

SEVERUS
Episode Seven

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FADE IN:

EXT. LEPCIS MAGNA - DAY, CIRCA 200 AD

We see a much larger, more robust city than it has ever been before. The buildings have been restored and repaired, the streets are clean, and the sun glistens on a harbour full of trading ships and fishing vessels.

We focus in on the road to the Palace.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA - DAY

Many servants and slaves hustle to and fro to hang Imperial Banners and fly the flags of Rome.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIPPODROME - DAY

Elephants are gently herded out into the streets, adorned in great purple decorations. The slaves doing the work seem generally in good cheer.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEPTIMIUS HOUSE - DAY

An older, wiser Septimius Severus (about 50 years old now,) sits and seems to nap in the sun by the garden. A voice calls out from inside the house (PIA)

PIA

Severus...

Severus's eyes pop open. He smiles and stands, stretching. He grunts a little and rotates his left arm. He then walks towards the house.

CUT TO:

INT. SEPTIMIUS HOUSE, KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Severus walks into the kitchen and sees that his elderly mother, Pia, is hobbling around, looking confused.

PIA

Severus? Where's your father?

Severus smiles sweetly and gently steps up, embracing his mother gently.

SEVERUS

Worry not, mother. I am here.

PIA

You're a good son, Severus. A good boy. I do hope your father can see that. I worry sometimes.

Severus holds her for a moment, then parts a little.

SEVERUS

Come, mother. You should be in bed. You must rest.

PIA

Yes, yes rest. The banquet is later, and it may be quite the event.

Severus winces slightly, but covers it up with a warm smile as he gently guides his mother out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. SEPTIMIUS HOUSE, PIA'S ROOM - LATER

Pia lies in a bed, asleep. Severus watches over her. A very young female servant enters the room, carrying a pitcher of water. She looks very nervous and guilt-ridden.

SERVANT

I'm sorry, sir. She must have gotten up when I went to fetch the water.

SEVERUS

All is well, child. No harm was done.

The servant seems to relax.

SERVANT

I am told that today is your birthday, and the whole city prepares for a celebration.

SEVERUS

It is true.

SERVANT

Will we be bringing your mother to the event?

Severus smiles, but his eyes appear sad.

SEVERUS

No. No, it would be too much for her. I would like her final days to be spent in comfort, and with much love.

SERVANT

I understand.

There is a long pause. Severus takes the hand of his sleeping mother in his own. He looks down at the contrasting skins, both old now, but starkly different colours.

SEVERUS

If she passes while I am gone, do not fret. You have cared for her very well since the sickness began taking her mind.

SERVANT

Thank you, sir. But... If you should come home and-

SEVERUS

I expect to come home to her passing every time I leave. I have had years to come to terms with her death. I mourn when I watch her eyes go distant. But I know she will soon be free, and I will be glad.

Severus turns to the servant.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

How old are you, girl?

SERVANT

Fifteen, sir.

Severus smiles.

SEVERUS

Enjoy being fifteen. Life is fleeting and takes strange turns.

He looks down to Pia again. She still sleeps, but her mouth briefly turns into a smile before relaxing once again. It is a quick moment, but Severus catches it and seems slightly relieved. He leans over and kisses Pia on the forehead. Then he stands.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

I must go.

SERVANT

I shall ensure she remains in comfort.

Severus nods and smiles before walking out of the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF LEPCIS MAGNA - LATER

Severus walks along the streets, different now, but still familiar.

He pauses and peers down an alleyway, a familiar one. The ground there is stained a dark brown. Severus's eyes go distant.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. ALLEYWAY - 35 YEARS AGO

Severus is thrown into that same alley, which is full of corpses. The fearsome Garamante named MAZ looks down at Severus, casually threatening him with a blade.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF LEPCIS MAGNA - PRESENT

Severus turns away from the alley and continues to walk.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA - LATER

Severus looks at the palace, a much grander and more beautiful structure than it was decades ago. He smiles and looks down at his bare shin. There is only the slightest hint of a scar still there from when he was a young man. He looks back up at the Palace and approaches it with a smile.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA - LATER

The Palace has received a significant upgrade along with the rest of the city. There is a bust of Severus in the main entrance. Slaves and Servants work to hang decoration and scrub floors. Severus walks in through the open doors. One of the slaves looks at him, then at the bust, then back to Severus. He simply smiles and walks past them.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA, GREAT HALL - LATER

Severus looks over the great hall. It, too, has changed much, but the layout is the same. He walks over to one of the windows and runs his hand over the edge of it.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA, GREAT HALL - 35 YEARS AGO

A younger Severus climbs in through a window and sees the carnage around him. Mad with hatred and rage, he turns to the nearest Garamante and charges. The man is caught by surprise, and Severus plunges his dagger deep into the savage's throat. The Garamante screams and bubbles blood from the wound.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA, GREAT HALL - PRESENT

Severus turns away from the window as if turning away from the memory. Another man in his fifties is now approaching, wearing the trappings of the Suphete. He stops short before Severus and salutes him.

SUPHETE

Hail, Caesar!

SEVERUS

Unnecessary, my friend. I am not a God, and require no salute, tribute, or prayer.

SUPHETE

Of course, Caes... Severus.
(Nervous Pause)
On the topic of tributes...

SEVERUS

Yes?

SUPHETE

I have heard a rumour that the tributes and taxes for Rome shall be restored.

SEVERUS

(Smiles)
I can personally guarantee that will not happen.

The Suphete seems relieved.

SUPHETE

Oh, good, thank you.

SEVERUS

When I left this city all those years ago, it was to remove Rome's power over it. I have accomplished this impossible feat. Lepcis Magna is free in every way.

SUPHETE

Which, of course, is why we are so ecstatic to celebrate your fiftieth birthday. Emperor Septimius Severus, the man who drove the Garamantes out of Africa, who freed the cities and made Lepcis Magna the equivalent of Rome.

SEVERUS

Gods, I hope not.

SUPHETE

Excuse me?

SEVERUS

(Smirks)
Nothing. I am happy to partake in a celebration, but I am only a man. I seek no worship.

SUPHETE

You may not seek it, but you are Emperor.

SEVERUS

I was. I left that duty behind years ago.

SUPHETE

Perhaps. But you are the only former Emperor of Rome that still lives. That is special enough.

Severus puts on a smile.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

EXT. ROMAN SENATE - TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO.

Severus draws his sword and sticks it into the Prefect's chest.

The Prefect tries to get back, but from where he is kneeling, he cannot escape Severus's blade. His blood erupts onto the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA, GREAT HALL - PRESENT

Severus's smile fades at the edges.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

The battlefield is a wasteland of corpses and blood. Smoke clouds drift over mounds of the dead. Clouds of flies swarm over the carnage. Severus is bandaged, and kneeling before him is Albinus, also wounded, his armour battered and blood seeping from underneath. Demetrius stands behind Albinus with his sword drawn, looking to Severus. Severus looks at Albinus, staring into his eyes.

SEVERUS

Do you yield?

ALBINUS

No.

Demetrius does not hesitate. He executes Albinus by cutting his throat. Severus watches as the mans blood leaks out onto the already-stained ground. It pools around Severus's feet.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA, GREAT HALL - PRESENT

Severus's smile fades completely. He bites his lip and looks back at the Suphete, forcing an insincere smile to return.

SEVERUS

So what shall be the arrangement
for this evening's events?

SUPHETE

Ah, well, we have some games at the Hippodrome planned, re-enactments of your most glorious battles. And then, of course, the feast, followed by entertainment from some dancers, quite beautiful ones, from the distant east.

Severus's smile becomes a little more sincere.

SEVERUS
That sounds excellent.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIPPODROME - EARLY EVENING

Establishing shot.

CUT TO:

INT. HIPPODROME - EARLY EVENING

Severus sits in the special box seat along with the Suphete. Servants bring plates of fruit and nuts. From the box, they can see down below two sets of gladiators fighting, some in Legion garb, others in the garb of the Garamante warriors. Severus is generally ignoring the combat as he speaks to the Suphete above the din of the crowd and clanging sounds of combat.

SUPHETE
We tried to make it as close to the battle reports as possible.

SEVERUS
Do not fret the details, my friend. However, I do remember the battle was during a very cold, windy night.

From behind them both comes a familiar voice, Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS
And I never thought it could get cold in the desert.

Severus turns and his smile becomes huge. We pan around and see Demetrius wearing fine clothes. His stump of an arm is covered, but he seems to have a simple hook-like attachment on the end. He is also older, greying, and has many battle scars.

Severus stands and embraces his old friend.

SEVERUS
What are you doing here? I thought you had returned to Greece.

DEMETRIUS
Well, when I realised my friend was turning a half-century old, I knew I had to make the journey. I nearly didn't make it.

SEVERUS

Demetrius! My old friend! I am happy to see you. When did you arrive?

DEMETRIUS

Just now. Senator Renautus is but steps behind me as well, however the old dog limps terribly.

Severus laughs and looks past Demetrius. Standing there is an elderly Renautus, looking uncomfortable and exhausted. Still, he salutes Severus with a knowing little smirk.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA, GREAT HALL - LATER

The feast is underway, and Severus sits with Demetrius at his left and Renautus at his right. The Suphete seems mildly annoyed, but covers it well as he seems to try to make conversation with a stiff, stone-faced man from the far-east. On Severus's far right is GOVERNOR SENECA, a clearly Anglo-Saxon man, but wearing Roman garb.

Severus seems genuinely happy.

SEVERUS

So tell me, Renautus, how does the Senate fare against my troublesome son?

Renautus's face falls a little.

RENAUTUS

I do not wish to bring bad news to such a celebration.

SEVERUS

What? Old friend, you know me, I will take bad news immediately before it can fester.

RENAUTUS

Well... Your son is looking to reinstate the old taxes, your wife rents out space in the palace to wealthy dignitaries, the senate finds itself castrated by your sons aggressive edicts and several senators have already been executed and replaced.

Severus's face falls a little.

SEVERUS

That boy never did listen to my instructions. I should expect he would ignore my letters as well.

DEMETRIUS

Greece is already paying twice what it was under your rule.

RENAUTUS

To make matters worse, and please understand I say this with all due respect, there are rumours floating around that Caracalla is not even your son.

Severus seems amused by this last piece of information.

SEVERUS

Ah, that old rumour. I never tire of that one. It reminds me of the senator who tried to appoint Iago Emperor on the basis of some falsified record of his relation to the original Julius Caesar.

Severus laughs.

RENAUTUS

I wish it were so amusing. Rome is on the decline again. Many in the senate, myself included, wish you would return.

SEVERUS

Well, now there's a sentence I never thought I would hear. Rome must be in dire peril.

Governor Seneco leans over, having eavesdropped on the conversation.

SENECO

If you think that's bad, come up and visit Hadrian's Wall sometime. I keep sending good men beyond it, and all I get back are corpses.

Severus raises an eyebrow at this.

SEVERUS

Governor Seneco, do you require the assistance of the Roman legion?

Seneco smiles.

SENECO

I would not turn down the help.

CUT TO:

INT. SEPTIMIUS HOUSE, COMMON ROOM - LATE EVENING

Severus, Demetrius, and Renautus sit with a pitcher of wine on the table, each with a large cup in their hands. Demetrius is in the middle of telling a story.

DEMETRIUS

- well, the Moor was *not* happy with that. I was young, and terrified. I always thought that just stabbing a man with a big enough blade would kill them, but this one... He grabs my hand, pushes the sword deeper into himself, and smiles. It's this smile of blackened, broken teeth. It smells like refuse on a hot day.

Severus chuckles, clearly having heard this story before, but Renautus bursts out laughing.

DEMETRIUS (CONT'D)

He looks down, and sees my hand still clutching the sword. So before I have the sense to do anything smart like... Run! Down comes his blade right onto my wrist. I ran screaming back to the camp, short one sword and one shield.

SEVERUS

And much blood, I would assume.

DEMETRIUS

Oh, yes! The surgeon, though, said to me only three words: "Don't be afraid." The next thing I know, my wrist is engulfed in flame, and my friends, that is a pain that makes all others pale.

RENAUTUS

And you survived that injury!?

DEMETRIUS

Survived it? I fought with my Centurion to return to duty. He asked me why, and I said "I need to make sure the bastard that took my hand is really dead, because I'm not losing this hand, too!"

They laugh as Demetrius waves his good hand around a little. Renautus shakes his head.

RENAUTUS

I am always amazed at the will to keep going that you legionaries display. I could never fight on after something like that, even when I was a young man.

DEMETRIUS

It's a matter of perspective. I've been stabbed, shot with arrows, battered by shields, married twice... and absolutely nothing I have endured has come close to the pain of that day. I still feel an ache in my hand, and it's not even there anymore.

SEVERUS

Oh, to speak of aches and pains, old war wounds. I never expected this is where I would find myself.

DEMETRIUS

You never expected... I'm having some truly vicious wine with the Emperor of Rome! I began my life as a street urchin and a thief!

RENAUTUS

A thief?

DEMETRIUS

The Magistrate gave me a choice.

RENAUTUS

What choice?

DEMETRIUS

Join the legion, or... Have my hands cut off.

Renautus laughs so hard the wine comes out his nose.

CUT TO:

INT. SEPTIMIUS HOUSE, BEDROOM - MIDNIGHT

Severus shows Demetrius the bedroom, and Demetrius takes two steps inside before falling onto the bed. The only sound we hear from him is snoring. Severus turns away with a smile and there stands Renautus, also looking fairly intoxicated.

RENAUTUS

I shall pay for this tomorrow.

SEVERUS

I guess we cannot even drink like young men anymore.

RENAUTUS

No.

(Pause)

Listen, Severus... I was not joking earlier in my report on Rome. It would... We in the senate would be grateful for your return.

Severus nods and smiles, but again, there is a sadness within him.

SEVERUS

So long as my mother clings to life, I shall be with her.

RENAUTUS

I understand, my friend.

SEVERUS

Her passing is imminent. I promise, I shall come to Rome once again when her time has come.

Renautus nods, smiling a little.

RENAUTUS

Thank you. I would not ask if-

SEVERUS

If it were not important. Yes, I know. You were my closest advisor for all of those years, and I take your word seriously. I swear, I will come to Rome.

Severus sighs.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

But I suspect I shall not enjoy it.

They share a wry chuckle.

CUT TO:

INT. SEPTIMIUS HOUSE, SEVERUS'S BEDROOM - LATER

Severus lies in the dark, but by the dim starlight coming from the window, we can see his eyes are open. He appears concerned, and very tired, but too worried to sleep.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. SEPTIMIUS HOUSE, PIA'S ROOM - MORNING

Pia appears to be sleeping peacefully, but the servant girl is standing in the doorway, lightly crying. Severus sits by the inert body of Pia. He, too, sheds tears. He leans over and lightly kisses her forehead again.

FADE TO:

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET, THE NEXT DAY

A funeral pyre burns. Severus stands there, a handful of other dignitaries by his side, including the Suphete, and other ambassadors from the feast a few nights before, like Governor Seneco.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCKS - DAY

Severus approaches a Roman vessel. On the deck stands Demetrius, several Praetorian Guards by his side. Slaves begin loading trunks and cargo around them as Severus boards. The Praetorian Guards salute Severus. Demetrius also salutes solemnly. He offers Severus his hand. Severus takes it, and they briefly embrace.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN VESSEL - DAYS LATER

Establishing shot. The seas are a little rough and there are dark storm clouds on the horizon.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN VESSEL - SECONDS LATER

Severus sits in a cabin, staring out at the angry ocean. Demetrius is nearby, seemingly lost in thought. He turns to Severus and speaks, shaking Severus from his own reverie.

DEMETRIUS

Do you think you'll need me?

SEVERUS

(Pause)

No. No, I think I shall be all right. My son, however... I always did fear he would cling to his foolishness. I imagine I would have, in such an instance.

DEMETRIUS

You don't believe that rumour,
though, do you?

Severus laughs.

SEVERUS

True or not, I raised that boy. He
is my son. I am well aware that my
wife had... very open ideas about
sex.

DEMETRIUS

Everyone does. My great-grandfather
had three wives. My sister lives
with a female lover. And two
villages over from where I grew up
is a village where they still
practice Spartan lifestyles. I've
always found it strange that some
cultures enforce such strict rules
on mating for life. My first wife
herself occasionally engaged in sex
with women.

SEVERUS

Ah, but when bloodlines determine
the legitimacy of the Caesar, it
becomes very important who fathered
whom.

DEMETRIUS

Since when is that important?

SEVERUS

Since Commodus.

DEMETRIUS

Oh, Commodus... He was interesting.
I recall you cursing his name many
times in Spain.

SEVERUS

Yes. And now I fear my own son
shall follow in those footsteps.
Power without discipline or
responsibility... The very thing
Marcus Aurelias warned me about.

DEMETRIUS

I think I'll keep a blade on me
when I'm around you.

SEVERUS

I said I don't need your
protection.

DEMETRIUS

Who said anything about you? I'm worried about my own back, being around you.

The two smile wryly. Severus chuckles and shakes his head.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROME, DOCKS - THE NEXT DAY

Establishing shot. Under a cloudy sky, the Roman vessel eases up to the pier. We can see the beautiful Roman architecture of the city, but also, the more weather-worn buildings. As usual, the dockside has a line of prostitutes waving scarves and calling out to the vessels.

Severus looks up at the line of women and smiles a little.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF ROME - LATER

Severus and Demetrius ride horses through the winding and twisting streets of Rome at a casual trot. Everywhere men, women, and children appear to be in poverty. Buildings are in disrepair and the streets themselves appear cracked and broken. Severus looks on all this with a deep scowl.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN SENATE - LATER

Demetrius dismounts and takes the reigns of both animals in one hand. He nods to Severus. We see Severus dismount his horse and walk towards the old, familiar building.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN SENATE - MINUTES LATER

The senate is in full-on debate. The only recognisable senator is Renautus. The shouting is nothing but a cacophonous noise.

The doors of the senate are suddenly thrown open. Severus stands there, looking angry. Two Praetorian Guards at the doors turn to intercept the intruder, but upon seeing Severus, they instead drop to their knees. Severus walks past them. A hushed silence falls over the Senate.

SEVERUS

Will someone please explain what in the name of the Gods is happening here?! I see my great city of Rome in nothing but poverty, desperation, the roads and buildings crumbling, and when I reach the senate... I find men shouting at each other.

RENAUTUS

Hail, Caesar!

The rest of the senate echoes Renautus.

SEVERUS

Silence, all of you! Where is my son?!

RENAUTUS

Forgive me, Caesar. Your son does not attend Senate meetings any more.

SEVERUS

Oh... He doesn't, does he? Then where is he?!

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - LATER

Geta sits at the desk, which is overflowing with parchment, scrolls, etc. He looks overworked and worried. As he holds up and opens one scroll, he grimaces and looks back down at another parchment.

GETA

Absolute madness.

At the sound of footsteps, Geta looks up. Two Praetorian Guards enter the room, then stand by the door. Severus enters immediately after, and Geta's face completely changes into both joy and relief.

GETA (CONT'D)

Father! Praise the Gods!

Geta gets up and runs to Severus, who despite his anger, smiles and embraces his son.

SEVERUS

Geta, my boy. It's good to see you.

GETA

Oh, father, your timing could not be better. We are in truly dire straights.

SEVERUS

So I see. What is all of this?

GETA

This? This is my desperate attempt to sort out my brother's absolutely convoluted finances. He borrows from one source to pay another, and then takes out other loans, only to loan that money out and demand double his money back. And those are just some of his... Honestly, I can't even make heads or tails of his gambling expenses.

SEVERUS

I should have expected this. Where is your mother?

GETA

Where she always is, these days. She sits in the temple and communes with the Gods, or some other such madness. She fasts, drinking only the dream tea and sees only other priestesses.

SEVERUS

And you? You struggle to make sense of madness?

GETA

I must! Father, the senate threatens to do away with the office of Emperor entirely, all while my brother executes supposedly corrupt senators. Politics has become vendetta.

SEVERUS

Why did you not tell me of this?

GETA

I tried sending letters! Caracalla had them intercepted and then threatened me with death should I speak ill against him.

SEVERUS

(Sighs)
This is my fault. Your brother was not ready for this responsibility, and now Rome pays the price.

(MORE)

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

I did not groom him for the role properly.

GETA

Don't blame yourself father, it will accomplish nothing. If our family's name, and more importantly Rome, are to be put to right, action must be taken immediately.

SEVERUS

(Smiles)

You are very much like your namesake, my son. Your uncle was very studious, very organised and reasonable.

GETA

You... You don't speak of him much.

SEVERUS

Because I regret that I caused him such harm to him. But as you say, self-blame accomplishes nothing. We must see to correcting this problem immediately.

GETA

I hesitate to ask, father. I know it is a dangerous life to lead, but while I have many plans that could solve our problems, I lack the authority to carry them out.

SEVERUS

Ah. You desire the throne.

GETA

No! I desire that my brother see reason and Rome see prosperity.

Severus smiles.

SEVERUS

Good. Then I think it is time we track down my wayward son.

GETA

He swore me to secrecy, but I know where he spends his free time.

CUT TO:

INT. BROTHEL - LATER

Caracalla lies naked across a large bed. Women lie in a massive entangled pile around him.

The air is thick with incense. Caracalla stirs slightly, but is otherwise in some sort of drug-induced haze.

Suddenly, two Praetorian Guards enter the chamber. They begin pulling the prostitutes off the bed. Caracalla seems to waken a little, and looks up at the guards.

CARACALLA

Wait! What are you doing?! Stop,
you fools!

Severus enters the chamber. He looks at his son with a stern, cold glare.

SEVERUS

They are not the fools here.

Caracalla looks horrified as Severus glares at him.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Cover yourself, child. We have *much*
to discuss.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - LATER

Severus has both of his sons standing before the desk that is covered in parchment and scrolls. Severus sweeps them all away angrily.

SEVERUS

I trusted you! I trusted you to
carry out my will, my plans for
Rome. I left detailed instructions
and told you to keep me informed if
anything went wrong.

CARACALLA

Nothing has gone wrong, father.

SEVERUS

Do not lie to me! I have seen the
sorry state of this city. Ten years
of neglect has Rome ready to
crumble to dust! An Empire that has
stood for centuries is now held up
by rotting wood and crumbling
plaster. Is that the legacy of the
Septimius house?!

CARACALLA

I thought your absence meant that
you no longer cared.

SEVERUS

(Enraged)

You thought wrong! For ten years I traded blows with the senate, clashed sword against shield with savages, survived assassination attempts, and broke bread with my enemies, offering them half of my own power just to keep the world stable and peaceful. And now, I find that my son, who I have shed blood for in more than one way, has abandoned every ideal I worked for! Public floggings of senators, open executions, assassinations, and the kind of reckless spending that took me a decade to repair!

CARACALLA

I can explain-

SEVERUS

Spare me! Your actions are inexplicable and inexcusable. Do my words even pass through your brain, or do they simply leak out through your ears?

Caracalla remains silent.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

You are no longer Emperor of Rome.

Caracalla's jaw drops.

CARACALLA

But father-

SEVERUS

Be silent! I am taking the throne back, and you two shall see how an Empire must be run. And when I am finished righting this madness, you two will either be ready to co-rule-

CARACALLA

(Incredulous)

Co-rule?!?

SEVERUS

Or I shall dissolve the office of Emperor myself!! I would rather the empire be left in the hands of the senate than watch my son set Rome ablaze with incompetence!

CARACALLA

Father, please, I only tried to do what was needed-

SEVERUS

What was needed? They call you Commodus the Second!! You remember what I told you about Commodus?!

Caracalla falls silent.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Our people live in poverty and despair. Your mother rents out the Palace as if it is some roadside hostel, and where do I find my son during all this? In the arms of a legion of whores!

CARACALLA

Father, stop! You don't understand! Being Emperor is such hard-

SEVERUS

WORK?!? Yes, yes it is! And clearly you are not up to the task. Now both of you, get out of my sight. And take all of this mess with you.

He gestures to the pile of parchment and scrolls.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Do not show your faces again until you have both worked together to make sense of this madness and pay back the money that is owed.

Geta walks over and begins collecting the papers. Caracalla reluctantly joins him.

Severus watches with a stern eye.

CUT TO:

EXT. PANTHEON - LATER

Establishing shot of the ancient temple as it was during the era.

CUT TO:

INT. PANTHEON - SECONDS LATER

We see an older Julia Domna lying naked on a raised dais. Her arms and legs are hanging by her sides. Her eyes have a far-away, glazed-over look in them.

The room is dim, lit only by candles, and thick with a haze of incense and smoke.

The doors open, and Severus enters flanked by the Praetorian Guard. He now wears the purple toga of the office of Emperor. He walks straight up to Julia. He looks down and sees that she is clearly not aware of what is happening.

SEVERUS

Julia. Julia!

Julia does not move, but she takes in a breath.

JULIA

My love... My love, I have paid penance.

Severus sighs and rolls his eyes. He turns to the Guard.

SEVERUS

Take her to the Palace, to my chambers, and keep her safe until she returns to us.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - LATER

Julia awakens in bed to the sound of scratching. She rises, and sees Severus at the desk, scribing into a scroll by the light of a torch.

JULIA

My love! You have returned.

SEVERUS

Ah, she rises.

Severus sets down his work and turns to Julia.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

I hear you have spent much time in seclusion in that temple. Would you care to enlighten me as to why?

JULIA

My love, I have made a grave mistake.

SEVERUS

Yes, you have.

JULIA

Please, you must listen.

SEVERUS

You have rented out the palace
suites to anyone who can pay.

JULIA

Well... Yes. The debts were piling
up, and-

SEVERUS

And you allowed my son to make a
mockery of the office of Emperor.

JULIA

Allowed?! He is-

SEVERUS

He is a foolish young man just as
he was a foolish boy, and you have
neglected him.

JULIA

(Angrily)
And you ran halfway across the
world! I would call that neglect.

SEVERUS

Watch your tongue, woman! I
understand why Geta could not reach
me with news, and I know why the
senate would spite me. But with
your network of slave-spies, you
could easily have informed me of
these dire problems years ago.

JULIA

And what would you have done? March
on Rome with another army?

SEVERUS

The day I need an army to deal with
my foolish son and my vacant wife
is a day I do not wish to see. You
still have not answered my
question.

JULIA

I have prayed to the gods that you
would hear my pleas!

SEVERUS

Messengers move faster than
prayers, and have clearer
instructions.

JULIA

You mock me!

SEVERUS

You insult me!

Julia fumes and steps towards the doorway. A pair of guards appear there.

JULIA

Let me pass.

SEVERUS

They will not. You and our sons are not to leave the Palace until I have restored some semblance of order.

JULIA

For what reason?

SEVERUS

Must I list them? Marcus's gambling debts could pay an entire legion. What he owes the brothels could finance road repair. He has executed senators without trial. And where are you during all of this? Alone in a temple surrounded by opiate smoke. The only one who has tried to even remotely fix any of this mess is Geta, and he has neither the power nor resources to do so. Shall I continue?

JULIA

I have told you, I was-

SEVERUS

(Angrily) Wife-of-mine! If you are intent on praying, then do let me know when the Gods answer. I shall enjoy hearing what they have to say. In the meantime, those of us still tied to *this* world have a great deal of work to do.

INT. ROMAN SENATE - THE NEXT DAY

Severus stands before the senate, in full Imperial regalia, with Caracalla standing beside him in much more humble, white garb.

SEVERUS

I must apologise to all of you. Until my good friend Renautus told me of the terrible state of Rome, I had no idea my son had done such damage. I promise you, this shall be remedied.

(MORE)

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

I have examined his convoluted finances, and I have determined that there is a way to pay off these debts and redirect income towards repairing Rome, itself. However, and I know you will not wish to hear this... I must reinstate some of the old taxes.

There is an uncomfortable murmur in the senate.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

It is temporary, as it was before. And it will only apply to those who sit upon great wealth, but do not allow that wealth to return to Rome and its people. I have seen the result of the senate's war against Rome's people, and my son's arrogant decimation of the laws that once protected them. If you wish to curse my name, I invite you to do so to my face. But when I am finished, you will all have a difficult choice to make. Either admit to your own poor judgment, or face the consequences of negligence.

The senate erupts in shouts and anger. Renautus seems shocked at the utter lack of diplomacy in Severus's attitude.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - LATER

Severus unrolls a large map upon the desk. Caracalla and Geta stand there. Julia is also present, and appears slightly ill, suffering some sort of withdrawal. She is shaky and appears exhausted, yet jittery.

SEVERUS

I have worked far too hard to see you three destroy Rome through neglect and stupidity. I can only really blame myself. I thought I had impressed upon you the importance of not just being strong, but being flexible, and sacrificing for the greater good.

CARACALLA

What are you going to do?

SEVERUS

(Smirks)
A test of character.
(MORE)

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

You will all come with me, North,
to the isle of the Britons.
Governor Seneco is having
difficulty with the Britons north
of Hadrian's wall. Do you two know
anything about this place?

They both shake their heads.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Hadrian's wall was built to
separate Rome from the more savage
men to the North. But his
successor, Antonius Pius, built a
new wall even further North. Marcus
Aurelias pulled the Romans back to
Hadrian's wall, and now, it seems
the people to the North are
rallying against our forces there.

GETA

We are going to war?

SEVERUS

Rome is always at war. Peace is an
illusion so that the people may
sleep through the nights without
fear. Our borders are constantly
challenged.

CARACALLA

And you allow this?

SEVERUS

You did. More to the point, your
ignorance to this shows how
inexperienced and ill-suited you
are to be Emperor.

GETA

But, father, you *hate* war.

SEVERUS

Yes, I do. But I would not be the
man I am if I had not been forced
to fight. So you two will join me,
on the front lines, and you will
fight for Rome. Perhaps then, you
will understand that being Emperor
is not a right, nor a privilege. It
is a responsibility that requires
personal sacrifice. I watched
friends die, I sent friends to die,
all for Rome. I have been stabbed,
sliced, and bear the scars to prove
that I have shed blood for Rome. If
I must risk my children's lives to
prove my point, I will do so.

JULIA

No matter what your wife or
children would choose.

Severus gives her a long look.

SEVERUS

I would not make an argument about
wise choices just at this time,
wife-of-mine.

He turns back to his sons.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Now, both of you pack. We will
leave tomorrow.

CARACALLA

Tomorrow?!

SEVERUS

Does that hood block up your ears?
I said tomorrow.

Caracalla looks as if he will argue, but he catches the stern
look from his father and simply turns, stalking away out of
the room. Geta follows in his wake.

JULIA

When did you become so cruel?

SEVERUS

When did you become so weak that
you require the Gods to make
decisions for you?

Severus rolls up the map and walks away. Julia turns away,
tears slipping from her eyes.

FADE TO:

EXT. BRITISH COAST - MONTHS LATER

A column of the legion pours off of a series of Roman
vessels. It is a grey, dismal day and snow flurries down
around everyone. Caracalla and Geta stand on the shore and
look up at the sky. Geta raises his hand and catches a
snowflake.

GETA

I have not seen snow since we were
children.

CARACALLA

I did not miss it. Wet, cold...

GETA

Remember what father said about sacrifice.

CARACALLA

Our father is old. He does not understand how things are done now.

GETA

You underestimate him.

CARACALLA

And you worship him.

Behind them, Severus and Julia, wrapped in warm clothes, approach. Severus looks at his sons, then nods towards the legion.

SEVERUS

We waste no time. Mount up. We ride for the wall, straight through the night.

CARACALLA

Have you gone mad, father?!

SEVERUS

I said, 'mount up.'

Severus walks off towards the gathered legion. Julia steps up to her sons.

JULIA

He is angry that his legacy is in danger.

GETA

So he puts us in danger?

JULIA

He is right. We have behaved shamefully. I fear his anger may doom us all.

CARACALLA

I fear this damp island will freeze us solid. Why can we not ride in a carriage?

JULIA

Because soldiers of the legion do not ride in carriages.

Julia steps forward to catch up to her husband. Geta and Caracalla trade a wary look.

CARACALLA

Well, brother... If we are to survive fathers wrath, we may have to genuinely work together.

GETA

I'd hoped that was obvious. You were always the fighter.

CARACALLA

And you the scholar. I should have listened to you.

GETA

No point in looking back. Our path is forward.

Geta begins walking to the rest of the legion. Caracalla watches him go with an infuriated glare, waiting until he is out of ear-shot.

CARACALLA

You may want to look back from time to time, brother.

Caracalla begins falling into step behind Geta.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH COUNTRYSIDE - THE NEXT DAY

Severus rides atop a horse at the front of the column. But he is obviously cold, even all bundled up as he is. He coughs a rough, hacking cough. Behind him, Caracalla and Geta also ride, both clad in the armour of the legion. Ahead of them is a massive stone keep. It flies the flags of Rome. As the legion approaches, the gates are opened.

CUT TO:

INT. SENECA'S KEEP - LATER

Severus and Governor Seneca sit in the great hall, Severus is close to the fire, trying to warm himself and occasionally letting out a nasty cough. Geta and Caracalla are also there. Julia sits by her husband, worried, but also exhausted.

SENECA

I did not expect you to come personally, great Caesar, much less bring your sons. I should have made appropriate accommodations.

SEVERUS

It is no trouble, Governor. My sons may sleep with the legion in the barracks.

Caracalla shoots his father a dark look, and he steps towards the older man, but Geta puts out an arm and stops him. Geta shakes his head, and Caracalla backs down.

SENECO

As you wish. Are these to be my reinforcements?

SEVERUS

No, governor. After much consideration, I've decided we will take back Antonia's wall.

Seneco looks stunned.

SENECO

But... that's suicide. The savages have the entire area settled, and their numbers have swelled beyond counting since Marcus Aurelias abandoned that wall.

SEVERUS

We shall count them when they are dead, Governor.

JULIA

Governor, my husband is ill from this cold weather. Is there somewhere he may rest?

SENECO

Of course. Rest, regain your strength.

SEVERUS

We march at dawn.

Everyone stares awestruck at Severus.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

We will waste no time.

SENECO

As you wish. I shall add one of my legions as a compliment to your forces.

SEVERUS

Thank you, Governor. I promise, you shall get every man back alive.

CUT TO:

INT. SENECA'S KEEP, BED CHAMBER - LATER

Julia helps Severus warm up next to the fire.

JULIA

You have caught a chill, my love.

SEVERUS

Not the first time. I was ill in Spain, and twice in Germania.

JULIA

You were younger then. Why do you insist on this mission?

SEVERUS

Our sons must be made to see.

JULIA

To see what? Their father become weak and sickly?

SEVERUS

If my oldest does not put a blade in my chest first.

JULIA

Caracalla would not be so bold, nor heartless.

SEVERUS

His name is Marcus Aurelius

Severus coughs.

JULIA

I know that man meant a great deal to you, but I do not believe our son lives up to that name.

SEVERUS

He will. He must. I have lost too much in fighting to make Rome a better place to let it all burn in my absence. I've lost too much time already. My wasteful wars, my fear and longing for a simpler life... I neglected my office and my family.

JULIA

I confess, it's hard for me to argue against that.

SEVERUS

I wish you had come with me to meet my mother while she still lived. While she could still... could still be herself.

Severus coughs violently, then spits into the fire. It sizzles.

JULIA

At least let me make you a draught
to fight this illness.

SEVERUS

Very well... If you believe it will
help.

She smiles at him and kisses him. Julia then stands and walks over to a large trunk, opening it and rummaging through a collection of jars and canisters.

JULIA

When the chill of such damp lands
gets into the chest, it is a long,
difficult task to get it out.
However, I find that some willow
bark, and a few herbs, can assist
in-

She stops, looking back at Severus. He seems to be asleep. She smiles at him, a smile full of warmth, and closes her trunk. She slides back over to him and wraps herself around his body to keep him warm.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH COUNTRYSIDE, NORTH OF THE WALL - DAYS LATER

Severus still rides at the head of the column with his sons behind him. A Centurion rides up beside them, and turns to Severus.

CENTURION

Caesar, I believe we are-

Before he can finish, a spear lands in his chest. He cries out. There is the sound of pipes and a war band as ancient Scots appear from the foliage and ambush the column. Caracalla rides instantly into the fray, but Geta is hesitant, and pulls a bow and arrow.

The scene around Severus becomes chaos. Severus himself dismounts, draws his sword, and approaches a Scottish warrior. The warrior charges Severus. Though old and frail, Severus dodges the clumsy attack and drives his blade into the warrior's neck.

By now, arrows are flying into the attackers, and even Geta fires an arrow that sticks into a warrior's back. Geta looks stunned, but has no time to ponder what he's done.

Caracalla fights with a fierce rage, cutting low and high, disabling and killing warriors ruthlessly.

Before long, there are only a few of the assailants left.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH COUNTRYSIDE, NORTH OF THE WALL - HOURS LATER

A few of the surviving warriors stand before Severus and his sons. Caracalla draws a blade and moves to execute them. Severus puts out a hand and signals for him to hold. Severus turns to one of the warriors.

SEVERUS

You... You are the leader of this band?

CHIEF

I am chief of this clan, yes.

SEVERUS

Your clan struck us without honour or reason.

CHIEF

You are leading an army into our lands. That is reason enough.

SEVERUS

I give you a choice. Tell the others to surrender, let us through to the Antonine wall, and no more harm will come to your people.

CHIEF

Rot in hell.

Caracalla moves to kill the Chief. Again, Severus motions for him to hold. Severus looks in the mans eyes.

SEVERUS

There is no need for us to be enemies. Rome's bounty is available to any citizen of the empire who seeks it.

Caracalla looks insulted by his father's words.

CHIEF

Save your bounty. You shall need it when we claim your heads.

Severus smiles and shakes his head.

SEVERUS

Greater warriors than you have tried.
(To the soldiers)
Let them go.

CARACALLA

Father!

SEVERUS

I said, let them go.

CARACALLA

They will just attack us again!

SEVERUS

Perhaps.

CARACALLA

Perhaps?!

SEVERUS

A chance for peace is worth any cost. Because war is a terrible cost to pay for nothing.

The legionaries undo the chains on the captives and begin escorting them away. Caracalla turns to Severus.

CARACALLA

That was foolish.

SEVERUS

No. They may choose not to fight.

CARACALLA

Fighting is all these savages know.

SEVERUS

Perhaps you've forgotten, but at one time, we were considered the savages.

Severus turns and goes to climb back onto his horse. Caracalla watches him, confused, angry, but also looking doubtful.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCOTTISH COAST - DAYS LATER

Severus no longer rides at the head of the column. Caracalla and Geta do. We move past them down to a carriage riding in the middle of the column.

CUT TO:

INT. SEVERUS'S CARRIAGE - SECONDS LATER

Severus lies in a cot, feverish, coughing, all while Julia tends to him, mopping his head with a cloth and trying to feed him hot beverages.

JULIA

You foolish man, you will die on
this cold island.

SEVERUS

Geta... Geta, forgive me...

JULIA

Pray that *I* forgive you, husband! I
will find you in the next world!
And when I do, I shall have the
gods teach you a lesson!

Tears lip down her cheeks, taking the menace out of her
threats.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCOTTISH COAST - SIMULTANEOUS

Geta and Caracalla ride together. Both look pensive and
uncomfortable.

GETA

What if he dies?

CARACALLA

Then... I suppose I become Emperor
again.

GETA

Father intended us to rule
together.

CARACALLA

Father also intended to re-take
land that Rome does not need. He is
old and feeble.

GETA

Then why not kill him and take
power? And me, for that matter?
Perhaps mother, as well?

Caracalla falls silent.

GETA (CONT'D)

My brother, I don't know what
drives you to do what you do. But
if we cannot at least agree to
fathers wishes, then we shall be
divided, and likely, so shall Rome.

CARACALLA

He is not my real father.

Geta looks at him in shock.

GETA

What?!

CARACALLA

Mother is a liar. Father is a fool. When this mad campaign is over, I shall be Emperor. But... I do wish you by my side, brother. I think perhaps father is wise in that idea.

GETA

If you mean that, brother... Then tell me, truly... If you believe our father is not your father... Who is your father?

There is an awkward pause for a long moment.

CARACALLA

When our mother killed Pescennius Niger, in Macedonia, I saw it. I heard his final words. "I still have the throne." He meant through me. He saw my face, and he knew.

GETA

You're mad.

CARACALLA

No. I watch and listen. I learn more truths from the dark corners than you ever will find in your academic texts. But we are still brothers, and I shall honour your council when I take power.

GETA

Take power?

CARACALLA

An expression, brother. Nothing more.

Geta eyes his brother with a wary look.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS, ROMAN CAMP - DAY

The Roman legion has finally set up camp. Guards patrol the perimeter in a tight formation.

Within the camp, efforts are made to light fires to keep everyone warm even though the wet, cold winter conditions make it difficult to get anything blazing. A handful of smoky, weak smouldering fire pits are all that stand between the troops and hypothermia.

CUT TO:

INT. SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS, ROMAN CAMP, SEVERUS'S TENT - LATER

A few braziers blaze to keep the tent lit, and warm. Severus lies in a bed, covered in thick furs. He breathes in shallow breaths.

Julia is there with him, trying to get him to drink a hot beverage, even if only a spoonful at a time.

Geta comes into the tent and shakes off the cold wetness. He stamps his feet and looks to his sick father.

GETA

Please tell me he is better than yesterday?

Julia shakes her head.

JULIA

This bitter land will kill him. We must turn back, or at least, bring *him* back to warmer climates. I fear, though, he may not survive the journey.

Geta approaches and sits by Severus's bed.

GETA

To end like this...

Tears slip from Geta's eyes. Severus's hand reaches out, Geta grasps it.

SEVERUS

My son...

GETA

Father! Yes, father, what-

SEVERUS

The wise, my son... The wise must rule.

GETA

Yes, father.

SEVERUS

Rome... is an idea...

From the other end of the tent, Caracalla enters. He shakes the snow off of his hood, then approaches his dying father.

CARACALLA

The scouts report no signs of anyone. Even the savages know better than to fight in this liquid death.

SEVERUS

Marcus...

CARACALLA

(Reflexively)
That's not...
(Pause)
What is it, father?

SEVERUS

The senate... Rome... must... be ruled by the wise. One man is only... Only wise for so many things...

CARACALLA

What is he trying to say?

GETA

(Angrily) His dying words, you fool! So listen well!

Caracalla is shocked by the fury in his brothers voice. The two share a look, and Caracalla seems to back down.

SEVERUS

Marcus Aurelias...

FADE TO:

DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ROMAN SENATE - DAY

The chamber is empty, but there are statues without faces all around. Severus stands there, looking at all the pale white marble statues. He hears a voice (Marcus Aurelias) from behind him.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I am here, my young friend.

Severus turns, and Marcus Aurelias is walking into the senate chamber with a small smile on his face.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

I must admit, I am impressed.

SEVERUS

You are... Does this mean that I-

MARCUS AURELIAS

Not yet, but very soon.

Severus looks dumbstruck and sits down, obviously shaken.

SEVERUS

It can't be. My sons are not ready...

MARCUS AURELIAS

I fully understand. Commodus was never going to be ready, but... As fathers, we are often blind to the true flaws of our sons.

Marcus Aurelias sits down next to him. He looks around the senate chamber with an amused smile.

MARCUS AURELIAS (CONT'D)

Oh, the hours I wasted in this place.

SEVERUS

I know that feeling. I feel as if I spent years accomplishing so much, only to have it fall apart as soon as I looked away.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Even the Emperor cannot control the hearts of men.

SEVERUS

I remember you telling me that. It was the most profound thing I had ever heard at the time. It changed how I viewed... well, everything.

MARCUS AURELIAS

Oh, good. Then at least I know that I did not waste my time.

He smiles at Severus. Severus chuckles and looks back at Marcus Aurelias, sitting up a little more straight, as an equal.

SEVERUS

What awaits me?

MARCUS AURELIAS

It is quite beyond my ability to put into words. But there is no pain, if that's what you're afraid of.

SEVERUS

No. I do not fear pain.

MARCUS AURELIAS

I sure did. Not the pain of the body, of course. My body is ashes in the wind. But pain of the soul aches far worse.

SEVERUS

Will I see my friends? The ones I have lost? Seok? Plautinius? Perhaps even my brother?

MARCUS AURELIAS

And more.

Marcus Aurelias nods to the other side of Severus. Severus turns, and we follow his gaze. Paccia is sitting there on the other side of him.

PACCIA

Oh, my sweet Severus. Look at the man you have become.

SEVERUS

Paccia!

He reaches out, almost afraid to touch her. She takes his hand and guides it to her face.

PACCIA

I am so proud of you.

SEVERUS

I should have been there for you. I abandoned you.

Paccia puts a finger to his lips.

PACCIA

You did not cause my suffering, Severus. I made my choices just as you made yours.

Severus begins to sob. He shuts his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. SEPTIMIUS HOUSE, COMMON ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Severus finds himself sitting comfortably, his mother Pia, appearing as she did when she was young, smiling and pouring him a cup of wine.

PIA

You did not need to follow me so closely, my son.

Severus is dumbstruck. From the doorway, his father, Publius appears. He smiles down at Severus.

PUBLIUS

Look at my son. From rebel to one of the greatest emperors that ever lived.

SEVERUS

I have made many terrible mistakes.

PUBLIUS

Don't we all, my son?

Severus opens his mouth, but a look of realisation dawns on him.

SEVERUS

My children... Oh... I see...

PUBLIUS

Awfully unfair that I could never meet my grandsons, but that's the way of things.

PIA

I never even met them.

Severus looks down at the floor in shame.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS

Severus looks up to find himself in Roman armour, kneeling before Commodus, who sits on a throne of bones. The Emperor's chambers are black, as if burned, and filled with twitching human limbs and agonising moans. Commodus drinks from a cup, but it is clearly not red wine that stains his lips.

COMMODUS

To be succeeded by the likes of you.

SEVERUS

No... Not you...

COMMODUS

Is that any way to speak to your emperor?

SEVERUS

I spent most of my life cleaning up
your mess!

COMMODUS

Weakening Rome, you mean. I know I
was a monster, but when diplomacy
fails, when men of ill character
scheme to do terrible things,
sometimes you need a monster to
purge the system.

SEVERUS

No!

COMMODUS

You know it's true as well as I do.
That's why you have such a bloody
past.

We cut to Severus, who looks down at blood-stained hands.

COMMODUS (CONT'D)

Face it, savage... You were a
monster when you needed to be, but
you were ashamed of it when your
enemies needed killing.

Suddenly, standing beside Commodus is Niger. He grins broadly
at Severus as if they were old friends.

NIGER

He should have killed me. Instead,
his wife killed me. But only after
showing me her son, the son that
wears *my* face.

SEVERUS

Be quiet!

NIGER

Or what? You'll kill me? You know
as well as I do that boy came from
my seed.

SEVERUS

A secret we both shall take to our
graves!

Niger laughs.

NIGER

Caracalla knows it, too. What do
you think he will do, once you are
dead? I expect your other son shall
join us soon, and that lovely wife
of yours shall be fast on his
heels.

Severus stands up and draws his sword.

COMMODUS

Yes, there is the monster! Make him bleed!

Severus stops. He slowly re-sheaths the blade. He stands before Commodus and plucks the laurel from his head.

SEVERUS

I am not a monster. I do not rule with cruelty. And I shall not allow you to place doubt in my mind.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMANIA, ROMAN CAMP - SECONDS LATER

Severus finds himself standing in a cold, wet field. Pertinax is there in the garb of the Emperor.

PERTINAX

Good man!

Severus looks around, shocked. Then he looks to his old friend.

SEVERUS

Pertinax.

PERTINAX

Hail, Caesar.

Pertinax smiles.

SEVERUS

What is happening? I don't understand.

PERTINAX

I'm just a soldier for Rome. But if I had to guess, I would say that you are dying, and everyone who has impacted your life is here to greet you. Some are less happy than others.

There is the sound of running footsteps. Severus turns, and Geta (His brother) is charging at Severus with a raised blade.

Severus draws his own blade, and prepares to fight. Geta swings clumsily, but with ferocity, and Severus parries each blow with the experience of a seasoned veteran in a young body. Geta hacks and slashes, screaming incoherently, until finally he seems to exhaust himself. He sinks to his knees.

GETA (BROTHER)

I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!

Geta begins to sob.

Severus drops his sword and puts an arm around his brother.

GETA (BROTHER) (CONT'D)

Traitor... thief...

SEVERUS

I love and miss you, my brother.
Even if you hate me.

Geta's sobs intensify, and he embraces Severus.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN SENATE - SECONDS LATER

Severus sits, tears slipping down his face. Marcus Aurelias stands before him again.

SEVERUS

What was it all for? My sons...
They will destroy it, won't they?

MARCUS AURELIAS

Probably. I am very familiar with
that shame. So take this advice
from a man who once stood in your
position: Let it go. You did the
best you could, against impossible
odds. Expecting everyone else to
rise to that challenge is foolish.

SEVERUS

I tried to rule wisely, as you
wanted.

MARCUS AURELIAS

And you did. Oh, the senate hated
you. But they hated me, too.
Powerful men always resent
responsible rulers. And
irresponsible rulers like my son
resent rivals. But we are dead men.
We have done the best we can in a
world full of greed and hatred,
vice and stupidity.

SEVERUS

But what does it all mean if it
does not last?

MARCUS AURELIAS

Ah... But remember what I said.
Rome is an idea. You can't destroy
an idea. Cultures fade and crumble,
men die, our children betray us,
but keep the idea alive, and it is
all worth something. You were an
African Emperor, the first, and
just by existing you changed the
world. Your accomplishments will
inspire men for centuries. The idea
of Rome gained more life thanks to
you. Even if your sons destroy the
Empire, they cannot destroy the
idea.

Severus chews his lip.

SEVERUS

That is a bitter pill to swallow.

MARCUS AURELIAS

It goes down easier when you let go
of your pride.

SEVERUS

(Chuckles) Because it is brittle.

Marcus Aurelias smiles with pride.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - SECONDS LATER

Severus sits upon a throne in the garb of the Emperor. He
stands and removes the laurel. As he does, Paccia appears and
helps him remove the purple toga. Beneath is a simple tunic.
He leaves the trappings on the throne and looks into Paccia's
eyes.

She touches his face.

PACCIA

My Emperor who kicked Rome out of
Lepcis Magna. I've waited for you.

They kiss.

FADE OUT:

END DREAM SEQUENCE

FADE IN:

INT. SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS, ROMAN CAMP, SEVERUS'S TENT - EVENING

Severus's eyes go distant. His breathing stops. Julia sits beside him and erupts into tears. Caracalla and Geta kneel beside the bed and sob.

FADE TO:

EXT. SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS, ROMAN CAMP - NIGHT

Despite the cold, wet, weather, a massive pyre is built. Oil is poured on the wood, and Severus's body lies there. A Roman soldier approaches with a torch, and ignites the oil. It burns with a thick smoke.

Julia, Caracalla, and Geta stand there watching the flames. Geta and Caracalla share a look.

GETA

We should honour his wishes.

CARACALLA

Rule together?

Geta nods. Caracalla offers his hand. Geta takes it, but as Geta looks back to the flames, Caracalla gives him a dark look.

We pan over to the fire as it grows larger. The legion stands around it to show respect, and get warm. Julia weeps, but with strength, not sobbing, but simply letting the tears slip down her face.

Falling ash mixes with snow, and a layer of grey covers the scene.

Julia holds out a hand, catching a piece of falling ash. She holds it to her chest. She then looks over at her sons, seeing Caracalla glare at Geta, and a terrified look comes over her face.

CUT TO:

BLACK.