

Beneath The Mask

Written by  
Seamus Kevin Fahey & Misha Green

FADE IN:

EXT. OLD ARENA - CAPUA - DAY

A SEA OF SPECTATORS scream in SLOW MOTION, their faces twisted in bloodlust. Time smashes back to NORMAL as a MURMILLO crashes against the wall in front of the crowd. He narrowly avoids

A RETIARIUS' TRIDENT

as it gouges the wood next to his head. TIME SLOWS AND ACCELERATES as Murmillo attacks. The RETIARIUS counters, casting his net. Murmillo dodges, but his opponent's trident finds its mark, ripping open his shoulder.

BLOOD SPLATTERS

across the nearest spectators. ADJUST to find BATIATUS AND TITUS in the stands, just out of reach of the crimson rain.

TITUS

A net and trident? The man appears more common fisherman than gladiator.

BATIATUS

The style is called Retiarius, carried from the outer regions.

TITUS

They should carry it back. I favor the Murmillo.

The Retiarius draws more blood. The crowd ROARS.

BATIATUS

The crowd takes opposite opinion. Soon we will find a Retiarius upon the sands in every game. And the ludus absent them tragically lacking.

TITUS

(reluctantly)  
Very well. Yet place net and trident in hands of one of our lesser man.

Batiatus beams at the minor victory. The crowd surges to their feet as the Retiarius sends the Murmillo crashing to

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the sand. Murmillo scrambles, barely avoiding the trident as it slams down again and again, blasting SAND at the CAMERA.

MURMILLO RALLIES,

regaining his footing. But the Retiarius swings his net, entangling Murmillo. Murmillo goes down. Retiarius is on him in a flash, slamming his trident down through Murmillo's face plate.

BLOOD SPRAYS

as the Murmillo goes limp. The crowd ROARS. Batiatus joins them, delighted by the carnage.

BATIATUS

Did I not tell you?! Listen to them!

TITUS

(laughs)  
A spectacle, to be sure.

BATIATUS

All the more thrilling, if viewed from the pulvinus.

Batiatus casts a sour look up to the pulvinus where TULLIUS and VETTIUS laugh and drink, surrounded by PRIVILEGED ROMANS. Titus waves the comment away.

TITUS

Invitation was extended.

BATIATUS

And refused?

TITUS

The pulvinus is too far removed. I would witness the games here, among the people. With son beside me.

OFF Batiatus, the crumb of his father's affection catching him by surprise, yet deeply appreciated...

INT. CHUTES - OLD ARENA - CAPUA - DAY

The corpse of the Murmillo is dragged away. ADJUST to find ASHUR and DAGAN watching. Ashur swallows hard at the sight, nerves threatening to unravel.

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CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS (O.S.)  
Your hour is upon you.

They look over to find OENOMAUS approaching with their swords. A gladius for Dagan, the curved sword of a Thraex for Ashur. Ashur tests the weight of it, blustering to bolster courage.

ASHUR  
A fine blade. To be wielded with  
deadly purpose.

Oenomaus glares at Ashur, unimpressed by the bravado.

OENOMAUS  
Re-form my words, in manner Dagan  
understands.  
(to Dagan)  
You bear the mark of the  
brotherhood.

ASHUR  
(in Aramaic)  
Hu amar anaHna ta'nin simana di  
aHutha. [He says we bear the mark  
of the brotherhood.]

OENOMAUS  
An honor you have not earned.

ASHUR  
(frowns, in Aramaic)  
Yeqara hu la mhaymen mrawHa. [An  
honor he does not believe earned.]

Dagan's eyes narrow in contempt, not liking that.

OENOMAUS  
Your true test awaits you. Live,  
and count yourself among us. Die...  
and prove yourselves as unworthy as  
I suspect.

ASHUR  
(in Aramaic)  
Nisyona mhaymena dilan qa meHakke.  
In neHye, anaHna mithqablin ke-  
aHin. In nemut, mzyna dena yeHde  
be-histalqutana. [Our true test  
awaits. If we live, we will be  
accepted as brothers. Die, and this  
fuck will rejoice at our parting.]

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CONTINUED:

DAGAN  
 (in Aramaic)  
 Hu yaHgug era dili b-shurma dileh.  
 [He will celebrate my cock in his  
 ass.]

Dagan grins. Ashur "translates."

ASHUR  
 Dagan says he will honor the House  
 of Batiatus with gifts of blood. As  
 will the mighty Ashur.

Oenomaus sizes him up, doubting his boast.

OENOMAUUS  
 Remember your training. And do not  
 die too quickly.

Oenomaus exits. Ashur's confidence falters as we PRE-LAP the  
 ROAR OF THE CROWD, propelling us to --

EXT. OLD ARENA - CAPUA - DAY

A SECUTOR hammers Ashur. Ashur is not without skill, but is  
 outmatched by his opponent.

A BLOODIED DAGAN RUSHES PAST,

engaged in his own battle against a HOPLOMACHUS (spear,  
 small shield). They trade thunderous blows. The Hoplomachus  
 thrusts with his spear. Dagan narrowly avoids it, counters  
 by

HACKING OFF THE ARM

that wields it. Hoplomachus screams. Dagan stabs him through  
 the throat, silencing the man forever.

ASHUR

scrambles to avoid his own opponent's deadly weapon. WHAM!  
 The Secutor lands a bone jarring blow to Ashur's helmet. It  
 flies off as he crashes to the sand. He regains his senses  
 just in time to see

THE SECUTOR

raising his weapon for the death blow. But a SWORD suddenly  
 bursts through the Secutor's stomach, showering Ashur in  
 blood. Dagan has run the man through from behind. Ashur  
 surges to his feet and CLEAVES THE MAN'S HEAD IN TWO.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE CROWD

goes wild. Ashur throws his arms up in victory.

ASHUR

Hasdrubal falls! As all men who  
face Ashur!

Batiatus is on his feet, CHEERING with the rest of the crowd. Titus frowns at Ashur's grandstanding.

TITUS

The man assumes credit owed his  
better.

BATIATUS

He is but swelled by the moment.

TITUS

Perhaps he will turn greater  
performance next time.

BATIATUS

You speak of what may never pass.

Batiatus glares up at the pulvinus as Tullius rises to address the crowd.

TULLIUS

Now that the less prominent matches  
have passed, let us have something  
of note. Vettius, make  
presentation.

VETTIUS

I give the good people of Capua  
this day my latest acquisition!  
Certain to inflame passion! And  
ignite fear in all who oppose him!  
From the darkest lands east of the  
Rhine... Behold Caburus! Murmillo!

CABURUS takes the sands to the roar of the crowd. He's a big, ugly, Nordic giant of a man.

TITUS

The crowd favors Vettius' offering.

BATIATUS

They greet Gannicus with louder  
voice, yet he stands removed from  
the games.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Crixus shows promise, yet the same  
fate again. Our men see victory,  
only to be awarded exclusion.

VETTIUS

And who shall face the beast! Enter  
Drappes! Thraex!

DRAPPES takes the sands, squaring nervously for battle.

TITUS

The fruits reaped, when you offend  
a man beyond our station.

Titus glances up at Tullius, laughing with his privileged  
compatriots in the pulvinus.

VETTIUS

Begin!

Caburus attacks, pounding Drappes. The vicious beating  
continues in the background.

BATIATUS

I but stood ground to protect our  
house. As any lanista would.

TITUS

Yet ambition beyond the title  
clouds your judgment. Place desire  
aside, and cast eyes below such  
lofty goals. We must be humble if I  
am to repair relations with  
Tullius, and see all our men  
returned to the sands.

BATIATUS

Quickly, I pray. If we are to place  
them in the opening games of the  
new arena --

TITUS

Reaching for such heights is what  
sent you tumbling from favor.  
Strike it from your thoughts, and  
place mind and effort towards more  
reasonable pursuits.

Caburus destroys Drappes in a spray of blood. The crowd goes  
wild. Titus takes them in with an envious frown.

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CONTINUED:

TITUS (cont'd)  
Perhaps the procuring of a man as  
worthy as Caburus.

OFF BATIATUS, jaw clenched, any warmth he was starting to feel from his father rapidly cooling...

EXT. CAPUA STREETS - DAY

An agitated LUCRETIA moves through the market with GAIA. MELITTA attends.

LUCRETIA  
Fleeting opportunity left to enjoy  
the old arena, and yet we are swept  
aside. Absent even casual regard.

Gaia searches the market for something, half paying attention.

GAIA  
I consider it a blessing, to be so  
repreived from condemning presence.  
The manner Titus glares, it is a  
shock we do not burst into flame.

LUCRETIA  
(not unkindly)  
He is but an old man, set upon his  
ways.

GAIA  
He is a Gorgon with a cock, turning  
all around him to stone.

LUCRETIA  
Titus does not fare well in the  
dust and the heat. His health will  
prompt return to the coast of  
Sicilia soon enough.

GAIA  
Until such glorious event, I would  
fade from beneath his oppressive  
roof.

LUCRETIA  
You would leave me?

GAIA  
You are with husband. A man who  
would never see you harmed by whim  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

GAIA (cont'd)  
 or circumstance. I stand alone,  
 severed from such protection. A  
 perilous condition that must be  
 attended.

Gaia forces a smile. Lucretia sees the genuine concern  
 lurking behind it.

LUCRETIA  
 You are never alone, as long as I  
 draw breath.

GAIA  
 (sincerely)  
 Words of much comfort.  
 (with a twinkle)  
 Though a husband with heavy purse  
 would be more so.

LUCRETIA  
 (laughing)  
 Then we must find one suitable to  
 cause.

Gaia spots what she's been looking for -- or rather who.  
 PETRONIUS, a distinguished Roman, barterers with a GRAIN  
 MERCHANT. Early 40s, handsome, with the air of wealth.

GAIA  
 Possibility presents itself, in  
 most pleasing form.

LUCRETIA  
 You know the man?

GAIA  
 I have seen him about in Rome.  
 Absent encumbrance of a wife.

LUCRETIA  
 Fortunate to come upon him, at such  
 a place and hour.

Lucretia eyes her with a smile, knowing this wasn't a  
 coincidence.

GAIA  
 In desperate times fortune must  
 give way to more assertive hands.

She grins, heads for him. Lucretia follows.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GAIA (cont'd)  
 Petronius?! Would the gods have me  
 so blessed?

Petronius turns, eyes Gaia quizzically. Can't place the  
 face.

GAIA (cont'd)  
 Gaia. We were introduced at one of  
 Varus' affairs.

PETRONIUS  
 Oh, yes, of course. Apologies.

GAIA  
 None required. Seeing you so  
 unexpected has lifted questionable  
 spirits. Lucretia can attest to --

PETRONIUS  
 (perking up)  
 Lucretia? Wife to the lanista,  
 Batiatus?

Lucretia registers surprise at the recognition.

LUCRETIA  
 I do call him husband, yes.

Petronius takes her hand, delighted. Gaia shifts  
 uncomfortably, forgotten in his excitement.

PETRONIUS  
 I have heard your house spoken of.  
 (conspiratorial  
 whisper)  
 And the pleasures contained  
 within...

Petronius smiles knowingly. OFF LUCRETIA, her smile in  
 response barely masking her discomfort...

EXT. TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - SUNSET

Practice swords clash. PULL BACK to reveal CRIXUS sparring  
 with GNAEUS. Crixus sends him to the ground, dazed. Crixus  
 offers his hand, glancing over at BARCA listlessly working  
 the palus as he helps Gnaeus up.

CRIXUS  
 Barca has lost form, since Auctus  
 fell.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The shadow of guilt creeps into Crixus' eyes.

GNAEUS

His cock will find a new hole to  
fuck.

Oenomaus returns with a bloodied Ashur and Dagan, GUARDS and LUDUS SLAVES trailing.

ASHUR

We return anointed in the blood of  
our enemies! Hasdrubal and Kleitos  
have met their end! The first of  
many to fall beneath our swords in  
the arena!

A few lackluster cheers from the men. The equivalent of a  
golf clap. Ashur glowers.

OENOMAUUS

See yourselves to the baths.

ASHUR

(in Aramaic)

Mzayne mlageqe d-shurma [Fucking  
ass lickers.]

He moves off with Dagan. Oenomaus' eyes fall on an  
unwelcomed sight: Gannicus sitting in the shade, sipping a  
cup of water.

OENOMAUUS

Gannicus. Pair with Rhaskos.

GANNICUS

To what end? If I am not to fight  
in the arena, I would remain in the  
shade.

TITUS (O.S.)

Doctore.

Oenomaus looks up to find Titus and Batiatus on the balcony.

TITUS

Send the man up. I would have  
words.

Gannicus frowns, knowing that can't be good. He rises,  
WIPING US TO --

INT. TROPHY ROOM - BATIATUS' VILLA - SUNSET

CLOSE ON the bust of MAGNETIUS (referenced in Episode HB2)

TITUS (O.S.)  
Magnetius. One of the finest  
champions this house has ever  
forged.

WIDEN TO REVEAL Titus studying the stone face. Batiatus  
hovers next to Gannicus. GUARDS are posted at the doors.

BATIATUS  
(lacking enthusiasm)  
He stood a titan.

TITUS  
As all my champions. The  
culmination of years of training.  
Dedication. Sacrifice.  
(pointedly, to  
Gannicus)  
You would hold yourself their  
equal?

GANNICUS  
In the arena, I am every man's  
equal.

TITUS  
A champion is more than his  
victories upon the sands. He is the  
sum of his actions. Every decision,  
no matter how small, speaks to the  
man. And the balance of his heart.

Batiatus thumps Gannicus' chest.

BATIATUS  
Beneath his breast beats the heart  
of a lion.

Titus' eyes remain on Gannicus, judging his every fiber.

TITUS  
And what does it beat for?

Gannicus considers the question.

GANNICUS  
(by rote)  
The House of Batiatus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Titus weighs his response. Gives away nothing.

TITUS  
(to Guards)  
Return him to the ludus.

Gannicus exchanges a concerned look with Batiatus as he's led out. Batiatus puts on his best face for his father, launches into the hard sell.

BATIATUS  
You see? The man fights for the honor of this house. As all your champions have in the past.

TITUS  
Gannicus speaks but words he knows I seek to hear. He is no champion of my house.

Titus exits. OFF BATIATUS, smoldering...

INT. TRICLINIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Gaia complains to Lucretia as Melitta pours wine.

GAIA  
I stand before Petronius with obvious charms, and all he can do is prattle about the House of Batiatus. I fear I have lost delicate touch.

LUCRETIA  
(tightly)  
Your touch is many things.  
"Delicate" not among them.

GAIA  
You are of a mood.

LUCRETIA  
If word of what we have offered here has spread to Petronius, how long before it lights upon Titus' ear?

GAIA  
Perhaps it should. The shock would no doubt end the old goat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA

You jest, when all around us  
threatens to fucking crumble.

GAIA

The only threat is of you and  
Quintus becoming favored among the  
elite.

LUCRETIA

As a whore is favored by the man  
atop her.

GAIA

It is not as if all of Rome knows.  
Only the most privileged tongues  
whisper of the delights offered  
within these walls. Delights  
Petronius and his friends long to  
witness for themselves...

LUCRETIA

To even consider it is beyond  
reason. If Titus were to discover  
such a thing --

BATIATUS (O.S.)

What joy does my father prevent  
now?

The women turn to find Batiatus entering the room, still  
fuming from his father's low opinion of Gannicus.

LUCRETIA

None of note --

GAIA

We came upon Petronius in the  
market. You are familiar with the  
name...?

Lucretia shoots her a withering look, not wishing to broach  
the subject. Gaia ignores it.

BATIATUS

As any man with eye towards  
business, and the procuring of it.

GAIA

He is familiar with yours as well.  
And spoke with great interest in  
sampling some of your more exotic  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GAIA (cont'd)  
offerings, with acquittances of  
equal position.

Batiatus considers that with a frown.

BATIATUS  
And how did good Petronius come to  
know of such things?

Lucretia waves Melitta out of the room.

LUCRETIA  
Varus and Cossutius. Their tongues  
are looser than their cocks.

GAIA  
Petronius departs for Rome the day  
after next. Decision must be given  
quick birth, or see opportunity  
aborted.

Batiatus wrestles with the temptation for advancement.

BATIATUS  
With Petronius' support, we may yet  
find ourselves in the opening games  
of the new arena.

LUCRETIA  
Quintus, your father --

BATIATUS  
Proceed with the arrangements. I  
will attend to my father.

OFF BATIATUS, a plan taking form as the CAMERA SLOWLY SINKS  
through the floor, TRANSITIONING US TO --

INT. CORRIDOR - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

A GUARD escorts Melitta through the barracks. Gannicus steps  
from the baths, half naked. His heart catching at the  
unexpected sight of her. Melitta continues on without even a  
glance. Gannicus hustles after her.

GANNICUS  
Melitta. A word.

MELITTA  
I have none to give

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GANNICUS

It is a matter of some importance.

Melitta pauses. Sees the somber look in his eyes. Relents.

MELITTA

(to Guard)

A moment.

He moves to the side. Gannicus whispers to her. Part secrecy, part intimacy.

GANNICUS

You avoid my gaze.

MELITTA

As you should mine. Lest suspicions be aroused.

GANNICUS

Will they not also be raised, if two friends are no longer seen to speak?

Melitta considers that, reluctantly nods. Gannicus struggles to find the right words.

GANNICUS (cont'd)

What happened between us --

MELITTA

Was not of our choosing. We must turn it from thought, and never give it voice.

GANNICUS

My tongue bends to such warning.  
(a beat, soft)  
Yet the thought of you... It proves troublesome.

Melitta sees a rare glimpse of emotion in Gannicus. Uncertainty. Genuine attraction. She looks away, not wanting Gannicus to see how affected she is.

MELITTA

The memory will fade with time. As do all things born of misfortune.

Melitta rejoins the Guard. Gannicus watches her drift away to Oenomaus' cell, longing and regret swelling in his eyes.

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CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS (PRELAP)  
We were as brothers once. But no  
more.

INT. OENOMAUS' CELL - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

Melitta lies naked with Oenomaus, half-listening, the  
exchange with Gannicus weighing heavily.

OENOMAUS  
The men no longer accept me as a  
gladiator. And do not yet give  
respect as doctore. Even Gannicus  
refuses to heed my instruction.

MELITTA  
Gannicus heeds nothing but his own  
desires, beyond all reason. You  
must teach him that you alone are  
in command. You must take control.

Melitta straddles Oenomaus, her lips inches from his.

MELITTA (cont'd)  
And by firm hand, erase all doubts.

She kisses him.

MELITTA (cont'd)  
Show them all the man I have given  
my heart to.

She devours him, desperately attempting to wipe her own  
thoughts of Gannicus from her mind. Oenomaus is surprised by  
her passion, but quickly responds in kind. He flips her  
over, pinning her down.

MELITTA GASPS

as he roughly enters her. Her nails dig into his back,  
urging him to thrust harder. SLOWLY PUSH IN on Melitta's  
face as she struggles to give herself over to the moment. To  
erase her doubt. As her eyes close...

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

FOLLOW CRIXUS' PRACTICE SWORD as it slices through the air  
in SLOW MOTION, connecting with GNAEUS' FACE. Wood  
splinters. Blood flies. Gnaeus drops.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS (O.S.)

Gnaeus!

Gnaeus looks up to see Oenomaus, whip clenched in his hand. Voice firm and commanding. Closer to the Doctore we will come to know in season 1.

OENOMAUS

Your mastery of the sword falls to question. The net and trident are your weapons now.

The other men chuckle as a LUDUS SLAVE hustles over with a practice net and trident. Gannicus glances over from where he sits in the shade, curious at the change in Oenomaus' demeanor. Gnaeus scowls.

GNAEUS

A fucking net, Oenomaus?

Oenomaus suddenly unleashes his whip. The shotgun CRACK of leather splits the air. Gnaeus grimaces as an ANGRY WELT starts from his skin. The men go quiet.

OENOMAUS

You will do as commanded, absent complaint. Or see flesh stripped from bone.

A tense beat. Gnaeus backs down, lowering eyes in respect.

GNAEUS

Yes, Doctore.

Gnaeus takes the net and trident. Oenomaus barks at the men.

OENOMAUS

Return to training!

The men comply. Gannicus ambles over.

GANNICUS

You speak as Jupiter, hurling bolts from the heavens.

OENOMAUS

Raised there by words and touch of loving wife.

Gannicus forces a smile. Oenomaus fails to notice the pain behind them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS (cont'd)  
 Pair with Barca. And remain far  
 from shade.

Oenomaus strides off. Gannicus watches him for a second,  
 before shifting his eyes to Melitta on the Balcony. She sets  
 food and wine for Batiatus, Lucretia and Titus. Melitta  
 catches the look, quickly shifts her gaze. Gannicus  
 tightens, his pain replaced by the hot sting of anger.

GANNICUS  
 Barca! Bring fucking spear to  
 purpose.

Barca complies, somewhat lackluster. Gannicus lays into him.  
 Titus takes note from the balcony.

TITUS  
 Your man shows fire today.

BATIATUS  
 Ignited by your words, I am sure.

Titus half chuckles, half coughs.

LUCRETIA  
 (to Melitta)  
 The honeyed wine. Quickly.

Melitta hustles off.

TITUS  
 (coughing)  
 I am fine.

BATIATUS  
 Sound and pallor threaten  
 disagreement. You have been too  
 long from salt air of the coast.

TITUS  
 And will remain from Sicilia longer  
 still. Do not waste breath on the  
 matter.

BATIATUS  
 I would not see you so far removed.  
 But perhaps a day or more by the  
 waters of Neapolis...?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA  
 (picking up on the  
 plan)  
 Yes, to revive color.

Melitta returns with the honeyed wine. Lucretia takes it and quickly pours a cup for Titus. [NOTE: Lucretia must pour the wine herself.]

TITUS  
 My concern lies only with this  
 ludus, and seeing it to former  
 glories.

BATIATUS  
 Then let our journey serve dual  
 cause. We can review the latest  
 shipment of slaves while there,  
 with mind towards procuring a  
 champion favored by us both.  
 Someone to rival Vettius' new  
 man...?

Titus is seized by a minor fit of coughing. Lucretia presses the honeyed wine into his hands.

LUCRETIA  
 Drink.

Titus drinks the wine. Clears his throat. Eyes Batiatus and Lucretia.

TITUS  
 You conspire against an old man.  
 (the hint of a  
 smile)  
 To your advantage. Make  
 preparation. We leave for Neapolis.

Titus exits. Batiatus grins, whispering to Lucretia.

BATIATUS  
 He is attended to as promised. Have  
 Gaia send word to Petronius. You  
 entertain tonight.

LUCRETIA  
 And if he and his circle overreach?  
 The appetites of men are not easily  
 set aside by words of a woman.

Batiatus sees the point of that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

I will send message to Solonius. He will stand in my place, and speak for the house if so needed.

LUCRETIA

(worried)

Quintus --

BATIATUS

The risk outweighs concern. See to Petronius and his guests. And with their satisfaction, our position in the opening games secured.

Batiatus kisses her and moves inside. OFF LUCRETIA, her own concerns far from assuaged...

INT. MESS HALL - BATIATUS' LUDUS - SUNSET

Gruel slops into a bowl as the men take evening meal. RHASKOS snorts to Gnaeus as he passes.

RHASKOS

Snare any fish today in your little net?

The men chuckle. Gnaeus seethes. ANGLE ON Ashur and Dagan, receiving coin from Oenomaus.

OENOMAUUS

Reward, for victory in the arena. Continue and see more weigh palm.

Dagan grins, receiving twice as much as Ashur.

DAGAN

(in Aramaic)

Ana eHze den qudam quta sagi'a. [I will see this towards much cunt.]

Ashur frowns sourly, mistranslates.

ASHUR

Dagan questions receiving the greater sum. We stood equally upon the sands.

Oenomaus dismantles Ashur with cutting eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS

Tell him he earns twice your coin... because you are half the man.

ASHUR

I am a gladiator, as he is.

OENOMAUS

If you were not needed to exchange our words for his, you would never have been given chance to take up sword.

Oenomaus moves away. Ashur seethes. Crixus passes with a crust of bread in hand, WIPING US TO --

INT. BARCA'S CELL - BATIATUS' LUDUS - SUNSET

The din of the men's VOICES echoes through to the barracks, where Barca sits alone, cradling one of Auctus' birds. A small reminder of his fallen lover.

CRIXUS (O.S.)

Bread.

Barca looks up to find Crixus in the doorway with his crust of bread.

CRIXUS

For your pets.

Barca stares with deadened eyes, says nothing. Crixus turns to go, pauses.

CRIXUS (cont'd)

Doiros was the brother I held closest to me. A fierce warrior, as our father and all before us. I would listen at their feet to their many tales of battle. Longing for the day I was of an age to take up arms and stand with them in glory.

(a beat)

My father. My brothers. Doiros. I watched as they fell beneath the spears of the Arverni. My hands yet too small to raise sword against them. I was forced to serve. To bow and scrape. First to the shits that took my family from me. Then to the Romans they sold me to. Not a day

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CRIXUS (cont'd)  
has since passed that I have not  
dreamt of honoring the dead. Of  
proving myself worthy to them in  
blood and victory.

(a beat, soft)  
Auctus was the first life I have  
ever taken in battle. He shall be  
remembered.

Crixus sets the bread down next to Barca, turns to go.

BARCA  
(soft)  
They were Auctus' pets.

Crixus pauses, turning back.

BARCA (cont'd)  
I never favored them.  
(a beat)  
Now they are all that is left.

Barca picks up Crixus' peace offering of bread, feeds it to  
the bird he's holding. OFF the unlikely bond forming between  
the two men...

EXT. NEAPOLIS STREET - SUNSET

A bustling street, vibrantly colored with MERCHANTS and  
their wares brought in from every corner of the Republic. In  
the distance we see SHIPS docked in the harbor, the setting  
sun framing their sails. ADJUST TO FIND Titus and Batiatus  
inspecting a SLAVE TRADER'S row of MEN.

SLAVE TRADER  
(re: hulking brute)  
What of this one? See how his form  
is carved, each muscle building  
upon the next? A worthy addition to  
any ludus.

TITUS  
(to Batatus, a test)  
A fine offering, is he not?

BATIATUS  
I would not waste coin. The man  
favors his left, revealing injury  
to the leg.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SLAVE TRADER

(quickly)

Unsuitable for men of discerning eye. Let us turn to something of rarer quality. I have a Thracian of the Maedi tribe, the likes of which --

BATIATUS

Thracians are too difficult to control. And aggravate the Gauls beyond reason.

Titus laughs, pleased.

TITUS

My son speaks truth. You offer us piss and claim it wine.

SLAVE TRADER

You will find none better in Neapolis.

TITUS

(snorts)

I but hope your city's drink holds higher standard.

Titus clasps Batiatus' shoulder.

TITUS (cont'd)

Come, let us seek libation to wash taste of shit from mouth.

They head off, WIPING US TO --

INT. TRICLINIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

SLAVES bustle as final preparations are made for Petronius and his guests. DIONA absently lights a row of candles, her own glow considerably dimmed. She finishes, doesn't blow her stick out. Watches detached as the flame licks her fingers.

NAEVIA (O.S.)

Diona.

She blows it out as NAEVIA approaches. Naevia grabs her hand, inspecting Diona's fingers with worry.

DIONA

It does not hurt.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

She pulls away, heading off.

NAEVIA

Wait.

Diona pauses. Naevia struggles to find balming words.

NAEVIA (cont'd)

We have not spoken. Or laughed, as  
we always --

DIONA

(snapping)

I have no time for childish things.

(softer)

Domina wishes me bathed. For  
tonight.

Naevia sadly watches Diona as she disappears into the atrium, passing Lucretia and Melitta as they enter. Lucretia, dressed in her finest gown, hands Melitta a list.

LUCRETIA

Take this to Oenomaus. These men  
are to be brought up to the villa,  
properly oiled and scented.

MELITTA

Yes, Domina.

Lucretia clocks the concern shadowing Melitta's face.

LUCRETIA

(softening)

There will be much I need attended  
to this evening. I would have you  
by my side, not be dislodged by any  
request.

MELITTA

(relieved)

Gratitude.

LUCRETIA

I would ask a thing of you in  
return. It is well known your  
husband's allegiance rests with  
Titus. Sway him to keep what we do  
here confined to shadow. Or I fear  
other secrets will follow into the  
light. I am understood?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Melitta absorbs this veiled threat of revealing her forced copulation with Gannicus to Oenomaus.

MELITTA

Yes, Domina.

LUCRETIA

See it done.

Melitta exits as Gaia sweeps into the room, resplendent in her RED WIG. She takes Lucretia in with an appreciative smile.

GAIA

Venus blushes in her garden, shamed  
by such beauty.

LUCRETIA

Would that she stood in my place,  
and I among the roots and leaves.

Gaia takes Lucretia's hands.

GAIA

These hands are not meant for  
common earth. They have held me  
close as dearest friend. As sister.  
Tonight mine shall return favor,  
and aid yours in seizing position  
so richly deserved.

Gaia kisses Lucretia. A sincere gesture of love. As she pulls back she spots SOLONIUS entering across the room, unencumbered by attending slaves.

GAIA (cont'd)

Solonius arrives. Let us greet him,  
and forge memory of a night not  
soon forgotten.

Gaia moves to Solonius. Lucretia lingers, the hint of worry refusing to vacate her eyes. PRE-LAP: The GRUNTS of SEX rise.

INT. TRICLINIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Rhaskos fucks a MASKED GIRL from behind on a raised dais. Petronius and a DOZEN PRIVILEGED ROMAN MEN laugh and drink as they take in the show. They are attended by beautiful, topless SLAVES in masks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A DOZEN GLADIATORS

stand off to the side on display. Stripped to their subligarias. Hardened bodies glistening with scented oils. TRACK past Barca, Dagan, Ashur, Gnaeus, and Crixus, who stares wide eyed at the proceedings. Come to rest on

GANNICUS,

who ignores the show in favor of Melitta across the room with Lucretia, Gaia, and Solonius. Gannicus quickly averts his gaze as

OENOMAUUS

passes by. His hand tightens on his whip, barely concealing his displeasure with such a dishonorable event. Melitta catches the look, forces a pained smile of support as she pours more wine for Gaia.

GAIA

The man is no Gannicus, yet he surpasses in enthusiasm. They are well received.

Solonius squirms, obviously uncomfortable with this.

SOLONIUS

As are all things born of base desire.

LUCRETIA

Apologies. We ask too much of you in this, yet your presence is of much comfort.

SOLONIUS

The situation forces us all into actions otherwise never considered. The blame lies in the Fates, absolving weighted heart.

Rhaskos thrusts harder. The Girl GASPS in pain, her mask falling off to reveal DIONA. Her eyes find Naevia, who moves among the Romans with an amphora of wine. Its purpose forgotten in her hands as tears well in her eyes. Diona looks away in shame.

NAEVIA

notices one of the Roman's eyes crawling over her. Her heart seizes in her chest. She starts as Melitta appears at her side, taking the amphora and handing her an empty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MELITTA

See this to the pantry.

(soft)

And remain there until I call upon  
you, after all have left.

Naevia registers surprise and relief.

MELITTA (cont'd)

Go.

Naevia complies, sparing a pained look back at Diona before exiting. Oenomaus joins Melitta, his eyes flashing disgust as he whispers to her.

OENOM AUS

We dishonor this house.

MELITTA

We but do as commanded.

OENOM AUS

The cause does not alter result.

MELITTA

No. Yet we must move beyond it, or  
be driven to madness.

Melitta steals a glance at Gannicus as she returns to Lucretia's side, her words meant to convince herself as well as her husband.

RHASKOS

grabs Diona's hair as his thrusts increase in intensity.

PETRONIUS

(laughing)

The man fucks as a bull, horns to  
purpose.

Diona grunts in pain as he climaxes. Petronius and the Romans APPLAUD as Rhaskos dismounts, leaving a humiliated Diona to gather her robes. Gaia nudges Lucretia forward to address the guests.

LUCRETIA

Gratitude to all for gracing the  
House of Batiatus with esteemed  
presence. One my husband regrets he  
cannot share, due to pressing  
business.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Petronius eyes Diona and Rhaskos with a lurid grin.

PETRONIUS

I had not noticed his absence.

The other Guests laugh in agreement.

LUCRETIA

What you have seen is but a taste of the pleasures afforded you beneath humble roof. Our gladiators, our slaves, everything within these walls, I place at the whims of your desire. For a single night, you are the masters of this house.

TULLIUS (O.S.)

An enticing offer.

Lucretia turns, shocked to find Tullius entering. Cold eyes belying warm smile.

TULLIUS

One I would see to full advantage.

LUCRETIA

Tullius.

Her heart claws into her throat. Solonius stiffens in surprise next to an intrigued Gaia. OFF LUCRETIA, forcing a smile to disguise rising fear...

TITUS (PRELAP)

I have never cared for surprises.

INT. TAVERN - NEAPOLIS - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a cup being filled with wine. PULL BACK TO FIND Titus and Batiatus seated in a cramped, seedy tavern.

TITUS

And you have provided many in your day.

BATIATUS

Your disappointment has often been given voice. A loud, clear one.

Batiatus downs his cup, pours another.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

Disappointment can only exist upon expectation. You proved from tender age you would listen to no one's counsel save your own.

Batiatus laughs at the ridiculousness of the statement.

BATIATUS

When did I ever turn from iron advice? A desire to gain military experience raised your objection. And I turned from it. You commanded I run the ludus in your absence. I obeyed, abandoning my own desires, now long forgotten. When has son ever denied the father?

Titus replies, more with sympathy than anger.

TITUS

When he married a woman beneath him.

A tense beat. Batiatus drinks, replies softly.

BATIATUS

You were wrong about her. As you have been of many things.

Titus feels the truth in that. A sad smile creeps across his face.

TITUS

An old man's mistakes swell in the breast, as remaining days shrink.

BATIATUS

(snorts)  
You will outlive us all. You are too stubborn to die.

Titus chuckles, takes a sip of wine.

TITUS

Do you think me a fool, Quintus?

BATIATUS

There are many words I would use towards your description. Fool lives not among them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

No, it is not. You knew those slaves were shit before we ever set foot to path. The purchase of men was not the reason you parted me from the ludus, was it?

Batiatus tenses, fearing his ruse has been discovered. But Titus laughs warmly, claspng his son's arm.

TITUS (cont'd)

You wish to find common ground, far from the site of former disagreements.

Batiatus returns the smile, tension fading.

BATIATUS

My deception meant only to strengthen bond between father and son.

TITUS

This surprise is one most welcome. And long overdue.

Batiatus musters a smile, feeling the guilt of his lie.

TITUS (cont'd)

(laughs, rises)

Yet we did not need to travel so far from comfort. I would return home, and continue in warmer surroundings.

BATIATUS

(surprised)

Now? Should we not wait until break of day?

TITUS

A few hours upon the road, and our own beds to fall to. Come. Let us put this wretched city behind us, and embrace closer future.

OFF BATIATUS' worry of returning home too soon...

INT. TRICLINIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Tullius laughs and drinks with Petronius and several other Guests. He glances across the room to where Lucretia, Gaia, and Solonius huddle. Appraises Gaia with an admiring eye.

LUCRETIA  
How does that man find himself  
here?

SOLONIUS  
Petronius, or perhaps loose tongue  
of his confederates...

Gaia smiles at Tullius as she whispers to Lucretia.

GAIA  
His presence changes nothing.

LUCRETIA  
It upends the fucking earth.

SOLONIUS  
I will break words, and gauge  
intent.

Solonius moves off, concern creasing troubled brow.

LUCRETIA  
To stand with a smile in our  
fucking house. After the injury put  
to my husband.

GAIA  
Force him from thought, or see  
effort and risk fall short of  
reward. Petronius and his guests  
stand erect with expectation. Let  
us see them to climax.

Lucretia steels her nerves, whispers to Melitta.

LUCRETIA  
Bring them out.

Melitta nods, moves off. Lucretia eyes Tullius across the room with barely concealed hatred as Solonius joins him. Solonius sips his wine, casually enters into conversation.

SOLONIUS  
Good Tullius. Finding you here  
comes a surprise.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

TULLIUS

Surely not to you.

Solonius tightens, lowering his voice to an agitated hiss.

SOLONIUS

I warned you of Batiatus' maneuverings not as invitation, but in hopes you would prevent such foolishness. And the retribution against valued friend it would bring.

Tullius' eyes darken, although his smile remains constant.

TULLIUS

You warned me to grow favor. Continue speaking and see it wither.

Solonius squirms as Lucretia steps forward with the GOLD MASK OF APOLLO in her hand (similar to the one in ep 109, season 1). Melitta and Slave Girls stand behind her with trays of more masks. Jupiter, Neptune, Mars -- enough for all the guests.

LUCRETIA

You have shared drink. Food. Distraction for eye and ear. Yet these are common things. Enjoyed by men bound by accusing morality of their deeds.

She directs that barb at Tullius, wrapped in a warm smile.

LUCRETIA (cont'd)

I would see you freed from such human constraints.

She motions Melitta and the Slaves to distribute the masks.

LUCRETIA (cont'd)

Touch these to flesh. Sever all ties from the mortal world. And rise as gods in the House of Batiatus.

The Romans clamor, eyeing the Gladiators and half-naked Slaves hungrily. Petronius takes the mask of Jupiter.

PETRONIUS

Jupiter!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETRONIUS (cont'd)  
 (laughs, to Tullius)  
 Never in our dealings have I been  
 so elevated.

TULLIUS  
 This house is truly a marvel. Yet  
 if I am to assume mantle of a god,  
 I would first prove myself against  
 one.

His eyes land on Gannicus. Lucretia tightens.

LUCRETIA  
 You would challenge Gannicus?

TULLIUS  
 A harmless exhibition. To measure  
 humble skill against vaunted  
 prowess.

PETRONIUS  
 I would pause in my desires, to  
 witness such a thing.

The other Guests chime in their drunken agreement. Lucretia  
 knows this is a bad idea, but Tullius has forced her hand.

LUCRETIA  
 (to Oenomaus)  
 Gather practice swords --

TULLIUS  
 Wood? The clash of steel is what  
 rings through the halls of Olympus,  
 is it not?

More drunken agreement from the Romans. Lucretia reluctantly  
 nods to the house Guards.

LUCRETIA  
 Give them your swords.

One Guard gives his weapon to Tullius, the other to  
 Gannicus.

PETRONIUS  
 Let us clear space, and have  
 contest!

Gannicus grins, feeling the weight of his sword. Oenomaus  
 hisses in his ear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS

See grin removed. You are to  
indulge him, allow a show of blood  
-- but level no insult nor injury  
in return. Such action would bear  
unfortunate consequence.

Gannicus absorbs the gravity of that.

GANNICUS

So I am to lose?

OENOMAUS

And win your life.

TULLIUS

Come! Let us see if I recall what I  
learned, years ago in service to  
the Republic.

CAMERA CIRCLES as Tullius and Gannicus face off. Gannicus catches Melitta's worried look as Tullius attacks. A simple exchange, easily deflected. Tullius laughs, shoots a warm smile Gaia's way.

STEEL FLASHES

as Tullius attacks again. Faster. Light-hearted nature fading as he DRAWS BLOOD. Melitta tenses. Lucretia seizes Gaia's hand in concern. The Romans APPLAUD. Tullius plays to them with a laugh.

TULLIUS (cont'd)

Ah. It begins to return to me.

Tullius grins at Gaia, showing off for her. Tullius circles Gannicus, his eyes dancing with malevolent intent. Gannicus is at a sizable disadvantage since he can only defend. Tullius unleashes a deadly volley, lands another cut. BLOOD FLOWS.

GANNICUS

grits his teeth against the pain. Crixus and the other Gladiators eye the contest with mounting concern. Tullius unloads a series of thunderous blows, drawing more blood. Tullius pulls Gannicus close as their swords lock.

TULLIUS (cont'd)

(whispered)

I stand unscathed. Perhaps you are  
not the champion I believed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gannicus snarls, shoves Tullius away. The Romans TITTER  
Tullius chuckles, delighted at getting a rise.

TULLIUS (cont'd)  
The man finally shows life.

Gannicus shoots a look to Oenomaus, who shakes his head just enough to send private warning. You cannot strike back. Gannicus buries his rage as Tullius presses his assault, repeatedly drawing blood.

LUCRETIA  
This goes too far.

Lucretia looks to Solonius. He averts his eyes, powerless to intercede. Tullius slices open Gannicus' chest and smashes him in the face with his hilt, sending him to his knees.

GANNICUS,

beaten and bloodied, looks to Melitta. Swallows all his pride, holds up two fingers. The MISSIO. Tullius ignores it, rearing back to end Gannicus and the affront he represents.

LUCRETIA (cont'd)  
Tullius!

Tullius whips furious eyes to Lucretia. Silence grips the room. Lucretia smiles, trying to be diplomatic.

LUCRETIA (cont'd)  
Apologies. The man gives the  
missio. The match is yours.

A tense beat. Tullius laughs, lowering his sword. Melitta remembers to breathe.

TULLIUS  
A god of the arena. Saved by a  
woman.

The air returns to the room as Petronius and his Guests join in Tullius' amusement. Gannicus seethes, blood dripping.

LUCRETIA  
(to Melitta)  
See him to the Medicus.

Oenomaus helps Gannicus up, motions for a Guard to escort Melitta. Petronius steps forward as they exit with Gannicus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETRONIUS

An excellent diversion! Gratitude  
for allowing it!

The Romans applaud. Lucretia nods in thanks, her eyes  
flicking nervously to Tullius as he steps forward.

TULLIUS

I have delayed proceedings past  
reason.

(to Lucretia)

Let us explore other pleasures to  
be mined from the House of  
Batiatus...

Tullius takes the golden mask of Apollo from Lucretia's  
hands with a knowing smile. He brings the mask up to his  
face, WIPING US TO --

INT. INFIRMARY - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

TIGHT ON A WOUND tended by frail, dirty hands. PULL BACK to  
reveal a WITHERED MEDICUS as he finishes treating Gannicus'  
injuries. He shuffles past Melitta, exiting to dispose of  
soiled rags and a bowl of bloody water.

MELITTA

That fucking animal. To turn simple  
exhibition to blood.

Gannicus painfully sits up.

GANNICUS

I could have ended the man in half  
a breath.

MELITTA

Yet you allowed him to nearly kill  
you?

He sees the genuine concern in her eyes. Is affected by it.

GANNICUS

I was ordered not to raise hand.

Gannicus half grins, breaking the moment.

GANNICUS (cont'd)

Other commands have been more  
pleasurable.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Melitta can't help but laugh in exasperation -- and relief that he is all right

MELITTA  
Are you never serious?

He drinks her in, his smile giving way to painful longing.

GANNICUS  
(soft)  
On occasion.

An electric beat. He tentatively reaches out to take her hand. She instinctively pulls back. Uncertain. Needing a safe distance between them.

MELITTA  
I should return to the villa.

Gannicus rises, narrowing the gap between them. Needing to be closer.

GANNICUS  
(a whisper)  
You should.

Melitta hesitates. Torn. But doesn't leave.

MELITTA  
Why are you doing this?

GANNICUS  
(pained)  
Because to not would be a lie,  
deeper than the one we tell  
Oenomaus. I did not want this. I  
love him as a brother. Yet what I  
feel for you...  
(a beat)  
Tell me it does not stir in your  
breast as well.

She struggles with the question, her own guilt over unexpected feelings for Gannicus swirling in her eyes. She averts them, unable to hold his gaze.

MELITTA  
What I feel means nothing.

He gently lifts her chin to return her eyes to his.

GANNICUS  
It holds the world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Melitta locks eyes with him. The atmosphere charged. No more safe distance. Tears well, her voice trembling.

MELITTA

What would you do, if you were my husband? And learned of such a thing?

GANNICUS

(a whisper)  
I would kill us both.

He pulls her into a TIME STOPPING, EARTH SHATTERING KISS. Melitta responds, caught in the moment. She pulls away, regaining herself. Shocked at her own longing. She turns and quickly exits, seized by guilt. OFF GANNICUS, hope and shame mixing in equal measure...

INT. BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Petronius and his Guests, faces obscured by the masks of the gods, partake of Lucretia's offerings. Romans watch Gladiators fuck Slaves. Romans fuck Gladiators and Slaves. Barca gets fucked by a Roman. Another Roman watches Crixus fuck a Slave while Gnaeus blows him.

ASHUR AND DAGAN

stand with DURATIUS, a young muscular gladiator, and a few other men waiting to be chosen. A short ROMAN wearing the mask of MARS approaches, taking in Dagan with hungry eyes.

MASKED ROMAN

You are an imposing brute. Tell me, giant. Where do your tastes lie? Towards cock, or cunt?

Dagan looks to Ashur in confusion.

ASHUR

(to Roman)  
Apologies, he does not grasp your language.

MASKED ROMAN

Are you able to form words, so that he may?

Ashur glances across the room at Oenomaus, the request stirring hateful feelings of earlier slight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASHUR  
 (tight smile)  
 I serve but to do so.

MASKED ROMAN  
 (to Dagan)  
 I do not care for struggle nor  
 complaint. Will you submit to all I  
 ask of you?

Ashur hesitates, his conscience making a brief appearance,  
 then mistranslates to Dagan.

ASHUR  
 (in Aramaic)  
 Hu Haze lakh yatir gavra minni. [He  
 finds you more a man than I.]

DAGAN  
 (laughs, in Aramaic)  
 'Ena shapirta, haden. [A fine eye,  
 this one.]

The slight burns Ashur even more. He turns to the Roman, all  
 hesitation gone.

ASHUR  
 He is agreeable.

MASKED ROMAN  
 Come then. I would have your ass  
 quickly.

Dagan's mirth fades.

DAGAN  
 (in Aramaic)  
 Ma hu ba'e minni? [What does he  
 want of me?]

ASHUR  
 (in Aramaic)  
 Kul ma de-mithbe'e, ant Hayyava le-  
 gayyama. O Hzi Hayye dilan tarwayna  
 avdin. [Whatever is asked, you must  
 comply. Or see both our lives  
 forfeit.]  
 (to Masked Roman)  
 He tells me he hopes you are not of  
 a gentle nature. A brute such as  
 this craves rough hands, and cock  
 their equal.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

Duradius glances at Ashur, wondering if that is really what Dagan just said.

MASKED ROMAN

Then he shall be well satisfied.  
Come.

Dagan shoots Ashur a worried look as he's led off. Ashur allows himself a dark smile. Melitta passes, returning from Gannicus. Oenomaus intercepts her.

OENOMAUUS

How does he fare?

MELITTA

Painfully. Yet he lives.

OENOMAUUS

It should not have happened.

MELITTA

To be said of many things this  
night.

Melitta turns away, the guilt of the kiss swelling. She quickly moves across the room to join Lucretia, Gaia, and Solonius. Lucretia eyes Tullius standing quietly amid the debauchery. Watching through the Golden Mask of Apollo.

LUCRETIA

He does not drink. He does not  
fuck. Why does he remain?

GAIA

The man is a mystery.

LUCRETIA

One I would have forever solved.  
(to Solonius)  
You gauged nothing of his intent?

SOLONIUS

He fears your husband attempts  
maneuver. I believe his presence is  
meant only to rattle nerves.

LUCRETIA

Would that were the end of it.  
Tullius will give voice to this  
until the din reaches Titus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GAIA

Then we must keep his tongue  
occupied.

Gaia's eyes sparkle with salacious intent.

SOLONIUS

You believe your charms will sway  
him?

GAIA

You know nothing of women,  
Solonius. And even less of their  
charms.

Gaia smiles at Tullius across the room. Tullius removes his  
mask, returning it warmly.

LUCRETIA

I would not ask you to do this.

GAIA

That is why I offer.

SOLONIUS

(not buying it)  
The only reason?

Gaia gives him a withering look.

GAIA

The man proves troublesome thorn.  
Who better to remove it than  
trusted friend?

LUCRETIA

Gaia --

GAIA

Keep thoughts towards elevating  
this house. I will see to  
Tullius... and in the act secure  
elevation of my own. To the benefit  
of all.

She kisses Lucretia and moves to join Tullius.

SOLONIUS

The woman thinks highly of herself.

LUCRETIA

An estimation deeply shared.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OFF LUCRETIA, radiating appreciation and love for her friend...

INT. GAIA'S BEDCHAMBER - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Silky fabrics have been draped from the ceiling. Overstuffed trunks spread out here and there, other wigs on display. Gaia enters, a cup of wine in her hand, a laugh on her lips. Tullius follows, his mask discarded.

GAIA

You have become a difficult man to gain private audience with. It was not always so.

TULLIUS

Much has changed since our youth.

Gaia takes him in with a coy smile.

GAIA

Not everything I hope.

He returns her smile with genuine affection.

TULLIUS

I remember a time when you were the one impossible to trap alone. Every man in Capua was at your feet.

GAIA

Now I would have but one. Standing beside me.

It's a charged moment, perfect for a kiss, but Tullius shifts the conversation.

TULLIUS

I was saddened to hear of your husband's passing.

GAIA

Were you?

A knowing smile tugs at her lips. Tullius laughs, caught in the lie.

TULLIUS

Only towards thought of you. Once again with no family to speak of. No one to care for you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GAIA  
It is a difficult thing.  
(eyes sparkling)  
To find a man who stands my equal.

Tullius grins in appreciation, favoring her boldness. He gently touches the red hair of her wig, considering it.

TULLIUS  
I always favored this color.

GAIA  
(soft)  
I know.

She kisses him. He responds, passions rising. Guides her down to the bed. Hands exploring...

TULLIUS  
The gods smile upon me, having had  
word of this evening reach my ears.

GAIA  
The fortune is mine.

Gaia lets him open her dress, exposing her bare breasts.

GAIA (cont'd)  
Yet I would have word travel no  
further.

Tullius pauses, eyes narrowing.

TULLIUS  
You petition this for yourself? Or  
the House of Batiatus?

Gaia speaks lightly, but with great calculation behind it.

GAIA  
Lucretia is as a sister to me. I  
would not see her injured by  
wagging tongue.

Tullius kisses her softly, his hands caressing her breasts.

TULLIUS  
You ask much.

GAIA  
I offer more...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Her hand slips beneath Tullius' robes. Tullius reacts, kissing her roughly. She responds in kind. Two predators devouring each other.

TULLIUS

I swear I will never speak of what happened this night. If you will deliver message to your friend and her husband. One they will take to heart, coming from you...

OFF THE DEVIL'S BARGAIN...

INT. ATRIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

The festivities are over. Petronius and the last lingering Guests are escorted to the door by Lucretia and Solonius.

PETRONIUS

Words have not inflated beyond truth. The offerings of the House of Batiatus are truly to be admired.

LUCRETIA

Even more so upon the sands. Imagine the excitement our wares would cause, if included in opening celebration of the new arena.

Petronius gives a satisfied CHUCKLE.

PETRONIUS

Capua would be blessed by such appearance. I will send word to your husband to discuss the matter.

Petronius exits with the last of his Guests. Lucretia sags in relief.

LUCRETIA

I thought this night never to end.

SOLONIUS

It concludes with this house soaring to the heavens, upon your wings.

LUCRETIA

A feat aided by your presence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Solonius forces a smile, the guilt of his actions with Tullius weighing on his conscience.

SOLONIUS

The evening would have gone as well had I never known. Perhaps more so.

LUCRETIA

The hour is late. Take to your bed, and carry with you my gratitude.

SOLONIUS

I would linger, until all guests have departed.

His eyes shift towards the villa, concerned with Tullius still within.

LUCRETIA

Gaia is a woman of great appetite. Dawn will threaten before she has had her fill.

Solonius reluctantly nods. Starts to head out. Pauses.

SOLONIUS

Lucretia?

She turns back. Solonius looks to her with great affection.

SOLONIUS (cont'd)

This house. It would be pale shadow, absent your light.

Solonius musters a smile, exits before she can respond. OFF LUCRETIA, glowing from the praise...

INT. TRICLINIUM/TROPHY ROOM - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Naevia and other Slaves return the villa to order. Naevia glances over at a deadened Diona, who avoids her look. Lucretia passes with Melitta in tow as they enter the deserted trophy room.

LUCRETIA

See everything restored to proper place. Nothing must be suspected.

Melitta's thoughts drift to her kiss with Gannicus.

MELITTA

Yes, domina.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lucretia catches the troubled look, misinterprets.

LUCRETIA

I know you feel it is a betrayal.  
Yet there are times when the truth  
is more hurtful. Titus must never  
know.

MELITTA

Domina.

Melitta moves off. Lucretia starts to leave, pauses. The GOLD MASK OF APOLLO is resting on the flat surface of the bust of Magnetius. She picks it up, eyeing it with a faint smile. She and Gaia have pulled off the impossible.

TULLIUS (O.S.)

Apollo.

Lucretia turns, surprised to see Tullius appearing from the shadows. She tenses, tries to hide it. Not wanting to give Tullius the satisfaction of knowing he frightens her.

TULLIUS

God of the sun.

LUCRETIA

And truth.

Tullius takes the mask of Apollo from Lucretia's hands.

TULLIUS

Something often obscured by the  
masks we wear.

Lucretia swallows. Nervous. Looks around the empty room.

TULLIUS (cont'd)

Your guests have abandoned you. I  
thought the toad Solonius would at  
least remain.

LUCRETIA

The hour is late. He believed you  
occupied for the night.

He nods. Runs a finger across the mask.

TULLIUS

They say Apollo brings warmth and  
prosperity, to those who would pray  
to him. Those who understand their  
place. On their knees.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He locks eyes with her. Lucretia is clearly terrified. Tries to hide it with a disarming smile.

LUCRETIA

Tullius --

TULLIUS

Did you know I often dreamt of Gaia's touch, when I was a younger man? The taste of her lips. Now they form words in ear, asking favor for this house. Placing me in difficult position.

Lucretia sees a crack in Tullius' armor. Moves to exploit it.

LUCRETIA

Gaia's affections for this house are genuine. As are those she holds for you.

TULLIUS

(soft)

Returned in kind.

He hands the mask of Apollo back to Lucretia with a warm smile.

TULLIUS (cont'd)

She holds my reply. Go to her, and see it delivered.

Tullius exits. A smile begins to bloom. Gaia has done the impossible. OFF LUCRETIA'S relief...

INT. GAIA'S BEDCHAMBER - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Lucretia rushes in, overjoyed.

LUCRETIA

Gaia --

She freezes in horror, the words constricting in her throat. REVERSE to find

GAIA DEAD,

her naked body splattered with blood. Limp arm hanging off the bed. Battered face half turned towards Lucretia. Lifeless eyes staring open. Her wig lays on the floor, dislodged by the violence.



EXTREME LOW ANGLE

as the mask of Apollo slips forgotten from Lucretia's grasp.  
It falls towards CAMERA, WIPING US TO --

INT. ATRIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - LATE NIGHT

Titus rails at Batiatus. Lucretia sits with tears streaking  
her face, shell-shocked.

TITUS

Have you lost mind!?! Again  
attempting to maneuver around  
Tullius?

BATIATUS

I only sought to elevate our  
position --

TITUS

By plunging the good name of this  
house into muck and shit!

BATIATUS

What would you have me do? Bow and  
scrape to that fucking lunatic?

TITUS

He is above our station! I gave  
warning not to provoke the man. You  
ignore it and here are the results.  
A Roman citizen. Dead in my house.

LUCRETIA

(soft)

By the hands of the very man you  
defend.

Titus levels a withering glare.

TITUS

You help set this in motion, and  
now claim innocence in the outcome?

Lucretia stands, grief giving way to anger.

LUCRETIA

I claim vengeance. His life for  
hers. Blood and brains upon the  
fucking floor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS  
Reward well deserved.

TITUS  
No. There will be no retribution.

LUCRETIA  
I will see him dead!

TITUS  
You will do as fucking commanded!

A tense beat. Lucretia calms, the fight draining out of her.

LUCRETIA  
And what of Gaia?

Titus considers the question, comes to a solution.

TITUS  
She partook of too much wine, as she was often known to do. In the night she lost footing. And fell to her death at the bottom of the cliff.

Lucretia shoots an incredulous look to Batiatus.

TITUS (cont'd)  
Do not look to him! I am the dominus of this fucking house. See it done.

Titus sweeps from the room, commanding Batiatus to follow.

TITUS (cont'd)  
Quintus.

Batiatus hesitates. Locking sympathetic eyes with Lucretia, then follows in the wake of his father. OFF LUCRETIA'S devastation...

INT. OFFICE CHAMBER - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Titus storms in with Batiatus in tow.

TITUS  
So this is why you spirited me to Neapolis. Not to find common ground, but to bury your father.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

That was not my intent.

TITUS

You knew nothing of this? It was all that woman's doing?

Batiatus doesn't answer, which is an answer.

TITUS (cont'd)

The two of you feed off each other, fattening yourselves with lies. I would see the feast at an end.

Batiatus eyes him, not liking the sound of that.

BATIATUS

What is your meaning?

TITUS

You know my fucking meaning. That ill-bred woman has brought this family nothing but shame.

BATIATUS

She is my wife!

TITUS

Because I foolishly allowed it! I wanted you to have something of your own. Something that held meaning to you, even if no one else saw it. Yet what has she given you? No dowry to speak of. No name to elevate status.

(pointedly)

And no heir to carry the name Batiatus.

Batiatus tightens, but feels the sting of truth. Titus takes a breath, calming himself.

TITUS (cont'd)

Every choice you make, shapes your fate, Quintus. I cannot change missteps of the past. But I will see you upon proper path. And Lucretia must be swept from it.

BATIATUS

You would dissolve my marriage?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITUS

No. You will make that choice for yourself. Or be gone from this house with her.

OFF BATIATUS, stricken, an impossible choice at hand...

EXT. TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - SUNRISE

The sun is just starting to crest. TWO GUARDS carry Gaia's body over to the edge of the cliff. No ceremony. Almost as if they were dumping garbage.

LUCRETIA

Wait.

They glance back to find Lucretia approaching. She goes to Gaia, tears filling her eyes. She brushes the hair from Gaia's face... gently kisses her lips one last time... nods to the Guards.

THE GUARDS

drop Gaia's body over the cliff. They turn to go.

LUCRETIA

steps to the edge, grief constricting her heart as she stares down into the vast sea of black. Gaia's body somewhere in its depths.

SLOWLY PULL BACK,

down into the shadows, Lucretia dwindling high above. Standing small and alone...

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE

