.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
As such, any lady *failing* to secure
the court's glowing endorsement shall
endure the consequences...

Lady F puts a hand on Prudence's shoulder. A flagrant attempt to help that curtsy. Queen Charlotte sees it, is about to say something, when she catches Penelope's mortified face. The Queen sighs, looks away with a flick of her wrist. Lady F just stands there: *The fuck does that mean??*

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And not just from Her Majesty...

LADY FEATHERINGTON
I should just like to--

LORD-IN-WAITING
--You should just like to go, madam.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
...*But from me*.

Lady F nods stiffly. And that's when a pale-looking Prudence suddenly just... *faints*. FEATHERINGTON. DOWN. Off an aghast Queen and a humiliated Portia Featherington...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 For this author has at her disposal
 a most powerful weapon that even the
 Queen lacks. My pen.

INT. ST. JAMES PALACE/OUTSIDE PRESENTATION CHAMBER - DAY

A proud, elated Violet throws her arms around Daphne as the rest of the family emerge with their jubilant congratulations. As VARIOUS BYSTANDERS gawk at Daphne and the Bridgertons...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
 But have no fear, gentle reader.
 For I shall wield this sword most
 keenly. *Every* transgression of
 politeness will be recorded. No
 matter who you are. Or what your
 name may be...

Off a picture-perfect, joyous Daphne Bridgerton, we have our--

BRIDGERTON TITLE SEQUENCE.

EXT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE - DAY

As a carriage -- *Mme. Delacroix, Tailoress* -- pulls up outside of this 18th century Palladian home, two Bridgerton Footmen greet the driver...

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DAPHNE'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Maid Rose, along with TWO OTHER MAIDS, help a glowing, vibrating Daphne out of her extensive court attire and into her afternoon dress. Corset unlaced. Makeup scrubbed. Fake hair unpinned. *A precise operation.* As Hyacinth hovers and Eloise lounges next to Francesca in the background.

DAPHNE
 ...And the magnificent three-tiered
 crystal chandelier, you must have
 seen the way the entire room sparkled.

HYACINTH
 I believe it was *you*, sister,
 sparkling brightest of all.

DAPHNE
 Come now, I only simpered and minced
 in a pretty dress like every other
 lady.

FRANCESCA
 Not *exactly* like every other lady.

ELOISE

I shall need to visit with Penelope.
Her presentation was anything but...
What was it the Queen called you
again--

DAPHNE

--*Flawless*. Or something as such.
Trust I was astonished Her Majesty
offered *me*, out of *two hundred* ladies
present, a most gracious remark.

And if *that* wasn't the humblebrag of the 19th century...

ELOISE

Astonished, were you?

DAPHNE

I was certain *something* would go
amiss. My train would catch. A
feather gone askew. But, when
everything went precisely as planned--

ELOISE

--Yes, it was a scene of *unmatched*
resplendence, sister. One none of
us shall ever forget.

Francesca giggles at her sister's playful snarkiness. But
Daphne proceeds to just smile that radiant smile...

DAPHNE

You may not have enjoyed the morning,
Eloise...

ELOISE

What ever should there have been to
enjoy? Other than the moment we
were permitted to depart...

DAPHNE

But one day, *you too* shall need to
care about all of this.

ELOISE

An interminable ceremony? Just so I
may be auctioned off to the highest
bidder?

DAPHNE

One day *you too* shall need to find
love. Indeed, as pure a love shared
by dear mama and papa, should any of
us be so fortunate.

And Hyacinth smiles at that. As do the maids. Even quiet Francesca offers up a reassuring nod. But Eloise just *sighs*.

ELOISE

One day, sister. But certainly not today. *Penelope*. I must go--

VIOLET (O.S.)

--You must stay, Eloise. We are choosing Daphne's dress for tonight's ball.

Violet's excitedly sailing in, trailed by A MAID who carries a collection of GORGEOUS GOWNS. As a thrilled Daphne makes an immediate beeline for them--

DAPHNE

Oh, the green is quite ravishing.

VIOLET

Mary Edgecombe wore a similar shade last season and secured *three* offers the very next day. One from *an Earl*.

ELOISE

Daphne could wear full mourning colors this evening and it would not matter.
(off their looks)
The season is hers. Even the newest town gossip is singing her praises.

And she tosses *Whistledown* onto a desk. Daphne eyes it.

DAPHNE

Another scandal sheet?

ELOISE

This one is... different. It lists subjects by name. *In full*.

Now that *is* different. Hyacinth reaches for the paper--

HYACINTH

Let me see!

--But Francesca has already grabbed it.

FRANCESCA

Lady Whistledown...

DAPHNE

Lady Whistledown?

ELOISE

The author.

VIOLET
Do we *know* a Lady Whistledown?

FRANCESCA
Surely *Lady Whistledown* cannot be
her true name...

And that's when Daphne snatches the paper from Francesca's hands. Violet watches her read a beat, before:

VIOLET
What does it say, Daphne?

DAPHNE
(reading)
She *loathes* the fact we've been named
alphabetically, oldest to youngest...

VIOLET
Your father and I found it *orderly*.

DAPHNE
Lady Whistledown finds *banality*.

VIOLET
Eloise, you shall no longer spend
your pin money on such nonsense.

ELOISE
The papers were distributed across
town today without charge, mama.

VIOLET
Without charge? What kind of author--

DAPHNE
--She says I shall be named the
season's Incomparable. That I am
a... *diamond of the first water*.
(then, smiling)
I quite like that.

ELOISE
I thought you might.

And now Violet's coming over to read over Daphne's shoulder. Delighted, when she suddenly gasps:

VIOLET
Oh! How dare she say such vile things
about the Featheringtons. Even if
they are true... Those poor young
ladies.

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Lady Featherington sits on her sofa, having tea with another equally enterprising society mama, LADY ARAMINTA COWPER (30s). Copies of *Whistledown* beside them.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

I should not be surprised if this *Whistledown* is revealed to be Violet Bridgerton herself. These pages certainly report on the Viscountess's family with much indulgence indeed.

LADY COWPER

The pages report nothing but the truth, Portia. Daphne has bloomed exquisite. The sooner she is taken from the market, the better for the other young ladies. Even ones prone to *hysterics*. *In front of the Queen*.

And as Lady Cowper shadily sips her tea, Lady F scoffs, waving her off. She turns toward the window, where Prudence fans herself as she and Philipa study a STACK OF MINIATURES of distinguished-looking gentlemen. Penelope is off to the side, reading.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

Ladies! Hurry with your miniatures before our guest arrives. And Penelope put down that book at once. You shall confuse your thoughts.

Penelope glances over at her sisters, studying their tiny portraits. Penelope just sighs, goes back to her reading. As Lady F turns back to Lady Cowper...

LADY COWPER

So tell me about *this cousin*. Joining you for the entire season?

LADY FEATHERINGTON

She is a distant cousin of *my husband*. With no close female relative to sponsor her debut, Lord Featherington directed me to take her in. For charity.

LADY COWPER

You are known to be quite charitable.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

Precisely what this new rumormonger should have published!

(MORE)

LADY FEATHERINGTON (CONT'D)

Instead of erroneously specifying I shall have only *three* young ladies under my care this year. She knows nothing.

PENELOPE (O.S.)

Unless you shall *like* to have only three young ladies under your care.

They turn back to Penelope, who's clearly been listening.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

I shall gladly sit this season out.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

(to Lady Cowper)

Penelope is quite nervous. This shall be her very first season--

PENELOPE

--I am not nervous mama.

PRUDENCE

What she is, is two stone heavier than she ought to be.

Ouch. But Penelope's used to it. We can tell as we watch Prudence and Philipa laugh.

PHILIPA

And her face... The blemishes are simply too much to conceal. Short of using arsenic and lead...

PENELOPE

Mama, should you allow me to delay only a year, just as Lady Bridgerton has done for Eloise, I may remain dedicated to *my studies*, perhaps--

LADY FEATHERINGTON

--The answer is *no*, Penelope. Now return to those miniatures. You too must recognize every eligible nobleman by sight before tonight's ball.

And Penelope begrudgingly takes hold of a miniature. We stay with Lady F and Lady Cowper.

LADY COWPER

You would do well to listen to her, Portia.

(MORE)

LADY COWPER (CONT'D)

Shepherding *four* young ladies through these endless rounds of affairs at *the same time*... I am quite thankful to only have my darling Cressida to worry about. Can you *imagine* the competition--

LADY FEATHERINGTON

--Oh how much competition can this cousin provoke? She came of age on a *farm*. She has a mere *four figure* dowry. As for her appearance, well... Let us hope Miss Thompson is more presentable than the legions of unkempt animals she spent her entire life tending to back home.

Lady Cowper nods. More tea. A FOOTMAN enters.

FOOTMAN

Lord Featherington's cousin has arrived, madam.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

Remember to be kind, ladies. And charitable. The poor are our burden.

The footman steps aside, revealing MISS MARINA THOMPSON (17). And as all of the ladies stare, taken aback, at this wide-eyed girl, Penelope can't help herself when she says:

PENELOPE

She is beautiful.

Because, yes, Marina? *Is stunning.* As she curtsies...

MARINA

Good afternoon, ma'am.

We're off a slack-jawed Lady Featherington...

INT. OPERA HOUSE - DAY

As Anthony enters this empty theater, eyeing Siena -- up on stage, singing her little soprano heart out as she prepares for her nightly show. A few THEATRE WORKERS scattered about, busy doing their thing. When Siena finally sees Anthony. And off their knowing look, we SMASH TO:

INT. OPERA HOUSE/SIENA'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

As Anthony and Siena go at it. *Vigorously.* Crashing into Siena's dressing table, knocking various items to the floor.

SIENA

Someone shall hear us, my lord--

But that seems to just make Anthony smile. Which makes Siena smile. Because this is way too good, and way too fun, before we finally move off of these spirited lovers...

EXT. COVENT GARDEN - DAY

As Anthony and Siena, now arm in arm, meander through this busy market. He checks his pocket-watch. Exhales.

SIENA

One day I shall seize that watch and take it apart. Bit by bit.

ANTHONY

This belonged to my father. Should it disappear, I should miss it sadly.

SIENA

Then you shall know precisely how I feel. Every time you disappear.

And she holds onto his arm a bit more tightly. A self-conscious Anthony glances around. Aware they're in public.

SIENA (CONT'D)

Stay *with me* today.

And even though Anthony would clearly like nothing more...

ANTHONY

I am afraid I cannot. I must chaperone my sister at the Danbury ball this evening.

SIENA

Daphne, yes? What might they be like? These *grand affairs* your sister must attend.

ANTHONY

You would hate them. Every eligible lady of breeding dressed in some lavishly-trimmed frock. Bloodthirsty mamas at their sides. Wary fathers making arrangements for only the most *advantageous* of matches. All whilst keeping their daughters free of any *defilement*, of course. Though without my father here, that responsibility should fall upon *me*.

SIENA

Daphne is fortunate. Every woman is not afforded such gallant protection.

ANTHONY

Every woman is not a lady.

And Siena has to look away, 'cause... *damn*.

SIENA

Of course not, my lord.

He eyes her. Sees she's bothered.

ANTHONY

Siena. You have *me*. Protecting you, too. I shall *always* protect you.

SIENA

And I shall always be grateful.

(then)

Surely hours remain before tonight's ball. Are you certain you cannot stay? In the interest of *defilement*?

And with a nod, she heads around a corner. On Anthony, conflicted, until... He follows her. Off his sly smile...

EXT. LONDON/EXT. DANBURY HOUSE - DAY

On the galloping hooves of a horse, thrashing through town, before revealing its supremely confident, obscenely handsome rider: SIMON BASSET (28). He slows, grimly eyes a magnificent Park Lane palace: *Danbury House*. And as he removes A FLASK, taking it to the head before he dismounts...

INT. DANBURY HOUSE/GRAND HALL - DAY

A FOOTMAN leads Simon inside, where TAPESTRIES and PORTRAITS cover every inch of these walls. MANY SERVANTS flutter about.

LADY DANBURY (O.S.)

Well if this is not a sight for my sore eyes...

It's the cane-wielding dowager we saw in our opening sequence. Sprightly. Acerbic. *Legendary*.

LADY DANBURY (CONT'D)

My condolences. For your father.

SIMON

Very kind of you.

LADY DANBURY

Kind of me? You hated the man.

And he looks at her. Has to smile. *Genuine.* Because--

SIMON

It is so *wonderful* to see you, Lady Danbury.

LADY DANBURY

Words I do not hear often enough.
(thumping her cane)
Come!

She heads down the hall, eyeing the servants. Simon follows.

LADY DANBURY (CONT'D)

You must excuse the disorderliness. As you know, I am to host a ball tonight. I have managed to keep the details of your return quiet, but when those vulgar *mamas* discover there is an eligible Duke present at tonight's *fete*, well, I shall no longer be able to keep such a secret.

SIMON

That is what I was hoping to discuss. While I appreciate your most gracious invitation, Lady Danbury, I am afraid I must ask you to accept my regrets.

And that seems to elicit the slyest of smiles from Lady D. She stops a servant carrying A BOX. As she begins to examine the CANDLES inside, she continues speaking to Simon...

LADY DANBURY

I have been offended only three times in my life. When I was a young lady, and my governess said I should never marry on account of my brazen disposition. The day of my wedding, when my mother felt it wise to ridicule the hem of my dress. She called it *unsightly*.

SIMON

I am sure it was exquisite.

LADY DANBURY

The last, though *greatest* insult of all was perpetrated by my own husband. Who thought it perfectly reasonable to get on *and die* before I did.

(MORE)

LADY DANBURY (CONT'D)

Thus adding the rather cumbersome
Dowager appellation to my good name.
Three insults, Your Grace. Three.

She thumps her cane on the ground with great force.

LADY DANBURY (CONT'D)

I simply shall not be able to endure
a fourth. Especially from the young
boy I used to walk about in leading
strings. Your regrets are denied.

And even *the Duke* can't argue with this force of a lady...

SIMON

I suppose a *brief* appearance shall--

LADY DANBURY

--Excellent! Though leave that flask
you carry at home. *Most* undignified.
(to the servant)
I shall need more candles than this.
A lady deserves to see her partner
when she quadrilles, does she not?

The servant nods, flees. And as Lady D heads away with a
nod, we're off Simon, left standing there, rather impressed...

INT. DANBURY HOUSE - NIGHT

SERVANTS walk purposefully with MORE CANDLES, now in full
preparation mode for A GRAND PARTY. MASSIVE CHANDELIERS are
set ablaze. FLORALS are taken from here to there. DANCE
CARDS and their TINY PENCILS are placed symmetrically on a
table. A SERVANT applies a beeswax polish to the dance floor --
a brush on one foot, slipper on the other...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

The season's opening ball at Danbury
House is a most highly sought-after
invitation indeed. For every darling
debutante from Park Lane to Regent
Street knows, if *anyone* can throw a
crush of a party -- it's Lady Danbury.

Lady Danbury appears behind the polishing servant. Her eyes
squint, inspecting the floor. Off her approving nod...

EXT. DANBURY HOUSE - NIGHT

As fantastically-liveried FOOTMEN receive guests from their
carriages, we spot the Bridgerton carriage arriving. Out
steps Anthony, followed by Violet, and then Daphne -- in a
stunning gown. She smiles assuredly. *She is ready for this.*

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
 Tonight, the answers to our most
urgent of questions shall finally be
 revealed...

INT. DANBURY HOUSE/BALLROOM - NIGHT

Corinthian columns and ornate swags and meticulous entablature surround glittering chandeliers above a room full of only the most *in vogue members* of society. MUSICIANS play. PEOPLE DANCE! Just as Daphne enters with Violet and Anthony. As GENTLEMEN begin to stare at Daphne, captivated...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
 Which *bachelors* might forsake their
 terribly rakish ways for the exquisite
 blisses of matrimony instead?

Anthony glares back. *Ice. Cold.*

ANTHONY
 (quietly)
 They are all *staring*, mother.

VIOLET
 (beams, to Daphne)
 Allow them to come to you, dearest.

Daphne nods. *Radiating.* Bow down, bitches.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
 Which *ladies* shall forever capture
 their hearts? Thereby securing their
 futures. And avoiding the grim,
 dismal condition known as a *spinster*.

We begin to pop around the room, intercutting VARIOUS YOUNG LADIES in mid-conversation with POTENTIAL SUITORS:

LIVELY YOUNG LADY
 Oh, I do love to dance.

FASHIONABLE YOUNG LADY
 Should you like my flower? We grow
 them in our very own garden.

HANDSOME YOUNG LADY
 I *must* show you my watercolours some
 time. If you desire to see them.

Handsome Young Lady's MAMA suddenly interjects--

HYL'S MAMA
 And she is quite proficient on the
 pianoforte, too...

Off the suitor, impressed, we ANGLE ON the Featherington sisters. Prudence and Philipa review their miniatures as Penelope stares at someone across the room...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

And shall one *Portia Featherington* finally resist bedecking her misses in the most *unflattering* of colors? Or shall she have them appear as only the most undesirable pieces of overripe citrus fruit, *once again*...

And they DO look very much like some rather sour produce, don't they? Especially Penelope, in her yellow dress, watching *Colin Bridgerton* dance with some PRETTY YOUNG THING. Penelope's suddenly jolted from her reverie by CRESSIDA COWPER (17, beautiful, superior), who bumps into her from behind...

CRESSIDA

Penelope. I did not see you there.

Off Penelope, feeling invisible, we ANGLE ON Portia Featherington, gossiping with Lady Cowper and a JUDGY MAMA--

LADY COWPER

Is that not the young lady from Lady Mottram's ball last year, over there?

She nods towards an unhappy-looking LADY, hanging on the arm of an equally unhappy-looking MISTER.

JUDGY MAMA

The one caught with her gentleman.
In the lady's conservatory.
Unchaperoned.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

She's lucky *her gentleman* agreed to a hasty marriage. After she went and *ruined* herself. *Lightskirts.*

And with a scoff, these mamas turn their attention elsewhere--

LADY COWPER

Oh, look who's already setting his cap at Miss Bridgerton...

ANGLE ON Daphne, still with Violet and Anthony, being approached by--

VIOLET

Lord Wetherby.

LORD WETHERBY (30s, attractive buck) nods. Daphne curtsies.

LORD WETHERBY
 Lady Bridgerton. Miss Bridgerton.
 (stiffly, to Anthony)
 My lord.

VIOLET
 I believe you have already been
 introduced to my daughter, Daphne.

LORD WETHERBY
 We met at your brother's levee.

DAPHNE
 If I recall, my lord, you had just
 won your first race at Newmarket.

ANTHONY
 His first and only, I believe.

And that was rather... *sharp*. Daphne breaks the tension--

DAPHNE
 (smiles)
 In that case, let us hope his lordship
 has found himself a new horse.

Wetherby laughs, charmed. A content Violet eyes Daphne,
 pleased she's a *natural*. Anthony shifts uneasily.

ANTHONY
 I have not had the pleasure of seeing
 you at our club lately, Wetherby.

And now Wetherby's the one who shifts uneasily.

LORD WETHERBY
 Oh. Why... Yes, I have taken time--

ANTHONY
 --I don't suppose it should have
 anything to do with the unpaid balance
 you left on our betting books winter
 last? You *do* plan to return, yes?

Wetherby holds Anthony's gaze a beat. And then he nods.

LORD WETHERBY
 Of course, my lord. Uh, excuse me,
 there is a matter I must--

ANTHONY
 --Very well. Proceed.

And Wetherby quickly absconds. Violet and Daphne eye Anthony.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Wetherby is a *cheat*. A man of any honor ensures his debts are fully paid.

DAPHNE

I did not realize...

ANTHONY

How could you have done? It is the very reason why *I* am here. Let us take a turn about the room.

And he takes hold of Daphne's arm, pointedly leading her away from Violet. Daphne takes a quick look back at her mother, left standing there, just as a passing GENTLEMAN nods at Daphne. Daphne smiles, nods back, when Anthony veers her in another direction.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

A Mister Duncan Lewis.

DAPHNE

He is rather pleasing.

ANTHONY

He is rather here to shuffle about *hunting fortunes*. Trust Mister Lewis knows of your sizable dowry. Leave him be.

Daphne nods. *O-kay*. Spots another FINE YOUNG MAN nearby.

DAPHNE

I presume you know of him, too?

ANTHONY

(all the disdain)
Can you not smell the shop from here?
A mere merchant's son. Ineligible.

And as Anthony begins to discreetly point to the VARIOUS ATTRACTIVE MEN they pass...

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Mister Worthington. Second son. We shall find better.

(another)

He of dubious parentage.

(yet another)

I shall not have you making a life with a *poet*, heaven forbid.

(still another)

Nor an *eccentric*. My word.

And throughout all of this, that glow of enthusiasm once visible behind Daphne's eyes has begun to extinguish. When--

COLIN (O.S.)
Anthony! Daph!

They turn, see Colin and Benedict approaching. Anthony sighs.

ANTHONY
If the only upstanding gentlemen present this evening are *your brothers*, then we are in a great deal of trouble indeed.

DAPHNE
You continue to say *we*, yet--

BENEDICT
--Capital evening tonight, yes?

DAPHNE
Quite.

COLIN
(sidling up to Daphne)
Did mother tell you? About my tour? I'm to begin in Greece.

DAPHNE
Greece? How adventurous, Colin--

ANTHONY
--*On guard*.

Anthony nods toward an approaching Lady Danbury. As the boys immediately look for an exit--

LADY DANBURY
Too late. I've already noted you.

ANTHONY/BENEDICT/COLIN
(all smiles)
Lady Danbury! /Good evening! /Lovely to see you!

LADY DANBURY
I should have known I'd find the lot of you ensconced in a circle of twittering young ladies...

And it's true. Ladies love these Bridgerton boys.

LADY DANBURY (CONT'D)
Miss Bridgerton, you look rather lovely this evening.

She spots Daphne's empty dance card, tied around her wrist.

LADY DANBURY (CONT'D)
Is there a reason I have yet to see
you on the dance floor?

ANTHONY
All in due time, Lady Danbury. We
have only just arrived.

And Lady D eyes him. Sly. *Knowing*. She leans to Daphne:

LADY DANBURY
You poor thing.

Daphne stares back at her, thrown. Colin, meanwhile, spots someone on the dance floor. He leans to Benedict:

COLIN
Who is *that*?

Benedict follows his gaze... To none other than Miss Marina Thompson, dancing with A SUITOR.

BENEDICT
I am sure I have never seen her.

COLIN
No. Neither have I...

Off Colin, entranced by this beautiful girl, we ANGLE ON:

LADY FEATHERINGTON
Miss Marina Thompson. A distant
cousin of my husband.

As Lady F and the mamas all stare at Marina now...

LADY FEATHERINGTON (CONT'D)
Rather dowdy, is she not?

LADY COWPER
She is a *lovely* creature.

JUDGY MAMA
It would seem that one of the
Bridgerton boys is joining the swarm.

We see Colin, sidling up to Marina on the floor, cutting in.

LADY COWPER
Most telling. I imagine your
household shall be a hive of callers
in the morning, Portia.

JUDGY MAMA

Where one suitor goes, the rest shall
surely follow...

And Lady F's face has kept falling through this entire exchange, having spotted her own daughters, *alone*. As we MOVE to find Violet, who watches Daphne and Anthony, across the room, standing at the edge of the dance floor. As Daphne sighs...

DAPHNE

Brother, I am quite parched.

ANTHONY

I shall fetch you a glass of lemonade--

DAPHNE

--No. You have already done so much for me tonight. I shall return in a mere moment.

Anthony eyes her. A reluctant nod. And as Daphne heads over to the lemonade table, we stay with her. Moving through the crowd. She smiles, offering up a nod to--

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

Cressida. Enjoying the evening?

Cressida smiles back, insincere, all but turning her nose up in the air as she moves by. Unfazed, Daphne reaches the lemonade table. Helps herself to a glass of lemonade. Until--

NIGEL (O.S.)

Small glasses.

Daphne looks over to see NIGEL BERBROOKE (40, all inelegance and awkwardness) standing there.

DAPHNE

Lord Berbrooke.

NIGEL

Tiny little things, are they not?

DAPHNE

The... glasses? I suppose?

NIGEL

Then the matter is settled.

DAPHNE

I am not entirely sure the matter in which we discuss, my lord...

Nigel smiles, inching closer to her. Breathes her in.

NIGEL

You have *always* amused me, Miss Bridgerton. Ever since I was a schoolboy and you were...

DAPHNE

All but *five*?

He nods, slurps his lemonade. And then he just... *stares*. Daphne shifts. Uncomfortable.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

My brother... He summons me, I...

And she turns, goes. *Quickly*. Glancing back to see Nigel, who has started to follow.

NIGEL

Miss Bridgerton? A moment please!

Shit. Daphne immediately spins back around, continues hurrying through the crowd, only to end up crashing straight into... *Simon*. And that powerfully-built chest of his--

DAPHNE

Oh!

SIMON

Forgive me.

She looks up at him. *At this perfect specimen of English manhood*. Momentarily thrown, before she steps back and sees Nigel, continuing to approach. And so, thinking fast--

DAPHNE

(suddenly, to Simon)

Tell me your name.

Simon blinks.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

Your name, sir.

And he just sighs.

SIMON

Am I honestly to believe you do not already know my name?

She eyes him. *Arrogant much?* But Nigel's still approaching so... Daphne tosses her head back with a laugh. Using Simon as a diversion. And it seems to work, because Nigel is now stopping, turning, heading away. Daphne breathes, relieved.

SIMON (CONT'D)
 If you desired an introduction, madam,
 I do believe *accosting me* is the
 least civilized of ways.

DAPHNE
 Accosting you?

SIMON
 (under his breath)
 Truly, they will try anything.

He looks around. Half the ladies here are ogling this man.
 Daphne shifts. Flustered. Because...

DAPHNE
 Sir. That is not... This is not...
What IS your name--

ANTHONY (O.S.)
 --Bassett?

Both Simon and Daphne turn to see Anthony coming over.

SIMON
 Bridgerton!

ANTHONY
 Come here, old friend!

And Daphne's eyes go wide as these two greet each other like
 old bro-y bros do.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
 I heard news of your father.
 (then, realizing)
 Deuce take it, you are no longer
Bassett!

SIMON
 I shall *always* be--

ANTHONY
 --Hastings! The Duke of Hastings,
 now known forever more.

Simon offers an uneasy smile.

DAPHNE
 The Duke of Hastings is it?

They turn to her. Anthony almost forgot she was there.

ANTHONY
 Right. Hastings, this is my sister.

SIMON
 (taken aback)
Your sister.

ANTHONY
 Daphne, Hastings and I know each other from our days at Oxford.
 (to Simon)
 Days we shall not soon forget...

DAPHNE
 (all smiles)
 Yes. As I am well aware of the company you keep, brother, I am certain your days with the Duke were most... *civilized*, indeed.

And as Daphne pointedly nods at Simon, we ANGLE on Lady Featherington, who's with Prudence and Philipa--

LADY FEATHERINGTON
The Duke.

And she grabs her daughters, taking them across the room...

PRUDENCE
 Mama, where--

LADY FEATHERINGTON
 --To meet the Duke.

PHILIPA
 (seeing Simon)
That man is not in our miniatures.

LADY FEATHERINGTON
Make haste! Before he should see Miss Thompson!

ANGLE BACK ON Daphne, Anthony and Simon:

ANTHONY
 Hastings, we shall need to get together properly. I expect to see you at our club then?

SIMON
 Indeed. Evening, Bridgerton. Miss.

Simon looks to Daphne, nods. She curtsies, *abrupt*, before heading away with Anthony. Simon watches her go. Daphne looks back, just in time to see Lady F and company arriving at Simon's side. OTHER MAMAS have started to surround him, too. Anthony leans in to Daphne.

ANTHONY

Fatiguing, is it not? I should think
it time for us to retire.

DAPHNE

I am anything but weary, brother.
And I still wish to dance. But you...
May go. *I insist.*

ANTHONY

Daphne. There is nary a gentleman
here who would not take your hand.
Look around. You must *think* about
this. Perhaps the most perfect thing
for you to do now is not *to dance*.
But to leave them all wanting more.

Daphne looks around. Gentlemen nod back at her, whisper.
She turns to Anthony. A long beat. Maybe he's right.

DAPHNE

Let us go then.

Anthony nods. Takes her arm. And as they go, we're off
Daphne, back to smiling that perfect smile...

EXT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE - DAWN

As golden, morning light bathes our family's beautiful home...

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DAPHNE'S ROOM - MORNING

We're on Daphne, wide-awake in bed. She's staring up at the
ceiling. Having barely slept she's so excited. An upbeat
Maid Rose appears at her bedside.

ROSE

The gentlemen shall soon be making
their calls, miss.

And Daphne bolts out of bed with all but a squeal.

DAPHNE

I know just the morning dress I wish
to wear.

Off an equally-charged Daphne and Rose...

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/PENELOPE'S ROOM - MORNING

We're CLOSE on a hand running across the sheets of a bed,
before we reveal it's Marina, indulging in what can only be
the finest woven white linen. Penelope's fast asleep on the
other side of the room.

We jump to the doorway, where Lady Featherington is with her housekeeper, MRS VARLEY (50s), eyeing Marina...

LADY FEATHERINGTON

The child must not enjoy such luxury in her own home. Should they have proper beds on a farm? Or only heaps of straw? Have them dressed, Varley.

And the devoted Mrs Varley nods...

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Daphne embroiders with her mother and sisters in this exquisitely-appointed room. No one's talking. Until the door suddenly opens. Daphne tosses her hoop to the side. Smooths her dress and looks up, hopeful, but it's just--

DAPHNE

Anthony. I did not expect to see you this morning.

VIOLET

It is terribly early for you, dearest.

ANTHONY

Yes I could not sleep for some reason. All the excitement, I presume.
(then, noticing)
Am I the first gentleman to arrive?
How wonderful.

And he goes to take a seat next to Daphne, who eyes him.

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Lady F, Prudence, Philipa and Penelope eye A FOOTMAN:

FOOTMAN

Callers, ma'am. The Earl of Stafford and The Marquess of Finley.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

(beaming, to her girls)
My word. Well you should have my colorful fashions to thank...

FOOTMAN

For a *Miss Marina Thompson.*

And all eyes turn to Marina, who innocently just sits there, smiling. Off this, we're LAUNCHED INTO A SEQUENCE:

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/INT. VARIOUS BALLROOMS - OUT OF TIME

QUICK POPS: Of corsets being affixed to Daphne's body. Of Daphne entering ballrooms, escorted by Violet and Anthony. Of Maid Rose waking Daphne the next morning. Of suitors then calling. And of Anthony interrupting *every single one*.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
Dearest gentle reader. This author
finds herself compelled to share the
most *curious* of news...

Corset. Ballroom. Rose. Suitors. *Anthony...* Corset.
Ballroom. Rose. Suitors. *Anthony...* And as we're moving
through time, we can't help but notice that the number of
suitors calling on Daphne IS STARTING TO DWINDLE...

EXT. MAYFAIR - DAY

As our favorite Delivery Boy leaves the latest Whistledown
at doorsteps across town. Handing PAPERS to passersby, all
increasingly eager to take hold of them...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
It seems the purported diamond of
1813 requires a closer inspection...

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

As a NERVOUS SUITOR sits next to Daphne. And he's about to
lay on the charm, when--

NERVOUS SUITOR
Is there a problem, my lord?

Reveal a glaring Anthony, hovering over him.

ANTHONY
I should think so. *You are in my
seat.*

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
For this stone appears to possess a
rather *glaring* imperfection.

The suitor quickly rises. Off Daphne, glaring at Anthony...

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

QUICK POPS of GENTLEMAN AFTER GENTLEMAN calling on Marina.
One comes with FLOWERS. Another with CANDY. Another with...
Is that A PUPPY?!

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

As such, an even rarer jewel -- of
only the most remarkable brilliance,
fire and luster -- has been unearthed.
Her name, unknown to most, yet soon
known to all, is Miss Marina
Thompson...

And as Marina all but glows, Penelope catches sight of her
rankled mother across the room and has to smile...

EXT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/SERVANT AREA - DAY

A dispirited Rose reads Whistledown with Bridgerton butler
HUMBOLDT, housekeeper MRS WILSON and FOOTMAN JOHN nearby.

FOOTMAN JOHN

Barely a caller for Miss Daphne at
all today? What ever is she doing
wrong?

ROSE

She is not doing anything wrong.
You must know what *this Whistledown*
is suggesting.

WILSON

What I know, Rose, is you will surely
never have a house to run if no one
wants Miss Daphne's hand...

HUMBOLDT

This does not concern Rose! Imagine
how *our mistress* must feel...

EXT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/SERVANT AREA - DAY

Varley, Whistledown in hand, is with BRIARLY, Lord
Featherington's valet.

VARLEY

Our mistress is beside herself.
Whistledown may refer to Miss Thompson
as a *jewel*... Well she is certainly
the murkiest *I* have laid eyes upon!
To have these young men stumbling
over themselves...

BRIARLY

Well. Not just *the young men*...

Varley looks at him. *That was certainly pointed.* CUT TO:

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON a dressed-up Lord Featherington, quite visibly ogling Marina across the room, as she greets ANOTHER SUITOR.

LADY FEATHERINGTON
Should you not be out on your daily
walk about the square, dear?

LORD FEATHERINGTON
(shrugs)
Appears as though it may rain.

Lady F glances outside, nothing but sunshine...

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DAPHNE'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

A stoic Daphne reads Whistledown as Maid Rose unties her corset from behind, revealing INDENTS on Daphne's skin where the boning has left impressions. A few blisters visible, too. Violet reads her own paper nearby.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
This author is left to wonder whether
Her Majesty might reconsider the
high praise she once afforded Miss
Bridgerton...

INT. BUCKINGHAM HOUSE - DAY

Where Queen Charlotte lounges most fantastically with her LADIES-IN-WAITING. Whistledown in all of their hands, too.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
For we all must know what the Queen
despises more than anything: *being
wrong.*

And as the Queen herself seems to sit a bit straighter in her seat, her own mouth dropping at what she reads...

INT. WHITE'S GENTLEMAN'S CLUB - DAY

All sophistication and the rattling of dice boxes in here as we PAN across this bustling, smoky scene to find Nigel Berbrooke, reading Whistledown at his own table...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
And the drawing room at Bridgerton
House currently appears to be emptier
than the muddled head of her dearest
King George.

Off Nigel's crude little smile...

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Anthony escorts an AXIOUS SUITOR to the door:

ANTHONY

And yet, where ever *did* you
matriculate, Merriweather? No matter,
I do hope you enjoyed the biscuits...

And the suitor goes. As an exasperated Anthony turns back around, we see his mother and sisters sitting in an otherwise empty drawing room.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Is a suitor in possession of a proper
gentleman's education simply too
much to ask? It is--

VIOLET

(pointed)
--*Astounding.*

DAPHNE

(also pointed)
Inconceivable.

ANTHONY

Well, I must be off to my club then.
Sisters. Mother.

He exits. Off Daphne and Violet, appalled...

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/GIRL'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

An embittered Lady F reads *Whistledown* as a MAID applies some kind of *foul-looking beauty cream* to Penelope's face, that puppy in her arms. Prudence lounges nearby in her own horrible face mask as ANOTHER MAID aggressively tweezes Philipa's hairline.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

Of course, it follows that Lady
Featherington is to receive what she
has always desired. The season's
true Incomparable, living under her
own roof. She must be overjoyed.

As Lady F suddenly spots ANOTHER MAID helping Marina dress--

LADY FEATHERINGTON

(scornful)
Is Miss Thompson so high in her instep
she is unable to don her own slippers?
I should think not.

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Daphne sits with her embroidery, along with Violet, Hyacinth, Francesca and Eloise, who reads Whistledown. Awed.

ELOISE
Has anyone else read what Lady
Whistledown has written?

HYACINTH
Should anyone pay any heed to what
Lady Whistledown writes? I do not.

ELOISE
She has made her opinion on our dear
sister's fortunes quite clear. Lady
Whistledown says--

DAPHNE
--*Enough* about Lady Whistledown!

And everyone looks to Daphne. Beside herself now. A beat.
When the door opens and Footman John enters.

FOOTMAN JOHN
A caller for Miss Bridgerton. Lord
Nigel Berbrooke.

Nigel enters and Daphne's face just *drops*. Even Violet has
to pause, before...

VIOLET
Lord Berbrooke. Come in. May I
help you to some freshly prepared
biscuits? Eloise, allow some room
for his lordship, will you?

Daphne's hand instinctively goes to Eloise. The sisters
exchange a look. Daphne silently pleads for her to stay
where she is, but--

VIOLET (CONT'D)
Eloise, are you not due for a visit
with Penelope this morning?

DAPHNE
--Eloise should like to stay--

VIOLET
--Eloise should like to go.

Eloise looks at Daphne, then goes. As Violet takes Francesca
and Hyacinth to the other side of the room, Nigel takes his
seat next to Daphne. Helps himself to a biscuit.

NIGEL

Forgive me for not calling sooner.
I had presumed your affections were
already spoken for. I should never
have wasted my time elsewhere.

DAPHNE

Elsewhere?

NIGEL

Before I could realize... You and I
were *destined* for each other.

And he licks his tiny lips on account of his biscuit. Daphne practically recoils, as Francesca and Hyacinth can't help but giggle across the room. Off a mortified Daphne...

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

A HANDSOME YOUNG MAN is down on one knee in the middle of the room, gesturing dramatically towards Marina.

HANDSOME YOUNG MAN

*...And so, by heaven, your love may
burn. From the depths of my soul,
'tis thee, I shall earn...*

THREE OTHER SUITORS are present, along with Colin Bridgerton, wincing at this young man's poem. Nearby, sits a resentful Prudence and a bored Philipa, along with an unimpressed Eloise and Penelope, who holds that puppy. We move past all of them to find an irritated Lady Featherington, as the awful poem concludes and everyone (hesitantly) claps.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

Wonderful, wonderful. Gentlemen,
thank you for your calls. Do not
forget to bid Prudence, Philipa, or
even *Penelope* farewell as you go...

The gentlemen go, offering mere nods to the Featherington girls. As Colin bows to Marina, passing Penelope and Eloise on his way out...

COLIN

A most wretched sonnet indeed.

PENELOPE

Lord Byron he is not.

COLIN

(laughs)

I do not believe so. Good day, Pen.

Penelope, shocked she made Colin actually laugh, eyes Colin HARD as he goes. As Eloise continues watching Marina...

ELOISE

She certainly *is* most interesting.
What is she like?

Off Eloise, eyeing the new girl...

EXT. KENSINGTON GARDENS - DAY

As Eloise and Penelope (along with that puppy) walk with Marina in a particularly beautiful portion of these gardens. TWO MAIDS trail them.

ELOISE

Tell us of your family's farm. We have never visited Somerset.

MARINA

Oh, it is most beautiful. Despite the recent drought. I miss it dearly.

ELOISE

Even with all of the attention you receive here?

MARINA

Attention?

ELOISE

You have certainly gained the admiration of Lady Whistledown, much to my sister's discontent.

MARINA

I am only here at my father's insistence. It seems our land has seen better times. Papa believes an advantageous match shall rectify the situation.

PENELOPE

Set your cap at someone yet?

And a tiny smile crosses Marina's face. We barely clock it.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

Someone like... Colin Bridgerton?

MARINA

Which one was he?

(MORE)

MARINA (CONT'D)

(off Pen's look)

I have met so many gentlemen over the past few weeks, I am unable to distinguish one from the next.

PENELOPE

A terrible predicament, to be sure.

MARINA

Am I the only one who finds all of these affairs a bit... *tedious*?

ELOISE

I am not out until next year. I cannot know what you mean.

MARINA

I mean we are *at war*. Men battle at sea and yet, everyone *here* continues to live as if there is nothing to fear. All energies solely devoted to the next dazzling party...

Eloise and Penelope exchange a glance. Because they feel the same way. But Marina thinks she's offended them.

MARINA (CONT'D)

I only mean--

PENELOPE

--I wish I were allowed to battle at sea. Can you imagine? Being a part of *the Royal Navy*. We should see the world!

ELOISE

With king and country our only concerns. Instead of this dreadful business of *marriage*.

PENELOPE

I would think the uniforms might be much more comfortable than the odious whalebone encasement of our corsets...

They laugh at the thought. Marina smiles. She likes them.

MARINA

I do suppose living on a ship full of handsome, *eager*, young officers would certainly be interesting for a young lady.

Eloise and Penelope look to her. Confused.

PENELOPE
What can you mean?

MARINA
Well. There would be situations.

ELOISE
Situations?

MARINA
That would undoubtedly... *arise*.

But Eloise and Penelope aren't exactly making the connection--

ELOISE'S MAID
(interrupting)
Young ladies. What ever are we
discussing?

The girls look at one another, until, covering--

MARINA
Why Lady Whistledown, ma'am. What
else should there be to discuss?

ELOISE
Yes... I wonder what poor soul the
author shall turn her pen to next...

The maid nods, satisfied. And as the girls smile, sly...

EXT. HASTINGS HOUSE - DAY

A grand, sprawling architectural manse. If this is Simon's
mere *London home*, what does his country estate look like??

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
Ambitious mamas, rejoice! For the
new Duke of Hastings continues to
grace our fair city with his presence.
And oh, what an *impressive presence*
it is...

INT. HASTINGS HOUSE/PORTRAIT HALL - DAY

As Simon makes his way down this stately hall of PORTRAITS.
He peers up at his ancestors. Stops to focus on ONE in
particular: *His father*. The ninth Duke of Hastings.

SIMON
Jeffries?

Simon's dutiful butler, JEFFRIES (50s), appears.

SIMON (CONT'D)
See to it that this painting of my
father is removed at once.

JEFFRIES
I shall place it in the vault with
His Grace's other possessions.

SIMON
No. This one I should like destroyed.
(a sigh)
I am leaving.

And as Simon goes, Jeffries can't help but eye him, concerned.

INT. HIGH-CLASS BROTHEL - DAY

As we move down a rather garish hallway, we catch glimpses
of FASHIONABLE IMPURES in these dark, shadowy rooms...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
It should be noted that the Duke has
been overheard announcing to mamas
everywhere that he has no plans of
EVER marrying...

Find a NAKED Simon, getting down and dirty with THREE CYPRIAN
WOMEN. *Whatever* they're doing, they're having fun...

INT. DANBURY HOUSE/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Lady Danbury sits, examining the latest Whistledown...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
This author wonders which brazen
matchmaker shall rise to such a
challenge? For *this* competition is
certainly well underway...

Off Lady Danbury, her wheels a-turnin', we CUT TO:

INT. WHITE'S GENTLEMAN'S CLUB - DAY

With AN IMBIBING SIMON AND ANTHONY, sitting at their table,
laughing raucously. Drinks and cheroots in hand.

ANTHONY
Good God, Hastings. *THREE?*

SIMON
Should it have been *four?*

ANTHONY
If it were, I certainly would not
expect to see you here, *alive.*

And they laugh a little more. As Simon takes in this scene. Men gamble. Others seem to be... *weighing themselves?*

SIMON

I do suppose, if it were not for an overzealous mother at every corner, this time of year in the city would not be so very dreadful.

ANTHONY

Those mothers simply want the same as you, I rather think.

SIMON

For every last one of them to choke on their daughters' hair ribbons?

ANTHONY

For you to claim a *wife*, Hastings. Are you truly not planning to take your place in society? When you have a *Dukedom*?

SIMON

I have a *title*. Which, as far as I am concerned, will end with me.

ANTHONY

Hastings--

SIMON

--Would you *stop*. Calling me *that*. It was my father's name. Never mine.

Anthony eyes him a beat. Nods, sipping his drink.

SIMON (CONT'D)

In any case, what of you?

ANTHONY

What of me?

SIMON

You are the firstborn Bridgerton of a firstborn Bridgerton nine times over. Where is *your wife*?

(off his look)

Is your plan to fuck her forever? *Your mistress.*

Anthony sighs, signals for someone to bring him another drink.

SIMON (CONT'D)

You shall need to sire an heir.

ANTHONY

I am in possession of something you are not... *Brothers.*

SIMON

You will pass the task on to one of them?

(then)

She must be *quite* a mistress.

ANTHONY

You have no idea.

And Anthony's all up in his head for a beat.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

You shall not outrun them. The eager mothers of this town. The harder you try to avoid them, the harder they try to find you. I would be willing to bet on it...

Off Simon's exasperated sigh, knowing his friend is probably right...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

It has reached my ears that the betting books at White's propose the most *fascinating* of pairings this season...

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Find Marina, on the sofa with Colin Bridgerton. As Lord Featherington pretends to read his paper nearby, eyeing the low cut of his distant cousin's dress...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

If one is to trust these accounts, despite the fact they are all written *by men*, then Colin Bridgerton shall be awarded the year's grand prize when he sweeps Miss Thompson from her pretty little slippered feet...

Marina laughs at something Colin says. Penelope, teaching her puppy tricks on the floor, all but rolls her eyes. A bitter Lady Featherington stands with Mrs Varley.

VARLEY

(quiet, to Lady F)

You could always send the willow back to her farm, madam.

LADY FEATHERINGTON
As if Lord Featherington would ever
allow that.

And off a disgusted Lady Featherington, turning away as
Penelope gets her puppy to play dead...

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DRAWING ROOM - DAY

A pensive Daphne stands by the window. Violet sits nearby.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
In other news, a most peculiar suitor
for Miss Daphne Bridgerton has
emerged...

VIOLET
Daphne. *Your caller...*

And Daphne slowly turns. Sees Nigel, sitting on the sofa.

NIGEL
Will it be just the two of us? Yet
again?

He pats the seat next to him. Daphne locks eyes with Violet,
who offers her daughter an encouraging nod. As we MOVE--

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DAPHNE'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Daphne, now clad in the chicest of chic riding habits, reads
Whistledown as Rose adjusts her ensemb.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
Though this miss cannot possibly
believe that *the town idiot* will be
able to reverse her rather dire
circumstances, can she?

DAPHNE
Burn this.

She hands the paper to Rose. *Livid.* And heads out.

EXT. HYDE PARK/ROTTEN ROW - DAY

The fashionable hour. As the QUALITY SET promenades. It's
all *see-and-be-seen* when we find Daphne, riding sidesaddle,
a few feet ahead of Anthony, on his own horse. Anthony eyes
Daphne, speeding up. He catches up to her--

ANTHONY
We shall pay a fine if you want to
gallop here.

DAPHNE

I know the rules I must follow.

And that was curt. She smiles at passersby. Keeping up appearances, naturally. Anthony senses something's wrong.

ANTHONY

Daphne...

DAPHNE

I presume news of Nigel Berbrooke's courtship has found its way back to you.

ANTHONY

I read as much in this scandal sheet taking Mayfair by storm.

(then)

Lord Berbrooke may be... persistent. But he is harmless. No one pays him any mind, sister. I certainly do not. So neither should you. There must be others...

And Daphne just stares straight ahead. Incredulous, because--

DAPHNE

Lady Whistledown has all but declared me *ineligible*. Worthy of the affection of a detestable simpleton *and no one else*. Tell me... What *others* should ever want such damaged goods now?

ANTHONY

You speak as if *Lady Whistledown* were to be held in higher regard than Her Majesty the Queen herself. You give far too much credit to some anonymous scribbler. These musings... They are not true.

DAPHNE

Only they are true, brother. And they are true because of you. You have managed to scare every worthy suitor away. *Whistledown* has merely reported it. You are ruining my chances.

ANTHONY

I am looking out for you. I am *protecting* you. It is my duty.

DAPHNE

And what of my duty? You are not the only one with responsibility to this family.

And she swallows her rage. A lady shall never cause a scene.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

You have no idea what it is to be a woman. What it might feel like to have one's entire life reduced to a single moment. *This* is all I have been raised for. *This* is all I am. I have no other value. If I am unable to find a husband... I shall be worthless. If I am unable to find someone to love me... I shall be useless. You have rendered me *useless* to society.

ANTHONY

Daphne... You are a Bridgerton.

And now Daphne has to smile. *The irony.*

DAPHNE

It would be easier if I were not.

ANTHONY

How can you say such a thing?

DAPHNE

I believed myself the perfect Bridgerton bride--

ANTHONY

--*And you are*--

DAPHNE

--*No.* All I am is an encumbrance. The fact I am a Bridgerton is the very reason why nobody wants me. Lady Whistledown has essentially deemed me a counterfeit. Can she be so very wrong?

And as that question seems to land on Anthony, he turns contemplative. Off our Viscount, eyeing his perfect sister, perfectly perched on her perfect horse in her perfect dress, we begin to HEAR the sounds of an OPERA, now taking place...

INT. OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

Blazing chandeliers float above the jam-packed, *noisy* audience as Siena performs Arne's "Love in a Village."

Anthony stands amongst a group of conversing MEN in the gallery. Every now and then, he meets eyes with Siena, up on stage. And as one of those looks between the two of them lingers--

SOCIETY MAN
(to Anthony, re: Siena)
Do you know her, Bridgerton?

It catches Anthony off-guard. But he plays it off.

ANTHONY
The singer? What ever for...

But as he resumes his conversation with the men, we wonder if he's started to feel rather like a counterfeit himself. When we ANGLE ON Violet and Daphne, just arriving. And as they move through the crowd, Daphne suddenly spots Nigel, preening at her from afar--

DAPHNE
(to Violet)
Our box, mama. I would hate to miss the remainder of the performance...

Violet nods, just as--

LADY DANBURY (O.S.)
Lady Bridgerton! Join us.

Violet turns, sees Lady Danbury standing with none other than Queen Charlotte and her ladies-in-waiting. Violet smiles, approaches with Daphne in tow. As they do, the Queen whispers something to one of her ladies, before...

QUEEN CHARLOTTE
Viscountess.

VIOLET
Your Majesty. Good evening.
(a curtsy)
You must remember my daughter, Daphne.

QUEEN CHARLOTTE
Yes. She made quite an impression.
(quietly, to her ladies)
How ever *fleeting* it may have been.

With that, the Queen heads away. Violet stands there, *shook*.

DAPHNE
What did she say, mama? Did you hear her?

VIOLET
She simply flattered you, dearest.

And Daphne nods. As Lady Danbury eyes Violet, sympathetic...

LADY DANBURY
I would like to welcome you both to
my box this evening. I insist.

And we TIME CUT:

INT. OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

Daphne and Violet sit with Lady Danbury in her box. Daphne leans forward, totally into the show, clearly taken by the love story. And as Violet can't help but eye Queen Charlotte, sitting in the royal box, Lady Danbury turns to her, quiet...

LADY DANBURY
(re: Queen Charlotte)
She is an irascible woman. They are
saying her husband will not live to
the end of the month.

VIOLET
Surely another rumor provided by
that vicious scandal mongering writer.
Should her degradation know no bounds?

LADY DANBURY
Lady Whistledown writes of my family,
too. Yet I suppose the Duke can
withstand such scrutiny since he is,
after all, a *man*.

Violet nods.

VIOLET
Hastings was fortunate to have you
there with him as a child. After
what happened to his mother. Awful.

LADY DANBURY
Yes. He is not what Whistledown
says, you know...

VIOLET
Nor is Daphne.

LADY DANBURY
It would seem the two of them have
that in common then. Matches have
certainly been made with far less.

Violet eyes her, curious.

VIOLET

What are you suggesting, Lady Danbury?

LADY DANBURY

Only that your eldest miss might look quite agreeable on the Duke's rather handsome arm. Lady Whistledown merely writes what she sees, Lady Bridgerton. Perhaps we might be able to help her see things a bit more clearly.

Violet sits there. Considering. Glances over at Daphne, who's still enthralled by the show.

LADY DANBURY (CONT'D)

The Duke is quite fond of gooseberry pie.

And as Violet turns back to Lady D with a nod...

VIOLET

The very dish my cook is renowned for.

On stage, Siena suddenly clutches her chest, belting out A STUNNING ARIA. Off these two plotting ladies, returning their attentions to the stage...

EXT. GROSVENOR SQUARE/EXT. FEATHERINGTON HOME - DAWN

As WORKERS make their morning deliveries, we find a COALMAN -- overturning his bag of coal, depositing the contents down a COAL CHUTE in front of the Featherington Home. CUT TO:

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/PENELOPE'S ROOM - DAWN

We're on Marina, in her bed, running her hands on those sheets again as she stares at a fast-asleep Penelope on the other side of the room. And she's smoothing the linen in long, sweeping motions when her movements become faster. *Frenetic*. Her face telling us that something is very, very wrong with those sheets. *What the fuck is wrong with those sheets?? Something*, because now Marina's furiously collecting them into one big ball in the center of her bed and tossing them to the floor. Spent. Breathless. *Distraught*. Off this...

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

We POP AROUND this luxurious room, where bits of the Bridgerton family history are on display: THE FAMILY CREST. A PAINTING of Aubrey Hall (the family's grand ancestral estate). Another of the family playing PALL MALL. Before we find the Bridgertons enjoying a boisterous dinner with an entertained-looking Simon, seated next to Daphne, of course.

ANTHONY

For all we know, Whistledown may be some interloper living in *Bloomsbury* of all places.

COLIN

What should be so terrible about Bloomsbury?

ELOISE

(to Anthony)

She writes with too much detail to come from Bedford Square, brother.

COLIN

Is it because people there *work* for a living?

DAPHNE

She does seem to be someone with access.

BENEDICT

Who knows if Whistledown is even a *she*?

FRANCESCA

Of course she is a *she*. It is obvious the writer is Lady Danbury.

DAPHNE

Lady Danbury quite enjoys sharing her insults with society directly. She would never bother herself writing them all down.

And at that, Simon has to smile. Violet catches it.

HYACINTH

Could it be *Lady Featherington*?

ALL OF THE BRIDGERTONS

No.

And their collective answer makes them laugh. Hyacinth eyes them, confused.

VIOLET

You have yet to read what Whistledown writes of *the Featheringtons*, dear Hyacinth.

And as this fun, lively conversation resumes, we CUT TO--

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Where the Featheringtons have gathered for dinner. It's much different here. Formal. Stilted. *Silent*. SERVANTS serve, as Lady Featherington and her husband sit at opposite ends of a grand table. Prudence and Philipa pick at their plates. Penelope eyes a glum Marina, who's not eating.

PENELOPE
(quiet, to Marina)
Are you not hungry, Marina?

PRUDENCE
If you shan't finish your meal, I am sure Penelope shall...

Prudence and Philipa laugh. Off Penelope, we're BACK--

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/DINING ROOM - DAY

With the Bridgertons.

ANTHONY
...Because Whistledown is a *man!*

ELOISE
Because she is simply *too good* to be otherwise??

And as the argument continues, Violet turns to Simon...

VIOLET
You must forgive this rather unruly debate, Your Grace.

SIMON
Nonsense. I find it entertaining. All of you at one table, even the children. A common practice?

VIOLET
Family dinners. Yes. I realize it may be unfashionable, but... We like each other. Most of the time.
(off his smile)
You should join us more often, Your Grace. Perhaps when we travel to our country seat. You would be most welcome.

And *that* seems to make Anthony sit a bit straighter in his chair. As if he just realized something. But then--

HYACINTH
--Mama, Gregory tossed a *pea* at me!

GREGORY
That pea was already there!

VIOLET
Gregory!

As Violet quietly scolds him, everyone falls into conversation amongst themselves. ANGLE ON Francesca and Eloise, hushed:

FRANCESCA
He does have a *presence* about him...

ELOISE
If rakish Dukes were one's thing.

HYACINTH
(loudly)
What might you two be discussing?

FRANCESCA
Eat your peas.

We ANGLE ON Colin, leaning across the table to Benedict:

COLIN
I'm to spar with Jackson himself.

BENEDICT
You?

COLIN
Is that *envy* I detect in your voice?

BENEDICT
Judgment, brother. I shall need to witness *this*...

And as these conversations continue, we finally ANGLE ON Daphne, quietly sitting next to Simon. She looks up, catching Simon's eye. Promptly returns to her meal.

SIMON
You appear displeased.

DAPHNE
Do I?

SIMON
We find ourselves seated beside each other, Miss Bridgerton. I would like to think you happy about *that*.

DAPHNE

Perhaps, Your Grace, it would be better if you refrained from thinking about me at all.

He nods. Amused. Violet eyes them from across the table.

SIMON

It is simply... surprising.

DAPHNE

Yes. How ever is it possible for a lady to offer anything but a *smile* whilst seated beside a Duke? Even one of *your* reputation.

SIMON

You are aware of my reputation?

DAPHNE

I am aware of your friendship with my eldest brother. And if that were not enough, I am also aware of the things a certain *writer* has recently written of you. Presumptuous, clearly. Arrogant, most definitely. You are a *rake*, through and through. Tell me I am wrong, Your Grace.

SIMON

Who should refrain from thinking about whom again?

DAPHNE

I assure you... I am anything but interested in you.

SIMON

Good.

DAPHNE

Quite.

SIMON

And *I* anything but interested *in* *you*.

She looks at him. Again. As Violet shifts in her seat.

SIMON (CONT'D)

The eldest sister of my oldest friend. Yet another recent subject of a certain writer. Chaste. Neat. *Desperate*.

DAPHNE
I shall have you know--

SIMON
--*To marry*, that is.
(off her look)
Tell me I am wrong.

And at that, a laugh seems to escape Eloise's lips. Until Violet shoots her a look. As Anthony clears his throat--

ANTHONY
Hastings. I am so glad you decided to join us this evening. It was most *spontaneous* of you.

SIMON
Not at all. With Lady Danbury accepting your dear mother's gracious invitation on my behalf, *well*, how ever could I have declined?

Anthony turns to his mother, all innocence.

VIOLET
It is always a pleasure, Your Grace.

And as Daphne and Simon's conversation resumes...

DAPHNE
You seem to consider the desire to marry a fault. Why is that?

SIMON
I am afraid I cannot give you that answer, Miss Bridgerton. For if I offered you those rather *unsavory* reasons, then I would be forced to marry you. And neither of us would want *that* now, would we?

And he smiles. There's something about it. Wickedly sexy, that smile. And for the first time, Daphne finds herself oddly, *annoyingly*, drawn to it. Until...

DAPHNE
Certainly not.

It's a moment not lost on Violet or Anthony either. As Violet can't help but smile, clocking that look on her daughter's face, and Anthony stabs his beef course with his fork--

ANTHONY
Well. Tonight has been exceptional, but I am afraid it is getting late.

VIOLET

Anthony. We have not even had our
dessert. *Gooseberry pie*, Your Grace.

SIMON

Ah. Lovely.

Off a none too pleased Anthony, onto his mother, we TIMECUT:

INT. BRIDGERTON HOUSE/ANTHONY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Anthony works at the desk a beat, when Violet appears at the doorway. He doesn't bother looking up.

ANTHONY

You were a perfectly reasonable mother
until your eldest daughter came of
age.

VIOLET

Anthony...

ANTHONY

This matchmaking scheme you rather
transparently concocted with Lady
Danbury... It will not work.

VIOLET

I can think of worse matches for
Daphne than a *Duke*. I believed the
two of you to be friends.

ANTHONY

We are good friends. Which is how I
know he has absolutely no intention
of marrying.

VIOLET

You must understand that *all men*
make that assertion.

She glances at the PORTRAIT OF EDMUND BRIDGERTON on the wall.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Your father, even--

ANTHONY

--Do not bring father into this.

(then)

Even if he were in want of a wife,
you would most certainly not have
the Duke anywhere near Daphne.

VIOLET

I fully subscribe to the belief that reformed rakes make the very best of husbands--

ANTHONY

--He will NOT make her happy. Daphne deserves better. I know you think you are solving a problem, but you are not. That is all I shall say about the matter.

And he goes back to his work, resolute. And even though Violet knows it is her place to now go, she doesn't move:

VIOLET

The Duke will be joining us as our guests at Vauxhall tomorrow evening.

He looks up at her. Stunned.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

I admit, it was not easy to convince him to come, but--

ANTHONY

--You overstep--

VIOLET

--She is my eldest daughter--

ANTHONY

--Yet she is MY responsibility. As are you.

VIOLET

Responsibility?

ANTHONY

Do not make this any more difficult than it already is.

VIOLET

I wish to know something, Anthony. Tonight, when you leave this study you continue to keep at your family home, are you to return to your bachelor lodgings across the square or shall you pay visit to a certain soprano you tend to in an apartment you pay for on the other side of town? Relying on your younger brothers to one day do the job you cannot?

(MORE)

VIOLET (CONT'D)

(off his look)

And you like to speak of
responsibility, my dear son? Of
duty? Pray tell... What should you
know of it?

A long beat, as the two of them hold each other's gaze.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

I sit with her in that drawing room,
and do you know what I see? A young
woman who is *terrified*. Because she
knows what kind of life, what kind
of future awaits her should YOU
continue to get in her way. She
shall become a spinster. Should she
not marry, she shall become *invisible*.
Insignificant. My lively, beautiful
girl... Presumed no better than the
fetid street matter scraped from
your boots every morning and night --
is *that* what you should like for
your dear sister?

ANTHONY

Of course not.

VIOLET

Then do something. If your father
were still here, Daphne would have
already been matched. The man would
have made an arrangement with an old
friend. *The man would have done
what was now necessary.* Are you
merely an older brother, Anthony?
Or are you *the man* of this house?

And with that, she begins to go. As Anthony sits there...

ANTHONY

I miss him. *Father.*

VIOLET

I know. But that is no excuse.

She exits. Off a pensive Anthony, staring over at Edmund's
portrait on the wall, wrestling with these burdens...

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/SCULLERY - NIGHT

As Mrs Varley sets a pail full of laundry on the counter.
She removes the contents -- linens, unmentionables and,
finally, that big ball of Marina's sheets. When she suddenly
pauses, noticing something. Off her startled face...

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/LADY FEATHERINGTON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Lady Featherington sits, applying her arsenic-laden nightly face cream. When she eyes herself in the mirror. Notices a nasty-looking RASH forming just underneath her hairline. She picks at it. A few hairs easily falling right out. When we see Mrs Varley appear in the doorway. CLUTCHING those sheets. We stay on her for a beat, silently debating. When she finally FORCES herself to go in...

VARLEY

Madam?

LADY FEATHERINGTON

(startled)

Yes, Varley?

Off Mrs Varley, closing the door behind her...

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/PENELOPE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marina sits at a writing desk, furiously scribbling, when the door opens to reveal Lady Featherington, who now holds the sheets in her hand. Penelope's in bed, reading.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

Penelope, leave us.

PENELOPE

What? It's half past--

LADY FEATHERINGTON

--To Prudence's room at once!

And a confused Penelope leaves. As Lady Featherington comes over to Marina, drops the pile of sheets on the desk. She eyes the girl, who's looking a little nervous now, and then:

LADY FEATHERINGTON (CONT'D)

You haven't bled.

Shit.

LADY FEATHERINGTON (CONT'D)

It has been over a month since your arrival. And you haven't bled.

And Lady F just glares her damn scary glare.

LADY FEATHERINGTON (CONT'D)

I suppose I should be happy. Up until now, I had no reasonable excuse to dispense with you. But when Lord Featherington hears of this. When your *own* papa hears of this...

MARINA

Please--

LADY FEATHERINGTON

--I suppose I should be happy. And if it were guaranteed that my own ladies should not be affected by your revolting recklessness, I would be.

(then)

Do you even know who the father is?

MARINA

Please... Do not tell anyone about any of this. I beg of you, ma'am--

LADY FEATHERINGTON

--I shall have nothing TO DO with this! My ladies shall have nothing to do with this! Not ONE of us will have ANY association with you whatsoever! Do you know what you have done?!

MARINA

(quietly)

What I know... Is that you shall never understand.

LADY FEATHERINGTON

What was that?

MARINA

You shall never UNDERSTAND. Someone like you. Living this ridiculously charmed... Do you think I wanted to come here? To be with people like you? So out of touch, so superior--

SLAP!! Lady Featherington is NOT to be trifled with right now. And as she stares daggers at this girl, we CUT OUTSIDE:

INT. FEATHERINGTON HOME/OUTSIDE PENELOPE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Where Prudence, Philipa and Penelope have all gathered, ears to the door, LISTENING to *shit*. Go. Down. Horrified, when Mrs Varley appears at the end of the hall, shoos them away...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

Be it shame or slander. Seduction or smear...

INT. SIENA'S LONDON FLAT - NIGHT

We move through this well-appointed flat to find a post-coital Anthony and Siena. He's lost in thought, twirling his pocket-watch through his fingers.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

There is one thing that continues to humble even the most highly-regarded members of our dear ton: *A scandal.*

He turns to her. She senses something is very, very wrong.

ANTHONY

I cannot see you anymore.

She stares at him.

SIENA

I do not understand.

ANTHONY

It is not for you to understand. I must do what is necessary.

And Siena just sits there a beat. *Stunned.*

SIENA

You said you would always protect me. You promised to care for me, my lord. And now... *What shall I do now?*

Anthony holds her gaze a beat, until:

ANTHONY

You shall leave.

Off a blindsided Siena...

EXT. VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS - NIGHT

As SOCIETY MEMBERS arrive at this decadent pleasure playground.

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)

Tonight, a privileged selection of only the most fashionable guests will descend upon the most *scandal-prone* grounds in all of London: Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens...

SOME, through the main entrance, by carriage. OTHERS, like the Bridgertons, through the THAMES RIVER ENTRANCE, by boat.

Daphne eyes the approaching spectacle, taking a breath, fortifying herself. And as we soar above the tree-lined promenades leading to illuminated waterfalls running past canals surrounded by lush, expansive grounds...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Its shaded garden walls, such as those of *the Dark Walk*, have covered for the most *notorious* of trysts. This author wonders which persons of Quality shall be discovered there tonight. Or better yet, *how many?*

We focus on a darkened canopy of trees, where CYPRIAN WOMEN await, and ONE SLY COUPLE disappears into the shadows -- clearly up to no good -- before we're:

EXT. VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS/BALL AREA - NIGHT

With MORE COUPLES, dancing beneath the stars at this visually stunning, spectacular event. We land on Penelope, wearing a surprisingly beautiful, NON-YELLOW GOWN. She's eyeing the dancers from the sidelines again, looking for someone...

COLIN (O.S.)

Pen!

She sees him approaching. Plays it cool.

PENELOPE

Colin. I did not know you would be here.

COLIN

Quite sorry to disappoint. Where could Miss Thompson be? Surely she made the evening's guest list.

PENELOPE

She is... *ill*. My mama stayed home with her. *Papa* had to chaperone.

They look over to see Lord F, guffawing with the other MEN.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

I am quite enjoying the fact he is here. Mama would never allow me to wear a dress like this. Not yellow enough, I think.

They smile. Until Penelope spots Cressida, glass of punch in hand, approaching with her minions. *These bitches.*

CRESSIDA

Mister Bridgerton, I believe you owe me a dance this evening. And I have only one more space remaining on my card. *At present.*

PENELOPE

(under her breath)
How convenient.

Cressida goes to retrieve her card. But as she does, she *accidentally* spills her punch. All over Penelope's dress.

CRESSIDA

Penelope! I did not see you there!
Yet again.

Penelope stares down at her ensemble. *Ruined.* And as she starts to back away, Colin eyes her. Turns back to Cressida:

COLIN

I am afraid I cannot offer you that dance, Miss Cowper. I am to escort Miss Featherington to the floor. *At present, I think.*

Penelope stops in her tracks, as an incredulous Cressida watches Colin take Penelope's hand, leading her to the floor.

PENELOPE

I... Do not know what to say.

COLIN

You do not have to say anything.

Off a bewildered Penelope, dancing with Colin, we move to find Daphne and Violet, entering the fray. And they can't help but notice a few passersby quickly averting their eyes upon seeing them. Daphne steels herself, before spotting Simon, on the other side of the dance floor, surrounded by **AMBITIOUS MAMAS AND DAUGHTERS**. We join them, just in time to see our Handsome Young Lady *covertly GROPE Simon's junk...*

HANDSOME YOUNG LADY

(oops)
Excuse me, Your Grace.

And the girl goes all atwitter behind her fluttering fan, just as her dear mama comes over to Simon:

HYL'S MAMA

The resemblance is remarkable. You look just like him. *Your father.*

Simon *stares daggers* at this woman, about to respond, when--

MASTER OF CEREMONIES (O.S.)
 Ladies and gentlemen, a most
 extraordinary event is about to take
 place! Right this way! Come! Come!

As everyone's ushered away from the dance floor, we stay on Simon, who turns and goes in the opposite direction of the crowd. Off Simon's dark expression, we move...

EXT. VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS/DARK WALK - NIGHT

Simon walks, by himself, down this shady corridor of trees. Sounds of revelers in the distance, as Simon passes A LORD AND LADY getting down and dirty in the dark. A little further and he passes TWO LORDS having some fun of their own. Finally, Simon finds what he's been hoping to find -- a group of CYPRIAN WOMEN. Simon pauses. Eyeing one woman in particular. And off this, we SMASH TO:

EXT. VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS/DARK WALK - NIGHT

As Simon and his lady friend GET TO IT in these shadows. His hands, everywhere. His mouth, hungry. Needy. Before we finally afford these two their privacy and move--

EXT. VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS/LANTERN AREA - NIGHT

On the wide-eyed faces of our crowd. Above, as many as *fifteen-thousand* colorful glass lanterns hang from festoons in trees. Our MASTER OF CEREMONIES stands with THREE PANDEAN MINSTRELS on a small stage up front.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES
 It is with great privilege I present
 Vauxhall's *newest* spectacle of
 illumination! Feast your eyes above!
 And allow all that is radiant to
 overwhelm you!

He nods towards an AIDE, who lights a nearby FUSE. Which is when the most glorious, golden-colored light bathes our crowd, as every single one of those lanterns ILLUMINATES! The effect is BREATHTAKING. The crowd GASPS. An awed Daphne looks up, smiling, as MUSICIANS play. Anthony approaches.

DAPHNE
 (seeing him)
 Is it not the most bizarre... Look,
 brother.

But he's not looking. And so now she's looking at him.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)
 What is it?

And she eyes him as he struggles with this. He takes a beat.

ANTHONY

Lord Berbrooke's baronetcy is over two-hundred years old. His lineage is legitimate. He has had an excellent education. Possesses no debts. Never hurt an animal or a woman and he is even a decent shot. To speak strictly, there is nothing truly wrong with him. I tried to find *something*, sister.

DAPHNE

What should any of this--

ANTHONY

--You are to marry him.

DAPHNE

Nigel.

ANTHONY

I have already begun the arrangements. The banns shall be printed in a matter of days--

DAPHNE

--*I will not hear of this--*

ANTHONY

--You wanted to find a husband, did you not? Well it should be just as easy for you to fall in love with Lord Berbrooke as with anyone else.

And Daphne STORMS away. Off a troubled Anthony, we CUT TO:

EXT. VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS - NIGHT

Where a furious Daphne paces, alone. Away from the party. We stay on her for a beat, hearing the SOUNDS of partygoers in the distance, until--

NIGEL (O.S.)

What ever are you doing?

Daphne turns, sees Nigel coming out of the shadows.

DAPHNE

Nigel. Not now.

NIGEL

Nigel? Are we to drop the honorifics so soon? I suppose, as your husband--

DAPHNE

--You will never be my husband. I
will never marry you. My brother...
He made a mistake.

Nigel eyes her. And as this man takes a rather predatory
step forward, we CUT TO:

EXT. VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS - NIGHT

On a sly Simon, now making his way back to the ball. And
he's in his head, his thoughts making him smile, until--

NIGEL (O.S.)

How dare you. Do you think yourself
better than me?

DAPHNE (O.S.)

It would be best for you *to leave*.

NIGEL (O.S.)

You should be thanking me. I am
your last hope. No one WANTS you,
Miss Bridgerton--

DAPHNE (O.S.)

--LET GO OF ME!

And now Simon breaks into a run, heading for the trees, ready
to save his best friend's sister, until he comes round and
spots DAPHNE CLOCKING NIGEL SQUARE IN THE JAW! Nigel goes
down. *Hard*. Even Daphne's surprised by her own strength,
as she looks up to lock eyes with Simon.

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

I had no intention...

SIMON

Of knocking the climp flat out? I
must say I am impressed.

She eyes him.

DAPHNE

What are you *doing* out here?

SIMON

Avoiding certain... *people*.

DAPHNE

People?

SIMON

Mothers. They are people, I suppose.

DAPHNE
 You were coming from the Dark Walk.
 It is merely a few steps away...

SIMON
 What would you know of...

DAPHNE
 (realizing)
*The Dark Walk is merely a few steps
 away... And I am alone. With two
 men.*

SIMON
 I believe you are only with *one man*,
 the other is...

DAPHNE
 I shall be compromised just the same.
 Do you have any idea... I must go.

NIGEL
Marry me... Miss Bridgerton...

And she looks back down at a half-conscious Nigel, who rolls himself over and falls back to sleep.

SIMON
 Now as far as proposals go, *that* may
 be the least romantic of all.

DAPHNE
 This is not a humorous occasion,
 Your Grace.

SIMON
 Yet I cannot keep myself from smiling.

Daphne sighs. Finally allows herself a tiny smile, too.

DAPHNE
 I suppose if someone were to find me
 here, it would be *one way* out of
 marrying *him*.

SIMON
 You cannot possibly be thinking of
 marrying *him*.

DAPHNE
 If I am unable to secure another
 offer, there may be no alternative.
 Unlike you, I cannot simply declare
 I do not wish to marry. I do not
 have such a privilege.

SIMON

Yes, I was quite surprised to learn you no longer have a line of suitors around every last square in London.

She exhales, frustrated--

DAPHNE

I am in no need of your derision, sir.

SIMON

I do not *mock you*--

DAPHNE

--I believe I have endured enough ridicule for one lifetime--

SIMON

--*I am being sincere.*

And now she looks at him. Sees that he means it. A beat.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I know of what this Lady Whistledown has written. Trust I possess as much contempt for the author as you. She has all but issued a challenge to London's most ambitious mamas -- encouraging, *provoking* them to...

DAPHNE

Claim you as their prize?

(then)

Do not worry, Your Grace. I believe such a *win* would be promptly forfeited, indeed.

And now he looks at her. There's that smile again. Daphne suddenly hears something off in the distance, refocuses--

DAPHNE (CONT'D)

I must... Go *this* way. You, through those trees--

SIMON

--Perhaps there is an answer. To our collective *Lady Whistledown* issue.

She slows. She's listening.

SIMON (CONT'D)

We could pretend to form an attachment.

DAPHNE

You and I?

SIMON

With you on my arm, the world will believe I have finally found my Duchess. Every presumptuous mother in town will leave me alone. And every suitor will be looking at you.

(off her look)

You must know men are always interested in a woman if they believe another, particularly a Duke, to be interested as well.

DAPHNE

You presume *Lady Whistledown* shall--

SIMON

--I presume she shall deem us precisely what we are: Me, unavailable. You... *Desirable*.

And she holds his gaze a beat. Until:

DAPHNE

It is an absurd plan, Your Grace.

SIMON

I find it quite brilliant. Provided you do not wish to marry me, and I do not wish to marry you -- what ever should you have to lose? Besides *him*, of course.

Daphne looks down at Nigel, fast asleep on the ground. Just as we HEAR the WHISTLE OF AN APPROACHING FIREWORK in the distance. Off Daphne, a decision in her hands...

INT. VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS/BALL AREA - NIGHT

FIREWORKS soar above, reflecting on the lake below. As COUPLES head to the dance floor, Violet finds Anthony.

VIOLET

Have you seen your sister?

ANTHONY

I hoped to ask you the same. I shall find her.

(then)

I decided to heed your advice. The opera singer, I'm to see her no more.

And Violet eyes him, surprised, when there's a SUDDEN BUZZ about the room, as WHISPERS abound. All discerning eyes turning to... *Simon and Daphne*. Heading to the center of the dance floor. He takes her in his arms. Daphne looks around. Tense.

SIMON
Stare into my eyes.

And her eyes dart to his. A beat, as they start to move.

DAPHNE
You look quite... *serious*.

He smiles.

SIMON
Is this better?

She smiles. Relaxing a bit.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Here. Closer. If this is to work,
we must appear madly in love.

She moves closer. He moves closer. They stare into each others eyes. They dance. Her breath catches. *And now time stands still*. As we LIVE in this dance. Because this dance? *Is magic*. But this dance is also just a charade... right?

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
For those not in attendance at the
Vauxhall celebration, you missed the
most remarkable coup of the season...

MEN elbow their pals. MAMAS goss furiously. Penelope watches from afar, moved. And Violet stands there, *beaming*. Before she looks over at Lady Danbury, who smiles right back at her. As these two exchange a subtle nod...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It appears Miss Daphne Bridgerton
has captured the interest of the
newly returned Duke of Hastings.
Perhaps she *is* the season's most
precious gem -- incomparable and
unbreakable -- after all.

We find a seething Anthony, *glaring* at his sister and Simon...

EXT. BUCKINGHAM HOUSE/FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

As our serious-looking Queen, trailed by her ladies, stalks towards an apparent commotion on her front steps...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
 Of course how Miss Bridgerton secured
 her newfound suitor is yet to be
 determined...

And now we see the GUARDS, apparently mid-argument with our
 Delivery Boy. Everyone stiffens upon seeing the Queen.

QUEEN CHARLOTTE
 What is the meaning of this?

GUARD
 He is asking for... *money*, ma'am.

DELIVERY BOY
 Whistledown started to charge, Your
 Majesty. *Five pence* if you want the
 latest.

Queen Charlotte blinks. Incredulous. *Tense*. Until...

QUEEN CHARLOTTE
 Well someone pay the boy! At once!

And as someone hands the boy his money, and the Queen snatches
 up her copy of the latest Whistledown...

INT. UNDISCLOSED LOCATION - DAY

CLOSE on A HAND, belonging to SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE, writing...

LADY WHISTLEDOWN (V.O.)
 Yet if *anyone* shall reveal the
 circumstances of this match, dear
 reader, it is *I*. Yours truly. Lady
 Whistledown.

And as this hand signs the paper with flourish, we have our...

END OF EPISODE