

More than Conquerors  
by  
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## EPISODE 1 - LAVINIA

PRE-CREDIT SEQUENCE

EXT. HILLSIDE, NEAR ROME (AD 60) - DAY

A pretty, securely confident girl, LAVINIA, (13 years old) walks through long grass, making a daisy chain. She's restless, and keeps looking up and squinting in the sunshine.

Seeing a cart coming over the hill on the horizon she begins running towards it, sprightly and coltish.

FABIAN AULIUS (48), a weary but seemingly successful merchant, sits on the cart, whipping the horse sporadically. He's wearing a stylish toga. There are piles of merchandise on the cart - clothing, spices, wheat, jewellery and marble statues.

Lavinia sprints towards the cart, and hoists herself up onto it next to her father, who slows down enough to let her get on. He laughs at her antics. Lavinia snuggles up into his chest.

LAVINIA

What did you buy me this time,  
Papa?

FABIAN

What makes you think I bought you  
anything?

He kisses her fondly on the forehead and slides a golden bracelet into her hand. Lavinia gasps in genuine surprise and squeals.

LAVINIA

Oooh, Papa!

Panoramic sweep of beautiful countryside leading down to large, grand villa. Tall cypress trees line the lane.

OPENING CREDITS.

Map of world at time unfurls, and we see ships travelling from the Eastern coast of Britain, from Greece and from Judea towards Rome, the centre of the world.

EXT. ITALIAN COAST - DUSK

SUPERIMPOSE: "Four years later"

Bustling Roman trading quarters. A variety of different market stalls are trading, whilst people from all over the Empire mingle on the docks, and around the stalls.

A South Asian ship bobs on the dock, its decks bleached by the intense sun.

Fabian Aulus (52) walks up the gangplank of the ship, visibly sweating and red faced from the heat. A couple of male slaves roll four marble statues of Apollo and Diana up the gangplank behind him.

An elaborately dressed Asian MERCHANT (45) commands the deck.

MERCHANT

Fifty sesterces for the whole lot  
and nothing more.

FABIAN

They're worth about triple that!

MERCHANT

(laughs)

Not a sestertius more than fifty or  
you ply your trade elsewhere.

The merchant turns away from Fabian, busying himself with several bags of spices piled high against one wall of the hold.

Fabian's shoulders slump. He's ready to give up. The slaves bring the statues up into the ship. Fabian waves them over into one corner, then shoos them away with his hand.

Fabian opens his mouth as if to protest, then thinks better of it, placing his fingers on his furrowed brows. He clears his throat to get the merchant's attention, reaches out his right hand and shakes the merchant's.

FABIAN

Done.

The merchant smiles. He has won. Fabian walks forlornly down the gangplank grasping a small bag with his pitiful income.

The merchant turns to one of his sailors and gives a cuckolding gesture.

MERCHANT  
(in Sanskrit)  
A Roman fool!

The local sailor laughs.

EXT.COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Fabian sits on a horse drawn cart on his way home. Another cart heavily laden with statues follows behind. SLAVES are riding the horses. The carts follow a country lane through lush green and yellow fields. Another panoramic sweep.

INT. COUNTRY VILLA - DAY.

Roman domestic bathroom. Mosaiced tiled floor. Bath set in ground. Steam rising. Flower petals sprinkled in bath create a sense of luxurious living. Lavinia (17) lies back in the water with her head against the side and talks to her loyal, female Numidian slave, SALAMMBO (22). Her manner is disarming and she talks to Salammbo as if she were her friend.

LAVINIA  
Has Papa arrived back home yet?

SALAMMBO  
Fabian Aulus arrived home forty minutes ago. He's resting in the garden and wants to see you when you're ready.

LAVINIA  
(sighing)  
I wish he wouldn't push himself so hard.

SALAMMBO  
He'd do anything for you.

Lavinia scoops up a handful of petals and scatters them across the water. Salammbo stands back a respectful distance on the mosaiced floor, holding Lavinia's towel.

LAVINIA  
I know. That's what worries me...

INT. COUNTRY VILLA - DAY

Lavinia steps out of the bath, taking her towel from Salammbo. Water drips everywhere.

LAVINIA

Thank you, Salammbo.

Salammbo gives her a smile that holds all the love and warmth that she bears for her kind mistress.

INT/EXT. COUNTRY VILLA - DAY

Wearing a sleeveless, pale coloured dress, Lavinia walks along a colonnaded corridor filled with statues out to the internal garden.

Fabian reclines on an outdoor lounge in the shade. The small garden is a pretty picture of privilege tastefully manicured with a fountain at the centre.

Fabian is drifting off to sleep. Lavinia approaches him, notices his sleepiness and gives him a gentle kiss on the cheek. Fabian stirs, grunts and wakes up.

FABIAN

Lavinia! My dear. I was hoping to see you.

He takes hold of her arm and pulls himself up into sitting position.

LAVINIA

Salammbo told me you were home.

Lavinia's bitter and resentful mother, JULIA (43), walks out into the garden in search of her husband. When she sees Lavinia and Fabian together she holds back, a look of pain on her face.

Rather than come to join them, she watches from a distance.

FABIAN

My head hurts. Maybe it's the heat of the day...

Lavinia puts the back of her hand on his brow.

LAVINIA

You're not well, Papa. You should  
stop pushing yourself so hard.

FABIAN

Pushing myself?  
(he chuckles)

FABIAN (CONT'D)

No, I really don't work as hard as  
you think, my child.

From her hidden position, Julia raises her eyebrows,  
disdainfully.

LAVINIA

(genuinely interested)  
And how is the sale of your  
statues, Papa?

FABIAN

Very well, my dear. I even managed  
to sell four yesterday.

Julia sighs. As if she can't bear to hear anymore, she slips  
away further inside the villa.

EXT. VILLA - INNER GARDENS - DAY

Alone again, Fabian tries to get up from the recliner, and  
stumbles, dizzy. He holds his head, winces and makes his way  
haltingly inside.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is lit only by candlelight, adding an ethereal glow  
to the darkness of the room.

Reaching out in front of him as if trying to figure out where  
he is, Fabian stumbles into the side of the bed and lies down  
on top of it fully clothed.

Julia is sitting at her dressing table removing hair pins.  
Becoming aware that something is not right with her husband,  
she stands up and moves close to the bed.

JULIA

Are you unwell?

FABIAN

A little. Nothing a good rest won't cure.

It's apparent he's more than a little ill. Julia frowns and purses her lips. Any love she once felt for her husband has long gone, but she is dutifully concerned.

JULIA

I'll arrange for a physician to come in the morning.

Fabian holds up a weak hand as if to protest.

JULIA (CONT'D)

No, don't argue with me.

INT. ATRIUM - DAY

Salamambo scurries from the first floor down to the ground floor. She finds Lavinia looking out of the window in the long, wide atrium and almost skids to an undignified halt.

SALAMMBO

(composing herself)

Ma'am.

Hearing herself addressed, Lavinia turns around and smiles at her maid.

LAVINIA

Salamambo. What's with all your hurrying? Has there been a fire or an invasion?

Salamambo starts, genuinely shocked by her ignorance.

SALAMMBO

You haven't heard then?

LAVINIA

Heard what?

SALAMMBO

Your father is very sick. The physician came to examine him early this morning and believes it is apoplexy.

Lavinia's face blanches.

SALAMMBO (CONT'D)

I'm sorry that you had to find out  
from me...

She's ashamed that Lavinia's mother has not told her herself.

Lavinia is torn between disbelief and fear.

LAVINIA

Thank you for informing me,  
Salamambo.

Salamambo nods. Lavinia holds up her chin and walks out of the atrium.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Fabian lies on the bed looking pained, pale and alone. The sheets are rumpled around his body.

From the door, Lavinia comes over to sit beside him. She takes holds of his hand. He looks at her and smiles weakly.

FABIAN

There's no need for you to worry,  
my dear. I'll be better in no time.

LAVINIA

I was just remembering the time you  
danced with me near the river. I  
almost thought I would fall into  
the water, but you held me so  
securely, I felt invincible.

FABIAN

As you felt, so I am...

Even as he drifts off into sleep, Lavinia grips onto his hand which becomes limper in hers. Both of them know that he's far from invincible.

INT. TABLINUM - DAY

Julia sits on a stool at the central table. The room has little in it other than a few wall decorations and the table. She strums her fingers on the table.

ALESSANDRO (37), a handsome steward, hands Julia a pile of scrolls then stands with his hands demurely clasped.

ALESSANDRO

I'm afraid these figures don't look  
good.



Julia nods tersely and opens the seal on one scroll, unfurling it so that it spreads out on the table.

LATER

There are three unfurled scrolls on the table. Julia is wild-eyed. She talks to Alessandro as though she were addressing Fabian himself.

JULIA

Oh yes, well-managed indeed.  
You've got us so deeply into debt  
that we'll need to build an  
aqueduct to get us out!

Alessandro's eyebrows twitch.

ALESSANDRO

I'm sure he had the best of  
intentions.

Julia stands up and paces the room.

JULIA

(spitting out the words)  
Having good intentions and being  
prudent are clearly not the same  
thing.

ALESSANDRO

Very true, ma'am.

Julia throws up her hands in frustration.

JULIA

Do you have any idea what I should  
do?

Alessandro walks over to the open window and looks out.

Through it, we see Lavinia walking in the expansive outer gardens. He turns to Julia and gives her an openly sly look, a look that says trust me to look out for your best interests and nobody else's.

ALESSANDRO

Perhaps...

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lavinia is sitting beside her father again. She's weary and anxious.

Fabian starts in his sleep and blood trickles out of his nose. The trickle becomes a gush.

Lavinia shakes him gently. He is already stiff. Lavinia takes a damp cloth from a bowl near the bed and wipes the blood from his face. This is the stuff of Lavinia's nightmares.

Shaking, Lavinia stands up and screams:

LAVINIA  
Mother!!!

Beat

Julia rushes into the room. Her face is hard and strands of hair are coming away from her coiffured hair. She comes over and checks the pulse on Fabian's wrist. She shakes her head.

JULIA  
He's gone.

LAVINIA  
What do you mean gone? He can't be!

Julia looks intently at Lavinia, her silence dripping with meaning. She doesn't want to deal with a hysterical daughter on top of a dead husband.

JULIA  
Calm down.

LAVINIA  
Calm down, calm down! How can I??  
What's the matter with you, Mother?

Fighting the urge to slap Lavinia, Julia reaches out to touch her on the shoulder tentatively.

JULIA  
I'll call Maria. She can clean up  
your father's body.

INT. CORRIDOR - LATER

Lavinia bursts out of Fabian's bedroom, weeping with grief and anger. She covers her mouth with a handkerchief to muffle the sound. She doesn't know where to go for comfort and stands in the corridor, alone, her whole body shaking with emotion.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Fabian's body burns on a wooden pyre. The villa can be seen in the distance.

Lavinia and Julia are closest to his body at the head of a small funeral procession including all the household slaves. They wear black and walk like distant warriors beside one another.

Wanting reassurance, Lavinia looks back at Salammbo.

MARIA (30s), the other female slave, reaches out her hand to touch Julia, trying to bring comfort, but Julia shakes off the hand.

As they reach the burning pyre, Lavinia's full attention is on it and she weeps inconsolably. Julia has tears in her eyes but looks over at the villa.

EXT. VILLA - OUTER GARDENS - DAY

All in black, Lavinia walks around the garden, aimless and alone. The garden is tastefully maintained with sculpted shrubbery, steps and fountains. It is drizzling.

Salammbo stands near the back entrance and watches Lavinia. She glances around her, trying to ascertain whether it is seemly for her to approach and comfort Lavinia.

Salammbo walks towards Lavinia.

LAVINIA

You have tidings from my mother?

Salammbo shakes her head.

SALAMMBO

The mistress has not sent me. I  
came to check whether you wanted  
some company in your grief?

Lavinia heaves a great sob. Her whole body responds to her weeping.

Salammbo comes forward and wraps both arms around Lavinia. Her own eyes are filled with tears.

LAVINIA

He was too young to die!