

CROSSING

by

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*CONTENT WARNING: Contains strong language and disturbing material.

CAST LIST:

OLDER MAN: A Roman Emperor who is very ill.

OCTAVIA/BEATRIX: A young Gaulish female, now a Roman slave.

FULVIA/REMINIX: An older Gaulish female, now a Roman slave who is non-verbal; her tongue has been cut out for *disrespecting the gods*. She will interpret everything that is said in B.S.L. Creative Captioning will also appear behind her.

SCENE 1. ROMAN VILLA, NOLA, ITALY, 14 AD, DAY.

AN OLDER MAN LIES ON A BED
WRAPPED IN A PURPLE AND GOLD
COVER, WE HEAR KNOCKING O.S.
TWO SERVANTS, OCTAVIA AND
FULVIA, BUSY THEMSELVES
ATTENDING TO THE OLDER MAN.
THE OLDER MAN THROWS A GLASS
ACROSS THE ROOM; OCTAVIA DUCKS
OUT OF THE WAY.

OLDER MAN: Puella defututa - worn out whore! I told you! No
visitors! None! No physicians! No guards! Not even Livia!

OCTAVIA LEAVES THE ROOM
BRIEFLY THEN RETURNS, FULVIA
SWEEPS UP THE GLASS AND
RESUMES INTERPRETING.

OLDER MAN (**TURNS TO OCTAVIA**): Gaulish bitch! It's airless in
here! Can't breathe...

OCTAVIA CROSSES TO OPEN THE
WINDOW.

OCTAVIA: Beatrix, my name is Beatrix, not whore - not Gaulish
bitch - not 'Octavia' - the name you make me answer to ...

FULVIA GIVES OCTAVIA A WARNING
LOOK AND CROSSES TO OLDER
MAN'S BED.

OLDER MAN: What tongue is it speaking? Speak Latin or shut
your mouth!

FULVIA WIPES SWEAT FROM
OLDER MAN'S FOREHEAD

OLDER MAN: Ah Fulvia, best kind of female; you don't talk back... (**LAUGHS, WHEEZES AND COUGHS**).

FULVIA REMAINS IMPASSIVE.

OLDER MAN: Were you ever young Fulvia? Wish I could forget being young... battlefields, smell of blood and burning, searing sun, the thirst... it was unquenchable...

FULVIA LOOKS INQUIRINGLY AT
OCTAVIA.

OCTAVIA: He's already with Bacchus.

OLDER MAN(**SHOUTS**): He started all this: Caesar(**PAUSE**) I thought about running, I thought about it - running - with Marcus - my Achilles moment... but I was naive, too power hungry, too caught up in the culture, besides, who would dare say no to Caesar? (**COUGHS AND APPEARS TO ADDRESS THE WINDOW**) But Marcus Agrippa, I loved him more than any woman...

OCTAVIA (**to Fulvia**): And what of that Livia? Fifty-two years of playing the perfect Roman wife at her loom - the public humiliation of his honouring of Agrippa must have been hard to take - placing him in the family tomb - what of her? She's just as much enslaved as we are, no matter how high the status!

FULVIA PLACES A FINGER TO HER
LIPS.

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF
APPROACHING VOICES.

OLDER MAN: Octavia! I said no visitors, none! Get them out!

THE SOUND OF VOICES FADES DOWN.

OLDER MAN (**ADDRESSES THE WALL/ NO-ONE IN PARTICULAR**): Marcus said I should have stopped when the falling sickness first came upon me....

OCTAVIA (**TO FULVIA**): Ha! I heard the falling sickness always came upon him the night before battle! If he hadn't been Caesar's 'special' son.... If Agrippa hadn't carried him!

OLDER MAN: Speak Latin or by the wrath of Jupiter! I'll - aqua - water! (**SNAPS FINGERS**)

OCTAVIA GOES TO FETCH WATER
FROM THE NIGHTSTAND. FULVIA
TURNS BACK TO ADJUST THE COVER
ON THE BED.

OCTAVIA POURS WATER FROM A JUG
INTO A GLASS, TURNS HER BACK
TO OLDER MAN. THE AUDIENCE
SEES THAT SHE SPITS IN IT THEN
CROSSES THE ROOM, HELPS HIM
SIT UP AND HOLDS THE GLASS TO
HIS LIPS AS HE DRINKS. SHE
WITHDRAWS TO THE NIGHTSTAND,
REPLACES THE GLASS, BUT KNOCKS
SOMETHING OVER; SHE SCRABBLES
ON THE GROUND SEARCHING TO
RETRIEVE IT.

OLDER MAN TURNS TO OCTAVIA,
NOTICES HER STILL KNEELING ON
THE GROUND. FULVIA HURRIES
OVER TO HELP OCTAVIA.

OLDER MAN: What have you dropped now! Get up! Vappa - Scum!

OCTAVIA STANDS UP, FULVIA
SQUEEZES HER HAND COVERTLY AND
RETURNS TO HER DUTIES. OCTAVIA
REMAINS IN THE CORNER AS SHE
COMPOSES A FIXED SMILE. SHE
TURNS BACK TO FACE THE OLDER
MAN.

OCTAVIA (**MEETING THE OLDER MAN'S GAZE**): But always... always...
in the face of your every attempt to subjugate me: my smile
is my weapon!

OLDER MAN: Are you still speaking? Pshhtah! Get on with your
work!

OCTAVIA SMILES, RETURNS TO THE
NIGHTSTAND, FULVIA STANDS BY
THE BED-SIDE.

OLDER MAN: (**TO HIMSELF, WHEEZES**): With Caesar, there was no
going back - the victories, the liberations -

OCTAVIA: Liberations! The murder of a people - my baby
brother...but when you would smother your own brother, just
sixteen, with your own hands, when you would gouge out the
eyes of your senator just to prove a point - no surprise
there!

FULVIA, ALARMED, COMES OVER
AND GUIDES OCTAVIA AWAY FROM
THE BED AND OVER TO THE
NIGHTSTAND.

OCTAVIA (**TO FULVIA**): What! What! You're not the priestess
anymore Reminix, you're just 'Fulvia' here! What's wrong with
you? He doesn't even know what I'm saying!

FULVIA (**IN BSL**): They cut my tongue out, not my soul.

OLDER MAN: Stultissima Fulvia! You total idiot! You're even dumber than I thought! Get it away from me with it's gibberish - if it can't speak Rome's tongue, it'll find itself with little to say, just like you!

OCTAVIA (**THROUGH CLENCHED TEETH**): Not 'it'- I am Beatrix, I am Gaul, I have the protection of Goddess Nantosuelta, I have learned the ways of the animals: patience, patience, how to hide in plain sight (**PAUSE**) and they taught me well... (**LOOKS OVER TO THE BED**).

OLDER MAN STARTS COUGHING
UNCONTROLLABLY, THEN JERKING
VIOLENTLY AS IF HAVING A
SEIZURE; THE ROOM DARKENS AS
TIME PASSES.

CHANGE

SCENE 2, ROMAN VILLA, NOLA, ITALY, 14 AD, EVENING.

FULVIA IS SEATED BY THE OLDER
MAN'S BED; HE IS CONSIDERABLY
WEAKER BUT STILL ABLE TO TALK.
OCTAVIA REMAINS BY THE NIGHT
STAND, BUSYING HERSELF
GRINDING HERBS ETC.

OCTAVIA RETURNS TO THE BEDSIDE
WITH A GLASS.

SHE RAISES THE OLDER MAN'S
HEAD AND HELPS HIM DRINK THEN
STEPS AWAY. THE OLDER MAN
MEETS HER GAZE.

WE HEAR THE NOISE OF A ROMAN
MILITARY CAMP, MEN SHOUTING,
WEAPONS BEING SHARPENED,
RUNNING, DRUMMING ETC.

OLDER MAN (**looking towards the window**): He told me he was
there... in his tent... Caesar... he knelt before a small altar - a
small altar to Jupiter... he jumped up, paced back and fore,
back and fore, back and fore - he said he cradled the die in
his hand - released it across the altar then he dared look -
he shouted: We cross - The die is cast!

THE SOUND OF THE ROMAN CAMP
FADES DOWN.

OLDER MAN: But it was cast for us all....

VISIBLY WEAKENED AND CLEARLY
DYING NOW, THE OLDER MAN
ADDRESSES OCTAVIA AS SHE
STANDS BESIDE HIS BED.

OLDER MAN: I know....

FULVIA JUMPS TO HER FEET,
OCTAVIA STARES AT HIM
DEFIANTLY.

OLDER MAN: I know (**LONG PAUSE**) I know you poison me.

OCTAVIA: As you have poisoned me!

OLDER MAN: All our Rubicons are crossed now Octavia.... (**LONG PAUSE**) War has poisoned us both.

OLDER MAN COUGHS AND WHEEZES.

OLDER MAN: Soldiers, warriors are not born, they are cultured, just as Caesar cultured me.... We might have had different lives, even peaceful lives....

OCTAVIA: And so? (**SHRUGS SHOULDERS**) Who can help you now? (**GESTURES TO THE EMPTY ROOM**) You don't even speak my tongue! Patience, patience, hiding in plain sight... my smile is not my *only* weapon (**HOLDS UP A SMALL BOTTLE**).

OLDER MAN (**WITH CONSIDERABLE EFFORT**): Latin is not my *only* language (**PAUSE**) Beatrix....

FULVIA'S BSL INTERPRETATION
BECOMES MORE AGITATED.

FULVIA (**TO OCTAVIA IN BSL**): What have you done?! You see me as the broken one but you, both of you.....!

FULVIA APPLIES A COLD CLOTH TO
THE OLDER MAN'S FOREHEAD

OCTAVIA: Why are you helping him ?! (**SPITS TOWARD OLDER MAN'S BED**) Leave it to suffer - Roman dog !

FULVIA (**IN BSL**) We will all suffer for this!

OLDER MAN: Study me closely Beatrix - I am your reflection: we both die killers now, like animals, animals taught us both well....

OLDER MAN GASPS AND TURNS TO
WINDOW, BEATRIX SHAKES HER
HEAD IN DENIAL.

OLDER MAN: But I am glad of your 'mercy'; I'm tired, Charon
awaits me. **(PAUSE)** Over forty years of peace; will I be
judged by what I leave behind or by what I have destroyed?

OLDER MAN COUGHS AND WHEEZES

OLDER MAN: So then Caesar, did I play my part well?

WE HEAR THE SONG 'HURT'
PERFORMED BY NINE INCH NAILS
AND DAVID BOWIE PLAY FROM 4.26
TO PLAY OUT.

BEATRIX WITHDRAWS TO THE
NIGHTSTAND AND SITS IN SHOCK,
STARING INTO DARKNESS. FULVIA
REMAINS BY THE BED.

SOME TIME LATER, AUGUSTUS,
CLEARLY VERY WEAK AND
STRUGGLING TO BREATHE, FALLS
SILENT AND DIES. FULVIA PULLS
THE COVER OVER HIS HEAD, AND
WALKS OVER TO HOLD BEATRIX.

BLACKOUT

CURTAIN.

