

79 A.D. - POMPEII

by
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(fourth draft)

FADE IN:

FLASHBACK - EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

A grainy and scratched, Kodak color 8mm, silent amateur-like clumsy footage of three children playing in the streets.

SUPER: POMPEII - 62 A.D.

NAUTIUS (12), SILA (6) and LIVIUS (14) have fun, running down through the crowded streets. They wear short togas and, by her looks, Sila could be mistaken with a little boy.

FLASHBACK - EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - DAY

Running on the piers, the three children hide behind the rolled heavy ship ropes and slip inside a hole in the wooden pier.

FLASHBACK - EXT. COUNTRY - DAY

Rolling down a mountain slope, Nautius and Livius gets up, draw their small wooden swords out their belt and pretend to fight, in front of an overexcited Sila who slaps in her hands.

Livius finally wins and Nautius theatrically collapses on the ground.

FLASHBACK - EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

Nautius, Sila and Livius walk down the streets when something wrong.

Everything shakes around them. Panicking, the three children look at people running. Sections of wall tumble by them.

They shelter under a portico, teetering, staring at the spectacle. Livius laughs, enjoying the show.

INSERT

Sila's small hand gets close to Nautius'. The boy squeezes her hand.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN SEA - DAY - ESTABLISHING

The quiet Mediterranean Sea lays to the infinite. The sun is high in the skies. No bird in sight.

A ROMAN TRIREME skims the sea off over the dark blue waters, her white square sail swollen by the wind.

EXT. GALLEY - DAY

On the galley, the "ASTROEA", SAILORS and SOLDIERS are busy to different tasks.

INT. "ASTROEA" CABIN - DAY

THE OARSMEN ROOM

The cabin is the central compartment of the "ASTROEA", lighted by three broad hatchways.

The chief of the rowers (the HORTATOR) is seated. In front of him a sounding-table, upon which, with a gavel, he beats time for the oarsmen.

At his right, a clepsydra measures relieves and watches.

Chained to the benches, nearly all the nations are gathered there, mostly prisoners of war, chosen for their brawn and endurance.

Sweaty, they are naked, except a cincture about the loins. The reach forward, the pull, the feathering the blade, the dip, are their only moves.

Along the sides of the cabin, fixed to the ship's timbers, are what at first appeared to be three rows of benches.

The oars are loaded with lead in the handles.

Though around sixty men are gathered there, none of them talk or even sing. The only sound they give out is a kind of groan as they pull their row.

On the passage between the benches, a GUARD walks back and forth, a whip in hand, watching the oarsmen cadence.

Among the oarsmen, seated on a bench in the middle of the cabin, a rower looks like not suffering the other' pain.

His name is NIKIAS (32). Badly shaved, his eyes and curly hair are as black as a crow. His muscles sway under the effort. Light streams down upon him from the grating above.

At the beat of the gavel, tirelessly, the oarsmen keep rowing, then exchange places with fresh and rested prisoners.

The clepsydra by the hortator is full.

LATER

The clepsydra is now empty.

The chief of the rowers keeps beating.

A NUBIAN ROWER has replaced Nikias.

Above the hortator, on a highest platform, well guarded by gilded railing, the trierarch, the "Astroea" captain, has his quarters. His name is APPIUS NAUTIUS BELLUS.

Nautius appears on the platform, overlooking the cabin, scanning over the oarsmen. The man is tall, well built, his military cloak half draping his tunic, sword in belt.

Hands on the platform balcony, Nautius watches the rowers, inspecting each man, looking for the weak to replace.

One of the oarsmen, exhausted, is about to fall nose on his row. The guard lefts his whip and is going to strike when --

NAUTIUS

Guard!

The guard holds his hand.

NAUTIUS

That's enough! That man is ill.
Replace him!

The guard kneels to unchain the rower. Two prisoners appear from a back door.

One of them is Nikias. The other, GALLIX, holds the exhausted rower to reach the back door as Nikias replaces him.

The guard chains him with a heavy anklet and Nikias catches the rhythm of the others rowers under Nautius' look.

As Nikias lifts his head to him, their eyes meet. Nautius holds his look upon him and Nikias, finally, lowers his chin.

INT. "ASTROEA" - NAUTIUS CABIN - NIGHT

Nautius' cabin is furnished with a couch, a table and a cushioned chair.

Nautius is laid on his couch, sleeping all-dressed. Someone knocks on his door. Nautius awakes at once.

NAUTIUS

Come in.

A decurion named BRACCHUS enters.

BRACCHUS

Sir! Two pirate vessels sighted!

Nautius gets up.

NAUTIUS

Get prepared, Bracchus. Set
everything up and ready!

Bracchus helps Nautius wearing his armor. Nautius gets his helmet and shield out. Then, they both steps out the cabin.

INT. "ASTROEA" CABIN - NIGHT

Along with Bracchus, Nautius stands on the platform above the hortator, overlooking the rowers and beckons to the guard.

NAUTIUS

Guard!

The guard lifts his head.

NAUTIUS

Unchain the rowers!

GUARD

But, Sir --

NAUTIUS

That's an order!

As the guard starts to unchain the oarsmen, Nautius caters to the oarsmen and Bracchus joins him.

NAUTIUS

(solemnly)

Row well and you will be awarded!

The oarsmen turn to each other, astonished. So, do Nikias and Gallix.

NAUTIUS

(to Bracchus)

A man is not useful if he is drowned.

They both walk out the cabin.

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

On the deck, soldiers and sailors get prepared to fight.

Sheaves of arrows and armfuls of javelins are carried on deck. By the central stairs, the oil-tanks and fireballs are set ready for use. Additional lanterns are lighted, buckets filled with water.

NAUTIUS
(to Bracchus)
Bracchus, strength and honor.

BRACCHUS
(saluting)
Strength and honor Sir.

INT. "ASTROEA" CABIN - NIGHT

Overhead Nikias hears the muffled noises of the final preparations of the sailors furling sail, spreading the nettings, unslinging the machines, and hanging the armor of bull-hide over the side.

Bracchus stations on the stairs leading to the deck.

BRACCHUS
Oars down!

The hortator ceases beating.

HORTATOR
(to the oarsmen)
Oars down!

All at once the oars stop.

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

The "Astroea" stays still. Everyone is ready, waiting, silent. Bows, catapults, large crossbows wait to draw fire. A huge boarding plank with a large spike on the end is prepared.

Facing the "Astroea", the two pirate hemiolias speed toward her.

Nautius observes them, then turns to Bracchus.

NAUTIUS
(to Bracchus)
Normal speed!

BRACCHUS
 (toward the cabin below)
 Normal speed!

The ship resumes her course and gains speed. The hemiolias are getting closer.

NAUTIUS
 (to Bracchus)
 Cruising speed!

BRACCHUS
 (toward the cabin below)
 Cruising speed!

INT. "ASTROEA" CABIN - NIGHT

Down in the cabin, the hortator beats the sounding board until it rings.

The rowers reach forward full length, and, deepening the dip of their oars, pull suddenly with all their united force.

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

Nautius watches the approaching pirate vessels under Bracchus' worried look.

NAUTIUS
 (to Bracchus)
 Withdraw right oars!

BRACCHUS
 (toward the cabin below)
 Withdraw right oars!

INT. "ASTROEA" CABIN - NIGHT

On the right side of the cabin, the oarsmen withdraw the wet rows. On the left side, Nikias and the other rowers still pull on their oars.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN SEA - NIGHT

The "Astroea" swerves and avoids the first hemiolia speeding to ram her.

In the same move, she scrapes along the second pirate vessel left side and succeeds in sheering every oar off.

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

Everyone is shaken under the rows smashing impact. Nautius waits for the crucial moment.

NAUTIUS

(to his men)

Fire!

As one, each soldier looses a flamed arrow on the hemiolia. They spray into the skies, cascading on the hemiolia like a flaming rain.

Plunging a cotton ball into the oil-tanks, TWO SOLDIERS place it on a small catapult. The machine projects the fireball through the enemy sail.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN SEA - NIGHT

The "Astroea" keeps swerving and now faces the immobile hemiolia flank.

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

NAUTIUS

(to Bracchus)

Withdraw all oars!

BRACCHUS

(toward the cabin below)

Withdraw all oars!

From downstairs, the beat RESOUNDS, faster and faster.

The hemiolia gets closer -- closer --

NAUTIUS
 (to his men)
 Hold on!

INSERT

The "Astroea" ram (a reinforced bronze forefoot) pierces the hemiolia hull timber.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN SEA - NIGHT

The "Astroea" passes through the hemiolia. Her men abandon the ship and jump into the waters as the galley keeps on speeding through the wrecked ship.

The "Astroea" is now behind the first hemiolia. The pirate stern is offered to the Roman attack.

INT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

NAUTIUS
 (to Bracchus)
 Extend all oars!

BRACCHUS
 (toward the cabin below)
 Extend all oars!

NAUTIUS
 (to the men on the deck)
 Get the raven ready!

As the spiked boarding plank is placed on the "Astroea" left side, an arrow rain starts to fall over the deck.

The pirates strike back.

A SAILOR has his throat pierced by an arrow and collapses on the grating above the oarsmen.

INT. "ASTROEA" CABIN - NIGHT

The sailor's blood runs over Gallix's face. The Gaul starts to panic, at the verge of the nervous breakdown.

Nikias lifts his eyes and sees the sailor's bloody corpse.

Gallix suddenly shrieks and drops the oar.

The guard paces to him and whips him. In a sharp move, Nikias gets the whip leather and holds it back. The guard tries to get it back.

GUARD
(to Nikias)
Drop it!

Nikias doesn't answer back. He just stares at the guard with hatred, still holding the whip as Gallix starts to calm down.

GUARD
It would be better for you to die
during the battle.

Nikias just opens his hand and leaves the leather slip in his palm. The guard turns his back.

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

The crossbow looses a flamed javelin.

EXT. HEMIOLIA DECK - NIGHT

A PIRATE gets the javelin right into his chest and turns into a human torch.

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

NAUTIUS
Ram the stern!

The "Astroea" speeds up but the pirate's ship is lighter and faster. Fireballs are still projected at the hemiolia but, most of the time, miss the pirate ship.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN SEA - NIGHT

The hemiolia sharply swerves and sails back onto the "Astroea".

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

A fireball falls on the deck. A SAILOR rushes to it with a bucket of water.

NAUTIUS

They're back to us! Prepare the
grapples and the corvus!

(to Bracchus)

Slow speed!

BRACCHUS

(toward the cabin below)

Slow speed!

The trireme immediately slows down. As sailors prepare grapples, the soldiers get the boarding plank ready in an upright position.

The "Astroea" nears the hemiolia stern.

NAUTIUS

(to Bracchus)

Withdraw all oars!

BRACCHUS

(toward the cabin below)

Withdraw all oars!

Nautius rushes to the bow.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN SEA - NIGHT

As one, every oar slips inside the "Astroea" flanks. So, the hemiolia's rows.

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

The released boarding plank now swings down onto the hemiolia deck and the sailors grapple the two ships together.

However, the pirates are quicker. As if they had anticipated the Romans tactic, they rush onto the "Astroea" deck.

In a hand-to-hand fighting, the Romans look like overwhelmed.

Both Nautius and Bracchus unsheathe their swords and defend themselves.

EXT. "ASTROEA" CABIN - NIGHT

Through the grating above his head, Nikias hears the shouting, groaning, and every battle noises.

In the cabin, the oarsmen don't know what to do. They feel useless.

The guard exhorts them to stay still but a rumble is heard in the stairs to the upper deck.

Bracchus' body tumbles in the stairs and falls at the hortator's feet.

HE'S DEAD

His throat has been sliced.

Pirates rush down the cabin.

The hortator defends himself with his gavel but a sword strikes him in the chest.

TWO PIRATES attack the guard. He's quickly reduced to a dead man. The oarsmen cheer and start to stand up, encouraged by the pirates.

Nikias rushes to reach the back door and frees the men who were on rest. He joins Gallix to the stairs to the upper deck.

EXT. "ASTROEA" DECK - NIGHT

On the deck, it's death, desolation and fighting, but the soldiers start to get over the enemy. As soon as Gallix steps out, an arrow strikes him through his eye.

Nikias tries to hold him, uselessly.

At Nikias' feet, a DYING PIRATE, struck by a javelin, grabs his leg, begging.

DYING PIRATE

Please, help me!

But his hand falls back on the deck. He's dead.

At the same moment, Nikias notices that Nautius fights with THREE PIRATES on the bow at once.

One of them is about to slash him in his back. In one move, Nikias takes the shield out the dead pirate and throws it to the man on Nautius' back.

The shield flies in the air and half-cuts his neck.

Nikias picks up a sword and starts to make his way to Nautius, swinging his mighty sword around. He eliminates one pirate, two pirates-- and finally reaches the bow.

One of Nautius' attackers notices Nikias. He turns to him and swings his sword at him.

Nikias blocks the thrust, lifts his opponent's arm and rams his sword right into the pirate's stomach.

Nikias shoves the blade in deep.

The pirate screams. Nikias spins the sword inside the wound. Blood shoots out of the pirate's mouth.

Nautius' face lights up with exhilaration. His forces seem increased tenfold.

A BEARDED PIRATE joins the fight.

Both masters of sword and shield combat, their swords clang and clash, feet stepping in puddles of blood on the slippery wood.

Nautius fights tauntingly and turns to Nikias.

NAUTIUS

I knew it! I saw it in your eyes!

They both get rid of their opponents but others rush to them. Nautius and Nikias face them, ready to strike back.

They look at each other as if they were challenging each other for fun.

Nautius fends a first strike off, and spins the blade around inside the pirate's guts, then uses his foot to shove him off his sword.

The pirate stumbles into ropes. Nautius grabs a LONG HAIRE PIRATE as a shield. A spears strikes the man in the chest, protecting Nautius.

ANOTHER PIRATE attacks Nikias and swings his sword by his head. Nikias ducks and cuts one of his legs off. The pirate screams and tumbles on the wood, losing liters of blood.

TRUMPETS SOUND

The fighting on the deck stops. The survivors stare at one another. The pirates drop their weapons and surrender.

Nautius suddenly bursts in laughs.

NAUTIUS

Roma Victor!

Everyone on the galley cheers "Roma Victor!". Nautius turns to the hemiolia.

The ship is now burning, devastated by the flames. Nautius sheathes his bloody sword and faces Nikias.

NAUTIUS

What is your name, brave man?

NIKIAS

Nikias.

NAUTIUS

You have saved my life and I will never forget it. And I swear by the Gods' names my eternal friendship to you.

Nautius firmly grabs Nikias' wrists. Nikias grabs his back. Their alliance is sealed.

SUPER: TWO MONTHS LATER

EXT. CAMPANIA COUNTRY - DAY

The Campanian landscape is quiet and sunny. As far as the eyes discern, there are green and gold fields, and olive trees.

Nautius and Nikias ride side by side. The horses' hooves resound on the tiled road.

Nautius mounts a magnificent Arabic black steed. He wears a white tunic under his toga and a brand new armor is fixed on his saddle's back with his stuff. He also proudly wears a new sword.

Nikias is now shaved and his curly black hair cut. He simply wears a red tunic and has his stuff on the back with a sword. He looks like a new man.

They both ride without a word, when Nautius turns to Nikias.

NAUTIUS

Navarch. Even in my craziest dreams, I never thought I could become a squadron commander. I cannot wait to tell my father tomorrow. He would be proud of me.

Nikias listens with a smile, apparently glad for his friend's promotion.

NAUTIUS

And what about you, my friend?
Are you glad to be free?

NIKIAS

(with a smile)
You mean a dead man?

NAUTIUS

Officially a dead man, but freed now. Roman administration is too complicated, especially in Rome.

NIKIAS

Rome administration managed
anyway to offer you that ring.

Nautius proudly stares at the large ring made out of gold
and a green stone around his finger.

NAUTIUS

Excuse me, but Caesar himself
granted it to me.

(staring at the jewel)

I was born to bear it.

Nikias can't help smiling.

NIKIAS

You deserve it. As your baton of
victory.

NAUTIUS

As you deserved your freedom. You
are a genuine fighter.

NIKIAS

I used to be.

NAUTIUS

Nikias, I gave you my amity. I do
not wanna know what led you to
the galleys.

NIKIAS

Friends share secrets, don't
they?

(beat)

I have no more family name. I
have abjured my relatives. My own
brother betrayed me. He denounced
me as a Christian. We were living
in Rome ---

FLASHBACK - INT. ROME GYMNASIUM - DAY

NIKIAS (V.O.)

I was a Greek wrestler training
for the next Emperor games.

A large sky lighted gymnasium. Athletes train at wrestling on the sand. Everyone is naked.

Among the athletes, Nikias. He wrestles with a tall red-haired man, ARKADIOS (35). Their greased bodies, shaped by exercise, bring each muscle out.

Thought Arkadios' obvious physical superiority, Nikias strength and nimbleness help him to fight.

FLASHBACK - INT. ROME GYMNASIUM CLOAKROOM - DAY

Nikias and Arkadios finish to dress up.

ARKADIOS

You won't be ready for the next games, Nikias. You're still too slow.

NIKIAS

Don't worry about me, Arkadios. I'll be ready. Give me two nights of sleep and a whole day training with a donkey like you, and I'll be the next champ.

Arkadios shows his fist to Nikias.

ARKADIOS

Remember his name. "Mighty Zeus".

NIKIAS

(bitterly)

Yes, and mine --

(showing his fist)

-- should be "Hebe", the Goddess of youth?

ARKADIOS

Exactly.

They laugh and exit the cloakroom.

FLASHBACK - EXT. ROME STREET - DAY

NIKIAS (V.O.)

Arkadios was my best friend. In
Rome, we used to share everything.
Wine, games, even women.

A narrow street. Nikias is on his way home. Upper in the street, he notices a patrol led by a civilian YOUNG MAN.

NIKIAS (V.O.)

My brother was with them.

The young man points at him to the patrol. Nikias starts to run down the street, chased by the patrol.

Around the corner, a horse is tied by a inn. Nikias unties it and mounts it.

But, at the very moment he is about to ride at gallop, the patrol appears and Nikias' horse bangs against one of the men who stumbles head against a wall.

Another patrolman succeeds in stopping the horse.

NIKIAS (V.O.)

My fate was sealed. Denounced as
a Christian by my own brother, I
had killed a man.

END OF THE
FLASHBACK:

EXT. CAMPANIA COUNTRY - DAY

NIKIAS

I killed a man.

NAUTIUS

It was not your fault.

NIKIAS

Perhaps, but I did.

NAUTIUS

You did on my ship too.

NIKIAS

It was to defend myself.

NAUTIUS

You answer every question, don't
you?

Nikias sighs.

NIKIAS

No.

Nautius stops his black horse. Nikias looks at him and
stops his.

Nautius beckons to Nikias to stay silent. Around them, just
singing birds and the wind through the olive trees
branches.

NAUTIUS

I thought I --

A half-dozen of men barge in front of them.

HIGHWAY ROBBERS

An ONE-EYED GUY who looks to be the leader takes a step to
the two riders.

ONE-EYED GUY

(too courtly to be
honest)

Hail, my good lords. Seems to me
you're both too heavy to travel
cozily. Would you mind if we help
you to light you up?

NAUTIUS

Let us pass and you will live!

The robbers laugh.

ONE-EYED GUY

Don't act foolishly gentlemen. My
men need exercise.

The robbers start to surround Nautius and Nikias. They
unsheathe their swords. One of them holds a stick.

ONE-EYED GUY

Take time to have a look at the situation. You're only two. We're six.

Nautius turns calmly to Nikias.

NAUTIUS

What do you think?

NIKIAS

This trip has rusted me a little bit. Like those fellows, I need exercise.

As one, the two riders take theirs swords out. The robbers attack, screaming.

Two robbers runs onto Nautius' horse. The steed bucks whinnying and hits one of the attackers with his hoof. Knocked out, the ROBBER collapses.

The SECOND ROBBER swings his sword at Nautius who blocks the thrust, and rams his sword right into his armpit.

One-Eyed Guy stays still, just staring at his men and studying the situation.

TWO ROBBERS attack Nikias and manage to push him off his steed . He falls on the ground with his sword still in hand.

A ROBBER WITH THE STICK strikes at him but, at the last moment, Nikias rolls aside on the ground and the stick pounds the dust.

In the same move, Nikias strikes him up between the legs. Screaming, the man collapses, blood running down his legs.

A THIRD ROBBER rushes and dives onto Nikias. They both roll on the ground, struggling. The robber tries to stick his short sword into Nikias' throat.

Nikias scoops up a handful of dirt, throws it in the robber's eyes and rolls clear of the deadly cut. Suddenly, Nautius' black steed is about to run over them.

Nikias sidesteps the horse, leaving the robber stumped by his hooves. His skull explodes.

Panting, Nikias gets up in a jump and faces now the one-eyed guy who starts to pace back.

ONE-EYED GUY

Apparently, you don't need me
anymore.

He turns back to rush and disappears behind the bushes.

Nikias mounts his steed.

NAUTIUS

Are you alright?

Nikias just nods, wiping with his hand the blood on his neck.

NAUTIUS

We are even now. I saved your
life. You can dispose it as you
will.

NIKIAS

(rather proudly)

A Greek man doesn't turn his back
to the brave who gave him his
friendship. If you desire, I will
ride along with you.

NAUTIUS

I'm lighthearted with your
decision. I know you will never
deceive me.

They resume riding.

NAUTIUS

I will be proud to introduce you
to someone very dear to my heart.
We should not be very far
anymore.

EXT. SEACOAST - DUSK

Nautius and Nikias ride along the seacoast. The sun is almost set, giving the sea orange flamboyant glints.

EXT. BAY OF NEAPOLIS - DUSK

Nautius and Nikias are still riding along the coast. On their far left, a large city blares with millions of lights.

They finally face a huge bay. Away, in the background, a majestic black mountain towers the sea.

EXT. PLINIUS'S VILLA - DUSK

Lying on a hill, overlooking the harbor, is a magnificent villa with a wide colonnade, two wings with red tile roofs.

A SERVANT stands at the garden gate. Nautius and Nikias are approaching.

As the servant holds the horses' reins, Nautius and Nikias dismount.

NAUTIUS

(to the servant)

Tell your master that Appius
Nautius Bellus is requesting
hospitality for the night.

The servant paces rapidly to the stables with the horses.

NAUTIUS

(to Nikias)

You will meet the man who has
been my mentor and who taught me
everything I know about sailing.
He gave me his passion for sea
and ships. He's the admiral in
charge of the fleet based down
there.

He scans the place.

NAUTIUS

How many days did I spend here as
a child, dreaming to sail away,
and listening to the ancient
sailor tales?

A deep voice resounds behind them.

PLINIUS (O.S.)

Navarch Appius Nautius Bellus!

Nautius and Nikias turn their heads and face now a fat
little man wrapped in a wealthy toga with a broad purple
border. He wears white hair and a thin beard.

PLINIUS (56) and Nautius warmly hug.

NAUTIUS

I see news fly fast.

(to Nikias)

I am proud to introduce you
Nikias, the man who saved my
life.

(to Nikias)

This is Caius Plinius Secundus,
my mentor and my master.

PLINIUS

(to Nikias)

Young man, saving Nautius' life
should be the most important
thing you did in your life.
Nikias? You are Greek, are you?

NIKIAS

And proud to be.

Plinius bursts in laughs.

PLINIUS

And with a straight talking, by
Jupiter!

He drags the two friends along.

PLINIUS

Come on. You are right on time
for dinner.

They enter a pillared hall.

EXT. PLINIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

The night has fallen on the villa. On an uppermost terrace,
there is a lawn cut out with flower-beds edged with box.

Around the dinner table, several people are reclined on
couches, leaned on their left elbows.

Besides Plinius, Nautius and Nikias, are Plinius' sister,
SABINA (50s), GAIUS PLINIUS CAECILIUS SECUNDUS (17),
Plinius' nephew, later well known as Pliny the Younger and
High Navarch VALERIUS, Plinius' right hand.

They all eat with their fingers.

On the small dinner table, a wide variety of food has been
served. In some sumptuous carafes, several wines.

Conversation is at its height.

PLINIUS

(to Nautius)

How are things going in Rome?

NAUTIUS

Heavy traffic, dust, smoke, crowd
entertainment, political schemes,
bread and games. The same old
refrain. I saw your friend
Melissus. He told me to say
hello.

(to Sabina)

You are still the beautiful woman
I used to know. What is the
secret of your eternal youth?

SABINA

(blushing)

You are still the same gallant
young man.

NAUTIUS

You would always been my favorite among each woman I have met in my life.

SABINA

You mean, your short life.

NAUTIUS

(with a slight
nostalgia)

Maybe.

He turns to the young Gaius.

NAUTIUS

And what about you, Gaius. Is your life not too much boring away from Rome?

GAIUS

I can't stand province anymore. Nothing happens around here. Lucky I have my uncle's library. I am currently reading Titus Livius' "History of Rome". I will give anything for something to happen hitherto.

PLINIUS

(to Nautius)

Don't you know I am waiting from Rome the notification for my nephew's adoption? He's gonna be soon my own son.

NAUTIUS

(to Gaius)

You could not have better father, Gaius. I would envy you if I had already a father on my own.

Plinius' face gets serious. Nautius notices it.

NAUTIUS

(to Plinius)

What's wrong?

Plinius looks incommoded.

PLINIUS

No-- Nothing.

He visibly changes of subject, turning to Nikias.

PLINIUS

So, Nikias, how did you meet my dear Nautius?

Nautius interferences.

NAUTIUS

(to Nikias)

You don't have to answer if you don't want to.

NIKIAS

(to Nautius)

I have no discomfort about it.

(to Plinius)

We met on a sail cruise on the Mediterranean Sea. As Nautius was on the deck, I was exercising below, on my row.

NAUTIUS

(to Plinius)

Nikias was on the "Astroea" among the oarsmen. When we were attacked, Nikias went upstairs and saved my life.

NIKIAS

Because you made us unchained.

PLINIUS

(to Nautius)

As I taught you, a man is not useful if he is drowned. Isn't it, Valerius?

Valerius just nods. Plinius raises his glass cup full of wine.

PLINIUS

(toasting)

To Nautius, the best navarch of
the Roman Empire Fleet. And to
Nikias, back from Hades' kingdom.

Everyone toasts, clinking the cups.

PLINIUS

(to Nautius)

By the way, on your way home
tomorrow, could you give my
regards to Tascius' wife
Rectinae? She feels so lonely
since her husband's death.

NIKIAS

I will, even if I long to see my
father.

PLINIUS

Your town is magnificent today.
People even come from Rome to
build a villa.

NAUTIUS

I do not believe that I will hug
my family tomorrow. I wonder how
little Flavia had grown up. She
was so beautiful. Is she married
and --

PLINIUS

(interrupting)

Do not be impatient, Nautius. You
will get every answer when the
night's over.

He pours Nautius some wine.

PLINIUS

Taste that Lesbian. It is
excellent. It is not very old,
but it has been made by being put
into the fire. The wine from the
flames of Vulcan. Drink and your
night will be shorter.

EXT. SEACOAST - DAY

Nautius and Nikias ride along a cliff above the sea. Umbrella pines tower against the sky. Nautius looks overexcited.

NAUTIUS

Three years I have not seen my
birth town. Three years sailing on
Mare Nostrum or barbarian seas.

Suddenly, emerging from nowhere, a RIDER appears on a mad horse at gallop, shaken and nearly disabled.

Taking a second look, Nautius and Nikias realize the rider is in fact a young woman who has lost control of her horse.

The two friends kick their steeds and gallop to her rescue.

The mad horse heads to the cliff edge. The young woman starts to shriek.

Nautius and Nikias gallop to sandwich her and grab the mad horse reins, stopping its ride a few feet before the precipice.

When the three riders realize where they're standing, a horror grin is read on their faces. They ride back, reaching a safety distance between them and the precipice.

Panting, the young woman tries to get over.

Nikias dismounts and helps her to get off her horse.

She is a beautiful brunette with long legs emerging from her short tunic. Her hair is coiled into a knot at the top of the head. She is Sila (24).

NIKIAS

Are you alright?

The young woman just nods. Nikias gently taps on her horse collar.

NIKIAS

He looks stiller.

SILA

(panting)

He saw a snake and got scared.

She turns to Nautius who keeps staring at her.

SILA

Do I know you?

A beat.

NAUTIUS

(hesitating)

Sila?

She frowns and stares back at him.

SILA

Nautius?

Happily, Nautius gets off his black horse and hugs her in front of Nikias' astonished look.

SILA

(lighthearted)

Nautius? Is that you?

NAUTIUS

(laughing)

Of course, it's me. Sila, my little Sila. It'd been so long.

SILA

I'd say about ten years?

NAUTIUS

You were so young. You're a woman now, even if you're still dressed as a boy. Look at you. You're beautiful.

They hug again. Nautius turns to Nikias.

NAUTIUS

Sila, this is my friend Nikias.

(to Nikias)

Sila is the little girl with whom I grew up.

(MORE)

NAUTIUS(cont'd)

We used to run over every street.
We knew each inch of the city and
of the beach, every hideout of
the harbor.

SILA

Do you remember the vow we made?

NAUTIUS

I don't.

SILA

(to Nikias)

We swore that we'll get married
when we are grown up.

NAUTIUS

I would remember that. No? Did
we? But it should too late today.

SILA

It's never too late. I'm not
married yet. Never found the
right stola to fit.

(right into Nautius' eyes)

I was waiting for you.

Nautius looks at her, floored.

SILA

(laughing)

I'm joking. Of course, I'm
joking. But I'm not married. Are
you ?

NAUTIUS

Me? Oh, yes.

(beat)

Sea is my spouse.

He takes Nikias by the shoulders.

NAUTIUS

We both are free as birds.

SILA

Maybe are you back to find a
wife?

NAUTIUS

Maybe. Shall we go?

They three mount their horses and start to ride.

SILA

My father's gonna be mad to know
you're back.

NAUTIUS

(to Nikias)

He never appreciated my family's
way of living and my friendship
with Sila. Her father is one of
the wealthiest man in town.
Though my father's business is
flourishing and--

SILA

(interrupting)

Nautius. Don't you know --

Nautius stares at her, interrogating.

SILA

You don't know.

NAUTIUS

Sila, tell me.

SILA

I -- I can't.

EXT. POMPEII - VESUVIUS GATE - DAY

Riding their horses, Nautius, Nikias and Sila enter
Nautius' birth town:

POMPEII

Along the horizon, about six miles away, a majestic mount
dominates the skyline:

THE VESUVIUS

EXT. POMPEII - VIA DI STABIAE - DAY

The via di Stabiae is crowded with passengers and chariots.

Many merchants sell pottery, glassware and cloth. People chat with shopkeepers negotiating purchases. Sparkling fountains throw upwards their grateful spray in the summer air.

Slaves pass to and forth with buckets of bronze, cast in the most graceful shapes and borne upon their heads.

Country girls are stationed at frequent intervals with baskets of blushing fruit and flowers.

Among the crowd, ladies, faces covered with veil, are attended by slaves.

Nikias cannot believe what he sees.

NAUTIUS

(to Nikias)

You didn't believe me when I told
you that Pompeii was Rome in
smaller.

Painted in red on a wall, Nikias notices a poster announcing an upcoming feast: Vulcanalia, the Festival of Vulcan.

Sila doesn't stop to peak glances Nautius in the corner of her eyes.

They pass a by bakery where a man (GLAUCUS) salutes Nautius.

GLAUCUS

May the gods bless you Nautius!
You're finally back!

NAUTIUS

Good day to you Glaucus. Is your
bread still the sweetest in town?

GLAUCUS

Sure it is.

Nautius stops his horse and dismounts.

NAUTIUS
(to Nikias)
Here we are.

SILA
(to Nautius)
I'll see you tomorrow Nautius.

NAUTIUS
You're welcome anytime Sila.

As Sila rides away through the crowd, Nautius and Nikias stare at her. Realizing they're both looking in her direction, Nautius bursts out in laughs.

NAUTIUS
Well, I guess we've both dug out
the same jewel.

Nikias turns to him and dismounts at his turn.

NIKIAS
She must be the most beautiful
woman I ever met in my life. Even
the Greek goddesses are far
behind her beauty.

NAUTIUS
Well, my friend, welcome in
Pompeii. Who knows, perhaps Venus
is watching over you?

He enters a villa.

EXT NAUTIUS' HOUSE - DAY

Nautius and Nikias step in a small entrance-passage into a hall adorned with marble columns.

In the central peristyle garden, two women sit on a stone bench.

The older, OCTAVIA (52), Nautius' mother, lifts her head and smiles. She gets up and warmly welcomes his son.

OCTAVIA

My son, at last, you are here. I couldn't wait since I've received your message. Look at you! You're tallest and stronger than ever.

NAUTIUS

Mother, gods protected me to bring me safe to you.

Nautius kneels by the younger woman seated. She smiles but her eyes look lost. Nautius holds her hand.

NAUTIUS

Flavia, my little sister. You're prettier than in my souvenirs. I was longing to hold your hand.

FLAVIA (22) raises then her other hand and gently caresses Nautius' cheek. She is blind.

FLAVIA

Nautius. I'm so proud to be your sister. All over the town, people only talk about your victory.

Nautius beckons Nikias to step to him. Nikias kneels by Flavia.

NAUTIUS

(to Flavia)

My victory came from a man from beyond the seas who is henceforth by my sides. This is Nikias.

Flavia's hand touches Nikias' face.

NIKIAS

I am honored to meet you at last. Nautius told me so much about you.

(to Octavia)

My respects, madam.

FLAVIA

(to Nikias)

Please, stand up, Nautius'
friend. I don't deserved to have
you at my knees.

Nikias stands up.

NIKIAS

As you will.

Nautius gets up at his turn and faces his mother.

NAUTIUS

(as a child)

Mother, I'm so impatient to tell
my father my story. Please, tell
me where I can find him.

Octavia's face gets pale and grave. She sits down.

OCTAVIA

Nautius -- Your father -- Your --

She bursts out in tears.

NAUTIUS

Tell me mother! Tell me! What
about him?!

Octavia can't talk anymore, sobbing.

FLAVIA

Our father is dead, Nautius.
Killed by Claudius' men.

NAUTIUS

Killed?! What do you mean?!

FLAVIA

Servius, the stable slave, was
accused of stealing by Lucius
Jucundus, the banker. When the
patrol led by Livius came to
arrest him, father wanted to
interfere and --

NAUTIUS
(interrupting)
What?! Livius' involved?!

FLAVIA
(resuming)
-- one of the soldiers
accidentally drew his sword in
his chest. It was one month ago.

NAUTIUS
No!

He falls on his knees, imploring the skies.

NAUTIUS
What did I do?!

NIKIAS
Who is Livius?

NAUTIUS
(tears in the eyes)
Livius used to play with Sila and
I when we were children. We both
shared the same nanny. We were
blood brothers. Today, he's an
aedile and Pompeii duumvir
Claudius' right hand.

OCTAVIA
Marius was helping Servius to
escape in the middle of the night
when they came. Servius was
killed too.

NAUTIUS
Who told you what happened?

OCTAVIA
Livius did. He was really moved
and deeply sorry. He helped us
for the cremation and the
funerals.

Nautius wipes his tears off and stands on his feet.

NAUTIUS

I have to talk to him.

OCTAVIA

He's out of town today. He's getting ready for the next aediles poll. He wants to be reelected.

NAUTIUS

Yes. I guess. I'll see him tomorrow then.

OCTAVIA

(to Nautius)

I lead to your father's tomb.

EXT. VIA DEI SEPOLCRI - DAY

Octavia stands by Nautius on a road bordered by the outside city wall, mourning. Rows of tombs are disseminated all along the wall.

Just behind stand Nikias and Flavia. The young woman holds his arm.

In front of them, on a column, lays a marble urn. Just above, a tufa bust represents Nautius' father, Marius.

EXT/INT. NAUTIUS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Nautius and Nikias are seated on the bench in the atrium, lighted by torches. They're almost whispering.

NAUTIUS

I never thought I could lose my father. We were so close. All through these years, all I did was for him, to see him proud of me.

NIKIAS

Gods would look over him now as they did for you.

NAUTIUS

I wish they would. Anyway, I want to clear the circumstances up of his death. I hope Livius will tell me more.

NIKIAS

I'll come with you.

INSERT - SITUATION SHOT

The camera enters the soil and rapidly runs through tiny galleries.

As the camera gets deeper, the atmosphere gets redder and glow to meet an underground boiling and running --

-- torrent of lava.

EXT. FORUM PARVIS - DAY

A large crowded and paved plaza with a huge square building with colonnades.

The large rectangular forum is filled with the commerce of market day on all the four sides. It looks like Pompeii's beating heart.

Among the crowd appear Nautius and Nikias.

INT. OFFICE OF THE AEDILES - DAY

Nautius and Nikias face a quite charismatic and arrogant tall blond man with a body equal to Adonis, wrapped in a wealthy toga, Livius (32).

They stand in Livius' office. Seated in his armchair, Livius looks annoyed and meditative.

LIVIUS

(smoothly)

-- your father's death really affected me. The soldier has been severely punished.

(MORE)

LIVIUS(cont'd)
He's rotting in jail, waiting for
the arena. Nevertheless --

NAUTIUS
What?

LIVIUS
-- we had problems with your
father.

NAUTIUS
Problems?

LIVIUS
Someone denounced him as a
traitor. He was planning to go to
Rome to warn the Senate about
some nebulous Claudius schemes.

NAUTIUS
How could someone denounced my
father? He was faithful to
Claudius from the start. They
were friends. Can't you tell me
who did give him up?

LIVIUS
Officially, I can't. My aedile
position doesn't authorized me to
tell you anything. Per contra, as
a friend --

NAUTIUS
Livius, who?

Livius sighs.

LIVIUS
Jucundus did.

Nautius is about to react.

LIVIUS
But Claudius himself ordered your
slave's arrest. I suspect your
father's friendship for Claudius
had finally turned to hatred.

(MORE)

LIVIUS(cont'd)

I've myself heard him once saying
that he was ruling over Pompeii
as a despot.

Nautius can't find anything to respond.

LIVIUS

Arresting your slave was a
pretext to force your father to
act I think. But I have no clue.
If I can help, you know you can
count on me Nautius.

He gets up.

LIVIUS

Well, I think we've finished. I
have no much time for you, my
brother. How long do you plan to
stay?

NAUTIUS

Just enough time to solve all
this.

LIVIUS

Anyway, you and your friend will
always be welcome.

Nautius and Nikias step out.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

Nautius and Nikias walk down the crowded Pompeii paved
streets.

NIKIAS

Do you entrust him?

NAUTIUS

Livius? I have no choice. Looks
like he's the only one to help me
in this investigation.

NIKIAS

May I say something?

NAUTIUS

You may.

NIKIAS

I don't like him.

NAUTIUS

Why would he lie?

NIKIAS

I saw it in his eyes. Pardon me
to be that straightforward.

NAUTIUS

Sometimes it's a virtue and --

He stops at once and freezes. Nikias follows his look. A MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE, wealthy dressed, attended by TWO SLAVES crosses the street, followed by a young woman wearing a sumptuous stola given her a goddess look: Sila.

She looks shy and unreal. The two friends are absorbed in her. Sila disappears in the crowd.

NAUTIUS

Seems to me, we yearn the same
fish. As friends, we shouldn't
share jealousy, so I wish you
good luck.

Suddenly, a rumble comes from the soil and the ground mildly shakes. Everybody in town feels the tremor.

Nautius bursts out in laughter. Nikias too.

NIKIAS

Well, Nautius, looks like the
Gods themselves have given us the
competition start!

They resume walking.

INSERT - SOMEONE'S P.O.V.

Nautius and Nikias are followed though the crowd from a distance.

EXT. VIA DEI FORTUNA - DAY

Nautius and Nikias walk into a street with painted houses. At the end of the street, a triumphal arch.

They stop in front of an inn and step in.

INT. SOFIA'S INN - DAY

As soon as Nautius and Nikias enter the inn, a big fat woman come to him and tenderly hugs Nautius.

She is SOFIA (56).

SOFIA

Nautius, my child, at last,
you're back. I've heard about
your father. I'm deeply grieving.
He was a good man. The man who
freed me.

NAUTIUS

Sofia, my only love. I'm so glad
smelling your balm again. Every
time, I'm a child again.

SOFIA

I knew you were coming and I've
spare your table.

Sofia leads them to a table by the window on the street.

NAUTIUS

(to Nikias)

Sofia used to be my nanny until
my father freed her. She raised
me along with Livius.

SOFIA

Livius. Don't say that name in
front of me. He never comes to
pay me a visit anymore since he's
in politics.

Nautius and Nikias sit down. Behind the counter, a MAN helps other customers. Sofia turns to him.

SOFIA

Aurelius! Bring me the chilliest
and sweetest wine we have to my
dear Nautius and his friend.

Limping, AURELIUS (59) brings a jar and two clay mugs he
fills with a clear red wine.

SOFIA

(to Nautius)

Taste this, with the best herbs
and spices.

Nautius drinks his wine up.

NAUTIUS

A real nectar, Sofia.

As Aurelius steps back behind the counter, Sofia pours
Nautius some more wine.

SOFIA

Guess you're not back for good.

NAUTIUS

You guess right.

Four men enter the inn, chatting noisily. They are well
built, tall and tanned. Three of them are in the thirties
(CALADUS, SALLUST & CRESCENS), while the last one is rather
young. His name is NERO (18).

They sit at a table.

SOFIA

What a pity. I've raised two
lovable little boys and the one I
prefer is always sailing far
away.

She is interrupted by the eldest of the men.

NAUTIUS

Hail Sofia. We who are about to
drink salute you!

Sofia turns to the man.

SOFIA

Just a minute Caladus, don't you see I'm talking with the greatest man in Pompeii?

The man on Caladus' right interferes.

SALLUST

The greatest man in Pompeii? I thought it was I?

CALADUS

Of course Sallust. The greatest in cowardice.

They all laugh.

CRESCENS

Yeah. You've beaten a lion. Only because you run faster!

They resume laughing as Aurelius brings them a jar and four mugs he puts on the table.

CALADUS

Sofia, why would this man greater than the four of us?

SOFIA

He's the boy I've raised and I know the most in the world.

CALADUS

(to Nautius)

So, you're mummy's boy?

NAUTIUS

(serious)

I am Appius Nautius Bellus, navarch of the Roman fleet, son of Appius Marius Bellus and Octavia.

CALADUS

(humbly)

Pardon me Lord. I'm Caladus --
(nodding to his companions)

(MORE)

CALADUS(cont'd)

Crescens, Sallust and Nero. We're simply humble gladiators, fighting for your entertainment. Would you two share a drink with us?

NAUTIUS

We'd be honored gentlemen.

Nautius and Nikias move from their table and sit with the gladiators.

CALADUS

I am a Thracian. Not from Greece, but the sica and the parma are my weapons.

He turns to Crescens who sips his wine.

CALADUS

Crescens is the net fighter who holds the hearts of all the girls. And, finally, Sallust and Nero are retiarius. Nero is about to fight for the very first time on Vulcanalia.

Nautius turns to Nikias.

NAUTIUS

Don't you know we've got a true Greek wrestler among us?

CALADUS

(to Nikias)

Are you?

NIKIAS

I used to fight in Rome before-- I retired.

CRESCENS

I'm sure Nero would be honored to challenge you at arm-wrestling.

(to Nero)

Would you?

Nero looks quite embarrassed.

NERO

I don't think that gentleman
would agreed.

SALLUST

Rather say you're a chicken.

NERO

I'm not!

NIKIAS

Why not. Though I'm a little
rusty on it.

Sallust leaves his chair to Nikias who now faces the young Nero. They both put their elbows on the table and grab each other hand.

CRESCENS

The loser pays the drinks.

Nikias and Nero are pushing each other wrist, stretching each arm muscle. On each side, the power is incredible.

SALLUST

Come on, Nero. Show us what you
worth.

Nikias' face gets sweaty. He frowns and concentrates, staring at Nero right into his eyes.

But the young gladiator doesn't seem to care. He accentuates his strength and Nikias' arm start to lean to the table, under Sofia amused eyes.

NAUTIUS

(whispering to Nikias)

Think about Sila.

Nikias succeeds in bringing back his hand back and pushes Nero's on his side. His serious eyes plunge again in Nero's look.

But the young gladiator is too strong. Nikias finally gives up and Nero lays his hand on the table.

Everyone waits for Nikias' reaction. Suddenly, he bursts out into laughter.

NIKIAS

(laughing)

I'm honored to pay for your
drinks, gentlemen. The kid has
Hercules' strength.

They all laugh cheerfully.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - DAY

Nautius and Nikias cross a wooden bridge over the Sarnus,
the Pompeii river, leading to the harbor front.

In the glassy bay the vessels of commerce and the pleasures
ships of the rich citizens are gathered along the piers.

The two friends walk on the docks and they stop, facing the
sea.

NAUTIUS

Two months I haven't sail and I
already miss it. I wish I'll soon
have my call. The wind on my
face, the smell of the spindrift,
the rolling of the sea. I guess
my life wouldn't exist anymore if
I knew I couldn't sail again.

NIKIAS

Sorry to spoil your dreams my
friend, but I don't share the
same purpose. All I know about
ships and sea is only through the
oar-holes.

They resume walking on the pier along the boarded merchant
ships.

NAUTIUS

If I didn't see it by myself, I
couldn't believe you've been
throw to the galleys --

Nautius hasn't the time to finish his sentence that Nikias
pushes him aside and throws himself onto the ground.

In a crash, a heavy merchandise bale falls a few inches from them. Without Nikias' reflex, the two friends would be both crushed. Hundred of wine jars have shattered on the pier.

Bathing in the red wine, Nikias is the first to get over. He turns to Nautius.

NIKIAS

Are you alright?

NAUTIUS

I guess I am.

They get up, looking at the broken jars in the net.

NAUTIUS

What a waste.

The SHIP OWNER, a Phoenician with a thick accent, comes down to them, almost groveling.

SHIP OWNER

(obsequious)

My good lords, my good lords. I'm deeply sorry. Are you safe?

He starts to dust Nautius off.

NAUTIUS

Get off, you imprudent.

SHIP OWNER

The sailor will be severely punished. It is the first time such thing happens. I'm deeply sorry. I'm deeply sorry.

NAUTIUS

That's alright. Leave us now.

He turns to Nikias who is checking the bale rope.

It has being cut --

Nikias comes back to Nautius and takes his arm to walk away.

NAUTIUS

It's the second time you save my
life. What would I be without
you?

As they reach a certain distance, Nikias stops.

NIKIAS

Wait for me, would you?

Nautius doesn't seem to understand.

NAUTIUS

Where are you going?

NIKIAS

I won't be long. I'll rather get
you later at your house. I'll
find my way home.

They split. As Nautius resumes his walk, Nikias comes back to the pier. Cautiously, he hides behind a small barn and stares at the Phoenician ship.

In the shadow of the boat, the ship owner talks with another man (CELATUS, 42) who looks like rebuking him.

Wearing a plain toga, his head shaved, the tall man talk silently. His eyes look cruel. Suddenly, he turns to Nikias who has just the time to hide.

When Nikias takes a glimpse again, they both have disappeared.

INT. THEATRE - EVENING

A small covered theatre, decorated with a tiled mosaic.

On the semicircular seats arranged in front of the stage, important people are sat on bronze stools just in front of the stage.

Behind them, on stone benches, the ordinary people. Among them, Nautius and Nikias are watching the show. Several musicians play lyre, double reedpipes or tambourine-like drum.

On the stage foreground, two dancers with masks, one dressed as a woman, slowly dance and mime with small bronze cymbals giving a ringing sound.

As Nautius enjoys the spectacle, Nikias' attention is drawn by someone seated on the first row: Sila.

She is with her parents. In her white and gold stola, she is now a real voluptuous woman. Nautius follows Nikias' look and stares at her too.

NAUTIUS

(whispering)

What about walking her back home?

NIKIAS

(whispering)

Why not, but her parents--

Nautius smiles and proudly shows his ring.

NAUTIUS

(whispering)

Her father will change his mind.

INT. THEATRE - DUSK

The show is over. The audience is getting up. Promptly, Nautius and Nikias make their way through the people, when they stop.

Someone already accosts Sila: Livius. Apparently, he offers Sila's parents to walk her back home to their great satisfaction.

As if he has guessed Nautius and Nikias' intention, Livius turns to them with a smile. Sila has noticed the two friends too.

Sadly, she takes Livius' arm and walks away with him after her parents.

NIKIAS

I really don't like him.

INSERT

A javelin violently pierces a large plank where a man silhouette is drawn. The weapon head is stuck right into the silhouette head.

EXT. NAUTIUS' HOUSE BACKYARD - DAY

Nikias takes the javelin off the plank and comes back to Nautius.

NIKIAS

The secret is to combine the strength with your aim. You must let your hand coming along with the shank and being one with the javelin.

He hands the javelin to Nautius who takes the posture. Then, Nautius throws the weapon that strikes --

the garden wall.

Suddenly, an applause resounds behind them. They turn back to face Sila. She wears the same boy's short toga she wore when they first met her.

Her hair is tied with a red ribbon. She laughs.

SILA

Nautius. Hope you're a better sailor.

She paces to the javelin and picks it up.

SILA

Do you mind if I try?

NAUTIUS

(with irony)
You're my guest.

Sila grabs the javelin as a pro and throws it -- right into the silhouette head by Nikias' shot.

Nautius and Nikias are floored.

NAUTIUS

Talk about beginner's luck.

SILA

Wanna bet?

She fetches the javelin and comes back by the two men. Then, she freezes.

NAUTIUS

Afraid to miss it this time?

Sila raises her finger to one direction.

SILA

Look!

Nautius and Nikias turn their head, following her finger.

Away, in the b.g., a black smoke flees from the top of the shadowy Mount Vesuvius.

NIKIAS

A fire?

NAUTIUS

Maybe. Remember the tremor we felt yesterday. An old legend tells that Vulcan is living down the mountain core. And sometimes his wrath comes up to the earth surface.

NIKIAS

I thought he was living down south, down the Etna.

NAUTIUS

He has so many places to stay.

(to Sila)

Do you remember when we were children, his fury had awoke the city early in the morning. Many houses and buildings crumbled and people died. Even the town reservoir broke.

(MORE)

NAUTIUS(cont'd)

They haven't finished to repair
most of the baths yet.

SILA

The gods wouldn't dare to strike
Pompeii twice. That would be
nonsense. Do you want to ride up
and check what's going on?

NAUTIUS

That would be a nice ride.

NIKIAS

(nodding)

Very nice ride.

SILA

One says that Bacchus loves the
shoulders of the Vesuvius more
than the hills of Nysa.

(beat)

Up there, I'll tell you my
secret.

EXT. COUNTRY - DAY

Under the hot summer sun, Nautius, Nikias and Sila happily
ride, getting closer of the Vesuvius. The shadowy mountain
becomes now nicer.

They pass olive groves and vineyards cover the slopes.

The three friends look like racing through the vines.

LATER

Exhausted, Nautius, Nikias and Sila slowly ride.

NIKIAS

The horses are thirsty and
abnormally nervous.

SILA

As if they were afraid of
something.

She gently taps on her horse's collar.

SILA

There's a brook up there.

The approach the place. The brook is dried. Sila doesn't understand.

SILA

Water is always running here,
even at this time of the year.

NIKIAS

Summer is hot.

NAUTIUS

Not enough to dry brooks up.

SILA

Let's climb up to the source.

They resume riding up the mount.

NIKIAS

Did you noticed that some vines
and bushes were dried too?

SILA

I do hope bad omens will preserve
us.

They reach the brook source. Not a drop of water. Nautius nods to a big olive tree.

NAUTIUS

Let get some refreshing shade
anyway.

They dismount and lead their horses under the tree. They sit on the grass. In front of Nautius and Nikias, Sila looks more sublime than ever.

She untied her red ribbon and sensually shakes her hair.

SILA

I'll be straightforward.

(beat)

Nautius. Nikias. I'll belong to
the most valorous of you two.

The two men are thunderstruck.

NAUTIUS

What?!

SILA

You do understand. You're both brave, loyal -- and quite handsome.

Nautius is about to talk.

SILA

In fact, Livius proposed me. My parents, of course, are delighted. I've got to have a good reason to decline him. I'm not one of these girls her parents choose a husband. I'm old enough to pick out the man I will share my life with. So, it will be one of you two.

NAUTIUS

Are you serious?

SILA

Do I look like joking?

Nikias stares at her.

NIKIAS

She means it.

NAUTIUS

Livius proposed you? But why don't you want him as a husband?

SILA

He's not the little boy we used to know anymore. Since he became an aedile, he thinks that everything has to be his. Even me.

(beat)

I'd prefer to kill myself than marrying him.

NIKIAS

In that case, I'll stand down the contest.

(to Nautius)

I know you always loved her. Your sister told me so. It wouldn't be fair for you --

NAUTIUS

(interrupting)

No. I have to draw back. You're my best friend and --

Suddenly, a shriek blares through the vineyard stake out into neat rows. Nautius, Nikias and Sila get up at once and rush toward the continuous scream.

A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN points to one direction. shrieking and gasping,

As Sila holds her, Nautius and Nikias step to the spot to find a 10 YEAR-OLD BOY laid down between two rocks, awfully burned.

He's dead.

Sila joins them and can't help screaming too.

Though the little boy is burned nothing around him is scorched.

NAUTIUS

There's a weird smell. Like rotten eggs.

NIKIAS

That's sulfur. The smell of hell.

They can't help looking at the body.

NAUTIUS

I think we'd better help that poor woman to bring back the body.

SILA

I get the horses.

She rushes back.

EXT. COUNTRY - DAY (LATER)

As a mourning procession, Nautius, Nikias and Sila slowly walk, holding their horses' reins. Sila still holds the woman, as Nautius' steed carries the little boy body.

INSERT

Between the two rocks where the little boy was laying, a yellowish smoke flies up, then, as it was literally sucked into the ground, disappears.

EXT. NAUTIUS HOUSE - STREET - NIGHT

Under the moonlight, two silhouettes, string together, leave Nautius' house on the sly.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - NIGHT

The two silhouettes creep in the desert streets.

EXT. POMPEII BORDER WALL - NIGHT

The two silhouettes disappear into a large tombstone.

INT. UNDERGROUND CRYPT - NIGHT

Lighted with torches, the crypt, with two exits, is large and about twenty people are gathered here, mostly WOMEN AND SLAVES. Two people enter: Nikias and Flavia who holds his arm.

A man, wearing a long white toga, steps to them. He's PANSA (45). His deep voice ECHOES through the cave.

PANSA

Flavia, who is this man?

FLAVIA

Do not worry Pansa. He's with us.

PANSA
 (to Nikias)
 In the name of the Christ, be
 welcome brother.

He turns to the community.

PANSA
 Our sister Flavia brought a
 newcomer.
 (to Nikias)
 What's your name?

NIKIAS
 Nikias.

PANSA
 (to the community)
 Please, welcome Nikias among us.
 May he be blessed.

Everyone welcomes him.

PANSA
 (to Nikias)
 We were about to begin. Please,
 join the others.

Still holding his arm, Flavia follows Nikias who steps
 behind the community group and kneels facing Pansa.

PANSA
 I speak by the Holy Spirit
 through the mouth of your
 servant, our father David: Why do
 the nations rage and the peoples
 plot in vain? The kings of the
 earth take their stand and the
 rulers gather together against
 the Lord and against his Anointed
 One --

Suddenly, Livius appears in the crypt, followed by Celatus,
 the man of the harbor, and a cohort of soldiers.

LIVIUS

My informer was right. This kind of political meeting is strictly forbidden by Rome. You, Christians, your stubbornness and unshakable obstinacy ought to be punished.

(to the soldiers)

Kill them all!

An increasing rumble comes up from the ground, followed by an earthquake --

Everybody is shaken and destabilized. Rocks, dust and torches fall down in the crypt. Livius tries to stay up but the shaking throws him onto the floor. Flavia is scared.

Nikias takes her in his arms and scans the cave. He notices the back exit. He tries to get up but falls back.

As the tremor subsides, Nikias is the first to stand up. He grabs Flavia's arm and rushes with her to the back exit.

Livius had seen them.

Another earthquake --

INT. UNDERGROUND GALLERY - NIGHT

Nikias and Flavia are thrown against the gallery wall but succeed in staying up. The tremor subsides. They both disappear in the gallery.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - NIGHT

Scared people is gathered in the streets as it was daytime, talking and praying. Nikias and Flavia are rapidly ambulating through the crowd.

EXT/INT. NAUTIUS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Nikias and Flavia reach Nautius' house and enter the atrium. They're immediately called out by Nautius. He looks furious.

NAUTIUS

By Jupiter, where have you been?!
I've been looking for you
everywhere in the house! Mother
and I were scared to death!

FLAVIA

It's my fault, Nautius. I --

Nikias interrupts her.

NIKIAS

Don't listen to her. I'm the
guilty one. But, there's more
serious.

NAUTIUS

More serious than my sister's
life?!

NIKIAS

She was with me all the time.
Nautius, it's about Livius.

NAUTIUS

What Livius?!

NIKIAS

I've asked Flavia to lead me to
the Christian community.

NAUTIUS

What?!

NIKIAS

Listen to me. When we were there,
soldiers swarm by, led by Livius
himself. But the most important,
a man was with him. Remember
yesterday what happened on the
harbor? When I came back on the
pier, I saw the ship owner
reproved by a man. The same who
was with Livius.

NAUTIUS

But --

NIKIAS

The rope had been cut. It wasn't
an accident. Someone tried to
kill you!

Nautius frowns and beckons to Nikias to stop. Octavia steps
to them and hugs Flavia.

OCTAVIA

My little bird. Where have you
been?

FLAVIA

I was with Nikias. It was so hot,
I asked him to take me out for a
walk.

OCTAVIA

(to Nikias)

Thanks for protecting my
daughter.

A servant boy (VITUS) paces to them.

FLAVIA

(to Vitus)

Vitus, bring my daughter some
water.

VITUS

(bowing)

Yes, mistress.

Nautius grabs Nikias' arm and drags him along into the
house.

INT. NAUTIUS' HOUSE - NAUTIUS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nautius leads Nikias in his bedroom.

NAUTIUS

Who would kill me?

NIKIAS

Face the facts. Besides your
family, who knows you're back in
town?

(MORE)

NIKIAS(cont'd)

Who's involved in your father's death?

(beat)

Who wants to marry Sila?

NAUTIUS

But why? Why Livius then did report all these details about my father's death?

NIKIAS

Certainly to urge you to act for revenge and get rid of you by the same occasion. Tell me, who's that Jucundus?

NAUTIUS

A banker who used to deal with my father. They were both very close with Livius' father, Rufus. But when my father married my mother--

He stops and thinks.

NAUTIUS

No --

NIKIAS

What?

NAUTIUS

As a kid, I always felt some rivalry between my father and Rufus. He was mad about my mother but she had chosen my father.

He shakes his head.

NAUTIUS

Livius wouldn't perpetuate this family hatred. That would be stupid.

NIKIAS

However. Why wouldn't we pay a visit to that Jucundus tomorrow?

NAUTIUS

And to Livius to a have a cut and
dry explanation this time.

EXT. JUCUNDUS' HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

JUCUNDUS (56) is a small man with shaved head. Wrapped in a wealthy toga, he is seated in a comfortable chair with armrests and a high back in the middle of his garden.

A SERVANT holds a tree palm over his head to protect him from the sun. Facing him, Nautius and Nikias are sat on smaller chairs.

At the back of the blooming court, Jucundus' wife, METALLA (52) is gardening, attended by a SERVANT GIRL.

Jucundus speaks with a soft calm voice.

JUCUNDUS

Marius' demise deeply grieved me.
An unfortunate accident as I've
heard. But I still don't
understand why you're here
Nautius.

NAUTIUS

Livius told me that you have
denounced my father as a traitor
to Claudius.

Jucundus can't help chuckling.

JUCUNDUS

I see. Livius, Livius, Livius.
Everybody in Pompeii is talking
about Livius. A clever publicity
just before the elections. Just
an advice, young man. Never
listen to him. He's a greedy and
ambitious young wolf. His game is
to divide to better reign. He's
clearly aiming Claudius'
position. Think about it.

(MORE)

JUCUNDUS(cont'd)

What interest could I have to get rid of your father? He was a good friend and an excellent client.

NAUTIUS

In this case, what would be Livius' purpose? Why did he tell me all those things about you?

JUCUNDUS

I don't know. Ask him.

NAUTIUS

Thank you for having granted your precious time.

They stand up.

JUCUNDUS

Do not worry. Give my regards to your mother Nautius. She's my client now.

They salute and Nautius and Nikias leave.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

Nautius and Nikias walk through the crowded streets.

NAUTIUS

Come on. I know you die to tell me what you think.

NIKIAS

I don't know what to say. Everybody looks suspect to me.

NAUTIUS

(smiling)

You're really unmistakable. How did you manage to survive in this world of traitors?

NIKIAS

Precisely, that's what made me stronger since I've been betrayed by my own brother.

NAUTIUS

Livius is like my brother.

EXT. FORUM PARVIS - DAY

Nautius and Nikias walk on the crowded plaza, leaving the office of the aediles building.

NIKIAS

Funny way to get votes.

NAUTIUS

Even aediles need some entertainment.

EXT. LUPANAR - DAY

Nautius and Nikias stop in front of a building entrance. Erotic paintings are hanging above the door. TWO MEN joyously step out.

NIKIAS

Sorry, my friend, but I do not patronize this kind of house. Do you want me to wait for you?

Nautius smiles, shakes his head and enters.

INT. LUPANAR - DAY

The statue of God Priapus stands in the center of the vestibule. On each side are small rooms with a raised platform in each.

Over each room is a wall painting, showing the erotic act available for sale.

As soon as Nautius steps in, a HALF-NAKED GIRL comes to hug him. He gently pushes her back.

NAUTIUS

I'm looking for the aedile Livius Varius.

HALF-NAKED GIRL

(upset)

He's up there.

She indicates the stairs at the end of the passageway leading to the first floor and shrugs. Nautius climbs the stairs up.

INT. LUPANAR - FIRST FLOOR - DAY

Reaching the first floor, Nautius looks for Livius. He finds him in a large room, decorated with colorful erotic and explicit frescoes.

Livius is laid on a stone built-in bed along with TWO NAKED GIRLS. He looks obviously drunk.

As soon as he sees Nautius, he raises his glass of wine.

LIVIUS

(cynical)

Well, Nautius! My friend! My brother! Something's brought you here?

(nodding to one of the girls)

Come and join me! Share her with me! She's from Greece. She likes everything!

NAUTIUS

I came to talk.

LIVIUS

Talk!? Can't you see I'm busy!

(chuckling)

The pure and innocent Nautius! The one everyone prefers! I've heard you wanted to steal my future wife too?! People talks in Pompeii, you know.

He drinks up.

LIVIUS

Take my advice, Nautius. Watch about yourself or you will fare alike your father.

NAUTIUS

Is it a threat?

LIVIUS

No, just a warning, brother.

With no more attention to Nautius, Livius is back to his erotic business. He takes a sip of wine and kisses the Greek girl, pouring his mouthful of wine into hers.

The wine runs over her breasts. She laughs.

The other girl leans over his stomach and runs her tongue down his skin.

LIVIUS

(to Nautius, not
looking)

I think we've finished.

Out of spite, Nautius steps out.

INT. NAUTIUS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Octavia, attended by TWO SERVANTS GIRLS, is cooking in the kitchen. Flavia is seated at the entrance, happily humming and playing cithara.

Then, she smiles and rearranges her hair. Nikias crosses the atrium and enters the kitchen.

OCTAVIA

Something wrong?

NIKIAS

Do not worry. Nautius is conversing with Livius in some squalid place. How comes that man, who could have several concubines, is haunting brothels?

OCTAVIA

Vice engenders vice.

(beat)

I wanted to thank you for having protected my daughter last night. Though those meetings are increasingly dangerous, we need to pray in community.

NIKIAS

You mean that you too --

OCTAVIA

(with a smile)

Yes, brother. But Nautius hasn't to know. We don't want to spoil his social position.

NIKIAS

I do understand.

(beat)

We visited Jucundus this morning. He told us you became a client of him.

OCTAVIA

He insisted to carry on Marius' garum business. But he looks annoyed when I told him that Nautius was back.

NIKIAS

Really?

OCTAVIA

Then, I've been looking through Marius' tablets and I found that we were practically ruined. I'm afraid Jucundus had involved my late husband in some unclear deals.

NIKIAS

So, you living alone with Flavia, are now quite vulnerable. I realize why Jucundus was annoyed about Nautius' return.

(MORE)

NIKIAS(cont'd)

But, one link is missing: what interest could Livius have in this story?

FLAVIA (O.S.)

If we're ruined, Jucundus would get our possessions and sell everything to Livius, including the garum factory.

Astonished, Octavia turns her daughter.

OCTAVIA

What are you talking about?

NIKIAS

(to Flavia)

How do you know all this?

FLAVIA

Metalla, Jucundus' wife, cautioned me. I met her once on my way to the baths. She doesn't apprise much her husband's schemes and I think she pities me too.

OCTAVIA

The jackal!

(to Nautius)

We must inform Nautius at once.

NIKIAS

We will, but without a single proof, you won't do much.

OCTAVIA

But, we can't simply sit here and wait.

NIKIAS

I'll talk with Nautius as soon as he will be home. Trust me. And, even if Nautius leaves Pompeii, and if only you will, I'll stay with you.

FLAVIA

Please, say yes mother.

Nautius turns happily to Flavia.

OCTAVIA

May God bless you Nikias. You're
welcome in His house and in ours.

A dim tremor shakes them. Several kitchenware fall and
smash on the tiled floor.

An olive oil lamp Crashes and fires the wooden table.

Nikias quickly scans the room. He grabs a cloth and
extinguishes the commencing fire.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

The earthquake is felt in the streets too but, as if
Pompeians were now used of it, they look like not noticing.

Nautius appears around the corner. He looks worried.

INSERT - SOMEONE'S P.O.V.

Nautius is shadowed though the streets from a distance.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

Nautius meets some people who greet him.

A MAN

Glad to see back, Nautius.

Nautius salutes the MAN. Further, a YOUNG WOMAN selling
flowers hails him.

YOUNG WOMAN

Still bachelor, Nautius? Anytime
you need flowers, you know I'm
here.

Nautius smiles at her, when his smile freezes. A patrol is
coming to him. A DECURION leads it.

At first, Nautius is not sure that the soldiers are here for him. He stops in front of an ANGLER shop and is about to talk with the owner when the decurion accosts him.

DECURION

In the name of Rome, Appius
Nautius Bellus, you're under
arrest.

NAUTIUS

You must be joking?

Quickly, Nautius scans the street. People start to gather around them, some inquisitive, other astonished.

ANGLER

(to the decurion)
What's the charge?

DECURION

Conspiracy against Claudius.

An OLD MAN steps forwards.

OLD MAN

There should be a mistake. I know
him and his father for years.

The decurion pushes him back.

DECURION

Get out of our way, old man.

The old man falls back. People reach out to him to help him to get up and start to gather to admonish the decurion.

Nautius manages then to slip through the crowd and runs. The decurion realizes he's escaping.

DECURION

Stop him!

The soldiers push the people back and rush after him.

As a hunted fox, Nautius runs through the streets, ahead to the harbor.

INSERT - SOMEONE'S P.O.V.

Nautius is still shadowed from a distance.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - DAY

Nautius arrives on the harbor. He knows perfectly where he's going.

He runs through the piers and reaches a hole between two decks.

He enters the hole and ducks, waiting.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - HIDEOUT - DAY

The soldiers arrive on the deck by Nautius' hiding place. He can see soldiers sandals a few inches from him.

DECURION (O.S.)

Keep on looking everywhere.

Search every boat if needed!

The feet recede. No more voices. Nautius is about to stand up when a hand appears from above.

VOICE (O.S.)

(whispering)

Come! Quick!

Nautius grabs the hand and gets out from the hole.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - DAY

Nautius finds himself facing a young man, wearing slave clothes. He is SERGIUS (17).

SERGIUS

My mistress had sent me to watch over you.

NAUTIUS

Your mistress?

SERGIUS

Sila.

Around his wrist, Sila's red ribbon.

NAUTIUS

I follow you.

EXT. SEASIDE - SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - DAY

The majestic Sila's parent's villa lays by the sea. The sprawling country house is surrounded by olive groves, vineyards, and vegetable gardens.

Sergius, followed by Nautius, enters the villa.

EXT. SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - DAY

Sergius and Nautius cross the peristyle garden where a magnificent fountain sprinkles freshness.

INT. SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - SILA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Nautius is introduced into a large majestic bedroom with view on the sea. In front of a polished mirror and attended by a servant girl (CASTA), Sila combs her hair. She wears a vaporous white stola that fits every curves of her body. Her lips are reddened.

As Nautius waits at the bedroom door with Sergius, Sila notices them in the reflect.

SILA

(not turning back)

Thank you Sergius.

Sergius bows and steps out.

SILA

I felt something terrible would happen to you. My guess was right. That's why I sent Sergius to look after you. That would be the last place in the world soldiers would search.

NAUTIUS

But -- your parents?

SILA

They're away for few days,
visiting some relatives in
Surrentum.

With a smile, she sends Casta out and turns to Nautius.

SILA

Please, come in, Nautius. I won't
eat you --
 (low voice)
-- yet.

Nautius steps in, not knowing what to do.

SILA

Have a seat.

Nautius shyly sits down on a small stool, uneasy.

SILA

Nautius, you look like a little
boy. I hope you're braver on your
ship. Don't tell me that's the
first time you enter a lady's
bedroom.

NAUTIUS

No, but the first time in yours.

She stares at him.

SILA

So, your sister told Nikias you
always loved me. Is that true?

Nautius lowers his eyes on the tiled floor.

NAUTIUS

Only now, there's Nikias. I think
he's in love with you too. I owe
him my life twice. I'll be
ashamed of myself if I'd take you
from him.

SILA

However, you ignore one thing. I always loved you too. Till I was a child. And when we made that vow, I took it for granted.

NAUTIUS

Sila -- I must refuse.

She smiles.

SILA

It's getting late. Would you like sharing my meal? We'll talk about the good old days, when I didn't scare you -- as today. I'll send a message to your mother.

Nautius raise his head to her and nods. Sila slaps.

SILA

Casta!

The servant girl appears.

SILA

Nautius will have dinner with me.
Get everything ready and perfect.

Casta bows and steps out.

SILA

(to Nautius)

At last, I will have a pleasant dinner. Life's so boring with my parents.

They exchange intense smiles.

EXT/INT. SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - GARDEN - DUSK

Leaned on their elbow, Sila and Nautius are reclined on couches, on each side of the table, finishing their dinner by the fountain and lighted by torches.

They both look slightly drunk and laugh a lot.

NAUTIUS

-- and the time, in the cellar of Sofia's inn, when you poured salt in the wine jar. Aurelius was ill for three days.

SILA

It was you, you liar!

NAUTIUS

My idea perhaps, but you did.

He drinks his crystal glass of wine up and fills himself some more.

SILA

I found, two years ago, the graffiti you carved on the wall of Loreius Tiburtinus' house. Remember?

NAUTIUS

We were children.

SILA

You were fifteen.

(sighs)

Three little words that made my heart pounding just like when I was nine.

(thoughtful)

Nautius loves Sila.

They stop laughing.

NAUTIUS

Sila. Tomorrow, next week, maybe in a month, I may leave for years. Do not be so cruel.

Sila stands up and kneels by Nautius.

SILA

(almost whispering)

I'm not cruel, Nautius. I'm just a woman simply kneeled by the man she loves.

They stare at each other.

SILA

I'll wait for you as I always
did.

NAUTIUS

You were always with me,
everywhere. I thought of you in
every battle. You were with me on
the seas. But, you know this.

SILA

There were times, I would run
away from life. I did not because
I told myself that, one day, you
will be with me.

NAUTIUS

I want to be with you for the
rest of my life.

SILA

Then, what are you waiting for?

NAUTIUS

Waiting?

SILA

To kiss me.

Their lips get closer, and closer, and closer -- to touch.
They kiss. A long and languorous kiss full with tenderness
and love. In his move, Nautius pours his glass of wine on
the floor. The wine puddles.

The puddle of wine is shaken by a slight tremor --

INT. SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - SILA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A full moon lights the bedroom. To the beat of the waves
outside, Nikias and Sila are making love. Sila moans under
Nautius' carnal assault and kisses.

SILA
(whispering)
I'm yours -- You're mine --
Forever -- and ever --

LATER

Bathed by the moonlight, Sila sleeps. Leaned on his shoulder, Nautius tenderly stares at her.

As if she felt watched, Sila awakes and smiles at him. She gently grabs his nape of neck and pulls him to her.

They kiss with passion and make love again.

INT. SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - SILA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Nautius peacefully sleeps. Outside, the waves keep on breaking. Daylight caresses his face, slowly waking him up. He opens his eyes and realizes that Sila is back behind her mirror, combing her hair.

SILA
Come on, sleepy head. It's past
midday.

NAUTIUS
(tired)
I'm starving.

SILA
Casta is fixing something to eat.

NAUTIUS
I can't believe what happened.

SILA
(sighing)
However. It did happen.

NAUTIUS
I don't want to leave anymore --

Sila beckons him to stay silent.

NAUTIUS

What?

SILA

Can't you hear?

Nautius listens.

NAUTIUS

Nothing.

SILA

(quite worried)

Yes. Not a bird is singing.

Nautius reaches his hand to her.

NAUTIUS

Come here.

Faraway, a dog howls. Then another, and another.

Sila and Nautius look to each other, surprised.

A mighty double explosion followed by an earthquake shakes everything in the bedroom --

Frightened, Sila rushes to the bed to Nautius who holds her.

ANOTHER EARTHQUAKE

Nautius and Sila hug each other, rocked by the shake increasingly stronger. Around them, furniture, vases, trinkets, chairs and the mirror fall on the floor.

Sila screams, still holding Nautius.

Then, the silence --

The room is a mess.

The earthquake is over. Nautius and Sila are both panting, looking around, wondering what's happened. They get up.

As Nautius gets dressed, Sila hastens to the window.

SILA
(confused)
Nautius --
(a beat)
It's -- snowing.

Aghast, Nautius rushes to her.

EXT. SEASIDE - DAY

White flakes are slowly falling over the beach. The spectacle is surreal.

INT. SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - SILA'S BEDROOM - DAY

SILA
It can't be snow.

Nautius takes her hand.

NAUTIUS
Come.

He drags her out of the bedroom.

EXT. SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - GARDEN - DAY

Nautius and Sila step out in the garden. Flakes fall all around them. Nautius takes some of them in the palm of his hand. It crumbles between his fingers.

NAUTIUS
That's not snow. It looks like --
hot ash.

But Sila doesn't listen to him. She looks to the north. She slowly steps back and bumps into Nautius. He turns to her and looks in the same direction.

Casta, Sergius and the other slaves join them.

The Mount Vesuvius top has exploded sending a gigantic cloud as black as ink in the blue summer sky.

SILA
What's happening Nautius?

NAUTIUS
 Vulcan -- has wakened.

They hold each other hand, squeezing hard.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

People has gathered in the streets, staring and enjoying the spectacle, commenting on what they see in small groups.

Some try to catch the ash that starts to cover the cobblestone, bantering.

Shop owners collect pieces of their merchandise fall during the earthquake. Others keep on going at their business as nothing has happened.

It is busy, yet no one seems to be in a hurry. In Pompeii, everyday life goes on.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - NAUTIUS' HOUSE - DAY

Nikias and Octavia are in the street in front of their house, watching the eruption cloud. Flavia holds her mother's arm, scared.

FLAVIA
 What do you see, mother?

OCTAVIA
 The mount is in fire. God is speaking to us as he did to Moses.

NIKIAS
 I'd rather say that Mother Nature is warning Pompeii about her sins.

OCTAVIA
 If only Nautius were with us.

She coughs.

NIKIAS

A slave brought me a message from Sila. He's with her, hiding from Livius' soldiers. He'll be safe as long he'll stay there.

(beat)

I think we'd better shelter.

OCTAVIA

I maybe have a better idea.

EXT. GLADIATORS' BARRACKS - DAY

In the large courtyard outside the gladiators' barracks, Caladus, Sallust, Crescens, and Nero train with others. They all gaze at the volcano.

The dark cloud is making his way to Pompeii. Sallust happily dances under the ashfall.

SALLUST

Vulcan is honored that we're fighting for him!

(to Nero)

Kid, he predicts for you a winner career!

NERO

Are you sure that is honor he's showing us? Look rather like wrath to me.

Caladus takes him by the shoulders.

CALADUS

(showing Sallust)

Come on, Nero. Dance with the satyr. And every girl in town will fall into your arms.

Crescens joins Sallust's dance, under Caladus' laugh.

INT. OFFICE OF THE AEDILES - DAY

Livius watches the volcano by his office window with Celatus. The sky is shaken with thunder. Livius looks joyful.

LIVIUS

Very good, indeed. If fear takes over the city, people will need a savior, a man to lead them through this hardship.

As the smoke gets closer and covers the sky, daylight decreases.

CELATUS

Don't you think we'd better get away?

LIVIUS

Are you crazy? Are you afraid of a fire?

(showing the city)

I thought you were smarter than those stupids.

He turns to Celatus.

LIVIUS

What about Nautius?

CELATUS

He's simply disappeared.

LIVIUS

Is that case, let's find another game to hunt. You know where his mother is living, don't you?

CELATUS

The Greek is living there.

LIVIUS

He's just a Greek.

CELATUS

I've heard he knows how to defend himself.

LIVIUS

Then, kill him.

INT. SOFIA'S INN - DAY

Exasperated, Sofia is behind her counter, collecting pieces of broken jars bathed in the wine on the floor.

The inn is empty. The customers all stand in front of the doorway, watching outside.

Suddenly, by the trapdoor giving way to the cellar, a multitude of squeaking rats emerges and spreads directly to the inn entrance.

SOFIA

Aurelius! Aurelius!

Limping, Aurelius enters the inn, restless, avoiding the rats.

AURELIUS

Sofia, you should see that! The mount is on fire! Ash is falling everywhere!

SOFIA

And let the place to the robbers? I don't care about that cursed mount or ash. You'd better help me to sweep all this up. Rats are swarming now.

Aurelius is about to help when they hear shouts and screams from the street. People start to run away.

AURELIUS

Sofia, it's raining stones now!

SOFIA

What are you talking about?

AURELIUS

It's raining stones!

Sofia gets up and looks outside. Small rocks fall on the ash covered cobblestones. Sofia and Aurelius step to the door.

Aurelius picks up one stone and have a look at it: a whitish petrified stone (lapilli) of about 0.4 inch.

AURELIUS

It's warm.

Sofia points at the street.

SOFIA

Look!

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

People run everywhere through the streets, trying to avoid the roaring fall of hot stones of now various sizes.

INT. SOFIA'S INN - DAY

SOFIA

Close every window and the door!
Ley's stay in! We'll be safer
than outside!

As Aurelius closes a window, a WOMAN outside is strike by a bigger rock on the head. Her face in blood, she screams and collapses on the street.

Scared, Aurelius closes the shutter.

EXT. PLINIUS' VILLA - GAIUS' BEDROOM - DAY

In his bedroom, the young Gaius, seated at a table, has fell asleep over some scrolls.

A servant (PAPIRIUS) rushes in, panting.

PAPIRIUS

Master! Master! Wake up!

Gaius wakes up in a jump.

GAIUS

(drowsy)

What time is it, Papirius?

PAPIRIUS

Two hours after midday. Your
uncle is requesting you!

Gaius gets up and follows Papirius.

EXT. PLINIUS'S VILLA - DAY

Plinius is with his sister and Valerius on the villa's
uppermost terrace, scrutinizing over the bay.

As soon as Gaius arrives, the only thing he sees is that
huge tall black and gray smoke column over the bay.

GAIUS

Uncle, what's that? A fire?

PLINIUS

(not turning back)

A mountain looks it has exploded.

GAIUS

The Vesuvius?

PLINIUS

(not turning back)

I don't know. Didn't you hear
that blast one hour ago?

GAIUS

Huh -- I was buried in my studies.

PLINIUS

(not turning back)

It resembled a pine tree made of
sand and ash. It expands
laterally certainly because of
its weight.

(excited)

This is extraordinary!

(MORE)

PLINIUS(cont'd)

As a scientist, I have to see
this closer at hand.

(he turns to Gaius)

Would you like to accompany me?

GAIUS

(rather scared)

I have rather go on with my work.

PLINIUS

As you will.

(to Valerius)

Valerius, I want a light vessel
to be ready first off.

VALERIUS

Yes sir.

Valerius salutes and leaves the terrace.

SABINA

Brother, I have a bad feeling
about it.

Plinius faces Sabina and takes her my the shoulders.

PLINIUS

The nature of things, that is
life. My life.

(with a smile)

Everything's going to be fine.

Gaius can't get his eyes off the smoke.

EXT. SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - ATRIUM - DAY

Nautius and Sila haven't move. They keep staring at the
black smoke tore with lightning coming to them.

NAUTIUS

It looks over Pompeii. I must
rejoin my family.

SILA

Don't you think we'd be safer by
the sea?

NAUTIUS

My mother and Flavia should need me.

SILA

They're with Nikias. I need you too.

NAUTIUS

(sorry)

I must go.

SILA

I go with you. I don't want to stay alone.

(turning to Casta)

Stay here. If needed, run away.

CASTA

(bowing)

Yes, mistress.

EXT. SEASIDE - SILA'S PARENTS VILLA - DAY

The sea has receded from the seashore, leaving fishes stranded on the sand. In the distance, the waters are stormy, big waves break.

SILA

Even the sea is getting wild! Is this the end of the world?

NAUTIUS

I don't know!

They start to run to the city.

EXT. MARINA GATE - DAY

As Nautius and Sila reach the Marina Gate, pumice begins to rain on them. They pass a SOLDIER who guards the city.

An earthquake shakes them --

The soldier flees away, abandoning his post.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

The more Nautius and Sila run through the city, the more obscureness increases, the smoke spreading over. Streets are rife of ash that gathers on the ground and penetrates everywhere.

People pack their stuff on carriages. The horses, whinnying, are getting mad. Unending tremors go on unabated, shaking buildings and people.

An OLD WOMAN hugs a chest as she'd carried a baby. Gold coins spill out as she runs.

A MAN drags a FAINT WOMAN.

A YOUNG GIRL runs ahead of Nautius and Sila, fleeing for her life, with white face and streaming hair.

A great BLACK SLAVE comes swiftly around a corner and runs into Sila and knocks her over. He flies on without looking back. Nautius helps Sila to get up.

Many men, women and children are laid on the cobblestones. Some are dead, others are simply wounded.

They're crying, moaning, imploring the Gods. In the houses, dogs howling.

THIS IS HELL

The whistling lithic rain is such that Nautius and Sila have to shelter under a portico. At the same moment, a section of wall falls right in front of them, smashing apart.

Sila hugs Nautius. Among the wall stones, Nautius notices a wood shutter. With precaution, he reaches for it and holds it upon his head.

NAUTIUS

(to Sila)

Hold me tight!

But Sila won't leave him. She still hugs him. They both advance in the street, protected by the strange shield and cross the Temple of Apollo.

SILA

Why the Gods are so hard-hearted
with us?!

EXT. FORUM PARVIS - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Nautius and Sila reach the Forum plaza, incredibly empty. The now thick ash stratum binds them to walk as they were on snow. Because of the quakes, buildings start to crack.

EXT. POMPEII VIA DI STABIAE - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Two carriages meshed together with wild horses block the street. People try to unblock them.

FIRST MAN

Get out of the way!

A MAN is stroke by a rock on the head. His skull explodes. A WOMAN by him shrieks.

Nautius and Sila pass by them without noticing. Suddenly, Sila collapses against a wall, blaring. Nautius turns to her. She holds her ankle, panting.

SILA

I've hurt my foot against a rock.

Nautius leaves his plank, leans over her, and helps her to get up.

NAUTIUS

We're almost there. I'll carry
you.

She grabs him, stands up and they resume advancing.

INT. NAUTIUS' HOUSE - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Nautius and Sila finally reach Nautius' house. Panting, he helps her to sit on the tiled floor.

NAUTIUS

I'll be right back.

She simply grins, coughing. Nautius leaves her and searches every room in the house, calling.

NAUTIUS

Mother! Flavia! Nikias!

No answer. The entire house is a mess too. Someone runs behind him. Nautius turns back and sees Vitus running as he had the devil on his tail.

NAUTIUS

Vitus!

Vitus freezes as caught in the act.

NAUTIUS

Vitus! Where are my mother and sister?

VITUS

(scared)

They've left you a note in your bedroom.

NAUTIUS

Where were you going?

VITUS

Nowhere master.

NAUTIUS

Good. Stay in the stables and take care of my horse Aquilo.

VITUS

But -- Master --

NAUTIUS

Do you prefer being in the streets and get a stone on your skull?

VITUS

No, Master.

NAUTIUS

Then, obey!

Vitus starts to walk away.

NAUTIUS

Vitus!

Vitus turns back.

VITUS

Yes, Master.

NAUTIUS

If I'm not coming back, consider
yourself as a freedman.

VITUS

Very well, Master.

With a smile, Nautius watches Vitus turning back and disappearing around a wall. He makes a beeline to his bedroom.

INT. NAUTIUS' HOUSE - NAUTIUS' BEDROOM - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

On his bed, a wax tablet. He picks it up and reads it. He suddenly looks annoyed. He drops the tablet on his bed, gets his sword, his shield, and leaves the room.

INT. NAUTIUS' HOUSE - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Nautius comes back to Sila who's coughing.

SILA

They're not here?

Nautius shakes his head and helps Sila to stand up.

NAUTIUS

They're down in the catacombs
beyond Sarnus Gate.

She puts her sandal on the floor and presses on it.

SILA

I'm fine though I'm hardly
breathing.

NAUTIUS

That's the ash.

They both step out the house, protected by Nautius' shield he holds above them.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

The daylight dims increasingly. Ashes fall thicker and thicker. Around the corner, Nautius and Sila face a cohort of soldiers led by Celatus.

CELATUS
(showing Nautius)
Seize him!

The soldiers start to spread around Nautius when a rumble rises from the ground.

AN EARTHQUAKE

The soldiers stagger, trying to stay up, when the house by them falls apart. Big stones collapse, smashing two of them.

The rest of the cohort spreads away, leaving Celatus alone.

He unsheathes his sword, facing Nautius.

CELATUS
At last.

Nautius raises his eyes and steps back.

CELATUS
Are you afraid, navarch?

A section of wall collapses and crushes him. Only his hand remains from under the rubble.

SILA
That was Livius' right hand.

Without a word, Nautius drags her down the street.

INT. SOFIA'S INN - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Lighted by a torch, Sofia and Aurelius are cling to the counter in the inn, waiting for the next quake.

Looking up, they listen, worried, to the TICKING of the pumice falling on the roof and the CRACKING of the ceiling.

INSERT

Ash mixed with pumice amasses and covers the roof of the inn. The accumulation starts to weight on the timber roof like heavy snowfall.

EXT. POMPEII STREET (VIA DELL'ABONDANZA) - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Sila keeps on coughing as they rush through a long and crowded street to the gate opposite to the Vesuvius.

There, TWO MEN fight for a horse. One of them takes his dagger out and stabs the other in the chest.

As the dying man collapses in the ash, the murderer mounts the horse and rides away at full gallop, missing close Nautius and Sila.

Here, robbers take the advantage of the panic for attacking people bringing their goods and jewelry with them.

When they see Nautius coming to them, his sword in hand, they simply step back to let them pass.

Elsewhere, people run and push each other.

Nautius and Sila keep on walking in the accumulated ash.

EXT. GLADIATORS' BARRACKS - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

In the gladiators' barracks, Crescens and Sallust are still unconsciously training with wooden sword, sheltered from the lapilli.

Caladus is sat on the floor, holding Nero. As he was suffering of asthma, the young gladiator can't breath and has a bad cough.

His eyes are crying. His leg is badly burned. Caladus does what he can to reassure him. Helmets, shields, and different gladiators weapons are piled in a corner.

CALADUS

Tomorrow, I'll pray the Gods to
get you well.

Nero keeps on coughing.

EXT. POMPEII BORDER WALL - NIGHT

The obscureness settles. Nautius and Sila stop in front the
large tombstone leading to the catacombs.

The tombstone has collapsed and now obstructs the way down
to the gallery. Nautius gets pale.

SILA

Maybe they didn't have time to
get in.

NAUTIUS

I hope so.

SILA

You will see them again. But why
would they shelter there? What's
so peculiar in this place?

NAUTIUS

My mother, Flavia and Nikias have
adopted the Christian faith. That
was the place where they used to
meet.

SILA

So, there's still hope.

NAUTIUS

Why?

SILA

A slave of mine shares the same
belief. They have another locus
to meet. A boat chamber by the
beach. But we have to cross the
city again.

NAUTIUS

I don't care. I have to find them.

She sadly smiles at him.

SILA

I just realize we passed in front of Loreius Tiburtinus' house.

Nautius wipes the ash off his brow and smiles back to her.

NAUTIUS

Listen Sila. Do you trust me?

SILA

Of course, I do.

NAUTIUS

Try to reach Stabiae and ask for a man called Tuccius Scaeva. He's a friend of my father. I'll get you there later.

He hands her his shield.

SILA

I don't want to leave you Nautius.

NAUTIUS

In fact, that's not Vulcan who has awoke, but rather Hades.

(reassuring)

I'll be fine. But if I'm not coming back, live for both of us.

Nautius doesn't let the time to Sila to answer. He kisses her and rushes back. He disappears into the darkness, leaving Sila disabled.

EXT. POMPEII STREET (VIA DELL'ABONDANZA) - DAY
(NIGHTFALL)

Nautius is back in hell. He starts to cough. He holds his throat and heads for a fountain. There's no water running.

He keeps on advancing, sinking in the ash to his ankles. Further, a tavern is still open. Patrons look lively.

Nautius steps to it.

INT. TAVERN OF THE COCK - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

As nothing had ever happens, life goes on in the tavern. Though they are coughing, customers drink, play dices, and chat happily. Some are even drunk or with prostitutes.

Nautius heads for the bar. The TAVERN-KEEPER welcomes him warmheartedly.

TAVERN-KEEPER

Hail, my good man. Not a weather for hanging out. Nevertheless, I have never been that busy for years. What would you like?

NAUTIUS

(coughing)

Anything, I don't care. Just need to dry my throat up.

The tavern-keeper takes an amphora out his counter and proudly shows it to Nautius.

TAVERN-KEEPER

What do you think? Vesuvinum. Vesuvius wine.

NAUTIUS

(coughing)

I don't care!

The tavern-keeper fills a mug. Nautius drinks it up in one gulp and hit the bar with the mug.

NAUTIUS

Another!

The tavern-keeper fills it again. Nautius drinks it up the same way and clears his throat.

TAVERN-KEEPER

What's wrong with you people
today? Looks like everybody wants
to get drunk.

Nautius puts a gold coin on the counter and leaves the
house.

TAVERN-KEEPER

Thank you my good lord. You'll
always be welcome!

INT. PLINIUS'S VILLA - DAY

Wearing his armor, Plinius is about to leave his villa when
Valerius comes back, followed by a YOUNG MAN.

VALERIUS

Sir, a messenger for you.

The messenger steps to Plinius and hands him a letter.
Plinius reads it and gets grave.

PLINIUS

(to Valerius)

We change our plans. My friend
Tascius' wife, Rectinae, is
calling for help, terrified by
the looming danger coming from
the Vesuvius. She has no way out
except by boat and begs me to get
her away. Pompeians will need us.
I want every available ship ready
at once!

Valerius salutes and steps back. Plinius turns to the
atrium.

PLINIUS

Lucius!

LUCIUS appears. He's a young man of the same age than
Gaius.

PLINIUS

You're coming with me. I'll need
you to quote everything I'll say.

LUCIUS

But --

Plinius severely stares at him. Lucius doesn't insist anymore.

EXT. POMPEII STREET (VIA DELL'ABONDANZA) - DAY
(NIGHTFALL)

Several houses are now ablaze and collapsing. Broad sheets of fire leap into the dark sky. Darkness amplifies over the city.

Nautius walks against the walls to avoid the hailstones. Passing in front of a house, he notices that the door is open.

Torches burn inside. Nautius steps in.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Nautius paces straight to the torches and takes one. He is about to step out when he hears a muffled sound.

A BABY BABBLE --

Intrigued, Nautius advances towards a room and enters. Lighting the place up, he scans the room.

On the floor, a WOMAN is laid with her BABY in the arms. Nautius reaches for her.

NAUTIUS

Are you alright?

No answer.

NAUTIUS

Lady, are you alright?

He leans over the stone-still woman and slowly turns her to him. Awfully burned on one face of her skull, she's been disfigured by the fire.

Horrified, Nautius jumps back. Taking over, he leans again over the body and picks up the baby.

She's a beautiful baby girl wrapped in a blanket, unaware of the dread around. Nautius, puts his sword in his belt, takes her in his arm and walks out.

EXT. POMPEII STREET (VIA DELL'ABONDANZA) - DAY
(NIGHTFALL)

The baby in his arm and holding the torch, Nautius makes his way through the ashfall.

A MAN appears from the darkness, running as a maniac. Nautius has just the time to get out of his way. The baby starts crying. Nautius feels enabled.

EXT. GLADIATORS' BARRACKS - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Crescens and Sallust stare at the blazing Vesuvius top. Nero is still badly coughing and gasps in Caladus' arms.

CRESCENS

It really looks like a huge fire.

NERO

(coughing)

It's not just a fire. Vulcan is punishing Pompeii to have lost itself into sin and debauch.

SALLUST

But -- Venus rules the city.

NERO

(coughing)

We're doomed.

(grimacing)

My leg hurts.

Suddenly, people enter the arcade. About twenty men, women and children, led by an elder woman: EUMACHIA (58).

She wears a wealthy blackened stola, a veil on her head, jewels, and a heavy emerald necklace.

Sallust comes to her and kneels.

SALLUST

Priestess Eumachia. Be welcome
among us.

EUMACHIA

Mercury is thank. Someone, at
last, welcomes us. Everyone is
locked up or gone. My house has
collapses and many of my servants
are dead.

SALLUST

(standing up)

Our modest place welcomes you
warmly.

Eumachia's people spread in the arcade, sitting hither and
thither. The elder woman notices Nero who's still coughing.

EUMACHIA

Is he alright?

CALADUS

He received a large burning stone
on the leg and now suffers from
the ash.

Eumachia kneels by him.

EUMACHIA

May I?

CALADUS

Please, High Priestess.

He stands up.

EUMACHIA

Simply call me Eumachia. Do you
have any water left?

CALADUS

Not a drop.

He sighs as Eumachia takes Nero in her arms and tries to
comfort Nero.

Outside, in the courtyard, lapilli get thicker.

CALADUS

I don't think the roof will stand
that thickness.

CRESCENS

Where else do you want to go?

CALADUS

Don't know. If we stay here, the
tiles will sure crash us.

Crescens puts his helmet on, rushes outside, braving the
hailstone, check the roof out and runs back.

CRESCENS

It's rather narrow. It'll
withstand.

CALADUS

It you say so. Let's pray
Jupiter.

Caladus lights a pinch of herb in an incense plate.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN SEA - DAY - ESTABLISHING

A dozen of ships are putting out the stormy sea, pointing
directly to the Vesuvius. Taking the lead, a quadrireme:
the "Stella".

EXT. "STELLA" DECK - DAY

Settled in an armchair and facing the raging sea, Plinius
looks imperturbable. Just behind him, Lucius is taking
notes.

PLINIUS

(dictating)

Shaped as a pine tree, the high
cloud has a long trunk from which
spread some branches. Its own
weight causes it to spread
sideways. The black and white
tones let suppose it is made out
of sand and ash.

Although the rolling, Lucius quotes, quivering. From below the deck, the hortator drum BEATS the sailing.

The eruption cloud is getting closer.

PLINIUS

(dictating)

Wind is blowing south. Otherwise, we could hear the roaring of the mountain.

(pointing ahead)

Look! Hailstones! Big as pigeon eggs!

From the distance, lapilli look like hail.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN SEA - DAY

The "Stella", followed by the other ships, holding her course directly into danger, is sunk by the eruption cloud.

EXT. "STELLA" DECK - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Ash falls onto the "Stella" now, darker and denser the closer he sails.

The volcano roar is now deafening. Lapilli and rocks swoop down on the deck, but Plinius, though his eyes are crying because of the ash dust, doesn't move.

From the below deck doorway Lucius calls for Plinius.

LUCIUS

Master Gaius! You must move down to the below deck! You won't see anything anymore!

Exasperated, Plinius decides to descend.

INT. "STELLA" CABIN - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Down in the near-darkness, the sailors listen to the drumming of the stones above them.

Irritated, Plinius smoky face appears through the doorway. He first addresses to Valerius.

PLINIUS

Keep steering for Pompeii harbor!

VALERIUS

We can't Sir! The sea is shoal!
We're hardly row! We'll be unable
to land because of the debris!
Pompeii is surely already buried!
The men want to return home!

PLINIUS

As Virgil said: fortune favors
the brave. Head for Stabiae!

Valerius' face gets drawn.

INT. SOFIA'S INN - DAY

Dust and ash start to fall from the ceiling. Threatening
cracking is heard. The torch flames dim.

Aurelius lights another one and raises it to the timber.

AURELIUS

The roof is going to collapse.

SOFIA

I'm so scared.

AURELIUS

We'd better get out.

Sofia just nods. Aurelius paces to the door and unlocks it.

Aurelius tries to open it, but the door won't budge. With
all his forces, he pushes and pulls the door, but nothing
happens.

SOFIA

What are you waiting for? Open
that door!

AURELIUS

(forcing)

It won't budge! The ashes-- have
blocked up the threshold!

Sofia comes to him and helps him. They both gather their forces. Without success.

The cracking above them intensifies.

SOFIA

What are we going to do?

AURELIUS

(pointing)

The cellar.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY (DARKNESS)

In Pompeii streets, and although the burning houses, it is now complete darkness, just like a room when it's shut up and all the lights put out.

Thanks to his torch, Nautius, the baby in his arm, can see where he goes.

On his way, he lights on the walls election notices scrawled in flaming red letters.

All around, he just can hear shrieks of women, screams of the children and the shouts of men. Some call for their children, their parents, their husbands. Some pray the Gods for sake.

EXT. FORUM PARVIS - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Nautius reaches the Forum. As the area is larger than the narrow streets, the darkness is lighter.

Suddenly, something bothers Nautius. In fact, the lack of something.

Ash and lapilli fall has stopped --

Haggard, Nautius looks all around him. People have stopped running and shouting. Some even stare at the volcano, cheering and embracing.

MAN

It's over! It's over!

ANOTHER MAN

Apollo has heard our prayers!

A COUPLE passes by Nautius. He approaches the WOMAN.

NAUTIUS

I found that baby. Would you take
care of her? Her mother's dead.
She needs someone.

Moved by the baby girl, the fat woman (LUPA) takes her in
her arms and shows her to her husband who holds a small oil
lamp.

LUPA

What's her name?

NAUTIUS

I can't tell. But I would call
her Fortunata. The lucky one.
Take care of her and get out of
that town while you can.

LUPA

We will. We will.

Nautius is already gone.

INT. NAUTIUS' HOUSE - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Nautius enters his house. Half of the vestibule has
collapsed. The kitchen is in flames.

Nautius crosses the atrium and heads for the stables.
There, he finds Vitus taking care of the nervous and
whinnying black steed, trying to comfort it.

Vitus jumps when he sees Nautius.

VITUS

Master, I knew you would be back.
I took a good care of Aquilo as
you'd asked.

NAUTIUS

Saddle her.

Vitus puts a blanket on the black steed and gets the reins ready.

VITUS

Is your mother safe?

NAUTIUS

I don't know, Vitus. I don't know.

Nautius takes the reins and leads the steed out the stables. Vitus stays inside. Nautius turns to him.

NAUTIUS

Vitus.

VITUS

Yes, Master.

NAUTIUS

What are you doing?

VITUS

I'm waiting for your return.

NAUTIUS

You don't have to anymore. I free you, Vitus. Take your chance and flee.

He takes the ring out his finger and hands it to Vitus.

NAUTIUS

Take it. It'll may be useful to you.

Vitus complies and takes the Emperor ring.

VITUS

Thank you, Master.

NAUTIUS

I'm not your master anymore. Go!

Asking no more, Vitus runs away.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Ashfall has start again. Nautius rides through Pompeii deserted streets. The black steed can hardly walk because of the ash thickness.

All around him, roofs begin to collapse. The ash extinguishes the fires, leaving columns of smoke among the ruins.

Around a corner, a MIDDLE-AGED MAN stops Nautius, blocking his way, arms spread.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Hey you! Ten thousands sesterces
for your horse!

NAUTIUS

No way, sorry.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Twenty thousands sesterces for
your horse!

He takes a wooden chest out his cloak and opens it. It's filled with shiny gold coins.

NAUTIUS

I said no.

Getting mad, the middle-aged man closes the chest and unsheathes a large sword.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Give me your horse!

Nautius kicks on his steed flanks. The black horse gallops ahead, hustling the middle-aged man on the side, hurling him against a wall.

INT. SOFIA'S INN CELLAR - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Down in the cellar, embraced to each other, Sofia and Aurelius listen to the collapse thud of the house above them.

AURELIUS

We're trapped.

SOFIA

We had enough food and wine
supplies to survive for days.

She lights the place up with the torch. On the cellar
walls, shelves of food and amphoras.

AURELIUS

As long as we have air to
breathe.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Boarding the deserted piers, most of the ships and boats
are in flames, laying on the sand.

Nautius' black steed heads for the boathouses.

Tremors are still shaking the town.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - BOATHOUSE - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

A cohort of soldiers is spread around, surrounding a
boathouse. Livius leads them. He looks mad.

Nautius arrives and dismounts. He directly paces to Livius.

LIVIUS

(to Nautius)

Don't you dare approach! Where is
Sila?! Did you forsake her to her
fears by cowardice?!

NAUTIUS

What are you doing here?!

LIVIUS

My friend! My brother! No doubt,
the same thing than you.
Christians are gathered in there.
I'll whip them out first and
then, I'll take care of you!

(MORE)

LIVIUS(cont'd)

I know your mother and sister are in there! Even that Greek friend of yours! They'll all get what they deserve. If they want to be martyrs, fair with me!

NAUTIUS

But, why Livius, why?!

LIVIUS

Why?! You still wonder why?! Your father took the woman mine loved. All his life he's been living with that burden before he killed himself!

(showing the boathouse)

That woman inside should be my mother by now! But, you see, today, she means nothing for me! Nothing but hatred.

An earthquake roars and twitters all and everyone around --

As some soldiers stumble on the sand, a kind of small tsunami unfurls on the beach, destabilizing several soldiers.

Rocks mixed with liquid lava start to fall around and explode.

A soldier is strike by one of them. He's a human torch. The soldiers begin to really get scared.

FIRST SOLDIER

Neptune and Vulcan join now their forces to annihilate us!

SECOND SOLDIER

Let's get out of here! Our families need us!

THIRD SOLDIER

You're right!

He flees away. He is soon imitated by the others soldiers, abandoning their weapons on the sand.

LIVIUS

Come back, you cowards! You'll
all end down the arena along with
the lions!

NAUTIUS

(to Livius)

Can't you see you're on your own
now?

LIVIUS

You won't take Sila away from me
as your father took away Octavia!

Livius unsheathes his sword. Nautius hesitates for a while, trying to avoid a confrontation, but as Livius throws himself onto him, he realizes he has no choice. Nautius takes his sword out his belt and faces Livius.

NAUTIUS

We don't have to, Livius! We're
blood brothers!

LIVIUS

(chuckling)

You always had everything you
wanted. Honors, a good name, a
loving family! And what do I got?
Nothing! You've stole me all this
since you're a child! You ruined
my life!

Sword in hand, Livius stretches forward onto Nautius who avoids the strike.

NAUTIUS

Listen, Livius! I don't want to
fight with you!

LIVIUS

Because I'm going to kill you,
brother?!

NAUTIUS

Because I don't want to kill you!

Their swords spark in the obscure day. Livius looks madder than ever. He whirls around with his sword, making Nautius stepping back and falling on the sand.

Livius strikes onto him, but Nautius avoids it and throws himself aside.

NAUTIUS

Livius, stop it!

LIVIUS

You're as coward as chicken!

Nautius gets up when another earthquake shakes the beach, throwing the two men on the sand. Nautius is the first one to recover and get up. He steps to Livius.

NAUTIUS

Listen, Livius! This is nonsense!

Livius grabs a handful of sand and sends it in Nautius' face. Blinded by the sand, Nautius steps back and drops his sword. Livius paces to him and is going to deadly strike when --

Livius stares wide-eyed and gagging at Nautius' seething visage.

He looks down his chest. A bloody javelin point comes out his chest --

Livius kneels, grimacing and moaning. He collapses, face in the sand, dead.

Nautius doesn't understand. Sila comes out from the ashfall. She steps to Livius.

SILA

(to Livius)

I think we've finished!

Nautius wipes the sand off his face and sees Sila rushing to him.

SILA

I love you Nautius. We are part of each other now. I'll live only if you'll live.

She kneels in the sand and hugs him. They embrace each other. She helps him to stand up.

Nautius takes her hand and drags her along inside the boathouse.

INT. BOATHOUSE - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Nautius and Sila enter the boathouse where about forty persons are gathered. Serenity reigns here. They're all on the knees, praying as one in front of Pansa.

Nautius rapidly scans the place and sees Octavia, Flavia and Nikias. They're praying with the others. Nautius rush to them.

They barely turn their heads to him.

NAUTIUS

Mother, we must go! We have to
leave the city! We can't wait!

Octavia keeps on muttering some prayer.

NAUTIUS

Flavia, Nikias! Tell her!

NIKIAS

(serene)

We'll stay here, my friend.

NAUTIUS

The mountain! She could explode
at any moment!

NIKIAS

(serene)

Sorry.

NAUTIUS

Mother, please!

OCTAVIA

(not looking)

We have no fear, Nautius.

NAUTIUS
Death is all around.

OCTAVIA
(not looking)
We will be saved.

NAUTIUS
Saved?

NIKIAS
(serene)
The Lord, our Lord, will save us
all.

NAUTIUS
You have to come. Flavia, be
wise. Listen to the mountain
roar.

FLAVIA
Do not insist brother.

NAUTIUS
Nikias --

NIKIAS
Go with Sila, Nautius. I'm
staying with the woman I really
love.
(taking Flavia's hand)
I won't forsake her.

NAUTIUS
Mother, I --

Sila puts her hand on his shoulder.

SILA
Nautius. We must go.

Nautius looks at his mother, at Flavia, at Nikias. They all
look lighthearted. In fact, like everyone in the boathouse.
Reluctantly, Nautius lets Sila pulling him by the hand on
the way out.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - BOAT HOUSE - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Nautius and Sila pace to the black steed.

SILA

We have to reach Surrentum at
once and find my parents.

EXT. STABIAE HARBOR - DAY

As soon as Plinius, Lucius and Valerius have debarked,
Plinius is welcomed by an elder man who embraces him. His
name is POMPONIANANUS (58).

Though he warmheartedly hugs Plinius, he looks rather
frightened.

In the far distance, the Vesuvius still spits his wrath.

POMPONIANUS

My dear Gaius. I'm so glad you're
here. By luck, I've loaded my
ships before the danger arrived.
I'll put out as soon as contrary
winds let up.

PLINIUS

You look all shake up.
(laughing)
My old friend, I used to know you
braver.

POMPONIANUS

The mountain is about to explode.

PLINIUS

Keep up your spirits,
Pomponianus. Nature cannot scare
old men like us. Lead me to your
house. I really need a bath after
that awful journey.

He wipes his toga off. Pomponianus stares at him as he was
some kind of lunatic.

EXT. SEASHORE - DAY (NIGHTFALL)

Bordering the seashore, both riding the black steed, Nautius and Sila protect them from pumice fall with the shield.

The horse doesn't walk easily, awkward by the ash thickness.

On the seashore, big waves are breaking.

Worried, Nautius turns a last time to the boathouse that disappears into the smoke.

EXT. SEASHORE - DAY (LATER)

The more Nautius and Sila ride away from Pompeii, clearer is the sky, and the ash thickness diminishes on the sand.

Sometimes, a sunray lights the beach still shaken by the tremors.

NAUTIUS

I didn't choose the easier path,
but, this way, we avoid the
exodus from Pompeii.

Nautius and Sila keep on riding when they realize they can't go any further. A shoal of rocks blocks their way.

NAUTIUS

We'll have to climb up.

They dismount and climb the cliff up. There, they find a narrow path bordering the cliff edge where they walk.

EXT. CLIFF EDGE - DUSK

Ash catches them up. As they walk, an earthquake shakes them. Sila's foot slips and she falls, screaming. Nautius manages to grip her hand at the very last moment.

NAUTIUS

(gasping)
Hang on!

Slowly, Nautius hardly pulls her up to him until she steps on the cliff back and hugs him.

NAUTIUS

I'll never let you go. We are family now.

Panting and trembling, Sila keeps hugging him. He gently pushes her back.

NAUTIUS

We'll go carefully. Nothing's gonna happen to us anymore.

They resume walking.

INT. POMPONIANUS' HOUSE - BEDROOM - DUSK

Plinius is taking a bath in Pomponianus' house. Anxiety can be read on his face. Through the window, ash is now falling on Stabiae. Valerius enters the bedroom.

VALERIUS

Sir, dinner is ready.

INT. POMPONIANUS' HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DUSK

Plinius and Valerius enter the dining room where Pomponianus looks outside with Lucius and his men at the distant red gleams in the falling night.

Plinius puts friendly his hand on Pomponianus' shoulder.

PLINIUS

That is only the burning of the villages country people have abandoned to the flames.

(falsely cheerful)

Let's eat, my old friend, and talk about the good years we shared in Rome. And we'll have a nice sleep.

Pomponianus can't take his eyes off the gleaming.

EXT. CLIFF EDGE - DUSK

The path becomes larger. Nautius and Sila mount the steed and start to ride at gallop.

SILA
(pointing onward)
There!

They approach an abandoned chariot. Nautius stops the horse and dismounts.

He paces to the chariot and inspects the different bags left on it: there are full of clothes, food and even Gods' statues.

Nautius laughs.

NAUTIUS
The Gods are with us.

Nautius checks the wagon harness and turns to Sila.

NAUTIUS
Bring the horse!

LATER

Installed on the chariot, Nautius and Sila continue their route.

INT. POMPONIANUS' HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Lapilli and ashes are falling outside, gathering in Pomponianus' house court. The walls are shaken by frequent and violent tremors.

Fearful, Lucius and Pomponianus watch the spectacle.

LUCIUS
I can't imagine how Plinius can
sleep.

From behind a curtain, they can hear Plinius' heavy and sonorous breathing.

Pomponianus turns to Valerius.

POMPONIANUS

What do you think?

VALERIUS

If all this continues, it would be impossible to make our way out. Either we stay here with the risk of the house collapsing on us, or we fly to wide open fields with the calcined stones and cinders to the harbor.

The house rocks from side to side, shaken from its own foundations. Everyone is thrown onto the floor. Furniture crash under pieces of the ceiling falling on it.

From behind the curtain, we hear a shout.

PLINIUS (O.S.)

BY NEPTUNE!

Pomponianus rushes to the curtain, lefts it to see Plinius at the foot of his bed, laid on the floor.

POMPONIANUS

Gaius, we must leave before the house collapses.

PLINIUS

It's a wise consideration. But, first of all --

He takes the pillow on his bed.

PLINIUS

-- would you mind handing me a napkin, please?

Amazed, Pomponianus complies. He gives a napkin to Plinius who puts the pillow over his head and ties it with the cloth.

PLINIUS

Gentlemen, I follow you.

EXT. STABIAE STREETS - NIGHT

In the streets of Stabiae is the same lethal panic as in Pompeii: houses in flames, people running anywhere, screaming, praying, dying.

Having all pillows tied with napkins on their head, Plinius, Valerius, Lucius, Pomponianus and his men are rushing down the streets, making their way to the harbor.

Plinius is running, out of breath.

EXT. STABIAE HARBOR - NIGHT

In the harbor, the waves run extremely high and boisterous. The ships are incredibly shaken.

VALERIUS

We're jammed!

Suddenly, Plinius looks tired, staggering and gasping. Pomponianus holds him.

PLINIUS

(panting)

I need some rest. I'm too old and too fat to run this way.

Valerius takes a nearby sailcloth and spreads it on the ground. Plinius lays on it.

VALERIUS

Are you alright Sir?

Plinius nods, gasping.

PLINIUS

Give me some cold water.

Valerius heads to a nearby fountain, gathers his hands under the thin trickle and brings it to Plinius.

The old man quenches his thirst, but looks like having pain to breath.

PLINIUS

Some more please.

Valerius goes and comes back, giving him the water. Red hot pumice falls all around. Valerius and Pomponianus lean over Plinius and help him to rise.

They pace on few inches, when Plinius instantly falls down dead.

EXT. CLIFF EDGE - NIGHT

Through the black ink night, Nautius and Sila are riding the wagon on the cliff edge path. Sila cuddles up to Nautius.

NAUTIUS

(reassuring)

Don't be scared. The sea rumble
guides me. Look!

Far ahead, through the darkness, there are some lights.

NAUTIUS

We've made it!

But, the more they approach, they realize the lights are in fact flames. They can hear the screaming, just like in Pompeii.

INT. PLINIUS'S VILLA - GAIUS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

In his bedroom, the young Gaius can hardly sleep. In the distance, the Vesuvius' loud rumbling echoes and his bed shivers with small-scale shocks.

Then, a big one --

Everything trembles and falls in the bedroom. Aghast, Gaius is immediately up. Sabina enters the room.

SABINA

Let's get out of here!

They both rush out.

EXT. PLINIUS'S VILLA - GARDEN - NIGHT

Gaius and Sabina are seated on a stone bench in an open court. Gaius is simply reading, unaware of what's happening.

SABINA

We'll be safer here.

A man (NEPOS) wearing an armor and helmet runs to them, out of breath.

SABINA

Nepos?! I thought you were in Spain.

NEPOS

I learnt I've just missed your brother!

(seeing Gaius reading)

Are you out of your mind?!

(to Sabina)

You must escape from here!

A quake makes the building tottered.

NEPOS

Come with me!

Sabina and Gaius follow him.

EXT. SEACOAST - NIGHT

Sabina, Gaius and Nepos are seated on a cart and start to drive but the tremors are so strong that the horses don't want to move anymore.

Behind them, a panic-stricken crowd presses them in dense array. Nepos shouts and shakes the reins and the cart finally moves on.

Gaius turns back. A black cloud, broken with rapid, zigzag flashes. Sabina puts her hand of his shoulder.

SABINA

Do not look back, my child.

GAIUS

Are you sure we couldn't be safer
by the house?

NEPOS

If your uncle be safe, he
certainly wishes you may be so
too. But, if he perished, it was
his desire, no doubt, that you
might both survive him.

The cart is now jammed because of the people and a chariot
of which the wheel broke.

Once again, Gaius can't help looking back. The black cloud
above the bay begins to descend and cover the sea.

GAIUS

Mother --

Sabina looks back at her turn, scared.

SABINA

Run, Gaius, run for your life as
fast as you can. I don't want to be
a burden for you. I'll gladly meet
the death if I could have the
satisfaction to know you alive.

GAIUS

Now way, mother!

He takes her hand and gets off the cart.

GAIUS

Come on!!

Reluctantly, Sabina descend the cart and follows him with
Nepos. The ash begins to fall like a dense dark mist and
spreads over the country.

NEPOS

Let's leave the road while we
still can see, or we'll be
stomped on to death by the crowd.

EXT. COUNTRY - NIGHT

They leave the road and pace under a large tree. There, they sit down, waiting for the darkness to wrap them up. Now scared, Gaius listens to the screams.

MAN'S VOICE

Lucia! Lucia! Where are you!

WOMAN'S VOICE

Have you seen my children?! Have you seen my children?!

MAN #2'S VOICE

O Jupiter, spare us!

MAN #3'S VOICE

There are no more Gods! No Gods!!

Red lights gleam in the faraway.

NEPOS

Fire is falling but we're distant enough.

A heavy shower of ashes rains upon the country. Sheltered by the large tree, Sabina, Gaius and Nepos stay still, listening to the continuous screaming.

EXT. STABIAE STREETS - NIGHT

Nautius and Sila's chariot drives in Stabiae streets. All around is mayhem, desolation, fire, ruins, death and incredible panic.

People nearly climb over people to leave the city.

SILA

We left a hell to find another!

NAUTIUS

We have to leave the town!

SILA

Watch out!

She has the time to push Nautius and throws herself out the chariot when a high marble column collapses and crashes onto the chariot, missing closely the steed.

Nautius and Sila's fall is broken by the ash thickness. Sila turns to him.

SILA

Are you alright?

NAUTIUS

Are you?

Sila just nods. They both stand up and Nautius unharnesses the horse. He picks up a burning piece of wood and hands it to Sila to use it as a torch.

Holding the horse reins, they make their way through the streets, running. Further on, around the corner, they bump into a group of men.

Helped by the torch light, Nautius recognizes one of them's face.

NAUTIUS

Valerius!

Valerius turns to him.

VALERIUS

Nautius. You have to escape!
Follow us!

NAUTIUS

Where's Plinius?!

Valerius doesn't answer.

NAUTIUS

Where is he?!

VALERIUS

He's dead. Suffocated by some
noxious vapor.

Nautius stays aghast. Valerius takes his arm.

VALERIUS

Come!!

They run. Fireballs are falling from the sky, whistling.

As they touch the ground, they explode. One of them falls by Sila and spreads lava drops on her dress. The cloth catches fire and starts to burn.

Sila shrieks and stops, trying to douse the flames. Nautius stops at his turn and looks back to her. He frenetically taps on the dress.

NAUTIUS

Roll yourself in the ash!

Sila complies and rolls over on the ground, panicked. The flames are finally extinguished. She stands up then. Her stola is pierced with burning holes.

SILA

I'm alright!

They are about to resume running, but Valerius and the other men are nowhere to be seen. They have disappeared in the ashfall.

Still pulling his steed, Nautius tries to find his route and finally makes his mind up.

NAUTIUS

This way!!

INT. SOFIA'S INN CELLAR - NIGHT

Sofia and Aurelius are clenched together. They visibly miss air though they look drunk.

They both hold amphoras of wine they drink directly by the neck, laughing and coughing.

AURELIUS

I think we're going to die,
Sofia. I can't breathe anymore.

SOFIA

Whatever, if we should ever meet
Mors, we'll be cheerful.

Slowly, the torches light declines. Aurelius becomes graver
and turns to Sofia.

AURELIUS

I want to have a last look at
your eyes. The same eyes that
overjoyed me for long years.

He puts his hand on her cheek and softly kisses her on the
lips. The lights die out.

BLACKNESS

SOFIA

Aurelius, I love you.

EXT. BEACH - DAWN

Stabiae flames are far behind, Nautius and Sila are back on
horseback again, riding on the seaside, along a cliff.

The volcano and the breaking waves still roar.

SILA

I do hope Surrentum is still safe
and --

Suddenly, Nautius stops his steed.

SILA

What?

Nautius turns back.

NAUTIUS

The mountain roar has stopped.

Sila heeds at her turn. Except of the sea, the whole
country is now noiseless. Even the ashfall clears.

SILA

Is it finally over?

As a response, Nautius pulls on the reins and makes his steed turning back.

SILA

What are you doing?!

Nautius doesn't answer and kicks his steed flanks.

SILA

No way I'm coming back!

NAUTIUS

It's all over. We must go and get my family back.

SILA

If it's over, they're safe then. You'll get to them later. And remember what you told me: we are family. And you promised to never let me go.

Nautius stops the horse, thinking.

NAUTIUS

We'll come back tomorrow.

SILA

Of course. We shouldn't be very far from Surrentum by now.

NAUTIUS

I don't recognize a thing. The landscape seems to have changed. And not a star in the sky to guide us.

A mighty thunder raises in the distance coming from the Vesuvius and sounds like rapidly approaching.

Without hesitation, Nautius kicks the steed flanks and rides at full gallop in the opposite direction.

SILA

Nautius, what is it?!

NAUTIUS

I don't know! It sounds ominous
to me!

SILA

Get closer to the cliff! Let's
find a shelter!

They ride for about one hundred meters when they notice a grotto in the cliff, two meters above the sand level.

The thunder gets closer, increasingly amplifying.

EXT. BEACH - GROTTO - DAWN

At the grotto level, Sila stands up on the steed back and steps into the cliff. Nautius imitates her. Then, he turns back to his horse.

NAUTIUS

(to the steed)
Sorry, Aquilo. Go!

He whistles.

NAUTIUS

Get away!

The black steed gallops away, whinnying.

INT. GROTTO - DAWN

Lighted by the torch, Sila and Nautius make their way to the bottom of the bending grotto. Swell by the natural cavity, the outside thunder, is getting closer and closer.

EXT. GLADIATORS' BARRACKS - DAWN

A gigantic flow of clouds is running down like an avalanche the Vesuvius slope with amazing speeds, devouring everything on its way in a deafening thunder.

Caladus, Crescens and Sallust, along with Eumachia's staff, are staring at it.

CALADUS

What's that, now?

EXT. VESUVIUS GATE - DAWN

A SENTINEL posted at the Vesuvius Gate gazes at the cloud coming to him, terrified.

As the cloud swoops down on the city wall, the sentinel is instantly burned and turned to ashes.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAWN

The pyroclastic surge travels across the streets at great speeds burns, knocks down, shatters, buries, or carries away nearly all objects and structures on its way.

Searing ash insinuates itself in each cranny, hole and covers everything. The more the flow advances, the more is gathering rock and woody debris, and increases its sordid power.

INT. TAVERN OF THE COCK - DAWN

Most of the customers are drunk and keep on drinking. The cloud enters the tavern and blasts people and furniture.

EXT. GLADIATORS' BARRACKS - DAWN

Laid on the ground, Nero rests in Eumachia's arms. He's not coughing anymore.

As the thunder approaches, Eumachia raises her head to see the surge of hot, dry rock fragment and gases.

In no time, Caladus, Crescens, Sallust, as everyone, are thrown back against the barracks wall with an incredible violence.

EXT. VIA DEI FORTUNA - SOFIA'S INN - DAWN

Sofia's inn crumbles like a house of cards under the deadly cloud and is literally swept away.

EXT. VILLA COURTYARD - DAWN

A howling dog, chained to a wall in a villa courtyard, struggling to break loose from its chain, is instantly buried under the flow.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - BOATHOUSE - DAWN

The pyroclastic surge makes his way to Pompeii harbor, hurling to the boathouse. Chants rise from the place.

INT. POMPEII HARBOR - BOATHOUSE - DAWN

In the boathouse, Christians chant with fervor. As the lethal thunder resounds closer, Nikias takes Flavia's hand and squeezes it.

The boathouse is blasted in a dreadful noise and the chants cease.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - DAWN

The cloud envelops the harbor and inflames the boats and ships by the piers. The flow now covers the sea and large columns of steam are swept away along with the ashes.

EXT. PROMONTORY - DAWN

Holding the baby girl, Lupa and her husband watch the cloud from a promontory overlooking the sea in the far distance.

Behind them, the Pompeian exodus crowd makes its way to escape the catastrophe.

Among the multitude, Vitus is walking. Lupa lowers her head to the baby, smiles and hugs her.

LUPA
(whispering)
Fortunata --

EXT. SEASIDE - DAWN

The pyroclastic surge reaches the seaside and passes in front of the grotto, whistling and spreading all over the beach and the cliff.

INT. GROTTTO - DAWN

Nautius and Sila hold each other at the bottom of the grotto. The improvised torch casts their distorted shadows on the wet rock walls.

A draft sweeps their faces and nearly blows the flame out. Suddenly, Nautius and Sila can hardly breathe.

SILA

Nautius, the air is so hot!

Their faces stand out in beads. They gasp like fishes out of water. The wall humidity starts to run on the rock and makes puddle.

Some ash particles reach them. Then, another violent draft.

The torch is blown out.

PITCH BLACK

In the dark, only is heard Nautius and Sila's rapid breaths. Then, the breaths fade --

INT. GROTTTO - DAY

In a semi-darkness, Nautius and Sila are laid on the grotto ground, entwined and sleeping. Their feet are covered with ashes.

Nautius slowly awakes. The first thing he notices is silence and -- birds singing.

A dim daylight comes from the grotto entrance.

Trying not to wake Sila up, Nautius gently lets her head slip on the ground and he crawls to the daylight.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

The whole beach is covered with a steaming thin blanket of white finer-grained ash and cool lava fragments.

The sun shines through black clouds caused by the fires. Some ashes are still lightly falling.

INT. GROTTO - DAY

Nautius crawls back to Sila and gently shakes her. She wakes up in a jump, scared.

SILA
(gasping)
Looks like I had a bad dream.

NAUTIUS
It's over. The sun is back.

Sila rushes crawling to the entrance and comes back to Nautius.

SILA
Is it really over?

NAUTIUS
(shrugging)
As long as the birds are back and singing, I think it'd be safe.

EXT. BEACH - GROTTO - DAY

Nautius and Sila stand at the grotto entrance, blinded by the daylight. Ground level has raised of a half-meter. It's a real lunar landscape.

The sea has still receded and the beach is wider. Waves now are calmly breaking in the distant. Quietness is back. Nautius jumps on the ground.

NAUTIUS
It's still hot. I'll carry you.

Sila jumps at her turn and Nautius carries her in his arms to the seashore.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Nautius and Sila walk along the beach as zombies. Dirty, their clothes sooty and torn, they look exhausted.

They finally face villas.

FADE OUT:

SUPER: SIX MONTHS LATER

FADE IN:

EXT. LUNAR LANDSCAPE (POMPEII) - DAY

In the far distant, the Vesuvius is now dormant for centuries. One part of her dome has collapsed. Her slopes are not greenish anymore, rather dark gray.

Vineyards, trees have disappeared. At her foot, a weird spectacle: from underneath a ground made of whitish rocks, some buildings tops are still emerging.

A couple stands there: Nautius and Sila.

With grave faces, they stares at what is left of the prosperous Pompeii.

Sila turns to Nautius and holds his hand.

She is pregnant.

FADE OUT:

THE END