

Paterfamilias

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FADE IN:

EXT. BALCONY/TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - DAY

BATIATUS, bruises not yet completely healed, stands on the balcony addressing the assembled GLADIATORS below. Flanking him are OENOMAUUS (in Doctore's newly mended chestplate) and GANNICUS, both weighed by heavy thoughts of recent events.

LUCRETIA

stands with GAIA, who eyes Gannicus with hungry appreciation. MELITTA attends in the background, weighed by the guilt of what she was commanded to do with Gannicus in HB2. NAEVIA and DIONA also attend, regarding Gannicus with schoolgirl wonder.

BATIATUS

We have won many victories in the arena. Sent many an unworthy opponent to the afterlife. Yet self important men have held us to lesser matches of the morning, absent both eyes and prominence. Such time has found its end! Two days hence, our champion shall take to the sands to face another of Vettius' shit-eating dogs. Not in the streets, but in the fucking primus!

The men ROAR their approval.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Behold the man whose recent performance inspired good Varus to return the House of Batiatus to proper position! Behold, Gannicus!

Batiatus indicates Gannicus, who hesitantly steps forward as Gladiators CHEER below.

GAIA

(whispered, to
Lucretia)

An inspired performance, indeed.

Melitta stiffens, having caught the comment. Lucretia clocks the reaction, whispers disapprovingly to Gaia.

LUCRETIA

One not to be repeated.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS
 (to Gladiators)
 A true god of the arena! A man to
 be emulated and admired!

Gannicus' eyes find Oenomaus regarding him with brotherly pride. He adjusts his view, finds Melitta within it. She averts her gaze, riddled with shame.

TRAINING SQUARE

Gladiators loudly incant praise. BARCA, AUCTUS, GNAEUS, and RHASKOS are in the forefront, leading the charge.

GLADIATORS
 Gannicus! Gannicus!

FIND ASHUR and DAGAN in the back, brands still fresh. CRIXUS stands with them, eyeing Gannicus with admiration and regret.

CRIXUS
 There was a moment... I nearly had
 the man.

Ashur chuckles at Crixus' assessment of the fight.

ASHUR
 Perhaps one day you will find
 chance again, and stand a champion
 as Gannicus.
 (re: brand)
 Yet first I suggest you earn the
 mark, as we have.

Crixus frowns at the smug comment.

BATIATUS
 This is but glorious beginning!
 Soon you will litter the sands with
 blood and bone of all who present
 challenge! Instructed in the ways
 of death and glory by a former
 champion! One of our very own! I
 give you Oenomaus! No longer to
 hold that name! No longer a
 gladiator! Now and forever, to be
 revered as your Doctore!

The men explode with shouts of approval. Batiatus hands Oenomaus the old Doctore's battered WHIP.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS (cont'd)

This has been wielded with pride by each before you, since the time of my grandfather. Bestowed only to the most loyal and honorable of men.

Oenomaus regards it solemnly. An honor tainted by blood.

OENOMAUS

Your will. My hands.

Batiatus grabs Oenomaus and Gannicus' arms, thrusts them high in the air. The men ROAR. OFF OENOMAUS AND GANNICUS, uneasy about their newfound positions and how they were obtained...

INT. BATIATUS' VILLA - DAY

FOLLOW Melitta as she escorts Oenomaus and Gannicus through the villa. A tense silence hangs between the three, all weighing thoughts of how their lives have forever changed.

OENOMAUS

(finally; to
Gannicus)

The primus. To gain such position, Varus must truly have been impressed by your prowess. As am I.

Gannicus awkwardly dismisses the praise.

GANNICUS

It was nothing.

An unintentional slight, but it stings Melitta nonetheless.

OENOMAUS

It is a great honor. For yourself, and this ludus.

They arrive at the door leading down into the ludus.

MELITTA

Both of you bring honor to this ludus. Each in his own way.

Melitta signals to the GUARD to open the door. She turns to Gannicus, quiets her nerves best she can.

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CONTINUED:

MELITTA (cont'd)

I would have private word with my husband.

Gannicus glances at Melitta, barely manages a nod to Oenomaus before exiting. Oenomaus frowns, picking up on his discomfort.

OENOMAUS

Did you note how he could scarce meet my eye?

Melitta tenses, heart in her throat.

OENOMAUS (cont'd)

He must now heed my commands, and does not embrace it. Will the other men share sentiment towards my "honored" position?

Melitta sees that he doesn't suspect Gannicus' true reason. Covers to ensure it remains that way.

MELITTA

It is his position that stirs troubled thoughts. He sets mind to the primus. As you must to training the men.

She sees the pain in his eyes.

MELITTA (cont'd)

I know this is not what you wished for.

OENOMAUS

Yet here I stand. Elevated.

MELITTA

As you deserve.

OENOMAUS

For taking a life? For betraying hand that forged the man before you?

MELITTA

There was no betrayal in what you did. Some acts cannot be avoided, when stripped of choice.

She bites back her own guilt, barely concealing it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MELITTA (cont'd)

Now turn thoughts from unfortunate past. We must look towards days to come, and embrace them.

OENOMAUUS

A task made less difficult, with you among them.

He kisses her deeply, heads down to the ludus. OFF Melitta, eyes welling with hot tears of shame...

EXT. MESS HALL/TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - DAY

WOODEN SWORDS CLACK as a GUARD opens the gate for Oenomaus. He steps out to find the men sparring. He regards the WHIP in his hand with uncertainty. Clenches it tight, the leather CRUNCHING beneath his powerful grip.

THE MEN PAUSE

as Oenomaus steps out onto the sand. He glances at Gannicus who looks away, unable to hold the gaze. Oenomaus struggles to find commanding words to begin his life as Doctore. Fails.

OENOMAUUS

Barca. Pair with Crixus. The rest of you... Continue training.

The men comply. OFF Oenomaus, far from the formidable Doctore we will come to know him as in season 1...

INT. TRICLINIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - DAY

Batiatus shouts to the heavens, a cup of wine in hand.

BATIATUS

At last, the gods remove cock from ass!

POP WIDE to find he's with Lucretia and Gaia in the curtained-off area. Naevia and Diona fill their cups. Melitta stands a fair distance behind, nods for Naevia and Diona to join her.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

The House of Batiatus --
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS (cont'd)
 (pauses; corrects
 himself)

The House of Quintus Lentulus
 Batiatus -- rises to the fucking
 heavens! Soon my champions will be
 carved in stone, towering above all
 who came before. And Gannicus will
 be the first of them after fucking
 victory in the primus.

LUCRETIA
 A position not gained absent aid.

She smiles at Gaia with appreciation and love.

GAIA
 I offered naught but introduction.
 And a few selective words of
 suggestion...

BATIATUS
 You could wile the Goddess Laverna
 herself! Your place in this will
 not pass without much fucking
 gratitude.

GAIA
 The kind I favor most...

She slides a hand across Lucretia's lap with a wry,
 salacious smile. Batiatus laughs.

BATIATUS
 Has a man ever been so blessed?

He kisses Lucretia passionately, fueled by wine and triumph.
 She responds, hungry for his touch. His hand finds its way
 to Gaia as he kisses Lucretia. Gaia responds with a laugh,
 undoing her dress.

MELITTA

escorts Naevia and Diona out, closing the curtains behind
 her. Passions rise, clothes fall. Gaia pours wine over her
 breasts with a smile. Batiatus and Lucretia attend to it
 with willing tongue.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Quintus.

Batiatus whirls in shock and horror.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

Father...?

REVERSE to find TITUS LENTULUS BATIATUS looming. A stricken Melitta stands by the curtain. Titus is a stern, elderly man in his 60s. The anti-Batiatus: honest, accepts his station, and has gained respect from those above it.

TITUS

Gather yourself. I would have words.

Titus sweeps out. OFF Batiatus, the gods fucking him once again...

INT. OFFICE CHAMBER - BATIATUS' VILLA - DAY

ON Titus, seated at the desk, reviewing the ledgers. Batiatus enters, hastily adjusting his robes. A long beat as Titus ignores him. Batiatus stands silent, stripped of his sure-footed demeanor in the presence of his father.

TITUS

(without looking up)
I leave this house in your care,
and this is what greets me upon
return?

BATIATUS

I was not expecting your arrival.

Titus finally looks at him.

TITUS

Am I to announce myself to the
walls that I own?

BATIATUS

Of course not. Yet if I had known
of your return from Sicilia --

TITUS

The knowledge would have produced
what result? Flowers and scented
oils laid to meet me, masking sight
of a son gone to shit?

BATIATUS

I but celebrate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

Upon what cause? Angering Tullius
with refusal of reasonable offer?
Your exclusion from the games?

BATIATUS

How did you come by that?

TITUS

I am old, Quintus. Not dead. There
are still those in Capua that hold
my name in regard, and would see me
well informed. Good Solonius
counted among them.

BATIATUS

(tightening)
Solonius?

TITUS

He sent word of his concerns
regarding your dealings with
Tullius.

BATIATUS

The man is seized by unnecessary
worry.

TITUS

(re: Batiatus'
injuries)
Your face suggests otherwise.

BATIATUS

A minor disagreement.

TITUS

Nothing with a man such as Tullius
is ever minor. A fact obvious to
the simplest of minds.

Batiatus simmers, barely holding his tongue.

BATIATUS

Then it is a blessing a greater one
than mine has arrived.

Titus sighs, softening.

TITUS

I bluster, when soft breeze would
be more welcome.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

You cannot ask the wind to change its nature.

TITUS

My frustration is more with myself. You never wished for this. The ludus, gladiators, the blood, the sand. Your eyes were always towards the horizon, to glories and triumphs forever out of reach of a common lanista.

BATIATUS

And yet here I stand. A lanista. Like my father.

TITUS

(a beat, sadly)
No. Not like him at all. You have never been able to look into the eyes of a man, and gauge his true heart.

BATIATUS

Only days past, I looked into the eyes of Quintilius Varus. And "gauged" way to secure the primus in his games.

Titus eyes him, more suspicious than surprised.

TITUS

Varus has never employed a lanista not blessed by Tullius. Why now break tradition?

BATIATUS

Because I possess what Tullius does not. Gannicus.

TITUS

Gannicus?

(snorts)
The man is a jest, inciting more laughter than awe. Now I find him desired by half of Rome?

BATIATUS

Much has changed in your absence.

Titus considers that, a sadness creeping into his eyes over the state of his son.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

And much has remained the same. I would review my men, and see how they have fared, denied proper guidance.

He exits, not waiting for a reply. Batiatus seethes as he follows, WIPING US TO --

INT. TRICLINIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - DAY

A BLURRED IMAGE OBSCURES FRAME. It RIPS away, revealing Naevia and Diona tearing down the curtains. SLAVES scuttle in the background. Gaia lounges on a sofa, sipping wine as Lucretia barks to Melitta.

LUCRETIA

Have feast prepared as instructed.
(an afterthought)
And send to market for an amphora of mulsum. The highest quality, not that shit from Flavus.

MELITTA

Yes, Domina.

Melitta moves off.

GAIA

Again with the honeyed wine. Does the corpse drink nothing else?

LUCRETIA

Lower fucking voice.

She glances nervously about. Gaia stifles a laugh.

GAIA

The man has severed you from moorings.

LUCRETIA

He is the paterfamilias! A word dropped from his mouth would see us both to the streets. We must be above reproach, or fall to ruin.

GAIA

Very well. I will be a vision of demure obedience and propriety.
(playful)
On the outside, at least.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lucretia shoots her a look as Titus enters. Batiatus trails in his wake. Lucretia quickly goes to them.

LUCRETIA
We are honored by your return to
Capua, father.

TITUS
(not buying it)
I am certain your heart swells.

Lucretia forces a smile. Gaia swoops in.

GAIA
The clime of Sicilia has most
certainly restored health.

Titus stares at her. Gaia laughs uncomfortably, reintroduces herself.

GAIA (cont'd)
Perhaps you do not recall me. Gaia,
a dear friend of your --

TITUS
(interrupts, as is
his wont)
The memory of you has not yet
faded. Quintus.

Titus heads off for the ludus. Batiatus hisses to Lucretia and Gaia.

BATIATUS
We must prove this fucking house in
order. And prompt decision for his
quick return to Sicilia.

Batiatus heads after his father. Gaia sips her wine, fumes.

GAIA
Withered old fuck.

OFF Lucretia, deeply disturbed by the turn of events...

EXT. TRAINING SQUARE/MESS HALL - BATIATUS' LUDUS - DUSK

CLOSE ON CRIXUS, face straining and beaded with sweat. PULL BACK to REVEAL he's circling the square, alone, carrying a log on his shoulders. The dreaded march, thrust upon all recruits until proven worthy. He passes the gladiator-filled

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MESS HALL

where Barca stands behind the serving table. He slops gruel into the bowls of Ashur and Dagan with a broad grin.

BARCA

Eat, brothers! You bear the mark now. Savor the taste of victory!

Ashur beams, basking in the moment of having earned the respect of the men as they cross the hall to find a seat. The men smile and nod at them.

ASHUR

(to Dagan, in Aramaic)

Hze aykh hane mistaklin 'alan. Kma Had minhon. [See how they look to us. As one of their own.]

They pass Auctus, feeding crumbs to one of his pigeons. Ashur and Dagan sit, dig into their gruel -- and immediately spit it out in disgust. The men HOWL with laughter.

BARCA

Our piss again finds way to their mouths!

AUCTUS

As if sucked from our cocks!

The men ROAR in delight. Ashur jumps to his feet.

ASHUR

We bear the fucking mark!

AUCTUS

Received absent the test. A fucking goat may carry the brand. It does not make him a brother.

DAGAN

(in Aramaic, seething)

Ma amar hu? [What does he say?]

ASHUR

(in Aramaic)

AnaHna la Hzen lehay madreaga. [We are unworthy of the mark.]

Dagan glowers, starts for Auctus. Ashur stops him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASHUR (cont'd)
 (in Aramaic,
 darkening)
 AnaHna neHzeh giHka mistallaq beh
 zimna. [We will see smile removed
 soon enough.]

Gannicus passes by, shoots daggers at Ashur. He sits and begins to eat. Oenomaus joins him.

GANNICUS
 (doesn't look up)
 You should not eat with lower men.
 You are the Doctore now.

OENOMAUUS
 A title I did not seek. I would not
 have events absent my control come
 between us.

Gannicus takes that in, the meaning resonating deeper than Oenomaus knows.

GANNICUS
 (soft, guilt ridden)
 Nor would I.

CHEERS erupt. Oenomaus turns, shocked to see Titus entering the hall. He's quickly encircled by the men as they enthusiastically greet their old dominus. Batiatus stands at the periphery, observing the admiration and love the men feel towards his father. A feeling never bestowed upon son.

OENOMAUUS

approaches. Titus lights up at the sight of him, greeting him with a familiar forearm clasp. It's apparent there's a special bond between these two.

TITUS
 Oenomaus!
 (confused, re:
 chestplate)
 You assume mantle of Doctore?

BATIATUS
 (interjects)
 After unfortunate death of his
 predecessor. I chose Oenomaus as
 replacement, knowing that he --

Titus waves lengthy discourse away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

(to Oenomaus)

Gather your food and let us retire to your cell. I would exchange stories of the passing years, old friend.

OENOMAUS

Dominus.

Oenomaus heads out with Titus. OFF Batiatus, feeling the sting of exclusion...

INT. OENOMAUS' CELL - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

Titus pours a cup of water.

TITUS

Many regrets haunt a man, as life draws nearer its end.

He offers the cup to Oenomaus, who's clearly in awe of the mentor seated before him. Titus smiles sadly, filling his own cup.

TITUS (cont'd)

Being too ill to witness your battle with Theokoles in Pompeii counted deeply among them. A fight of legend, I have been told.

Oenomaus frowns, not holding the match in the same regard.

OENOMAUS

A defeat of equal proportion.

TITUS

Defeat? You did not lose.

OENOMAUS

Nor was I victor.

TITUS

You are the only man to ever face the Shadow of Death and live. That alone is a great victory. One that has brought honor to this house. As you have always done.

OENOMAUS

I would continue so.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS (cont'd)

(a beat)

In the arena.

Titus eyes him in surprise.

TITUS

Are you not pleased with elevation
to Doctore?

OENOMAUS

Give command, and I would gladly
release title in favor of sword and
shield.

Titus regards Oenomaus, sees the longing in his eyes.

TITUS

Words I am reluctant to speak. The
Doctore is second in importance
only to the lanista himself. I
chose Ulpus many years ago. This
ludus was his beating heart. The
stilling of it is unfortunate news
-- tempered by you assuming his
place. The sole decision my son has
made that I find agreeable.

Oenomaus fills with regret, knowing how the promotion was
obtained.

OENOMAUS

It is a position I am not worthy to
hold.

TITUS

There are none more so. From the
moment I laid eyes in that awful
place, I knew. That wild boy, so
filled with rage and hate, would
grow into the man I see before me.
We have traveled a great distance
together, Oenomaus. I would finish
my journey comforted by thought of
you maintaining honor within these
walls. A comfort I am certain your
wife will share, knowing you will
not die beyond them.

Oenomaus nods, disappointed yet deeply affected by Titus'
belief in him. OFF Oenomaus, struggling to accept his
fate...

INT. GUEST BEDCHAMBERS - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Melitta removes Lucretia's robes, readying her for bed.
Naevia attends an agitated Batiatus.

BATIATUS

The way they fawn over him! Falling
to knee to lick his fucking ass! He
takes over my house. My gladiators.
My fucking bed!

LUCRETIA

Did he give voice towards length of
stay?

BATIATUS

He gives voice only towards
considerable faults of unworthy
son.

(barking, to Naevia)

Out.

Naevia quickly exits. Lucretia nods for Melitta to follow.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

I secure the primus, and he acts as
if I shit upon the name Batiatus.

LUCRETIA

You raise it, beyond anything he
could imagine. He will see this,
and bitter tongue will turn to
praise.

BATIATUS

He would sooner bite it off, than
have it betray him so.

His anger gives way to the hurt of his father's
disappointment in him.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

I had forgotten the feeling. That
sudden abyss, when he would set
disapproving eye upon me.

She kisses him, stroking his cheek.

LUCRETIA

You will not need endure his
presence long. His health fled in
this clime before. Should he fail
to realize his house -- his name --

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA (cont'd)
is in proper hands, a forced return
to Sicilia will eventually arise.

BATIATUS
I would see him removed sooner. And
will do everything in my power to
set him upon fucking way.

Batiatus burns with the thought, his face consumed in the
brilliant fire of the SUN as we TRANSITION TO --

EXT. BALCONY/TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - DAY

The blazing SUN stabs down. ADJUST TO FIND Titus on the
balcony with his Attending Slave, observing the men as they
gather for training. Melitta sets out BREAD and DATES.

MELITTA
Your return lifts the heart,
Dominus.

Titus replies with a warm smile.

TITUS
Only for those who yet possess one.
(re: food)
Gratitude.

Melitta nods, exits back inside. Titus takes a date, chews
reflectively as he returns his attention to

THE TRAINING SQUARE

Oenomaus paces, nervously fingering his whip as the men
linger about, engaged in jocular conversation.

OENOMAUUS
Attend!

The men barely pay attention. Oenomaus steels himself,
continues with more authority.

OENOMAUUS (cont'd)
Pair up! Crixus, spar with Barca.
Auctus... work the palus until
Gannicus joins us.

The men casually fall to order, begin to spar with one
another. Oenomaus glances to Titus on the balcony, who nods
back encouragingly.

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CONTINUED:

ON BARCA,

training as a Hoplomachus (practice spear, shield, small sword in belt). He chuckles as the much smaller Crixus squares off with wooden sword and shield.

BARCA

Oenomaus! This one is too small! I would have something the size of a man!

The other men laugh. Crixus burns with humiliation.

TITUS

Barca. Do as your Doctore commands.

BARCA

(with reverence)
Yes, Dominus.

Oenomaus bites back his own humiliation. Barca grins at Crixus.

BARCA (cont'd)

Come. Let us see what is between your legs.

Barca attacks with his spear. Crixus counters. Barca spins, cracking him across the back. Crixus grunts, an angry WELT appearing. Crixus retaliates. Barca deflects. He lands a crushing blow to the stomach, sending Crixus to the sand.

AUCTUS

(laughs)
The Gaul winces from spear... as he would from my cock!

Barca and the men laugh. Oenomaus glares. Crixus vomits.

BARCA

Is my long, hard weapon too much for you, little man?

CRIXUS

I am without lesson against it.
(spits)
But your instruction is well received.

Crixus rises, readying himself for more pain. Barca attacks, giving it to him. Auctus howls with laughter.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE ON ASHUR AND DAGAN

sparring across the square. Their hatred for Barca and Auctus flare in their eyes.

DAGAN

(in Aramaic)

Akhleh era mezayyne. Hashvin nafshehon elahesh. [Fucking cock eaters. Think themselves gods.]

ASHUR

(in Aramaic)

AnaHna naHze le-Barca u-Auctus di la hanhu ella bne-nasha. [We will show Barca and Auctus they are but men.]

BALCONY

Batiatus hurriedly rushes out, clearly having just woken.

BATIATUS

Apologies. You rise earlier than expected.

TITUS

I rise at proper hour. An attribute neither you nor your man Gannicus seem to share.

Titus indicates Gannicus, as he emerges from his cell. Batiatus tightens, embarrassed.

BATIATUS

Harsh word will find the man's ear.

TITUS

It could be shouted yet ignored. Gannicus is no champion. I would promote Auctus or half a dozen men in his place.

BATIATUS

A matter we disagree on.

TITUS

One of many.

(re: Crixus)

What man spars with Barca?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS
 (selling)
 Crixus, a fierce Gaul of worthy
 stock.

TITUS
 I recall name from the ledger. A
 sapling of exceeding cost.

BATIATUS
 He will earn the mark, and see
 investment well returned.

Titus grunts, not buying it. Batiatus signals to Oenomaus.

BATIATUS (cont'd)
 Doctore! Bring Crixus up! My father
 would have closer inspection --

TITUS
 (to Oenomaus)
 No. Continue training.
 (to Batiatus)
 We are to town for necessary
 business.

BATIATUS
 I will have Barca prepared as
 escort.

TITUS
 Barca is a gladiator. Trained to
 wield weapon in the arena, not be
 yours in the street. Come. Your
 late rise already threatens the
 appointed hour.

Titus exits, WIPING US TO --

INT. NESTOR'S MEAT SHOP - CAPUA - DAY

TIGHT ON A SKINNED CARCASS. ADJUST as Titus and Batiatus are
 led to the back of the shop by THERON, Tullius' bodyguard.
 Batiatus hisses to his father.

BATIATUS
 You would have me sit with this
 fucking man?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

(hushed)

I would have you silent. While I attempt repair of damaged relation.

Batiatus seethes, anger and fear swirling as he revisits the scene of his humiliation.

TULLIUS

stands at a small table. VETTIUS glares by his side, bruised and battered from his vicious beating in HB2.

TULLIUS

Titus. Good to lay eyes, old friend.

(embracing him)

Your experience in delicate matters of business have been sorely missed.

TITUS

To be rectified presently.

TULLIUS

Come, sit.

Titus and Batiatus take seats. Tullius and Vettius sit their opposite. Batiatus keeps half a worried eye on the ever looming Theron.

TULLIUS (cont'd)

You recall my associate, Vettius?

TITUS

Vettius? You were but a child last I knew. How the years flee from us. How fares your father?

VETTIUS

Dead.

Vettius eyes Batiatus coldly, wishing him the same fate.

TITUS

Oh. Apologies. How terrible.

TULLIUS

The boy is ill-starred acquaintance to such misfortunes. Why only days past he was set upon in our own streets, on way to appointment with Quintilius Varus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

Varus?

Tullius glances at Batiatus, suspicions stirring. Batiatus avoids the gaze, squirming.

TULLIUS

The same man who, absent Vettius' presence, managed to find way to your ludus --

Vettius erupts out of his seat, accusing Batiatus.

VETTIUS

Where this fucking cock eater stole the primus from me!

TULLIUS

(snapping)
Vettius.
(softer, tight
smile)
Reclaim your chair.

Vettius reluctantly obeys. Titus fumes at his son.

TITUS

How do you answer this?

BATIATUS

He accuses absent cause. My wife and her friend Gaia came upon good Varus in town, baking under noon-day sun.

TULLIUS

Gaia?

BATIATUS

She knew Varus from her days in Rome, offered respite at my villa while he waited for the absent boy to come to purpose. A fortunate coincidence for all involved.

VETTIUS

And was it this same fortune that saw me set upon by your fucking men?

BATIATUS

Did you see faces? Did they bear my mark, you fucking cunt --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

Enough! Remove yourself to the street.

Batiatus whirls in surprise at the command, starts to protest.

TITUS (cont'd)

Go. And leave reasonable men to discourse.

Batiatus fumes as he complies, glaring at Vettius as he exits. Vettius sees him off with a smug smile.

TULLIUS

Your son has much to learn in the ways of diplomacy.

TITUS

(re: Vettius)
A subject all young men struggle to master.

Tullius laughs, pouring wine.

TULLIUS

Come then. Let us school them in its ways.

OFF Titus, forcing a smile in reply, knowing his next words must be chosen with deadly care...

EXT. TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - DAY

A wooden shield smacks Crixus across the face, blood SPURTING from his mouth. WIDEN to REVEAL Barca, doling out more "instruction" to the bloodied and bruised Gaul. Oenomaus watches the sparring session closely as the other men train.

CRIXUS

attacks, but Barca deflects and SWEEPS him off his feet with his practice spear. Crixus scrambles to recover, but the spear is instantly at his throat. Barca laughs.

BARCA

You are better matched against wooden men. Work the palus, Gaul.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Barca turns away, joining a laughing Auctus. Crixus looks to Oenomaus. Oenomaus frowns, motions him to comply with Barca's order. Gannicus approaches, sweat dripping.

GANNICUS

Are we to follow Barca's commands now?

OENOMAUS

He shares my thoughts. The Gaul falters against spear. Perhaps advice from the champion would aid his cause...

ON CRIXUS

as he attacks the palus in frustration.

GANNICUS (O.S.)

Days past you fought me with something approaching skill.

Crixus pauses as Gannicus sidles up.

GANNICUS

Yet opposite Barca, you act as his lover. Face down with cheeks spread.

CRIXUS

The spear is unknown to me.

GANNICUS

(surprised)
You are a Gaul. Did you never face the Arverni?

CRIXUS

(shifting
uncomfortably)
My years before capture did not hold the pleasure.

GANNICUS

They wield spear with deadly purpose.

(re: Crixus' wounds)
As does Barca, from the judging.

CRIXUS

He but instructs. Each blow carefully studied. So it will never be repeated.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GANNICUS

(laughs)

You should be quite the scholar. By the time he's beaten you to death.

Crixus frowns, returns to attacking the palus. Gannicus shakes his head with a chuckle, starts to move off. Pauses. There's something about his thick-headed countryman that he can't help but like.

GANNICUS (cont'd)

Crixus.

Crixus pauses.

GANNICUS (cont'd)

You fought well against my two swords. Rid a Hoplomachus of his spear, and he is left with only one.

Crixus nods his thanks. Gannicus grins, calls to Barca.

GANNICUS (cont'd)

Barca! If you have done with your man's cock, let us have proper contest.

AUCTUS

(laughs, to Barca)

The gods bless you with another tiny man to fuck.

Barca grins, welcoming the challenge. He hoists his spear and attacks. Gannicus counters with his swords, moving with devastating grace.

BALCONY

Gaia lunches with Lucretia. Melitta attends.

GAIA

Your Gannicus appears in fine form.

LUCRETIA

As he will in the primus, elevating the house with glorious performance.

GAIA

My heart yet races at the thought of his last.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gaia casts a sly glance at Melitta. Melitta reddens with shame. Lucretia swoops in to protect her.

LUCRETIA

Let us place such memories behind us.

GAIA

A difficult feat, when so enjoyed by all.

(eyeing Melitta)

Some more than others.

Melitta is saved further humiliation by Naevia appearing.

NAEVIA

Apologies, Domina. Guests have arrived.

LUCRETIA

Guests...?

OFF the question...

INT. ATRIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - DAY

VARUS waits with COSSUTIUS, a wealthy, handsome Roman in his 30s. ATTENDING SLAVES accompany. Diona waits with them. Lucretia and Gaia enter, Melitta and Naevia trailing.

LUCRETIA

Varus. Apologies, we were not expecting --

VARUS

The fault is mine, for failing to announce. Good Cossutius is on stay from Rome to celebrate the Vinalia. After I extolled the virtues of the house of Batiatus --

COSSUTIUS

(chuckling)

I demanded introduction immediately.

LUCRETIA

You honor us, but my husband tends to final preparations for tomorrow's games in town.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COSSUTIUS

Oh. How disappointing.

GAIA

Yet we could remove ourselves to the balcony for proper viewing of his gladiators until his return.

Varus and Cossutius share a look, laugh uncomfortably.

VARUS

I fear you mistake intent. I was not regaling Cossutius with tales of your men. But of your house's more... intimate delights.

Varus' gaze falls on Melitta. Lucretia laughs nervously.

LUCRETIA

I fear that was a... special consideration.

Varus' smile fades.

VARUS

Was it? Perhaps Vettius will be more accommodating then. Concerning this and my primus.

Lucretia squirms. Gaia intercedes.

GAIA

It would be unfortunate to come so far, and find hands empty.

(pointedly, to
Lucretia)

Would it not?

Lucretia shifts, realizing they will lose the primus if she doesn't relent.

LUCRETIA

I would not have it so.

Melitta's heart sinks.

GAIA

Excellent! Let us prepare Gannicus and --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA
 (off Melitta's pain)
 No. What joy is there in exploring
 ground already discovered?

COSSUTIUS
 None at all. I would best all
 presented this old goat.

Cossutius grins at Varus. Varus laughs.

VARUS
 What do you offer?

LUCRETIA
 A gladiator of your choosing,
 paired with a slave yet
 untouched...?

Lucretia indicates Naevia and Diona. They glance at each other nervously, but with an air of excitement that they have caught the eye of a rich, handsome Roman.

COSSUTIUS
 Untouched?

Cossutius' eyes crawl over them. Melitta tenses, concern shifting from herself to her young charges.

COSSUTIUS (cont'd)
 A delicacy no longer present at the
 moment in my house.

LUCRETIA
 Then it is fortunate you find
 yourself in ours.

OFF Lucretia's forced smile...

EXT. STREETS - CAPUA - DAY

Batiatus stands outside Nestor's meat shop, seething. His mood darkens as he spots SOLONIUS passing by in the crowd.

BATIATUS
 Solonius! A word.

Solonius crosses to him, his own displeasure obvious.

SOLONIUS
 I would share its equal.
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SOLONIUS (cont'd)

(hushed)

I came to you as trusted friend,
 carrying news of Tullius' renewed
 offer towards Gannicus --

BATIATUS

You carried but shit, spewed from
 errant hole.

SOLONIUS

And what of other knowledge I
 lighted upon treacherous ears? That
 of Varus' arrival, to be met by
 Vettius?

BATIATUS

Vettius is a fool.

SOLONIUS

Under the employ of Tullius! He
 will think I had hand in the boy's
 assault --

BATIATUS

He suspects nothing! His thoughts
 have turned towards my father
 inside. What seized fucking mind,
 dispatching message to him?!

SOLONIUS

Your father is in Capua?

BATIATUS

He sits with Tullius as you bleat,
 stroking fucking cock.

SOLONIUS

Why do you remain in the streets?

BATIATUS

(indicates his
 bruised face)

Why do you fucking think!?

SOLONIUS

(softening)

I did not mean for his return. I
 only sought advice, towards worry
 for a man I hold as brother.

Batiatus sees the sincerity in Solonius eyes, calms.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS
Intentions well-received.

Batiatus spots Tullius and his father emerging from the shop. Theron and Vettius follow.

BATIATUS (cont'd)
(soft, to Solonius)
Let us place transgressions aside,
in favor of more pressing concern.

TULLIUS
(to Titus)
Your patience and reason recalls
joyous times, when business was
conducted by those who shared
respect for it.

TITUS
I fear we are a dying breed.

SOLONIUS
I am certain you shall outlive us
all, Master Batiatus.

Solonius presents a well-oiled smile. Titus returns it with pale reflection.

TITUS
Solonius. I hardly placed you. The
years weigh heavy on a man, do they
not?

TULLIUS
Your presence is fortuitous,
striking need to seek you out.
Share walk, and let us review
recent events...

Solonius nods, shooting Batiatus a worried look as he moves off with Tullius, Vettius, and Theron. Batiatus turns his attentions to his father, tightening with barely contained anger.

BATIATUS
Am I allowed voice now?

TITUS
Could the gods halt the sound?

Titus moves off. Batiatus follows him through the crowd.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

Whatever Tullius and the boy may think, I gained the primus on merit of Gannicus' prowess.

TITUS

Even if true, it is of no matter now. Gannicus will not appear in the games.

BATIATUS

But Varus made personal request!

TITUS

A necessary sacrifice, towards leveling uneven ground with Tullius. You will make apology to Varus, relaying Gannicus found injury in training. And that Vettius is amply capable of seeing the primus attended.

BATIATUS

You give away the primus, and now ask that I tongue the fucking boy's ass?

TITUS

(snapping)

I ask nothing. This is how it will be. In return a few of our men will be paired against each other after mid-day sun.

BATIATUS

Our men fight themselves?

TITUS

The only plank salvaged from such wreckage.

BATIATUS

Then we must choose the men with care, and yet give Varus proper show.

TITUS

They have been chosen for us.

BATIATUS

Tullius now selects my fucking men as well?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

An unavoidable concession. Barca and Gnaeus, Auctus to face your Gaul, Crixus.

BATIATUS

Crixus? He is yet a recruit, not a gladiator!

TITUS

Who you failed to mention was purchased from Tullius.

BATIATUS

To gain his favor.

TITUS

And what fruits did your scheme bear? This is price due for attempting to maneuver men above your station. Be thankful it was not more costly.

Titus moves off. Batiatus absorbs the sting of his father's words. He heads after him, WIPING US TO --

INT. TRICLINIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - DAY

A sweaty, dirt-caked Gnaeus stands for inspection. Cossutius eyes him with Varus. Lucretia, standing with Gaia and Melitta, barely conceals her distaste for the choice.

LUCRETIA

Are you certain you would not prefer the man bathed and scented?

COSSUTIUS

He stands perfect towards his cause.

His attention shifts to Naevia and Diona. Their excitement has been considerably dimmed by the introduction of Gnaeus.

COSSUTIUS (cont'd)

I would, however, gauge the freshness of your offerings.

Lucretia forces a smile, nods to Naevia and Diona.

LUCRETIA

Remove your robes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Naevia and Diona shyly comply. Gaia grins, titillated by the whole unseemly affair. Varus laughs in appreciation at their young bodies.

VARUS

Did I not tell you?

COSSUTIUS

They are of a form. But a woman's worth is not always revealed to the eyes. A man must probe deeper for true value...

His hands drift below FRAME. Naevia and Diona wince as he fingers them. Sympathetic tears well in Melitta's eyes. Lucretia whispers to her, worrying over the time.

LUCRETIA

Remove yourself to the vestibule. Return if dominus and his father are seen upon the road.

MELITTA

Yes, Domina.

Melitta casts a worried look to Naevia and Diona as she goes. Cossutius smiles, steps away to address Lucretia.

COSSUTIUS

(re: Diona)

I will have this one. She is considerably tighter.

LUCRETIA

She is yours. To command as you please

Cossutius' smile widens, his eyes dancing. OFF DIONA, her own eyes filling with fear...

PRE-LAP: Stifled CRIES coupled with animalistic GRUNTS...

INT. BEDCHAMBERS - BATIATUS' VILLA - DAY

A filthy Gnaeus is on top of Diona, grinding into her. She fixes her eyes on the CEILING, attempting to block the pain. ADJUST to find Cossutius watching them.

COSSUTIUS

Move on top of him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Diona obeys, straddles Gnaeus. Winces as he roughly penetrates her. Cossutius circles them, his eyes studying Diona's face. Absorbing her pain and revulsion. He whispers to her, soft and gentle.

COSSUTIUS (cont'd)
Do you know why I chose this man?
So crudely etched? The smell of
shit hot upon his breath?

Diona shakes her head, biting back the tears. Cossutius disrobes as he answers...

COSSUTIUS (cont'd)
Because this world is filled with
the grotesque. And the divine. They
exist together, two sides of a
coin. You cannot have one... absent
threat of the other. Yet words do
not convey the true nature of this.
It must be experienced. It must be
felt...

He climbs up on the bed behind her while Gnaeus continues fucking her.

COSSUTIUS (cont'd)
And never forgotten.

He enters her anally. She cries out, caught between Gnaeus and Cossutius. OFF Diona's anguish...

INT. TRICLINIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - DAY

Gaia lounges beside Varus, flirting. Lucretia sits nearby, anxiously awaiting an end to Cossutius' visit before Titus returns. Naevia pours wine, barely hiding her own growing anxiety for Diona.

VARUS
(laughs)
Your absence has been missed in
Rome since your husband's passing.
Your charms could brighten darkest
night.

GAIA
I long to return. And crest dawn
upon a husband yet of this world.

Varus considers that with a noncommittal smile.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VARUS

How does your dowry stand? I was under impression you were absent family of means.

That catches Gaia by surprise. She sputters to answer. Lucretia intercedes.

LUCRETIA

Gaia is a treasure within herself.

VARUS

One to be coveted. By a man untethered to the burden of position and appearance.

Gaia forces a smile to hide the sting of that. Cossutius appears, bringing welcome distraction.

LUCRETIA

Cossutius. You were well satisfied?

COSSUTIUS

Praise laid upon your house has not been exaggerated.

VARUS

It is a wonder. Such base diversion would be impossible to conceal in Rome.

Lucretia's smile tightens.

LUCRETIA

Capua is city of many pleasures.

VARUS

Often obscured by pressing business, which we sadly must attend.

GAIA

You take leave? So soon?

VARUS

A regrettable necessity. Gratitude for your hospitality. I look forward to seeing you at the games. And your man Gannicus upon the primus.

Lucretia presents a genuine smile. Mission accomplished.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA

You honor us.

Lucretia and Gaia escort them out. Diona returns, absently adjusting her robe. She locks eyes with Naevia. She looks away, the hot flush of shame staining her cheeks. OFF Naevia, her heart constricting for her friend...

INT. BARRACKS - BATIATUS' LUDUS - SUNSET

Barca and Auctus move through the barracks. A small clutch of men play bones and dice in the background.

AUCTUS

Crixus begins to show promise.

BARCA

Upon his back?

AUCTUS

The man always rises. A trait to be admired.

BARCA

(half-joking)

You have eyes for the Gaul now?

AUCTUS

(playfully)

And if I did?

BARCA

I would fucking kill you.

AUCTUS

(laughs)

You would but try, you oaf.

Auctus smacks Barca in the face. Barca reacts with a laugh, exchanges mock blows. Auctus grabs Barca roughly and kisses him. Barca returns it, hands exploring, passions rising. They half tumble into their cell. But Auctus pulls away, eyes widening as he sees

SEVERAL PIGEONS

loose. And more missing from smashed open cages. OFF Auctus, shock turning to rage...

EXT. MESS HALL/TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - SUNSET

TIGHT ON a hunk of half-cooked PIGEON as teeth strip meat from bone. WIDEN TO REVEAL Ashur and Dagan savoring the meal on the edge of the mess hall.

AUCTUS (O.S.)
You fucking cunts!

Auctus and Barca are heading for them from the ludus. Dagan and Ashur rise to meet them.

ASHUR
You soil our food! Why should we
not make meal of your fucking pets
--

Auctus roars, tackling Ashur into the

TRAINING SQUARE

Dagan turns to help, but is set upon by Barca. Fists and blood fly. Gladiators spill out into the square, SHOUTING encouragement, loving the violence. Ashur spits bloods, calls to Crixus for help.

ASHUR (cont'd)
Crixus --

WHAM! Auctus is on him, raining blows. Gannicus glances at Crixus standing next to him.

GANNICUS
You do not help your friend?

CRIXUS
This is a fight between brothers. I
do not yet bear the mark, as Ashur
is fond of reminding.

Oenomaus rushes past, bellows for order.

OENOMAUUS
Have you lost fucking sense?! Stand
down!

But no one's listening. Oenomaus unfurls his WHIP, rears back and attempts to crack it. Fails. He growls, tossing it aside and wading in to quell the tumult the old fashioned way. He grabs Dagan from behind.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAGAN THROWS AN ELBOW

without looking, sending Oenomaus crashing to the sand. Gannicus rushes to assist, clocking Dagan. The Gladiators ROAR their approval, laughing and hooting.

TITUS (O.S.)
CALM YOURSELVES!

Gannicus halts in mid-punch as Titus appears through the gates with Batiatus. The men quiet and part under Titus' withering glare. Lucretia, Gaia, and Melitta appear on the balcony, drawn by the commotion.

TITUS
Is this what my house has fallen to? Brother setting upon brother so far removed from the honor of the arena, where such contest holds meaning? This points to reason the gods have turned from us, stripping the primus from our hands.

The men react, stunned and confused.

GANNICUS
I do not fight in the games?

TITUS
You do not.

Gannicus' heart sinks. He glances to Melitta, guilt welling in his eyes. Everything they were forced to do has been for nothing. Batiatus catches the look.

BATIATUS
(quickly)
But our sacrifices do not stand unrewarded. A few of you will yet take the sand after mid-day sun.

TITUS
And I expect those chosen to bring more honor to the House of Batiatus than you bring now to yourselves.

OFF the proclamation...

INT. BATHS - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

Gnaeus snatches a PARCHMENT from a disappointed Rhaskos. The other men crowd and jockey to get their hands on the list.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GNAEUS
(reading, laughs)
Fuck you! Gnaeus fights Barca!

BARCA
I will split your ass in two.

Auctus grabs the list, growls at what he sees.

AUCTUS
Fuck.

BARCA
You do not gain position?

AUCTUS
I do. Against Crixus.

BARCA
Your favorite.

AUCTUS
The man does not even bear the
fucking the mark.

Crixus approaches, having overheard.

CRIXUS
I am to face you?

AUCTUS
You are to die. At the end of my
spear.

Auctus slams the list into Crixus' chest as he exits with
Barca. Gannicus eyes him with a frown.

GANNICUS
So you take to the arena and I do
not. The gods truly punish me.

CRIXUS
I long to be of the brotherhood. To
be a gladiator. A champion. But
being awarded position... it is an
honor I have not yet earned.

GANNICUS
There are many things in this life,
given to us for the wrong reason.
What you make of such blessing is
the true test of a man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As Crixus ponders his new fate, Gannicus exits, WIPING US TO --

EXT. TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

Oenomaus stands near the cliff, looking out across Capua as he practices with his whip. Attempting to crack it. To prove himself worthy. Each attempt ending in failure.

GANNICUS

appears behind him, heading for his cell. Oenomaus doesn't notice him. Gannicus pauses. Starts to head for his friend, to offer words of support. But guilt overrides. He turns away and disappears into his cell, the closing door
TRANSITIONING US TO --

EXT. TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - MORNING

SLAVES load a wagon with equipment. Gnaeus, Auctus, Barca forearm clasp their brothers in farewell -- a ritualistic send-off before the games. Ashur and Dagan, bruised from yesterday's altercation, glare from the sidelines. Ashur eyes Auctus and Barca, spits.

ASHUR
(in Aramaic)
Hare mezayyne. [Fucking shits.]

They move off, passing a nervous Crixus as he readies himself for his first fight. Crixus is in even worse shape, the result of Barca's brutal training.

ASHUR (cont'd)
(to Crixus)
May Auctus fall. And Barca follow.

Crixus glances at Auctus and Barca, his worry of facing the spear deepening. Gannicus approaches Barca.

GANNICUS
Return victorious, brother. For I
am out of wine.

Barca laughs. As they forearm clasp, ANGLE TO --

BALCONY
Batiatus stands with Lucretia,
taking in the preparations. Melitta
attends.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA

After all we have done. The
sacrifices made.

She glances to Melitta, who averts her eyes.

LUCRETIA (cont'd)

Only to see the primus torn from
grasp.

BATIATUS

Torn would imply resistance. My
father offers none.

LUCRETIA

You could not move him from
decision?

BATIATUS

Hercules himself would fail in the
labor.

Titus enters from the villa.

TITUS

Are we set to leave? I would not
arrive late.

BATIATUS

Doctore gathers the men.

Lucretia pours a cup of mulsum from an amphora, putting on
her best subservient smile.

LUCRETIA

Perhaps some mulsum while you wait,
father. To celebrate your return to
the games.

TITUS

You seek to ply me with honeyed-
wine?

Lucretia tenses. Titus laughs.

TITUS (cont'd)

You find my weakness. And I would
have it exploited.

Lucretia laughs, hands him his cup.

BATIATUS

I will join you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA

It disquiets your stomach.
Especially on hot days such as
this.

TITUS

It never did agree with you. A
trait gained from your mother.

BATIATUS

A presence sorely missed.

TITUS

Every day.

A brief flash of sad longing drifts across Titus' face. The sincerity of it catches Batiatus by surprise. Titus pushes it away, his eyes falling on Crixus below.

TITUS (cont'd)

Your Gaul appears ragged.

BATIATUS

The result of hard training. In
preparation for the test he has yet
to take.

TITUS

You set this in motion, Quintus. By
purchasing the man to gain favor.

BATIATUS

Only after gazing into his eyes,
and seeing a spark. As you always
spoke of.

TITUS

(considers that)

Then today presents rare
opportunity. Auctus, a man forged
beneath my rule, to face Crixus,
forged beneath yours. The outcome
to prove if son has learned
anything of worth from father.

As Titus takes a sip of his wine, the ROAR of the CROWD
PROPELLING US TO --

EXT. OLD ARENA - CAPUA - DAY

Barca (Hoplomachus: spear, shield, small sword in belt)
battles Gnaeus (Thraex: curved sword, rectangular shield).

CONTINUED:

Gnaeus lands a blow, drawing blood. Barca winces, lunges with his spear, driving Gnaeus back. Barca slams Gnaeus with his shield, sending him flying past the CHUTES.

EXT./INT. THE CHUTES - DAY

Auctus HOWLS from inside, delighted by his lover's prowess. PUSH THROUGH the bars and past Auctus to find Crixus sitting alone. Silent and focused, recounting the bruises on his body. And the lessons they imparted. Oenomaus approaches with an old helmet and Murmillo octopus shield (from season 1).

OENOMAUS

Your time has come.

Crixus solemnly takes the helmet and shield.

CRIXUS

Gratitude. For all you have taught me.

OENOMAUS

Fight with honor. And if the gods will it... die the same.

Batiatus appears at the entrance.

BATIATUS

Crixus. A word.

Crixus rises, crosses over.

CRIXUS

Dominus.

BATIATUS

(hushed)

You have shown great promise. In practice. In exhibition against Gannicus. Yet this is the arena. This is where men become gods. Legions with far greater training and skill than you have fallen upon this sacred ground. Many beneath Auctus' spear.

Crixus glances over to Auctus, who roars encouragement to Barca in his fight against Gnaeus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS (cont'd)
I do not believe you will be one of
them. You have the blood of a
champion. To rival any my father
has ever heralded.

Batiatus looks deep into his eyes.

BATIATUS (cont'd)
Do you wish to behold such miracle
come to pass?

CRIXUS
(hardening in
resolve)
It is all I desire.

BATIATUS
Then seize fucking glory. And see
us both proven worthy.

Batiatus exits. PUSH IN on Crixus as he steels himself, the
ROAR OF THE CROWD thrusting us back to --

EXT. OLD ARENA - CAPUA - DAY

Barca assaults Gnaeus with a series of bone-jarring blows.
Gnaeus counters, thrashing wildly with his sword.

THE STANDS

Batiatus returns from the chutes, joining Lucretia and Gaia.
Melitta and a few other SLAVES attend.

LUCRETIA
You have set Crixus to purpose?

BATIATUS
I stoke the flame as best I can. It
is now up to the man to ignite. Or
be forever extinguished.

GAIA
A pity it is not Gannicus, nor the
primus. It was well earned.

Melitta's guilt deepens. Batiatus glances up to

THE PULVINUS,

where Titus sits with Varus, Cossutius, Tullius, Vettius,
and the other elite.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

Yet he is the one honored. While his only fucking son is left to languish.

LUCRETIA

Soon your father will attest your worth.

GAIA

Or decay into the afterlife. Either way, we will be free of him.

Gaia smiles brightly. The crowd ROARS, drawing their attention to

THE ARENA,

where Barca attacks Gnaeus, brutally pummeling him. He blasts Gnaeus across the face with his shield, then sweeps his legs with his spear.

GNAEUS

crashes to the ground, spitting blood. Barca rears back with his spear to finish him off. Gnaeus quickly throws up the MISSIO in surrender. Barca laughs, halting the deadly blow to look up to the

PULVINUS

for instruction. Varus stands, addressing the crowd.

VARUS

An epic showing from the House of Batiatus, certain to please the gods! In gratitude, we will be merciful, and grant life!

The crowd EXPLODES with cheers. Vettius seethes. Titus nods in deference to Varus as he sits.

TITUS

You are overly kind.

VARUS

Your house has been most accommodating, and should be rewarded.

Varus shares a veiled smile with Cossutius. Titus smiles politely, not sure what to make of that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS
Gratitude. I --

Titus is seized by a fit of coughing.

VARUS
Are you unwell?

VETTIUS
Perhaps the excitement is too much
for him.

TITUS
(waving it away)
It is but the heat and dust.

TULLIUS
(to Slaves)
Water.

A Slave delivers a cup of water. Titus drinks.

TULLIUS (cont'd)
I would not have torrid throat
announce your final offering.

Titus reacts, surprised by the gesture.

TITUS
Address the crowd? The honor is
unfit a lanista. My presence in the
pulvinus alone --

VARUS
(laughing)
We decide what befits a lanista,
Batiatus. Give introduction and let
us move on.

Titus nods, rises to address the crowd. He is obviously
deeply humbled and a bit uncomfortable in the spotlight. The
complete opposite of his son, who longs for it.

TITUS
I stand humbled before the great
people of Capua. My home and my
heart, too long parted from chest.
In gratitude, I present the final
offering from the House of
Batiatus.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS (cont'd)
 (indicates chutes)
 Entering the arena, a virgin upon
 its sands... I give you Crixus!
 Murmillo!

Crixus steps out of the chutes. Squints against the glare. Disoriented by the noise of the crowd. His eyes find Batiatus in the stands. Batiatus nods. Fucking do it.

TITUS (cont'd)
 His opponent, a warrior unmatched
 in skill and honor. I give you
 Auctus! Hoplomachus!

The crowd ERUPTS as Auctus trots out. Crixus can't help but shrink a bit under the weight of their enthusiasm for his opponent. Auctus looks to Titus, raises his spear and shield in respect. Titus brings his fist down.

TITUS (cont'd)
 Begin!

Auctus attacks. Crixus defends, narrowly avoiding the deadly spear. Auctus is oiled poetry with the weapon, spinning and thrusting with lethal purpose. Crixus stumbles back, the spear's gleaming tip opening a gash across his chest.

BATIATUS

grits his teeth as the crowd ROARS. He shoots a tense glance to Titus up in the pulvinus, who smiles at the performance.

VARUS
 Auctus wields spear to rival Mars
 himself.

TITUS
 He has been well trained.

TULLIUS
 The same cannot be said of Crixus.
 Perhaps he should have remained a
 hauler of stones.

THE ARENA

BLOOD RIBBONS through the air as Crixus takes another hit. The crowd CHEERS -- then gasps in surprise as Crixus counters, finally drawing blood. Lucretia clutches Batiatus' arm in excitement. Auctus grins at Crixus, then HOWLS to the crowd.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUCTUS CHARGES,

unleashing lightning blows, driving Crixus back. He whips his spear around and slams Crixus' helmet off. Crixus staggers. Auctus lunges, lands a thunderous combination. Crixus crashes to the ground, his shield flying from his hands.

CRIXUS

scrambles to retrieve it. Auctus seizes the moment and hurls his spear. Crixus dives for his shield and rolls up with it just as the spear hits. It drives through the wood, halting a millimeter from Crixus' eye.

AUCTUS' FACE DROPS

as he realizes he just lost his primary weapon. Crixus tosses his ruined shield aside and attacks. Auctus absorbs the blows with his shield, struggling to counter with his much smaller sword.

THE CROWD ROARS

as the men exchange bone-crushing blows. They finally SLAM TOGETHER -- and freeze in a deadly embrace. The crowd GOES QUIET, all eyes straining to see what has happened.

AUCTUS

(soft)

Barca has taught you well...

Auctus grins. Blood trickles from his mouth as the CAMERA CIRCLES around, REVEALING Crixus' sword protruding from Auctus' back. Crixus has run him through. CAMERA COMPLETES ITS CIRCLE as Crixus removes his sword. Auctus falls to his knees, his eyes finding

BARCA

at the bars of the chute. Face twisted in anguish. Auctus' eyes fill with tears. Not for fear of death, but in regret of parting this life absent his love. He smiles sadly as the life fades from his eyes. He crumples to the sand, dead.

THE CROWD ERUPTS

Batiatus surges to his feet, overjoyed. Varus laughs up in the pulvinus, delighted.

VARUS

A fine showing, Batiatus! With unexpected conclusion!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

Indeed it was.

His eyes find his son in the crowd. Batiatus grins up at him, vindicated.

CRIXUS

stands over Auctus' body. He absorbs the CHEERING crowd. Tears fill his eyes as he raises his arms to the heavens, having achieved his own vindication.

CRIXUS (V.O.)

... I swear to be burned, chained, beaten, or die by the sword. In pursuit of honor in the arena.

EXT. TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

TIGHT ON Crixus' FOREARM as a red-hot iron sears the Mark of the Brotherhood into his flesh. REVEAL Batiatus as he removes the iron, Oenomaus at his side. Gannicus, Ashur, Dagan, Gnaeus, Rhaskos, and other Gladiators watch from the periphery.

BATIATUS

Welcome to the brotherhood.

Crixus beams with pride. Batiatus looks up to

TITUS,

standing on the balcony outside of the office. Titus holds his son's gaze for a moment then disappears inside the office, giving nothing away. Batiatus frowns in disappointment.

GAIA

eyes Crixus like a fine cut of meat further down the balcony, Lucretia beside her.

GAIA

Crixus proves himself. Perhaps even as match for Gannicus one day. In and out of the arena.

Lucretia takes Crixus in with dawning appreciation as he is loudly greeted by his new brothers. Crixus' mirth falters as Barca approaches, his face unreadable. The Gladiators go quiet. A tense beat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARCA
(softly)
You fought well. Brother.

Barca walks away, heartbroken. OFF Crixus, knowing his victory came at a great cost to the man...

INT. OFFICE - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Batiatus enters to find Titus at the desk, jotting notes in the house ledger. Titus does not look up.

TITUS
Your Gaul, still yet a recruit,
defeated a gladiator I considered
among the best of my men. It would
appear I underestimated Crixus.
(looking up)
As I did my son.

A rare moment of praise. Batiatus beams.

BATIATUS
You honor me, father.

TITUS
You honor yourself. When cleared of
plots and schemes.

BATIATUS
Thoughts well removed, never to
return.

TITUS
Nothing pleases more than to see
reason take hold of senses.

Titus grasps his son warmly.

TITUS (cont'd)
And a house righting its path.

Just the words Batiatus wanted to hear from his father.

BATIATUS
I will see it continued in your
absence.

TITUS
Absence?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

I assume you return to Sicilia.
Your health...

TITUS

Seeing Crixus' victory stirred
passions I have not felt in many
years. For the blood and the sand,
the roar of the crowd. It lifts
spirits more than change of clime
could hope to offer. No, I will
stay at your side, and together we
shall see the House of Batiatus
rise to former glories.

Batiatus covers his disappointment.

BATIATUS

You remain here?

TITUS

Until breath flees wearied flesh,
calling me to the afterlife.

Titus exits with a warm smile. OFF Batiatus, his own smile
fading as he realizes he is once again condemned to live in
the overpowering shadow of his father...

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE