

EXT. SCHÖNBRUNN PALACE - DAY

SUPER: Vienna, 1854

The palace, with its baroque architecture, is both beautiful and intimidating. The pristine gardens exude power and luxury. All is quiet. Until...

JEFF (O.S.)

Laaaaadies and gentlemen, I welcome you to the reunion special of season 416 of The Real Hapsburgs of Vienna!

INT. PALACE - CONTINUOUS

We follow a boisterous applause into the front doors, around a corner, up the stairs, and through a hallway to the --

INT. PALACE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

An audience stands as our host JEFF (40s, Andy Cohen plus Stanley Tucci from the Hunger Games) struts around on stage.

SUPER: Vienna, 1854... if reality tv existed in the 19th century

JEFF

You all look absolutely marvelous today!

As Jeff soaks up another round of applause, we take a look around the anachronistic room. It looks like an old fashioned theatre complete with a raised STAGE and VELVET SEATING. The audience is even wearing 19th century clothing. But then there are STUDIO CAMERAS and BOOM MICS and SPOTLIGHTS and a HAGGARD STAGE MANAGER.

A very different but definitely more fabulous world.

JEFF (CONT'D)

I hope you are prepared for an exhilarating show! Now, if you will allow me to introduce our ladies.

A line of FEMALE ROYALTY walk on stage and sit on WHITE LEATHER COUCHES. The couches surround an opulent THRONE, but that's not for Jeff. This is for --

JEFF (CONT'D)

And raise and bow for Empress Sophie!

EMPRESS SOPHIE (40s, big crown and even bigger sense of entitlement) enters. She gestures to the CONDUCTOR who stops the music. She sits, and everyone follows suit.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Perhaps the biggest story of the season was the birth of Joanna's grandson. How feel you, Joanna, about your daughter-in-law's contribution to your family?

JOANNA (40S)

I am blessed to have not one but two male grandchildren. And I am blessed to share my good fortune with the ladies and the world.

SOPHIE

Touching.

JOANNA

Thank you, Empress.

SOPHIE

However... I believe there is more to the story.

JOANNA

Excuse me?

SOPHIE

I have with me a piece of unreleased footage of the event.

The audience gasps.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Jeff?

JEFF

Roll the clip!

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE THE BIRTHING ROOM - DAY

Joanna, her SON, and some of the other ladies from the studio pace in front of the bedroom door. Screams come from the room as well as the muffled voices of MIDWIVES. A camera crew shoots the anticipated moment, concentrating on Joanna's nervous look.

The screaming subsists, and a midwife appears in the doorway.

MIDWIFE
It's a boy!

Cheers erupt from the small crowd, and Joanna's son rushes into the room. Joanna faces a camera and speaks to the audience.

JOANNA
I had no doubt of a boy. We prayed for a strong lineage to carry on the family name.

Another lady, MARGARET (20s) rolls her eyes.

MARGARET
(under her breath)
More likely: a deal with the devil.

INT. VENETIAN PALACE STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

The audience "oohs" and waits for Joanna's reaction.

JEFF
Did you know Margaret said this?

JOANNA
Not at all!

JEFF
Would you care to explain your words, Margaret?

MARGARET
Well... I mean I thought... I assumed we all knew!

JEFF
Knew what?

MARGARET
The real reason behind Joanna's two grandsons.

The audience gasps.

JEFF
I don't think we do know, Margaret. Care to elaborate?

MARGARET
Good heavens! I - It's - I cannot discuss --

SOPHIE
-- I can explain, Jeff.

Joanna turns her furious gaze to Sophie, her new opponent.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
I believe Margaret was referring to
the methods our dear Joanna
suggested to her impressionable
daughter-in-law. There are old
wives tales on producing a male
child. Fornicating under the
quarter moon, drinking potions.
Dare I call it... witchcraft?

JOANNA
You slander me so!

SOPHIE
Did you not speak privately with
your daughter-in-law on the night
of January tenth? Nine months ago?

JOANNA
We were merely discussing the
latest fashions.

SOPHIE
In a private courtyard?

The other ladies nod along with Sophie.

JOANNA
Witchcraft is so 17th century. Such
regressive ideals, Your Majesty.

SOPHIE
You routinely brought "medicine" to
your daughter-in-law to drink not 6
months ago. I wouldn't call that
archaic.

JOANNA
Well, perhaps it is your words that
come from a place of hell, Sophie.
How old is your eldest son? And he
is yet to be wed!

JEFF
Franz Joseph, the crown prince, is
24 this year.

JOANNA

Ancient! He's ancient and unwed!
Does the state of your bloodline
unnerve you? Especially as Franz is
to be king somed --

MARGARET

-- 24 is not so old for a man! In
fact-

JOANNA

Shut the fuck up, you wench! You
Know nothing of family bloodlines,
daughter of a bastard!

MARGARET

You cranky old bitch, I'll end you
right here right now!

SOPHIE

If you ladies are finished trading
schoolyard insults, I have an
announcement.

Joanna, Margaret, and the audience are too caught up in the drama to listen to Sophie.

JOANNA

Fight me, if you dare stoop so low!
I could outwit ten of you in a duel
of minds!

AUDIENCE

Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame!

SOPHIE

Silence!

Sophia taps her ROYAL SCEPTER on the stage, and everyone settles down.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

As Joanna so kindly brought to my attention, my son is in need of a wife. Luckily for the fate of our empire, I've thought of this issue much before Joanna ran her mouth faster than a whore in Vienna's red district. I have arranged a marriage between my son and a lovely candidate. She's beautiful, gentle, and a devout Christian. She will bless our land with her goodness.

JEFF

Don't keep us in the dark! Who is
this mysterious lady?

Sophie pauses for dramatic effect.

SOPHIE

Helene of Bavaria, my dear sister's
daughter.

The ladies immediately begin whispering. Who is Helene? What
have you heard of her? Is she worthy?

JEFF

And I have more news to impart.
Thanks to the allowance of our dear
empress, the show will be hitting
the road! For the first time in The
Real Hapsburgs' history, we will be
taking the cameras outside Vienna!
Join us next week for the
engagement party in the resort town
of Bad Ischl!

The crowd erupts with applause as the curtains close.
Margaret uses the private opportunity to ask the question on
everyone's mind.

MARGARET

Empress, pray tell, who is this
Helene of Bavaria?