FADE IN:

1   COUNTRYSIDE IN TUSCANY, ITALY – CONTINUOUS

1A  EXT. ROMAN ROAD LINED WITH SLENDER CYPRESS TREES – DAY

Fifty barefoot men in gray unbelted tunics run along a Roman road. They are escorted by a half-dozen soldiers wearing black uniforms and capes and riding black horses. The soldiers whip the runners and prod them with swords and spears. Here and there, a runner collapses.

1B  DUSTY STRETCH OF ROAD – AFTERNOON

The sun beats down on the runners, who are now staggering more than running. One of them, a very tall, powerfully built young man named DECIUS, speaks to another runner, named BULLA.

    DECIUS
       (panting)
       A hundred miles without food or water! We’ll never make it, sir.

    BULLA
       (glancing at the sky)
       Pray for rain, Decius.

1C   ROMAN ROAD IN TUSCANY – DAY

It’s raining. The fugitives cup their hands on their cheeks to direct the water into their mouths.

1D   ROMAN ROAD IN TUSCANY – DAY

The rain has stopped. Again the sun beats down on the men. Perspiration pours from their bodies. More men collapse.

2   EXT. SMALL TOWN IN TUSCANY – DAY

The runners and mounted soldiers pass through a small town where some people stop work to watch them pass. One of the refugees falls down and a townsman moves to help him. A mounted officer intervenes.

   (CONTINUED)
OFFICER
No! Help him and you will die! The new emperor
commands it! No food, water, fire, or shelter
until they are 100 miles from the city of Rome.

3  EXT. CROSSROADS IN TUSCAN COUNTRYSIDE – EVENING

The fugitives struggle on. They approach a crossroads with a public
water fountain and milestone. BULLA veers to a marble basin full of
water and begins to drink. OFFICER draws his sword and approaches
him in anger, preparing to strike.

BULLA
(pointing at the milepost)
Can’t you read? One hundred miles from Rome.
We're safe now. 'The new emperor commands it.'

The officer squints at the sign, scowls, and signals for his men to
turn around. The other fugitives rush to the water.

Sated, the men sprawl around the watering hole. Decius turns to
Bulla.

DECIUS
What do we do now, sir?

BULLA
No more “sir”, Decius. We're not praetorians
anymore.

A pause as he scans the men’s worried faces.

BULLA (CONT’D)
I'm going to my family place - up in the
mountains. You men can join me if you wish.

Most of the men murmur their assent.

BULLA (CONT’D)
But we'll need supplies.
(beat)
I have a friend with a farm near here.
Bulla and six of his men approach a farm in the Apennine foothills. A white-haired nobleman (MARCUS) greets Bulla warmly and marvels at his bedraggled condition.

MARCUS
Bulla! My friend! What is this?

BULLA
(ignoring the question)
Can you use a few strong backs?

MARCUS
Always!

Marcus leads Bulla and his men to his villa.

5 INT. DINING ROOM IN MARCUS’ VILLA - NIGHT

MARCUS
(to Bulla)
Tell me, Bulla. What has happened?

BULLA
The new emperor, Septimius Severus. He wanted a new praetorian guard. He banished us all from Rome.

MARCUS
Why banished?

DECIUS
He holds us responsible for the murder of his patron, the emperor Pertinax. And for selling the empire to the highest bidder.

SECUNDUS
(indignantly)
That was just a few of the men. Nothing to do with us.

(CONTINUED)
BULLA
Those were just excuses. He wanted our jobs - to reward his soldiers. We’re lucky he didn’t kill us all. I’ve followed his career - he’ll stop at nothing to get what he wants.

There is a long glum silence. Finally, Marcus speaks.

MARCUS
Anyway, you’re well out of Rome. Four emperors in one year! These are dangerous times for everyone. Perhaps this emperor won’t last, either?

BULLA
We won’t stay here long, Marcus. Just through the olive harvest. I want to open up the old place...

MARCUS
(amazed)
What? Your father’s folly in the woods? Bulla! No one goes up there anymore! I’ll bet no one’s been there in ten, fifteen years! It’s all overgrown - the buildings have probably fallen down.

BULLA
Perfect! No one will bother us there.

6 MONTAGE: BULLA AND HIS MEN WORKING ON THE FARM – DAY

6A LIVESTOCK
Bulla and his men feeding the livestock, milking cows, sweeping the farm enclosure

6B IN THE ORCHARD
Bulla and his men pruning trees, harvesting fruit

6C IN THE VINEYARD
Bulla and his men harvesting grapes.
Bulla, his men, Marcus, and Marcus’ family and workers celebrate the grape harvest with drinking, feasting, dancing.

EXT. GROVE OF TREES AT FARM – DAY

Bulla, his men, Marcus, and other workers (still somewhat hung-over from the revels) are resting under some trees and eating lunch.

DECIUS
(surveying the scene)
You know, I could stay here.

The other men mutter in agreement.

MARCUS
(tentatively, looking at Bulla)
You’d be welcome. It’s hard to find good workers these days. Life is easier here than in the mountains, Bulla.

BULLA
Thanks for the offer, Marcus. It’s safer in the mountains.

Bulla stands up. He has been watching a group of 20 soldiers on horseback approaching in the distance. The others rise as the soldiers draw near. The mounted officer (LENTULUS) confronts Marcus.

LENTULUS
I’m looking for Marcus Pescennius Butto.

MARCUS
Why?

LENTULUS
I am Lucius Lentulus, the imperial legate. Is it true that you are second cousin to Niger, the governor of Syria?

MARCUS
Yes. Or so I am told. I’ve never met the man.

(CONTINUED)
LENTULUS
Then, by imperial edict, these lands and chattels now belong to Caesar.

MARCUS
(incredulous)
What?

LENTULUS
Your cousin leads a rebellion in the eastern provinces. All of his family’s properties have been confiscated.

MARCUS
But I don’t even know Niger!

LENTULUS
(brusquely)
Doesn’t matter. If you were his first cousin, you would be executed.
(looking the gathering over)
Are all of these your slaves?

MARCUS
(reeling)
What? No. Most of them are free. Bulla here and his men are just passing through.

LENTULUS
(officiously)
Anyone who does not have papers proving his freedom will be considered a slave.

DECIUS
(to Lentulus)
But we are free men.

LENTULUS
You have papers?

DECIUS
(hesitantly)
No, they were taken away when...
LENTULUS

Yes?

SECUNDUS

We were praetorians. Bulla here was an officer.

Bulla winces; this will not help them.

LENTULUS

Ah, I see! Banished by the emperor! Then you deserve to be slaves, and slaves you shall be.

Lentulus addresses all of the assembled workers.

LENTULUS (CONT’D)

You should be prepared to work much harder for your emperor.

(nodding toward Marcus)

The days of soft masters are over!

8  EXT. FARM FIELD – DAY

Bulla and the others are working in the field, piling hay into carts with pitchforks. Lentulus’ men are on horseback, supervising the work and applying the whip now and then.

Secundus moves close to Bulla and addresses him in a low voice.

SECUNDUS

There’s no way I’m going to be a slave here.

(beat)

I’m going to make a run for it.

BULLA

Wait, Secundus! Wait for the right moment. If you run now they will cut you down. Be patient.

Bulla, his men, and the other workers continue loading the carts. One of the soldiers begins whipping an old woman who is carrying a jug of water to the workers. Marcus is indignant. He addresses the soldier.

MARCUS

Stop it! Leave her alone!

(CONTINUED)
A soldier on horseback pushes Marcus to the ground and begins to whip him as well. The other soldiers laugh.

Bulla suddenly moves toward the first soldier and impales him with his pitchfork under the soldier’s cuirass, lifts him off his horse like a bale of hay, and drops him, squirming and bleeding, on the ground.

The other soldiers are stunned for a moment, then draw their swords and converge on Bulla. He knocks two of them from their mounts with carefully-timed thrusts with the butt end of his pitchfork and stabs them with the pointy end. Then he grabs a sword from one of his victims and uses it to engage a fourth soldier.

Bulla's men run to join him, using their farm tools as weapons. Eventually all of the soldiers are dead. The workers stand alone in the field, breathing heavily and staring at each other.

DECIUS
(to Bulla)
What now?

BULLA
To the mountains! But first - supplies.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MARCUS'S VILLA - DAY

Lentulus and the rest of his men are lounging in the garden beside the main house, sampling the local wine.

LENTULUS
(Making a face)
Much too sweet!

OFFICER
Yes, but the more you drink, the better it tastes.

He gestures to a servant who hurries to refill his glass while Lentulus watches three carts half-full of hay approaching, surrounded by workers and followed by eight mounted men in uniform. Lentulus frowns and stands up.
LENTULUS
(shouting angrily at the soldiers)
You’ve stopped early! Why?

Bulla, wearing a soldier’s uniform and on horseback, replies.

BULLA
We stopped just in time.

Bulla leads his men in an attack against Lentulus and his officers, two of whom take spears in their bellies before they can even draw their swords. Lentulus stands watching his men fall, not knowing what to do. Three of his soldiers see the odds and run for their lives. Lentulus finally draws his sword, but remains frozen in place. Bulla removes his helmet and confronts Lentulus, who sees the others converging on him and drops his weapon.

BULLA
You forgot that we are soldiers.

DECIUS
The very best soldiers!

The other men mutter in assent.

LENTULUS
You have made a very grave mistake, Bulla. You and your men are outlaws now. You will be hunted down and crucified. Caesar will insist on it!

BULLA
Tell Caesar that he is the outlaw; stealing from good men and beating their workers. Tell him to stay at least 100 miles away from us - on pain of death!

Bulla’s men, Marcus and his workers and family cheer. Two of them tie Lentulus’ hands behind his back and lift him onto a horse, which gallops off with him barely on board, squirming to stay in the saddle. The men and workers cheer and laugh as he disappears.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Now we go to the mountains! Gather all the food and tools you can carry. And the livestock. MORE)

(CONTINUED)
BULLA (CONT’D)
But quickly; there is little time.

10 MONTAGE: JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAINS – CONTINUOUS

10A EXT. NARROW PATH INTO THE MOUNTAINS – DAY
Bulla, his men, Marcus and his workers – a party of about 50 in all, including women and children – hike into the mountains. They bring some livestock laden with supplies.

10B EXT. DEEP FOREST IN THE MOUNTAINS – DAY
They enter the forest and have to hack their way through the undergrowth. Bulla points the way from horseback. Bogged down in the heavy vegetation, the men are exhausted.

SECUNDUS
I say we stop here. This is far enough. We can set up a camp – no one will ever find us.

BULLA
No, Secundus! If we can come this far so easily, so can Severus’s men. The old villa is the perfect place to hide. We must press on.

10C EXT. BULLA’S VILLA IN THE WOODS – DAY
They arrive at an abandoned villa. The few buildings are in disrepair and overgrown with vines and other plants. They force open the door of the main building and find the interior teeming with rats on the floor and bats in the rafters.

DECIUS
We can’t live here!

BULLA
Of course we can! There’s water nearby, lots of game, all the rats and spiders you can eat!

There are groans of disgust.
BULLA (CONT’D)
All it needs is a little sweeping.

The door groans on its hinges and collapses with a loud crash on the floor.

10D EXT. BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

Everyone works to clear an area for a small village and to repair the structures already there.

10E EXT. BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

New huts are being erected. Workers thatch roofs, apply stucco to walls, hammer together window and door frames.

10F EXT. BULLA’S CAMP - EVENING

There is a celebration with dancing and feasting. Bulla begins the dancing with the elderly farm woman who was whipped before, then with a small girl, then with Marcus. Wine flows freely and musicians play with gusto.

10G INT. MAIN BUILDING IN BULLA’S CAMP – NIGHT

The main building has been cleaned and decorated. It is lit by hanging oil lamps and heated by fires in metal tripods. A large central table is loaded with food and drink. Bulla and his men recline on makeshift couches to dine. Bulla takes a heaping spoonful that Secundus hands to him and tastes it. He makes a face.

BULLA
What is this stuff?

DECIUS
Your favorite!

(beat)
Rats and spiders!

Bulla spits it out. All laugh.

DECIUS (CONT’D)
Bulla, how did anyone ever build a place like this up here? There’s no road – barely a trail. It must have been a labor of Hercules!

(CONTINUED)
BULLA
My father is a very determined man - a Hercules in more ways than one.

DECIUS
Why did he abandon it, then?

BULLA
He thought he wanted to live in the country, but he could only be happy in the city. He used to spend time here just to prove a point, until he realized that it always made him miserable. Now he rarely leaves Rome.

11 MONTAGE: FOREST SCENES - CONTINUOUS

11A EXT. TRAIL ENTERING BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

Several men with bows and arrows enter camp carrying deer, pheasants, woodcock, and other game they have shot in the forest. They are welcomed with cheers.

11B EXT. ALONG A STREAM IN THE WOODS – DAY

A party of women and children fill baskets with wild berries while some men catch fish.

11C INT. A HUT IN BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

A blacksmith has set up a forge and is instructing Bulla and some of his men in his craft. Bulla tries his hand at hammering a glowing piece of metal into shape.

11D EXT. A CLEARING NEAR BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

Marcus and several of his workers plus Bulla plant seeds in a freshly plowed garden plot.

12 EXT. BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

Marcus, Decius, and Secundus return from a hunting trip. Decius and Secundus carry bows and arrows and Decius has a doe slung over his
shoulder. Marcus approaches Bulla, who is sharpening a sword. With him is a stranger, GAIUS. Everyone gathers around.

MARCUS
We found Gaius here wandering in the forest.

GAIUS
The emperor’s procurator said that I owed back taxes. It was a lie, but I had no papers. They took my land. I protested.

Tears spring to his eyes as he holds up his bandaged, handless right arm, still bleeding.

GAIUS (CONT’D)
(angrily)
This is what they did to me! They said I won’t need a farm with only one hand!
(beat)
I used my other hand to strangle one of the tax collectors. Now they are looking for me. They’re taking my family and workers to Spoletium tomorrow morning, to be sold into slavery, to pay my debt to the emperor.

There is a pause. Bulla lowers his head and thinks deeply. Then he looks at Gaius.

BULLA
(gently)
We’d better stop them then.

MARCUS
(surprised)
Bulla, if we get involved, they’ll come looking for us.

BULLA
They’re already looking for us, Marcus. Every man can make his own choice. But Gaius and his people need our help. I’m ready for an adventure. Who is with me?

His men cheer.
A detachment of six soldiers on horseback is escorting a dozen men, women, and children on foot, tied together with ropes that bind their hands.

Bulla, riding a horse in the opposite direction, approaches the soldier in front, making him stop.

SOLDIER
We are on imperial business. Out of the way!

BULLA
Not until you have released your prisoners.

The lead soldier sneers and grabs the handle of his sword.

BULLA (CONT’D)
(gesturing to the woods)
But my friends insist.

A dozen of Bulla’s men with bows and arrows show themselves. The lead soldier lets go of his sword and raises his hands. Gaius and a couple of others hurry to cut the prisoners’ ropes. Gaius embraces his wife and children. Bulla rides up close to the lead soldier and points with his sword to a money bag hanging from the soldier’s saddle.

BULLA
That’s a heavy purse you’ve got there. Perhaps more than you need?

SOLDIER
This belongs to the emperor, too.

Bulla lifts it off the saddle with the point of his sword.

BULLA
Not anymore.

(beat)
Tell your masters that Bulla and his outlaws will punish anyone who commits crimes against the people. Including the emperor.

Marcus rides close to Bulla and speaks in a low voice.
MARCUS
Is that wise – giving him your name?

BULLA
There’s no going back now, Marcus. If we are going to be outlaws, we might as well be famous outlaws. That will annoy Severus even more – and the people need to know that someone is on their side. It will give them hope. They’ll help us if they know who we are.

14 ITALIAN CITY OF ARRETIIUM – CONTINUOUS

14A INT. MAGISTRATE’S OFFICE – DAY

A tribune in a toga affixes his seal to a document, watched by a magistrate in toga and four centurions in uniform.

TRIBUNE
That should do it. Is the money loaded and the escort ready?

MAGISTRATE
Yes, tribune.

The tribune nods and looks approvingly at the four soldiers.

TRIBUNE
Excellent! The emperor must be very pleased ... to send his own centurions all the way from Rome. And no wonder – 4 million sesterces! A king’s ransom!

MAGISTRATE
Yes. A lot of money. Your confiscation program has been quite successful – the emperor will not forget this.

TRIBUNE
(to the centurions)
How many men do you have with you?

FIRST CENTURION
Twenty!

(Continued)
TRIBUNE
(surprised)
Twenty! So many? Is that necessary?

MAGISTRATE
You’ve heard about this outlaw, haven’t you? Bulla, or something? The emperor is taking no chances. It would be a disaster if this much money got in the hands of criminals.

14B EXT. OUTSIDE THE MAGISTRATE’S OFFICE – DAY
The tribune and magistrate watch the centurions mount their horses and lead the ox-drawn wagons and other soldiers down the road. The procession moves slowly through the city streets and into the countryside. The wagons are very heavy, containing household objects such as silver plate and goblets as well as bags of coins.

14C EXT. COUNTRYSIDE SOME DISTANCE FROM ARRETIUM – DAY
The soldiers glance around them, as if watching for an ambush. Then the lead centurion takes off his helmet and smiles at the other soldiers. It is Bulla!

BULLA
(triumphantly)
Whoop!

His men join in the celebration.

15 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE – DAY
A crowd has gathered for a grain auction. Beside a row of wagons laden with barley is a platform on which the auctioneer, several merchants, and a contingent of praetorians are engaged in heated conversation. The crowd is alarmed and agitated. Finally, the auctioneer (in obvious distress) addresses the gathering.

AUCTIONEER
Attention please! I have on auction ten wagonloads of prime barley. Bidding will start at 200 denarii per wagon.

The praetorian commander raises his whip.
PRAETORIAN COMMANDER

One hundred denarii!

The crowd explodes into angry protest. Then a voice comes from the back. It is Bulla, disguised as a merchant.

BULLA

200 denarii!

The praetorian commander is furious. He holds his whip hand aloft and glares at Bulla.

PRAETORIAN COMMANDER

Hear me! I am bidding on behalf of the emperor. This grain will be used to feed the people of Rome. No other bids will be tolerated. Am I understood?

BULLA

(defiantly)

300 denarii!

The crowd cheers. The praetorian commander is alarmed. He signals to his men to arrest Bulla, but Bulla’s men appear and restrain them at sword and arrow point. Some of Bulla’s men climb into the wagons and drive off while others disarm the praetorians and lead them away. When the praetorians are gone, Bulla addresses the crowd.

BULLA

There will be other auctions, my friends. We will let you know when and where. If you do not have enough money to bid, let us know and we will give you some. People in the country have to eat, too!

The crowd cheers.

16 MONTAGE: A VILLAGE IN THE COUNTRY - CONTINUOUS 16

16A EXT. VILLAGE CENTER - DAY 16A

Bulla’s men unload bags of grain from the wagons.

16B EXT. VILLAGE CENTER - DAY 16B

Individual peasants fill their sacks and baskets with grain.
Bulla is presented with a fresh loaf of barley bread as other loaves are distributed to his men in a spirit of merriment.

Bulla begins to dance with a beautiful village girl as musicians gather. His men and the other villagers join in.

A FARMER
Hail Bulla! Bulla Felix, Bulla the Lucky!

The crowd and Bulla’s men cheer. He is hoisted onto his men’s backs and waves to the crowd. The dancing, music, and feasting continue.

Finally, Bulla mounts his horse and waves goodbye as he rides away with his men, the villagers cheering and continuing to celebrate.

Bulla and his men stop a caravan of wagons loaded with valuable artwork and furnishings.

WAGON DRIVER
(reining in his mules)
Whoa! Whoa there!
(smiling)
Are you the outlaw? Bulla?

BULLA
The very same! And what do you have for me today?

WAGON DRIVER
(smiling)
Works of art from the villa of my master. He was executed for treason. But he was innocent.
(beat)
The emperor wanted his sculptures for the palace in Rome.

BULLA
(looking at the wagons)
What a coincidence! We need some sculptures for our camp. Isn’t that right, men?
His men shout their assent from the woods on the sides of the road. CALLISTOS, a refined, somewhat vain-looking gentleman sits beside WAGON DRIVER. He has endured this interruption with impatient disdain.

BULLA (CONT’D)
And who is this impressive looking fellow?

CALLISTOS
(irritated)
I am Callistos of Aphrodisias – the master sculptor. What is it to you?

BULLA
What a coincidence! I am in great need of a master sculptor! The emperor has put his portrait on top of every piss pot in the Empire. There should be at least one statue of Bulla. What do you say men?

His men cheer.

18 EXT. BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

Bulla’s camp is now a bustling village, filled with the dispossessed. It also overflows with valuable objects confiscated from imperial agents – chests of coins, statues, expensive furnishings.

In different parts of the camp, craftsmen and women work at their trades: blacksmithing; making baskets, pottery, and clothing. In several places, people are practicing swordplay, spear-throwing, and archery. Bulla is posing in the nude for Callistos, who chisels at a block of stone. Bulla points to a very realistic, painted statue of the empress Julia Domna, which was among the confiscated works of art.

BULLA
Who is that supposed to be, Venus?

CALLISTOS
No. That is the empress. Julia Domna of Syria. Very beautiful, no? It was to be a gift for the emperor.

(CONTINUED)
BULLA
Much too beautiful for the emperor.
(beat)
Both the statue and the woman.

CALLISTOS
She is very refined, and intelligent. She loves my work.

BULLA
(smiling)
Naturally!

Several onlookers laugh.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Perhaps you should take your portrait of me to her, as a gift. Tell her it is – a native god of Italy.

19   EXT. BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

Callistos is putting the finishing touches on Bulla’s portrait. Bulla and his men are admiring it. Secundus approaches at a run, out of breath.

SECUNDUS
(to Bulla)
Bad news from town. The emperor is sending an army. They’re going to scour the forest until they find us.

BULLA
(calmly)
Regular army, or praetorians?

SECUNDUS
Regular army.

BULLA
How many?
SECUNDUS
Four or five cohorts. At least 2000 men, against our 300.

The onlookers begin to murmur in fear.

BULLA
(undisturbed)
Any auxiliaries?

SECUNDUS
(perplexed)
No. Does that matter?

BULLA
Legionaries are equipped with short swords and javelins, right? What is the range of a short sword? Three feet? What is the range of a javelin? 200 feet, at the most?

DECIUS
So?

BULLA
We have bows and arrows — and we are good shots. Our range is 300 feet, at least. And the forest gives us cover. They’ll never get close enough to land a blow.

Bulla addresses all within earshot.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Gather your arrows, men. No running and hiding this time; we’ll stand and fight!

20 EXT. DENSE FOREST — DAY

A Roman army in gleaming armor marches into thick undergrowth in Bulla’s forest. At first, they hold their formations, but are soon forced by the vegetation to break ranks.

Suddenly, arrows start to fly — a few at first, most finding their marks — then more. Finally, they fly by the hundreds, and the archers remain invisible in the greenwood.

(CONTINUED)
The Roman soldiers hold their javelins ready, but can see no targets. They are dropping at a great rate. Finally, the survivors panic and flee. There is quiet for a moment, then a cheer rises, echoing in the woods.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE IN ROME – DAY

The emperor Severus reacts to the bad news with anger. His empress, Julia Domna, sits quietly by a window admiring Callistos’ statue of Bulla. Lentulus stands at attention nearby.

SEVERUS
This is your fault, Lentulus! If you hadn’t let these ex-praetorians get away in the first place, none of this would have happened.

ADVISOR
Caesar, remember that Lentulus can recognize their leader.

SEVERUS
(to Lentulus)
That is true! You saw him. What sort of man is he?

LENTULUS
Very capable, Caesar – he was an officer in the Guard.

SEVERUS
What does he look like?

LENTULUS
That’s a bit hard to say...

He looks at the statue of Bulla.

LENTULUS (CONT’D)
Actually, he looks a lot like this statue...

SEVERUS
(ignoring the comment)
What are his politics?
LENTULUS
I am told that he isn’t political, Caesar. But he believes in justice, and individual freedom.

SEVERUS
That makes him political. And with 4 million sesterces in his purse, he has influence.

(beat)
Lentulus, I’m putting you in charge of his capture. Take whatever men you need and find him. Do not fail again!

22 INT. PALACE HALLWAY – DAY

Septimius Severus is walking through a palace hall with his entourage. He encounters his teen-aged sons, Caracalla and Geta, shoving each other.

SEVERUS
(to his bodyguard)
Look at my sons, squabbling like chickens.

CARACALLA AND GETA
(in unison)
Father!

SEVERUS
Caracalla, I hear that your younger brother defeated you in wrestling. Perhaps he is the better man? Perhaps he should be emperor when he grows up?

CARACALLA
(wincing)
Geta cheated!

SEVERUS
Perhaps you should have cheated, too? One of you will become emperor someday and it won’t be the one who played fair.

The boys snarl and resume shoving. Severus is pleased and walks on smiling.
Lentulus and a cohort (500 men) of Praetorian guardsmen on horseback, each wearing a black uniform and black cloak, stream out of the gate at a gallop in pursuit of Bulla and his men.

EXT. BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

Bulla sits on a log, expertly carving a piece of wood into a horse. Decius bursts into view and addresses him. Marcus is with him.

DECIUS
(breathlessly)
Bulla! The emperor has put a price of 100,000 sesterces on your head – and 1,000 on each of ours. He’s sent an entire cohort of praetorian cavalry to find you.

MARCUS
Our old friend Lentulus is their leader, Bulla. Severus has given him a chance to redeem himself.

DECIUS
What are you going to do?

BULLA
(laconically)
I don’t really want to see Lentulus again, do you? He was such a bore. No, if he’s coming here, I think I’ll go on holiday. What do you say, men? Shall we all take a vacation? Block the trails; hide the loot?

The men laugh and cheer. Marcus shakes his head in admiration of the plan’s simplicity. They disperse and begin to make preparations to leave camp.

MARCUS
(to Bulla)
Where will you go?

BULLA
(after a pause)
Well, if Lentulus is coming here, that means he won’t be in Rome. So...
MARCUS
(alarmed)
Be careful, Bulla. The emperor has spies everywhere, but especially in Rome.

25 EXT. HADRIAN'S VILLA AT TIBUR NEAR ROME – DAY

A white-bearded, barefooted philosopher in a dirty robe (PEREGRINUS) is lecturing the empress Julia Domna and about thirty other intellectuals beside a fountain in the elaborate villa grounds.

PEREGRINUS
Worldly pleasures are empty, my friends. Desiring them brings emptiness; acquiring them brings despair. Virtue is everything. The greatest virtue is to be without fear. If a man has no fear, he will do what the gods demand of him.

JULIA
But it is our nature to fear, is it not, Peregrinus? Animals also have fear.

PEREGRINUS
Not before they have experienced pain, my lady. A rat will nuzzle the serpent until he is bitten.

(beat)
Fear is nothing but the anticipation of pain, which is often worse than pain itself. Fear is only a state of mind and it can be removed by reason.

JULIA
Tell me, Peregrinus. If you have contempt for worldliness, why have you come to see an empress? This place is the very center of wealth and power.

PEREGRINUS
I forgive you for your wealth and power, my lady. I have come here because I have a weakness for art.

(he gestures at the sculptures around him)
And because the gods want me to give you a gift.

(beat)
But it must be given to you in private.

(CONTINUED)
The empress’s guards are alarmed – they glance at each other, then at Julia.

JULIA
(after a pause)
Very well, Peregrinus. Come with me.

She raises and walks towards a small temple. The guards begin to follow, but Julia raises her hand to make them stop.

JULIA
(to the guards)
Don’t worry; he’s a frail old man.

26 INT. TEMPLE IN VILLA COMPLEX – DAY

When they are alone inside the temple, Peregrinus takes off his false hair – it is Bulla. Julia doesn’t flinch.

JULIA
I saw through your disguise, stranger. Who are you and what do you want?

BULLA
My name is Bulla. They call me an outlaw.

Julia pauses to take this in. She begins to become frightened, but lets it pass.

JULIA
You practice what you preach about fearlessness, Bulla. But why have you come here? What is worth so great a risk?

BULLA
As I said, I have brought you a gift. It is something that you have never had before and need very badly. Something that you deserve.

JULIA
(intrigued)
What is this gift?
Bulla walks closer to her, very slowly and carefully. He places his hands tenderly on her shoulders, moves them to the small of her back, and kisses her on the mouth very gently.

JULIA
(impassively)
What makes you think I would betray my husband?

BULLA
I know your husband.

Julia pauses to consider, then kisses him hungrily.

27 INT. THRONE ROOM IN THE PALACE IN ROME – DAY 27

The room is richly decorated with colored marbles and statues. The ceiling is 100 feet high. Bulla is relaxing on Severus' throne, toying with the imperial scepter. Julia is admiring sculptures of herself and her sons that are placed around the throne room.

JULIA
Aren’t these portraits magnificent? They were done by your friend Callistos. I have made him court sculptor.

BULLA
Yes, magnificent!

Bulla looks around nervously.

BULLA (CONT’D)
You sure your husband is away?

JULIA
Severus has gone to the port of Ostia for an inspection of the harbor facilities - which means that he has gone for an inspection of the brothels. Don’t worry; he won’t be back for days.

Callistos enters the room.

CALLISTOS
You wished to see me, my lady?

(CONTINUED)
Callistos sees Bulla and they embrace.

CALLISTOS (CONT’D)
Bulla, my friend! I never expected to see you here!

Callistos notices the scepter in Bulla’s hand.

CALLISTOS (CONT’D)
So, are you the new emperor?

Bulla laughs and puts the scepter down on the throne.

JULIA
Absolutely! I’ll let you tell Severus the news.

All laugh.

BULLA
We have been admiring your portraits, Callistos. But where is one of the emperor?

CALLISTOS
(firmly)
No! I told him that his features are much too coarse.

BULLA
(amused)
He didn’t insist?

JULIA
No one wants to be portrayed by an artist who thinks him ugly.

All laugh.

28 INT. JULIA’S PALACE CHAMBER IN ROME – EVENING

Julia and Bulla have been making love on her bed. They are resting beside each other, staring at the ceiling.
BULLA
Your husband is pillaging the countryside, Julia. He’s destroying our way of life. In the end, he will destroy himself - and his family.

JULIA
I know, but what can I do? I have no influence over him. He married me because it was prophesied that I would marry a king. And he wanted to be a king.

(beat)
Before you came into my life, I had only art and philosophy to console me. Now that you have given me your gift, I can’t let you take it away.

BULLA
We will be together again soon, but not in Rome. There’s a temple to Fortuna in the mountains near Perusia. You must visit there once a month, on the night of the full moon. There is a cave near the temple. The priest there will show you. I will wait for you there.

29 EXT. BULLA’S CAMP – DAY

Bulla slides off his horse and into the arms of his friends. They are glad to have their leader home, but there is an air of concern.

BULLA
Why so grim? Were your holidays that bad?

DECIUS
Bad news. Lentulus caught Lucius and Marcus in a tavern while you were away, Bulla. They’re going to feed them to wild beasts in the arena at Corfinium the day after tomorrow.

SECUNDUS
(bitterly)
We never should have left camp. I knew this would happen!

Bulla is troubled by this news. He pauses to think.

(CONTINUED)
BULLA
Who is the magistrate in Corfinium?

DECIUS
His name is Lucius Boranius Cosa.
(beat)
He's not a bad man, but he won’t help us. He won’t cross Lentulus.

BULLA
Maybe he will help us without knowing it.

INT. MAGISTRATE’S RECEPTION ROOM IN CORFINIUM – DAY

Bulla and two of his men are dressed as merchants. They enter the room carrying samples of fine cloth and gemstones. The magistrate Cosa sits on a finely upholstered couch. He is finely dressed, perfumed, and effeminate.

COSA
Yes, yes. What do you have to show me? I am a busy man, you know. Do you have any sapphires or rubies?

BULLA
No, honorable magistrate, but we do have carnelian and amethyst. And look at these fine silks, your honor - just arrived in Brundisium from the East. The finest in Italy!

Cosa handles the cloth.

COSA
Ooooh! I like!

BULLA
Try this one on, your honor.

Cosa stands and wraps a colorful silk around him as Bulla studies him closely.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Very nice! It is definitely you, sir.
Bulla, disguised as Cosa and wearing a fine silk like the one Cosa tried on, sashays into the jail. Two of his men are with him, disguised as uniformed bodyguards. One of them announces him to the jailor.

**BULLA’S MAN**
All Hail Praetor Lucius Boranius Cosa, chief magistrate of the municipality of Corfinium!

**JAILOR**
(obsequiously)
Greetings, your honor. How can I be of service?

**BULLA/COSA**
I need a couple of young men for a private gladiatorial display at my villa. The emperor’s nephew will be there, so they must be good-looking and capable of putting on a show.

**31B** **INT. JAIL CELLS – DAY**
The jailor leads Bulla/Cosa past the cells.

**BULLA/COSA**
No, no, no. These are pitiful specimens.

**JAILOR**
Sorry, your honor. We don’t have what you’re looking for at the moment. Perhaps a couple of young women?

**BULLA/COSA**
(horrified)
Heavens no! Female gladiators? How vulgar!

He sees Lucius and Marcus in a cell. They recognize him, but he motions for them to be quiet by placing his finger on his lips.

**BULLA/COSA (CONT’D)**
What about these two? (CONTINUED)
Bulla moves closer to their cell.

**BULLA/COSA (CONT’D)**

Oh yes! These are just the men I’ve been looking for!

**JAILOR**

Oh no, your honor! Those are the outlaws. Bulla’s men. They are to be exposed to the beasts. Everyone is looking forward to it.

**BULLA/COSA**

Well, unless you want to take their place, you’ll release them to me at once.

**JAILOR**

But sir!

**BULLA/COSA**

Do you know who I am? I told you the emperor’s own nephew is expecting entertainment. Shall I tell him a lowly jailor interfered with his pleasure?

31C EXT. TRAIL INTO FOREST – EVENING

Bulla and his men, including the released captives, hurry into the woods, laughing and slapping each other on the back. Bulla looks at his fine silk tunic in mock alarm and imitates Cosa.

**BULLA** (cringing)

Hey, watch it, Decius! Are your hands clean?

All laugh.

32 INT. THRONE ROOM IN PALACE IN ROME – DAY

Severus is surrounded by advisors and courtiers. Julia is also present. The emperor is livid. He lambastes Lentulus.
SEVERUS

(fuming)
I’m surrounded by incompetents! Humiliated by a local brigand! And his strength grows daily. He has hundreds of armed men at his disposal – an army of runaway slaves and ex-praetorians.

Severus sits on the throne and picks up his scepter. It falls apart in his hands – the screws were intentionally loosened by Bulla. Severus is surprised by this, then irritated.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
I should have you executed for your failure, Lentulus, as an example. You have my wife to thank for my leniency. She always looks out for her Syrians.

Lentulus looks at Julia and bows. She acknowledges this with a nod.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
But you are no longer a tribune. Sextus, here, will take your place.

Sextus is a menacing-looking, large man with a deep voice. He steps forward.

SEXTUS

(confidently)
I’ll get him, Caesar. I’ll bring you his head.

SEVERUS

No, bring him to me alive. I want him in the arena, so the mob can see in bleeding color what becomes of my enemies.

33  EXT. GATE OF ROME – MORNING

Sextus mounts his horse and leads a new contingent of praetorian cavalry out the Roman gate in pursuit of Bulla.

34  EXT. CROSSROADS IN THE ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE – DAY

The horsemen stop at an intersection. Sextus addresses his men.
SEXTUS
This is where we split up. I want you to interrogate everyone you meet. Make them talk. Don’t spare the whip or the branding iron. Bleed it out of them!

The horsemen divide into several groups and ride off.

35 INT. BACK ROOM AT TAVERN – DAY

Sextus and his men are interrogating an innkeeper. The man has been flogged and his arms are tied to a hook on the ceiling.

SEXTUS
Your tavern is right on the edge of the forest where Bulla and his men live. You expect me to believe none of them have ever been here?

INNKEEPER
I’m not in the habit of asking my customers if they are outlaws.

Sextus hits him with the whip. The innkeeper grimaces in pain.

SEXTUS
Enough impertinence! The emperor himself sent me. I have the power of life and death, do you understand?

One of Sextus’ men enters the room from the main tavern.

SOLDIER
(quietly to Sextus)
Sir, there’s a man in the tavern who says he has information. He’ll only speak to you.

36 INT. PUBLIC TAVERN – DAY

The soldier leads Sextus to a table in the corner where Licinius, a bald man with bushy eyebrows, wearing a toga and a neatly-trimmed gray beard, is waiting for him. Licinius rises as Sextus approaches.
SEXTUS
Yes?

LICINIUS
(quietly)
My name is Licinius. I can lead you to Bulla. But I must have assurances of protection.

SEXTUS
(loudly)
You’ll tell me what you know or you’ll be tortured.

LICINIUS
(nervously)
It is not that simple. I can find him for you, but it will take time.

SEXTUS
Why would you help me when no one else around here will say a word, even under torture?

LICINIUS
Because they have all been helped by Bulla – while I have been his victim.

SEXTUS
How?

LICINIUS
Bulla is famous for his romantic adventures. Half the women in Italy are in love with him – the other half haven’t met him yet.

(beat)
My daughter was to be married to a wealthy senator – a man with estates in Sicily and Spain. But when he discovered that she had been with Bulla, he called the whole thing off.

(beat)
I will never forgive the outlaw for this.

SEXTUS
How can you help me catch him?

(CONTINUED)
LICINIUS
Bulla and my daughter meet at a grotto on my estate. I always know when it will happen because she has a servant fix her hair before she goes riding. It will be short notice, but, next time, I will let you know.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE – EVENING
Licinius, Sextus, and ten soldiers ride to the edge of the woods. They dismount.

LICINIUS
(in a low voice)
We’ll have to go on foot from here – and quietly. The grotto is at the end of that ravine. There’s no way out at the other end - he’ll be trapped.

The men follow Licinius into the ravine. It is rapidly becoming dark. Finally, they arrive at the grotto. Sextus looks around and then at Licinius.

SEXTUS
So? Where is he?

LICINIUS
Who?

SEXTUS
Bulla, you idiot! You said he’d be here.

LICINIUS
And so he is!

He takes off his mask - Licinius is Bulla! On cue, his men appear from above and behind, some carrying torches, others with their bows and arrows at the ready. Sextus and his men drop their weapons.

EXT. GROTTO – NIGHT
Bulla and his men have convened a trial by torchlight. Bulla sits on a makeshift throne, assuming the roles of judge and magistrate.
BULLA
This court is now in session.
(beat)
Sextus, you are charged with torturing innocent people. How do you plead?

SEXTUS
(with contempt)
This court has no jurisdiction or authority.

BULLA
Maybe not, but it can pass sentence, so I advise you to take it seriously.

SEXTUS
(reluctantly)
What I have done, I have done at the emperor’s command.

BULLA
Only slaves, children, and animals cannot be held accountable for their actions. Therefore, you must be a slave.

He motions to his men.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Give him the look of a slave – shave half of his hair off. Then return him to his master.

The men grab hold of Sextus.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Tell your master that many more will become outlaws if he does not feed his people.

39 INT. CAVE – TORCHLIGHT

Julia Domna and Bulla are half dressed on a bed of animal furs, laughing together.

JULIA
You shaved his head? Why?

(CONTINUED)
BULLA
Because that’s the mark of a slave and a slave is what he is.

JULIA
(reflectively)
Aren’t we all? Who can defy the emperor and get away with it? Other than Bulla the Outlaw, that is. Bulla Felix, Bulla the Lucky! That is what they are calling you.

BULLA
Don’t call me lucky. The gods might envy me and make me unlucky.

JULIA
But you are not the lucky one. We are the lucky ones – I am lucky – to have you.

They embrace.

JULIA (CONT’D)
I wish we could be together always.

BULLA
The world would have to turn completely upside down for that to happen.
    (beat)
Let’s just enjoy every minute. Carpe diem. No fear, remember?

JULIA
(affectedly)
“Fear is only the anticipation of pain and therefore unnecessary.”

BULLA
(laughing)
So you were listening after all?

They embrace. Julia hesitates and becomes more serious.

JULIA
They say that you are a great ladies’ man; that you have many lovers.
BULLA
(sheepishly)
No. I’m a big flirt, that’s all. I have many girlfriends. People want to know that I notice them, that I care about them. But I only have one lover.

JULIA
So do I.

They embrace again.

BULLA
Would you like to see where I learned not to fear?

JULIA
Yes, of course!

40 INT. TEMPLE OF FORTUNA NEAR PERUSIA – NIGHT

The temple is empty except for a delicately-wrought bronze statue of the goddess Fortuna, holding a ship’s rudder and a cornucopia full of fruit and wearing a golden crown. The room is lit by a few dozen small oil lamps, each of them left as a prayer offering by a devotee.

JULIA
(impressed)
Fortuna! So beautiful!

BULLA
Yes. My mother brought me here often when I was a boy.

JULIA
Where is your mother now?

BULLA
She died when I was 10.
(beat)
She taught me that Fortuna is the greatest god of all because the other gods must act through her. She chooses our roles and we should act them out boldly - but not too seriously. After all, it is only a play.
JULIA
Some of us have more difficult roles than others.

BULLA
Not unless we take them too seriously. That is what makes them difficult.

INT. PALACE THRONE ROOM – DAY

Severus is with Lentulus and Sextus, whose hair is shaved off the back of his head. Another man, QUADRATUS, stands behind the emperor.

SEVERUS
(fuming)
Here I am winning wars everywhere in the world – and bested by an outlaw in my own backyard! Well this time it will be different. If an army can’t catch him, perhaps one man can.

SEXTUS
What man?

SEVERUS
(gesturing behind him)
Quadratus. Bulla won’t have a chance against Quadratus. He’s the greatest gladiator alive today.

SEXTUS
I follow the games, Caesar. I’ve never heard of him.

SEVERUS
He’s too valuable to waste in the arena. Quadratus was brought from Gaul by the emperor Commodus to be his personal trainer. He knows more ways to kill a man than anyone else in the world.

LENTULUS
But how will he find the outlaw? How will he get close to him? The people protect him.
QUADRATUS
I will find a way.

SEVERUS
(to Quadratus)
This time I don’t care if he’s dead or alive. Just get rid of him!

42 EXT. GATE OF ROME – NIGHT
Quadratus on horseback gallops off in pursuit of Bulla.

43 INT. MAGISTRATE COSA’S GARDEN COURTYARD – DAY
Quadratus and Cosa, the magistrate that Bulla impersonated, are walking through the garden.

QUADRATUS
Cosa, I know that you are anxious for revenge against the outlaw for the way he took advantage of you.

COSA
Bulla? Oh no, that didn’t bother me. I was flattered, actually. He made me a little famous.

Quadratus stops walking and turns to face Cosa.

QUADRATUS
(menacingly)
The emperor knows that you want revenge!

COSA
(getting it)
Oh! Yes! Of course! Revenge. Yes, I want revenge!

Cosa reflects and becomes alarmed.

COSA (CONT’D)
(nervously)
What will I have to do for this revenge?

(Continued)
QUADRATUS
Don’t worry; nothing brave. You’ll have to arrest me and claim that I am one of Bulla’s men. Then you will announce that I am to be executed.

COSA
That shouldn’t be too difficult.

QUADRATUS
Bulla will rescue me. When he discovers that I am not one of his men, I’ll tell him it was a trap and that I was unwilling bait. Then I’ll join his band – and kill him when he is off-guard.

Cosa pretends to be impressed by the cleverness of the plan.

EXT. BULLA’S CAMP – DAY
Bulla and some of his men are taking target practice with bows and arrows. A group of several band members walks up to him.

MEMBER OF BULLA’S BAND
Bulla, the word is they’ve captured one of our men. He’s being held at the arena in Corfinium. The magistrate plans to execute him publicly during the harvest festival.

BULLA
Who did they capture?

MEMBER OF BULLA’S BAND
They say he won’t give them his name.

BULLA
Is anyone missing?

DECIUS
Hard to say. There’s an awful lot of us now. Someone’s always missing. Long weekends, that sort of thing.

BULLA
We’d better look into it.
Bulla and about 10 men gallop on horseback through the woods. They approach a clearing with the city of Corfinium in the distance.

Bulla and his men cautiously approach the edge of the forest and look at the arena. The jail is just outside the arena entrance. They see that it is lightly guarded.

**BULLA**

Only two soldiers to guard one of my men - on the edge of town - and he has no name? Something smells like rotting fish. Back to camp.

Bulla and his men ride away from the city.

Bulla and his men ride into camp. He dismounts and gestures for everyone to assemble.

**BULLA**

A trap! I’m sure of it. What do you say we all go to town and have some fun with this?

Everyone cheers.

Bulla’s entire army of 600 men approaches the city - some on foot, some on horseback.

Bulla’s men stream through the streets of the city, disarming all of the soldiers they come across and herding them to the arena. Curious citizens follow.
An astonished and frightened Cosa is escorted from his villa to the arena by Bulla’s men.

Bulla’s men disarm the guards at the arena jail.

BULLA
(to one of the guards)
Let him out!

The guard unlocks the cell and Quadratus emerges. He is clearly surprised by the size of Bulla’s force.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Well what a surprise! I’ve never seen you before in my life.

QUADRATUS
Are you Bulla, the outlaw?

BULLA
Yes.

QUADRATUS
(pointing at Cosa)
Then please tell this man that I am not one of your band. He arrested me under false pretenses. He was trying to trap you and your men.

BULLA
The magistrate? Lucius Boranius Cosa? Trying to trap me?

He looks at Cosa, who is trembling and shaking his head. He turns back to Quadratus.

BULLA (CONT’D)
I don’t think so. I think you want to be rescued so you can spy on us. Perhaps kill me. But, tell me: how were you going to do that?

There is a long pause. Quadratus sees the game is up. He sneers at Bulla.
QUADRATUS
Any way you like, outlaw.

Bulla turns and points at the arena entrance just a short walk away.

BULLA
Well, here’s your opportunity! Shall we?

49  EXT. ARENA – DAY  49

The crowd pours into the stands. The atmosphere has become festive for all but Quadratus. Bulla limbers up with his sword as Quadratus is given a weapon. Bulla addresses the audience.

BULLA
(indicating Quadratus)
He who is about to die salutes you!

Quadratus scowls as Bulla’s men cheer and laugh. He charges Bulla and unleashes a whirlwind of thrusts and slashes. Each one is parried by Bulla. There is a pause as they reposition themselves.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Impressive! Severus’ money was well-spent on you. A shame that you have failed and won’t live to spend it.

QUADRATUS
I haven’t failed yet!

He charges again, thrusting his sword just under Bulla’s chin. Bulla rallies from the near miss by shoving Quadratus into the sand.

BULLA
You have failed even if you kill me, assassin. Do you think my men would let you return to Rome to spend your reward? I’m afraid not.

Quadratus looks at the hundreds of men in the stands and realizes his predicament.

BULLA (CONT’D)
It kinda makes you wonder.

(CONTINUED)
Quadratus circles towards Bulla.

    QUADRATUS
    What?

    BULLA
    What you are fighting for? You lose either way.

Quadratus stands straight with his sword hanging at his side and considers.

    QUADRATUS
    What choice do I have?

    BULLA
    Well, you could join us.

    QUADRATUS
    Why would you trust me?

    BULLA
    I used to work for an emperor, too, you know. I think you’d rather be a free man than a slave. Look where slavery’s gotten you.

Quadratus looks around him and then at Bulla. He drops his sword and starts laughing out loud.

    QUADRATUS
    They told me you were brave. They didn’t tell me you were clever.

They embrace and walk off the arena arm in arm. The crowd cheers wildly. Quadratus smiles broadly, but a quick cool glance at Bulla raises a question about his true intentions. Bulla looks at Quadratus with a grin, but also a hint of uncertainty.

    DECIUS
    (quietly to Bulla)
    I don’t trust him.

    BULLA
    Nor do I. That will keep me on my toes.
Bulla is working in the blacksmith shop, beating a sword into shape. Some others are watching. Secundus joins them.

SECUNDUS
(Excited)
They’re going to have a javelin throwing contest at the Festival of Fortuna in Praeneste. 500 gold pieces for distance and 1000 gold pieces for accuracy!

DECIUS
Now that’s a prize! I could win the distance easy. And Bulla, you’d win for accuracy. A shame we can’t go.

BULLA
Of course we can go – and we’ll win, too!

Everyone disagrees loudly.

SECUNDUS
It’s too dangerous, Bulla. There’ll be flocks of soldiers there. Way too risky.

BULLA
The crowd will be large – easy to blend in. Besides, we’ll go in disguise.

DECIUS
As what?

BULLA
(after a pause)
As imperial slaves. We’ll wear the imperial insignia around our necks – say we were sent directly from the palace by the emperor himself. No one will mess with us – I assure you.
Bulla and Decius wander through the excitement of the festival. The temple is the largest and most impressive in Italy and its grounds swarm with celebrants, dancing to loud, raucous music, watching gymnasts, strong men, jugglers, dancers, people on stilts. There are many concession stands selling food, drink, silly hats, flags, and small statues of the goddess Fortuna.

A large, gray-haired man named Magnus, wearing only a loincloth and leather bands around his wrists, challenges all comers.

MAGNUS
Who will fight with Hercules? Has no one the courage to face an old man?

To Decius’s surprise, Bulla takes off his tunic and faces off against Magnus. The two men circle around each other, then engage. It is an even match. Bulla is quicker, but Magnus is larger and stronger. Finally, after several throws but with no one gaining an advantage, Magnus has had enough. He holds Bulla’s hand aloft.

MAGNUS (CONT’D)
Mars be praised! I have met my match!

The nearby crowd applauds and then turns toward other amusements.

BULLA
(softly)
Hi Dad!

Magnus wraps a bear hug around his son and begins to weep. Bulla addresses Decius who watches, thunderstruck.

BULLA
This is my father. Magnus. He was the greatest gladiator in Rome before he retired. Father, this is Decius.

MAGNUS
It fills me to see you, my son. Clearly, you are well!

BULLA
(rubbing a sore shoulder)
As are you.
MAGNUS
(suddenly serious)
I’ve heard about your misfortunes, Bulla. Your
punishment was unjust. You are an outlaw, but it is
better to be an outlaw than slave to a wicked master.

Magnus clasps him on the shoulder. Bulla looks uneasy, ashamed.

MAGNUS (CONT’D)
Listen my son, I know you – I know who you are.
I only believe the good things I hear about you,
and I will sacrifice for your safety.

BULLA
Thank you, Father. But if you are held
responsible for my actions...

MAGNUS
(shaking his head)
Don’t worry about that. Severus wants to be
popular with the Roman mob – and the mob loves me.
He would gain nothing by punishing the most famous
retired gladiator in Rome. Besides, his sons
idolize me. I instruct them in gladiatorial combat
and introduce them to the current champions. They
wouldn’t let the emperor strike me down.

DECIUS
What are the princes like?

MAGNUS
Beastly bastards. Especially Caracalla, the
older one. I thought Bulla was bad when he was
16, but these boys are vicious. We may hate
Severus – and, believe me, I do – but we should
pray for his long life; his boys are far worse!

BULLA
How are things in Rome these days?

MAGNUS
Grim. Severus is from Libya; he has no respect
for Italian traditions. He’s brought in his army
of semi-civilized Germans and is giving them
free rein. They plunder everyone – to enrich
Severus and themselves.

(CONTINUED)
MAGNUS (CONT’D)
It’s like Hannibal’s invasion all over again, except that now our tormentors call themselves Romans. And there’s no one to stand up to them – except my son!

(he smiles proudly, then looks concerned)
Tell me, Bulla, what is it that brings you here? It is risky – many soldiers.

BULLA
The javelin contest. You know I can’t resist a challenge.

51B EXT. JAVELIN CONTEST FIELD – DAY
Bulla and Decius approach the judge’s table to sign in. There are guards present.

JUDGE
What are your names. Who do you represent.

BULLA
I am Castor and this is Pollux. We represent the house of Caesar.

He and Decius hold forth the insignias hanging from their necks. An officer steps forward.

OFFICER
You are liars! The emperor’s men have already registered.

He signals to some soldiers to seize Bulla and Decius.

BULLA
Wait! We were sent by the empress, Julia.

The judge and officer look at each other.

BULLA (CONT’D)
(softly)
It is a private wager between the emperor and empress. You understand?
The judge looks at the officer who hesitates, then nods. Bulla and Decius join the other contestants.

51C  EXT. JAVELIN CONTEST FIELD – DAY  51C

Javelin distance contest. Decius wins by a large margin. The crowd is awed by his strength and applauds.

51D  EXT. JAVELIN CONTEST FIELD – DAY  51D

Javelin accuracy contest. Throwing at a series of stationary targets, Bulla and an African are tied and all others eliminated. The playoff involves throwing at swinging gourds. Both men are successful. Smaller gourds are used - both men succeed. The Judge confers with his assistants and addresses the contestants.

JUDGE
It appears to be a tie. I propose dividing the prize money between you.

BULLA
Mars hates ties. May I propose another test?

OTHER CONTESTANT
What do you have in mind?

BULLA
Two gourds, swinging in opposite directions. One behind the other. But we have to pierce both gourds with one throw to win.

The other contestant shakes his head and laughs. Then shrugs.

OTHER CONTESTANT
If neither of us succeeds, we split the money?

The judge nods. The contestants agree. The African strikes the front gourd, but misses the second. Bulla watches the swinging gourds for some time, then throws, impaling both gourds with his javelin. The spectators cheer wildly.

52   INT. PALACE THRONE ROOM – DAY          52

Severus is with Lentulus. The emperor paces back and forth, finally
kicking over a bronze lampstand. The coals skitter across the marble floor. He moves toward Lentulus.

SEVERUS
I’m going to give you one last chance, Lentulus. If you fail to capture the outlaw this time, you will be exposed to wild beasts in the arena – and so will your entire family!

Lentulus shudders.

LENTULUS
(whining)
It is very difficult, Caesar. He has the support of the people and he knows every hiding place in Italy.

SEVERUS
(thoughtfully)
Sextus tells me that he claims to have a reputation as a womanizer. Is this true?

LENTULUS
The women are crazy about him.

SEVERUS
Then find out who his lovers are. They should be easier to control than Bulla and his men.

53   EXT. CITY GATE OF ROME – MORNING

Lentulus and his cohort of mounted praetorians leave Rome in pursuit of Bulla.

54   INT. BROTHEL IN AN ITALIAN TOWN – DAY

Lentulus is talking with a madam at a brothel. He holds a bag of coins.

LENTULUS
What do you know about Bulla’s love affairs. Has he ever been here?
MADAM
No. Some of his men have.

LENTULUS
Have they mentioned any of his women by name?

MADAM
No.
   (beat as she looks at the money bag)
But one of them says he has a rendezvous with
a noblewoman every month. In a cave near the
temple of Fortuna in Perusia. That’s all I know.

She snatches the bag of coins from his hand and Lentulus smiles.

55 INT. TEMPLE OF FORTUNA NEAR PERUSIA – NIGHT

Lentulus is talking to a priest, who is very nervous and keeps
looking around to see if he is being watched.

LENTULUS
You are the priest of Fortuna. Is that right?

PRIEST
Yes.

LENTULUS
A local magistrate says there are caves near
here, in the hills. Do you know about them?

PRIEST
I don’t know about any caves.

Lentulus hits the priest in the face with the back of his hand,
knocking him to his knees.

LENTULUS
(angry)
He also says that Bulla Felix has been seen near
your temple on several occasions, and that you
know him.

(CONTINUED)
PRIEST
(sweating)
I am a priest. Many people come here to make offerings, to seek advice. I don’t ask what they do for a living.

LENTULUS
Do you know that the reward for the capture of Bulla has been raised to one million sesterces?

The priest is amazed.

LENTULUS (CONT’D)
And that the penalty for failing to cooperate in his capture is death?

Lentulus draws his sword and presses its point against the priest’s neck until a trickle of blood appears.

PRIEST
All right! Listen. There is a small cave behind the temple...

EXT. ENTRANCE TO CAVE – DARKNESS WITH TORCHLIGHT

Carrying only a small lamp, Julia approaches the cave entrance. She looks around to make sure that no one is watching and enters. She follows a narrow passageway to the main chamber, where Bulla is waiting for her on a bed of animal skins. They embrace.

JULIA
I was afraid you wouldn’t be here.

BULLA
Why?

JULIA
Lentulus and his men are looking for you everywhere. Severus is going away - to conquer the lands north of Britannia. But he won't leave Italy until you have been captured. He’s offering 1 million sesterces for your head.
BULLA
A million? Maybe I should turn myself in; I could use that money!

JULIA
This is no joke, my love. He’ll stop at nothing. Promise me you will be careful. Maybe you should leave the country for awhile?

BULLA
I don’t run away from Severus. Perhaps he is running away from me?

They embrace.

57  INT. CAVE - MORNING

Julia awakes, brightens an oil lamp, and quietly dresses. Bulla is asleep. She leans over and kisses him. He smiles. She walks away.

58  EXT. ENTRANCE OF CAVE - MORNING

Julia stops at the cave entrance, looks around for observers, then slips away. Lentulus is watching from a distance. He recognizes her and smiles to himself. A guardsman sees her getting away.

GUARDSMAN
(pointing at Julia)
Should I arrest that woman, sir?

LENTULUS
(calmingly)
No, let her go. It is Bulla the emperor wants.

59  INT. CAVE - MORNING

Lentulus and his men surprise Bulla in bed and take him captive. He is pulled to his feet and put in chains.

LENTULUS
We meet again.

(CONTINUED)
BULLA
Yes. Sorry I missed you last time. I had business in Rome.

LENTULUS
And now you have more business in Rome.

He gestures for the soldiers to take him away.

60 EXT. ROAD TO ROME – DAY

Bulla is on display in a cage on a wheeled cart, escorted by a cohort of praetorians. The road is lined with people, curious to see the famous outlaw, captured at last. Some call his name, others throw rocks or spoiled fruit at him, others shed tears at the misfortune of their hero. He watches the people as he passes by, his face serene, impassive. A small boy in rags sits on the side of the road, watching with tears on his face as Bulla goes by. Bulla smiles at the boy and waves slowly.

61 INT. TEMPLE OF FORTUNA NEAR PERUSIA – NIGHT

The room is packed with visitors, mostly the poor, filing past the statue of Fortuna. They are distraught - many in tears. As each one passes, he or she looks up at Fortuna and says a prayer, then lights a small oil lamp and places it as near her feet as possible. There are hundreds of lamps around the statue, filling the room with light.

62 EXT. BULLA’S CAMP – MORNING

Bulla’s men and other camp dwellers are gathered together, clearly despondent.

DECIUS
We have to rescue him. Who is with me?

MARCUS
He’s in Rome by now, Decius. There’s nothing we can do.

SECUNDUS
We can go to Rome. We can rescue him there.
MARCUS
You know that is not possible, Secundus. But he
has friends there.
(beat)
Perhaps he will escape.

Many present lift their heads and look at Marcus, daring to hope.
Decius scowls, jumps on a horse, and rides off.

63 INT. PALACE IN ROME – DAY

Bulla, in chains and surrounded by guards, is being taken to the
emperor. As he passes through the palace hallway, he is accosted by
a high official. The guards halt to let the official speak with Bulla.

OFFICIAL
(with contempt)
I remember you. You were once an officer in the
Praetorian Guard. Tell me, why did you become an
outlaw?

BULLA
Why did you become a prefect? I rob from the
rich and give to the poor – you rob from the
poor and give to the rich. We are both thieves.

The official is an intelligent man and takes the point. He smiles and
nods and motions for the guards to move on with their captive.

64 INT. PALACE THRONE ROOM – DAY

Severus is on his throne. Bulla, bound and surrounded by guards, is
thrown at his feet. Severus looks at him for a while, mildly amused
at his condition.

SEVERUS
Tell me, outlaw. Why did you oppose me? You were
once a good soldier. Was your loyalty so fragile
that you had to be paid for it?

BULLA
I oppose you because you oppose freedom and
punish the innocent.

(CONTINUED)
SEVERUS
I have re-established order – isn’t that the first duty of a Caesar?

BULLA
No! The first duty of a Caesar is to protect the welfare of his subjects – all of his subjects. You impoverish the people to enrich yourself and pay for unnecessary wars.

SEVERUS
How do you know they are unnecessary?

BULLA
If the people are enslaved to pay for them, then it doesn’t matter if they are won or lost – the result is the same either way. That makes them unnecessary.

SEVERUS
Marcus Aurelius spent most of his reign at war. Did you oppose him?

BULLA
Marcus Aurelius fought for peace and security – you fight for pride and personal glory. Aurelius was a great Caesar; you are a bully and a warlord.

The emperor kicks him in the face and sends him sprawling.

SEVERUS
Enough of this! I will not explain my policies to a criminal! Tomorrow you will be fed to the lions for the glory of my family and to amuse the people of Rome.

He stands and moves towards Bulla.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
You have caused me a lot of trouble, outlaw. But the emperor always wins in the end.

Severus addresses the guards.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
Take him to the arena. Guard him well!
Bulla is thrown into a small cell with bars along the front. The door is locked and two uniformed jailors stand at attention beside it.

Some animal keepers are watching a large group of irritable lions milling around.

**KEEPER ONE**
They’re famished. Pretty soon they’ll be eating each other.

**KEEPER TWO**
They’d better not. They’re the main event tomorrow.

**KEEPER ONE**
How many men will they be facing? Christians?

**KEEPER TWO**
Just one man, and he’s no Christian. Bulla the Outlaw!

The lions roar and squabble, their growls echoing through the arena chambers.

Bulla is on his cot. Two uniformed praetorians arrive at his cell to escort him to the arena. The guards open the cell door and drag Bulla to his feet. One of the praetorians places a Samnite helmet—a gladiatorial helmet with a crest and wide brim and a mask that covers the face—on Bulla.

With a praetorian gripping each arm, Bulla is dragged to the elevator that will convey him to the arena above him. The three men are slowly lifted in the elevator by a human-powered turnstile.

(CONTINUED)
The guards and their prisoner, his arms held at his sides by the guards, emerge from the elevator. The crowd explodes into cheers and jeers. An executioner dressed as Chiron throws a sword and square shield at the prisoner’s feet. He struggles to speak and to remove his helmet as the executioner and two guards leave hastily. The lions pour into the arena and the crowd begins to chant.

CROWD
Bul-la! Bul-la! Bul-la! Bul-la!

Severus, Julia, their two sons, several guards and retainers watch the action.

SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS
He’s good. But fifty lions... Who will wager with me? How many beasts will fall before he is finished? I say seven!

CARACALLA
It is always sevens with you, father. I say 17.

GETA
I say 19.

Julia is wearing a veil. Severus notices that she is trembling and in tears. Suddenly Severus realizes that she cares for Bulla. His face turns red with fury, but he says nothing.

The crowd lets out a groan as the victim is overcome by the lions. Caracalla and Geta cringe as they watch the lions dismember him.

Julia is grieving, weeping in her chair next to the statue of Bulla. Severus bursts in on her. He looks her in the eye, then at the statue of Bulla, which he suddenly recognizes. Furious, he pulls his sword and knocks off the head of the statue. Then he turns back to Julia and strikes her in the face with the back of his hand.
SEVERUS
If you were not the mother of my sons, I would feed you to the lions as well!

(beat)
I’m taking you with us to Britannia, to keep an eye on you. A military campaign in the barbarian North will cool your passions!

He storms out of the room. Julia’s tears flow more quickly.

69   EXT. COLOSSEUM CORRIDOR – DAY         69

Lentulus and the EXECUTIONER are strolling together, discussing the show. They are followed by the two guards from the arena.

EXECUTIONER
Well he didn’t last as long as I expected. Perhaps he wasn’t such a great fighter after all.

LENTULUS
Who could stand against 50 lions?

(beat)
Tell me what did he say just before he died?

EXECUTIONER
I couldn’t quite make it out. It sounded like he was saying “Publiuth! I am Publiuth!” His voice was muffled - by the helmet, I suppose. Imagine, trying to impersonate someone else right to the end!

Both laugh. The executioner turns to the guards.

EXECUTIONER
Did you get what the outlaw said before he died?

Both guards shake their heads no. The guards walk past Lentulus and the executioner and through an exit into a street outside the Colosseum, where they remove their helmets, smile at each other, and embrace - it is Bulla and Decius!

70   INT. LENTULUS’ OFFICE IN THE PALACE – DAY      70

A centurion addresses Lentulus, who is seated, looking pleased with himself.

(CONTINUED)
CENTURION
Sir, have you seen Publius? He seems to have disappeared. No one has seen him since the execution of Bulla the Outlaw. He was one of his guards.

Lentulus gradually understands. Bulla pulled off a switch and escaped - and the emperor will hold him responsible if he finds out.

INT. BULLA’S FATHER’S HOUSE IN ROME – NIGHT

Bulla’s father Magnus bursts into the room, followed by Lentulus and four praetorian guardsmen. Magnus’s voice rattles the statuary.

MAGNUS
(raging)
You pay no respect to a grieving father!? Today my son was eaten by lions and now you search my home?

(beat)
What are you looking for, tears? Here they are! On my cheeks! Take them if you must, but leave my house!

Lentulus motions to his men to search the house. They leave the room. Magnus suddenly understands.

MAGNUS
(jubilantly)
Great gods! You’re looking for Bulla! That means he’s still alive! Venus be praised – my son lives!

Lentulus fears that Magnus will spread the truth and stabs him in the stomach with his sword. Magnus sinks to the floor as the four praetorians return, having found nothing. Lentulus moves toward the door. With his dying breath, Magnus grabs a short sword on a table beside him and throws it at Lentulus, piercing his neck and killing him instantly.

INT. CALLISTOS’ STUDIO IN THE PALACE IN ROME

Callistos is busy chiselling away on a scowling bust of Caracalla.
He is alone. Bulla approaches cautiously. Without looking at Bulla, Callistos speaks.

CALLISTOS
I thought you were eaten by lions.

BULLA
I thought you didn’t do ugly portraits.

CALLISTOS
There is little beauty left in Rome these days, Bulla. I must work. What are you doing in the palace?

BULLA
Callistos, I must find Julia. Can you help me?

CALLISTOS
She is gone. Severus took her with him to Britannia.

BULLA
(turning to leave)
Keep my secret?

CALLISTOS
That you are alive or that you love the empress.

BULLA
Both.

CALLISTOS
Of course.

73   EXT. ROAD ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF ROME – DAY

Bulla and Decius are standing on a busy road.

DECIUS
You can’t follow her, Bulla. It’s too dangerous. You’ll be recognized. The emperor has seen you now. So have others.

(CONTINUED)
BULLA
They all think I’m dead; they won’t be looking for me.

(beat)
I have to find her, Decius. She thinks I’m dead, too.

Decius can see there is no point in arguing. He embraces Bulla.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Tell the others what has happened. Severus is going to Britannia and taking most of his army with him. I will follow – to find Julia and keep the emperor in line.

He grabs Decius by the shoulders and looks into his eyes.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Listen, my friend: now is the time for the band to break up and go home. With me out of the picture, the few soldiers left in Italy will forget all about Bulla and his band of outlaws. If the men keep a low profile, they can return to normal lives.

Decius is downcast at losing his friend.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Don’t despair, my friend. If the gods will it, we will see each other again. You saved my life – I’ll have to repay that debt some day.

74 EXT. HARBOR NEAR THE WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER – MORNING
A vast fleet of Roman ships is in the harbor, unloading numerous troops, horses, and supplies. Among the disembarking men is Bulla, disguised as a blacksmith. It is raining.

75 EXT. HIGHWAY IN BRITANNIA – DAY
The army, including the imperial party, is marching north on a paved Roman road from Londinium (London) to Eboracum (York), which will be
the Roman home base during the coming campaign against the barbarian Caledonians in the north of the island.

Bulla is marching on foot with the craftsmen and auxiliary personnel. He sees the empress’s elaborate palanquin ahead of him, with no fewer than 12 bearers, and follows behind it.

76   EXT. A SHADY CROSSROADS ON THE HIGHWAY – DAY      76

A centurion on horseback rides beside the ranks, loudly repeating the same command.

CENTURION
Halt! Half hour break for food and rest. Halt!
Half hour break for food and rest.

Bulla sits on the ground and pulls a hunk of bread from his bag. He watches Julia leave her palanquin to walk around and stretch.

Julia surveys the countryside. She finds it beautiful and feels refreshed. Bulla stands and moves towards her, but Severus suddenly appears, followed by his grim-looking bodyguard, and strides up to her.

SEVERUS
So you like it here? Believe me, it’s much colder up north. I’m leaving you in Eboracum while we’re fighting the barbarians. You’ll be under guard, of course. Now get back in your palanquin. It’s time to go.

77   INT. INSIDE JULIA’S PALANQUIN – DAY       77

Julia climbs back into her curtained palanquin. The bearers lift it from the ground and march on. Julia’s seat is strewn with pillows and coverlets. Suddenly, Bulla emerges from beneath them. Julia, believing him to be dead, is thunderstruck. She struggles to breathe. Bulla kisses her hand and caresses her shoulders.

JULIA
What? No! It can’t be! But how? I thought you were dead! I saw you die! Are you a vision? A ghost?

(CONTINUED)
She recoils slightly, thinking this can be the only possibility.

    BULLA
    Neither. I escaped! One of my men replaced a guard. We pulled a switch in the elevator.

    JULIA
    But what are you doing here?

    BULLA
    You’re here.

They embrace.

    JULIA
    What if Severus sees you?

    BULLA
    I figure the best place to hide from him is right under his nose.

    JULIA
    He knows about us, Bulla. He knows that I love you. He saw my reaction at the arena, when I thought you had been killed. And he recognized you in Callistos’ portrait. He knocked off its head.

    BULLA
    Well I’m sure that made Callistos angry! No wonder Severus ran away from Rome!

    JULIA
    I’m serious, my love. You are in great danger here.

    BULLA
    If Severus knows that you and I were lovers, then you are in danger as well.

    JULIA
    He keeps me alive because of his sons. If he accuses me of adultery, it will raise questions. He’s too old to start a new family.

    (beat)
    I can’t believe you are alive!
They embrace and tumble together into the cushions.

78 INT. IMPERIAL PALACE IN EBORACUM – DAY 78

Julia is writing letters at her desk. A secretary stands beside her, holding scrolls, and two bodyguards stand on either side of the doorway. One of them has red hair and a red beard and a cuirass with a large pot belly.

Severus strides in and looks things over. His two sons, now in their late teens, are with him. Geta takes a fig from a bowl on the table - Caracalla snatches it from his hand and takes a bite.

SEVERUS
(to Geta)
Geta! Are you going to let him get away with that?

Geta tries to take the fig back. Caracalla runs out of the room with Geta in pursuit.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
(eating a fig)
I’m taking Caracalla with me to Caledonia in the morning. He’s shared the throne for too long - he wants it to himself. I need to keep an eye on him. (beat)
When we make contact with the enemy, I will summon you to meet with their women. Women have much importance in their culture. (beat)
Strange people, these Caledonians!

He strides toward the door and pauses to stare at the redheaded guard.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
Who is this one? I don’t remember seeing him before.

JULIA
He was part of the local garrison. He knows the city, so I thought he would be useful.

SEVERUS
Maybe so. (CONTINUED)
Severus taps the guard’s bulging cuirass.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
But I think you’re feeding him too well.

Severus leaves, chuckling to himself. Julia hands her letter to the secretary.

JULIA
Take this to the courier for delivery to Rome along with the others.

The secretary has too many scrolls in his hands and drops a few. Julia speaks to the other bodyguard.

JULIA (CONT’D)
Help him, will you?

The other bodyguard picks up the errant scrolls and leaves with the secretary. This leaves Julia and the red-headed guard alone. The latter, of course, is Bulla. They embrace.

JULIA (CONT’D)
You were right! He didn’t have a clue!

BULLA
The Caledonians sound interesting. I think I’ll go north and look around.

JULIA
(dismayed)
You’re leaving me?

BULLA
You’ll be safe with Severus gone. I’ll see you when you come to Caledonia.

Julia pouts. He holds her close.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Being a bodyguard is boring, Julia. Especially a fat one. I’d like to know what this war is about. Severus seems intent on destroying the Caledonians. I’d like to know if they deserve
that before I let it happen.

(beat)
I’ll be with you again soon. You know by now
that I come and go as I please in this world!

79   MONTAGE: BULLA EXPLORING SCOTLAND

79A  EXT. SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS – DAY

Bulla hiking through the highlands, admiring the mountain scenery

79B  EXT. CALEDONIAN VILLAGE – DAY

Bulla meeting and making friends with Caledonian villagers

79C  EXT. CALEDONIAN VILLAGE – DAY

Bulla dancing with the villagers

79D  EXT. CALEDONIAN VILLAGE – DAY

Bulla admiring tattoos on the Caledonians, who are tattooed from
head to foot.

79E  EXT. CALEDONIAN VILLAGE – DAY

Bulla getting a tattoo

79F  EXT. BY A STREAM IN CALEDONIA – DAY

Bulla catching a salmon in a stream

79G  EXT. BY A STREAM IN CALEDONIA – EVENING

Bulla eating his catch

79H  EXT. A VAST FIELD OF STUMPS – MORNING

Bulla enters a rolling vista where thousands of trees have been
chopped down by the Romans. He bends over and picks up an axe with
the Roman inscription “II PARTHICA” on it, then angrily buries it in
a stump and walks on.
Carrying his pack, Bulla walks into a village that has been devastated by Severus’ army. An old woman and two small children sit beside the charred remains of a dwelling.

**BULLA**

What happened here?

**WOMAN**

Romans.

**CHILD ONE**

Are you a Roman?

**BULLA**

Yes. But I am the enemy of the Romans who did this.

He addresses the woman.

**BULLA (CONT’D)**

Did you fight back?

**WOMAN**

How could we? Our men are away for the war. When the soldiers came, we knew they would take our food – and much more. But they took everything.

**BULLA**

How did the three of you survive?

**WOMAN**

We hid among the corpses. I told the children, don’t move or the demons will get you. They didn’t move.

Bulla has killed a deer and the old woman and children are eating it with him.

**BULLA**

Tell me. Your people have been fighting Romans for a century and a half now. Why haven’t you made peace with them?
WOMAN
Because they want us to become like them. But we
are different and that is important to us.

Bulla gestures toward the wreckage of the village.

BULLA
But look at the price you pay! There are too
many Romans and they fight too well.

WOMAN
No, we love our freedom too much. Losing it
would be an even greater price to pay.
(beat)
Tell me. You are a Roman. Why do you try to make
us like you? We make no effort to make you into
Caledonians.

BULLA
Romans love order and your people just don’t fit.
You confuse and frighten some of us.
(beat)
They think that if you were like Romans, you
would buy our wine.

WOMAN
We already buy your wine.

BULLA
Yes, but you would buy more.

WOMAN
We will buy nothing if you destroy us.

BULLA
(frowning)
You are right. Severus is different. He is not
a true Roman. He is a man who has lost his way.
Remember that after he is gone.

CHILD ONE
Who will make him go away?

Bulla looks into the faces of the woman and children.

BULLA
(confidently)
I will.
Bulla approaches a severely damaged Caledonian hill-fort. The sentries open the gate and two leaders come to meet him. They are tall and wild-looking, with tattoos all over their bodies, which are almost naked despite the cold.

**BULLA**
Does anyone here speak Latin?

One of the Caledonians inspects Bulla’s tattoo and is reassured.

**CALEDONIAN LEADER**
All of us speak a little. But we have visitors who speak it well. Come inside. I will take you to them.

Bulla enters the fort to find several of his men, including Marcus, Sextus, Decius, and Quadratus, sitting around a fire, trying to keep warm.

**MARCUS**
Bulla! Gods be praised! It is Bulla!

The Caledonians are amused by the exuberant greetings shared by Bulla and his men – especially when they begin to dance in a circle around the fire. Finally, Bulla addresses the Caledonians.

**BULLA**
My friends, we have come to fight with you against the invaders. I’ve seen what they’ve done to your country. Their leader – the emperor – is my personal enemy. Let us make common cause and drive him out of Caledonia!

Bulla’s men are suddenly forlorn – they have already tried to rally the warriors.

**CALEDONIAN LEADER**
Your friends have made the same offer, but it is too late. The Roman emperor has defeated us. We
have surrendered. He is on his way here now with his wife and sons to receive our homage. If he is your enemy, then you should leave soon or he will capture you.

**BULLA**
You are not defeated as long as you have breath and the desire for freedom.

**CALEDONIAN LEADER**
(gravely)
You must understand. We have suffered greatly. Many have died.

**BULLA**
I have been told that Caledonian means “men of great toughness”.

**CALEDONIAN LEADER**
Hungry men cannot fight.

The Caledonians leave and enter a lodge in the enclosure. Marcus takes Bulla aside.

**MARCUS**
Bulla, there’s something you should know. Shortly after you left Rome, your father died.

Bulla hangs his head, his shoulders heave as tears spring from his eyes.

**BULLA**
How?

**MARCUS**
It was announced that he committed suicide after your death.

Bulla shakes his head violently.

**BULLA**
Impossible! Not my father. Severus must have ordered his death, because of me. I was surprised that he had let him live for so long.

(Continued)
MARCUS
Your father was a hero, a famous gladiator. The people would have been furious. But your execution must have given him the opportunity. The people would not question a report of his suicide so soon after your death.

BULLA
This makes it even more personal. If the Caledonians do not join us, then I will fight him alone.

MARCUS
Not alone!

83 EXT. THE HILL-FORT GATE – DAY
Severus, accompanied by trumpeters and the Praetorian Guard in dress uniform, is carried in a litter into the hill-fort recently vacated by Bulla and his men. He is in his 60’s now, lame and unable to walk. With him are his troops, his sons on horseback, and Julia in her palanquin.

84 INT. INSIDE THE HILL-FORT – DAY
The Caledonian leaders kneel and pay homage to Severus. The emperor holds court, with Julia on a throne by his side. Supplicants bring gifts - reindeer antlers, animal skins, bronze cauldrons, gold torques, amber necklaces, weapons.

85 INT. A LARGE WOODEN LODGE – NIGHT
Severus and Julia are guests of honor at a feast in the great hall. There is music, dancing, and drinking, but the tone is subdued. The Caledonians are resentful, forced to celebrate and entertain their conquerors.

Julia watches one of the women dance gracefully with a tall Caledonian warrior. They move very well together and are clearly in love. When the dance is over, the woman returns to her seat beside Julia.
JULIA
I understand that your husband is a great chieftain.

CALEDONIAN WOMAN
(proudly)
Yes, his name is Argentocoxus. He has won many battles.

JULIA
He is also a marvelous dancer.

CALEDONIAN WOMAN
Oh no, he injured his leg years ago - fighting Romans.

Julia is confused. She points to the tall warrior.

JULIA
I thought that man was your husband?

CALEDONIAN WOMAN
Him? Oh no! He’s my boyfriend.
(beat)
We can have as many boyfriends as we like, my lady.

JULIA
(shocked)
I have to say, that sounds very uncivilized.

CALEDONIAN WOMAN
Pardon me, but I have heard about the sexual behavior of you Roman women. I think we do things better here. We have sex openly with the best of men. You have sex in secret with the worst.

Julia smiles, looks at Severus, then leans closer to the Caledonian woman and speaks to her in a low voice.

JULIA
My dear, some of us are married against our will to the worst of men, but have sex in secret with the best.
Severus is carried into Julia’s tent on his litter. She is sitting on her bed.

SEVERUS
You were useful tonight, Julia. Perhaps, with time, I will forgive your indiscretion.

He draws his sword and toys with it.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
I’ve heard from Rome. Bulla's band of outlaws has vanished without a trace. They’re nothing without their leader.
(beat)
As I told him, the emperor always wins in the end.

Caracalla and Geta enter.

SEVERUS
Geta has also been helpful. I’ve decided to make him co-emperor – father and both sons on the throne.

Geta smiles and Caracalla frowns.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
Caracalla doesn’t like it, but that’s just a bonus.

JULIA
(surprised)
But what will happen when you die? Who will become emperor?

SEVERUS
That’s for them to sort out. Whoever it is, it will be the stronger one.

Severus signals to his bearers and they carry him out of the tent. Caracalla and Geta follow in his wake, tussling to be first. Julia sighs and begins taking off her jewelry, preparing for bed. Suddenly, Bulla emerges from behind a curtain.
JULIA
(surprised)
My love, you’ll have to stop doing that to me.

BULLA
Doing what?

They embrace.

JULIA
Never mind.

They embrace again and slide onto her bed.

87 INT. JULIA’S TENT – NIGHT

Julia and Bulla are lying beside each other, talking.

JULIA
Tell me, what do you think of my sons?

BULLA
(cautiously)
They look like their father.

JULIA
Yes, inside and out, I’m afraid. Caracalla especially. You know they say that a person is “so mean he will pull the wings off a fly”? Well, Caracalla pulls the wings off birds – he would pull them from angels if he could catch one. He is fascinated with black magic, Bulla – with prophesies and spells. He flies into rages and threatens to kill the emperor, and his brother – anyone who crosses him.

BULLA
(amazed)
He has actually threatened to kill his father?

JULIA
Worse than that – he has tried to do it!
Septimius is always berating Caracalla. He says to him,

(CONTINUED)
JULIA (CONT’D)
“I should have you killed before you can rule – you’ll be a terrible emperor.” And now he’s made his brother Geta his equal.

A few months ago, Caracalla and his father were on horseback, on their way to parley with the enemy chieftains. In full view of both armies, Caracalla lost his temper, pulled his sword, and moved to strike Severus down. The other officers warned the emperor in the nick of time.

Caracalla gained control of himself and sheathed his sword. But when they returned to camp, the emperor confronted him. He threw a sword at his feet and said “Here is your chance! Do it now!”

My son was ashamed and broke into tears of remorse. But his resentment only deepened. There is nothing he wants more than to see both his father and his brother dead.

Bulla pauses to think.

BULLA
What are your sons’ attitudes about this war? Do you think they would pursue it if…

JULIA
If their father died? No, I don’t. Geta isn’t fond of war, and Caracalla has no interest in Caledonia – he considers it a freezing wasteland. He wants to conquer the East, all the way to India. If Septimius died – and he is not well – they would leave this place.

BULLA
How far will Severus take things here? What are his intentions?

JULIA
He wants to conquer the whole island, Bulla. And he doesn’t care about taming the Caledonians. He wants to exterminate them. He knows they will never be
Romans. All he cares about is glory and conquest.

BULLA
((cautiously)
If I try to stop him, I will have to fight against your sons.

JULIA
My prayers will be with you and not with them, Bulla. I don’t want to see them harmed, but they don’t deserve to win this war. They are his creatures; they are on the wrong side.

88 INT. SEVERUS’ AUDIENCE HALL IN EBORACUM – NIGHT

Severus, sitting on a throne and propped up with pillows, is briefing his soldiers. He points at a map of Britannia with a very long stick.

SEVERUS
We have advanced to the end of Britannia – to the very edge of Thule. No Roman army has come this far in more than a century. Beyond the wall of Hadrian.

Severus points at Hadrian's Wall on the map.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
Beyond the wall of Antoninus.

Severus points at the Antonine Wall, north of Hadrian's Wall, on the map.

SEVERUS (CONT’D)
There will be no need for walls when the savages are completely gone.

89 INT. CARACALLA’S BEDCHAMBER – NIGHT

Severus pokes his sleeping son in the ribs.

SEVERUS
Caracalla, wake up! Come with me!

(Continued)
The young prince rubs the sleep from his eyes.

CARACALLA
What hour is it? What has happened?

SEVERUS
Shhhh! I want to show you something. Dress yourself. Quickly!

EXT. ROAD NEAR EBORACUM – NIGHT
Severus, Caracalla, and several bodyguards gallop along a road by torchlight. They arrive at the mouth of a cave, decorated with human skulls and animal bones. All dismount.

CARACALLA
What is happening, father? Why have you brought me here?

SEVERUS
The local priests are said to derive magical powers from human sacrifice. I want to see for myself - I thought you would, too.

CARACALLA
Why not Geta?

SEVERUS
(frowning)
No, he’s not interested in the dark arts. He’s too much under your mother’s influence. Come!

Inside the cave, a young male slave is trussed up and dripping with honey and blue paint, ready for sacrifice. Around the periphery of the chamber are a dozen local priests, several of them playing drums or mournful flutes.

The head priest begins to chant Celtic incantations as the others drag the terrified victim to a stone altar. With a shout, the priest raises a long bronze sword, grips the handle with both hands, and drives the blade down, from inside the boy’s collar bone into his heart. The victim groans. His limbs go limp and he falls, blood squirting from his wound into Caracalla’s face. Switching to Latin, the priest speaks.
PRIEST
This boy’s life is offered for the success and
good fortune of mighty Caesar!

The drumming resumes and several of the priests dance around the
altar. Severus watches with a steady grin.

SEVERUS
(to Caracalla)
His strength is mine now! Do you feel it? Do you
feel the energy?

People die every day, and for what? This boy was
sanctified by his death, and I will benefit from
it. Rome will benefit from it. This is a better
way to spend human life than battle or plague,
don’t you think?

Caracalla is deeply impressed.

91 INT. CALEDONIAN LODGE – NIGHT

Bulla is addressing the barbarian chieftains.

BULLA
I am a Roman. I have been fighting Severus for
many years. I know his tactics. You think that
you have appeased him by giving him land and
the promise of tribute. You think that he will
withdraw, as Roman generals have done in the
past. Look around you. Severus builds forts deep
in your territory with stone walls as thick as
an ox. He plans to stay.

The Caledonians murmur among themselves.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Severus will not stop until you have been wiped
off the face of the earth.

(beat)
You must fight him now. You must make a stand if
you want to survive.

( CONTINUED)
The hall is silent. Finally, the first Caledonian leader, whom Bulla met at the hill-fort, rises to his feet.

FIRST CALEDONIAN LEADER
How can we fight against the emperor of the world? His army churns the earth before it. His legions have never been defeated. We have fought back valiantly and with all of our strength. But for every Roman we killed, 10 Caledonians died.

BULLA
You cannot defeat Severus in open battle. Roman armies have been fighting and defeating people like you for centuries. They know how to crush your hill-forts like grapes.

There is silence.

BULLA (CONT’D)
No! If you are going to defeat a Roman army, you have to outsmart it. That’s where my men and I can help you. We have outsmarted Severus many times. But first you must identify the enemy’s weaknesses and use them in your favor.

FIRST CALEDONIAN LEADER
What weaknesses does the emperor of the world have? All of Europe is supplying his army. His soldiers are without number and they fight as one.

BULLA
(confidently)
Severus has many weaknesses. He is old; he can barely walk because of his gout. He is superstitious. His sons hate each other and the older one, Caracalla, wants his father out of the way – he even tried to kill him.

The Roman legions are vulnerable to hit-and-run attacks and their supply lines are very long. If we pick them off one by one and deprive them of food, morale will plummet. If we exploit all of these weaknesses, we can win!
There is heated discussion among the Caledonians. One of the chieftains stands and addresses Bulla.

CHIEFTAIN
But we have already surrendered. We have turned over most of our weapons and dismantled our forts.

BULLA
You can make new weapons - and you won’t need forts in the kind of war I’m talking about. Remember, you only surrendered to Severus and Caracalla. Now Geta is an emperor, too. We will announce that the truce is null and void because Geta is the true successor and may not honor its terms. That will drive Caracalla crazy and lead to dissension among the Romans. Do you see?

The chieftains resume their deliberating. As he waits for their decision, Bulla notices something peeking out from Decius’s tunic. He pulls on its sleeve.

BULLA
What’s this?

Decius smiles.

DECIUS
Yes. It’s a tattoo.

Decius pulls the corner of his tunic down to reveal a fantastic horse rearing across his chest.

BULLA
Impressive!

DECIUS
It’d better be; it hurt like hell!

The gathering becomes quiet as the leading Caledonian stands to speak.

FIRST CALEDONIAN LEADER
We are agreed. The truce is over. We will fight the Romans to the last man. We will do what we must to survive as a free people!

(CONTINUED)
Bulla and his men raise their arms in salute. The Caledonians do the same and all join in a mighty roar.

MONTAGE: CALEDONIAN GUERILLAS HARASSING ROMANS

PATH THROUGH CALEDONIAN FOREST - DAY

A Roman army marches through a forest and is suddenly attacked on both sides by Caledonians, hurling spears and shooting arrows from the woods, then disappearing.

OPEN CALEDONIAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A train of Roman supply wagons is ambushed by Caledonians.

OPEN CALEDONIAN HILLSIDE - DAY

As a Roman army marches through pasture land, a group of foot soldiers – plus Caracalla and his bodyguard on horseback – leaves the main unit to chase a flock of sheep up a hillside. When they reach the top of the hill, they face an equal force of Caledonians, plus Bulla and his men.

Caracalla draws his sword, but his officers prevent him from entering the fray. Instead, he watches from the fringes while waiting for reinforcements, summoned by trumpet blasts, to arrive from the main army below.

The fighting is furious. Quadratus sees that Caracalla is watching and turns on Bulla, who is temporarily stunned, but then smiles.

BULLA
I wondered when you would turn on me.

QUADRATUS
I am a gladiator. I don’t kill a man when no one’s looking. Now I can kill you in front of an emperor and leave the field with glory and my reward.

BULLA
What reward? I’m dead, remember?
QUADRATUS

I’ll take your head to Severus. I’ll tell him what you have been up to in Caledonia. My reward will be great. Eternal fame will be mine when I have killed Bulla Felix in single combat.

Caracalla is watching, but he can’t hear the conversation and has no idea who the two men are.

Quadratus whirs into action, wounding Bulla’s calf and leaving a deep gash in his cuirass. Bulla retaliates with a deep thrust that slices Quadratus’s left cheek. Quadratus wipes his face and looks at the blood. He laughs.

QUADRATUS

You are a worthy opponent, Bulla. But I am the best.

He charges with his sword extended, then leaps and whirls around clockwise in midair, catching the back of Bulla’s head from behind with the butt of his sword, knocking off his helmet. Bulla is stunned by the blow and drops his sword.

Meanwhile, reinforcements from the main Roman army are surging up the hillside on horseback. Bulla staggers toward his sword, but Quadratus steps on it; then kicks it away.

Quadratus circles Bulla, preparing to deliver the death blow. He raises his sword and moves forward, aiming to slash through Bulla’s neck. But Bulla suddenly leaps into the air, kicking the sword from Quadratus’ hand. He lands on top of his opponent and they wrestle on the ground.

Quadratus pulls a dagger from his boot, but Bulla grips his hand and shakes it loose. They separate and spring to their feet.

Quadratus charges, but Bulla crouches down and gets under his opponent, throwing him over his back. Quadratus lands hard next to his dagger. He picks it up, but then topples over — pierced from behind by a Roman javelin. He is dead.

Bulla and the survivors of his party are chased by the Roman cavalry and almost captured, but make their way into a thicket in the nick of time and manage to escape.
Bulla is with the old woman and two children from the burned-out village. One of the children sits in his lap while the woman sews up his wounds. His men and several Caledonian warriors stand by.

**MARCUS**
The guerilla tactics are working, Bulla. Roman morale is low. But Severus will never give up — his pride won’t let him. He’s bringing a whole new army and fresh supplies over for the next campaign.

**BULLA**
Then we’ll have to try something new. Seeing Caracalla has given me an idea. I think I’ll pay him a visit.

**DECIUS**
(alarmed)
You’ll do what? If you’re recognized...

**BULLA**
Don’t worry about that, Decius. He’ll never know me.

---

Caracalla and some of his officers stand on the wall of their fort, watching a ring of bonfires burning on a nearby ridge, about 200 yards away. In its center is a shaman (Bulla) with long gray hair and beard and flowing robes. His face is painted blue and his eyes are outlined in black. He holds a twisted wooden scepter in one hand and a narwhal tusk in the other. He wears a tall gilded conical hat. He dances rhythmically and chants incoherently. He pretends to be blind.

Caracalla has been summoned by a prefect to witness this spectacle.

**PREFECT**
I thought you’d want to see this, Caesar. I know that you are interested in seers and the like.

**CARACALLA**
Let’s find out what it’s all about.
PREFECT
(cautious)
It could be a trap, Caesar.

CARACALLA
No, it’s too obvious for a trap. Just bring along my praetorians.

Caracalla rides to the hilltop with his bodyguard and confronts the shaman.

CARACALLA (CONT’D)
What are you doing here, shaman. What is the meaning of this?

BULLA
I have come to give thanks.

CARACALLA
Thanks for what?

BULLA
For the death of Severus.

CARACALLA
(stunned)
What? Severus is not dead!

BULLA
The gods have told me he will die very soon – and that the Romans will leave our land.

CARACALLA
Even if Severus does die, what makes you think that the Romans will leave?

BULLA
Because the new emperor Geta does not like war. He will take the soldiers home.

CARACALLA
(insulted)
Geta! Geta? What about Caracalla? He will be the emperor when Severus dies, not Geta!

(CONTINUED)
BULLA
(firmly, loudly)
No! The gods have told me that the younger son has been chosen to rule. The older one will be killed very soon. Severus has decided.

Caracalla draws his sword to strike Bulla, who pretends not to notice.

BULLA (CONT’D)
Yes, Caracalla will surely die, unless...

CARACALLA
Unless what?

BULLA
Unless Severus dies first.

Caracalla reconsiders and sheaths his sword. He signals to his men to follow him back to camp. Bulla resumes his dance and chanting, a smile on his face – the seed has been planted.

95  INT. THE IMPERIAL PALACE IN EBORACUM – DAY

Caracalla has cornered a doctor alone in a storage room.

DOCTOR
But Caesar, I am a doctor. I am sworn to prolong the emperor’s life. I cannot help you take it!

Caracalla grabs his throat.

CARACALLA
How long will my father live?

DOCTOR
Perhaps another year. Maybe two.

CARACALLA
And when he dies, you will die with him - if you do not help me now.
DOCTOR
But if I poison the emperor, you will kill me anyway, for I will know of your crime.
Caracalla lets go of the man’s throat.

CARACALLA
Yes - a dilemma. But there’s a solution. You show me where the emperor’s medicine is kept and leave me alone in the room with it. You will never know if I added the poison or not, so you can not accuse me - and I will have no reason to kill you.

96 INT. SEVERUS’ CHAMBER IN THE PALACE AT EBORACUM - NIGHT

Severus is stretched out on a couch, attended by a doctor who offers him a flask of medicine and by two servants who stand ready to attend him.

SEVERUS
Whatever did you see in that outlaw, Julia? How could you betray me for someone of such low birth? I gave you the whole earth and everything in it.

JULIA
You gave me everything but love.

SEVERUS
And he gave you that, I suppose?

JULIA
Yes.

SEVERUS
Well, he took away your honor, and my respect for you.

JULIA
You never respected me - you used me. You needed a wife of noble birth - you needed sons. I gave them to you and you turned them into monsters. Bulla risked everything - just to be with me.

SEVERUS
He paid with his life. And you are with me now.

(CONTINUED)
JULIA
Yes, so you can “keep an eye on me” and “cool my passions“. Bulla and I were together for the sake of love and he will be with me always. But that is something you will never understand.

Severus’s doctor again proffers the flask of medicine, which the emperor finally accepts.

97  INT. SEVERUS’ TENT – NIGHT

Geta and Caracalla are kneeling beside Severus’ bed. Julia watches from behind. Severus is very ill, struggling to breathe. Geta looks at the doctors, who shake their heads “no”.

SEVERUS
My sons, take this advice. Get along with each other. Take care of the army. And to hell with everyone else!

CARACALLA
(agitated)
Get along with each other? But you taught us to fight with each other!

SEVERUS
So you would be strong! Maybe you are strong enough now to rule together? Neither of you is strong enough to rule alone.

He has a brief convulsion and dies. His scepter rolls out of his hand. Caracalla seizes it. Geta tries to take it away from him. There is a brief tug-of-war, which ends when Julia extends her hand and they give it to her.

98  EXT. ON TOP OF HADRIAN’S WALL

Bulla and Julia are watching the sunset from the top of the wall.

JULIA
We’re returning to Rome, Bulla. Hadrian’s Wall will remain the limit of Roman power. You have won!
BULLA
Freedom has won.

JULIA
Are you coming with me?

BULLA
No, not now. I am needed here.

Julia looks in his eyes, not understanding.

BULLA (CONT’D)
To protect freedom. To clean up the mess your husband made.
(beat)
Why don’t you stay, too?

Julia’s eyes brighten.

JULIA
Really? Stop being an empress? Live in a wattle hut instead of a palace?
(beat)
You may not believe me; I wish I could. But the Roman people need me, too. My sons don’t know how to rule, so I will have to do it for them. I, too, must protect freedom.
(long beat)
How can I live without you, Bulla? I’ll never see you again!

BULLA
Why do you say that? You know that I come and go as I please in this world!

He kisses her, smiles, jumps off the wall, and runs north, turning back to wave a time or two.

JULIA
(to herself)
Goodbye, Bulla. Be lucky!
Aerial views of celebrations throughout the Caledonian countryside, with feasting and music and dancing on the tops of hills around bonfires, many within sight of each other, connecting the land and its people.

100 EXT. CAMPFIRE IN CALEDONIA - NIGHT

Bulla and his men celebrating with the Caledonians, including the old woman and children he met at the devastated village.

FADE OUT:
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