

SEVERUS
Episode Two

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FADE IN:

EXT. HARBOUR, ROME - 160 B.C.

Ancient vessels dot the HARBOUR, mostly Roman, but there are clearly some sailing ships from all over the world, the far East, the British Isles, etc.

One Roman warship is gliding over the water, slowly approaching a large pier complex. There are several ships tied up here, most are military vessels. Roman soldiers wander the docks while porters and slaves cart cargo to and fro.

We turn and focus in on the warship approaching the dock. Sitting there are a number of African men, well-dressed, surrounded by the Roman Legion. Among those men are SEVERUS, and PLAUTINIUS who stand with the various Roman soldiers is SEOK. SEVERUS stands on the edge of the deck, looking out at Rome. Seok steps over to him. He nudges Severus, who turns to him with a small smile.

SEOK

There it is.

SEVERUS

I never imagined it was so...

SEOK

Big?

Severus smirks and nods.

SEOK (CONT'D)

I love Rome. Well... I love to visit Rome.

SEVERUS

Just visit?

SEOK

Rome is like twenty cities all stuck together. That means twenty times the people, twenty times the beauty, and twenty times the problems.

SEVERUS

I would imagine.

Pulling back, we see the shore is lined with women, provocatively dressed and heavily made-up: Prostitutes. They wave and cheer at the boat, some in completely alien languages to Severus. One in particular, a Roman woman, is trying very hard to get their attention. Seok smiles warmly.

SEOK

Look, there! With the red scarf.
That's my wife.

Severus gapes and turns back to Seok.

SEVERUS

Your wife? But... She is...

SEOK

Yes, she is. And she makes great
money at it, too. In a few years,
we'll be able to afford a place for
ourselves away from Rome.

SEVERUS

I... But, don't you ever...

SEOK

(Laughs)
What? Get jealous? Why would I?
It's not a pretty world out there,
my African friend. My father told
me once the secret to success in
this world: Suffer now, prosper
later.

SEVERUS

Is this common in Rome?

SEOK

Sure. Everything is common in Rome.
Think of the most bizarre thing
you've ever seen, you'll see it
twice before breakfast.

Severus falls silent. Seok smiles at him. Behind him, a
Centurion barks a command, and Seok steps away. After a
moment, Severus turns and sits next to Plautinius.

PLAUTINIUS

There sure are a lot of eager women
on that dock.

SEVERUS

Avoid the one with the red scarf.

Plautinius frowns at him.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIER - A LITTLE LATER

Severus and Plautinius step across the pier. Severus looks
down and bites his lip, as if remembering the last pier he
was on.

A large net full of fish is lowered down to the pier. A cloud of flies has already formed around it as the eager insects dip down towards the feast.

Plautinius walks beside Severus, his mouth hanging open. At one point, we hear a fly buzzing. Plautinius stops and gags.

PLAUTINIUS

This is not what I expected at all.

SEVERUS

We have flies in Lepcis Magna.

PLAUTINIUS

Not that fat!

Severus laughs and swats some of the pesky insects away.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF ROME - LATER

Severus and Plautinius walk past several prostituted that smile and beckon them closer. Plautinius has a confused look on his face.

PLAUTINIUS

These women... Are they-?

SEVERUS

Yes.

PLAUTINIUS

By the Gods, how many are there?

SEVERUS

Likely at least one for every Roman Soldier who travels through this port.

PLAUTINIUS

It's unbelievable.

Severus looks at one dark-skinned prostitute. As he does, he gets a dark, sad look on his face.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. SEPTIMUS HOUSE, SEVERUS'S BEDROOM - MONTHS AGO

Severus is naked, but quickly pulls a tunic on. Beside him, PACCIA is also hurriedly dressing while GETA silently fumes. PIA has a hand on her mouth.

PIA
Severus... What have you done?!

Geta finally speaks.

GETA
Traitor!

SEVERUS
(Wounded)
Brother-

GETA
No!! We are brothers no more!
Paccia, I thought better of you!

PACCIA
And I of you, Geta!

GETA
What did you say?!

PACCIA
I am a woman! And the nights can
get very cold! When I come to your
bed, somehow, it gets even colder!

GETA
Are you *blaming me*?!

PIA
Everyone, please, calm down!

SEVERUS
(Calmly)
No, mother. That time is no more.

Geta steps up to Severus

GETA
Brother and betrayer. Leave.

SEVERUS
Leave?

GETA
Leave this house. Leave this city.

PUBLIUS appears at the door, obviously still sleepy and still slightly intoxicated.

PUBLIUS
What is all this shouting in my
house?

He looks at Severus and Paccia. Both of them avoid his judgmental eyes. Publius sees the bed in disarray and Geta's obvious fury.

PUBLIUS (CONT'D)

No... Son, tell me you didn't!

GETA

He did.

PACCIA

And so did I! And I'm glad! Severus has passion and strength!

GETA

You! You be silent, harlot!

PACCIA

(Infuriated)

Call me that again if you dare.

PIA

Enough! All of you, enough!

SEVERUS

Yes. Yes, it is enough. I shall go for tonight.

GETA

For longer than that.

Severus gives Geta a look.

SEVERUS

Shall you fight me, brother?

GETA

I should kill you both.

PUBLIUS

Geta! Severus! That is enough! Severus, your brother is right to hate you right now. Paccia was betrothed to him!

PACCIA

Not by my choice.

PUBLIUS

(Snaps)

Your choice is irrelevant! Your betrothal is still a promise, one that you have broken!

PACCIA

One I never made in the first place! What does it matter anyway? If I marry Severus, your family still gets the same dowry.

(Mocking)

Isn't that what's important here?

PIA

Paccia!

GETA

Father, I demand they be thrown out! Else I will kill them both where they stand.

PACCIA

You are welcome to try. I know the mettle of your blade.

Geta steps towards her. Severus steps between them.

SEVERUS

We will go.

Severus turns towards the door. He steps towards it. His mother and father step out of the way. Paccia follows him out.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STREETS OF LEPCIS MAGNA - LATE NIGHT

Severus and Paccia walk through the silent, dark streets. They stop at a bridge over the Wadi Lebda. Severus looks down at the flowing water, his face twisted in rage and despair.

SEVERUS

They are right, you know. We did betray them.

PACCIA

I will honour no vows made without my consent. I do not choose Geta. I choose you.

SEVERUS

We have both made... questionable choices.

PACCIA

What do you mean by that?

Severus hesitates.

SEVERUS

It was my fault, Paccia. The attack on the Palace. The destruction of the pier. I trusted the wrong man, and people died. Some of those people... Some of them I killed.

PACCIA

I don't care. Severus, do not withdraw from me like this! That is what Geta does.

Severus turns to her to say something, but stops. He frowns and thinks for a long moment.

SEVERUS

They will never let me return home now.

PACCIA

And I am certain my father shall be equally enraged.

SEVERUS

Will he hurt you?

PACCIA

He will try. Since I became a woman, I have not suffered my father's wrath with complicity. I know how to hurt him back. I do not fear him.

SEVERUS

I am sorry that you must.

PACCIA

It was inevitable.

There is a long silence with only the bubbling of the river beneath them.

SEVERUS

I should leave in the morning.

PACCIA

Leave?

SEVERUS

For Rome.

PACCIA

Not alone!

SEVERUS

Yes, alone.

PACCIA

Do you expect me to stay here and suffer the wrath of the Septimus house and my father? They may stone me in the street!

SEVERUS

They will not.

PACCIA

They will!

SEVERUS

You and my brother were betrothed,
not married. Besides, I know a safe
place for you to stay.

PACCIA

What safe place?

SEVERUS

With a friend.

PACCIA

This had better not be another
friend like the others.

SEVERUS

No. His name is Plautinius. His
family is not wealthy, but they are
good people, and his father is a
priest.

Severus smiles at her. She frowns at him for a long moment,
but then realisation dawns on her face.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STREETS OF ROME - PRESENT

Severus turns his head away from the prostitute and looks to
Plautinius.

PLAUTINIUS

We are lost, my friend. How are we
to find the Palace? This place is a
maze.

SEVERUS

Follow anyone from the Legion or
dressed in fine clothes.

PLAUTINIUS

And that will lead us to either
barracks or some merchant's home.

SEVERUS

Do you have a better suggestion?

Plautinius thinks for a moment.

PLAUTINIUS

We ask someone.

SEVERUS

I hope your Latin is better than it was last year.

PLAUTINIUS

It is. How is yours?

SEVERUS

Quite good, I'm told.

PLAUTINIUS

I recall you saying you would never dirty your tongue with Latin.

SEVERUS

(grimly)
Things change. We must change with them.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE - LATER

Severus and Plautinius approach the impressive structure. Around them are senators, wealthy men of influence, street vendors selling expensive finery, and of course, the ever-present Roman Legion. Severus looks up in awe.

SEVERUS

It is larger than I dreamed.

PLAUTINIUS

It should be. Like the coliseum, many men died building it.

SEVERUS

Well... That is certainly symbolic.

The two approach the Palace. As they do, a pair of Roman Guards step out to meet them.

GUARD 1

State your business.

SEVERUS

I am here from Lepcis Magna. I received a scholarship to come to Rome. I was told to come straight to the Palace.

GUARD 2

What are your names?

SEVERUS

I am Septimus Severus. This is Plautinius.

PLAUTINIUS

Hail.

The guards look them over, but don't seem to find any reason to detain them.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Severus and Plautinius wander the wide halls, clearly lost. Plautinius frowns and keeps looking back and forth.

PLAUTINIUS

I am certain we are moving in circles.

SEVERUS

We will be late if we do not find some sign of where we are. And more importantly, where to go.

PLAUTINIUS

Ah! Over here, these stairs!

Pan around to show a staircase going down.

SEVERUS

Why would we go down?

PLAUTINIUS

Is not the senate chamber down?

SEVERUS

I don't think so.

PLAUTINIUS

Well, it is a direction we have not tried.

SEVERUS

That doesn't make it correct.

PLAUTINIUS

Nor incorrect.

Plautinius heads down the stairs. Severus sighs and follows.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, BASEMENT - MINUTES LATER.

Severus and Plautinius wander through dark hallways. We hear a voice in the distance. The two hurry towards it.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, BASEMENT, STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Severus and Plautinius peer into a large room full of statuary, art, and large objects made of bronze. A man (AUCTIONEER) stands at the front of the room, and a small crowd is gathered around him.

AUCTIONEER

The bid is currently five hundred.
Do I hear five-hundred and fifty?
Yes?

A man raises his hand.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

Five-fifty. One? Twice? Three times? Very well, it is sold. Rome thanks you, sir. Next up is a piece of bronze from the Coliseum itself.

Severus and Plautinius slip away from the room.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, HALLWAY - LATER

Severus and Plautinius walk along the hall again, both looking confused.

PLAUTINIUS

Those were priceless works of art.

SEVERUS

It is shameful. They tax the world, and still don't have enough money for the wars they must wage to keep it.

PLAUTINIUS

Bronze from the Coliseum... Do they intend to strip it bare? Sell Rome to save Rome?

SEVERUS

It's disgusting.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, GREAT HALL - LATER

There is a large feast set out, and many young men and women sit enjoying the fare. A few senators mill about here and there, and members of the Praetorian Guard stand at attention around the room.

At the end of the room, sitting comfortably but looking weary, is an old MARCUS AURELIAS (Long greying hair, thin, almost frail, but dignified and with sharp eyes.) Beside him is his wife FAUSTINA (Younger than Marcus, late thirties to mid-forties, attractive with a smile pasted on her face,) and his daughter LUCILLA (Late teens to Early Twenties with her father's sharp eyes.)

One of the Praetorian Guards stops Severus and Plautinius as they enter. Over the din of the room, it is hard to hear what they say, but the guards let them in. Severus and Plautinius find a pair of empty seats. As they sit down together, some of the fairer-skinned Romans move away.

Soon, the Emperor stands and raises his hands. The room begins to quiet.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I would like to welcome all of our young scholars to Rome, the seat of power for all the world.

Behind him, Marcus's son COMMODUS (Slightly older than Lucilla, with the same sharp eyes, but his have a strange glazed-over look about them) shuffles over and takes a seat. Marcus Aurelias notices this, but says nothing.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

I have always believed that education and intellect is a far stronger and more reliable friend than the most well-forged sword. You are the future of the Republic, all of you.

Severus scoffs. Marcus's eyes flicker in his direction, but he continues.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

During your stay here, you will learn from masters of all disciplines, music, art, mathematics, architecture, and take these skills back to your homes, to teach others, to spread knowledge and improve the lives of everyone. Those who have great knowledge and wisdom are obligated to share it with those who seek it. You have come to the great city of Rome to seek it, and soon, others will come to you for the same reason.

Severus mutters.

SEVERUS

I wonder what else shall spread to everyone.

Plautinius looks at Severus in horror. One of the Praetorian guard steps over, threateningly.

PRAETORIAN GUARD

Did you say something, citizen?

Severus does not react.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Young man... Yes, you. Let me hear your voice. I promise, I will hear you fairly.

Marcus Aurelias waves the guard off. The guard takes a few steps back. Severus looks uncertain, but turns to Marcus Aurelias.

SEVERUS

I... I meant no offence, sir-

MARCUS AURELIAS

No, no, please. Offend me.

Severus looks shocked and embarrassed. He clears his throat.

SEVERUS

It just seems as if... As if Rome itself might be short of some of that wisdom.

The Guard draws his sword. Severus turns and sees a blade coming at him.

Laughter is heard. The guard stops, and turns to Marcus Aurelias.

MARCUS AURELIAS

(To Severus)
What is your name?

SEVERUS

Septimius Severus of Lepcis Magna.

Marcus Aurelias nods and smiles.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I would appreciate a word with you, young man, at the end of the feast.

The guard looks at Marcus Aurelias in shock, but sheathes his blade and steps back. Plautinius looks as if he is going to faint.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

Please, friends, Romans... eat, drink, and enjoy your time here.

The feast resumes and the chatter once again drowns out individual remarks. Several of the scholars are looking at Severus, both with envy and rage.

PLAUTINIUS

If your goal here was to make new friends, I suspect you have made a grievous error.

SEVERUS

Yes! I see that! Why does the Emperor want to see me?

PLAUTINIUS

Perhaps to kill you where your blood will not spoil this great meal.

SEVERUS

I have no intention of dying today.

PLAUTINIUS

Your intentions don't factor into it. These are the Praetorian Guard. They are the second most feared and respected elite soldiers in the entire Empire.

SEVERUS

The second? Who are the first?

PLAUTINIUS

You don't want to know! Just... just eat.

SEVERUS

I don't even recognise most of this food.

PLAUTINIUS

Then you will have an interesting last meal, if nothing else.

Severus starts to argue, but decides to let it go. He takes some kind of dried fruit and a slab of cooked meat onto his plate. A servant comes over and fills his cup of wine.

Behind Severus, one of the Roman Senators (CASSIUS,) watches the young boy with keen interest.

CUT TO:

INT. EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - LATER

Severus is ushered into a large, ornate room by the Praetorian Guards.

There, sitting in luxury, is Marcus Aurelias, flanked by his daughter Lucilla and his son Commodus.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Ah! Septimus Severus, welcome.
Please, do come closer.

Severus walks forward, hesitant, half-expecting a sword to enter his backside.

SEVERUS

Sir, I apologise for my earlier-

MARCUS AURELIAS

Don't.

SEVERUS

Sir?

MARCUS AURELIAS

Don't apologise. It would cheapen you. Please, come forward. This is my daughter, Lucilla, and my son Commodus.

SEVERUS

Hello.

LUCILLA

You're from Africa.

SEVERUS

I am.

LUCILLA

I've never actually talked to someone from Africa before.

SEVERUS

Well... You are talking to someone now.

LUCILLA

My brother says you are all savages, and that you eat people.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Lucilla!

LUCILLA

I'm certain he is wrong.

COMMODOUS

I'm not. Africans hunt men for sport.

SEVERUS

(Winces)

No we don't. Besides, how is that different from forcing slaves to butcher each other for entertainment?

Marcus Aurelias laughs. Commodus looks infuriated.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Commodus, Lucilla, would you allow this young man and I to talk for a moment?

Commodus fumes, but he obediently leaves. Lucilla stands and slowly follows, but first stops to look at Severus.

LUCILLA

You do not look savage to me.

She smiles, then leaves. Severus looks at Marcus Aurelias with shock and confusion.

MARCUS AURELIAS

You have criticisms of my great Republic?

SEVERUS

N... Yes.

MARCUS AURELIAS

(smiles)
So do I.

Severus's mouth hangs open.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

Don't look so shocked. No one knows the flaws of a kingdom more than the one who rules it.

SEVERUS

But... You could change things.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I could, if the Gods were kind and smiled on me more often. In truth, there are days I believe the Gods seek to make a non-believer out of me.

SEVERUS

I don't understand.

Marcus Aurelias stands and approaches a table where more fresh fruit and cups of wine are placed. He pours a cup for himself.

MARCUS AURELIAS

No, probably not. I try to be a fair ruler, but I am only a man. I can make it illegal to commit murder, but men will still murder, for no law can change the hearts of men.

SEVERUS

You are... Not what I expected.

MARCUS AURELIAS

No? Good, then.

He smiles and takes a sip of wine.

SEVERUS

Where I come from, Roman culture erodes our own. Romans appear arrogant and beyond reproach. Here, I see a city struggling with poverty and shame. It is a hypocrisy.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Yes it is. And every young man in the world believes they can do better. They are all right, and wrong.

SEVERUS

I had no idea the Emperor spoke in riddles.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I speak with wisdom. With experience. To the young, it sounds like a riddle. So tell me, young man from Africa, Why did you come to Rome?

Severus hesitates.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

Interesting. You didn't want to come.

Severus looks shocked.

SEVERUS

It is... complicated.

Marcus Aurelias pauses and pours a second cup of wine. He offers it to Severus.

MARCUS AURELIAS

You must be the young man I was told about.

(MORE)

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)
 Fought a group of Garamante bandits
 who had attacked the Palace. Am I
 correct?

Severus looks shocked once more. He takes the cup of wine robotically.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)
 Speak, boy. I know you have a sharp
 tongue. Don't fear reprisal. I
 value honesty, even if we disagree.
 In fact, especially if we disagree.

SEVERUS
 Well... Why? Why does Rome do the
 things it does? Why does it fight
 to expand and slowly destroy the
 cultures it invades? Why does it
 struggle at the edge while the
 middle crumbles?

Marcus Aurelias ponders for a moment before answering.

MARCUS AURELIAS
 Hm. Culture. We stole our culture
 from the Greeks. What do we know?
 We don't even have our own Gods.
 But a melding of cultures is good.
 It challenges old beliefs, forges
 new ones, inspires cooperation and
 conflict. Rome is an idea, a goal,
 an inspiration. We will falter, we
 will fall, and perhaps even burn
 again. But the Roman Republic will
 not soon be forgotten. So I
 apologise if our ways influence
 that of your people. I only wish to
 spread one idea.

SEVERUS
 The wise should rule the foolish.

MARCUS AURELIAS
 And may the Gods have mercy on us
 all if it ever becomes the other
 way around.

Severus takes a sip of wine, frowning. He clearly seems uncomfortable with what he's learned. Marcus Aurelias watches with interest.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)
 You're thinking. Most men your age
 would be shouting.

SEVERUS
 At the Emperor?

MARCUS AURELIAS

I am just a man. I can be wrong.
Just as you can be. That is the
source of your confusion, isn't it?
Which of us is wrong.

SEVERUS

... I am confused.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Good. The worst senators are the
ones who are certain, steadfast,
unwavering. They will cling to
fallacy even in obvious defeat.

There is a long moment of silence. Severus sips wine and
stares at Marcus Aurelias. The Emperor returns his gaze, each
one sizing up the other.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

What did you do back home? What was
your field of expertise?

SEVERUS

I worked with animals in the
Hippodrome. I helped organise
games, entertainment, that sort of
thing.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Oh? Splendid. Were you well
regarded?

SEVERUS

I suppose.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Well, how would you like to do the
same thing here? At the Coliseum?

Severus almost spits out his wine.

SEVERUS

The Coliseum?! But, surely you
already have people to-

MARCUS AURELIAS

Yes, I do. But I know the extent of
their abilities. Now I want to know
the extent of yours.

Severus gives him a dark look.

SEVERUS

To serve Rome?

MARCUS AURELIAS

To serve man.

Severus is taken aback by the answer. Marcus Aurelias smiles.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)
Tomorrow morning, go to the
Coliseum. See a man named Atticus.
I shall send word that you are to
begin working with him. I want you
to impress him.

SEVERUS
What makes you think I will impress
him?

MARCUS AURELIAS
You've impressed me. You are a
strong, passionate, clever, and
humble young man, Septimus Severus.
You have qualities I would like to
see in my own children.

Severus looks at him with an open mouth.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)
You may go now. Be wise, Severus.
And don't lose your fire.

Severus awkwardly steps away and back out through the door.
Marcus Aurelias finishes his wine and sits down again. His
son, Commodus, seems to appear from the edge of the room.

COMMODUS
He disrespected you.

MARCUS AURELIAS
He is not the only one. If my own
children will not listen, what hope
do I have to rule a mighty
Republic?

COMMODUS
I would have killed him.

MARCUS AURELIAS
Yes, and that would certainly have
improved Rome's greatness. You are
too proud, my son.

COMMODUS
You are old, weak, and drunk,
father.

MARCUS AURELIAS
Not so drunk as you might think.
Not as weak as you would desire.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

Marcus Aurelias is asleep beside his wife, Faustina. We focus in on her eyes. A shadow moves past our vision. Her eyes open.

We follow her gaze to the edge of the chamber, where someone is walking slowly, quietly, away from the chamber.

Faustina rises. She slips away from Marcus Aurelias and walks into the hallway.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Faustina walks down the long hallway, coming to an archway into a much smaller antechamber. Inside is all darkness. She steps through the darkened archway. A pair of hands reach out from the darkness and begin to stroke her hips. She closes her eyes in delight. The hands rise up, and the face of Cassius appears from the shadows.

FAUSTINA

(Whispers)
Quietly.

CASSIUS

(Whispers)
Of course, my love.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLISEUM - MORNING

The great structure is as breathtaking and impressive as the Palace was. It gleams in the morning sun. Severus approaches it, a little intimidated and unsure of himself. Plautinius stands beside him.

PLAUTINIUS

I still cannot believe the Emperor himself sent you here. And after you spoke with such disrespect.

SEVERUS

He is a strange man. He admits Rome is faulty. He speaks ill of the Republic and his own children.

PLAUTINIUS

My friend, I believe you have a destiny.

Severus looks uncomfortable.

SEVERUS
I don't like that idea.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM - LATER

Severus approaches a row of animal cages. Lions, elephants, hippo's and many other creatures of Africa sit behind cages and watch him with a wary eye. Severus looks them over, careful not to get too close, nor make eye contact for too long.

A voice rings out from behind him. (ATTICUS)

ATTICUS
The Hippo's are the worst.

Severus turns. Behind him is Atticus, an older man, Roman, wearing fine clothes, but carrying a whip, sword, and shield. He approaches Severus and holds up a small scroll.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)
You are Severus?

SEVERUS
Yes, I am.

ATTICUS
The Emperor thinks much of you. I have been warden of these beasts for fifteen years. Are you here to replace me, African?

SEVERUS
What? No! And what does-

ATTICUS
You should be in one of these cages, African.

SEVERUS
Watch your tongue!

ATTICUS
Or what? You'll cut it out and eat it?

SEVERUS
(Angrily)
I would never eat such venomous meat, you soft, pale-fleshed Roman bastard!

ATTICUS

(Smirks)

Oh, this one speaks well. Perhaps your pretty words shall even calm these monstrous beasts. Shall I open the cages and let us see?

Severus narrows his eyes.

SEVERUS

Feel free. I suspect these beasts will be hungry for the hand that whips them.

Atticus looks Severus over.

ATTICUS

You're not like other Africans I've met. But then, most of them, I met with my sword during wartime. You can speak. Can you read?

SEVERUS

Yes, and unlike you, my lips don't move while I do it.

Atticus laughs.

ATTICUS

And what of numbers? Mathematics?

SEVERUS

Yes, I am educated.

ATTICUS

Good. Educated, literate, you speak excellent Latin and have experience with beasts. I may be able to make use of you.

SEVERUS

The Emperor sent me here to work on the games. Not to spar with an old fool.

ATTICUS

And what are your plans, boy? What do you know of the games?

SEVERUS

I know when I am being insulted. Give me that whip, and I shall show you what I can do.

Atticus laughs.

ATTICUS

I should put you in the arena. Test you there against our massive bull elephant.

SEVERUS

There is no test you can think of that I cannot pass.

Atticus sizes Severus up for a long moment.

ATTICUS

If it were anyone but the Emperor himself, you would be mucking out the cages. All right, African. I believe I have a task for you.

Atticus beckons for Severus to follow. Severus glares at him, but follows.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, SLAVE PIT - LATER

Inside a cage normally used for slaves and prisoners is a sick-looking leopard. Severus and Atticus stand looking at it. It seems to have laboured breathing, but otherwise no wounds.

ATTICUS

This animal has been ill for days. We would normally just kill it, but we have only one leopard, and the crowd loves him.

SEVERUS

What does he eat?

ATTICUS

All kinds of things, mostly Moors, Christians, other beasts.

Severus looks at Atticus in disgust.

SEVERUS

The prisoners, were any of them ill?

ATTICUS

Probably. We get savages from all over the world, all with their own kinds of sickness. It's never bothered the animals before.

SEVERUS

What of poisons?

ATTICUS
What of them?

SEVERUS
Are any of the weapons poisoned?

ATTICUS
No. If we gave the prisoners
poison, some would use it on
themselves.

SEVERUS
Of course. Of course they would.
What if they snuck poison in? What
if they took the poison, but it
wasn't enough to kill them? Or it
simply took too long? Then you let
the leopard eat his flesh, which is
poisoned. Then you have a poisoned
Leopard.

Atticus rubs his chin, considering this.

ATTICUS
Most likely then, it is belladonna
or perhaps hemlock. I shall consult
with an herbalist.

SEVERUS
And perhaps search your prisoners
more thoroughly.

Severus turns to Atticus.

ATTICUS
Perhaps.

SEVERUS
You will be in some trouble if the
leopard dies, won't you?

ATTICUS
Perhaps.

SEVERUS
Then, you are welcome. May we begin
discussing the games now?

Atticus sneers, but seems to have a little less hostility.

ATTICUS
Come. We shall discuss the games.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLISEUM - LATE AFTERNOON, WEEKS LATER

Establishing shot.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM - CONTINUOUS

It is obvious that much time has passed. Severus is more confident. He directs guards with gestures of his hand. We can see the seats are filling quickly, and the Emperor's Banners are set up around the outer ring. Marcus Aurelias is there, in the Emperor's seat, with his family.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, ARENA - CONTINUOUS

From the arena, Severus looks up. He sees Marcus Aurelias, and gives a slight bow of his head. Marcus Aurelias seems to see him and nod in return.

Atticus approaches Severus. The older man looks somewhat dubious.

ATTICUS

I will admit, I'm eager to see if your... strange game will please the Emperor.

SEVERUS

It is not strange. This actually happened. It was the most horrifying moment of my life. Now... It is entertainment for fat Romans.

Atticus laughs.

ATTICUS

Prove yourself, African.

Severus gives Atticus a look of warning.

SEVERUS

After today, you will use my name.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, ARENA - MINUTES LATER

The games are beginning. In the middle of the arena is a large, wood-constructed miniature version of the Palace at Lepcis Magna that rests on a large pile of rocks.

A number of slaves in old, battered, or obviously faked Roman armour stand there. There is a long wooden pier above an opening in the floor. Other prisoners and slaves enter the ring, walking beside elephants.

The crowd cheers, clearly expecting some kind of combat with the elephants. As the gladiators playing the Garamantes begin lashing the elephants to the pier, there seems to be some great confusion. The crowd hushes.

Pan over to Marcus Aurelias, who leans forward with interest.

One of the Garamante gladiators lights a small fire, and the elephants begin bounding away, tearing down the pillars around the pier. The crowd goes wild.

The Garamante gladiators begin climbing pre-placed ropes to get to the top of the structure where the Roman gladiators wait.

The gladiators begin fighting, and Severus watches with a mix of pride and disgust.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA - MONTHS AGO

Severus charges at a Garamante with savage ferocity, plunging a sword into him.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, EMPEROR'S PRIVATE BOX, PRESENT

Severus enters with Atticus, and they stand well behind the Emperor and his family. As Severus waits patiently, Commodus turns to Severus with an ugly look.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, ARENA - MINUTES LATER

It appears the combat is dying down, as most of the Roman Gladiators are still standing, but few of the Garamante Gladiators remain. Those that remain are quickly overwhelmed. One is pushed over the side, and falls to the arena floor below. We hear the sound of snapping bone as he lands.

The crowd cheers wildly.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, EMPEROR'S PRIVATE BOX - CONTINUOUS

Marcus Aurelias smiles. He raises a hand and waves Severus and Atticus forward.

The two obediently step forward.

MARCUS AURELIAS
Severus... Is this a fair
representation of the attack on the
Palace?

SEVERUS
As best as I could do. Though, I
suspect there were fewer Roman
defenders and more elephants.

MARCUS AURELIAS
(smiles)
Amazing. Brilliant tactics. Very
unlike the typical Garamante
assault.

SEVERUS
Yes, sir.

Marcus Aurelias gives Severus a look, but then turns to Atticus.

MARCUS AURELIAS
What do you think, old friend?

ATTICUS
The crowd seems to love it.

Marcus Aurelias stands up. He holds out his thumb, and raises it high into the air. The crowd cheers even more, and Severus looks surprised, not so much at the reaction of the crowd, but at his own elation. He looks to Atticus.

The older man smirks and nods his head to Severus.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)
Excellent job, Severus.

Severus allows himself a small smile of pride.

SEVERUS
And you said it would be too
expensive.

ATTICUS
Oh, it is. But if the crowds come
back for the next show, maybe, just
maybe... it is worth it.

Atticus smiles and nods to Marcus Aurelias.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I look forward to your next show,
Severus.

Severus smiles and nods to Marcus Aurelias. He looks down at the Arena where the guards are entering to bring the prisoners in. The elephants are led away. The crowds are chanting and singing. Severus steps to the edge and looks out at the massive crowd. He finds himself smiling.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. LEPICIS MAGNA, PLAUTINIUS'S HOUSE - MONTHS AGO

Severus and Paccia sit in a modest home while Plautinius stands next to them, gaping in disbelief.

PLAUTINIUS

Married?

SEVERUS

Yes. Quietly, last night, before either of our families could object.

PACCIA

And they shall, quite violently if given the chance.

PLAUTINIUS

And you think *I* can protect her here?

SEVERUS

Your father performed the ceremony... for a favour.

PLAUTINIUS

Severus, your family will cut you off! You will have no money, nowhere to stay, they won't even let you work with the animals at the Hippodrome now! Where will you go?

Beat.

SEVERUS

Rome.

PLAUTINIUS

(Laughs)
Rome?! At least you have your sense of humour, my friend.

SEVERUS

Rome.

Plautinius's smile fades.

PLAUTINIUS

You're serious.

SEVERUS

I received the scholarship for helping fight the Garamantes. I suspect Geta shall... decline the offer for himself.

PLAUTINIUS

But you hate Rome! You hate the Romans! You once told me you would spit on their gods if you could find them.

SEVERUS

As you said, Plautinius, I can't stay here. But I cannot take Paccia with me.

PLAUTINIUS

I don't understand. Why not? If you two are legally wed, then-

SEVERUS

If the Romans ever learn that I was tricked into helping the Garamantes, they will kill me, and almost certainly my wife.

PACCIA

And I can only stay safe here if I am under the protection of someone else's house.

PLAUTINIUS

My father must have demanded some great favour for this arrangement.

SEVERUS

Yes. He asked that I take you with me.

Plautinius's jaw drops.

PLAUTINIUS

To Rome?!

SEVERUS

To study. With me.

PLAUTINIUS

Wait... Won't I be in danger?

SEVERUS

Why? We are not related, certainly not married.

PLAUTINIUS

... True... But Severus... What do you plan to study in Rome?

Severus shrugs.

SEVERUS

At this point, all I know is that I must go to Rome. From there, I suppose I shall have to improvise.

Plautinius laughs.

PLAUTINIUS

Improvise. That is your specialty, isn't it.

Plautinius sighs and seems to think it over for a long, tense moment.

PLAUTINIUS (CONT'D)

When do we leave?

SEVERUS

Dawn.

PLAUTINIUS

Dawn?!

SEVERUS

There is a Roman Naval ship ready to sail in the morning. The Legate has arranged a place for two.

PLAUTINIUS

I... I need to pack!

Plautinius runs off across the house to begin gathering his belongings. Severus smiles, then turns to Paccia.

PACCIA

I'm so sorry. I put you in this danger.

SEVERUS

I had an equal hand, Paccia. I made a choice. I suffer as a result.

PACCIA

I seduced you.

SEVERUS

I let you.

Severus smiles.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

I am responsible for my actions,
just as you are for yours. The deed
is done, and I do not regret it. I
regret that it has wounded both our
families.

PACCIA

As do I.

SEVERUS

But I see now, no matter our
choices, someone would suffer.
Whether it would be us, or our
families, to be trapped in a
marriage without love is as cruel
as betraying a betrothal.

PACCIA

Do you love me?

Severus smiles.

SEVERUS

I think I always have... But I
chose not to, for Geta.

Paccia smiles and kisses him. When the kiss breaks, she puts
a hand to his cheek.

PACCIA

Why must it be Rome? Why not run?
We could flee across the desert, or
the sea, and find someplace for
ourselves in the world.

SEVERUS

(Smiles weakly) Without coin?
Without protection? We would
starve.

PACCIA

Then let us starve together!

SEVERUS

(Grimly) No, Paccia. I will go to
Rome. I will take what I can from
the Romans, and return for you.

PACCIA

I do not wish to be apart from you.

SEVERUS

Nor I from you. But our suffering
shall be short-lived. Then... Then
we shall be prosperous.

PACCIA

What if Rome changes you?

Severus smiles.

SEVERUS

Perhaps I shall change Rome.

Paccia smiles slightly, despite herself. She kisses him.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, EMPEROR'S PRIVATE BOX - PRESENT

Severus looks out at the crowd, smiling with some pride, but his eyes carry a deep sadness.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, ARENA - DAYS LATER

A group of six gladiators are chained to the ground by very long chains around their necks. A very healthy, not-chained leopard paces back and forth, out of the gladiators reach. It seems to be trying to decide which one to attack. It finally seems to decide on one, and pounces. The crowd roars with excitement. We pull back to see Severus watching from the sidelines.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, SLAVE PIT - DAYS LATER

Severus walks among some of the imprisoned men. One of them is an African, like him.

SEVERUS

You... Why are you here?

AFRICAN

I killed twenty pale Roman bastards when they marched on my village.

SEVERUS

I know your accent. You are a Garamante.

AFRICAN

And you are a traitor to Africa!

SEVERUS

They call us savages. You would prove them right. I will prove them wrong.

AFRICAN

They will throw you into this ring
beside me.

Severus smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. COLISEUM, ARENA - LATER

The African Garamante has a single spear and flees across the arena. He is being chased by an enraged rhinoceros.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLISEUM - EVENING.

The Emperor and his family are being loaded into a carriage. Severus and Atticus trail behind the entourage. Marcus Aurelias smiles to Severus.

MARCUS AURELIAS

You will join us for the
festivities this evening, won't
you?

SEVERUS

What festivities?

MARCUS AURELIAS

To celebrate the most successful
month of games in a decade.

Marcus smiles. Atticus looks a little envious, but not maliciously. Severus nods, dumbly.

Marcus Aurelias climbs into the carriage, and the guards usher it away.

ATTICUS

I have not received an invitation
to the Palace in many years.

SEVERUS

Well then... let us go.

The two begin to walk behind the procession.

ATTICUS

You've impressed him.

SEVERUS

That much is obvious.

ATTICUS

Be careful. Roman senators consider anyone who the Emperor smiles at as a threat.

SEVERUS

I don't understand. Why?

ATTICUS

Senators wish to be the Emperor. Or they wish to do away with the very concept of an Emperor. Some want to return to the old ways.

SEVERUS

I care not for politics.

ATTICUS

It doesn't matter. Good men have died over less.

Severus stops. Atticus keeps walking.

SEVERUS

Is that why you treated me like a slave when we met?

ATTICUS

Oh no. I really did hate you.

Severus runs to catch up.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

But for a dirty savage, you have a lot of qualities I like. You are a better man than most Romans.

SEVERUS

People keep telling me that.

ATTICUS

(Smiles)
Men of power guard their power jealously, like a lioness protecting her cubs. Tread lightly, tonight. Stay humble.

SEVERUS

I thought this was an honour.

ATTICUS

It is. Do watch your back. It may sprout daggers.

INT. PALACE, GREAT HALL - LATER

Another great feast is happening. This time, it seems the Emperor and many senators are the primary attendants. The Praetorian Guard stand sentinel at the entry ways. Severus and Atticus enter to great applause. Severus is shocked, but smiles humbly and bows his head.

A servant offers them cups of wine. They each take one.

Marcus Aurelias spots them across the room.

MARCUS AURELIAS
My friends! Welcome!

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, GREAT HALL - LATER

Severus sits beside Lucilla. Commodus sits on the other side of her, and Marcus Aurelias sits beside Commodus. On the other side of Marcus Aurelias is Faustina, and beside her is the senator Cassius.

MARCUS AURELIAS
Severus, you have impressed many important people here in Rome.

SEVERUS
Thank you, sir.

LUCILLA
Even my brother enjoys your games.

COMMODUS
Yes! Especially when you chained the gladiators and let the animals wander free. I've never seen so much blood!

MARCUS AURELIAS
Most of the arena battles before were very standard. Re-enactments of old campaigns, men fighting beasts, but you have shown some real inventiveness.

FAUSTINA
I don't care for these games, myself. Excuse me.

Faustina stands and steps away from the table. Marcus Aurelias watches her leave, then turns to Commodus. Commodus is staring at Cassius.

SEVERUS
Sir...

Marcus Aurelias turns back to Severus.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)
I apologise if I-

MARCUS AURELIAS
Don't apologise. My wife has...
other interests.

Cassius shoots a worried look at Marcus Aurelias, but turns instead to Severus to cover his panic.

CASSIUS
Severus, I understand your games
are based on some real battles
you've experienced.

SEVERUS
Only one. The siege of the palace
at Lepcis Magna.

CASSIUS
So you have experience with the
savage Garamantes.

Severus seems hesitant to answer.

SEVERUS
I do. Unpleasant experience.

CASSIUS
(Smirks)
There seems to be no other kind.

COMMODUS
We should send a full column to
wipe them all out.

MARCUS AURELIAS
Oh yes? And what of their women and
children?

COMMODUS
I don't understand.

MARCUS AURELIAS
Shall we destroy all of them? Show
the world that Rome is a merciless
fire that burns its enemies away?

COMMODUS
Yes!

SEVERUS
That is already how Rome is seen in
Africa.

Commodus turns to Severus, almost angrily.

CASSIUS

Is it?

SEVERUS

That is why the Garamantes have so many allies. It is so with many tribes, and of course, the Moors. If Rome were not so heavy-handed with their legions, and did not tax so heavily, the free cities would not be so keen to HARBOUR them. The Garamantes are brutal even to the rest of Africa.

COMMODUS

Then why ally with them?

MARCUS AURELIAS

Because we are their common enemy.

SEVERUS

Exactly.

CASSIUS

I see. So if Rome were seen to be benevolent, these savages would lose their support. And what of the Garamantes themselves? Or more importantly, the Moors. What could we do to temper their hatred?

SEVERUS

I don't think there is anything. I suspect... They think Rome will murder them all to take their lands and corrupt their culture.

CASSIUS

Do tell.

Pull back to see Atticus, a little further down the table, watching Cassius speak with Severus. Marcus Aurelias listens intently. Atticus looks worried.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, GREAT HALL - LATER

Severus and Cassius are still talking, while Marcus Aurelias listens, smiling.

CASSIUS

But you do speak their language?

SEVERUS

Of course.

CASSIUS

Astonishing. Great Caesar, I believe this man may be the solution to our problems with the Moors in Spain.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Perhaps.

SEVERUS

What do you mean?

CASSIUS

Well, our attempts at negotiation with them have all met with brutal violence. But you are African, you speak their language, you understand their ways. Perhaps you could help us.

Severus looks terrified.

SEVERUS

Oh! Oh, no. I don't think I could do that.

CASSIUS

But think of it. If you could convince the Moors to stop their attacks, even forge some kind of peace, Rome could pull much of it's forces out of Africa. It would relieve us of the terrible burden of fighting on that front.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I agree. And I suspect, Severus, that you would find Africa to be a much more Roman-free place once that happens.

Severus looks at Marcus Aurelias with shock.

CASSIUS

If you'll excuse me, I promised I would meet with members of the Merchant's Council this evening. I have already kept them waiting far too long.

MARCUS AURELIAS

By all means, Cassius. Don't let us keep you from your senatorial duties.

Cassius bows.

CASSIUS

Thank you, great Caesar.

Cassius turns and heads for one of the exits. Severus looks to Marcus Aurelias.

SEVERUS

I cannot perform this task you suggest, sir.

MARCUS AURELIAS

No? Atticus tells me you can convince lions to purr like kittens, and elephants to stand on two legs like a man without use of a whip.

SEVERUS

That is different by a wide margin.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Yes, it is. And it is dangerous. But Cassius is correct. If ever someone could convince these savages to stop their raids, it would be someone like you.

SEVERUS

What if I refuse?

MARCUS AURELIAS

You are free to do so. However, should you accept and succeed, you would rise very fast in Rome. Perhaps you could oversee Rome's African province yourself someday.

Severus's eyes go wide, and he sits back as if slapped.

SEVERUS

Me?

MARCUS AURELIAS

Severus, Rome needs good men. Wise men. Will you be one of my wise men?

Severus stares blankly. He turns and sees Lucilla smiling, while Commodus appears to be watching with cold eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. SEVERUS'S ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Severus sits with an open bottle of wine next to him. Plautinius sits across from him, listening to Severus's tale. He is wide-eyed with disbelief.

PLAUTINIUS

The Moors?

SEVERUS

Yes.

PLAUTINIUS

It's madness.

SEVERUS

No. He has the right of it.

PLAUTINIUS

You are drunk!

SEVERUS

But I'm not wrong.

PLAUTINIUS

It's been less than a year, and now you are some... ambassador?! The Gods either truly love you, Septimus Severus, or bitterly despise you.

SEVERUS

I'm told the one looks very much like the other.

PLAUTINIUS

Spain? You will go to Spain?

SEVERUS

Yes. This man, the Emperor... I have studied him. I learned much of him before I came to Rome. He is a man who never does anything on a whim. Marcus Aurelias has a plan.

PLAUTINIUS

Well, if anyone should, it's him.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBER - LATER

Marcus Aurelias looks exhausted. He finds Faustina naked, lying in bed waiting for him. He eyes her with a wry smile.

MARCUS AURELIAS

You look enticing tonight.

FAUSTINA

Well, husband, I have procured a special wine for this evening, with some special Egyptian herbs that should prove to be quite... exciting.

Marcus Aurelias smiles.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Is that so?

He steps forward and picks up the bottle sitting there. He sniffs it and smiles.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

What is it?

FAUSTINA

The petals of the Blue Lotus flower, when soaked in wine, are supposed to inspire lust in any man or woman.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Oh yes? Where did you find such a rare flower?

FAUSTINA

A keen merchant I know imports them.

He smiles. Marcus pours the wine into a cup and offers it to Faustina.

FAUSTINA (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Marcus Aurelias smiles and raises his own cup. They both drink.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBER - MORNING

Severus, looking somewhat haggard, enters the chamber and finds Marcus Aurelias also seeming rather ill.

SEVERUS

You summoned me?

MARCUS AURELIAS

Yes, Severus. I have written the order to send you to Spain to negotiate with the Moors.

Severus looks less than pleased.

SEVERUS

I see.

MARCUS AURELIAS

You don't wish to go?

SEVERUS

I don't wish to be killed.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I am sending you with the Legion. You'll be quite well protected. And from what I've heard, you can handle yourself in a fight.

SEVERUS

I... I suppose I can.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Then have nothing to fear. If you succeed, there shall be no door in all the world that you cannot walk through.

CUT TO:

INT. SENATE CHAMBERS - MID-MORNING

Senator Cassius is carefully examining a scroll. He hears loud footsteps, the footsteps of men in armour.

Several Praetorian Guards step into the chambers. Cassius looks up at them, trying to hide his fear.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, GREAT HALL - LATER

Faustina and Cassius are on their knees before Marcus Aurelias. The Praetorian Guard stand around them.

MARCUS AURELIAS

So, my beloved. Was that poison supposed to kill me?

FAUSTINA

It still may, husband.

MARCUS AURELIAS

And you, Cassius. What was your part in this? Besides your affair with Faustina?

Cassius looks shocked.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

Oh yes, I knew. You don't spend the most intimate moments of your life with a woman and not know what she is thinking... Where her eyes wander.

CASSIUS

I was seduced.

MARCUS AURELIAS

A foolish gambit. We are all responsible for our actions. So what was the plan? Kill the Emperor, and take his place by marrying the Empress?

FAUSTINA

You forget yourself, husband. It is my power that you wield on the throne.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Oh, I know. It is a sad truth that great emperors, and empresses, rarely come from blood. But when I took power, I did so for the greatness of Rome, not myself.

CASSIUS

What will you do to us?

MARCUS AURELIAS

Hm. Excellent question. It would be a great irony to poison you slowly, watch you die. But no. Cassius, a simple beheading will do for you.

CASSIUS

No! Great one-

MARCUS AURELIAS

Be silent. And you, Faustina... Your betrayal cuts the deepest.

FAUSTINA

So shall I also suffer the blade?

MARCUS AURELIAS

I raised no objections to your promiscuity. It made you happy, and that made me happy. I do not own you like some coveted jewel. But I did expect more respect from you than to carry on a secret affair and conspiracy.

FAUSTINA

And I expected more from you,
husband! You need a co-emperor, and
I have expressed my desire for that
very clearly.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Yes. And I would have given it to
you when the time was right. I may
have even agreed that Cassius take
my place as Emperor. But patience
has never been your virtue. Perhaps
you shall learn some.

FAUSTINA

You are dying, husband.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Oh, yes. I can only assume my ill-
health is from the modest poison
you have been slipping into my
wine. Why does it not affect you?
An antidote before the drink,
perhaps? It matters not. Now that I
have proof, and a confession, I
need not know the details.

CASSIUS

How did you know?

MARCUS AURELIAS

There are only a few merchants who
sell the blue lotus flower, and of
them, but one is on the Merchant's
council that you've been meeting
with regularly. Faustina offers me
some before bed, and I awaken
feeling more ill than I have in
weeks. I did not imbibe that much
wine.

CASSIUS

You are too clever.

MARCUS AURELIAS

There is no such thing. Guards...
Take Cassius away for execution.
And you, my love... I could not
bear to see them kill you, even
after you have killed me.

FAUSTINA

You are soft.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I banish you from Rome. I will allow you a small amount of coin for travel, but you shall never again come near this city. If you do, you will be killed instantly. To be safe, you should cross the Mediterranean.

FAUSTINA

Damn you, husband!

MARCUS AURELIAS

You already have!

He nods to the guards. Faustina and Cassius are taken away. Marcus Aurelias sits down heavily, holding his head.

As he does, Commodus appears from the corner of the room.

COMMODUS

Father...

MARCUS AURELIAS

You must have the feet of a cat, my son.

COMMODUS

And the ears of a bat. Is it true?

MARCUS AURELIAS

I am dying by your mothers hand.

COMMODUS

Father... What can I do?

MARCUS AURELIAS

Listen. Listen to my words and wisdom. Help me rule. Help me keep this idea that is Rome from crumbling beneath the feet of flawed men.

COMMODUS

Yes, father. I shall! I shall make you proud.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I do hope so, my boy. But you have much to learn.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE - MORNING

Severus joins a column of Roman Legionaries heading through the streets of Rome.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIER - LATER

Severus walks onto the pier and soon is climbing aboard another Roman Naval vessel. He turns and looks back at the pier. He sees Plautinius standing there to wave goodbye to him. He smiles and waves to his friend, but his smile is hollow. We hear narration over the scene.

SEVERUS (V.O.)

Dear Father,

The ship casts off and begins to slowly push away from the pier.

SEVERUS (V.O.) (CONT...)

My time in Rome has been strange and prosperous. I have met the Emperor and found favour with him. I should be proud, but I cannot help thinking that I am in my brother's place. I'm sure by now you've heard that Paccia and I married. I can feel your fury from across the sea. But please, father...

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN SEA - LATER

The ship sails into somewhat stormy waters.

SEVERUS (V.O.) (CONT...)

Please understand that I have no malice in my heart. You once told me that pride is a brittle thing. Well, my pride has been shattered many times. I am in awe of my own ignorance.

CUT TO:

EXT. LEPCIS MAGNA, PIER - A MONTH LATER

The ship pulls slowly up to the pier while sailors work to anchor and dock the vessel.

SEVERUS (V.O.) (CONT...)
Perhaps it is naive to think I may find forgiveness or even civility when I return, before heading to Spain. But I do seek to see my father, brother, and mother once again. I have not seen a familiar face in some time.

CUT TO:

EXT. LEPCIS MAGNA, PIER - A LITTLE LATER

Severus steps off onto the pier and walks towards the land. In the distance, we can see the Palace has a brand new pier joining it to the land. Severus pauses to look at it.

SEVERUS (V.O.) (CONT...)
And I am prepared to face your wrath, as a grown man, as an African and a Roman. The pain will be great. I expect nothing less than your full fury. I will be glad to face it.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEPTIMUS HOUSE - LATER

Severus approaches the house. It seems as if nothing about it has changed.

SEVERUS (V.O.) (CONT...)
For there is no greater agony than your silent hatred. I have endured that already, willingly. I hope you shall at least endure my presence, and that it not be agony.

CUT TO:

INT. SEPTIMUS HOUSE, COMMON ROOM - MINUTES LATER.

Severus enters the house, and finds his mother, Pia, sitting and weeping. She looks up at him. Geta appears from the other room and glares at him coldly.

SEVERUS (V.O.) (CONT...)
That it be a bearable torment. For myself, Geta, and mother. Please forgive me, father. Or, if not, at least tolerate me, and let me prove that I am a good and loyal son.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

EXT. BEACH - DUSK.

Geta and Pia stand weeping along with a great number of other well-respected men and women of Lepcis Magna. A body is burning on a pyre.

CUT TO:

INT. SEPTIMUS HOUSE, COMMON ROOM - PRESENT.

No one speaks. But Severus looks between his brother and mother. Pia shakes her head, as if answering the question Severus hadn't asked.

SEVERUS (V.O.) (CONT...)
I shall see you soon, father. I
still love you all.

CUT TO:

BLACK.