

The Vestals: Do You Hear What I Hear?

TV Pilot Episode

WGA #I239859

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ACT ONE

EXT. ALBA LONGA - PALACE GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

Children's LAUGHTER. Green fields. A stone castle in the distance.

SUPER: Alba Longa, the capital of Latium (Central Italy).

SUPER: 773 BC - Twenty years before the founding of Rome.

RHEA SILVA (16) - a breath-taking natural beauty - chats under a shade tree with AUNT AUGUSTINA (40's). FLAVIUS (9) and PROTUS (7), play nearby.

Flavius practices lunges with his wooden sword while his brother prances around him, dodging the thrusts.

RHEA SILVA

You know better than to swing that sword near your brother, Flavius. Protus, come over here and sit with Aunt Augustina and me.

Flavius unleashes a few more thrusts of his sword and then stows it in the scabbard at his belt.

FLAVIUS

Now I am the stag and you are the hunter! You cannot catch me!

Flavius takes off. Protus dashes after him, dives for his legs, and tackles him.

PROTUS

Got you!

FLAVIUS

No fair!

The boys wrestle around, SCREAMING and LAUGHING.

RHEA SILVA

Boys...

AUNT AUGUSTINA

Well done, hunter. Come here now and give me a kiss, both of you.

The boys reluctantly walk over to Aunt Augustina. She plants wet kisses on their cheeks. They grimace and run off.

FLAVIUS

This time you are the stag and I shall catch you!

(CONTINUED)

The boys run off, SHRIEKING. Rhea covers her ears and laughs.

RHEA SILVA

Perhaps a wealthy husband and all girls is what I should pray for.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

Well finally. Talk about a husband. What ever happened to that boy - Renaldo? Receptus?

RHEA SILVA

Renatus. Gone.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

You were so fond of him.

RHEA SILVA

It took me a long time to get over him.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

You need to stop spending your whole life within the palace compound. When you visit I shall make sure you meet some eligibles.

RHEA SILVA

But my father-

AUNT AUGUSTINA

He will be none the wiser. Besides, he knows little more than affairs of state and how to wield a sword.

RHEA SILVA

At least *that* he has taught me well.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

If you find the right young man to protect you, you will have no need of a sword. Does he not understand you are an eligible young woman?

RHEA SILVA

His answer is always, 'It is in the hands of the Gods. Be patient.'

(MORE)

Aunt Augustina sighs.

Rhea takes a small clay figure of her mother out of her pocket and rubs it gently.

(CONTINUED)

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

I voice my wishes to my mother so  
that her spirit will hear me and  
help guide me.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

And what does she tell you?

Rhea's face shows pain.

RHEA SILVA

She does not answer. She has never  
answered. She promised...

AUNT AUGUSTINA

She believed in a god of free will.  
I think she expects you to choose  
your own path.

RHEA SILVA

Here? What choices do I have?

Aunt Augustina puts her arm around Rhea.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

It is not fair. I remember how my  
mother's eyes used to light up when  
my father entered the room. I want  
that, too.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

Love will come. As I said, when you  
visit we will give it a little nudge.

Rhea smiles weakly.

Augustina takes the token and stares at it.

AUNT AUGUSTINA (CONT'D)

It is amazing how much you look like  
her, how much you sound like her.

RHEA SILVA

That is what father says.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

She was a remarkable woman. A beauty  
in figure and gentle in spirit. Do  
you remember her?

RHEA SILVA

Yes - the sound of her voice.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

(laughs)

I remember how she would prance around and imitate young priestesses. She warned me about all the religious trappings of the father's new gods - the new rules, the silly rituals, the pretty little priestesses parading around. 'They are there to please men,' she would say. 'God lives inside you - within your heart.'

AUNT AUGUSTINA

(handing the token  
back to Rhea)

You must keep it with you always.  
It will remind you-

RHEA SILVA

-that I am a strong, independent woman like my mother.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

Yes - but let us keep it between ourselves. No sense getting your father all riled up.

Rhea laughs and nods.

RHEA SILVA

Worry not. I shall continue to act reliant on the gods - and on men.

From off in the distance, palace guards LUCANUS and CARBO (both 20's), march toward Aunt Augustina and the children.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

I see we are being summoned. It is time to ready ourselves for our trip.

Aunt Augustina stands and waves to the guards.

AUNT AUGUSTINA (CONT'D)

Flavius! Protus! It is time to go.

The boys ignore her and continue to run around.

RHEA SILVA

Boys!

The women begin to gather their things.

(CONTINUED)

AUNT AUGUSTINA

And yet look how your father has  
relied upon you. You have honored  
your mother well by tending to your  
brothers.

RHEA SILVA

They are his pride and joy.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

Oh, do not underestimate your father's  
love for you. Sons provide him with  
a sense of security and continuity,  
but a father's love for a daughter  
is something special.

Flavius spies the approaching guards. He unsheathes his  
sword and waves it threateningly.

FLAVIUS

(calling out)

I shall teach you to interrupt us,  
you scoundrels!

AUNT AUGUSTINA

Young man, put up that sword at once.  
Protus! It is time to go. We must  
pack and bid farewell to your father.

PROTUS

Papa is not coming with us?

FLAVIUS

Silly. He has to stay to tell people  
what to do. He is the king!

The guards continue their approach. Unnoticed, Flavius dashes  
off toward the men.

Protus runs to Aunt Augustina and tugs on her tunic.

PROTUS

I am hungry!

AUNT AUGUSTINA

We shall eat straight away.

RHEA SILVA

Flavius?

Aunt Augustina looks around, then spies the boy in the  
distance.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

Flavius! Return at once!

(CONTINUED)

RHEA SILVA  
I shall fetch him.

AUNT AUGUSTINA  
No. Finish gathering our things and  
bring Protus along.

Flavius reaches the guards and waves his sword.

FLAVIUS  
Halt, savages! Not one step further!

LUCANUS  
Come on then, young master. Do your  
best.

Flavius playfully charges Lucanus. He dodges and laughs.

LUCANUS (CONT'D)  
A fine attempt!

FLAVIUS  
Surrender your arms! I am the son  
of King Numitor and I command you!

Lucanus draws his sword and takes a step back.

LUCANUS  
(to Carbo)  
By the gods, shall I give up my sword  
or fight?

CARBO  
Hold and defend your honor!

Aunt Augustina marches toward the men.

AUNT AUGUSTINA  
You, sir! How dare you draw your  
sword on the king's son - even in  
jest!

LUCANUS  
Come on, boy. Attack. I shall  
attempt to parry.

FLAVIUS  
Prepare to die!

Flavius jumps and twirls, his sword whistling through the  
air. He finishes his moves with a strong lunge of his wooden  
blade.

Lucanus looks down: The tip of the wooden sword presses  
against his groin.

(CONTINUED)

Carbo guffaws deeply.

CARBO

Ah, the young lad has found your Achilles' heel, so to speak. You'll do well to surrender or lose your valuables.

LUCANUS

Surrender? Never.

Lucanus retreats a pace and with a swift stroke of his sword, knocks the wooden sword, sending it into the air.

LUCANUS (CONT'D)

And now my countermove, young master.

In a blur, Lucanus sweeps his heavy sword forward, full-force into the boy. A soft gasp barely escapes Flavius as his body is sliced in two. The grass is spattered with blood.

Aunt Augustina, horrified, collapses on the ground.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

Gods have mercy, what have you done?

Carbo feigns shock.

LUCANUS

A bit too zealous, perhaps?

CARBO

It was self-defense. The boy attacked first.

LUCANUS

One little prick down, one to go.

Aunt Augustina rocks back and forth and groans.

Rhea screams hysterically and runs toward her aunt.

AUNT AUGUSTINA

No! Go back! Get Protus to the palace!

Rhea doubles back to her brother.

From a distance, she watches as the men march up to Aunt Augustina. She pulls a knife out from under her tunic to fight them off, but they slay her quickly and viciously.

Rhea holds Protus close, shielding him from the violent sight.

(CONTINUED)



RHEA SILVA

By all that is holy, why is this happening?

The armed men march toward Rhea and Protus.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

Protus, quickly! We must run!

Protus is frozen in place.

Rhea scoops her brother up into her arms and takes off. He is too heavy and she stumbles.

She spies an animal shed nearby and grabs his hand. She takes off, all but dragging him across the grass.

They reach the shed. Rhea looks back.

The armed men are now at a trot, not far behind.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

Gods damn it. What is going on?

She pulls Protus inside.

INT. ALBA LONGA - PALACE GROUNDS - SHED

Slivers of light dapple the dark interior. An aisle runs the length of the shed. Empty stalls are on either side.

Rhea pulls Protus into a corner of one of the back stalls and pushes him down into a sitting position.

RHEA SILVA

Stay here. I shall not be far away.  
When I tell you to run, go through  
that door and run to the palace.  
You are very fast. They will not  
catch you.

Protus whimpers as Rhea piles hay on top of him.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

Shhh. You must be very quiet.

Rhea moves to a stall on the opposite side.

She sees an ax handle and grabs it, and quickly crouches down in the shadows.

The men are outside.

CARBO (O.S.)

Stay here. I shall flush them out.

(CONTINUED)

LUCANUS (O.S.)  
Mind the girl. She is not to be  
killed.

Carbo enters the shed.

He steps into the first stall on the left and pokes around with his sword. Nothing. He moves to the stall opposite. Nothing.

CARBO  
Come out. I promise I will not hurt  
you.

He enters the next row of stalls and thrusts his sword into the hay. Nothing.

Rhea, crouched down in a back stall, tosses a small clod of dirt into the aisle.

The man reacts and moves toward the back of the shed.

RHEA SILVA  
Mother, hear me. Please. We need  
your help.

EXT. ALBA LONGA - KING'S PALACE - THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

KING NUMITOR (late 30's) confers with his counselor, URBICUS (40's). Also in the throne room are four palace guards: PALACE GUARDS 1 and 2 flank the throne; PALACE GUARDS 3 and 4 are at the main doorway. Urbicus stands in front of the throne.

KING NUMITOR  
Then it is settled. We shall meet  
with their envoy to draw up a treaty.  
The people will be pleased.

Urbicus barely stifles a grimace.

URBICUS  
Yes, sire.

Flushed, he leaves the room.

Standing in the doorway and witness to what has been said, AMULIUS (20's) approaches the throne with BODYGUARD 1 and BODYGUARD 2 in tow.

KING NUMITOR  
Ah, my brother and his loyal lapdogs.

AMULIUS  
Loyal subjects all, Your Majesty.

(CONTINUED)

KING NUMITOR

We are moving forward with the treaty. You will work with Urbicus to rein in the generals. We must curb their lust for blood and quash their expansionist designs against the Sabines.

AMULIUS

The generals know those savages will use the peace to amass more forces.

KING NUMITOR

I have the word of the Sabine leader. This peace will be a lasting one.

Amulius shakes his head.

KING NUMITOR (CONT'D)

We are losing scores of young men in needless skirmishes on the border. Our coffers are hemorrhaging. The people have had their fill of war.

AMULIUS

The people? This decision is the king's alone to make. Alas, you are just like our father - giving in to the rabble's every whim. No backbone, no vision.

KING NUMITOR

I trust in my people as I trust in the gods - as did Father and the ten kings before him.

AMULIUS

The gods favor those who shape their own destiny.

KING NUMITOR

Enough. As you said, this is the king's decision to make - and I am the king.

Amulius draws his dagger and steps toward Numitor.

AMULIUS

No more. Your days of weakness - your pathetic attempts to appease the people - have come to an end.

Furious, King Numitor nearly jumps out of his throne.

(CONTINUED)

KING NUMITOR

How dare you!

Amulius waves his dagger.

AMULIUS

Come, brother. Come at me - man to man. Give me a reason to end your life. It would make things so much easier.

KING NUMITOR

Guards!

King Numitor looks at the guards to his left and right, but neither responds.

He calls over to Palace Guards 3 and 4 at the door.

KING NUMITOR (CONT'D)

You men! Arrest them!

Nothing.

KING NUMITOR (CONT'D)

All of you - I shall have your heads! And you, brother - I suggest you leave the city altogether. I shall not forget this.

AMULIUS

It is not I who will be leaving the city, Numitor. For now, sit there and keep your mouth shut. I am just getting started.

INT. ALBA LONGA - PALACE GROUNDS - SHED - CONTINUOUS

Carbo stands at the stall where Protus hides. He peers in but sees nothing.

He cocks his head and listens. Protus whimpers.

The man moves deeper into the shadows. He stops and raises his sword, ready to pounce.

BAM! The ax handle connects with the back of his head. He roars, and spins around. Rhea again swings the handle upward with all her might.

BAM! She connects with the man's face. He howls in pain, stumbles, and falls to the floor, dropping his sword and seeing stars.

(CONTINUED)

Rhea plucks Protus out from the hay and pushes him toward the door of the shed.

RHEA SILVA

Run, Protus! Go to Papa - now!

Protus dashes for the door. Rhea starts off after him, but a beefy hand grabs her tunic and yanks her back.

Protus slips through the doorway and sprints off. Lucanus, standing outside, dives for the boy. A miss!

Outside, Lucanus finds it hard to keep up with Protus. The man lurches left, then right, then left again. His sword cuts the air inches from the boy's body.

Inexplicably, Protus stops and turns. He charges the man.

LUCANUS

What the fuck?

The man plants his feet and raises his sword.

LUCANUS (CONT'D)

Come on, you little prick. Do it!

PROTUS

I am the stag and you are the hunter.  
You will never catch me.

Protus shifts left and right as he moves toward the man. Drawing close, he feints to the left, but abruptly cuts right. He dives, scoots through the man's legs, and takes off.

PROTUS (CONT'D)

Papa! Papa!

Looking out through the door of the shed, Carbo sees Protus run off.

CARBO

Shit!

Seeing the man distracted, Rhea sprints for the door, but Carbo lunges and catches her by the hair.

CARBO (CONT'D)

You little bitch!

She claws at him, but his grip is too strong.

Fed up, Carbo jerks her by the hair and sends her flying into the side of a stall.

She smacks into the wall and collapses to the floor.

(CONTINUED)

Back outside, Lucanus pulls out a weighted net from his belt and hurls it at Protus. A miss!

LUCANUS

Fuck!

PROTUS

I am the stag...! Papa! Papa!

Lucanus calls out to Carbo in the shed.

LUCANUS

Take the girl! I shall bring the bodies of the boys to the palace!

Lucanus sprints off.

Inside the shed, Rhea springs to her feet. As Carbo lunges for her, she swings her arms wildly to fend him off.

He grabs both her wrists in one hand and with the other, delivers a powerful backhand across her face. He releases her and she crumples to the ground, blacking out.

CARBO

Gods damn this she-devil!

INT. ALBA LONGA - PALACE

SOUNDS OF FOOTSTEPS AND HEAVY BREATHING.

Protus reaches the base of the palace. He runs along it, but sees no door. He turns a corner. There - a few feet away - is a small alcove that shields a door.

The bottom panel of the door shows a small opening covered with a piece of leather sized so that it gives away, allowing for a dog to enter or leave.

He scoots down and starts through. Stuck! He is too big.

In pursuit, Lucanus calls out.

LUCANUS (O.S.)

Come on, boy. I will not hurt you.  
I will take you to your father.

Protus grunts as he rocks back and forth fractions of an inch. With a final series of twists, he wiggles his way through the opening and into a small, dark room.

He gets to his feet. The room is tiny. The darkness unnerves him and he whimpers. Slowly he gains control of himself.

(CONTINUED)

PROTUS

I am the stag. You cannot catch me.

On the opposite wall, there is an inside door that leads into the interior of the palace. Protus tries to open it, but it is locked.

Outside the castle, Lucanus stops to catch his breath.

The SOUND OF CHICKENS CLUCKING AND SQUAWKING.

Lucanus walks toward the noise, turns the corner, and spots a small hut a short distance away from the palace.

Lucanus dashes over and pounds on the door. A TEEN-AGED GIRL answers.

LUCANUS

The boy. Where is he?

TEEN-AGED GIRL

Boy?

LUCANUS

Gods damn it! A boy. He ran this way! Tell me or I shall beat it out of you! Tell-

Lucanus freezes: The blade of a scythe presses against his back.

Lucanus peers over his shoulder. A middle-aged, well-built GROUNDS-KEEPER towers over him, holding the scythe.

GROUNDS-KEEPER

That is my daughter you are threatening.

LUCANUS

I seek the son of the king.

GROUNDS-KEEPER

He is not here. I am the grounds-keeper. We have seen no one.

Protus watches from inside the small room across the way.

The Grounds-keeper's daughter anxiously peers across the way toward the castle. Lucanus follows her line of sight.

LUCANUS

Shit.

(MORE)

Lucanus turns and marches toward the castle door.

(CONTINUED)

Watching, Protus jumps to his feet and backs into a corner.  
Lucanus runs over and tries the heavy door. Locked.

LUCANUS (CONT'D)  
Gods damn it!

He pounds on the door and kicks at it. BAM! BAM! BAM!

Inside the room, Protus presses himself into a corner.

Lucanus gets on his knees, lifts the leather cover of the opening, and peers in. Darkness.

He unsheathes his sword and sticks his arm through the opening. He swings the sword wildly.

LUCANUS (CONT'D)  
Fuck me, you little shit. I know  
you are in there.

Protus looks down. The sword blade cuts through the dappled darkness and slices into his bare shins. He stifles a cry.

Lucanus pulls the sword out. Blood.

LUCANUS (CONT'D)  
Trapped, are you?

Lucanus looks around and then runs back over to the hut.

A heavy cart sits off to the side. He grabs the poles used to hitch a beast to it and hefts it up with a grunt.

He rolls it over to the castle door and positions one of the large wheels in front of leather opening.

LUCANUS (CONT'D)  
You are going nowhere, you little  
prick. I shall be back.

A moment later, Lucanus is hovering over Flavius's bloodied corpse. He pulls a large sack from his belt, bends down, and manipulates the corpse of the slain boy into the bag.

He draws a knife and sticks his arm into the bag. CHOP-CHOP-CHOP! Blood seeps through, staining the bag.

He hefts the bag up over his shoulder and heads off.

INT. ALBA LONGA - KING'S PALACE - THRONE ROOM - MOMENTS  
LATER

Palace Guard 3 signals Amulius from the doorway of the hall.  
Amulius acknowledges.

(CONTINUED)



Lucanus enters the room, carrying a huge sack over his shoulder. Reaching the throne, he drops it to the floor.

AMULIUS

Your sons, my brother.

Lucanus looks up. Carbo gives him a questioning look. Lucanus imperceptibly shakes his head.

CARBO

(under his breath)

Fuck me.

Blood seeps through the bag and pools onto the stone floor.

King Numitor wails.

KING NUMITOR

My boys! My beautiful sons! Why?

AMULIUS

I am putting an end to your bloodline.

King Numitor leaps up from his throne and lunges at Amulius. Body Guard 1 blocks him with a spear and uses it to herd him back to the throne.

KING NUMITOR

By the gods, I shall see you dead!

King Numitor looks around wildly.

KING NUMITOR (CONT'D)

Urbicus! My friend! Help me!

Urbicus enters the room and stands next to Amulius.

URBICUS

I am here, Your Grace. Understand:  
I am no traitor. I will always love  
you. But what I do, I do for Latium.

Urbicus turns to Amulius and addresses him with barely concealed distaste.

URBICUS (CONT'D)

A messenger has brought word from  
Lepidus, the Rex Sacrorum. He blesses  
you and gives his support for the  
coup. With the religious now behind  
us, the people will fall in line.

Amulius signals Palace Guards 1 and 2. They grab the king and pull him from the throne. Amulius takes his place.

(CONTINUED)

AMULIUS

Alas, dear brother. It seems that  
your reign has come to an end.

INT. ALBA LONGA - TEMPLE OF VESTA - CONTINUOUS

Vestal High Priestess SOSSIA (40's) stands at the altar,  
before the Sacred Fire of Vesta with her arms upraised.

Vestals stand in front of the altar with heads bowed.

SOSSIA

That the Goddess's grace may continue  
to flow across Latium, bringing  
harmony and abundance to all...

She turns to face the Vestals and Vestal novices.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

...go and give the Goddess thanks at  
your hearths this day for the  
blessings she has bestowed.

Two Vestals mount the steps to the altar and take seats on  
either side of the Vestal Fire.

Sossia and the other Vestals file out of the temple, followed  
by the Vestal novices.

Outside a MESSENGER approaches Sossia, nods, and hands her a  
small scroll. She dismisses him, breaks the seal, and reads.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

The fools!

She hands the message to breath-taking Vestal, OPIA (20).  
Although flawless, dimwitted Oppia is clearly not the  
brightest flame in the Vestal fire... Oppia reads the  
message, then reads it again.

Silence.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

By the Goddess, do you not understand?  
Lepidus has supported the coup.  
Numitor is to be exiled and his  
daughter is now to come to us. They  
could have killed the both of them  
and finished with the whole business,  
but, no. Now we shall all live under  
the shadow of vengeance.

INT. ALBA LONGA - KING'S PALACE - THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Amulius motions to Palace Guard 3.

(CONTINUED)

AMULIUS

Have the girl brought in!

King Numitor is wild-eyed and shaking with fury.

Armed Guard 2 enters, holding Rhea by the scruff of the neck. She breaks free and runs to her father.

RHEA SILVA

Papa! Those men - they killed Aunt Augustina. Flavius-

King Numitor looks at his bloodied and bruised daughter.

KING NUMITOR

I know. My poor, sweet child. What have they done to you?

Rhea spies the pooling blood on the floor. She screams.

KING NUMITOR (CONT'D)

Look away, Rhea. It is over now. I thank the gods that you were spared.

AMULIUS

The gods? Thank me that she did not share their fate. I am allowing her to live but there are conditions.

KING NUMITOR

Conditions?

AMULIUS

Her life for your obedience...and your life for her obedience.

KING NUMITOR

You are mad.

AMULIUS

You will leave Alba Longa and be taken to the borderlands where you will be allowed to live - under my watchful eye, of course. But hear me: If you attempt to return or to take any action against me - or incite others to do so - she will die.

RHEA SILVA

You cannot do this!

AMULIUS

Stupid girl, look at me!  
(MORE)

Rhea turns to Amulius.

(CONTINUED)

AMULIUS (CONT'D)

You will be given to the Vestals of Alba Longa. You will take their sacred oath and there you will remain. If you attempt to leave, I shall have you father killed. Do you understand?

Rhea looks at her father.

KING NUMITOR

The Gods will bring us justice. I promise it.  
(to Amulius)  
My people will rise up against you.

AMULIUS

They will do nothing. They will see this little beauty willingly serving the Goddess in the exalted Sisterhood and will hear of your wishes to turn the throne over to me.

Amulius nods to his Bodyguards. They circle the king. Other guards flank Rhea.

AMULIUS (CONT'D)

Gather your things, brother. You leave immediately.

INT. ALBA LONGA - KING'S PALACE - LOWER REACHES - HALLWAY.

Lucanus and Carbo rush down a hallway, carrying torches.

Lucanus reaches a door at the end and slides the bolt mechanism open. Carbo thrusts his torch into the small room.

The sheet of leather sways in a draft, letting slivers of light into the tiny room. It is empty!

CARBO

Your stupidity will cost us our lives.

An idea strikes Lucanus.

LUCANUS

Follow me.

EXT. ALBA LONGA - OUTSIDE THE KING'S PALACE - CONTINUOUS

Amulius watches as Guards lead King Numitor and Rhea out. Two mounted ESCORTS (20's) are in waiting as well as King Numitor's Personal Guard, KESTER (30's).

(CONTINUED)

King Numitor turns to Rhea. His eyes tear up as he gently rubs her battered face.

KING NUMITOR

Whatever happens, know that I love  
you. Trust in the Gods. I know  
they will bring us together again.

King Numitor kisses her, turns, and mounts his horse.

RHEA SILVA

Papa, please! Papa!

AMULIUS

Enough! Take her to the Vestals.

END OF ACT ONE

## ACT TWO

INT. TEMPLE OF VESTA GROUNDS - VESTALS' RESIDENCE -  
PINARIA'S CHAMBER - DAY

Weathered-looking Vestals, PINARIA and SEXTILIA (70's), circle Rhea, who sits on a stool.

SEXTILIA

What shall we do with her?

PINARIA

The girl is hungry, dirty, battered,  
and frightened. We shall feed and  
bathe her, bind her wounds, and  
comfort her. What else?

MONTAGE:

Sextilia holds a plate of food. She raises spoonfuls to Rhea's mouth, but the girl refuses to eat.

Sextilia sighs and puts the plate down.

The women help Rhea to undress and put her in a hot bath.

They gently pat her dry and apply lotions to her wounds.

They run a comb through Rhea's tightly coiled hair, and gather it up, securing it with a ribbon.

They dress Rhea, and then take stock of their work.

END MONTAGE

PINARIA (CONT'D)

Sweet daughter, the worst is over.  
Calm yourself. Pray to the Goddess  
for inner peace.

There is a knock. Sextilia goes to the door and speaks with someone. A moment later, she steps back into the room.

SEXTILIA

Sossia has sent for her.

Sextilia and Pinaria exchange worried looks.

INT. RESIDENCE OF REX SACRORUM - DAY

Rex Sacrorum Lepidus (40's) lays on a table, naked, while a handsome young servant, ALERIO (late teens), massages his master's back and shoulders. Lepidus fidgets.

(CONTINUED)

ALERIO

Would you rather I prepare your bath?

Lepidus abruptly sits up.

LEPIDUS

Gods spare me that Vestal witch's  
trickery. She's up to something.

Lepidus gets off the table, wraps a towel around himself,  
and paces.

LEPIDUS (CONT'D)

Tomorrow you will deliver a dispatch  
to the palace reporting to the king  
that I have ordered Sossia to have  
Rhea ready to pass The Questioning  
before three months have passed.  
This then will serve as proof of my  
good faith. If the girl fails, it  
will be on Sossia.

Alerio nods.

Lepidus removes his towel, tosses it on the floor and climbs  
back up on the table, laying on his back.

LEPIDUS (CONT'D)

Tomorrow you will also begin working  
on the Vestal grounds. You will  
gather any information you can from  
my sources - you know who they are.

Alerio nods.

LEPIDUS (CONT'D)

You will bring all information to me  
only. Is this clear?

ALERIO

Yes, Master.

Lepidus reaches over and pulls Alerio closer. He takes one  
of Alerio's hands and runs it down his naked torso, and then  
lays back with his arms behind his head.

Alerio hesitates.

LEPIDUS

Go on. Do not be coy with me, Alerio.

ALERIO

Yes, Master.

(CONTINUED)

Alerio runs his lips over his master's chest, and slowly works his way down the naked abdomen. Lower...

Lepidus closes his eyes and sighs.

LEPIDUS

Mm... Yes. I can see her body.  
Make me feel it. Harder. Yes, she  
is indeed luscious, is she not?

(moans)

One day she will know the joy of a  
man - a powerful man. She will cry  
out with pleasure, but then I shall  
withhold myself until she begs.

Silence.

LEPIDUS (CONT'D)

Why do you stop? Go on... Yes...  
Like that... Yes, and then I shall  
take her - take her as no other man  
could. She- Yes! Like that, Alerio.  
Do not- Yes! Do not stop!

A LOW GROAN GATHERS IN INTENSITY UNTIL LEPIDUS GASPS AND BELLOWS. A FINAL GROAN...

LEPIDUS (CONT'D)

Ahhhhh. Yes... yes, my priestess!

Lepidus lays a moment and collects himself.

Alerio wipes his mouth with his forearm and lowers his eyes.

Lepidus gets up and wraps a towel around himself.

LEPIDUS (CONT'D)

Ah, she is indeed beautiful - and  
clever, but a woman nonetheless.  
She will not get the best of me.

(to Alerio)

Go and have hot water brought in.

EXT. LATIUM BORDERLANDS - DESERTED VINEYARD - EVENING

SUPER: NORTHERN LATIUM

Heavy footfalls. Rapid, panicked breaths. Dogs barking.

Rows of tall posts and ropes supporting vines confine RENATUS (18) to a narrow path. He ducks down and scrabbles in among the thickest of the vines.

Several rows away to his right, MAN 1 and MAN 2 (40's), each bearing a torch, trot to keep up with a barking dog.

(CONTINUED)



The dog stops, growls, and emits a series of yaps and howls.  
From out of nowhere, a light rain starts up.

MAN 1

The dog has found him! Hurry!

The men race to the dog and hold their torches high.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

There!

On the ground is a pile of ragged, filthy clothes.

MAN 2

Damn! May the gods' wrath rain down  
upon him.

Man 1 bends down, rubs the dog's body and pats him.

MAN 1

You followed the scent, boy. It is  
not your fault he got away.

The rain picks up. Within seconds, the torches sputter.

MAN 2

Let us go. It will be difficult  
enough to find our way back.

Amidst the vines, Renatus is huddled into a ball, shivering uncontrollably. Visible in the moonlight is a brand on his forearm that reads "DFR."

INT. TEMPLE GROUNDS - RESIDENCE OF THE HIGH PRIESTESS -  
EVENING

Candles flicker. Curls of smoke drift from incense burners.

Angry words are interrupted by purrs of pleasure.

SOSSIA (O.S.)

That spineless goat. The fool...

(moaning)

Mm- yes. Like that. Make me forget  
his wretched...handsome...face.

Yes, my sweetness. I loathe him...

(MORE)

Sossia, reclined on a sofa, wears a sheer robe. She sighs contentedly as Oppia, all curves and jiggling softness, stands behind and plants moist kisses on Sossia's neck.

THERE IS A KNOCK.

Oppia continues her exploration of Sossia's neck.

(CONTINUED)

Sossia sighs.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

The door.

Oppia goes to the door, opens it, and chats with someone.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

Let them in. Oppia! Sweet Vesta...

Oppia opens the door wider and steps back.

Pinaria enters, followed by Rhea and Sextilia. Rhea's face is a mask of anger and pain. She stares at the floor.

PINARIA

Holiest Mother, this is Rhea, daughter of Numitor.

Sossia gets up, turns, and eyes Rhea.

SOSSIA

By the Goddess, she is plain.

Rhea looks up. A flicker of defiance flashes in her eyes.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

And belligerent, too. Well, we shall change that. Your father was a coward, and I suspect that behind that harsh veneer of yours we shall find an even a bigger one.

EXT./INT. LATIUM BORDERLANDS - SMALL HOMESTEAD - SHED - THE SAME NIGHT

Renatus steals toward a shed, behind a small house. The door is open and he slips inside.

Moonlight filters into the shed through high windows. Renatus looks around - tools and deserted animal stalls...

He picks up a feed-bag and pours the few remnants of grain into his mouth, but nearly chokes on the dry mixture.

Spying a blanket, he wraps it around himself and nestles down in the corner of a stall. Within seconds, he is asleep.

INT. RESIDENCE OF THE HIGH PRIESTESS - THE SAME EVENING

Sossia circles Rhea slowly. She fingers Rhea's hair.

SOSSIA

Do something with this ragweed.

(CONTINUED)

Pinaria nods.

SEXTILIA

Yes, Your Radiance.

SOSSIA

(to Oppia)

A lamp.

Oppia brings a lamp. Sossia frowns and motions for her to hold it up.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

Harsh... a barnyard animal's mein.  
Quite surprising for noble lineage.  
Perhaps powder to soften the angles  
and mask the puffy flesh.

PINARIA

The swelling and bruises will subside.

SOSSIA

We shall work with what little the  
Goddess gives us.

Rhea's eyes slowly tear up.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

My, my. Our little ragweed is upset.  
Why is that?

PINARIA

She has been through much, Holiest.

SEXTILIA

She is frightened, but wishes to  
please.

Rhea continues to stare at the floor. Tears plop onto the floor tiles.

SOSSIA

Daughter of Numitor, look at me!

Rhea reluctantly raises her head.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

Why the tears? Rejoice, daughter.  
The new king has smiled upon you,  
despite your traitorous ties. You  
are to be trained to become a Vestal.

RHEA SILVA

My father is the king.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

His brother - my uncle - may sit upon the throne, but he is no king.

SOSSIA

Your childish views are of interest to no one. Hold your tongue or I shall have you gagged.

Sossia motions toward Oppia.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

This is Vestal Oppia. She will train you.

Pinaria exchanges an astonished glance with Sextilia.

OPPIA

But Radiant One-

Sossia raises a finger ever so slightly. Oppia stops.

SOSSIA

A difficult task it will be, but she is equal to it. But the responsibility ultimately lies with you. If you fail me, frankly, I shall be quite pleased. You are unfit for the Sisterhood. King Amulius, well, he may have a different reaction - one that would prove unhealthy for your father.

SEXTILIA

She will not fail. I shall assist.

SOSSIA

You will focus on your own tasks and leave the preparation to Oppia.

Sextilia nods.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

Go now. You have ten days to ready her for the feast day procession. Prepare her hair in the Vestal style.

Oppia frowns.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

And veil her! The Goddess only knows whether it will help.

Pinaria, Sextilia, and Rhea leave the room.

(CONTINUED)

OPPIA

Holiest-

SOSSIA

Hold your tongue and open your ears.  
You will instruct the girl.

OPPIA

But-

Sossia raises a hand and cuts Oppia off.

SOSSIA

I am aware of your limitations as an  
instructor, but it is of no  
consequence. When she stands for  
The Questioning, she must not pass.

Oppia looks puzzled.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

I shall then report that she refused  
to learn. Do you not see?

Oppia's gaze is empty and uncomprehending.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

(waving Oppia off)

Go. I know you will do your best.

Oppia leaves and heads down the hallway.

Inside her chamber, Sossia approaches her corner altar and  
raises her hands, palms-up, and gazes at a lamp's flame.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

Sweet Goddess, the sands of the  
hourglass cannot be stopped. I have  
barely a year left as high priestess.

(beat)

I need Claudinia if the Sisterhood  
is to succeed under my guidance.

(beat)

Yes, my Goddess. As you command.

EXT. ALBA LONGA - GROUNDS-KEEPER'S HUT.

Inside the hut, Carbo holds the blade of his sword against  
the Grounds-keeper's neck.

Lucanus stands millimeters away from the Grounds-keeper's  
daughter. He inhales deeply.

(CONTINUED)

LUCANUS

A sweet scent. I can tell that she  
wants me. What do you think?

Lucanus makes to unlace his breeches.

GROUNDS-KEEPER

Wait! Stop. The boy was whimpering -  
stuck between the door and the cart.  
I moved it. I did not know what to  
do. I freed him. He ran and said  
he was running to his uncle.

CARBO

Run to Amulius?

TEEN-AGED GIRL

Urbicus. The boy calls him 'uncle.'

CARBO

Shit. He is in the palace.

Outside, HORNS BLARE IN AN URGENT CADENCE.

LUCANUS

We are being mustered.

Carbo lowers his blade.

CARBO

If the boy shows again, you will  
hold him. Understood?

INT. LATIUM BORDERLANDS - SMALL HOMESTEAD - SHED - DAY

HEAVY SNORING. THE DOOR OF THE SHED SQUEAKS. FOOTSTEPS...

A booted foot nudges Renatus. Another nudge - harder.  
Renatus opens his eyes. Startled, he backs into the corner.

Standing over him with a club is BARO, a peasant in his 40's.

RENATUS

Who are you? Where am I?

BARO

I am Baro, and I ask, 'Who are you?'  
You are on my land. Speak!

Renatus remains silent.

BARO (CONT'D)

You are a deserter from the army.  
(MORE)

Renatus pulls the blanket to cover the brand on his arm.

(CONTINUED)

BARO (CONT'D)

Do not hide it. Had I not seen it,  
I would have bashed your skull in.

RENATUS

I am Renatus, and, yes, a deserter.

Baro notices whip scars on the man.

BARO

You ran once. They flogged and  
branded you.

RENATUS

Correct.

BARO

You have run again. This time they  
will put you to a slow death.

RENATUS

Only if they catch me.

BARO

Where have you come from?

RENATUS

The north. Kidnapped when I was  
fifteen. Days later, I found myself  
deep in the mountains. Discipline  
was harsh, but I survived by learning  
the ways of the army and keeping  
silent. Deep inside, though, I knew  
that one day I would run.

BARO

My young fool, years have passed.  
She is likely with husband and  
children.

RENATUS

She still waits for me - I believe  
that with all my heart.

BARO

Come. We shall get you some clothes  
and food. And you can tell me about  
this love of yours.

INT. CANDIDATES' RESIDENCE - DAY

Pinaria and Rhea enter the Dining Chamber

Three young Vestal candidates - Aemilia (7) and twins, Minucia  
and Tuccia (6) - are seated at a table.

(CONTINUED)

PINARIA

Rhea, these are our youngest novices -  
Minucia, Tuccia, and Aemilia.

(to the girls)

Say hello to Rhea, daughters.

MINUCIA, TUCCIA, AND AEMILIA (together)

The Goddess's blessings be upon  
you, Rhea!

Rhea approaches the table and gently strokes the girls' hair.

RHEA SILVA

By the gods, they are precious!

In the center of the table is a pile of reeds.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

What are you doing, little ones?

AEMILIA

We are making mats for the altar in  
our chamber.

MINUCIA

(holding up her mat)

Look at mine!

TUCCIA

I am going to paint mine.

RHEA SILVA

They are both lovely.

PINARIA

Daughters, where is Claudinia?

AEMILIA

She is in her chamber.

PINARIA

Claudinia is our fourth candidate.  
She was to fill the next vacancy-

RHEA SILVA

But now I am to take her place.

Pinaria nods and leads her out into hallway.

PINARIA

Our initiates usually come to us at  
a very young age. We judge when  
they are ready to be tested. If  
they pass, they are invested and  
serve for ten years or more.

(CONTINUED)



Pinaria stops at a door, taps on it, and they step inside

CLAUDINIA'S CHAMBER

A tiny, sparsely-furnished cell. Seated at a table heaped with scrolls - a striking blond, CLAUDINIA (16).

CLAUDINIA

Mother Pinaria, the ancient languages are too difficult.

PINARIA

But the secrets they unlock for us are beyond value.

Pinaria urges Rhea forward.

CLAUDINIA

Why, hello.

PINARIA

Claudina, this is Rhea. She will be in the chamber next to you.

CLAUDINIA

Finally someone my age!

PINARIA

When she is settled, you will show her our home and share what you know about a candidate's life here.

CLAUDINIA

I am glad that you and I shall be friends. Oh, the Goddess is good, is she not?!

PINARIA

Four Vestals now serve at the altar, but one of them - Fabiola - is ill.

CLAUDINIA

I have great sorrow for her, but I shall soon pass The Questioning and shall be ready if she dies.

PINARIA

(to Rhea)

The tasks that lay before you are arduous, but you have been chosen by Vesta to serve. It is a great honor.

RHEA SILVA

It is one I did not ask for.

(CONTINUED)

Barely holding back sobs, Rhea leaves the room.

CLAUDINIA  
Why is she saying that?

Pinaria enters Rhea's chamber. Rhea lays face-down on her cot. Pinaria sits and strokes Rhea's back. Rhea sits up.

RHEA SILVA  
What? What can you possibly say?  
It is the will of the gods? It is  
Vesta's will?

PINARIA  
You are right to be confused - angry  
even. But here you are.

RHEA SILVA  
I will not do this to her.

PINARIA  
She will become a Vestal in time.

Claudinia stands in the doorway.

CLAUDINIA  
What do you mean? This cannot be!  
(to Rhea)  
How did you do this? Your father -  
he has bought your way in. I have  
heard of such things. Who is he?

PINARIA  
Enough, Claudinia.

RHEA SILVA  
He is a king in exile. Your king.

CLAUDINIA  
I don't understand.

PINARIA  
Rhea is King Numitor's daughter.

Claudinia sobs and runs out of the room.

PINARIA (CONT'D)  
She will come to understand in time.  
Pray now. Pray that you both will  
learn to accept your fate.

RHEA SILVA  
Pray? Who is listening?

END OF ACT TWO

## ACT THREE

EXT. OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE OF VESTA - MORNING - DAYS LATER

Preparations are underway for a procession.

Two Vestals are stationed on either side of the temple door: LUCRETIA (17), a flawless redhead, and VALERIA (16), a slightly built brunette beauty.

Pinaria stands with the Vestal Novices - Aemilia, Minuccia, and Tuccia - who bounce excitedly, and Rhea, who stands next to Claudinia. Neither makes eye contact with the other.

Claudinia eyes Rhea's hair: Claudinia's hair is plainly pulled back. Rhea's is done up in the Vestal style with many plaits and a pure white fillet.

Nearby, the eldest Vestal, Sextilia, holds a rope. The other end is tied around the neck of a PREGNANT HEIFER. A wreath of flowers hangs around its neck. It MOOS uncomfortably.

Slaves flank an elegant cushioned litter. Behind it is a large cart festooned with flowers.

A GONG RINGS OUT three times. SILENCE.

Sossia and Oppia step out from the darkness of the temple into the bright morning light. They stop.

Sossia holds a golden chain from which a large censer hangs. Smoke drifts up from it. Oppia holds a small golden box.

Sossia nods to Oppia. Oppia opens the box. Sossia spoons incense onto the coals. Smoke billows out. Oppia snaps the box shut and puts it in an inner pocket of her vestment.

Sossia then walks three times around the Pregnant Heifer, swinging the censer.

Sossia stops and addresses the Vestals, the Vestal Novices, and a TOWNSPEOPLE who have gathered inside the temple grounds.

SOSSIA

It is the Feast of the Fordicidia,  
when we offer the sacrifice of the  
two spirits to the Earth Mother.

Sossia lifts her hands, palms up, in prayer.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

We humbly beseech you, Earth Mother  
Tellus, to grant robust fertility to  
the seeds that have been sown for  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

the next crop and in our livestock.  
Accept and bless our offering.

VESTALS/VESTAL NOVICES

We give thanks to the Sacred Mother  
in whose womb are nourished the seeds  
of our lands and its people.

Sossia nods to TWO SLAVES who stand off to the side holding the handles of a stretcher.

On the stretcher lies the frail body of Vestal FABIOLA, a wisp of a woman.

The SLAVES position the stretcher in the back of the cart.

Fabiola's face is veiled. Her chest heaves slowly with labored breathing.

Sossia swings the censer and walks three times around the cart and then stops at the stretcher in the back.

SOSSIA

As we prepare our sacrifice, we ask  
that the Mother bestow upon our  
sister, Fabiola, renewed health and  
vigor so that she may serve the  
Goddess. If this is not to be, may  
the Earth Mother welcome Fabiola  
back to her womb and guide her to  
Elysium.

Sossia hands Oppia the chain bearing the censer.

VESTALS/VESTAL NOVICES

May this be done, we pray.

Sossia nods to Pinaría, who herds the Novices into formation.

Sextilia leads the PREGNANT HEIFER into position, falling in behind the Novices. As it lumbers along, it MOOS WEARILY.

Sossia approaches the litter, raising a finger and gesturing slightly. Pinaría nudges Rhea forward. Rhea moves reluctantly toward the litter.

Oppia, too, is moving toward the litter, but Sossia stops her with an upraised hand. Oppia looks confused.

SOSSIA

Behind.

Scowling, Oppia takes up a position behind the cart and Rhea and Sossia step into the litter.

(CONTINUED)

OFF TO THE SIDE...

A SMALL CROWD OF WORSHIPERS stands quietly. Among them is Alerio. His eyes are riveted on Lucretia.

Lucretia gazes downward, but manages to steal a look at him. He flashes a smile. She feigns disinterest. He laughs.

Oppia watches the sparks fly between Lucretia and Alerio.

OPPIA

A dangerous path, Lucretia...

Slaves lift the litter and the procession starts off.

The WARBLING TONES OF CRUDE HORNS BLARE as TWO YOUNG MUSICIANS BEGIN TO PLAY. They are flanked by TWO STANDARD BEARERS at the head of the Vestal procession.

INSIDE THE LITTER...

Sossia examines Rhea.

SOSSIA

I am quite surprised, Ragweed. You look almost presentable today.

RHEA SILVA

Why am I here?

SOSSIA

The people must see that you willingly seek to join our ranks and support our leaders. Besides, today is the Fordicidia. Did you never attend any feast day rites?

Silence.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

Ah, yes. Your mother, the heretic. Of course your father did no better. I believe he wanted three sons, but there you were... I hear you wield a sword like a man.

RHEA SILVA

I can take care of myself.

SOSSIA

We Vestals do not believe in swords. We do not need them.

Sossia closes her eyes and turns her palms upward in prayer.

EXT. LATIUM SOUTHERN BORDER - NUMITOR'S CAMP - DAY

King Numitor sits on a stool next to a small table, examining a small strip of parchment. His personal guard, Kester, stands off to the side.

KING NUMITOR

So she puts a prayer slip like this  
in the box at the altar every morning.

Numitor holds the parchment up to the light and reads.

KING NUMITOR (CONT'D)

'Vesta, if you are indeed a goddess,  
show me: Send my uncle to the depths  
of Tartarus to rot for all eternity.'

He sets the small parchment on the table.

KING NUMITOR (CONT'D)

That would be Rhea.

KESTER

The raven arrived from our contact  
at mid-day, My Lord.

KING NUMITOR

Birds - they bring the only real  
proof that Rhea still lives.

KESTER

But they also bear reports to Amulius  
from his spies - that is if my men  
have not shot them down as they are  
dispatched to the capital.

KING NUMITOR

You serve me well, Kester. I am  
grateful for your loyalty.

EXT. ALBA LONGA - CITY STREET - DAY

The Vestal litter moves down a narrow street toward a square.

INSIDE THE LITTER

Sossia's head is bowed in prayer.

Rhea looks through the curtain at the crowds gathered to  
catch a glimpse of the Vestals.

The litter unexpectedly stops, rocking gently.

Sossia's eyes open. She speaks through the curtain to a  
GUARD OUTSIDE THE LITTER.

(CONTINUED)

SOSSIA

Inform whoever it is that they must  
yield and let us pass. Start the  
procession. Now!

Outside...

THE SOUNDS OF THE VESTAL HORNS CLASH WITH DISTANT DRUMS THAT  
BEAT OUT A SLOW, MOURNFUL CADENCE:

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP! THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!

The DRUMS GROW LOUDER: THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!! THUMP,  
THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!

The banners of Vesta's High Priestess flap wildly as the  
Vestal procession moves forward toward the open square ahead.

From a side street, another procession moves into the square:

DRUMMERS flanked by MEN BEARING DARK BANNERS followed by a  
litter marked with flags and carrying a JUDGE (50s).

It is followed by FOUR GUARDS, who surround a young PRISONER.

The Prisoner walks with his head down. His hands are bound.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!! THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!!

INSIDE THE VESTAL LITTER...

Rhea is peering out through the nearly transparent curtain.

RHEA SILVA

What is happening?

Sossia ignores her.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

Please.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!! THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!!

SOSSIA

A prisoner is being led to the Square  
of Justice for punishment.

RHEA SILVA

What will they do to him?

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!! THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!!

The prisoner's procession continues to move forward.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!! THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!!

(CONTINUED)

Neither column yields, and both must stop.

Claudinia finds herself standing near Oppia.

OPPIA

(to Claudinia)

Rhea's hair looks so lovely today,  
does it not? She will make a striking  
Vestal.

CLAUDINIA

What transpires is Vesta's will.

OPPIA

Fool. What transpires is what we  
make happen. You are better suited  
to serve. Make it happen or I shall  
do it for you. I loathe that brat.

AT THE PRISONER'S PROCESSION, INSIDE THE JUDGE'S LITTER...

JUDGE

(speaking through the  
curtain)

Why have we stopped?

JUDGE'S GUARD OUTSIDE THE LITTER

The law prohibits hindering the  
movement of a Vestal procession. We  
must yield.

JUDGE

Gods damn those little whores.

AT THE VESTAL PROCESSION...

A CROWD has gathered around the High Priestess's litter.

For long moments, there is no movement, no sound.

THE VOICE OF THE HIGH PRIESTESS RINGS OUT FROM THE LITTER.

SOSSIA (O.S.)

What has this man done?

The Crowd BUZZES.

The litter is lowered and Sossia steps out in plain view.

She is flawless - powerful - confident.

The CROWD GASPS.

Rhea steps out. The wind blows the veil away from her face.

(CONTINUED)



LOUD MURMURS from the Crowd as she is recognized.

MAN 1 IN SQUARE

The Daughter of Numitor! There was talk that she was to join the Vestals.

WOMAN 1 IN SQUARE

Pray for us, Holy Daughter of Numitor!

Oppia barely conceals a scowl. Claudinia's eyes show fire.

The GUARD IN CHARGE of the Prisoner approaches Sossia.

GUARD IN CHARGE

He has stolen, Your Holiness.

RHEA SILVA

What will they do to him?

SOSSIA

He is to lose a hand, of course.

A look of horror flashes across Rhea's face.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

(to Rhea)

Perfect. Now we shall see just how ready you are to serve the goddess.

INT. LATIUM SOUTHERN BORDER - NUMITOR'S CAMP - DAY

Kester stands before King Numitor.

KESTER

Sire, about your son... We have expanded our search for him, but there is yet no news.

KING NUMITOR

I know in my heart that he lives.

KESTER

We are sending men onto the palace grounds under cover.

KING NUMITOR

The guard - the one who killed Flavius - have you found him?

KESTER

Yes, Sire. We shall grab him tonight or tomorrow as the opportunity presents itself.

(CONTINUED)

KING NUMITOR

There is no time to waste. And do  
what you must to make him talk!

EXT. ALBA LONGA - SMALL CITY SQUARE - MOMENTS LATER

The Crowd has grown more and more restless.

MAN 1 IN SQUARE

Justice! Justice for this thief!

MAN 2 IN SQUARE

His hand! He must lose a hand!

Rhea looks around at the agitated throng.

SOSSIA

The people have lost all compassion.  
They lust for the spectacle of others'  
torment - all because of your father's  
tyrannical rule.

RHEA SILVA

That is false.

SOSSIA

Is it?

At the prisoner's procession... The Judge steps out of the  
litter and faces the Vestals.

JUDGE

Most Holy Vestal Mother! The sentence  
is proscribed by law! The people  
will have justice! Surely the Goddess  
demands no less.

FURIOUS SHOUTS AND SCREAMS! FINALLY, A CHANT.

CROWD

His hand! His hand! His hand! His  
hand, his hand, his hand!

The drums start up again, fueled by the fervor of the Crowd.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!! THUMP, THUMP, THUMP-THUMP!!!

The VESTAL HORNS BLARE! Sossia raises her hands. Silence.

SOSSIA

People of Latium! The Fates have  
caused my path to cross that of one  
awaiting punishment! It is a sign  
that an injustice has been committed!

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE

This man has been fairly judged!

SOSSIA

Vestal law supersedes the laws of man! It is now for me to decide the punishment of the prisoner! Bring him to me!

The PRISONER'S GUARDS lead the Prisoner through the Crowd.

People spit at the man or strike him. The Guards all but drag him the rest of the way and push him to his knees before the High Priestess.

He lowers his head in shame and fear. Sossia grasps his chin and lifts his face.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

Truly a thief... I can see it.

From off to the side, Rhea studies the young man's face. His eyes show the struggles of his life. He trembles.

SCREAMS FOR PUNISHMENT COME FROM THE CROWD.

RHEA SILVA

Please, no. It cannot be so.

Sossia steps toward the Crowd, pulling Rhea long with her.

SOSSIA

The daughter of Numitor has petitioned to become one of us. Her father, the former king, has retired to the borderlands to regain health and strength. Let us now heed the judgment of his daughter.

RHEA SILVA

What?

SOSSIA

What say you, Rhea Silva? What is the just fate of this man?

RESTLESS CRIES FROM THE CROWD GROW IN INTENSITY.

All eyes are riveted on Rhea.

RHEA SILVA

(to herself)

Mother, please help me!

END OF ACT THREE

## ACT FOUR

A sudden, deafening silence.

Rhea looks around.

Everything and everyone around her - frozen in time. No motion. No sound.

The silence is broken by A SOFT FEMALE VOICE.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Rhea... Look into the man's eyes.  
Let his eyes speak to your heart.  
You will know what to do.

RHEA SILVA

Mother?

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Do it now. Look into his eyes.

Rhea reaches down and grasps the man's chin, pulling his face upward. She looks into his eyes...deeper, deeper.

RHEA HAS A VISION:

The Prisoner holds a sick woman in his arms. In the background, TWO YOUNG CHILDREN CRY.

The young man moves through a market place. As he does so, he snatches fruit from a cart and hides it inside his tunic.

As he rushes away, someone knocks him. The fruit falls out of his tunic.

SELLER (V.O.)

Stop, thief! Stop that man!

The Prisoner picks up the fruit and runs off.

SELLER (CONT'D)

Grab him! Grab that thief!

THE VISION ENDS.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

You have seen the truth, daughter.  
Wield it without fear.

RHEA SILVA

Yes...Mother.

RESTLESS MURMURING FROM THE CROWD BECOMES SHOUTS OF ANGER.

(CONTINUED)

SOSSIA  
 (loudly, to the Crowd)  
 What say you, Rhea Silva? What is  
 the just fate of this man?

Rhea struggles to speak. Sossia hisses under her breath.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)  
 Unsuitable - as I thought. I shall  
 show you how it is done! The young  
 man shall lose both hands!  
 (to the Crowd)  
 People of Alba Longa...!

Rhea gathers herself, her strength building, her anger  
 mounting.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)  
 Do not let her do this!

Rhea looks at the Prisoner. His whole body trembles.

SOSSIA  
 (to the Crowd)  
 I have conferred with the daughter  
 of Numitor! We find that the  
 punishment indeed does not fit the  
 crime! So that all will understand  
 fully that to steal is an affront to  
 the Goddess, we have decided-

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)  
 Do it! Do it now!

Rhea forcefully steps out in front of Sossia.

RHEA SILVA  
 Hear me Alba Longa! By law, this  
 man is to lose a hand! But I have  
 looked into his eyes and I tell you,  
 this shall not come to pass!

SOSSIA  
 What are you doing, you fool?

The CROWD'S DISCONTENTED MURMURS GROW MORE UNSETTLING.

JUDGE  
 What?! Impossible!

RHEA SILVA  
 I tell you, this man is innocent of  
 any crime! He took food not out of  
 greed, but to feed his family!  
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

Rhea looks down at the Prisoner.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)  
Is this not so?

The man nods and, overcome, begins to weep.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)  
I tell you: This man's hands shall  
serve the priests and priestesses of  
the city! From this day forward, he  
will labor in the fields that serve  
the religious of Alba Longa!

The Crowd is drawn to her and grows quiet.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)  
There he will work for the rest of  
his days in harmony with the Earth  
and at one with the Goddess! For  
his labors, he will receive a fair  
share of food so that he and his  
family might live!

DISGRUNTLED MURMURS CHANGE TO SHOUTS OF SUPPORT.

Rhea turns toward the Judge.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)  
Release this man!

CROWD  
Release him! Release him!

JUDGE  
(sotto voce)  
You will pay for this indignity,  
young slut of the Goddess.

RHEA SILVA  
(addressing the Crowd)  
Go now, children of Vesta, and as  
the sun sets, give thanks at your  
hearths, for Vesta's justice prevails!

ROARS OF APPROVAL WITH SHOUTING, JUMPING, AND DANCING.

Suddenly the Crowd TAKES UP A CHANT.

CROWD  
Rhea! Rhea! Rhea! Rhea! Rhea!

A WOMAN IN THE CROWD weeps and touches the hem of Rhea's  
dress.

(CONTINUED)

## WOMAN IN THE CROWD

May the Goddess keep you safe. This day, you have saved my son.

Rhea, powerful and confident, basks in the Crowd's adoration. She turns toward Sossia.

## RHEA SILVA

This is the just fate of the man.

Rhea moves toward the litter. Sossia, taken aback, follows.

## SOSSIA

(to herself)

So it is to be like that, my little Ragweed? By the Goddess, you will pay for your arrogance. You will learn to obey.

## WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

There is hope for you, young mortal.

EXT. ALBA LONGA - CENTRAL SQUARE - MOMENTS LATER

The Vestals and Novices stand before a raised stone platform in the center of the large square.

Sossia and Rhea climb the steps and stand next to a young priest, the FLAMEN OF CERES (30). He wears a long robe and tall headpiece.

The quivering body of the heifer is splayed out on the main altar. The heifer's front and rear legs are bound and stretched to expose her underbelly. The heifer SNORTS LOUDLY AND MOOS IN FEAR.

Also on the platform, on a smaller altar, is a pile of straw.

## SOSSIA

Oh Earth Mother! We offer to you these two lives through one sacrifice. Accept our gift and render the seeds of our plants and livestock fertile.

Sossia steps back and pulls Rhea away from the altar. She nods to the Flamen of Ceres.

He steps forward, unsheathes a large gold knife, and thrusts it deep under the rib-cage and up into the heart of the beast.

The animal thrashes. Its eyes roll back into their sockets.

Blood runs freely to the edges of the altar where it flows into ridges and down off the altar into a large urn.

(CONTINUED)

Sossia joins the priest.

FLAMEN OF CERES/SOSSIA

Oh Goddess Ceres, we ask that you intercede on our behalf, so that the Mother might accept this sacrifice of the unborn calf and deliver us from drought, flood, and pestilence.

VESTALS/VESTAL NOVICES

We beseech you, Goddess. Hear our prayer.

Sossia steps back next to Rhea.

The priest again inserts the knife into the heifer's abdomen and slices toward the legs.

Rhea is horrified and turns away.

Working swiftly, he sets the knife down. Reaching into the animal's body, he retrieves the fetus of the unborn calf.

The priest carries the fetus to the pile of hay and sets it down. He bows and moves off to the side.

Sossia nods to Oppia, who climbs the steps of the platform. Oppia hands the censer and tongs to Sossia.

Sossia removes several embers from the censer and places them in the hay.

The kindling and hay rapidly catch fire and the smell of the roasting fetus fills the air. Sossia turns to the Crowd.

SOSSIA

It is done. The ashes of the unborn calf will be brought together with horse blood and bean straw to form the sacred suffimen mixture for the Festival of Parilia.

(turning to the Crowd)

Go now, children of the Goddess.  
The sacrifice is complete.

VESTALS/VESTAL NOVICES

We give thanks to the Sacred Mother in whose womb are nourished the seeds of our lands and its people.

Smoke snakes its way across the platform. Rhea closes her eyes and covers her mouth and nose with her hands.

VESTAL BUGLES SOUND as Sossia moves back next to Rhea.

(CONTINUED)



The Vestals and Vestal Novices form up for the return procession.

Repulsed and, at the same time, inexplicably drawn to the gruesome mound of bloodied flesh on the main altar and the fetus that sizzles in the fire, Rhea sways precariously.

Sossia impatiently nudges her.

SOSSIA

Go, Ragweed.

Rhea's eyes close and she wobbles on her feet. She cannot escape the smoke and begins to turn green.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

Ragweed?

Rhea collapses into a heap on the platform.

SOSSIA (CONT'D)

As I thought. Weak.

INT. TEMPLE OF VESTA GROUNDS - GALLERY COURTYARD - EVENING

Rhea sits on a bench near the fountain in the Gallery Courtyard.

In the center of the fountain is a statue of Vesta. She holds a bright gold flame in her upraised hand.

From the flame, water bubbles out and downward into a curved basin inlaid with tiles to form a map of Latium.

Rhea stares at the water.

Claudinia walks up to the fountain and bows her head in silent prayer. Her face shows anger - and sadness.

Rhea watches her.

Claudinia opens her eyes.

RHEA SILVA

What gods would demand the senseless slaughter of a mother animal with her unborn?

Silence.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

The disgusting rituals and prayers that sound like a street magician's incantations - this is what you long for?

(CONTINUED)

Claudinia is furious.

CLAUDINIA

We perform the rites because we believe in the Goddess and serve the people. You are a hypocrite! You stood there all puffed up and full of yourself when the Crowd chanted your name. You loved it. You drank it all in.

RHEA SILVA

I played the role of pretty little priestess as expected, nothing more.

CLAUDINIA

Just shut up! You do not realize how great the opportunity is that you have been given.

Rhea bolts to her feet.

RHEA SILVA

Oh, I am truly lucky, Claudinia. To never know the love of a man or the joy of motherhood. What fortune!

CLAUDINIA

When we become Vestals, we offer ourselves up as channels, allowing Vesta's grace and strength to flow through us to others. You are too full of yourself to realize it.

RHEA SILVA

Hollow little trinkets - that is all you are.

CLAUDINIA

Our beauty and purity make us worthy vessels for this task. Our courage enables us to reach out to the people in a way that no other women can. Vestals can own land and have other privileges you do not yet understand!

Rhea gets in Claudinia's face.

RHEA SILVA

It is you who does not understand. I do not care. Even if she does exist, why would I do anything for a goddess who would see my family destroyed?

(CONTINUED)

CLAUDINIA

Because it is all bigger than your  
own small life. If you are so  
convinced that all of this is nothing  
but a farce, then leave.

RHEA SILVA

I will - when my father sends word,  
I will escape. And to Hades with  
you and your goddess!

END OF ACT FOUR

## ACT FIVE

INT. BARO'S HOME - THE SAME NIGHT

Renatus laces his tunic and glances down, pleased.

RENATUS

It is time. I must set out for the capital.

BARO

Barely two weeks have passed. They are still looking for you.

RENATUS

I am sorry, my friend.

Baro, seated at a small table, motions to Renatus.

BARO

Then come, sit. Tonight we shall drink to the success of your quest.

Renatus sits. Baro pours them ale. They tap large mugs and down the contents. Baro pours more.

RENATUS

I thank you for your help. I know you do so at great risk.

BARO

I, too, have suffered the savagery of those bastards who held you. Whenever they pass through the region, all hide until they are gone. Two years ago, the Fates did not afford my wife and me such favor.

Baro downs his drink. Renatus follows suit and pours more.

BARO (CONT'D)

A group of soldiers was traveling through the area and attacked my wife and me. I fought as best I could, but they severely beat me and tied me up to watch.

The men down their ale. Baro refills their cups.

BARO (CONT'D)

They raped her repeatedly. For two days and two nights they brutalized her. When they left, she never recovered. She died soon after.

(CONTINUED)

RENATUS

May the gods bring them a painful death. The will of the gods is difficult to understand sometimes.

BARO

I piss on the will of the gods. Is it just to cause such suffering? We pray to them for guidance and help. What we get in return is shit.

LATER, THE SAME NIGHT...

Both Baro and Renatus are slurring words.

BARO

You have a long way to go to find that woman of yours, Renatus. The closest town is Viterbo. From there, it is still a good 80 milia passus to Alba Longa.

RENATUS

I am strong. I can make it.

Renatus rubs the brand on his arm.

Half-drunk, Baro gets up and stumbles across the room. He pulls out an item from a cupboard and hands it to Renatus.

BARO

You will need this.

It is a forearm guard. Renatus slips it on. He tries to lace it, but is too drunk. It hangs loose from his arm.

RENATUS

Perfect.

BARO

So who is this love of yours?

Renatus's face lights up.

RENATUS

She is a vision. Curves like a goddess. Smart - and strong. I love her. Rhea - that is her name.

BARO

A fine name.

RENATUS

We grew up together.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RENATUS (CONT'D)

One day we both realized that we were deeply in love. Numitor, her father-

BARO

Numitor? King Numitor?

RENATUS

The same.

Baro laughs uncontrollably.

BARO

The king? His daughter? You have big ones, my friend.

RENATUS

I loved her. I mean I love her, and she loves me. I am sure.

Renatus slams his cup down. Ale flies everywhere.

RENATUS (CONT'D)

Strange thing, but her mother would have blessed our union. She could see into my heart. She knew my love was true.

BARO

So your plan is to make your way through dense forests without being caught, reach Alba Longa, and then find your Rhea, defy her father - the king - and steal her away.

RENATUS

Correct.

Baro shakes his head.

BARO

A dumb, dangerous, disastrous plan, my friend...

Baro raises his mug.

BARO (CONT'D)

...But I love it!

They bash their mugs together and down their drinks.

BARO (CONT'D)

May the gods be kinder to you than they were to me, the selfish bastards.

(CONTINUED)

Baro picks up the pitcher and pours.

RENATUS

Selfish they may be, my friend, but  
they have done you a great favor...

Renatus raises his mug.

RENATUS (CONT'D)

They have given you an ale worthy of  
even the gods themselves!

Baro guffaws as Renatus nods and slurps his drink.

BARO

The evening is still young. Let us  
drink... Me, to forget, and you, to  
remember.

Renatus looks confused.

BARO (CONT'D)

Me, to forget the misery they have  
caused me. You, so that on your  
journey, you will remember to stay  
out of the rain. If your luck is  
anything like mine, it is nothing  
more than the gods taking a piss.

INT. TEMPLE OF VESTA - DAYS LATER - DAWN

Rhea slowly makes her way through the temple to its center  
where a huge statue of Vesta rises upward, illuminated by  
rays of light coming from an opening - an "oculus" - at the  
highest point of the temple's vault.

Vesta's upraised arm holds a large glass lens. The other  
points down to a marble pit at the altar in the front of the  
temple where a fire burns.

At the base of the statue - a large basin to catch rain.

Rhea looks up at Vesta's cold, empty eyes. The eyes SUDDENLY  
DART IN HER DIRECTION!

Rhea jumps, then struggles to stifle a laugh at herself.  
She looks again at the cold, empty eyes and shakes her head.

A raised platform at the front of the temple holds, in the  
middle, a large, curved disk of highly-polished gold.

Two Vestals sit motionless, one on either side of the altar.  
One is Oppia; the other, Lucretia.

(CONTINUED)

Rhea continues toward the front of the altar and stops at an ornate wooden box that sits atop a pedestal.

She fishes out a slip of parchment up from her tunic, folds it in half, drops it into the box, and closes the lid.

A hand on her shoulder startles her.

PINARIA (O.S.)

Very good, daughter. Prayer slips remind the Goddess of our petitions.

RHEA SILVA

I should think a goddess would know them already.

Rhea turns around to face Pinarria.

PINARIA

These small rituals are as much for us as for the Goddess. They give us a private moment to reflect on our feelings - even vent our vilest anger.

Rhea nods sheepishly. Pinarria stares at the Vestal fire.

PINARIA (CONT'D)

Do you know why the fire is so sacred to us?

Rhea shakes her head.

PINARIA (CONT'D)

Because it is as pure and clean as can be anything in this world. We take our oath of chastity so that we might remain as pure and uncorrupted as Vesta's fire.

Pinarria puts her arm around Rhea and steers her over to the statue of Vesta in the center of the temple.

PINARIA (CONT'D)

Once a year, the Fire of Vesta is extinguished. The new fire must be born of pure sunbeams.

Pinarria points to the glass atop the statue.

PINARIA (CONT'D)

We gather the sunbeams using the disk that Vesta holds in her hand.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



PINARIA (CONT'D)

Once started, the flame is carried to all the other temples throughout the city so that it may bring safety and security to all.

Rhea nods wearily.

PINARIA (CONT'D)

I know there is a lot to learn, but I tell you these things so that you may begin to better understand the Sisterhood and its ways. Come. Walk.

EXT. TEMPLE OF VESTA GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Pinaria and Rhea walk across a small square.

PINARIA

I know that you have lost your brothers and that your soul aches more than ever to be with your father once again.

Rhea's eyes fill with tears.

PINARIA (CONT'D)

Whether what transpired was the will of the gods, I do not know. But I do know that a new path requires courage and the will to leave behind what was your former life.

Rhea takes the words in.

PINARIA (CONT'D)

I speak of your loved ones, daughter. If you are to move forward, you must properly mourn those you have lost.

Rhea breaks out into sobs.

RHEA SILVA

It is true. I have not said good-bye. I carry it all inside, hoping that I shall wake and find myself back in the warmth of my home, where the air is filled with the laughter of my young brothers.

PINARIA

Tomorrow, at first light, meet me here. You must do this, Rhea.

EXT. BANK OF A STREAM - FIRST LIGHT - THE NEXT MORNING

Rhea finishes making a reed token - a "stick figure" of a boy. Her face is red and puffy. She looks drained.

Pinaria holds a basket with a small candle burning in it.

PINARIA

Now put the it in the basket.

Rhea puts the token in.

PINARIA (CONT'D)

Now the token of your mother.

RHEA SILVA

I cannot.

PINARIA

You must. Let the river carry away  
your sadness.

Rhea kisses the clay figure and puts it in the basket.

Pinaria places the basket in the shallows. Rhea gives it a gentle push, and slowly it is carried out onto the river.

RHEA SILVA

Flavius. I shall miss your laughter  
and your brave spirit. Run free in  
the Fields of Elysium and join our  
mother.

Rhea watches the basket float away.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

Mother, may you again have the joy  
of holding your son in your arms.  
May he know the warmth of your love  
for all eternity.

Rhea is cried out. She takes a deep breath.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)

My sweet Protus, I know you are yet  
alive. I shall find you. I miss  
your little voice and your big heart.

Pinaria reaches down and takes Rhea's hand.

PINARIA

It will be better soon, Rhea.

Rhea tugs her hand away and sets her shoulders.

(CONTINUED)

RHEA SILVA

I will grieve and I will heal, but  
know this: I will leave this place.  
My mother has heard me and will guide  
me. There is no life for me here.

INT. CANDIDATE'S RESIDENCE - RHEA'S CHAMBER - DAYS LATER

Rhea sits at a table scattered with papers. Her head rests  
on her arms. She is in a deep sleep.

The flame in an oil lamp flickers erratically. Unsettling  
shadows jump across the walls.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Rhea. Rhea Silva... Hear me.

Rhea stirs slightly.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Rhea. Wake up, daughter.

Rhea's eyes open. She rubs her face, yawns in exhaustion.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Your eyes are now open but still you  
do not see. Come to me.

Startled, Rhea freezes.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Come. I shall pull the curtain away  
from your eyes.

RHEA SILVA

Who are you? Come where?

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Where the twelve line the gallery,  
the ninth will gain you entry twice.  
Come. Come now.

RHEA SILVA

The gallery - the Gallery of Doors.  
But I cannot. I am not allowed.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

You will come to me. Now.

EXT. TEMPLE OF VESTA GROUNDS - GALLERY OF DOORS - CONTINUOUS

Rhea makes her way down the gallery. On her left - a  
courtyard; on the right, doors. Over each is a sacred symbol.

(CONTINUED)

Rhea counts as she passes each door. She halts at the ninth, grasps the door handle, and pushes down.

The heavy door opens with a CLICK! Once inside, the heavy door swings closed behind her.

Instead of finding herself in a room, she stands at the start of a long, narrow passageway with doors on each side.

RHEA SILVA  
Hello? Anyone?

Rhea reaches back and presses the door handle. Locked.

Panicking, she turns around and tugs in vain at the handle.

She turns back and looks down the dimly lit passageway. The doors on each side seem to sink lower and lower as the passage progresses, and ultimately disappear from view altogether.

Rhea takes a deep breath and walks forward several steps and stops. She looks down at her feet and takes more steps.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)  
The passage - it is leading me  
downward.

As she proceeds, she counts the doors that zigzag down the hallway.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)  
Rhea... Come...

She walks forward and counts off the doors, stopping at the ninth.

She grips the door handle and presses down. The door slowly swings open. She steps into a room, shaped like an octagon.

In the middle of the room, a hole in the floor opens to a spiral staircase that leads downward.

Rhea approaches, leans over, and looks down. She pulls back in fear: The narrow staircase of wedge-shaped steps seems to drop into an abyss. There is no stair rail.

Gathering courage, she steps onto the staircase.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Rhea...  
(MORE)

A third of the way down, she leans over and peers downward. Vertigo seizes her. The walls seem to blur and spin slowly.

(CONTINUED)

She sways...but there is nothing to grab on to! She takes a deep breath and steadies herself. She looks down at the next step and extends her foot. It shakes wildly. She gains control and continues downward. The darkness recedes.

Reaching the bottom, she is bathed in the flickering light of lamps that illuminate a larger octagonal-shaped room.

There is a rumble from deep within the walls and the staircase slowly rotates. Startled, Rhea jumps back.

Before her eyes, the stairway collapses, its steps folding upward and inward.

A moment later, the staircase is no more. It has become a single smooth column. She touches the smooth stone surface.

ANOTHER LOW RUMBLE. The column sinks downward into the floor until its bowl-shaped top rests a few feet from the floor.

Seconds later, a flame sprouts up from inside the bowl. Tongues of light and shadow flicker across the walls.

The walls are marked with strange letters and symbols. Brass tubes run down the walls and curve inward toward the center of the space.

Large stones in the floor form a pattern of concentric circles, with the Basin of Fire at the center.

Rhea's breaths come in short, shallow spurts.

Another low rumble: Around the Basin of Fire, a near-circular stone bench rises up from the floor.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Do not fear, my daughter. Clear your mind. There is much to discuss.

RHEA SILVA

Who- Who are you?

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Sit, my daughter. Calm yourself.

Rhea walks over and sits on the bench, facing the fire.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There is nothing to fear.

A realization strikes Rhea. She gasps, relieved.

RHEA SILVA

Mother! You have heard my prayers!  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)  
It was you who spoke to me during  
the procession. Mother!

Silence.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)  
No.

Disappointment. Rhea wipes tears away.

RHEA SILVA  
But you called me 'daughter.'

Rhea becomes angry.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)  
Mother Pinarria! It is you! Where  
are you hiding? Show yourself!

Silence.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)  
No.

Then...

RHEA SILVA  
It cannot be... It is impossible...

Silence.

RHEA SILVA (CONT'D)  
It is you...the Goddess...Vesta?

The fire flares up brighter and more powerful.

WHISPERING VOICE  
Yessss...

INT. ALBA LONGA - THE KING'S PALACE - WINE CELLAR.

Urbicus carries sleeping Protus into the wine cellar.

URBICUS  
You must wake, little one.

Urbicus pats Protus's back. The boy's eyes open.

PROTUS  
Where are we?

(CONTINUED)

URBICUS

You were wise to find me, but I cannot hide you any longer. You have been very brave. You must be brave a while longer.

Urbicus leads Protus by the hand up to a large empty barrel and kneels down to speak to him face-to-face.

URBICUS (CONT'D)

I have found men who will take you to your papa, but you must hide until you are far away from the palace.

He bends down, lifts the boy, and puts him in. He hands him a small wrapped bundle.

URBICUS (CONT'D)

Food. Save it for later. Be brave, my boy. Remember, you are-

PROTUS

I am the stag...

URBICUS

Yes. The hunter will not catch you.

Urbicus straightens up and turns away. Protus whimpers and reaches out for Urbicus. Urbicus turns back.

URBICUS (CONT'D)

You must be strong. Sit. Stay quiet, no matter what you hear.

Urbicus loosely puts the lid of the barrel over the opening and props it up with a piece of wood.

Urbicus steps out into the hall where Lucanus and Carbo stand.

LUCANUS

We are in your debt.

URBICUS

If Amulius had found out, we all would have paid the price. Go. Do what you must.

The guards enter and approach the barrel. Lucanus lifts the lid off and looks in. Protus is curled into a ball.

The men jimmy the barrel. SQUEALS OF FEAR from the barrel.

The men move the barrel until it is under the tap of a large, raised vat.

(CONTINUED)

Protus tries to stand, but Lucanus pushes him down.

Carbo turns on the tap. Wine floods into the barrel. PROTUS SCREAMS and jumps up. Lucanus holds him down as the level of the wine in the barrel moves higher and higher.

LOUD THUDS, KICKING SOUNDS, AND MUFFLED SCREAMS.

Bubbles surface in the wine. Death throes. Stillness.

LUCANUS

Seal the barrel and mark it for  
Numitor's camp. I promised the boy  
he would be taken to his father.  
Let us not disappoint him.

INT. ALBA LONGA - TEMPLE OF VESTA - OCTAGONAL ROOM

RHEA SILVA

If you are who you say, prove it.  
Tell me: Where is my brother?

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Dead.

RHEA SILVA

No. Protus. Where is he?

WHISPERING VOICE (v.o.) (V.O.)

Dead.

RHEA SILVA

No. You are wrong.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Daughter, the stag that could not be  
caught is now with the hunter.

RHEA SILVA

What? The stag... No...

Rhea's eyes fill with tears.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Your mother weeps with sadness and  
joy at the reunion.

RHEA SILVA

Enough! Yes, you are a goddess - a  
goddess who murdered my brother!

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Do not be a fool. Even had I wished  
to, I could not.

(CONTINUED)



RHEA SILVA

Done by another's hand at your behest.  
It does not matter. Let me out of  
here!

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Stop acting like a child. There are  
forces in motion greater than your  
little life. You will help me.

RHEA SILVA

Never.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

You will if you wish to see your  
father again. You will if you wish  
his kingdom to survive.

RHEA SILVA

I want to leave. Let me out of here!

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

The die is cast. You will play your  
role. You will save Latium. You  
will save my Vestals. You will obey.  
Now go!

The stone bench begins to recede into the floor. Rhea leaps  
to her feet. She wipes her eyes.

The flames in the Basin of Fire grow weak and die. The column  
supporting the basin rises from the floor.

WHISPERING MALE VOICE (V.O.)

You have lost, Mother.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

This is far from over.

WHISPERING MALE VOICE (V.O.)

I need her.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

It is not your time.

WHISPERING MALE VOICE (V.O.)

She will never do as you say.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Oh, she will. She will.

END OF PILOT