

Past Transgressions

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FADE IN:

INT. BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT (EP 113 SEASON 1)

[NEW MATERIAL] A SWIRL OF RED fades into existence. Beautiful. Mesmerizing. We PULL BACK to reveal BLOOD spewing in slow motion as a ROMAN GUARD lazily flies through the FRAME, dying from massive wounds.

RAMP TO NORMAL SPEED

as he crashes to the ground, dead. THREE MORE GUARDS rush in, stepping over their fallen comrade to confront the cause of his brutal end.

SPARTACUS

greeted them, his sword drawing fresh blood. He moves with deadly purpose, striking the Guards down in a gory display. NOBLE ROMANS scream as they rush to flee the slaughter. Spartacus ignores them, bellowing for the only man he seeks.

SPARTACUS

Batiatus!

A threat. A challenge. A promise of impending doom...

INT. TROPHY ROOM - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT (EP 113 SEASON 1)

[MATERIAL SHOT IN SEASON 1] Batiatus hustles through the carnage with Lucretia, Domitia, Numerius, and Aurelia. They stumble upon a dying Guard.

GUARD

(gurgling blood)
The doors... Glaber's men... sealed
the doors...

LUCRETIA

(realizing)
Ilithyia.

DOMITIA

(coming apart)
Why would she do such a thing --

A Gladiator surges behind her, slicing her open in an eruption of blood.

NUMERIUS

Mother!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Batiatus grabs the dead Guard's sword and runs the Gladiator through. Batiatus rips his sword free, shouts to Lucretia and the others.

BATIATUS
Go!

LUCRETIA
Quintus --

BATIATUS
GO!

Batiatus hustles off, sword clenched in trembling hand.

INT. BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT (EP 113 SEASON 1)

[NEW MATERIAL] Several NOBLE ROMANS flee from two blood-splattered GLADIATORS. BATIATUS appears after they exit. SCREAMS echo as the Gladiators catch up to their prey OFF SCREEN. Batiatus considers his options, cautiously heads in the opposite direction.

FOLLOW BATIATUS

as he weaves through the destruction. He holds his breath as a pack of Gladiators pass nearby, hooting and laughing. He turns to go, but is startled by a WOUNDED ROMAN staggering out of the shadows.

WOUNDED ROMAN
(sputtering blood)
Help me! Please, Batiatus!

BATIATUS
Still yourself, you fucking --

Too late. A BURLY GLADIATOR appears, drawn by the noise. He grins as he spots Batiatus, rushing for him. Batiatus whirls, shoving the Wounded Roman in his path. Wounded Roman gets a sword through his chest, but Burly Gladiator is knocked to the ground.

BATIATUS POUNCES,

decapitating Burly Gladiator before he can recover. Batiatus spits on the severed head in contempt as he moves on -- and runs afoul of RHASKOS and a knot of blood-drenched warriors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS TAKES OFF,

running for his life. Rhaskos and the others howl in delight, giving chase. They finally corner him in

THE ATRIUM

[MATERIAL SHOT IN SEASON 1] Bodies litter the floor. Crixus and Agron glance over, both bloodied and spent. Rhaskos and the Gladiators laugh and jeer, taunting their master. Batiatus wields his sword, desperately trying to keep them at bay.

BATIATUS (cont'd)
I am your Dominus! I will see your
fucking hearts for this!

LUCRETIA (O.S.)
Quintus...

Batiatus freezes in horror as he spots Lucretia, clutching her stomach, the wound Crixus inflicted gushing blood.

BATIATUS
Lucretia!

Batiatus starts to go to her as she collapses, but is intercepted by Spartacus, his eyes blazing with hot desire for revenge.

SPARTACUS
What would you do? To hold your
wife again? To feel the warmth of
her skin? The taste of her lips?
How many men would you kill? A
hundred? A thousand? There stands
but one, between you and her.

Batiatus screams, attacking. Spartacus counters, driving him to the ground, sword to his neck.

SPARTACUS (cont'd)
Go to her. Tell her the gods
themselves will not keep you apart.
Lie. As you lied to me of my wife.

Spartacus releases him. Batiatus rises, trembling as he scans his men for mercy. His eyes fall on Doctore, entering with a shell-shocked Aurelia.

BATIATUS
Oenomaus...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Oenomaus averts his gaze. Batiatus swells, fear giving way to rage. He abandons his sword, locking eyes with Spartacus in defiance.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

You were nothing before me! I gave you the fucking heavens! I gave you means to accept your fate!

SPARTACUS

And now you are destroyed by it.

Spartacus HACKS OPEN BATIATUS' THROAT. Batiatus sputters in shock as BLOOD spews from his ruined neck. He staggers towards Lucretia, collapsing on the crimson floor next to her. [NEW MATERIAL FOLLOWS]

PUSH IN ON BATIATUS

as the life begins to fade from his eyes. OFF SCREEN we hear Spartacus' voice coming through in DISTORTED WAVES as he makes his rousing speech to the liberated slaves.

SPARTACUS (O.S.)

I have done this thing... because it was just. Blood demands blood...

CONTINUE PUSHING IN. Batiatus' EYES fill the FRAME. Spartacus' voice is replaced by the cacophony of a CHEERING CROWD. The sound swells to a DEAFENING ROAR, propelling us to --

EXT. OLD CAPUA ARENA - DAY

Not the spectacular arena from Season 1. No grand appointments, no fluttering awnings to shield spectators from the blazing sun. Much smaller and in disrepair.

THE MOTLEY CROWD ROARS

as two GLADIATORS trade deadly blows on the sand. It's a dirty, brutal fight, lacking in refinement.

REVEAL BATIATUS,

frowning sourly, jammed in with the common dregs in the stands. He's slightly younger at this point in time, his hair not yet troubled by encroaching gray. With him are his body slave ACCO (large brute), LUCRETIA (slightly younger, natural hair), her body slave MELITTA (30-ish, curvy red-haired beauty -- has a tattoo on the back of her shoulder like Naevia did in season 1), and several ATTENDING SLAVES.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA

jumps at a bone-jarring blow, laughs.

LUCRETIA

The fights are particularly
entertaining this morning.

A DIRTY FAN too close at hand erupts, spilling wine.

DIRTY FAN

Fucking kill him!

BATIATUS

(frowning, to
Lucretia)

I would find it more so viewed from
the pulvinus.

He glances up to the "pulvinus," which is little more than a roped off area set up and apart from the unwashed masses. VETTIUS, a holier-than-thou young lanista (early 20s) from Nola, holds court with upper crust Romans. Two seats next to him are conspicuously empty. Vettius spots Batiatus, tosses him a smug grin. Batiatus smiles politely.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

(through the smile)

Fucking shit eater.

LUCRETIA

Let Vettius preen like a woman. You
will school him in the ways of men,
when Gannicus takes to the sands.

Batiatus eyes the empty seats in the pulvinus.

BATIATUS

Absent Tullius and the Magistrate
to bear witness, what's the fucking
purpose? One man in today's games.
One only, and the seats needing to
impress stand empty as Vettius'
head.

SOLONIUS appears, pushing his way through the throngs with a frown of distaste. Batiatus greets him warmly. At this point in time they are as brothers.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Solonius! What news do you bring?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SOLONIUS

Tullius and the Magistrate were delayed with pressing business, but arrive shortly. As long as the current match --

The crowd ROARS as one of the Gladiators goes down in a spray of blood. Batiatus leaps to his feet.

BATIATUS

Get up! Get up, you fucking...

The Gladiator coughs a gout of blood, goes still. Batiatus throws his hands up in frustration as the body is dragged off. Vettius waves down for the next match to begin.

LUCRETIA

He begins the match? Without proper introduction?

BATIATUS

Proper? Vettius and the word are of distant relation.

A grungy MURMILLO gladiator takes his position in the arena. Helmet, heavy shield, sword.

SOLONIUS

I for one am grateful to be spared his oratory. The man's voice causes skull to ache.

LUCRETIA

Gannicus takes position!

GANNICUS appears -- and he is a golden fucking god. Late 20s, tall and muscular, with a perpetual twinkle in his eye and a grin on his lips. Han Solo by way of Achilles. Two swords, no helmet. A leather necklace graces his throat (the exact same one Crixus wears in Season 1). Batiatus cheers.

BATIATUS

(to the crowd)

Now there is a fucking gladiator!

Gannicus takes his position opposite the Murmillo. He assesses the man from head to toe. And laughs. Really? This is who he's fighting? He glances up to the pulvinus, awaiting the signal.

VETTIUS

Begin!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Murmillo attacks. Gannicus counters -- and he ain't your daddy's gladiator. He's a showboater, laughing and playing to the crowd as he trades blows with the deadly serious Murmillo. Solonius sighs in disapproval.

SOLONIUS

Is your man ever of a serious note?

BATIATUS

He can strip naked and fight with his cock, as long as he wins.

A SEXY WOMAN in the crowd exposes herself for Gannicus. He grins at her, laughing in approval. The Murmillo strikes, slicing open Gannicus' arm while he's distracted.

MELITTA,

Lucretia's body slave, reacts to the injury. Worry clouds her eyes. Batiatus shares her concern.

GANNICUS

glances at the blood dripping down his arm, locks eyes with the Murmillo. The Murmillo tenses, waiting for Gannicus to retaliate. But instead Gannicus stabs his swords into the ground, disarming himself.

LUCRETIA

What is he doing? Quintus --

Gannicus throws his arms out, mocking the Murmillo, daring him to attack. Murmillo hesitates, then surges forward, hacking and slashing. Gannicus deftly avoids each blow -- and kicks the man in the ass for good measure.

THE CROWD HOWLS

in approval. Vettius frowns from the pulvinus, whispers something disapproving to the man next to him. Batiatus eyes the empty seats in the pulvinus, turns back to whisper pleading instruction to Gannicus.

BATIATUS

Do not kill him yet... Do not --

Gannicus retrieves his swords and lands half a dozen lightning fast blows. Batiatus sags. The Murmillo sinks to his knees, keels over dead. Gannicus throws his arms up. The crowd LAUGHS and CHEERS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PULVINUS

TULLIUS and MAGISTRATE SEXTUS (ep 113, Season 1) finally arrive. Tullius is a dark, handsome man in his mid 40s, flanked by his huge, deadly bodyguard THERON. Vettius leaps up to greet them.

THE STANDS

Batiatus glowers at the sight.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Now they arrive.

LUCRETIA

A victory regardless.

BATIATUS

Won in dewy morn. The important matches do not even begin until after the midday sun has passed.

SOLONIUS

Consider yourself fortunate to have a man in the games at all. Good Solonius stands with empty hands.

Batiatus laughs, realizing the truth in that. He clasps his friend on the back.

BATIATUS

Come then. Let us see them filled with drink.

(to Attending Slave)

Tell Doctore to see Gannicus back to the ludus. And properly rewarded for his showing.

LUCRETIA

(disappointed)

Can we not stay for the rest of the games?

BATIATUS

Vettius' men command the prominent matches. He has more than enough eyes to watch him stroke his cock. I would not add ours to the fucking sight.

Batiatus rises, WIPING US TO --

INT. CHUTES - OLD ARENA - DAY

Batiatus' Attending Slave weaves through the dilapidated wooden chutes, maneuvering past dead and wounded Gladiators.

ATTENDING SLAVE
 (spotting someone
 O.S.)
 Doctore.

REVEAL DOCTORE -- but it isn't Oenomaus. This DOCTORE is a grizzled giant of a man. Skin baked a golden bronze, white SCARS standing out in stark contrast. He wears the chestplate that Oenomaus one day will take possession of, but at this point it is merely weathered and has not been patched up.

ATTENDING SLAVE (cont'd)
 Dominus orders Gannicus returned to the ludus, and seen to reward.

OTHO, a big bearded slab of ugly, laughs as he spots Gannicus returning through the chute gate.

OTHO
 Perhaps one day the pretty little bitch will fight later in the afternoon. With the rest of the men.

The Gladiators chuckle. Gannicus grins mirthlessly.

GANNICUS
 You and your tiny cock best pray that day never comes.

Otho GRUNTS, starts for him. Gannicus is ready to go. Doctore intervenes.

DOCTORE
 Save blood for the fucking sands.
 Gannicus.

Gannicus grins, blowing Otho a kiss as Doctore leads him away. Otho spits in disgust, continues suiting up. Doctore hisses at Gannicus.

DOCTORE (cont'd)
 What seized fucking brain,
 releasing your swords in the arena?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GANNICUS

I could have taken the man absent
an arm and both legs.

DOCTORE

Hubris. A fine quality. Often
possessed by cunts who have
perished from it.

Doctore leads Gannicus out, WIPING US TO --

EXT. CAPUA STREETS - DAY

ARM DOWN into the bustling streets of Capua. MERCHANTS hawk
their wares. Questionable meats perfume the air. PROSTITUTES
display their charms.

BATIATUS

strolls through the chaos with Solonius and Lucretia. They
are closely followed by Melitta, Acco, and Attending Slaves.

BATIATUS

Did you catch the manner of his
eye, as he gazed down from the
pulvinus? Fucking Vettius. Barely
free of his mother's tit, yet
carries himself above lanistas of
more deserving years.

Batiatus drinks from a wine skin, passes it to Solonius.

LUCRETIA

Youth often imagines itself swollen
beyond its worth.

SOLONIUS

Time will cure him of the
condition, as it does all foolish
young men.

BATIATUS

Time is what he holds in abundance.
The new arena will be finished in
but a handful of months. If we are
excluded from the opening games...

LUCRETIA

Vettius is but shit from a shit
town. How could Tullius and the
Magistrate favor a boy from Nola
over Capua's own sons?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

(snorts)

How do they do it now?

SOLONIUS

We must prove ourselves in the more important bouts in the old arena and secure position.

BATIATUS

To fight later in the day we must first distinguish ourselves against Vettius' men. Yet Vettius' men only fight later in the day.

SOLONIUS

A vexing conundrum.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Lucretia?!

Lucretia turns, shocked to see GAIA launching out of the crowd. Gaia is a stunning beauty dripping with sexuality and mischief, a few years younger than Lucretia (early 30s). She's dressed in the finest appointments, jewels, and an expensive BRACELET adding to the image. Currently blonde, she wears the wigs that we will see Lucretia in during Season 1.

LUCRETIA

Gaia!

They both shriek like schoolgirls, throwing their arms around each other. Solonius forces a smile, eyeing the crowd to make sure no one of note has witnessed the break in decorum.

LUCRETIA (cont'd)

You return to Capua without telling me?

GAIA

I have only this moment arrived, with intentions of seeking you out.

BATIATUS

You travel with your husband?

GAIA

He takes to road no more. Not in this life, at least.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

Apologies --

GAIA

None required. It was his time.
 (gaily, to Lucretia)
 Are you occupied? I am fit to
 bursting with stories of my
 adventures.

Lucretia turns to Batiatus for approval to go with her.

LUCRETIA

Quintus...?

BATIATUS

(laugh)
 What man dares stand between women
 and gossip?

Lucretia kisses Batiatus and heads off with Gaia. Melitta
 and a few Attending Slaves follow in their wake.

LUCRETIA

You must tell me everything. Secret
 no detail.

GAIA

Removed from the ears of men, my
 lips willingly part...

She gives Batiatus and Solonius a smile as she heads off.
 Solonius admires Gaia as she goes.

SOLONIUS

Gaia returns unencumbered. And in
 enticing form.

BATIATUS

The woman is a force of fucking
 nature. One that has blown many an
 unsuspecting man to his ruin.

He clasps Solonius on the back, leading him away. Acco and
 Attending Slaves follow.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

You require someone more refined to
 grace arm as our fortunes rise.

They turn down

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A SIDE STREET

In the distance the new Capua arena looms, now 80 percent complete. WORKER SLAVES haul stones and equipment past Batiatus and Solonius, heading for the construction site. Batiatus takes in the splendor of it.

BATIATUS (cont'd)
Have eyes ever beheld such a
marvel?

SOLONIUS
A sight to put the Circus Maximus
in Rome to bitter shame.

BATIATUS
We will be the ones shamed, if
grand ceremony passes absent our
gladiators. We must force
advantage, before opportunity slips
from grasp.

SOLONIUS
We must be patient. Your father
would venture forward with respect
and caution.

BATIATUS
Then a blessing he is not present.

SOLONIUS
Perhaps we should send word to him
in Sicilia, petition advice...?

BATIATUS
I can already divine content of his
reply. Which is why the man never
rose above his humble station. Fuck
patience!

Batiatus tosses a coin to a MERCHANT, takes an apple.

BATIATUS (cont'd)
(eating)
Look to Tullius for the way! He
seizes opportunity by the fucking
balls while lesser men are left
holding cock! A simple merchant,
yet he gives honored counsel to the
Magistrate and all the rest of the
noble shit eaters of Capua.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SOLONIUS
 (glancing about
 nervously)
 Truth told, yet at excessive
 volume.

BATIATUS
 I would shout his fucking praise to
 the heavens. His hands shaped
 events resulting in the erection of
 the new arena. He supplies slaves
 from the furthest reaches of the
 Republic to help speed its
 completion. Through the ambitions
 of Tullius, Capua is elevated. A
 lesson to be studied, and
 reproduced in kind.

SOLONIUS
 (laughs)
 Is that all? Well, a simple task
 then, Batiatus.

BATIATUS
 Between us, we have the greatest
 gladiators in Capua. Gannicus,
 Barca, Arkadios, Decabalis -- Men
 forged into something beyond their
 worth. Beyond anything that smug
 little piss Vettius could ever hope
 to offer --

A commotion interrupts. One of Tullius' Worker Slaves has
 abandoned his stones in favor of beating the shit out of
 another. Brutal and ugly. Citizens shout in surprise,
 scampering out of the way.

SOLONIUS
 Perhaps Tullius should not have
 strayed so far abroad in acquiring
 his slaves.

Worker Slave #1 gets his opponent down, fists hammering his
 face into pulp. APPIUS, a large, bearded slaver, rushes in
 with two GUARDS. They smash Worker Slave #1 off -- revealing
 a younger CRIXUS. Hair wild, chin stubbled with beard, face
 not yet scarred from years in the arena.

APPIUS
 Crixus! You know of the rules.
 (to other slaves)
 No one breaks the line!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He raises a spiked club to bash Crixus' brains in, but Batiatus intervenes.

BATIATUS
Hold! This is one of good Tullius' slaves?

Appius eyes Batiatus suspiciously.

APPIUS
It is.

BATIATUS
(fishing out coin purse)
I would make purchase.

SOLONIUS
Purchase?

BATIATUS
What is the man's worth?

APPIUS
He is not for sale.

Appius raises his club again.

BATIATUS
Fifty denarii.

SOLONIUS
(hissing to him)
What are you doing?

BATIATUS
(whispered)
Seizing balls.

APPIUS
The man is barely worth ten. Why would you pay such a sum for a shit Gaul?

BATIATUS
Shit? Do you not see the promise in his eyes? The spark smoldering within his breast? I would give it tender, to ignite in the arena!

Appius hesitates, tempted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

APPIUS

Fifty?

BATIATUS

And an extra five to weight your own purse.

Appius licks his lips, nods. Batiatus grins, counts out his coins. Realizes he's a few denarii short. He whispers to Solonius.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Loan me twenty denarii.

Solonius sighs, digs into his own purse.

SOLONIUS

You pay too much for the man.

BATIATUS

The man is nothing. I pay to gain favor with Tullius.

Batiatus hands the coins over. Appius snorts.

APPIUS

A waste of coin. The shit fuck will never be a gladiator.

Batiatus takes Crixus in, musing on that.

BATIATUS

Even the lowest man can rise beyond the heavens, if tempted with proper reward...

OFF Batiatus' calculating grin...

INT. GANNICUS' CELL - BATIATUS' LUDUS - DAY

The same cell Spartacus received in episode 106 after his victory over Theokoles. Gannicus fucks two BEAUTIFUL SLAVE GIRLS. Everyone is drinking and laughing and having a rollicking good time. Wine flows. Passions climax. Slave Girl #1 writhes in ecstasy as she orgasms, SMASHING US TO --

EXT. TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - SUNSET

PRACTICE SWORDS clash as GLADIATORS train under the watchful eye of Doctore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS WIELDS A SWORD,

the golden rays of the setting sun bathing his marbled flesh as he spars with BARCA (training as a Hoplomachus, with spear and shield). Oenomaus is still a gladiator at this point, although the scars marring his chest, back, and face indicate that his fight with Theokoles is in the past.

AUCTUS,

a well-muscled tank of a man (and Barca's lover), spars with GNAEUS nearby. Auctus is also a Hoplomachus, but Gnaeus trains as a Thraex, not the Retiarius he will later become.

NEW RECRUITS,

the Mark of the Brotherhood yet to be earned, train in the background. Among them are ASHUR (heavily muscled, face clean shaven), DAGAN, a hulking Syrian, and INDUS, a svelte, athletic youth.

GANNICUS' CELL DOOR OPENS

across the square. The Slave Girls spill out, exhausted and glowing. Melitta is waiting with a GUARD to escort them back up to the villa.

MELITTA

He was well satisfied?

Gannicus appears, sweaty, a jug of wine in hand as he ties a bit of cloth around his waist, barely hiding his nakedness.

GANNICUS

Very well.

He grins, smacking one of the girls on the ass as Melitta leads them to the mess hall gate.

MELITTA

Dominus will be pleased.

GANNICUS

Not as much as I am.

MELITTA

When are you not so? Especially with yourself?

GANNICUS

It is a curse. Being blessed with so much to offer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gannicus grins, taking a swig of wine. The two have an easygoing friendship, filled with good-natured barbs.

MELITTA

And so few interested in sharing
it.

Melitta catches Oenomaus' eye across the square, graces him with a loaded smile. Oenomaus returns it.

OENOM AUS

Doctore. A moment?

Doctore laughs, signals him permission.

MESS HALL GATE

The Guard opens the gate leading up to the villa. Melitta shoos the Slave Girls in.

MELITTA

See yourselves well scrubbed. I
would not have you smell of goat.

GANNICUS

(sniffing himself)
Goat?

OENOM AUS (O.S.)

A dead one.

Gannicus breaks into a toothy grin, clasping forearms with Oenomaus as he joins them.

GANNICUS

The smell of victory, brother.

OENOM AUS

(laughs)
Well earned. The men all speak of
your triumph.

Melitta catches the longing in Oenomaus' eyes.

MELITTA

As they will of yours, when you
return to the arena.

GANNICUS

The crowd will fucking cum in great
geysers, drenching the gods
gathered to witness Oenomaus once
more upon the sands!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Oenomaus forces a smile, uncertain the day will ever come.

OENOMAUS
I would have words with my wife.
(glancing down)
Absent your cock, which has escaped
you.

Gannicus laughs, adjusting his wrap below FRAME.

GANNICUS
It will be missed.

He drinks, heading off to the baths in all his naked glory.
Oenomaus turns to Melitta, anxious.

OENOMAUS
Has Dominus spoken of my return?

MELITTA
(reluctantly)
I have not heard it.

OENOMAUS
Almost a year has past since I
faced Theokoles. Perhaps Dominus
does not intend --

MELITTA
You were the only one to ever stand
against the Shadow of Death and
live. Batiatus would be a fool to
keep you from the arena.

OENOMAUS
Or I am the fool, for dreaming of
such a thing.

MELITTA
You are many things. Foolish is not
among them. Batiatus waits but for
the perfect moment for his champion
to retake glory.

She pulls him into a passionate kiss.

MELITTA (cont'd)
Now see your ass back to training,
and be well prepared for the day.

She disappears with a grin up the stairs. Oenomaus watches
her go with a warm smile, her love and confidence
infectious. He moves back to the square, WIPING US TO --

INT. BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

DIONA, a pretty young slave barely out of her teens, and her best friend NAEVIA titter as they pelt the two Slave Girls with questions about Gannicus' prowess. [NOTE: Naevia does not have the tattoo on the back of her shoulder yet.]

DIONA
Is it true? That his thing is large
as a horse's?

NAEVIA
Diona!

DIONA
Are you not curious?

NAEVIA
(hesitates, to
Slave Girls)
Is Gannicus' really that big?

Diona and Naevia shriek with laughter -- which they quickly stifle as Melitta appears.

MELITTA
Where is Domina?

NAEVIA
In the triclinium with her guest.

MELITTA
Diona, see the girls bathed.

DIONA
Yes, Melitta.

Diona exits, giggling with the girls. Naevia falls into step with Melitta as she moves off. Melitta glances sideways at Naevia.

MELITTA
It is exciting, speaking of such
things, is it not?

Naevia isn't sure how to answer. Melitta laughs. She obviously has a fondness for Naevia, as a big sister would towards a younger sibling.

MELITTA (cont'd)
I was of a similar age, not so long
ago. I know the giddy enticement
of the subject.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MELITTA (cont'd)

(more serious)

Yet you and Diona should turn thought from it. Soon enough your flowers will be plucked. Hastening the moment will only result in bruising of the petals.

Naevia nods uncomfortably, feeling properly chastised.

MELITTA (cont'd)

And in regards to Gannicus... I have seen bigger.

Melitta hits her with a wry smile. OFF Naevia, forcing back a laugh...

INT. TRICLINIUM - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Lucretia and Gaia lounge, drinking and laughing.

LUCRETIA

You do not seem overly distraught at his passing.

GAIA

How would you present, after years enduring withered flesh groping at you.

LUCRETIA

But when you left Capua I thought you madly in love.

GAIA

I was -- with his purse. Sadly his fortunes went dry towards the end.

Lucretia eyes Gaia's expensive dress and jewelry with a knowing smile.

LUCRETIA

And did you aid in the evaporation?

GAIA

(laughs)

What can I say? I am the glorious sun.

She removes her jewel-studded bracelet, places it around Lucretia's wrist.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GAIA (cont'd)
Returned to bless loving rays upon
favored friend.

LUCRETIA
(declining the gift)
Gaia --

GAIA
I have far too many baubles brought
from Rome. Along with other
pleasures to be shared...

She kisses her on the lips, lingering for a moment before
returning to her wine. From Lucretia's lack of reaction, it
is not an uncommon thing between them.

GAIA (cont'd)
(re: bracelet)
It suits you.

LUCRETIA
It would dazzle Venus herself. I
fear I have nothing so exquisite to
give in return.

GAIA
Your company is all I ever desire.

Lucretia eyes her with a smile, knowing her too well.

LUCRETIA
And...?

GAIA
(laughs, caught)
I would not refuse the comforts of
a well appointed villa, until I
manage other arrangements...?

LUCRETIA
Involving a ripe purse?
(laughs)
I will ask Quintus upon his return.

GAIA
Ask? Women do not ask their
husbands for permission. They
maneuver them to proper answer,
before question is ever put to
tongue.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA

(laughs)

All these years, yet nothing has changed.

Gaia eyes the sumptuous villa.

GAIA

Everything has changed, and for the better, by the judging of it. When last we parted, this house was a tomb, haunted by the living specter of your husband's father. And you, forced to smile and cater, bringing him his honeyed wine every evening. I thought the crusty old bastard would never succumb to the afterlife.

LUCRETIA

He is not yet so far removed. Merely retired to Sicilia for his health.

GAIA

So he yet controls the ludus?

LUCRETIA

No. My husband does.
(reluctantly)
As his proxy.

Melitta and Naevia enter, bearing food and more wine. Lucretia seizes on the opportunity to shift the subject.

LUCRETIA (cont'd)

Was Gannicus attended to?

MELITTA

He was, Domina.

GAIA

Gannicus? The Celt with that ridiculously charming smile?

LUCRETIA

He has risen to prominence within the ludus since Oenomaus was injured against Theokoles.

She catches the pain of that in Melitta's eyes, offers balm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA (cont'd)
In an amazing display of bravery.

She waves Melitta and Naevia out with a kind smile. Gaia munches on the snacks, a lusty smile bending her lips.

GAIA
Gannicus. Oenomaus. All the hard,
rippling men right beneath our
feet. One moistens at the thought.

LUCRETIA
(laughs,
scandalized)
Gaia! They are but slaves!

GAIA
Please. In all the years you have
called this ludus home, you have
never once considered fucking one
of them?

LUCRETIA
The very thought turns stomach. I
would never lay with any man
besides my husband. Let alone a
filthy gladiator.

OFF the proclamation...

INT. BARRACKS - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

A bloodied and bruised Crixus is thrown into the main cell. Ashur chuckles. His hulking friend Dagan and young Indus are sprawled out, dirty and exhausted from the day's training.

ASHUR
Another sacrifice to the gods of
the arena.

DAGAN
(laughs, in Aramaic)
Ze'irta kema atteta mezayyna, hada.
[Small as a fucking woman, this
one.]

Crixus eyes him, not understanding the language. Ashur quickly "translates".

ASHUR
Dagan thinks you of a form, giving
odds in your favor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CRIXUS

Odds?

INDUS

(laughs)

Do you know where you are, friend?

CRIXUS

The House of Batiatus. Trainer of gladiators.

ASHUR

Yes. You stand among his latest recruits. Bound by pain and blood, together we toil beneath the cruel sting of Doctore's whip.

INDUS

There were eight of us, when training began.

ASHUR

Now we are but three.

CRIXUS

Four.

ASHUR

(laughs)

And how are we so blessed by swelling number? By what means do you find yourself among such storied company?

CRIXUS

My own. I was bound to Appius the slaver, carrying stones towards purpose of the new arena. I saw Batiatus, and knew him by his words of gladiators. I gained attention, in hopes of --

INDUS

You willingly present ass for fucking?

ASHUR

No, no, young Indus. Do you not see it in his eyes? This is a man with dreams of blood and glory.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INDUS

(snorts)

I doubt he will live to see the test.

CRIXUS

Test?

ASHUR

The last trial. We must all face one of the seasoned men, and demonstrate to the Dominus what we have learned. Live, and receive the Mark of the Brotherhood, proving yourself worthy of the arena.

Crixus hardens at the thought.

CRIXUS

I will stand upon its sands.

The other men chuckle.

DAGAN

(in Aramaic)

Gammadta mezayyna. Be-qushya matya maysa eri. [Fucking dwarf. Barely tall enough to suck my cock.]

Ashur grins at Crixus.

ASHUR

He longs to call you brother, and join you as gladiator.

Dagan laughs, spits. Crixus eyes him, knowing that isn't close to what he said.

CRIXUS

Tell him the feeling is well shared.

OFF Crixus, a challenging smile bending his lips...

EXT. BALCONY - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

The moon blazes in the night sky, illuminating Batiatus and Lucretia. Batiatus drinks as he paces, agitated.

BATIATUS

Fifty denarii, for a fucking stone hauler.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA

Coin well spent.

BATIATUS

Was it? Word surly has reached
Tullius' ear, yet none of gratitude
return. Fifty denarii! Solonius was
right. I should temper patience, as
my father would.

LUCRETIA

You are not your father. Nor would
I have it so.

Lucretia kisses him gently, whispering support.

LUCRETIA (cont'd)

Perhaps tomorrow you will find
yourself in the market. Where you
have often mentioned Tullius
frequents upon a certain hour,
overseeing his concerns.

Batiatus grins, gaining her meaning.

BATIATUS

A chance encounter, to gauge his
reaction?

LUCRETIA

Certain to be favorable. As I know
your reply to my request will be.

BATIATUS

Give it voice, and see it
considered.

LUCRETIA

I would have Gaia remain with us.
For a few days, until she can
manage other arrangements.

BATIATUS

(laughs)
The request does not surprise.

LUCRETIA

Is that a yes?

BATIATUS

Ask for the moon, and I would wrest
it from the heavens.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She kisses him, excited.

LUCRETIA
Gaia will be pleased by your
answer.

She starts to head back in. Batiatus stops her.

BATIATUS
Let her keep company with her wine
a moment longer...

He kisses her, passion rising, hands exploring... Lucretia
sighs at his touch.

LUCRETIA
Has a wife ever had such a husband?

Batiatus turns her around, lifting her dress as he whispers
in her ear.

BATIATUS
He but honors her... and the gods
for guiding such treasure to his
arms...

He enters her, their faces seized by pleasure and love.
REVEAL Gaia watching from the shadows inside the villa. Her
hand drops below frame to pleasure herself as she takes in
the show. As she bites her lip in mounting ecstasy, the
SCREEN IS CONSUMED IN LIGHT, transitioning us to the BLAZING
SUN --

EXT. TRAINING SQUARE - BATIATUS' LUDUS - DAY

The sun beats down, scorching Gladiators and Recruits as
they train under the crack of Doctore's whip. Oenomaus again
spars with Barca. Auctus trades blows with Gnaeus.

CRIXUS

spars with Ashur. Ashur pivots, smacking Crixus across the
face with his practice sword. Dagan chuckles.

DOCTORE
You lower shield when you thrust.
See it raised, or your fucking
brains upon the sand.

CRIXUS
Yes, Doctore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ashur grins, whispers at Crixus.

ASHUR

A lucky blow.

CRIXUS

It was well struck. I will not repeat the mistake.

Ashur laughs, attacks. Crixus counters, then raises his shield just in time to deflect Ashur's blow.

ASHUR

Good! Again!

Crixus attacks. Gannicus steps out of his cell across the square, squints in hang-over discomfort at the searing light.

GANNICUS

Doctore! I would work the palus. In the shade.

Doctore frowns, motions approval. Gannicus takes a practice sword and heads for a palus in the shade. Crixus eyes him curiously as he passes.

ASHUR

(to Crixus)

I would not let gaze linger. Gannicus is a fucking fool, yet one of deadly skill. He is often rewarded for his victories with wine and cunt. Gain Dominus' favor, and such delights could be yours.

CRIXUS

Drink and women are not my concern.

ASHUR

More for me, then.

Ashur attacks. Barca chuckles as he spars with Oenomaus.

BARCA

Fucking recruits. Smaller and smaller each year.

Oenomaus ignores him, his attention drawn to Batiatus as he appears from the villa. He heads for the main gate, Acco and Attending Slaves in tow. Oenomaus sees a chance to gain notice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS
(to Barca)
Apologies.

WHAM! Oenomaus attacks, driving Barca back. Batiatus pauses at the gate, glancing over. Barca counters. They trade bone-shattering blows, but Barca is outmatched. CRACK! Oenomaus sends Barca to the ground, dazed and bleeding. Auctus rushes over to help him.

BATIATUS
Oenomaus.

Oenomaus looks over, eyes shining with expectation.

BATIATUS (cont'd)
You return to form. Pair with
Crixus, and bring him to speed.

Oenomaus barely hides his disappointment.

OENOMAUS
Dominus.

Batiatus exits. Crixus hustles over.

CRIXUS
Gratitude. Your instruction is much
appreciated --

CRACK! Oenomaus smashes Crixus to the ground with a single blow. He glares down at him, the sting of being assigned to train a raw recruit flaring in his eyes.

OENOMAUS
Lesson one: never drop your fucking
guard. Rise. And prepare for lesson
two...

Crixus spits blood and painfully rises, WIPING US TO --

EXT. CAPUA STREETS - DAY

Batiatus anxiously weaves through the crowd with Solonius. Acco and Attending Slaves follow.

BATIATUS
Do you lay eyes?

SOLONIUS
No. Perhaps Tullius did not come
today.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

He always comes, and seldom departs
before noonday sun.

SOLONIUS

(laughs)
Are you his shadow now, adhered to
each footstep?

BATIATUS

I but study my subject, as any
proper student would in pursuit of
knowledge.

Batiatus spots Tullius' bodyguard Theron standing outside of
a meat shop.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Tullius' man.

Batiatus grins, heads for him. Solonius frowns, follows.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

(to Theron)
I seek your master, good Tullius.
Would he be within?

Theron stares down at Batiatus, says nothing. Batiatus licks
his lips, tries another tactic.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

I wish to express gratitude for
allowing me to purchase his slave
Crius. The Gaul shows great
promise towards the arena. Perhaps
you could pass word of my
presence...

Batiatus presses a few coins into Theron's hand. Theron
stares at them. Batiatus frowns, adds a few more. Theron
disappears inside without a word.

SOLONIUS

You owe me a few of those, if you
recall.

Batiatus hands over the borrowed coins from yesterday.

BATIATUS

A costly enterprise.

SOLONIUS

That one prays will turn profit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Batiatus grins as Tullius appears from the shop.

BATIATUS

The gods answer --

His grin falters as he spots Vettius also exiting.

SOLONIUS

In mocking tone.

Tullius greets Batiatus with a warm smile.

TULLIUS

Good Batiatus. I hoped for occasion to give gratitude for relieving me of that troublesome Gaul.

BATIATUS

Think nothing of it. A gesture of respect, for a man deserving of it.

TULLIUS

Received with all intentions. Yet I fear you have overpaid.

VETTIUS

A common mistake, for those with no head towards business.

Tullius presses a small purse of coins into Batiatus' hands.

TULLIUS

Fifty denarii, minus the ten of the Gaul's actual worth.

Batiatus is stunned, struggles to regain advantage.

BATIATUS

This is -- I do not ask for its return. Fair bargain was struck.

VETTIUS

Fair?

(snorts)

A clumsy maneuver to gain position for your ill-trained men.

TULLIUS

Vettius.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

Ill-trained? Any one of my men
could best yours fucking
blindfolded, you pissy little shit.

VETTIUS

Listen how the rooster crows.

SOLONIUS

Let us calm ourselves, with drink,
perhaps --

Solonius takes Batiatus' arm. Batiatus shakes it off,
getting in Vettius' face.

BATIATUS

You doubt my words? Test them. If
you have fucking nerve to request
the match in next month's games.

VETTIUS

Why delay? Let us see it here in
the morning, the people to judge
who holds the better man.

SOLONIUS

In the market? Surely the
Magistrate would not approve such
disruption.

VETTIUS

Good Tullius has his ear.

Vettius looks to Tullius. Tullius considers it, nods.

TULLIUS

The Magistrate could be swayed to
allow it... if that is what you
wish?

BATIATUS

It is. And long past due.

TULLIUS

Tomorrow then. A friendly rivalry,
well settled.

Tullius moves off with Vettius and Theron. Solonius frets.

SOLONIUS

You press beyond advantage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

No. I fucking press towards it.

OFF Batiatus' determination...

INT. BATIATUS' VILLA - DAY

Wine spills into a cup as Batiatus excitedly regales Lucretia and Gaia with his tale of the marketplace.

BATIATUS

You should have seen young Vettius, so easily goaded into making challenge! The fucking child!

Batiatus drinks with a laugh.

LUCRETIA

All men are reduced in years, when faced with superior mind.

BATIATUS

Superior in all accounting! A fact Tullius and the rest of the city will bear witness to in the marketplace!

GAIA

Sleep will come with difficulty tonight. It has been ages since I have seen a decent match. Or Tullius. In the blush of youth, he was forever attempting to slip beneath my robes.

BATIATUS

You should have let him. Tullius has grown to a man of worth.

(pouring her more wine)

One to be emulated and admired.

GAIA

I have the perfect wig for tomorrow. A color he once favored.

LUCRETIA

(to Batiatus)

What man will you choose to impress him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

Vettius' foolishness presents rare opportunity. The question begs careful consideration...

Batiatus drinks, turning the possibilities in his mind...

INT. OFFICE - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Oenomaus is escorted in. He can barely contain his excitement as Batiatus counts coin at his desk, not looking up. He finishes, rises.

BATIATUS

I have news to lift the heart.
Vettius has made challenge.

OENOMAUUS

The coward finds his cock.

BATIATUS

(laughs)
And I would see it shriveled. My best man is to meet his dog in the marketplace come morning.

OENOMAUUS

The market?

BATIATUS

A detail of no consequence. My question to you is plain. Is our man prepared for such a vital match?

OENOMAUUS

(swelling with pride)
Yes, Dominus. I long to honor this house once again.

Batiatus stares, laughs uncomfortably.

BATIATUS

No, I fear you have mistaken intentions. I speak of Gannicus.

Oenomaus barely contains his disappointment -- and embarrassment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OENOMAUS

Gannicus. I -- The question would be better put to Doctore.

BATIATUS

His counsel is always valued, yet he is my father's man. His judgement clouded through the haze of outdated tradition. I seek a more visceral assessment. You and I practically grew up together in this ludus. You have seen the rise and fall of a dozen champions. What now does your gut tell you of Gannicus? Is he worthy of assuming the mantle?

Oenomaus struggles with the question.

OENOMAUS

(soft)

I believe it so.

BATIATUS

He must truly be, for you to offer support despite your own desires.

OENOMAUS

I would not give false tongue to gain advantage.

BATIATUS

There are few that would stand with you so.

He clasps Oenomaus warmly on the arm.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Your wife's weekly visit. Two days hence?

Oenomaus nods.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

I would see her to your bed tonight as well. In gratitude for honest thoughts.

He motions to the Guard. Oenomaus is led out, WIPING US TO

--

INT. OENOMAUS' CELL - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

Melitta, naked, lights a candle at a makeshift altar (the same seen in episode 106, season 1). She mouths a silent prayer before sliding into bed with Oenomaus. He takes her in his arms with a troubled frown.

OENOMAUS
Do the gods ever answer your
prayers?

MELITTA
They often reveal their leanings,
though not in words. Much like my
husband.

He forces a sad smile. Melitta knows him too well.

OENOMAUS
(reluctantly)
Dominus summoned me. To ask of
Gannicus.

MELITTA
Gannicus?

OENOMAUS
He has chosen him as champion, to
face Vettius' man in the
marketplace tomorrow.

MELITTA
And this is why you sulk? The
streets are no place for the mighty
Oenomaus to make his return. The
arena will be home to your
triumphs, when the time comes. And
I will be there to witness it...

Her lips devour him, hungrily, passionately. Oenomaus responds in kind, her words and her touch dispelling doubt --for the moment...

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

A Guard escorts Melitta and Oenomaus to the pantry gate, unlocks it. She embraces her husband.

MELITTA
I will dream of your touch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OENOMAUUS

As I dream of yours each night.

He kisses her, their lips lingering, neither wanting to part. She finally disengages, touching his face with a smile before following the Guard up into the villa. A great sadness creeps into Oenomaus' eyes. He turns to go, freezes in concern as he spots

GANNICUS

"tightrope walking" along the cliff's edge, wine jug in hand, singing a little song to himself.

GANNICUS

(singing softly,
muttered)

The blood rains down, from an angry
sky, my cock rages on, my cock
rages on...

Oenomaus draws close, hissing to him.

OENOMAUUS

Gannicus!

GANNICUS

My brother! Join me!

OENOMAUUS

Lower voice! If the Guards were to
see you --

GANNICUS

They have already passed. And were
well plied with wine to keep nose
from fucking business.

He takes a swig from his jug.

OENOMAUUS

Tomorrow you fight for the honor of
this ludus. Now is not the time for
drink.

GANNICUS

Every night is time for drink. For
the morning sun may greet you with
your last fucking day.

A cloud threatens to darken the perpetual twinkle in his eye as he takes another swig. A loose stone gives way under his foot. He tumbles to the sand with a thud, almost going over

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

the cliff. A frozen moment -- broken by Gannicus bursting into drunken laughter. Oenomaus glowers, helping him up.

OENOMAUUS

Fall to your bed.

(taking wine jug)

Or risk steeper plummet against
Vettius' man.

GANNICUS

Words of fucking wisdom, well
received.

Gannicus laughs, heads for his cell. Oenomaus half chuckles, half glowers as he turns for the barracks.

GANNICUS (cont'd)

Oenomaus?

Oenomaus pauses. Gannicus hesitates, his eyes belying a rare moment of seriousness.

GANNICUS (cont'd)

It should be you tomorrow.

Oenomaus registers that, nods in thanks. Gannicus laughs, returning to his old self as he sings himself to his cell.

GANNICUS (cont'd)

(singing softly,

muttered)

Till death is found, my sword
swinging hot, my cock rages on, my
cock rages on...

Oenomaus takes a deep drink from the wine jug, turns to head back to his own cell for the night, WIPING US TO --

EXT. CAPUA MARKETPLACE - DAY

A crush of CITIZENS crowd the marketplace. The air is electric as they push and laugh, eyes shining with excitement. Acco parts the crowd, clearing a path as

BATIATUS

makes his grand entrance with Doctore and Gannicus. Gannicus wears a cloak, the hood up. Lucretia, Gaia (in the classic Lucretia red wig), Solonius, Melitta, and other Attending Slaves follow. Batiatus mock-searches the crowd with a grin.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS

Where is good Vettius? Is he among
you? Or did he come to sense, and
remain within warm safety of his
bed?

The crowd LAUGHS. Batiatus spots Vettius at the other end of
the marketplace, standing with Tullius and Magistrate
Sextus. Vettius' gladiator Otho looms close by, as does
Tullius' bodyguard Theron.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Ah! There he stands! Fresh and
young as a newborn calf!

More chuckles from the crowd. Batiatus presses the flesh as
he makes his way towards Vettius. Vettius glares.

VETTIUS

(to Tullius)

The fool at last shows himself.

TULLIUS

(warmly)

Batiatus. We had begun to fret on
your arrival. Although I see you
arrive with unexpected gift...

He smiles appreciatively at Gaia, recognizing her.

TULLIUS (cont'd)

It has been too long, Gaia.

VETTIUS

(irritated, re:
Batiatus)

And grows longer still.

BATIATUS

Apologies for my delay. I found
much difficulty in the choosing of
a man.

(playing to the
crowd)

An imposing task, when each among
my stable stands a titan!

The crowd TITTERS approval. Batiatus eyes Otho with a frown.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Perhaps good Vettius should have
taken more time in the choosing of
his own.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The crowd LAUGHS. Vettius flares.

VETTIUS
Words fall from your mouth, as shit
from ass.

Tullius intervenes with practiced smile, playing peacemaker.

TULLIUS
Let us not become mired in base
exchange
(to crowd)
We have gathered this glorious day
to witness honorable contest
between respected rivals. Clear
space!

The crowd complies, creating a ring for the gladiators to fight. Gaia smiles appreciatively at Tullius as she moves.

GAIA
(to Lucretia)
The years have favored Tullius.

LUCRETIA
And his purse.

Lucretia gives Gaia a loaded smile, knowing exactly what she's thinking. Gaia laughs, not denying it.

DOCTORE
(soft, to Batiatus)
A brawl in the streets. Where is
the honor in such a thing?

BATIATUS
(hissed)
Fuck honor. This is business.

SOLONIUS
The event turns larger than
expected. Your mad schemes may yet
bear fruit.

BATIATUS
Enough for both of us to feast
upon.

Tullius raises his hands. The din of the crowd dies down.

TULLIUS
Gratitude to Magistrate Sextus for
allowing such thrilling event in
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TULLIUS (cont'd)
the streets of the great city of
Capua.

Cheers. The Magistrate acknowledges them with a nod.

TULLIUS (cont'd)
Batiatus. Present your man.

BATIATUS
(to the crowd)
In honor of the Magistrate,
esteemed Tullius, and the people of
Capua... I give you the most
fearsome Gaul ever to take up arms
in the arena! Conqueror of giants!
Slayer of beasts! Behold Gannicus!
Champion of the House of Batiatus!

Melitta tightens at the title as Gannicus throws off his
cloak and steps forward. He is truly a golden god, bound
only in a subligaria. A rousing cheer ripples through the
crowd. Batiatus beams. Gannicus takes twin swords from
Doctore, eyes Otho with a searing grin.

TULLIUS
A fine choice. Vettius. Present
your man.

VETTIUS
I have no tongue for overripe
embellishment. Nor is it required.
Otho! Stand forth!

Otho, also in a subligaria, takes his position. The crowd
explodes in a deafening ROAR. Lucretia frowns to Batiatus.

LUCRETIA
They favor Vettius' offering.

BATIATUS
Only until he falls.

The worry lurking in Batiatus' eyes contradicts the
assurance of his words. Otho takes a sword and a shield from
VETTIUS' DOCTORE, grins at Gannicus.

OTHO
Your day finally comes.

GANNICUS
And yours ends.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TULLIUS

Gratitude to Batiatus and Vettius.
Now, let us judge who stands the
better house!

Tullius nods to the Magistrate. Otho and Gannicus tense as
Magistrate Sextus raises his fist and --

VETTIUS

Apologies, Magistrate. There
appears to be something missing.
(calling to
Batiatus)
Where is your man's blindfold?

Batiatus sputters in shock. The crowd WHISPERS. Vettius
grins, his trap sprung.

BATIATUS

Blindfold? What --

VETTIUS

That was your boast, was it not?
That your gladiator could best any
of my men absent sight...?

Vettius holds out a ragged piece of cloth, offering it as
the blindfold. Batiatus turns to Tullius for help. Tullius
reluctantly can give none..

TULLIUS

You did voice such challenge.

Lucretia stiffens. Gannicus tenses. The crowd MURMURS
excitedly. Batiatus attempts to dismiss the matter.

BATIATUS

A simple figure of speech, not
meant to -- Good Tullius --

VETTIUS

If Batiatus does not wish to honor
terms, he should remove himself.
With tail between legs.

The crowd CHUCKLES. Batiatus looks to Gannicus, trapped. A
tense beat. Gannicus turns from Otho, holding his swords out
for Doctore to take.

GANNICUS

Doctore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Otho grins. The crowd chuckles. Batiatus deflates. Doctore takes the swords -- but Gannicus doesn't retreat. Instead he crosses to Vettius and takes the blindfold. The crowd titters. Gannicus ties the blindfold around his head, just above his eyes.

DOCTORE
(hissed)
What are you doing?

Gannicus retrieves his swords.

GANNICUS
(loudly, for the crowd)
The task should not be that difficult. I need only direct my blades towards the smell of shit.

The crowd ROARS as Gannicus pulls the blindfold down over his eyes. Doctore glowers.

DOCTORE
Ever the fool.

LUCRETIA
You are going to allow this?
Quintus --

BATIATUS
The choice is removed from my hands.

Gannicus raises his swords, readying himself. The Magistrate raises his fist and brings it down.

MAGISTRATE SEXTUS
Begin!

Otho GRUNTS and attacks with sword and shield [Note: Otho grunts loudly before each attack]. Gannicus narrowly counters. Melitta's heart leaps into her throat.

GAIA
How thrilling. I have never seen such a thing.

SOLONIUS
For good reason.

He shoots Batiatus a worried look. Batiatus ignores it, focusing a glare at Vettius. Vettius grins.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE CROWD REACTS

as Otho draws blood. Melitta tenses. Gannicus shakes it off. Otho grunts, attacks. Gannicus counters and miraculously lands a blow of his own, drawing blood. The crowd ROARS. Batiatus brightens.

OTHO GRUNTS,

attacking. Gannicus counters, but Otho clocks Gannicus in the face with his shield. Blood flies. Otho redoubles his attack, pummeling and hacking at Gannicus. Gannicus staggers, bleeding and bruised. Otho circles Gannicus, playing for the crowd. Batiatus sags.

SOLONIUS (cont'd)
(kindly)
A noble attempt.

BATIATUS
To be remembered only in its
failing.

Gannicus desperately tries to keep a fix on where Otho is, but the sounds of the crowd are disorienting. Otho gets behind him. He grunts, going in for the kill. Gannicus spins at the last second, narrowly avoiding Otho's sword. TIME SLOWS as the blade just barely SLICES THROUGH GANNICUS' BLINDFOLD, restoring his vision.

GANNICUS SURGES,

attacking with a series of lightning fast blows, ending by SLAMMING HIS SWORD through the big man's face and out the back of his head. The crowd goes silent. Batiatus gawks, not believing his eyes.

OTHO

takes a few shaky steps with the sword lodged in his skull, then collapses, dead before he hits the ground. The crowd EXPLODES.

BATIATUS (cont'd)
Yes! Have you ever seen such a
fucking thing?!

Gannicus, more dead than alive, grins at Melitta. Melitta returns it, greatly relieved for her friend.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS (cont'd)
 (to Vettius)
 Perhaps next time you should pit a
 man less prone to death against the
 mighty Gannicus!

Vettius glowers, his hatred for Batiatus multiplied.

MAGISTRATE SEXTUS
 (laughs)
 An impressive display, Batiatus.
 One not soon forgotten.

The Magistrate moves off.

TULLIUS
 Gannicus is truly a wonder.

BATIATUS
 One deserving more prominent
 position in the games.

TULLIUS
 (laughs)
 You gaze upon my very thoughts.
 Commitments beckon. Join me at
 Nestor's shop after the market has
 closed, and we shall discuss your
 man at length.

He smiles warmly at Gaia as he exits, Vettius in tow.
 Batiatus basks in his triumph, signaling his approval to
 Gannicus. The crowd mobs him, anxious to soak rags and the
 tip of robes in his blood. They press in, WIPING US TO --

INT. BATHS - BATIATUS' LUDUS - NIGHT

Naked Gladiators cheer and laugh, welcoming a victorious
 Gannicus back into the fold (his wounds tended to by
 Medicus). Crixus, Ashur, Dagan, and Indus, battered from the
 day's training, look on from the sideline.

AUCTUS
 Only mad Gannicus could win contest
 fucking blindfolded!

The Gladiators ROAR. Barca laughs in mock scorn.

BARCA
 Barca could do the same!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUCTUS

And I would kill you for being a fool.

Auctus laughs, roughly grabbing Barca and kissing him hard in warning. Oenomaus appears. The din dies down. Oenomaus still commands much respect among the men.

OENOMAUS

Auctus speaks truth. Facing Vettius' man absent sight was beyond foolish. The gods must have taken pity on your addled brain, to see you yet among us.

GANNICUS

The gods had shit to do with it. Otho grunts like a stuck pig before each attack. His squeals gave way position!

The men roar in approval. Oenomaus joins them, clasping forearms with his friend. Oenomaus' approval obviously means a lot to him.

OENOMAUS

Your victory lifts the heart.

GANNICUS

(sincerely)
You will not be rid of Gannicus so easily.

(to the men)
Dominus rewards with all the wine I can drink! I would share it with my brothers!

The men ROAR. Gannicus tosses the Recruits a wry grin as he exits with the Gladiators in tow.

GANNICUS (cont'd)

Those who bear the mark.

Ashur spits in contempt.

CRIXUS

(soft)
One day.

OFF Crixus, eyes darkening at the thought...

INT. BEDCHAMBER - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

Batiatus roars with excitement as Naevia and Diona dress him in his finest robes. Gaia and Lucretia sip wine, enraptured.

BATIATUS

Gannicus' victory forges path to greater glory. With Tullius' support, we will finally gain proper position in the games!

LUCRETIA

Perhaps even a place in the opening ceremony of the new arena.

She signals Melitta to fill her cup.

GAIA

After such a magnificent showing, I have no doubt Gannicus will be offered the primus.

LUCRETIA

The primus...

BATIATUS

I favor the sound of that.

He kisses her lustily.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Expect late return. I would seek out Solonius afterwards, to discuss extending advantage to his house as well.

GAIA

Send Tullius my regards. And gauge his reaction in remembering me.

BATIATUS

(laughs)

Who could fucking forget you.

He sweeps out, bursting with pride and expectation.

GAIA

It staggers mind, the change in him.

LUCRETIA

Change?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GAIA

You know my meaning. He always seemed so... demure and cowed. Now he positively burns.

LUCRETIA

He has always done so. His light was but muted by the shadow of his father.

GAIA

The man could turn day to night with disapproving frown. He never cared for me. Or, I suspect, anything that smacked of enjoyment...

She grins mischievously, producing a small clay bottle from her robes. Lucretia eyes it with a suspicious smile.

LUCRETIA

And what might this be?

GAIA

More gifts from Rome.
(uncorking it)
The finest opium, carried from Cyprus.

Lucretia hungrily eyes it, but begs off.

LUCRETIA

I have not partaken in many years.
My husband --

GAIA

Will be gone most of the night...

Gaia smiles, the snake offering delicious fruit. OFF the temptation...

INT. NESTOR'S MEAT SHOP - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Animal carcasses hang from meat hooks. Cleavers and carving tools litter the room. Tullius and Batiatus sit at a small table. Batiatus' bodyguard Acco stands a ways back, as does Tullius' man Theron.

TULLIUS

(pouring wine)
Word of Gannicus' victory has spread throughout the city. His
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TULLIUS (cont'd)
name -- and yours -- fall from
every mouth.

BATIATUS
(taking wine)
May they always find the taste
pleasing.

Batiatus drinks. Tullius laughs, joins him.

TULLIUS
Everyone clamors to see your man
again. With exception of poor
Vettius. He is fit for seizure from
the ordeal.

BATIATUS
Unfortunate. That he could not
produce more worthy opponent. Yet
his stock is well known to be of
inferior quality, as the boy
himself. The manner in which he
tends his ludus. The child has no
fucking talent for it.

Tullius eyes Batiatus, a faint smile bending his lips.

TULLIUS
You surprise me, Batiatus. Your
disposition towards business is
much more... aggressive. Than your
father's.

BATIATUS
We are of diverging temperament.
And desires.

TULLIUS
How does he fare in Sicilia?

BATIATUS
The clime is more agreeable with
various conditions brought about by
the passing of years.
(back to business)
How did the Magistrate find
Gannicus' display?

TULLIUS
Ignited by it, as was the crowd.

Tullius refills Batiatus cup.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TULLIUS (cont'd)
He even broached subject of
retaining the man. For the opening
games of the new arena.

Batiatus lights up.

BATIATUS
Gannicus in the opening games? If
you could aid in such a thing, I
would forever be in your debt.

TULLIUS
It merely requires a word in the
proper ear. All that remains is to
agree upon a price.

Batiatus' mirth falters. Ah, here it comes. The shakedown.
He forces a smile.

BATIATUS
Of course. I would be happy to see
coin to your hands in exchange for
your assistance. What sum did you
have in mind?

Tullius stares in surprise, then laughs.

TULLIUS
You misunderstand, Batiatus. I do
not offer to broker arrangement. I
offer to purchase your man.

The bottom drops out of Batiatus' world.

BATIATUS
Purchase? But --
(laughs)
Why would you want a gladiator? You
are not a lanista.

TULLIUS
(laughs)
Jupiter's cock, no. Yet I do have
many vested interests. In shipping.
Goods and services. This very shop.
(pointedly)
And young Vettius' ludus.

Vettius appears behind Tullius, a nasty smile cracking his
face. With him are several large, brutish GLADIATORS. Acco's
eyes flick nervously to the Gladiators. Batiatus tenses.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VETTIUS

(laughs)
Look at the little fuck now. About
to shit himself.

TULLIUS

Still your tongue. The grownups are
talking.

He levels his gaze at Batiatus, all pretenses of warmth and
friendship vanishing. He sets a heavy purse of coins on the
table between them.

TULLIUS (cont'd)

Two hundred denarii. A generous
offer. In respect of your father.

Batiatus hardens. Wrong thing to say.

BATIATUS

Apologies. I would not part with
the man.

Tullius considers that, has a sip of wine.

TULLIUS

I allowed you to purchase one of my
slaves. Yet now you deny me the
same opportunity?

Batiatus' eyes flick to Vettius and his men. He licks his
lips, musters the courage to stand his ground.

BATIATUS

Gannicus is not for sale.

TULLIUS

Everything is for sale, Batiatus.
The question is but price.

He smiles warmly, his eyes flicking to his man Theron.
Theron erupts, sinking a meat cleaver into Acco's skull.
Batiatus overturns the table, using the distraction to
scramble out of the room. Vettius and his men rush after
him.

EXT. CAPUA STREETS - NIGHT

Batiatus crashes out of Nestor's shop. He takes off through
the mostly deserted street, fleeing for his life. Theron,
Vettius, and his brutes chase after him. Music swells,
TRANSITIONING US TO --

INT. BEDCHAMBERS - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

TIGHT ON the little clay bottle, the remainder of its powdered contents spilling out onto a side table. ADJUST TO FIND Lucretia sprawled on her bed, eyes glazed in opium bliss. Gaia appears next to her, gently stroking her hair. She kisses Lucretia. Lucretia half smiles, too out of it to even care. Gaia's hands crawl over Lucretia's body, slowly undressing her.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. SIDE STREET - NIGHT

Batiatus gets cut off by Theron. He turns to run the other way, but Vettius and his men are there. Batiatus tries to fight, but he's quickly overpowered. Vettius and his men beat the living shit out of him.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BEDCHAMBERS - BATIATUS' VILLA - NIGHT

A naked Gaia kisses her way down an equally exposed Lucretia. Lucretia writhes in absent pleasure, her eyes hazy and unfocused. Gaia disappears OUT OF FRAME as she goes down on her. Lucretia gasps in ecstasy.

MATCH CUT WITH:

EXT. CAPUA STREETS - NIGHT

Batiatus gasps on the ground, his face bloodied and raw. He spits blood, barely conscious. Tullius appears, looming over him.

TULLIUS

I make fair offer. And you produce
cock to piss on me. Do you know
what that feels like, Batiatus?

Tullius reaches down OUT OF FRAME and parts his robes. Batiatus sputters as Tullius pisses on him. A show of power. He finishes, closes his robes.

TULLIUS (cont'd)

Reconsider your answer. Or be
excluded from the games forever.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Tullius exits. Vettius spits on Batiatus, laughing as he follows with the men. Batiatus' eyes flutter shut as he loses consciousness. ANGLE UP to reveal the PARTIALLY COMPLETED ARENA looming in the distance.

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE

