

SHIPPER SEASON TEN

“Liberation”

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Logline

Zenobia, the deposed Syrian queen, has returned home to reclaim what's rightfully hers. Upon hearing the news, Xena, Gabrielle, Ares and Darion travel to Palmyra--as does Sabina, who is leading a Roman army against Zenobia's forces. Unexpected reunions and old memories await as the fate of the city and its people hangs in the balance.

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TEASER

FADE IN

A group of Roman cavalry ride across the desert.

CUT TO

A small village. There are a few scattered trees with thin branches and sparse leaves surrounding the huts in the sand but most of the village is drenched in sunlight. In the distance, a man in his forties, holding a crooked cane, is tending to his small herd of goats.

Pan around to show a young boy, six or seven years old, walking into view, wearing long off-white clothes that shield his body from the intense mid-day sun. He is carrying a large bucket of water toward the village from a well behind him. Some of the water sloshes out of the bucket and he attempts to steady it.

VOICE (off-camera):

Let me help you with that.

A hand reaches down to steady the bucket. The boy looks up. Pan up to show Haimon standing over him. He's wearing long desert clothes--light brown and somewhat tattered. His hair is also a little scraggly and he's grown a thin, scruffy beard.

CUT TO

Another part of the village. A grandmother, with her gray hair pulled back under a scarf, is seated on the ground beside the doorway of her hut, kneading dough on a large board. She stops for a moment to wipe the sweat from her brow with a rag and then resumes kneading.

A shadow falls on her from the side of the hut and she looks up and smiles. Pan up to show Haimon standing with the boy who's holding the bucket of water. He sets the bucket down.

GRANDMOTHER:

Go wash up, Orren. (she looks to the doorway where, on a hook, two freshly killed jackrabbits hang) Haimon's caught dinner. We'll have a feast today.

Haimon smiles back at her and ruffles the boy's hair.

DISSOLVE TO

What remains of the rabbit meal sits on a large plate on a table inside the house. The grandmother is taking the dirty dishes from the table, and Haimon is helping her. The boy and the man we saw before with the goats are sitting on a bench by the wall. The man's cane is leaning against the side of the bench. Orren is sitting on his lap, and the man is quietly talking to him.

The grandmother smiles at them and then turns back to the dishes. She walks to a large basin with water in it.

GRANDMOTHER (to Haimon):

You've helped us so much these past few months. Hunting. Fixing the roof. Helping around the house. (She pauses, then lowers her voice) Ever since that terrible accident when Orren lost his mother and my son was injured...life has been difficult. But you have made things a little bit brighter. I'm not sure we can ever thank you enough.

HAIMON (picking up a plate and some utensils):

It's the least I could do. (after a brief pause, looking away, his voice quieter) You've helped me, too.

The grandmother puts the dishes in the basin.

There is a long moment of silence. Then she turns to Haimon as if to say something, but before she can speak someone is heard shouting outside. The words are indistinct at first but then they get louder.

VOICES (off-camera):

They're coming this way!

Pan to Orren and his father as they look up.

ORREN:

Who's coming, Dad?

The father grabs his cane and stands, favoring one leg over the other, and limps toward a window. He and the boy look out, and the grandmother follows; so does Haimon, looking wary.

From the window, three boys of twelve or thirteen can be seen running into the village, as people begin to come out of their houses to see what is going on.

BOY #1 (out of breath):

We were out hunting and we saw them...

OLD MAN:

Saw whom?

BOY #2:

Romans, on horseback!

BOY #3:

Probably a dozen of them!

BOY #1:

Coming this way!

The camera pulls back inside the house.

ORREN (looks up at his father):

Who are the Romans, Dad?

Orren's father shakes his head.

GRANDMOTHER:

The gods protect us! Surely not another war...

She looks back at Haimon but he has disappeared. She frowns, puzzled.

CUT TO

A small room in the house. Haimon is frantically packing up his things into a small pack, throwing his Roman clothes, a dagger, some bread and a waterskin into it. As he stuffs things into his pack, a small silver medallion with a rough carving of a face on one side and an eagle on the other falls out of the pile of clothes and onto the floor.

Not noticing the medallion, Haimon closes the bag and latches the clasp, then heads out the doorway and nearly collides with the grandmother on the other side. The grandmother looks at him, startled, then notices his pack.

GRANDMOTHER:

Where are you going?

HAIMON (urgently):
I'm sorry.

He brushes past the grandmother and heads for the door. The father and the boy watch him. The father steps up.

FATHER (concerned):
What's going on?

Haimon stops and looks back. The father is standing with his hands on his son's shoulders, and the grandmother beside him.

HAIMON (hesitates):
I have to go.

She and Haimon share a look and then she looks out the window. The boys are standing in front of several villagers in the house across from them, talking.

GRANDMOTHER:
The Romans...?

HAIMON (sighs, lowering his pack):
We...have a history. I'm-- (heavy sigh) I used to be one of them.

FATHER (surprised and somewhat wary):
When we found you in the desert--you...

HAIMON (interrupts):
I didn't want you to know because I'm not proud of it. And because...it could put you all in danger. I just needed a new life.

GRANDMOTHER:
And we gave that to you.

HAIMON:
I left the army months ago. If they find me with you, you'll be punished for protecting a deserter. So I have to go. (he reaches for the door handle, then looks back) Thank you for all that you've done. These past few months... (Orren and the father stand looking back at him, Orren looking sad) ...they reminded me of what having a family could be like. (pause) Goodbye.

Haimon opens the door and leaves. The grandmother, father and boy stand together in the open doorway as Haimon heads away from the house.

CUT TO

The docks. A ship pulls away from port. Eve and Virgil are on the ship, waving from the bow. Pull back to show Xena and Gabrielle, from the back, standing on the dock, waving to them.

Pan around to Xena and Gabrielle from the front.

A short distance away, a smaller ship has just docked. The plank is lowered and a small group of simple looking villagers leave the ship. The fish emblem medallions around their necks indicate that they are Elijans. Gabrielle turns and notices the group as they walk along the dock. Among them is a recognizable face, a dark skinned woman with dark hair in a pale green and tan peasant dress.

GABRIELLE (surprised):
Siran!

Xena turns toward the group of people. Siran looks up, shocked, then smiles brightly; the group of people continues on past her.

SIRAN (walking up):
Xena. Gabrielle. It's good to see you.

GABRIELLE (giving Siran a brief hug):
It's good to see you, too.

SIRAN:
What are you doing here so far from home?

XENA:
We're on business.

Siran nods, understanding.

GABRIELLE:
Haimon has left the Roman army; he's a deserter. The Romans are now on his trail and we're hoping to catch up to him; with luck, before they do.

There is silence for a moment.

GABRIELLE (changing the subject):
And what about you?

SIRAN (gestures toward the group of people who have now stopped behind her and are waiting):
We're on our way to Palmyra. We're going to establish an Elijan community there. But for me, it's also a homecoming. I was born there and haven't seen it in... (pauses for a long moment) ...far too long. (she smiles) It's an exciting time to return, too, now that the queen is back.

GABRIELLE:
The queen?

Xena and Gabrielle look at each other for a long moment, the look of realization finally appearing on their faces.

XENA and GABRIELLE:
Zenobia.

DISSOLVE TO

The sun shines down over a large stone city in the middle of the desert; sparse palm trees inside and a river flowing not too far from the city walls.

DISSOLVE TO

On the balcony of a sandstone palace, Zenobia stands looking out over the city, dressed in gold and purple robes, her hair pulled back regally behind her head with a gold headband. The look on her face is a mix of pride and apprehension, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Pan slowly through the bustling city of stone. The place looks very wealthy, with a cobblestone main street and a marketplace full of all kinds of fruit, spices, cured meats and other foods, vendors selling silk garments, jewelry and other exotic items. People are dressed simply but elegantly, the women's hair up in fashionable hairstyles and neatly trimmed, the men clean shaven. Most of the people are rather dark-skinned, though there is clearly a mix of different ethnicities.

There is an aqueduct that runs along the main street leading to a large pool in the center of town where it deposits the water. A large, ornate stone fountain with detailed scroll work is at the pool's center. People are around it, drinking and talking.

The buildings show the heavy influence of Roman architecture, in the subtle scroll work and colonnades--in fact, the place, from the buildings to the people's clothing, has a very Roman look.

Among the harmony of the city, there is one building that has been demolished and a group of people are working on cleaning up the rubble. Several guards stand around, watching, and as they do, some of the people working look up and don't look happy.

DISSOLVE TO

The exterior of a grand palace.

CUT TO

Inside the palace. The decorations are elegant and rich but not ostentatious. A few guards stand along the walls with spears, in uniforms of brown leather accented with gold.

The camera tracks down the hallway until the faint voices of a woman and a man in a heated argument can be heard.

CUT TO

Inside the main palace chamber. Pan around the wealthy room, tapestries on the walls that are made partially with gold threads, potted ferns in every corner. One side of the room opens on a canopied balcony with a grand view of the bustling city below.

A man comes walking into view and then turns abruptly to look at Zenobia, who is standing on the steps of a throne. He looks a few years younger than she is, but equally regal, with a small headband of gold around his head and wearing robes of gold, tan and purple.

MAN:

You can't *do* this, Zenobia.

ZENOBIA (haughtily):

I am the *rightful* queen of this city, Hairan. *I* can do as I *please*.

Zenobia goes to walk past him but he grabs her arm. She turns and they look into each other's eyes for a brief, tense moment. Hairan lets go of her arm.

HAIRAN (sighs):

It's good to have you back, cousin. I didn't think... (looks down) ...I'd ever see you again. But you've been back for less than a month and already, you're trying to turn back time. You can't just pick up where you left off and expect people to accept it...It doesn't work like that.

ZENOBIA (angry):

You let *them* (she says the word with contempt, pointing toward a bust of the Emperor Vespasian standing on a small pedestal by the balcony) colonize this city. I walk through the streets, I don't even see Palmyra anymore. I see Rome. (steps closer to him) I came back because my city needs me once again. And it will be mine as soon as Rome is gone from here...for good.

Zenobia turns to walk out, the fabric of her robe flapping behind her. Hairan stands silent for a moment.

HAIRAN (from behind):

And are you willing to condemn your own people to achieve your goal?

Zenobia stops and looks back.

ZENOBIA (contemptuously):

Because the Romans will be back with their armies?

HAIRAN (walks up to her, then stops):

No, not just because of that. Roman influence has been good for this city. Trade, medicine, schooling for our children--everything has flourished. The Romans have done some good here, Zenobia.

ZENOBIA:

We can do all this for ourselves. Face it, Hairan--you're afraid.

HAIRAN:

All right--so I am. I don't want to see this city nearly destroyed *again*.

Zenobia stands silent, her expression unreadable.

HAIRAN (steps closer and puts a hand on her shoulder):

I understand your hatred for the Romans, after everything they did to you. But you must think of your people.

Zenobia steps back and glares at him, then turns around abruptly and walks out.

ZENOBIA (as she walks away):

I *am* thinking of my people.

Pan around to show Hairan's frowning, worried face.

CUT TO

Zenobia walks out into a courtyard of the palace, where a few guards are waiting with about a dozen Romans chained together. As Zenobia approaches, the guards push down the Romans, forcing them to kneel before her.

GUARD:

The prisoners, my queen.

Zenobia surveys them arrogantly. Some of them look like common soldiers or citizens but one has the bearings of an officer, with an insignia on his armor. His face is bloodied but he looks vaguely familiar.

ZENOBIA (looks up at the guard):

Take them to the dungeon.

The guards haul the men to their feet. They do not struggle but as they are marched past Zenobia, the officer suddenly turns toward her.

OFFICER (defiant):

The Romans take care of their own. Remember that when they return, tearing down the city gates.

The guards start to drag him away but Zenobia gestures to them to stop.

ZENOBIA (to the officer):

Have I met you before?

OFFICER:

Perhaps. I fought against you at Moesia where you and your barbarian allies would have slaughtered thousands of innocents.

ZENOBIA:

At Moesia. You fought at Livia's side? (off his silent glare) What is your name?

OFFICER:

Nymphidius.

We now recognize him as Livia/Eve's old teacher.

ZENOBIA:

I'll remember that name--if I need to make an example of one of the prisoners.

She gestures to the guards to take the prisoners away.

CUT TO

The desert, the sun beating down.

CUT TO

A Roman army is seen marching across the desert. Many of the men are on foot but there are cavalry as well. At the head of the line is Titus. Another horse comes riding up beside the group, a woman in bronze armor and a red and tan cape flapping behind her. She heads for the front of the line and slows her horse to meet Titus' pace. She looks at him. It's Sabina.

TITUS:

Any news of the deserter?

SABINA:

There are reports he was spotted not too far from here. I sent a squad of men. It won't be long before we have him.

TITUS:

And make an example of him.

Sabina gives him a thoughtful look.

SABINA:

The legion from Caesarea will join us tomorrow.

TITUS:

Good. (firm) Zenobia must be stopped.

Sabina stares at him for a moment.

SABINA:

For the glory of Rome.

TITUS:

There is no other glory.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Ares are walking along a road leading their horses. Darion is walking next to Gabrielle, who has Samuel strapped to her chest. Siran and the Elijans walk alongside them.

GABRIELLE:

So Zenobia is really back... (doubtfully) Well, if she has reclaimed her city--that's good, isn't it?

XENA:

She was ruthless at Moesia.

SIRAN (to Xena and Gabrielle):

She was a good queen. (she pauses, reminiscing) My mother was a servant in her palace. Then, the Romans came, captured the queen and conquered the city, and I and many others were taken to be slaves in Rome. I was very young then, and I don't remember much about her; but I remember my mother saying how kind and wise and generous she was.

They walk in silence for a moment.

XENA:

She is not the same woman she was, Siran. She was a prisoner for years.

SIRAN (quietly):

So was I.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a silent look.

GABRIELLE:

It hasn't made you bitter and hateful.

Xena stops walking, her attention drawn away from them. Gabrielle notices she's stopped and looks in the direction Xena is looking.

XENA (suddenly points ahead):

Look.

The camera pans for a long shot of a rider in the distance, galloping across the sand. He is wearing a brown cloak and a hood. It looks like his horse is getting tired and stumbling a bit. A group of Romans in hot pursuit come into view as well.

Pan back to Xena, Gabrielle, and Ares as they exchange a look and stop, as do Siran and the Elijans.

GABRIELLE (looks at Darion):

Darion, take Samuel.

She hands the baby to Darion, then reaches down toward the sais in her boots.

XENA:

Gabrielle. (Gabrielle looks up at her) Ares and I can handle this.

Gabrielle hesitates a moment, then looks at Darion and Samuel in his arms. She stands up and nods.

GABRIELLE:

All right.

XENA:

This won't take long.

She and Ares mount their horses and ride off as Gabrielle watches.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares ride toward the Romans, cutting them off from the man they are chasing and forcing them to a halt. A tall man who seems to be the leader of the group glares at them.

ROMAN OFFICER:

What do you think you're doing? You are interfering in Roman affairs.

XENA (drawing her sword):

Well--it's all in a day's work.

CUT TO

Gabrielle watches from a distance while Xena and Ares, still on horseback, engage the Romans. Then she looks at the man riding away.

CUT TO

Xena charges the Romans with a loud "Yah!" as Argo neighs. She flips off Argo and lands across from a few Romans.

Ares is fighting two of the Romans, dodging a swing from one and then the other.

The leader, who hangs back, nods toward two other Romans. They ride off while Xena and Ares are preoccupied with the rest. Xena glances up, grabs her chakram and is about to throw it at them but one of the Romans crashes into her, and they both go tumbling down into the sand.

CUT TO

The rider gallops near a dead tree.

Pan to one of his Roman pursuers shooting an arrow at him. Spooked, the horse rears, throwing the man to the ground, and then gallops off.

Pull back to show Gabrielle watching. She sees the two Romans quickly riding toward the fallen man. Xena and Ares are locked in a fight with the others and unable to help.

Gabrielle grabs the bridle of her horse, preparing to mount, when suddenly she stops, as if thinking for a second. She looks toward the group of Elijans standing with Darion. One of the men is holding a walking staff, ornate symbols and scroll work along the upper half of it.

Gabrielle comes up to him and nods toward the staff.

GABRIELLE:

Can I borrow that?

The Elijan looks at her, surprised.

CUT TO

Xena swings at a Roman and he jumps back, his sword meeting her own. They get in a few good swings until Xena is able to push on his sword hard enough that she forces it downward and the two of them halt the fight for a moment, their blades locked.

ROMAN (breathing hard):

Back off before it's too late. This is *none* of your business. The man we're chasing is a deserter from the Roman army.

Zoom in on Xena's shocked face. Then, with a harsh cry, she lifts her sword and charges again, and after sparring briefly runs the Roman through. She looks over her shoulder to see Gabrielle riding toward the Romans who've nearly caught up to the man.

DISSOLVE TO

The Romans riding toward the fallen man, who is not moving and seems unconscious. Gabrielle comes galloping toward them, holding the staff in one hand. She catches up to one of the Romans and raises the staff, swinging it hard and knocking the Roman off his horse. He tumbles to the ground and rolls as the horse continues to gallop away.

The Roman in front of him hears the noise and looks back, seeing Gabrielle behind him, the staff headed straight for his head. He quickly turns his horse around and stops. As Gabrielle swings toward him, he ducks out of the way. The Roman grabs the end of the staff and yanks on it, pulling Gabrielle off her horse. Still holding onto the staff, she flips through the air in a pinwheel motion; the Roman is also pulled off his horse and lets go of the staff as he makes a rather wobbly landing in the sand. Meanwhile, Gabrielle lands firmly on the ground between the Romans and the man who'd fallen off his horse, the staff gripped tightly in her hands and a look of determination on her face.

CUT TO

Roman #2 draws his sword while Gabrielle watches him closely. When he swings, she counters the attack with the middle of her staff, then does a move similar to her staff-wielding days of the past: swings it left and right, under arm, and then punches him in the stomach with the end of the staff. The Roman staggers back.

CUT TO

The fallen man in the sand. Regaining consciousness, he slowly looks up and we see that it's Haimon. Through his eyes, we see the blurry scene of Gabrielle facing off against the Roman, swinging the staff. Haimon blinks and the scene becomes more clear.

HAIMON (bewildered):

Gabrielle...?

CUT TO

Behind the Roman Gabrielle is fighting, the other Roman that she had knocked off his horse charges forward. The two Romans attack her at once and she kicks out, using the staff to block their blades. She swings the staff over her head, spins around and with a powerful force, knocks both Romans down at the same time. They fall, unconscious.

Breathing hard, she looks at the Romans and then at the staff in her hands, thoughtfully. Then she turns toward the man on the ground and meets Haimon's stare. The camera zooms in on her face; she looks stunned.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

Haimon...

Recovering from shock, she rushes toward him and kneels at his side.

HAIMON (weakly):

It's really you...I thought I was seeing things...

Gabrielle reaches out to touch his hand. When she does, they freeze for a brief moment, looking at each other, her eyes expressing mixed emotions: relief, surprise and tenderness.

GABRIELLE:

Let's get you out of here.

She stands, and holds out her hand to help him to his feet. He gets up but then immediately bends over, holding his hand to his side. Gabrielle frowns with concern. She pulls his hand back and finds it bloody.

HAIMON:

I'll-- (weakening, his knees give out and he collapses, Gabrielle catching him before he hits the ground) --be all right.

GABRIELLE (concerned but trying not to show it):

As soon as we get you fixed up, you will be.

Xena's battle cry sounds and Gabrielle and Haimon look up. Xena and Ares are fighting the Romans in the distance.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares are fighting the Romans back to back; simultaneously, and in a similar graceful, fluid, but ferocious motion, each strikes down a Roman soldier. Two other soldiers start to back away, holding out their swords to keep Xena and Ares at bay.

Zoom on Xena and Ares. They are breathing hard, their eyes glittering, clearly caught up in the fight.

Xena whips around to see two more Romans galloping straight at them. With a yell, she launches herself into a leap, flips and does a V-kick, knocking both men out of the saddle.

As they land in the sand, the camera pans up to show Ares standing over them pointing a sword at each--his own, and one obviously taken from a Roman.

ARES (nonchalant):

Had enough?

The terrified men back away, then scramble to their feet and run to their horses. The other Romans who are still standing get on horseback as well and ride away.

Xena and Ares exchange a look.

ARES (grins):

Like you said, all in a day's work.

Xena grins back at him.

CUT TO

Under the lone dead tree that provides little shade, Gabrielle and Haimon are sitting together. The staff is propped up against the trunk of the tree. Haimon's shirt has been removed to expose the cut at his side. Gabrielle puts some water from a waterskin on a wet cloth, dabbing it lightly against the wound. Haimon winces.

GABRIELLE (as she tends to the wound):

Sorry...I wish I'd--we'd found you before they did.

HAIMON (gives her a puzzled look):

What do you mean?

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Xena and I...we heard that the Romans were on your trail.

HAIMON (surprised and moved):

You were coming to help me.

Gabrielle looks up, meeting his eyes.

GABRIELLE:

I had to. You're--

There is a long pause during which both of them look at each other and then avert their eyes in the uncomfortable silence. Gabrielle takes a bandage and wraps it around his torso, covering the wound and tying the bandage on the other side.

GABRIELLE:

That should help for now but we need to clean it properly and stitch it up before it becomes infected.

Haimon grabs his shirt lying beside him.

HAIMON:

Thanks.

Gabrielle gives him a small nod, and they stare at each other as if wanting to say more.

XENA (off-camera):

Gabrielle.

Gabrielle turns to see Xena and Ares walking up. Ares is leading his own horse and Xena's, while Xena is leading one of the Romans' horses.

XENA (in a neutral tone):

Hello, Haimon. (after a pause, gives the horse's bridle a slight tug) Thought you could use this.

HAIMON (nods):

Thank you...Xena.

He and Ares exchange a silent nod.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena, Ares, Gabrielle, and Haimon stand with the group of Elijans. Darion is still holding Samuel.

XENA:

There's a village not far from here. We can stop there to get the medicines we need.

GABRIELLE (to Haimon):

We should go.

Gabrielle turns to look at the Elijan man she'd taken the staff from, and holds it out to him.

GABRIELLE:

Thanks for the loan.

The Elijan man looks at the staff and then back at her.

ELIJAN MAN:

Keep it. (Gabrielle opens her mouth to speak but the man preempts her) I saw you fighting with it. It was like it was made for you.

GABRIELLE (surprised):

You'd give it to me, as a weapon? But the Elijans don't believe in violence.

ELIJAN MAN (smiles):

We may not like to admit it to ourselves, but in the world we live in, sometimes those who do not fight only have their lives, and their freedom, thanks to those who do. You and Xena have defended us many times over the years. Perhaps this is the least we can give back.

Gabrielle, moved, pulls the staff back.

GABRIELLE:

Thank you.

The Elijan man nods warmly. Gabrielle looks at the staff. Pan around to show Xena watching her thoughtfully.

DISSOLVE TO

A long shot of the group of travelers: Xena and Ares riding ahead, Gabrielle and Haimon behind them, with Samuel in a sling strapped across her chest. Darion, Siran and the Elijans are walking.

Medium close-up of Gabrielle and Haimon riding side by side.

HAIMON (softly and a little timidly):
So...how have you been?

GABRIELLE (glances at him):
Same old, same old, I suppose.

HAIMON (looks at Samuel):
He's getting big.

GABRIELLE:
He is. (after a pause) And how have *you* been?

Haimon looks down a bit.

HAIMON:
I've been doing a lot of thinking.

Gabrielle nods and then turns her head away. There is a long silence.

GABRIELLE (quietly):
You've...missed a lot. (pause) Your son...

HAIMON (looks down):
I know.

GABRIELLE (finishing):
...doesn't even know his father.

HAIMON (raises his eyes with a guilty look):
Do you think I don't regret that? You know why I had to stay away; if we had been together, the Romans would have been a danger to you, too. (pause) And to *him*. I *had* to leave.

Gabrielle sighs and looks down.

GABRIELLE (reflective):
I guess we've all had to make hard choices.

Haimon gives her a long, heavy look. They continue riding. Samuel wakes up and starts to whimper; Gabrielle rocks him and shushes him.

CUT TO

Overhead view of the desert. From a distance, a camp can be seen set up near an oasis, tents positioned around scattered trees and small pools. Zoom in to show that there are men walking around in armor, swords and shields glinting in the sunlight. Two large purple and gold banners are staked into the ground on the outskirts of the camp with letters that read "S. P. Q. R". This is a Roman camp.

CUT TO

The Romans that Xena and Ares fought are standing before Sabina in front of her tent. Most have cuts and bruises, some hastily bandaged wounds.

SABINA (twirling a dagger in her hand):
You failed.

ROMAN (his head down):
They were too much for us.

SABINA:
Really? How many were there?

The Romans exchange nervous looks; at last one of them speaks.

ROMAN #2 (nervous):
Two. (Quickly continues) Who fought like two dozen! A fierce warrior woman and a man in black leather. (A touch of admiration in his voice, despite his nervousness) They were amazing. I've never seen *anyone* fight like that.

Sabina stops, contemplating this. Then she looks at the Roman and nods.

SABINA:
Go. Take a dozen reinforcements and go after him before the tracks go cold. We're too close to let him get away again.

The Romans nod, salute and then exit the tent.

Once they are gone, Sabina turns around.

SABINA (with a small smile):
Xena. We meet again. What a surprise.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, Ares, Darion and Haimon are riding. Siran and the Elijans are walking beside them. Haimon begins to smile as he sees the village in the distance.

CUT TO

As they approach the village, the smile on Haimon's face begins to fade, giving way to a look of shock, then dismay.

Pan to a charred pile of blackened wood and sand, the remnants of where a house once stood.

HAIMON (whispers):
No...

He pulls his horse to a stop, then dismounts and runs toward the house. Behind him, Gabrielle can be seen doing the same.

Haimon turns and looks toward the center of the village. The camera pans to show about two dozen villagers gathered around a dying funeral pyre, while others are walking away, their heads hanging in sadness. A young couple walks past Haimon; the woman's head is resting on the man's shoulder, her cheeks stained with tears. The young man comforts her by wrapping his arm around her as they walk.

GABRIELLE (to Haimon):
What happened?

He shakes his head silently and slowly walks toward the group of people. Some of them pass by him and look up. Their expressions suddenly turn from sadness to hostility; a man, two women, and a little girl give him nasty, silent stares as they pass him by. He sees their looks and is unnerved by them but continues forward.

As the crowd thins, Haimon stops near the pyre to watch. From the back, he sees the family he had stayed with by the pyre, minus one. He sees the grandmother kneeling, and Orren in her arms. Orren has buried his face in her shoulder, crying uncontrollably. A middle-aged woman stands next to the grandmother. Faintly, Haimon can hear her speak.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN:

You've said your goodbyes. (bends over, putting a hand on the grandmother's shoulder, gently)
Come on. My home is open to you for as long as you need. We'll get through this.

The grandmother nods and stands, picking up the boy slowly. He wraps his arms around her neck and rests his chin on her shoulder--and sees Haimon standing there, watching them.

Suddenly, the boy's tear-stained face is distorted with rage. He struggles and the grandmother puts him down.

GRANDMOTHER (startled):
Orren, what--

Without a word, he races past the grandmother and she turns, as does the middle-aged woman next to her. They watch as the boy rushes toward Haimon and starts hitting him with his fists. Haimon backs away, startled and distressed. The grandmother stands in shock, looking at Haimon.

ORREN (through tears):
It's all your fault! You killed him!

Gabrielle walks up next to Haimon. She grabs Orren's hands as he continues to thrash about and kneels down so that she's at eye level with him.

GABRIELLE (trying to understand):
What happened?

ORREN (still crying):
He brought the Romans here!

He looks up at Haimon and throws something hard at him. It's a metal object that hits his chest and Haimon catches it. He holds it up. It's the Roman medallion he'd lost before when he left the house in a hurry. Haimon's face falls.

ORREN (off-camera):

They came, destroyed our home and killed my dad because he would not say where you were.
(quick shot of the boy's face in close-up) It's all your fault!

CUT TO

Xena, Ares, Siran and Darion watch the scene from a distance. Close up of Xena's sympathetic expression and then of Darion who looks almost as if he could cry himself and lowers his head.

CUT TO

Gabrielle looks at Haimon. Haimon turns to look at the grandmother who hasn't moved from her spot. Her look is bitter and heartbroken.

HAIMON (sincere):

I'm sorry.

She stares at Haimon, shakes her head silently, and turns away without saying a word.

Pull back to show Haimon as he looks back toward Gabrielle. There are tears in his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO

Close-up of the medallion in Haimon's hand, and then his fist closing around it, clenching tightly.

Pull back to show Haimon turn around and walk quickly past Gabrielle and away from the house. She turns to look after him.

DISSOLVE TO

Under the branches of a tree, Haimon sits on the ground, holding the medallion in his hands.

A shadow falls on him but he does not look up. Pan around to show Gabrielle standing there.

GABRIELLE:

I'm sorry, Haimon.

Haimon doesn't respond. Gabrielle kneels down.

HAIMON (looks at the medallion angrily):

I should have gotten rid of this thing the moment I left the army.

Gabrielle reaches out to touch his hand. He lets her do so for a brief moment then moves away, suddenly upset.

HAIMON:

Now you understand.

GABRIELLE:

What?

HAIMON:

That this is *exactly* why I had to leave.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon--

HAIMON (stands, angrier):

I've sealed my fate by joining the Romans. They will never stop looking for me. *Never*. I will always be a wanted man.

GABRIELLE:

What are you saying?

HAIMON (looks her in the eye, his anger giving way to regret and sadness):

That we can never be together. I'm sorry.

Before Gabrielle has a chance to say anything, Haimon walks off. Gabrielle watches him go, her expression uncertain, wistful, and worried.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Xena are standing inside a house. There are small jars of medicines on the shelves; clearly, the person living here is a healer. In the background, an elderly woman can be seen kneeling before a large chest and rummaging in it.

Gabrielle looks out the window. The destroyed house can be seen from where she stands. Haimon is sitting on the ground, obviously lost in thought.

GABRIELLE (to Xena but still looking out the window):

It's my fault.

XENA (startled):

What?

GABRIELLE:

Haimon. If I had only told him I was with child..

XENA:

Gabrielle--

GABRIELLE (finishing):

...none of this would be happening now. He never would have joined the Romans, he would have been there when our son was born...

XENA (sighs):

Gabrielle...there are many what-ifs in the lives we lead, we both know that. What matters is making the best of what we've got.

Gabrielle sighs and then looks at Xena, smiling a little.

GABRIELLE:

Sometimes you know just what to say.

XENA (tilts her head affectionately):

A gift I got from you.

The woman gets up and comes toward them carrying a vial and a roll of thread.

GABRIELLE:

Thank you.

WOMAN:

Now I suggest you be on your way. (bitterly) Your friend has brought enough trouble. We don't want any more.

Gabrielle nods, looking out the window again.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle come out of the house. Gabrielle stares at the charred remains of the house, then at Haimon sitting under the tree.

GABRIELLE (pensively):

I wonder...

XENA:

What?

GABRIELLE:

Making the best of what we've got... What if that isn't good enough?

Xena gives her a worried look and puts a hand on her shoulder.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle (with Samuel), Haimon, Ares, Darion, Siran and the Elijans are leaving the village, their horses in tow.

DISSOLVE TO

The sun is low in the sky. Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon, Darion, Ares and the Elijans are making camp near a cliff with natural arches, scattered caves and spires. Shrubs, low to the ground, grow out of the rocky red soil surrounding the cliff.

CUT TO

Gabrielle is filling a flask from a spring nestled amongst a few rocks under a shady arch. She takes a drink and then soaks a cloth in the water.

CUT TO

Inside one of the larger caves. There are several interlocking caves to the right, left and back, some smaller and more inaccessible than others, one of them leading out into a cluster of stone arches outside.

Gabrielle is sitting on a stone with Haimon beside her; she is stitching up his wound with the thread she'd gotten from the healer. Some rays from the dying sun are shining into the cave from cracks in the cliff wall, bathing parts of it in a soft glow. Samuel is lying on the ground on a blanket, sleeping.

Close-up on Haimon as he flinches at the pain from the needle. There is silence as Gabrielle takes the wet cloth and presses it to the wound.

HAIMON (quietly, his mind far away):
Thank you.

GABRIELLE (looks up at him):
Of course. (nods toward the wound) You're good to go. (trying to be lighthearted) Maybe ease up on the fighting for a while, though.

Haimon nods. He looks down at Samuel.

HAIMON (distant):
Must be nice to have no cares in the world..

Gabrielle gives him a long, sad look, then her gaze follows his and they look down at their sleeping child together.

GABRIELLE (quietly):
It must be...

DISSOLVE TO

Outside. Haimon is kneeling beside a few shrubs, digging a small hole in the ground. He takes the medallion and puts it in the hole, then covers it up. Pan back to show Gabrielle watching him; then she slowly walks up.

GABRIELLE:
We're going to stay here for the night, then head out in the morning.

HAIMON (not looking at her):
I should leave.

GABRIELLE (gives him a startled look):
To go where?

HAIMON (still not looking at her):
It doesn't matter. I'm nothing but a danger to you.

GABRIELLE (sighs, losing her patience):
You can't keep running from your problems, Haimon!

HAIMON (stands and turns to her, exasperated):

Yes, I can, when my problems happen to be wearing Roman uniforms! Do you want to end up dead like that boy's father?

GABRIELLE (vehemently):

That is a risk I have dealt with every day since I left my home to join Xena. I've realized that I cannot be so afraid of losing my life that I let it pass me by.

HAIMON:

And what about the life of our son?

Gabrielle holds silent for a moment, the thoughts sinking in. She can't answer and looks down, conflicted. Finally she raises her eyes.

GABRIELLE:

Let's just talk about this tomorrow morning, all right?

HAIMON (sighs listlessly):

Sure.

DISSOLVE TO

The sun sets; night; dawn breaks out.

CUT TO

Morning, just before sunrise--the light has only just begun to show over the horizon.

Inside the large, spacious cave. Siran and the Elijans are camped out on the ground, sleeping on their blankets by a smoldering fire.

Ares is sitting on a rock by the entrance, looking out toward the desert. His sword is at his side, propped up against the rock. He yawns and slumps forward a bit, obviously making an effort to stay awake.

CUT TO

A smaller cave near the back, where Xena is sleeping on her bedroll.

CUT TO

Another cave where Gabrielle, Samuel and Darion are asleep together on the ground.

Pan to a man standing over them, his back to the camera.

Pull back to show that it is Haimon. He is holding a pack, looking down at them. He stares at Gabrielle for a long moment, sadness in his eyes; then his gaze slides toward Samuel, who is sleeping peacefully, sucking his thumb. Haimon gets down on his haunches and lightly strokes the child's head, careful not to wake him. Then he sighs, rises, slings the pack over his shoulder and tiptoes toward the outer cave.

CUT TO

Haimon walks past the sleeping Elijans and stops, looking at Ares from the back. Ares' head is leaning against the wall and he's snoring lightly. Haimon sets his pack down behind a boulder and walks up to Ares.

HAIMON (whispers):
Hey.

Ares opens his eyes with a start, jumps to his feet and whirls around, instinctively grabbing his sword. Finding Haimon standing in front of him, he breathes a sigh of both relief and exasperation.

ARES (in a loud whisper):
Sneaking up on the God of War? Not a good idea. Could be hazardous to your health.

HAIMON (with a bitter chuckle):
Ex-God of War.

ARES (rubs his eyes):
Whatever.

HAIMON (shrugs):
Thought I'd give you a break. I can't sleep anyway, and you looked like you could use some more shut-eye before we have to get up.

ARES (defensively):
Yeah, mortality's kind of exhausting. (yawns) Thanks.

He walks past Haimon and ducks to pass under an arch leading to a connecting cave.

Haimon turns and grabs his pack from behind the boulder and turns toward the entrance, walking out.

Zoom in on Siran. She stirs and sits up, frowning as she sees Haimon walk away.

CUT TO

Outside, the horses are standing near the entrance. Haimon unties one of them, then pauses and looks back.

HAIMON (whispers):
Goodbye, Gabrielle. Take good care of Samuel.

He turns and walks away with the horse.

CUT TO

Haimon walking, leading the horse. The cliff can be seen at some distance behind him. Dawn is breaking out.

SIRAN (off-camera):
Haimon!

Haimon stops, whirling around to find Siran coming toward him.

HAIMON:

What are you doing here?

SIRAN:

I know what you're doing. (pauses) You're running away. (Haimon goes to speak but Siran cuts him off) You can't. Your child--.

HAIMON:

You know very well why I'm doing this.

SIRAN:

But shouldn't you at least--

HAIMON (bitterly):

I've made up my mind. Stay out of this.

SIRAN:

I saw you with Gabrielle and your child. I know you care about them...

HAIMON (exasperated):

Yes, and it's for them that I'm doing this! Go back to camp, Siran.

SIRAN (forcefully):

No. Not unless you come back with me.

HAIMON:

Dammit--

SIRAN (points suddenly ahead):

Look! What is *that*?

Haimon turns to look. A cloud of dust is approaching down the road. There are riders coming; as they get closer, it is obvious that they are Roman soldiers.

SIRAN (grabs Haimon's arm):

We *must* get back to camp!

HAIMON:

And lead them there so that all your friends can get slaughtered? No, Siran. You go back. I'm going to deal with this on my own.

SIRAN (shocked):

No!

HAIMON:

Are you even listening to me?

He gives her a forceful shove, causing her to fall in the sand. She gets up, glancing fearfully at Haimon.

HAIMON (shouting):

Go!

Siran begins to walk away reluctantly. She hears the Romans ride up and looks back. Haimon stands still as the Romans ride forward. He watches, indifferent and hollow. Siran looks torn.

CUT TO

In the cave. One of the Elijans opens his eyes, stirs and sits up. He looks around, then frowns and nudges one of the other Elijans, who wakes up as well.

ELIJAN #1:

Where's Siran?

CUT TO

A Roman officer pulls his horse to a halt in front of Haimon, the other Romans stopping behind.

OFFICER (looking at Haimon):

Are you Haimon, the Greek deserter from the Roman army?

HAIMON (indifferently):

I am.

OFFICER:

Then you're under arrest.

In the background, we see Siran running toward Haimon.

HAIMON (steps up and throws down his sword):

Go ahead and take me. It doesn't matter anymore.

SIRAN (running up):

No!

Haimon whips around, shaken and angry.

HAIMON (yells):

Just stay out of this!

CUT TO

The cave. Xena stirs awake as one of the Elijans approaches her. The camera pans up to show that it's the elder who gave Gabrielle his staff.

ELIJAN ELDER:

We can't find Siran.

Frowning, Xena looks around and sees Ares, fast asleep beside her. She sits up and nudges Ares in the back.

XENA:

Ares...

Ares sighs and turns over, looking up at her.

XENA:

Why aren't you on watch?

He sits up on his elbows.

ARES:

Haimon said--

GABRIELLE (off-camera):

Xena!

Xena quickly stands and turns. Gabrielle comes walking briskly out of the cave she had been sleeping in, holding Samuel in her arms.

GABRIELLE (concerned):

Haimon's gone.

Xena looks down at Ares, giving him a disappointed look. Ares looks down, guiltily.

CUT TO

The Romans dismount from their horses, one of them holding some rope. Siran quickly steps between them and Haimon.

SIRAN (holding her hands out, pleading):

Don't take him. Please, he has a family...

HAIMON (hisses at her):

Shut up! (to the Romans) She's lying; I have no one.

ROMAN SOLDIER # 1 (rolls eyes):

I don't really care, one way or the other.

He goes to tie Haimon's hands but Siran tries to stop him. Another Roman grabs her from behind and pulls her away.

ROMAN SOLDIER #2:

Help a deserter, huh? Well, maybe we'll crucify you right next to him!

Siran struggles and screams.

HAIMON:

Leave her alone! She hasn't done anything!

ROMAN SOLDIER #2 (grins):

Too late.

Haimon pushes aside the soldier who was going to bind his hands, picks up his sword which is still lying on the sand, and charges forward to help Siran. A fight breaks out. Haimon kicks one of the Romans and then doubles over in pain from the wound in his side which is bleeding again.

FLASH TO

Inside the cave, by the entrance. Gabrielle, still holding Samuel, and Ares are standing, facing each other. Xena is beside them. Darion is nearby.

GABRIELLE (to Ares, livid):
How could you let him leave?

ARES:
I didn't *let* him do anything. He said he was going to keep watch.

GABRIELLE:
And you believed him? (scoffs) I thought you'd lost your godhood, not your brain.

ARES (glares):
Hey.

Xena steps between the two of them, holding a hand out toward Gabrielle and Ares to keep them at a distance.

XENA:
Come on. We don't have time for this. (looks at Gabrielle) If Haimon was determined to leave, there was nothing we could do. What's important is finding him now.

Gabrielle sighs and nods. She gives Ares an almost apologetic look.

ELIJAN (shouting, off-camera):
Gabrielle! Come quick!

Gabrielle turns and runs outside, toward the shout. Xena and Ares follow.

FLASH TO

Siran struggles with another Roman who grabs her and is easily able to tie her up and haul her toward a horse, setting her down in front of the saddle. A Roman lands a hard kick to Haimon's face, sending him down and unconscious. They tie his hands and feet and haul him toward a horse as well.

FLASH TO

Gabrielle, Xena, Ares and Darion run out in front of the cliff, where several Elijans are standing. Samuel has begun to cry in Gabrielle's arms but Gabrielle's mind is focused elsewhere.

GABRIELLE (worried):
What is it?

ELDER ELIJAN:
The Romans--they took Haimon and Siran. We saw them as they disappeared over those dunes.

Xena and Gabrielle look ahead. There are several rolling sand dunes in the distance.

Zoom in on Gabrielle's face.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

Haimon...no!

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

With a determined look and no words, Gabrielle turns toward Darion who is standing the closest to her. She urgently pushes Samuel into his arms with a forcefulness that surprises him, and then she runs past Xena and the others, grabs her staff and goes toward her horse. She gets up in the saddle and races after the Romans.

Xena watches a moment, then sprints toward Argo, jumps in the saddle and follows. Darion is left watching them leave, rocking Samuel, attempting to calm him down as he cries.

CUT TO

Gabrielle speeding across the sand in the general direction the Elijan woman had pointed, Xena on her heels.

XENA:

Gabrielle!

Gabrielle ignores her. The wind begins to pick up, causing the sand to take flight and make visibility more difficult. The shape of the dunes ahead all begin to look the same but Gabrielle presses on.

Xena catches up to Gabrielle, riding alongside, and finally reaches out and grabs the reins of Gabrielle's horse, pulling the horse to a stop.

GABRIELLE (upset):

Xena! I have to go after them!

XENA:

We're not even sure which way they went.

GABRIELLE:

I'll figure it out.

Gabrielle grabs the reigns from Xena but Xena puts a hand on her arm.

XENA:

What are you going to do? Take them on by yourself?

Gabrielle breathes heavily, looking into the distance. She can't tell which direction they might have gone. Her determination suddenly crumbles into hopelessness. As she turns to look at Xena, her eyes fill with tears.

GABRIELLE:

I have to get him back, Xena. I can't let them--

XENA (gently):

We have to get him back. And we will.

She squeezes Gabrielle's hand.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena and Gabrielle ride up to the caves and dismount. Darion and Ares come walking out of one of the caves. The Elijans are off to the side. Gabrielle looks at Darion. He's still holding Samuel. Xena walks up behind Gabrielle and stops.

DARION (coming up):

He won't stop crying...

Gabrielle looks at the baby.

XENA (softly):

Your son needs you.

Gabrielle, looking a bit guilty, takes Samuel in her arms and begins to rock him.

CUT TO

The Romans riding over the sand. The camp by the oasis is in front of them.

Siran is walking behind one of the horses, still tied to the rope. Across from her, Haimon walks behind another horse, also tied up. He has a bleeding cut on his forehead from the kick he received. He looks glumly at Siran.

HAIMON:

I'm sorry. (sighs) You shouldn't have stepped in.

SIRAN:

I couldn't stand by and let them take you. Eli teaches us to help others.

HAIMON (shakes head):

I'm not worth helping.

SIRAN (gently but passionately):

You're *wrong*.

Haimon looks at her silently.

DISSOLVE TO

At the camp, two Romans lead Haimon toward a large tent. Behind him, another Roman is leading Siran; three others follow.

CUT TO

Inside the tent. One of the Romans pushes Haimon forward. Sabina turns around. Her mouth curves in a small grin.

Haimon watches her silently. Sabina nods toward the other Romans.

SABINA:

Leave us.

One of the Romans nods in acknowledgment; they head out, leaving Sabina and Haimon alone.

Sabina begins to circle Haimon as if he were a prize stag that had just been killed on a great hunt.

SABINA:

You didn't think you'd be running forever, did you? (Haimon is silent.) No matter, we have you now and this time, there is *no* escape.

She walks toward a table, her back to Haimon.

SABINA:

So... (turns around) ...we finally get to have a face-to-face talk. (walking toward him.)

CUT TO

Outside the tent, a Roman waits with Siran, whose hands are bound. Siran's eyes widen and she flinches at the sound of Sabina's voice.

SABINA (off-camera, inside the tent):

It's been a long time coming.

CUT TO

Inside the tent. Sabina walks up to Haimon.

SABINA (continues):

To think that, years ago, you were chasing me across Greece with a band of wannabe warriors, hoping to capture me and bring me to justice. And look at us now.

HAIMON:

Look at *you*. A lackey to a Roman emperor.

SABINA (smiles imperturbably):

A *general* in the Roman army. Not quite the same as being my own boss, but still--pretty impressive.

CUT TO

Outside the tent, Siran listens intently.

SABINA (voice from inside the tent):
You're a fool.

CUT TO

SABINA:
You deserted from the Romans. What did you think they'd do? Send you a thank-you note.

HAIMON:
I realized this was not the place for me.

SABINA:
Then why join them.

HAIMON (thoughtful):
Because I thought I could do some good--find a purpose. I thought that, with the new Emperor, they really were going to use their power to build a better world. After Jerusalem...I knew I'd been wrong.

SABINA (wryly; it's not clear whether she's being sarcastic or not):
You know, maybe you're just not looking at the bigger picture. Maybe the Romans *are* building a better world--it just needs to be built on the wreckage of the old one. Look at everything they've got going for them: wealth, knowledge...power. And if they have to break a few heads or burn a few temples along the way--well! Who said the path to a great future has to be rosy?

HAIMON (stares at her incredulously):
And you really believe that.

SABINA (laughs lightly):
Me? When did I say that? I'm not fighting for a better world, *or* for Rome and her glory. I am always out for myself.

CUT TO

Siran is outside the tent, listening to the faint conversation between Haimon and Sabina. She looks thoughtful.

CUT TO

HAIMON:
Perhaps you and I are not that different after all.

SABINA (tilts her head with a sarcastic look):
Really.

HAIMON:
We both stand by the choices we've made.

Sabina looks down, suddenly thoughtful. There is a long moment of silence.

HAIMON:

Do whatever you will with me. I deserve it. But let the Elijan go.

SABINA (looks up):

What Elijan?

HAIMON:

She was captured when they came for me. I believe she's an old friend of yours.

Slow zoom on Sabina's face as she realizes who he's talking about, a look of surprise and uncertainty in her eyes. After a moment she strides briskly toward the exit, throws the flap aside and looks out.

Pan to Siran as their eyes lock for a brief, intense moment. Before either of them can say anything, a voice off-camera interrupts them.

TITUS (off-camera):

So. The deserter's been caught.

Pan to Titus approaching, then to Sabina as she flinches slightly and looks at him.

SABINA (curtly and with barely disguised antipathy):

Yes; he's in my tent.

TITUS (looking pleased):

Bring him out.

Sabina motions to one of the Roman soldiers. He goes inside the tent and comes out with Haimon, holding him by the arm. Titus steps closer, paying no attention to Siran, and looks Haimon over.

TITUS:

Welcome back. (pauses) The question is...should we have you executed right here and now as an example to the other soldiers... (he reaches out, grabs Haimon's collar and pulls him closer) ...or save the spectacle for the masses in Rome--and for the emperor.

As he yanks harder for emphasis, the leather string of a necklace around Haimon's neck snaps and the necklace comes off in Titus' hand while Haimon staggers back. Titus examines the object in his hand with puzzlement and distaste; it is a leather band with a woman's bracelet attached to the end of it--the same pendant he had in *The Inheritance*.

HAIMON:

No!

Titus gives him an amused, curious look.

HAIMON (his voice a mixture of pleading and defiance):

Kill me if you must--but do *not* take this from me.

TITUS (mockingly):

A gift from your sweetheart?.

HAIMON (with quiet defiance):

It's the only thing I have left of my mother.

After a moment Titus laughs, looking back at Sabina. Sabina gives a small, forced laugh.

TITUS (looking at Haimon):

A sentimental sap. More worried about some trinket than the neck it's on. No wonder you couldn't make it in the Roman army.

He drops the necklace at Haimon's feet, then nods toward the Romans.

TITUS:

Take him away and keep him secure. (noticing Siran) Who's this?

ROMAN SOLDIER #2:

Some girl who tried to stop us from taking the deserter, Sire.

TITUS:

She tried to help him, eh? Very well; she'll share his fate.

Pan to a close-up of Sabina. Her face remains hard but there is a flicker of emotion in her eyes.

Titus turns around and walks away. Sabina looks after him, her expression unreadable. Then she turns to the soldiers.

SABINA:

Put them in one of the storage tents.

ROMAN SOLDIER #1 (nods):

Yes, Sabina.

Sabina looks at Haimon, then at Siran, obviously pondering something. Then she motions her head toward the necklace lying in the sand.

SABINA:

Put it back on his neck.

Haimon exhales in surprise and relief. The Romans eye Sabina, obviously taken aback; then, Roman Soldier #3 shrugs, bends down, picks up the pendant, ties the string in a knot and puts it around Haimon's neck. Haimon gives Sabina a small nod of thanks. Sabina turns away; once again, her eyes meet Siran's.

Haimon and Siran are marched away, each of them led by two Romans. Siran turns back to give Sabina one last look.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Ares are riding their horses along a stone road through a rocky landscape.

XENA:

They'll probably take Haimon to an outpost in one of the nearby villages. We just have to find out where.

GABRIELLE (distracted, after a moment of silence):

Is it right that I left Samuel back there with the Elijans?

XENA (business-like):

You wanted to track the Romans. He's better off with them than with us right now. They'll take care of him, and Darion will be there to make sure they do.

Gabrielle nods.

XENA (seeing Gabrielle's hesitation; speaks gently):

You did the *right* thing.

GABRIELLE:

Sometimes, I don't know if I did. (pause) I was so desperate to help Haimon, I made my son cry. What kind of mother does that make me?

XENA (sighs):

A good one. You love him more than anything, don't you? (Gabrielle nods) You protect him, you make sure he has everything he needs. You'd save him before you'd save yourself. (Gabrielle nods, a little emotional) You're a *good* mother, Gabrielle.

They ride in silence.

Then, in the distance, they see a large group of people coming toward them.

CUT TO

Close up of the group of people traveling over the sand, at least a few dozen. There are men, women and children. They are all simple townspeople, traveling with a few mules and livestock, a wagon packed to the brim with bags and crates. Some of the people look like they have been in fights, with scratches, bruises but no serious wounds.

Xena, Gabrielle and Ares ride up.

GABRIELLE:

They look like they've been traveling for a while.

XENA:

And away from something.

WOMAN (off-camera):

No, I can't do this anymore!

Xena and Gabrielle look to see a woman in her mid-thirties in a long tan dress and shawl, her brown hair pulled back behind her head under a scarf walking briskly toward the wagon. She's frantic and gets more frustrated searching until she finds the right pack among the pile, pulls it out and turns around to head back in the direction she had just come from.

An elderly woman stands in her path, puts her hands on her shoulders and they begin to talk but we cannot make out the words. The young woman begins to cry and the elderly woman tries to console her until their exchange finally ends when the younger woman breaks down and the elderly woman pulls her into a hug.

Gabrielle, affected by their emotion, dismounts and walks up to them.

GABRIELLE (gently):
What's wrong?

The two women don't hear her.

MAN (off-camera):
Her husband is marked for execution.

Shocked, Gabrielle turns around to see a man in his 50's standing behind her.

MAN (continues):
He's the Roman high priest of Palmyra; to Zenobia, that makes him a public enemy. He and more than a dozen others are to be executed in the palace square at sunset. (nods toward the young woman, with sympathy) She had to leave him behind, to save herself and the children.

Gabrielle shakes her head in dismay.

XENA (off-camera, behind Gabrielle):
So. Zenobia's going after Roman colonists in high positions. (while she speaks, the camera pans over to her.)

MAN:
Not just in high positions. All Romans; even natives of Palmyra who have married Romans or adopted their customs. They have no place in Zenobia's city now. It's either leave--or die. And not everyone gets a chance to leave.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):
I'm...very sorry.

MAN (bitter):
Well, good riddance. We'll find a better life somewhere else. (looks back at the two women and sighs) Most of us, at least.

GABRIELLE:
Where are you headed?

MAN:
Damascus.

A young boy, about three years old, and a young girl about five years old walk up to the elderly woman as she pulls back from her hug with the younger woman. The boy looks up at them.

YOUNG BOY:
When will daddy be here?

The elderly woman looks at the younger woman, who has to avert her eyes as she begins to cry again. The elderly woman kneels down in front of the boy and the girl, shielding them from their distraught mother, and puts her hands on their shoulders.

ELDERLY WOMAN (flatly, with a smile that to anyone else but the kids is clearly forced):
He'll be here soon, darlings. Promise.

Pull back to show Gabrielle and Xena standing side by side, watching.

GABRIELLE:
Zenobia... (shakes her head) Someone has to stop her.

XENA (grimly):
Yes, someone does.

Gabrielle gives her a quick look. Xena turns around and walks toward Argo, who's waiting in the background. Gabrielle watches as people continue to walk on.

GABRIELLE (calls out):
Good luck to you!

Some of the refugees turn to look at her. A few nod or murmur in acknowledgment.

Gabrielle turns to see Xena already in the saddle. She walks over and mounts her own horse.

GABRIELLE:
So. You're going to Palmyra.

XENA:
Those people need my help.

GABRIELLE:
And Haimon needs mine. (thinks, then looks toward the sun) You don't have much time. (looks back at Xena) Go on to Palmyra without me. I'll catch up with you later.

XENA:
Gabrielle--

GABRIELLE:
I'm going to track the Romans and find out where they've taken Haimon. The longer we wait, the further away he gets and the closer to death he is. (Xena gives her a look but Gabrielle pre-empts her before she can speak; vehemently) I know I may not be able to save him. But that doesn't mean I'll stop trying as long as there's hope.

XENA (nods reassuringly):
We'll save him.

GABRIELLE:
You have to be in Palmyra before sunset. And I cannot afford to wait.

XENA (concealing her worry):

You're sure you want to do this on your own?

ARES (off-camera):

She won't be on her own.

Xena turns back to see Ares riding up.

ARES (grins at Gabrielle):

I'll come with you.

GABRIELLE:

You...want to come.

ARES:

Don't act so surprised. Tracking Romans is as good a way as any to spend an evening. If we're lucky, we'll even find some ass to kick... (glances at Xena) while she's out there saving innocents.

Xena thinks about it a moment, then nods.

XENA:

All right. We meet up at the caves where we stayed last night. (after a pause, looking at Gabrielle, then at Ares) Stay safe.

ARES:

Don't get into too much trouble without me.

XENA (chuckles):

Can't make any promises.

She and Ares exchange a brief look that is both tender and playful.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena riding quickly over the stone road.

CUT TO

Inside the tent at the Roman camp. Siran is sitting on the ground, her head down, her hands folded in prayer. On the other side of the pole, Haimon is leaning back, looking up at the roof of the tent.

The flap of the tent opens and light floods in. Haimon turns to look but is unable to see around far enough to recognize who walked in.

Zoom in on Siran, who continues to pray. Then she lowers her hands and looks up, and finds herself looking at Sabina, who is standing over her.

There is a long moment of uncomfortable silence.

SABINA:

You shouldn't have helped him.

SIRAN:

You know I had to.

There is another moment of silence as Sabina comes closer and sits down on her haunches so that she's at eye level with Siran. Siran watches her, unafraid.

SABINA:

Well, look where your good intentions got you. I don't know if I'll be able to get you out.

SIRAN:

I don't expect you to. It was my choice, and I accept the consequences.

Sabina sighs and stands. Then she whips around abruptly, the cape at her back flapping behind her, and strides toward the exit.

SIRAN (from behind, softly):

I missed you, Sabina.

Sabina stops in her tracks and turns back to look at her. Their eyes meet for a moment. Then Sabina turns and leaves the tent.

CUT TO

Sabina strides out of the tent briskly and walks away. The two soldiers guarding it follow her with their eyes, then exchange a puzzled look.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Ares are riding their horses over the sand. Ares takes a drink from a waterskin and Gabrielle looks at him for a moment, until he notices her gaze, pulls the waterskin back, wipes his mouth and adopts a crooked half-grin.

ARES:

Admiring my rugged good looks?

GABRIELLE (chuckles; then, after a pause):

It wasn't the Romans, was it?

ARES:

What?

GABRIELLE:

The reason you came with me. You could have gone with Xena. (She chuckles again) Chances are, she'll get to kick more ass than we will.

ARES:

And your point is--?

GABRIELLE (teasingly, with a small laugh).

You wanted to help *me*.

ARES (makes a theatrically disgusted face):

Watch it! You even think about putting that in your scrolls, and-- (points a finger at her) no more Mr. Nice God!

GABRIELLE (still teasing):

Ex-God.

Ares harrumphs and gives her a mock glare. Gabrielle grins at him brightly. Then, after a moment, her grin fades.

GABRIELLE (softly, more serious now):

You know, I never could have imagined this. You and Xena together... She's been good for you. And you-- (there is a slight pause as he slowly looks toward her) I can see that she's happy with you, and that makes me happy.

ARES (mocking):

Yeah, yeah, I love you, you love me, we both love Xena--are we done with the sappy stuff yet?

Gabrielle gives him a smile; after a moment he smiles too, almost contentedly, and shakes his head. They ride in silence for a moment.

ARES:

So once we find him, do you think he'll stick around this time?

Gabrielle shoots him an annoyed look and Ares holds up his hands in surrender.

ARES:

Hey, it's an honest question.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head, facetious but also somewhat annoyed):

Well, some things haven't changed--you're as sensitive as ever.

ARES (grins):

And you just changed the subject.

GABRIELLE (not looking at him):

It's Haimon's choice. (after a moment she looks up, resolutely) First we'll find him and rescue him, then we'll figure out the rest.

They stare ahead at a small village in the distance.

GABRIELLE (businesslike):

We'll stop there and ask if they've seen the Romans.

She speeds up and Ares follows.

DISSOLVE TO

The village. Gabrielle and Ares ride up to a woman drawing water from a well.

GABRIELLE (stops):

Excuse me. (the woman looks up) Have any Romans passed here recently.

WOMAN:

Romans? You're looking for Romans? There's a whole camp of 'em, not an hour's ride east of here. (waves her hand, pointing in the direction) My husband saw it not two hours ago, when he was out hunting.

GABRIELLE (shocked):

A--camp.

WOMAN (nods):

Gotta be at least a thousand men, so he said.

Gabrielle nods, thinking.

GABRIELLE:

Thank you.

WOMAN:

Glad I could help. (Measures Gabrielle with a curious look) You looking for someone?

GABRIELLE (thoughtfully):

Yes. Yes, I am.

WOMAN:

Well, if that someone you're looking for is with the Romans, you'll find them there unless they've moved on already. Good luck.

She picks up the bucket of water and starts walking away. Gabrielle turns to Ares.

GABRIELLE:

You know what that means.

ARES (nods):

A Roman legion.

CUT TO

The city of Palmyra from a distance. Xena comes into view, riding toward the city with her back to the camera. The setting sun illuminates her back.

CUT TO

Overhead view of the palace courtyard bordered by a stone wall on all sides, four small towers positioned in each corner of the length of the wall. A large crowd is gathered. Zoom down to show about a dozen men lined up on a wooden platform, their hands tied behind their backs. There is a beam above them; each man has a noose around his neck. Some look defiant, others terrified or dazed.

The camera pans up to the balcony of the palace overhanging the square, positioned on a single stretch of wall between two towers. Zenobia is standing there, a proud look on her face.

ZENOBIA (raises a fist in the air):

People of Palmyra! We are proud and free once again! Death to the Romans and their lackeys!

A chorus of cheers goes up from the square but it sounds somewhat reluctant. When the camera pans down to the crowd we see that many people are not cheering and some look rather glum.

Pan to the back of the crowd where we see Xena standing quietly.

Pan to a long shot of Zenobia, bringing her hand down.

ZENOBIA:

Proceed with the execution!

A man in a long dark brown robe, a hood over his head, walks toward the end of the platform and reaches for a large wooden lever. He grips it with both hands. As he begins to pull it down, there is a buzzing sound that grows louder.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, the chakram appears, slicing the rope on each noose, one after the other-- just as the Executioner releases the lever and the people drop through the trap door and land on the sand below.

The crowd gasps. They watch the chakram as it ricochets off the side of the building and heads back in the direction it had come. Meanwhile, Xena gives an ululating battle cry and soars over the heads of the crowd, somersaulting off some people's shoulders, catches the chakram in mid-flight, and lands near the platform, hooking the chakram back on her belt.

Pan up to Zenobia, who sees Xena; her eyes narrow and her mouth twists in anger.

Pan back to the square. Two guards try to tackle Xena but she grabs them and knocks their heads together, taking them down. As they fall, she grabs a dagger from the belt of each guard and throws the daggers, cutting the ropes binding the hands of two of the men who were going to be hanged and who have just struggled to their feet under the platform. They flinch and turn around, staring at her in shock.

Pan up to the balcony. Zenobia motions to several guards and they disappear into the building. She watches Xena intently.

Pan down to Xena, by the platform.

XENA (shouts to the men she freed):

Free the others and follow me!

They do as she says and they dash across the square. There is rumbling in the crowd and some shouts of "Stop them!", but no one makes a move to actually stop the escape.

Pan back up to show Zenobia watching as Xena leads the prisoners toward the archway leading out of the square, and then she turns, disappearing inside of the building.

CUT TO

Xena runs through the street along the other side of the wall, the escapees following her.

A few guards appear at the end of the street, blocking her path and Xena comes to a halt, drawing her sword. The guards charge and Xena is drawn into a fight. While Xena exchanges blows with the guards, the people escape past them.

Xena kicks behind and knocks one of the guards down, then swings around, and spin kicks another guard. A small, feathery dart suddenly shoots out from nowhere and we watch as it zooms through the air and hits Xena on the right side of her neck. She jerks from the impact and immediately pulls the dart out. She looks at it and then tosses it to the ground, turning back to the guards.

She swings at one of them but misses. We see through her eyes as her vision becomes blurry and she shakes her head and blinks, trying to focus. She glances up at the tower, seeing someone, concealed, standing in the shadow of the doorway. Before she can realize who it is, a guard charges toward her and as she turns to see him, the scene is shown in slow motion. Seen through her eyes, the scene darkens, her knees give out and she lowers to the ground as the guard reaches her, fist raised. The screen goes black and the loud smack of the punch is heard.

FLASH TO

The Roman camp. It's dark now.

Sabina is standing beside her horse, mindlessly tugging at the bridle. Titus walks up.

TITUS:

We join with the legion from Caesarea in the morning. From there, we head for Palmyra.

Sabina doesn't respond; Titus stares at her.

TITUS (firmly):

General.

Sabina turns to him as if snapping out of a slight daze.

TITUS:

Once we storm the city, your task is to capture Zenobia.

SABINA (clutches at the reins of the horse):

Understood.

TITUS:

Good. (after a pause, he steps closer to her) We cannot afford to have any distractions, Sabina. Remember that.

With that, he walks off. She watches him go, a thoughtful look on her face.

CUT TO

The screen is black. We see through someone's eyes as they flutter open, the scene in front blurry. A person appears to be standing in front; when focused, the face is recognized as Zenobia. She stands, twirling a blowdart gun in her hand, smirking toward the camera.

ZENOBIA:

Have a nice nap?

Pan around to show Xena slumped on a bench by the wall, in a hall of the palace. Her hands are manacled; her armor and weapons have been removed, leaving only the leather tunic and boots. Four guards are standing a few steps away. Xena squints, then glares at Zenobia.

ZENOBIA:

I didn't think I'd see you again.

XENA:

The feeling is mutual. We thought you were dead.

ZENOBIA:

Well, it seems you're not the only one with nine lives. (looks out a window toward the city) And I intend to make the most of this one.

XENA:

By killing or banishing anyone who doesn't follow your way.

ZENOBIA (harshly):

Romans and wannabe Romans. They deserve whatever they get.

Before Xena can answer, Hairan steps up.

HAIRAN:

So this is the legendary Xena. (nods toward Zenobia) I'm the Queen's cousin, Hairan.

XENA (sarcastically, lifting up her manacled hands):

You'll excuse me if I don't shake hands.

ZENOBIA (sharply):

Cut the small talk. (looks at Xena) You'll regret coming here.

XENA:

Well, then, it won't be the first or the last thing I regret. (pauses, narrowing her eyes in disgust) Did you think I'd stand by and let you kill people just because they're Romans?

ZENOBIA:

Did you think I'd let them take *my* city and get away with it? I am *not* the enemy here.

XENA (cutting her off):

You keep doing what you're doing, and you'll make enemies of your own people.

ZENOBIA (sarcastic):

Unless you stop me. For my own good.

Xena slowly stands. The guards step closer.

XENA:

I couldn't care less if it is for your good or not. But I *will* stop you.

Zenobia is silent for a long moment. Then, she nods to the guards. Two of them grab Xena's arms.

ZENOBIA:

Take her to the dungeon until I decide what to do with her.

The guards nod and lead Xena out. Xena gives Hairan a glance before departing. He looks thoughtful and then turns back to Zenobia who stares ahead, outside her window, looking down over the city with pride. Zoom in on the moon as it shines over the city.

CUT TO

Pan down from the moon toward the desert, where Ares and Gabrielle are riding their horses across the sand. They slow when they see a shape in the distance: the camp of the Roman army surrounding an oasis and the lights flickering from the campfires.

They hold still for a moment, looking at the camp.

GABRIELLE:

It's larger than I expected.

ARES:

They must be heading toward Palmyra.

GABRIELLE (nods):

Then the city's in danger. (pauses) We have to warn them.

ARES:

First things first.

Gabrielle nods. She grips the reigns and gallops forward. Ares watches her, surprised for a moment, then follows.

CUT TO

The edge of the oasis. Ares and Gabrielle's horses are a distance behind them, while the two of them lie crouched on the ground behind a small dune, looking at the camp ahead. Several soldiers are patrolling the edge of the camp. Gabrielle scans the area, looking intently. Her eyes soon fall on a tent on the edge of the camp; there are barrels and sacks piled near it, and two guards sitting on sacks, clearly keeping watch, a fire burning in front of them. Gabrielle's eyes narrow as she takes this in.

GABRIELLE:

That's where they are.

ARES:

So what's the plan?

GABRIELLE:

Get them out.

ARES:

Oh, yeah. Charge in, take no prisoners-- (Off Gabrielle's eye-roll) What, what? I do look for a little fun now and again.

Gabrielle stares ahead, at the backs of the patrol as it fades into the distance.

GABRIELLE (gets up, her face serious):

Then you've found it. Let's go.

ARES (taken aback):

What, *now*?

CUT TO

Near the tent with supplies. The two guards are sitting on the sacks playing dice. Behind them, Gabrielle and Ares peek around from behind a barrel.

Pan around to show Gabrielle and Ares in their hiding place. She is holding the staff while Ares draws his sword. Gabrielle looks at him.

GABRIELLE:

Remember--no killing anyone.

ARES:

Always the spoilsport.

Gabrielle shoots him an exasperated look.

ARES (sighs):

Yeah, yeah. No killing.

Gabrielle looks around for any signs of other soldiers and then moves forward, crouched low.

Pan around for a close-up of the guards playing dice. There is a thud as one of them is hit on the head with Gabrielle's staff. His mouth slackens and his eyes grow dim. As he falls over, the other guard jumps up, only to find himself facing Ares.

ARES:

Hello.

He hits the guard on the head with the hilt of his sword. The guard falls.

GABRIELLE (coming up next to Ares):

That wasn't so hard, was it?

Ares chuckles. They start walking toward the tent.

Suddenly, the tip of a sword is placed between them, the tip of it touching their shoulders. Pull back to show Sabina standing behind them.

SABINA (quietly, almost in a sing-song):
I see you.

Slowly, Ares and Gabrielle turn to face her.

SABINA:
I figured you'd show up sooner or later. But without Xena? That's a first.

ARES (casually):
She had business elsewhere.

SABINA:
And you're playing the sidekick's sidekick. (Shakes her head, smirking) The things...*mortal* men will do for love.

Ares glares. Sabina looks past him toward the tent.

SABINA:
Oh. You're here to rescue your deserter friend. (taunting) What is it again--Simon? Timon? (clicks her fingers) Oh yes--Haimon.

Close-up on Sabina, then on Gabrielle as they stare at each other--Gabrielle looking defiant, Sabina thoughtful.

SABINA:
You've got thirty seconds to get out of this camp.

GABRIELLE (shocked):
You're letting us go?

SABINA:
Yes. And I've got someone to take home with you. Wait over there. (motions toward the dunes where Gabrielle and Ares were hiding before.)

GABRIELLE (in shock):
You mean, you're--

SABINA (mockingly):
Don't get your hopes up. Not *too* high, at least. (Gabrielle opens her mouth to say something else but Sabina cuts her off) Now *go*, before I change my mind and call the guards!

Sabina turns and walks into the tent. Gabrielle and Ares share a bewildered look.

CUT TO

Siran and Haimon are inside the small supply tent. Both of them are sleeping. The tent flap is lifted and Sabina walks in.

Close in on Siran as she sleeps, leaning back against the tent wall, in the moonlight that pours in through the opening at the top of the tent.

Pan around to show Sabina standing in front of her. She pulls a dagger from her belt and moves toward Siran. Siran stirs and opens her eyes, startled.

Sabina kneels down in front of Siran, holding out the dagger, and slashes the ropes that bind her hands and are attached to the rope fastened to the post. Siran watches her, quietly surprised and grateful.

Once she is released, Sabina steps back. Siran looks down at her hands, then up at Sabina.

SIRAN (sincere):

Thank you.

There is a long moment of silence. Sabina reaches out to touch Siran.

SABINA:

Come on.

Siran turns back to look at Haimon who is still sleeping.

SIRAN:

What about Haimon?

Sabina lowers her eyes.

SABINA:

He's a Roman fugitive. He stays here.

Siran lowers her eyes.

SIRAN:

I can't leave without him.

SABINA (anxious):

Of course you can.

Sabina goes to grab Siran's hand but she pulls it away, looking firmly at Sabina.

SIRAN:

You're my friend, Sabina, but I can't let someone die without trying to help.

Sabina gives her a frustrated look, then looks at Haimon, struggling with herself. Finally, she takes Siran's arm and hauls her forcefully to her feet. Siran gasps. The commotion wakes Haimon and he opens his eyes.

SABINA (leaning in so that her face is right up against Siran's, harshly):

This is your *only* chance.

HAIMON (off-camera):
Listen to her, Siran.

Siran turns to look at him, conflicted.

CUT TO

Outside the tent. Sabina opens the flap and nearly runs into one of the guards that had been knocked out by Gabrielle and Ares. He staggers up to the tent, still groggy and rubbing his head. Seeing Sabina, he does his wobbly best to straighten up and salutes, fist across his chest.

GUARD:
General! I must report an attack--.

SABINA:
I know. They tried to free the deserter but I chased them off.

She moves past him, pulling Siran by the hand behind her. He looks at her curiously and opens his mouth to speak, when she turns to look at him, firmly.

SABINA:
The girl is of no consequence. She's been punished enough.

Sabina leads Siran past him. The guard frowns but then shakes his head, obviously willing to take her word for it.

CUT TO

The sand dune. Gabrielle and Ares peer over the ridge. Pan down to show Sabina and Siran walking toward the edge of the camp.

Close-up on Gabrielle's face; she looks surprised and happy, then disappointed--she clearly hoped Sabina would release Haimon.

CUT TO

Sabina and Siran at the edge of the camp. Sabina stops.

SABINA:
Your friends are waiting over there. (points to the dune) Go quickly.

SIRAN:
Promise me you'll try to save him.

Sabina hesitates for a moment, glancing back at the tent, then shakes her head. Siran sighs, her eyes reflecting sadness.

SIRAN (pleading):
We could leave here together. You still have that choice.

Sabina looks at her thoughtfully, then gives a bitter laugh with a hint of regret.

SABINA:

So I can end up hunted like him? You're such a child.

Siran holds her gaze silently. Then she turns and walks away toward where Gabrielle and Ares are waiting. Sabina watches her go, then hangs her head in thoughtful silence.

CUT TO

Outside the caves. Darion and a young Eliijan woman are sitting by a small fire.

DARION:

Look!

Pan to show Gabrielle and Ares riding up in the moonlight, Siran riding behind Gabrielle. Darion jumps up, running toward them.

DARION:

You're back!

Gabrielle dismounts, Siran following close behind. In the background, the Eliijan woman jumps up and runs into the cave, shouting, "They're back! Siran is back!"

Gabrielle hugs Darion.

DARION (looks at Siran):

Hi, Siran.

He thinks a moment, then frowns and is about to ask something when the Eliijans come running, with shouts of "Siran!" "You're back!" "Thank Eli you're all right!" They surround her, patting her shoulders and hugging her.

ELIJAN ELDER (to Gabrielle and Ares):

We are in your debt.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

We...didn't do all that much. Sabina, the Roman general, caught us by the tent with the prisoners. She let Siran go.

ELIJAN ELDER (shocked):

The Roman general! (thinks a moment) What about that man? Haimon?

Gabrielle shakes her head, her lips tight. Pan to a worried-looking Darion.

An Eliijan woman comes up to Gabrielle carrying baby Samuel, who is now awake. He giggles happily when he sees Gabrielle, and her expression changes to a smile as she takes him.

DARION:

Are you going back after Haimon?

GABRIELLE (emphatic):

Yes. (She pauses a moment, clearly struggling) But it's not just about him now. It's about stopping a war. The Romans are heading to Palmyra.

ELIJAN:

Are you sure?

ARES:

Why else would thousands of Romans be camped in the desert? They never have been big on letting others take back what they took first.

GABRIELLE (looks around):

Is Xena back?

ELIJAN WOMAN (the one who was holding Samuel):

No, she hasn't returned.

GABRIELLE (determined):

Then we need to warn her, too.

ELIJAN ELDER:

You can go first thing in the morning.

GABRIELLE (firmly):

We're not waiting 'til morning. We go now.

Samuel starts to cry in her arms. She looks torn as she hugs him.

GABRIELLE:

Hush, now. Mama will be back soon.

Medium closeup on Gabrielle rocking Samuel in her arms while Darion stands by her side, looking worried as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

A long shot of Palmyra, in the predawn light.

Ares and Gabrielle ride into view. The camera zooms in on them. Gabrielle is quiet, her look worried. Ares catches her look.

ARES:

Worried about Haimon? Or Xena?

GABRIELLE:

Both.

ARES (with false swagger):

Well, Xena can take care of herself. Which is more than I can say for the boyfriend. (Off Gabrielle's dirty look) Well, I just mean--no one's like Xena.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

I know.

CUT TO

The dungeon. Xena is sitting on a hard, stone bench under a small window high above. She's leaning back against the wall. She lets out a heavy sigh.

MAN (from the shadows):

I didn't think our paths would ever cross again.

Xena perks up, hearing the voice and looks around. In a cell next to her, a man appears out of the shadows, gripping the rough metal bars of the cell. His face comes into the light and she recognizes him as Nymphidius, Livia's old teacher she met in *What Separates Us* in season 9.

There is a large bloody wound across his forehead and he seems to have been beaten a few times by the bruises on his face and arms, his hair matted and tangled from the dirt and grime.

Xena stands up, but only far enough until the leg-irons around her ankles keep her from moving too close to the bars. She squats down across from him, able to see him but not close enough to touch.

XENA:

Nymphidius.

NYMPHIDIUS:

Xena.

She looks at the wound on his head and frowns.

XENA (nods):

You need to get that treated.

NYMPHIDIUS:

I'll be okay.

XENA:

How long have you been down here?

NYMPHIDIUS:

I don't know; the days all bleed together. Why Zenobia hasn't executed me yet, I'm still not sure. I've seen many people come and go.

XENA (shakes head):

She has to be stopped. This isn't about freedom for her people; it's about vengeance.

NYMPHIDIUS:

If anyone can stop her, you can. (chuckles bitterly) If you can get out of here first.

XENA (grimly):

Oh, believe me, I will.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Ares are walking through Palmyra's marketplace. A cluster of people stand talking loudly and animatedly by one of the stalls.

WOMAN #1 (in her thirties):

You should've seen it, the way she threw that round weapon and just *cut* the ropes!

Gabrielle and Ares exchange a quick look and stop.

WOMAN #2 (very young, no more than twenty):

Well, about time someone stood up to Zenobia. Executing those people just because they're Roman? (shakes head.)

MAN #1 (an older man):

Hush, now! (looks around) You've got to be careful what you say. She *is* the Queen.

WOMAN #2:

I don't care! Ever since she's returned--

MAN #1:

And besides, a lot of us suffered at the hands of the Romans, too. You're just too young to remember it!

WOMAN #2:

Doesn't make it all right to go after people who never harmed anyone, does it? I'm glad they escaped!

GABRIELLE (comes closer):

Excuse me. (the people turn to look at her nervously) You're talking about yesterday's execution, aren't you? They all escaped?

WOMAN #1:

Yeah. This warrior woman just showed up out of nowhere--

MAN #2:

They say she was ten feet tall!

WOMAN #1 (scoffs):

She was not! I was there, and I tell you--

GABRIELLE (interrupts impatiently):

And then? What happened to her?

The people exchange uncertain looks.

WOMAN #1:

Disappeared into the crowd with the Romans, I suppose. Nobody knows.

MAN #2 (in his thirties):

I heard Zenobia's soldiers caught her and took her to the dungeon.

WOMAN #2:

No, they didn't!

Gabrielle looks back at Ares and they share an uncertain look.

GABRIELLE (quietly):

We have to go to the palace.

WOMAN #1:

What, you two know her?

ARES (conspiratorial wink):

Yeah, we, uh--think she might be an old friend of ours. Lots of catching up to do. (to Gabrielle)
Let's go.

They walk away as the people give them puzzled looks.

CUT TO

In Zenobia's chambers. Zenobia is standing with her cousin, Hairan. They are in another argument.

HAIRAN:

You can't keep the Warrior Princess locked up!

ZENOBIA:

And why not? She came here to defy me. As queen, I have the right.

HAIRAN:

We can't afford to have Xena against us, not with everything else we're facing.

ZENOBIA (whips around):

And what are we facing, dear cousin?

HAIRAN:

There are a *lot* of people in the city who aren't happy about what you've been doing to the Romans.

ZENOBIA (angry):

The Romans don't belong here. This is *my* home.

Hairan sighs and walks past Zenobia.

ZENOBIA:

Where are you going?

Hairan stops but doesn't turn around.

HAIRAN:

It is your city; you can do as you please--but you'll have to do it without me. (he turns to look back at her, sadness in his eyes) For your sake and the people's--I hope it's worth it.

When he is already near the door, there is a knock.

ZENOBIA (turns around):

Enter!

Two guards walk in with Gabrielle and Ares.

GUARD:

Your highness, these two insisted on speaking with you. They say it's urgent.

Zenobia frowns, recognizing Gabrielle immediately. She eyes them for a moment, then motions to the guards to go. The guards walk out.

ZENOBIA (coming closer):

Urgent? Let me guess, you've come for Xena.

Hairan gives them a sharp look.

GABRIELLE:

We came to warn you. (Zenobia cocks her head, intrigued) The Romans are on their way here with a legion.

ZENOBIA:

And you know this how...?

ARES:

We passed by a large camp on our way here. (sarcastic) I doubt they've traveled all this way to sightsee.

Zenobia stares at them.

CUT TO

The dungeon.

We see down the center of the two cells, the bar dividing the two cells in the center of the screen, Xena in the cell on the right, Nymphidius in the cell on the left. Both of them are sitting back against the wall.

NYMPHIDIUS:

You know, I never did tell you before, but you've done well by your daughter.

XENA (turns her head, bitterly):

I barely had any hand in raising her. How can you say that?

NYMPHIDIUS:

I think of Livia now, and the best that was in her--her strength--I think I know where she got it. (Smiles a little) You were with her even when you weren't.

Xena looks down, moved and thoughtful.

XENA:

I never thought I'd say this, but you did well by her, too.

NYMPHIDIUS (after a pause):

I never did have a daughter of my own.

The door to the dungeon opens suddenly and Xena and Nymphidius jerk their heads to look. Hairan walks in, holding a key in one hand and a brown cloth bundle in the other. He walks to the end of the hall and Xena stands, coming as close to the bars as she can. She watches Hairan silently until Hairan reaches for the door and unlocks the cell.

He walks up to her and unlocks the chains from her hands and her feet, then drops the bundle on the floor; it unwraps, revealing her armor and chakram.

HAIRAN:

Get your things. We're leaving.

Xena studies him for a moment.

XENA:

Let me guess; Zenobia doesn't know you're here.

HAIRAN:

Keeping you in here isn't right.

XENA (looks at Nymphidius):

Keeping *him* in here isn't right, either. This man is my friend. I'm not leaving without him.

HAIRAN (urgent):

You have other friends who are waiting. And if what they say is true, perhaps we can get all the prisoners released.

Xena exchanges a look with Nymphidius and he nods, as if to say he'll be all right.

CUT TO

The throne room. Zenobia stands in front of Gabrielle and Ares, her hands folded across her chest.

GABRIELLE (exasperated):

Why would we make it up?

ZENOBIA:

I don't know--to get me to release your precious Xena?

GABRIELLE:

That's not--

ZENOBIA:

She released prisoners who I had condemned to death.

GABRIELLE:

For what? For being Romans?

ZENOBIA (mockingly):

After all this time, you still believe the Romans are innocent. Very sweet of you, Gabrielle. Believe what you want. But I am the queen of Palmyra, and I *will* have this city cleansed of the Romans. And those who defy me will pay for it. Xena will stay in the dungeon--as long as I say she stays.

XENA (off-camera):

Sorry to disappoint.

Zenobia looks up, and Gabrielle and Ares whirl around to find Xena, in full armor with sword at her back and chakram at her side, standing in the doorway. A few guards rush in and go to grab her by the arms but she gives them deadly stares and they back off.

Zenobia stares at her, surprised and angry, Gabrielle and Ares relieved and smiling.

Hairan walks around Xena and looks at Zenobia.

ZENOBIA (shocked):

Cousin?

HAIRAN (firm but trying to hide his nervousness):

If the Romans are coming, we could use her skills.

ZENOBIA:

The Romans are *not* coming!

XENA:

If you believe they wouldn't, you're not as smart as I thought you were.

Zenobia opens her mouth to speak when a guard walks into the room.

GUARD (salutes):

Queen Zenobia, we have news. Romans have been spotted on the horizon. Scouts have confirmed that a Roman legion is on its way.

Zenobia turns and heads for the balcony. Looking out in the distance, she sees the glint of light reflecting off metal, flickering over the length of the horizon like little lights. Close up of her face as her expression reflects realization and uncertainty.

ZENOBIA (after a long pause while she regains her composure, she turns back to the guard with false confidence and cockiness):

So what if the Romans come? I'll just stop them.

Hairan gives her a concerned look.

XENA (deadly serious):
Like you did *last* time.

Zenobia is silent, caught off-guard.

ZENOBIA:
I'm more prepared now.

XENA:
Are you? You may be on a self-destruct mission but don't bring your people down with you. Believe me, you'll never forgive yourself.

Hairan watches quietly, Gabrielle and Ares share looks. Xena steps up to her; some guards try to stop her but she pulls her hands away from them forcefully.

XENA:
I don't want to see this city, or its people, destroyed. So I'll help you stop them--on one condition.

ZENOBIA (raises an eyebrow):
The Warrior Princess is giving ultimatums now?

XENA (serious):
You release the Roman prisoners, and I'll fight by your side.

A pause.

ZENOBIA (shakes head):
You think I need *your* help to win? You're not the only one out there with skills, you know. Just ask your daughter.

XENA (after a pause):
So that's a no.

ZENOBIA:
It's a no.

XENA (shrugs):
Your choice.

HAIRAN (steps up, fervently):
Don't be a *fool*, Zenobia.

Zenobia shoots him a quick, dark look.

ZENOBIA (to Hairan):
You've chosen the way of a traitor. Now you'll face the consequences. (nods toward the guards)
Seize them.

Xena, Gabrielle and Ares turn as several guards advance on them, forcing them into a fight.

Hairan gives Zenobia a disappointed look.

HAIRAN:

You don't have to do this.

ZENOBIA:

I wish I didn't.

CUT TO

Xena kicks one of the guards and knocks him down. She turns to see Ares and Gabrielle holding their own against the other guards, then turns to see a guard moving in to apprehend Hairan, grabbing him by the arms. She frowns, then rushes toward him, only to be met by the point of Zenobia's sword.

ZENOBIA:

Face it, Xena, you can't save everyone.

XENA:

I can try.

Their swords clash. She gets in a few good swings before finally pushing Zenobia to the side and when Zenobia swings again, Xena flips right over her to land behind. She turns, and engages the guard holding onto Hairan--she reaches for Hairan's arm and kicks the guard in the side. The guard draws his sword and tries to parry her blade but is at a disadvantage while he holds onto Hairan with his other hand at the same time. Xena knocks the sword from his hand and pushes him back and down to the floor. Grabbing Hairan's arm, she quickly pulls him away from the the guard and Zenobia.

ZENOBIA (annoyed):

Guards!

Xena turns toward the door, hoping to exit with Hairan but several more guards begin to enter the room. She turns to see Gabrielle and Ares downing the guards they had been fighting and turning to look at her. Xena scans the room for a quick moment and then focuses on the balcony. She pulls Hairan with her.

XENA:

Come on!

Xena runs toward the balcony, bringing Hairan with her. Gabrielle and Ares notice her intentions and follow. They all rush out onto the balcony; Xena looks over the railing to see the city square below, then quickly turns back as she sees Gabrielle, Ares and Hairan beside her and the guards advancing on them.

The guards begin to close in. Gabrielle, Ares and Xena get in a few good swings and kicks to push them back. As Gabrielle and Ares fight them briefly, Xena thinks, glancing around the room and then in a split second reaction, removes the chakram from her belt and tosses it. It ricochets across the room, past the startled guards, off the walls, a potted plant and a table before finally knocking into the large statue that stands at the entryway of the balcony--a bust of Vespasian on a tall pedestal. She catches the chakram and returns it to her hip. The pedestal sways and then finally topples over, landing on the floor blocking the guard's paths as they jump out of its way as it falls.

While the guards try to get past the statue, Xena runs back to the edge of the balcony, takes out her whip, ties the end to the railing and lets the rest of it drop over the edge. She gestures toward Gabrielle, then Ares. Gabrielle comes up and begins to climb down the whip, then Ares follows.

XENA (looks at Hairan, urgently, continuing to glance back at the guards to see if they have come over the statue yet):

Come on.

After a long moment of looking at her and then at Zenobia whose arms are crossed in a very annoyed gesture, he shakes his head.

HAIRAN:

I can't.

Xena's surprised. Just as the guards begin to move the statue out of their way, Xena gives Hairan one last look before grabbing the end of the whip and somersaulting off the balcony.

Hairan watches her, Ares and Gabrielle at the base of the palace, running off.

Then, the tip of a sword suddenly touches his neck. Pull back to show Zenobia standing behind him now, her sword pressed firm against the skin.

His face is of determination and fear as we.

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Resume scene. Zenobia holds Hairan at swordpoint. Pan around to show Hairan's face and Zenobia behind him.

ZENOBIA (shakes head, disappointed):

If you're not with me, then you're against me.

HAIRAN:

We've had our differences but I care about this city...and about you. (softly and sincerely, he slowly turns around; she still has the sword pointed at him) I don't want to be your enemy.

Close up of Zenobia's conflicted expression. Slowly, she lowers the sword as they stare at each other.

CUT TO

Outside the city limits. There are a few scattered homes surrounding the city walls near a small pool.

Standing beside the pool, Gabrielle pulls back from a hug with Xena.

GABRIELLE:

I'm glad you're okay.

Xena smiles at her, then turns to look at Ares.

ARES:

Thought you said you *weren't* going to get into too much trouble?

XENA (grins):

Well, not like it was *real* trouble.

Ares grins, clamps forearms with her and gives her a quick kiss.

GABRIELLE:

What are we going to do?

XENA:

This isn't our fight. I offered my help, Zenobia refused. It's up to her now.

GABRIELLE (uncertain):

What about the prisoners and Hairan?

XENA:

We'll find a way to help them. As for Hairan...he had the opportunity to escape, but he wouldn't take it.

Gabrielle contemplates this for a moment.

GABRIELLE (changes the subject):

Xena, Haimon is still at the Roman camp. Sabina stopped us from getting to him. (pause, thoughtfully) She did release Siran, though. (Xena gives her a surprised look) We have to--

XENA (cuts her off, putting a hand on her shoulder reassuringly):

We will.

CUT TO

The Romans have stopped at the crest of a hill, Palmyra ahead. A few small tents have been set up-- some of the men getting a quick meal before the battle. Haimon is pushed into one of the tents, two guards stand watch.

CUT TO

Sabina is walking back to her horse with a waterskin. She takes a drink. Titus walks up to her.

TITUS:

Report?

SABINA:

The ninth legion from Caesarea is prepared. We'll have the city surrounded by mid-day if not earlier.

TITUS:

Good.

There is silence.

TITUS (not looking at her):

I heard you released the girl. (Sabina quickly looks at him; he turns to her with a sideways glance)
I didn't give you those orders.

SABINA (casually):

It's one less prisoner to keep track of once the battle starts. She was of no consequence.

TITUS:

Rumor has it she's a friend of yours.

Sabina doesn't respond one way or the other, and continues to look him in the eye, her face betraying no emotion. He moves closer to her, staring her down.

TITUS:

You may have called the shots when you were leading your little army across Greece but here, you answer to *me*. Need I remind you that you are here *only* because the Emperor, my *father*, wishes it so. You go releasing prisoners without orders, you will no longer have his favor--and I will have no more use for you. (pause) (Titus turns to walk off, speaking as he does) Consider that a warning.

Sabina watches him leave, frowning thoughtfully.

CUT TO

The streets of Palmyra. The din of voices fill the city.

In the distance someone shouts "The Romans are coming! The Romans are coming!"

DISSOLVE TO

People are in a panic. We see mothers and fathers running down the streets carrying or leading their children; some men and women grabbing brooms and shovels to be used as weapons, others locking doors and windows.

CUT TO

The palace. A man in high-ranking armor, an officer, walks purposefully down a corridor and into a large room where Zenobia stands with several soldiers of lower rank.

ZENOBIA:

Well?

OFFICER:

The army is gathering as quickly as possible but... (Zenobia glares at him) our numbers are, at best, only half of what the Romans have at their disposal.

SOLDIER (blurts out):

We don't stand a chance!

Instantly, Zenobia's look turns cold and she turns to him, grabbing a small dagger from a nearby table and ramming it into his chest. He gasps and falls over, dead. The other soldiers around him gulp.

ZENOBIA:

Those that doubt me will die. Are we clear?

She stares at the soldiers and then the officer. They nod, intimidated.

ZENOBIA (to the officer):

Let the guards know that *if* we have to surrender, I want every prisoner killed without exception. (the officer nods) I will meet the army outside in an hour. Make sure they are ready.

OFFICER (bows his head):

Yes, your highness.

ZENOBIA (waves a hand):

Now leave me.

The officer nods, then walks out. As he exits, we see Harian standing outside the door, his back to the wall. He had heard Zenobia's conversation. He thinks and then walks off.

DISSOLVE TO

Zenobia is in her bed chambers. She stands in front of a mirror, now wearing a gold breastplate (similar to Xena's from *A Friend In Need*) and a brown leather and gold chainmail skirt. She wears knee-high leather and gold boots. A small gold headband with a stone in the center adorns her head.

She grabs her sword. Pull back to show her looking at the blade and then her sliding it into the scabbard at her back.

DISSOLVE TO

Many soldiers are in the war room, being handed swords and shields.

DISSOLVE TO

Zenobia, in full battle armor, stands on the balcony, overlooking the city. Soldiers are gathered below.

ZENOBIA (raises her sword, shouts):

The Romans are at our doorstep! They've come to take this city away from us. Well, I say we will not let them! When we are done here, the Romans will know that we cannot be enslaved--and I will forever be your queen!

The soldiers begin to cheer, raising their swords. Zenobia raises her sword, too.

DISSOLVE TO

Hairan is walking through the dark dungeon, the bared cells on either side of him. Most of the cells are empty. He comes to the cell where the group of prisoners Zenobia had re-captured are huddled. As he approaches, they stir and start to rise to their feet.

HAIRAN (unlocking the cell):

You're free. Go back to your families.

The prisoners hesitate for a moment, exchanging wary looks that turn to incredulous smiles; then, in obvious relief, murmur their thanks and rush out of the cell, past Hairan. Nymphidius is the last to leave; as he does, Hairan stops him, putting a hand on his arm. Nymphidius turns and gives him a hard look.

HAIRAN:

You're a Roman officer, I know that. (As Nymphidius scowls, he continues) And you know Xena. I know that, too.

NYMPHIDIUS:

Where is Xena?

HAIRAN:

Outside the city. Go, join her.

NYMPHIDIUS (nods):

Thank you.

As he starts to leave, Hairan calls after him.

HAIRAN:

There's a battle about to start. (bitterly) The Romans are here to take back the city.

Nymphidius stops and turns back, eyeing Hairan a moment.

NYMPHIDIUS:

What the Romans are doing... (he pauses) it's not what / would choose to do.

HAIRAN (meets his gaze, nodding slowly):

And what Zenobia has done is not what / would choose to do. I suppose that makes us even.

They watch each other a moment.

HAIRAN:

Go. Go, before Zenobia finds out.

He looks on as Nymphidius leaves the dungeon.

CUT TO

Outside the city. Xena, Gabrielle and Ares are on their horses. From where they are positioned, they can see the army beginning to gather outside Palmyra, and they can see the Roman legion marching down the hill toward the city.

Then they see a man walking off to the side, away from the city. The man approaches the hill. As he gets closer, Xena realizes that it's Nymphidius.

She dismounts.

XENA (surprised):

Nymphidius? You escaped?

NYMPHIDIUS:

No, released--by Zenobia's cousin. He freed every prisoner.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a surprised look.

GABRIELLE:

Do you think he convinced Zenobia--?

NYMPHIDIUS:

No, he was acting on his own. (pauses) Xena, I want you to know I'm not joining the Romans in this fight. (gestures toward the legion marching toward the city) There are many things I believe in, but this isn't one of them. (he smiles) Maybe this time, I've learned something from your daughter.

Xena nods, giving him a look of respect. She reaches out and the two of them clamp forearms.

GABRIELLE (realizing):

You're Eve's old teacher.

Nymphidius looks up at her and nods.

XENA (thinks):

If you're not going to fight with them, then maybe you could help us.

NYMPHIDIUS:

To do what?

XENA:

We need someone to infiltrate the Roman camp and release a prisoner.

Zoom in on Nymphidius as he thinks.

NYMPHIDIUS:

I know just what to do.

CUT TO

Palmyra. Zenobia's army has gathered outside the city gates. The soldiers are lined up, the line stretching the length of the wall on both sides of the entrance, several rows deep. Zenobia is riding back and forth along the line of soldiers until she finally stops in front of the gates.

ZENOBIA:

For Palmyra!

SOLDIERS (raising their swords):
For Palmyra!!!

The soldiers charge forward. Hairan watches from a window of the palace.

CUT TO

Titus gives the signal to charge.

Slow motion as the Romans charge toward the Palmyrans and they clash. The battle begins.

CUT TO

The small Roman camp.

The guards surrounding the tent where Haimon is being kept. Nymphidius walks into view.

NYMPHIDIUS (coming toward them):

Orders from Titus, I'm to relieve you of your duty. You're to report to the battlefield at once.

The guards survey him warily, taking in his bedraggled appearance and his cuts and bruises.

GUARD #1 (cautious):

Why would he want the prisoner to go unguarded?

NYMPHIDIUS:

I'll keep watch.

GUARD #2:

You. (looking him up and down) An officer of your rank?

NYMPHIDIUS:

Can't you see I'm in no shape to fight? I've spent a long time in Zenobia's dungeons. I wouldn't be any good out there. Titus needs more men out in the field.

The guards exchange looks, then look back.

GUARD #2:

Very well, sir.

He hands over the spear and Nymphidius takes it. The guards walk off. Nymphidius watches them as they disappear from sight, down the hill.

Nymphidius looks in the other direction and smiles.

XENA (off-camera):

That was good.

Pan around to show Xena peeking out from behind some sacks with supplies. Crouching low to avoid being seen, she approaches the tent.

XENA (to Nymphidius):
Keep watch. I'll get him.

She opens the flap and goes inside the tent.

CUT TO

Inside the tent. Haimon is chained to a pole. He looks up and sees Xena walking in.

Xena walks up and kneels down, grabbing the chains around his wrists. The chains are thick. She contemplates them for a moment.

HAIMON:
You shouldn't have come.

XENA (looks at him sharply):
You mean, just leave you here?

HAIMON:
Don't you think it's better this way?

XENA (curtly):
Nope. (she pulls out her dagger and starts working on the lock on his manacles) I think it's better for you to be with Gabrielle and your son.

Haimon looks down.

HAIMON (softly):
I can never have a life with them. Not as long as the Romans are around. And since we both know they're not going anywhere... (He sighs and goes on, his voice breaking). At least if I'm dead, Gabrielle could move on.

Xena stops working on the manacles and glares at him.

XENA:
Gabrielle would be *heartbroken* if you were killed and she could do nothing to stop it.

Haimon sighs and looks down guiltily as Xena goes back to her task.

XENA (her head down as she works on the manacles):
Ever heard of Shark Island Prison?

HAIMON (surprised):
I have. Why?

XENA:
Once--years ago--I allowed myself to be sent there for life because I was tired of running from my past... (her voice drops) from my guilt. (Haimon nods, understanding) And because I thought that Gabrielle would be better off without me--that as long as we were traveling together, I would put her in danger. Well, she came after me--nearly got herself killed trying to help me. And that's when I realized that I had hurt her much more by giving up than I ever could have by staying at her side.

The lock clicks and the chains fall from Haimon's wrists. Xena looks up at him as he rubs his wrists.

XENA:

So I understand what you're doing. You're willing to give yourself up because you think that if you do, the ones you love can live in peace. I've been there.

She bends down to unlock the chains around his feet.

XENA (not looking at him):

I gave away my only son because I believed that it was the only way to protect him from the world I had created. (Haimon watches her silently, noticing the emotion in her voice) I thought I had no choice... (she looks at him) ...but I can *never* forgive myself for what I did. He died and I had missed most of his life. (Xena pulls the chains off his feet and stands up, looking down at him) You still have a choice.

Haimon looks up at her silently.

CUT TO

Dunes at some distance from the Roman camp. Gabrielle and Ares are waiting. Pan to the top of the dunes; Xena and Nymphidius come into view.

GABRIELLE (leaps to her feet):

He's not here!

A moment later, we see Haimon come up behind Xena and Nymphidius. Gabrielle rushes toward him and hugs him tearfully, then pulls back.

GABRIELLE:

I'm not letting you go again. (Haimon goes to speak but she holds up her finger) You've missed too much. I'm not letting you miss more.

Haimon looks at her, unable to say anything.

HAIMON:

Gabri--

Before he can finish, Gabrielle kisses him. He's taken aback for a moment but when she deepens their kiss, he wraps his arms around her.

Behind them, Xena, Ares and Nymphidius avert their eyes to give them privacy.

Gabrielle pulls back and looks at him.

HAIMON (quietly):

I'll stay with you.

She squeezes his hand.

ARES:

Listen, I hate to break up a tender moment, but we're much too close to the Roman camp for my comfort.

GABRIELLE (nods):

You're right. Let's get out of here.

They start to walk away from the camp--and, just then, a female voice rings out.

SABINA (off-camera):

Going somewhere?

Xena and the others whip around, with Xena, Gabrielle, and Ares drawing their weapons. Sabina is at the top of the dune, astride her horse.

SABINA:

Surprise, surprise.

XENA (walks out in front of the others):

Sabina.

SABINA (looks past Xena, toward Nymphidius):

And you've got a Roman working for you this time. (to Xena, somewhat mocking) You can turn anyone into your ally nowadays, can't you?

XENA:

What are you doing here? You should be on the battlefield.

SABINA:

I was. Until the men I left guarding your friend showed up and said they'd been relieved of duty. (she grins) I figured you had a hand in this.

XENA (studies her):

And you came alone.

SABINA (with a mocking pout):

You don't think I could take you all by myself.

XENA (bluntly):

No, I don't.

SABINA:

You're right. I have better things to do than fight.

She dismounts and walks toward the group.

I think I have a way to solve both our problem.

XENA:

What problem?

SABINA:

You see, if I let him escape... (nods toward Haimon) I get in trouble with Titus--and he'll still have the Romans nipping at his heels.

Haimon looks nervous.

SABINA:

So, I think you'll agree that there's only one way out of this. He has to die.

GABRIELLE:

What?

SABINA (unflappable):

At least as far as Titus is concerned. (She comes up to Haimon, ignoring the others' watchful stares.) Don't worry, bringing back your head is not part of the plan. (She reaches out to touch the pendant around his neck and takes it in her hand.) This'll do.

HAIMON:

But that's--

SABINA:

The last thing you have of your mother's. I know. (off his uncertain look) Do you want them to believe you're dead, or not?

Haimon hesitates for a long time.

HAIMON (sadly but determined):

Take it.

Sabina draws her dagger, cuts the cord on which the pendant hangs, and clutches it in her palm.

SABINA:

Thanks. I'll need some blood on it to make it more believable... but there'll be no shortage of that today.

Pan to Gabrielle as she winces.

HAIMON (looking into Sabina's eyes):

I'm doing this for Gabrielle and my son. That's the *only* reason.

SABINA:

And I'm doing it for myself. Life's a lot simpler that way.

GABRIELLE:

Are you? You could have brought a squad of men to kill him.

SABINA (shakes her head):

I'm not taking any chances, with Xena around.

HAIMON:

Still--you helped me. Just like you helped Siran.

SABINA:

That was--incidental. No need to thank me.

HAIMON:

Thank you anyway.

Without a word, Sabina goes back to her horse and gets in the saddle. Before riding away, she turns away to give Xena a last look.

SABINA:

Good-bye, Xena.

As she rides away, the camera moves in on Xena, Gabrielle, and Haimon, with Ares and Nymphidius standing in the background. Gabrielle leans against Haimon, who puts his arm around her. Xena squeezes his shoulder. The camera zooms in on her face as she mouths a silent "Thank you," then pans to show Sabina disappear over the ridge.

DISSOLVE TO

The battle. People are fighting fiercely, the clash of metal, the screams of men echoing in the air.

CUT TO

Zenobia gallops through the battlefield, cutting down Romans around her.

CUT TO

Titus, on horseback, surveys the battlefield. Sabina rides up to join him.

TITUS (not looking at her):

Finish this, Sabina.

Sabina looks at him.

TITUS:

Go after the queen. (looks at her) Win this for Rome.

CUT TO

A room in the palace in Palmyra. Hairan watches the distant battle from the window, looking worried. The servants, clearly frightened, huddle behind him.

CUT TO

Zenobia on her horse. Sabina rides toward her. As she approaches, Zenobia draws her sword.

SABINA (taunting):

The great Palmyran Queen.

Sabina draws her sword.

ZENOBIA:

We finally meet.

Zenobia dismounts, so does Sabina. They begin to circle each other.

ZENOBIA:

By sundown, my people will be free. And you'll be dead.

SABINA:

Or *you* will be.

They continue circling, eyeing each other, watching each other's every movement, every sound. Then Zenobia swings, Sabina dodges the blade and the fight begins.

Sabina pushes Zenobia back and swings. Zenobia dodges under the blade and whirls around, kicking out her foot and hitting Sabina in the side. Sabina moves back--Zenobia charges and jumps up, sending out another powerful kick that just misses Sabina's head as she ducks under it.

Their swords clash a few times, dancing around each other. Sabina lunges toward Zenobia and she moves out of the way.

Zenobia attacks her and Sabina parries the blow. Sabina kicks her back, but not without Zenobia's sword scraping her across her arm. Sabina looks at the wound, then back at Zenobia. Zenobia reaches down and pulls out two small daggers attached to her belt. She throws them at Sabina with lightning speed, but she dodges each one, using her sword to deflect them. Zenobia snarls and charges again. This time, Zenobia is able to knock Sabina back slightly, causing her to lose her footing. Sabina staggers and Zenobia charges again, pushing her to the ground. She punches Sabina in the face and Sabina kicks back, but Zenobia blocks her foot.

Zenobia, in rage, raises her sword and brings it down, cutting Sabina's other arm. Sabina cries out a moment, and tries to push back almost desperately but Zenobia has her firmly pinned to the ground, her foot on her chest.

Their eyes meet for a moment, then Zenobia raises her sword. Just as she's about to bring it down, she hesitates, staring into Sabina's eyes. It's enough of a pause to allow Sabina to regain herself. She pushes forward with her foot, kicking Zenobia in the stomach, knocking her backwards and losing the grip on her sword. Sabina stands up, looming over Zenobia.

There is uncertainty in Sabina's eyes as well; then, determined, she raises her sword and brings it down. The screen goes black.

DISSOLVE TO

The battlefield, some time later. The battle is over; soldiers, Roman and Palmyran, are gathering their dead.

CUT TO

Titus stands under the Roman banners, the city walls visible behind him. Sabina comes up; behind her, two soldiers bring a chained, silent Zenobia.

TITUS:

Well done, Sabina.

Sabina nods in response.

SABINA:

Just doing my job.

TITUS:

And doing it well. We'll be bringing her back for the triumphal march--*and* that deserter.

SABINA:

Not the deserter, I'm afraid.

TITUS (scowls):

What.

SABINA:

The Palmyrans must have helped him escape; I saw him on the battlefield, fighting on their side. Don't worry--he didn't get away from me.

She takes Haimon's pendant off her belt, now smeared with blood.

TITUS:

The body...?

SABINA:

Trampled by horses--there's not much left of it. But you'll know this. (She hands the pendant to Titus.)

TITUS (takes it):

Oh yes--his mother's bracelet, was it? (he chuckles) Good work. (He hands the pendant back to Sabina) You can keep it as a trophy. Come on, let's pay a visit to the palace.

As he walks toward the city gates, with Zenobia led behind him, Sabina shrugs and drops the necklace in the sand before following Titus.

Pan down to show the necklace lying in the sand. The wind picks up and covers the necklace partially with sand.

DISSOLVE TO

The throne room in the Palmyra palace. As Titus strides in, with Sabina behind him and Zenobia led in chains, Hairan comes forward and kneels.

HAIRAN:

General Titus.

Suddenly, Zenobia breaks free, bolts forward and springs toward him. He leaps to his feet. Zenobia manages to grab his throat.

ZENOBIA:

Traitor! It's because of you that we've lost! You should have been by my side!

HAIRAN:

What you were doing was madness!

ZENOBIA:

I was fighting for freedom! You *chose* to be a slave to Rome!

With manacled hands, she manages to reach around his throat.

HAIRAN (terrified):

Zenobia, stop!

ZENOBIA (hisses in his ear):

Fool. What better way to show them you're loyal.

Understanding dawns in his face, even as the soldiers pull her off him.

HAIRAN (wheezing and rubbing his throat):

I beg you, do not punish the people of Palmyra for my cousin's reckless actions! They too suffered at her hands. If you leave me in charge of the city as before, I swear I will keep the peace.

Zenobia snarls and spits toward him.

TITUS:

I'm not taking any chances.

Out of his line of sight, Zenobia winces in disappointment. Hairan looks dejected.

TITUS:

You can stay on as ruler of Palmyra. But you'll answer to a Roman procurator, and we'll keep a legion stationed here. (motioned toward Zenobia) She goes back to Rome, with the rest of our prisoners.

HAIRAN (bows):

Thank you for your mercy. (to Zenobia) As much as you may hate me, I intend to take care of our people.

TITUS:

Take her away.

As Zenobia is led away, she turns and gives Hairan one final look, a touch of wistfulness in her eyes. He watches her sadly.

CUT TO

Morning. The Elijans are camped outside the caves where they stayed before. Gabrielle is rocking Samuel in her arms; Haimon sits next to her, with Darion beside them. Xena is talking to some Elijans while Ares sits next to her, sharpening his sword (and occasionally catching disapproving looks from the Elijans).

DARION (to Haimon):

So the Romans aren't after you anymore?

HAIMON (looks down at him):

Not anymore.

DARION:

And you'll stay with us?

HAIMON (pauses, looks at Gabrielle and smiles a little, then pulls Darion toward him):

I'll stay.

Darion smiles and wraps his arms around Haimon's waist. Haimon looks at Gabrielle again. She squeezes his arm.

Pan over to Xena.

XENA (to the Elijans):

I spoke to Hairan last night. He'll answer to the Romans, but he will have enough power to protect his people--and you. You'll be safe in Palmyra.

ELIJAN ELDER:

Thank you for all your help.

ARES:

I still can't believe you missed out on a good battle, Xena. (nods toward the Elijans) Those peace lovers must have rubbed off on you.

XENA (shakes her head as she replies in a serious tone, not a bantering one):

It wasn't our fight. Zenobia had to be stopped--even if the Romans had to be the ones to do it.

Gabrielle turns toward her, pondering this.

GABRIELLE:

It's strange... Zenobia waited so long to get her city back. And when she did...she lost it again because she could not let go of her hate.

SIRAN (off-camera):

Xena! Gabrielle! Here they come!

Pan to Siran, looking back at Xena from the top of a dune where she is sitting. Xena and Gabrielle go to join her, Haimon and Ares following behind them.

An overhead shot of the Romans marching through the desert. Pan down to show Sabina riding next to a chained Zenobia, who stares stonily ahead.

PAN TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Siran watching from the top of the dune, lying low.

As if sensing their presence, Sabina looks up. Her eyes meet Xena's in silent understanding--and then Siran's. The two women share a long look tinged with sadness, each knowing that this is goodbye.

Zenobia, too, looks up and fixes Xena with a furious glare that Xena meets with an equally hard expression. Then, Zenobia turns to stare ahead, her face a mask of bitter resignation. Sabina casts one last look toward Xena, Gabrielle and Siran, then looks forward as she rides with her legion. There is no joy in her face, only a calm acceptance of duty and destiny.

The Romans march on. Haimon comes up with baby Samuel in his arms and sits down next to Gabrielle as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Zenobia's anger management problems were not helped during the production of this motion picture.]