

FADE IN:

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - EARLY MORNING

An army of Roman soldiers moves into position in the mists of the early morning. They are tense, making as little noise as possible. They approach a crude outpost of Gauls, not yet stirring for the day.

The foot soldiers are powerful men, hardly armored, and those armed with blunt weapons flank those with long spears. Alongside them are smaller figures in elaborate breastplates, moving in formation with broad shields and short swords. They take their orders from officers mounted on horseback who herd them into position. Every one of these armored figures and mounted commanders is a woman.

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - CONTINUOUS

A new figure rides out onto the field, a small but grandly armored person in the raiment of a general. She removes her helmet, revealing the commander DIANA, thirties, face stern and aristocratic. She surveys the soldiers, the advantage of their place, with a calculating eye.

EXT. BARRACKS - MORNING

An outpost in the French countryside is constructed by slaves, strongly-built men laboring under the eyes of female overseers.

Among them is AIDAN, a slave in his twenties taken from Britain, strikingly beautiful with a shock of blond hair and beard, sculpted with muscle like a statue of a hero. He labors alongside his fellows, occasionally lending a broad shoulder to those who are struggling. Whips crack out and batons swing, but he sets his jaw and presses on.

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - MORNING

One of Diana's mounted officers, CALLISTO, rides up to her and makes report. Diana accepts it with a nod, eyes never leaving the field. She sends Callisto off again, then she puts spurs to her horse.

EXT. BARRACKS - MORNING

A small slave woman makes her way among the various overseers, taking notes on a tablet. This is MORNA, with long blonde hair that marks her as Aidan's sister, limping from one leg that is twisted and shorter than the other. While still a slave, her position as scribe commands some authority, and with quiet force she demands their attention.

A few of the overseers pause to watch Aidan as he works. He can feel their leering eyes on him, but he steels himself and ignores them. One of them decides to push further, invading his space and touching him with her hands.

Morna addresses her sternly, trying to order her back to work, but the soldier is annoyed at the defiance. She wheels on Morna in a posture of intimidation and kicks her stick out from under her. The girl staggers, almost falls.

This infuriates Aidan in a way the personal invasion couldn't rouse. Ignoring Morna's forbidding shake of her head, he throws himself in the soldier's path between them. Outraged, the overseer turns her violence on him.

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - MORNING

Diana canters along the line of her army. At last she reins up when she is out where everyone can see. Then she draws her sword, holds it aloft, and cries out the charge. Her troops brandish their own weapons and answer with a bellow. They surge forward toward their foe.

EXT. BARRACKS - MORNING

Baited by his defiance, soon other soldiers join the first, kicking and punching Aidan to subdue him. He absorbs blow after blow as a distressed Morna looks on.

INT. GALLIC OUTPOST - MORNING

The sound of Diana's troops approaching thunders within the Gallic encampment. Within it, BRIGIN, the leader of the Gauls, a fierce woman in leather armor with a salt and pepper braid, struggles to marshal her people to meet the coming assault.

EXT. BARRACKS - MORNING

Aidan is knocked to the ground by his attackers. They loom over him, but once it's clear they have the upper hand, their demeanor changes. The first glances at the others, then snakes her hand down to grope Aidan's crotch.

He jerks in surprise at the contact, then lapses into a pained resignation as he realizes their intent. They drag him off with them, cracking at him with their batons.

Morna calls out to him and takes a step forward, but other soldiers block her path and order her back to work.

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - MORNING

Diana's soldiers push through the weak line of Gallic resistance and break into the outpost itself.

EXT. BARRACKS - MORNING

The overseers shove Aidan down. They each climb atop him in turn, while the remaining two hold him. He struggles against the rape but they pin him fast and strike him with their batons, until finally he subsides beneath their violations.

INT. GALLIC OUTPOST - MORNING

Diana's forces overwhelm their enemy, laying waste to the encampment. When they set their sights on Brigin, fighting desperately to hold her ground, the soldiers cut a path straight toward her.

EXT. BARRACKS - MORNING

The sounds of the assault on the Gauls can be heard as Aidan's expression goes distant and dead as he tries to go away in his mind. Aidan clenches his teeth as the Gallic commander screams.

INT. DIANA'S TENT - MORNING

Callisto enters dragging a bloody, staggering prisoner in irons behind her. She shoves the chained woman to the ground before the general. Diana surveys her prize with satisfaction but no pleasure. She nods to a secretary, who begins to draft a letter.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A rider on a fast horse gallops across the country to take the message to Rome.

EXT. ROME - DAY

The rider threads her way through the streets to approach the empress's grand palace.

The city of Rome sprawls out in imperial splendor, busy with the industry of empire. Markets bustle, artisans labor, and business is conducted in grand forums amid beautiful stone structures, built on the labor of slaves.

Everywhere one looks is the grip of matriarchy; every slave master, every owner of property, every magistrate or enforcer of the law. Wherever there is position of power or authority, it is filled by a woman.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DAY

The rider is escorted inside, where she is met by JANARIA PAVO GOTHICA, a haughty woman in general's decoration, and hands over the letter to her. Gothica peruses it and smiles in satisfaction.

ORESTEA (O.S.)

Well? What news?

GOTHICA

Victory, my empress.

She turns to ORESTEA, empress of Rome, a beautiful, grandly attired woman with a deceptively delicate affect. She lounges on a chaise attended by gorgeous male slaves.

ORESTEA

Excellent. I knew Diana would not disappoint.

Orestea stretches and rises daintily from her throne.

ORESTEA

Why do they think to defy us, Gothica? After everything we bring them.

GOTHICA

You can conquer men's lives, lady,  
but you cannot command their love.

ORESTEA

It's not their love I mean to rule.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EVENING

Morna waits in distress for Aidan's return. He enters at last, looking exhausted and empty.

MORNA

Aidan! What did they--?

AIDAN

Please, don't.

MORNA

Brother, you must stop doing that.  
I can handle them--

AIDAN

Better me than you. You're the one  
who can buy us free, you can't risk  
drawing their notice.

MORNA

You did.

AIDAN

They always notice me.

MORNA

You could report them. They say the  
general doesn't stand for it!

AIDAN

It won't stop it.

MORNA

Aidan--

AIDAN

Nothing stops it.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Morna tends to Aidan's wounds.

AIDAN

We'll be moving soon, the Gallic rebels have been subdued. They say we're headed next to Rome. Strange to think we'll finally see it.

MORNA

We won't, they'll leave us on the far side of the Rubicon with the legions. Why are they returning? You don't think the unrest has spread?

AIDAN

Not to the heart of the empire.

MORNA

The slaves there can be no less miserable than we are.

He tenses in recognition.

AIDAN

Morna. Not this again.

MORNA

Why? Haven't we as much reason as anyone to fight our way free? Their grip is weakening, you can see it as the borders fray. If there were enough of us...

AIDAN

What? What then?

MORNA

We could fight.

AIDAN

You wouldn't survive that.

MORNA

Is that all there is? Survival?

AIDAN

I won't let anything happen to you.

MORNA

And what about you?

AIDAN

I can bear it.

MORNA

You should not have to.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DAY

Diana, flanked by Callisto and her women, strides down the hall of the palace.

GOTHICA

General! So pleased you could spare the time from campaign. You will find a grand welcome awaits you for the history you've made. The glory is yours!

DIANA

Such as there is, in crushing desperate and half-broken men.

A slave bangs his partisan against the floor.

SLAVE

The Empress Orestea!

Enter Orestea with her entourage. The soldiers bow.

ORESTEA

Diana! Or should I say, Gallica! For I hear all of Gaul now trembles at your feet.

Callisto drags Brigin forward, clean and bandaged but still in irons. She kicks the Gaul to her knees.

DIANA

I'm no conqueror, Imperatrix. Just a warden of broken peace.

ORESTEA

Nonsense. You've won a great victory for the empire.

Orestea surveys the kneeling Brigin smugly.

ORESTEA

And what to do with this trophy,  
Brigin the Gaul? Shall we drive her  
before you through the streets with  
a crown of laurels on your head?

BRIGIN

I'll see you kill me first.

Callisto hits her in the jaw. Orestea laughs.

ORESTEA

She speaks! They're clever enough  
to learn Latin, but not what's good  
for them.

DIANA

You honor me, Imperatrix. But I  
fear a triumph would only aggravate  
the unrest.

GOTHICA

She's right. And besides this  
wretch, she hardly brought back  
anything of value.

ORESTEA

Hmm, perhaps so. My governors out  
in the territories report new  
insurgence every day.

DIANA

Something shall have to be done.

Orestea wheels on Brigin again.

ORESTEA

Have you ever seen a lion, Gaul?  
They bear down on you like Roman  
soldiers. I think it will be the  
last thing you ever see.

She turns back to the generals.

ORESTEA

Gothica, convene my council. It's time we dealt with these peasants once and for all.

Orestea sweeps down the hall and glances back to Diana.

ORESTEA

I hope you were not expecting reprieve, general. Your duty is not yet done.

DIANA

It never is, your majesty.

INT. COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY

Orestea lounges in an elegant chamber surrounded by her council of high-ranking women. The generals are arrayed simply, the magistrates with elegant ceremony, and the politicians are grand with adornment. Gothica speaks as two older senators, THAIS and VORENA, glare at one another. Callisto tries to offer Diana a seat at the table, but instead she leans at a window and broodingly stares out.

GOTHICA

It's the price of such swift expansion. Our control was bound to weaken at the outskirts.

VORENA

Can we not keep legions at the ready for this? An ongoing patrol of the borders--

THAIS

We can't afford constant war. Wages for the troops, not to mention the lost tax revenues every time we raze their fields. The city won't bear any further loss to public works.

DIANA

And it only stirs more resentment in the end.

VORENA

Surely a commander of your caliber,  
Diana, is a match for every last  
one.

DIANA

Not all of them at once.

ORESTEA

Unfortunate but true. Even you  
cannot overcome the whole of the  
empire.

Gothica scowls to hear the esteem for Diana.

GOTHICA

What this calls for is a way to  
head off the rebellion before it  
begins.

ORESTEA

And how are we to do that?

THAIS

By granting them something they  
want. We cannot always lay on the  
rod.

ORESTEA

I'll not have you give away what's  
mine, senator.

GOTHICA

There are other means, Empress,  
than ceding our control.

ORESTEA

Such as?

Gothica falters slightly.

GOTHICA

It's-- it's a matter of the  
circumstance. There are certain  
gifts--

ORESTEA

Gifts? And who will be paying for  
gifts on this level?

VORENA

We could bestow honors in Rome--

ORESTEA

Honors they could bestow upon  
themselves if they fight their way  
free.

Her smooth persona gives way to imperious rage.

ORESTEA

Look at you, the greatest minds in  
the empire! This is the best that  
you have for me? If you cannot  
devise a way to control them, then  
they will not remain within our  
control!

The council begins arguing with itself, voices rising in a  
panicked din. Finally Diana cannot bear it any longer and  
cries out over them all.

DIANA

A games!

GOTHICA

What?

DIANA

A gladiatorial games. To draw their  
attention and display the might of  
Rome.

Gothica regards her suspiciously.

GOTHICA

What sort of games?

Diana wracks her brain.

DIANA

One that calls for... a warrior  
from every corner of the empire, so  
that they turn their rivalries on  
each other.

ORESTEA

Yes! Until at last they face a final champion, who stands for all of Rome. One who will crush all comers and remind them of their place.

VORENA

Panem et circenses. Of course.

Diana exhales hard as the rest of the council grows easier. Vorena nods to the empress.

VORENA

This can be arranged, Imperatrix.

GOTHICA

And the sooner, the better. I should be honored to--

ORESTEA

No. Diana shall do it. After all, it will be held in celebration of her victory.

Every eye turns on her.

DIANA

I-- you honor me, Empress. But I thought I was required in the field. The Franks on the German border--

ORESTEA

You must be here to remind them what awaits those who defy us.

Gothica eyes Diana resentfully.

GOTHICA

We may need her to subdue the rabble.

ORESTEA

And so she shall, standing before them in the ornaments of triumph. General, we may not parade your

(MORE)

## ORESTEA (CONT'D)

foes in chains before you, but you will wear the honors so that everyone knows what you have accomplished. And at that sight, they will tremble.

## INT. DIANA'S VILLA - DAY

Diana storms into her study and hurls her helmet across the room in a rage. Callisto follows in after her.

## DIANA

Blast her! To Hades with it all!

## CALLISTO

It's an honor. For everything you've accomplished!

## DIANA

Honor? She means to use me like a guard dog, to frighten the population into line.

## CALLISTO

What else is there? Back to the front?

## DIANA

Ah, yes. To crush more hopeless peasant uprisings.

## CALLISTO

There's no pleasing you. That's what the empire requires. What good is there in conquest if we can't keep the holdings we've already taken?

Diana sighs in frustration.

## CALLISTO

You've been too long on campaign. The rest will do you good. Some of the officers have planned a tear through the brothels tonight.

DIANA

Not this time, Callisto.

CALLISTO

There's no call for military discipline here. Perhaps a smooth-skinned boy with soft hands is just the thing for a weary soldier.

DIANA

Not till the work is done.

A slave leads in a beautiful Judean woman with elaborate hair and piercings all over her face.

SLAVE

The aedile Tamar.

Callisto dismisses the slave. Tamar bows grandly.

TAMAR

Hail to the conquering hero.

Diana turns to her impatiently.

DIANA

You are in charge of public games?

TAMAR

I am, general.

DIANA

Her imperial majesty has decreed there is to be a tournament of gladiators, with a likely representative of every corner of the empire.

TAMAR

I see. To celebrate the recent victory?

DIANA

Yes, yes. The populace must be given a good show, with all the power of Rome on display.

TAMAR

Have no fear, general. I know just what you're looking for.

DIANA

Good. See that it's done.

She turns bitterly to Callisto.

DIANA

I am the empire's servant, I do as it commands.

EXT. BARRACKS - DAY

Tamar, accompanied by her assistants, goes among the ranks of the legionary slaves, inspecting them for the purpose. She squeezes a bicep here and checks a set of teeth there, but mostly she watches them from afar, consulting with an overseer on the ones in which she has interest. She chooses the occasional likely woman, but her attention is reserved mostly for the fittest and most attractive of the men.

Suddenly Tamar's gaze falls upon the laboring figure of Aidan, slick with sweat and beautiful. She smiles.

EXT. BARRACKS - DAY

The overseer prods Aidan with her partisan so that he stands to attention. He stares straight ahead with dead eyes as a leering Tamar paces around him to take in his every angle.

OVERSEER

So you'll have him then?

Tamar grins. She seizes hold of Aidan's jaw and brushes a thumb across his beard.

TAMAR

See that he's made presentable.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EVENING

Aidan, shorn smooth from jaw to waist, gathers his things while Morna watches him sadly. She touches his cheek.

MORNA

They shaved you.

AIDAN

It's the Roman taste. I must turn out to best advantage for the empress's entertainment.

MORNA

I'll come and see you, if I can.

AIDAN

See me gutted on the sands? Or else, gutting other men in the same place.

MORNA

You have no choice.

Exhausted, Aidan bows his head. Morna goes to him.

MORNA

You mustn't give up. Not if you're to come back to me. Remember, brother. You are all I have.

He looks up at her.

AIDAN

If I live through this, it will be to see you again.

They embrace. Morna undoes her braided leather bracelet and ties it around his wrist.

MORNA

Then survive for me. Obey them, make them dismiss you if you can. Do what you must to survive.

AIDAN

Is that enough?

MORNA

It's the beginning. Nothing else can begin without it.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

Armored soldiers conduct a great mass of slave men and women through the streets of Rome toward the training

barracks. The women all appear to be seasoned warriors, but the men among them come in every shape, size, color, and language, with only one thing in common-- every one is a striking specimen of manhood.

INT. TRAINING BARRACKS - DAY

The male slaves wait restlessly inside the men's barracks. They murmur in low tones, waiting for something to happen. Then the door clatters open and soldiers stride in.

GUARD

Eyes here!

The men turn to see Tamar enter. She looks them over in smug satisfaction.

TAMAR

You are all meat.

They regard her warily. She begins pacing among them.

TAMAR

You will go out before the crowd with shining blades in hand, and they will call you gladiators. You have heard that those warriors who acquit themselves well can win fame, wealth, freedom. But do not forget. You are men, good for nothing but rutting and doing violence upon one another. If you butcher well and fulfill one purpose, you may then be called upon to do the other. And if you are lucky, you will devoured by those great women for whose entertainment you fight. It may indeed win you fame, or wealth, or fortune if you suit their taste. But do not forget that, one way or another, you are still meat.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

The men and women filter out onto the sands and slowly spread out, blinking against the sun. Aidan is among them,

bare-chested and a beacon with his smooth skin and blond hair.

Aidan looks around at the mostly empty gallery, then sees Orestea's cadre where they are gathered to watch. His survey is interrupted when the overseeing soldiers thrust a two-handed warhammer into his hands. Other men receive similar instruments all around him, clubs and cudgels and short javelins. Many of them stare at the weapons and hold them awkwardly, like they have never handled them before.

EXT. GALLERY - DAY

Tamar makes her way to the empress with a satisfied smile.

TAMAR

Our warriors await your measure.  
We'll be sure of a good show when  
we pit them against our champion.

ORESTEA

And who is this champion?

GOTHICA

I'm glad you ask, empress.

Tamar scans the grounds, then makes a sweeping gesture.

TAMAR

Allow us to present she who will  
stand for the power of Rome before  
all the subjects of the empire.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

A warrior enters, clad in an elaborate red and gold breastplate and a crested helmet, flanked by a pair of armored female soldiers.

TAMAR (O.S.)

Once she was a legionnaire in  
General Gothica's force, known for  
cutting down barbarians before her  
like wheat.

When the men notice her, they nudge one another and turn their heads to look.

TAMAR (O.S.)

Too wild for the ranks of the  
legions, we have remade her into  
the ultimate symbol of imperial  
dominion over all who would oppose.

The warrior steps out on the sands. She removes her helmet, revealing a wild mass of hair over an ornate half-mask with the design of a fierce eagle on it. A pair of twin gladii hang from either side of her waist. The men gape at her.

GOTHICA (O.S.)

We call her Aquila. The Roman  
eagle.

Standing between the two legionnaires, we see how short and slight a woman she is. As she and her entourage regard the groups of men to inspect them, some of the men laugh in disbelief at her unimpressive stature.

Finally one of them hefts his hammer, grinning as he's struck with an idea. He murmurs something to his fellows, then circles around behind her with stealthy steps.

When he is close, he lunges at her with a cry and a swing of his hammer. With reflexes like lightning, Aquila spins and disarms him, before driving her twin gladii into his gut and his sternum. She shakes the man off her blades, wipes them clean on his body, then continues on her way. The other men stare at her and move away in newfound terror.

GOTHICA (O.S.)

They will remember that name.

EXT. GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

From her vantage point, Orestea laughs at the sight.

ORESTEA

Well done. Just the messenger to  
deliver the word.

Tamar leans from the box to gesture to the soldiers in her command. They begin herding the men and women into groups to square off against each other.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Aidan is shoved by a soldier's partisan into ranks with other slaves. Powerful, battle-scarred warriors regard his unmarked flesh and shove him in contempt as they pass.

EXT. GALLERY - DAY

ORESTEA

A fair showing. You've done well,  
Diana.

DIANA

It was the aedile's doing, not  
mine.

GOTHICA

Look at those magnificent beasts  
down there. The bronzed Assyrian is  
a sight to behold.

ORESTEA

I know the sort, he would thrash  
like a boar in a trap. And look at  
the mouth on that one! Bent like  
the bow of Eros.

GOTHICA

A Spaniard, I'd say. I've had my  
share of them on campaign.

ORESTEA

And of course that black narcissus,  
the one with the Nubian look.

Diana stares moodily out over the training grounds. She regards the men boredly, until at last, her eye falls upon Aidan. Her gaze rakes over his chest, his arms, his parted lips and searching blue eyes. Little by little, she is consumed.

GOTHICA

Still, I've seen no sign there's a  
real warrior among them.

TAMAR

Have some faith, general.

GOTHICA

Hm. What do you say, Diana?

Diana does not answer.

GOTHICA

Diana? What's come over you?

Diana finds her voice but her gaze does not waver.

DIANA

Who is the blond Adonis?

Every head turns to look. Tamar crows.

TAMAR

Oh, him! He caught my eye  
straightaway as well. Of course,  
whose wouldn't he?

DIANA

I asked who he is.

TAMAR

Some northern barbarian, I'd guess,  
but I'm thinking of selling him as  
a Greek. He's blond as Helen and  
just as beautiful.

DIANA

Is he a typical specimen, then?

TAMAR

I doubt it! Else I'd remand to the  
front tomorrow.

GOTHICA

It seems the general can't take her  
eyes off of him.

ORESTEA

What's this? Can it be he's stirred  
even our steely warhawk? I'd never  
have thought to see the heat in  
your cheeks, Diana. The difference  
suits you.

GOTHICA

I'd heard your rules against  
fraternization, you must forgive me  
if I'd thought you were rather a  
cold fish.

Diana stares straight ahead, refusing to react.

ORESTEA

Of course, he would make Vesta  
dampen her hearth.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Aidan watches his opponents preparing to fight, testing the heft of their weapons, stretching their muscles, performing their pre-battle rituals. Panic threatens to well over in him, but he takes hold of himself and looks at his warhammer. He turns the hammer over in his hands as he's struck with an idea.

EXT. GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

GOTHICA

I'd warn off becoming too attached  
to that one. Looks a bit soft for  
the ring.

ORESTEA

Care to make it a wager?

GOTHICA

Gladly, what terms?

ORESTEA

A Barbary horse I lay upon on the  
sculpted Egyptian. Among other  
things!

GOTHICA

Ha! I take it on the Spaniard.

ORESTEA

Lucky him! Which leaves for Diana  
the blond.

As Orestea and Gothica debate the merits of the various warriors, Diana keeps watch on Aidan as he travels the perimeter of the ring. She observes how he stops and lowers

the warhammer to hang at his side. Slowly he releases his grip on it and allows it to fall. Diana's eyes widen in surprise, then narrow.

Glancing around, Aidan kicks sand over the hammer until it is completely out of sight. Respect shows on Diana's face as she realizes his intent.

DIANA  
(to herself)  
The clever brute.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Tamar raises a scrap of red cloth to draw their attention, and the armored soldiers hurry to back out of the ring. Tamar throws the cloth to the ground. At first the slaves mill about as if uncertain what to do, but suddenly the Assyrian lunges forward at the Spaniard, who brings up his weapon just in time to lock with him.

Aidan jumps as the battle breaks out around him. Looking at the other men and the many more experienced warriors around him, he resorts to one of the only tactics at he knows-- drawing fire.

The Spaniard tosses aside a smaller man after a crushing blow to the sternum. He surges forward, and Aidan steps in his path so that their bodies crash against one another. The Spaniard turns on him, swinging. Aidan steps back, dodging his blows, keeping him following.

EXT. GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

The empress's cadre struggles to see the action through the billowing dust.

ORESTEA  
A point to the Spaniard! With  
another on the way. Who is that?

GOTHICA  
Juno! It's the Adonis!

Diana leans forward in her seat.

ORESTEA

Gods, what is the stupid beast  
doing?

GOTHICA

He's managed to lose his weapon!

The Spaniard delivers a vicious swipe, and Aidan drops to the ground. Silently Diana gasps.

The Spaniard looms over Aidan and raises his cudgel. But as he bends to strike, Aidan moves like lightning, seizing his warhammer from beneath the sand. He cracks the Spaniard hard across the face, knocking him back.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Panting hard, Aidan drags himself to his feet. He hears the sound of raucous laughter behind him, and turns to look at the women in the gallery. He tenses when he realizes their gazes are fixed on him.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

TAMAR

Turn, Adonis.

Tamar has Aidan standing before the gallery. He turns around to face the empress gazing down at him from her box. Tamar traces her fingernails along his iliac furrow.

TAMAR

And Aphrodite's saddle. The cradle  
of a horsewoman's pleasure.

ORESTEA

He's even more an Apollo up close.  
Do you speak Latin, slave?

AIDAN

Yes, mistress.

Tamar cracks him.

TAMAR

Bow before the Empress of Rome!

Aidan bows, keeping his gaze low.

ORESTEA

Peace, Tamar. You have done well,  
beautiful boy. You have won my  
general a Barbary horse.

She gestures for Diana to step up beside her.

ORESTEA

Look well, Adonis, for you stand  
before a hero of Rome. A conqueror  
of barbarians like you. And it is  
your good fortune today that she  
has looked on you with favor. Thank  
the general for your good fortune.

AIDAN

Hail, domina.

ORESTEA

Gods. A prize fit for a hero.

She considers and decides.

ORESTEA

I hereby make you a gift of him.  
The Adonis is yours, my general.

Diana glances up in surprise.

DIANA

Your imperial highness is kind.

ORESTEA

A trifle for your service. Of  
course you'll be good enough to  
permit us to finish out the games  
with him?

DIANA

Of course.

ORESTEA

Good. I should so desire to see how  
he fares.

Orestea turns to leave.

ORESTEA

You shall have to report back.

END OF "ADONIS" EXCERPT