

SHIPPER SEASON SEVEN

“Burying the Dead”

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Logline

Xena and Gabrielle are called to Thebes to try and stop two brothers from destroying the city and in the process, encounter a young princess, Antigone.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Night. A large army camp in front of a walled city. Torches are lit in the camp and up on the city walls, but everything is silent; the atmosphere is extremely tense.

Two night watchmen are warming their hands by a fire. In the background, the city walls loom large and dark.

There is a sound off-camera. The watchmen grab their spears, trying to look awake.

WATCHMAN #1:

Who goes there?

A tall, elaborately armed man walks up to the watch post. The watchmen hurriedly lower their weapons.

WATCHMAN #2:

My lord Polyneices. The city is asleep--it's just waiting...

POLYNEICES:

I don't recall asking your opinion, soldier.

WATCHMAN #2:

N-n-no, sir...my lord.

Polyneices ignores the watchmen and continues to walk past the fire. The camera focuses on his face as he looks towards the city walls. He takes a deep breath, savoring the feel of the air.

POLYNEICES:

Thebes. My city. *My* city. How I have missed you.

CUT TO

The outside of the city wall. The camera focuses on two shadows, which seem to peel off from it; they turn out to be two cloaked figures. A gap in the wall opens up and they disappear inside.

CUT TO

The other side of the gap, inside the city. The wall is well-lit by torches. The two cloaked people climb through; behind them, someone swings a heavy metal plate back to close the gap. The first person lowers the hood of their cloak: it's Xena. Next to her, Gabrielle does the same and shakes out her hair.

GABRIELLE:

That wasn't so bad. So much for the mighty army of Argos--those guards looked asleep.

XENA:

They're very sure of themselves.

A richly dressed, middle-aged man with a retinue of servants hurries towards them.

XENA:

Creon. We came as soon as we heard. (nods at the wall to indicate the army outside) How long have they been there?

CREON:

Long enough. Xena, Gabrielle. (bows slightly) Without your assistance, I fear Thebes is going to fall before dawn.

The camera follows them as they walk briskly along the wall.

GABRIELLE:

Why is Argos attacking? I didn't think they had any interest in Thebes.

CREON:

The army is led by my nephew, Polyneices.

GABRIELLE (aghast):

He's leading an army against his own city?

CREON:

Worse, against his own brother. My other nephew, Eteocles, is organizing our defense.

GABRIELLE (shaking her head):

Why would Polyneices do this?

XENA:

The usual. His royal title, money, power...

CREON:

He was exiled to Argos...

XENA:

...and the climate didn't agree with him.

GABRIELLE:

But he was brought up here. He must know this city like the back of his hand!

XENA:

He does. That's what makes him so dangerous.

CREON:

I was hoping...

He is interrupted by the sound of trumpets and battle cries. A gong sounds.

VOICES OFF-CAMERA:

To arms! To the battlements! To arms, we're under attack!

There's a hissing sound and a series of loud crashes, as missiles from catapults hit the walls above. More screams from outside the city, presumably the Theban archers have responded.

CREON:

It's started! This way, hurry!

They reach the base of a tower; a spiral staircase inside leads up to the wall.

XENA:

Come on!

CUT TO

The top of the Thebes city wall. Archers are posted at every other crenulations; some have been wounded or killed by the most recent attack. Others hurry to take their position to hold off the attacking Argive army. Creon appears, followed by Xena and Gabrielle.

CREON:

There are seven gates; we have captains at every gate, but the Argives have surrounded us...

XENA:

Take cover!

She forces Gabrielle and Creon back as burning projectiles pelt the wall. There is a muffled scream off-camera; an archer slumps over. Another man grabs the bow from his hands and pushes him aside, aiming down.

XENA (yells):

Where's Eteocles? At one of the gates?

VOICE OFF-CAMERA:

No such luck, Warrior Princess.

Xena turns around to find Eteocles--a tall young man in bright, gaudy armor. The resemblance to Polyneices is striking.

ETEOCLES:

If you're thinking of taking my command, think again. My uncle (he gives Creon an angry look) seems to think that I am not capable of leading my own city against our enemies. I disagree.

XENA:

No one is taking your command, Eteocles--but these men can't hold the Argives off much longer.

ETEOCLES:

The gates are fortified and well-guarded; my brother's dogs don't stand a chance.

XENA (trying to contain her impatience):

Once they've weakened the archers, they're going to mount the wall, don't you see?

ETEOCLES:

Good, let them come up here! I'll take on my traitor brother face to face!

CREON:

You stupid boy! We're all going to die here!

Something slams into the wall below; the sound is repeated all along the battlements.

GABRIELLE:

What was that?

XENA:

Ladders!

GABRIELLE:

They're coming up!

CUT TO

The outside of the city walls, soldiers are climbing the ladders.

CREON'S VOICE:

Let Xena help us, Eteocles!

CUT TO

Back on the wall, a soldier points down.

A SOLDIER (calls out):

There he is, lord Eteocles! Polyneices the traitor!

Eteocles hefts his spear.

CREON:

Eteocles!

ETEOCLES (to Xena):

Very well--but Polyneices is mine.

Eteocles runs towards the soldier who pointed out his brother.

XENA:

We need reinforcements here--the gates...

GABRIELLE:

Of course.

Gabrielle runs along the far side of the wall, in the direction of the top of a gate, where the majority of the troops are stationed.

XENA (to the troops):

Get those ladders back! Push them back!

CUT TO

The Argive soldiers scaling the wall are close to the top; Xena and the Thebans are pushing the ladders back. A ladder teeters, then topples backwards slowly; archers from the city wall shoot at the men clinging to it. They scream, breaking the ranks of the troops behind them as the ladder falls. More arrows follow them.

CUT TO

On the wall, Theban soldiers cheer, heartened. Another ladder is pushed backwards. The cheer grows louder as reinforcements arrive.

GABRIELLE:

The gate is secure; more men are on their way.

Xena nods, as Gabrielle and the others join the fray. A few men make it to the top of the wall before the ladders are pushed back; skirmishes break out.

A man comes up behind Xena, sword raised.

GABRIELLE:

Xena! Behind you!

Xena swivels back, grabs the man's arm and twists it, forcing him to drop the weapon.

MAN:

Xena?! (panicking) Warrior Princess!

Other Argive soldiers hear him; there are isolated exclamations among the soldiers in the vicinity.

XENA:

Yeah, nice meeting you.

She knocks him out and continues fighting the others, as more reinforcements arrive. The battle has clearly turned to Thebes' favor.

CUT TO

Some of the soldiers scaling the wall panic, trying to climb back down; those below them on the ladders try to hold on.

SOLDIERS' VOICES:

Xena! She's Ares' favorite! Ares is on their side; we can't win this!

COMMANDER'S VOICE BELOW:

Retreat!!

CUT TO

The last few skirmishes are ending, the Argive army below is fleeing.

GABRIELLE:

It's over.

XENA:

Not quite.

The camera follows Xena's indication: Eteocles and Polyneices are fighting. The sound of their swords clashing continues after all other skirmishes have ceased. Two other men from the Argive army lie dead at their feet.

ETEOCLES:

Why don't you follow your army and get out of here alive, Polyneices? Oh, I'm sorry---*what* army?

He throws Polyneices against a crenulations in the wall, then twists his head so he can see the Argive army retreating.

ETEOCLES:

That army?

POLYNEICES (struggling):

This is *my* city, brother!

He wrests his arm from his brother's grip and stabs Eteocles in the side with his dagger. Eteocles screams and releases him momentarily; in the next instant, he lifts Polyneices against the wall and

hurls his body down. There is a distant sound as Polyneices' body hits the ground. Eteocles clutches his side, then collapses.

The camera focuses on his still form for a moment, then moves back. Behind a line of soldiers, Creon looks pale-faced and stunned. Soldiers stand aside as he makes his way to the body, followed by Xena and Gabrielle. He shakes his head in disbelief.

CREON (softly):
Eteocles... Gods.

There is a noise as soldiers try to hold someone back; Xena and Gabrielle turn around. A slender girl in a richly embroidered tunic, with a diadem around her head, is trying to force her way past the soldiers.

CREON:
Antigone, no!

ANTIGONE (cries):
My brothers!

She finally breaks through and falls to her knees near Eteocles' body, sobbing. She puts her arms around him, shaking him, trying to push his hair from his face.

ANTIGONE:
No...no!

Gabrielle moves away from Xena and kneels beside the girl, trying to comfort her. Soldiers try to remove Antigone from near the body, but Creon stops them with a gesture.

CREON:
No. Eteocles died a noble death, protecting our city from the worst kind of enemy--a traitor. His own brother! He came back from exile, intent on destroying his own city, intent on spilling the blood of his own kin...

Antigone sobs dejectedly, crumpled over her brother's body.

CREON (continues):
Look at the anguish he caused, look at his sister! As I live, this city will not stand for treachery. (raises voice) Guards!

Guards appear.

CREON:
Take our prince's body and give him a hero's burial. He deserves no less. But Polyneices... Leave his body where it is. (raises voice) This is what Thebes says to her enemies: the wicked will not stand with the just, even in death. Let the traitor's body lie unburied!

Gabrielle looks up at Xena, they exchange a troubled look as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

The next evening. A big victory celebration on the main square of Thebes by the royal palace lit so brightly by torches and oil lamps that it might as well be daylight. The camera slowly pans over the square, taking in the various sights and sounds of the festivities: singers, mimes, clowns and acrobats entertaining the public, pipers and drummers playing, vendors hawking snacks and drinks, parents hoisting their children up on their shoulders, men and women dancing in a conga line.

We follow the camera to a large dais in front of the palace doors for the royal family, the most important people of the city, and the guests of honor. Creon is seated on a throne, now wearing a crown and a rich mantle, discussing something with two middle-aged city aldermen. A servant comes up to refill their goblets with wine.

CREON (lifts his goblet):

One more toast--to our victory!

ALDERMAN #1 (likewise):

To our victory, and to King Creon!

EVERYONE:

To King Creon!

As Creon and the others empty their goblets, the camera pans over to a far corner of the dais, where Antigone stands alone. She is now wearing a plain black dress and no jewelry. She is staring into the distance, looking very tense, as though expecting something. The goblet in her hand is still full.

Gabrielle comes up on the dais. She looks around a little anxiously, then finally sees Antigone and heads toward her. She puts her hand on Antigone's arm; the girl flinches and turns. Seeing Gabrielle, she smiles wanly and looks away again.

ANTIGONE:

Oh...hello, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (gently):

Antigone...how are you holding up?

ANTIGONE (sighs):

About as well as anyone could be--in my shoes. (she looks up at Gabrielle, her voice growing harsh) I wonder, Gabrielle, how many people do you suppose there are in my shoes? People who've had to see both their brothers die in one night...at each other's hands? And who've had to see one of them being left to the vultures and the dogs like a piece of carrion?

GABRIELLE (a pained look on her face):

Antigone...

ANTIGONE:

Just don't tell me that you know how I feel. You don't. No one does.

GABRIELLE (looks at Antigone, biting her lip, then finally speaks):

It's true, Antigone. No one can know how you feel. But I do know something about pain and loss. And I do know that you could use a friend right now...I'd like to be that for you.

CUT TO

Xena, coming up the steps to the dais. She searches for Gabrielle and sees her talking to Antigone, then heads toward Creon.

CREON (sees her coming and rises):

Xena! I was beginning to worry that you weren't going to show up. And you are, after all, our guest of honor. (raises his voice) More wine! (a servant refills his goblet) Let's drink to Xena, the warrior who saved our great city!

VOICES:

To Xena! To Xena!

CREON:

And to our wise prophet Teiresias, who counseled us to call for the Warrior Princess.

The camera pans over to a very frail, white-haired man in a dark blue robe at the back of the dais. His eyes are closed and sunken--he is blind. He inclines his head, acknowledging the toast.

VOICES:

To Teiresias!

As everyone drinks, Xena stands silently, her face chilly and closed. Creon gives her a worried look.

CUT TO

Antigone and Gabrielle.

ANTIGONE (chuckles bitterly):

Look out there, Gabrielle. Look at them. Dancing and laughing and singing like it's a big holiday...

GABRIELLE:

You really can't blame them, Antigone. A war just ended, the city is safe again--

ANTIGONE (interrupts):

And hundreds of our men, *their* men, lie dead. But they don't care, do they. They'll put up with anything as long as their lives aren't in danger and their stomachs are full.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe someday, everything won't be quite so black and white to you anymore.

ANTIGONE (impatiently):

Oh, Gabrielle, please don't tell me that someday I'll grow up and learn to accept things as they are.

If that's what growing up means, I don't *ever* want to grow up. You don't believe that, Gabrielle--you of all people. You and Xena, you've dedicated your lives to fighting injustice.

GABRIELLE (softly, taking her hand):

Antigone--you haven't had a very happy life, have you--even before all this happened?

ANTIGONE:

Can a bird in a cage be happy? Ever since I was little, people have told me to be a good little girl. No, Antigone, you can't play with those other kids in the street, you're a princess. No, Antigone, you can't get on your horse and gallop through the fields with your hair flapping in the wind--you can only go with a retinue of servants, and besides, you don't want to mess up your hair. No, Antigone, you can't take off your gold bracelet and give it to a beggar in the street, it's a foolish thing to do. All I've ever heard is what I can't do. I wish, once in my life, I could just stand up and shout for all the world to hear: *Yes, I can!*

GABRIELLE:

We all have our place in life, Antigone. Isn't it true that in five years, when you turn twenty-three, you will take over from your uncle as the ruler of Thebes? (Antigone nods sullenly) Think of all the good you'll be able to do then.

ANTIGONE (bitterly):

Do you really think I'll have much more freedom as the queen? Only the words will change. (in a mocking tone) Queen Antigone, you must play by the rules. Queen Antigone, you must follow your head and not your heart. Queen Antigone, you can't eliminate poverty and injustice, it's just not practical. (she sighs) How I wish I could leave all this behind and live the way you and Xena do, Gabrielle. I've read your scrolls, you know.

GABRIELLE (smiles a little--she can't help feeling flattered):

You have?

ANTIGONE (nods):

You and Xena, you're my heroines. You don't answer to anyone...you break all the rules and defy all the odds...and all you care about is doing the right thing.

A close-up of Antigone's face, with a wistful and simultaneously defiant look.

CUT TO

The battlefield outside the city walls where the dead bodies of the Argive soldiers and Polyneices lie. Three guards are patrolling the grounds, one of them carrying a torch.

GUARD #1:

I'm telling ya, boys, it just ain't right. Yeah, I know they were the enemy and all. But let's face it, the same thing could happen to us someday. Could be you or me, just lyin' out there like that for the dogs and the vultures to snack on....

GUARD #2 (with the torch):

Hey, cut it out. You're gonna get me all jumpy. It's bad enough as it is, bein' on patrol out here...

GUARD #1:

It's gonna get worse. Pretty soon, they're gonna start to smell...

GUARD #3:

Kings... They just give their orders. We're the ones that have to get our hands dirty.

Suddenly, Guard #2 stops.

GUARD #2:

What the--? Take a look at this, boys.

He lowers the torch a little, shining it on the ground. One of the dead bodies is covered with a layer of earth.

GUARD #1 (shocked):

Somebody buried the poor devil.

GUARD #3:

Who is he?

GUARD #2:

Come on, boys. Let's get this stuff off him.

Guard #3, a little reluctantly, uses his sword to sweep the earth off the body. In the glimmer of the torch, they see the shining armor with an ornate design.

GUARD #2:

Well, I'll be damned if it ain't Polyneices himself!

CUT TO

Creon, on his throne, draining another goblet of wine. Xena stands next to him.

XENA (quietly):

Creon, I think we need to talk before all this revelry affects your judgment--any further.

CREON (gives her a suspicious glance):

Any further? What do you mean?

XENA:

I think you know what I mean. The order you gave not to bury the slain Argives--

CREON (harshly):

The order shall stand.

XENA:

You've won a war, Creon. Now is the time to show proper respect to your fallen enemies.

CREON:

They were no better than bandits.

XENA:

They were soldiers--soldiers who went where their commanders ordered them to go. Creon...what's the point in denying them the final honors?

CREON:

Xena, Thebes can't afford any more wars. Let the men of every kingdom in Greece and beyond know what happens to those who come here to attack us, and maybe they'll have second thoughts.

XENA:

So you're willing to subject your own people to the risk of disease just to make a point. (she shakes her head slightly) You're an educated man, Creon. You know what can happen if you leave those dead bodies rotting out there--

CREON:

The vultures and the wild dogs will take care of that.

XENA (softly):

Creon...your own nephew...

CREON (abruptly):

...is the worst of them all! Polyneices is no nephew of mine. He's a traitor who brought an enemy army to the gates of his own city.

XENA:

And died for it.

CREON:

His punishment deserves to continue, even in death. (he notices the disapproving look on Xena's face) Listen to me, Xena. You know that I never wanted to rule Thebes. I wasn't even born into the royal family--my late sister, Jocasta, became queen by marriage to King Laius. I'm no politician; you know that. (there is a sad tone in his voice now) I've always loved the arts... I've spent most of my life collecting scrolls. If it were up to me, I'd spend most of my days in my library. You remember how we got to know each other, don't you?

XENA (wistfully):

Oh yes...you met Gabrielle at a Bards' festival...nearly...thirty years ago. (she shudders slightly) It's so strange, when everyone you know is suddenly twenty-five years older--I still can't get used to it.

CREON (smiles slightly):

Well, it might be even stranger to imagine Xena, Warrior Princess as a middle-aged lady. (his smile fades.) Until yesterday, Xena, I never thought I'd have to take the reins of governing in my hands. But look at everything that's happened to our city. First, four years ago, my sister and her husband died in a mysterious outbreak of disease...some of the rumors blamed it on poison, and others said that the royal family had somehow incurred the wrath of the gods. Since their sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, were born mere hours apart, there wasn't a clear heir to the throne, and so they became joint rulers--but Polyneices was too ambitious and started plotting to seize all the power for himself. So he was exiled, and you know the rest--he raised an army in Argos and brought it here. We were barely able to defend our city--with your help, for which I'll be forever grateful.

XENA:

What does all this have to do with refusing burial to the dead? Creon, we're talking about a simple act of human decency.

CREON:

No, we're talking about maintaining order in the city. I know there are many in Thebes who think that I don't have what it takes to rule. Oh, Creon, that bookworm. Oh, Creon, he's never held a sword

in his hand in his whole life. Oh, Creon, he's nothing but an old softie. Well, if anyone thinks I can't make tough decisions, let them think again.

XENA:

Is this really the way to prove yourself?

CREON:

Let me tell you something, Xena. Even if you convinced me right now that I was wrong to give such an order, I am not going to reverse my very first decree as the ruler of Thebes. How much respect do you think I'll get after that? After all that turmoil, our city needs some stability. And that's not going to happen if the new king is seen as a weakling who can't make up his mind.

XENA:

Creon, sometimes it takes more strength to admit that you were wrong than to stick by a bad decision.

CREON:

You know I have the greatest respect for you, Xena. But you're a warrior, not a ruler. I don't like this any more than you do, but I'm doing what's best for the city. This conversation is over. There will be no more burials.

A close-up of Xena's face. Her look is one of bitter disappointment--but it also looks like she is mulling over a plan.

Suddenly, a commotion is heard. Creon turns his head sharply.

VOICE (off screen, hoarse and breathless):

My Lord Creon! My Lord Creon!

A hush falls over the revelers on the dais. The camera pans over to Guard #2, who stands by the dais panting. He is holding some object in his hand.

GUARD #2:

My Lord....someone tried to bury the traitor Polyneices!

There are loud gasps. Creon rises abruptly. As the news spreads through the square, the festivities come to a halt.

CREON:

What happened?

GUARD #2 (stammering):

M-my Lord....

CREON:

Speak up, soldier.

GUARD #2:

S-sir...we were making the rounds outside the city walls, just like you ordered...and then all of a sudden....there he was, almost completely covered with earth...

CREON:

Did you see anyone?

GUARD #2:

N-no, sir...not a thing. Didn't see anyone, didn't hear anyone...but we did find something by the body. (he holds up his hand)

CREON:

What is it? Bring it here.

A servant takes the object from the guard's hand and brings it to Creon, who takes it and looks it over.

Seen in close-up, the object turns out to be a small wooden shovel, painted red although the paint is chipped, covered with fresh dirt.

COUNCILOR (standing near Creon, looks shocked):

It's a kid's toy!

CREON (thoughtfully):

Whoever they are, they're clever. (to Xena) Now, Xena, do you see what I have to deal with? Treason still lurks within the city walls--the supporters of Polyneices are among us. And now they come up with this ploy to seek sympathy, making it look like a child did this.

XENA:

Or maybe it was someone who just thought it was the right thing to do.

CREON:

I decide what the right thing to do is. (he steps forward and speaks in a loud, commanding tone that carries all over the square) People of Thebes, hear me! You know what I have decreed. The bodies of the Argive invaders shall lie unburied, as a lesson to anyone who would come to Thebes with ill intent. And the one who deserves such a fate the most is Polyneices, our former prince turned traitor. Polyneices, who brought an enemy army to our own gates and who cost Thebes hundreds of her best and bravest men. Such is my decision, and as your king, I will not tolerate disobedience. Someone has just tried to bury the body of Polyneices.

Loud boos from the crowd.

CREON (continues):

I hereby declare that anyone who is caught trying to do it again... (he pauses dramatically, a close-up of his face) ...shall be put to death!

A murmur and subdued cheers from the crowd. Xena's face remains emotionless, her lips tightly pressed together. As she looks to where Gabrielle stands with Antigone, the camera pans over. Gabrielle meets Xena's eyes and then turns to look at Antigone. The look on the princess's face is one of shock and pain, but also defiance and determination. Gabrielle's eyes widen slightly. She looks troubled as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Dawn. A marble statue of Zeus, his arm raised as if preparing to throw a thunderbolt. Instead of the thunderbolt, a stream of water flows from his hand. The camera moves back, and we see that it is a fountain, set in the center of a small leafy garden. The only sounds are the gurgle of water and the chirruping of birds. Xena is leaning on the side of the fountain, looking down into the water.

GABRIELLE'S VOICE:

There are heralds all over the city, proclaiming Creon's decree.

Xena looks up as Gabrielle comes up beside her.

XENA:

I know.

GABRIELLE:

And a permanent guard near Polyneices' body. (fretfully) I would never have expected this of Creon. He's determined to make an example of those men out there.

XENA:

He made a rash decision, and now he's sticking by it.

GABRIELLE (sighing):

The years have not been kind to him.

XENA:

Nor to any of us.

She turns to regard the statue of Zeus. Gabrielle follows her gaze.

XENA:

He thinks it's for the best. (nods at the statue) So did he. So did Athena.

GABRIELLE:

You mean, the Twilight? Trying to kill Eve to save Olympus?

XENA:

I mean everything. (looks back to Gabrielle) The gods were protecting their own power. We thought that without them, we'd be free to be human. But look at Creon: he may not have wanted to be King, but now that he is, he's making decisions for the city--not the people.

GABRIELLE:

The "greater good"?

XENA:

Yeah. You could call it that. (bitterly) Eli was right. We don't need the gods. We make our own lives miserable just as well without them.

Gabrielle looks like she's trying to make a decision, then speaks.

GABRIELLE:

We may have even more problems than we thought.

XENA (half-smile):

Well, it's not like I was doing anything this weekend anyway...

Her smile disappears abruptly at Gabrielle's worried expression.

XENA (alarmed):

Gabrielle--what is it?

GABRIELLE:

Antigone. Xena, I think it was her. She did it.

XENA:

Did what?

GABRIELLE:

Buried Polyneices' body. (rushes ahead) When the guards told Creon about the burial--the look on her face. She really scared me, the way she looked at Creon. Like she wished it was him in her brother's place.

XENA (slowly):

It's got to be tough on her, losing both her brothers in one day. Even without Creon's decree. She needs time.

GABRIELLE:

It's...more than that. There's something about her. She's angry, and alone. I tried talking to her, but she won't let anyone close.

XENA:

Losing a brother will do that to you. (pause) Antigone has to find her own way to live with the pain. She's lucky to have you there for her.

GABRIELLE:

She wants to be a hero.

XENA:

She's young.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, if she did do it--

Xena gets up, turning to go.

XENA:

I can't say I'd blame her. Keep an eye on her while I'm gone, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (also getting up):
Where are you going?

XENA:
To talk to someone who may be able to help.

GABRIELLE:
Help Antigone?

XENA:
No. Creon.

GABRIELLE:
Why don't I like the sound of that?

XENA (shrugs slightly):
We all do what we've got to do.

CUT TO

Gabrielle walks along a corridor in the palace. There are ornate windows on the right, weak morning light dappling the floor. As the camera follows her, a closed door appears on the left. Gabrielle pauses beside it, then takes a breath and knocks. There is no answer. She knocks again, then tries the handle. Close-up of her hand as she turns the knob--the door swings inwards. Gabrielle pauses in the doorway.

GABRIELLE (calls out):
Antigone?

She walks through the door and looks around. The camera pans to show the lavish interior of a ladies' sitting room. Several cushioned chairs are set by the window, a loom with a half-finished tapestry stands nearby. There is no one in the room.

GABRIELLE:
Antigone? Oh!

A servant girl in a cloak tries to slip past Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:
Oh, I'm sorry--is your mistress in?

SERVANT (without looking up, mumbles):
She's...indisposed.

Gabrielle's eyes widen slightly, she lays her hand on the girl's shoulder.

GABRIELLE:
Antigone? What...what are you doing?

The girl pulls down the hood of her cloak--it is, indeed, Antigone. She is holding something in her hands, trying to conceal it.

GABRIELLE:

What's that?

ANTIGONE (defensively):

Nothing important--to you. (hides her hands) I have quite enough people trying to police my comings and goings as it is. I thought you were different. (she narrows her eyes) Or did my uncle send you to...keep an eye on me?

GABRIELLE:

I'm not here to "keep an eye on you". I want to help you, Antigone--it's a hard situation to be in. And it's not getting any easier. I just thought we could...talk?

ANTIGONE (softening a little):

So, talk.

GABRIELLE:

All right... (looks at Antigone's attire) Why are you dressed as a servant?

ANTIGONE:

Your idea of "talking" is interrogating a princess about her dress?

GABRIELLE (soothingly, but with a slight edge of impatience):

You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to. I was just wondering why a princess should dress like a servant to go out into the city.

Antigone looks up defiantly.

ANTIGONE:

You want to help me, Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE:

Of course...

Antigone draws her hands from under the folds of her cloak: she is holding the toy shovel we saw before.

ANTIGONE:

Then help me bury my brother.

GABRIELLE:

Wh... How did you get that?

ANTIGONE:

It's mine. I took it back. (impatient) So, are you going to help me? I don't have a lot of time before they start looking for me.

GABRIELLE (indicating the shovel):

They'll be looking for that, too. (shakes her head) Antigone... You can't go out there, in broad daylight--there are guards at the body now. You'll be caught, and if you are...

ANTIGONE:

So all those stories of yours--they were just lies? You're nothing but a coward. (she swallows, then softens her tone) Gabrielle... Please. Try to understand. I *know* it's too late for my brother. And I know what my uncle's decree says. But I must do this, don't you understand? How would you feel if it was your brother's body lying out there, for the birds and the dogs to pick to pieces?

GABRIELLE (whispering):

I...don't have a brother.

ANTIGONE:

Sister then--mother, father... Friend. Xena. How would you feel if it was Xena's body, left to rot because someone said it must be so?

Gabrielle looks faintly sick. A shadow of triumph crosses Antigone's fine-boned face, then she grows earnest again.

ANTIGONE:

It's the only thing I can do for him now--no decree will stop me doing what is right. And I'm going to do it, with or without your help. Are you going to run to my uncle and report me? You should, you know.

GABRIELLE:

I'll help.

Antigone scrutinizes Gabrielle's face, then nods slowly.

ANTIGONE:

You *are* different.

CUT TO

Outside the city, guards are patrolling the battleground. The sun is well above the horizon now, warming the air. There is a buzzing noise, as the camera moves towards the bodies, swarms of flies and other insects become visible.

The three guards from the night before are sitting on a hillock, playing knucklebones. Beside them, Polyneices' body is lying on the ground, once again unburied. The camera pans around, so that the body is hidden by the hillock.

GUARD #3 (slamming his hand down):

Ha! I win!

He chokes and starts coughing, then holds his hand over his nose and mouth.

GUARD #1:

Told you they were gonna smell. (squints at the sun) In this weather, even the dogs aren't gonna want 'em.

He takes a dirty handkerchief from his sleeve and wipes his forehead.

GUARD #2 (to someone off-camera):

Hey! What do you think you're doin'? No one is suppose' to be out here.

He gets up, reaching for his spear. The camera pans right, to show Gabrielle carrying a closed wicker basket.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

I thought you could use a drink. (she raises the basket) And something to eat.

Behind them, a small figure scuttles past and disappears behind the hillock, where Polyneices' body is. Gabrielle moves slightly to block the guards' view.

GUARD #2:

Thank'ee kindly, but rules is rules. You shouldn't be out here.

GUARD #3 (to Guard #2):

She could jus' leave the food, though, right?

GUARD #1:

Wait a minute, I recognize you! You're the bard--Xena's friend.

GABRIELLE:

Yeah--I'm Gabrielle.

GUARD #2:

I'm Davos. In charge here. Ye shouldn't...

GABRIELLE: (opens the basket):

Davos. There's bread and cheese, and olives-- (takes out a wineskin) --and wine.

She steps sideways, again blocking Antigone from view.

GABRIELLE:

Could I sit down?

The guards look at each other uncertainly, then Davos sits back down, leaving room for Gabrielle. She puts the basket over the finished game; the guards reach for the food.

In the background, Antigone's face is visible for a moment, as she checks that the guards aren't watching. Gabrielle again moves, almost imperceptibly.

DAVOS (through mouthful of food):

You write great stories, y'know.

GABRIELLE (with genuine surprise):

You've read them?

DAVOS (enthusiastically):

Oh, yeah. There was the one about the centaur baby--that one's my favorite, but they're all great...I write a bit meself, truth to tell. Nothin' serious, mind--just muckin' around...

Gabrielle and the other two guards look stunned.

GABRIELLE:

Uh...really? That's wonderful. (gives the man an encouraging smile) I'd love to hear your stories, if you have any scrolls with you.

DAVOS (embarrassed):

Well, as a matter o' fact...

He fumbles with his clothes, at last retrieving a small, sullied scroll. Gabrielle sneaks a glance in Antigone's direction, then looks back at the guard, who is unrolling the parchment.

DAVOS:

Yer sure you wanna hear it? It's really not very good...

GUARD #3 (tearing off another piece of bread):

'Course we wanna hear it! (snickers, elbowing Guard #1) Think ya know a man, huh?

GABRIELLE (sharply):

It takes a lot of courage to let others hear your work. (to Davos) Go on, please.

DAVOS (clears his throat):

Ahem. (shift uncomfortably) Won... (takes a deep breath, and continues with feeling) Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man; the power that crosses the white sea, driven by the stormy south-wind...

The other guards stop eating and listen, open-mouthed. Guard #1 drops an olive from his mouth; it rolls to the ground. He dives down to pick it up.

DAVOS (continues):

...making a path under surges that threaten to engulf him...

He is interrupted by a sudden noise.

GUARD #1 (jumps up):

The body! (yells) Stop, whoever you are!

Davos stuffs his scroll hurriedly into his sleeve and gets up; Gabrielle follows. The camera pans right--Guard #1 is hauling Antigone back by her arm, she is struggling.

ANTIGONE:

Get your filthy hands off me!

DAVOS (taking her other arm):

You're the one with the mud on your hands, princess. (with some sympathy) Sorry--but we gotta take ye back. Rules is rules. (to Gabrielle) I'm awful sorry 'bout this, I 'preciate your listenin' an' all. It was a real honor.

Gabrielle looks horrified, trying to catch Antigone's eyes. The princess looks back defiantly. Gabrielle manages an absentminded nod at the guard.

GABRIELLE:

Honor. Yes.

Antigone is taken away as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Afternoon. An army camp in a valley by a riverbank. Xena comes out of a tent in the company of Theseus, a tall, broad-shouldered warrior with ash-blond hair and grey eyes. Argo is tethered outside the tent.

XENA:

Remember, Theseus, don't make a move until you hear from me. (she mounts Argo)

THESEUS:

We'll be ready, Xena.

XENA:

Thank you.

She rides away at a gallop.

CUT TO

The throne room in Creon's palace. It is richly decorated, with marble busts of Theban kings and queens lined up by the walls, large vases, and ornate draperies. To the right of the throne is a large brass gong. In the middle of the room is a mahogany table covered with parchments--various official documents. Creon is standing by the table surrounded by his advisors and government officials, mostly middle-aged men.

ADVISOR #1 (holding a parchment):

And this is the trade agreement with Corinth. Now that the war's over, we can get that signed right away.

CREON:

Good. Thank the gods, now merchants from other cities can feel safe enough to come here again.

ADVISOR #2:

My Lord, there's still the matter of the damage to the surrounding villages--there are four that will need to be rebuilt almost from the ground up...

Creon shakes his head with a gloomy look. There is a loud and frantic knock on the door.

SERVANT (behind the door, off-screen):
My Lord Creon! My Lord!

CREON (raises his voice):
What is it? I said I didn't want to be interrupted until this meeting was over!

SERVANT (off-screen):
It's Princess Antigone, sir!

CREON (worried look):
Come in!

The doors swings open and a young servant rushes in. He looks scared.

SERVANT (stammering a little):
M-my Lord...

CREON:
Speak up, man! Is she all right?

SERVANT:
She, she--she's been--arrested, sir.

A murmur in the room as the advisors and officials exchange glances; some look bewildered, while others have a look of understanding of their faces. Creon stares at the servant in shock, his mouth slightly open, as the realization of what has happened slowly dawns on him.

CREON (harshly):
All right. Clear the room, everyone. We will continue this meeting later. (to the servant) Have her brought in.

The servant leaves as everyone files out of the throne room, leaving Creon alone. He stands by the table, looking blankly in front of him and rummaging pointlessly through some parchments as he shakes his head in disbelief. Then, his shoulders sagging a little, he walks to the throne and sits down. Davos and Guard #3 come in, leading Antigone by the arms.

She is handcuffed.

CREON:
Close the doors. (Guard #3 goes over to shut the doors) Now. Tell me exactly what happened.

DAVOS (uncomfortably):
Well, m' Lord...there we were, guardin' the body of Polyneices just like you ordered...

CREON:
Were you standing right by the body?

DAVOS:
W-well...no, m' Lord...we did sit down behind a hillock for a little while to play a coupla rounds of knucklebones...to tell ya the truth, m' Lord, the stink was gettin' pretty bad out there... (Antigone flinches visibly at his words) But we were keeping an eye on it, the whole time...

CREON:

All right. Then what happened?

DAVOS:

So then my buddy Nicos, he says all of a sudden, "Hey, you out there! Stop!" And Simon here (points to Guard #3) and I, we look over and we see this one. Down on her knees she was, diggin' and tryin' to cover up Polyneices' body... And Nicos, he goes over and grabs 'er and she starts wigglin' and fightin' like a crazy woman... (to Antigone) No offense, miss. (to Creon) You see, m'Lord, we didn't even know at first it was the princess...

CREON (to Antigone):

Is it true, what this man is saying?

ANTIGONE (scornfully):

It certainly is. What do you think--that these clumsy oafs deliberately concocted a conspiracy to frame me?

CREON (closes his eyes for a moment, then opens them):

All right. You two go to the guards' room and wait there. And shut the doors.

DAVOS:

Yes, m'Lord.

He and Simon leave, closing the doors behind them.

CREON (to Antigone):

What am I going to do with you?

CUT TO

The hallway outside the throne room. Officials, advisors, palace servants, and courtiers are milling about; there is a buzz of conversation, and the tension is palpable. The camera pans over to an anxious-looking Gabrielle, pushing her way through the crowd.

CUT TO

The throne room. Antigone stands in front of the throne, her head thrown back slightly, her posture defiant.

ANTIGONE:

What are you going to do with me? Put me to death, I imagine. Isn't that what your decree says?

Creon rises, comes down the steps of the throne and stands before Antigone. His face softens as he puts his hands on her shoulders.

CREON:

Do you think I want to do that? By the gods...you're my own niece! The last of my sister's children left alive!

ANTIGONE:

Polyneices was your own nephew.

CREON:

Polyneices was a traitor.

ANTIGONE:

According to your decree, so am I.

CREON:

Was it you the first time as well?

ANTIGONE:

Of course it was. You should have realized it sooner, uncle. You were the one who gave me that little shovel as a gift when I was five years old. (Creon's eyes widen as he remembers) And have no doubt--if you do not kill me, I shall do it again.

CREON (nervously):

Antigone, you're just a child...

ANTIGONE:

I'm old enough to scare you.

CREON:

You stubborn little fool! Don't you realize that I'm scared for you, not of you? Listen to me. Do you know how traitors are executed by Theban custom? It's not a quick and easy death. (speaks slowly, quietly and deliberately) They wall you up in a windowless dungeon, alive...with just a little food and water and a candle to last you while you suffocate. That doesn't sound very appealing, does it?

ANTIGONE (quietly, a horrified look on her face):

No.

CREON:

I thought not. (he starts to pace around the room while Antigone follows him with her eyes) I want to find a way to save you, Antigone, but you have to help me! The whole palace probably already knows what happened...so there's no hushing it up. And I have to impose the law without bias, on a princess and my own niece just as I would on a barmaid. (he stops in front of her) All right. Listen to me. We can say that you lost your mind after what happened to your brothers...people will understand. All you have to do is make a public apology. Say that it was a moment's impulse, that you were mad with grief...anything you like.

ANTIGONE (listlessly):

What do you want me to do? Get down on my knees in the palace square and beg forgiveness?

CREON:

Come now, child...nothing so dramatic. I'll call in the people who are gathered outside the hall...my advisors, city aldermen, government officials...you can make your statement, and it will all be over.

ANTIGONE:

All right.

CREON (breathes a sigh of relief):

Well. Finally, for once in your life, you're listening to reason.

He goes over to the gong, hits it three times, and then ascends to the throne. The doors swing open, and the crowd streams in--including Gabrielle. Antigone stands facing the throne, with her back to the crowd, her shoulders hunched and her head lowered. There is a tense silence.

CREON:

Good people of Thebes! Royal advisors, members of the government, lords and ladies of the court! You have heard, no doubt, that my niece, Princess Antigone, has been placed under arrest. (a murmur in the room; close-up of Gabrielle's worried face) She was caught trying to bury the body of the traitor Polyneices, in direct violation of my royal decree. You all know that the penalty for disobedience is death. (gasps in the room) And I tell you now that justice makes no exceptions for anyone--not even a princess and a king's niece. But a ruler must know how to be merciful as well as just. Antigone is barely out of girlhood (a close-up of Antigone, who looks up, frowns and bites her lips), and she has suffered losses that could drive a grown man to the brink of madness. (an audible sigh of relief runs through the room. A close-up of Gabrielle's face--she looks hopeful but still nervous.) The princess has something she wants to say to us all. (to Antigone.) Speak up, child.

Antigone turns around. She straightens out her shoulders and looks directly at the people in the room.

ANTIGONE (in a loud, clear voice):

Good people of Thebes! I tried to bury my brother's body--because it was the right thing to do. (gasps in the room. Close-ups of Creon, who is horrified, and then of Gabrielle, whose face expresses shock but also a kind of understanding) Yes, I grieve terribly, but I am as sane as I have ever been in my life. I fulfilled my duty to my brother, and I am proud of it. I will not obey an unjust order. There is something higher than the decree of a king or the laws of a city, and I followed this higher law.

A horrified silence hangs over the room.

CREON (his face now cold and hard):

Then, by the king's decree and the laws of the city, you shall die.

Antigone looks almost triumphant as her gaze meet Gabrielle's. Gabrielle shudders and closes her eyes.

CUT TO

The guards' room in the palace. The two guards we saw before, Davos and Simon, are at a table eating pottage.

SIMON:

Say, Davos. Ya think we'll get a bonus for catchin' the girl?

DAVOS (lost in thought):

Huh?

SIMON:

What are ya, deaf? I said, d'ya think we'll get a bonus for nabbin' the girl, or not? I could use a bonus, ya know. The wife's got 'er birthday comin' up...maybe I'll buy a nice bracelet or somethin'. Think we'll get one?

DAVOS (absent-mindedly):

I dunno...maybe.

SIMON (chortles):

What'cha doin', thinkin' about poetry an' stuff? (Davos flinches and gives him a strange look)
Man...when ya pulled out that scroll and started readin' to that blonde gal, what's-'er-name, ya coulda knocked me out with a feather.

DAVOS (snaps to attention and puts down his spoon):

That's it.

SIMON (puzzled):

What's it?

DAVOS:

The blonde gal--Gabrielle. Don't ya think it's funny, the way she showed up just then and wanted to talk to us?

SIMON (snickers):

I dunno, man...a pretty girl like that wants to talk to me, I got no problem with that.

DAVOS:

Come on, Simon...right at the time when the other one, the princess, was tryin' to bury the body? Don'tcha smell a rat?

SIMON (guffaws):

Hey, man, I know what we was smelling out there, and that wasn't no rat. (suddenly grows serious and stares at Davos) Wait a minute. You sayin' she was in on it? You mean like a, a--whaddaya call it--

DAVOS:

Distraction.

SIMON:

Yeah. (enthusiastically) Hey, I bet you're right. We gotta go tell the king about it--this time we'll get a bonus for sure!

DAVOS (regretfully):

Damn...she was so nice to us...

SIMON (sneers):

Nice? C'mon, the broad was playin' us for fools!

DAVOS (looks hurt as he reaches into his vest where the scroll is hidden--obviously thinking that Gabrielle only pretended to listen to his poem as a ruse):

I dunno, Simon...I don't feel good about this one. She's with Xena, and Xena's the one who saved our city--

SIMON:

Hey. Doesn't the rulebook say that (he looks up and moves his lips, trying to remember the words) any suspicious activity that occurs on your watch has to be reported?

DAVOS (looks at him intently):

Yeah, it does. To the command.

SIMON:

Well there ya go--the king is the highest command of all, isn't he?

DAVOS (sighs and pushes away his bowl):

You're right. Rules is rules.

CUT TO

The now-empty throne room. Creon sits on the throne, leaning his elbows on an armrest, hiding his face in his hands. The camera pans over to Gabrielle, who stands on the other end of the room, hidden from Creon's view by a large vase on a pedestal.

GABRIELLE (steps forward):

Creon...

CREON (looks up sharply):

Who's there?

GABRIELLE (comes closer):

It's me, Creon.

CREON:

What are you doing here?

GABRIELLE:

I stayed behind when everyone else left. I wanted to talk to you.

CREON (sits up):

There is nothing to talk about.

GABRIELLE (softly):

Yes, there is. What happened to the Creon I used to know?

CREON:

He became a king, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

You just sent your own niece to a terrible death.

CREON (bitterly):

I thought you and Xena were champions of justice, Gabrielle--champions of the common people. Would it be just if I spared my niece, a princess, even though she committed a crime for which a woman of the people would have died?

GABRIELLE:

No, Creon. Princess or woman of the people, no eighteen-year-old girl deserves to die because she wanted to pay the last respects to her brother.

CREON:

To a traitor!

GABRIELLE:

He's still her brother. No one will see this as an act of treason...only as an act of love.

CREON:

She publicly defied me, Gabrielle. She publicly defied and mocked her king. How can I maintain order in the city if I let her get away with that?

GABRIELLE:

Creon, you are the ruler of a free city, not a tyrant lording it over slaves. You didn't consult anyone when you ordered to leave those bodies without burial. (pleading) Creon, you know that I'm your friend...I implore you, do not make another rash decision--one that you won't be able to take back! Will you at least consult your advisors and the city elders first, and see what they think?

Creon begins to waver visibly when there is a knock on the door.

CREON (raising his voice):

Come in!

SERVANT (enters):

My Lord...the guards who arrested the--the princess say they have something urgent to tell you...

CREON:

Show them in.

The servant shows in Davos and Simon. They see Gabrielle; Davos looks away, embarrassed.

CREON:

What is it, men? (they remain silent) Speak up.

SIMON (coughs):

M' Lord...we figured out that the princess, she--she had a--what do you call it--well, she wasn't in it alone.

DAVOS (quietly):

An accomplice.

CREON (his face darkens):

An accomplice? Who? (an awkward pause as the two men fidget silently. Gabrielle lowers her eyes.) Well?

DAVOS (points at Gabrielle, without looking at her):

It was her.

CUT TO

Outside the throne room. Xena is striding resolutely through the hallway, heading toward the doors.

SERVANT (at the door):

I'm sorry, my lady...you can't go in there right now--the king is in the middle of some business.

XENA (grimly):

Well, I have some business with the king. (she pushes past the servant in and stands in the doorway, holding the doors open) Creon! I'm told that you've arrested Antigone.

CREON:

Not just Antigone.

The camera pans over to Gabrielle, who is handcuffed and surrounded by guards.

XENA (rushes toward Gabrielle and takes her hands):

Gabrielle! (her face distorted by rage, she turns to Creon, snarling) Have you gone mad?

CREON:

No, Xena--if anyone here has gone mad, it isn't me. Two of my men have just testified that Gabrielle was a part of my niece's plot. And she has confessed.

Xena looks at Gabrielle, her face full of shock and pain.

GABRIELLE (nods slightly in acknowledgment of what Creon said):

I'm sorry, Xena.

CREON:

Now, she dies with the other one.

Xena's hand goes toward her chakram. Creon hits the gong, and dozens of soldiers file into the hall. Xena finds herself facing a forest of spears and arrows pointed straight at her.

CREON:

Xena, I have heard stories that you once took on an entire Persian army and won. But you took them by surprise. My men are ready for you. (there is regret on his face) Believe me, Xena, the last thing I would want to do is--hurt you after what you have done for our city. But I will not be defied.

XENA (in a low voice full of controlled rage):

Creon...if you think that I'm going to stand by while you kill my friend...think again.

She storms out. Gabrielle looks bewildered, until comprehension that Xena must have a plan dawns on her face. Creon follows Xena with a worried gaze as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

The city gates open and Xena rides Argo outside, breaking into a gallop as soon as the guards move to close the gates. Anxious, military music swells; the beat of Argo's hooves seconds its beat. The camera tracks rider and horse for a moment.

CUT TO

A detachment of grim-faced guards marches Gabrielle and Antigone along a gloomy stone-walled corridor; the military music continues in time with their steps. Torches flicker in their brackets, casting shadows on the faces as the group passes them.

The music grows more urgent as we cut from Xena riding downhill, to the prisoners marching towards a cell, then back again to Xena. An army camp appears in the distance, Xena urges Argo to even more speed.

CUT TO

One of the guards unlocks a door, while another thrusts Gabrielle, then Antigone, inside. Antigone gives him a withering, contemptuous look as he locks the heavy door. Gabrielle is holding a small candle--in its light, the cell looks tiny and cold. Cut to show men carrying building stones; another guard motions them towards the door. As they start laying the stones, the music rises to a crescendo, then stops abruptly.

CUT TO

Xena reaches the army camp and dismounts quickly.

XENA:

Theseus!

Theseus appears with two other men. Seeing Xena, he rushes forward.

THESEUS:

My army is ready. We can ride the moment you give the word.

XENA:

Good. That moment is now.

THESEUS (alarmed at her urgent tone):

What is it? What's happened?

XENA:

Creon's arrested his niece. And Gabrielle. He's condemned them to death.

THESEUS (to the soldiers):

We ride for Thebes, at once.

A SOLDIER:

Yes, sir.

He disappears into the camp, trumpets sound in the background. Xena mounts Argo again and turns her around.

THESEUS (looking up at Xena):

You're going back?

XENA:

I have to.

They exchange a brief nod in acknowledgement of importance of the mission, then Xena kicks Argo into a gallop.

CUT TO

Gabrielle pounding at the dungeon door. She stops, lets out a long breath, then puts her hands forward and leans her forehead against them. Behind her, Antigone puts a hand on her arm gently.

Gabrielle is still for a moment, then she straightens and turns back to Antigone, who looks surprisingly calm, if a bit regretful.

GABRIELLE (determined):

I'm going to get us out of here.

She turns around on the bare stone flagging, trying in vain to find something she can use. Antigone follows her with her eyes.

ANTIGONE (sadly):

They've sealed us in here. There's stone all around--they can't even hear us. There's no way out.

Gabrielle stops, then looks at Antigone. The princess looks back evenly.

GABRIELLE (dismayed at the realization):

You...wanted this. You knew they would arrest you.

Antigone sits down near a wall and leans back with a resigned sigh. Gabrielle comes to stand over her.

ANTIGONE:

I never meant to involve you in this. It was supposed to be just me--I was ready to face the consequences of what I had to do. I'm really, really sorry, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

You wanted to die?!

ANTIGONE (raises her voice):

Wanted? No, of course I didn't want to die! But tell me--what else could I have done?

GABRIELLE:

Waited for Xena and me to...

ANTIGONE (rounding on Gabrielle):

Waited for you and Xena to do what was my own duty? (bitterly) Oh, yes, just like the rest of my life. For once, Gabrielle--just once!--I could do something myself, something that was right, and brave. Something that is *worth* dying for. (with a child's delight) They didn't even suspect me; I surprised them! (resentfully) My uncle didn't think his little Antigone could defy him like that.

Gabrielle sighs, rubbing her face, then sits down beside Antigone.

GABRIELLE:

Your uncle...isn't a bad man.

ANTIGONE:

And that's why we're here?

GABRIELLE:

I think things just got out of hand for him. He made a bad decision--and what you did... (she glances around as she speaks, still looking for an escape) It just made it harder for him to admit it.

Antigone shrugs.

GABRIELLE:

Sometimes the most direct way to do things isn't the best way.

ANTIGONE:

It's a bit late to lecture me, Gabrielle. I'd rather die knowing I did the right thing than face a lifetime as a coward.

CUT TO

Xena riding back towards Thebes. The city is up ahead, with the battleground in front of it. Ravens are circling the dead men. The camera pans up along the wall. There are two figures on the battlements.

CUT TO

The battlements. Creon is standing there, watching Xena approach the city. Teiresias, the blind prophet, is next to him. Teiresias' face is turned in the same direction as Creon's; the wind is whipping strands of his white hair around his face.

TEIRESIAS:

The Warrior Princess returns for her friend. I fear for our city, Creon. My heart weeps for Thebes, and I cannot ignore its pleas.

CREON (bitterly):

Your heart. You have that luxury, Teiresias--listening to your heart. I have my city to think of--no matter how my own heart breaks, there are decisions that no one else can make.

TEIRESIAS:

Yes... There are decisions to be made, Creon. The Warrior Princess returns for her friend--what will she do, when she discovers her dead? What fury will she unleash upon Thebes?

CREON (defensive, but clearly frightened):

I... I only did what was right...

Teiresias turns his unseeing eyes to Creon; Creon shifts uncomfortably, as though the prophet is looking straight into his soul.

TEIRESIAS:

Release the prisoners, Creon.

CREON:

I can't do that.

TEIRESIAS:

Then at least release the young bard.

Creon looks torn for a few moments. Abruptly, he calls the guards.

CREON (to the guards):

Open the tomb and bring Gabrielle to me. The princess...the other prisoner stays where she is.

GUARD:

But...

CREON (barks):

Do it!

GUARD:

Yes, my liege.

CUT TO

The dungeon cell, where Gabrielle and Antigone are still sitting on the floor. There is a scraping noise outside, both Gabrielle and the princess look in the direction of the noise.

GABRIELLE (jumping up):

Xena!

One of the large stones beside the door is pushed inwards, the head of a guard appears in the opening. He crawls through, then gets up.

GUARD (grins at Gabrielle):

'Fraid I'm not her--but it's your lucky day. King orders your release. (looks regretfully at Antigone)
Sorry, princess--King's orders; you stay here.

GABRIELLE:

What?! You can't be serious--you've got to let her go, please...

The guard grips Gabrielle's arm and steers her towards the opening; she tries to free herself. Antigone makes no move to protest.

GUARD:

I'm sorry--but there's really nothing I can do.

GABRIELLE:

Antigone!

ANTIGONE:

I've made my choice, Gabrielle. Don't worry about me.

The guard disappears with Gabrielle, and the stone is moved back into position. The camera focuses on Antigone's face for a while, as she listens to the footsteps retreating outside. She closes her eyes.

CUT TO

The battlements. Gabrielle is brought before Creon; Teiresias is no longer there. The guard releases her and steps back respectfully.

CREON:

Gabrielle...

GABRIELLE:

What are you doing, Creon?

CREON (shakes his head tiredly):

What I must.

CUT TO

Xena runs through the dungeon corridors towards the door of the cell we saw earlier--only now, a layer of stones blocks it completely. She looks at the stones, almost completely in shadow.

She takes a step back and looks up. The camera follows her line of sight to a torch in a metal bracket. Xena reaches for her chakram and throws it; the chakram slices the bracket and Xena catches the torch, still burning, in one hand. There is a 'clink' off-camera as the chakram bounces off the opposite wall; Xena catches it with her other hand and returns it to her hip.

She inspects the stones and mortar by torchlight, then squats down and runs her hand along the seams in the wall. It's the place where the stone was removed to release Gabrielle.

XENA (looking at her hand):

Fresh mortar.

CUT TO

The stone moves slightly, then falls into the cell with a crash, raising a cloud of dust. Xena climbs though, still holding the torch. Close-up of her face as she looks around, then freezes.

XENA (dropping the torch):

Antigone! No!!!

The camera pans to show what Xena is looking at. In the center of the cell, a rope hangs down from a ceiling crossbeam. Antigone is holding on to the rafter by her hands--the end of the rope is around her neck.

She releases the rafter and falls, the rope drawing taut. Xena leaps forward, catching Antigone before she can hang herself.

XENA:

It's okay...I've got you... It's going to be all right.

Antigone looks at the rope, almost in disbelief, then at Xena. Her hands shake as she fingers the rope. She releases it abruptly and drops her face into Xena's shoulder, shaking.

ANTIGONE:

I thought...I...I... Xena, I don't want to die!

Xena untangles the rope around the girl's neck, stroking her hair a little uncomfortably.

XENA:

Shhh... It's all right now. It's okay. You're safe.

ANTIGONE (sobbing):

I thought it would just end...I thought I wanted it to! But I don't.

CUT TO

The battlements, where Creon and Gabrielle are talking.

CREON:

Try to see it my way, Gabrielle. If I release her now--if I withdraw the decree, it's going to be the end for me. And for Thebes: this city will fall apart, all over again. If I'm not strong for us--what use am I as a king? No. I have to be strong.

GABRIELLE:

You have to be just, Creon.

CREON:

And what is justice, Gabrielle? You tell me that. Is it *just* to honor the enemies of Thebes?

GABRIELLE:

Creon--there are no enemies, not anymore. Those men, down there, they are dead. Gone. And Antigone--

CREON:

She broke the law and sided with enemies of Thebes. What does that make her?

GABRIELLE:

A young girl, trying to right the wrongs she sees around her. She needs your love, Creon, your support--not your condemnation.

A pause as Gabrielle glances over the wall.

GABRIELLE:

But if you continue this, Creon--there will be enemies. Real ones.

Creon follows Gabrielle's gaze. In the distance, wavering against the setting sun, are the standards of an approaching army.

CREON:

What...? That's Xena's doing, isn't it?

GABRIELLE:

No, it's your own doing. (close-up as she looks at Creon) You are your own enemy, Creon. That army down there--your actions brought them here. Just like Polyneices did.

CREON (shaking his head slowly):

No... This has gone too far. Much too far. (yells) Guards!

Guards appear. Gabrielle looks at Creon apprehensively.

CREON:

Release princess Antigone. And find Xena.

The guards step aside in surprise, as Xena makes her way towards Creon.

XENA (smiling):

Best commands I've heard in a long time. But I'm afraid I pre-empted your orders.

She stands aside as Antigone walks past her, then stops, looking at her uncle. For a moment, Creon looks at her uncertainly, then rushes to embrace her. Gabrielle and Xena exchange a relieved look.

CREON:

Antigone... Gods! You're all right! (holding her) Oh, thank the gods! Your grief for your brothers--I was so angry at them for the war, for making you hurt like that... But I lost sight of what was really important... I thought I lost you.

ANTIGONE:

You almost did. (smiles up at Xena, then Gabrielle) I was wrong, too.

CREON:

Things are going to be different now.

ANTIGONE:

I know.

CUT TO

The battleground in front of the city. Funeral pyres are burning orange against the blue of the evening; Theseus' soldiers are moving between them. Xena's voice, singing a mourning chant, sounds in the background. There is a small group of people around one of the pyres. The camera focuses on it for a few moments, before moving closer.

Gabrielle and Antigone stand together, watching the flames.

ANTIGONE:

Rest in peace, my brothers.

She touches Gabrielle's hand in thanks, before leaving her side to join Creon, standing nearby.

Gabrielle comes up to where Xena is standing, as she finishes the song.

GABRIELLE (watching Antigone):
Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

XENA:
What's that?

GABRIELLE:
That she will make a great queen one day.

XENA:
No.

GABRIELLE (surprised):
You don't think so?

XENA (grins):
Oh, I do. But that's not what I was thinking.

The theme music plays as their conversation fades into the background...

GABRIELLE:
You're going to make me guess aren't you?

XENA:
Uh-huh.

FADE OUT

THE END

[Sophocles turned over in his grave during the production of this motion picture.]