

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT



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Logline

Agrippina returns, notifying Xena and Gabrielle of terrible rumors going around about the emperor of Rome and when her convictions prove to be true, Xena and Gabrielle journey to Rome to help Agrippina.

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TEASER

FADE IN

A clearing at sunset. Xena and Gabrielle are riding their horses at a slow trot, coming to a halt. Darion is sitting in front of Gabrielle on the horse, Gabrielle's arms around him, while he holds the reins and pretends to be guiding the horse himself, beaming with joy. Gabrielle smiles indulgently.

DARION:

Yah!

XENA (grabs the reins before the horse can bolt):

Whoa, not so fast. This is our stop.

GABRIELLE:

Ohh--all right then. C'mon, Darion--let's make camp.

DISSOLVE TO

Night. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are sitting around a bright campfire, its reddish reflections flickering on their faces. Xena is busy polishing her boots while Gabrielle is telling a story; Darion, sitting next to her and eating an apple, is hanging on her every word.

GABRIELLE:

So, the day kept repeating and no one could remember what had happened. Except Xena, who had been chosen by Cupid to stop the feuding between two families and thus allow their son and daughter, who were in love with each other, to be together at last.

DARION:

Wow! You got to relive the same day over and over again? I wish I could do that!

GABRIELLE (curiously):

Why?

DARION:

Well... (scrunches up his face) You know, that way, if you mess up, you always have a chance to fix it the next time around. (he thinks a little more and his face brightens) And besides (waves his half-eaten apple), you can eat as many apples as you want and your tummy's not going to hurt the next day!

GABRIELLE (smiles):

Trust me, Darion, it's not something you'd really want to happen to you. It gets pretty tiresome after about the third time.

XENA (lifts her head):

Gabrielle, what do you know? You couldn't *remember* anything from day to day. You weren't the one who had to wake up in the same barn and hear Joxer yell "Rise and shine!" in that (clenches her teeth) cheery voice every da-- (catches herself) --every single morning a hundred times in a row.

GABRIELLE (chuckles):

Well, you're right. That's one memory I don't especially miss.

DARION (pauses briefly to finish the apple):

I wish I could have met Joxer... (after another pause, quietly) Gabrielle...you told me Joxer is-- gone...

GABRIELLE (wistful):

He is, honey.

DARION (looks down, obviously struggling):

How did--I mean, you know--what happened to him?

Xena gives Gabrielle an uncomfortable look. Gabrielle looks away for a moment, then turns to Darion and clears her throat.

GABRIELLE:

He--he was-- (her voice breaks off as the camera closes in on Xena's anxious face) --it was a Roman commander. Joxer-- (choking back tears) See, I was captured by the Romans and he tried to save me, and-- (she lowers her head)

DARION (reaches out to touch her hand):

I'm sorry I made you sad...

GABRIELLE (tries to smile through tears):

It's all right, Darion...

DARION (thinks for a moment, quietly):

He was a real hero, right?

A close-up on Gabrielle's face. She is clearly moved, her eyes bright with tears. She puts her hands on Darion's shoulders as the camera pulls back.

XENA:

Yes, he was.

GABRIELLE (darts a quick, surprised look at Xena, and then looks back at Darion):

Of course he was a real hero, honey. See, Xena thinks so too. (she forces herself to smile and strokes Darion's hair) Now, try and think some happy thoughts, okay?

DARION (nods, smiling bravely):

Okay, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

Now, young man, I think it's about time you got some sleep.

She kisses him on the forehead.

DARION:

Goodnight, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

Goodnight, Darion. Want me to put you to bed?

DARION (indignantly):

I can do it myself.

He walks to the other side of the campfire and settles into a small bedroll while Gabrielle watches him.

XENA (reaches out to touch Gabrielle's hand comfortingly):

Gabrielle...

GABRIELE:

I'm all right.

A brief silence. Xena looks over at Darion, listening to his even breathing--he is obviously sound asleep already. She then turns to Gabrielle.

XENA (in a half-whisper):

Gabrielle, mind if I ask you a question?

GABRIELLE:

Sure.



XENA (looks at Darion and speaks softly):

Tell me something...it's not that I have anything against Darion, but... (looks at him again) ...how long do you see him traveling with us?

GABRIELLE:

Xena, you know I can't leave him.

XENA (quickly):

I wasn't suggesting--

GABRIELLE:

I know.

XENA:

Gabrielle, if you want to raise him--I'll support whatever you decide to do. I just wanted to make sure that you know what you're getting into.

GABRIELLE:

Look, Xena, I want to find his sister. I promised him I would. If she's alive--we'll find her. (looks at Xena) You'll help me, won't you?

XENA:

Of course I will. But what if we can't?



GABRIELLE (sighs a little sadly, glancing at Darion):

Well...I know that with the kind of life we lead, it's difficult to have a child around. He shouldn't have to deal with the kinds of things we face day after day. Remember what you said once, Xena, when Eve was little--maybe it's just wrong to expose a child to all this violence. (Xena looks away, anguished) Sorry... But Darion...he needs me, Xena. He's got no one else. And...I need him too. I've never really had a chance to--you know--

Xena nods and wordlessly squeezes her hand, obviously overcome with emotion. A brief silence.

GABRIELLE (obviously changing the subject):

So, what now? We're all done in Corinth...I was thinking that we could head back toward Amazon lands. It'll be good to see Eve. And I did promise her that I would come back to help hunt down the gang that raided Darion's village. (a little reluctantly) Maybe we'll even find his sister.

XENA:

Sounds like a plan. Right now, let's get some shuteye.

Xena stands up and goes over to lie down in her bedroll; Gabrielle stands as well, follows her and lies down between Xena and Darion.

GABRIELLE:

Goodnight, Xena.

XENA (drowsily):

'Night....

Gabrielle sighs and closes her eyes.

DISSOLVE TO

Later that night. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are asleep in their bedrolls. The fire is nearly out. There is the sound of rustling leaves around the campsite. Xena opens her eyes; the noise is repeated a few more times. She sits up quietly and reaches for her sword next to her. Without waking Gabrielle or Darion, she walks slowly toward the source of the sounds--behind a row of bushes. She points her sword out in front of her and then sees three dark figures dart from the bushes and run. Xena races after them into the woods. They have a good head start, but as they reach a moonlit clearing, Xena leaps, flips in the air and lands right behind the slowest of the three men, grabbing his neck and knocking him down. He manages to get up, draw his sword and parry her blows for a few moments until she kicks the sword out of his hand. Meanwhile, the other two men disappear into the woods.

MAN (falls to his knees):

Please--please don't kill me, Warrior Princess! Have mercy, I beg you!

XENA (looks in the direction where the other two men ran):

Looks like you and your friends are much better runners than you are fighters. (lowers her sword) All right. Are you going to tell me what's going on the easy way--or the hard way?

MAN:

I swear, Warrior Princess, we didn't mean you or your friends any harm! We were just told to follow you because there've been rumors that you were working with a traitor to Rome--

XENA (raises her sword to the man's throat, her face hard in the moonlight):

Are you from Rome? Do you work for the Emperor Claudius? (the man nods, sweat pouring down his face) A traitor--do you mean Agrippina?

MAN (trembling):

Yes--we were ordered to find out if she was with you--

XENA:

Well, she's not. (the corners of her mouth curve up in a sneer) You'd better run back to your Emperor and tell him he needs to find better help.

The man gets up and runs. Xena looks after him, then sighs, shaking her head, and starts walking back to the campsite. Then she stops and listens intently to something; in a moment, the smile on her face indicating that she is sensing Ares' presence.

XENA:

Still sneaking up on me?

ARES (materializes in a flash of light, with a familiar grin on his face):

Looks like you caught me again.

XENA (teasingly):

Well, better you than a bunch of Roman spies, I suppose...

ARES (wryly):

I'm touched. Anyway--I thought I'd stop by.

XENA:

Uh-huh. In the middle of the night?

ARES (grins):

Hey, that's the best time of the day.

XENA:

You know, just because you're a god and you don't need sleep doesn't mean nobody else does.

ARES:

Well, it's hard to catch you alone these days, now that you've got your little friend hanging around...

XENA:

By now, I would have thought you'd be used to her hanging around.

ARES:

Her? I'm talking about that kid.

Xena chuckles and Ares grins; there's silence between them for a moment. Then, Ares takes a step back and looks down, obviously struggling with something, then looks at Xena again.

ARES:

So--I hear they're doing pretty well with the rebuilding in Corinth.

XENA (a little bitterly):

Since when are you so concerned about the rebuilding of cities ravaged by war?

ARES (pauses briefly, fidgeting a little, then looks up at Xena):

Xena, look... About Sabina... I didn't mean to--

Xena suddenly holds out a hand, signaling him to be quiet. A child's cry can be heard at some distance--it's Darion.

XENA (a worried look on her face):

Ares, we'll talk about this some other time. I left Gabrielle and Darion alone at the site, with those Romans prowling around--I need to get back and make sure they're okay.

ARES:

Come on, Gabrielle can take pretty good care of--

Before he can finish, Xena races away.

ARES (sighs):

Like I said...it's hard to catch you alone these days.

He vanishes in a flash of light.

CUT TO

The campsite. Gabrielle is sitting up, comforting Darion.

XENA (runs up to her):
Is everything all right?

GABRIELLE:
Yeah...just a bad dream. (looks at Xena, puzzled) Where were you?

XENA (grimly):
We had visitors.

CUT TO

A horse and a cloaked rider gallop through the fields under the full moon and approach a village. Everything is dark; only one house near the edge of the village has a light flickering in a window. The rider brings the horse to a halt near the house and dismounts. The rider's face is lit by the moon. It's Agrippina.

CUT TO

Inside the house. It's small but cozy, a fire burning in the fireplace. A young man who seems to be a little over twenty is sitting at a table with oil lamps positioned at each corner, reading from a scroll by their light. He is pale-skinned and freckled, with short blond hair and pale blue eyes, wearing a peasant outfit of gray pants and a dark green shirt.

The door opens. He looks up at the sound and sees Agrippina come in. He smiles at the sight of her and stands up.

YOUNG MAN:
Mother.

AGRIPPINA (smiles proudly):
Domitius... (she comes closer and they hug and kiss each other tenderly on the cheek) So, how's Greece?



DOMITIUS:
It's wonderful, Mother. (inhales deeply) In this land, the very air one breathes seems to be saturated with the exquisite spirit of Grecian poetry and arts.

AGRIPPINA:
You're quite the poet yourself, my boy. (they break the embrace) Well, if you think it's been good up to now--it's about to get better. (off his curious look) You have heard of Xena, Warrior Princess and Gabrielle--

DOMITIUS (interrupts):

Oh yes--the Bard of Potidaea. Of course! Her scrolls are some of the best writing I have ever had the pleasure to read. (eagerly) Do you mean to tell me there's a chance of my meeting Gabrielle?

AGRIPPINA:

More than a chance, Domitius. We're going to meet her, and Xena.

DOMITIUS (obviously interested):

Are they going to help us?

AGRIPPINA:

I don't know yet, son. But I have hopes.

Close-ups of Domitius and Agrippina smiling at each other as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Morning at the campsite. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are rolling up their bedrolls.

DARION:

Gabrielle, can we go pick some berries for breakfast?

GABRIELLE:

Sure, sweetie, as soon as I finish up.

DARION:

You know what I would *really* like? A rabbit.

GABRIELLE:

Okay. I'll get you a rabbit for dinner.

DARION (stares at her in dismay):

Uhh... I meant as a pet...

GABRIELLE (looks at him uncomfortably):

Oh...of course you did! (with a forced laugh) I meant, you know, once I get you a rabbit, we'll, uh, have him over for dinner. (scrunches up her eyebrows, realizing that she isn't making much sense) Let's go get those berries, okay?

DARION (grins):

Maybe you can get me a pet rabbit like the one you told me about--you know, with the *huge* fangs. (demonstrates the fangs with his hands) That would be great!

XENA (chuckles):

A killer bunny for a pet. Wonderful.

GABRIELLE:

Come on.

She picks up a basket and she and Darion start to walk away from the campsite.

XENA (looks after them):

Be careful out there--you could run into those Romans.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, from what you told me, it sounds like I can handle them. Don't worry. (to Darion) Just make sure you only pick the good berries, okay? You know what happened to Xena, Eve and me once when we ate some bad berries?

DARION:

You got sick?

GABRIELLE (her voice fading away):

No, it was a lot weirder than that--

As Gabrielle and Darion leave the campsite, Xena looks after them thoughtfully and shakes her head with a wistful smile. Then she takes their bedrolls over to the horses and begins to pack them away in the saddlebags. Suddenly, the sound of rustling leaves is heard from the same direction as the night before. Xena rolls her eyes, picks up her sword and walks towards the bushes.

XENA:

You people are lousy at your job, but at least you're persistent.

The branches part, and Agrippina atop a gray horse, wearing a long silvery cape as the night before, rides out of the trees.

AGRIPPINA (puzzled):

That's a strange way to greet a friend, Xena.

XENA (lowers her sword):

Agrippina. (pauses) Last night, I caught some spies--apparently sent by your husband to track me and see if I was working with you.

Agrippina gives her a concerned look and dismounts.

AGRIPPINA:

That doesn't surprise me.

XENA (turns away and starts packing again):

Well, it sure surprised *me*. (pauses) And now, you show up. Why do I get the feeling you aren't here on vacation?

AGRIPPINA:

I'm afraid I have some news. (pauses as Xena turns around) Bad news.

XENA:

It usually is bad news. (she tugs vigorously at the saddlebags, tightening them, and then walks toward Agrippina) All right, let's hear it. Something about Claudius?

AGRIPPINA:

It's been bad before, but now... (shakes her head) Do you remember Fufonius, the chief magistrate of Pompeii?

XENA (smirks):

How could I forget.

AGRIPPINA:

Xena, that poor man has been thrown in a dungeon. His only crime was that, when he recovered from his injuries and came to Rome to report on the disaster in Pompeii, he told the truth about what I did to help with the rescue.

Xena gives her a shocked look, then purses her lips and shakes her head.

XENA:

So a Roman emperor is throwing people in prison because he considers them dangerous to his authority. That's news?

Agrippina chuckles bitterly. Just then, Gabrielle and Darion's voices are heard in the distance, getting closer. We see Gabrielle and Darion walking back into camp, Darion carrying a basket full of berries.

DARION (puzzled):

So was it a dream or was it real?

GABRIELLE:

Well, it was kind of both. It's complicated. See, those berries we ate make people see things, and then Aphrodite put us all in the same dream... (she trails off as she sees Xena standing with Agrippina near the horses)

DARION (points to the basket a little anxiously):

But these are good berries, right? They won't make us see things?

GABRIELLE (a little distractedly):

No, sweetie. I've made sure they're okay.

DARION (sees Agrippina and grins broadly):

Wow, Agrippina is here! You think she brought me a present? (a little wistfully) You know, back home when a friend of my mom's used to come over from another village, she always used to bring me presents...

GABRIELLE (gives him a sad, concerned look at his mention of life at home):

Uh...I don't know, Darion. (bends down to hug him) Just don't ask her if she's brought you a present, okay? That wouldn't be very nice. I promise Xena and I will give you lots of presents. (stands up and pats him on the head) Why don't you start eating your berries--I'll join you later, okay?

Darion waves at Agrippina, smiling, then sits down and starts to eat berries from the basket while Gabrielle goes over to Agrippina and Xena.

GABRIELLE:

Agrippina. (smiles) It's good to see you again.

AGRIPPINA (sighs):

Good to see you too, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

So, what brings you to Greece?

AGRIPPINA:

Trouble, I'm afraid. I was just starting to tell Xena about it. (pause) Things are getting really bad in Rome, Gabrielle. People being thrown in jail on the slightest suspicion of treason, grain not being distributed to the poor--

GABRIELLE (winces):

What is it with Roman emperors? Every one of them seems to go bad sooner or later.

XENA (shrugs):

Something in the water?

AGRIPPINA:

Even good rulers can be corrupted by having too much power in their hands. (sighs) Or they can fall under the influence of corrupt advisors. Claudius was a good man, once. Now, I can hardly recognize him as the man I married.



XENA:

And you want *us* to do something about it?

AGRIPPINA:

Xena, this doesn't just concern Rome. I know that many years ago, before your--disappearance, you helped Boadicea, the queen of Britannia, defeat Caesar's troops and preserve the freedom of her land. (Xena nods and gives her a curious look) Claudius is planning to launch a new invasion of Britannia in order to subjugate it and make it part of the Roman Empire.

XENA (stares at her, horrified):

No.

AGRIPPINA:

It's all too true, and I can prove it. (she reaches into a satchel she has at her belt, pulls out a scroll and hands it to Xena) This letter, from Claudius to one of his advisors, will speak for itself.

Xena and Gabrielle read the scroll, then exchange concerned looks.

GABRIELLE:

How do we know this is genuine?

AGRIPPINA:

Look at the imperial seal.

XENA (looks at her suspiciously):

How did you get this?

AGRIPPINA:

I have a--trusted friend who is close to the Emperor. He risked his head to get me this letter.

GABRIELLE (skeptical):

And you're concerned about the freedom of Britannia?

AGRIPPINA:

I'm a Roman patriot, Gabrielle. But some of us understand that the Empire has become too big. We can't afford any more conquests--more taxes to pay for them, more lives lost in battles. I have great respect for the queen who rules Britannia now, Boadicea the Second. But I am thinking about what's good for Rome, as well.

XENA (returns the scroll to her in a brusque gesture):

All right, Agrippina. What do you want us to do?

AGRIPPINA:

Help me and my son return to Rome. Then, we'll see what we can do. (smiles) Come on, Xena--you know we make a good team.

Xena looks at her, obviously hesitant.

GABRIELLE:

Agrippina, I'm sorry--can Xena and I talk alone for a moment?

AGRIPPINA:

Of course.

Xena and Gabrielle walk off to the side.

XENA (looks curiously at Gabrielle):

You don't trust Agrippina, do you?

GABRIELLE:

Xena...I remember you telling me that when you met Agrippina in Pompeii, the reason you were so impressed with her is that she never asked you to help her get back to the top. Now, it sounds like she's asking you for exactly that. Are you sure you know her well enough to--

XENA:

No. And that's why we're going to go to Rome and look into it ourselves.

GABRIELLE:

But you still plan on helping her.

XENA:

Maybe if you had seen Agrippina the way I did, risking her life to save complete strangers... I think she's a good woman, Gabrielle. And I think she's telling us the truth. (gives Gabrielle a curious look) Funny, you're usually the one to trust people...

GABRIELLE:

Maybe that's just it. I've trusted the wrong people too many times. Eventually, it's bound to make you a cynic.

XENA (puts a hand on her shoulder):

No, no--not *you*, Gabrielle. (grins a little) Leave the cynicism to me, okay?

GABRIELLE (smiles affectionately):

All right--if you insist. (pause) So we go to Rome, then.

XENA:

We go to Rome.

Gabrielle and Xena walk back to Agrippina.

XENA:

We'll help you.

CUT TO

The village we saw in the teaser. It's early evening; we see everyday scenes of villagers going about their daily tasks, children playing, chickens pecking at the dust, dogs running around. Xena, Gabrielle, Darion and Agrippina ride up to the small house near the edge of the village where we saw Agrippina and her son the night before. They start to dismount.

CUT TO

Inside the house. Domitius stands up as the door opens and Agrippina comes in with Xena and Gabrielle. Gabrielle is holding Darion's hand.

AGRIPPINA:

Domitius--Xena, Warrior Princess, and Gabrielle, Bard of Potidaea. Xena, Gabrielle--this is my son, Lucius Domitius.

DARION:

And I'm Darion.

GABRIELLE (laughs and ruffles his hair):

This is Darion, my--son.

DOMITIUS (looks admiringly at Gabrielle):

So you're the Bard of Potidaea.

Darion suddenly flinches and huddles closer to Gabrielle. Gabrielle pats him on the shoulder.

DOMITIUS (continues):

You know, I am probably your biggest fan in the whole Roman Empire.

GABRIELLE (obviously flattered):

So your mother tells me.

DOMITIUS:

I was just a boy when I first read your scrolls--no older than your boy is now. (points to Darion, who is clutching Gabrielle's arm) I was truly captivated, from the very first line. You made me feel as if I had seen everything you wrote about with my own eyes--the Amazons and the Centaurs, and that brave mariner on the cursed ship, and that marvelously evil Callisto... (Gabrielle winces a little) But I apologize--I see that I've upset you. I forget that what is literature to me--*great* literature--was real life to you.

GABRIELLE (with a wan half-smile):

It's all right, really. (to Darion) Darion, you've got a death grip on my arm. (strokes his hair) What's wrong, sweetie?

DOMITIUS (looks curiously at Darion):

Maybe he's afraid of strangers.

DARION (mumbles):

No, I'm not. (lets go of Gabrielle's arm) I'm going to go outside and play with the other kids, okay?

GABRIELLE:

Okay. Just be careful. (follows Darion with her eyes as he runs out, then turns to Domitius, apologetically) He's had some bad experiences--his village was raided by bandits a couple of months ago. His parents were killed and his sister was carried off. (shakes her head) If I ever find the bastards who did it...

DOMITIUS:

What a terrible thing to happen to a small child. The world can be such a wicked place sometimes. (sighs) Thank the gods there are people like you two to help make it better. (to Xena) It's a pleasure to meet the great Warrior Princess at last. After reading Gabrielle's scrolls, I feel like I know you already.

XENA (curtly):

Thanks. Can we cut down on the introductions and get ready for the trip to Rome?

DOMITIUS:

So you're going to help Mother.

XENA:

We're going to find out what the situation is.

DOMITIUS:

It's pretty bad, I can tell you that. Though, of course, Claudius isn't nearly as bad as Uncle Gaius--I mean, Caligula--

XENA (gives him a sharp look):

Caligula was your *uncle*?

DOMITIUS:

Of course. Didn't you-- (glances at Agrippina, then, slightly embarrassed) Oh. I thought Mother would have told you.

Xena shakes her head and slowly turns to Agrippina. The look on her face is both sympathetic and guilty. Agrippina steadily holds her gaze.

XENA (in a half-whisper):

He was your--

AGRIPPINA (interrupts, businesslike):

We should leave as soon as we can. Right now, our first priority is to get into Rome undetected. (to Xena) My husband suspects that you and I are traveling together, so it's best if nobody knows that you're headed to Rome. Maybe you and Gabrielle should wear a disguise.

GABRIELLE (to Xena):

Look, if we're doing this whole mistress-slave thing again, this time / get to be the mistress, okay?

DOMITIUS (gives her a curious look):

Mistress-slave thing?

XENA (clears her throat):

She's--uh--talking about a disguise. (smirks) That's all.

Gabrielle looks from Domitius to Xena and blushes profusely.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, Darion, Agrippina and Domitius riding along a road with open fields on one side and a forest on the other. Agrippina is in her silvery cape while Domitius is now wearing a purple cloak. Xena and Agrippina are riding in front; Gabrielle (with Darion in the saddle) and Domitius a few paces behind.

XENA (quietly):

Caligula was your brother.

AGRIPPINA:

Yes, he was.

XENA:

And knowing what I did, you still--

AGRIPPINA (firmly):

Xena, my brother was a dangerous madman. You did what you had to do to stop him. There was no other way.

Xena glances at her and nods. While she remains stoical, the relief is evident in her face.

The camera pans back to Gabrielle, Domitius, and Darion. Darion seems to be dozing, leaning back against Gabrielle.



GABRIELLE:

So, you like Greek literature.

DOMITIUS:

I love it. It's not that we Romans don't have some fine writers of our own, but it seems to me that the Greek language and spirit are far more suited for expressing beautiful things than our Latin tongue. Romans are the best at conquest and commerce, but when it comes to the fine arts, it's from the Greek masters that we must seek our inspiration.

GABRIELLE (looks at him with curiosity):

We? Are you a bard too?

DOMITIUS:

I wouldn't be presumptuous enough to call myself a bard. But I do compose some poetry in Greek, and play the lyre. (sighs) My mother thinks these are frivolous pursuits. I confess I'd much rather be a great artist than a great emperor.

Gabrielle gives him an affectionate look.

The camera pans back to Xena and Agrippina just as a low buzz cuts through the silence. The camera zooms in on an arrow whizzing through the air. Xena's hand shoots out, catching the arrow. Another arrow flies out of the dense shrubbery by the roadside, heading straight for Agrippina.

XENA:

Look out!

Xena tugs on Agrippina's arm. Agrippina is able to dodge the arrow but it grazes her upper arm. She clutches her arm in shock, pain and fear. Everyone stops; Xena and Gabrielle look around cautiously. Darion is now wide awake. Another arrow comes flying through the air; Xena deflects it with her

sword. Agrippina's eyes are wide and she is breathing heavily. Darion clutches at Gabrielle's hand, terrified.

GABRIELLE (squeezes his shoulders):

It's all right. Xena and I do this all the time.

Xena looks at the shrubbery, her eyes narrowing.

XENA (to Gabrielle):

Stay here and be careful. There may be more of them.

She charges at the shrubbery, raising her sword, and gives her ululating battle cry.

DARION (fascinated, despite his fear):

Wow...

Xena starts chopping at the shrubbery while Agrippina and Domitius look on nervously, and Darion looks thrilled and fearful at the same time. There is loud rustling in the bushes and the sound of branches being trampled. Xena flips off Argo and disappears into the bushes in pursuit of the attacker.

CUT TO

Xena running through the trees pursuing a running man.

CUT TO

The road.

DARION (tries to imitate Xena's war cry):

Alalalala....

Agrippina looks at him with an indulgent smile.

GABRIELLE (listening intently):

Shhhhh!

Branches are heard rustling overhead. Gabrielle looks up. Suddenly, a dark shape hurtles down from the branches. It's a man who jumps down on top of Agrippina, knocking her off her horse and taking her down on the ground with him. Her horse neighs and rears up in alarm. As Agrippina struggles with the man, two more people, a man and a woman armed with daggers, jump out of the shrubbery.

DOMITIUS:

Mother!

He's about to jump down from his horse but Gabrielle holds out a hand to stop him.

GABRIELLE:

I'll take care of it--you watch the boy.

DARION (scared):

Gabrielle, don't leave me!

GABRIELLE (pats him quickly on the cheek):

Don't you worry, I won't be long.

She hands her horse's reins to Domitius and races toward Agrippina, drawing her sais. Agrippina has just managed to wriggle free from her assailant. As the two other attackers are about to jump her, Gabrielle knocks them both down with powerful kicks to the midsection. Then she turns to the man who first attacked Agrippina and strikes him in the face with the blunt end of a sai. Blood pouring down his face, he screams and clutches at his nose. The man Gabrielle knocked down before rises to his feet and tries to jump her from behind but she downs him again with a backward kick.

The female assassin gets up, dagger still in hand, and starts circling Gabrielle. Gabrielle spins to kick her but the woman dodges the kick and herself kicks at Gabrielle, hitting her in the side. Taken by surprise, Gabrielle staggers back slightly. The two women spin, kick and spar with their daggers.

A close-up of Darion's frightened face. His fear has definitely gotten the better of his excitement and he is now whimpering a little.

CUT TO

The woods. Xena catches up with the archer who had shot at Agrippina. Dropping his bow, he draws a sword and tries to fight her off, but she quickly knocks the sword from his hand and then punches him out with her free hand.

CUT TO

The road. A stunned Agrippina stumbles toward the horses. Her arm is bleeding where she was struck by the arrow, and there is a scratch on her face as well. Her cape is torn.

DOMITIUS:

You all right?

AGRIPPINA (recovering from shock):

Yes--it's nothing serious. (to Darion) Don't worry, little one. Gabrielle will be fine. It's all in a day's work for her. (to Domitius) Go on, help her--I'll hold the horses.

Domitius dismounts, runs toward Gabrielle and tackles the man she hit in the face with the hilt of her sai. Meanwhile, Gabrielle knocks down the woman, and as she falls the dagger flies out of her hand. Gabrielle kicks it away.

FEMALE ASSASSIN:

Let's get out of here!

She and the two men run off into the woods. Gabrielle stands still, panting for breath; then she sees Darion with tears on his cheeks, and runs toward him.

GABRIELLE (helps Darion off the horse and hugs him as he clings to her):

Everything's all right, honey. (to Agrippina) Are you--

AGRIPINA (shakes her head):

Just a couple of scratches--nothing to speak of. (smiles) Thank you for saving my life, Gabrielle.

There is a rustle in the bushes and they all turn simultaneously. Xena emerges, dragging the man she captured. She shoves him down on the ground.

XENA:

All right. Let's make this simple. Who sent you to kill us? (the man remains silent) All right, we'll do it the hard way. (jabs him in the neck) I've just cut off the flow of blood to your brain. You'll be dead in thirty seconds if you don't tell me who sent you. (the man is coughing and wheezing but remains silent) Come on.

MAN (wheezing):

I was-- (coughs) I was sent by the Emp...eror...Claudius...to kill...Agrip...pina...

A close-up of the grim look on Xena's face. She looks from Gabrielle to Agrippina as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Snarling, Xena releases the would-be assassin from the pinch. He gags and gasps for breath.

XENA (stands up):

Like I said...Claudius needs much better help.

The man starts to sit up. Just then, Domitius hurls himself at him and stabs him through the heart. The man's eyes bulge; he gasps for breath and slumps, dead.

The camera pans quickly to Darion, who cries out in terror and presses his face to Gabrielle's stomach while she hugs him.

GABRIELLE (shocked):

Domitius! (strokes Darion on the hair, in a half-whisper) It's all right, honey. It was one of the bad men.

DOMITIUS (looks at her defiantly):

Do you expect me to stand by and keep my cool while a man who nearly murdered my mother walks away? (his expression changes and he now seems almost ashamed) Gabrielle, I know you don't believe in revenge--but not all of us can be as noble as you.

Embarrassed, Gabrielle nods quickly and turns away.

XENA:

We should have turned him over to the authorities.

AGRIPPINA:

Xena, we're in Roman territory now. What judge do you think is going to detain one of the emperor's own assassins? He would have been free to attack again.

XENA (grimly):

All right. (she drags the body off into the bushes, then turns to Agrippina) Are you okay? (looks at the cut on her arm) Looks like that arrow got a piece of you.

AGRIPPINA (wryly):

Only a *little* piece--thanks to you.

CUT TO

Another stretch of the road. This time, Xena and Gabrielle are riding side by side, with Darion sitting in front of Gabrielle, while Domitius and Agrippina are visible in the background.

DARION:

I really wasn't that scared.

GABRIELLE (pats him on the shoulder):

Of course not, sweetie. You were *very* brave. (after a brief pause, she turns to Xena) Xena--I'm sorry.

XENA:

About what?

GABRIELLE:

About doubting Agrippina. You were right.

XENA (gives her a skeptical glance):

Agrippina's all right. It's that kid of hers I'm not so sure about.



GABRIELLE (looks at Xena):

Xena...I spent some time talking to him and--I liked him. (defensively) All right, I hated what he did--but can you really blame him for losing his head? I mean, he had just seen a gang of hired thugs try to kill his mother right in front of him.

XENA (sighs):

I guess you have a point.

GABRIELLE (after a brief pause):

You know, I never imagined we'd be going to Rome again.

XENA:

Yeah, you'd think that Eve's ten-year banishment would be enough to keep us away. But something always pulls us back here... (grimly) ...like a curse.

GABRIELLE (with a somewhat forced smile):

Don't be so negative. I have a feeling we're going to do good this time.

CUT TO

A crowded street in Rome at dusk. Vendors are sitting on the pavement hawking their wares. Xena and Gabrielle are making their way through the crowd. They are dressed like Roman ladies, Xena in a black dress, Gabrielle in a blue one. Gabrielle is leading Darion by the hand; he looks around, wide-eyed and excited. Agrippina, in a simple gray dress, and Domitius, in a short tunic and sandals, follow behind them.

DARION:

Wow! So this is Rome... It's so--huge! I bet it's even bigger than Corinth!

GABRIELLE (smiles at him):

I bet it is. (to Xena) That was a smart idea, for Agrippina and Domitius to disguise themselves as our servants. It got us past the guards at the city gates with no questions asked...

XENA (gives her a wry look):

And you didn't have to play the slave girl.

GABRIELLE (exasperated):

Xena, I don't mind playing the slave girl. I just don't want to be the slave girl every time.

Xena chuckles.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, and Darion walk into an inn, with Domitius and Agrippina behind them.

CUT TO

A room at the inn. Gabrielle is putting Darion to bed on a small cot. Xena is standing by the window looking out.

Darion yawns.

GABRIELLE:

Tired, huh?

DARION:

Yeah... (yawns again) Goodnight, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle pulls the bedcovers over him, bends down and kisses him on the forehead.

GABRIELLE:

Goodnight, Darion.

Gabrielle puts out the lamp by Darion's cot and then walks over to Xena.

XENA:

I'm going out to a tavern. Are you coming?

GABRIELLE (surprised):

A tavern? We already had dinner.

XENA:

Gabrielle, I want to find out what they're saying in town about Claudius. And about Agrippina.

GABRIELLE (surprised):

Don't tell me *you* don't trust her now?

XENA:

Oh, I do. But I did tell you that we were going to Rome to find out for ourselves exactly what's going on--before we jump to conclusions. Or take any action.

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, you're right. You want me to come with you?

XENA:

Well, you're better at talking than I am... (Gabrielle looks uncertainly at Darion) Come on, he's asleep. We can leave him here for a couple of hours.

CUT TO

The inside of a murky, crowded tavern. Xena and Gabrielle, still in their Roman outfits, are sitting at the bar with goblets of wine in front of them.

BARKEEP (a slightly paunchy, balding man, trying to be suave):

I don't believe I've ever seen you two lovely ladies in my establishment before.

GABRIELLE:

No, we're new in town.

BARKEEP:

Really! (smiles invitingly) Well, I hope you decide to come back.

GABRIELLE:

In fact, new in the country. We have spent the last two years traveling in Greece.

XENA:

So many changes while we were away... A new emperor...

GABRIELLE:

And thank the gods for that! The stories we heard about Caligula--

BARKEEP (shudders):

Ugh! Don't even mention his name. Gives me the creeps.

XENA (sips her wine):

So Claudius is a good emperor, then?

BARKEEP (looks around, then lowers his voice a little):

Well, let me tell you...he's not a bloodthirsty maniac like the other one. But things haven't been too good lately.

MAN #1 (lanky and middle-aged, sitting next to Xena):

Not good? Talk about an understatement. If they raise my taxes any more, pretty soon the only choice I'll have will be to sell my own kids into slavery!

WOMAN #1 (in her thirties, sitting next to Gabrielle):

This past solstice, they didn't even distribute bread to the poor the way they usually do. We nearly had a riot in the city.

MAN #2 (young, standing behind the woman with a mug of ale in hand):

Nothing's been the same since Empress Agrippina was sent away.

A murmur in the tavern.

WOMAN'S VOICE (off-camera):

They say she was a poisoner, that Agrippina!

MAN# 1:

Lies! They just falsely accused her to get her out of the way!

MAN #2:

Agrippina was always a friend to the people.

WOMAN #1:

We've all heard about how she risked her life to save people in Pompeii!

BARKEEP (nervous):

Hush, or you'll get in trouble and get this establishment shut down! (to Xena and Gabrielle) To tell you the truth, I myself think Claudius is a good man. Trouble is, his advisors have gotten way too powerful--especially since the Empress Agrippina went away into exile. (shakes his head morosely) And now, there's a rumor that he's very ill--who knows what's going to happen next...

Xena and Gabrielle exchange startled looks.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle walking down a street in Rome, dimly lit by torches mounted into the walls.

GABRIELLE:

You know, if the people in this tavern are typical, Agrippina's pretty popular.

XENA:

If the people in the tavern are typical, the whole city is like a bunch of dry kindling--all it needs is a spark to go up in flames.

GABRIELLE (thoughtfully):

Do we want to take that kind of responsibility?

XENA:

Don't forget, Gabrielle, it's not just the fate of Rome that's at stake...it's the fate of Britannia, too, and who knows how many other lands.

GABRIELLE:

But can we even be sure...

XENA:

Maybe not. (pauses for a moment) Gabrielle, I think we need to try to talk to Claudius himself.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--if he's the kind of person who would send assassins to murder his own wife--

XENA:

We can't be completely certain that it was him. Who knows, maybe one of those advisors of his was behind it.

GABRIELLE:

But then, if Claudius *is* behind it, he's going to know that you're in town and working with Agrippina...

XENA:

Then we'll just have to act quickly.

GABRIELLE:

How are you going to get in to see Claudius?

XENA:

Time to call in a favor with a couple of senators who were on Caligula's blacklist when (she stumbles for a moment) he died. I'll go see them first thing tomorrow morning.

GABRIELLE:

By yourself?

XENA (grins):

I think I can handle it. Unless, of course, you think I should be escorted by a slave girl...

GABRIELLE (beams at her):

That works fine for me. I can take Darion around the city.

CUT TO

The Roman forum. Day. Xena in her Roman outfit, her face half-covered with a veil (like in "Livia"), stands by the steps leading up to the massive building of the Roman curia, the meeting place of the Senate. A dignified-looking man of about sixty, with graying hair, wearing a white toga bordered with purple and gold stripes, approaches.

XENA:

Fulvius Rufus.

Rufus stops and gives her a puzzled look. Xena lifts the veil.

RUFUS (gasps slightly):

Xena! I didn't expect to see you here again.

XENA (smiles a little bitterly):

Really. I didn't expect to be seen here again.

RUFUS:

I, uh--I take it this isn't a social visit?

XENA:

I need a favor, Rufus. (glances around) Can we talk privately?

RUFUS:

Sure. Anything for you, Xena--I'm only alive today thanks to you.

CUT TO

Rufus and Xena enter a small room inside the curia, with only a desk, a couple of chairs, and a bust of the Emperor on a shelf. The bustling Forum can be seen through the window. Rufus closes the door behind them.

RUFUS (uncomfortably):

Is this about your daughter's banishment?

XENA (shakes her head):

No. Actually, it has something to do with the business of state. I need to see the Emperor.

RUFUS (looks alarmed):

I'm afraid that's not possible.

XENA (harshly):

Why not?

RUFUS:

Because the Emperor Claudius is very ill--has been for nearly a week now. Only the medics are allowed to see him right now, and they don't seem to be doing him much good. (he shakes his head sadly) Xena, I think Claudius is dying.

Xena looks at him in shock as we:

ACT THREE

FADE IN

The same room as in the previous scene.

XENA:

Claudius dying... What's going to happen if he dies? Who is his heir?

RUFUS:

Claudius has no children--his only daughter, Octavia, died a few years ago.

XENA:

I thought he had a stepson, Domitius.

RUFUS (his face darkens):

Oh yes--Agrippina's boy. I believe he's in Greece right now.

XENA (looks at him curiously):

Rufus, what do you know about Agrippina?

RUFUS (sighs):

Only what we all heard during the trial. She had some strong supporters in the Senate who thought she had been falsely accused, and that the principal witness against her had been paid off. Me, I'm just glad I didn't have to be the judge in that case. (Xena nods pensively) In any case, when Agrippina was banished from Rome, Claudius wrote her son out of his will, and Domitius was unofficially advised to leave the city as well.

XENA:

So who will become emperor after his death?

RUFUS:

Claudius has chosen one of his advisors, Junius Drusus, a distant relative, to be his successor.

XENA (frowns almost imperceptibly at the name):

I see. (brusquely) Thank you for the information, Rufus. I'll probably see you again before too long.

She starts walking toward the door.

RUFUS:

Wait--you still haven't told me what you're doing in Rome...

XENA (without looking back):

Once I know, I'll tell you.

CUT TO

Xena walks into the room at the inn; Gabrielle and Darion aren't there yet. There is a flash of blue light, and Ares materializes, lounging casually on Xena's bed.

XENA:

What are you doing here?

ARES (grins and pats the bed next to him):

Waiting for you to join me?

XENA (chuckles):

I'm here on business, Ares.

ARES:

You're always on business *somewhere*. You know what they say about all work and no play...

The camera pans quickly to show him suddenly standing behind her, softly kneading her shoulders with his hands. She closes her eyes in pleasure and leans back into him. Ares kisses her neck and starts to draw an arm around her waist, but just then Xena turns to face him, a strange, slightly wary look on her face.



XENA:

You know, seeing you here in Rome brings back--memories.

ARES (sighs, slightly exasperated):

Just be careful you don't end up having more bad memories of Rome.

XENA (frowns):

Meaning *what*?

ARES:

I don't like your new friends.

XENA:

What do you know about Agrippina and Domitius?

ARES (shrugs):

I didn't say I knew anything about them. I said I didn't like them.

XENA (coldly):

And I'm supposed to trust you as a judge of character? Maybe you just find it hard to believe that someone whose first concern is for the good of others can be sincere. (looks at Ares with sudden wariness) Ares--are you up to something?

ARES:

Well, as a matter of fact--I do have a special reason for being in Rome.

XENA (brusquely):

What?



ARES (reaches out to touch her face with the back of his hand):

I missed my girl.

XENA (sighs, visibly softening):

Ares, look--

ARES:

I know. You're working.

He blows her a kiss, obviously about to disappear.

XENA:

Ares--wait!

ARES (hopeful):

What?

XENA:

Do you know anything about the Romans planning to invade Britannia again?

ARES (looks disappointed for a moment, then purses his lips thoughtfully):

All I can tell you is, they haven't mentioned it in their prayers.

XENA (nods):

Thank you... (looks at him and smiles a little) You know, Ares, maybe when I'm done here we can spend--a little quality time together.

ARES (grins):

How about a lot of quality time?

XENA (smiles faintly):
Don't push it.

She leans toward him and they're about to kiss when there's a knock on the door.

AGRIPPINA (off-camera):
Xena?

ARES (rolls his eyes):
Do all your friends do that?

XENA (chuckles):
It's one of the job requirements. (she gives him a quick kiss on the lips) I'll see you later. (steps back and raises her voice) Come on in!

Ares vanishes as the door opens and Agrippina and Domitius come in.

AGRIPPINA:
Are you alone? I thought I heard--

XENA:
Never mind that. Claudius' letter about invading Britannia--where is it?

AGRIPPINA (puzzled):
In my room. But--

XENA:
The advisor it was addressed to--it was Junius Drusus, wasn't it?

AGRIPPINA:
Yes. Why do you ask?

XENA (grimly):
Because your husband is dying. And he's appointed Drusus to be his successor.

A brief pause during which Agrippina and Domitius digest this news.

AGRIPPINA:
You can't let this happen, Xena.

XENA (looks at her intently):
We can't let this happen.

CUT TO

Later in the afternoon; the same room where Xena was talking to Rufus before. Xena stands with her arms folded while Rufus and two other senators--one about the same age as Rufus, the other a young man--are poring over the scroll with Claudius' letter.

SENATOR #1 (the middle-aged man):
Shocking!

SENATOR #2 (the young man):

This is definitely Claudius' handwriting.

RUFUS (looks warily at Xena):

How did this fall into your hands?

XENA (calmly):

Let's just say I have my sources.

RUFUS:

The Senate would never approve of a campaign to conquer Britannia right now. Our military forces are already weakened by the recent war in Germania, and by rebellions in several parts of the Empire...

SENATOR #1:

What are we going to do? In less than an hour, the Senate meets for an emergency session to vote on the succession.

XENA (looks at him):

So Claudius is--

RUFUS:

The physicians say that he will not live through the night.

SENATOR #2:

If we bring this evidence before the Senate, it could sway them.

SENATOR #1:

Let's say that it does. Who else is going to succeed Claudius?

XENA:

How about Domitius, his stepson?

RUFUS:

We don't even know where he is.

XENA:

Don't worry, you will.

CUT TO

Xena coming out of a side door of the curia. The sun is beginning to set. As she walks through the forum, Xena hears a hum of voices and notices that a crowd has begun to gather in front of the curia. She heads toward the crowd.

XENA (to a young woman in the crowd):

What's happening here?

YOUNG WOMAN:

Haven't you heard? The emperor's dying. They're about to choose a new one.

OLD MAN:

I still say they should bring back the Empress and her son. It isn't right!

An old woman standing next to him, obviously his wife, elbows him in the side.

OLD WOMAN (scoffs):

As if anyone cares what *you* think is right!

MAN (in his thirties):

Maybe it's time they *did* care about what we think!

Xena looks at them thoughtfully, then moves on.

CUT TO

The Senate meeting hall inside the curia. In the torchlight, the senators are arguing vehemently.

SENATOR #1:

You know very well that many of us were never satisfied with the case against Agrippina!

SENATOR #3:

Only because Agrippina fooled you just like she's fooled all those ignorant commoners who worship her.

SENATOR #4:

In any case, there was never any evidence that her son was implicated in any wrongdoing. And the emperor *had* adopted Domitius as his son.

SENATOR #5:

Most of us have never even met this Domitius--they say he's far more interested in Greek theater than in Roman affairs of state. Why should we pick him over Junius Drusus, whom we've known for a long time?

RUFUS (brandishes the scroll Xena got from Agrippina):

The question is, how well *do* we know him?

SENATOR #3:

He denies ever seeing this letter!

SENATOR #2:

Of course he would!

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle's room at the inn. Xena and Gabrielle are now dressed in their regular outfits, while Agrippina is wearing a white gown with a purple sash and a purple wrap around her shoulders, and Domitius is wearing a warrior's brown leather outfit with a sword at his side. Darion is playing in a corner, making his wooden chakram roll along the floor like a wheel.



XENA:

Just remember, Agrippina, things may get ugly out there.

AGRIPPINA (smiles):

I'm ready. I told you, Xena--we work well as a team.

CUT TO

The hall in the curia. The debate continues.

SENATOR #5:

Claudius is still the emperor as long as he lives--and while he's made mistakes, he has been a *good* emperor. (a murmur in the hall) It would be wrong to disrespect his wishes on dubious evidence.

SENATOR #2:

You call a scroll with an imperial seal dubious evidence?

The murmur grows stronger.

SENATOR #6:

And what if Rufus does want to conquer Britannia? Many of us believe such a war would breathe new vigor into the Empire!

A mix of cheers and boos erupts across the hall.

CUT TO

The room at the inn.

GABRIELLE (squats down next to Darion):

Are you sure you'll be all right staying here? (looks up at Xena, anxiously) I just don't like leaving him alone.

DARION (indignantly):

Of course I'll be all right!

GABRIELLE:

Just remember, keep the doors locked and don't let anyone in until we get back.

CUT TO

The forum. Night has fallen, but many torches illuminate the majestic buildings and the crowd gathered in front of the curia. The crowd is now quite large, and obviously growing more and more impatient. As its noise grows louder, the guards standing by the steps leading up to the curia are exchanging nervous glances.

The front doors of the curia are thrown open, and the crowd stills for a moment. Several senators come out. Senator #5 is carrying in his hands a golden laurel crown. Next to him is a man in his forties, tall, with curly dark hair, wearing a dark blue shirt and a white cloak draped over it. The white cloak looks almost orange in the torchlight.

SENATOR #5:

Citizens of Rome! It is my sad duty to inform you that the Emperor Claudius is dead. (a loud murmur runs through the crowd; the senator waits until it dies down before resuming) We have chosen his successor-- (points to the man in the blue shirt and the white cloak) Junius Drusus.

After a brief silence, there are scattered cheers but even louder murmurs in the crowd as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

The same scene as before.

SENATOR #5:

Junius Drusus! Do you agree to accept the imperial crown? (holds up the golden wreath)

AGRIPPINA (off-camera):

People of Rome! Hear me out!

The camera pans over to Agrippina, Domitius, Xena and Gabrielle, who are making their way through the forum. The crowd parts to let them through.

VOICES IN THE CROWD:

- It's Agrippina!
- Who?
- Agrippina, the Empress!
- The poisoner!
- Shut up!
- Let her through!
- Agrippina!

There are a few boos but they are soon drowned in a chorus of cheers. The camera pans up to the senators and Drusus who are standing at the top of the steps. They look alarmed.

Agrippina runs up the steps of the curia, stops midway to the top of the steps, and turns toward the crowd.

AGRIPPINA:

Men and women of Rome! A year ago, I was smeared by my enemies and banished from this city because I dared to speak up on your behalf--

The crowd erupts in cheers.

SENATOR #5:

Seize that woman!

Two guards standing at the side of the steps rush toward Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA:

And I am still here to speak on your behalf, even if they silence me forever--

Just as the guards are about to reach her, Xena gives her ululating battle cry, leaps in the air and, with several flips, catches up with the guards. She grabs them, knocks their heads together and pushes them down the steps. The crowd erupts in laughter. Three more guards start running up the steps, their swords drawn; Xena throws her chakram, which knocks the swords out of their hands; the impact knocks them off their feet and they tumble down, causing more laughter.

VOICES IN THE CROWD:

- It's Xena!
- She rid us of Caligula!
- Xena!

XENA:

Sorry 'bout the interruption. (to Agrippina) Please continue. (she walks down the steps under the curious stares of the crowd)

AGRIPPINA:

Romans! My husband was a good emperor when he first started to rule. It's people like Junius Drusus who have misled him and pushed him to make decisions that would have led to the ruin of Rome! (the murmurs in the crowd grow louder and louder) Even now, as he prepares to become emperor, Drusus has a secret plan to invade Britannia.

DRUSUS:

Lies!

He is drowned out by boos from the crowd.

AGRIPPINA:

We already tried to conquer Britannia once, and it costs us thousands of Roman lives. Are you prepared to sacrifice more of your sons for a war meant only to satisfy an emperor's ambition?

CROWD (roars):

No!

AGRIPPINA:

Are you willing to pay for these wars out of your pockets?

CROWD:

No!

A chant of "Agrippina! Agrippina!" goes up in the forum. The camera pans over the cheering crowd, with people pumping their fists in the air as they chant, and then up to the top of the steps.

SENATOR #5 (to one of the two guards standing at the door of the curia):

Go bring out the full guard! Drusus, follow me!

The senators and Drusus retire hastily inside the curia and the doors are closed. The roar of the crowd becomes deafening as the people charge up the steps.

As the crowd led by Agrippina reaches the top of the steps and starts banging on the doors of the curia, dozens of Roman soldiers stream out onto the square and attack the people. There are screams, and the scene becomes chaotic.

The camera zooms in on Domitius and Gabrielle fighting next to each other.

DOMITIUS:

It's party time! Let's shout and dance! Play the music! Raise the roof!

GABRIELLE (glances at him, puzzled):

What?

DOMITIUS (turns to her while sparring with a soldier):

Don't you remember? It's from one of Euripides' tragedies--it's the lines of the chorus just as the heroes are about to slay their enemies--

GABRIELLE (fighting):

You really *do* love Greek poetry, don't you...

A montage of images shows Xena, Gabrielle, and Domitius battling Roman soldiers in various parts of the forum. People in the crowd are fighting as well, some with their fists, others with weapons dropped by dead, wounded, disarmed, or fleeing Roman soldiers. Some Roman soldiers are switching sides and turning their swords against their own comrades. Those images are cross-cut with those of senators cowering nervously inside the curia, hearing the sounds of battle.

CUT TO



Xena and Gabrielle fighting the Romans in front of one of the temples in the Forum, at the foot of a tall marble statue of Vesta. A Roman soldier runs up to one of the officers.

SOLDIER:

Sir, there are riots breaking out all over the city!

OFFICER:

What's going on?

SOLDIER:

They're looting and torching shops!

The camera pans quickly to Gabrielle who gives Xena an alarmed look.

OFFICER:

Dammit--we'll have to take some of the troops there.



GABRIELLE (spins and kicks a soldier who's attacking her, then turns to Xena, worried):

I can't believe Darion is there all alone...

XENA (glances at her sideways while blocking a sword thrust from one of her opponents):

Do you want to go back and look after him?

Gabrielle looks troubled. Before she can answer, there is a flash of blue light behind the statue of Vesta. Ares walks around the statue and stands next to Xena, slouching casually against the statue's pedestal.

ARES:

Need help?

XENA (gives one of the attacking soldiers a kick in the midsection that sends him flying, his arms and legs flailing in the air):

No th-- (she pauses and glances at Gabrielle, who is skillfully blocking an attacker's swords with her sais but looks somewhat distracted; then she looks at Ares, a faint smile touching the corners of her mouth) As a matter of fact, I do.

ARES:

Oh really. (a Roman soldier's sword goes through his chest; he winces slightly and yanks the blade out) Hey, watch the vest! (the camera pans quickly to the soldier, who falls down in a dead faint, and then back to Ares, who is smirking) So?

XENA (punches out one Roman while striking another with the flat of the sword and knocking him down; as she speaks, she seems to be slightly out of breath):

Would you zap yourself over to the inn and watch the kid?

Close-up of Gabrielle's shocked face as she turns to Xena.

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

Another Roman runs up to attack Gabrielle; she kicks, aiming at his sword, but she is slightly distracted and misses her target. The Roman strikes out, the tip of his sword slashing the skin just above her armor, but in the next moment Xena knocks him down.

ARES (incredulous):

Watch the *what*?

XENA (manages to stay unflappable while sparring with another Roman):

The kid. Darion. Just make sure he doesn't get in any trouble.

ARES:

Let me get this straight. I baby-sit while you and Blondie kick some Roman ass.

XENA (smirks as her blow sends her opponent staggering back):

Sounds good to me.

ARES (shakes his head):

You really owe me for this one.

XENA (slyly):

I'll check the going rate for babysitters.

The Roman charges her again. Leaning on her sword and using it for leverage, she lifts herself up, her legs and torso almost parallel to the ground, and kicks him hard in the chest, throwing him back. He lands on the ground and is knocked out.

ARES (appreciatively):

Oooh. Nice move.

XENA (lands on her feet):

Thanks. So, are you going or not?

ARES (grumbles):

Yeah, yeah.

GABRIELLE:

Oh--Ares? Please don't talk to Darion about... (winces) ...things that aren't suitable for a child.

ARES:

I think that rules out pretty much everything I *can* talk about.

He smirks at Gabrielle and vanishes. Xena and Gabrielle look around at the Roman soldiers who are lying on the ground around them, groaning.

XENA:

I think we're all done here.

They race toward the curia, which can be seen in the distance, fierce fighting raging on its steps.

CUT TO

The top of the curia steps. Several Roman soldiers who are still trying to beat the crowd back from the doors throw down their weapons. Loud cheers go up. People start banging on the doors of the curia.

VOICES IN THE CROWD:

- Open up!
- The people have spoken!
- Break down the doors!

Two axe-wielding men in leather aprons, obviously carpenters, emerge from the crowds and start chopping down the doors. Suddenly the doors creak and start opening. The carpenters stop. The doors swing open and the crowd pours in.

DISSOLVE TO

Inside the curia, some time later. The floor of the Senate meeting hall is strewn with remnants of broken benches. Several dead bodies, of people from the crowd, soldiers, and two senators, can be seen lying on the floor. Xena, Gabrielle, Agrippina, and Domitius are wandering through the hall surveying the wreckage.

XENA (to Gabrielle, sadly):

It didn't have to come to this.

GABRIELLE:

Look!

She points to a body lying face down by the podium of the meeting hall. It's a dark-haired man in a dark shirt and a blood-stained white cloak. Xena walks up to the man and turns him over. It's Drusus. He's dead, his eyes wide open.

XENA (looks up at the others, uneasily):

He was stabbed in the back...

AGRIPPINA (gently):

Xena, you did your best to avoid bloodshed. It's not your fault that it wasn't enough.

Xena places her hand over Drusus' eyes, closing them. Then she rises, looking troubled.

The camera pans to several senators, including Rufus, who come in. Rufus is carrying the golden wreath.

RUFUS (to Domitius):

You are the new emperor, Domitius. (somewhat uncomfortably) May you wear your title well.

DOMITIUS (nods in acknowledgment):

Thank you, Senators. (glances at Agrippina) But I can only accept this honor on one condition: that my mother, the Empress Agrippina, will rule by my side.

The senators exchange somewhat startled looks.

SENATOR #4:

Many senators won't be happy about it--Agrippina was banished from Rome after a court found her guilty of attempted poisoning...

SENATOR #2:

And many others believe that her trial was a travesty. It's time to put the past to rest. (to Agrippina) Your wisdom and your nobility will be great assets for the Empire.

AGRIPPINA (smiles):

I can only hope to justify the trust the people of Rome have placed in me.

SENATOR #2:

Come, let's make the announcement.

Rufus motions to an attendant who is carrying a purple toga edged with a gold stripe. The attendant hands the toga to Domitius, who puts it on over his leathers.

DOMITIUS:

I'm ready.

CUT TO

The forum in front of the curia. The crowd waits tensely. Many people are wounded. The sky is lit up with reddish reflections of distant fires.

The senators with Domitius and Agrippina emerge from the doors of the curia. They are followed by Xena and Gabrielle, who come down the steps and stand in the front row of the crowd.

RUFUS:

People of Rome! Here is your new emperor--Lucius Domitius Nero.

The crowd erupts in cheers as Rufus places the golden wreath on Nero's head.

DOMITIUS NERO (takes Agrippina's hand):

And here is my co-regent, the Empress Agrippina.

The cheers grow even louder.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle walk down a street in Rome.

GABRIELLE (looks at Xena and shakes her head):

I can't believe you got Ares to baby-sit Darion.

XENA (chuckles):

You can't believe I asked him, or you can't believe he agreed?

GABRIELLE (wrinkles her nose):

Hmm...both, actually.

XENA (shrugs):

Hey, you got Aphrodite to baby-sit him. Just be grateful she didn't give him a detailed description of those carvings in her temple.

GABRIELLE (looks away, embarrassed, then turns back to Xena with a sly smile):

Did Athena say something once about Ares being whipped?

XENA:

He's not whipped. He just wants to stay on my good side.

GABRIELLE (teasing):

You have a good side?

XENA:

Occasionally.

GABRIELLE (chuckles):

He's whipped.

CUT TO

The room at the inn. Darion is sitting on the bed, watching Ares raptly. Ares stands in the middle of the room, holding his sword in front of him. Behind him, the door opens slowly.

ARES:

So, let's say the enemy is charging you from behind and you don't have room to turn around--you twirl the sword in your hand like this (twirls the sword) and then thrust backwards (he twirls it again and then rams it past his side, aiming behind him) and get them right in the--

The sound of someone clearing their throat is heard. Ares nearly drops the sword and turns around to find Xena leaning on the doorframe, a smirk on her face, her arms crossed. Gabrielle is standing next to her. Ares quickly slips the sword in his scabbard, trying to look as innocent as possible.

DARION (joyfully):
Gabrielle! Xena!

He runs toward Gabrielle and hugs her tightly.



XENA (gives Ares a wry look):
Suitable for a child, huh?

ARES:
It most certainly is. The kid should know something about the practical side of life.

Gabrielle looks up at him and shakes her head.

GABRIELLE (to Darion):
Are you okay?

DARION (enthusiastically):
Oh, yeah! We had a great time! Ares was telling me all about the war between the gods and the titans and then he showed me some toy soldiers who were actually moving and fighting each other and then--

GABRIELLE:
Shh, sweetie. You'll tell me about it later. (glares at Ares) I get the picture.

ARES (mockingly to Gabrielle):
You're welcome. (to Xena) So, that quality time we were talking about--

XENA (chuckles):
I'll get back to you on that. (glances at Gabrielle and Darion) Uh...thanks--I think.

Ares grins at her and vanishes.

GABRIELLE (sighs):
I think we have to line up some new babysitters.

CUT TO

Day. A veranda in the imperial palace, luxuriously decorated with marble and gold statues drowning in greenery and flowers--roses, lilacs, and more exotic fare. Agrippina (in a gorgeous blue and gold dress), Nero (in his purple toga, with the gold laurel crown on his head), Xena and Gabrielle (in their leathers) and Darion are seated around a table laden with fruit and wine, Agrippina and Xena on one side of the table, Gabrielle and Nero on the other, with Darion next to Gabrielle. Darion is eating a peach.

GABRIELLE (smiling):

I think you're going to be a great emperor after all.

NERO:

In my heart, Gabrielle, I will always be an artist.

The camera pans to Xena and Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA:

I want you to know that you two are always welcome in Rome. We have issued an official pardon to your daughter--she can come here any time she wants.

XENA (nods):

Thank you, Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA:

No, thank *you*. This couldn't have happened without you. (pauses, seeing Xena's slightly troubled look) Believe me, you won't regret this.

XENA (quietly):

I hope you're right.

The camera pans to Darion, now eating grapes.

DARION (to Agrippina):

So, are you actually going to live in this place?

AGRIPPINA (smiles at him indulgently):

Of course, little one. I've lived here before.

DARION:

Wow... Did you ever get lost?

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion (sitting in the saddle in front of Gabrielle) are riding down a wide road, with other riders, horse-carts, and pedestrians around. The setting sun is blazing ahead of them.

GABRIELLE:

So, Darion, what was the one thing you liked best about Rome?

DARION (scrunches up his face):

Hmm... I think it was when Ares let me put on his gauntlets.

XENA:

Aren't they a little too big for you?

DARION:

Nah. (casually, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world) He just went like this-- (waves his hand) and they fit me perfectly. Can I have gauntlets like that?

GABRIELLE:

I think you're a little too young for that, sweetie.

DARION:

All right. Then I want a pet rabbit.

GABRIELLE (chuckles and ruffles his hair):

We'll see about that.

DARION (sighs and fidgets a little):

I'm tired.

GABRIELLE:

Why don't you just lean back and get some sleep, okay?

She bends down and kisses his forehead.

DARION (yawns):

Okay...

He leans back, settling against Gabrielle.

CUT TO

A little further down the road. Darion is sound asleep.

GABRIELLE (to Xena):

So...did we do the right thing?

XENA (after a pause):

I think so. I saw Rufus today, while you and Darion were at the theater. He told me that when Drusus' quarters at the palace were searched, they found more letters showing that he and Claudius were planning an invasion of Britannia.

GABRIELLE (nods):

You think Agrippina and Nero will turn out to be better rulers than all the emperors who came before?

XENA (quietly):

I hope so.

The camera pulls back to show the walls and gates of Rome behind them as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Roman history was mangled during the production of this motion picture.]