

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT

“Judgment Calls”

Production #XWP174/SS40
Episode #8.16

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Logline

A rift between Agrippina and Nero brings Xena and Gabrielle back to Rome—where some shocking revelations await them both.

Airdate

August 24, 2003

TEASER

FADE IN

A camp at night. Xena and Gabrielle sit before a campfire while Darion can be seen asleep in his bedroll.

GABRIELLE:

Okay. Truth or dare?

XENA:

Dare.

GABRIELLE:

Come on, Xena! You always choose dare. Where's the fun in that?

XENA:

And you always choose the truth. (She yawns in an exaggerated fashion)

GABRIELLE:

The whole point of the game is to reveal something about yourself--something you would never tell otherwise.

XENA:

Maybe there are some things people shouldn't know about one another.

GABRIELLE (smiles a little):

The truth hurts sometimes. But I'm a bard! I'm supposed to be curious.

XENA:

Careful. Don't forget what curiosity did for the cat.

GABRIELLE:

Please, just this once? (she smiles.) For me?

XENA (sighs):

Okay--just this once. Truth!

GABRIELLE (stares at her in shock):

Truth? Really? Well--I never expected you to pick--now I don't know what to ask... (she looks back at Darion to make sure he's asleep)

XENA (in a conspicuously bored tone):

Ask anything you want. When did I first kiss a boy--how old was I when I lost my virginity--

GABRIELLE (probingly narrows her eyes at Xena):

How long have you been in love with Ares?

For a moment, Xena gapes at her silently.

XENA (quietly):

What?

GABRIELLE:

It's a simple question. How long have you been in lo--

XENA (impatiently):

I heard you. Where do you come up with this kind of stuff?

GABRIELLE:

Come on, Xena! The truth! Or are you scared?

Xena doesn't react to Gabrielle's obvious baiting--which frustrates Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

I'm warning you! If you don't tell me I'm going to think up the worst dare I possibly can.

XENA:

Whatever you dish out I can take.

GABRIELLE:

Okay, you asked for it. Let's see... (she studies Xena a moment, deep in thought. After a moment her expression brightens with inspiration.) I know! Your dare is that you've got to call Ares here, right now, and tell him you've decided to give up the warrior business and become a poet.

XENA (snorts):

There's *no way* Ares would ever believe--

GABRIELLE (interrupting):

And then--and then you have to recite a poem for him. Hmm... How about this:

*Violets are blue,
Roses are red,
Daisies are pretty,
War makes me sad.*

Xena's eyes widen in horror and revulsion with every line Gabrielle recites. Finally she throws up her hands.

XENA:

Okay! Okay, you win! The truth...

GABRIELLE (nods knowingly):

I knew I'd get you with the poem.

XENA:

The truth is... (she is lost in thought for a moment) ...the truth is--I'm not sure.

GABRIELLE:

You're not sure? Oh come on--you're not getting out that easily!

XENA (rolls her eyes, concealing her obvious embarrassment):

Look, Gabrielle...when you do what I do, you don't have a lot of time to stop and get in touch with your feelings.

GABRIELLE (gently):

Was it since he gave up his godhood for you?

XENA (shakes her head):

No, I think it was before...maybe when-- (she looks very thoughtful, then perks up and lowers her voice to a whisper) What was that?

GABRIELLE (exasperated):

Yeah, sure--you don't expect me to fall for that--

XENA (raises her hand, motioning to Gabrielle to be quiet):

Shh--there's someone--

A noise is heard in the underbrush; a man stumbles out toward Xena, and Xena and Gabrielle both leap to their feet.

XENA:

Milo!

MILO:

Xena--Gabrielle! Thank the gods I've found you!

XENA:

What's wrong? Has something happened to Agrippina?

MILO (nods, gasping for breath):

Yes! She's--she's been... (his voice breaks off)

GABRIELLE:

Just relax and try to breathe slowly.

Milo nods and struggles to catch his breath while Xena looks on impatiently.

XENA:

What about Agrippina, Milo? Is she in trouble?

Milo nods, his breath returning to normal.

MILO:

She sent me to find you. It's Nero! Since you were last in Rome, he's--he's changed. He's turning into a ruthless tyrant--only Agrippina has had the courage to stand up to him. So he silenced her--the only way he could.

XENA (with a touch of fear in her voice):

What did he do to her?

MILO:

He accused her of trying to seize sole power for herself, and had her exiled to Bauli--it's a small island a short distance from Rome.

XENA:

She's alive.

MILO:

For the moment. Agrippina fears that Nero won't stop there. She's convinced that now that she's out of Rome, he'll--finish the job. Agrippina needs you, Xena. You're the only person in the entire Empire that can protect her from her son.

CUT TO

A calm moonlit night at sea. A long shot of a ship sailing across toward an island dimly visible in the distance.

The camera slowly zooms in on the ship.

CUT TO

A modest cabin inside the ship, illuminated by an oil lamp. Agrippina is resting on a couch. Her elderly slave Smyrna, whom we saw in *THE BONDS WE CHOOSE*, is sitting on a low stool next to her.

SMYRNA:

My lady, I'm sure he will come to his senses and bring you back.

AGRIPPINA (chuckles bitterly):

For my funeral pyre.

SMYRNA (gasps):

Surely you don't think... My lady, your son is not an evil man. He's just young and hot-tempered and--misguided.

AGRIPPINA (sighs):

I wish I could be as sure of that as you are. Yet here I am, thinking that at this very moment, my own son may be plotting--

She is interrupted as the ceiling of the cabin collapses with a deafening crash.

As the dust settles, shouts are heard from outside the cabin.

A large piece of the cabin's roof has fallen on the couch where Agrippina was lying, covering it completely so that she cannot be seen.

After a few moments, we see the piece of wood move slowly, then tip over and fall to the floor. Agrippina sits up, stunned, and looks around. She touches the high sides of the couch, which kept her from being crushed by the falling piece of wood, then shakes her head and gets up a little gingerly.

AGRIPPINA:

Smyrna?

There is no answer. Agrippina looks around; the camera pans over to Smyrna on the floor, partially covered with debris. She is not moving; there is blood on the floor around her head. Agrippina bends over her, then stands up and shakes her head sorrowfully.

FEMALE VOICE (outside, screaming hysterically):

My Empress! My Empress!

AGRIPPINA (shouts):

I'm all right!

CUT TO

A member of the crew and an elegant-looking woman in a light blue gown, obviously a noblewoman, helps a still-dazed Agrippina up on the deck. The camera pans over the deck. The crew is running around in a panic; people are shouting incoherently; a few are seen hauling a small rowboat. Cries of "We're sinking!" and "Save yourselves!" are heard.

AGRIPPINA (to the woman, calming down):

Acerronia, what happened? Did we hit a rock?

ACERRONIA (distraught):

I don't know--thank the gods you're alive!

CREWMAN (stammers):

I don't know what's happening, my lady--it was as if--all of a sudden, the ship started falling apart!

There is a loud screech. Agrippina looks up and sees that a mast is falling.

AGRIPPINA:

Run!

She dashes off in one direction, Acerronia and the crewman in another. The mast falls on the deck with a loud crash. Pan over to the ship's helm, which starts to wobble and creak, and then comes off as well. The ship tilts and begins to sink.

Pan to Agrippina, who looks around her and jumps in the water.

CUT TO

A rowboat with three men in it, getting away from the ship, which is seen sinking. Shouts and scream are still heard from the sinking ship.

In the near-darkness, someone is seen swimming toward the boat.

FEMALE VOICE (muffled):

Help! Help me!

The boat moves on.

FEMALE VOICE (louder, sputtering):

Help! I am your Empress!

One of the men in the boat signals to another and the boat slows down. The woman in the water swims closer to the boat.

One of the men raises an oar over the woman's head and forcefully brings it down as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Night at the campsite. Xena is preparing Argo for travel while Gabrielle looks on in disapproval.

GABRIELLE:

I know we've had our differences with Domitius, Xena, but I can't believe he'd do anything to hurt his mother.

XENA (turns and glares at Gabrielle):

You know, this isn't just your friend Domitius anymore. It's Nero, Emperor of Rome.

GABRIELLE (with a touch of resentment in her voice):

And what is that supposed to mean? You're so quick to rush to judgment without even bothering to find out what really happened.

XENA:

That's why I'm going to see Agrippina--to get to the bottom of this.

GABRIELLE:

And what makes you so sure you can trust her?

XENA:

What makes you so sure you can trust Nero?

GABRIELLE:

Xena, he's not the monster you make him out to be.

XENA (snorts):

Oh yeah--he's a real prince.

GABRIELLE (holding up her hands placatingly):

All I'm saying is that we shouldn't side with Agrippina until we have a chance to hear Domitius' side of the story.

XENA:

Gabrielle, if Agrippina believes she's in danger and that she needs my help then that's good enough for me.

GABRIELLE:

Well, I don't believe it. Let me go and talk to Domitius.

XENA (shakes her head):

No. I don't think that's such a good--

GABRIELLE:

Xena, I know him! He'll listen to me. Maybe I can end this feud between him and his mother.

Xena shakes her head slowly, contemplating this. Finally she sighs.

XENA:

Okay.

DISSOLVE TO

A field at dusk. Xena and Gabrielle are both on horseback, wearing dark cloaks; Darion is in the saddle with Gabrielle. He is dozing.

XENA (quietly, so as not to wake up Darion):

Are you sure you want to do this?

GABRIELLE (a little impatiently):

Xena, we've been over this before. I think I can help.

XENA (gives her a sharp, worried look):

Just make sure you stay safe.

GABRIELLE (winces a little):

Xena, you don't think that Domitius would ever... (shakes her head) I'll be all right.

XENA:

We meet up in Ostia in two days--at the tavern in the port. (she looks at Gabrielle gravely) Gabrielle, if you're not there--

GABRIELLE (nodding confidently):

Don't worry--I'll be there.

CUT TO

A long shot of Xena, still wearing the cloak over her customary leathers, getting off a boat at a small dock on what is obviously an island. The camera zooms in as Xena comes up to a fisherman unloading fish from his net.

XENA (appreciatively):

Nice catch.

The fisherman turns to her; he is a middle-aged, stocky man with a weather-bitten face and a scraggly russet beard.

FISHERMAN (shrugs):

I've had better.

XENA:

Then this island must be a great fishing spot. (businesslike) Can you tell me where Agrippina's house is?

FISHERMAN:

Agrippina? The Empress?

XENA (obviously getting impatient):

What, you have more than one Agrippina on this island?

FISHERMAN:

You're here to see her, then? (off Xena's glare) Did you hear about the shipwreck?

XENA (gives him a worried look):

Shipwreck?

FISHERMAN:

A terrible thing, it was. Such a shame, too. Another half hour and it would have reached the shore. (shakes his head) Terrible. And that poor woman's body washing up on the shore the next morning, with her head all bashed in--

XENA (brusquely):
Agrippina? She's dead?

FISHERMAN (shocked):
No, the gods love you! No, the Empress is alive and well. Shaken up, she was, but not injured. She swam to shore. (shakes his head admiringly) A real strong lady.

XENA (breathes an audible sigh of relief):
All right. Where's her house?

The camera starts to pull back as we hear the fisherman's voice fading.

FISHERMAN:
Just walk down this path and then--

CUT TO

Xena knocks on the door of a small brick house with a garden. A glum-looking female slave opens the door.

XENA:
I'm here to see the Empress Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA'S VOICE (off-screen):
Xena!

CUT TO

Inside the modestly furnished house. Agrippina and Xena sit on a couch, a fruit-laden tray in front of them on a table.

AGRIPPINA:
I barely recognize my own son anymore. I've never thought much of his passion for poetry--I thought it was too frivolous a pastime for an emperor--but now he performs on the stage in Rome!

XENA (wryly):
Well, the theater isn't my thing--but if that's what he's into... (shrugs) Sounds like a harmless enough hobby to me.

AGRIPPINA:
Xena, whenever he performs, he orders the Praetorian guards to lock all the exits--no one is to leave until he is finished. For *any* reason. (off Xena's shocked look) Once, a pregnant woman gave birth--right in her seat. Another time, a man who tried to push his way past the guards was beaten so badly that he may be left crippled. (pan to Xena, who nods slowly) And there's more. His hostility toward the followers of Eli has become an obsession--he blames them for his humiliation in that wretched affair with the slaves of Senator Gracchus. (Xena looks at her in alarm, narrowing her eyes) He has had several Elijan leaders thrown into prison on charges of conspiracy. He's also had several senators and noblemen jailed--mainly because he was starting to fear that their popularity would pose a threat to his power...

XENA (grimly):

And you want *me* to do something to stop him.

AGRIPPINA:

We put him in power, Xena--you and I. (off Xena's stricken look) We're responsible.

CUT TO

A stately room in the imperial palace in Rome. Gabrielle and Darion enter. The camera pans over the room and zooms in on Nero, who is sitting in a chair talking to a group of men, obviously his advisors.

ADVISOR #1 (holds up a scroll):

My Emperor--over a hundred distinguished citizens are petitioning you for the release of Petronia.

NERO (glances at the scroll and frowns):

The Elijan conspirator?

ADVISOR #2 (timidly):

She is greatly respected in Rome, Sire-- (Nero turns and notices Gabrielle as the man continues to speak) --her charitable work--

Nero rises abruptly and walks briskly toward Gabrielle, never noticing that he has bumped several people as he crosses the room.

NERO:

Gabrielle! I could hardly believe it when Tigellinus told me you were here. It's so good to see you again...and your boy, of course.

GABRIELLE (in a slightly strained and nervous voice):

It's...good to see you too, Domitius. (Gabrielle glances down at Darion who is now clutching her hand.) Darion, where are your manners? Say hello.

Darion presses himself against Gabrielle's side, burying his face.

DARION (mumbles):

Hello.

In an obvious attempt at forced affection, Nero ruffles Darion's hair and the boy ducks away. Nero looks visibly miffed for a moment but quickly recovers, pretending not to notice.

NERO:

You've come to see this evening's performance?

GABRIELLE (unconsciously smoothing Darion's hair):

Whose performance?

NERO (peevisly):

My own. (with a slightly forced smile) Gabrielle, haven't I always told you that at heart, I am an artist? Some day I should tell you about the time I spent on the road as a traveling performer.

GABRIELLE (uncertainly):

That's...wonderful. But actually, Domitius, I came here to talk about the rift between you and Agrippina. (off his sour look, trying to be light-hearted) Isn't Rome big enough for the two of you?

NERO:

For the two of us, yes--but it may not be big enough for two empresses. (he raises his eyebrows meaningfully)

GABRIELLE (slightly taken aback):

You--you have a bride?

NERO (trying to be suave):

Oh, I've--got someone in mind.

Gabrielle looks confused and uncomfortable for a moment, then collects herself and moves on.

GABRIELLE:

Domitius, we need to talk about your mother.

Nero waves his hands as if clearing away smoke.

NERO:

No! I won't allow such an unsavory subject to mar this evening's performance. I'm reciting from *Orestes*, you know. It should be quite educational for the lad.

He reaches out to pat Darion on the head but Darion ducks his hand again.

DARION:

I saw that with Gabrielle and Haimon. It was really boring.

GABRIELLE (laughs uncomfortably):

Darion! That isn't very polite. I'm sure Domitius is an accomplished--

NERO:

Haimon? And who might this *Haimon* be?

DARION (petulantly):

Haimon is our friend. Gabrielle really likes him--a lot.

NERO (gives Gabrielle a strange look):

Does she now? Well...I'm sure Euripides with *Haimon* (he makes a mocking emphasis on the name) was quite an experience. I hope Rome's interpretation won't be too much of a disappointment.

Nero turns to leave, then abruptly stops and turns back.

NERO (smiling):

Oh--and Gabrielle? Do be on time for the performance. I would hate to have to send the Praetorian Guard to fetch you.

He smiles teasingly, but one gets the sense that this may not be entirely a joke. The camera pans over to Gabrielle, who looks visibly uncomfortable, her arm wrapped protectively around Darion's shoulder.

CUT TO

Later in the afternoon. The steps of a building at the forum. Gabrielle is talking to Rufus, the Senator who helped her and Xena in POWER PLAY.

RUFUS:

The stories about Agrippina build every day. Some are even starting to suspect that Claudius' death wasn't as it appeared.

GABRIELLE:

You mean that he might have been murdered? (Rufus shrugs, as if to say "anything's possible.") But Agrippina was in exile when Claudius died.

RUFUS:

True. But some say she had a clever accomplice. I'm sure it's that rumor that has made Nero increasingly wary of his mother. She has been accused of plotting to oust her son.

GABRIELLE:

Do *you* believe that, Rufus?

RUFUS (sighs tiredly):

It's hard to know what to believe these days, Gabrielle. I've seen very little in the way of actual evidence. But the Emperor can't afford to take any chances. First Claudius, now Nero. Perhaps where there's smoke, there's fire.

CUT TO

Xena and Agrippina walk through the garden of Agrippina's house on Bauli, among shrubbery and flowers.

AGRIPPINA:

Xena-- (hesitant) --there are things I still haven't told you.

XENA (gives her a wary look):

Like what?

AGRIPPINA (reluctantly):

The shipwreck-- (trails off)

XENA (looks at her sharply):

You think it was no accident.

AGRIPPINA:

I have no proof. But the way it happened-- (shakes her head) We didn't hit a rock, there was no storm--the ship just started to fall apart. (bitterly) Rome has clever engineers.

XENA:

You really think that your own son would--

AGRIPPINA:

Believe me--I wish I didn't have the suspicions I have. There is nothing worse than... (trails off and shakes her head) I had a lady-in-waiting traveling with me, Acerronia. Her body washed ashore the morning after the shipwreck. (pauses) Xena, she hadn't drowned--her head was bashed in.

XENA:

She could have been crushed during the shipwreck.

AGRIPPINA:

It's not very likely. She was on the deck, unharmed (while Agrippina speaks, Xena listens to something intently) --I saw her jump--

With an abrupt movement, Xena pulls Agrippina off the path on which they are walking. A faint clanging sound is heard and the camera pans to an arrow that has fallen on the path--then to Xena, who has a cut on her arm. Xena and Agrippina both look up at the garden wall to see a person peering over the top of the wall; the person disappears.

XENA (grimly):

This is getting to be a habit. (to a speechless Agrippina) Go back to the house--*now!*

Xena races toward the wall and leaps up on top of the wall. The camera pans to show a figure in dark clothes (one can't see if it's a man or a woman), on a gray horse, galloping away from the house across a field, toward a nearby grove. The rider is still reasonably close.

XENA:

A-yi-yi-yi-yi!

She launches herself off the top of the wall, flipping in the air and falls hard on the ground, barely missing the escaping assassin who gallops away and disappears into the grove. Xena slowly gets up with a grunt, looking after the rider, the expression on her face a mix of frustration, disappointment and disbelief as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

On the same scene. We see a replay of Xena slowly getting up, wincing a little, and looking after the rider with a mix of frustration and disbelief. Xena turns and walks back toward the wall.

CUT TO

Inside Agrippina's house. Agrippina is sitting on the couch and sipping wine from a goblet. Xena strides in; Agrippina puts down the goblet and rises abruptly.

AGRIPPINA:

Well?

XENA (grimly):

He escaped. Or she...I didn't see. (shakes her head) Maybe I'm losing my touch...

AGRIPPINA (grips her arm):

You see? What did I tell you? My own son is trying to murder me! (she lets go of Xena's arm) If they succeed, I hope they strike me here (points to her belly) --where I carried that monster!

XENA:

You're sure it was him?

Agrippina walks across the room and stands at the window with her back to Xena. She is silent for a moment.

AGRIPPINA:

Xena... (hesitates) I haven't told you--everything.

XENA:

What else?

AGRIPPINA (turns slowly toward Xena):

I have--reason to believe that, while living in Greece during my exile, he was involved with a gang of criminals.

XENA (shocked):

A gang of--what kind of gang?

AGRIPPINA:

A gang that went around the Greek countryside robbing peasants.

XENA (disbelieving):

Why would he do something like that?

AGRIPPINA:

Not for the money, of course. Just for the thrill of it.

XENA (narrows her eyes suspiciously):

And this is based on--what?

Agrippina hesitates for a moment, then comes closer to Xena.

AGRIPPINA (in a low voice):

Two months ago, a man showed up at the palace wanting to see me. He said he had information about the--things Domitius had been doing in Greece...that he had been one of his accomplices. He told me that if I didn't pay him off, he would go to some of Domitius' enemies in the Senate and give the information to them--even take them to Greece to talk to the witnesses. (She pauses)

XENA:

Well?

AGRIPPINA:

He showed me evidence...a piece of papyrus on which he said Domitius had scribbled some information about a village they planned to raid. (she looks stricken) It looked like his handwriting. I still didn't want to believe it--I told myself it had to be a forgery. I asked a trusted servant of mine, a freedman, to investigate the man and his story. (She pauses again, obviously struggling with what she has to say next)

XENA (growing impatient):

Go on.

AGRIPPINA (sighs):

A few days later, they were both found murdered--the man who tried to blackmail me, and my servant.

She looks meaningfully at Xena. A close-up of Xena's face as she listens intently.

CUT TO

A banquet at Nero's palace. Everyone is lounging about, just having finished their dinner. Nero has a sleepy, surfeited expression on his face. Gabrielle sits across from him, almost fidgety with impatience.

GABRIELLE:

Domitius, I'm sure your performance alone is going to be worth my trip here, but I was hoping we would have a chance to talk about why I really came. Your mother--

NERO (smirking):

Io! Io! Fate!

Another blow, another dreadful blow

Befalls the tragic house of Atreus--

Gabrielle stares.

Nero gains to his feet and bows gallantly.

NERO:

Excuse me. My muse beckons.

Cross fade to the same scene. It is obviously much later. Nero performs before the crowd. Darion leans tiredly against Gabrielle's side. She puts her arm around him and hides a yawn behind her hand.

NERO:

...She ran from her father, she ran from her man
She slaughtered in thousands the Greeks by the river
her tears fell like rain as cold steel took their lives
At Troy by the banks of Scamander.

DARION:

Gabrielle? I have to...you know...

GABRIELLE:

Okay, sweetie.

She gets up and takes Darion by the hand, heading for the door, where a Praetorian guard stands. He holds up an arm to bar the way.

GABRIELLE (lowers her voice to a near-whisper):

Excuse me. My little boy needs to...go out.

GUARD (likewise in a near-whisper):

I'm sorry but I can't allow you to leave.

GABRIELLE:

Why not?

GUARD:

The emperor has called for the doors to be locked--no one is to leave during his performance.

GABRIELLE:

Well, *I'm* answering a higher call--the call of nature.

GUARD:

You would dare risk insulting the emperor by walking out on his performance?

GABRIELLE:

Would he be less insulted if my son had an accident right here on the floor?

GUARD:

I have my orders. No one is allowed to leave during the Emperor's performance--for *any* reason.

GABRIELLE:

But we've already been here for hours. How much longer are we supposed to wait?

GUARD:

Sometimes the emperor can go all night.

In the background Nero can be seen performing, pacing back and forth, gesturing dramatically. Darion turns to look.

NERO:

It's party time! Let's shout and dance!

Play the music! Raise the roof!

Let them think "it's just the chorus" -

The victim's screams will not be heard.

Darion's eyes go wide and he throws himself against Gabrielle, crying and screaming hysterically.

Nero stops his performance, glaring as Gabrielle's attempts to soothe Darion fail. He finally sighs in exasperation.

NERO:

Gabrielle, is he quite finished yet? My performance is being terribly disrupted.

GABRIELLE:

Domitius...I'm sorry...I don't know what's--

Darion sobs harder and Nero rolls his eyes impatiently.

NERO:

Take him out.

Gabrielle picks Darion up in her arms and rushes him out.

CUT TO

Gabrielle sits beside Darion's bed. He sleeps soundly as she looks on in concern, stroking his face gently. A soft knock falls on the door.

CUT TO

Gabrielle steps outside the door where Nero is waiting for her.

NERO:

So...how is the boy?

GABRIELLE (resentment is clear in her tone):

Fine now. Though being locked in during your performance didn't do him any good.

NERO:

I'm sorry, Gabrielle. But I need to focus when I perform. Locking the doors is the price we all must pay for my art.

GABRIELLE:

And you expect a little boy to understand--or even care--about your art?

After a moment Nero sighs and looks at her sheepishly.

NERO:

Perhaps you're right. I might have been a bit...too passionate in the presentation of my craft. (he pauses and reaches out to touch her arm) Perhaps the pressure is finally getting to me.

GABRIELLE:

Domitius--

NERO (turns away):

It's just this situation with my mother.

GABRIELLE:

Right. We should talk about that.

NERO:

Nothing to talk about, Gabrielle. Mother has wounded me deeply--deeply! She might as well have plunged a dagger into my heart!

GABRIELLE:

Domitius, I know you think Agrippina was plotting against you. Perhaps we can find a way to bring the two of you together.

NERO:

Against me? Oh, Gabrielle! Do you think my heart would be so heavy if this was just about me? No...it goes so much deeper than that.

GABRIELLE (puzzled):

What do you mean?

Nero purses his lips. He is silent a moment, then sighs.

NERO:

Come with me, Gabrielle. There's something I want you to see.

CUT TO

The inside of a temple. It is ostentatiously decorated, with marble, gold, and precious stones as well as flowers in vases and garlands. Looming at the center of the temple is a large marble statue of a man in a toga with a gold laurel wreath on his head, a large heap of flowers before the pedestal. Nero and Gabrielle enter. Nero strides up to the statue. He turns to Gabrielle, his arms stretched wide.

NERO:

The temple of Claudius. I commissioned its building not long after my return to Rome.

He glances at Gabrielle expectantly. She looks around, trying to hide her disapproval over the ostentation of the temple.

GABRIELLE:

It's--it's very...impressive.

NERO:

Claudius deserved a temple befitting his greatness. I realize now that he was the greatest of all the Caesars--Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus.

GABRIELLE (gently):

Domitius--we were talking about your mother...

NERO (breaking into a dramatic sing-song):

Our mother...that vicious monster,
Enmeshed her husband in a knotted net
And murdered him, as helplessly
He flailed his prisoned limbs.
Her motive was not something you should ask
An unmarried girl to descry
Please draw your own conclusions.

Gabrielle stares at him, horrified comprehension dawning on her face.

GABRIELLE:

What are you saying?

NERO (sighs):

Ever since Claudius died, there have been rumors that he died at the hand of Agrippina. I refused to believe it--as any loving son would. So I decided to hold my own investigation to put an end to the vicious lies being told about my mother. (he trails off and stares silently at Gabrielle)

GABRIELLE (nervous):

And--? (off his heavy, rueful stare) You mean--it's true?

NERO:

Agrippina--his wife and my mother--has not only murdered Claudius--she has tried to murder his reputation as well. And she thinks she can cover her wickedness by appointing herself head priestess of his temple. (Nero shakes his head) Agrippina may have been able to kill the man--but I will see to it that his legacy lives on forever.

A close-up of the Gabrielle's face as she nods numbly.

DISSOLVE TO

The walls and gates of Rome, just before sunrise; the sky is a light grey, turning pink at the horizon. A rider gallops out of the gates. The camera zooms in slowly to show that the rider is Gabrielle, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

A crowded tavern. Through an open window in the background can be seen a docked ship. The camera pulls back slowly until we see Xena and Gabrielle sitting at a table across from one another. Gabrielle's hands are clenched tensely around a mug as she and Xena stare at one another a moment.

GABRIELLE:

Domitius raiding villages! (she laughs in disbelief) Xena, that's insane!

XENA:

It sounds to me like your boy crossed that line long ago.

GABRIELLE:

I admit Domitius can be a little...eccentric--

XENA (snorts):

Eccentric? Is that what you call it?

GABRIELLE:

--but he's not a thug! And if he does act a little strangely--who can blame him, after what his own mother did to Claudius?

XENA:

I can--especially since I need a little more than Nero's word to believe that Agrippina would kill her own husband.

GABRIELLE:

And you expect me to believe every wild accusation she makes about Domitius? Where's *her* proof?

Xena lets that sink in a moment, clearly at a loss for what to say next.

XENA (blurts out):

You've never liked Agrippina, have you? (off Gabrielle's stare, shakes her head in disbelief) I don't get it. You're defending a man who was about to send hundreds of slaves to their death.

GABRIELLE (defensively):

You weren't there, Xena! It broke Domitius' heart to sign that order.

XENA:

Did you ever think that maybe you're so busy patting yourself on the back for having a Roman emperor wrapped around your finger that you're not seeing Nero for what he really is?

GABRIELLE:

Did you ever think that sometimes you just can't see the good in people?

XENA:

Oh--you mean like Najara?

They stare at one another in open-mouthed shock a moment. Finally Xena reaches out to touch Gabrielle's arm.

XENA:

Gabrielle, I'm sorry--

Gabrielle pulls away from Xena.

GABRIELLE:

You've been waiting a long time to throw that up in my face.

XENA (anguished):

No! No--I didn't mean it. I'm sorry. Look--this fighting is getting us nowhere--

GABRIELLE:

You're wrong about Domitius, Xena--and I'm going to prove it.

XENA:

Okay, Gabrielle. (she sighs wearily) I know you think you can trust Nero but...just be careful, okay?

Gabrielle looks at Xena a moment. The caution in Xena's tone makes her pause a moment. She smiles, though clearly her confidence in Nero is shaken a little.

GABRIELLE:

Of course. (she reaches out and squeezes Xena's hand) You watch out for yourself too, okay?

Xena mechanically squeezes Gabrielle's hand in return.

XENA:

I'll be okay.

She rises from the table.

CUT TO

The dock outside the tavern. It is packed with people--merchants, sailors, travelers. Xena distractedly weaves her way through the crowd. A woman wearing a hooded cloak is in Xena's path. She tries to get out of her way but isn't able to move quickly enough. Xena walks into her, knocking the woman off balance. Never breaking her stride, she turns her head slightly and offers an absentminded apology.

XENA:

Sorry...

WOMAN (in a high pitched falsetto):

No harm done!

Xena continues on. The woman stops and turns, her back to the camera, watching Xena disappear into the crowd. Once Xena is out of sight, she turns around and we see her face. It's Sabina. She smiles coldly.

SABINA (shakes her head):

Xena--I'm insulted. Too busy to spare a moment for an old friend? (the camera zooms in for a close-up as she grins wryly) Or maybe you're losing your touch.

CUT TO

A montage:

* A wide overhead shot of a small sailboat crossing the waters toward Bauli.

* Gradually superimposed on this image, a close-up of Xena, her face hard and grim.

* A long shot of Xena getting off the boat at the dock at Bauli. She is seen paying the boat captain and then taking a path that leads uphill.

CUT TO

Xena walking up the path, amidst sparse trees. Agrippina's house is already visible in the distance. Suddenly Xena stops and tenses.

XENA (quietly):

Ares.

In a flash of blue light, Ares materializes next to her.

ARES:

Hello, Xena. (He reaches over to touch her face)

XENA (puts her hand over his; distractedly):

Hello.

ARES:

Busy?

XENA (softly and a little grimly):

Yeah.

ARES:

Want some advice?

XENA (looks at him warily):

What?

ARES:

Get out of this.

XENA (shocked):

What are you talking about?

ARES:

This whole thing between Nero and his mommy. You can't do any good here. (He pauses) Go back to Greece, Xena.

XENA (narrows her eyes at him suspiciously):

Wait. Do you have--something going on with Nero?

ARES (exasperated):

Maybe you've got me confused with Gabrielle. (off her hurt and angry stare, raises his hands in a gesture of surrender) Sorry. No, I don't.

XENA (still upset):

Then why--

ARES (tries to sound gentle despite his obvious frustration):

Because this is not going to turn out well for you.

XENA:

So *you* think Agrippina's lying too?

ARES:

I didn't say that. Has it occurred to you that maybe she's telling the truth about Nero--and he's telling the truth about her? (off Xena's shocked look) Obviously not. Well, think about it. What if they deserve each other?

XENA (belligerently):

Do you know something?

ARES:

No. I just don't trust either one of them. And neither should you--or Gabrielle. Let the Romans fight their own battles.

A close-up on Ares as he gives Xena a meaningful look; then a close-up of Xena who stares back at him, her face full of doubt.

XENA (shakes her head):

Ares, I promised I'd protect Agrippina. I'm not about to go back on that. (her lips tighten and her expression becomes defensive and defiant) She's a good person. Maybe that's something you don't understand.

ARES (purses his lips and shrugs):

Do whatever you want. Just--watch out.

He vanishes. Xena stands looking thoughtfully at the spot where he vanished, her expression softening again. Then she shakes her head and walks on.

CUT TO

A stately room in Nero's palace. Nero is half reclining on a plush, velvet covered settee. His chin is resting in his hand, a bored expression on his face. His advisor stands nervously before him.

AQUILO:

My emperor, there is still the matter of the Elijan Petronia to be dealt with. The people are with her.

Nero rubs his forehead in agitation.

NERO:

Elijans again. They do make a nuisance out of themselves, don't they, Aquilo?

AQUILO:

Petronia is very popular with the people, Caesar.

NERO:

True...and that makes her even more dangerous. Wouldn't you agree, Aquilo?

Aquilo opens his mouth to respond and Gabrielle enters.

NERO:

Gabrielle! (he leaps out of his chair and rushes to her) You're here! I had wondered where you had gone off to.

Gabrielle pats his arm in reassurance.

GABRIELLE:

I'm fine, Domitius--fine.

Nero takes her arm and begins to lead her out.

NERO:

Let me escort you to breakfast. I had the kitchen keep it warm for you.

GABRIELLE:

I should really check on Darion before I--

NERO:

Of course! Of course! We'll check on the boy together.

They have almost made it to the door.

AQUILO (timidly):

My emperor?

Nero turns back, his annoyance is evident.

NERO:

Yes, Aquilo? Speak fast. You're keeping our Gabrielle from her breakfast.

AQUILO:

The Petronia matter, my emperor. It has yet to be decided.

NERO:

Petronia? Oh yes--the Elijan. The Elijans are pacifists, are they not, Aquilo?

AQUILO (nods):

They are, my emperor.

NERO:

Is there any reason to believe that Petronia is going to have a lapse of faith and raise an army against me?

AQUILO:

I find that highly unlikely, my emperor.

NERO:

Never let it be said that Rome is without compassion. Petronia is free. (he makes a grand gesture with his hand) I don't want her to walk out of here empty handed, Aquilo. Make sure she receives 12 bushels of grain to distribute amongst the poor.

AQUILO (bowing):

I'll see it done, Caesar.

Aquilo marches out and Nero turns back to Gabrielle, touching her elbow.

NERO:

Breakfast awaits.

GABRIELLE:

Domitius, that was a good thing you just did.

NERO:

In your honor, Gabrielle. You inspire me to greatness.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, Domitius. I don't think--

NERO:

History is going to remember me as Nero the Compassionate--and it will all be due to you. You're a very wise woman, Gabrielle. I think you might even be right about trying to make peace with my mother. As a gesture of good will, I've arranged for her possessions to be delivered to her on Bauli.

GABRIELLE:

That's wonderful, Domitius.

NERO:

Granted twenty five slaves is only a small fraction of how many she owns--but it's a gesture that I hope will help smooth the way between us.

GABRIELLE:

Slaves? You're sending Agrippina slaves?

NERO (chuckling):

Yes, of course. I hardly think she has much use for her jewels on that island. I was trying to be practical.

GABRIELLE (frowning in disapproval):

Practical...

CUT TO

A room in the palace. It's dark, with only a small oil lamp burning on a table. Gabrielle is asleep in her bed; Darion is sleeping on a cot nearby. Suddenly Darion starts to toss and moan in his sleep. Gabrielle sits up, rubbing her eyes.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

Darion?

Darion is still tossing and turning, making inarticulate sounds that clearly indicate distress.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head ruefully):

Another nightmare...

She gets up and goes over to Darion's cot.

DARION (shouts in his sleep):

Raise the roof!

Gabrielle stares at him in bewilderment, then takes him by the shoulder and gently shakes him.

GABRIELLE:

Darion--Darion, wake up!

Darion flinches and opens his eyes, sitting up with a jerk. Gabrielle looks at him, obviously struck by something.

GABRIELLE (gently):

Are you okay?

Darion nods, breathing hard. Gabrielle kneels in front of the cot, putting her hands on his shoulders.

GABRIELLE:

Darion... "raise the roof" --what does that mean? (The boy glances at her, obviously nervous.) You said it in your sleep, Darion. What does it mean?

Darion's face scrunches up; he starts to cry. He leans forward, burying his face in Gabrielle's shoulder as she strokes his hair.

GABRIELLE (softly):

It's all right, baby--everything will be all right.

DARION (sobbing):

That man...that man said it!

Gabrielle stares blankly ahead.

[FLASHBACKS]

From THE BONDS WE CHOOSE:

Gabrielle's hut. Darion is frantically tossing and turning while muttering in his sleep. Gabrielle sits on the edge of the bed and touches his shoulder.

GABRIELLE:

Darion? Hey--

Obviously still in the grips of a nightmare, Darion suddenly sits upright swiping wildly with his fists and gasping in terror.

DARION:

Raise the roof!

CUT TO

From POWER PLAY:

Inside Domitius' house in Greece.

GABRIELLE (laughs and ruffles Darion's hair):

This is Darion, my--son.

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

DOMITIUS (looks curiously at Darion):

Maybe he's afraid of strangers.

CUT TO

The riot in the Roman forum. Domitius and Gabrielle are fighting next to each other.

DOMITIUS:

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

CUT TO

From THE CHALLENGE:

The village square raided by the traveling actors. Xena stands before the captured bandits who are lined up with their hands tied behind their backs.

XENA (skeptical):

So this fellow was the head of your gang and none of you know anything about him. Nice try. Anyone else want to tell me anything?

ACTRESS #1:

He's telling you the truth. All we know is, he was the son of some high-ranking Roman official who dabbled in acting.

CUT TO

From JUDGMENT CALLS:

NERO:

...Gabrielle, haven't I always told you that at heart, I am an artist? Some day I should tell you about the time I spent on the road as a traveling performer.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle in the tavern in Ostia.

GABRIELLE:

Domitius raiding villages! (she laughs in disbelief) Xena, that's insane!

[END OF FLASHBACKS]

A close-up of Gabrielle's horror-stricken face; Darion's face is still buried in her shoulder and she has her arms around him. He is not sobbing anymore and his breath is steadying.

GABRIELLE (in a hollow voice, tears in her eyes):

So it's true...

DARION (sits up and looks at her, still sniffing a little, obviously alarmed by the look on her face):

Gabrielle...are you all right?

GABRIELLE (nods distractedly):

Yeah...I'm fine. (collects herself) I'm all right, Darion. Don't worry. Everything will be all right. (She strokes his hair, her gaze growing blank again.)

DARION:

Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE (flinches and looks at him):

Yes?

DARION:

I don't like it here anymore...let's go away.

GABRIELLE (nods, a look of quiet determination on her face):

Yes, Darion. You're right. We're going away.

She hugs Darion tight, staring ahead of her with a determined yet deeply hurt look on her face, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Agrippina's house on the island. Xena and Agrippina are sitting at a table with a meal in front of them. A grim-looking Xena is absent-mindedly picking up pieces of meat from her plate.

AGRIPPINA:

So he hasn't relented...and he's repeating those horrible lies about me. (Shakes her head ruefully, then gives Xena a penetrating look and speaks bitterly) One of these days, you will believe him too.

XENA (interrupts, looking up sharply):

Agrippina--I trust you. (her look and her voice softens) You earned my trust a long time ago--when I saw you risk your life to help the people in Pompeii. (she pushes her half-empty plate away and rises from the table) I've promised to protect you and I will. I have to get you out of here--as far away from Rome as possible.

AGRIPPINA (blurts out):

And leave the empire to him? (Xena gives her a startled look and Agrippina stumbles a bit) I mean...leave him in power--when it has become so obvious that he will put that power to ill use?

XENA:

First things first. As long as you stay here, you're in danger. I can't stay here forever and--

There is a noise outside. Xena looks toward the door, instantly alert; Agrippina rises from the table, obviously nervous.

AGRIPPINA:

What's happening?

XENA:

Stay here.

As she heads toward the door, the door is flung open. The female slave who let Xena into the house rushes in.

SLAVE (excited):

My lady--it's from your son!

AGRIPPINA (wary but hopeful):

What? (pauses) Is he calling me back?

SLAVE (deflated):

No--no, my lady. But he's sent you twenty-five of your favorite slaves... (quick pan to Xena, who winces slightly) ...and also two horses and a lot of books from your library.

AGRIPPINA (with bitter sarcasm):

So Nero wants to make sure his mother doesn't get too bored in her exile. (To Xena) Have you ever seen such a devoted son? (turns to the slave with a sigh) My slaves...is Doria with them?

SLAVE:

Yes, my lady. They're all waiting to greet you.

AGRIPPINA:

All right. Xena--we'll talk about this later.

Xena nods and looks pensively after Agrippina as she heads for the door.

CUT TO

Outside the house. A group of male and female slaves, seen from the back, is waiting outside. The door opens and Agrippina comes out on the porch. The slaves start to kneel; one of them, a gray-haired man, nudges a young woman next to him who remains on her feet, and she kneels as well.

AGRIPPINA:

Get up, get up! I'm happy to see you all.

CUT TO

The docks in Ostia. Late afternoon. The camera pans over a bustling, noisy crowd; then we see Gabrielle, wearing a hooded cloak and holding Darion by the hand. As she walks briskly, she looks

around as if to make sure she isn't being followed. She approaches a few sailors who are standing around talking.

GABRIELLE:

I need a boat to Bauli. As quickly as possible.

SAILOR (looks her over skeptically):

As quickly as possible? That'll be fifteen dinars.

GABRIELLE (indignantly):

Fifteen-- (she looks around and notices a man who seems to be watching her with a little too much interest; then she sighs, defeated) All right. But we leave *right now*.

CUT TO

A room in Nero's palace. Nero paces back and forth restlessly, touching the strings of a lyre and muttering to himself in a sing-song. A nervous-looking slave approaches him; Nero stops and looks at him sharply. With his back to the camera, the slave leans toward Nero and says something inaudible.

Nero's stare grows blank and he resumes pacing around the room.

NERO (muttering):

Gabrielle is gone...

CUT TO

The garden of Agrippina's house. A moonlit night. Xena strolls through the garden and walks out through the garden gate. She walks across a field toward some rocks that turn out to be a high cliff over the sea. She sits down and looks out into the distance, obviously lost in thought. After a moment there is a flash of light and Ares materializes sitting next to her. She glances at him but remains silent.

ARES:

Can't sleep? (Xena looks at him and says nothing) So...starting to have doubts?

XENA (brusquely):

About what?

ARES:

About your friend. About what you're doing here.

XENA (defensively):

I'm not.

CUT TO

Agrippina's bedroom. Agrippina is in bed, asleep. A small oil lamp burns on the table by her bed. A dark figure approaches the bed and raises a knife over her.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares on the cliff.

ARES:

It's a power struggle between two crazy Romans. You know how that usually ends.

CUT TO

The temple of Claudius, empty and lit by torches. Nero walks in, looking around him.

NERO (with a chilly smile):

No, Mother...Rome *isn't* big enough for the two of us. Beware of Greeks bearing gifts. (grins slyly)
Enjoy your slaves.

CUT TO

Agrippina's bedroom. The knife comes down, gleaming in the moonlight.

Quick pan to Agrippina's face as her eyes fly open and she gives a strangled cry.

CUT TO

Xena looks sharply at Ares and gets up.

XENA:

I promised to protect her. And I will.

CUT TO

The temple of Claudius. Nero picks up a torch, walks over and sets fire to the wreaths in front of the statue, then flings the torch at some draperies, which instantly catch fire.

CUT TO

Agrippina's bedroom. The hand with the bloodied knife goes up and then down again.

The camera pans down to show Agrippina, the front of her nightgown spattered with blood, feebly raising her hands in an attempt to defend herself.

CUT TO

Nero walks out of the temple, the glow of the fire visible behind him.

CUT TO

Xena walks back to the house.

CUT TO

A close-up of Agrippina. Her head lolls to the side, her eyes closing as she groans hoarsely and blood trickles from her mouth.

CUT TO

Xena walks inside the house and stops in the main room, lit by several oil lamps. A sound catches her attention--it's Agrippina's groan. She stands still for a moment and then rushes toward the bedroom door.

CUT TO

Agrippina's room. Xena pushes the door open and sees Agrippina kneeling on the floor, covered in blood. Gasping, she rushes toward her and kneels next to her.

XENA:

Agrippina--

AGRIPPINA (with an effort):

Xena...he did it.

XENA (her face full of horror and anguish):

Let me look at your wounds--

AGRIPPINA:

No, it's too late... (coughs) It's funny...the girl who did it...he gave her to me. (she coughs again, blood trickling from her mouth) She looked so much--like...Doria...my girl who died... (groans a little) He got her in one of those raids they did--in a Greek village...

XENA (looks at her in shock):

Wait...how do you know that?

AGRIPPINA (grips Xena's hand):

I knew all along...I'm sorry, Xena. I lied to you.

XENA (slowly):

You knew that your son led a gang of thugs who sacked villages and kidnapped girls--and you made him the Emperor of Rome? (with a touch of anger) With *my* help?

AGRIPPINA:

That's not all. Xena--I don't have much time... I need to get this off my chest...before I die.

Xena stares at her, appalled.

AGRIPPINA:

I lied to you about Claudius, too...he never sent assassins after me...Domitius and I--

XENA (shakes her head):

I--I don't believe you--you're delirious--

AGRIPPINA (feebly lifts a hand to silence her):

Let me speak...please. Domitius and I--we set it all up...to get you to help us. (she closes her eyes, exhausted, and opens them again) And those letters about Claudius and Drusus--the plan to... (she coughs) ...invade Britannia... (she coughs again) ...forged by--his advisor...Narcissus--he was working with me...

XENA (shakes her head):

No...

AGRIPPINA:

I killed Claudius. (Pan to Xena's horrified face) I was giving him a slow poison--when I was exiled...and then, Narcissus...

Xena stares at her silently, tears in her eyes, obviously torn between grief and anger.

AGRIPPINA (clutches her hand tighter):

Xena...tell me you forgive me...that way I can die in peace...

Xena looks at her grimly and remains silent.

AGRIPPINA (smiles feebly):

We would have made a great team. (coughs) I just wish--

She slumps forward and her head drops; she's dead. Xena stares silently at her body, tears rolling down her face.

Steps are heard and Xena looks up sharply. A slave girl stops in the doorway; she is slender and of medium height, wearing a long dark dress. Her face remains hidden in the shadows.

SLAVE GIRL:

What happened?

XENA (stares blankly, her voice hollow):

She's dead. She's--she's been murdered. (She drops her head in her hands) She's dead.

SLAVE GIRL (with sudden vehemence):

Well, don't expect *me* to cry over her! I hate them all--*all* the Romans! (She chuckles bitterly) You know--her son gave me to her as a present--because I looked like her favorite slave who had died. (Xena looks up at her sharply, realization crossing her face) Just like--replacing a favorite cat or dog. He took me from my village--killed my family... (points to Agrippina's body) She knew about it--and she *thanked* him!

Xena puts Agrippina's body down on the floor, then gets up wordlessly and walks past the girl.

The camera follows Xena as she walks through the house and toward the front door. In the background, we see the slave girl follow her into the main room.

Xena opens the door and comes out on the porch. Coming toward her are Gabrielle (no longer wearing her cloak) and Darion. Xena steps off the porch and stops.

XENA (grimly):

You're back.

DARION:

I don't like it in Rome anymore, Xena. I don't want to go there ever again.

Xena looks at Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

Xena? Listen--you were right--

XENA (heavily, her face rigid and expressionless):

No. I was wrong. We both were.

GABRIELLE (looks at her, confused):

What are you talking about?

Xena glances cautiously at Darion, clearly not wanting to speak in front of him. Gabrielle picks up on this and touches his shoulder.

GABRIELLE:

Darion--sweetie, go sit down over there, okay?

Darion nods and walks toward the porch. Gabrielle waits until he is out of earshot.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--the raids on the villages--Agrippina was telling the truth about Do- (she stumbles) about Nero--

XENA:

Yeah, I know. And he was telling the truth about her. It's true. *All* of it.

GABRIELLE (stares in disbelief):

What? (she suddenly notices the dark stains on Xena's hands and her eyes widen) What happened?

XENA:

Agrippina's dead.

Gabrielle is about to say something but suddenly notices that Darion is walking into the house through the open door.

GABRIELLE (horrified):

Oh no--her body--I don't want him to--

She rushes after Darion. Xena looks after her for a moment, then turns and walks toward the garden gate.

CUT TO

Inside the house. Darion walks into the main room, looking around. The slave girl who spoke to Xena is still standing there, motionless. A close-up on Darion's face as his eyes widen.

DARION (uncertainly):

Lykia? (he pauses as the camera pulls back to show Gabrielle coming in) You--you're here?

Pan to the slave girl, who stands frozen in shock, staring at him.

LYKIA (whispers):
Darion?

DARION (shock giving way to joy):
Lykia--you're here!

He rushes toward her and wraps his arms tightly around her waist, hugging her. Lykia hugs him but the look on her face is still numb.

CUT TO

Xena is walking toward the cliff where she spoke to Ares before. She stops at the top of the cliff and stands still for a moment, her silhouette sharp and black in the moonlight. She takes off her sword, throws it down on the rocky ground at her feet, and then after a moment's reflection kicks it off the edge of the cliff. A faint clanging sound is heard as it hits the rocks below.

Xena (facing the camera) unhooks the chakram from her belt and throws it. The camera follows the chakram, zooming in on it as it gleams in the moonlight and starts to fall, then pulling back as it sinks into the foaming waves below--a shot that merges with a close-up of Xena's anguished face as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[The chickens came home to roost during the production of this motion picture.]