

SHIPPER SEASON TEN



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Story By: Aurora
Written By: Elfrieda
Edited By: LadyKate
Collage By: Aurora
Images Gathered By: Aurora

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Logline

A series of seemingly unrelated events causes chaos in a small village and when Xena, Ares, Gabrielle and Aphrodite are asked to explain the reasons for the madness, they find that keeping their stories straight is harder than it looks.

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TEASER

FADE IN

A dark, forbidding room with stone walls, black fabric and skulls and weapons adorning the walls. A portal swirls in the room in front of a large, high-backed chair. Someone is sitting on the throne, but all we can see is a hand, long black fingernails and a black and silver gauntlet. The hand is clearly that of a woman.

In the portal, an image forms and a village comes into view, with a gradual zoom on people in the streets.

We move through the portal toward the village as a cackle is heard over the screen.

CUT TO

A town with a large crowd of people. Everyone is fighting each other; the scene is total chaos.



We see shots of:

- a woman holding a man in a headlock and sticking her finger in his ear.
- a man and a woman near a food stall throwing eggs, fruit and bread at each other.
- Aphrodite slapping Gabrielle with a herring and then getting a squid thrown at her face, by Xena, who then gets tackled by Ares.
- Horace running through the crowd, barking, with Darion chasing after him.
- a man pushing a woman's face into a meringue pie, and then gets a pie thrown in his face by another man standing next to him.
- a couple of young boys wrestling, and one of them trying to make the other one eat a bug.
- Xena and Ares wrestling on the ground with Aphrodite pelting them with eggs, while Gabrielle sneaks up behind Dite and tries to hog-tie her with a piece of rope.

-- Xena goes to punch Ares in the face but Horace jumps up and bites her arm. She jerks back as the dog runs off.

-- Gabrielle pushes Aphrodite into a puddle of mud; Aphrodite lets out an angry groan, looking at her ruined clothes.

A woman dressed in rich but severe attire comes out of a nearby building. She looks around in confusion for a few moments, then comes out into the middle of the crowd and yells at the top of her lungs.

MAGISTRATE:

Quiet!!!

Everyone freezes at the same time and gives the woman full attention.

MAGISTRATE (looks impressed with herself, then clears her throat):

That's better. I've been in meetings with the rest of the town council all day, so I have no idea what is going on here, but *someone* had better have an explanation!

The magistrate scans the crowd, waiting for someone to respond, then she notices Xena, Gabrielle, Ares and Aphrodite. All four look extremely filthy and disheveled now. The magistrate eyes them suspiciously, then makes her way over to them.

MAGISTRATE:

You're strangers here, and (looks them up and down) you all seem to be perpetrating several health code violations, not to mention the fashion felonies you're committing...

She points at Aphrodite, who is wearing her furry pink costume from "Love Amazon Style." Ares smirks at this insult, and Aphrodite looks appalled.



APHRODITE:

Do you think this color washes me out?

MAGISTRATE (ignores her):

You're coming with me on a little trip *downtown* (she pauses for emphasis, relishing the drama of the situation) so I can figure out what in Zeus' name is going on here.

Xena, Ares and Gabrielle look like they are each about to speak when they are interrupted.

APHRODITE (confused):

But Zeus had nothing to do with this!

MAGISTRATE:

What?

XENA (elbows Dite in the ribs):

She's right, Zeus isn't responsible. It was probably just a cranky ex-goddess with too much time on her hands (she glares at Dite pointedly).

APHRODITE:

Or maybe a grouchy Warrior Princess with no fashion sense!

ARES (jumps into the bickering):

Grouchy? That's putting it mildly! My dog Gregus had a sweeter disposition, and he used to eat the bodies of the dead!

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, and you're, what? Some kind of saint? Ever since you lost your godhood, you've been nothing but a lazy mooch!

APHRODITE:

Hey, just because some of us are accustomed to a certain standard of living--



XENA:

You know, there's a word for people like that--

MAGISTRATE (annoyed):

Cut it out!

They look back at her, as if they forgot she was there.

MAGISTRATE:

Come with me, now!

CUT TO

A single candle, glowing brightly in the center of a long table.

Xena, Gabrielle, Ares and Aphrodite are crowded shoulder-to-shoulder in chairs behind the small wooden table.

Ares is holding an icepack to his head, where he has a bruise on his temple and a black eye. Xena has her arm wrapped in a bandage where Horace bit her and Gabrielle and Aphrodite have various small scratches on their arms and faces. Aphrodite's hair and clothes are covered in flecks of dried mud. She still doesn't look pleased as she tries to clean herself off, getting more disgusted by the minute.

The magistrate stands on the other side with her hands on the table, propping her up as she leans forward to thrust her face forward threateningly.

MAGISTRATE:

I want to hear from each of you exactly what happened. And I want the truth, or things might get...uncomfortable for you.

Xena, Gabrielle, Ares and Dite look at each other guardedly as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

MAGISTRATE:

Well? Out with it. I want to know what you four had to do with today's little experiment in anarchy! New Athens is in shambles!

The woman looks at Ares, and her eyes linger on his chest, which is partly visible through his vest. She catches herself and makes herself look back up to his eyes.

MAGISTRATE:

You first.

Ares, noticing her admiring glance, gives Xena a look that says, "See? Some people appreciate me," adjusts his icepack, and begins to speak.

ARES (gives his most winning smile, then winces at the pain in his cheek):

The name's Ares, by the way. Yes, *that* Ares. (realizes why that sounds really bad right now) Oh, but I never used to get into fights, not until I became mortal...you see, I'm a lover, not a fighter.

Ares starts and cries out in pain as Xena apparently kicks him under the table.

ARES:

It--it was a horrible morning, just like any other day of my mortal life...

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

A campsite. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are all busy working. Darion is gathering sticks, Gabrielle is building up the campfire, occasionally turning to coo to the baby, who is bundled up on a tree stump next to her, and Xena is skinning a rabbit. Ares is sitting on a log, rubbing his eyes.

XENA (looks up):

Ares. What's wrong? Didn't sleep well?

ARES:

I tried, but...being mortal is *brutal*. You have *no* idea.



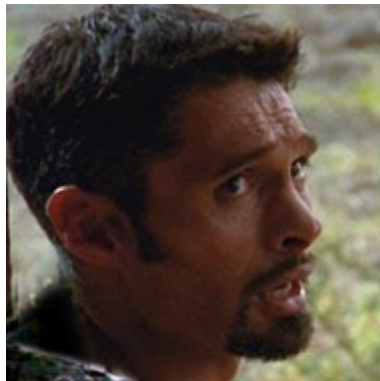
XENA (teasing):

Oh, you're right--I don't. (more sympathetic) I know this must be hard for you.

GABRIELLE (looks at Ares):

Hey, could you finish packing up all the bedrolls?

She points over to where Ares' bedroll, recently vacated, lies on the ground.



ARES:

You know I would, but... (yawns) I just have... (yawns again) *no* energy in the morning.

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, okay. Darion, would you please pack up Ares' bedroll for him?

ARES (continues speaking while Darion packs the bedroll):

When I was a god, I could have just snapped my fingers like this (snaps his fingers) and it would have been done. Actually, I wouldn't even have had to do the snapping thing. That bit was just for show; mortals eat that stuff up, you know?

XENA (gives him an adoring look that's only part teasing):

Yeah, I bet they did...Hey, could you bring me a bucket of water from the stream? I'm going to need some to finish cleaning this rabbit.

ARES:

My arms are soooo sore, Xena! I wasn't meant to sleep on the ground. When I was a--

XENA:

Okay, okay. I'll get the water.

Xena stands up and moves to grab the bucket, which is sitting right beside Ares, giving him a nice (though unintentional) view of her cleavage.

ARES (waits until Xena is right beside him, then whispers in her ear):

Maybe later tonight you could help me work these kinks out...

Xena gives him a sultry look, but doesn't reply. She picks up the bucket and swings it as she walks away, strutting in a seductive yet teasing manner, never looking back. Ares admires her backside as she disappears around a bush.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE (cuts into Ares' flashback irritably):

Get to the point!

ARES (gives Gabrielle a withering look):

I was just *going* to. Anyway, we ate breakfast and started walking down the road. Walking. All morning, we walked. And walked, and walked. Xena was getting really b--

He is cut short by Xena's glare as she turns her head with a "whoosh" sound.

ARES (continues, a little sheepishly):

--bossy all of a sudden.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Xena and Ares are walking next to each other, and Gabrielle is a few steps behind with the baby in a sling, and Darion is skipping all over the road beside her, excited.

XENA (rolls her eyes and groans):

What is it now, Ares?

ARES:

Don't you think we should take a break? My feet hurt...I mean, my mortal legs aren't used to this kind of strain!

XENA:

We just took a break three hours ago, so suck it up! You can rest later.

ARES:

But don't you think Gabrielle would like a break? And the boy?

XENA:

No, they're fine. I mean, if you're such a wimp, you could always ride the horse...Can't you walk any faster?

ARES:

I could. If I were, I don't know, A GOD.

XENA (impatiently):

Ares, we have been through this. So you lost your immortality. Why can't you just...you know, get over it?

ARES (scoffs):

Get over it? I was a god. I was going to live forever. I never had to sleep, much less sleep on the ground. And you want me to get over it? You know, Xena, sometimes you can be so...insensitive.

XENA (getting angrier):

And you can be *such* a baby! Why can't you just be a man and help us out sometimes? I don't ask much...only that you do what I say when I say it!!!

ARES (sarcastically):

Oh, is that all? Isn't there anything else I can do for you? Maybe wash your feet? Perhaps you'd like to use me as a footstool?

XENA:

Now you're just being ridiculous. I can wash my own feet, thank you very much.

ARES:

Figures--the one thing I was kinda looking forward to, you're not interested. I wonder if Hephaestus has to put up with this kind of--

XENA (interrupting):

Well, considering your sister and her husband are both ex-gods, too, they probably don't get anything done at all except sleep their mortal lives away!

ARES:

Well, at least *they* probably don't snore like Gregus with a bone stuck in his throat!

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA:

I do not snore! (turns to the magistrate, pointing her finger) He is making that up!

MAGISTRATE (to Ares):

Can you please tell me what this has to do with the fighting in my town?

ARES (glares at Xena, then smiles at the magistrate):

Yeah, no problem. I met Hephaestus, my brother-in-law, for some drinks at the tavern. We got to talking...

Xena glares at him.

ARES:

...and drinking...

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

A tavern. Ares is sitting with Hephaestus, and it's clear they are both starting to get a little drunk. They are in the middle of a lively conversation.

ARES (with slightly slurred speech):

Oh, and remember that time you forged that armor for me? What was that warlord's name, anyway? Ag...Agathon. He was no match for... (grumbles something inaudible) ...anyway, at least he didn't expect me to wash any frying pans! Can you believe that--the God of War, doing dishes!

HEPHAESTUS (also slurred):

Yeah, Aphrodite's always after me to set the table for dinner...I used to forge the greatest weapons known to man or god, and now (he hiccups, and his voice grows louder) the only knives I deal with are the ones she uses to cut her meat into little tiny heart-shaped pieces!

ARES:

At least Aphrodite cuts her meat! Xena just gnaws everything off the bone like she's some kind of...tigress!

HEPHAESTUS:

Hah--I bet she *is* a real tigress, right?

He slaps Ares on the back and laughs loudly. Ares grins, then sighs.

ARES:

Yeah, I just wish she wouldn't spend so much time chewing my ass! (They both laugh raucously.) 'Ares do this, Ares do that!' It never ends!

HEPHAESTUS (nods understandingly):

You should hear Aphrodite. 'I can't wear this same outfit twice! We need more money! Why don't you sell some of those rusty old weapons you used to make?'

ARES (shakes his head):

Ouch.

HEPHAESTUS:

Sometimes I go out to the forge just to get away from her. I mean, I love her, but...sometimes I just want to be alone with my equipment, you know?



ARES (gives him a shocked stare, then finally gets it and grins):

Oh. Yeah. I hear you, man. I mean, I can't live without her...and I mean that...but sometimes it's like co-habit...(burps) co-habiting with the Furies. Well, one, anyway, but one is enough. But at least that includes the free lap dances...

The two men break into laughter again, and Ares has to lean on Hephaestus for a moment to steady himself.

HEPHAESTUS:

So your sword is still getting plenty of use?

ARES:

Xena makes sure it stays...polished.

He nudges Hephaestus heavily, which is totally unnecessary, because he is already laughing uproariously.

HEPHAESTUS:

Get this, Dite says real men who are in love write poetry! I made a golden bust showcasing her...you know... (holds up both hands in the air and makes a squeezing motion as we hear a honking sound effect) but she wasn't impressed!

ARES:

So what did you do?

HEPHAESTUS:

I wrote her a poem! I couldn't think of enough words that rhyme with "Dite," so I tried using Venus...

ARES (eventually gets the joke after taking a long swig of ale):

So how did she take it?

HEPHAESTUS (pauses for a beat):

On her back!

Both men laugh so hard that they fall off their stools.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

APHRODITE (disgusted):

Ewww, bro, you guys are, like, such...guys! That's what you were talking about when I came in?

ARES:

Excuuuse me, I'm *trying* to tell a story, here!

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Same tavern. Ares and Hephaestus are picking themselves off the floor when Aphrodite rushes through the front door, out of breath and very distressed about something.

APHRODITE (her voice gets gradually higher in pitch):

Hephie! My statue! Some dirty little hooligan stole my statue!

Hephaestus takes her aside and tries to calm her down and get the full story out of her. Ares sits back down at the table and starts up a conversation with his drink.

ARES:

Guess it's just you and me now.

He takes a large gulp of the drink, 'ahhh's loudly and wipes his mouth. Then we hear Xena's battle cry from somewhere outside.

ARES (looks down into his glass, sighing):

We'll always have New Athens.

Ares gets up and stumbles out the door, leaving Hephaestus and Aphrodite to themselves.

Outside, Xena is fighting a bunch of thugs who are trying to manhandle some Hestian Virgins.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

MAGISTRATE:

So this is when the fight in my town broke out? And *she* (points at Xena) started it?

XENA:

No, that wasn't the same fight at all! That was a different-- (she stops, realizing she's not helping her cause)

ARES:

No, but it was (with relish) *awesome*.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Ares braces himself against the building to steady himself, and looks on while Xena fights. There are six men wearing leather armor, and two of them are off carrying bags of money, and the rest of them are trying to circle around Xena. There are two more men already on the ground, rubbing their heads.

Xena jumps into the air with a loud cry and kicks two of the thugs in the head at the same time. She lands on her feet and reaches back to punch the other two thugs, who were standing behind her, in the face. One of the first two men tries to land a swing with his sword, which she deflects easily with her own. She elbows the other one in the head and then moves her arm back to hit the first one with the hilt of her sword.

The two men behind her now try to attack again, and she swings back around with her sword, knocking their weapons from their hands. She runs forward, then runs up the tavern wall and does a backflip, which sends her outside the little circle of men.

ARES (loving every moment):
Showoff!

As Ares watches, the fight slows down, almost dream-like, as Xena spins around, swinging her sword left and right as the thugs attack. Her movements are as graceful as a dance, her loose hair flowing with the movements of her body.



Pan back to Ares watching, his lips parted slightly, his eyes filled with admiration and passion. Xena turns around, and fixes her eyes on his. They stare for just a moment when time seems to freeze around them, Xena's eyes burning with adrenaline. She gives him a sultry little smile as she swings behind her back, skewering one of the thugs in the gut with her sword.

Ares swallows.

ARES (aroused):
Oh yeah...

The fighting returns to normal speed.

She throws her chakram, which bounces off the four men's helmets, then cuts into one of the bags of money, which causes silver coins to shower onto the ground, and sends all of the men running.

Xena sees them scattering and goes to check on the Hestians. Ares walks cautiously in her direction, wobbling unsteadily. The Head Priestess comes rushing over to join them.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

MAGISTRATE:

And these are the men who started the fighting?

All four of them look at each other.

ARES:

Not exactly. Well, not right then, anyway.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Aphrodite comes rushing out of the tavern, with Hephaestus following behind (though much slower and with less purpose). Aphrodite runs toward Xena, nearly tripping, in a desperate state.

APHRODITE (squeaking through deep breaths):
He...took...my...favorite...statue! That...cretin!

ARES:
Some guy from Crete stole your statue?

XENA (whacks his arm):
Aphrodite, I don't have time for your silly ex-god problems!

XENA (voice-over):
I did not say that!

APHRODITE:
Xena, puh-leeese help me!

[END OF FLASHBACK]

ARES:

Since Xena was too busy to help my sister, Hephaestus offered to do it, even though he's mortal and might have been killed. And since dying would mean no more chores or sleeping with assorted rodents crawling all over the place... / volunteered to go with him.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Hephaestus motions in the direction he plans to go to track down the statue thief.

ARES (sarcastically, to Xena):
I think I'm gonna go with Hephaestus, that is, if you think you can manage without me for that long.

XENA (smiling with clenched teeth):
Yeah. I can manage *just* fine. You boys better hurry now.

Just then, Darion comes running over to them. We can hear Gabrielle calling out something, but she's not in sight.

DARION:
Wait! I want to go, too! I want to go with Ares.

XENA:
I don't know if that's such a good idea...

DARION (stubbornly):

I'm old enough! I don't want to stay here at the orphanage while everybody else gets to have fun!

XENA (not in the mood to argue anymore):

Fine. Ares, take good care of him, all right?

ARES (mutters):

You'd think I'd never watched the kid before.

DISSOLVE TO

A narrow path in a forest. Ares and Hephaestus are walking together with Darion a short way ahead of them, carrying a stick and swinging it around like a sword. The two men are still a bit drunk.

HEPHAESTUS (nods in Darion's direction):

Cute kid. Where'd you and Xena pick him up?

ARES (nearly chokes):

He's not--he's not *our* son! I guess Gabrielle found him. She's one of those humans who's always bringing home strays... Apparently she actually *likes* children. (Shudders.)

HEPHAESTUS (chuckles):

And I take it you don't? What about Xena? Aren't you two ever going to have any?

ARES:

Maybe--if she can figure out a way to get me pregnant! She expects me to do everything else now that I'm mortal.

HEPHAESTUS:

Oh, come on, it can't be that bad. You know, Dite wanted to have a baby before--back when we were still gods. Now she's afraid of losing her figure.

ARES:

Is there anything about being mortal that doesn't suck?

HEPHAESTUS (pretends to ponder the question for a moment):

Nope.

DARION (comes up to the two men and whispers):

Shhhh! I heard something over there!

Darion points to a cave in a nearby rock cliff.

ARES (puts his arm on the boy's shoulder):

Stay close to me.

He motions to Hephaestus to follow. They walk quietly over to the cave, then cautiously step inside. There are signs that someone has been here recently.

Suddenly, a blade appears against Hephaestus' neck.

FEMALE VOICE:

Didn't your mother ever teach you to--

ARES:

Xena? What are you doing?

XENA (withdraws her sword):

Ares? How did you manage to find this place before I did?

ARES:

What's that supposed to mean?

XENA:

Well, this morning you couldn't even find your way out of your bedroll without help, so--

ARES (bitterly):

Oh, that's right. Go ahead and mock me, Xena. 'Oh, silly Ares, he isn't used to living like a vagrant!' That doesn't change the fact that I got here first!

XENA (gets up in his face, shouting):

I was assessing the situation! I'm not dumb enough to go into a cave without knowing what's inside first!



ARES (shouting back):

Oh, that is just like you! You can never let anyone else win, can you?

One of the thugs from earlier approaches the entrance from outside the cave. He hears the shouting, drops the chest he is carrying, and runs away.

ARES (points at the thug):

Hey, that guy is getting away!

XENA (ignores him, then shoves him backwards):

Quit trying to change the subject, deadbeat!

Hephaestus runs into the cave after the thug, and Xena pays no attention.

ARES (concerned):

Xena, you're not listening to me! They're going to escape!

A pair of the thugs approaches from another tunnel in the cave, wondering what the shouting is about. Their eyes widen when they see Xena, and they run past her and Ares while the two are fighting. Darion looks as if he wants to run after the thugs himself, but thinks better of it, and then he attempts to come between Xena and Ares.

XENA:

You're just as worthless as all the other gods! The only thing you care about is-- you!

ARES:

Well, at least somebody does!

Three more thugs approach the cave, hear the argument, and run out. A few moments later, Hephaestus comes out, chasing them, but Xena doesn't notice them.

DARION:

HEEEEEYYYYYYY!!!

Xena and Ares finally look down at Darion.

DARION (points in the direction of the thugs):

They're getting away! Aren't you supposed to be, you know, chasing them?

Xena looks at Ares, who gives her an "I tried to tell you" look, then they run off simultaneously after the bad guys. Darion runs after them.

ARES (yells across at Xena while running):

Betcha I catch them first!

XENA:

No way, Ares!

Xena reaches out her leg and trips Ares, who goes flying head-first onto the ground. We see him spit out a leaf, his face angry and determined, and pick himself back up.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena and Ares running into the village, getting there just after the thugs. They see that everyone is fighting, and even the thugs are battling each other. Ares and Xena

look at each other and draw their swords, looking like they're going to kill each other. In the background we can see Gabrielle and Aphrodite pulling each other's hair and taking turns slapping each other.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

ARES (to the magistrate):

And that is *exactly* what happened.

Xena, Gabrielle and Aphrodite look at him and roll their eyes.

XENA:

No, no, no, *no!* You're telling it all wrong, Ares. (to the magistrate) Why don't you let me explain?

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

The interrogation room. The magistrate looks like she is losing patience. She grabs the candle and shoves it in Xena's face.

MAGISTRATE (threateningly):

I still don't have an explanation for why my people are fighting all of a sudden. I want the truth.

XENA (looks at the candle, then replies with a veneer of politeness):

Of course.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

The campfire setting from the beginning of Ares' story. Xena is cleaning the rabbit, and Gabrielle is working on getting the fire started, and Darion is picking up sticks. Everyone seems to be working hard except Ares, who is still lying in his bedroll.

Xena nudges Ares with her foot, first gently, then harder.

ARES (barely stirs, still dreaming):

Mo-om, I don't *want* to kill Hercules right now! I'm (yawns) too tired...

XENA:

I am definitely *not* your mother. It's time to get up. (reaches down and shakes his shoulder) Do you want breakfast, or not?

ARES (starts to come around, then looks at Xena doubtfully):

Who cooked it?

GABRIELLE:

I'm going to cook it, but it's not ready yet.

ARES (sits up, looking relieved):

Right, then. Wake me when it's ready.

Xena looks at the knife she's holding, then looks back at Ares, who has already gone back to sleep in his bedroll. She shakes her head, then goes back to skinning the rabbit.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA:

I decided to let Ares live--but only because I figured it'd be better to save him for emergency food.

ARES:

Oh, you can be so--hurtful sometimes.

Xena gives him a smirk, then leans back and continues her story.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Xena picks up a metal bucket, grabs one of Gabrielle's spoons, then puts it right next to Ares' head.

XENA (with wicked glee):

Wakey-wakey, God of War!

Baby Samuel starts to cry in the background as Xena continues to pound on the bucket.

ARES (groans):

All right, all right! I'm up! I'm up!

XENA (enjoys watching Ares stumbling to his feet):

Sleep well?

ARES (very whiny):

Xeeenaaa...being mortal is *bruuuutal*. You have *nooo* idea.

XENA (sarcastically):

Yeah, it must be *very hard* for you.

GABRIELLE (looks at Ares):

Hey, could you finish packing up the bedrolls?

ARES (lethargically):

You know I would...but I just have (yawns) no energy in the mornings.

GABRIELLE (annoyed):

Forget it. Darion, would you please pack up Ares' bedroll for him?

ARES (arrogantly):

When I was a god, I could have just snapped my fingers like this (snaps his fingers) and it would have been done. Actually, I wouldn't even have had to do the snapping thing. That bit was just for show; mortals eat that stuff up, you know?

XENA (rolls her eyes):

Yeah, I *bet* they did...Hey, since you're not doing anything at all helpful, could you bring me a bucket of water from the stream? I'm going to need some to finish cleaning this rabbit.

ARES:

My arms are soooo sore, Xena! I wasn't meant to sleep on the ground. When I was a--

XENA:

Oh, forget it, I'll take care of it. *You've* been through *a lot lately*.

Xena gets up angrily and stomps over to Ares and grabs the bucket, which is right beside him.

ARES (tries to be seductive while not lifting a finger to hand her the bucket):

Maybe later tonight you could help me work these kinks out...

Xena gives him a "go to Tartarus" look and stalks off.

XENA (voice-over):

No thanks to Ares, we finally managed to get on the road...

CUT TO

The same road where Xena, Ares, Gabrielle and Darion were walking in Ares' tale. Xena and Ares are walking off by themselves, and Gabrielle and Darion are a little behind them.

ARES (extremely whiny):

But, Xeeeeena, when can we take a break? My feet hurt, and my mortal legs aren't used to this strain!

XENA (exasperated):

Ares, we just took a break three minutes ago. (tries to look sympathetic) You can rest when we get to the farmhouse. Plus, you'll get to see your sister and Hephaestus. You'll feel better once we get there.

ARES:

But...Xeeeeena...Don't you think Gabrielle and Darion look tired?

Pan to Gabrielle, who is bouncing Samuel and raising him up in the air, and Darion, who is skipping happily in circles around them.

XENA (sarcastic):

Yeah. They look exhausted. (pauses) They're fine. Anyway, if you're too tired, why don't you ride the horse for a while?

Ares looks doubtfully at the horse Xena is leading.

ARES:

It doesn't like me. Why can't we ever do what I want?

XENA (exasperated):

Fine, whatever. (after a moment) Can't you at least pick up the pace a little?

ARES (exaggeratedly):

I could...If I were...I don't know...A GOD.

XENA (trying to be sympathetic):

Do we really have to go over this again and again? I'm sorry you lost your immortality, but...you're going to have to learn to adjust.

ARES (losing his temper):

Adjust? I was a *god*. I was going to *live forever*. I never had to sleep, much less sleep on the filthy ground. And you want me to get over it?

XENA (getting angrier):

All I ask is that you try! Take the lead from the rest of us, we can help you, show you how humans do things.

ARES (sarcastically):

Oh, so I can be your humble servant? Maybe you'd like me to wash your feet?

XENA:

I can wash my own feet, thank you.

ARES (voice-over):

Hey, were you implying I don't wash my feet?

XENA (voice-over):

Well, can you?

ARES (crossing his arms over his chest):

That's not the point.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena and Ares walking, a little later in the day. They're still arguing.

XENA (trying to sound rational):

Ares, I'm just saying, you could help out a little more often.

ARES:

Well, maybe if you wouldn't nag me all the time, I would!

XENA (losing control):

You know, I'm starting to appreciate the old Ares, God of War. I wish--

ARES (challengingly):

What?

XENA (sighs):

Nothing. I just...It was a lot easier when you had your powers. You could just zap in and out and--

ARES:

Oh, I get it. You wish I'd just go away!



XENA (frustrated):

Ares, no, I just...I haven't had any time to myself lately, and I'm used to being able to just go off on my own for a while, but now that Gabrielle has a baby, and you're here...

ARES:

I'm sorry I'm such a burden to you, Xena. Maybe I'll just stay with Aphrodite and Hephaestus for a while. I bet they won't ask me to wipe the blood off their chakram!

XENA (yelling):

They don't have a chakram!

ARES (yelling):

Then I won't have to wipe the blood off it, will I?

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA (sighing):

This went on for another...two hours.

ARES:

Two? More like seven!

GABRIELLE:

Ares, it was only two hours. It only seemed like seven because...

Gabrielle pauses and Xena chimes in for the rest of the sentence.

XENA AND GABRIELLE (sing-songy, in unison):

...you're a *mortal*.

DISSOLVE TO

[FLASHBACK]

Xena, Ares, Gabrielle and Darion are standing on an ornately-sculptured lawn with shrubbery that has been trimmed into statues of a curvaceous female form. The group is staring, their mouths all hanging open.

XENA (voice-over):

We arrived at my grandparents' old farmhouse, where Aphrodite and Hephaestus have been staying...



We pan to a shot of the spot where the old farmhouse used to be, only now it has been remodeled to the point that it is almost unrecognizable. There is gleaming white siding and the roof has been painted gold, and there are short little cupid statues scattered all over the yard, and the path leading up to the house passes through a hedge that is shaped like a heart.

GABRIELLE:

Are you sure this is the right place?



XENA (about to lose it):

APHRODIIIIIIIIITE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

XENA (voice-over):

I was a little...surprised.

Aphrodite runs out of the house, banging the door behind her, obviously upset. Hephaestus is running after her, yelling.

HEPHAESTUS (yelling):

We can't afford a hot tub!!!

APHRODITE (pouting):

But it's an investment!

HEPHAESTUS:

No, it's not--do you have any idea what the economy is like right now?

APHRODITE (turns to face him, skeptical):
Since when do you care about the economy?

HEPHAESTUS:
Since we became mortal and you started spending every dinar as fast as you get your greedy hands on it, that's when!

APHRODITE (insulted):
You mean ever since you started reading those self-help books. "Finding Your Inner Miser!"

HEPHAESTUS (defensive):
Salmoneus has helped a lot of people, you know. He made a lot of money after he--



APHRODITE (gives him a challenging look):
He what?

HEPHAESTUS:
--after he got out of prison for tax evasion.

GABRIELLE (coughs awkwardly):
Ahem!

Aphrodite and Hephaestus finally look at the others. Aphrodite's eyes light up as she runs over to hug Gabrielle and make over the new baby. The two women start chatting while Aphrodite holds Samuel and pinches his cheeks. Xena and Ares greet Hephaestus, who seems unsure of how to act around both of them.

HEPHAESTUS (awkwardly):
Do you...like what we've done with the place?

XENA:
I was just going to ask...what *have* you done with the place? I hardly recognized it.

HEPHAESTUS (apologetically):

We...er, Dite has been doing some redecorating.

ARES:

And in her usual subtle, tasteful style, I see...

APHRODITE:

Oh, but not everything that you remember is gone, Xena! Look at this!

Aphrodite walks over to the front porch, under the heart-shaped hedge. Xena follows her. Aphrodite shows her the old post that still stands, alone--no longer supporting the roof--that Xena had carved her initial into years ago.



APHRODITE:

I knew I couldn't get rid of everything that gives you those warm, fuzzy, peaceful memories. This post has sentimental value, I totally get that.

XENA (looks at Aphrodite, smiling slightly):

Thanks. (pause) Where did you two get the money for all this?

HEPHAESTUS:

We...Dite has been selling off the more valuable items from her temples. So far, we've been able to live quite comfortably, but soon we're going to run out of gold vases...

APHRODITE (on the verge of tears):

Doesn't it just break your heart? I think we might even have to get... (sucks in a deep breath) *jobs!*

GABRIELLE (looks shocked):

Wow, you must be really desperate.

XENA (not very concerned):

Uh...yeah, that's really...tragic. But--where is Argo?

ARES (voice-over):

You know, sometimes I think you care more about that horse than you do about me.

XENA (voice-over, wryly):

Your point being...?

DISSOLVE TO

Xena standing in the stable next to Argo. Gabrielle is leading Klio out the door, but Xena lingers behind a little. The music swells and we get a close-up of the two.



XENA (smiles):

Hey, Argo. I've missed you, girl.

Argo whickers softly, nuzzling Xena's hair.

XENA:

I've got something for you. Open your mouth, Sweetheart.

Xena holds out a shiny red apple, and Argo begins to bite into it.

The music gets cut short by Ares' voice yelling from somewhere else in the stable.

ARES:

Xena! This place is full of horse-[bleep]!

XENA (yells back):

It's a stable, Ares.

Ares comes into view leading his War Stallion, Quirinus.

ARES:

Yeah, well, Olympian stables weren't full of--

Pan down to Ares' feet, where he has just stepped into a pile of horse manure. Xena chuckles and pats him on the shoulder.

Argo and Quirinus look at each other and neigh, and we see the subtitles that translate their horse talk.

QUIRINUS:

Are they always like this?



ARGO:

They're just having trouble adjusting. Ares is feeling emasculated and impotent due to the loss of his godly powers, and Xena is longing for her bygone sense of freedom and autonomy. *Such* a classic case of dependence and resentment, those two.



QUIRINUS:

You think too much. Can I get a bite of that apple?

ARGO:

Neigh.

Xena looks amused as Ares tries to scrape the manure off his boot, but they both look up when they hear a dog barking outside.

APHRODITE (opens the door, careful not to ruin her manicure):
Hey, lovebirds! Are you decent? You're not scaring the horses, are you?

XENA (flatly):
Not to worry.

There is another bark from outside.

ARES (holding his breath):
Horace?

Just then, Horace, Dog of War, runs between Aphrodite's legs and into the stable. Ares bends down, and Horace jumps up to lick his face.



ARES (looks back at Xena pointedly):
At least *someone* knows how to treat an ex-god.



APHRODITE (watches Horace lick Ares' face, hands, and neck, then looks at Xena with concern):
How are things...you know... (whispers) *in bed*?

[END OF FLASHBACK]

MAGISTRATE (confused):
Who is Horace? And why was he licking this man?

GABRIELLE:

Horace is Ares' dog. Ares made Horace immortal back when he was a god, but when Ares lost his immortality, so did Horace.

APHRODITE:

Hephaestus and I were keeping him as a surprise for Ares. We figured we'd better have him brought down from Olympus since there was no one to cuddle and love him up there.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Darion squeezes through the door past Aphrodite. He has clearly been chasing Horace. Gabrielle stands in the doorway behind Aphrodite, now holding Samuel. Darion sees the dog playing with Ares and looks slightly hurt.

DARION:

Here, doggie! Here boy!

Horace ignores him and continues to lick Ares.

DARION (comes closer):

Come on, boy! Come here!

Darion holds out a stick, trying to tempt Horace with it. Ares looks up and notices the boy's frustration. He picks up the dog and stands back up, then puts him in Darion's arms.

ARES:

It looks like you have a new master now, Horace.

DARION (excited):

Really? I can keep him?

XENA (hesitantly, giving Gabrielle a brief look):

Uh--Darion--we can talk about this later...

DARION:

Pleeeeeeease?

APHRODITE:

Oh, come on, guys? Can't you see the little guy needs a sidekick?

DARION (eyes light up):

Yeah! Every hero needs a sidekick!

GABRIELLE:

I don't know...

XENA:

I don't know, Darion--a dog could interfere with my scouting, and fighting, and, well, *everything*. (off Darion's hurt look) But we'll think about it.

Darion let out a whoop as if she's already said yes.

XENA (voice-over):

We all spent some time getting reacquainted, and then Aphrodite wanted to get out of the house for a while, so we went into the town...

DISSOLVE TO

The center of a very small town. There is a sign that translates to "Welcome to New Athens," and underneath that, there is a population sign that has flippable numbers that can be adjusted frequently. There are only two digits, and the population currently seems to be 49.

Xena, Argo, Gabrielle (holding baby Samuel), Aphrodite, Ares, Hephaestus and Darion walk into the town. Horace follows them, hanging around Ares' ankles. Darion is still trying to get Horace's attention.



An elderly woman walks up and stares at them. Then, shaking her head, she counts on her fingers as she walks toward the sign and flips it to 58. Then she stares after them again, counts again, and flips it to 55; then shakes her head, flips it to 56 and nods in satisfaction.

We see Ares and Hephaestus separate from the group and walk inside the building we now recognize as the tavern. Horace tries to follow them but Darion grabs his collar and holds him back, then picks up a stick which he holds up so that Horace can jump up trying to reach it. The ladies wander in the direction of the temple, chatting together, while Darion trails behind them, keeping Horace busy.

GABRIELLE:

This seems like a nice, peaceful town.

APHRODITE:

Yeah, like, way too peaceful. As in "rest in peace"-ful. They don't even have a major shopping center! We have to go all the way to Braetia if we want to buy anything... (looks down at her outfit, then smiles) cute.

XENA:

Yeah, but that's the beauty of it! It's so calm, so quiet. Yes, being free of war--and ex-Gods of War--must be *heavenly*.

APHRODITE:

Oh, come on, you two aren't having problems, are you? The thought of you two happy and in love is the only thing keeping me going right now, especially after that argument with Heph!

She bites her lower lip, pouting. Gabrielle snorts. Xena and Aphrodite ignore her and continue to talk about their own problems. Just then, someone puts a hand on Gabrielle's arm and the three of them turn around to face Genia, who is dressed in white robes similar to the ones she wore in "Many Happy Returns."

GABRIELLE:

Genia? What are you doing here?

GENIA (cheerfully):

Gabrielle! Xena! Aphrodite! It's so good to see you!

Xena looks nervously at Genia's white robes.

XENA:

You're not--



GENIA (laughs):

No, no. I'm working with the Hestian Virgins now! After meeting you and Gabrielle and Aphrodite, I realized I had no idea who I was. I decided I needed to know myself really well before making any more important life decisions, and that's just what I'm doing!

She notices Samuel in Gabrielle's arms and squeals.

GENIA:

You have a baby! That's awesome!

APHRODITE:

Oh! The baby! I, like, almost forgot! (looks at Gabrielle) I have a little gift for you and little sweet pea there. It's in my temple, not far from here. I'll go get it for you.

GABRIELLE:

Aphrodite, you really don't need to do that--

APHRODITE:

Oh, I insist! I've been meaning to do a little inventory, anyway...but I promise I won't be gone long. (Winks at Genia) *We'll* talk later.

Aphrodite freezes and seems to be concentrating hard on something, then she frowns and sighs.

APHRODITE (whines):

Stupid mortal lack of teleporting ability!

She stomps out of the square. The others watch her leave, and we can see Genia making over baby Samuel and apparently asking Gabrielle questions about him.

XENA (voice-over):

Gabrielle and Genia started chattering about the baby, so I took a walk around the perimeter. Then Genia showed us around the orphanage, and it wasn't long before we heard a commotion outside.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena opens the door and sees the band of thugs, the same ones from Ares' version. They are grabbing the Virgins; there is chaos everywhere.

Xena draws her sword and goes to fight them. We can see that two or three of them enter the temple while five or six remain outside to fight Xena.

XENA (voice-over):

It was nothing out of the ordinary, just a little skirmish, really...

Brief montage of Xena fighting from her perspective, including:

- her foot kicking one of the thugs in the face
- deflecting a thug's sword from a downward slice
- falling through the air to land on a bad guys' chest
- throwing the chakram and hitting several baddies on the helmet

ARES (voice-over):

Just a skirmish? You--we--I-- (exhales frustratedly) oh, forget it.

Genia comes rushing from the entrance of the temple. We can see Ares making his drunken way over.

GENIA:

Thank you, Xena!

XENA:

Don't mention it.

GENIA:

You saved us all! But...they stole all the money we'd been saving up. If we don't get it back, we'll have to close the orphanage.

XENA:

I just knew it wouldn't be that easy.

GENIA (bats her eyelashes pleadingly):

Will you help us?

XENA (sighs resignedly):

Sure. What do you know about these men who robbed you?

GENIA:

They didn't look familiar, but maybe some of the others would know.

CUT TO

A montage of Xena, Ares and Genia questioning the other Virgins who are outside.

VIRGIN #1 (primly):

They smelled like... (wrinkles her nose) sailors.

CUT TO

VIRGIN #2 (sounds a lot like Greba):

The one who grabbed me was a nasty, awful brute! He was tall, and dark...with *penetrating* green eyes... (starts to sound more and more dreamy) and the leather pants he was wearing was molded really tightly to his--

XENA (interrupts):

Thank you, you've been a big help.

CUT TO

VIRGIN #3 (a bit shyly):

Well, it all went so fast... (looks at Xena admiringly) You were amazing! With those flips and kicks...

She attempts to mimic Xena's kick, and nearly falls. Ares, standing next to her, reaches out to keep her from falling, and Xena glowers at them both. Ares holds his hands up innocently.

GENIA:

Is there anything else you can remember about the men who attacked us, Portia?

VIRGIN #3/PORTIA:

Yeah, I think so...I mean, it was a little dark, but I noticed one of them had this symbol tattooed on his wrist, and then I saw the same tattoo on the other one who grabbed me. It looked like a snake, or maybe a river? I'm not sure, I'm sorry.

XENA:

Well, thanks, anyway. It could be important.

DISSOLVE TO

Outside, near the tavern and temple. Hephaestus and Aphrodite come out of the tavern and approach Xena and Ares.

APHRODITE (now breathing regularly, but on the verge of tears):

Xeeeeena, you have to help us! Well, me, at least!

XENA:

What is it, Aphrodite? There are other people here who need my help.

APHRODITE:

Can't you see I'm, like, in pain, here? That odiferous hooligan stole my favorite statue!

XENA (rubs her temples, then droops her shoulders in an "I give up" way):

What did he look like?

APHRODITE:

He was all grody-looking and wore leather (pauses) --no offense. He was a thug! What do you want to know? I didn't get a good look.

XENA:

I'm going to need a little more to go on than that.

Aphrodite furrows her brow in concentration for a moment, then looks up.

APHRODITE:

I do remember something! He had this tattoo on his wrist, like a rope, or something. If I were getting a tattoo, I'd get something cuter than that, like maybe a picture of myself... (hits Hephaestus' chest with the back of her hand) Hey! Hephie, you should totally get a tattoo of me!

Hephaestus puts his head in his hands and starts rubbing his temples.

APHRODITE (oblivious):
What?

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA (puts her feet up on the table and crosses them, getting into the story):

We decided to split up; I went to get back the money from the orphanage, and Ares and Hephaestus went off to find Aphrodite's statue.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Xena is leading Argo through the woods. Xena seems to be tracking the bad guys, stopping every few moments to look at the ground or a twig or leaf. After a moment, Xena stops and looks deeply into Argo's eyes.



XENA:

It's been a long time, hasn't it? I've missed you, you know.

ARGO (brushes her nose against Xena's face):

Neigh.

XENA (concerned):

You're not angry, are you? You know I couldn't take you with me to Jerusalem, right? Right?

ARGO (placidly):

Neigh.

XENA:

Don't look at me like that! It's not like I didn't think about you.

Argo whinnies. Xena continues walking and tracking while she talks.

XENA:

Oh, I know, it's just that--well, life has been...different lately, what with Gabrielle's new baby, and Ares' being mortal, and not having any time to myself, you know?

ARGO:

Neigh.

XENA:

Yeah, well, at least you get some time to yourself sometimes. And nobody expects you to do everything for them. I mean, they're my family, but...

Xena looks up as though she's heard a noise.

XENA (softly):

I think we've found our bad guys.

Xena approaches the cave and sees Ares, Hephaestus and Darion standing near the cave's mouth. The corners of her mouth quirk up mischievously.

Xena moves closer to listen in on Ares and Hephaestus' conversation.

ARES (sluggishly):

I don't know, I think we're lost. We should just go home. My head hurts.

HEPHAESTUS (sounds like he's in pain):

I can't leave without Aphrodite's bust...but I don't feel so good, either...ugh, stupid mortality!

Xena sneaks up behind them and puts her blade against Hephaestus' neck playfully.

XENA:

Didn't your mother ever teach you to hold your drink?

ARES:

Xena! What are you doing here? We've got this under control!

XENA (withdraws her sword):

I can take it from here, boys. How did you even find this place?

ARES:

What do you mean? Uhh... (starts to figure out that this is the thugs' hideout) I mean...we tracked the thugs here.

XENA:

Well, this morning you couldn't even find your way out of your bedroll without help, so--

ARES (childishly):

I don't need your help!

XENA:

Ares, you're both hungover, maybe still drunk. You can't face these guys without me.

ARES (shouting loudly, and a little slurred):

You just can't let me win, can you, Xena?

HEPHAESTUS (trying to reason with Ares):

Hey, maybe we should let Xena handle this--

One of the thugs from earlier approaches the entrance from outside the cave. He hears the shouting, drops the chest he is carrying, and runs away.

XENA:

I'm going after him! There are probably more in there, so you three stay and guard the entrance.

ARES (grasps her wrist):

Hey, I t-told you I don't need your help!

XENA (hisses):

Ares, we don't have time for this!

Hephaestus runs into the cave after the thug. Ares moves to stand in front of Xena so she can't get past.

ARES:

Don't change the subject, you harpy!

XENA (anxiously):

Ares, they are going to get away if I don't do something!

A pair of the bad guys comes out of another tunnel in the cave, confused by the shouting. They run past Xena and Ares while the two are fighting. Darion looks as if he wants to run after the thugs himself, but thinks better of it, and then he attempts to come between Xena and Ares.

ARES (yells):

I can't believe you are trying to hog all the glory!

XENA (snaps):

You're just as worthless as all the other gods! You only care about yourself!

ARES:

Well, at least somebody does!

Three more thugs approach the cave, hear the argument, and run out. A few moments later, Hephaestus comes out, chasing them, but Ares pays no attention.

DARION:

HEEEEEYYYYYYY!!!

Xena and Ares finally look down at Darion.

DARION (points in the direction of the thugs):

They're getting away! Aren't you supposed to be, you know, chasing them?

Ares looks at him, then back to Xena, who gives him an "I told you so" look, then both go off after the bad guys who ran out of the cave. Darion runs after them.

ARES (panting, trying to keep up with Xena):

Betcha I catch them first!

XENA (yells back, not breaking stride):

You couldn't catch the pox in a whorehouse!

DISSOLVE TO

The same scene from Ares' story. Xena and Ares running into the village, getting there just after the thugs. They see that everyone is fighting, and even the thugs are fighting each other. Ares and Xena look at each other and draw their swords, looking like they're going to kill each other. In the background we can see Gabrielle and Aphrodite pulling each other's hair and slapping each other.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

MAGISTRATE (paces the room):

This is getting us nowhere! How am I supposed to figure out what happened when your stories don't even match up?

APHRODITE:

That's because they're, like, totally leaving out the most important parts! You wanna know how it *really* went down?

She crosses her legs playfully and glares at Xena, Ares and Gabrielle. She winks at the guard standing in the corner and we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

The interrogation room.

APHRODITE (exasperated):

Let me tell you what happened. And I promise not to leave out *any* of the juicy details, like *these* prudes...

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

An outside shot of Aphrodite and Hephaestus's "farmhouse." We can hear loud thudding noises coming from inside. We cut to an interior shot of a shaking headboard, with the same noises as before. Then we pan down to see Hephaestus and Aphrodite rolling over and stretching out on their backs, sweaty and exhausted. Aphrodite is wearing a pink bra top with feathers along the top of the bust. Their lower halves are covered by a blanket (because it's a family show).

HEPHAESTUS (out of breath):

Where did you learn how to do that?

APHRODITE (smiles coyly):

You don't think I was Goddess of Love for all those years without picking up a few tricks, do ya?

HEPHAESTUS:

Well, as far as I'm concerned, you'll always be Goddess of Love...

Hephaestus begins to nibble her ear, and Aphrodite giggles, then sighs.



APHRODITE:

But I'm not the Goddess of Love anymore. I'm not the goddess of anything. I'm going to grow old, and get (takes in a deep breath, barely able to say the word) -- wrinkles--and my hair will turn gray!

HEPHAESTUS:

Yes, but so will I. It's what all mortals do, my love. We've lived longer already than any mortal will ever do.

APHRODITE (softens):

At least we'll be able to grow old together. (her voice takes on a more stringent tone) You will still love me when I'm old and saggy, right?

HEPHAESTUS (strokes her face with his hand):

I've loved you for an eternity, Aphrodite. I'm not about to stop now. You'll always take my breath away.

APHRODITE (melts):

Really? (a lascivious look comes into her eyes) Is that a challenge? I do recall another trick I could show you, something from a scroll a tourist from Indus left in one of my tem--

At that moment, Horace runs in and jumps on the bed between Aphrodite and Hephaestus. He barks loudly a couple of times, and they both roll their eyes.

APHRODITE (voice-over, laughing):

See, the Gabster's not the only one with the bad timing!

ARES (voice-over):

Yeah, don't remind me.

APHRODITE:

What do you want, doggy? Another treat? You'll be eating us out of house and home if Ares doesn't come and get you pretty soon.

HEPHAESTUS (serious):

You're really worried about us, aren't you?

APHRODITE (wistfully):

I just never had to think about this stuff before. I always had plenty of gifts from my worshippers, and what they didn't give me, I could always zap up for myself... (suddenly turns whiny) Now we might actually have to (squeaks) *work* for a living! Being mortal sucks!

She begins to weep on Hephaestus' shoulder.

HEPHAESTUS (stoically):

Yes. Yes it does.

Aphrodite looks up to turn her face to him, but then seems to notice something outside. Through the window we can see Gabrielle and Darion walking toward the farmhouse. The camera pans over to the barn, where Ares is shoved up against the building, and Xena is pressed up against him, and the two are kissing passionately, groping each other and occasionally gasping for breath. Ares' hands reach slowly down Xena's back.

XENA, GABRIELLE and ARES (voice-over):

Aphrodite!!!

[END OF FLASHBACK]

APHRODITE (innocently):

What?

GABRIELLE:

That never happened! (looks over at Xena doubtfully) Did it?

Xena and Ares both look uncomfortable.

XENA and ARES (adamantly):

No!

The three of them give Aphrodite impatient looks.

APHRODITE (throws her hands up):

Okay, okay! Ex-squeeze me for trying make your boring little lives more interesting. Fine, here's what really happened.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

We rewind the last part and come back to the part where Aphrodite is crying on Hephaestus' shoulder. She looks from his face to something out the window. Through the window we can see Xena, Gabrielle, Ares and Darion arriving. Her face lights up and she hugs Hephaestus.

APHRODITE (squealing):

They're finally here! And...Ares isn't wearing his gauntlets anymore. Doesn't he care about his image *at all*? (sighs) Oh, well...I'll have to have a talk with him about it later.

She rushes to the door, but Hephaestus grabs her wrist.

HEPHAESTUS (wryly):

Um, Dite, don't you think we should... (looks her up and down, indicating her unclothed state)

APHRODITE (laughs):

Oh, yeah! I almost forgot!

She snaps her fingers, but nothing happens.

APHRODITE (dejected):

Ugh, I am sooo mortal! I'm all sweaty and gross--and I can't even zap myself clean anymore!

Her mouth opens and her eyes light up as if she's just gotten an idea.

APHRODITE:

Oooh, I know! We should get a hot tub!

HEPHAESTUS (trying not to make her angry):

Dite, you know we can't afford one right now...

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE:

And *that's* what you two were arguing about when we showed up?

APHRODITE:

Yeah, why?

GABRIELLE (bitterly):

I *wish* I had your problems...

APHRODITE (shrugs):

Anyway, we all went into town, since there is, like *nothing* to do at home. At least, not until I get my hot tub...

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Outside the renovated farmhouse. Xena is brushing Argo, and Aphrodite is standing, cooing over the baby on the front porch, while Gabrielle is sitting close by, looking exhausted, on the "love seat". Darion is trying to get Horace to fetch a stick, but Horace ignores him. Ares and Hephaestus are standing by the barn, and they seem to be having an animated conversation. Ares mimics throwing a lightning bolt.

APHRODITE:

Aww, look at these little dimples! My little Cupie had dimples like these...before he turned into a rebel with a major 'tude. (Off Gabrielle's pained expression, gushing to Samuel) Oh, but I'm sure little Sammy will grow up to be a perfect gentleman, won't he?

GABRIELLE:

Let's just hope he doesn't turn out like...never mind.

APHRODITE (looks sympathetic, but can't resist the temptation):

Have you heard from the baby's father lately?

GABRIELLE (curtly):

No.

APHRODITE:

But maybe you'll--he'll--

GABRIELLE:

He'll what? Come swooping back in on a white horse and we'll live happily ever after?

APHRODITE:

Hey, yeah! It could happen! (Off Gabrielle's skeptical look) Hey, I used to be the Goddess of Love, remember? I think I know a thing or two.



GABRIELLE:

Love isn't like that. *Life* isn't like that. Things don't happen the way they do in comedies.

APHRODITE:

Whoa, where did this attitude come from? I'm picking up, like, a very disheartened vibe, here!

GABRIELLE (a little bitterly):

Maybe that's because you've been mortal for months now, and you still haven't had to live like one.

APHRODITE:

What's that supposed to mean? I have to style my own hair now, for your information!

GABRIELLE (sighs exaggeratedly):

Nothing, never mind, forget I said anything.

Aphrodite bites her lip and bounces Samuel on her hip. Her face brightens as she seems to be getting an idea.

APHRODITE:

Hey, I know! Let's all go to New Athens!

GABRIELLE:

New Athens? As opposed to Old Athens?

APHRODITE:

Oh, I know, like, totally lame name, right? But one of my temples is near there, and--

GABRIELLE (irritably):

What, you want to get more stuff to sell? That's supposed to be fun?

APHRODITE (defensively):

No, no, I just thought of something that would make a perfect gift for the baby, that's all!

GABRIELLE (less irritably):

Aphrodite, you don't have to do that--



APHRODITE:

Nonsense, it's just a little something I've had in my temple for a while, and it's not getting any use there, so I figure it ought to go to you and little Sammy-kins, here.

GABRIELLE (doubtfully):

It isn't...that *one* statue...right? The one with all the different posi--

APHRODITE (realizes what she means):

Oh, Sweetie, no! I'm not showing Samuel that one until he gets old enough for me to teach him about the birds and the bees.

Gabrielle looks like she's about to say something, but Aphrodite walks off holding Samuel. She calls the others over, and tells them they're all going to town.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE (crossly):

I did *not* sound that crabby!

APHRODITE:

Uh-huh. Anyway, we got to the town and met my little ex-protégé Genia...

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Xena, Gabrielle and Aphrodite talking to Genia in front of the Hestian temple. Darion is squatting nearby, petting Horace.

APHRODITE (raises an eyebrow):

So, all this time, you've been getting to--*know* yourself?

GENIA (beams at Aphrodite):

Yeah! It's great! You know, I am so grateful that the three of you taught me how to look to my own needs. You made me realize that I need to learn how to please myself, and then I'll be able to make other people happy, too. And it turned out that all I needed was a little know--how and my own two hands!

GABRIELLE (looks up, startled):

Huh? Genia--

Gabrielle looks nervously down at Darion and Samuel.

GENIA:

You don't know how blissful my life is now that I know the secret to--

GABRIELLE (sharply):

Genia!

GENIA:

-- gardening.

GABRIELLE (relieved):

Oh. I mean, oh! Yeah, great.

Xena and Gabrielle look relieved; Aphrodite giggles.



GENIA (continues):

And I've got the biggest summer squash in the whole temple!

GABRIELLE (distractedly, but trying to sound supportive):

That's...that's wonderful, Genia.

APHRODITE:

Sweetie cakes, I always thought the Hestian Virgins were, like, totally crazy hagsters, but that doesn't sound half bad. Tell me more about the sum--

XENA (cuts her off irritably):

Maybe another time. Maybe Genia would like to hold the baby, don't you think, Gabrielle?

APHRODITE:

D'uh! The baby! That reminds me--

The camera pulls back as she continues to talk. After a moment, Aphrodite waves good-bye to the others and whistles. A gleaming white horse trots up to her and she mounts it.

GABRIELLE (voice-over, confused):

Aphrodite, I don't remember any horse--

APHRODITE (voice-over, annoyed):

Hey, you're not the only one who can do the bard thing. Listen and learn, Sweet Cheeks.

DISSOLVE TO

Aphrodite riding the white horse bareback through the woods. After a short while, she arrives at a gleaming white temple with pink hearts painted on columns in the front. Aphrodite dismounts and, leaving the horse outside, enters the temple.

CUT TO

Inside the temple. It's clear the building is no longer in use, and there are boxes and crates scattered around the room. Several ornate vases, a few statues, jewelry, and some coins litter the floor.

Aphrodite seems to deflate as she enters. She walks around, shoulders hunched, peeking into some of the boxes and occasionally tracing a hand over some of the items that are lying around, then wiping her hands, since everything is dusty.

APHRODITE (to herself, softly):

This place looks...different.



She walks over to the golden bust of her from "Love Takes a Holiday" that Hephaestus made. She ponders its features for a moment, then touches her own face, then frowns.

APHRODITE:

Then again, so do I. (to herself, sighing) And it's just gonna get worse, kiddo.

After a moment, she shakes herself, bringing herself out of her reverie.

APHRODITE (with some humor):

Gods, like, major buzzkill! I'm gonna give myself frown lines if I keep this up. (looks around) Now which box is my little present hiding in?

She walks over to a gilded chest full of junk and starts pulling things out of it. First she picks up a scroll that's covered with drawings of people in various positions. She tosses it aside carelessly, then thinks better of it and folds it up neatly at her feet.

APHRODITE (smirking):

I'll just take this back home with me...

Next she pulls out a toy crossbow with a large painted heart on it. She rubs a finger over the sharp tip of the arrow.

APHRODITE:

Awww, Cupie's first bow! Thank gods I was smart enough to give him regular arrows until he was old enough to walk, 'cause otherwise he could have caused some major damage!

She places the crossbow carefully on the floor and then pulls out a plush dove, a heart-shaped pillow, some wax apples covered with gold paint, a hydra doll (much like the one Hercules gave Xena in "God Fearing Child"), and a tiny statuette of Aphrodite herself with a comically exaggerated figure. Aphrodite pulls a string, and the statuette releases a string of pink, heart-shaped bubbles from its lips. She throws it down.

APHRODITE (frustrated):

Come on...it's gotta be in here somewhere!

A man wearing a mask and a leather outfit, exactly like the ones the thugs from the orphanage were wearing, enters the temple, but Aphrodite doesn't see him. She's too busy tossing things out of the chest.

The man tiptoes through the temple, making his way over to the golden bust, which he picks up and puts under his arm.

Aphrodite, oblivious, pulls out of the chest a small white wooden box with a complex gold leaf design.

As the man is walking out, we see his foot step on a Pegasus doll, which gives out a loud squeak. The man pauses, then begins to run, but is slowed down by the statue's weight.

APHRODITE (looks up angrily):

This temple is closed! The Love Goddess has gone out of business, haven't you heard? (sees him carrying her statue) Hey! Get your hands off my bust!

The man pulls out a dagger and tosses it clumsily in her direction, but it misses her by a long way. Aphrodite shrieks and jumps behind a box and grabs a nearby vase, holding it up in an attempt to defend herself.

The man continues to run to the door. Aphrodite stands up quickly, dropping the vase, which shatters on the floor.

The man picks up his pace, racing to the door as fast as he can with the heavy object. Aphrodite looks down at the vase and grimaces, but then turns her attention quickly back to the thief, who is almost at the exit. First she pulls her hand back to use her powers on him, then when nothing happens, she sighs and picks up another vase. Then, thinking better of it, she sets it down carefully. The man is escaping, so she picks up the crossbow.

APHRODITE (in her best hard-boiled, menacing voice):

Freeze, dirtbag!

She releases the trigger on the crossbow, but the arrow only goes ten feet and embeds itself in a heart-shaped chair. The thug pauses to chuckle, then disappears through the door.

APHRODITE (shouting):

Miscreant! (shrieks) That's my favorite statue!

She pauses, then looks down at the crossbow, and then at the arrow stuck in the chair.

APHRODITE:

Whoa. I can't believe I let Cupid play with this thing!

APHRODITE (voice-over):

I went back to town as fast as my horse would carry me...

DISSOLVE TO

A slow-motion shot of Aphrodite riding the horse back to town, her hair flying in the wind.

DISSOLVE TO

Aphrodite rides into town, and we see the same old woman from before flipping the number sign back to "29." Aphrodite dismounts from the horse and goes into the tavern where Hephaestus and Ares are drinking.

APHRODITE (hysterically):

Hephie! My statue! Some dirty little hooligan stole my statue!

HEPHAESTUS (stands up and takes Aphrodite off to a quiet corner of the bar):

What's this about your statue?

APHRODITE (weeping):

You know, the one you made for me!

HEPHAESTUS (drunkenly):

The one--wait, not that one? The one I (belches) made for you?

APHRODITE:

Yes! The one you gave me the first time we--you know--

HEPHAESTUS (grins):

Yes, I remember...

Hephaestus reaches out a hand to grab her backside, but she swats him away.

APHRODITE (irritated):

Hephie! Focus! My statue, remember?

HEPHAESTUS (sighs):

All right, my love, let's go find Xena. I'm in no condition to get your statue back on my own right now, but I promise you, we'll get it back.

Hephaestus awkwardly kisses Aphrodite's hand and, still clutching her fingers, leads her outside, where there is already a fight going on. They look at Ares, who is leaning against the wall watching the fight raptly, and then at Xena, who is in the middle of kicking the bad guys' butts.

APHRODITE (yelling):

Stop it, you barbarians! I need to talk to that Warrior Princess!

The thugs act as if they haven't heard her, and continue fighting Xena. Aphrodite sighs frustratedly and, from behind, we see her pull her corset open, flashing the ruffians, who immediately stop fighting and gape at her.



APHRODITE (smugly):

I've still got it. (to the thugs) Now get out of here! Scram!

The thugs are so smitten that they immediately obey her and run off.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

ARES (chuckling):

Scared them off, did ya.

Aphrodite gives him a furious glare, pursing her lips, then pokes his black eye.

APHRODITE:

Does this hurt?

ARES:

Owww! Yes, it hurts!

APHRODITE (with false pity):

Aww, you should put more ice on that! (looks back at the Magistrate) So, as I was saying, I stopped the fight, the bad guys ran off...then Xena was all, 'Saving the orphanage is more important than your statue that your husband gave to you the day you fell in love,' (rolls eyes) so Ares and Hephaestus went to look for my statue, and I stayed behind with Gabrielle and Genia.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Inside the orphanage. There are children playing in small groups. We can see that there are more children in the orphanage than there are people in the entire village.

Gabrielle is holding baby Samuel and telling some of the children a story about David and Goliath. Genia is assisting some of the other children who are painting with

easels. Aphrodite looks harried as one child wraps himself around her ankle and another runs over and puts a paint handprint on her leg.

APHRODITE (shakes her leg):

Get down! Eww, get off! No touching!

One child, who is eating chocolate pudding, stumbles over to her and holds the spoon out to her.

APHRODITE (holds her hands up):

Stay back! This is an original Valentinus!

The child starts crying loudly, and Aphrodite puts a hand on her forehead, pushing up her blonde curls. She groans loudly.

APHRODITE (yells):

Gabrieeeelle!!!

GABRIELLE (calls over to her):

Why don't you come over here and listen to the story?

APHRODITE (hesitantly):

What kind of story is it?

GABRIELLE:

It's a *beautiful* love story!

APHRODITE (brightens):

Really? I could totally use some of those vibes right now...

DISSOLVE TO

Gabrielle, Aphrodite and Genia playing a game of what looks like "Pin the Tail on the Centaur" with the children. Aphrodite looks very irritated when one of the children tries to pin the tail on her.

DISSOLVE TO

Aphrodite teaching the children how to play "Spin the Amphora." Gabrielle stops her when she realizes what the game is about. Aphrodite modifies the game to use a high five instead of kissing.

DISSOLVE TO

Genia fervently leading the children in prayer. Aphrodite looks incredibly bored, and Gabrielle has taken the opportunity to go over to the corner and change Samuel's diaper.

DISSOLVE TO

The children taking their afternoon naps. Gabrielle is feeding Samuel, and Aphrodite is sitting next to her. Genia and some of the Hestians are putting some stragglers down in their bedrolls.

APHRODITE (looks at Samuel adoringly):

He's so beautiful. (pauses) Too bad he'll have to grow up into one of those monsters.

She points at the sleeping children, then her look softens.

APHRODITE:

Heh, even *they* look sweet while they're sleeping.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

Yeah. They're not so bad... (pauses, then sighs) most of the time.

APHRODITE:

Hey, I remember this stuff! Cupid went through kind of a rough phase, too...but he eventually got over it.

GABRIELLE:

How long did that take?

APHRODITE (crinkles her forehead, as if trying to remember):

Twenty...maybe twenty-five years?

They both laugh. Gabrielle stops feeding Samuel and burps him. We hear a loud roar at the same time that he burps.

APHRODITE (looks at Samuel in disbelief):

Whoa, that kid burps louder than Hermes after one of Uncle Dionysus' festivals!



GABRIELLE (looks at Aphrodite with disdain):

Aphrodite, that wasn't Samuel, that was something outside! (angrily) And was that a crack about my kid?

APHRODITE:

Oh, no! (suddenly miffed) I mean, he probably just learned it from watching you!

GABRIELLE:

And to think people *actually* used to worship you.

APHRODITE:

Hey!

GABRIELLE (shakes her head as if to snap herself out of the bickering):

Wait, the noise outside is getting louder. We should see what's going on.

Gabrielle hands the baby to one of the Hestians, and she and Aphrodite exit the orphanage.

Outside, we see the same scene as before of people fighting each other.

A man standing off to the left is repeatedly ducking another man's head under the water of a horse trough and bringing it back up. After a minute, the other man grabs him and flips his entire body into the trough, then points and laughs.

Some of the children from the orphanage, hearing the commotion, follow the two women outside, where they start fighting, too. A little boy dumps a barrel of flour over another boy's head, and the other boy attacks him. They wrestle on the ground in a flurry of white powder. A little girl in the foreground throwing tomatoes at a woman in a white dress, who picks them up and throws them back at her.

Gabrielle tries to go over to the little girl and stop her, but she gets pelted by tomatoes and runs back to Aphrodite, who is trying to pry two girls apart who are pulling each other's hair, but she's not having much success because she's being too careful of her outfit.

GABRIELLE:

What is wrong with these people? They're acting like they're under some kind of spell! (looks suspiciously at Aphrodite) Do you know anything about this?

APHRODITE (looks innocent):

I'm mortal now, remember? I don't have those kinds of powers anymore!

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, but I bet you could still do a spell if you wanted, couldn't you? You could enchant this entire village and trick them into worshipping you again.

APHRODITE (disgusted):

How does that even remotely make sense? Aren't you supposed to be, like, erudite? (mutters) And they call *me* a dumb blonde.

GABRIELLE (angrily):

Are you calling me dumb?

APHRODITE:

If the shoe fits, Sweetie, wear it! (looks askance at Gabrielle's boots) On the other hand, maybe you shouldn't.

GABRIELLE (annoyed):

Oh, yeah?

She twirls up Samuel's blanket, which had been slung over her shoulder, and whacks Aphrodite with it.

APHRODITE:

Hey!

She grabs Gabrielle's hair and drags her over to a barrel of grapes, then starts rubbing Gab's face in the fruit.

We see a few more shots of fighting. A little boy standing next to Aphrodite is using the grapes in a slingshot and pelting a little girl across the road with them. The little girl is wrapped around the ankle of one of the thugs, and we see her bite into his leg with a "chomp." The thug tries to shake her off, but he's too busy fighting off a very large woman, who is beating him with a broom.

We see Xena and Ares enter the scene, and they draw their swords on each other.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

APHRODITE (impatient):

There, that's what happened. So now that I've enlightened you, can we go?

MAGISTRATE (at wit's end):

You haven't enlightened me at all! I still don't know what caused the fighting in New Athens!

ARES (smart-alecky):

Maybe the people don't like the name. Did you ever think of that?

Everyone glares at him.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe I can help sort things out. I *am* a bard, after all...

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

The candle on the table is burning low and starting to sputter. We can hear crickets chirping outside.

MAGISTRATE (taps foot impatiently, looking at Gabrielle):

So you think you can explain? Can you tell me why the people of my town are acting like a bunch of rabid bacchae?

GABRIELLE (confidently):

Please! I'm the Battling Bard of Potedeia. I *think* I can tell you a simple little story about something that just happened today.

She smirks at the others.

GABRIELLE (clears her throat, then speaks in a dramatically low tone):

My tale begins with the sound of weeping...

Xena rolls her eyes and settles back in her chair.

DISSOLVE TO

[FLASHBACK]

The clearing in the woods from Xena and Ares' versions. Gabrielle wakes up to find Samuel crying. Xena and Ares are both asleep in their bedrolls. Gabrielle yawns and stretches, then gets up and picks up Samuel. She crinkles her nose when she realizes why he's crying. She picks up a clean cloth and walks him over to a tree stump, where she begins changing his diaper.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

It's never just because you missed me, is it?

Samuel giggles and reaches up to grab a piece of her hair and put it in his mouth. Gabrielle patiently extracts it and finishes changing the diaper. Then she looks around the campsite worriedly.

GABRIELLE (trying to call out without waking the others):

Darion? Darion!

Not getting any response, she picks up Samuel and walks over to the edge of a clearing, walks a few paces into the woods, then stops right in front of a big boulder. Suddenly, Darion appears from behind the rock, and she jumps back in surprise.

DARION (excited):

Gabrielle, look what I found!

He steps aside, and a rabbit hops out from behind his ankle.

DARION:

Isn't he cute? Can I keep him?

Gabrielle opens her mouth to respond, but stops when she sees Darion reach down and drop a shiny red berry on the ground. She grabs his wrist.

GABRIELLE (eyes widening):
Darion, where did you get those?

DARION (points to a bush a few paces to his right):
Over there, why?

She looks back at the rabbit, whose eyes are glowing red and whose mouth is covered in foam. It bares its sharp fangs at her.

GABRIELLE (panicked):
Can't you hear it growling? It's going to bite you!

Darion looks back at the rabbit, which looks completely innocent and normal now. He gives Gabrielle a "what is wrong with you?" look.

DARION:
It's a rabbit, Gabrielle, not a wolf!

GABRIELLE (grabs his shoulder and walking him toward the clearing):
Back to the camp, now!

DARION (looking back at her defiantly):
I want to play with the rabbit some more!

Gabrielle gives him a stern look, and he starts to pout, but walks back in the direction of the camp, and she follows him, patting Samuel's back. We see a close-up of Gabrielle's face, which looks weary and stress-worn.

GABRIELLE (sighing):
Maybe I could get him a pet rock...

Samuel gurgles as if he's amused.

GABRIELLE:
Yeah, I didn't think so, either.

She stops to look back at the rabbit, which looks back at her placidly, then she continues walking.

GABRIELLE:
Maybe I just need more sleep... (looks back one more time) But I'll be watching you, Mister Bunny Rabbit.

Samuel giggles and tries to clap his chubby hands together.

DISSOLVE TO

Gabrielle starting a fire. Samuel is on a stump, cooing and looking at his hands. Xena is gone, and Ares is still in his bedroll. Darion is picking up sticks.

DARION (whiny):

How many more do I have to get?

GABRIELLE:

Enough to keep the fire going.

DARION:

And how many is that?

GABRIELLE (growing annoyed):

I'll tell you when it's enough.

DARION:

But how--

Just then, Samuel starts crying at the top of his lungs. Gabrielle drops the stick she is using to poke the fire and picks up Samuel.

Ares rolls over in his bedroll, picking up his pillow and covering his head with it.

GABRIELLE (bouncing Samuel, trying to placate him):

Hush, now, Samuel, I already fed you!

Her face changes suddenly, and she looks at her hand.

GABRIELLE (in disbelief):

Again?!

DISSOLVE TO

Xena returns to the camp with a dead rabbit on a string. Darion eyes her keenly.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, good, you're back. (looks at the rabbit) Couldn't you hear Samuel crying?

XENA:

Huh? Oh, yeah, no. Isn't Ares up yet?

GABRIELLE:

No, he didn't even wake up when Samuel started bawling.

Xena walks over to Ares and starts nudging him with her toe. We can see her in the background shaking him to wake him up.

DARION:

Gabrielle, Xena has a rabbit! Why can't I have one?

GABRIELLE (sighing):

Darion, that rabbit is for breakfast.

Just then, Samuel starts to roll off the stump, and Gabrielle quickly grabs him and puts him back. Xena busies herself with cleaning the rabbit.

GABRIELLE:

I'm going to have to tie you down, aren't I? (looks at Darion pointedly) Where are those sticks?

Darion runs off to get more sticks, trying to look industrious.

A few moments later, there is a large clanging noise. We see Xena banging a spoon against a metal bucket right next to Ares' ear. This causes Samuel to start wailing, but Xena is too focused on Ares to notice.

GABRIELLE:

Xena! Stop it!

She picks up Samuel and bounces him, trying to calm him down. Xena stops banging the bucket as Ares starts to get up from his bedroll. She and Ares bicker back and forth for a minute.

Gabrielle sees that Darion has run off into the woods again.

GABRIELLE (yelling):

Darion, stay away from the rabbit! I'm serious! (more softly, to Samuel) Shhh-shhh... (looks at Ares, who has managed to get on his feet) Hey, could you finish packing up all the bedrolls?

ARES (with exaggerated weariness):

You know I would...but I just have (yawns) no energy in the mornings.

GABRIELLE (very irritated):

Forget it. (mumbles under her breath) God of War, my eye. Should have been the God of Couch Turnips. Hmm, "couch turnips" doesn't sound quite right... (snaps out of her reverie) Darion, would you please pack up Ares' bedroll for him?

GABRIELLE (voice-over):

By some miracle, we managed to get breakfast cooked and start out on our way to Aphrodite's...

DISSOLVE TO

The path in the woods. Xena and Ares are walking just ahead of Gabrielle, who is carrying Samuel in a sling, and Darion, who is tripping along next to her. Xena and Ares aren't arguing yet, but are walking in silence.

Suddenly, Samuel lets out a loud burp, and Gabrielle looks with dismay at her shoulder.

GABRIELLE:

Aaacck! Did any of your breakfast actually stay inside you? (to Xena) Hey, how come you never warned me about this?

XENA (patronizingly):

Gabrielle, he's a baby. That's what babies *do*.

GABRIELLE (sarcastically):

Thanks, that's very helpful.

XENA:

What's the matter with you this morning? Did you sleep on a rock again?

GABRIELLE (exasperated):

No, I've just been taking care of Samuel *and* Darion *and* cooking our food, and on top of that, I've got to put up with your whiny ex-God of War boyfriend--

ARES:

Whaddaya mean, whiny?

XENA (annoyed):

You *must* have slept on a rock. I've never seen you this cranky before! It's not like we haven't had to listen to Sammy's caterwauling all morning, too, you know.

GABRIELLE (takes a deep breath, then exhales):

You know, when Eve was a baby, I always tried to be understanding. But now that I'm raising a baby of my own, you've done nothing but complain!

XENA (smugly):

Well, that's because Eve was much better behaved than Sammy.



GABRIELLE (her voice takes on an edge):

Are you trying to say your kid is better than mine? Xena, Eve cried every bit as much as Samuel.

XENA:

Well, she never cried when *I* was holding her.

GABRIELLE (sputtering with barely-controlled rage):

You--I--that's--not--true! (pauses) At least Sammy doesn't spit up every five minutes!

XENA (indignant):

She only spit up on *you* because you weren't holding her right! Babies aren't meant to be shaken like paint cans, you know!

GABRIELLE (shouting):

Or maybe because *you* liked to eat garlic and onions right before feeding her!



XENA:

I did not--



ARES (interrupting):

I do *not* get mortals. Why would you want one of those when they don't even *do* anything?

GABRIELLE:

Like what? Move things with their minds?

ARES (gulps):

For example. (changing the subject) So, uh, when are we supposed to get to the farmhouse?

On the side of the road we see a single yellow flower begin to wilt as they walk by.

GABRIELLE (voice-over):

We eventually reached Aphrodite's house, where I was reunited with my horse Klio...

DISSOLVE TO

Gabrielle, smilingly, hands Samuel off to Hephaestus, who looks very uneasy, holding the baby out at arm's length. She nods reassuringly, then runs off.

DISSOLVE TO

Gabrielle leading Klio out of the stable. They get outside, and Gabrielle climbs up into the saddle and takes off at a fast pace. We see a brief montage of Gabrielle riding:

- through a wheatfield, her hair blowing in the breeze
- beside a stream in the woods, a smile lighting up her face
- past a waterfall surrounded by lush greenery.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE (euphorically):

I felt a sense of renewal surging through my spirit, like a spring rain...

ARES:

I think / feel something surging through my stomach... (makes a mock vomiting sound)

GABRIELLE (irritatedly):

Some people have *no* appreciation for fine artistic prose.

ARES (smart-alecky):

Is that what that was?

GABRIELLE (shooting Ares a "go to Tartarus" look):

Anyway...later we all walked to New Athens, where we met Genia. Aphrodite went to get the gift for Samuel, a goddess stripped of her powers, but not of her generosity...

APHRODITE (touched):

Awwww!

Xena and Ares look at one other and roll their eyes.

GABRIELLE (ignoring them):

Suddenly, we heard a *cacophony* coming from the town square...

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Xena, Gabrielle, Darion and Genia inside the orphanage. This room has a rocking horse; a toybox with puppets, dolls, a couple of wooden swords, slingshots, balls; and a shelf full of books.

Genia is talking animatedly while Gabrielle listens. Darion is walking next to them, holding Samuel and trying to keep him from sucking his thumb. Xena is sitting on a stool, polishing her sword.

GENIA (effusively):

Oh, Gabrielle, my life here is wonderful! I'm helping people, and the Hestians have been so kind to me, and the children are--

Genia is interrupted by shouting, scuffling, and crashing noises coming from outside the temple. Xena rushes outside and starts fighting with the thugs.

Gabrielle runs to the door, but stops when one of the thugs barrels into the orphanage. She throws a sai at his head as he comes through the door, and then turns around as another thug enters the building.

Thug #2 starts slashing wildly at her with his sword, which she deflects. Two more thugs enter the building while they are fighting and head for the treasury box. Thug #1 gets up and lunges at Genia, and Gabrielle catches his sword in one of her sais while she kicks the other thug in the abdomen.

The other two thugs grab the bags of money and run toward the door.

GABRIELLE (yelling):

Stop!

She looks horrified as she sees Darion stepping into the path of one of them, his arms out at his sides. He is holding one of the toy swords from the toybox. Samuel can be heard crying somewhere off-screen.

GABRIELLE:

Darion, no! Get over here now!

Darion ignores her, so she rushes over and pushes him out of the way. The thug raises his sword over his head and nearly brings it down, but she rolls out of the way at the last minute, hugging Darion to her. The thug runs out the door, followed by the others. Gabrielle stands up and pulls Darion to his feet. She looks livid.

GABRIELLE:

What did you think you were DOING?!

DARION:

I was gonna help you fight the bad guys! If you would have let me--

GABRIELLE:

NO! I don't want to hear it. You almost got us both killed, and you left Samuel alone.

She hurries over to where Samuel is crying. She picks him up, and Darion scowls at her in the background. He runs outside.

Gabrielle tries to shush the baby, then sniffs the air, then grimaces.

GABRIELLE (to Samuel):
Not *again!*

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE:

Xena went off to do the hero thing, (sighing) leaving me behind with the baby.

APHRODITE:

Hey! I am not a--

GABRIELLE:

I *meant* Samuel.

APHRODITE (embarrassed):

Oh. I knew that.

GABRIELLE (rolling her eyes):

We helped Genia by keeping the children entertained.

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

Gabrielle has the children gathered around her, and she is in the middle of telling a story. She is holding Samuel on her lap. Aphrodite is in another corner of the room helping some of the children with their painting.

GABRIELLE:

So then, when the beautiful princess woke up, she was in a magical land where everything was different from anything she had ever known. In this land, she was married to a man she didn't remember, and he made her take care of their three children, who looked like...fish.

LITTLE GIRL:

But how could they look like fish? People aren't fish!



GABRIELLE:

You know, I have an interesting theory about that, but... (sees the children's eyes glaze over) that's not important right now. The children were children, but they had gills and flippers...and one of them was a squid. Or an octopus--

LITTLE GIRL:

That's silly!

Samuel giggles and then spits up. Gabrielle grabs the rag from her shoulder and wipes his chin.

GABRIELLE (trying to remain calm):

No, you see, it was a magical kingdom where the people were like fish. The princess discovered that she turned into a mermaid when she went into the water.

LITTLE BOY:

Why?

GABRIELLE (starting to lose patience):

Why what?

LITTLE BOY:

Why was she a mermaid?

GABRIELLE:

Just--listen to the story, and maybe you'll find out, okay?

LITTLE BOY:

But I want to know now!

LITTLE GIRL #2:

I need to go to the bathroom!

LITTLE GIRL #3:

Me, too!

LITTLE BOY #2:

Me, three!

Some of the kids start to get up and run around. Some of them start throwing paper airplanes and jumping on the chairs.

GABRIELLE (moves as if to stand up):

All right, all right! If you don't want to hear the rest of the story...

A chorus of whining goes up from the children, who stop in their tracks. Samuel starts fussing and trying to escape from Gabrielle's grasp.

LITTLE BOY #1:

We want to hear what happens!

GABRIELLE:

All right, then. The princess got tired of taking care of the kids all the time, with no help from her ungrateful husband--

LITTLE GIRL (raises her hand):

Why?

Gabrielle puts her head in her hands, groaning.

GABRIELLE (looking up after a few moments):

Uhhh...how about a different story? About a boy who fought a giant?

The kids all cheer excitedly. Gabrielle notices Aphrodite struggling with some of the kids in the corner who are in danger of ruining her outfit.

APHRODITE (yells):

Gabrieelle!!!

GABRIELLE (calls over to her):

Why don't you come over here and listen to the story?

APHRODITE (hesitantly):

What kind of story is it?

GABRIELLE:

Uh, it's a beautiful love story!

APHRODITE (brightens):

Really?

GABRIELLE:

Er, sort of. (under her breath) At least, for *some* people, it was...

One of the children crawls over to Gabrielle and taps her knee to get her attention.

GABRIELLE:

What is it, uh, Leonis, isn't it?

Leonis smiles impishly. He pulls a slingshot from behind his back and hits Gabrielle in the forehead with a pebble. The other children laugh hysterically.

GABRIELLE (peeved):

Owww! (trying to keep her cool) Leonis, that wasn't very nice. Give me the slingshot... (off his defiant grin) *now*.

Leonis shakes his head and hides the slingshot behind his back, and the other children giggle.

GABRIELLE (rubs her forehead):

Geniaaaa!

DISSOLVE TO

All the children sleeping in their bedrolls. Gabrielle is feeding Samuel, and Aphrodite is sitting next to her. They are already in the middle of a conversation, but we are too far away to hear what they are saying. The camera pans over the sleeping kids in the foreground, then over to Genia, who is talking animatedly to some Hestians while holding a pair of onions in front of her.

The camera gradually gets closer to Gabrielle and Aphrodite. As it does, we hear a loud roar coming from outside.

APHRODITE (snidely):

Gabrielle, your...child...burps louder than Hermes after one of Uncle Dionysus' festivals! Don't you think you should teach him some manners?

GABRIELLE (looks to the door concernedly):

Aphrodite, that wasn't Samuel, that was something outside! (looks back at Aphrodite, slightly peeved) And what did you say about my son?

APHRODITE (archly):

Oh, nothing, I was just saying that he must get his manners from *you*.

GABRIELLE (under her breath):

And to think people *actually* used to worship you.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE:

The rest was pretty much like Aphrodite said. It was as if the people were suddenly spellbound, like they were being drawn into chaos by some unseen force, a mystical--

MAGISTRATE (losing patience again):

Honey, we get it. Everybody was fighting, right?

GABRIELLE (a little hurt):

Well, I suppose, if you want to put things so prosaically...yes. They were fighting. We were all fighting.

MAGISTRATE (expectantly):

And?

GABRIELLE:

And? That's it. That's when you walked in.

MAGISTRATE (tries to keep calm):

And yet--you haven't--told me--the reason for all the fighting in New Athens. Have you?

GABRIELLE (looks down at her hands):

No.

MAGISTRATE:

In fact, I've listened to all four of you now, and none of you has been able to tell me anything that might give us a clue to what's happening out there!

The magistrate walks over to the lone window in the room and opens it. The sun has gone down, but there is still enough light to see some people still fighting, although most of the villagers seem to be scattered unconscious throughout the town square.

XENA (serious):

If we don't figure out what's causing this, these people are going to keep fighting until they kill each other.

ARES:

Well, for once, I can honestly say it wasn't me.

APHRODITE:

Or me! (sighs) I wish I still had those kinds of powers...

Everybody gives her a glowering stare, and she backtracks quickly.

APHRODITE:

Not that I'd use them for, like, evil, or anything! Not like this! Love Goddess, former, remember?...

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, but a lot of those spells you cast caused a lot of pain. They weren't about love at all.

APHRODITE (puts her hand to her chest):

That *hurts!* I have completely done a karmic 180 since then!

ARES (to Gabrielle):

Yeah, lay off! Besides, it's not like you never used a spell to your own advantage before! Remember the enchanted scroll?



GABRIELLE (hotly):

Yeah, and as I recall, that was *your* idea!

XENA (yelling):

Enough! (shakes her head) We're all still letting this--spell--or whatever it is--get to us. We've got to figure out who's behind this, or we're never going to end it. It's possible that the guys who broke into your temple (looks at Aphrodite) and the Hestians' orphanage are related to the fighting somehow. Now, we know that they had tattoos with some snake or rope symbol--

APHRODITE (gasps):

Oh, my gods, of course! It wasn't a rope at all! I think--it was a whip.

XENA:

Then if I know my Olympian deities, there's one goddess in particular who would make her followers get that tattoo.

MAGISTRATE (impatiently, but with a sliver of hope):

Yes?

XENA, GABRIELLE, ARES and APHRODITE (in unison):

Discord!

They all turn around to the other wall when they hear a cackling noise, which is accompanied by a puff of smoke and a flash of light. Discord appears to have nearly completely faded away, but she smiles at them with a grim sort of satisfaction.

DISCORD:

So glad you dummies finally figured it out. I was starting to get bored.

GABRIELLE:

What was the point of all this? It's not like you're going to get more worshippers this way...

DISCORD (looks at Gabrielle hatefully):

Yeah, rub it in, Bardie. I knew my time was almost up, so I decided to make things interesting--one last hurrah, you might say. And it sure was fun watching you goody-goodies go at each other's throats all day!

APHRODITE:

You stole my statue! I *knew* you were obsessed with me!

DISCORD:

Please, don't flatter yourself! In fact, I'll give it back so I don't have to look at your ugly face.

APHRODITE (shrieks):

Ugly?! Why, I'm gonna--

She reaches her hand back to use her powers, then remembers she doesn't have any. Discord laughs at this, so Aphrodite swings her arm forward for a punch, which lands successfully, since the goddess wasn't expecting it. Discord grabs her nose.



DISCORD:

Ow! You actually punched me, you--

MAGISTRATE (interrupts):

You are under arrest for disturbing the peace! Guard!

The guard tries to grab her elbow, but his arm goes right through her.

XENA (solemnly):

Don't bother. She won't be around much longer to cause trouble.

DISCORD (looks at Ares pityingly):

You know what? I'd rather fade away than go out like you and the love bimchette here. (jerks her thumb at Aphrodite) You're so pathetic, you whining, sniveling, cry-baby! (imitates Ares) 'My legs are soooo sore!' You're so--mortal! And all (pauses, then with mock sentimentality) for the sake of *true love!*

ARES:

Looks like I'm gonna outlive you, though. Besides, I'd rather live a mortal life with Xena than be a god and have to spend one more minute with you!

DISCORD (laughs):

I'll bet you would. I wish you all (chokes, starting to show a break in the tough-girl façade) long, boring, mortal lives!

Discord is almost invisible now. She turns to the magistrate, trying to regain some of her bravado.

DISCORD (disdainfully):

Relax, you can all go back to your pitiful, achingly tedious existences now. (to the group) You won't have me around to liven things up anymore... See you on the Other Side.

Discord gives them one final wicked grin, and then fades out completely. A gust of smoke blows through the building and around Xena, Ares, Gabrielle and Aphrodite, and all four of them sigh as they feel the spell leaving them. The smoke flows out the window and over the townspeople. There is silence for a few moments, then Xena turns to the magistrate.

XENA:

I think your town should be safe now. Discord won't be bothering you anymore, the spell is over. It shouldn't be hard to find the rest of her goons and get the stolen goods back, now that she's gone.

MAGISTRATE (looks confused, but also very relieved):

Thank the gods. Or, um...thank...you, I suppose. You're all free to leave now...and I think the sooner, the better.

They all nod silently in agreement, and wearily start to walk out.

DISSOLVE TO

Night. Xena, Ares, Gabrielle, Darion, Genia, Aphrodite and Hephaestus in the tavern. They are eating dinner and talking, enjoying themselves and relaxing. Darion is holding baby Samuel while Horace lies at his feet, thumping his tail contentedly.

APHRODITE (squeezing Hephaestus in a hug):

Thank you sooo much, Hephie! I'm so happy you got my statue back from those creeps!

HEPHAESTUS (blushes):

I had to get it back, Dite; it was very precious to me, too.

APHRODITE:

Awww! (kisses him tenderly)

Xena, Ares and Gabrielle look away for a moment, then clear their throats.

APHRODITE:

Oh, I nearly forgot to give you this! (pulls out the white box with the gold-leaf pattern and hands it to Gabrielle)

GABRIELLE (pleased):

Thank you! (pauses) What is it?

APHRODITE:

It's a magical music box. It's something I zapped up when Cupid was a baby to put him to sleep. Just a few minutes of this lullaby, and baby Sammy will be sleeping like--well, a baby. You don't even have to wind it.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

Thank you! I love it. It's perfect.

Xena and Gabrielle turn to each other while the others go on chatting.

XENA:

Gabrielle, I'm sorry I haven't been more supportive of you and the baby lately. I've been having a hard time adjusting to having two more traveling companions, but you're the one who's had to work hard taking care of Sammy.

GABRIELLE:

It's just been really hard getting used to having someone depend on you every moment. But it's nice, too.

XENA:

Yeah, I went through the same thing with Eve. I should have been more understanding.

GABRIELLE (smiles reassuringly):

You've been great. *We've* been great. (sighs) Today was just a little more...trying than usual.

XENA:

Yeah, now that you mention it, we *have* been great. (nods her head to the baby, who is gurgling happily in Darion's lap) And I think Sammy agrees.

Xena and Gabrielle smile warmly at each other and share an affectionate hug.

After a moment, Xena leaves the table, and we see Ares get up shortly afterward.

Aphrodite smiles as she sees them leave, then turns to face Genia.

APHRODITE:

So, Sweet Pea, you're not really gonna be a virgin, like, forever, right?

GENIA:

Well, technically...

Gabrielle reaches over to cover Darion's ears.

DISSOLVE TO

Outside. Xena and Ares leaning up against the tavern wall, kissing passionately, just like in Aphrodite's fantasy. Ares reaches his hand up to cup Xena's cheek in his hand, and she snakes one leg around his back to pull him closer. Then she leans her head back ecstatically as his lips voraciously wind their way down her throat.

The camera pans out, expanding the view to show a through-the-window shot of Gabrielle, Darion, Genia, Aphrodite, and Hephaestus talking happily around the dinner.

DISSOLVE TO

Day. An overhead shot of the square as Xena (leading Argo), Ares, Gabrielle carrying Samuel, Darion, Aphrodite and Hephaestus walk toward the edge of town, talking and laughing. The camera zooms in as the same old woman walks slowly up to the sign and counts on her fingers as she starts to flip the number for the town population back down, finally getting it back to "49" as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[No former love deities looked washed out during the production of this motion picture, but Discord was permanently faded.]