

SHIPPER SEASON SEVEN

“The Inheritance”

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Logline

Xena and Gabrielle save the life of a warrior who is on the trail of a smart, vicious warlord preying on the countryside with her army. Things get complicated when it turns out that both the idealistic young man and the ruthless woman he seeks to stop have a connection to a crucial and devastating event in Xena's past.

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TEASER

FADE IN

A warrior preparing a makeshift gallows. Two nooses hang beside one another from the heavy limb of a tree. The warrior prepares another noose, tests it by pulling on it then slings the rope over the limb, securing it beside the other two. He nods at two men who are standing guard over three prisoners. All three appear to be more farmers than soldiers but it is apparent from their wounds and torn clothing that they have just been in a fight. Their hands are bound behind their backs and they glance anxiously at the hanging noose.

CUT TO

Two warriors standing a distance away watching this. Their appearance is clean--they have not been fighting. Standing nervously beside them is an older man--his clothing indicates that he too is a villager. A strong looking woman warrior, Sabina, is in front of them.

SABINA:

It's a good thing you came to your senses. Otherwise this entire village would have wound up like those three fools.

VILLAGE ELDER:

I'm begging you to reconsider! They're just boys! Young and brash...they have families.

SABINA:

Families? Good. Maybe the next time some peasant decides he can fight me, his own wife will beat some sense into him before he leaves the house. (looks at him and smiles coldly) It was your decision to surrender rather than stand and fight with those three. You made your choice, old man.

CUT TO

The gallows. All three men now stand atop rickety stools, the nooses tightened around their necks. All three glare without flinching at Sabina. The three soldiers guarding them take their positions behind each stool and wait for Sabina to give the order.

CUT TO**SABINA:**

Look at them, Peneios. These peasants were willing to die fighting for this worthless collection of shacks they call home rather than surrender to my army. Bravery like that is rare.

PENEIOS:

Just a moment ago they were fools. Now you call them brave!

SABINA:

How long have you been a soldier, Peneios?

PENEIOS:

Three seasons or so.

SABINA:

In time, you'll learn that more often than not, a brave man is usually someone that's just too stupid to know when it's time to save his own skin.

She raises her arm to ready the guards and pauses as if for dramatic effect. Her arm slashes down.

SABINA:

Do it!

The three soldiers kick the stools out from under the prisoners.

VILLAGE ELDER:

I surrendered the village. Those three boys weren't a threat to your army. You could have spared them.

SABINA:

A girl can get a bad reputation that way. Next thing, I know every village between here and Philippi will expect me to be kind to animals and help old people across the street.

A scout rides up to Sabina and Peneios.

SABINA (turns to him):
Report?

SCOUT:

You were right. The militia from Parsus is heading towards the village. They're closing in on us from the west.

SABINA:

Very clever. They're trying to block us off and force us to retreat through the mountains.

PENEIOS:

In this heat a climb like that would be suicide! Shall I pull the men out now?

SABINA:

No! We finish what we started here. Our little friends should know just what we think of them crashing our party. I'll take the men guarding our right flank. They won't expect us to divide our forces and meet them in the woods. (Sabina turns and mounts her horse) I'll meet you back here after I take care of these pests. Make sure you're done and ready to pull out.

PENEIOS (nods):

We'll be ready.

CUT TO

A small army of about 20 men in the woods. A man, Haimon, in his late 30's is addressing the troops.

HAIMON:

We've chased them halfway across Greece, stopping only long enough to tend the wounded and bury the dead they've left in their wake. But now we've got that murderer and her army cornered. If anyone here has any doubts about why we're doing this, I want you to remember what we found in Cressida, or rather what was left of it after Sabina came.

The men begin to murmur amongst themselves, nodding their heads in agreement.

HAIMON:

Are we going to let that happen again?

SOLDIERS (in unison):

No!

HAIMON:

Justice for Cressida!

The men cheer and they mount their horses.

HAIMON (murmuring to himself):

And justice for you too, Mother. (with reverence, Haimon touches the pendant that hangs around his neck)

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle riding through the woods.

GABRIELLE:

You said "take care of the horse."

XENA:

So while I was in the middle of a fight you thought it would be a good time to get Argo a snack?

GABRIELLE:

I thought she looked hungry.

XENA:

And because you were feeding Argo, Hesiod was able to get away.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, I had never even been on a horse before Argo. To me "taking care" meant either feeding her, watering her or brushing her down. What you should have said was "hold on to Argo for me while I go bash a few skulls." Then we wouldn't have had a problem. But nooooo. Miss Warrior of Few Words never thought it was important to develop her communication skills.

XENA:

Oh please! You're lecturing me on communication? I wasn't the one that wandered into that cave and liberated the Titans.

GABRIELLE (under her breath but loud enough for Xena to hear):

That would have been a miracle.

XENA (growls):

Watch it!

GABRIELLE (holds up her hand and grins):

I just meant that you didn't know the difference between an Ionian and Dorian chant.

XENA:

I know exactly what you meant.

They ride along in silence for a few moments.

GABRIELLE:

You said "take care of the--"

XENA (stopping and holding up a hand):

Shh!

GABRIELLE:

Oh, don't start that again! (adopts a high pitched voice and sneer to mock Xena) "Gabrielle, that was thirty years ago. When are you going to let it drop?" Just once, Xena, I'd like you to admit--

XENA (waves impatiently):

Gabrielle, will you just shut up a minute? (pauses) Do you hear that?

GABRIELLE (stops and listens a moment, the sound of two armies clashing is heard in the distance):
It's coming from across the river.

XENA:

Let's go check it out.

They ride off towards the sound of the battle.

CUT TO

The fight is winding down. Most of Haimon's men are either wounded or dead. Haimon and 3 or 4 of his soldiers are still fighting. One by one, Sabina's soldiers kill or wound them until only Haimon and Ademtes are left. Both men are surrounded by half a dozen of Sabina's soldiers. Ademtes is wounded by Sabina.

HAIMON (dropping his sword and falling to his knees beside the man):

Ademtes!

One of Sabina's soldier's steps forward and hits Haimon in the back of his head with the hilt of his sword, knocking Haimon out.

SABINA (looking around at the bodies and gestures to six of her men):

Make sure they're all dead. Leave their bodies for the animals.

She mounts her horse and rides off with the rest of her men.

Sabina's men inspect the bodies, every so often nudging one with their foot to confirm whether the fallen man is dead or alive. Anyone found alive is quickly executed with a stab through the heart. One of Sabina's men steps up to Haimon and sees that he is still alive. He raises his sword.

XENA:

Ayiyiyi!

Xena and Gabrielle burst onto the scene, galloping through the trees toward the warriors. Xena makes a spectacular spinning flip off of Argo and lands in the middle of Sabina's men while Gabrielle quickly halts her horse and dismounts, drawing her sais from her boots. Xena draws her sword and snarls at the six men who seem startled. Xena and Gabrielle glance at each other and then charge the men.

Recovering from their surprise, the men try to strike back. However, Xena parries every one of their blows with her sword maneuvers while Gabrielle fights back with her sais. The men stumble as the two women continue to attack them. The warriors are unable to strike either of them--it is clear that Xena and Gabrielle have the upper hand.

With the hilt of her sword, Xena swings at one of the warriors and knocks him in the head. He staggers backwards, falling into the other men, causing a domino effect, all of them falling flat on their backs. The men hastily get to their feet and look at Gabrielle and Xena standing over them, still ready for action. The men glance at each other and then race toward their horses, jump quickly in the

saddle and gallop away. Xena and Gabrielle pause a moment, catching their breath and then they glance at the bodies.

GABRIELLE:

They can't all be--

Haimon is slowly beginning to regain consciousness and stirs slightly.

XENA (gesturing to Haimon with her sword):

Check him out. I'll see to the others.

Xena walks off to inspect the other men and Gabrielle kneels beside Haimon, rolling him onto his side to inspect his wound. Haimon groans and moves as if to get up but Gabrielle holds him down.

GABRIELLE:

Just lie still a minute. (she probes his head gently and Haimon flinches) You took a pretty nasty blow to the head. It ought to be stitched up. (his eyes widen at this and Gabrielle smiles, patting his arm) Don't worry. My friend is a skilled healer. (continues checking his wound)

HAIMON (confused):

I don't see why you're--Sabina isn't exactly known for her humanitarian impulses. Since when does she treat the enemy?

GABRIELLE:

Sabina? That's who you were fighting?

HAIMON (nods suspiciously):

You aren't part of her army?

GABRIELLE:

No. My friend and I were across the river when we heard the fighting. We're just trying to help.

HAIMON:

You're too late. Sabina's army sacked Aleta this morning. That's where we were headed, my men and I. This time I thought I had her... (looks around) My men--

XENA (stepping up to Gabrielle and Haimon):

They're all dead. (Gabrielle glances up at her and Xena thinks a moment) I'm sorry.

Haimon lets the news sink in and an uncomfortable silence falls. None of them know what to say.

GABRIELLE (trying to break the tension):

I'm Gabrielle. (looks up at Xena) And this is--

XENA:

What happened here?

HAIMON:

Valeria Sabina happened. She and her army have been terrorizing the countryside for months now, raiding small villages. At first, she presents herself to them as so damned amenable--almost as

if she's doing them a favor by demanding payment in exchange for not destroying the village. If they refuse...well let's just say that they get a taste of what it's like to be on her bad side.

XENA:

And what about the local militias? Aren't they doing anything to stop her?

HAIMON:

They tried...at first. But when she razed Cressida it sent a message to anyone that even thought of opposing her.

GABRIELLE:

So you and your men took her on alone?

HAIMON:

I would do it by myself if I had to. My village was raided by scum like Sabina when I was a baby. They murdered my mother. If I have to track Sabina to the ends of the earth, I swear that they will be avenged, my men and every other innocent life she's taken. That bitch will pay for what she's done.

XENA:

Just you? Against an entire army?

HAIMON:

Mainas is a town a day's ride from here. If I'm able to muster enough men I'll be able to go after her. (Haimon studies Xena and Gabrielle a moment) What about you two? You seem capable of handling yourselves in a fight. Will you join me?

XENA (dryly, pointedly looking around at the bodies of Haimon's men):

I don't think your latest success is going to inspire many people to follow you into battle.

HAIMON:

Now just a damn minute! Sabina--

GABRIELLE (grabbing Haimon by the shoulders to restrain him):

Wait a minute! You don't understand. (she gestures towards Xena) This is Xena, the Warrior Princess. She doesn't follow anyone. They follow her.

HAIMON (pushes Gabrielle off of him and sits up):

You're Xena?

XENA (nods a little smugly):

That's right.

Haimon slowly gets up and stands before Xena. She waits, expecting gratitude and relief from Haimon. He studies her a moment and then spits in her face as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Xena gapes at Haimon in disbelief a moment and her expression changes to barely concealed rage. Slowly, she wipes the spit from her face, clearly restraining herself.

XENA:

Now I know why you did something as stupid as allowing yourself to be ambushed out here in the woods. You obviously have a death wish.

Xena steps closer to Haimon but Gabrielle jumps in between them before either one can react.

GABRIELLE:

Okay! Ah...let's all just calm down here a moment. (she lays her hands on Xena's shoulders and steers her away from Haimon) Maybe he's confused. He took a hard hit to the head, after all. Or maybe...maybe he has you mistaken for someone else. Let me talk to him, okay?

XENA (looks at Gabrielle then to Haimon, then back to Gabrielle again, and finally nods grudgingly):
Okay.

GABRIELLE (squeezes Xena's shoulder):

Thank you. Why don't you go take care of the horses?

Xena glares at Gabrielle a moment, then turns and walks off.

GABRIELLE (walking back to Haimon, mutters to herself):

I would have thought that at least after a 25-year sleep, all the people who hated her would be dead.

HAIMON:

Now I know who you are. You're Gabrielle, the Battling Bard of Potidaea. I've heard some of your stories.

GABRIELLE (gets Haimon to sit upon a boulder as she threads a needle in order to tend his wound):

If you've heard my stories then you know that Xena turned her life around a long time ago. She's not the same person she used to be.

HAIMON (barely flinching as Gabrielle stitches the cut on the back of his head):

I don't think you have any idea of who she really is, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (continuing to stitch Haimon's scalp):

I don't think you do. She's a good person now. And she'll spend the rest of her life trying to make up for her past. (she thinks a moment then reluctantly asks) What did she do?

HAIMON (through clenched teeth, fighting the pain):

When I was a baby, Xena's army raided my village. By the time they were done, my home was just a memory. Men, women, children...it didn't matter. No one was spared.

GABRIELLE (finishes dressing Haimon's wound):

You were from Cirra?

HAIMON (laughs bitterly):

You really don't know her at all, do you, Gabrielle? Cirra may have been Xena's crowning achievement, but it wasn't the only time she was responsible for the slaughter of women and children.

Unseen by Gabrielle and Haimon, Xena has just led the two horses back and hears what Haimon has just told Gabrielle. She bolts forward, grabs Haimon's arm and roughly hauls him to his feet.

XENA:

You'd better have some facts to back yourself up with or I'm liable to--

HAIMON:

I have all the evidence I need right here!

He holds up the pendant hanging from his neck by a strong leather cord. It's large and at one time was obviously a woman's bracelet.

HAIMON:

This was all I had left of my mother after you were through with Ikaros.

XENA (numbly):

Ikaros...

Xena's gaze drops to the pendant. Finally, she relaxes her grip and lets him go.

HAIMON:

So you admit it then?

XENA (looking up into Haimon's eyes. There is something different in her look. It is softer now):

I remember Ikaros. I--my army was there...

HAIMON:

I've heard all the stories about how you've changed and on some kind of quest for redemption. And it doesn't mean a thing to me. There's nothing you could possibly do that would make up for what you did to my village. The whole world might forgive you, Xena, but I never will.

Haimon turns and starts to walk off. Gabrielle moves to go after him.

XENA:

Let him go, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

But--

XENA:

Let him go! (she stares after Haimon sadly, and then speaks softly) Haimon...

GABRIELLE:

Wait a minute... Wait a minute...how do you know his name?

Xena makes no response, staring despondently after Haimon.

GABRIELLE:

So...you *do* know him?

XENA:

Yes.

GABRIELLE (stares expectantly; when Xena doesn't elaborate, she cannot hide her irritation):

Do you want to talk about it?

XENA:

No.

She turns and walks off towards the horses. As if trying to decide whether or not to follow, Gabrielle pauses a moment, then turns and follows Xena.

CUT TO

Sabina rides back into the village and dismounts. Her men are running back and forth, packing up the last of the supplies they have looted from the village. Peneios comes up to her.

PENEIOS:

The men are just about ready to pull out. You took care of our uninvited guests?

SABINA (grins):

I gave them a lesson in manners they're not likely to forget.

CUT TO

A scuffle between one of Sabina's soldiers and a young woman near the gallows. The soldier pushes the woman away and turns towards one of the hanging men. He reaches for the dead man's hand. The woman throws herself at him again.

VILLAGE WOMAN:

That ring belonged to my husband! I won't let you--

The soldier roughly throws her to the ground and grabs the hand again, pulling hard at his finger.

SOLDIER:

Come on, you bastard. Give!

The point of a dagger presses into his throat and he freezes.

SABINA:

Touch that ring and you'll have a spot up there right next to him.

The soldier holds up his hands in a gesture of surrender and Sabina lowers the dagger, backing up a step.

SABINA:

We aren't vultures that pick over the dead.

VILLAGE WOMAN (scrambles to her feet and steps up to Sabina):

No. Vulture is too kind a word for what you are. A thieving, murdering bitch is what you are!

The Village Woman raises her fist to strike. Sabina's hand shoots up and catches the woman by the wrist before she can strike her. She twists her arm so that Sabina now has her arms helplessly pinned behind her back.

SABINA:

I was willing to walk away and let you be. Just remember when you meet your husband in Tartarus that this was your choice, not mine. (she looks at the soldier) Kill her.

SOLDIER (stares in disbelief):

Kill her?

SABINA (holding the woman tighter as she begins to struggle):

You heard me! Take your dagger and slit her throat.

The soldier tentatively pulls out his dagger and hesitates.

SOLDIER (shaking his head):

I can't. She's a--

SABINA:

You could always take her place.

Almost on impulse, the soldier steps forward and quickly draws his dagger across the woman's throat. Sabina turns her head to the side and tosses the body to the ground before the blood can stain her. The other villagers gasp in horror.

CUT TO

The six cavalymen Sabina left at the ambush site, riding slowly up the street. When Sabina sees them, they exchange anxious glances.

SABINA:

You men! Come here.

Reluctantly, they dismount and lead their horses to her; falling behind one man they have all silently appointed the leader.

SABINA (studies him closely):

Looks to me like something has taken the wind out of your sails, Troizen. Did you have a problem disposing of our problem out in the woods?

TROIZEN (looks back at his friends and sees that they aren't about to offer him any help):

There was a small...altercation.

SABINA:

Altercation? Do you mean to tell me that you and your men are so worthless that you couldn't finish off a handful of half dead men all by yourselves?

TROIZEN:

No, Sabina! We almost--there was just one left to take care of and then out of nowhere...

SABINA:

What? Someone attacked you? Another militia?

TROIZEN (nodding furiously):

Yes! Another militia! There were at least thirty of them and they had us surrounded. It's a miracle we were able to get away.

SABINA (suspiciously):

Are you lying to me, Troizen? A band that large wouldn't have gone undetected by my scouts.

TROIZEN:

Well...perhaps it wasn't thirty. I didn't count. (turns to the other men) Did any of you? (they all shake their heads) It could have been more like fifteen--or perhaps even as few as nine or ten--

SABINA:

And you and these pathetic excuses for soldiers couldn't handle ten men?

TROIZEN (takes a nervous step backwards):

Oh, but it wasn't just any ten men! They had this leader--a woman...

SABINA:

A woman?

TROIZEN (nods):

I've never seen anyone that could fight like that. (holds up his hands placatingly) Except you, of course! She was magnificent. Tall, dark-haired, with a war cry that cuts right through your heart. And she had another woman with her--her second in command, I presume. She didn't look like much--a little thing, no higher than here on me-- (he holds his hand level to his shoulder) --but a regular demon with her daggers...

SABINA:

Two women? You say one was tall and dark, and the other was small and fair?

TROIZEN:

Yes.

SABINA:

You're lying to me, aren't you, Troizen? There was no militia, no ten men. Two women attacked you and drove you off, didn't they?

TROIZEN (panicking):

I-I...she was big! Twice as large as any of us...

SABINA (to herself):

Xena. I heard the stories but I never believed that after all these years you would actually show up. (glances at Troizen) Tell Peneios we're moving out immediately. If that really was Xena, this village is going to be getting a visit from her any time now. And if I have to fight her, it's going to be on my terms.

Troizen nods breathlessly, not quite believing that he has gotten off the hook this easily.

SABINA:

Oh and, Troizen?

TROIZEN (nervously):

Yes, Sabina?

SABINA:

If I ever catch you lying to me again--I'll cut out your tongue.

CUT TO

The three men still hanging from the gallows and the dead woman lying at their feet.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and the Village Elder. Xena and Gabrielle are staring in horror but the Village Elder looks on almost impassively.

XENA (nodding towards the dead men):

Get them down from there.

VILLAGE ELDER:

Why?

GABRIELLE:

They deserve a proper burial.

VILLAGE ELDER:

Sabina wanted them left there...to serve as an example.

XENA:

An example of what? The cowardice of every person in this village except these four?

VILLAGE ELDER:

I-I did what I had to do. I saved the village.

XENA (shaking her head in disgust):

At what cost, old man? At what cost?

VILLAGE ELDER (defensive now):

It was their own fault! Sabina was perfectly willing to leave us in peace as long as we met her demands. They're the ones that chose to defy her! There was no reason for them to risk their lives!

GABRIELLE:

Better a live dog than a dead lion, is that it?

CUT TO

Xena, a quietly anguished look on her face as a memory flashes through her mind.

[FLASHBACK]

XENA:

We are warriors, *not* barbarians. Cretus, you made it clear that anyone who raises a sword against us will die.

CRETUS:

They said they'd rather die, defending the fruits of their labor, than give it to renegades.

XENA:

Then tomorrow, they'll get their wish.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena is cutting down the bodies of the hanged men with the help of a young village man. Xena wraps her arms around the waist of the first dead man to break his fall as the villager cuts the noose. Gently, she lowers the body to the ground and--almost as if to not hurt him--removes the noose from his neck. She looks up at the villager.

XENA:

You say this was her husband?

The villager's reply is barely audible as we pan to Gabrielle who is looking on. Her head turns slightly to the right as she senses rather than hears something. She holds herself still a moment, then hunches over slightly, prepared to grab her sais. She takes three cautious steps forward and holds. After a moment her expression changes to relief and she straightens.

CUT TO

A boy of perhaps a year crawling out of a straw-filled wheelbarrow. He crawls towards the body of the dead woman. Gabrielle quickly strides forward, taking the child into her arms. She quickly realizes that this is the child of the dead woman and presses the boy's head to her shoulder, turning her body so that his back is to the gallows.

GABRIELLE (murmuring softly to the child):

It's all right...everything is going to be okay...

CUT TO

Xena looks up and her eyes go wide and a little vacant. She jumps to her feet and rushes towards Gabrielle, roughly yanking the child from her arms.

GABRIELLE:

What are you doing?

Xena holds the child out at arm's length from her, looking it up and down--as if searching for signs of a wound. She appears to be almost in a haze. After a moment, she blinks and her head jerks, as if she has just noticed Gabrielle.

XENA:

What? I'm sorry. For a second there I...here. (she holds the boy out to Gabrielle who carefully takes him in her arms)

GABRIELLE (a hint of resentment in her tone):

If I didn't know better, I'd think you didn't trust me.

XENA:

No! No...it's nothing like that. I just...never mind.

VILLAGER:

That's Leonidas, Kimon and Dirke's boy. (gestures towards the hanged man and the dead woman, bitterly) And that's Kimon and Dirke.

GABRIELLE:

Did they have any family here in the village that would take care of their son?

VILLAGER (shakes his head):

Not a soul. Dirke had a brother that ran off and joined the Legion of Darien a few summers back. The rest of her family's dead. As for Kimon, he was an orphan. He lost his parents in an earthquake when he was not even eight summers old.

GABRIELLE (turns to look at Xena):

Someone is going to have to take care of him.

VILLAGER:

Well...I suppose my wife and I could look after the boy for the time being. We've already got four so what's one more mouth to feed?

XENA (nods and gives Gabrielle a sheepish look):

You go ahead and take the boy. I can finish up here myself.

With the child in her arms, Gabrielle leaves with the villager. Xena looks around pensively, then tenses up all of a sudden. She walks around the corner of a house, out of the villagers' view, and stands expectantly.

XENA:

You can come out now.

Ares appears in the usual flare of silver-blue light. As the light fades, he stands looking at Xena, his arms folded, a grave look on his face.

ARES:

More bad memories?

XENA:

There are always more bad memories. But this one is...different. (she shakes her head a little and changes the subject) What do you know about this Sabina?

ARES:

Nothing. (off her skeptical look) Come on, Xena, do you really think I keep tabs on every warlord wannabe who pops up somewhere? (smirks at her) Soon to be an ex-warlord wannabe, I'm sure, now that you're on her trail.

XENA (chuckles bitterly):

Right.

ARES:

But it's not really Sabina who bothers you, is it? It's that man who's after her. Haimon. The one who gave you such a warm greeting today.

XENA (darts an uneasy look at him, startled):

What do you know about him?

ARES:

Come on, Xena. Didn't you think Ikaros would ring a bell for me?

He reaches out and gently touches her face; Xena shivers and lowers her eyes.

ARES:

I ought to know something about that man. After all, you left me for him.

Xena looks up at him, her eyes wide with shock and anguish as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

A close-up of Xena's face as she stares at Ares.

[FLASHBACK]

Clips from "The Gauntlet":

Xena and her men are looking at the devastated village. A baby cries, lying on the bed next to its dead mother.

CRETUS:

I thought I killed them both!

DARPHUS:

Kill it!

XENA:

Stop! You kill this baby, you die next. Contrary to what some might think, *I* still lead this army.

CUT TO

Xena's tent, later.

XENA (to Darphus):

I'm relieving you of your command!

DARPHUS:

My men won't allow that--yes--my men. You're the one who's stepping down. And you'll leave the only way a warrior can.

XENA:

The gauntlet? There's not a man here who'll raise a hand against me.

CUT TO

A warrior striking a bloodied Xena.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA (lowers her eyes, speaking softly):

I knew it was him right away. Ikaros...he was the only one to survive. And that bracelet...I'd seen it before. It was his mother's.

ARES:

You saved his life--almost at the cost of your own. Why didn't you tell him?

XENA (harshly):

What's it to you?

ARES:

Hey. I'm trying to help.

XENA (bitterly):

Sure...just like you tried to help me back then.

Ares lowers his eyes and bites his lip, looking almost embarrassed.

[FLASHBACK]

Xena, still with visible cuts and bruises from the gauntlet, is running through a forest. She suddenly stops and looks around. There is a flash of blue light. Ares appears. He has the same look as in "The Reckoning" and "Ties That Bind."

ARES (suavely):
How's my girl?

XENA (grimly):
Alive.

ARES:
Oh, you'll get over this little setback. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

He comes up behind her and starts massaging her shoulders. She closes her eyes and throws her head back, leaning into him with a sensuous sigh.

ARES:
Are you going back after him?

XENA (opens her eyes with a start):
After whom?

ARES:
My bastard half-brother, of course. You were right. If you can bring back the head of Hercules, you're sure to get your army back. (he smirks and strokes her hair) To think that the fool actually wanted you to join him.

XENA:
Hercules could have killed me back there, Ares. He spared my life.

ARES (continues to rub her shoulders and upper arms):
That's only because he wants you to buy into his do-gooder nonsense. I know how Hercules' mind works. For him, converting you would be a far bigger prize than killing you. (chuckles sarcastically) I can just see you as a humanitarian. Going from village to village, helping out every time some peasant's barn catches fire or some squalling brat falls down a well--yeah, that's my Warrior Princess all right. (he kisses her neck)

XENA (softly):
Maybe Hercules saw something in me that you don't.

ARES (turns her around abruptly and looks her in the eye):
Don't tell me you're serious, my dear. What did he do to impress you? You think people love him, admire him? (she looks at him strangely--he has obviously hit a chord) When you think people love and admire you, Xena, you never know if it's real or fake. In fact, it's usually the latter. When they fear you--you know it's for real.

XENA:

You're wrong. I saw Hercules with those people. It's real.

ARES (impatiently):

Xena--

XENA:

It's not just about being loved by other people. It's about (her voice drops to a near--whisper and she has an awed look of sudden realization on her face) liking myself.

ARES (puts his hands on her shoulders again):

I think you're still a little dizzy from that pounding you took. Need a place to sleep it off?

XENA:

I've never been so clear-headed in my life.

Obviously making an internal effort, she removes his hands from her shoulders.

XENA (softly and regretfully):

Goodbye, Ares.

She thinks for a moment, then turns around and starts to walk in the direction she came from. Teleporting himself, Ares stands in her path.

ARES:

This isn't over. You know you'll be back.

XENA:

If you're so sure about that, then why are you trying so hard to stop me?

ARES:

Because you're about to make the biggest mistake of your life.

XENA:

Maybe I am. But that's something I'll have to find out for myself.

Scowling, Ares vanishes. Xena stands still for a moment, looking wistfully at the place where he stood, then shakes her head and walks on.

CUT TO

A scene from "The Gauntlet."

Hercules is fighting Darphus and his men. Xena appears and joins him.

CUT TO

Xena fighting Darphus. She kills him.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA (stares bitterly at Ares):

And then you brought Darphus back--and you were willing to let him kill me if he killed Hercules for you.

ARES (looks up):

What do you expect me to say?

XENA:

Maybe "I'm sorry" would be a good start.

ARES (defensively):

I was the God of War, Xena. I wasn't going to let one of my star employees go over to the competition. (his voice softens and he sounds almost apologetic) That was a long time ago.

XENA:

And you think I should just get over it. Maybe there are some things you can never quite get over.

ARES (stung):

Sure. Just ask Haimon.

Xena looks as if he has slapped her. Then, she turns around abruptly and walks away.

Ares looks after her grimly, then punches his palm in frustration and vanishes.

CUT TO

A town square. A crowd has gathered and Haimon stands at the center. The townspeople appear restless, reacting to him with hostile murmurs. Xena and Gabrielle appear at the back of the crowd, looking on.

TOWNSMAN #1:

On your way, hayseed.

HAIMON:

Listen to me! If we had fifty men, we could...

TOWNSMAN #1:

...wind up like your last posse. We've made our decision. If Sabina comes through here, we won't oppose her.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle looking on.

GABRIELLE:

They've already given up!

XENA:

Sabina has made sure to spread the word about Aleta. Fear is a powerful weapon, Gabrielle.

HAIMON:

Fifty men! Aren't there fifty men among you willing to take a stand against Valeria Sabina? Think about what happened at Cressida and Aleta.

TOWNSMAN #2:

Not our problem. They were the ones foolish enough to stand up to Sabina. It's a battle we can't win.

XENA (stepping forward):

That's right. You can't win it because you've already lost.

A collective gasp from the crowd as they all turn towards her.

XENA:

All Sabina needs to win is for good people to do nothing and allow her to run over every innocent village she comes across.

TOWNSMAN #1:

It's not our town Sabina is after!

GABRIELLE (stepping up beside Xena):

So that makes it all right to hide your head in the sand? Maybe Sabina won't come after you today--or even tomorrow. But sooner or later she'll run out of villages to conquer. That's when she'll come for you. And then there won't be anyone left to fight for you.

TOWNSMAN #2:

Easy for you to preach to us, little girl. Did you see what she did to Cressida? And this fool who wants to lead us has already lost one militia.

XENA:

Give me fifty of your best men and I'll bring Sabina to heel.

TOWNSMAN #2:

You? And who in the name of Ares are you, woman?

HAIMON (points a condemning finger at Xena):

That's Xena, Destroyer of Nations, Butcher of Cirra and Ikaros. Xena raised an army in the name of protecting her home too. And before long that army of simple men from Amphipolis was laying siege to Corinth--with Xena at its head.

A murmur runs through the clearly impressed crowd.

A WOMAN'S VOICE IN THE CROWD (heard over the general noise):

That's Xena? I heard she was ten feet tall!

A MAN'S VOICE:

So the legends are true--she *is* alive!

TOWNSMAN #1:

With Xena to lead us Sabina doesn't have a prayer!

HAIMON (distressed that his plan has backfired on him):

Follow her and you'll wind up the same way Xena's kinsmen did. We've all heard the stories, Xena. Gabrielle has been very good at spreading the word of your so-called heroics. Why doesn't she tell the entire story? How you lost your entire army at Corinth, how you laid waste to Cirra and Ikaros.

GABRIELLE:

That part of Xena's life is long over, Haimon.

HAIMON:

And that means we should forget all about it?

XENA (stepping up to him):

I've never expected anyone to forget. I've never forgotten. I never will.

HAIMON (gives her a chilly smile):

Then I suppose we have something in common after all.

XENA:

Haimon, how much did Spiros tell you about what happened at Ikaros?

HAIMON:

What do you know about my father?

XENA:

I know he was brave and honorable and that he would have laid down his life for you.

Haimon draws his sword halfway from its scabbard. Gabrielle steps forward and lays her hand on his arm; he relaxes his grip on his sword but his face betrays his rage.

HAIMON:

I may not be able to defeat you, Xena. But I swear by any god you name that if you say one more word about my father... You're not worthy even to draw the breath to speak his name. My father died when I was three--before he could tell me anything about what you did to my village. But the older I got, the more I heard. Everyone knows about what you did at Ikaros.

TOWNSMAN #2:

Makes no difference to us, hayseed. That's ancient history. If Xena is willing to lead us against Sabina, I say we do it!

HAIMON:

You're all fools!

TOWNSMAN #1:

That may be so, little man. But at least we'll be live fools--which is more than I can say if we follow you into battle.

The townspeople laugh. Embarrassed and angry, Haimon pushes through the crowd and walks off.

GABRIELLE (looking after Haimon):

If we're going to do this, we'll need all the help we can get.

XENA (nods):

He's a good fighter. He has courage and skill. But he's let anger and hatred cloud his judgment so much that it makes him unfit to lead men into battle.

GABRIELLE:

I'll talk to him. Maybe I can make him see that stopping Sabina is more important than...

XENA:

Hating me?

Gabrielle looks down at her feet.

XENA (forcing a tight smile onto her face):

I don't think this is the time or place to tiptoe around the truth, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

I'll talk to him.

She turns to leave and stops. She is facing away from Xena.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, maybe some day you'll be ready to tell me what you did at Ikaros.

XENA:

Maybe.

GABRIELLE (turns back to look at her):

But you're still not ready.

XENA:

Maybe you're not ready either.

GABRIELLE:

It was bad, wasn't it? Really bad?

[FLASHBACK]

Images of Xena walking the gauntlet, taking a hard blow across the face, being kneed in the stomach.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

A close up of Xena's anguished face.

XENA:

Yes, it was.

CUT TO

Haimon is saddling his horse as Gabrielle walks up to him.

GABRIELLE:

Where are you going?

HAIMON:

Don't know, Athens perhaps. Maybe it's time for me to take it easy, enjoy life and just worry about myself.

GABRIELLE:

So you're just going to walk away and let Sabina win?

HAIMON:

It looks like you and Xena have got things under control, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

That's not what I mean and you know it. You're a good man, Haimon. I don't think you can just walk away and not care.

HAIMON:

No? Watch me. I'd rather ride with the devil himself than follow Xena. (smiles bitterly) Come to think of it, there isn't much of a difference.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon, I know what Xena did to you was horrible. But if you walk away now you let evil win, you let that monster that Xena used to be win. Do you think you'd be able to live with yourself if you didn't do everything you could to stop Sabina? I don't.

HAIMON (wavering):

Dammit, Gabrielle...

GABRIELLE:

This isn't about Xena or you or what happened at Ikaros.

HAIMON:

Yes, it is. Why do you think I've been chasing after Sabina for so long? No child should have to suffer the way I did.

GABRIELLE:

Then don't turn your back now. Make your mother's death mean something.

HAIMON (bows his head in surrender):

This doesn't change anything, you know. I won't ever forgive Xena for what she did.

GABRIELLE (smiles sadly):

I think you and Xena have a lot more in common than you think.

CUT TO

The common room in the inn in Mainas. The assembled men listen attentively to Xena.

XENA:

...And make sure we're ready to head out by dawn. I don't want to give Sabina too big a lead.

TOWNSMAN (nods):

We'll try our best.

XENA:

You don't try. You do. Now go get a good rest.

As the men start leaving, Gabrielle comes in.

XENA:

You talked to Haimon?

GABRIELLE:

I talked to him.

XENA:

And?

GABRIELLE:

He's agreed to come with us. (crosses the room to Xena) Xena, maybe now you'll have a chance to talk to him--try to explain how--

XENA:

Explain what? My army was responsible for the destruction of his village, the death of his mother. There's nothing I can say that's going to make him feel any better about that.

GABRIELLE:

Well then maybe you could explain it to me.

XENA (her voice takes on a softer tone):

What do you want to know?

GABRIELLE (thinks a moment, then shakes her head):

I don't know, Xena. It's just that every time I think I really know you, another demon pops up out of your past.

XENA:

And now you think you don't know me at all?

GABRIELLE:

I'm not saying that! I'm just trying to understand what happened at Ikaros.

XENA:

I trusted the wrong people, simple as that.

GABRIELLE:

There has to be more to it than that. If nothing else, you owe it to yourself to try to come to terms with...

XENA:

Who are you trying to make feel better about this? Me? Or yourself?

GABRIELLE:

Maybe I just want to know what I'm fighting for.

XENA:

Think about what we found at Aleta, and then ask me that!

GABRIELLE:

You know that's not what I'm talking about!

XENA (anger cooling):

Gabrielle...what happened at Ikaros...it was my fault. I accept responsibility for it. I can't--I won't make any excuses for it. Not to you, not to Haimon--and not to myself. I've accepted it.

GABRIELLE (hesitantly):

Xena, it was after Ikaros that you lost your army, right?

XENA (nods tiredly):

Yes. Just before I met you.

GABRIELLE:

So, in some way, what happened there gave you a push to turn your life around. (Xena casts an anxious glance at her) If Haimon knew that, then maybe he could make some sense of it, maybe he'd be able to make peace with what happened.

XENA:

Gabrielle, Sabina is gearing up to sack another village. Right now, finding out where she's headed and making sure she doesn't get there is more important than getting Haimon to like me.

Xena walks out.

CUT TO

Gabrielle opening the door of her room at the inn. Gabrielle comes into the room, only dimly lit by the moonlight. Leaving the door ajar, she goes over to a small table by the bed and lights an oil lamp.

ARES (off-camera):

Hello, Gabrielle.

Startled, Gabrielle whirls around and sees the God of War sitting in a chair in a relaxed pose, one leg slung over the other, staring at her sarcastically.

GABRIELLE:

What do *you* want?

ARES:

Can't you come up with something more original?

GABRIELLE:

I thought just this once we would dispense with our usual niceties and get down to why you're here.

ARES:

Ouch. You're not cutting anyone any slack tonight, are you?

GABRIELLE:

What's that supposed to mean?

ARES:

You were pretty tough on her back there.

GABRIELLE:

Well, excuse me if I don't get a... (she stumbles, looking for words) ...warm tingle every time I hear a new story about her slaughtering innocent people! (she glares at Ares)

ARES:

You think you know everything, don't you?

GABRIELLE (bitterly):

Well, it seems I only know what Xena tells me--and that isn't much.

ARES:

And if she isn't telling you everything, you just fill in the gaps by assuming the worst.

GABRIELLE:

What am I supposed to do? Last time I checked, I wasn't an oracle. (looks angrily at Ares) Did you come here to give me sensitivity lessons?

ARES:

You're dying to know what really happened at Ikaros, aren't you?

GABRIELLE:

And you're going to tell me? No thanks. That's just what I need--to watch you drooling over one of Xena's war stories.

ARES:

Suit yourself. (the light flares around him and he starts to disappear)

GABRIELLE:

Ares...wait!

ARES (the light around him fades):

So, do you want to hear this or not?

GABRIELLE (with a mix of resentment and apprehension):

Tell me what happened at Ikaros.

ARES (grins):

Now, see? That wasn't so hard to say.

GABRIELLE (through clenched teeth, giving him a look that could kill a mere mortal):

Just cut to the chase.

ARES:

You'll have to excuse me if my storytelling skills aren't up to your standards. It's not really my line of work. (Gabrielle rolls her eyes impatiently) So. Once upon a time, Xena was leading her army through the Parthian province...

As he speaks, Ares waves his hand at the door. An outside shot from the hallway of the door closing slowly as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Xena is standing in Argo's stall, later that evening. She is slowly and tenderly brushing Argo down, the expression on her face is pensive and it is clear that she brushes her horse down more to soothe herself than for Argo. Over Xena's shoulder, Gabrielle appears at the door of the barn. She folds her arms and leans against the doorframe, watching Xena with a tiny, gentle smile.

Xena is aware that Gabrielle is watching her.

XENA (still brushing Argo):

Still up? Where have you been?

GABRIELLE:

Oh...just getting to know someone a little better.

XENA (nods):

Right. You and Haimon are perfect for one another.

GABRIELLE (flinches):

I deserved that.

XENA (turns to look at her):

What? No. I just mean that you're both honest and decent and--

GABRIELLE:

Quick to judge.

Gabrielle comes into the stall and stands on the other side of Argo, almost absently stroking her mane as Xena continues brushing the horse down.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, I want to tell you something. Not long before I met you, a rider came through Potidaea. He came to warn us about an army of marauders that was overrunning the Parthian Province. Father said it was just a matter of time before they made their way to our village. (glances at Xena) Was that true?

Xena looks away guiltily.

GABRIELLE:

There was some arguing between Father and some of the other men from the village. He thought the best thing to do would be to give you what you wanted. I overheard them fighting about it one night after Lila and I were supposed to have been asleep. It just seemed so wrong. What right did anyone have to just march into our village and take away everything we worked for? I walked out right in the middle of my father and all those other men and told them so. I told them that anyone that didn't stand up to you was a...what was it I called them? Gutless worms.

XENA (with a warm smile):

You always were one to stand up to a bully--no matter how big they were.

GABRIELLE:

Father told me it wasn't my place to speak up like that. He thought being sent out to the barn for the night would teach me a lesson.

XENA (grins admiringly):

Obviously, your father didn't know whom he was dealing with.

GABRIELLE (twining Argo's mane in her fingers):

No, he didn't. The lesson I learned was that if I stayed in Potidaea, I would never be a real person. I would always be...

XENA (murmurs):

Invisible.

GABRIELLE (nods):

Right. Anyway, not long after that, word got around that your army had broken up after Ikaros was sacked. Father relaxed--but I couldn't. I knew I had to get out but I didn't know how. I was afraid.

A close-up of Xena's face--she is clearly unsettled by the idea of Gabrielle being afraid.

GABRIELLE:

And then Draco's men rode into our village. I suppose with you and your army out of the way he thought we were easy pickings.

XENA (chuckles fondly at the memory):

And you were the only one to stand up to them.

GABRIELLE (smiles at Xena):

Not the only one. Xena, when I saw you stand up to Draco's men, risk your life for a bunch of strangers, I knew that you weren't the same person that I tried to convince my father to fight. And I told myself that if you could change your life, so could I.

XENA (looking down, in a hushed voice):

You never told me that before.

GABRIELLE:

No. I thought it would...hurt you.

Gabrielle reaches across Argo and touches Xena's hand tenderly.

GABRIELLE:

So many things we've kept from one another. (a long pause) Xena--why didn't you tell me the truth about Ikaros? And more important, why haven't you told Haimon?

XENA (looks up at her sharply):

How do you--? Oh, wait...Ares told you, didn't he? Gloating about how no good deed goes unpunished, I suppose? It wouldn't be the first time I heard that from him. The smug bastard.

GABRIELLE:

That's not it at all. He told me because... (she shakes her head, almost bewildered) I know it sounds crazy--but I think he didn't want me to go on believing the absolute worst about you.

Xena cocks a skeptical eyebrow at her.

GABRIELLE (laughs):

Yeah, it sort of surprised me too! But deep down, I think he wants people to see you for what you really are. You deserve that. And Haimon deserves to know that it wasn't you who destroyed his village and killed his mother--that you risked your life saving his.

XENA (grimly):

Is that what Haimon deserves? To feel that he owes his life to the person who was responsible for his mother's murder? (Gabrielle starts to say something but Xena cuts her off) Gabrielle, I may not have been there when my army sacked Ikaros, but it was still my army. I have to accept responsibility for what went on there.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

Oh, Xena--don't you have enough on your shoulders without this too? Believe it or not, you are not to blame for every single thing that's wrong with the world.

XENA:

They were my men, Gabrielle. I was so arrogant that I actually believed they feared me enough to never go against me. I let my guard down and left a butcher in command while I went to scout out another village to loot. Now look me in the eye and tell me that it wasn't my fault.

GABRIELLE:

Then if anyone's to blame, it's me.

XENA:

You? (laughs harshly) You weren't even there!

GABRIELLE (glances at her meaningfully):

Neither were you. I know you, Xena. If you had been at Ikaros you never would have let your army do what they did.

Xena thinks about this a moment. Slowly, a smile spreads across her face.

XENA:

Thank you, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

For what?

XENA:

For believing in me. Even way back then, when no one else did.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon would. Just give him a chance, Xena.

Xena is silent, gathering her thoughts.

XENA:

I will tell Haimon--when the time is right.

GABRIELLE:

And when is that going to be?

XENA (after a brief pause):

When I don't have to feel like I'm using it as a bargaining chip against him.

Gabrielle digests this and nods, then reaches out to touch Xena's shoulder.

GABRIELLE (softly):

Why didn't you tell *me*?

XENA:

I'm-- (falters) Maybe I didn't want you to think I was bragging about my good deeds.

GABRIELLE (looks at her probingly):

Or maybe you didn't like to think about a moment in your life when you were weak and defenseless. After all, you're Xena. Tough, invincible...just like all those people out there believe you are. (she nods in the direction of the street, indicating the people of the town) You can't stand to remember feeling helpless like that.

Xena looks away, struggling with her emotions, a tender little smile finally breaking out on her face-- she is moved by the fact that Gabrielle knows her so well.

XENA:

You should get some rest, Gabrielle. We're heading out early tomorrow.

CUT TO

Close up of a saddle. A boot slips into the stirrup and the shot pans up to Xena mounting Argo. She settles herself in the saddle and Gabrielle gallops up to the head of the column beside Xena.

GABRIELLE:

Sorry. It took some time finding someone willing to scout ahead.

XENA:

Who did you get to volunteer?

Gabrielle smiles knowingly.

XENA (frowns):

Haimon. Are you sure that's such a good idea? He'll probably find Sabina and take on her army all by himself.

GABRIELLE:

Have a little faith, Xena. (she pauses a moment) Besides, I think it's important to Haimon that someone should believe in him right now.

XENA (smiles grudgingly--Gabrielle has struck a chord):

Right. (looks out into the distance as if staring after Haimon) Besides, riding leagues ahead of us means that he gets to keep as far away from me as possible. That has to hold some appeal for him.

Gabrielle frowns and avoids Xena's eyes--it's apparent that Haimon has admitted that to her.

Xena turns Argo to address the militia now mounted and ready to ride.

XENA:

I can't promise you anything. Some of you may leave here today and never return. But whatever happens from here on out, you've taken a stand for what's right, regardless of the consequences. Bravery like that is rare. Every one of you has earned my respect.

The men are clearly moved by her speech.

GABRIELLE (mutters out of the corner of her mouth):

And you say I have a way with words.

XENA (grins):

I learned from the best. (she snaps the reins down) Yah!

Xena takes off at breakneck speed, her galvanized army close behind her.

CUT TO

Sabina's army riding through the countryside. Sabina, riding at the head of the army with Peneios next to her, slows down and raises her hand. The rest of the soldiers slow down as well. Sabina is looking at a small roadside shrine just ahead of them.

SABINA:

Ride on. I'll catch up with you.

Sabina gallops toward the shrine as the rest of the army rides on. She stops her horse by the shrine and dismounts. Sabina looks at the symbols over the entrance--skulls and crossed swords. A close-up of Sabina's face as she smiles.

Sabina enters the shrine. Judging by the military-themed decorations inside, it's clearly a temple of Ares. It's very run down, with cobwebs, dust, and dry leaves everywhere.

Sabina looks around, sweeps a layer of dust off the altar, then takes her sword out of the scabbard and puts it down on the altar.

SABINA (in a loud, clear voice):

Ares, God of War! I, Valeria Sabina, request your presence!

There is a flare of blue light, and Ares materializes facing Sabina, arms folded on his chest. He cocks his head, looking at her with curiosity and amusement.

ARES (wryly):

You know, you're supposed to make a sacrifice when you summon a god.

SABINA (picks up on the sarcasm and responds in kind):

I'll make sure to get something for you next time I pass through a village. Say, a chicken...or a virgin?

ARES:

Good luck catching one. (smirks at Sabina) You could use some manners.

SABINA (casts a look around):

You could use some housekeeping.

With a bored look, Ares waves his hand, and in an instant the dust and the cobwebs are gone and shrine is sparkling clean.

SABINA:

Impressive. Still, you have to admit--things aren't what they used to be. Worshipers aren't exactly flocking in, are they?

Ares glares at her; then, his scowl dissolves into a grin--despite being insulted, he is impressed by her boldness.

ARES:

I gotta say, you found an original way to get my attention.

SABINA (businesslike):

Do you know what you really need, Ares?

ARES:

I suppose you're going to enlighten me?

SABINA:

A special warrior. One who could increase the glory of the God of War. One who would conquer and rule in your name--just like you once believed Xena would.

ARES (a look of sudden realization on his face):

So that's what this is about. You're asking for Xena's old job. Been there, done that.

SABINA:

I'm not asking for Xena's old job. I'm taking it.

ARES (grins):

Clever girl. You're no Mavican, that's for sure.

SABINA:

Mavican?

ARES:

Just another girl who thought she was someone special.

SABINA:

What happened to her?

ARES:

She thought she could take on Xena. But she didn't know the rules of the game.

SABINA:

I play by my own rules.

ARES:

If you want to play, you should know that increasing my glory takes a little more than beating up on a bunch of peasants.

SABINA:

Give me time--I'm only getting started.

ARES:

Cutting a helpless woman's throat? You're getting off to a good start.

SABINA:

I don't take pleasure in pointless cruelty. But sometimes, one has to be cruel to make a point. You're the God of War--you ought to know that. (looks at him curiously) Or have you gone soft, like Xena?

ARES:

Got a little Xena obsession, have you?

SABINA:

I hear I'm not the only one. (gives him a meaningful look) Anyway, I have my reasons.

ARES:

Let me guess. When she was bad, Xena raided your village, broke your dolls and spat in your milk. (looks her over) You seem a bit young for such memories. What'd she do? Raid your parents' village before you were even born?

SABINA:

When Xena was a warlord, my father served in her army. Later, he married and settled down, but he never forgot her. I grew up hearing stories about how magnificent she used to be. Xena inspired me.

ARES:

And so you want to take her on.

SABINA:

Only when I'm ready. I'm not stupid. And I'm not crazy, either. (she pauses) I know Xena is after me right now, and I know I'm not good enough to beat her--yet. But I'll find a way to get her off my trail.

ARES (eyes her probingly for a few moments):

So what are you asking for, Sabina? A new weapon? Help dealing with Xena? A new army--after she's through with the one you've got?

SABINA:

Who says I'm asking for anything?

ARES:

You summoned me. You must have wanted something.

SABINA:

Just a face-to-face meeting with my patron god.

ARES (laughs and shakes his head):

I like your style.

He vanishes. Sabina smiles, picks up her sword, puts it back in the scabbard and walks out of the shrine.

CUT TO

Xena's army charging up a grassy slope. Xena is at the head, Gabrielle at the rear. As Xena reaches the crest, she pulls back hard on Argo's reins.

XENA:

Whoa!

Argo comes to an abrupt stop and the rest of the militia slows itself to gather around Xena at the top. Gabrielle comes hurtling up and halts her horse beside Xena.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, what is it? Why are we stopping? We're so close now...

Gabrielle trails off as she sees the look on Xena's face.

Xena is looking off into the distance. Her expression is more saddened than angry.

XENA:

Take a look. (points) There.

Gabrielle looks in the direction that Xena has indicated. Despite herself, she can't withhold a small gasp of shock.

CUT TO

A village far off from their position on the slope--it is small and barely perceptible at such a distance--except that large plumes of smoke are rising high into the sky above it.

CUT TO

A lone rider charging up the other side of the slope towards Xena and her army.

GABRIELLE:

It's Haimon!

HAIMON (pulls back hard on the reins, careening to a stop before Xena):

She's done it! Sabina's army has put the torch to every house in Skeiron!

Xena nods grimly.

Haimon stares at Xena and Gabrielle expectantly but neither of them move.

HAIMON:

Well, what are we waiting for?

Haimon moves to turn his horse back in the direction of Skeiron.

XENA:

You're not going anywhere, Haimon. And neither are we.

Haimon turns back, staring at her in disbelief.

HAIMON:

People are hurt down there! They need our help. We might be able to put out the fire before everything burns to the ground.

XENA:

That's what Sabina wants us to do.

Haimon glares at her.

GABRIELLE (a little hesitantly):

Haimon, don't you understand? Sabina burned that village to slow us down. She knows we're closing in on her and she's hoping that we'll stop to help those people.

HAIMON:

Well, she's damn right about that!

XENA:

We're not stopping. We're moving on.

HAIMON (gazing at her scornfully):

Right. What's one more destroyed village to you?

Xena glares at him then at Gabrielle who gives a slight shrug. She looks back to Haimon.

XENA:

All right. (she turns toward the rest of the men) You, you, and you, (pointing at three men) go back to the village and see what you can do to help. The rest of us are riding on. We have to stop Sabina. There's no time to waste.

HAIMON:

Three men? That's nowhere near--

XENA:

You can go with them if you want.

She begins the ride down the slope. After an apologetic look to Haimon, Gabrielle rides off to catch up with Xena. In groups of two and three, men begin to follow her.

CUT TO

A wide shot of the crest of the slope. Haimon starts to follow the three men who ride toward the burning village, then abruptly turns around and follows Xena and the others.

CUT TO

Xena's army rides down a heavily wooded, winding road. Xena and Gabrielle are side by side at the head of the column. Xena is broodingly silent. Finally she speaks.

XENA:

Gabrielle, do you think I did the right thing about Skeiron?

GABRIELLE:

Xena, after all this time, you don't need me to act as your conscience.

XENA (laughs self deprecatingly):

I'm not so sure about that.

GABRIELLE:

You saved Haimon all those years ago, Xena. You didn't need anyone to tell you it was the right thing to do.

XENA:

Mmm. (still not satisfied, she gives Gabrielle a sidelong glance) You didn't answer my question.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

I think you did the right thing. It's funny, isn't it? I used to think it was so easy to make the right choice. Everything was black and white--but it's not. If there's one thing I've learned since we've been together, it's that the world isn't as simple as I thought it was.

XENA (smiles guiltily at Gabrielle):

Have I been that bad an influence on you?

GABRIELLE:

It's not about good or bad, Xena. It's just the way things are. Sometimes we just do the best we can and hope for the best.

Xena nods to acknowledge Gabrielle's answer--but it is apparent that she isn't sure whether she believes it. They continue to ride in silence until hooves thunder up from behind them.

HAIMON:

Xena!

Haimon rides up to the head of the column, facing Xena.

HAIMON (panting heavily from riding so hard):

I can't let you do this, Xena. People are dying in Skeiron. They need our help.

XENA:

I did what I could.

HAIMON:

Three men? What are three men going to do against that fire? Spit on the flames? (Haimon looks past Xena to the men behind her) Xena can't stop us all from going. The people of Skeiron need us now. There'll be plenty of time to catch up to Sabina later. Xena doesn't give a damn about Skeiron. Why should she? She's done the same and far worse to countless villages. Don't fool yourselves. She's not interested in helping people--she just wants a victory over Sabina as another notch in her belt. (smiles coldly at Xena) And I'm sure riding at the head of an army again holds a certain appeal as well.

Xena's face twists in anger. She brings her arm back and strikes Haimon across the chest, knocking him from the saddle. She leaps down off of Argo and before Haimon can scramble to his feet, Xena leans down and hauls him up by his collar.

Gabrielle jumps to the ground.

GABRIELLE (laying her hand on Xena's arm):

Xena, don't do this.

XENA (twists away from Gabrielle's touch):

Is that how you feel, Haimon? (she looks over her shoulder to the rest of her men) Is that how you all feel? Well, then so be it. I won't stop anyone from following their conscience. You have to make your own decisions. But before you decide, ask yourselves what's going to serve the greater good in the long run, going after Sabina to make sure she doesn't do to other villages what she just did at Skeiron, or stopping to help those people? I know I'm asking for an impossible choice, but in war there are no good choices, only lesser degrees of evil.

Gabrielle stares wide eyed at the men, holding her breath in anticipation of their decision. Finally voices can be heard calling from the ranks.

FIRST VOICE:

We're with you, Xena!

SECOND VOICE:

Let's bring Sabina to heel once and for all!

THIRD VOICE:

We should listen to Xena! She knows what's right!

Xena looks on, clearly moved by the loyalty and trust from her men. Her eye twitches as if she's fighting back a tear. Gabrielle reaches out and rubs Xena's arm. Slowly, Xena wills an impassive expression back onto her face.

XENA:

Good. Now let's get moving.

Xena mounts Argo. She waves her hand and takes off, her men trailing close behind as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Sabina's army riding along sparsely wooded rocky terrain. Ahead of them, there are two fairly steep, tall cliffs; the road between them narrows so that only two or three riders can pass at the most.

VOICE (slightly breathless, off-camera):

They're still coming!

Sabina slows down, signaling her men to do likewise. The camera pans over to a scout who is riding hard, catching up with Sabina's army.

SCOUT (rides up to Sabina):

I saw them...they're behind us and gaining!

Sabina smiles coldly and shakes her head.

SABINA (to herself):

Maybe Xena hasn't gone quite as soft as I thought. (to Peneios) All right. Now, we go to the backup plan.

CUT TO

Gabrielle riding along the road at the very back of the column. She spurs the horse ahead a bit until she is riding alongside a grim-faced Haimon. He doesn't turn to acknowledge her and they ride in silence a few moments.

GABRIELLE:

You did the right thing deciding to come with us.

HAIMON:

Then why do I feel so wrong?

GABRIELLE:

No one said doing the right thing was easy. Sometimes, the choices we have to make are horrible. You just hope that whichever way you choose is the right one. Sometimes it is. (Haimon glances at her and she smiles gently) And sometimes it isn't. (she nods towards Xena riding far ahead of them) Now you know what she feels like.

HAIMON (lowers his head):

You're saying Xena wanted to help those people back in Skeiron?

GABRIELLE:

I'm saying that Xena had to decide what was more important--helping the people of Skeiron or stopping Sabina from doing the same thing to a dozen more villages. (she pauses a moment) I wonder, Haimon...I agreed to keep riding. I hold myself as responsible for that decision as Xena is. And yet you're laying all the blame on her. Did you ever think that your judgment is clouded by your hatred for Xena?

Haimon is silent, pondering what Gabrielle is saying to him.

GABRIELLE:

Xena's done some terrible things in her past--and I know that she wishes she could turn back time and change all of it. But--strange as it may sound--Xena wouldn't be who she is today if she hadn't been who she was. Without her, there might be a thousand more just like Sabina terrorizing all of Greece. (Haimon stares straight ahead, making no reply. Gabrielle shrugs) Just something to think about.

Gabrielle spurs her horse forward and moves ahead in the column, leaving Haimon alone to think.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle can be seen over her shoulder, riding behind her. Haimon ambles up to ride next to Xena. She looks at him out of the corner of her eye, wary.

XENA (nodding coolly):

Haimon.

HAIMON (his expression as stiff as hers):

Xena.

They ride together in silence a few moments, neither one looking at the other.

HAIMON (still just as aloof):

You did the right thing about Skeiron.

In shock, Xena darts a sidelong glance to him, but she quickly masks her surprise, her face turning expressionless.

XENA:

I'm glad you approve.

HAIMON (looks at her, as if debating with himself whether to be angry or not):
Let's just find Sabina.

He turns his horse and rides back towards the rear of the column.

Over Xena's shoulder, Gabrielle smiles. She leans forward slightly in her saddle.

GABRIELLE:
Well, that's a step in the right direction.

XENA:
But still a long way to go.

CUT TO

The militia, with Xena, Gabrielle, and Haimon riding in front, approaches the same spot where we previously saw Sabina's army--only now, a pile of rocks, about waist-high, is blocking the pass. Xena looks around suspiciously and then slows down Argo. Haimon, Gabrielle and the others do likewise.

HAIMON:
What are we waiting for? Let's get those rocks out of the way!

XENA (nods toward the narrow pass):
This could be a perfect place for an ambush. Sabina's men could be waiting on the other side to pick us off one by one. Let me go first and take a look.

GABRIELLE (touches her arm):
Be careful, Xena.

Xena rides up to the barricade of rocks and dismounts, looking around warily. As she picks up one of the smaller rocks to throw it aside, an arrow whizzes at her from behind the cliffs but she manages to catch it just as it's about to strike her, eliciting awed gasps from the men behind her.

XENA:
Just as I thought.

She steps back, then charges forward and executes a high leap, flipping in the air with a piercing "A-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi!" and landing on the other side of the rock pile. Her face distorted in a yell, she throws her chakram, deflecting several arrows.

XENA (grabs her sword out of the scabbard):
Gabrielle, Haimon! Come on! The rest of you, clear the rocks--we'll cover you!

As Xena charges toward the pass, she is met by two of Sabina's warriors. Gabrielle and Haimon dismount hastily and climb over the rock pile while Xena battles the warriors, quickly dispatching one of them; while she fights the other, six more of Sabina's men attack and block the passage. A ferocious fight ensues. Deftly wielding her sais, Gabrielle kills one attacker and wounds another; Haimon is slightly wounded in the arm but manages to strike his assailant dead. In the meantime, the men from the militia are clearing the rocks so that the horses can get through.

A close-up on Xena as she runs her sword through the second man she was fighting.

SABINA (off-camera, in a firm, cool voice with just a slight touch of sarcasm):

Oh, Xena!

CUT TO

Sabina, riding out from behind a cluster of trees.

HAIMON:

Kill the murdering bitch!

With a snarl, Xena leaps into the air and at Sabina, knocking her out of the saddle. The two women land hard on the ground, but the agile Sabina manages to free herself from Xena's grasp and clamber up to her feet.

The two women battle each other in a dazzling ballet of kicks, jumps and sword maneuvers. It is clear that Sabina is a highly skilled warrior, but she is no match for Xena. In a short time, Sabina makes a bad move and Xena quickly takes advantage of it to trip her. She lands on her back, with Xena's sword at her neck. Two of Sabina's men who are still on their feet and fighting--one facing off against Gabrielle, the other against Haimon--immediately stop and lower their weapons, looking expectantly at Sabina.

GABRIELLE (looks around, puzzled):

Where's the rest of the army?

XENA:

We'll follow their tracks and catch up with them soon enough. (to Sabina, who is still clutching her sword) Do you give up, or are you going to save us the trouble of bringing you to justice?

SABINA:

How about neither?

XENA:

I don't think there's any other offer on the table.

SABINA:

Oh, but you haven't heard mine. (Xena looks at her warily) Let me and my men go, and dozens of lives will be spared.

XENA (flinches slightly, in a menacing voice):

What are you talking about?

SABINA:

This isn't a particularly comfortable position to talk. Let me up and I'll tell you. Come on, I'll even put down my sword.

She lets go of the sword; Xena steps back a little and lets her stand up but remains fully alert for any sign of mischief.

XENA:

Well?

SABINA:

It's very simple, really. By now, my men should have surrounded a village...somewhere not too far from here. If I am not there by sundown (she glances at the sun, which is already low), their orders are to burn the village and kill every living soul.

HAIMON (turning crimson):

You're a butcher!

SABINA (coldly):

I'm practical.

XENA (her voice seething with quiet rage):

You fool. You think I can't follow the tracks to find out which way your men went?

SABINA:

Too bad they split up into three groups at the crossroads straight ahead. (she nods toward the woods where the road is leading) You try and figure out which one of them has the orders to wipe out which village.

Xena glowers at Sabina and starts moving toward her.

SABINA (assumes a defensive posture):

You're smart, Xena, so act like it. Smart enough to know when you've been outplayed. (laughs) Don't even think of trying the pinch on me. I could always call your bluff.

XENA (growls):

And I could call yours.

SABINA:

You could--but would you?

Xena stops.

HAIMON:

Xena--

XENA (raises her hand, silencing him):

And if I let you go, how do I know that you'll call off the attack on the village?

SABINA (almost offended):

I'm not a monster, Xena. I don't relish killing innocent men, women and children...any more than you did. (she gives Xena a meaningful look; Xena flinches) Besides, I always keep my word.

Xena stares at Sabina, her face reflecting an emotional struggle.

HAIMON (in a suddenly soft voice):

Let her go, Xena.

Xena nods, lowering her eyes, and puts her sword away in her scabbard. Sabina picks up her sword and mounts her horse; her two warriors help up their wounded comrade and head for the trees where they have left their horses.

SABINA:

By the way, if I think someone could be following me, I just might get nervous and confused and ride in the wrong direction. You wouldn't want that, would you? (gives Xena a mocking glance) I knew you'd be sensible, Xena. After all, you don't want the slaughter of an entire village on your conscience...just like at Ikaros.

Haimon and Gabrielle flinch; Xena looks sharply at Sabina.

XENA:

What do you know about Ikaros?

SABINA:

Everything. My father was there.

XENA:

Your father...? He couldn't be--

Haimon stares at Sabina, transfixed.

SABINA:

Not in the village, Xena. In your army. His name was Valerius Berillus.

XENA (something stirs in her memory):

Berillus...

SABINA:

He admired you, Xena. Even after your army was gone, even after he settled down and became a simple shopkeeper, he kept a medallion with your name carved into it. (she reverently pulls the medallion out of her breastplate and holds it up)

Xena stares intently at Sabina, a horrified look on her face.

SABINA:

But you really messed up at Ikaros, didn't you, Xena? First, you let your army get out of control and slaughter a village against your order... (Haimon darts a quick look at Xena) Then, you got a conscience and were so preoccupied with saving some little brat that you let Darphus plot against you right under your nose.

A close-up of Haimon's face as the realization that Xena saved his life dawns on him.

SABINA (continues):

You know, Xena, my father always remained loyal to you. Even when Darphus made you walk the gauntlet, Berillus wouldn't strike you. And afterwards...he always kept hoping that one day you would return to your former glory. He remembered you the way you were...a fierce, proud warrior, a conqueror striking terror into the hearts of men. It was his legacy to his daughter.

She lets these words sink in, and then turns to her men, who are now on horseback as well.

SABINA:

Let's go!

They ride off and disappear into the wood behind the curve of the road.

Gabrielle eyes Xena anxiously, taking note of the grim expression on her face. She steps forward and lays her hand on Xena's shoulder.

GABRIELLE:

You did the right thing letting her go, Xena.

XENA (nods bleakly):

I know.

Haimon hesitantly approaches Xena. Neither he nor Xena can look at one another.

HAIMON (studying the toe of his boot as he scuffs it in the dirt):

Xena...what Sabina said about Ikaros...you saving a child. Was that true?

Xena looks away, unable to respond.

GABRIELLE:

It's true.

HAIMON:

I was the only survivor of Ikaros. (he looks at her intently) So it was you?

XENA (shrugs lightly, as if to play down her good deed):

It was the right thing to do.

HAIMON:

And the raid on my village? That wasn't you either?

XENA (shakes her head):

I never wanted it to happen. By the time I got there it was too late...

GABRIELLE:

Tell him, Xena.

XENA (she takes a deep breath):

Darphus had ordered the death of everyone in the village. And when I found you--still in your mother's arms--Darphus sent one of his men to kill you too. And I decided I wasn't going to let him do that.

HAIMON:

Why didn't you tell me this before? You let me go on blaming--

XENA:

Haimon--whether I was there or not, the blood of Ikaros is still on my hands. I wasn't about to wash it away by getting you to feel like you owed me something.

HAIMON:

Xena, you saved my life...

XENA (turns to him--there is a catch in her throat when she speaks):

And you saved mine. We're even.

HAIMON (laughs lightly):

Me? It sounds like saving me almost got you killed.

XENA (smiles gently at him):

There's more than one way to save someone, Haimon. I've still got a long journey ahead of me, but it was because of you that I took that first step towards the person I want to be.

HAIMON:

Maybe the journey isn't as long as you think, Xena. (he pauses a moment then reaches out tentatively to touch her shoulder) Thank you. (he glances at Gabrielle.) To both of you. All my life I've wanted to be a hero. I guess I was trying so hard to make it up to my mother that I lost sight of the most important thing of all. Knowing right from wrong.

XENA:

Sometimes you *don't* know, Haimon.

HAIMON:

Maybe not. Sometimes all you can do is try your best.

GABRIELLE:

Thanks for stealing my line.

CUT TO

An overhead shot of Haimon and Xena chuckling.

CUT TO

Sabina and her three surviving soldiers are riding fast along a path in the woods.

CUT TO

Ares stepping out from behind a tree.

SABINA (to her men, slowing down):

Go on ahead. I'll be right behind you.

The men ride ahead while Sabina stops her horse next to Ares. She looks at him, unable to suppress a proud little smile.

SABINA:

You were watching, weren't you?

ARES:

Yeah, watching Xena kick your ass.

SABINA (shrugs, unfazed):

I knew I wasn't ready to take her on yet. (smirking) But I won in the end. I would think that you'd appreciate a clever plan as much as good fighting moves.

ARES (looks at her curiously):

Did you actually order your men to wipe out that village?

SABINA:

Of course I did. Why bluff when you don't have to? (she pauses and gives Ares a questioning look) It's the kind of thing your precious Xena would have done in the old days, isn't it?

ARES (very thoughtful look):

Xena... Yes, I suppose it is.

He vanishes in a flare of blue light. Sabina laughs triumphantly, then spurs on her horse and rides away after her soldiers.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle are beside a campfire in a clearing of the woods. Xena is laying back on her bedroll, propped up on her elbows. Gabrielle sits upright a few feet away from her. A scroll rests on her lap and a quill is in her hand. It is dark so she angles the scroll towards the fire in order to see what she is reading.

GABRIELLE (laughs and shakes her head):

I can't believe it. After all these years and all the stories I've written, I can finally tell the one that started it all.

XENA:

Just make sure you spell my name right.

Gabrielle pauses a moment and looks up at Xena, a curious expression on her face.

XENA:

What?

GABRIELLE (smiles):

You're glowing.

XENA:

It's the fire.

GABRIELLE:

No it's not. You should see your face right now.

Xena reaches up to touch her cheek and Gabrielle leans over her scroll and begins to scribble furiously.

XENA:

Come on! Don't write *that!* Gabrielle, I do *not* glow.

GABRIELLE:

You most certainly do, Warrior Princess. You're glowing like a... (Gabrielle holds her scroll up to read aloud) ...a proud mother.

Xena curls her lip to demonstrate her scorn.

GABRIELLE:

It's Haimon. Don't even try to deny it, Xena! You're proud of him.

XENA (allows a grudging smile):

Yeah. I suppose I am. He's not going to make things easy for Sabina once she rears her head again. (Xena stares thoughtfully into the flames for a moment) You know, Gabrielle, all these years I've believed that the only thing I would leave the world was a legacy of violence and bloodshed. But maybe the world will inherit something good from me too, people like you and Haimon.

GABRIELLE:

I'm going to make sure to write that down. The next time you start blaming yourself for everything from high taxes to measles, I'm going to read it back to you.

XENA:

Like you would forget *anything* I said to you?

GABRIELLE (she is silent, thinking a moment):

You *did* say "take care of the horse."

XENA (chuckles softly):

Right. My mistake. Get to sleep.

GABRIELLE (smiles warmly):

Good night, Xena.

XENA:

'Night.

Gabrielle sets her scroll and quill aside and settles down into her bedroll. Barely a moment passes before she begins to snore lightly.

Xena lies on her back silently, staring at the stars.

[FLASHBACK]

From "The Gauntlet":

XENA (to Spiros, Haimon's father):

Just raise your son to be as brave as you.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena smiles. Then, her eyes flicker and she sits up, suddenly alert. There is a flash of light, and Ares appears, standing in front of her. They both look slightly uncomfortable.

XENA (quietly):

Hey.

ARES:

Hey.

He sits down next to her and they are briefly silent.

ARES:

I just wanted to tell you that you made the right choice.

XENA (glances at him quickly):

You mean--letting Sabina go?

ARES:

That too. But I meant--long before that.

Xena looks at him, her eyes widening in understanding.

XENA:

If I hadn't left you then-- (trails off)

ARES:

Oh, I'm sure we would have had great fun. But--

XENA (stares at him expectantly):

Yes?

ARES:

...I never would have known what I was missing.

He takes her hand and she smiles at him affectionately.

ARES (looks down awkwardly):

Listen, about that other thing--about what I did--

XENA (interrupts him):

Don't. (pauses) Ares, all these years, I've been bitter because, no matter how much I had changed, people still held my past against me. Maybe I've been doing the same thing.

They sit together in silence for a few moments, holding hands. Then Ares looks up with a slightly forced grin, obviously trying to break up an uncomfortably intense moment.

ARES:

Of course, I still think your new friend is a stuffy, irritating goody-two-shoes... (Xena gives him an amused, tolerant smile) A perfect match for our Battling Bard.

GABRIELLE (in a drowsy voice):

I heard that!

ARES (rolls his eyes):

Oh, look at the time. I'd better get going.

He squeezes Xena's hand and vanishes.

XENA (smiles mischievously):

What else did you hear?

GABRIELLE:

Enough to make for a really nice ending to my new scroll...

XENA:

No one will ever believe it. And Ares will deny everything.

GABRIELLE:

Yeah? Well, maybe you could put the pinch on him.

Xena rolls her eyes.

GABRIELLE:

Or maybe we can make some kind of deal with him. If he places his thumbprint on my scroll, you'll spend the weekend with him on Mt. Olympus.

Xena gives Gabrielle a shocked look.

GABRIELLE:

Hmm. Right. Bad idea. Okay--well, how about if you...

The camera pulls back higher and higher into the trees as Gabrielle's voice gets softer and softer until we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Xena's guilt complex was not harmed in the production of this motion picture.]