

SHIPPER SEASON SEVEN

“Of Love and War I”

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Logline

New developments in Xena's relationship with Ares prompt her to relive her past history with the God of War. Meanwhile, an attack by the Persian Army brings back other painful memories for the Warrior Princess. As past hostilities threaten to derail a military alliance between Athens and Sparta against the common enemy, the very survival of Greece hangs in the balance.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Front view of a large building, with dim light coming from the windows. The camera zooms in on one of the windows and takes the viewer inside a dimly lit room. The light of candles and oil lamps is reflecting off the swords and shields hanging on the wall. Two warriors whose richly decorated armor suggests their high rank, Tydeus and Pausanias, are sitting at a table.

TYDEUS:

We are running out of time. For weeks, I have heard about the Persian army planning an attack against Greece.

PAUSANIAS:

Rumors are rumors and nothing more. And even if it was true, is the Persian army that much of a threat? (off Tydeus' astonished look) If the reports I have heard are true, only thirty years ago they tried something of the sort, and were defeated single-handedly by one woman warrior.

TYDEUS (thoughtfully):

Xena--the Warrior Princess.

PAUSANIAS (derisively):

Very good. (Tydeus gives him an irritated look but remains silent) If one woman could defeat the Persians, then surely the *mighty* Athenian army shouldn't have too much trouble.

TYDEUS:

One woman? This is *Xena* we're talking about.

PAUSANIAS:

So? She's not a god.

TYDEUS:

Right--only the greatest warrior to walk the face of the earth. Besides, she took the Persians by surprise...and she was lucky. And since then, the Persians have been building up their military might. Do you really want to test the Fates again?

PAUSANIAS:

So you suggest that Sparta should enter an alliance with Athens.

TYDEUS:

Two armies are better than one. The rumors have it that the Persians are moving on Thessaly. If that is true, Athens is likely next--and if they take Athens, then Sparta will lie directly in their path. Are you sure that the *mighty* Spartan army will be able to stop them? And most of all, do you want to find out the answer after it's too late? (after a pause) Athens and Sparta have had our differences.

PAUSANIAS:

To put it mildly.

TYDEUS:

Our recent war has weakened both our armies. This is the time to unite in the face of a common enemy.

Pausanias is silent for a moment, wearing an expression of concern as he thinks.

PAUSANIAS:

Very well, then. Sparta will join forces with Athens--for the time being.

TYDEUS:

For the time being.

The two men stare at each other with a hard expression but at the same time determined. They clasp hands. At that moment, there is a knock on the door, and without waiting for an answer the door is pushed open by a guard.

GUARD:

Excuse me for interrupting, sir...

TYDEUS (turns to him):

I gave strict orders not to interrupt this meeting!

GUARD (nervously):

I know, sir, but this is an emergency. A messenger is here who says he has news of the Persian army.

TYDEUS (shoots Pausanias a meaningful look):

So much for *rumors*. (to the guard) Show him in.

The guard steps out, and then comes back with a man in his mid-30s. He is simply dressed, but his bearing suggests that he is more than a mere messenger.

TYDEUS:

Who are you and what business do you bring to Athens?

MESSENGER (he seems to be making an effort to speak):

I am Nicosias, the King of Thessaly.

Tydeus and Pausanias look at him in shock.

TYDEUS:

Is this a joke?

NICOSIAS (bitterly):

No joke. (he holds up the medallion on his neck; it has an engraved profile of himself)

TYDEUS:

Then what are you doing coming here as a messenger?

NICOSIAS (through clenched teeth):

I have been sent by Mardonius.

PAUSANIAS (stunned):

The Persian commander?

NICOSIAS:

Yes.

TYDEUS:

The Persians have conquered Thessaly? It can't be!

NICOSIAS:

It is all too true.

TYDEUS:

But the dispatches from our scouts--

NICOSIAS (bitterly):

...have been intercepted and altered.

Pausanias and Tydeus are visibly shaken as they digest this news.

NICOSIAS:

Mardonius does not want a full-scale war with Athens. If you surrender peacefully and accept Persian rule, the lives of everyone in the city will be spared. If you do not accept these terms, he will have no choice but to conquer by force.

PAUSANIAS:

How can you, a Greek king, come here with such a shameful proposal?

Nicosias looks down, ashamed.

TYDEUS:

We will not submit to any invader without a fight.

NICOSIAS (looks up, his stare heavy):

So be it, then. I will take your message back to Mardonius. But know this: his army is but two days' ride from here.

Tydeus and Pausanias exchange shocked stares.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle riding through a forest in a storm. Thunder and lightning fill the night sky.

GABRIELLE (shouting over the sound of rain and thunder):

Xena! Why is it that when we decided to camp out in the middle of nowhere, we always run into a storm?

XENA (also shouting):

Maybe you got on the bad side of a god!

GABRIELLE:

Now that you mention it, I can think of *one*!

XENA:

Nah, he doesn't do things like this!

GABRIELLE (gives Xena a mischievous look):

I never said anything about a *him*.

They speed up and see an old abandoned house up ahead. They ride up to the house.

CUT TO

Inside the house, which looks very run down. Xena and Gabrielle come in, dripping with rainwater.

GABRIELLE:

This place looks like it has been deserted for years. Look at this!

She removes a cobweb stuck to her hair and shows it to Xena.

XENA:

It'll do for the night.

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, maybe we can make a blanket out of all the cobwebs.

Xena chuckles and they go exploring the house.

XENA:

Well, not much in the way of creature comforts, but there are beds here. Which room do you want?

GABRIELLE:

Hm...the one where the roof is least likely to collapse? (shrugs) I don't think it makes a difference. This one. (she points to the door on the right) I'll see you in the morning.

XENA:

Yeah. 'Night.

CUT TO

Later that night, Gabrielle is soundly asleep in her room.

CUT TO

Xena's room. Xena is still awake; in her leather shift but without her armor, she is standing by a window staring as the rain falls outside and lightning flashes. She closes her eyes.

[FLASHBACK]

ARES (as an angel):

Michael saved me. I owe him everything; I was drowned in darkness. The Light saved me from myself.

XENA:

No, Ares. You weren't evil.

Xena reaches out and touches his cheek, stroking it gently.

XENA:

You weren't evil... (continues to stroke his cheek, then his lips) You could love.

CUT TO

Xena staring at Ares, who is now himself again. She rests a hand on his cheek.

XENA (softly):

You really have changed, Ares.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares look into each other's eyes and then she slowly places her hand at the back of his head, capturing his lips. They melt into a caring, tender kiss.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena opens her eyes and sighs, smiling almost contentedly at the same time. Suddenly, she flinches but soon relaxes again. The camera pans back and we see two strong arms slowly encircling her waist. Xena quietly turns her head back to look at Ares.

ARES:

What's the matter? Having trouble sleeping?

XENA (smiles):

Does that worry you?

ARES:

I'd hate to see you all cranky when you wake up in the morning.

XENA:

I'm never cranky when I wake up.

ARES (teasingly):

Never?

XENA (her expression turning sad suddenly):

Unless it's after a really long sleep. (she releases herself from Ares' embrace and faces him) Ares-

-

ARES:

Sorry, didn't mean to bring up a sore spot. I just came to say thanks...again.

XENA (smiling a little):

I couldn't leave you an angel. That wasn't the real you.

ARES:

The real me? You mean, the conniving, ruthless son of a bitch?

XENA (chuckles):

Better that than a brainwashed minion of Michael's. (she turns serious) Besides...I meant what I said, Ares. (she takes a deep breath) You *have* changed.

ARES (speaks solemnly and almost sadly):

I'm still the God of War.

XENA:

That's what you do...but maybe it's not what you are. (off his puzzled look) At least, that's not *all* you are. (she pauses slightly) You have been human, Ares. I think that human part of you is still inside you.

Ares is clearly moved by Xena's words. He closes the space in between them as he approaches her. Xena doesn't move as she looks straight into his eyes. Their lips meet in a tender kiss and they deepen it. Xena puts her arms around his neck, and almost simultaneously, Ares puts his arms around her waist drawing her body closer to his. Without breaking the kiss, they lower themselves down to Xena's bed. Xena moves her hand down Ares' back. Finally, they slowly break the kiss and Ares lifts his head up to look at Xena's face. At this point, Xena's gaze is directed sideways--away from Ares. She looks uncertain and a little confused. Ares sees this and starts to pull away but Xena gently tightens her grip on his back. She pulls him down and they start to kiss again as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

It is morning and the storm has cleared up. Sunlight shines through the broken shutters over a sleeping Xena and Ares. Xena stirs, and the camera closes in on Xena's face as she opens her eyes. She slowly turns her head towards Ares and finds him looking back at her.

ARES:

Did you have nice dreams?

XENA (with a warm chuckle):

You could say that. You?

ARES (smiles back as he briefly kisses her):

I'll let you know when I wake up.

Xena smiles as she sits up in the bed and bends to pick up her clothes from the floor. With a snap of his fingers, Ares dresses himself instantly and stands up.

XENA (grins):

I guess godhood does have its advantages.

ARES:

I keep telling you.

He waves an arm, and Xena finds herself fully dressed. She looks herself over wryly.

XENA:

The mortal way is more fun.

ARES:

We'll have to try that sometime.

He comes up and takes her in his arms. They kiss tenderly. Off-camera, a door is heard opening and closing, and there are footsteps, followed by a knock on the door.

GABRIELLE (off-camera):

Xena? Are you awake yet?

ARES:

I think that's my cue to leave. See you soon?

XENA (nods):

See you soon.

Ares disappears in his trademark blue light.

XENA (raises her voice):

Come on in.

The door opens and Gabrielle enters.

XENA:

Morning.

GABRIELLE (gives her a puzzled look):

I thought I heard voices.

Xena looks away slightly embarrassed.

GABRIELLE (understanding starts to dawn on her):

Oh! Did you sleep well?

XENA:

You could say that. (quickly changes the subject) You look pretty well-rested--you're up early this morning.

GABRIELLE (makes a face):

Only because I had a wake-up call from a mouse. By the way, the roof leaks too.

XENA (shrugs):

Well, nothing's perfect.

GABRIELLE (looks around):

Oh yeah...even this magnificent dwelling has a few tiny flaws. (grins) I'm going to make us some breakfast.

XENA:

I'll feed the horses. We should be getting back on the road before too long.

CUT TO

An army camp. King Nicosias rides up to a large tent, dismounts and enters. Inside, two men, their backs turned to the camera and to the entrance of the tent, are looking at a map on the table. One of them, judging by his rich crimson cloak and his gold-decorated armor, is a commander of high rank.

NICOSIAS (a faint note of defiance in his voice):

I bring back a message from the Athenians, Mardonius.

The high-ranking man, Mardonius, answers without looking up.

MARDONIUS:

What did they say?

NICOSIAS (with a touch of pride):

They refuse to surrender--they have chosen to fight against you.

MARDONIUS (looks up and turns around):

Fools. Now, they will have a chance to see what happens when they oppose Mardonius--or did you tell them already?

Nicosias remains silent, staring down sullenly.

MARDONIUS:

Care to hear about your wife and children?

Nicosias clenches his fists but still holds his silence.

MARDONIUS (chortles):

Not to worry. Since you have performed your task well, they won't be harmed. (to his second in command) We head out first thing tomorrow morning.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle are atop their mounts riding down a dirt road. Xena is lost in thought. She momentarily closes her eyes.

Dissolve to a quick flashback from that morning--Xena wakes up and sees Ares looking at her tenderly.

A close-up of the dreamy, absent expression on Xena's face as she and Gabrielle continue to ride.

[FLASHBACK]

Clip from "Past Imperfect":

XENA:

Take this child. He's my son--the son of Borias. If he stays with me, he'll become a target for all those who hate me. He'll learn things that a child shouldn't know. He'll become like me. Please.

KALIEPUS:

The son of Borias--shall be raised as my own.

Xena sheds a tear.

CUT TO

Xena walking back along a dark wooded path, still shaken by what happened. She hears a sudden noise in the trees and stops, drawing her sword.

XENA:

Who's there? (she pauses, waiting for an answer, but there is none.) Who's there? (another pause) If you don't show yourself now, I promise you will die a very painful death.

A dark figure emerges from the trees, its face invisible; it is a man in black attire, carrying a big sword. The man and Xena stand facing each other for a moment, then he attacks. They fight ferociously, their swords clashing. In a short time, the man succeeds in knocking Xena's sword out of her hand. It flies high in the air, flipping over several times as it falls, and the man catches it. A close-up on Xena's face--her look is one of helpless, feral rage. The tip of the man's sword is at her throat.

MAN'S VOICE (off-camera):

So you don't always keep your promises.

XENA (growls):

Cut the small talk and be done with it.

MAN (suavely):

If you insist.

Xena flinches slightly, expecting the death blow. The camera pulls back to show the man lowering his sword and handing Xena's sword back to her.

XENA (shocked):
What do you want?

MAN:
Only to introduce myself. (she eyes him warily. A close-up of Ares' face) Ares,
God of War, at your service.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE:

Xena. (Xena doesn't hear her, lost in her memories) Xena? (she flaps a hand in front of Xena's face) Are you there?

Xena flinches and snaps out of her trance.

XENA (stares back at Gabrielle):
What?

GABRIELLE:

You think there's any truth to those rumors of the Persian army getting ready to invade Greece again?

XENA (her face darkens):
We'll find out when we get to Athens.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle riding in through the Athenian city gates. It is broad daylight but everything is very quiet, with only a few dogs barking in the distance. It is the same one from before. Xena frowns as they ride further and see the streets deserted.

GABRIELLE (confused):
Did we get to the right place? Is this Athens?

XENA:
Either that or an exact copy.

GABRIELLE:

There isn't a soul in sight. What could have happened to all those people?

XENA:

We're going to have to find out.

They continue to ride through the streets, looking around in bewilderment, and finally reach a square.

VOICE (off-camera):
Hello? Hello?

Xena and Gabrielle look up, startled but pleased to find some signs of human life. There is a man in the distance, running toward them. He approaches and slows down. His clothes indicate him to be a common townsman, perhaps an artisan.

MAN:

Oh, thank the gods--someone is here! (looks at the women in surprise) You're not from around here, are you?

GABRIELLE:

This is Xena, Warrior Princess. I'm Gabrielle.

MAN (nods, too anxious to be really impressed):

I've heard of you. Can you tell me what happened?

XENA (sighs):

We were hoping to ask you the same question.

MAN (disappointed):

I have no idea. I was attending my cousin's wedding in Corinth and just returned. My wife and daughters aren't in the house...it looks like they left in a hurry. I can't find anyone anywhere. (he looks around, wild-eyed) I'm going to go look for my brother--maybe he's home.

GABRIELLE (shouts after him as he takes off running):

No, don't, there's no use! I think the whole city is deserted--

Without listening to her, the man runs off.

XENA (sighs):

Well, that explained a lot.

GABRIELLE:

You think we should look for more people?

XENA:

No, let's head back to the city gates.

As they ride through the streets, a distant rumbling is heard off-camera. Xena listens intently.

GABRIELLE (turns to Xena):

Do you hear that?

XENA (grimly):

I do.

The rumbling gets louder, until it seems that the ground is shaking. Xena and Gabrielle look at each other, alarmed. Approaching the city gates, they look out and see an army headed towards the hills on which the city stands.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe it's the Athenian army, coming back?

Xena looks closer and sees the banner they are carrying.

XENA:

No, Gabrielle. It's the Persian army.

A close-up of Mardonius galloping at the head of the Persian troops as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

A close-up of Mardonius galloping at the head of the Persian troops.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle at the Athenian city gates, staring at the advancing army.

XENA (grim):

I've fought the Persians before.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, let's not wait for our luck to run out. We need to get out of here--find out what happened to the Athenians, and then think of some way to deal with the Persian army.

XENA:

Let's go.

They gallop away, taking a side path.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle riding through the woods. They slow down.

XENA:

Maybe Ares can tell us what happened.

GABRIELLE:

You think he had something to do with this?

XENA (hastily):

No! (Gabrielle gives her a sideways look) But maybe he knows something. Ares!

There is a flash of blue light and Ares appears. He looks concerned.

XENA:

Ares, I want to know--

ARES:

About the Persian army? They have taken Thessaly, and now they are about to take Attica.

XENA (wary and a little angry):

And it never occurred to you to tell me before?

ARES:

I didn't know.

GABRIELLE:

There's an invading army sweeping through Greece and the God of War doesn't know about it?

ARES (exasperated and slightly embarrassed):

Look, I've been a little preoccupied lately, okay?

GABRIELLE:

Athens is completely deserted--what happened there?

ARES:

I'm going to find out soon enough.

XENA:

Funny, I was just about to say that.

ARES:

Look, let me take you to one of my temples. I'll see what I can find out for you, and then we can figure out what to do about those Persians.

GABRIELLE:

We?

ARES:

What, you have a problem with that? I could always leave you behind.

GABRIELLE (thinks a moment and looks at Xena):

Um...I guess not.

They disappear in a flash of light.

CUT TO

The Persian army, riding through the deserted streets of Athens.

MARDONIUS:

Looks like the cowards ran away.

Two Persian soldiers appear from behind a corner, dragging the man we saw before talking to Xena and Gabrielle.

MARDONIUS:

But some aren't as swift as others. (stares contemptuously at the man, who is dragged before him) If you want to live, you'd better tell me what happened here.

MAN (stammers):

I--I d-don't know, my lord! I was out of town and I found everything like this when I got back... I know nothing!

MARDONIUS:

Well, if you know nothing, then you can't be of much use to me. (to the soldiers) Kill him.

MAN (desperately):

No, no, my lord! Wait--wait! Maybe I *can* tell you something useful...

MARDONIUS:

What?

MAN:

Before your army got here, I ran into two women, on the square before the temple of Demeter...

MARDONIUS (laughs):

Two women? They'd have to be *really* good-looking if you think that kind of information could buy you your life!

MAN:

They said they were Xena, Warrior Princess, and her friend Gabrielle.

MARDONIUS (suddenly looks serious and even shocked):

Take him away. (continues thoughtfully as the soldiers drag the man away). Xena, the legendary Warrior Princess... (to his lieutenant) You know what happened the last time one of our armies crossed her path?

LIEUTENANT (nods nervously):

Yes, my lord.

MARDONIUS:

So those stories of her return must be true. (smiles nastily) Oh well...miracles don't happen twice.

CUT TO

One of Ares' temples. Gabrielle paces around nervously; Xena sits on a chair, seemingly lost in thought again. Ares stands watching them, arms folded on his chest.

GABRIELLE (stops and turns to Xena):

Xena? (pauses as Xena does not respond) Xena!

XENA (looks up with a start):

What?

GABRIELLE:

Are you all right? You looked a little...out of it.

XENA:

I'm fine. What did you want to say?

GABRIELLE:

Do you think it's possible that the Persian army wiped out all the Athenians?

XENA:

No. There were no traces of battle. Besides, if the Persians did slaughter the Athenians, there was no reason for them to leave and then return to an empty city.

ARES:

I'll be right back.

XENA:

Where are you going?

ARES:

My sister should know something about this.

GABRIELLE:

Why would Aphrodite--oh, I see. Yeah, after all she is the patron goddess of the city.

CUT TO

A room on Olympus. Athena is at a desk reading a scroll. Ares enters.

ARES:

Hello, sis.

Athena looks up. She replies sharply but without the hostility she's showed him before.

ATHENA:

Hello, brother.

ARES:

I suppose you're wondering why I'm here.

ATHENA:

Let me guess--to spend some quality time with your sister? (smiles slightly at his embarrassed expression) So I take it this isn't a social call. Something to do with the Persians army?

ARES:

Your wisdom is right on the money. So--what exactly is going on?

ATHENA:

When they learned that the Persians were coming, they were not ready to defend themselves. So they prayed to me for help, and I told them to go to the island of Salamis and seek refuge there for a while. Meanwhile, their army is headed to Euesis where they will meet with the Spartans.

ARES (raises an eyebrow):

The Spartans?

ATHENA:

The Athenians and the Spartans have agreed to join forces to fight the Persian invasion...

ARES:

Really. (sarcastic) The beginning of a beautiful friendship?

ATHENA (leans forward on her elbows and stares at him intently):

Brother, I know that the hostilities between Athens and Sparta go a long way back. And I know you've had a hand in those hostilities. But this alliance is too important right now for you to mess it up. So I suggest you stay out of this.

ARES (gives her a "who, me?" innocent look):

Who says I'll do anything to mess it up? Maybe I'm interested in the welfare of the Athenians.

ATHENA (mockingly):

Since when have you taken interest in the welfare of any mortals?

ARES (wryly):

Hey, I'm always up for new experiences.

Ares disappears. Athena shakes her head, looking after him; then, a small smile crosses her face, and she returns to her scrolls.

CUT TO

Ares' temple, Xena is now the one pacing around, lost in thought. Gabrielle is examining the décor of the temple, shaking her head at some of the grisly symbols such as human skulls. Periodically, she turns and glances worriedly at Xena.

A close-up of Xena's face, and then dissolve to:

[FLASHBACK]

A close-up of Ares' face.

ARES:

Ares, God of War. At your service.

Xena looks shocked at first, but manages to keep her emotions in check and assume an arrogant expression.

XENA:

Xena, Destroyer of Nations. So, now that we've completed the introductions--what do you want?

ARES (slightly surprised):

You're not afraid of me.

XENA:

If you wanted to kill me, you'd have done it already. Anyway, I don't have time to chat. If you have a reason for being here, cut to the chase.

Ares walks around behind Xena. Xena follows him with her gaze.

XENA (sarcastically):

What are you trying to do, size me up for a new dress?

ARES:

Do you know what you're meant to be?

XENA:

The Destroyer of Nations. I've been promised the greatest power.

ARES:

Is that all? (Xena eyes him in confusion) You can have so much more than that, Xena.

XENA (dreamy):

More...?

ARES (suavely):

Oh sure, there is a lot to be said for wanton slaughter. But real power...that comes from something else. When you destroy, people feel your power for a very short time-between the moment when they know you can kill them and the moment you actually do. And then one day, you'll have destroyed everything in your path, and then what? (Xena looks at him, entranced by his words and his presence) If you conquer and rule, your power will last.

XENA (regaining her composure, bitterly):

That sounds great. With what I've got left of my army, maybe I can take over a small fishing village.

ARES:

Join with me, Xena. I can give you a new army.

XENA:

Why?

ARES:

I have had my eye on you for a long time. Ever since Cortese's army attacked Amphipolis.

XENA (steps toward him, her eyes suddenly flashing with anger):

Was he working for you?

ARES (slowly shakes his head):

Cortese wasn't smart enough or good enough to serve me. But someone else caught my eye that day. A girl of seventeen who was determined to fight when

everyone else in the town wanted to give up. That girl didn't have much in the way of combat skills, or experience...but what she had in her was the spirit of War. And with that fire burning inside her, she led men into battle.

While speaking, he has been coming even closer to Xena until they are face to face. Lifting a hand, Ares touches Xena's chin, staring into her eyes. She suppresses a shiver.

ARES:

Join me, Xena. Then you can experience war like you never have before.

His sensuous whisper suddenly seems to fill the air, echoing in the trees, carried by the wind.

ARES:

Join me.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Ares' temple, in the present day. Xena paces nervously. Gabrielle walks over to her and puts a hand on her arm.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, I know something is bothering you. Something besides the Persians...

XENA:

Gabrielle--

GABRIELLE:

You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to. I'm just worried about you.

XENA (smiles a little):

You worry too much.

She starts to pace around again.

GABRIELLE:

It's Ares, isn't it? You-- (she stumbles and blushes slightly) You were with him last night?

XENA (looks down):

Yes. I've just been thinking about...the old days. Back when I first met him.

GABRIELLE (softly):

You never told me about that.

XENA:

After I gave Solan to Kaleipus, I was...lost. And that was when he came to me. He offered me to join him, and I accepted. I thought that, together, we would be unstoppable.

[FLASHBACK]

Xena and Ares are in Xena's tent. Xena is sitting at the edge of her bed fixing her armor. Ares is behind her, naked, his arms around her waist.

XENA (voice-over):

And for a while, we were.

ARES (in the flashback):

You are *good*.

XENA:

I hope so. I conquered that miserable town in your name.

ARES:

Oh yeah--that too.

VOICE (off-camera):

Xena!

XENA (raising her voice):

What is it?

Darphus comes in. Xena stands up as he walks over to her. He does not see Ares.

DARPHUS:

I have news of the centaurs.

XENA:

I'm no longer interested in the centaurs. I don't need the Ixion Stone anymore--I've got something much better.

Ares grins.

DARPHUS:

But they've split up. They're easy prey if we attack now.

XENA (sneers):

What part of "no" don't you understand? There's no glory in taking out a nation of

losers. They're hardly worth my time. Now, if you don't have any more bright ideas, I suggest you get going.

Darphus gives Xena a resentful look before he leaves. Xena turns around and walks back to the bed.

ARES:

Better watch out for him. He could be trouble.

XENA:

That fool? I'll get rid of him when he no longer serves my needs.

ARES (smirks):

Speaking of needs-- (he pulls Xena down to the bed and rolls on top of her) where were we?

XENA:

Well-- (she flips over so that she's on top) I was leaving to attend to some business.

ARES:

Come now, my dear. When are we going to *really* celebrate your victories? (he reaches up to kiss her neck)

XENA (momentarily closes her eyes in pleasure but quickly gets a grip on herself and reverts to a sarcastic tone):

You gods are all alike--you're only after one thing.

ARES (teasing):

You know other gods?

XENA (extricates herself from his arms and gets up):

No, but I know what sorts of unpleasant things happen to mortal women who get a little too close to them.

ARES (looks irritated but then laughs):

Remind me again why I put up with your insolence.

XENA (smiles):

Because it's fun?

She leaves the tent. The camera follows her outside as she walks, surveying her camp with a small, feral smile on her face.

ARES' VOICE:

Xena!

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena flinches and finds herself staring at Ares, in the present.

XENA:

Ares... (composes herself) Got any news?

ARES:

The Athenians have taken refuge on the island of Salamis--Sis told them to go there when they asked for her help. Meanwhile, their army is headed to Eulexis, to meet with their new allies. (he pauses for dramatic effect) The Spartans.

GABRIELLE (incredulous):

The Athenians and the Spartans are working together?

ARES:

Oh, I can think of stranger--bedfellows. (glances at Xena)

XENA (chuckles):

In that case, we need--

ARES (cuts her off):

Shuttle service to Eulexis? Done.

The three disappear.

CUT TO

The Athenians' army camp. The camera pans over groups of soldiers engaged in various activities to kill time--playing dice, having knife-throwing contests, sharpening their swords, wrestling. The camera then takes us inside the command tent where Tydeus sits on a chair, reading a scroll.

GUARD'S VOICE OUTSIDE:

My lord?

TYDEUS (looks up sharply):

Come in.

A guard enters.

TYDEUS (hopefully):

News of the Spartans?

GUARD (shakes his head):

None, my lord. (Tydeus looks disappointed) But there is some news. Xena, Warrior Princess, and her companion, Gabrielle, have just arrived at the camp. They wish to see you.

TYDEUS (stunned, glances at the scroll he has been reading):

Xena! (eagerly) Show them in, show them in.

The guard goes out. A moment later, Xena and Gabrielle come in.

TYDEUS (rises):

Xena! Gabrielle! This is the most extraordinary coincidence--you won't believe what I was reading just now.

She holds up the scroll. Gabrielle approaches and takes a look. A strange look crosses her face, expressing both pride and painful memories.

GABRIELLE (softly):

It's my scroll... (to Xena) ...the story of how you fought the Persian army.

XENA (looks away uncomfortably):

I had luck on my side... (glances at Gabrielle) ...and desperation.

TYDEUS:

Still, I feel much more hopeful knowing that we have the legendary Xena in our corner. You know what's happening, don't you?

XENA:

We've come straight from Athens--or the ghost town that's left of it. We'll help, in whatever way we can.

GABRIELLE:

We've heard that you are allied with the Spartans now. You're expecting reinforcements from them?

TYDEUS:

Just before we learned of the Persians' attack and were forced to leave the city, Pausanias, the Spartan commander-in-chief, gave me his promise of an alliance. (disappointed look) We agreed to meet here, as soon as possible. Our ambassador in Sparta was supposed to notify us by messenger pigeon when the Spartan army started its march to Eleusis. Yet, so far, there is no word from him. I just hope they get here before the Persians do.

Xena, Gabrielle and Tydeus exchanged worried looks as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Athens, the same room in the government building where we saw Tydeus and Pausanias conferring in the first scene. Now, Mardonius and several of his officers are gathered around a table, looking at some maps. There is a knock on the door.

MARDONIUS:

Come in.

A soldier enters.

SOLDIER:

My lord, there is news of the Athenians.

MARDONIUS (turns around, looking very interested):

Go on.

SOLDIER:

We still don't know where their army went, sir. But the civilians have all taken refuge on the island of Salamis.

MARDONIUS (with a satisfied smile):

Salamis! Once our naval forces arrive from Thessaly, it will take us but a day to get to the island. And then, if the Athenian army finally decides to show up, we will have an added weapon against them in our arsenal.

OFFICER #1:

This is wonderful news, my lord.

MARDONIUS:

Excellent news. Go and send word to our ships to leave without delay.

OFFICER #1 (bows):

Immediately, my lord. The wisdom of your plans--

MARDONIUS (interrupts him impatiently):

Go on!

The officer bows again and leaves with the soldier.

CUT TO

A brook outside the Athenian army camp outside Eulexis, in a flowering meadow with luxuriant trees at the edges. Xena sits by the brook, lost in thought, occasionally throwing pebbles into the water. She looks troubled. Gabrielle comes up and sits down next to her.

GABRIELLE:

Isn't it amazing...such a beautiful, peaceful meadow, full of fragrant flowers and warbling birds, just outside an armed camp.

XENA (absent-mindedly):

Amazing.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

You don't care much for nature, do you.

XENA:

I care for nature. I just don't have a need to make up poems about it.

GABRIELLE (laughs):

Thank the gods for that.

Xena says nothing. Still lost in thought, she picks up another pebble and throws it in the brook, watching the ripples spread.

GABRIELLE (softly):
What are you thinking?

XENA:
The last time I fought the Persians...I nearly lost you.

GABRIELLE:
I'm not the little girl I was then. I can take care of myself now... (in an attempt at humor) Look, I even have my own armor.

XENA (smiles feebly):
I knew you were going to say that. Still, I can't help thinking-- (she trails off and pauses) We have some tough battles ahead. I know what war does to you.

GABRIELLE:
Xena, you shouldn't let yourself get distracted. By worrying about me, or-- (gives her a probing look) by anything else. (Xena lowers her eyes) It's not just that, is it? You're thinking about Ares.

XENA:
The last time I was with him, it was *my* army sweeping across Greece.

[FLASHBACK]

Xena's army conquering a town. People run screaming; some houses are burning.

CUT TO

Xena in her tent, surveying her loot--jewelry, gold and silver plates, bowls and goblets.

CUT TO

Xena, in the saddle, riding in front of her troops.

WARRIORS (chanting):
Xena! Xena! Xena!

Xena throws her head back and laughs triumphantly. The camera pans over to Ares, who is standing to the side, applauding and smiling.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares sparring in a field, in a scene reminiscent of Ares' scene with Livia in "Livia." They repeatedly clash their swords until Ares strikes a hard blow, making Xena's sword fly out of her hand.

ARES:
Come on, you can do better than this!

XENA:

How's this for better?

Xena grabs Ares and aggressively kisses him.

ARES:

Not exactly what I had in mind, but not bad.

Xena smirks. She kicks Ares in the abdomen and does a back flip landing by her sword. She picks it up and they begin the sword fight again.

ARES:

You're still not keeping your focus! Remember, don't let anything distract you! This is war--once you start something, there's no going back!

XENA (still sparring):

Oh, I don't plan on going anywhere but forward!

ARES (parries her blow, in a teasing tone):

Really?

XENA:

I will conquer all of Greece--and I'll keep going until I have the rest of the world at my feet!

ARES:

That's my girl! (he sheathes his sword and comes close to Xena, letting her sword run through his chest as he takes her in his arms) Some day, Xena, all of the known world will tremble at your name!

XENA (with a feral smile):

I hope that day comes soon. Patience isn't my strong suit.

ARES (looks at her with a lustful glint in his eye):

But apparently, it's mine.

He pulls her close and kisses her.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE:

Xena... (she shakes her head a little) When are you going to forgive yourself for your past? You have changed and--I never thought I'd say this, but so has Ares.

XENA:

Don't worry about me. I'll be all right. (she perks up suddenly, her face changing) Go on back to camp. I'll join you soon.

GABRIELLE:

Okay. Don't forget, we're having dinner with Tydeus.

XENA:

Yeah.

Gabrielle gets up and walks away. Blue light flares and Ares flashes into view, standing next to Xena. He sits down at her side.

ARES:

You know, Blondie has a point.

XENA:

Eavesdropping, were you?

ARES:

I never eavesdrop. I just happen to overhear things.

XENA (smiles in spite of herself):

Anyway, since when do you agree with Gabrielle about anything?

ARES:

Ever since we both became members of your fan club. (he caresses her shoulder, letting the knuckles of his other hand touch her face) She's right--it's time for you to forgive yourself. (pauses) It wasn't all your fault, anyway.

XENA (gives him a sharp look):

Don't tell me you're feeling guilty.

ARES (with a look of mock horror):

Guilty? Now, let's not take this *change* thing too far...

Xena chuckles, then grows serious.

XENA:

I never had to follow you, Ares. I always had a choice.

ARES:

So you're not going to blame me for everything, then?

XENA (smiles):

Not *everything*.

They look into each other's eyes. Ares leans over and lightly kisses Xena; then their kiss deepens.

CUT TO

A messenger pigeon flying high in the air, a small rolled-up scroll attached to its leg. The camera follows the bird as it flies over the Athenian army camp and then starts its descent. Some of the soldiers notice it and look up, pointing at the pigeon and gesturing excitedly to each other. Outside the command tent, the pigeon flies down into the hands of one of the soldiers, who carefully detaches the scroll from the bird's leg and goes inside the tent.

CUT TO

Inside the tent, Tydeus and Gabrielle look up as the soldier comes in.

SOLDIER:

A message from Sparta, sir.

TYDEUS (eagerly):

From Sparta! Quick, let me read it.

The soldier hands him the scroll and leaves. Tydeus unrolls the scroll and starts reading. The camera closes in on his face as the look of excitement gives way to one of shock, disbelief and dismay. He looks up at Gabrielle. A close-up of Gabrielle's worried face.

GABRIELLE:

What is it?

CUT TO

Xena and Ares are lying down on the ground near the brook, their arms around each other, locked in a passionate kiss.

GABRIELLE (off-camera):

Xena!

Xena sits up hastily.

ARES (rolls his eyes):

I see that some things never change.

The camera pans over to Gabrielle, who is racing toward them.

XENA (looks worried):

Gabrielle, what happened?

GABRIELLE (runs up to them, out of breath):

They just got a message from Sparta.

ARES:

Bad news?

GABRIELLE:

You know the Spartan army that was supposed to be on its way here? Well, it isn't.

XENA (shocked):

What? They had an agreement!

GABRIELLE (catching her breath):

Pausanias, the Spartan commander, made the agreement with Tydeus. When he got back to Sparta, he was overruled by the governing council. Xena, they still mistrust the Athenians...they don't want an alliance. Instead, they're getting ready to repel the Persian invasion by fortifying the city walls.

XENA:

Fortifying the walls...The fools! Neither army is strong enough to challenge the Persians on its own. This will mean the destruction of Athens *and* Sparta...perhaps all of Greece.

GABRIELLE:

Unless we do something.

She looks from Xena to Ares as we:

FADE OUT

TO BE CONTINUED...

[Xena and Ares' cat-and-mouse game ended during the production of this motion picture.]