

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT



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Logline

A rebellion against Nero pushes Xena and Gabrielle into an unlikely alliance with Sabina.

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TEASER

FADE IN

The dining room of a busy inn. Xena is seated at a table, a plate of food in front of her. Across the table from her stands a man--thirty-ish and obviously a warrior from the way he stands with his feet wide apart and his hand resting on the hilt of the sword hanging from his hip. At the next table a child can be seen fidgeting while her parents look on in disapproval. Mechanically, Xena glances at them then up at the warrior.

XENA:

Thanks for the offer but I think I'll pass.

ANDRASH:

Too bad. We could use someone like you.

XENA:

Thanks for the compliment but--

Gabrielle descends the staircase into the dining room. She has a sleepy, slightly tousled look. She stops at the foot of the stairs and scans the room, looking for Xena.

ANDRASH:

Don't be so quick to decide. At least think about it.

XENA (nods dismissively):

Right. I will. (she glances at Gabrielle) Now get lost.

Gabrielle spots Xena and smiles, coming over to the table.

XENA:

Morning.

GABRIELLE:

What happened to you last night? Haimon and I thought you were right behind us when we came in for dinner but when we turned around you were gone.

XENA (shrugs):

I figured that three's a crowd.

Gabrielle takes a seat across from Xena. She sniffs and glances down at Xena's plate.

GABRIELLE:

What's for breakfast? It smells delicious.

Xena offers her plate to Gabrielle.

XENA:

Here. Help yourself.

GABRIELLE (smiles indulgently):

I can order for myself, Xena.

Xena places her plate in front of Gabrielle.

XENA:

Go ahead. I'm not very hungry. Besides (she grins teasingly) I'm guessing you worked up a pretty good appetite last night.

Gabrielle laughs uncomfortably and looks around. She notices Haimon coming down the stairs, yawning and stretching. She waves at him and he grins, coming over to the table.

Xena rolls her eyes and looks over at the little girl at the next table, still fidgeting and now playing with her food.

Haimon comes up behind Gabrielle and lays his hands on her shoulders. She smiles and squeezes his hand.

HAIMON:

Morning. (he leans down and nuzzles her neck, then takes a seat.) Good morning, Xena. What happened to you last--?

XENA:

Business. I had some business to take care of.

HAIMON:

Too bad. (He reaches over and takes a piece of fruit from Gabrielle's plate. Xena frowns in annoyance.) We were looking forward to you joining us for dinner.

He draws his arm around Gabrielle's shoulders. They all sit in uncomfortable silence a moment and Xena looks away. The little girl at the next table fiddles with the cup on her table as the girl's mother looks on in disapproval.

MOTHER:

Leah! Stop that and drink your cider!

Gabrielle clears her throat and shifts slightly to gently move out of Haimon's reach.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon and I have been talking.

XENA:

Really? What about?

HAIMON:

Well, you know I spent some time with Darion before meeting up with you in Thebes. He's fine-- happy to have his sister back. But...I don't know...there's something about Lykia that I can't--

The warrior approaches their table again.

ANDRASH:

I've got to be heading out. Think about my offer, Xena. Someone like you would be a great asset to our cause.

XENA (grimaces):

Thanks but I'll pass.

ANDRASH (shrugs):

Too bad. But if you change your mind you can always--

Xena nods dismissively.

XENA:

Right. I'll find you.

Gabrielle watches as the warrior walks out.

GABRIELLE:

What was that all about? Another bounty hunter looking to make you a partner?

Xena clears her throat uncomfortably.

XENA:

Not exactly...he's more of a recruiter.

GABRIELLE:

For what?

XENA (frowns):

He's been traveling all through Macedonia and Thrace raising an army.

HAIMON:

Against Rome?

XENA:

Not against Rome. Against Nero.

Xena and Gabrielle glance at one another meaningfully.

HAIMON:

Well what are we waiting for? It's about time someone took that bastard out.

XENA:

It's not up to us--

HAIMON:

Who says it's not? From everything I've heard Nero isn't fit to rule.

Gabrielle gives Xena an almost apologetic look then turns to Haimon.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon, it isn't as simple as that.

He shakes his head.

HAIMON:

Maybe not for *you*--but it *is* that simple for me.

GABRIELLE:

You were just wounded. You should be taking it easy for awhile.

HAIMON:

I think I'm pretty fully recovered, don't you?

Gabrielle blushes and Haimon smiles, placing his hand over hers and squeezing it affectionately.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon, I'm serious. (she glances uncomfortably at Xena.) And there are things...things that you just don't understand about--

HAIMON:

I understand that Nero needs to be stopped. That's all I need to know! And I'm going after him in the morning--with or without you.

Haimon gets up and Gabrielle watches him walk out. She turns and stares at Xena expectantly.

Xena looks away, again absently watching the family at the next table.

XENA:

I'll understand if you want to go with him...

Gabrielle smiles and reaches out, squeezing Xena's hand.

GABRIELLE:

Where you go, I go. Don't you know that by now?

Xena smiles tenderly and squeezes Gabrielle's hand in return. They sit in warm, companionable silence a moment until it's broken by the sound of a loud clang from the next table. The little girl has spilled her cider all over the table. The mother leaps to her feet, taking the little girl's arm.

MOTHER:

Leah! I told you to stop fidgeting. Now look what you've done! You're going to march right over to that serving girl, young lady, and ask her for some rags so that you can mop this up. You're going to learn that you have to clean up your messes.

CUT TO

Xena who flinches at hearing these words as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

An overhead shot of an army camp. Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon can be seen on horseback in the distance, riding into the camp. Xena brings Argo to a halt and hops down. Haimon and Gabrielle dismount and step up beside Xena, who is surveying the camp with a critical eye.

XENA:

Whoever is in charge here obviously has a good handle on things.

In the distance a small group of soldiers as well as female camp followers are clustered together, their heads bowed. The warrior from the teaser, Andrash, observes the group a moment then turns and notices Xena. He waves and hurries over.

ANDRASH:

Xena! I'm glad you decided to join us.

XENA (with obvious strain in her voice):

Right. Let's not make a big deal out of it.

ANDRASH:

What made you change your mind? Don't tell me Rome has another contender for the throne.

XENA:

I'm through with politics, Andrash. I'm here because it's the right thing to do.

ANDRASH (shrugs):

No matter. We're glad to have you whatever the reason. (he looks over Gabrielle and Haimon) And you brought help. (he nods in greeting at Gabrielle) The Battling Bard, of course. (he then looks at Haimon) And your friend looks like he can hold his own with a sword.

HAIMON:

I do all right. (he extends his hand) Haimon.

Andrash and Haimon shake and Andrash waves a young orderly over.

ANDRASH:

Priam, make sure Xena and her friends are given quarters and made comfortable.

PRIAM (nods and salutes):

Yes sir.

Priam takes Argo's reigns from Xena.

HAIMON:

I'll give him a hand.

He takes the reigns of Gabrielle's horse and she reaches out to brush her fingertips over his arm. Haimon cannot suppress a small smile as he follows Priam.

XENA (to Andrash):

It looks like things are under control here.

ANDRASH:

Our force has almost doubled in the past month. Pretty soon we'll be large enough to go at Nero head on. We've had three minor skirmishes with his troops in the past 4 days.

GABRIELLE:

How many men have you lost?

ANDRASH:

None. We were able to take prisoners. Morale is high. (he gestures towards the gathering of soldiers and camp followers and frowns.) Though I'm afraid it won't be for too much longer.

Xena and Gabrielle look over and Gabrielle gasps, clutching Xena's arm.

GABRIELLE:

Xena! (she points) Siran!

Xena spots Siran before the group, obviously leading them in prayer.

ANDRASH:

You know her?

GABRIELLE (nodding):

Yes. She's...she's an Elijan that we...what's she doing here?

ANDRASH (he leans confidentially close):

Between you and me, the girl is really killing morale. All this preaching about peace and love is driving the men crazy--worse yet, it's started to infect some of them. And if that isn't enough, she's got a lot of the camp followers refusing to--be friendly with the soldiers. (Off Xena's glare) You've been around armies, Xena. I'm sure you know that a...satisfied soldier is a better soldier.

Gabrielle glances at Xena who gives a small, barely perceptible nod.

XENA:

So why are you letting her continue?

ANDRASH:

Because of her friend.

GABRIELLE:

Friend? You mean Valeria Sabina?

ANDRASH (nods):

That's right. Sabina rode into camp six weeks ago with the girl and took charge. Before she came we were just a disorganized bunch of rabble rousers. This army is what it is because of Sabina's leadership and she's made it clear that we're not to interfere with the girl.

Sabina appears riding down the road into camp at the head of a column of ten Roman soldier prisoners, all bound by their hands. Upon seeing Xena and Gabrielle, she smirks and trots her horse over to Xena, Gabrielle and Andrash.

SABINA (gesturing towards the prisoners):

Another successful hunting trip. (She glances at Xena.) Though not nearly as successful as yours, Andrash. Welcome, Xena. I wish I could say I'm surprised to see you--but I knew your conscience wouldn't let you stay out of the fight too long. I've warned you before about that silly, sentimental streak of yours. It's going to be your undoing.

Siran comes running up.

SIRAN:

Sabina! You're all right!

Siran hugs her and Sabina returns the embrace until she notices Xena and Gabrielle smirking in amusement. Xena arches her eyebrows and glances pointedly at Sabina.

XENA:

You were saying?

Embarrassed, Sabina gently steps out of Siran's embrace.

SABINA:

Enough of that, Siran--I've got business to attend to.

Siran nods and steps back--it's obvious she understands Sabina's awkwardness at any public displays of affection.

Gabrielle nods towards the column of bound men.



GABRIELLE:

You've taken prisoners.

SABINA:

There's no getting anything by you, is there, Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE (coolly):

By me *or* my Amazons. Didn't you learn anything at Corinth?

Without missing a beat, Sabina chuckles.

SABINA:

I guess it's not true what they say about blondes. I knew there was a reason you kept her around, Xena.

Xena sighs in frustration.

XENA:

Look, Sabina--I'd love to stand here all day and trade insults. But we've got business.

SABINA (nods):

You're right. Andrash, make sure the prisoners are secured.

Siran touches Sabina's arm.

SIRAN:

After their march they must be starving.

ANDRASH:

Young woman, this isn't a roadside inn. These are prisoners of war.

SIRAN:

They still need and food and water and someone to tend to their wounds.

Andrash glances warily at Sabina.

ANDRASH:

Sabina--if I may...we can't be squandering our rations on prisoners. Do you really think that Nero would show our men the same hospitality?

SIRAN:

Two wrongs don't make a right.

Sabina looks from Siran to Andrash and back again.

SABINA:

And dead prisoners don't make good bargaining chips, Andrash. These Romans might prove useful to us later on. Make sure Siran is given whatever she needs.

ANDRASH (sneering):

Is that all? Perhaps Siran would also like me to tuck the prisoners in and read them a bedtime story.

SABINA:

Siran, would you like Andrash to tuck the prisoners in and read them a bedtime story?

Siran shakes her head gravely.

SIRAN:

No.

SABINA:

Then that's all, Andrash.

Andrash reddens but holds his tongue. He turns and marches off towards the prisoners. Siran smiles softly at Sabina then follows after Andrash with a small skip in her step.

Haimon returns and steps up beside Gabrielle, touching her shoulder.

HAIMON:

I've put our things...(he notices Sabina and can't mask his shock.) *You?*

SABINA (raises an eyebrow at him):

Well, well, well. The cast of characters just keeps growing more interesting. My little shadow has returned. (she glances pointedly at the familiar way Haimon's hand rests on Gabrielle's shoulder and purses her lips.) Though he's probably more of an annoyance to Xena at this point than he ever was to me.

Xena turns and starts to walk away.

XENA:

Forget it. Let's go, Gabrielle. We don't need to listen to this--

Gabrielle catches Xena's arm to stop her, then turns on Sabina.

GABRIELLE:

You know what, Sabina? You talk too much.

Sabina is momentarily deflated by Gabrielle's comment but she quickly recovers and smirks.

SABINA:

Really? Well now, isn't that the pot calling the kettle black. (she glances at Haimon.) I guess you don't mind letting your girlfriend do all the talking.

HAIMON:

I'm here to fight Nero--not you. Besides, it's getting kind of old, don't you think? We've already fought and beat you.

Sabina places a hand over her heart.

SABINA:

Ouch. Taking a hit from the sidekick's sidekick--now that hurts. (she claps her hands together.) Well, as amusing as this little reunion has been--I really should go check on Siran. Have fun (she glances at Haimon and Gabrielle.) Or perhaps I should say 'be good.' That would probably be easier for you two.

Haimon watches Sabina walk off towards the prisoners.

HAIMON:

She's as...charming as ever.

XENA:

And about as trustworthy. We need to keep a close eye on Sabina.

GABRIELLE:

You're right. Knowing Sabina's at the head of another army isn't going to make *me* sleep any better at night.

XENA (smiles teasingly):

Perfect. Then maybe for once you won't keep me awake all night with your snoring.

GABRIELLE:

My snoring? I wish you could hear *yourself* sometime--

HAIMON:

Actually, Xena...I've put Gabrielle and me into our own quarters. I've arranged for you to be...

Haimon trails off under Xena's annoyed glare. Gabrielle glances carefully between Xena and Haimon.



GABRIELLE:

Xena, are you--?

Xena takes a breath, presses her lips together and nods.

XENA:

I'm great. That's just great. It's been a long time since I've had my own room. And we could all use the rest...

Now it's Xena's turn to trail off into embarrassed silence.

XENA:

Okay...so...I'm going to go get settled in. I'll see you two later.

Gabrielle squeezes Xena's arm affectionately and smiles tenderly as she watches Xena turn and walk off alone to find her quarters.

CUT TO

Nero in his quarters. He is lying across a sofa, an arm draped tragically across his eyes. Aquilo stands before him. He clears his throat nervously.

AQUILO:

More news of the rebellion, my Emperor.

NERO (sighs):

News, news and more news, Aquilo. I often wonder what would make the news stop.

He glances menacingly at Aquilo, who squirms uncomfortably.

AQUILO:

My Emperor...the rebels have done battle with the Twelfth again. The rebels have taken...more prisoners.

NERO (in an accusing tone):

Do you know how thin a line it is between prisoner and convert, Aquilo?

Aquilo shakes his head in confusion.

AQUILO:

My Emperor?

Nero leaps to his feet and begins to pace frantically.

NERO:

Do you think that if I were to embrace this god of Eli that he would grant me his favor? Yes...of course he would. Don't you think that any god would rather count Rome among his worshippers than among his enemies? Especially since the latter would be most disagreeable for his followers.

AQUILO:

My Emperor...it's been reported that Xena has joined the rebellion.

NERO:

Xena? Xena...Xena, friend to slaves, Elijans and mothers alike...

Aquilo rubs his hands together nervously.

AQUILO:

It has also been reported that Gabrielle of Poteidaea is with her.

NERO:

Gabrielle? No...my Gabrielle would never--

AQUILO (hesitantly):

She is also rumored to be in the company of a man.

Nero stops pacing and covers his face with his hands.

NERO:

Well that's how it is then, isn't it? So typical of her sex, wouldn't you agree, Aquilo?
*Though all the Olympians banded come
In wrath, and rouse against me all the sea,
I will escape them!*
(He sighs in resignation.) So be it.

Nero drapes himself across his sofa. After a moment he appears to have fallen asleep while Aquilo looks on. Aquilo fidgets a moment, as if unsure whether to speak or not. Finally he speaks, caution evident in his tone.

AQUILO:

Caesar?

NERO:

Still here, Aquilo?

AQUILO:

There's more, I'm afraid. The masses are being infected with this talk of rebellion. Riots are breaking out almost daily. Rome isn't safe for you right now. You must vacate the city and join your loyal troops until this uprising is put down.

Nero waves his arm tiredly, obviously not taking heed to Aquilo's warning.

AQUILO:

You must act against this rebellion now before it grows. The more successes the rebels have, the greater the danger that the morale and allegiance of your own troops will be compromised. The threat of an uprising from within the ranks is all too real.

Nero gasps in shock and lifts his head to look at Aquilo.

NERO:

My own troops? Against me? Their Emperor? Such perfidy cannot be permitted. Tell me, Aquilo, what I must do.

AQUILO:

I would suggest sending for the Ninth immediately and--

NERO:

And I'll appear before them personally! I shall weep and they'll be so moved by my display that they'll swear their undying allegiance to me. And then - and then when they have put down this rebellion I'll reward them by reciting a poem of my own creation, lauding their heroism.

AQUILO:

My Emperor...if we send for the Ninth immediately--

Nero waves dismissively.

NERO:

I leave the logistics to you, my dear Aquilo. Now I must have counsel with my muse if my poem is to be ready for my legion's victory.

Muttering scraps of poetry to himself, Nero wanders out of the room. Aquilo watches him go, then shakes his head with a sigh.

CUT TO

A large tent serving as a hospice. Xena, Gabrielle and Sabina are gathered around a table. Siran can be seen in the background thronged by six men in a semi circle. They are wounded though none of them seriously. Though her words aren't audible from the distance, it's obvious that Siran is speaking to the wounded as she stitches a gash in the shoulder of one of them. Sabina watches Siran out of the corner of her eye as Xena indicates the map she has spread out on the table.

XENA:

Sabina, we need to talk.

SABINA:

Talk? (she glances knowingly down at the map.) What about, Xena? About the fact that Nero's troops are just twenty leagues southwest of us?

Xena and Gabrielle glance at one another, shocked that Sabina already knows this and doesn't appear very worried.

XENA:

Doesn't that concern you?

SABINA (chuckles):

Actually--I'm impressed.

GABRIELLE:

Cockiness won't win this battle, Sabina.

SABINA (rolls her eyes):

Obviously you haven't been paying attention all these years hanging out with Xena.

Xena is obviously trying to spare Gabrielle the embarrassment of agreeing with Sabina.

XENA:

That's not what we're here about. My problem is with the town that lies halfway between us and Nero's troops.

SABINA (shrugs):

Caranacus. I can read a map as well as you can, Xena. What of it?

XENA:

Aren't you even a little curious to know where their loyalties lay?

Xena and Sabina continue to talk and Gabrielle's attention is caught by Siran tending to the wounded. As the girl works it appears as though she is preaching to them at the same time. The soldier she is tending to suddenly draws back with a horrified gasp.

SOLDIER #1:

One god? Blasphemy!

Gabrielle turns her attention back to Xena and Sabina.

XENA:

...if it's all the same to you, I'd rather not go into battle against Nero's troops until I'm sure where the loyalties of Caranacus lay. They could attack us from the rear.

SABINA (smirking):

Don't tell me a few peasant women scare the Warrior Princess. What are they going to do? Beat you with their frying pans?

In the background Siran can be seen picking up a vase of lilies from a bedside table. She hands each soldier a flower. Gabrielle notices this and gives Xena an odd look.

SIRAN:

...take these lilies, for example. They grow in their fields and no one tends them. (she holds a lily to her nose, inhales deeply, then smiles.) And yet they thrive in the sunlight and flourish in the rains provided by the God of Love. Don't you think He cares for you more than he does for these flowers?

The men gaze at the flowers with mixed expressions. Some are obviously struck by Siran's words, the others disdainful.

XENA:

...I'd rather check things out myself, if you don't mind. Gabrielle?

Gabrielle snaps her attention back to Xena.

XENA:

Let's go check things out in Caranacus.

They start out of the tent. A soldier suddenly throws his flower in Siran's face in disgust. Sabina notices and steps forward with an upraised arm.

Siran holds up a hand.

SIRAN:

Don't. He can only see the truth by allowing the God of Love into his heart. Violence will only make him more blind.

Without hesitation, Sabina steps back and lowers her arm. Xena and Gabrielle both gape in shock. Then they walk out of the tent as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

A town square in the middle of a brawl. A quick montage of shots:

Two middle-aged women pummeling each other;

A grey-haired man beating a young man with a stick while the young man tries to block his blows but doesn't go on the offensive;

A man is punched in the face and flies back, slamming into a wall and then slumping down.

A young woman is riding on a man's back and beating him with her fists while he tries in vain to shake her off.

The camera pans over to the spectators on the sidelines, watching the brawl in progress, some of them shouting encouragement--"Yeah!", "Go get him!", "Way to go!"

A middle-aged woman hesitantly pushes her way to the front of the spectators, peering into the brawling mob. She finally spots the grey-haired man attacking the young man. She stands still for a few moments, obviously trying to muster the courage to join the fray.

Finally the pair find themselves on the edge of the melee. The woman uses this opportunity to charge forward and grab the man's arm.

WOMAN:

Priscus! What are you doing?

PRISCUS:

Teaching an insolent pup a few lessons! Leave me alone, woman!

The woman continues to restrain him. He shoves her away, making her stumble and nearly fall. Then he swings his stick at the young man again and is about to bring it down when a hand grabs his wrist. We realize that it's Xena as her gauntlet comes into view.

XENA:

Isn't it about time to start acting a little more mature?

The camera pulls back to show Xena and Gabrielle. Gabrielle is helping the middle-aged woman steady herself.

PRISCUS (bitterly):

Why don't you lecture that son of mine about manners! Turning his back on his father *and* his emperor! (tries to wrestle free from her grip) Let go of me!

Just as Xena releases him, the man we saw before with a female attacker on his back stumbles into Priscus, knocking him to the ground.

MAN:

Get off me, witch!

With a sigh and a headshake, Xena pulls the woman off the man's back while Gabrielle helps Priscus to his feet.

GABRIELLE:

Come on, let's get out of here before you really get hurt.

She and Priscus' wife lead him aside. In a moment Xena rejoins them.

XENA:

So what's going on here?

PRISCUS' SON:

We're organizing a group of fighters to join the rebellion against that monster Nero. Some people in town (glances bitterly at his father) don't like the idea.

PRISCUS:

You hotheads are going to get us all into trouble. Nero's a good emperor--always has been. He's looking out for the people, not like some of those others!

PRISCUS' SON (scoffs):

Right. A good emperor who has people killed for daring to speak the truth about his tyranny.

PRISCUS:

What do you care if he's executed some plotters? They had it coming.

He raises his stick again; Xena glares at him, exasperated, and grabs the stick from him.

XENA:

You shouldn't be playing with dangerous toys.

PRISCUS' WIFE (shakes her head):

My sister wrote to me the other day from Naples. It's like this all over the empire--factions for and against Nero tearing apart every town and village. Brother turning against brother, father against son-

GABRIELLE:

Why isn't someone breaking this up? Where are the guards?

PRISCUS' WIFE:

Right there.

She points to the brawling townspeople; among them are several guards in Roman uniforms. Two of them are fighting each other; others are participating in a general melee on both sides.

XENA (sighs):

I guess that's our cue. Come on, Gabrielle.

Xena and Gabrielle charge into the melee and start pulling the combatants apart. Priscus' son rushes after them and starts to help them. A quick montage of Xena, Gabrielle and Priscus' son trying to stop the fight--separating combatants, punching or kicking some of the more stubborn ones who continue charging into the fray, pulling others to the side.

DISSOLVE TO

The town square some time later. The fight has stopped. People are standing around dazed and out of breath; some are tending to others' cuts and bruises. Quick pan to a man being carried away by two others, and a limping, bloodied woman being helped away by a man.

Pan to Xena and Gabrielle, who survey this scene. Priscus' son approaches them.

PRISCUS' SON:

Thank you for your help. (extends his hand to Xena) I'm Aelus. (his face is aglow with curiosity and enthusiasm) You're Xena, aren't you?

XENA (smiles coolly):

I am.

AELUS (nods):

And you're Gabrielle. We've heard rumors of the two of you joining the rebellion. (He shakes Xena's hand, then Gabrielle's.) It's given us a lot of hope. With Xena, Warrior Princess fighting under Valeria Sabina (quick pan to Xena's shocked and disgusted face as he continues) victory will be ours for sure.

XENA (narrows her eyes at him):

What do you really know about Sabina?

AELUS:

Only that she's inspired the people as no one has in a long time. Some were reluctant to rally behind her at first, because of her past as a slave. But she's a true Roman, born and bred--leading Romans in a fight for their freedom and dignity.

Close-up on Xena as she stares at him grimly. Then she exchanges a worried look with Gabrielle.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle ride back along a forest path.

GABRIELLE:

You think they'll join the rebels?

XENA (grimly):

Probably.

GABRIELLE (a little hesitant):

Well--that's good news, right?

XENA (curtly):

Maybe.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--

Xena perks up suddenly, as if listening to something. Gabrielle looks at her and shakes her head.

GABRIELLE (with a sigh of resignation):

He's here, isn't he. (off Xena's somewhat guilty look of agreement) You talk to him, I'll ride on ahead.

XENA (presses her hand):
I'll catch up with you soon.

Gabrielle smiles at her wanly, then rides off as Xena stops Argo and waits.

XENA:
Well?

There is a "whoosh" and a blue light, and Ares materializes by Argo's side. His face looks grim.

ARES:
Hello, Xena.

XENA (looks down on him sarcastically as she sits astride Argo):
Having fun?

ARES (raises an eyebrow, somewhat annoyed):
Didn't we just go through this the other day at Thebes?

XENA:
Go through *what*?

ARES (adopting a casual tone):
You busting my chops about a war that you think is my doing.

XENA:
I don't think it is. The Romans don't need you to get into a war over a crazy emperor.

ARES:
Well, I'm glad we've got *that* figured out.



XENA:
So what? Both sides in this war will be praying to you for help. Don't tell me that means nothing to you.

ARES:
This is getting old.

They stare at each other, the tension between them palpable, Ares biting his lip, Xena's face hard and closed.

XENA:

So why are you here?

ARES:

Xena. For once, listen to me and stay out of this war.

XENA:

This is getting old too.

ARES:

I warned you not to get involved with Agrippina and Nero.

XENA:

Well, I did. And now, I have to fix what happened because of that.



ARES:

So you'll help get rid of Nero and hand the power to someone else. How do you know you won't regret it someday? (off her startled, grim look) Of course, now you think that I'm only warning you off this war because I've got a hand in it.

He stares at her, as if waiting for her to say something. Xena remains silent.

ARES:

Suit yourself.

He disappears.

CUT TO

A square in Rome. It's night but the darkness is dissipated by torches carried by a large crowd. Many people in the crowd are carrying swords, battle-axes, and makeshift weapons such as sticks or rakes.

Close-up on a large man, his face lit up by the reddish torchlight.

MAN (yells furiously):

Down with Nero!

The camera pulls back to show him brandishing an axe, then pans over the crowd to show men and women of various ages, brandishing their weapons or shaking their fists, shouting, "Down with Nero!"

The camera pulls further back to reveal a huge statue of Nero--holding a lyre, with a poetic expression on his face--looming over the crowd. A man is sitting on the statue's shoulders fitting a noose around its neck, with ropes attached to it.

When he is done, the crowd erupts in cheers.

The man clammers down the statue and to the pedestal, where we see two other men with pickaxes chipping at the statue's feet. The camera then pans to several men and one stout, powerfully built woman on the ground who are pulling at the ropes attached to the noose.

The other three men climb down a ladder leaning against the pedestal. The chant of "Down with Nero!" picks up again as the people with the ropes pull harder. The crowd backs away cautiously from the statue, clearing a circle around it. As the statue starts to sway, a collective gasp rolls over the crowd; then the cheers go up again. Finally the statue topples; its feet still rest on the pedestal while the body protrudes from it. The cheers grow deafening.

OLD WOMAN:

Murderer!

She throws an egg at the statue's head; it splatters over its face.

YOUNG MAN:

Monster! (throws a rock at the statue's head)

More people in the crowd start throwing rocks and refuse at the statue; others start dancing.

CUT TO

A wide shot of the imperial palace, lit up by torches.

CUT TO

A distant corner of the palace. It's almost completely dark.

A door opens and several cloaked figures emerge. One of them stops, looking around warily, its face concealed in the shadows.

MAN:

Come on--the way is clear.

The other figures move after him.

CUT TO

The square with the fallen statue, which is being pelted by rocks, eggs and rotten fruit as it still hangs from the pedestal. The people holding on to the ropes give them another tug, and the statue finally falls from the pedestal and to the ground. Its head breaks off and rolls on the ground. The gasps and

exclamations of shock in the crowd are followed by a roar of cheers. Some people run up to the head and start kicking it.

The camera pans back to the man we saw at the start of the scene. He brandishes his axe.

MAN:

Let's not waste our time on a statue! We should get the tyrant himself!

The crowd roars its approval.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN:

Kill the monster!

There are more cheers.

A sudden hush falls over the crowd. The camera pans to a group of Praetorian guards who are standing on the edge of the square. Pan back to the now-silent crowd, staring at the Praetorians in fear and defiance. Then back to the Praetorians. For a moment there is a tense standoff. One of the Praetorians draws his sword. The man with the axe lifts it menacingly.

PRAETORIAN:

Down with Nero!

A huge sigh of relief rolls over the square.

The other Praetorians join in a chorus of "Down with Nero!" and the crowd erupts in wild cheers.

CUT TO

The arched city gates, lit by torches mounted into the wall. There are guards posted at the gates.

A party of seven riders approaches the gates, their backs to the camera. A guard steps in front of them and holds out a hand, forcing them to come to a halt.

GUARD:

Pretty late hour to travel.

LEAD RIDER (his back to the camera, talks to the guards):

I'm Septimus Rufius, the silk merchant. Just got word that my wife's been taken ill while visiting her mother in Naples.

GUARD:

All right--come on through.

Pan to a front view of the group. As they start to ride, a gust of wind sweeps aside the cloak of one of the riders, making his face clearly visible. It's Nero.

The guard flinches in shock.

GUARD:

Emperor!

The other guards turn to him in shock, then stare at Nero, who remains silent, looking frightened but also proud and defiant.

Aquilo (the lead rider) reaches quietly for his sword.

GUARD:

The gods be with you.

NERO:

Depart then each unto his fate, Your quarrels over.

CUT TO

Camp. Night. A group of rebel soldiers are sitting around the fire playing dice. Xena and Gabrielle come up.

REBEL SOLDIER #1 (looks up excitedly):

Xena! Come and sit with us! It's an honor.

The soldiers move over and Xena and Gabrielle sit down by the fire.

REBEL SOLDIER #2 (impressed):

Xena? That's Xena?

REBEL SOLDIER #1:

The very one. (to Xena) He just joined up today. Defected from one of Nero's legions.

XENA (her face inscrutable):

Is that right.

REBEL SOLDIER #1:

So what do you think of our fighting force?

XENA:

Not bad.

REBEL SOLDIER #1:

Especially for an army that didn't even have many real trained soldiers in it when we started out, some three moons ago. I was just a humble weaver myself. But who can sit by idly when the empire is ruled by a power-mad monster who killed his own mother and set fire to Rome? Just to think how many people he had fooled early on...

He shakes his head. Quick pan to Gabrielle, who winces slightly but visibly.

GABRIELLE:

Of course, now you've got soldiers from the Roman legions coming over to your side. (Motions toward Rebel Soldier #2)

REBEL SOLDIER #3:

The crazier the emperor acts, the more people desert him.

REBEL SOLDIER #2:

Give credit where it's due. A lot of it goes to Valeria Sabina.

REBEL SOLDIER #1:

That's right. Can't say enough about what that woman did to build up our army.

XENA (impassive):

Pretty popular, is she?

REBEL SOLDIER #2:

It's the stories I've heard of Sabina that finally inspired me to join the rebels. It's not just that she's a brave warrior and a great leader...she's truly a woman with a noble heart.

XENA:

A noble heart. Sabina. (she and Gabrielle exchange bewildered looks)

REBEL SOLDIER #2:

Indeed. Not long ago, when Nero's troops and the rebels clashed in Jeronim, a town south of here, the town hospital somehow caught fire in the fighting. Sabina herself went into the burning building to rescue the sick.

GABRIELLE (unable to conceal her shock):

Sabina? Rescuing people from a fire? I'd have to see it with my own eyes before I believe *that*.

REBEL SOLDIER #1:

Well, I didn't see it with my own eyes, either. But it was the talk of the army for days.

REBEL SOLDIER #2:

Of Nero's army, too.

XENA:

I bet it was.

She gets up abruptly and walks off. Gabrielle stares after her, then get up and follows.

CUT TO

Xena striding through the mostly sleeping camp, with Gabrielle at her side.

GABRIELLE:

Well, what if Sabina *has* changed? (off Xena's exasperated glare) Come on, Xena--you've always said that everyone deserves a second chance. Why not Sabina?

XENA:

Because she's up to something. (she pauses grimly, staring ahead as they walk on) And I think I know what it is.

GABRIELLE:

Speak of the devil...

Sabina steps toward them, emerging into the moonlight, a wry smile on her face.

SABINA:

Girls. Gossiping about me?

XENA:

Talking about your heroics--or at least the stories people tell about them. (gives Sabina a questioning look) Saving people from burning buildings? Doesn't sound like the Sabina I know.

SABINA:

Oh yes. My heroics. (she tilts her head, smiling brightly) Do you have any idea how many new recruits that little story brought over to our side?

XENA:

Watch it--you might get a reputation as a do-gooder.

SABINA (clicks her tongue):

The sacrifices one makes for the cause.

GABRIELLE:

And what cause is that? Bringing down Nero?

SABINA:

Bringing down Nero ... building up an army...take your pick. (with a slight grin) Look at it this way--we're all on the same side now. Or maybe I should say--for now. (chuckles) Good night.

She walks away. Xena and Gabrielle stand looking after her.

XENA:

You know what she's after, don't you?

GABRIELLE (shocked):

You don't mean--



XENA:

Sabina has always set her sights pretty high. She believes her father could have been the emperor. She probably thinks the empire is hers by right. And even if she doesn't--she'll take whatever she can get.

GABRIELLE:

That story about the hospital ... you don't think it's true?

XENA:

Who cares? Even if it is, Sabina's a dangerous woman to have at the head of an army.

GABRIELLE (thinks a moment):

Xena, let's go talk to Siran.

XENA (gives her an incredulous look):

Why? To find out if Sabina is really a good person now? Come on, Gabrielle. Siran worships her--and why wouldn't she? Sabina saved her. Siran is a naïve little girl who doesn't know anything about people like Sabina.

GABRIELLE (quietly):

People could have said that about me, once...

Xena glances at her, obviously cut to the quick. Then she nods.

XENA:

Have it your way. Let's go find Siran.

CUT TO

A tent that serves as a makeshift field hospital. Siran hands a cup of water to a wounded man.

WOUNDED MAN:

Thank you. (takes a sip) But you know, wine would be a lot better.

SIRAN (chuckles):

Sorry, this is all I've got--and I don't think Eli himself could change water into wine.

XENA (off-camera):

It wasn't his kind of thing.

SIRAN (turns around abruptly as the camera pans to Xena and Gabrielle, who are standing behind her):

Xena! Gabrielle--hello.

GABRIELLE:

Siran, can we talk to you for a minute?

SIRAN:

Sure. (smiles) What about?

GABRIELLE:

Sabina. We've heard a story about her going into a burning hospital to rescue the sick...

SIRAN:

Oh yes--in Jeronim. (smiles) It was very brave, what she did.

GABRIELLE:

Siran. (puts a hand on Siran's arm) Did you actually see her do it? Were you there?

SIRAN (matter-of factly):

Of course I was. I went in first.

XENA:

You.

SIRAN:

That's right.

XENA:

So she was just going in after you.

SIRAN:

I know she was. But she didn't leave until everyone was out of that building. (almost pleadingly) Xena, she did the right thing--even if--*maybe*--it wasn't for the right reasons. Isn't that what's important?

Close-up on Xena, who looks very thoughtful.

CUT TO

Inside the tent of Haimon and Gabrielle, Haimon sits on the bed, sharpening his sword. The tent flap is pulled back and Gabrielle enters.

GABRIELLE (smiling):

There you are. I've been looking all over camp for you.

Haimon says nothing and continues sharpening his sword. After receiving no response, Gabrielle studies him a moment and touches his shoulder.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon, what's wrong?

HAIMON (shrugs):

Nothing. What makes you think something's wrong?

Gabrielle smiles and takes a seat beside him on the bed.

GABRIELLE:

Right now you remind me of Xena. She sharpens her sword when she's angry too.

HAIMON:

Obviously you know *me* a lot better than I know *you*.

Gabrielle frowns, her confusion over his behavior is evident. She places her hand on top of his.

GABRIELLE:

Tell me what's bothering you.

He sighs and lays his sword aside.

HAIMON:

Was there something going on between you and Nero?

GABRIELLE (aghast):

Me and...? Of course not! Why would you ask me something like that?

HAIMON:

I was in the prisoner's compound this morning with Siran. I heard some of the men talking.

GABRIELLE (laughs):

Haimon! You should know better than to believe gossip--*especially* from a soldier.

Haimon stares and Gabrielle becomes increasingly uneasy under his scrutiny. She leaps to her feet.



GABRIELLE (defensively):

It's not true! I admit that Domitius and I--

HAIMON:

Oh--so now it's Domitius?

Gabrielle glares at him.

HAIMON:

Is that why you didn't want to go up against Nero?

GABRIELLE (angrily):

If you think I could forget everything I believe about right and wrong then *you* obviously don't know *me* at all. (she pauses a moment then sighs) I made a mistake. (pause) We both did--Xena and I. We were tricked... we let ourselves be tricked into bringing Nero and his mother to power. Nero liked my writing and I was...flattered. I couldn't see him for what he was. (she glances at Haimon.) You're disappointed in me, aren't you?

Haimon looks at her.

GABRIELLE:

...I'm even more disappointed in myself.

Gabrielle turns away resignedly and exits the tent as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

The interior of Xena's tent. It's night. Xena and Gabrielle are lying on their beds, across from one another. Xena is lying on her back, her hands tucked behind her head. Gabrielle lies on her side, facing away from Xena.

XENA:

Gabrielle? Are you awake?

Gabrielle rolls over to face Xena.

GABRIELLE:

Yes. (she sighs) I can't sleep.

XENA:

Me either. (pauses) Do you want to tell me what happened between you and Haimon?



GABRIELLE (frowns):

He thinks Nero and I were...close. I told him it wasn't true but I'm not sure he believes me. (she shakes her head) I never realized Haimon had such a jealous streak.

Xena rolls onto her side to face Gabrielle.

XENA:

Are you sure it's jealousy?

GABRIELLE:

What do you mean?

XENA:

Have you ever told Haimon that you love him?

GABRIELLE:

I...well...what does *that* have to do with--?

XENA:

Maybe it's not about Haimon being jealous. Maybe it has more to do with him not being sure of where he stands with you. Gabrielle, you need to be honest with him--no matter what that means.

Gabrielle sighs and flops onto her back. Both women lie in silence a moment.

XENA:

We've got to stop this war--and fast. Ares is *way* too eager to keep us out of it and the longer it goes on the more powerful Sabina is going to become.

GABRIELLE (after a brief silence):

So you still don't trust Ares.

Xena pauses and thinks about her answer a long moment then sighs heavily.

XENA:

When it comes to a war? (after a moment, bitterly) In a way--it was easier when I couldn't trust him about *anything*.

GABRIELLE:

Then how can you be with him?



XENA (in a near-whisper):

Maybe it was a mistake...

An uncomfortable pause.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--I trust your judgment.

XENA:

Well, maybe that's just it. I don't--not after all the mistakes I've made. (she sits up abruptly) Nero...

GABRIELLE (sits up as well):

Xena--

XENA:

Agrippina...

GABRIELLE:

Xena, don't do this. We both made mistakes. We're going to put things right.

XENA:

There are some things we just can't fix.

Xena is silent for a moment. It's obvious she has something to say and Gabrielle waits patiently.

XENA:

Gabrielle...there's something I haven't told you. Maybe I should have. (she sighs.) I don't know why I didn't...it's about Lykia.

GABRIELLE:

Lykia? What about her?

Xena turns to face Gabrielle.

XENA:

Haven't you ever wondered how Agrippina was murdered?

GABRIELLE (shocked):

Agrippina? Oh, Xena--don't tell me you think Lykia had something to do with it!

XENA:

I don't *think* she did, Gabrielle. I know it. Lykia killed her.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head incredulously):

No--that's not possible.

XENA:

Think about it, Gabrielle. Nero had already made two attempts on his mother's life. He knew I was going to be watching for any strangers landing on the island. He snuck the killer in right under my nose--knowing I would never look for an assassin among the slaves.

Gabrielle's expression turns pensive as she considers what Xena has told her.

[FLASHBACK]

From JUDGMENT CALLS:

NERO:

...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.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Gabrielle shakes her head--obviously struggling to accept the idea that Lykia is a killer.

GABRIELLE:

You mean--you saw her--?

XENA:

Not exactly.

GABRIELLE:

Then how can you be sure? Did Lykia tell you this?

XENA (frowns):

No. Agrippina did.

[FLASHBACK]

From JUDGMENT CALLS:

Agrippina, bloody from her stab wounds kneels on the floor of her bedroom. She is obviously dying. Xena is beside her.

AGRIPPINA:

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..

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA:

Lykia didn't know it, but she confessed to me right after that.

[FLASHBACK]

From JUDGMENT CALLS:

LYKIA (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!

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena and Gabrielle sit in silence a long moment.

GABRIELLE (gently):

Xena, you can't blame yourself for what happened.

XENA:

Yes, I can.

GABRIELLE:

No, you can't! Lykia had a choice!

XENA:

Some choice. What was she supposed to do? Nero offered her freedom from a mistress who thought of her as nothing more than a toy or a pet. In her place--I probably would have done the same.

Gabrielle nods slowly. Then she lies down on her back, staring up.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

Nero...

DISSOLVE TO

Dawn breaking out over the countryside. An overhead shot of several riders galloping down a country road.

DISSOLVE TO

The gate of a small, isolated country house. Nero's riding party approaches and pulls up at the gate.

AQUILO (dismounts):

Come on in, Emperor. We'll wait it out here until the way is clear.

NERO (looks around):

Aquilo--do you think this is where I'm going to meet my end? (stares ahead blankly) Maybe it's fitting--a man like me, with an artist's soul, ending his days in the house which so inspired his muse...

AQUILO (grabs his shoulder almost roughly):

Sire--I implore you, get a grip on yourself! (off Nero's shocked and indignant look, takes his hand off his shoulder) Please, stop this talk of dying. We're just stopping here to evade the rebel spies. Tomorrow we'll go on to rejoin the Ninth Legion.

NERO (absent-mindedly):

You're a loyal servant, Aquilo. Loyalty. It's an important quality in a man... (stares blankly) ...or a woman.

Aquilo shakes his head and ushers Nero in through the gate.

CUT TO

The rebel camp. Morning. The troops are lining up in obvious preparation for the battle. Sabina in armor, a red cloak and a helmet walks along the line of rebel soldiers inspecting the troops, her helmet gleaming in the sun. Andrash stands to the side watching her.

SABINA:

Friends! Fellow Romans! We're going up against one of Nero's legions--the legion that stands between us and Rome. We're about to face trained, elite fighters--and many of you have never held a weapon in your hands until a month ago.

The camera pans over the eager faces of the rebels. Among them is Aelus, the young man we saw in the brawl on the Caranacus town square.

SABINA (off-screen):

And yet we all know that victory is within our reach. Why is that? (pan back for a close-up of Sabina as she pauses in front of the troops) Because they're fighting out of fear--and blind loyalty to a tyrant. We are fighting for freedom.

As the troops cheer, the camera pans to Xena and Gabrielle who approach and stand at Sabina's side.

Cheers go up from the rebels.

ANDRASH (steps up to stand next to Xena, Gabrielle and Sabina):

Ares, the God of War, will grant us his favor!

The cheers grow louder. Sabina gives Xena a wry look.

SABINA (quietly to Xena):

We know better than that, don't we? (Xena looks back at her coldly as Sabina continues) Nero's commanders are saying the same thing. And of course, when all is said and done, our dear War God will play both sides to his advantage. Want to bet?

XENA (quietly and coldly):

I'm not a betting woman.

Sabina gives her an ironic look.

REBEL SOLDIERS (brandishing their swords and spears):

For Ares!

After the noise dies down somewhat for a moment, Sabina steps forward and raises her sword.

SABINA:

For freedom!

After a moment's hesitation, Xena and Gabrielle step forward, joining her in the chant, which is picked up by the soldiers. As the clamor begins to fade, a voice in the soldier ranks cries out.

REBEL SOLDIER:

For Sabina!

A few other voices shout out, "Sabina," and then a chant begins to swell in the ranks.

REBEL SOLDIERS:

Sa-bi-na! Sa-bi-na!

Gabrielle looks alarmed; Xena has a frozen expressionless look. Andrash looks confused. Quick pan to Haimon, standing with the soldiers. He looks appalled and disgusted as he exchanges looks with Xena and Gabrielle.

As the chant continues the camera zooms in on Sabina, who brandishes her sword in the air, looking rather pleased. Suddenly, she turns her head; her smile fades and her expression changes to a slightly anxious one. Xena turns and sees Siran approaching. Sabina turns back to the troops.

SABINA (raises her voice):

That's enough! (She brings down her sword. As the chant dies down, she turns to Siran) What are you doing here?

SIRAN:

I wanted to wish you--well. (she takes Sabina's hand) I won't wish you victory--there's no such thing as success in bloodshed. But I pray that the God of Love will keep you safe. (turns toward the soldiers) All of you.

Pan to Andrash, who glares at her.

ANDRASH (mutters to the soldier next to him):

Somebody better get this girl out of here.

SABINA (obviously moved but trying not to show it):

Thank you, Siran. Now--go back to your tent. And remember, don't leave the camp until the battle is over. It's for *your* safety.

SIRAN (nods):

I'll be praying for you. (presses her hands to her heart) Even in the heat of battle, may compassion never leave your hearts.

Andrash glares at Sabina. She firmly takes Siran by the shoulders and steers her away in the direction of the tents.

SABINA:

Go on.

Siran steps aside but remains a few paces behind Sabina, Xena and Gabrielle.

ANDRASH (raises his sword):

To victory!

The soldiers are slow to respond. Sabina turns toward the troops and raises and brandishes her sword, her eyes sparkling.

SABINA:

To victory! For freedom!

The crowd cheers. One of the soldiers approaches Sabina, leading a white horse.

SABINA:

See you on the battlefield, Xena.

She mounts the horse and rides off. The rebel troops march after her. Xena shakes her head grimly and follows them as well. Gabrielle is about to follow when Siran steps up and grabs her arm.

SIRAN:

Gabrielle...

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

Not now, Siran. I've got a battle to fight.

SIRAN:

You do believe me, don't you?

GABRIELLE (turns to look at her):

About what?

SIRAN:

I know you believe that people can change. And so does Xena.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Siran... Xena knows Sabina is going to do right by you. But when it comes to anything else... (she shakes her head) ...she can't be trusted.

SIRAN:

But *you* don't believe that, do you?

Gabrielle's mouth tightens. She lowers her eyes, then looks up at Siran again.

GABRIELLE:

I'm sorry, Siran... I think I do.

She walks away briskly. Siran stands with her arms folded, looking wistfully after Gabrielle.

CUT TO

A long shot of a field, with the two armies--the rebels and Nero's legions--charging toward each other. Zoom in on Sabina on horseback charging into battle, shouting furiously.

We see a montage of battle scenes as Nero's soldiers fight the rebels:

- * a succession of shots of swords clashing, making sparks fly;
- * a Nero loyalist falls to the ground, blood streaming down his face--followed by an identical shot of a rebel falling;
- * a spear whizzes through the air; a shout and a dull thud is heard off-camera;
- * Sabina clashes with a Nero loyalist officer on horseback and runs him through with her sword after a short fight;



- * Xena and Gabrielle, on foot, are fighting back to back, Xena with her sword and Gabrielle with her sais;
- * a quick succession of scenes of loyalists and rebels fighting each other with swords;
- * a riderless horse runs through the battlefield, neighing in alarm.

Pan to Xena and Sabina, a few paces apart, Xena standing in battle-ready position, Sabina in the saddle. Both of them turn simultaneously to look toward on a section of the field where the camera now zooms in, and where the rebels are being pushed back by the loyalists.

XENA:

That way! (to Sabina) Take them from the other side!

Letting loose her battle cry, Xena charges forward and then flips toward where the fight is. Sabina gallops away.

XENA (charges at the Roman loyalist ranks):

Chee-YA !

In a powerful leap, she slams her boots into two soldiers, knocking them down, and lands on her feet, running her sword through another Roman before he has the time to collect himself. While she spars with another soldier, Sabina, on horseback, charges into the Roman infantry from the other side, hacking at the soldiers with her sword and cutting herself a clear path through their ranks. Close-ups of several soldiers falling down, struck down by her sword. Heartened by the backup, the rebels start pushing back the loyalist troops, which disperse under the onslaught.

SABINA (to Xena):

Look--they're not using their full force. One battalion has stayed back--they're waiting for us to be weakened by the battle and then they'll hit us on our right flank and take us down.

XENA (looks in the direction Sabina is looking in and narrows her eyes appreciatively):

Unless we take them down first.

SABINA:

They're starting to pull around now. (she dismounts) I'll take a couple of hundred men and we'll head that way to cut them off. You can supply the distraction.

XENA (eyes her thoughtfully):

All right.

SABINA (grins):

Told you we made a good team.

Xena chuckles bitterly, then leaps in the saddle of Sabina's horse and gallops toward another part of the field where the battle is raging, brandishing her sword and yelling. Sabina looks after her, then runs off.

CUT TO

A nearly dark room in Nero's residence, illuminated by a single candle and a small amount of daylight coming in through a tiny window. Distant fires can be seen erupting and the sounds of battle can be heard faintly.

Nero mutters to himself as he paces frantically before the window.

NERO:

Sing me, Muse, a tale of Troy, a funeral dirge in strains unheard as yet, with tears the while...

Aquilo rushes in, breathless.

AQUILO:

Caesar! The battle has begun!

Nero doesn't react, as if he isn't even aware of Aquilo's presence. He continues to pace and mutter to himself.

NERO:

...for now will I uplift for Troy a piteous chant, telling how I met my doom and fell a wretched captive...

Aquilo rushes forward and seizes Nero by the shoulder, shaking him back into awareness.

AQUILO:

Emperor! You must collect yourself and focus!

Nero stops and blinks in confusion, as if just aware of Aquilo's presence.

NERO:

Aquilo?

AQUILO (sighs with relief):

The rebels have attacked and the Ninth has been unable to halt their advance. They could reach us by daybreak.

Nero reels back.

NERO:

Reach us? No! How could the rebels know where I am?

AQUILO:

I don't believe they do, Emperor. (he gives him a meaningful look.) Unless you've told someone about this place ...someone that shouldn't be trusted.

Nero looks nervous a moment then shakes his head in order to reassure himself.

NERO:

No...no my Gabrielle would never...

Aquilo rolls his eyes in exasperation.

AQUILO:

They're sure to find us if we remain here.

Nero's expression falls. He thinks a moment then looks up, an odd smile on his face.

NERO:

My poem! I must finish my poem! That will inspire my legions to stop this godless horde. (Nero turns to Aquilo and lays a comradely arm on his shoulder.) I look to you, my good Aquilo, to hold off these heathens so that I can complete my ode to my legions.

AQUILO (hesitantly):

Caesar, forgive me...but hold them off with what? There's no one left here save for me and a few servants...

NERO:

Consider it the beginnings of a fine new legion, Aquilo. (Waves his hand dismissively.) And now--I must insist that you leave me. You seem to ward off my muse.

AQUILO:

Yes...of course...my Emperor...

As Aquilo bows and backs out of the room, Nero takes a seat at the table and immediately begins to frantically scribble on a scroll.

CUT TO

Close-up of a stone-faced Roman centurion, his helmet gleaming in the sun.

A clang of metal is heard. The camera pulls back to show the centurion's sword lying at his feet, and then further back to show a row of loyalist Roman soldiers throwing down their swords. Sabina stands in front of them, smiling slightly.

Xena approaches, sheathing her sword as she walks toward Sabina. Gabrielle and Haimon are seen following behind her. Xena stops next to Sabina; she is slightly out of breath. There is a bleeding cut on her left arm and some blood on her face.

XENA:

All done, I see.

SABINA:

Complete and unconditional surrender--not bad for a day's work. (pauses and continues in a tone that may or may not be sarcastic) But we couldn't have done it without you, Xena. (She steps forward and raises her voice, addressing the captured troops) You've fought bravely. There's no shame in defeat--only in fighting for an unjust cause. Those of you who are willing to join us will be treated as if they had fought with us from the very first day. Step forward! Join us and fight for freedom--Rome's and your own.

Tentatively, one of the soldiers steps forward, then another. Soon, a large group of captured soldiers has stepped forward. One of them shouts, "Sabina!" The others pick up the chant.

Smiling, Sabina turns toward the rebel troops behind her. They erupt in a roar of cheers.

SABINA (glances at Xena):

Like I said--not bad for a day's work.

DISSOLVE TO

A long shot of the rebel camp. It's late afternoon, the sky blazing orange as it gets close to sunset.

CUT TO

Xena standing outside her tent, brushing down Argo. Gabrielle and Haimon stand nearby, at a certain distance, not looking at each other.

HAIMON (bitterly):

You know, if someone had told me a year ago that I'd be fighting side by side with--(interrupts himself) What am I talking about! If someone had told me a month ago that I'd be fighting under Valeria Sabina, I would have laughed in their face.

XENA (her back still turned to him and Gabrielle):

Sometimes, you make whatever alliances you can.

HAIMON:

Even if it means watching Sabina become Empress of Rome?

XENA (whips around, her eyes narrowing):

That is *not* going to happen.

HAIMON:

You're going to stop her? How?

GABRIELLE (awkwardly):

Xena, Haimon is right--she's getting much too powerful. You saw what happened out there.

XENA (brusquely):

Yes, I saw it. You don't need to remind me.

Pan to Andrash coming up to them.

ANDRASH:

Xena. A messenger from Rome has just arrived with news. (Xena looks at him expectantly) The legions of Galba, governor of Hispania, have turned against Nero and are on their way here--ready to proclaim Galba the new emperor. Otho, the head of the Praetorian guard in Rome, is backing him as well.

XENA (looks at him appraisingly):

What sort of a man is he?

ANDRASH:

An honorable man, from everything I've heard--one who doesn't want power for himself, and has never been known to misuse it. The messenger says he is still hesitant to assume the title of emperor.

GABRIELLE:

But Nero's still the emperor, isn't he?

ANDRASH (turns to her):

That's the other news. Nero has fled Rome.

GABRIELLE:

How--when--? (stunned) Where did he go?

ANDRASH (shrugs):

If anyone knew that, he'd have been captured by now. He and a few of his minions left the palace last night, under the cover of darkness. From the reports we've had, they were headed in this direction. They could be hiding out anywhere--probably on their way to rejoin Nero's loyal legions.

XENA:

So Galba will be the new emperor.

ANDRASH:

I didn't say that. (Xena looks at him curiously) Galba's getting on in years; he's not much of a

leader on the battlefield anymore. If we have to continue fighting Nero's troops, the men are liable to want someone younger and--shall we say--more vigorous at the helm.

XENA (gives him a probing look):
And what do *you* want, Andrash?

ANDRASH:
Me? To get rid of a mad tyrant wearing the emperor's mantle. After that--it's up to the people.

He looks meaningfully at Xena and walks away.

HAIMON:
He couldn't have made it clearer. The longer this war goes on, the more powerful Sabina becomes.

XENA:
And the longer Nero lives, the longer the war goes on.

Gabrielle gives her a troubled look.

HAIMON:
Xena--I've never killed in cold blood. But knowing what I know about Nero-- (he glances quickly in Gabrielle's direction, then turns to Xena again) if I had to kill him with my own hands to stop Sabina from becoming Empress... (he pauses for a moment) I'd do it.

The camera slowly pans over to Gabrielle's, who looks anguished.

XENA:
You'd have to find him first.

Close-up on Gabrielle, her expression changing from anguish to grim determination.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle in their tent. Xena, in her leather tunic with the armor off, is mending a rip in her boot. Gabrielle is sitting on a fur spread, lost in thought. After a moment Gabrielle gets up. Xena looks up at her.

GABRIELLE:
I'm--going out.

Xena gives her a questioning look, then nods in understanding.

XENA (quietly):
Good luck. (off Gabrielle's slightly shocked look) Gabrielle, Haimon's a good man. And he loves you. (pauses) It's about time you two worked things out.

GABRIELLE:
I--I'm not--

She trails off and looks as though she were about to say something. Then she sighs.

GABRIELLE:

Don't wait up for me.

XENA (with a forced smile):

I understand.

Gabrielle leaves. Xena goes back to mending her boot, her movements harsh and slightly jerky.

There is a flash of blue light; Ares materializes sitting next to her. She doesn't look up.

ARES:

You know, I could help you... (she looks up at him sharply and he gestures toward her boot) ...with that.

XENA:

That's all right. (after a short silence, she finally looks up at him) What do you want?

ARES:

Not to talk about the war for a few hours? (he puts his hand on her bare leg and she shivers slightly)

XENA (puts down the boot and sighs):

That's not going to solve anything.

ARES:

Well--it could make for a--much more pleasant evening.

XENA (sadly and wearily):

And then it's going to be morning--and I'm still going to have to figure out a way to end this war before Sabina becomes unstoppable. And you are still going to have two armies praying to you for success...just like you always wanted.

Close-up on Ares as he stares at her grimly, his lips tightening.

XENA (glances at him wonderingly):

What does it feel like?

ARES (after a brief pause, rubs his chin wearily):

What did it feel like to have thousands of warriors chanting your name? (Xena nods somberly in understanding) Take that--and make it a hundred times stronger.

She gazes at him, stricken. Then her expression softens.

ARES (lowering his voice):

Now can we not talk about the war?

Xena takes his hand.

CUT TO

A makeshift stable in the camp--a canopy supported by four poles. Haimon is in the stables brushing his horse down.

Gabrielle comes in. Seeing Haimon, she stops short and flinches slightly. Haimon barely turns his head to acknowledge Gabrielle's presence. She gives him a defiant look, then goes over to Klio and starts to saddle her. They work in resentful silence until Gabrielle finally sighs in exasperation.

GABRIELLE:

Are you ever going to talk to me again?

HAIMON (shrugs lightly):

Maybe I'm just waiting my turn. After Xena and Nero I'm pretty far down on your list.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon, that's not--

HAIMON:

Not what? Not fair? Not true?

Gabrielle says nothing, at a loss for words. Haimon gestures to her horse.

HAIMON:

So where are you going?

GABRIELLE:

There's something I have to do--alone.

HAIMON:

That's just fine. No, no--don't tell me what it is. I didn't expect you to.

GABRIELLE (smiles bitterly):

So I guess you *do* know me better than you thought.

She mounts her horse and rides out of the stable. Haimon stands looking after her in exasperation.

CUT TO

Gabrielle rides away. In the half-dark, a figure strolling through the tents stops, looking after her.

Close-up on Sabina, who stares quizzically after Gabrielle. She tilts her head, obviously thinking about something as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Xena's tent. The camera pans over to Ares and Xena. He is half-lying on the fur spread, propped up on some pillows, with his arms around Xena, whose head is resting on his chest. Their eyes are closed, their expressions tender and wistful.

HAIMON (off-camera):

Xena?

Xena's eyes fly open and she sits up. Haimon is standing at the tent entrance. Ares scowls while Xena stares silently at Haimon.

HAIMON (uncomfortably):

Sorry, I didn't realize you had--company.

Xena glances awkwardly at Ares; he gets up and disappears in a flash of light. Haimon flinches slightly.

XENA:

It's all right--what is it?

HAIMON (awkwardly):

Can I talk to you...about Gabrielle?

XENA:

You mean she's not--(breaks off abruptly, a flash of realization on her face)

HAIMON (stares at her intently):

No. She told you she was going to see me?

XENA (shakes her head slowly):

No.

HAIMON:

She just rode out of camp--she told me there's something she needs to do alone. (pauses) I think we both know who she's gone off to find.

He and Xena stare at each other.

XENA:

Haimon. If Gabrielle has gone to find Nero, it's not to protect him.

HAIMON:

What makes you so sure?

XENA:

Knowing what I know about Nero. (pauses) And knowing Gabrielle.

HAIMON (frowns):

What about Nero?

XENA (with an anguished look):

Haimon--it was Nero who led the gang that raided Darion's village. It was Nero who kidnapped his

sister. (off his shocked look) It was just a lark for him. A spoiled Roman nobleman--sowing his wild oats. (softly) Whatever illusions Gabrielle may have had about Nero once--she could never forgive him for that. (pauses) And she knows that the war needs to be stopped--as much as you and I do.

They stare at each other.

CUT TO

Night. Outside Nero's house. Aquilo and the slaves guarding the exits are visible in the moonlight. The camera pans to Gabrielle, who is hiding in the shrubbery nearby, watching intently.

A hand comes down on the shoulder. She flinches and turns around to see Ares standing behind her.

GABRIELLE (in an angry whisper):
Ares. I don't have time for this.

ARES (with a crooked grin):
For what? You've been sitting here long enough to take a good nap.

GABRIELLE:
What are you here for?

ARES:
Funny, I could ask you the same thing.

GABRIELLE:
You know why I'm here.



ARES (sarcastic):
Kill Nero. Stop the war. Stop Sabina. Am I missing anything?

GABRIELLE (angrily):
Don't try to stop me.

ARES (raises his eyebrows):
Me? The only thing stopping you is you.

GABRIELLE:

I'm just waiting for a chance to get into the house. I need to get past them. (gestures toward the men patrolling the house)

ARES (chuckles):

Them? A few house slaves too much for you to handle? Come on, you could have taken them in your first year on the road with Xena.

GABRIELLE:

That's just it, don't you see? They're not warriors. And they'd fight to the last to protect their emperor.

ARES:

So--if you could get past them--you would just walk up to Nero and--(draws his finger across his throat)

GABRIELLE (winces):

I'll do what I have to do. (off his skeptical look) Isn't this what you've been telling me, Ares? That I won't accept my responsibility as a warrior? (bitterly) Maybe it's time I did.

ARES:

Right. And your only problem is getting inside the house.

Gabrielle stares at him defiantly. Ares walks past her and toward the house.

GABRIELLE (hisses):

What are you *doing*?

ARES:

Don't worry, they can't see me.

He holds out his right arm and makes a sweeping motion. In the next instant, the men outside the house crumple to the ground.



GABRIELLE (runs toward Ares):

Oh no--what did you--

ARES:

They're asleep, not dead. They'll stay that way until dawn. (smirks) There goes your excuse. Good luck.

He vanishes in a flash of light. Gabrielle stares in exasperation at the spot where he vanished. Then, pursing her lips with a determined look, she walks toward the house.

CUT TO

Nero shuffling morosely down a dark, deserted hallway in his residence, a beam of moonlight provides faint illumination. He stops and glances around.

NERO:

Aquilo?

He waits for a response but there is only deadly silence.

NERO (sighs):

Alone... (He shuffles along aimlessly, muttering sorrowfully to himself.)

...The horror of the house,

The curse of ancient bloodshed, now repaid!

Yea, deep and to the heart the deathblow fell,

Edged by their (he stops, blinks and shakes his head, trying to remember the rest of the line)...*by their feud ineffable...*

He passes by a darkened archway and Gabrielle steps out of the shadows behind him, a dangerous expression on her face.

GABRIELLE:

...By the grim curse, their sire did imprecate

Discord and deadly hate!

Nero gasps and spins around.

NERO:

Gabrielle! You...(he looks her up and down) You're here...

She glares and Nero shrinks back a little. He glances around nervously.

NERO:

And Xena?



GABRIELLE:

Xena isn't the one you should be worried about.

NERO:

Of course she is! She's a barbarian--a vicious, deceitful thug. Surely I don't have to tell *you* that.

GABRIELLE (menacingly):

I'm warning you. Watch what you say about--



NERO:

We are artists, Gabrielle. We've dedicated our lives to the muse--to creation--not the destruction that Xena is so hell bent on.

Gabrielle is eerily calm. She glares at Nero dangerously.

GABRIELLE:

You're one to talk. It was you that raided Darion's village, killed his parents, took his sister. (she takes a menacing step towards Nero.) Then you offered Lykia her freedom in exchange for murdering Agrippina.

Nero reels back, as if struck by a blow.

NERO:

Who is it that has turned you so against me? That pathetic weakling that you've taken up with? (he smirks) Oh yes--I know all about him. A destitute vagabond that follows after you and Xena like some tame pup. What could he possibly have that I don't?

GABRIELLE:

For starters--me.

With a howl, Nero lunges at Gabrielle. Gabrielle reacts quickly, spinning around to land a kick in the small of his back. Before he can check his forward momentum, Nero stumbles into a wall, banging his shoulder. He glances around for a weapon or an avenue of escape, finding none, he glances up at the ceiling as if in supplication.

NERO:

*O father, look down on the fight;
Look down in thy wrath on the wronger, with eyes that are eager for right.*

GABRIELLE:

Forget the poetry and fight.

Nero freezes, as if trying to screw up his courage to charge at her again. When Gabrielle pulls her sais from her boots and affects a fighting stance he sinks to his knees, holding his hands up in front of his face.

NERO:

No! No, you can't! Gabrielle--I implore you...in the name of everything we--

Gabrielle takes a menacing step closer. Realizing he is unable to talk her out of this, Nero suddenly sighs, composing himself. He lifts his head to expose his throat and squeezes his eyes shut.

NERO:

What an artist the world loses in me!

Gabrielle lifts her sai above her head. Nero clasps his hands tightly together, his lip quivers even as he tries to maintain his composure. Despite herself, Gabrielle is affected by the pathetic figure crumpled on the floor. She pauses a long moment, thinking. Finally, she exhales slowly, lowering her weapon. Nero opens up his eyes, blinking in confusion.

NERO (sighing in relief):

I knew you couldn't--

She strikes Nero in the temple with the handle of her sai. He crumples to the floor unconscious.

Gabrielle stares down at him, her expression inscrutable. She doesn't hear Sabina step up behind her.

SABINA:

I knew you couldn't do it.

Gabrielle turns her head slightly.

GABRIELLE:

You followed me?

SABINA (shrugs lightly):

I figured that if anyone knew where Nero was hiding, it would be you.

GABRIELLE (speaks as if to herself):

He told me about this place once. He said it inspired his muse.

Sabina rolls her eyes.

SABINA:

Well, be sure to give his muse my regards. But if I were you I'd leave her name out of this and hog all the credit for myself.

Gabrielle flinches, as if reminded of something. Sabina notices and nods.

SABINA:

My, my. Quite a sticky situation for you, isn't it, Gabrielle? You can't bring yourself to kill Nero--and yet you and Xena both think that Nero has to die to keep me from getting too powerful. (smirks) Don't think I haven't figured it out. Now, what's to stop me from stealing Nero right out from under your nose and bringing him back to camp as my trophy? Just think how many converts I'd win with a move like that.

Gabrielle spins on Sabina, a fierce glint in her eye.

GABRIELLE:

The war is over, Sabina. Galba is going to be proclaimed emperor and Xena and I are prepared to do whatever it takes to keep you from power.

SABINA (smirks):

Whatever it takes...well, when you put it like that it sounds almost too good to pass up.

Close-up of Sabina smirking coldly at Gabrielle, then Gabrielle staring back defiantly at Sabina. Off-camera, a moan is heard. Sabina and Gabrielle both look down abruptly. The camera pans to Nero, who stirs and slowly sits up, and then back to Gabrielle, who is clearly struggling with her emotions.

DISSOLVE TO

Dawn. A covered wagon on a road. As the camera pulls in closer we see that Sabina and Gabrielle are sitting at the front of the wagon, Gabrielle holding the reins. Sabina looks over her shoulder back inside the wagon.

SABINA:

Your little friend is still out. (she shakes her head in admiration) That's quite a right hook you've got. I guess you picked up something from Xena after all.

Gabrielle raises her eyebrows in curiosity.

GABRIELLE:

That almost sounded like a compliment.

Sabina shakes her head and taps her temple.

SABINA:

You're right. Hanging around a goody-goody like you is starting to turn me soft in the head.

Approaching from down the road, two soldiers on horseback can be seen approaching the wagon. One is a dark-haired man barely in his twenties, with a still-healing cut on the left side of his face. The second man is somewhat older; from his armor, it's apparent that he's a high-ranking officer.

RIANORIX (pointing at Sabina):

That's her. That's Valeria Sabina.

Sabina nods at the young man.

SABINA:

You were with me yesterday, weren't you?

He nods.

SABINA:

I remember. Rianorix. You fought well.

The young man grins shyly, obviously flattered that Sabina remembered him.

OTHO:

Valeria Sabina. (he slightly bows his head.) Marcus Salvius Otho, commander of the Praetorian Guard. My compliments to you. Your army has carried the day.

Sabina smirks and cocks her head to one side.

SABINA:

And what exactly is your business with me, Marcus Salvius Otho? Can I expect to be facing the Praetorian Guard on the battlefield any time soon?

OTHO (frowns):

You do have a reputation for being...direct.

SABINA (chuckles):

And you Romans waste too much time on the social niceties. Skirting around like a pack of frightened schoolgirls isn't going to win any battles.

Gabrielle chuckles uncomfortably, trying to defuse what could become a confrontation.

GABRIELLE:

You'll have to excuse her, General. Manners aren't exactly her strong suit.

OTHO (raises his eyebrows):

Obviously not. Be as it may--I'm here to tell you that the Praetorian Guard is at your service.

GABRIELLE:

What about Galba?

OTHO:

Galba is a beloved leader--but he's an old man. As I'm sure you've heard, Nero has fled Rome and is on his way to join his still-loyal legions. That means we're in for the long haul--and Galba doesn't have what it takes to lead an army in a drawn-out campaign.

Gabrielle glances warily at Sabina. Sabina notices and slides her gaze to Gabrielle, smirking dryly. She pauses a moment, obviously reveling in the idea of the power she is about to command, then glances behind her into the wagon. She turns back to Otho and frowns, shaking her head.

SABINA:

I'm afraid you're a day late and a dinar short, General. The war is over. We found Nero dead in his residence.

OTHO:

The emperor is *dead*?

SABINA:

An apparent suicide. You didn't expect him to be taken alive, did you?

OTHO:

Where is his body?

SABINA:

Burned up. His slaves were cremating him as we arrived. (She chuckles dryly.) Apparently Nero didn't want to be taken dead *or* alive.

Gabrielle holds up her hand to Otho.

GABRIELLE:

This is all that was left.

On her index finger can be seen Nero's imperial ring.

Otho is flustered, this outcome not being one he had expected.

OTHO:

Well, this changes everything... I--

SABINA:

You mean, I've just lost my new best friend? Pity.

Otho stares.

SABINA:

Send my regards--and this (she takes the ring from Gabrielle)--to the new emperor Galba.

She hands the ring over to Otho. Flustered, Otho bows to her again and turns his horse around, galloping off quickly.

Gabrielle gapes at Sabina, the magnitude of what the woman has just walked away from has rendered her speechless. Sabina stares straight ahead, not meeting Gabrielle's gaze.

SABINA:

Where's that goody-goody friend of yours? I've got a job for him.

CUT TO

Early morning. Xena is in the stables brushing Argo down. It's obvious by the far-away look in her eyes and the mechanical way she tends to Argo that she's troubled. Gabrielle comes up behind her.

GABRIELLE:

Xena?

XENA (gasps):

Gabrielle! (she spins around and rushes forward to gather Gabrielle in her arms, hugging her tightly.) Are you okay?

Gabrielle steps out of Xena's embrace.

GABRIELLE:

I'm fine, Xena--fine. (she pauses a moment then bows her head guiltily.) Xena, I...last night...I lied to you. I wasn't with Haimon--.

Xena takes Gabrielle's hands.

XENA:

I know, Gabrielle. I know you went to...find Nero.

GABRIELLE:

You know?

XENA:

Haimon came to see me after you rode out of camp. It wasn't hard to figure out the rest.

GABRIELLE (frowns):

I'm sorry I lied to you, Xena.

XENA:

No...no--as much as I wanted to stop you--I knew this was something you had to face on your own.

Gabrielle nods sorrowfully and sighs. Xena reaches out and strokes Gabrielle's shoulder gently.

XENA (in a near-whisper):

Nero is dead?

Gabrielle looks at Xena and shakes her head slightly.

CUT TO

Outside the camp. The covered wagon we saw before stands off the side of the road, in the shade of some trees. Haimon and Gabrielle are standing a few paces away from the wagon, facing each other, both looking uncomfortable.

GABRIELLE:

Thank you for doing this. (after a pause she gestures toward the wagon) You do believe that I'm doing the right thing--don't you?

HAIMON:

Yes, I do.

GABRIELLE:

He'll never be a danger to anyone again. As far as everyone's concerned--Nero, the Emperor of Rome, is dead.

HAIMON:

Unless he tells someone who believes him.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head sadly):

Where he's going--I'm sure they've seen their share of Roman emperors.

A brief pause. Then Haimon reaches out and takes Gabrielle's hand.

HAIMON:

Gabrielle...some of the things I said to you--I... (shakes his head) I don't know if I'll ever forgive myself.

GABRIELLE (squeezes his hand):

Haimon--we were both at fault. I hope...I know we can put this behind us.

They stare at each other for a moment.

HAIMON (with a forced smile):

Let's not wait for another war until we see each other again, okay?

GABRIELLE (sighs):

There's always going to be another war.

After another brief pause, Haimon leans down to kiss her. They are interrupted by Nero's voice off-camera.

NERO (off-camera):

Young man!

The camera pans toward the covered wagon. Haimon sighs resignedly and walks over to the wagon, with Gabrielle cautiously following him. Haimon opens the flap of the wagon covering and we see Nero sitting inside, his hands chained, a blank and absent look in his eyes.

NERO (peevisly):

Isn't it time for us to get on the road? I would *hate* to be late for my performance.

HAIMON (rolls his eyes):

Right...wouldn't want that to happen.

NERO:

Do you think Mother will be in the audience? You know--it's a terrible thing to say for a loving son--but I'd rather she didn't come. She doesn't think acting is a proper hobby for a Roman gentleman, you see. (lifts his eyes in resignation) Mother has no appreciation for the arts. Not like Gabrielle.

Quick pan to Gabrielle, who stands behind Haimon, unseen to Nero, an anguished look on her face. Then back to Nero, who suddenly grows more animated.

NERO:

Gabrielle--she will be there, will she not?

HAIMON (somewhat at a loss for words):

I--I don't know.

NERO (sighs and holds up his chained hands):

I must say, this costume is most uncomfortable. But one must make sacrifices for the muse...

He stares blankly at his hands and his speech turns to unintelligible muttering. With a sigh and a headshake, Haimon closes the flap and turns toward Gabrielle. They step aside from the wagon.

GABRIELLE (worriedly puts her hand on Haimon's arm):

Will you be all right? Maybe I should come along...

HAIMON (with a forced smile):

This isn't the way I would want to spend time with you. (puts her hand on top of his) I can handle it, Gabrielle.

They stand still for a moment, staring at each other. The camera pulls back to show Xena, Sabina and Siran, waiting on the road, standing by their horses.

SABINA (pretends to yawn):

Well? How much longer will it take them to profess eternal love?

Xena glances at Sabina and rolls her eyes.

Gabrielle walks back toward them. Behind her, we see Haimon getting on the trestle of the wagon and driving off.

GABRIELLE:

I'm ready. (She turns and stares after Haimon.) Do you think I'll ever see him again?

XENA (gives her a thoughtful look):

I know you will.

Gabrielle squeezes Xena's hand affectionately and they smile at each other.

SABINA:

I hope you don't mind if I don't join in the group hug.

XENA (glances at her wryly):

I see you're as sensitive as ever.

SABINA (smirks):

Did you expect anything else?

XENA:

Good-bye, Siran. (to Sabina) Look out for her.

Gabrielle comes up and faces Sabina looking at her intently.

SABINA (smirks):

You're dying to ask me a question, aren't you?

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Why did you do it?

SABINA:

You mean--why didn't I hand Nero over to Otho? In his condition--it wouldn't have been very sporting.

XENA:

You could have had it all.

SABINA (shrugs and grins slightly):

I'm a survivor, Xena. Being a Roman emperor doesn't come with a long life expectancy. I wouldn't count on Galba to die of old age.

GABRIELLE (looks at her curiously):

And that's the only reason.

Sabina pauses and glances briefly at Siran, then back at Gabrielle. She smiles slightly, cocking her head.

SABINA:

It's the only one you're going to get.

Gabrielle looks at her curiously, then smiles slightly and walks over to Siran.

GABRIELLE:

Good-bye, Siran.

They hug, then pull apart.

SIRAN (smiles):

I was right about her, wasn't I? (Gabrielle gives her an uncertain look and nods slightly) Will you write to me?

GABRIELLE:

Sure.

SABINA:

Just don't send her any poems.

GABRIELLE:

Where are you going now?

SIRAN:

To Jeronim. They're rebuilding that hospital--I'd like to help.

Xena gives Sabina a curious look, saying nothing.

SABINA (off her look, grins a little):

Don't worry, I'll find something to keep me busy. (she gets in the saddle) Come on, Siran.

Siran mounts her horse and they ride away. Xena and Gabrielle stand watching them.

Xena shakes her head; then she straightens up and smiles a little.

XENA:

Don't tell me you're going to miss her.

Gabrielle gives her a shocked look. Ares materializes next to them and Gabrielle nods, realizing that Xena wasn't talking to her.

ARES:

Not much. Especially now that she's turned out to be just another softie.



XENA:

Careful. You might miss her *more*.

ARES:

You don't think I'd let *that* happen again, do you?

His cocky grin turns to a suddenly serious expression.

XENA:

Gabrielle told me about--what you did. (a little awkwardly) Thank you. (teasingly) You realize that this war is over thanks to you?

ARES:

Don't rub it in.

They look at each other; Xena smirks a little and Ares cocks his head at her with a small grin. Then he turns to Gabrielle.

ARES:

So--

GABRIELLE:

I know what you're going to say. I didn't kill him. (Xena frowns as she looks from Gabrielle to Ares and back, as Gabrielle continues) I am a warrior, Ares. But as a warrior--I'm going to do things my way. I can fight--and kill--if I have to. If I can find a solution without killing, I will.

ARES (lifts his eyebrows quizzically):

Did I say anything?

XENA (smiles at him a bit tensely):

I think you should quit while you're ahead.

ARES (smirks at her):

Let's face it, Xena--you would have stopped this war one way or the other. Maybe I just saved us both some time.

XENA (lifts an eyebrow):

Right.



ARES (suavely):

For which we both have better uses.

Xena gives him a barely perceptible smile as he vanishes. She stands still for a moment, lost in thought. Then she looks tenderly at Gabrielle.

XENA:

I'm proud of you, Gabrielle.

They look at each other, smiling affectionately.

GABRIELLE:

Well, now that we have all this time on our hands...what do you say we pay Darion a visit?

XENA (after a moment's pause):

Good idea.

They get in the saddle and ride off at a trot.

GABRIELLE (wonderingly):

You know--things haven't turned out so badly after all. (pauses) So, do you think Siran was right?

XENA:

I've always said that anyone has the ability to change. After what Sabina did--we owe it to her to believe that she has. (glances at Gabrielle) Just like you believed in me once.

They both mull this over for a moment. Then Gabrielle gives Xena an amused look.

GABRIELLE:

You know what Sabina would say if she could hear us now, don't you?

XENA (smiles a little):

She'd say I've gone soft in the head.



GABRIELLE (grins mischievously):

Well, have you?

XENA (her smile fading to a serious expression):

I hope not.

The camera pulls back for a long shot of Xena and Gabrielle riding along the road as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Sabina's reputation as a do-gooder got a boost during the production of this motion picture.]