

# SHIPPER SEASON SEVEN

## “Sly Fox”

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### Logline

Xena discovers that her resurrection had dangerous consequences and knows that she must put a stop to them.

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## TEASER

### *FADE IN*

Xena, Gabrielle and Eve are walking along the peaceful coast of a beach. Argo trots alongside them.

### **EVE:**

Mother, I can't tell you how much I missed you and Gabrielle in the land of Indus.

### **GABRIELLE:**

It's a lovely place there, isn't it?

### **EVE:**

Oh yes. It's very peaceful.

### **XENA:**

Sure. Peaceful. If you don't count the demons at every turn.

### **GABRIELLE:**

Why are you always so cynical?

**XENA:**

I'm not cynical. Just realistic.

Xena halts, darting her eyes around. Gabrielle, Eve and Argo follow her example, when Argo whinnies loudly. Streams of white light are blowing all around them. Xena draws her sword, and Gabrielle reaches for her sais. Eve tries wordlessly to get them to lower their weapons, but fails. Meanwhile, the light has been covering at a single point, directly in front of Xena. The figure of a large, bearded man replaces the white light.

**XENA** (harshly):

Who are you? (levels her sword at him)

The figure waves a hand and with three bolts of white light, the sword and sais fly from Xena and Gabrielle's hands, respectively, to land on the sand behind them.

**XENA** (undaunted):

I asked who you were.

**FIGURE:**

I am Enma, Lord of the Spirit World.

**EVE** (steps forward, wishing to present a message of peace):

I am Eve, the messenger of E--

**ENMA** (angry):

I know who are. You are one of the pathetic ningens responsible for Xena escaping my realm.

**GABRIELLE:**

Is that what this is about? A single mortal escaping you? We won't let Xena die again.

**XENA:**

And believe me, I have no intention of dying again. (snarls) And no worthless wannabe god is going to have any say in it.

**ENMA:**

Foolish. Self-obsessed. Like all you ningens. Do you truly believe that I, Enma, Lord of the Rekai would come to your worthless plain of existence because the life of one human escaped me?

**XENA:**

Then why don't you get to your point?

**ENMA** (glances almost respectfully at Xena):

Very well. Your escape from my realm, the Rekai, was far more destructive than you suspect.

**XENA:**

Maybe you need better management. Give my regards to the Rekai's custodian. (starts to walk away, uninterested in a god's problems)

**ENMA:**

More that my world was affected, Xena! You have put your own realm into grave peril.

**XENA** (turning to face Enma):

You'll forgive me if I don't believe that you give a damn about us *ningens*.

**ENMA:**

Humans may be irritating, but there are creatures that are far more dangerous. There are three different realms. Yours; the human world, the Ningenkai, Mine; the spirit world, the Rekai and last, a world so horrible that it should not exist, the demon world, the Makai. I control the gateways between these worlds. I keep them shut, so that everyone remains where they belong. But when you (fiercely grabs Eve's chin between his finger and thumb) returned your mother to life, you momentarily opened those gateways. (releases Eve's chin)

Now Enma's voice is heard over scenes of chaos, demons and spirits scrambling through the open gates.

**ENMA** (voice over):

Demons poured into the Ningenkai, Humans fell through to the Makai, Spirits escaped and now wander as ghosts. I have sent my messengers to collect the spirits and the weaker demons.

Scenes change to show Spirit world messengers apprehending hundreds upon hundreds of spirits and demons.

**ENMA** (voice over):

But even with my messengers and seekers of the dead on non-stop patrol, some still elude us.

Return to the beach.

**GABRIELLE:**

And that's where we come in.

**ENMA** (almost ignoring Gabrielle):

A particularly dangerous kitsune has escaped to Greece, beyond the range of my seekers. He has killed thousands of demons for mere pleasure and demons are much harder to kill than humans. I can only imagine what sort of havoc he will wreak in the Ningenkai.

**XENA:**

And why should we help you?

**ENMA:**

Quite aside from the fact that it will prevent me from dragging you back to the Rekai with me, apprehending this kitsune will save thousands of ningen lives.

**XENA:**

All right. But I'm not doing this for you.

**ENMA:**

I hardly expected you to. If I am correct, the kitsune has already destroyed the village of Elem and you should find him in or near Imat.

Xena nods and Enma vanishes the way he appeared as we:

**FADE OUT**

## ACT ONE

### *FADE IN*

Gabrielle and Eve run up behind Xena, who is walking at a brisk pace.

**GABRIELLE:**

Xena, I'm not sure I understand. What's a kitsune? Why is it so dangerous?

**XENA:**

When I was traveling with Akemi, she told me once of a race called the kitsune. They were fox spirits.

**EVE:**

Foxes?

**XENA:**

Yes. Some kitsune served Jappa's gods and were loved by the people. But those that didn't... (pauses, licking her lips) Well, they delighted in suffering.

**GABRIELLE (gasps):**

That's horrible.

Xena nods solemnly but both she and Eve avert their eyes.

### *CUT TO*

Panoramic shot of what is at first a peaceful countryside but changes rapidly into the burnt remnants of a village. Charred bodies of men, women and children litter the ground, some dismembered, others with gardening tools imbedded in them. Xena, Gabrielle, Eve and Argo stand amidst the ruins. Eve and Gabrielle wear expressions of horror. Xena looks as though she expected nothing less.

**EVE:**

This was slaughter...

**GABRIELLE (still staring around):**

One man did all this?

**XENA:**

A demon. Not a man.

**EVE:**

Elem has always been a peaceful village. Why would someone do this? Elem was never rich or powerful. There was no profit to be gained, not even prowess. Why?

**GABRIELLE (harshly):**

For fun.

Xena begins taking her bedroll out of Argo's saddle.

**XENA:**

Set up camp. We'll leave tomorrow at dawn, so we'll need all the rest we can get without losing time.

Xena throws Eve and a startled Gabrielle their bedrolls.

**GABRIELLE** (disbelieving):

Xena?

**XENA** (laying on her bedroll on some cold ashes):

Yes, Gabrielle?

**GABRIELLE:**

What about the people here?

**XENA** (slightly sarcastic):

They're dead, Gabrielle. I can't help them.

**GABRIELLE** (slack-jawed):

Xena, these people deserve to be buried. They deserve their final respects.

**XENA:**

I already told you, Gabrielle, we can't lose any time!

**GABRIELLE:**

But Xena--

**XENA:**

Look, Gabrielle, I'm leaving tomorrow at daybreak to make sure that we don't have to worry about anyone else's last respects. You can come or not.

Xena pulls the cover over herself, violently turning away from Gabrielle, who stares in silent horror until Eve places a hand on her shoulder. Gabrielle, slightly relieved, turns to Eve.

**EVE:**

She's right, you know.

Eve walks away and proceeds to lay her bedroll beside Xena's. Gabrielle hesitates a moment, before placing her bedroll down too.

**CUT TO**

It's daybreak and Xena is already fastening Argo's bridle. Gabrielle stirs, then looks to her friend with disappointment on her face.

**GABRIELLE:**

You're just going to leave, aren't you?

**XENA:**

Gabrielle, I told you I was leaving at daybreak. Are you coming?

**GABRIELLE** (shaking her head slowly):

I can't, Xena. No one else will tend to these dead and I can't just leave them to rot. The dead deserve respect.

Frowning slightly, Xena walks to her companion.

**XENA:**

Take care of Eve for me.

**GABRIELLE:**

You know I will.

**XENA:**

I'll meet you in Athens when I've defeated the kitsune.

**GABRIELLE** (puzzled):

Athens? But Xena, I was going to help you in Imat when I was done here...

**XENA:**

I know. Gabrielle, I can't risk you coming in that far after me. There's too great a chance of the kitsune catching you.

**GABRIELLE:**

Xena, I can take care of myself.

**XENA** (slightly worried):

Against warlords and murderers, yes, but Gabrielle, look around you. Look at what this demon is capable of.

**GABRIELLE:**

Xena, that's only more proof that you'll need my help.

**XENA** (firmly):

No, Gabrielle. I'll meet you in Athens.

Gabrielle opens her mouth to speak, but shuts it at Xena's piercing glare. Finally, Gabrielle nods.

**GABRIELLE:**

Athens.

**XENA:**

Good girl.

Xena walks away from Gabrielle, mounts Argo and rides west. Gabrielle continues to look at the spot where Xena disappeared on the horizon.

**GABRIELLE:**

I'm not an infant, Xena. (shakes her head) I'm a warrior now.

Gabrielle abandons her bedroll and sets to the task of burying the dead, allowing Eve to continue sleeping.

***CUT TO***

Fade into a beautiful green forest, dew on the grass, light streaming through the leaves. An attractive, black-haired man leans contentedly against a strong tree, apparently savoring the forest's docile beauty. A soft smile plays at his lips as a peaceful wind blows his cropped hair about his face. In the grass behind him, there is movement and two gleaming eyes show through the foliage. The man inhales deeply, savoring the forest air. Suddenly, his eyes open wide and he sits up sharply, seemingly troubled, just as a fox jumps out of the bushes as we:

***FADE OUT***

**ACT TWO**

***FADE IN***

The man turns to look at the fox, and we see an old battle scar over his right eye. He regards the fox and the fox seems to regard him.

**MAN:**

If you're here to tell your friend Ibu that he's being followed, my pet, I already know. I can smell the warrior and her steed on the wind.

Ibu inhales deeply again.

**IBU:**

Mmmm.... This one is strong, isn't she?

The fox nuzzles Ibu's hand and he strokes the fox in return.

**IBU:**

You say she's determined to see me dead, my pet? I like her more already.

The fox suddenly sits up straight and Ibu raises an eyebrow.

**IBU:**

Hm, yes, that is an interesting piece of information indeed. Thank you, my pet. It'll only make the game more interesting. I have one more favor to ask of you, my pet.

***CUT TO***

Gabrielle and Eve are slowly taking the bodies and placing them in high stacks, ready for a funeral burial. The heat is intense this day and ever so often each of them has to stop and wipe the sweat that drips from their brows.

**EVE:**

Gabrielle, it's things like these that make my job so hard for me.

**GABRIELLE** (stops what she is doing, glances at Eve):

What do you mean?

**EVE:**

I am the messenger of peace and it breaks my heart to see all the suffering and evil in this world. Will Eli's message ever be heard and...actually understood by people? When I was traveling in Indus, I would preach to everyone I came across. Some of them followed me for months, wanting to hear more and more about what Eli could be for them. But there was this one time... (she trails off for a moment, closes her eyes for a brief moment and then looks at Gabrielle) There was this one time that I had preached to a large group in a tavern near the town of Sythess. And I was nearly driven out by them. They threw food and cursed at me but I continued to preach despite their harsh words. And then a man came up to me carrying his dead daughter in his hands. He was crying like I had never seen anyone cry before. And he told me that he had been a follower of Eli's for a few months but when his daughter died, his faith died along with her. He asked me that if there was this all-powerful god, then why did he let his daughter just die. (a tear falls from Eve's eye) I couldn't answer him and he said that if Eli's god were for real, then his daughter would have never died. He hated me and the god I served because of what had happened. (Eve wipes her eye and looks at Gabrielle) Why can't people understand that Eli's love is pure and that although it may not seem like he is watching over us, he is; always?

Gabrielle's eyes look at the ground and she lets out a heavy sigh. She walks up to Eve.

**GABRIELLE:**

I don't know. Xena and I have been fighting evil for...for as long as I care to remember. But I think that no matter how hard we try, there will always be evil and people who don't understand what you teach. It's just the way it is. I've come to accept that and I just try to go through day by day doing everything I can even though I know that I can't change the world.

Eve smiles slightly and nods her head, then continues back to the job at hand. Then, they hear a faint sound from afar, a soft crying of a child. Gabrielle and Eve look around curiously, trying to identify where the sound is coming from.

Behind a fallen beam near the edge of one of the destroyed houses, lies what appears to be a small child. Eve and Gabrielle rush over to it and find that it is a tiny baby wrapped up in a cloth, almost completely covered with black soot. The baby's forehead has a stream of blood running down it and there is a small red spot on its side.

A hand comes to Eve's mouth in shock as Gabrielle picks up the child gently. Gabrielle's eyes are glazed with tears but she tries to hold them back as much as possible.

**EVE** (voice breaks):

I can't believe this thing would do this and to an infant, no less.

Gabrielle holds the baby against her body. Eve looks around and then, next to the beam where they had just picked up the baby, she sees a young woman lying on the ground. Eve goes over to her and kneels down. The woman is still alive, her breaths very ragged, a large wound in her chest.

**EVE:**

Gabrielle, she's still alive.

Gabrielle looks back and kneels down next to the woman. Eve takes her hand and runs it over the woman's forehead. The woman barely opens her eyes.

**WOMAN** (stutters):

M-My...baby. Where's my...ba-baby...?"

**GABRIELLE** (holds out her arms):

Right here.

The woman forces her eyes to open and tries hard to extend her hands to her child but fails.

**WOMAN** (incoherent):

My baby...

Eve looks at Gabrielle and then back at the woman. She takes the woman's hand, it already becoming cold. Gabrielle extends her hand out to Eve and rests it on Eve's hand.

**GABRIELLE:**

There's nothing we can do, Eve. Look.

Eve looks at the woman, her eyes now staring blankly ahead. She is dead.

Eve lowers her head, tears falling from her eyes. She looks at Gabrielle. Gabrielle tries to hold back her own tears and looks down at the child in her arms. She finds that the child is no longer with her. The little body is limp in her arms. The baby's wounds were too severe, especially for a child to handle.

Gabrielle lets out a long breath and then sets the motionless child on top of the woman. Eve takes the woman's hand that she is still holding and lays it across the child, making it look as if they had died together, mother holding the child in her arms.

Eve bends over, puts her hands together and says a silent prayer for the two deaths that they had just experienced. Gabrielle sniffs. When Eve finishes, she stands up and looks at Gabrielle.

**EVE:**

No one deserves this kind of death, especially at this young of an age. This demon will pay.

Gabrielle nods and puts a hand on her shoulder.

**GABRIELLE:**

That's Xena's job. Come on. We have some more bodies to prepare for the burial.

Gabrielle puts her arm around Eve and hugs her briefly before beginning their task of taking the bodies to the burial mound as we:

***FADE OUT***

**ACT THREE**

## **FADE IN**

Montage of Xena riding hard over various landscapes. Near a river, Xena slows, pulling Argo to a trot.

**XENA:**

Bet you're thirsty, eh girl?

Xena dismounts and brings Argo to the riverside, where Argo drinks thankfully. Xena pulls her water skin off Argo's saddlebag and begins to fill it up.

**XENA:**

I'm sure by now you've noticed that we're following fox-prints.

Argo whinnies, then continues drinking.

**XENA:**

I'm figuring out kitsune is traveling in his fox form. But at the rate he's traveling, we'd get to Imat before him. It's better if we can catch him before he gets to the village. That way we might avoid bloodshed.

Argo knickers into her water. Xena pulls her water skin from the river and takes a deep drink. A rustle across the river draws her attention.

On the far bank, a fox halts its movement, regards her skeptically and then darts off into the forest. Xena has an odd look on her face.

**XENA (mounting Argo):**

Come on girl, let's catch that fox.

Xena and Argo back away from the riverbank and then Xena sends Argo forward at a run and Argo clears the river, landing smoothly on the other side. Pursuit of the fox begins instantaneously. Xena and Argo ride swiftly through the forest, barely catching glimpses of the red fox, which they chase.

**XENA:**

You're mine fox!

Xena almost falls off Argo as Argo stops very suddenly. Directly in front of them is the fox they had been chasing, sitting as calmly as if nothing was happening. Its tail twitches slightly as Xena levels a glare at it.

**XENA:**

I'd prefer to fight you in a human form but if you want to be slaughtered as an animal, that's fine by me.

As Xena draws her sword, the fox tilts his head, black eyes shining in the afternoon sun. Xena hesitates, and the fox swishes its tail. Xena's eyes widen and she seizes Argo's reigns.

**XENA:**

Gabrielle! (a look of horror crosses her face as she sheathes her sword and she gasps out a single word) Eve...

Xena sends Argo crashing through the foliage back in the direction they came.

**CUT TO**

Eve and Gabrielle are just finishing the burial mound, the land around them is still bloody but there are no bodies in sight.

**GABRIELLE** (adding a stick to the top of the high pile of wood and stones of the burial mound):  
That's it Eve. That's the last of them.

**EVE:**  
May Eli watch over them and may they find peace in the afterlife.

Gabrielle sits down, exhausted.

**EVE:**  
Aren't we going to go help Mother in Imat?

**GABRIELLE** (somewhat bitterly):  
No. We're meeting her in Athens. She says it's too dangerous for us to come in so far after her. That the chance we'll get caught is--

A black-haired man with a scar over one eye interrupts the bard. Neither Eve nor Gabrielle had heard him arrive.

**MAN:**  
Is as ever-present as ever.

Gabrielle draws her sais.

**GABRIELLE:**  
Who are you?

**MAN:**  
I suppose an introduction is in order. My name is Ibu, formerly of the Rekai, and (glances around) orchestrator of the mess you just cleaned up.

Gabrielle and Eve both wear angry expressions.

**GABRIELLE:**  
You did this.

**IBU:**  
Mmmmmm... Yes.

**EVE:**  
Don't you have any remorse?

**IBU:**  
Remorse is for those who can afford it.

**GABRIELLE:**

You're sick.

**IBU:**

Call it what you will. Personally, I prefer playful...

With a twisted look of anger, Gabrielle throws a sai at his head. Ibu catches it with ease.

**IBU:**

That wasn't nice.

Gabrielle hurls her other sai at him. Again he catches it.

**IBU:**

Are you so angry that it's clouding your judgment into thinking that if you throw those hard enough, you'll be able to catch me?

**GABRIELLE:**

You deserve to die.

**IBU:**

That seems to be a common consensus. I've never really bought into it, myself...

Gabrielle seethes with anger.

**IBU:**

Oh, you're out of weapons. That puts you at quite a disadvantage, doesn't it? Tell you what; I'll give you these (he lifts the sais between each of his forefingers and thumbs) back. All you have to do is fish them out of your peaceful little friend.

Ibu hurls the sais at Eve at an alarming rate. Only Eve's skills as a warrior allow her to catch them in time.

**IBU:**

How amusing. The pacifist isn't as helpless as she looks.

**EVE (darkly):**

Believe me, you're out of your league.

**IBU:**

A threat? From a peace-lover? This just got a lot more interesting. Now, if only the true warrior would show up... You know, it's rare that someone has so powerful a fighter's spirit that I can smell it. But your friend...

**GABRIELLE (hatefully):**

Her name is Xena.

**IBU:**

Your friend *Xena*, well she positively reeks of a warrior heart. She'll be a great adventure to kill.

**EVE:**

And us? (Eve idles Gabrielle's sais, unconsciously) Will we be a great adventure to kill as well?

**IBU:**

You? I'm not going to kill you...yet, anyway. You see, you're bait.

He sneers and Gabrielle and Eve's faces fill with worry as we:

***FADE OUT***

## **ACT FOUR**

***FADE IN***

**XENA:**

Eve!! (dismounting Argo, just inside what's left of Elem) Gabrielle!!

No response.

**XENA:**

Eve! Gabr--

A black-haired man steps into Xena's line of sight.

**IBU:**

You know, Xena, that is getting rather annoying.

Xena runs toward Ibu, drawing her sword. She reaches him and levels it at his neck.

**XENA:**

Where are they?

**IBU:**

For a ningen, you're very persistent.

**XENA (flatly):**

We're full of surprises. Where are they?

**IBU:**

But Xena, we haven't even been introduced. I'm sure you'd like to know who I am.

**XENA:**

Actually, I really don't care.

**IBU:**

My name is Ibu. And I'm going to kill you.

**XENA:**

I've been dead before.

**IBU** (glances at the sword against his neck):

Are you going to kill me or are you too concerned that you won't find your friends without little old me?

**XENA:**

Hadn't crossed my mind.

Xena presses hard on her sword, cutting Ibu's throat open. He falls to the ground. Xena frowns, her brow wrinkling, confused as to why that was so easy. As though to make sure he's dead, Xena chops off his head, then begins calling her companions.

**XENA:**

Gabrielle? Eve!?

A muffled sound emanates from within the burial mound that Gabrielle and Eve had erected earlier. Xena frantically begins pulling away the stones and wooden pillars. She reaches in and clasps a hand. She pulls hard and Eve climbs roughly out of the burial mound.

**EVE:**

Mother!

**XENA:**

Eve! (she hugs her daughter, stroking her hair and making sure she's okay, then they break apart) Where's Gabrielle?

**GABRIELLE** (as if on cue):

Xena!

Xena turns to see Gabrielle running towards her, sais drawn.

**GABRIELLE:**

Xena, he's not--

Gabrielle is cut off as a powerful arm seizes her around the neck. Looking to the owner of the arm, Xena sees a relatively handsome "man" with a scar over his left eye, white fox ears and a tail.

**XENA:**

Ibu!

**IBU:**

You should really know that kitsune have more than one form. Or weren't you told, by Enma, lord of all things incompetent? (Gabrielle struggles against his grasp) She's a fiery thing, isn't she? Did she come that way or did you teach her?

**XENA** (growling):

She came that way.

**IBU:**

Then I'm not at all surprised you picked her.

Ibu forcefully grabs Gabrielle's wrist and kisses her suddenly. Gabrielle struggles but Ibu only draws the kiss out longer. When he pulls away, he licks his lips seductively.

**IBU:**

She tastes good too. I'd almost be willing to let you all live freely, if I could keep her.

**XENA** (draws her sword):

Forget it.

**IBU:**

I said *almost*. She's not that good.

Gabrielle takes the opportunity to kick Ibu in the shin and nearly stab him with her sai but he catches her wrist.

**IBU:**

No, no, no. I can't let you go.

Xena pulls her chakram off her hip, preparing to throw it.

**IBU:**

You wouldn't throw that. Not when I could just lift your friend in the way. I don't think you'd kill her.

**XENA:**

Care to bet on that?

**IBU:**

Love to. How about the stakes are....Gabrielle's life?

**GABRIELLE:**

I'd sooner die than let you kill more innocents.

**IBU:**

No one is innocent.

Xena throws her chakram. Ibu smirks and moves Gabrielle to act as his human shield. At the last second, Gabrielle lifts her sais and deflects the chakram.

**XENA** (angrily):

Gabrielle!

**IBU** (smirking superiorly):

What was that about giving your life?

**XENA:**

Now, Gabrielle!

Gabrielle elbows Ibu in the stomach and breaks free of his hold. Xena flips between Gabrielle and Ibu, standing in front of her protectively. Gabrielle deftly throws Eve a sai.

**IBU:**

Intelligent move. She'll be a hard target for me if she has a weapon in her hand.

**XENA:**

I have a weapon in my hand. And right now, it's pointed straight at your heart.

**IBU:**

How non-threatening. I can move faster than you could possibly swing that sword.

**XENA:**

Prove it.

Xena begins attacking him with the sword, which he evades with ease. Behind their battle, the chakram, after bouncing around the remains of the village, is heading straight towards Eve. With a dark look, Eve lifts the sai, and deflects the chakram. Its new course sends it straight into Ibu's back. As it hits, blood spurts from Ibu's mouth.

**IBU:**

How...?

**GABRIELLE:**

Dying is only a last resort.

Xena finishes Ibu's death by chopping off his head. His body falls to ground with a sickening thud. Xena pulls her chakram out from Ibu's back, wiping it on his robes. Within seconds, a shimmering white, nine-tailed fox leaps from the blood. It gives a laugh-like bark, before darting away.

**XENA:**

Get it!

Swirls of blindingly white light appear in front of Ibu. From the white light steps Enma. He grabs the fox by the scruff of the neck. The fox bites at Enma but Enma, being a god, is unaffected by the bites.

**ENMA:**

That will do, Xena. In this weakened form, Ibu will be an easy target in the demon world.

**EVE:**

You're going to leave him to be slaughtered?

**ENMA:**

Don't you think the families of those he killed deserve retribution?

**EVE:**

Vengeance isn't the way.

**ENMA:**

Maybe not here but in the Makai, that's all there is. It wouldn't be your concern anyway. Xena, your debt is paid in full. I shall not bother you again.

**XENA:**

Good.

Enma vanishes with Ibu, in the same white swirls of light he always uses.

**EVE:**

Is it right? To just let justice act in the form of vengeance?

**GABRIELLE:**

He didn't feel remorse, Eve. He did it for fun.

Xena clenches her jaw.

**EVE:**

He wasn't the only one.

**XENA:**

Come on girls. Let's get going.

Xena whistles and Argo comes running up. She mounts, looks down at Gabrielle and Eve and clicks her tongue, Argo starting to walk. Gabrielle and Eve look at each other and then follow Xena as they head out of the town as we:

***FADE OUT***

**THE END**

*[Gabrielle began to wonder just what exactly she tasted like during the production of this motion picture.]*