

SHIPPER SEASON SEVEN

“Letting Go”

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Logline

When Ares finds out about Xena's death he knows that he must find a way to bring her back but only with the help of Eve, Gabrielle, and a myth told by people far to the north of Greece can they hope to achieve that goal.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Gabrielle is trudging uphill, holding Argo's reins. She's wearing the chakram, occasionally reaching down to her hip to reassure herself that it's there. Her face is set--she's cried all her tears. Suddenly she stops, as though listening to something.

XENA'S VOICE:

Gabrielle...

GABRIELLE:

Xena? (turning around, louder) Xena! Where are you? Xena!!

The voice fades into the sound of leaves rustling. It had been yet another delusion. Gabrielle releases the reins, drops to her knees, shoulders shaking.

GABRIELLE (whispering):

No...please, no more. I can't do this...

XENA'S VOICE:

Gabrielle...

GABRIELLE (tries to block her ears):

No!! She's dead! (sobbing again) Xena...

Flashback of Gabrielle seeing Xena's body beheaded, burning her body, Gabrielle screaming.

GABRIELLE:

I can't do this...

Argo comes up to nuzzle Gabrielle's cheek. Gabrielle buries her face in Argo's mane. A flash of blue light illuminates Gabrielle's back. She gets up, turns sharply and draws her sais, her eyes red-rimmed.

ARES (emotionless):

So you're back in Greece. Took you long enough.

GABRIELLE:

I'm only human, Ares. I have to *walk*. What do you want?

Ares ignores her hostility, looks at the chakram at her hip.

ARES:

I... (tonelessly) Xena's dead, isn't she?

Gabrielle sheathes her sais.

GABRIELLE:

Yes. (takes out the urn that contains Xena's ashes from the saddlebag, rubs it with her fingers)
She was only human, too. (puts it away again)

She turns away from Ares, fixes up Xena's belongings strapped to Argo's saddle--Xena's armor, leathers and sword.

GABRIELLE:

Sooner or later (gives the straps an angry tug) we die.

ARES:

And you're just going to let her go--without a fight?

GABRIELLE (rounding on him):

Let her go?! What do you know about it? Was it a good battle, Ares, when she died? How was the view from Olympus?

ARES:

I don't know.

GABRIELLE (stops screaming):

What?

ARES (almost embarrassed):
It's out of my domain; too far.

GABRIELLE:
Oh. (looks at him curiously) If you didn't see her die, then how do you know about it?

ARES:
I just knew. But I want her back.

Gabrielle shakes her head.

ARES:
I want her back!!

GABRIELLE (trying to restrain him):
There's nothing anyone can do, Ares! Nothing!! She's gone and you have to accept that. I have. She had to do it--there are forty thousand souls at stake. She sacrificed herself to save them!

ARES:
Why am I not surprised? That's my girl, always stubborn.

GABRIELLE:
Ares, please. It's hard enough. (reaches out to touch his hand gingerly) Don't do this.

ARES (snatches hand away):
No! Now you listen to me, Blondie, I *will* get her back.

Ares disappears; Gabrielle drops her head, her fingers grazing the chakram at her hip as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Ares appears in one of his temples. It is a temple that has been deserted for a long time while he was mortal and now looks rundown and old. Cobwebs cover the walls and dust floats in the air.

Ares walks up to his throne and sinks down into its cold stone seat with a heavy sigh. He looks around the room thoughtfully. Then on the floor in the darkest corner of the room, Ares sees a chest--a chest that brings back memories long forgotten.

Ares stands up quickly and walks over to it, picking it up. He blows off the dust that covers it and sets it down on a table that stands in the room.

The chest is made of wood, rimmed with gold. On the front side there is a golden keyhole. Ares makes a key appear in his fingers and unlocks the chest. The hinges squeak as the lid opens, having

been many years since it has ever been touched. Its interior is covered in black velvet and inside the chest is a rolled-up piece of parchment.

Ares picks it up and opens it. It isn't just any piece of parchment; it is the contract that Xena and Ares signed long ago that signified that after death, Xena's soul belonged to him. Ares closes his eyes momentarily, remembering back to that time.

[FLASHBACK]

Xena and Ares are standing in a forest; Ares is beginning to roll up a piece of parchment.

ARES:

Oh. (unrolls it and shows it to Xena, her face filled with contempt) Thumbprint right here on the bottom line. Thank you.

Xena looks at him suspiciously and then presses her thumb to the parchment, leaving an imprint behind.

ARES:

That didn't hurt, did it? (she glares at him somewhat, he rolls up the contract) And there it is--my free access pass to your soul (he puts it in his back pocket, grins) and as long as I have this...you're pretty much mine.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

He opens his eyes, then looks at the contract in his hand, a touch of guilt showing in his eyes as if he feels bad about ever creating it in the first place just so he could use it to control Xena's destiny. Ares nods grimly and rolls the contract up again, gripping it firmly in his hand.

ARES:

Hang in there, Xena. I'm coming. (puts the contract in his back pocket, disappears)

CUT TO

Ares appears in the Japanese underworld, the subterranean realm of Jigoku. Billows of steam rise from the ground and the place is filled with an eerie red glow. It is a large open room that seems to have no walls, ceiling or floor--the steam seems to go on and on.

Ares walks down the long hallway of smoke until he reaches a large metal arch. On one side of the arch stands a man dressed in a dark kimono and a judge's cap. He is holding a mace. On the other side stands a woman, dressed identically to the man. Their eyes are so clear that it seems one could see right through them.

Ares looks at the two people, unsure of what to make of them--they are unlike anyone he has ever seen. They do not move a muscle as he walks toward the arch; he decides to proceed. Just as he gets to the entrance of the arch, the maces in their hands become spears and they point them at him.

MAN:

No one enters Jigoku unless they're dead. And you...are definitely not dead.

Ares spares him an impatient look.

ARES:

That's very observant of you--now, if you could just step out of my way, we can all go about our own business. (tries to peer through the steam beyond the gate) And while you're at it, you may want to check the air-conditioning; all that steam can't be good for the paintwork.

The two sentinels exchange scandalized looks, then the man speaks again.

MAN:

And just who do you think you are, to so flout our will?

Ares makes an attempt to walk past the spears, but they do not part for him.

ARES:

And that's *whose* will, exactly?

MAN:

I am Emma-ho--judge of the souls of male sinners. My sister-- (points to the woman) --judges the female transgressors. None dares gainsay our word--and we say you may not enter!

ARES:

Believe me when I say that it's been a pleasure meeting you both, but I really must be going now.

Ares starts to walk through the arch but is stopped when both of their spears jam into his stomach and out the other side. Emma-ho and his sister gasp in surprise.

EMMA-HO AND HIS SISTER:

He's immortal...

ARES (looks at spears, gives them a cocky grin):

Oh, please. You think these are going to stop me? (steps back and the spears slide out of his stomach) Now, I'm getting past you one way or another. And believe me, you won't like the *other*. (a ball of fire appears in each of his hands)

EMMA-HO:

We will not let you pass, foreigner, even if you *are* a deity.

ARES:

Have it your way, then.

He throws the balls of fire at them but they disintegrate in the air before they hit their target. Somewhat put out, he tries again, with the same result--the fireballs disintegrate before they hit. He eyes the deities in angry confusion.

ARES:

Fine. Let's talk, then. I've come to claim what is rightfully mine.

EMMA-HO (raises eyebrows in surprise):

Are you accusing us of theft, foreigner?

ARES (tilts his head to one side, pretends to think):

Hmm. Let's see--yep. Nicely put. Theft. I have prior claim to a soul in your realm and (voice breaks slightly but he recovers immediately) I want her back. Now!

EMMA-HO'S SISTER (shakes head):

Impossible. No spirit may leave the Jigoku. (curiously) What claim do you have to her?

ARES (mutters to himself):

I *hate* beaurocratic red tape. (louder) But if you insist on inspecting the paperwork...

He produces the contract, the parchment glowing slightly in the foggy atmosphere.

ARES:

According to this contract, I own her after she dies. (he holds it up so they can see it) See, that's her thumbprint and her name, right there. Xena--with an "X".

EMMA-HO (looks at it):

Your contract, as you call it, is worthless, foreigner. This Xena you speak of died in our land, therefore she belongs in our realm.

The haughty speech is beyond the limit of his patience. Ares growls and rolls the contract back up.

ARES:

I *demand* that you release her soul! She belongs to me!

He lunges to attack, but Emma-ho raises his hand and a surge of energy erupts from it, sending Ares flying backwards, landing several paces away. The fog swirls around and over the fallen body. A moment later, the God of War rises out of it, his face terrible with rage. His voice is dangerously low and quiet.

ARES:

That was a very, very stupid thing to do to an Olympian God.

The sentinels look suddenly uncomfortable.

EMMA-HO:

Olympian?

ARES (somewhat threatening):

I am the God of *War*.

Emma-ho's sister whispers something in her brother's ear and he nods grudgingly.

EMMA-HO:

My sister speaks the truth. We have no quarrel with Olympus and we wish none. You may enter, God of War, but know that you cannot hope to remove a spirit from Jigoku. She may not tread past this gate.

ARES (grits his teeth):

I'll keep it in mind.

Ares starts to pass through the arch and then in an angry flash of azure light he's gone as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

He materializes once again, this time in another part of the underworld. He is in an icy cavern, its walls dark and gloomy. The souls of people drift through the air, moaning with the torment of being trapped there for eternity.

Ares looks around until he finds Xena's soul sitting atop a stone. His heart thumps painfully at the sight of her--barely there; her eyes dull and empty, her figure almost transparent.

ARES (whispers, needing confirmation, solid proof that it's really her):

Xena?

Xena's spirit looks up at him without interest and then looks away.

XENA:

Ares. Go away, you shouldn't be here. You shouldn't have looked for me.

Ares is simultaneously relieved that she recognizes him and appalled at her indifference.

ARES (tries to arrange his face into a smirk, but fails):

What? Not even a hello? (sobering) Gabrielle told me everything, Xena. Not wanting forty thousand souls to seek revenge, taking the hint--that's all very admirable, of course--but just once, don't you think you could forget about the Greater Good and think about yourself for a change?

XENA:

I don't expect you to understand it, Ares. The guilt, the horror when I think of condemning all those souls... That's just one of the ways that you and I are very different.

Xena pauses for a long moment, Ares looks at her without a word.

XENA:

But if Gabrielle told you everything then you already know that I have to stay here. There's no other way.

ARES:

And that's where you're mistaken. I've come here to bring you back. (takes out the contract) We had deal. Remember?

Xena glances at the rolled up parchment with the same indifference she showed Ares.

XENA:

How did you get that? It was at the bottom of the Ionian Sea.

ARES:

Xena, I'm a god. You think that I can't find something that I made? I saw you put it there and I retrieved it. (unfurls the scroll and holds it out)

Suddenly a change comes over her, as though sight of the writing, undeniably tangible, rouses her from resignation. Xena jumps off the rock and twists to face Ares, her previously dull eyes blazing with something like her former fire.

XENA:

Oh, this is rich, Ares! I can't believe you have the nerve to show that to me! No, wait--I can! (she is furious) So this is why you want me back? Come to claim your lost property, have you? Finally got your chance?

ARES:

No. You know, Xena, I'm doing you a favor by bringing you back. I mean it beats being in this place.

XENA:

Ares, get this through your thick skull--I don't *want* to go back and I don't *need* a favor from you, or anyone else. (the fire gradually seeps out of her voice and the next phrase rings with her former emotionlessness) Go away and let me find peace, Ares.

ARES:

Fine. You can stay in this wretched place looking for *peace* for the rest of eternity for all I care. Don't worry about the people you left behind.

He touches her cheek with the back of his hand, she looks a little uncertain--clearly expecting a kiss but unsure of her own response. Ares leans in; Xena closes her eyes.

ARES (leans past her mouth to whisper in her ear):

Like Gabrielle, for instance. And Eve.

Xena's eyes fly open, she pulls away angrily.

XENA (snarls):

You wouldn't *dare*!

ARES (shakes his head):

You were always stubborn, Xena but you were never stupid. Now's not a good time to start.

With that he disappears, leaving her frowning in puzzled concern.

CUT TO

Ares appears in a peaceful and calm woodland area, a blue mist flows over the land. On the edge of the forest is a cave with two streams flowing side by side from it. One stream is crystal clear, the other black as ebony.

Ares, frustrated by Xena's stubbornness and her unwillingness to let him help, begins throwing lightning bolts into the trees to vent his anger. One by one, trees crash and fall to the ground; some overtaken by flames, others split into a thousand pieces.

Ares soon ceases fire on the defenseless plants and lets out a heavy sigh. Then from within the forest emerges a deer from behind the foliage. There is a large gash in its side. It is bleeding tremendously and sizzling; the poor creature having obviously been caught in the crossfire of one of Ares' stray bolts.

Ares watches as the deer hobbles and staggers before collapsing to the ground in exhaustion. It manages to fall in between the two streams, the black water splashing up onto its body. Ares watches in amazement as the deer is engulfed with a bright light that fades from white to blue. When the light ceases, the deer is magically healed, no evidence that a wound had ever been inflicted.

Ares is speechless, his face filled with wonder and confusion. He walks over to the streams and looks at them, then at the cave and back at the streams again. A small grin crosses his lips, an idea obviously having struck him.

ARES:

These must be the Twin Streams... (he disappears)

CUT TO

Gabrielle is sitting in a forest, writing a dispatch to Eve.

GABRIELLE (to herself):

Oh, Eve...I wish I knew how to tell you. (dips quill into ink, continues forming characters on the parchment)

ON-SCREEN TRANSLATION AS GABRIELLE WRITES:

Your mother wanted to be buried in Amphipolis--

Gabrielle blinks to disperse the unshed tears, continues to write.

TRANSLATION:

I will wait for you there. (pause) Come if you can. Gabrielle.

XENA'S VOICE:

Oh, Eve...

Gabrielle presses her hand to her mouth, trying not to sob. She looks around her--Xena's ashes, her chakram, other weapons, her armor--shakes her head.

GABRIELLE (softly):

Even in the air... You're everything, all around. Please Xena... Please.

She looks into the fire, has a split-second flashback of Xena's body burning--grabs the water skin and puts out the fire, then starts coughing in the smoke.

Blue flash off-camera.

ARES' VOICE:

Hey, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle looks up at him through tears, clutching the empty water skin, her expression guarded but concern in her eyes.

GABRIELLE (gritting her teeth):

She's gone, Ares. Not even a god can bring her back now.

ARES:

If you think that then you're crazier than I thought.

Something in his tone, the smug self-confidence that is such a contrast to his earlier emotion, angers Gabrielle beyond all control.

GABRIELLE (her voice rising):

I could have brought her back, Ares! She could be here right now with me! But Xena said I couldn't restore her life because the souls of the people she killed would be condemned forever. What makes you think anyone has the right to deny their redemption?

Her anger dissolves into sobs, she's crying again.

GABRIELLE:

I hate her decision but I had to keep it, Ares. I promised her I would. (wiping her eyes) So tell me why you're here or go away.

ARES (walks around the fire):

How would you feel to have Xena alive again?

GABRIELLE:

Are you deaf, Ares? I just told you. That's not possible.

ARES:

Yes, it is. Her soul belongs to me and I can use that to get her back. The thing about the condemned souls; I'll work that out too.

Gabrielle is too stunned even for anger.

GABRIELLE:

The contract? You're talking about the contract you made with Xena that made her soul yours after death, aren't you? (huffs in disgust) I can't believe you. You want to bring her back as your Warrior Queen, your champion--chained to you by a contract? Xena was right--you're only ever out for yourself.

ARES:

No, you're wrong. I'm just using the contract as a way to get her back, that's it.

GABRIELLE (her tone is dark):

I don't believe you.

ARES (paces angrily, avoiding Gabrielle's eyes):

I miss her, okay? I miss her greatly. I thought you'd be able to understand that after all we've been through over the past year.

Gabrielle's face loses its hardness, Ares stops pacing.

ARES (embarrassed by his outburst, trying to conceal it):

Besides, I'm the only hope you've got to get her back. I doubt you'll get a better offer--or *any* other offer for that matter. I didn't have to come here-- (he looks away momentarily, obviously not telling the whole truth) --I'm offering you a chance to do something, instead of sitting here, starting forest fires. For--old times' sake, if you like. I was mortal once, too.

Gabrielle looks contrite, opens her mouth to say something but Ares pre-empts her.

ARES:

So if you don't want it--that's fine. See you around, Gabrielle.

Ares starts to disappear; Gabrielle's voice stops him.

GABRIELLE:

Ares, wait!

ARES (appears fully again, folds his arms across his chest):

Yes?

GABRIELLE (sighing):

All right, I believe you...for now.

ARES (sarcastically):

Well, thanks so much. That's real big of you.

GABRIELLE:

Ares, come on. What do I have to do?

ARES (unfolds arms, nods):

We need Eve.

Gabrielle looks confused for a second, then her eyes brighten in understanding. She smiles cautiously, obviously pleased.

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, you're right. We do.

They look at each other, then Gabrielle gets up on Argo's back and Ares waves his hand and she disappears and then he too vanishes from sight as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Back in the ice cave of Jigoku, Ares materializes, spooking a few floating spirits away. Xena glares at him and then looks away.

XENA (bitterly):

You never give up, do you?

ARES (starts walking toward her slowly):

I thought you already knew that.

XENA:

Even now, you have to torment me.

Ares comes to stand behind her, caressing her shoulder. Xena looks the other way but makes no move to stop him.

ARES (softly):

Remember, Xena? It hasn't always been violence and hatred between us...

Xena, still not looking at him, begins to remember the things that had happened between them, the good things. She closes her eyes as Ares' hand moves from her shoulder to her arm and images of them together flash through her mind.

[FLASHBACKS]

...Ares admitting that he feels something for her--"God Fearing Child"...

...Xena and Ares in his temple during Athena's siege, Xena admitting that she felt something--"Amphipolis Under Siege"...

...Ares telling her for the first time that he loves her during the storm, Ares giving up his immortality, Xena thanking him--"Motherhood"...

...The tender moment they had after his insanity by the Furies was lifted, she seeing a new side of him--"Coming Home"...

...The time they came to a new understanding and trust about each other after Eve was freed from the Amazons--"Path of Vengeance"...

[END OF FLASHBACKS]

Xena opens her eyes, trying to shake the thoughts from her mind, turns her head slightly to see Ares.

XENA (almost pleading):

Ares, stop it...

ARES:

No, Xena--you gave me another chance...

[FLASHBACK]

...Ares biting into the golden apple in Xena's hand, regaining his immortality, Xena looking at him almost lovingly--"You Are There"...

[END OF FLASHBACK]

ARES:

Let me do the same for you. I can free you from here, all those souls...

Xena touches Ares' arm briefly, cutting him off, almost as if she doesn't realize she's doing it.

XENA:

This is different, Ares. I'm not free to leave. Even my body is gone.

ARES:

What if I could get it back? Restore it?

XENA:

Sure, like in Borias' fairy tales about the Twin Streams...

Ares grins suddenly; Xena is shocked.

XENA (laughs mirthlessly):

You know that's just a myth.

ARES:

At the heart of every myth there is bound to be truth. (slyly) So you'd come back if you could have your body again? And those souls... (he gestures to encompass the whole cave) ...were set free from their obligation? As a purely hypothetical question, of course.

Xena shakes her head, amused despite herself by his persistence.

XENA (echoing his last words, almost teasingly):

Of course...

ARES (interrupts her punching air in triumph):

Thank you. That's all I needed to know.

Xena is about to object, but he's already gone. She makes an exasperated noise, but continues looking after him.

CUT TO

Gabrielle appears, riding through a clearing in the forest towards a group of people gathered in a circle. She dismounts and walks up, pushing herself through the crowd. In the center is Eve, talking to one of her followers. Gabrielle taps her on her shoulder. Eve turns around, joy filling her eyes when she recognizes Gabrielle.

EVE:

Gabrielle! It's so good to see you.

The followers step back to give the two women space, Eve enfolds Gabrielle in a hug.

GABRIELLE (hugging her back, somewhat saddened tone):

Eve.

EVE (worried):

What's wrong?

GABRIELLE (puts a hand on Eve's shoulder):

Can I speak to you for a moment?

EVE (nods):

S-Sure.

Gabrielle smiles faintly at Eve as they walk out of the crowd and away from the people.

EVE:

What is it?

Gabrielle looks at her sadly, Eve shifts her feet uneasily, looks around.

EVE:

Where's my mother?

GABRIELLE:

That's what I've come to talk to you about. (takes a breath) Eve, she's...dead.

EVE (shaking her head):

No...no, that can't be right... (louder, almost hysterical, grabbing Gabrielle's shoulders) No! You're not serious...she can't be dead!

GABRIELLE:

I'm sorry, Eve. I'm so sorry...

Gabrielle wraps her arms around Eve, restraining her. Eve buries her head in Gabrielle's shoulder, begins to cry.

EVE (shakes her head, sniffs):

H-How did it happen?

GABRIELLE (stroking Eve's hair):

She was killed...by a Samurai in Jappa.

EVE (shakes herself again, angry with herself):

I should have been there. I didn't even know. My mother's gone and I didn't even know!

GABRIELLE:

Your mother wouldn't have wanted you to be there to see her die. She didn't even want me there

to see her die. I only knew she was dead because she came to me in spirit. I know...I hurt too but together we can get through this. There was nothing anyone could have done. (forcing her voice to stay steady) Not then--but...there is now. I need your help, Eve.

EVE:

What could I possibly do?

GABRIELLE (lifting Eve's tear-stained face):

Not you. (pauses to make her understand) Eli.

Eve nods slowly, wipes her face with the back of her hand. Gabrielle takes out the urn with Xena's ashes and places it on the ground between Eve and herself.

EVE:

Will you help me, Gabrielle?

Gabrielle nods. Eve uncorks the urn and pours the ashes onto the ground between them. They hold hands, heads bowed in prayer to Eli as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Ares appears in the woods where the deer still lies between the streams. Two jugs appear in his hands--one white, the other black.

[FLASHBACK]

Hades' underworld. Hades and a man dressed like a northern shaman, with antlers on his head, are talking.

MAN:

Hades, you already know too much by learning their location. The people of my land, far to the north where snow covers the ground almost all year, tell tales of the Twin Streams. To them, they are just myth--but now you have found that they are reality, to tell anyone about them would be a devastation to both of our kingdoms.

HADES:

The Water of Life--maybe... But the Water of Death?

MAN:

Don't you see? Yes, the dark Waters of Death can kill a living person--but there's

more to the Twin Streams. The Waters of Death can beautify a dead person and the Waters of Life can restore the soul to the body.

HADES (horrified):

If people find out about them, our kingdoms will suffer... They will try to cheat death--who knows for how long.

MAN:

Precisely. Hades, I must have your word that you won't tell anyone, not even your fellow Olympians about these. As far as anyone should ever know, these streams are just a myth.

HADES:

Yes, I won't tell anyone about them. Your people can continue to tell the stories of them but they will never know the real truth.

MAN:

Thank you. (there is a burst of energy and he is gone)

The camera pans to one side to show young Ares listening behind the door.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares dips the white jug into the Waters of Life and the black one into the Waters of Death, then looks at the deer almost guiltily, as though fighting the urge to help it.

ARES (at the deer):

But does it work?

He sprinkles a little of the water from the white jug onto the deer. The animal slowly rises to its feet, takes a breath, shakes itself briefly and then bounds over the two streams, running off.

ARES (looking after it):

The antlers look better on a deer, anyway.

He disappears.

CUT TO

Ares appears with the black and white jugs in his hands. He stands between Gabrielle and Eve and hands the black jug with the Water of Death to Gabrielle. She looks up at him in surprise.

GABRIELLE:

Me?

Ares nods. Gabrielle releases Eve's hand and takes the jug. Ares hands the white jug with the Water of Life to Eve, who grips it tightly.

Gabrielle looks down at the ashes.

GABRIELLE:

Xena... You taught me so much. You showed me what true courage is, loyalty, friendship. I owe you--everything. I miss you, so very badly. The whole world misses you, Xena--it needs you back. But, more than that... (looks up at Ares, then across at Eve) We need you back.

She pours some of the black Water of Death onto the ashes. For a second, nothing happens--then the ashes start flowing together, melting and merging, until they form Xena's body covered by a white wrap, her eyes closed.

EVE (gasping):
Mother!

Ares grips her hand before she can touch the body.

GABRIELLE:

She's not in there, Eve--not yet.

ARES (looking at Eve):
Can you do it?

Eve pauses, then nods. Ares releases her hand.

EVE (whispers as she pours the Water of Life over Xena's body):

You never gave up on me, Mother--and I won't give up on you now. (pauses to draw a shaky breath) Eli, help us.

The water splashes on Xena's body and bursts into light. Eve, Gabrielle and Ares shelter their eyes.

A white flash illuminates the icy cave in Jigoku; Xena's spirit jumps off the rock and looks around frantically, trying to understand what's happening. The souls are milling about; the fog is growing thicker.

The gate guarded by Emma-ho and his sister shakes suddenly, lightning illuminates their faces--no longer impassive, they are clearly frightened.

Another white flash--and spirits are pouring out of the gate. The sentinels try to stop them with their spears, but it's no use--they are overwhelmed, and more and more spirits leave the gate. They aren't moaning anymore--their faces are alight with peace; some are smiling.

Everything slows in the white light, faces of the released spirits float through it... Xena's face appears in the light, too, eyes closed, as though dreaming.

[FLASHBACKS]

...Callisto's redemption...

...Angel Callisto, turning and smiling...

...Eve's redemption...

[END OF FLASHBACKS]

ELI'S VOICE:

Redemption is found in love, not hatred. (more souls float through the light, released) Give yourself to love, embrace it. Break the cycle of violence, revenge, suffering--and find peace. (Xena's face appears again, eyes open now) Turn your face to the light and allow your soul to be healed.

Light fades in the forest. Ares, Gabrielle and Eve look down at Xena's motionless body. For a moment, they are worried that it hasn't worked.

Then Xena opens her eyes, still lying on the ground and looks at the three of them standing above her.

EVE (wonder in her voice):
Mother?

Ares takes out the contract. Xena's eyes widen.

GABRIELLE:
Ares, no!!

Ares holds up the contract--and tears it into pieces, then allows the wind to catch them.

The words from the contract float off the pieces of parchment and swirl upwards, circling Ares, Gabrielle and Eve. They look on in wonder as the letters turn into sparks of light and drift upwards, as if caught in a current.

ELI'S VOICE:

The souls are free--and Xena's spirit with them. Vengeance cannot stand in the face of love. Love is the way.

GABRIELLE (whispers):
Thank you.

Ares lets out a long breath. Xena sits up slowly, then looks down at herself.

XENA (softly):
I think you forgot something...

GABRIELLE (anxious):
What?

XENA (fingering the white robe):
My fashion sense.

She grins at Gabrielle, who bursts into tears and hugs Xena fiercely. Eve drops down to her knees, Xena hugs them both, running her hands through their hair, then looks up at Ares.

ARES (grins):

I'd be thankful; you could be wearing a kimono.

XENA (serious):

You really don't give up...

ARES:

You're not the only stubborn one. You know, the robe kinda looks good. I think it might be see-through.

Ares moves his head as if to get a better look. Xena just glares.

XENA (she then averts her eyes and looks at him):

With the contract gone, that means you don't possess my soul anymore, Ares.

ARES:

I never had it in the first place, Xena...not in any way that matters.

Xena and Gabrielle both look surprised; it's almost an apology.

ARES:

At least, in the end, creating the contract wasn't a total waste of time. (perks up) I got to see you dressed like that. And I thought *Aphrodite* needed help.

A small smile almost undetectable crosses Ares' lips. Xena bites her lip, then looks down at the still-crying Gabrielle and Eve, as though trying to make a decision. She looks back up, about to say something--but Ares is gone.

XENA (to herself):

You never needed that contract, Ares.

Xena stands up, taking Eve and Gabrielle with her.

XENA:

Come on.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, wait.

Gabrielle steps back to remove the chakram from her belt, hands it to Xena. Xena takes it and looks at it thoughtfully, then shakes herself.

XENA (smiles):

Thanks.

GABRIELLE:

Of course. What's a Warrior Princess without a chakram? Besides, you look better with it anyway. It's not right for me. I know that.

Xena walks over to Argo to retrieve her leathers and armor, Gabrielle and Eve follow.

GABRIELLE:

Where are we going?

Xena kisses Eve's forehead, then smiles at Gabrielle.

XENA:

Anywhere the wind takes us.

She squeezes Eve and Gabrielle's hands and then hugs them again, before getting ready to start their journey once more as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[The gates to the spirit world were left open during the production of this motion picture. Oops...]