

SHIPPER SEASON TEN

“Clean Slate”

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Logline

Arriving in Petra with the Israelite refugees, Gabrielle has a surprise encounter with someone she never expected to see again and is not sure she can trust. Xena's return adds to the tension--and so does Haimon's unexpected appearance, which forces Gabrielle to make some difficult choices.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Overhead view of a vast desert of sand in the dark of night. A few patches of yellow light dot the darkness.

CUT TO

Gabrielle sits beside a dying fire, holding Samuel in her arms. She rocks him gently, humming a soft tune. She is still wearing her *Legacy*-style desert outfit.

Scattered around her are the Israelite refugees, sleeping closely together around more campfires. Gabrielle looks down at Samuel.

His eyes have started to close as she rocks him to sleep but he looks up at her. She smiles at him then looks up into the sky, watching the stars twinkle and a bird fly overhead.

DISSOLVE TO

A small oasis. A campfire burns brightly in a small grove of sparse, scraggly trees, the sound of trickling water in the distance.

Ares is sitting on a large, dead log beside the campfire. His sword rests beside him and his horse can be seen tethered to a tree in the background. Haimon is sitting next to him, absent-mindedly tapping a stick on the ground, obviously lost in thought. Suddenly, in a gesture of obvious frustration, he breaks the stick in half with a loud snap and throws it in the fire. Ares raises his head slowly and gives him a questioning look.

Haimon rises to his feet and paces back and forth.

HAIMON (frustrated):

She could have sent word she was having my child.

ARES:

What did you expect? A letter care of the Roman army?

HAIMON:

Sure, it's all my fault. (He sits down again and sighs) You know, this was *not* where I thought I'd end up.

ARES (chuckles):

Welcome to the club.

HAIMON (almost to himself):

All I really wanted was a life with Gabrielle. To be together--have a family...

As he speaks, the camera pans to Ares, who rolls his eyes sarcastically.

HAIMON (now off-camera, continues, his voice dropping lower):

Except--there was always Xena.

Ares' expression turns almost sympathetic as he turns to look at Haimon.

HAIMON (continues):

I didn't think I could compete.

Pan around to show Xena walking toward the camp, with a large bird in her hand. She stops in her tracks, looking troubled. Pan to Ares and Haimon; Xena's figure is visible behind them, though blurred.

ARES:

That's the way it goes. Didn't I tell you they always come first for each other? You either deal with that--or move on.

HAIMON (bitterly):

Easy for you to say.

Ares shoots him a sarcastic look.

ARES:

You think?

Pan to Xena for a close-up. She looks troubled.

CUT TO

Daybreak. The blazing sun shines over a hot, dry desert of terracotta-colored sand.

CUT TO

The refugees are traveling through the desert, with red cliffs visible in the distance. Gabrielle leads the way; she has a sling over her shoulder with a pouch at the front that holds Samuel securely. Darion is walking next to her, holding out a stick like a sword and looking around. Gabrielle glances at him and smiles.

GABRIELLE:

Want some water?

DARION:

Sure.

Gabrielle opens the flap of a saddlebag on the horse beside her. She sees something move and jerks her hand away. A scorpion scurries out of the bag and Gabrielle pulls her hand back, startled, clutching Samuel closer. The scorpion sits on the side of the bag, its curled poison-tipped tail raised behind its body. Suddenly, a stick comes down, knocking the scorpion down into the sand and then, just as quickly, smashing it. Gabrielle looks up to see Darion pulling the stick back and scraping the end against the sand.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

Always looking out for me, huh?

DARION (proudly):

Yeah.

She chuckles and ruffles his hair.

GABRIELLE:

Thank you, young man.

Darion beams as Gabrielle cautiously pulls the waterskin out of the bag and hands it to him.

DISSOLVE TO

A long shot of the caravan of refugees moving on through the desert.

DISSOLVE TO

The Israelites, led by Gabrielle with Darion at her side, walk between the walls of two cliffs.

Pan to a large, thuggish-looking man who steps out from behind some rocks and stands in the way of the caravan, his hand on a sword.

GABRIELLE (frowns):
What do you want?

MAN:
No one comes through the pass without paying the toll.

GABRIELLE (scoffs):
Who's collecting?

MAN (grins broadly):
Me and my friends.

A group of armed thugs file out from behind the rocks, blocking the path.

Gabrielle turns to Naomi and quickly hands Samuel over, then steps out in front of the group. Darion begins to follow her but Gabrielle holds out a firm hand as if to tell him to stay.

Close-up on Darion as he nods, backing off but watching Gabriele intently.

Gabrielle walks toward the bandits.

GABRIELLE (trying to reason):
Look, these people have lost everything.

THUG LEADER (taps his hand on the hilt of his sword):
Do I look like I care?

He laughs and the others join in. Gabrielle stands still for a moment, then gives him a chilly smile.

GABRIELLE:
Give me a moment.

She walks toward the group of refugees, her back to the thugs, and approaches one of them, an old man who is leaning on a large walking stick.

Gabrielle nods silently toward the stick. The older man steps back, letting her take it. Gabrielle grips the stick with both hands and then whips around toward the bandits, a determined look in her eyes.

Pan to Naomi, who gasps slightly.

GABRIELLE:
I care.

Gabrielle spins the staff skillfully as she moves toward the thugs.

THUG LEADER (shakes his head):
Well, if you insist...

He signals his men to attack. They do.

Her confident moves showing that she has not lost her old skills, Gabrielle parries the bandit's attack with the staff, twirling it, hitting one man with one end, then hitting another man with the other. The swords are propelled from their hands and land in the sand beside the cliff.

Naomi and Darion watch; Darion with admiration, Naomi with uncertainty.

One of the bandits charges. Gabrielle aims the staff at his legs, knocking him off his feet and he falls face-first into the sand. With scraped palms, he stands up and turns. Gabrielle hits him in the stomach with the staff and he doubles over. She rams the staff into the sand and uses it as leverage as she rises up off the ground and kicks two more of the men coming toward her from behind, knocking them down as well.

Pan to Naomi. Samuel wakes up in her arms and starts to cry.

Quick pan to Gabrielle, who whips her head around at the sound of the baby's wail. Taking advantage of her distraction, one of the men she has just knocked down scrambles to his feet and starts coming up behind her, raising a club.

Quick pan to Darion. He bends down, picks up a piece of rock and throws it. Pan to the would-be assailant who is hit in the head. He stumbles and falls, momentarily knocked out. Gabrielle looks at Darion, clearly disturbed.

Meanwhile, the thug leader looks incredulously at his downed comrades and moves toward Gabrielle, trying to be cocky.

THUG LEADER:

You're tougher than you look.

Gabrielle narrows her eyes at him as he charges, swinging his sword. She parries a thrust of the sword with her makeshift staff, then another. He kicks her in the shins and she stumbles for a moment--but then rallies to parry another blow of his sword, knocking it out of his hand. As he dives to pick it up, she slams the staff hard on his shoulders and knocks him down. He cries out as he falls.

Breathing hard, Gabrielle stands over him as he begins to pick himself up. He finds himself staring at the sharp end of the staff. He looks around at his men, who sit up groaning and rubbing the sore spots.

GABRIELLE:

Had enough?

The thug leader grunts resentfully as she stands back to let him rise to his feet. He cautiously picks up his sword and slips it into the sheath, then waves retreat to his men. They disappear behind the rocks. Gabrielle stands still, staring after them.

Loud cheers go up from the Israelites. Gabrielle glances at them, startled, as if coming out of a bit of a trance. A look of regret comes over her face as she looks at the staff.

Darion runs up to her.

DARION:

Are you okay?

GABRIELLE:

Yes, I am. (She clutches his shoulder) What did you think you were doing? You could have killed that man!

DARION (defensively):

I was helping *you*!

GABRIELLE (pained, slightly at a loss):

Darion....

She is interrupted by Naomi, who walks up to her and holds out Samuel. The baby is still whimpering a little.

NAOMI:

That was very brave.

Gabrielle looks down at her son who is looking back at her with big blue eyes, filled with tears.

[FLASHBACK]

From "From the Ashes":

NAIOMI:

When it comes to taking care of a baby, a woman's nature just seems to take over.

Gabrielle looks away.

GABRIELLE:

What if I don't have that inside of me anymore? I've been a fighter so long that maybe that other side of me is gone now.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Gabrielle looks up at Naomi and slowly takes the baby from her arms. She rocks Samuel until he stops crying, then secures him in the sling at her side. She hands the staff back to the old man.

GABRIELLE (in a determined voice):

Come on. We'll be in Petra soon.

Gabrielle grabs her horse's reins and walks. Naomi and Darion watch her for a moment, then follow, with the other refugees behind them.

DISSOLVE TO

The sun setting in the sky, as we:

ACT ONE

FADE IN

On the caravan of refugees traveling across the desert.

DISSOLVE TO

The view of a large, imposing cliff. An intricate doorway resembling a temple has been cut into the face of the cliff, with columns holding up the façade and more columns stacked on top of the doorway. Gabrielle stops to marvel at the site.

Gabrielle and the refugees enter under the large archway and into the city.

CUT TO

Gabrielle, Darion, Naomi and the other refugees walk through a narrow gorge with a light visible at the end of it. Coming out at the end of the gorge, they find themselves in a large square, in front of a magnificent building with columns, also hewn into rose-colored rock, surrounded by lush tropical vegetation. There is an intricately carved fountain in the center of the square. The place is bustling with activity: there are riders on horseback, camels, mules pulling carts filled with goods, people walking around dressed in bright garments of many colors. The new arrivals gape at all this as they walk through the square.

A succession of quick cuts shows them walking through the city, past a large amphitheater, an aqueduct, and houses two and three stories high, many of them carved into natural rock.

DISSOLVE TO

Gabrielle and the refugees arrive in what is obviously a poorer part of the city. The buildings are smaller, with some scattered, dusty plants around them--nothing like that magnificent structures we saw before. The people's clothes are shabbier and simpler, and sometimes ragged.

One large building with a garden, and a well outside the gate, stands out amidst the poverty.

GABRIELLE:

This must be it.

There is a thankful murmur among the refugees as they stop. One of the women brings up a bucket of water from the well and others come up to fill their waterskins, or scoop up water to drink. Meanwhile, Gabrielle walks through the garden gate, comes up to the front door of the building and knocks. Some of the refugees follow her, looking around.

After a moment the door creaks open and a young woman wearing a long white robe steps out.

YOUNG WOMAN:

May I help you?

GABRIELLE:

We have traveled a long way. We're just looking for food and shelter--for my friends and me. (she indicates the refugees behind her).

The young woman glances at the dozens of people, then turns to Gabrielle and nods, smiling.

YOUNG WOMAN:

Yes, of course. We are here to help those in need. I'll go get the Holy Mother. Wait here.

The woman turns around and walks back into the building, leaving the door ajar.

GABRIELLE (turns back toward the refugees, smiles):

Looks like we're about to get a good meal and a place to sleep.

MALE REFUGEE:

God has smiled on us.

Samuel wakes up in the sling and starts to coo. Gabrielle rocks the baby, shushing him.

DARION:

So who's this Holy Mother?

WOMAN (off camera):

I am told you need help.

Something about the voice startles Gabrielle. She turns around as the camera zooms in on her face. She looks completely stunned and alarmed as she stares ahead, speechless.

The camera pulls back and pans around to the middle-aged woman in a white and blue robe and headdress standing in front of Gabrielle, then zooms in on the woman's face. It is a much older, but still unmistakably recognizable Najara. She has aged well, and looks dignified and still beautiful.

NAJARA (in a calm, unwavering voice):

Gabrielle. (pause) I thought our paths might cross again someday.

GABRIELLE (slowly recovering from shock):

I didn't.

A small smile crosses Najara's face.

Darion touches Gabrielle's arm.

DARION (getting the feeling that Gabrielle knows the older woman):

Who is this?

GABRIELLE (looks down at Darion then back toward Najara):

She, um... We have a history. (pause) From many years ago.

The tension and uneasiness in the air are apparent. Gabrielle turns back toward the Israelites who are watching intently.

GABRIELLE (looks from them to Najara):

Maybe we should find some other place...

NAJARA (holds out her hand):

No. You came here for shelter. That's what you'll get. (turns back toward the door) Jannah.

The young woman comes out of the building.

NAJARA:

Show these people to the rooms and give them whatever they need. They've been on a long journey--they need food, water, rest.

JANNAH (nods):

Yes, Holy Mother. (to the Israelites) This way.

Jannah walks out of the building and around the side through the garden. The Israelites begin to follow, bringing their bundles with them. Gabrielle's eyes are fixed on Najara as the refugees disappear around the corner. Najara opens her mouth to speak, then stops. Gabrielle looks uneasy.

NAJARA:

Jannah will show you where to stable your horse. I hope he doesn't mind sharing a room with our milking goat.

GABRIELLE:

Thank you.

She and Darion follow the other refugees, Gabrielle leading her horse with her.

Najara looks down as Gabrielle disappears around the back.

CUT TO

The garden. Gabrielle is seated on a stone bench in front of a large fern, holding Samuel in her arms and breastfeeding him. The sky above is cloudy but the sunlight peeks through clouds and casts an uneven light onto the garden.

Pan over to Darion a few feet away, practicing fighting moves with a small stick he's chosen as his staff. He's swinging it around and twirling it, trying to imitate what he saw Gabrielle do.

Gabrielle looks up at him and smiles slightly.

GABRIELLE:

You're getting pretty good at that.

DARION (twirls it once but misses the catch and it falls to the ground):

Not as good as you. The way you clobbered those guys out in the desert... Wow. I hope I can--

GABRIELLE (interrupts):

Darion, about that. I know you were trying to help me out. It's just that... (she shakes her head) I don't want to see you having to deal with the kind of things that I've had to deal with. Especially not when you're just a kid.

DARION (picks up the stick; offended):

I'm not a kid! And I'm going to learn how to fight.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

If that's what you want.

NAJARA (off-camera, to Darion):

You should listen to Gabrielle.

Gabrielle looks up, startled.

DARION (sullenly):

Yeah? Well, you shouldn't listen in on other people talking.

He throws the stick away, scowling.

GABRIELLE (suppressing a smirk):

Darion. Be nice.

NAJARA (coming closer):

May I talk to you?

Gabrielle looks at her hesitantly, then turns to Darion.

GABRIELLE:

Darion, go check up on Naomi to see if she needs anything.

DARION (grumbles):

Fine.

He walks away. Najara sits down next to Gabrielle.

NAJARA (trying to make conversation):

Would you like some new clothes? These look worse for the wear.

She points to Gabrielle's desert clothes, which look quite grimy from the dust and sweat.

NAJARA (continues):

Not that we can offer anything fancy--

GABRIELLE (interrupts):

Thanks, but I'll get something in town.

There is a long moment of silence.

GABRIELLE (blurts out):

I hope you don't expect me to trust you again.

NAJARA:

I thought you of all people would believe that everyone deserves a second chance. (off Gabrielle's skeptical look) Or sometimes, a third.

This has clearly struck a chord with Gabrielle; she looks at Najara, troubled.

CUT TO

Xena, Ares and Haimon riding in silence. They reach a crossroads and Xena slows her horse down.

XENA:

Haimon.

He gives her a questioning look. Xena brings her horse to a halt; Ares and Haimon do likewise.

XENA:

Ride on ahead. Ares and I will catch up with you later.

HAIMON:

Why?

XENA (impassive):

I've got some old friends in these parts that I want to catch up with.

Ares shoots her a suspicious look. Haimon nods slowly, looking puzzled.

XENA:

We'll be heading this way. (She points down the road that goes off to the left, toward a row of trees in the distance.)

HAIMON:

All right. (hesitates) What--should I tell Gabrielle?

XENA (quietly):

You'll know what to tell her.

HAIMON:

Okay. I'll--see you later.

He nods to Ares, then picks up speed and rides on while Xena and Ares take the road to the left and ride silently. After a few moments Ares speaks.

ARES:

"Old friends," huh?

XENA (curtly, staring ahead):

Nope.

Ares digests this for a moment.

ARES:

I get it. (Xena shoots him a sharp look.) You want him to get there first.

A moment's pause. Xena says nothing.

ARES (sighs and rolls his eyes):

I hate self-sacrifice.

Xena gives him a small, amused smile.

XENA:

Do you, now. (After a moment her look turns serious and thoughtful as she continues) Me too.

ARES (flippant):

Thought so.

He reaches toward her and touches her hand on the bridle of her horse. She looks down at his hand, then slowly squeezes it with her fingers as the camera zooms in on their hands.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Najara are still sitting in the garden.

GABRIELLE:

How did you end up in Petra?

NAJARA:

I was unconscious for more than ten days after that fight with Xena...

[FLASHBACK]

From "The Convert":

Xena and Najara are fighting in the trees, hanging from vines. Najara roars and holds the dagger toward Xena, preparing to bring it down. Xena struggles with her, turning the dagger toward Najara and impaling her with it.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena and Gabrielle standing in the doorway of a hospice, Najara lying on a bed in the background while a healer tends to her.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

NAJARA:

And when I woke up...I was changed. (Gabrielle listens intently but skeptically) After that, I did a lot of searching. Soul-searching. Finding out who I was--what I had done with my life--with my gifts. I

went back to the teachings of Eli. I traveled--and my path finally led me here, where I found people who needed my help, and didn't know anything about my past.

GABRIELLE (uneasy and with an undertone of challenge):

Did the Djinn lead you here?

NAJARA (looks away for a moment, then meets Gabrielle's gaze):

No. I haven't spoken to them since I saw you last. I've realized that they were not the good spirits I thought they were.

GABRIELLE (still skeptical):

Oh really. And when did you realize that?

NAJARA:

Almost as soon as I woke up. (after a brief pause) You still don't trust me.

GABRIELLE (exasperated):

Najara, what do you expect? Last time we met, you told me that you had changed and given up all violence--and the last thing I remember is you attacking me and trying to kill Xena. (she pauses) Xena kept telling me you were insane. I argued with her. And then--

NAJARA (quietly):

I was insane, Gabrielle. At first, when I regained consciousness, I couldn't understand what happened. It was as if some power had possessed me and driven me on.

GABRIELLE:

Power...you mean, the Djinn?

NAJARA (nods slowly):

I think it was their way of punishing me because I had stopped following their path--because I was following the path of Eli instead. They drove me mad. They tried to get me to kill Xena, and to hurt you. (her voice drops) And that's something I will never forgive myself for.

GABRIELLE (hesitant):

Najara....

NAJARA:

I know this sounds like an excuse. I can't blame you if you don't believe me. But all I want to tell you is that I'm very sorry, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle stares at her, struck by the sincerity and intensity in Najara's voice.

NAJARA (continues):

I mean it.

Gabrielle nods wordlessly.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

Najara...I don't know what to think. All I know is what people have told me. You've been doing a lot of good.

NAJARA:

So have you and Xena, from what I heard.

GABRIELLE (nods, not looking at Najara):

Yeah. (after a pause) A lot of fighting.

A pause.

NAJARA:

I know.

[FLASHBACKS]

From "Ides of March":

Gabrielle killing all the Romans as Xena lies helpless on the ground. When it is over, she looks at the bloody dagger, devastated by what she had done, and drops it into the sand.

CUT TO

From "Eternal Bonds":

Gabrielle fighting the temple warriors in the field, killing one of them with a gruesome jagged-edged sword.

CUT TO

From "Legacy":

Gabrielle killing Korah in the desert.

GABRIELLE (voice over):

My reflexes are those of a warrior. I'm afraid my judgment's not.

CUT TO

From "To Helicon And Back":

Gabrielle running after one of Bellerephon's men, her sword raised, her face in a fit of rage.

GABRIELLE (voice-over):

With every battle, I lose more of myself.

CUT TO

From "The Challenge":

Gabrielle beating Taphius to death in rage.

ARES:

Like it or not, you're a warrior with a warrior's reputation.

CUT TO

Montage of Gabrielle fighting in various battles: with the Amazons against Sabina, with the Romans against the Goths.

[END OF FLASHBACKS]

GABRIELLE (looks at Najara):

And you...?

NAJARA:

I've given up fighting.

GABRIELLE:

Completely?

NAJARA (nods):

I've done enough fighting in my life. (pause) But I won't judge those who choose to fight. If Eli thought the Way of Love wasn't the way for you--

GABRIELLE (surprised):

How did you know?

NAJARA (smiles):

You'd be surprised, the places where your scrolls turn up. Well, if that's what he thought--that's good enough for me. We each have our path in life.

Gabrielle looks down at Samuel, sleeping peacefully in her arms.

GABRIELLE (quietly):

Yes, we do.

Najara looks at her probingly, then raises a hand and touches Gabrielle's shoulder. Gabrielle flinches, then looks Najara in the eye.

NAJARA (in a low voice):

And someday you'll know which one is right for you.

The two women look at each other for a moment; then, Najara rises and speaks up.

NAJARA:

Come, join us for dinner. All that traveling must have made you hungry.

Gabrielle stands up from the bench and follows Najara.

The camera pans around to show a man in the shadows in the back of the garden, watching Gabrielle and Najara intently.

CUT TO

Night. A small room. Gabrielle is in bed, asleep. Samuel sleeps in a crib by the side of her bed. The camera pans to Darion; he is lying on a small cot, wide awake. He hears a noise that alerts his attention, and gets up and goes to the window.

The camera pans down to show something moving in the garden, then back to Darion. He looks thoughtfully at Gabrielle, then tiptoes to the door. Before he goes out, he grabs the stick he was practicing with before, propped against the wall.

CUT TO

Darion walks through the darkened garden, holding the stick at the ready. He hears a twig cracking and he crouches down, hiding behind the bench.

A male figure is seen, moving stealthily. Positioned behind the bench, Darion watches the man as he walks closer; then, he jumps out from behind the bench and hits the man with the stick, knocking him down. As the man sits up with a groan, Darion comes over to him and raises the stick again, preparing for another strike. The moonlight shines down onto the man's face. It's Haimon.

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

On the same scene as before. Darion stares at Haimon. After a moment, his shock gives way to a hard, sullen look.

DARION:

I didn't know it was you.

HAIMON:

Damn! Why does this always happen? (he touches his nose gingerly, then looks up, studying the boy a moment) Darion? Is that you?

Darion lowers the staff and takes a step back. Haimon slowly gains to his feet, looking Darion over.

HAIMON:

I wouldn't have recognized you. You've changed so much since I saw you last.

Darion looks down at his feet and mutters sullenly.

DARION:

A lot of things have changed since you saw us...

Gabrielle's voice can be heard coming from inside.

GABRIELLE:

Darion? (The door opens and Gabrielle emerges, wide awake.) Darion, is Xena--?

She stops short upon seeing Haimon.

GABRIELLE:

Oh...

Haimon nervously drums his fingertips against his leg and nods at Gabrielle.

HAIMON:

Hello, Gabrielle.

DARION (to Gabrielle):

I caught him sneaking around the garden.

Haimon touches the bridge of his nose.

HAIMON (to Gabrielle):

Did one hell of a job guarding against intruders, too.

DARION (grimly and proudly):

You bet.

GABRIELLE:

Darion--why don't you go back in the house and check on... (pauses) Just go back to bed.

Darion glances at Haimon, then turns wordlessly and disappears into the house.

Haimon and Gabrielle stare awkwardly at one another a moment.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon. How did...how are you?

HAIMON:

Darion has really shot up since I saw him last.

Gabrielle says nothing, practically fidgeting. Haimon looks her up and down.

HAIMON:

And you're...almost back to your old self.

GABRIELLE:

What are you--?

HAIMON:

I ran into Xena. She told me everything. About Jerusalem, the baby--everything.

Gabrielle stares.

HAIMON:

You should have told me.

Gabrielle takes a step closer to him.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon, I tried. Please believe me. I just...I couldn't find the right words. And when you joined Vespasian--well... (She trails off, lowers her eyes, then looks up at Haimon again.) Maybe I was wrong.

Haimon says nothing.

Gabrielle glances over her shoulder and back at him.

GABRIELLE:

Do you want to see him?

Haimon stares at her, then nods almost imperceptibly. Gabrielle goes quickly inside the house. A moment later she returns with Samuel in her arms. She smiles softly down at him then glances up at Haimon, taking a step closer.

HAIMON (pulls back a little):

Is it okay? I mean, you didn't wake him, did you?

GABRIELLE (smiles and shakes her head):

No. He's a good sleeper.

She holds the baby out to Haimon.

GABRIELLE:

This is Samuel. Your son.

Haimon takes the boy into his arms carefully.

Najara, wearing a long dark robe, comes out into the garden.

NAJARA:

Gabrielle? (she sees Haimon, his back to her) I was told that a stranger had been seen on the grounds, and--

GABRIELLE:

It's fine. Najara, this is Haimon. He's-- (she falters a moment) my friend.

Haimon turns around and nods. Najara gives him a curious look, obviously scrutinizing him. Looking uncomfortable, Haimon hands Samuel back to Gabrielle, mouthing a quiet "thank you." Close-up on Najara as understanding dawns in her face.

NAJARA:

Sorry. I can't be too careful around here.

GABRIELLE (suspicious):

You have enemies?

NAJARA:

Yes--King Aretas. He would do anything to shut this place down and run me out of the city--or worse.

GABRIELLE:

Why?

NAJARA:

I'm a follower of Eli. Eli's message brings hope and strength to the common people--the hope that one day, they can be free from kings as well as gods. And that's dangerous to anyone who wants to hold on to absolute power. So I'm a threat--and the king's been sending his spies to do mischief. (turns to Haimon) But you say this man is your friend--then I trust him, too. (to Haimon) Come. I'll find you a spare bed.

Haimon hesitates a moment, then looks at Gabrielle, who nods slightly.

HAIMON:

All right.

With one last look at Gabrielle, Samuel and Darion, he follows Najara out. Gabrielle stares after him. Darion comes up to her and puts a reassuring hand on her arm.

DISSOLVE TO

Day. A wide shot of the garden and the shelter.

CUT TO

Outside the gate, Gabrielle is drawing water from the well.

A dark-haired, dark-eyed, bearded young man peeks from around the street corner, making sure Gabrielle is alone. Then he approaches her. This is the same man who was spying on Gabrielle and Najara in the garden in Act One. Hearing his step, Gabrielle looks up.

MAN:

Good morning. May I speak to you?

GABRIELLE (slightly hesitant):

Sure.

MAN:

You know Neimah?

GABRIELLE:

Who?

MAN:

Ah, of course. You know her by another name. Neimah is what she calls herself here in Petra. (pause) My name is Duman. And you are--?

GABRIELLE (guardedly):

Gabrielle.

She draws the water from the well and pours it inside two waterskins.

GABRIELLE (continues):

What do you want?

DUMAN:

The woman who calls herself Neimah--you've known her before, haven't you. (Off Gabrielle's silent look) There are things I'd like to know about her past.

GABRIELLE (narrows her eyes at him):

Wait a minute. You're one of the king's men, aren't you? Well, forget it. I have no intention of helping your master persecute people of a peaceful faith.

DUMAN:

Are you so sure Neimah is truly peaceful?

Gabrielle looks troubled; it's clear that the thought has already crossed her mind. She hesitates, looking at Duman. Before she can speak, the sound of a baby crying can be heard, and Gabrielle turns her head abruptly. The camera pans to show Haimon coming toward the garden gate, with a crying Samuel in his arms.

HAIMON (at the gate):

I think he needs to be fed. (He gives Duman a suspicious look, clearly wondering who the man is.)

GABRIELLE (to Duman, abruptly):

I have to go.

She picks up the water skins and heads toward the gate.

DUMAN:

I'll see you again.

GABRIELLE (after a brief hesitant pause):

Don't waste your time.

Duman turns around and walks away while Gabrielle goes inside the garden. She hands Haimon the waterskins and takes Samuel from him.

HAIMON:

Friend of yours?

Gabrielle attempts a teasing smile but it appears weak and forced.

GABRIELLE:

Why do you ask? Jealous?

HAIMON:

Not really. Well...not of him, anyway.

Gabrielle seats herself on a boulder in the garden and begins to feed Samuel. Haimon looks on and the air is thick with tension. Several times, Gabrielle looks ready to speak then stops. Finally, Haimon speaks.

HAIMON:

I remember you telling me once before about this Najara.

Gabrielle looks up at him.

HAIMON (continues):

Is this really a good idea to stay here--especially now with Samuel--given your past history with this woman?

Gabrielle shrugs and gazes down at Samuel.

GABRIELLE (murmurs):

Sometimes people can change...

HAIMON (frowns and nods):

True. People can really surprise you sometimes.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares ride along a long stretch of road in the desert. The sun is hot, beating down on them.

Close-up on Ares as he wipes the sweat from his face and neck, then reaches for a waterskin and drinks avidly. Xena glances at him.

XENA (quietly sympathetic):

It's tough, huh.

ARES (glances at her):

What, the desert? (makes a face) I've seen worse.

XENA (quietly):

Not just the desert.

ARES:

Oh, you mean the whole mortal thing? (he pauses and takes another swig of water) I can handle it.

He and Xena look at each other. She slows down her horse and he does likewise, matching her pace.

ARES (continues, lowering his voice):

I've got everything I always wanted... (he pauses for an instant, still looking intently at Xena) ...right?

Xena brings her horse to a complete halt; so does Ares.

XENA (a husky note in her voice):

You've got *me*.

They look into each other's eyes.

XENA (reaches out to take his hand):

You're part of my life now, Ares. Nothing--and no one--is going to change that.

They lean toward each other and are about to kiss when Ares' horse, startled, neighs and bucks suddenly, then rears up, throwing Ares off so that he lands in the sand on his rear. Xena pulls hard on the reins, restraining the horse, then quickly dismounts.

XENA:

You okay?

ARES:

Yeah.

XENA (chuckles):

Looks like he's jealous.

She extends her hand to help Ares, who scrambles to his feet as he speaks.

ARES:

Nah--it's not that kind of relationship. (Pats the horse on the side.) He's just spirited, that's all.

XENA:

Where'd you get him?

ARES:

Bought him right after I landed in Judea--some guy was selling him on the cheap. (The horse neighs and bucks again, and Ares mutters under his breath) C'mon, boy.

XENA (grins):

No wonder. He's not easy to handle.

ARES (pats the horse on the side):

That's how I like 'em.

He grins and puts his arm around Xena's shoulder; she whips around to face him.

XENA (in mock outrage):

Are you comparing me to a horse?

They both laugh and kiss. After a moment Xena tenses and pulls away, turning to look to her left.

XENA:

We've got company.

The camera pulls back to show a group of six Roman soldiers riding toward them.

Xena and Ares turn to face the Romans, their hands on the hilts of their swords.

The Romans approach and bring their horses to a halt. The camera pans over the faces of the Romans as they stare intently at Xena and Ares.

ROMAN #1 (to the others):

That's Xena.

ROMAN #2 (shouts, pointing a finger at her):

She was in the camp when the prisoners were freed--I saw her!

There is a murmur in the group of Romans.

ROMAN #3 (under his breath):

The guy that's with her--is that--?

ROMAN #2:

It's gotta be him. (dismounts, shouting) *Get them!*

The other Romans follow, jumping down and drawing their swords, and Xena and Ares are forced into a fight. They deftly repel their attackers, blocking the thrusts of their swords, and delivering blows of their own as well as kicks. Xena gives her piercing, ululating battle cry as she leaps into the air, flips, and knocks out two of the Romans with a split V-kick on landing; meanwhile, Ares spins around, kicking down one of the Romans, and spars with another.

ROMAN OFFICER (off-camera):

Halt the attack!

The camera pulls back to show two Roman officers riding up. They halt their horses as the fight stops. The Romans who have been downed scramble to their feet, breathing hard. Xena and Ares stand at the ready, shoulder to shoulder at a slight turn, their swords drawn.

ROMAN OFFICER #1:

What is going on here? You were told to scout the area, not pick fights with strangers.

The soldiers do as they are told and step back. Xena and Ares stand facing the general.

ROMAN SOLDIER #1 (to the officer):

That's Xena, Sir. Looks like she was at the camp when the prisoners--

ROMAN OFFICER #1:

We've got no orders to detain *her*.

ARES (smirks):

Then it's your lucky day.

ROMAN SOLIDER #2:

We thought the man with her might be the deserter, Sir.

ROMAN OFFICER #2 (looks closely at Ares):

That's not the man we're looking for.

XENA (scornfully):

So, what exactly is going on?

ROMAN OFFICER #1:

We're looking for a deserter--a Greek who was serving in the Roman army. Got three search parties after him, combing the area. (he pauses and looks closely at Xena) Name's Haimon. You wouldn't happen to know where he is, would you?

XENA (impassively):

I don't keep tabs on Roman soldiers--deserters or not.

ROMAN OFFICER # 2 (suspicious):

Rumor was that you (points to Xena) had a hand in freeing the Israelite prisoners--and that Haimon might be traveling in your company.

XENA:

I have all the company I need.

Close-up on Ares as he grins a little.

ROMAN OFFICER #2 (scowling a little):

Well, I think you know more than you're letting on. You got no reason to be here except to make trouble. If I ever do get orders to bring you in--

XENA (with a slight mocking note in her tone):

Well, then you'll just have to catch me.

The officer grunts in displeasure and signals to the men.

ROMAN OFFICER #2:

Come on--let's get moving!

The Romans get on their horses and ride off. Xena stares after them.

ARES:

You know, if they do get on wonder boy's trail--

XENA (finishes for him, abruptly):

--he'll lead them straight to Gabrielle.

ARES:

So--want to make sure they *don't* catch up with him?

Xena looks heavily in the Romans' direction, her hand on her chakram. Then, she shakes her head and mounts her horse.

XENA:

That won't stop the other search parties. (looks at Ares) We just have to get to him before they do.

ARES (sighs, sarcastic):

So much for taking the scenic route.

Xena clicks her tongue and gallops off. Ares mounts his horse and follows.

CUT TO

Haimon is now seated next to Gabrielle as she continues to feed Samuel.

HAIMON:

I'm worried about Darion.

Gabrielle sighs. There is a hint of defensiveness in her tone.

GABRIELLE:

I'm doing the best I can.

Haimon shakes his head ruefully.

HAIMON:

You never should have taken him to Jerusalem.

GABRIELLE (a little brusquely):

Maybe if you hadn't run off to join the Roman Legions--

HAIMON (interrupts):

You didn't give me a lot of reason to stay.

GABRIELLE (bristles):

Well, maybe if you had-- (she bites off the rest of it and looks away; then, after a pause) This isn't helping.

Haimon shakes his head and sighs, gazing down at Samuel a long moment as the baby feeds.

HAIMON (in a softer voice):

He's a good-looking boy.

Samuel is finally done feeding and Gabrielle repositions him on her shoulder, patting his back gently. She smiles.

GABRIELLE:

Even Xena can't get over how much he looks like his father.

Haimon nods, smiling grudgingly. Gabrielle rises to her feet and Haimon does likewise.

GABRIELLE:

I'm going to put him to bed. I have to go into town and get something. (Off Haimon's questioning look) Oh, Naomi will watch him. She's great with babies.

HAIMON (quietly):
I'll watch him.

They stare at each other for a moment. Then Gabrielle nods slowly.

GABRIELLE:
Good.

CUT TO

A busy street in town. Gabrielle comes out of a shop, wearing a new green and brown leather outfit with black and silver accents, armbands and gauntlets.

As she starts to walk down the street, she hears a voice behind her back.

DUMAN (off-camera):
So you and Najara do have a history.

Gabrielle whips around, startled.

DUMAN:
I heard what your friend said in the garden.

GABRIELLE:
I don't like spies.

DUMAN:
Do you like people who kill for their faith?

GABRIELLE:
The only people Najara ever killed were criminals she had captured.

DUMAN (grins):
So it *is* true. We had only heard rumors 'till now.

GABRIELLE (vehemently, obviously upset at herself):
She gave them a chance to reform. It was only if they refused--

DUMAN:
Then she's become more ruthless since then.

GABRIELLE:
What are you talking about?

DUMAN:
About a month ago, a young woman name Malia, who worked at Neimah's--Najara's shelter, disappeared without a trace. Rumor has it, she wanted to leave the Eli cult. And Neimah killed her.

Close up of Gabrielle's horrified face as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Same scene as before. Gabrielle looks at Duman, clearly troubled.

GABRIELLE:

I'll find out the truth myself. (Angrily, she points a finger at Duman) Do *not* follow me.

She starts to walk away.

DUMAN (shouts after her):

The truth? You think she'll tell you that?

Pan around to see Gabrielle's conflicted expression as she walks away.

CUT TO

A man in his 40's, Saalim, Najara's assistant, is fixing a broken chair inside the shelter. Gabrielle walks in behind him.

GABRIELLE:

Saalim. What do you know about Neimah?

The urgency in her voice startles him, and he turns around. The chair leg he was fixing drops to the ground, the chair tilting to one side.

SAALIM:

What do you need to know?

GABRIELLE:

Everything. I need to know if she's everything she says she is.

SAALIM:

She's in the kitchen if you want to talk--

GABRIELLE (cuts him off):

Do you know anything about Malia?

SAALIM (looks down):

Malia... (He shakes head sadly) She disappeared. No one knows what happened to her. (looks up at Gabrielle) We're all very worried about her. She was a good friend to all of us.

GABRIELLE:

Do you think that Najara--I mean Neimah--might have harmed her in some way?

SAALIM:

You can call her by her real name. Many of us know what it is.

Gabrielle gives him a surprised look.

SAALIM:

I was one of Najara's men in Phoenicia, many years ago.

Gabrielle watches him uneasily.

GABRIELLE:

Then you do know her history.

SAALIM:

Which part of her history? Saving hundreds of innocents from warlords and slavers?

GABRIELLE:

Or should I say--her philosophy. Convert or die.

SAALIM:

I know. (the camera pulls in for a close-up) I was given that choice.

Gabrielle stares at him, fascinated.

SAALIM:

I was very young when I ran away from home and joined a gang of pirates. I had been with them for a year when Najara captured us. (He lowers his eyes) One of my friends...he could have become a good man too. But he had once made vows to the goddess Anat in appreciation for healing his sister, and he was afraid his sister would die if he converted to another faith. (He looks up, his eyes meeting Gabrielle's) I won't defend what she did. And yet--

GABRIELLE (in wonderment):

And yet she has earned your loyalty.

SAALIM:

At first when I followed her, it was mainly out of fear. Even when I started to see the good she was doing, a part of me hated her for killing Raheem. Then I met her again after she had escaped from prison. She told me she knew she had been wrong--she had changed her ways. And then I knew that no matter what else she did, she still saved my life. Maybe even my soul. I don't like to think of what I would have become if I hadn't met her. (He pauses) And if there's one thing I'm sure about--it's that she wouldn't have done anything to harm Malia or any other innocent person.

Gabrielle stares at him, not sure what to think.

CUT TO

A hand holding a cleaver comes down in a violent chopping motion, with a thud.

The camera pulls back slightly to see an eggplant chopped in half, then further back to show Najara in the kitchen, chopping vegetables. There are several other women and men around her, doing various tasks as they prepare dinner.

CUT TO

Gabrielle walking down the hall in a determined stride.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares galloping into the city of Petra and riding through the streets.

CUT TO

Najara throwing the chopped eggplant into a large pot of boiling water. She throws a pinch of salt in the pot.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares dismount in front of the shelter.

CUT TO

Gabrielle walks down the hallway, then pushes the kitchen door open and strides in.

GABRIELLE (loudly):

Najara.

Startled, Najara turns to see a very perturbed Gabrielle standing in the doorway. Najara looks at her servants and nods to them to continue cooking while she wipes her hands with a towel and walks toward Gabrielle.

NAJARA:

What's wrong?

GABRIELLE:

I want to talk about Malia.

They stare at each other for a moment.

NAJARA (worried):

I think it would be best if we talked someplace more private.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares at the shelter door. Xena knocks. Jannah, the young woman who greeted Gabrielle and the refugees, opens the door.

CUT TO

Najara and Gabrielle walking through the hallway.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares at the shelter door.

JANNAH:

Oh yes, they're here. I believe your friend is talking to the Holy Mother.

Xena looks puzzled.

ARES:

Leave her alone for a week and she joins a cult. Figures.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Najara come into an inner garden and stop, Najara turns to Gabrielle.

NAJARA:

How do you know about Malia?

Gabrielle hesitates. Najara nods.

NAJARA:

One of the king's spies, wasn't it?

CUT TO

Xena walking down the hallway.

CUT TO

NAJARA:

Believe me, Gabrielle--I'm just as worried about Malia's disappearance as--anyone else.

Gabrielle watches her silently.

NAJARA (sighs):

You still don't believe me, do you?

Gabrielle hesitates. Before she has a chance to say anything, Xena walks out into the courtyard and stops short when she sees Gabrielle standing with Najara (who is facing Xena). Najara flinches slightly at seeing Xena, and Gabrielle turns around.

GABRIELLE (happily):

Xena!

She starts to walk toward Xena. Xena opens her mouth to speak, then clenches her jaw, as if not sure what to say. Finally, she speaks, her voice bristling with anger and disbelief.

XENA:

This is the Holy Mother?

Gabrielle opens her mouth to speak but before she can, Xena turns around abruptly and leaves. Gabrielle darts a quick look at Najara, then dashes after Xena.

CUT TO

The front of the shelter. Xena walks out through the garden gate in a quick stride and comes out in the street.

Gabrielle comes running after her.

GABRIELLE:

Xena. Wait!

Gabrielle catches up to her at a street corner.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, I can explain.

Xena continues walking, with Gabrielle following her, and turns onto a busier street. Gabrielle is out of breath trying to catch up. Finally, Xena stops and turns around brusquely, taking a deep breath.

XENA:

I just never thought--*she* would be back.

GABRIELLE:

I know.

XENA:

Don't tell me she's changed. *Again*.

GABRIELLE (a little sheepishly):

Well...

XENA (rolls her eyes in disgust):

Oh--no, no--

She starts walking again, Gabrielle following.

GABRIELLE:

All I know is, she's been doing good, Xena. She's opened a shelter, she's helping the people here-

-

XENA (sarcastic):

And she's given up fighting.

GABRIELLE:

Yes, she has.

Angry and distracted, Xena jostles past a donkey-driver with a cart.

DONKEY DRIVER:

Hey, watch it, lady!

GABRIELLE (to the donkey driver):

Sorry--

XENA:

Right. Until her voices talk to her again.

She turns into an almost empty side street and continues to walk. Gabrielle follows.

GABRIELLE:

She told me she hasn't heard them in nearly thirty years.

XENA:

And you believed her.

GABRIELLE (almost yelling):

Xena, for once, please trust me on this. I don't want to fight. Yes, I have my doubts, too--

Xena comes to an abrupt halt and whips around, staring at Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (continues):

--but after everything that I've been through, I *have* to give her another chance.

The two women stand facing each other.

GABRIELLE (lowering her voice back to normal):

You know I've changed a lot since we last saw Najara.

Xena nods slowly.

GABRIELLE:

Back then, I was on a peaceful path--

XENA (stricken):

...and Najara said that if you stayed with me, it would destroy you.

Gabrielle stares at Xena, her eyes widening in shock.

GABRIELLE (quietly):

Is that why you're so scared of her? (after a brief pause) Because you're afraid it's true? Or that I think it's true? (Off Xena's guilty look) Xena, you should know better than that by now.

XENA (smiles a little):

I guess I should, huh? (She puts an affectionate hand on Gabrielle's shoulder.)

GABRIELLE:

Give her the benefit of the doubt. That's all I ask.

Xena takes her hand off Gabrielle's shoulder and studies her face, then nods vaguely.

XENA:

Let's go back.

They start walking toward the shelter.

GABRIELLE (touches Xena's arm):

Thank you.

The two of them turn back and head toward the shelter.

XENA:

I still wish you'd have found another place to stay.

GABRIELLE:

I know--of all the shelters in all the cities of the known world, I had to walk into Najara's, huh?

They both chuckle.

GABRIELLE (continues):

Don't worry, we won't be here long.

XENA:

Is Haimon here?

GABRIELLE:

Yeah. (after a brief pause) Let me guess. You sent him ahead because you thought he and I needed to talk.

XENA (chuckles):

Did you get a chance to talk?

GABRIELLE:

Yeah. He's still getting used to the idea that he has a son. (pause) And I'm still getting used to the idea that he's here.

They approach the shelter gate. Then Xena stops and turns toward Gabrielle. She looks worried.

XENA:

We've got a problem. (Off Gabrielle's alarmed look) The Romans are looking for him.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

Of course... He's a traitor.

CUT TO

A group of Romans ride into Petra. The camera lingers over their hard, expressionless faces as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

A room in the shelter. Darion stands with his feet planted firmly, holding the staff in front of him like a sword. He swings and hits a larger stick. Pull back to show Ares standing in front of him, holding a long stick. The two of them spar, Darion hitting Ares' stick and Ares countering him, back and fourth. Darion is grinning wildly, clearly enjoying it, and Ares looks rather pleased as well.

Haimon walks past the room and stops at the open door to see Ares and Darion sparring. He stands in the doorway, watching them silently but somewhat glumly.

Darion swings at Ares and knocks the stick out of his hands, then points his stick at Ares.

DARION:

I win. (the grin on his face fades a little) Wait a minute--you let me win, didn't you?

ARES (grins):

Hey, I don't let just anybody win.

He ruffles Darion's hair. Darion chuckles and picks up his stick.

DARION:

Let's--

He notices Haimon and his expression turns sullen. He turns away toward Ares.

DARION:

Let's go one more round.

Xena comes up behind Haimon and comes into the room.

DARION (with genuine joy):

Xena! (he runs up to hug her)

XENA (hugs him):

I've missed you, too.

She is obviously glad to see him but looks somewhat preoccupied. She stands up straight, looking at Ares and Haimon.

XENA (continues):

We need to get out of here--quickly.

Ares and Haimon both give her a questioning look.

ARES:

Well. So much for a rest stop.

HAIMON:

What's wrong?

XENA (looks at him):

Lots of things. The Romans are after us.

HAIMON:

You mean, after *me*. They're on my trail, headed here.

XENA:

Don't know--but I wouldn't be surprised.

HAIMON:

Then I'll leave right away. I can't endanger Gabrielle--or the boys.

Pan over to Darion. There's a flicker of emotion in Darion's face as he turns away sullenly.

XENA:

We should head out too. (to Ares) Don't get too comfortable.

ARES:

Running from the Romans? That's a first.

XENA:

It's not just the Romans. (she pauses) The woman who runs this place--the one they call the Holy Mother--her real name's Najara. She and I-- (she pauses for a second)

ARES (finishes for her):

--have a complicated past. (off her sharp look, shrugs) Wild guess.

XENA:

I don't want to be around her any longer than we have to be.

Xena's gaze falls on the open window, and something below catches her attention. Ares follows her stare and sees Gabrielle and Najara in the garden, talking.

XENA (abruptly and firmly):

We leave tomorrow.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Najara in the garden.

NAJARA:

I can try and talk to Xena. Maybe--

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

I don't think that's such a good idea. Xena still doesn't trust you.

NAJARA (after a pause):

Do you?

A long pause.

GABRIELLE (quietly):
I want to trust you.

NAJARA:

I understand. (she takes a deep breath) Gabrielle--about Malia... I didn't tell you the whole truth before.

Gabrielle looks at her warily.

GABRIELLE:
Go on.

NAJARA (sighs):

I had--reasons to suspect that Malia was a spy for the king.

Gabrielle stares at her in shock.

NAJARA (continues):

The day before she--disappeared, I confronted her. She cried and cried. She told me my unjust suspicions had hurt her deeply. I wasn't sure what to think; I was afraid I had wronged her.

GABRIELLE (suspiciously):
And--?

NAJARA:

And then next morning, she was gone--without a trace.

GABRIELLE (looks at her probingly):
You suspected she was a spy--a traitor...

NAJARA:

Gabrielle, I swear to you I didn't--

They are interrupted by Haimon, who walks out into the garden.

HAIMON:

Gabrielle.

Gabrielle turns to see him walking toward her.

HAIMON (coming closer):
I need to talk to you.

GABRIELLE (to Najara, a little flustered):
I'll--talk to you later, okay?

NAJARA (smiles):
Any time.

She leaves the garden, walking back into the building. The camera follows her while Haimon talks to Gabrielle in the background.

CUT TO

The room where we last saw Darion, Xena and Ares. Xena has her armor off and is polishing it with mechanical gestures, obviously lost in thought. Ares is trying to mend a rip in one of his boots. He pricks his finger with the needle and flinches.

ARES:

Ow. (he sucks on his finger)

XENA (glances at him):

Want me to do it?

ARES:

No thanks.

He continues, rather clumsily, to mend the boot.

XENA:

Thought you didn't like touching the tools of common labor.

ARES (in mock outrage):

What are you calling common labor?

Xena chuckles and then tenses as she hears something outside the door. The door is pushed open and Najara comes in, a little hesitantly. Xena stands quickly, her posture stiff and defensive. She stares Najara down as if ready for a fight.

XENA:

What do you want?

NAJARA:

A word with you. (glances at Ares) Alone.

XENA (scoffs):

Not interested.

NAJARA:

Xena. Give me a chance.

Xena moves toward her, her eyes cold.

XENA:

You ran out of chances years ago.

Ares puts down the boot he's trying to mend and stares at her, intrigued by the fury of her reaction.

XENA:

Turning Gabrielle and me against each other--deceiving us twice... Or at least, deceiving *Gabrielle* twice--because I didn't fall for it the second time--and I sure ain't falling for it in the third round.

NAJARA:

Gabrielle--

XENA:

Look, I know Gabrielle trusts you. Or wants to trust you. I don't want to fight with her over that--not again. But don't think you're going to win me over, 'cause it's not happening.

NAJARA:

Very well.

She turns around and leaves. Xena sits down on the bed, exhaling. Ares moves up to her and puts his hand on her shoulders.

ARES:

So. This is personal, huh?

XENA (sharply):

What are you talking about? She's dangerous. She's a crazy zealot who's very good at fooling people with her talk of goodness and light.

ARES (gently squeezing her shoulders):

Mm-hmm--people like Gabrielle?

XENA (whips around and stares at him):

What are you saying? That I'm j--

She stops in mid-word. Ares gives her an innocent look.

XENA (grimly):

Let's just get out of here tomorrow.

He rubs her shoulders and she closes her eyes for a moment, leaning back into him, but remains visibly tense.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Haimon sitting on the bench in the garden. Gabrielle is looking down.

GABRIELLE (quietly):

I'm sorry you have to go. (She sighs and looks up) I don't think we'll be staying here much longer, either.

HAIMON:

I don't think you should. (brief pause) Do you trust Najara?

GABRIELLE:

I don't know. I'm... (sighs) I want to trust her but--this whole thing with Malia... After everything that

happened before--I just don't know if I can put it past Najara to have--done something to that girl if she thought Malia had betrayed her.

HAIMON:

Xena needs to know.

GABRIELLE (shakes head, emphatic):

No. If I tell Xena, she'll convict Najara immediately. I don't know *what* she'll do. But I'd rather not risk it.

She sighs, dropping her head in her hands.

GABRIELLE (continues):

I don't know what to think.

Haimon reaches out gently and touches her shoulder.

CUT TO

Najara standing in a window behind them; she has obviously heard the conversation. Her expression is unreadable.

Suddenly, she shifts her eyes to the garden, hearing something.

CUT TO

The five Romans we saw at the end of Act 3 rush into the garden.

ROMAN #1 (pointing toward Haimon):

That's him!

Gabrielle and Haimon leap to their feet. The Romans charge them. Haimon moves in front of Gabrielle, drawing his sword to fend them off.

HAIMON (to Gabrielle):

Get out of here!

GABRIELLE (vehemently):

No!

Najara runs out into the garden and yells, looking up toward the windows.

NAJARA:

Xena!

CUT TO

Xena, half-lying in Ares' arms on the bed, bolts to her feet and toward the window. She sees Haimon fighting off the Romans and Gabrielle standing back hesitantly.

XENA (to Ares):
Let's go.

CUT TO

The garden. Haimon is trying to fight off the Romans but they are surrounding him. Finally, Gabrielle charges forward, drawing her sais.

NAJARA:
Gabrielle!

Gabrielle fights one of the Romans; she blocks his sword with her sais, then knocks it from his hand and kicks him in the face. He staggers back. Haimon spins around and knocks him down. Meanwhile, Gabrielle slips the sais back into her boots and picks up the Roman's sword.

Najara stands watching this, obviously wanting to intervene but hesitating. Finally, she runs forward.

NAJARA:
Gabrielle! Don't do this.

GABRIELLE (snaps):
Najara, let me go. I'm not leaving Haimon alone.

NAJARA (grabs Gabrielle's arm):
Xena will be here any moment.

GABRIELLE:
Let go of me!

NAJARA (pleading):
Gabrielle, you *know* what all this violence was doing to your spirit. You have a chance to stop it. You've brought new life into the world. Maybe it was a way for a higher power to--

GABRIELLE:
And maybe the father of my child could be killed while we're debating my spiritual path. Let go!

She forcefully pushes Najara aside--only to see one of the Romans knock Haimon down.

GABRIELLE (in an intense whisper):
No.

As the Roman starts to raise his sword, Gabrielle grabs one of her sais and throws it at him, hitting him in the face. He staggers and loses his footing, tumbling to the ground. This gives Haimon a chance to get back to his feet and fend off another Roman.

ROMAN OFFICER:
Somebody get that girl!

A Roman soldier, sword drawn, charges toward Gabrielle. She assumes a combat stance, her sword ready.

NAJARA:

Gabrielle, wait--

She runs in front of Gabrielle.

Zoom in on Najara's face, her eyes wide open in shock as a small cry pushes out of her lips.

PAN TO Gabrielle, who looks horrified.

GABRIELLE (screams):

Najara!

The camera pulls back to show Najara staggering, a dark bloodstain spreading on the front of her dress.

As the camera pulls further back, we see the Roman, looking somewhat perplexed, pulling his sword out of Najara's back. Najara collapses to her knees, blood tricking from her mouth.

With a scream of rage, Gabrielle charges the Roman with her sword. She knocks the sword out of his hand and attacks him with a flurry of kicks, shouting as she delivers each of them. He staggers and falls, and with a final furious cry Gabrielle raises her sword and brings it down, running him through.

NAJARA (weakly):

Gabrielle--

Gabrielle looks at her bloody sword, sighs and shakes her head.

Xena and Ares come running into the garden. Xena surveys the situation--Najara on her knees and bleeding, Gabrielle with the bloody sword--with a momentary look of shock on her face, then rushes into the fray to fight the other Romans. Ares follows.

Gabrielle drops the sword, runs to Najara and kneels next to her.

GABRIELLE (moves her hands toward the wound and applying pressure; the blood seeps through her fingers):

Najara--

NAJARA (weakly):

I'm--I'm sorry. (she lifts her hand and strokes Gabrielle's face)

In the background, Xena, Ares, and Haimon are seen fighting the Romans. The camera zooms in on the fight.

Xena is fighting with two swords, her own and one of the Romans'. A Roman soldier charges Ares, who spins and gives him a powerful kick to the side, causing him to stagger and fall down. Xena, in a move reminiscent of the battle from *Endgame*, twirls the two swords and plunges them into the Roman with a fierce yell. Two Romans are attacking Haimon; Xena throws her second sword at one of them, killing him on the spot, while Haimon kills the other.

Pan back to Gabrielle and Najara.

GABRIELLE:

Najara...I know you meant well--

NAJARA (hoarsely):

Just remember, Gabrielle-- (struggles to speak) It's never too late for a second chance...

Her hand in Gabrielle's hand goes limp; she slumps forward, dead.

The camera pulls back to show that the fight is over. Xena sheathes her sword, with a grim look on her face, and walks toward Gabrielle. Haimon follows behind.

DISSOLVE TO

An overhead shot of the garden. The Romans lie dead on the ground. Gabrielle rises from her knees and stands over Najara's body, looking down. Xena comes up to stand beside Gabrielle and puts a hand on her shoulder; Gabrielle turns her head slightly. Haimon lingers a couple of steps back, while Ares sheathes his sword. Meanwhile, Najara's disciples and shelter residents start filing out of the building into the garden.

PAN TO

Xena and Gabrielle, standing over Najara's body.

XENA (quietly):

I'm sorry.

Xena pulls Gabrielle into a hug. Gabrielle rests her head on Xena's shoulder.

DISSOLVE TO

The flames of a funeral pyre in the garden. The camera pulls back to show the mourners, Saalim and Jannah among them, standing around the pyre. Xena and Gabrielle stand next to each other; Ares stands next to Xena and Darion next to Gabrielle, holding Samuel in his arms.

GABRIELLE (speaking almost to herself):

I guess now I'll never know who Najara really was.

Xena glances at her and says nothing.

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

I'm so sorry she's dead.

Gabrielle turns around to see a slender, olive-skinned, dark-haired young woman in a blue dress. She looks guilty and regretful.

SAALIM (off-camera):

Malia?

The camera pans to him. He looks incredulous, as do some of the other disciples.

JANNAH:

What happened to you? We were so worried...

MALIA (stares down grimly, then looks up):

I--have a confession to make. I'm one King Aretas' servants. Or at least I was. (Saalim looks at her in shock) I came to this place because he wanted me to spy on Neimah.

Gasps of disbelief. Pan for a close-up on Gabrielle, who looks incredulous, stricken, and relieved at the same time.

MALIA:

Neimah found out. Or at least she had suspicions. I went back to the king and he sent me out of town. (sighs) I know they were planning to spread rumors that Neimah--harmed me in some way...

GABRIELLE (looks down):

They did.

Xena gives her a puzzled look.

MALIA (sighs):

Anyway, I...I wasn't feeling good about what I was doing. And I felt even worse when I heard she's been killed. That's why I came back. (to Saalim) I want to help keep this place alive. If you'll let me.

Saalim looks at her, his face reflecting a struggle. Finally, he nods.

SAALIM:

The Holy Mother would have forgiven you. We can do no less.

The other disciples murmur in assent. Saalim embraces Malia; Jannah does likewise.

MALIA:

She was a good woman.

GABRIELLE (nods slowly, tears in her eyes):

She was.

Xena sympathetically squeezes her shoulder.

DISSOLVE TO

Later. The funeral pyre is still burning but most of the mourners are walking back into the house.

Haimon approaches and stops, looking at Gabrielle, Darion and Samuel. His inscrutable expression gradually becomes tender, then guilty and finally rueful.

Xena glances in his direction, then touches Ares' hand.

XENA:

C'mon.

Xena and Ares walk toward the house. Xena turns around, once, as Haimon steps up to Gabrielle.

Darion looks down at his feet while Gabrielle gazes up at Haimon. There is a hint of longing in her eyes.

HAIMON:

This is all my fault.

GABRIELLE:

We've both made mistakes.

Haimon nods towards the funeral pyre.

HAIMON:

But my mistake got someone killed. I never should have come here. I'm a deserter from the Roman Legions--a wanted man. I put you and Darion and Samuel in danger.

DARION:

You're going to leave again.

Haimon reaches out to touch Darion's cheek but the boy jerks away. Haimon frowns and pauses a moment, then withdraws his hand.

HAIMON:

I can't help it. You and Gabrielle and Samuel will never be safe as long I'm with you. You understand, don't you, Darion?

Darion shrugs sullenly and looks away. Haimon strokes Samuel's forehead gently.

HAIMON:

I'm counting on you to take care of Gabrielle and your baby brother. You'll do that for me, won't you?

Darion steps back, moving Samuel out of his reach.

DARION (sullenly):

We'll be fine.

Haimon winces. Darion has obviously struck a nerve. Darion turns and walks off towards Xena, Ares and Naomi.

GABRIELLE:

He'll understand when he's older. Sometimes we have to make choices we don't want to make.

Haimon sighs and nods sadly.

HAIMON:

I'm sorry I let you down.

GABRIELLE:

I'm the one that should be sorry. I should have told you about Samuel. I just... (she becomes flustered, at a loss to explain herself) I wish we had been able to work things out.

HAIMON:

We've had some ups and downs.

GABRIELLE (reluctantly):

Haimon...this isn't...will I ever see you again?

Haimon smiles sadly and reaches out, tenderly taking Gabrielle's hand in his. They gaze at one another silently as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[The Djinn were not harmed during the production of this motion picture.]