

SHIPPER SEASON SEVEN

“Divided We Stand II”

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Logline

When Xena and Gabrielle lead an army against Sabina, Ares must make his choice.

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TEASER

FADE IN

[MONTAGE OF PREVIOUS EPISODE]

ANNOUNCER:

Previously on Xena...

GABRIELLE:

Megara has been invaded? By who?

HAIMON:

Take a guess.

CUT TO

An overhead shot of a vast army on the move through a valley: ranks of foot soldiers and cavalry. The camera slowly pans down to the warrior riding at the head of the army. It's Sabina, with her lieutenant Peneios at her side.

CUT TO

PENEIOS:

I still think it would have been better to wait before taking on Corinth.

CUT TO

XENA:

Hard to believe that after only a few months, she'd have an army large enough to be a threat to a city that size. Then again--it wouldn't surprise me if she was ambitious enough to want to succeed where... (she trails off)

GABRIELLE (softly):

Where you failed?

CUT TO

Eve standing inside a military tent, talking to Sabina.

EVE:

The only interest the Amazon nation has in Corinth is protecting the women and children inside.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Haimon kissing. Xena watching in shock.

CUT TO

XENA:

Come on, Gabrielle. Do you really think you could ever--?

GABRIELLE (throws up her hands):

Okay, here we go! I knew if I waited long enough, sooner or later you'd start rattling off all the reasons why he's wrong for me! So let me have it. He's too short? Too tall? Or maybe you think I should spend my life waiting around for you to get tired of playing with Ares? Why don't we start a list comparing the faults of both our boyfriends, Xena? Believe me, I don't think you or Ares would appreciate that.

CUT TO

Sabina's soldiers streaming over the walls. The defenders of Corinth, led by Xena, Gabrielle, and Haimon, charge at them and start beating them back. From the top of the wall, about a dozen of Sabina's archers fire flaming arrows at the Corinthians.

XENA (shakes her head):

Sabina can't expect to take the city this way. There's something else going on.

CUT TO

XENA (sneers):

Last time I went up against Sabina, she wasn't that difficult to stop.

WARRIOR:

That was before Sabina had the favor of the God of War.

CUT TO

Xena standing, talking to Ares, looking hurt and angry.

XENA (looks at him probingly):

Then tell me you've never spoken to Sabina. (Ares stares at her silently) Tell me you didn't come to see her after I fought her. (off his silent stare, bitterly) I thought so.

CUT TO

GABRIELLE:

Xena, he gave up everything for you--twice. He wouldn't put his ambitions for some second-rate warrior queen ahead of you.

XENA (shakes her head bitterly):

Ares hasn't changed, Gabrielle. I wanted to believe that he could--that he had. Yes, he has some compassion in him, and... (her voice drops as she looks away slightly) ...love. And sometimes, he can act on it and do something completely selfless. But eventually, it's back to normal. Ares can never be good. Not really.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, Eve, and Haimon walking out of the Corinth, surrendering the city to Sabina.

XENA:

The city is yours.

CUT TO

Xena rides along a road, standing in front of her. She stops, looks at him and reaches into her breastplate, taking out the medallion and the pearl and dropping them to the ground. She urges Argo on without looking back. A long shot of Ares standing in the road with his back to the viewer, and Xena ahead of him, riding slowly away in the dusk.

[END OF MONTAGE]

Sunset in the Amazon village. Argo, saddled and ready for travel, waits. Xena steps up to her, giving her halter a perfunctory check.

CUT TO

Ares, perched on the heavy limb of a tree, watching Xena from afar. His jaw is tightly clenched and the look in his eyes is troubled, almost pained. He swallows and folds his arms across his chest.

CUT TO

Xena, who gathers Argo's reins in her hand and climbs into the saddle. She settles herself and then looks down, an unreadable expression on her face.

GABRIELLE (looks off into the distance):

I guess things didn't exactly turn out the way we expected.

XENA:

Sometimes they don't.

A quick burst of white light flashes across the screen and dissolves to:

[FLASHBACK]

A battle rages in an open field. Amazons are battling soldiers. A tight shot of an Amazon being pierced by an arrow and crumbling to the ground with a gasp. The camera pans closer for a close-up of her face, her eyes open and frozen in death, a thin trickle of blood dripping from the corner of her mouth. Then the camera pulls back and up, for an overhead shot of the battle.

CUT TO

Buildings on fire. Piercing, desperate screams are heard.

CUT TO

A large building with columns, enveloped in flames, crumbles in slow motion.

CUT TO

A wide shot of the raging battle. A close-up of two swords, one in a man's hand, the other in a woman's. As the two swords clash, a burst of white light flashes across the screen and fades to:

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA (nods towards Eve):

Make sure she stays out of trouble.

Gabrielle glances over her shoulder at Eve. Eve's side is heavily bandaged and she is looking on mournfully from where she is seated outside of Gabrielle's hut. Gabrielle turns back and gives a weak, sad smile to Xena.

GABRIELLE:

That's one thing you won't ever have to worry about again.

XENA (nods crisply, as if trying to keep a tight rein on her emotions):

I know.

Xena glances over at Eve then at Gabrielle.

XENA:

I'll see you.

She flicks the reins and Argo begins to head away. After only a few steps, Xena stops her and turns back.

XENA:

Gabrielle? (she looks away, her emotions threatening to get the best of her) I'm sorry about Haimon.

GABRIELLE (nods and smiles sadly):

I know.

Xena nods in farewell to Gabrielle, then turns Argo around again. She flicks the reins sharply and Argo takes off at a well-paced gallop.

CUT TO

Gabrielle. As she watches Xena ride away, the camera draws in tighter and tighter on Gabrielle's face until the tears welling in her eyes can clearly be seen.

A quick burst of white light flashes across the screen and dissolves to:

[FLASHBACK]

Gabrielle and Eve are walking closely together as they lead their horses down a narrow, heavily wooded road. They walk in somber silence. Eve's head is bent, she is deep in thought. Finally, she speaks.

EVE:

Gabrielle? Are you sure about this?

GABRIELLE (looks away, as if afraid to look at Eve):

Yes. I wish it didn't have to come to this. But Sabina's made it clear that she's no friend of the Amazon Nation. I'm afraid that if we don't hit her first she'll--

EVE (quietly):

Come after us.

GABRIELLE (stops and faces Eve):

I'm asking you for your opinion, Eve. (she lays a hand on Eve's shoulder) Not as a warrior or the Messenger of Eli. You need to put all that aside and think about your people first.

EVE (speaking almost to herself):

An Amazon Princess can't be afraid to lead her people into battle...or away from it. And she must have the wisdom to know which one to choose.

Gabrielle turns and they resume walking.

GABRIELLE (frowns guiltily):

I know it's not an easy decision for you to make.

EVE (she murmurs a non-committal answer):
Have you talked to my mother about this?

Gabrielle glances over her shoulder. Xena rides well behind them, pointedly not looking in their direction.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):
Not yet.

EVE:
But you will, won't you?

Gabrielle ducks her head, saying nothing.

EVE (grasping Gabrielle by the arm):
Gabrielle, if you're going to lead the Amazons into battle against Sabina, my mother deserves to hear that from you--not from some decision made by a War Council.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head with a bitter laugh):
There was a time when I felt like I could talk about anything with Xena.

EVE (arches her eyebrows):
And now?

GABRIELLE (frowns and looks over her shoulder again):
Now I'm not so sure.

A quick burst of light flashes across the screen:

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Gabrielle is standing in the same spot she was before the flashback began, staring after Xena's figure retreating against the setting sun. Eve is at her side.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head sadly):
Xena and I have been apart before. But this time it feels so...permanent.

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Gabrielle and Eve stand as they were when the teaser ended. Gabrielle's look is stricken. Eve watches her carefully a moment, then lays a comforting hand on her shoulder.

EVE:

Distance won't ever keep you and my mother apart, Gabrielle. You'll always carry her in your heart.

Gabrielle sighs and nods sadly.

EVE:

You had to think of your people.

GABRIELLE:

You know, Eve--there were times that I thought what Xena and I have is a curse. Others have come between us before and we always wound up...losing one another. It's as if being together meant there wasn't room for anyone else.

EVE (lowers her head pensively):

I know...

A quick burst of light flashes across the screen and dissolves to:

[FLASHBACK]

Night. Haimon emerges from the underbrush, illuminated only by the glow of an unseen fire. He stops and looks around, then approaches Gabrielle, who is seated before the campfire, her legs drawn up to her chest. She barely turns her head to acknowledge him as he drops to his haunches beside her. The silence is long and awkward between them until Haimon stretches his hands out to warm them by the flames.

HAIMON:

Where's Eve?

GABRIELLE:

She needed some time alone to think.

HAIMON:

And Xena?

GABRIELLE (sighs and making a sweeping gesture with her hand):

Off scouting the area for signs of Sabina's men.

HAIMON (looks off into the woods):

I've been around the perimeter of this camp at least twenty times. There's no one but us within five leagues of here.

GABRIELLE (smiles bitterly):

Xena only trusts herself when it comes to certain things.

HAIMON (frowning):

Things haven't been...right between you and Xena lately.

Gabrielle glances at him anxiously out of the corner of her eye.

HAIMON:

Is it me? Ever since that night she found us together up on the colonnade--

GABRIELLE (almost sharply):

It doesn't have anything to do with that. It's just...everything. Sabina and Corinth. Xena isn't used to losing.

HAIMON (shakes his head sorrowfully):

She told me once that anger and hatred clouds the mind. And now she's let herself give in to that.

GABRIELLE:

If you knew her like I did, you'd realize it isn't anger. It's humiliation.

HAIMON (he looks at her intensely):

What about you?

GABRIELLE (arches an eyebrow at him):

What about me?

HAIMON:

Gabrielle, you've been walking around in a rage for days now.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head vehemently):

I don't get angry.

HAIMON (laughs lightly):

Oh sure, you try to cover it up, but I've been watching you. Don't you think I see what's going on?

Gabrielle flushes deeply and looks away. It's apparent that the idea of Haimon's attention is unsettling to her.

HAIMON (nods and exhales wearily):

So it's me you're angry at.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon, I'm not--

HAIMON:

I thought we were--that there was something between us. When I kissed you that night, I thought you wanted it too. (he stops and looks away in frustration) Look, if I was mistaken--

GABRIELLE (lays her hand over his and squeezes it insistently):

Haimon. I'm *not* angry at you.

Haimon looks down at her hand holding his and--as if suddenly remembering herself--Gabrielle quickly withdraws it.

HAIMON (sighs):

Then what is it? You've barely spoken ten words to me since we left Corinth. You're using Eve as your personal messenger to go between us. You can't keep avoiding me forever, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (reaches up and rubs her temple contemplatively):

It's not you, Haimon. It's not. It's just...it's me...something I'm not sure I can explain. (she laughs self-derisively) I'm not even sure you would understand it if I did.

HAIMON (reaches out and takes her hand, in a friendly more than romantic gesture):

Try me.

GABRIELLE (she looks down at his hand, a sad, longing expression on her face):

I care about you, Haimon. I do. But... (at a loss, she looks away, unable to meet his gaze. She struggles for a long moment to find the words. Unable to do so, she finally tries a different approach) If I asked you to do something, would you do it?

HAIMON (nods):

Of course I would.

GABRIELLE:

And promise not to ask why?

HAIMON (deep furrows of confusion appear on his forehead and his tone betrays a hint of suspicion):

What do you want me to do?

GABRIELLE:

I'm going to lead the Amazons into battle against Sabina. (she pauses a moment to let Haimon digest that.) Don't follow us. I want you to get as far from Sabina as you possibly can.

HAIMON:

What the hell kind of thing is *that* to ask?

GABRIELLE (looks at him tentatively):

Would you do that--for me?

HAIMON (shakes his head fervently):

Dammit, Gabrielle! No! Not until you tell me why--

Haimon breaks off when he looks up and notices Xena standing broodingly silent on the other side of the campfire. Gabrielle quickly leaps to her feet.

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

XENA (glaring):

We need to talk. (she casts a swift glance at Haimon.) Alone.

GABRIELLE (nods, grateful for the distraction):

Yes! Yes, of course! (she turns slightly towards Haimon.) Would you excuse us a minute?

Haimon makes no response except to stare resentfully. Pretending not to notice, Gabrielle turns and circles the campfire, following Xena out through the underbrush.

CUT TO

Xena standing with her back to the camera, looking off into the distance. Gabrielle steps up behind her. She lifts her hand as if to touch Xena's shoulder and pauses. After a moment's deliberation, Gabrielle tiredly lets her hand drop to her side with a barely audible sigh. Xena turns, glowering at Gabrielle.

XENA:

Were you ever planning on telling me that you were going to war with Sabina?

GABRIELLE (lifts an indignant eyebrow):

Well, I see your hearing is as good as ever.

XENA:

Don't turn this around, Gabrielle. I wouldn't *have* to eavesdrop on your conversations if you had let me in on your plans. After everything we've been through, don't you think I had a right to hear it from you?

GABRIELLE (she looks up at Xena apologetically):

Xena, I was going to tell you--

XENA (gruffly):

Really? When?

Gabrielle looks away, not quite sure of the answer herself.

GABRIELLE:

I don't know...maybe when I was sure I was doing the right thing. I didn't want--

XENA (nods resentfully):

Oh sure, I get it. You didn't want my help. Amazons only, right? Just like every other time.

GABRIELLE (shaking her head, tears of frustration brimming in her eyes):

No! That's not it at all! (she covers her eyes a moment, getting her emotions under control. Finally, she is able to look at Xena again.) I didn't want you talking me out of it, okay?

Xena turns angrily and stalks a few steps away. Gabrielle takes a step towards her and stops, thinking better of approaching Xena. She raises her hands in a futile gesture.

GABRIELLE:

I know you're hurt, Xena--and I'm sorry for that. But this is something I have to work out on my own. The Amazons are counting on me to lead them. I can't do that if I have to turn to you every time I make a decision.

Xena doesn't respond.

GABRIELLE:

Nothing is certain yet anyway. All I can do is convene the War Council and give them my recommendation. It's up to the Council to decide.

Hesitantly, Gabrielle moves closer to Xena. She reaches out and tentatively strokes Xena's arm.

GABRIELLE:

If we do go to war, I'm going to want you there. I couldn't do it otherwise...you know that.

Xena sniffs indignantly and keeps her back to Gabrielle. Close-up on Xena's face; her expression reflects feelings of betrayal, anger, sadness and vague tenderness.

XENA:

What makes you think you can defeat Sabina when Ares is backing her?

GABRIELLE:

Maybe I'm not convinced that Ares *is* backing her.

Xena turns to Gabrielle, gaping at her. She shakes her head and snorts in disbelief.

XENA:

I can't believe it. After all these years, after everything you've seen, you're still an idealist.

GABRIELLE:

You say that like it's a bad thing.

XENA (frowning sadly):

It is. A good leader can't afford that, Gabrielle. You could be leading the Amazons straight into a massacre. The price of your idealism could be the death of your own people. Are you *really* prepared to pay it?

The camera slowly pulls in tighter and tighter on Gabrielle's face as she silently ponders this.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Alone in the hut, Gabrielle sits down at a table, unfurls a scroll and dips a quill in ink. She pauses with her hand over the scroll, lost in thought, tearing up slightly.

There is a "whoosh" and a flash of light. Gabrielle turns around with a start and sees Ares standing behind her. She tenses, pursing her lips. A close-up on Ares' face, immobile and expressionless.

ARES:

Looking for a way to write this one down?

GABRIELLE:

What are you doing here, Ares? (pauses, lowering her eyes) I thought you'd be with *her*.

ARES:

Aren't I full of surprises?

Gabrielle rolls her eyes slightly; Ares sighs and looks away. A long pause.

ARES (still not looking at Gabrielle):

You know, it's amazing. You actually trusted me. You of all people. (turns to her brusquely with a bitter smirk) After everything that's happened, you're still an idealist.

GABRIELLE (raises her eyes):

I had to believe in you...for Xena's sake. I couldn't believe that you'd betray her for Sabina.

Their eyes meet and they stare tensely at each other as a burst of white light flashes across the screen and we dissolve to:

[FLASHBACK]

The palace in Corinth--the headquarters hall from "Divided We Stand Part I". The hall is in disarray. The camera glides over a statue lying on the floor, a smashed vase, a pile of half-burned parchments and scrolls by the fireplace; then pans over to the desk, meticulously neat with scrolls and maps laid out, an amphora and a goblet, and a bowl laden with fruit. Finally the camera pans to Sabina, who stands at the window with her back to the viewer.

Ares materializes in the usual flash of blue light. Sabina tenses slightly and slowly turns around. She grins gleefully, almost letting her self-control slip for a moment. Then she gets hold of herself, the grin changing to a self-satisfied smile.

SABINA:

Ares.

ARES (glares at her):

You know, I've fried people on the spot for much less.

SABINA (leans back slightly, resting her hands on the windowsill):

Less than what? Taking one of the greatest cities in Greece without your permission-- (pauses) or your assistance?

ARES:

Try lying about having my patronage.

SABINA (smiles slyly):

Oh, I don't think that was lying. Just--being a little premature.

ARES (snorts, impressed in spite of himself):

You're good. (glares at her again) But not good enough to get away with this.

SABINA:

Well, you haven't fried me yet, have you? Could it be because you--like my style?

ARES (in a quiet but menacing tone):

You're getting to be more trouble than you're worth.

SABINA:

Trouble? Let me guess...did you get a dressing-down from--one of your fellow gods? Or... (pauses and gives Ares a sly, questioning look) ...from somebody else?

ARES (scowls and points a finger at her):

Hey, hey, hey. I don't answer to anyone. You'd better remember that.

SABINA:

Oh, I will--as long as *you* don't forget it.

Still scowling, Ares walks over to the desk. He sprawls in a chair, puts his legs up on the desk and tilts his head back.

ARES:

So. You've taken Corinth. Now what?

SABINA (comes closer and places her hands on the other side of the desk, leaning forward and flashing a little smile):

Told you I was only getting started. Trust me, I'm aiming pretty high. (she lowers her voice to a half-whisper, her eyes sparkling) I won't stop until I've conquered Rome.

Ares stares at her, then takes his feet off the desk and sits up.

ARES:

Rome. (thoughtfully) You're a Roman, aren't you?

SABINA (a touch of passion in her voice):

I could have been the Empress of Rome now--if my father had been given his due!

ARES (sarcastic):

Really.

Sabina straightens up, walks around the desk and comes up to Ares.

SABINA (standing over Ares):

Before my father served in Xena's army, he was a Roman officer. He was rising fast through the ranks...a little too fast for Caesar's liking. (Ares looks at her attentively) Caesar plotted against him, and he lost his post and had to go into exile. That's why he joined Xena--he knew no one hated Caesar as much as she did.

ARES:

So this is all about avenging Daddy.

There is a momentary flash of emotion in Sabina's face, but then she laughs lightly.

SABINA:

Oh no. My father didn't raise me to be a sentimentalist. I just want to claim what should be mine.

ARES:

Just like you claimed that you had my favor.

SABINA:

I have it now, don't I? (off his silent glare) If you wanted to stop me--all you'd have to do is appear to my troops out there and tell them that I'm a liar. (She reaches over to the tray of fruit on the desk, picks up a peach, bounces it a couple of times in her hand, and finally bites into it.) They would desert me at once, the fools! Everything I've worked so hard to achieve over this past year, all my victories--everything I gained without (meaningfully) asking anyone for help--it would all be undone in one moment.

Ares stands up and stares at her, pressing his lips together. She calmly meets his stare and takes another bite of the peach.

SABINA:

Or--you could let me dedicate this victory to your glory. (Takes another bite as she moves closer to Ares) You could let me give you everything you've ever wanted from Xena. (moves even closer and takes another bite) And I mean *everything*.

Ares stares at her intensely. A close-up on Sabina's face as she slowly licks the half-eaten peach, then parts her lips slightly in a seductive but chilly smile as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

On Sabina smiling seductively at Ares. She puts the peach down on the desk and reaches out to touch his chest. Ares puts his hands on her shoulders and she moves in to kiss him, half-closing her eyes. Then he turns her around and sits her down in the chair. Her eyes fly open in shock.

ARES (suavely):

I'm impressed. (off her wary look) No, really, I am. But I think your conquests are best kept to the battlefield.

Slightly shaken, Sabina smoothes over her leather skirt and clears her throat, trying to regain her composure.

SABINA (looks up at Ares, still not entirely sure of herself):

So--we're a team, then?

ARES (chuckles):

Since when did you need my answer? (Sabina looks at him probingly, obviously trying to figure him out) Go on, Sabina. (Solemnly and sternly) Lead your army to victory. I'll be watching. (He straightens up and throws his head back, preparing to disappear--then looks back at Sabina and smirks, relaxing his posture) By the way--next time you try this routine on someone... (shakes his head as if to say, "You're overdoing it," and lowers his voice to a confidential near-whisper) ...lose the peach.

Ares vanishes. Sabina frowns, then picks up the peach and pensively bites into it.

A quick burst of light flashes across the screen:

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Eve enters Gabrielle's hut.

EVE:

Gabrielle, the ceremonial pyre is almost--

Eve breaks off abruptly when the scene inside the hut registers with her. Gabrielle is still seated at the table, the scroll laid out before her. She rests her forehead against her left hand and nibbles pensively on the end of her quill. Ares stands behind her, his arms folded across his chest.

EVE:

Oh...

Gabrielle looks up at her and Eve glances uneasily at Ares.

EVE:

I could come back later--

ARES:

Actually, I think this is my cue. Besides, I've got bigger fish to fry than hanging around here, listening to your pressing tribal matters.

Ares disappears in a flash of blue light. Eve takes a step towards Gabrielle.

EVE:

What was he doing here? I thought--

GABRIELLE:

I'm not really sure. (she smirks) Maybe he just wanted to make sure his reputation as a cold-hearted bastard wasn't totally compromised.

EVE (murmurs to herself):

I don't think there's any danger of that happening anytime soon.

GABRIELLE (chuckles wryly):

No. Probably not. (she stares down at her scroll, lets out a fatalistic sigh and slowly rolls the scroll back up) No point in this now, I guess. It'll be some time before even *I* can believe this story enough to write about it. (she tucks the scroll away in her pack) You said the ceremonial pyre is almost ready?

Eve nods wordlessly and Gabrielle studies her a moment.

GABRIELLE:

Are you nervous?

EVE:

I just hope I've done the right thing.

GABRIELLE (lays her hand on Eve's shoulder and squeezes it in reassurance):

You *have*. Eve, this ceremony is a sign of our endurance. No matter what happens, the Amazon Nation carries on.

EVE (tiredly drops into the chair Gabrielle had just occupied):

Gabrielle, the woman that gave you her rite of caste--what was she like?

GABRIELLE:

Terreis? Well, I really only know what others have told me. (smiles reflectively.) I suppose she did make an impression on me, even though I didn't know her all that long. Terreis was a true Amazon--brave, loyal, smart. But I think what I noticed right away about her was her sense of justice. (Gabrielle looks down, fond memories softening her expression.) She would have been a great leader.

EVE (frowns and leans forward, resting her elbows on her knees):

Terreis wouldn't have had any doubt about leading the Amazons to war against Sabina, would she?

GABRIELLE:

You're wrong, Eve. No one makes a decision like that lightly.

Eve stares doubtfully up at Gabrielle for a long moment.

A quick burst of white light flashes across the screen and dissolves to:

[FLASHBACK]

A large hut with lit wall torches hung completely around the room every few feet. In the center of the room a dozen Amazons have gathered in a semi-circle. Gabrielle, now clothed in her Amazon garb and wearing the necklace that signifies her as Queen, sits at the center. Eve is seated to her right and Cyane to her left. A loud din of voices is heard as Gabrielle remains quiet, looking on patiently. Eve glances at her expectantly while Cyane frowns at the arguing women.

Xena is standing near the entrance, leaning against the wall with her arms folded sullenly across her chest.

AMAZON #1:

If we go against Valeria Sabina, it's the death of the Amazon Nation!

AMAZON #2:

And how much time do you think we have left if we *don't* oppose her?

AMAZON #3:

I'd rather die all at once, with a sword in my hands, than bit by bit as one of Sabina's whipped dogs.

AMAZON #1:

Spoken like a true Celt barbarian! I'd appreciate it if you didn't volunteer *me* for any of your suicide missions!

AMAZON #3:

As if I'd want to die fighting beside a Norse cow like you!

The arguing increases in intensity and Xena rolls her eyes in irritation and glares at Gabrielle, who is calmly observing each Amazon. Finally, Cyane raises her hands to silence them.

CYANE:

That's enough! This fighting is getting us nowhere! We've heard Queen Gabrielle's recommendation and the arguments both for and against going to war with Sabina. Now it's time to vote.

AMAZON #2:

Wait! With Varia gone, there are only twelve of us on the Council. What happens if there's a tie?

GABRIELLE:

As Queen, I reserve the right to cast the deciding vote. (she takes a deep breath and glances around the room) It's time. Those in favor of going into battle against Valeria Sabina, stand.

Four Amazons stand at once. Slowly, a fifth rises. The camera pans across the remaining women and stops at Cyane, who's head is bent deep in deliberation. With a weary sigh, she stands and glances around the room. The remaining women stay seated.

GABRIELLE (nods calmly):

A tie. The decision is up to me.

AMAZON #1 (snidely):

Pack your swords and spears and kiss your loved ones goodbye, ladies. It's off to war.

GABRIELLE (darts a scathing glance at her then thinks a moment):

Since you already know where I stand, it wouldn't be fair for me to cast the deciding vote. It's within my rights to yield to my next in line.

Gabrielle slowly turns her head to look at Eve.

EVE (gapes as the realization falls on her):

Me?

AMAZON #1 (snorts derisively):

Oh sure--that's fair. Give the deciding vote to your little puppet!

GABRIELLE (ignoring her and looking at the rest of the Amazons):

Eve is the only one here that hasn't given her opinion yet. I know that she'll make her decision based on what she believes is best for the Amazon Nation--regardless of what I think.

CUT TO

Xena takes half a step forward as if to put a stop to this. Obviously with great restraint, she stops and steps back, waiting. She stares anxiously at Eve.

Open-mouthed, Eve looks into the face of each Amazon as they watch her expectantly. Eve studies them carefully. Finally, her gaze comes to rest on Gabrielle, who is smiling in a gentle, neutral way. She looks across the room at Xena. Mother and daughter exchange a long, tense look. Eve bows her head and slowly rises, taking her place with the other six Amazons.

CUT TO

The scene slowly cross-fades to the same hut, some time later. The Council has dispersed and Eve and Gabrielle are alone. Eve's head is bent and she grips a staff tightly in her hands. Gabrielle watches her closely.

EVE:

I did the right thing, Gabrielle. (she is silent a moment, then turns and speaks with a little less conviction) Didn't I?

GABRIELLE:

You have to reconcile your decision with your own conscience, Eve. I can't do that for you. But I will tell you that I think you acted in the best interest of the Amazon Nation. (a sad smile) Though I'm not sure that helps.

EVE (murmuring thoughtfully):

It does.

There is a "whoosh" and a flash of light. The two women turn with a start and see Ares, who stands watching them with an unreadable expression on his face. Eve walks over to the wall and half-turns away, while Gabrielle obviously steels herself and meets his eye.

GABRIELLE:

What are you doing here, Ares? Wouldn't your time be better spent trying to convince Xena that you aren't helping Sabina?

ARES (chuckles bitterly):

Convince her? There are things even a god can't do. Getting Xena to change her mind once she's made it up happens to be one of them. (pauses and tilts his head) Besides, why should I want to convince her I'm not helping Sabina?

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Because I don't believe you are.

ARES:

Really. (pauses, pursing his lips) I'm touched.

GABRIELLE (passionately):

I just don't believe that after everything you've done for Xena, you would throw away--

ARES (holds out a hand, silencing her):

Let's leave Xena out of this for the moment. I wanted to talk to *you*--in an official capacity.

GABRIELLE (frowns in puzzlement):

Official...?

ARES:

As God of War to Queen of the Amazons. (Gabrielle stares at him, narrowing her eyes) You're going to lead them against Sabina. I'm sure you could use the help of a god.

Eve turns to him, her face expressing a mix of pleasant surprise and uncertainty.

GABRIELLE (with a sigh of relief):

Ares, I knew you'd--

ARES (holds out his hand again):

Not so fast. There are strings attached. (Gabrielle's face crumbles) You see, Xena was right about Sabina. (Gabrielle stares at him, horrified; a quick close-up of Eve, who looks disgusted.) She *is* everything I've always wanted in a Warrior Queen. Oh, don't get me wrong--she's not Xena. No one else is. But sometimes you have to take what you can get. So, if I'm going to pass up that kind of opportunity--I want something in return. (he pauses and comes closer to Gabrielle) Right after I got my godhood back, I made a deal with Varia. The Amazons were going to worship me as their patron god. Then Xena got involved and messed it all up.

GABRIELLE (eyes widening):

You want the Amazons to--

ARES:

To swear their allegiance to me.

EVE (vehemently):

You bastard!

ARES (turns to her, mockingly):

Oh, we have company. (yurns back to Gabrielle, his face growing grim) I'm a god, Gabrielle. I need worshippers. I need warriors who'll fight in my name. It's who I am.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head bitterly):

Ares...that's not all you are.

ARES:

I think it's about time for me to start being professional about this. (looks at her wryly) So, you need time to think?

EVE:

No, she doesn't.

GABRIELLE (turns to Eve and shakes her head slightly, stopping her, then looks at Ares again):

Ares, if the Amazons follow you, all you'll do is get them into more wars.

ARES:

You seem to be doing that with no help from me.

GABRIELLE (turns crimson):

This is different. We're fighting a just war. And besides--

ARES:

And besides, what?

GABRIELLE (lowers her head):

I was hoping that right now, gaining worshippers wouldn't be the most important--

(her voice breaking off, she shakes her head slightly and then looks up) The answer is no.

ARES (crosses his arms on his chest):

Very well. You've made your choice. Don't blame me for making mine.

As the blue light starts to flare around him, Gabrielle calls out.

GABRIELLE:

Ares!

ARES (the blue light around him fading):

What?

GABRIELLE:

Why are you doing this?

ARES:

Because it's what I do.

GABRIELLE:

Xena believes you're back to being a cold bastard who's only out for himself--and you think that because she'll believe it no matter what, you might as well prove her right.

Ares clenches his jaws and swallows hard, his eyes flickering. Without another word, he flashes out of sight. Gabrielle stares at the spot where he vanished, then looks at Eve.

GABRIELLE (firmly):

Eve, I want you to do me a favor.

EVE (puzzled):

What?

GABRIELLE:

Don't tell Xena about--what just happened. (off Eve's bewildered look) Not yet.

A close-up on Gabrielle's anguished face.

CUT TO

The exterior of the Amazon village. It's morning and the sun has just risen. The village is in a flurry of activity as the warriors are preparing for the march. Eve and Klymene come out of a hut. Eve draws a comforting arm around the girl's shoulders.

KLYMENE:

I don't understand why you have to go.

EVE (shakes her head and smiles gently):

Klymene, we talked about this last night. You know why.

Klymene's lips tremble as if she's fighting to hold back her tears.

KLYMENE:

But you told me killing is wrong.

EVE:

No. There's a difference between killing out of hatred and revenge and fighting for what you believe in. I've learned that here.

Klymene stares up at Eve resentfully.

EVE:

Klymene, I'm doing this for you. For you and for all of my...sisters.

KLYMENE:

But you might... (she wipes at a tear in frustration and looks away) and I'd never know what happened. (she looks up at Eve beseechingly) You could take me with you. That way--

EVE (shakes her head):

No, Klymene. (Eve slips her arm around Klymene's shoulders and leads the girl over to sit upon a tree stump, then sinks down to her knees.) You have to stay, in case anything happens to Gabrielle and me. (Eve takes a deep breath and takes the girl's hands in her own.) Klymene, I want you to take my rite of caste. If I don't come back, I want to know that the future of the Amazon Nation is in good hands. (Eve squeezes the girl's hands affectionately.) Will you promise me that?

KLYMENE (bows her head and nods miserably):

I promise.

Xena and Gabrielle emerge from Gabrielle's hut. They walk side by side, the look on their faces sedated. Eve watches in confusion as Xena slips a saddlebag off her shoulder and slings it across Argo's back. She is obviously preparing the horse for travel. Eve rises to her feet.

EVE:

Klymene, wait here.

Xena and Gabrielle look up as Eve approaches, a cautious expression on her face.

XENA:

I was just coming to find you.

EVE:

Where are you going?

XENA:

To Athens.

EVE:

Athens? But we're marching to Corinth tomorrow morning.

GABRIELLE:

Your mother is going there to raise an army, Eve.

XENA (nods):

I'm betting the Athenians aren't sleeping too well knowing that Sabina and her army are practically next door. I don't think they'll mind helping out if it means bringing Sabina to heel once and for all.

GABRIELLE (to Eve):

Don't worry. We're going to meet up with her outside Larissa in a week.

XENA (nods):

Right. At the crossing to the Peneus River.

GABRIELLE (stiffly reaches out and squeezes Xena's arm):

Good luck.

XENA (awkwardly patting Gabrielle's hand):

You too.

Gabrielle smiles uneasily at Xena and turns to walk away in order to give Xena and Eve a moment alone. She stops and turns back.

GABRIELLE:

Xena? Why don't you take Haimon with you to Athens? I mean...you could probably use some help.

XENA (quickly masks her odd, confused look):

Uh...sure. I suppose. I'll be heading out soon. Make sure he's ready.

GABRIELLE (nods, nearly gasping with relief):

He'll be ready. Oh--and one more thing. (she bows her head and murmurs) Make sure he stays in Athens. Please. (she looks up at Xena imploringly) Do you understand?

XENA (nods and smiles sorrowfully):

I think I do.

Gabrielle turns and walks off, leaving mother and daughter to stare tensely at one another a moment. Absently, Eve reaches out and begins to fiddle with a loose strap on Argo's saddle.

EVE (softly):

You're disappointed in me, aren't you?

XENA (shakes her head in bewilderment):

Disappointed? Why?

EVE:

I saw the way you looked at me after I cast my vote.

XENA:

Oh... (she looks away guiltily) I'm just worried about you, Eve. (grips Eve's shoulder) Whatever you do, I want it to be because it's the right thing for you--not because you've been told it's the right thing by me or Gabrielle.

EVE (looks up at Xena defensively):

Gabrielle didn't try to sway my decision, Mother. She wanted me to follow my own conscience.

XENA (smiles apologetically and reaches out to stroke Eve's cheek with the back of her hand):

Right. I guess I should know the both of you better than that.

EVE (peers curiously at Xena):

You've been so distant lately. Is that why? You think Gabrielle has been a...bad influence on me?

XENA:

No! No, that's not it at all! You and Gabrielle have been spending so much time together lately. Your rite of caste is a bond between you that I'll never... (Xena trails off and shakes her head as if to shake off feelings of insecurity)

EVE (shocked):

You're my *mother*. And Gabrielle--she loves you...

XENA:

And I love her. But with Gabrielle...things are a little more complicated now. Her Amazons come first. And I understand that...at least I'm trying to. When it comes to her and the Amazons, I'll always be an outsider.

EVE (her gaze drops sadly):

It's strange. For so long, I was jealous of what you and Gabrielle had. There were times I wished she would just go away so that I could have you all to myself. And now, I just wish things could go back to the way they were.

XENA:

I guess we've all got to learn to accept change. (Xena's attention is caught by something over Eve's shoulder. She arches her eyebrows) Though I suppose that's a harder lesson for some than for others.

Eve turns and sees Gabrielle and Haimon engaged in a heated argument. Meanwhile, three Amazons bustle about them, preparing Haimon's horse for travel. We can faintly hear Gabrielle say to Haimon "take care of yourself." Then she clasps her hands behind his neck and pulls him down for a short, though intense kiss. Abruptly, Gabrielle releases him and turns away, marching back into her hut, leaving a perplexed Haimon staring after her. He takes a step as if to follow her, but a look at the two Amazons standing guard at the door quickly discourages him.

XENA (wryly):

I suppose I should get Haimon out of here before he does something stupid and finds himself chained up. (she turns to Eve, touching her cheek tenderly) I'll see you in a week, okay?

EVE (nods, tears welling in her eyes):

A week.

Mother and daughter hug and then Xena turns and climbs up onto Argo.

XENA:

Eve--I'm counting on you to look after Gabrielle.

EVE (reaches up and squeezes Xena's hand confidently):

That's one thing you'll never have to worry about.

Xena smiles gratefully at Eve and takes up the reins in her hand. She gently nudges Argo's flanks. Close-up of Eve's face as she watches her mother ride off. After a moment, Eve sadly shakes her head and turns back towards Klymene.

CUT TO

A large column of Amazons on horseback, riding through a densely wooded forest. Gabrielle is heading them, Eve is at her side. Gabrielle picks her head up as a rider can be heard approaching.

GABRIELLE (holds up a hand to halt the column):

Whoa!

Aia--an Amazon scout--gallops up, coming to a breathless halt before Gabrielle.

AIA:

There's three men across the stream shadowing our movements. They're dressed as farmers, but I heard them talking. They're Sabina's scouts.

GABRIELLE:

All right. (she turns in her saddle to address a woman behind her) Cyane, keep the column moving forward. Aia, Eve--come with me. This is one message Sabina isn't going to get.

CUT TO

Three men in farmers' clothing walk beside a stream. They look around cautiously, as if sensing that something isn't right. Scout #1 stops and holds up his hand, his eyes darting to the trees. He slowly draws his sword and his two companions do the same.

Gabrielle, Eve and Aia drop from the trees, surrounding the three men. Gabrielle and Aia have swords; Eve carries a staff.

Gabrielle eyes Scout #1 warily; he emits a low growl and charges her. Eve sidesteps a lunge from Scout #2 and he stumbles; she spins around to face him, crouching into a defensive position. He recovers his balance and charges her again. She delivers a hard blow to his chest and he lands on his back, gasping; as he tries to get up, she knocks him out with a blow to the head. She turns just in time to see Aia disarmed and laying on the ground, the third scout pinning her down with his knees. Eve leaps to her feet.

CUT TO

Gabrielle, who is still fighting Scout #1. She delivers a hard kick, which sends him stumbling backward. Gabrielle turns her head and sees Scout #3 raise his sword above his head. A close-up of Aia holding her hands up in front of her face.

Gabrielle is suddenly knocked to her knees by Scout #1, who has recovered his fighting stance. She loses her grip on her sword.

A tight show of Aia as Scout #3 brings his sword down, running it through her chest.

EVE (off camera):
Aia!

CUT TO

Gabrielle, on one knee. She draws a sai from her boot, ducks a swipe of Scout #1's blade and, with a savage yell, plunges her sai into his stomach. He drops his sword and hangs there a moment, a shocked expression on his face, then slowly crumples to the ground, dead. Gabrielle leaps to her feet and hurtles herself at Scout #2, who is trying to yank his sword from Aia's chest. Gabrielle lands on him, knocking him off of Aia's body, then leaps up. Scout #2 is only halfway to his feet before Gabrielle kicks him hard across the face. He sprawls on his back; a close-up of his face, his eyes rolling up. Gabrielle kicks him again in the head and he passes out. In a rage, she continues to kick him in the ribs and the head.

GABRIELLE:
You son of a--

Two arms encircle her waist from behind and pull her away. She tries to break free, then turns to see Eve holding her.

EVE:
He's beaten, Gabrielle. There's no reason to kill him.

Gabrielle fights Eve a moment longer, staring at her with almost unseeing eyes. Then she glances down at the unconscious man and seems almost frightened. She gasps and looks away.

A quick burst of white light flashes across the screen:

[END OF FLASHBACK]

A tight shot of Gabrielle. Night is rapidly falling and she looks on pensively as the Amazons prepare the ceremonial pyre, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

The same shot as at the end of ACT TWO: Gabrielle looks on as the Amazons prepare the ceremonial pyre. The sudden blaze of the fire can be heard and Gabrielle's face glows from the flames. Sensing something, she turns her head slightly and the camera pulls back until Ares can be seen standing behind her.

GABRIELLE:

I thought you had more important things to do.

ARES:

Maybe that was before I knew there was going to be a bunch of half-naked Amazons dancing and rolling around.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Go away, Ares. I don't have time for this.

Gabrielle turns to cast a challenging look at Ares but he doesn't move. He looks at her solemnly and she turns away.

ARES:

Who would have believed it? You've become a true warrior.

GABRIELLE (brusquely):

Is that supposed to make me feel good?

ARES:

It doesn't matter how you feel about it. You are what you are.

GABRIELLE (bitterly):

And what is that? The kind of person who nearly beat an unconscious man to death?

ARES:

Nobody would have blamed you if you had. It's war--sometimes, you just do what you need to do to win.

GABRIELLE:

That sounds like something Sabina would say.

Ares looks at her pensively.

A quick burst of white light flashes across the screen and we:

[FLASHBACK]

The headquarters hall at the Corinthian palace. Sabina sits at her desk looking over a map, twirling a dagger in her hand. There is a knock on the door. After a moment the door opens and Peneios comes in.

PENEIOS:

Sabina.

SABINA (without lifting her head):

Any news?

PENEIOS:

None.

SABINA (looks up, a slightly worried look on her face):

So, still no word from our scouts?

PENEIOS (shakes his head):

No. (after a pause) You think it's--

SABINA:

Xena. (in a low, intense voice) Of course it's her! She's up to something. (thoughtfully) I never should have let them leave Corinth alive.

PENEIOS (gives her a quizzical, somewhat skeptical look):

Then why did you?

SABINA (in an icy voice):

Are you implying that I was afraid to take on Xena? (she glares at Peneios until he lowers his eyes) I had--other priorities. (pauses and twirls the dagger again) But maybe I was too generous. At the very least, I should have kept her precious little girl as insurance. Xena's on the move, I can feel it.

PENEIOS (looks up again):

So what do we do now?

SABINA:

We wait. Theron's army left the Pindus Mountains four days ago; three more days

and they should be here. With such reinforcements, I'm not worried about any tricks Xena could have up her sleeve. (pauses) Now go and tell the men to be ready for battle. (off his expectant look, raising her voice slightly) I said, go! You're dismissed.

Peneios bows his head and leaves. Sabina twirls the dagger and then, with a frustrated growl, drives it into an orange on the tray in front of her. A "whoosh" is heard off-camera and she turns around quickly to see Ares standing there, his arms folded, a somewhat sarcastic look on his face.

ARES:

Punishing innocent fruit?

SABINA (trying to be lighthearted):

Ah--is anyone in this world really innocent?

ARES (looks at the tray):

I'd say oranges come pretty close. You're not losing your cool, are you?

SABINA (snorts):

Why should I lose my cool?

ARES (scrunches up his eyebrows, pretending to think):

Hmm...because you're learning some important lessons?

SABINA (brusquely):

What kind of lessons?

ARES:

Just a few things from the warlord's handbook. For instance, that it's one thing to conquer a city and another to hold on to it. Or that it's not very smart to make enemies that you're not sure you can beat.

SABINA (eyes narrowing slightly):

You think I'm afraid of Xena?

ARES:

Let's say you're worried about her.

SABINA (with a pleasant smile):

You wouldn't happen to know what she's up to, would you?

ARES (smirks at her):

You want me to spy for you? I'm afraid I'm a little overqualified for the job. Besides, I thought you weren't asking for my help.

SABINA (raises her chin a little):

I'm not. I was just asking a question. (she rises from the chair so that she's at eye level with Ares, and stares at him coolly) Actually, I'm not worried about Xena at all. I

know she's out there raising an army against me--probably the Amazons. But I'm one step ahead of her. You know who Theron is, don't you?

ARES (shrugs):

A warlord who holds a small patch of ground near the Pindus Mountains?

SABINA:

A warlord who has an army of more than five hundred--and is bringing it right here. I promised him a post in my army, he promised me his men.

ARES:

That's not an army--it's a large band of cutthroats with a lot of aggression and very little discipline.

SABINA (nods, with a hint of a smile on her lips):

Oh, I know that. But they can be a good buffer for my valuable troops. When Xena gets here with an army in tow, I'll put Theron and his men on the front lines to take the hit. With any luck, I won't have too many troublemakers left to deal with after it's over.

ARES (gives her a long stare):

I *am* impressed.

SABINA (a satisfied smile flashes on her face):

Thought you would be.

ARES:

So that way, you consolidate your hold on Corinth...

SABINA:

And then, use its wealth to recruit more soldiers--and move on to bigger things.

ARES (stares at her thoughtfully):

I'm sure you will. (pauses) I'll see you around.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Close up on Ares. The camera pulls back until the shot includes Gabrielle. They are standing in the same position as they were before the flashback. Gabrielle faces the pyre while Ares stands behind her. Darkness has fallen; Gabrielle and Ares are bathed in the glow of the flames.

ARES:

You have to admit one thing about Sabina. Once she decided on a course of action, she never second-guessed herself.

GABRIELLE (scoffs):

You're telling me I should be more like Sabina?

ARES:

Maybe you could learn a thing or two from her.

Gabrielle lowers her head and a quick burst of white light flashes across the screen and dissolves to:

[FLASHBACK]

Late afternoon. The Amazons are camped beside the Peneus River. Small campfires glow every dozen yards or so. Gabrielle and Eve sit before their own fire. Eve glances off into the woods expectantly while Gabrielle warms her hands near the flames.

EVE:

Where is she? She's supposed to be here already.

GABRIELLE (calmly):

She'll be here.

They sit in silence a few moments, Eve jittery and Gabrielle patient. Seeing Eve's anxiety, Gabrielle reaches out and pats Eve's hand with a smile.

GABRIELLE:

Relax, Eve. You can count on Xena the way you can count on the sun rising in the east--maybe even more so.

A voice calls out from a distance.

AMAZON:

Rider's coming!

GABRIELLE (grins):

You see? That's her now.

Xena gallops up through the trees and leaps down off of Argo, handing her off to a waiting Amazon. Eve rushes up to Xena, hugging her and then stepping back.

XENA:

I expected you to be further downriver. I almost didn't find you.

GABRIELLE:

We got a little sidetracked this morning and had to cross a little further up.

XENA:

Trouble?

GABRIELLE:

We caught a few of Sabina's scouts following us. Nothing we couldn't handle. (she smiles genuinely) It's good to have you back, Xena. How did it go in Athens?

XENA (sighs):

Not too bad. They wouldn't raise a real army--after the recent battle with the Persians, they weren't in the mood for another big war. But they've heard enough

about Sabina to get nervous. So they're sending over one regiment. It'll be waiting for us at Melios--that's a village halfway between Athens and Corinth.

GABRIELLE:

Great! So I guess we camp here tonight and head out for Corinth in the morning?

XENA:

Sounds like a plan. (she sniffs at herself diffidently) I've been riding non-stop since late last night. I think I should wash up in the river before I'm in polite company. I smell like Argo.

GABRIELLE (catches a whiff and wrinkles her nose):

Phew! More like Argo smells like you.

Xena gives her a mock-insulted look and Gabrielle laughs lightly. Xena shakes her head and walks off. Gabrielle stands still for a moment, a wistful look on her face.

AMAZON (off-screen):

Another rider coming!

Gabrielle flinches and turns. The quick flash of joy on her face quickly gives way to shock and dismay.

CUT TO

Xena bathing in the river. She cups some water in her hands and scrubs at her face then pauses, cocking her head to one side. The camera pans over to Gabrielle racing to the edge of the water.

XENA (wryly):

I don't suppose you're here to tell me any good news like Sabina has decided to surrender Corinth and dedicate herself to a life of love and peace?

GABRIELLE (glaring):

Xena, you brought Haimon back with you.

Xena swims to the bank and gets out of the water while Gabrielle glowers at her. She pulls on her shift.

XENA:

I didn't *bring* him back. Haimon's a grown man, he can make his own decisions.

GABRIELLE:

I asked you to leave him in Athens.

XENA:

What did you want me to do, Gabrielle? Lock him up and throw away the key?

GABRIELLE:

If that's what it would have taken--yes! At least that way I'd know he'd be...

Gabrielle trails off and turns away.

XENA (gently):

Alive?

Gabrielle flinches.

XENA (nods):

So that's it then. I thought so.

GABRIELLE:

Anyone that I've ever been...close to...ends up... (she smiles bitterly) After Perdicus, I decided it must be me. I don't think I can go through that again.

Xena steps around to face Gabrielle, laying her hands on her shoulders.

XENA:

You can't live the rest of your life in fear, Gabrielle--afraid to love. (an almost beseeching look) You just can't.

CUT TO

The same riverbank, but it's almost dark now. Gabrielle's horse is drinking while Gabrielle stands next to it, patting its flank. With a "whoosh" and a flash, Ares materializes by her side. Gabrielle flinches slightly, her lips twitching. She looks at the stream. Ares stands for a few moments watching her silently.

GABRIELLE (finally losing patience):

What do you want, Ares?

ARES (grabs her by the shoulder and turns her around):

I want you to listen to reason.

GABRIELLE (smirks bitterly):

Really. I never figured you for the voice of reason.

ARES (brutally):

I'm really not interested in trading witty remarks, Gabrielle. (as she opens her mouth, he holds up a finger in a warning gesture) Listen to me. This is a war you can't win. Sabina has reinforcements coming--the warlord Theron and his army of more than five hundred men, riding toward Corinth from the Pindus Mountains at this very moment. Three more days, and they'll join Sabina. When you get there, you and your Amazons won't stand a chance. (he pauses, staring at her intently) Do you understand?

GABRIELLE (looks back at him, her mouth slightly open, then narrows her eyes):
Is this a scare tactic to get me to pledge the Amazons' loyalty to you? I already told you, the answer is--

ARES (tightens his grip on her shoulder and brings his face closer to her):
Think about what I told you, Gabrielle.

He releases her shoulder, steps back and vanishes in a flash of light.

Gabrielle stares after him, frowning slightly, obviously trying to figure this out. Then her eyes widen; she yanks at her horse's bridle and runs toward the camp.

CUT TO

The Amazon camp. Eve and Xena are sitting by a small campfire, Eve with her back to Xena, Xena slowly brushing Eve's hair with a tender smile on her face. Sleeping Amazons can be seen around them.

GABRIELLE (comes running, slightly out of breath):
Xena, Eve--we--

The two women turn toward her with a start. Her voice breaking off, Gabrielle looks rather uncomfortable, realizing that she has interrupted an intimate moment.

XENA (frowns slightly):
What is it, Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE (kneels next to them):
We have to turn around.

EVE (puzzled):
What are you talking about?

GABRIELLE (furrows her brow in concentration):
If an army of five hundred men was headed on horseback from the Pindus Mountains toward Corinth and they were within three days of getting there, where would they be?

XENA (brusquely):
What is this, a quiz?

GABRIELLE:
Come on, Xena--where would they be now?

Xena frowns, thinking. Eve looks calmly at her mother and Gabrielle.

EVE:
They'd be approaching Amphissa, about twenty leagues west of here. (off Xena

and Gabrielle's slightly surprised looks, with bitter irony) If there's one thing they teach you in the Roman army, it's to memorize maps and calculate distances.

Xena bites her lip and lowers her eyes. Gabrielle sighs but steadily meets Eve's gaze.

GABRIELLE:

Then tomorrow morning, we're heading that way.

XENA (suspiciously):

What's going on?

GABRIELLE:

Sabina's expecting reinforcements from a warlord named Theron. (Xena nods grimly, obviously recognizing the name, and then gives Gabrielle another wary look) If they get to Corinth before we do--

XENA:

How exactly did you come by this information?

GABRIELLE:

Does it matter?

XENA:

Of course it does! How do you know that it's reliable? (Gabrielle looks away silently; Xena stares at her and then narrows her eyes) Wait a minute...you didn't get it from Ares, did you?

Gabrielle looks at her defensively. Xena's face reflects a mix of shock, hopefulness and distrust. She turns away.

EVE:

Gabrielle, do you really think we can trust Ares? (gives Gabrielle a penetrating, meaningful look) It could be a trap, or a distraction--he could be trying to delay us and buy Sabina more time...

Gabrielle is silent for a moment. Her face shows an emotional struggle. She looks at Eve, and then at Xena. Their eyes meet.

XENA (softly):

It's your call, Gabrielle. The Amazons are your people.

GABRIELLE (rises to her feet, a resolute look on her face):

Then I've made my choice. We march toward Amphissa tomorrow morning.

CUT TO

A montage: the Amazons are marching down a road, past forests, hills, and villages. Gabrielle, Eve and Cyane are riding at the head of the Amazon army, while Xena and Haimon are riding to the side. Meanwhile an army of scruffy, thuggish-looking men on

horseback is moving in the other direction, led by Theron, a stocky red-headed, red-bearded man in dark leathers.

An overhead shot of the road as the two armies close in on each other and begin to slow down. The camera pans down as the armies come to a halt, and closes in on Theron and Gabrielle, who are facing each other at a distance no more than two paces. Theron then turns his head to look at Xena, who gives him a dangerous smile. He looks shocked.

THERON (in a heavy, raspy voice):
Xena! Long time, no see.

XENA (smiling):
Indeed. Last time we met, you were just a kid leading a small gang of thugs. If memory serves me right, I took your toys away and sent you back to your room.

THERON (scowls):
Lots of things have changed.

XENA:
Yeah. You're twenty-seven years older and you're leading a much bigger gang.

THERON (lifts up his hands, looking a little nervous):
I have no quarrel with you, Xena. Me and the boys are just headed to--

XENA (still smiling pleasantly):
Corinth?

THERON (stunned):
How did you know?

XENA:
Let's just say I have my sources. (darts a quick look at Gabrielle) Well, I'm afraid your trip is canceled.

THERON (scowls):
Says who?

XENA:
Me and my friends.

She points to the Amazons. At Gabrielle's signal, the Amazons raise their bows and spears, taking aim. Theron's men find themselves staring into a forest of weapons.

THERON (looks at Xena uncertainly):
You think I'll just let you push me around again?

XENA:
I don't think you have much of a choice.

THERON (turning crimson):

We'll see about that!

The camera pans over to Eve, who has a resolute look on her face.

EVE:

Just a minute, Mother. (to Theron) Theron, tell me--

THERON (stared at her with awe):

You're Xena's daughter? You're Livia of Rome, aren't you?

EVE (bows her head for a moment, her face darkening):

There is no more Livia. I'm Eve, a princess of the Amazon nation, and I want to ask you something. Your alliance with Valeria Sabina--what do you plan to get out of it?

THERON (scoffs):

High rank in a conquering army. Good enough for me.

EVE:

And what makes you think you'll get that? Do you really believe that Sabina would tolerate a high-ranking officer in her army who had his own loyal following? (waves an arm toward the army behind Theron) Chances are, she's planning to use you and your men, and then destroy you the moment she no longer needs you.

Xena gives Eve a proud, pleased look.

THERON:

What makes you think that?

EVE (lowers her head again, softly):

Because that's what Livia would have done.

Theron is starting to hesitate.

XENA (looks at his uncertain expression and seizes the chance):

Come on, Theron. If you want to keep your date with Sabina, you'll have to go through us first. And even if you do--which I doubt--all you'll be doing is walking into a trap. She'll double-cross you in the end. (off his increasingly hesitant look, as he fidgets and grunts inarticulately) You'll save yourself a lot of trouble if you turn around now. I can even promise I won't bother you much if you behave.

THERON:

And how to you think it's going to look to my men if I turn tail and run without a fight?

XENA:

How's it gonna look to them if you get knocked down on your behind?

Theron glowers at her silently and finally turns to his army.

THERON:

We're turning back!

A murmur runs through the ranks. The camera pans over to Gabrielle, who gives Eve a quick smile and a pat on the shoulder.

CUT TO

Night. A long shot of Corinth in the distance, illuminated by the moonlight.

CUT TO

The Amazon encampment. Gabrielle stands in the center of a circle of Amazons who are seated at her feet, mesmerized. She has obviously just delivered a moving speech and smiles, making a slow, complete turn to look into the faces of the women.

GABRIELLE:

Get a good night's rest. Tomorrow we liberate Corinth.

As if afraid to disturb the sanctity of the moment, the Amazons sit in silence as Gabrielle slowly leaves the circle.

The camera pans to Xena, seated at the very outside of the circle, bowing her head almost in reverence. As Gabrielle passes by her, she drops her hand down. Xena reaches up and the two women clasp hands for a brief, intimate moment.

CUT TO

Haimon reclining back against a tree in a lush grove, staring up at the moon. A faint rustling sound from the bushes can be heard and he grabs for the sword lying at his side. Footsteps can be heard approaching and he levels his sword in the direction of the noise. Gabrielle steps out into the open.

GABRIELLE:

It's just me.

Haimon exhales in relief and lays his sword down.

HAIMON:

You shouldn't be sneaking around out here.

GABRIELLE:

I wasn't sneaking. Do you think you would have heard me coming if I was?

HAIMON (laughs lightly and shakes his head):

True enough.

GABRIELLE (gestures awkwardly):

Can I join you?

Haimon waves magnanimously and Gabrielle comes over, taking a seat beside him against the tree. Their shoulders brush against one another and Haimon darts a quick, anxious glance at her, then looks back up at the sky.

GABRIELLE:

What are you doing out here by yourself?

HAIMON (shrugs):

I like to go off alone before a battle--to think.

GABRIELLE (in a near whisper as she gazes up at the moon):

What do you think about?

HAIMON:

I don't know...I guess I just try to make peace with what I have to do. (he looks away) And what could happen.

GABRIELLE (nods and smiles softly):

You do that too... (she laughs lightly) Xena used to think I was crazy to do that. But when I'm in the middle of a fight, surrounded by all that ugliness and death, I think a place like this helps remind me that there's still something beautiful in world. And then what I have to do isn't so hard. (her gaze drops to her hands folded in her lap) Haimon, I'm sorry--for shutting you out, for trying to get rid of you...lots of things.

HAIMON:

I can't pretend I wasn't angry and...confused. (he pulls a blade of grass from the ground and fiddles with it a moment) You should have told me about your husband, Gabrielle. I would have understood.

GABRIELLE:

How did you--? Oh, wait. (she frowns) Xena, right?

HAIMON (grinning disarmingly):

You sent us off to Athens together, remember? Did you honestly think that in all that time your name wasn't going to come up? When she told me you wanted me to stay behind in Athens, it wasn't too hard to figure out the rest.

Gabrielle stares at him, open mouthed.

HAIMON:

You're afraid I'm going to die.

Gabrielle draws her knees up to her chest and rests her chin on them.

GABRIELLE:

It took a long time for me to get over Perdicus' death. After that, I tried telling

myself that I didn't need... (she looks away uncomfortably) And then you came along and I felt...it scared me to think that it could happen all over again.

HAIMON (softly):

Are you better off this way, Gabrielle? Shutting yourself so far away that no one will ever touch you again? Is it really worth it?

GABRIELLE (shakes her head and laughs ruefully):

Until a few days ago, I would have said yes.

HAIMON:

And now?

GABRIELLE (gazes at him with an odd mix of ardor and doubt):

Now...I'm not so sure anymore.

Transfixed, Haimon swallows deeply as Gabrielle slowly leans forward and brushes her lips against his. After a moment, she pulls back slightly and he carefully studies her.

HAIMON:

We don't have to do this. I know you're scared.

Gabrielle sits up on her knees and faces him. She cups his face in her hands.

GABRIELLE:

Terrified... (gives him another quick, gentle kiss) But...

She leans in and kisses him passionately, her arms encircling his neck. Haimon is unresponsive for a moment, then his arms travel up around her back to hold her tightly against him. They continue to kiss as they slowly sink out of view to the ground as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Daytime. A long shot of Corinth; the camera slowly closes in on the empty field in front of the city gates, with dense woods on both sides.

Quick cut to the woods. The leaves part and we see, in close-up, Gabrielle with dark war paint on her face. Gabrielle looks around, an expression of intense focus on her face, then abruptly raises her arm. A harsh bird-like cry is heard.

The camera pans over to several warriors from Sabina's army who are sitting on the ground amidst the trees. Some of them look up sharply at the sound. In the same instant, Amazons leap out of trees and come crashing down on them.

The camera pulls back to show more of Sabina's soldiers. Some, who have been sitting down, jump to their feet; others, who have been standing, turn around in bewilderment. All seem confused by the attack. Meanwhile, more Amazons are streaming out of the underbrush and leaping out of the trees with terrifying war cries.

Close-up on the face of one of Sabina's soldiers. He looks terrified and confused.

SOLDIER:

*We were supposed to ambush *them*!*

Close-up on the painted face of an Amazon, filled with the exhilaration of battle.

AMAZON:

I guess we had other plans!

She strikes at the soldier and he backs up. The camera pans quickly from one part of the battle to another to show the Amazons attacking Sabina's men. Gabrielle, her face distorted in a battle yell, is seen striking down on an enemy soldier. Haimon, the only man fighting with the Amazon forces, is battling by Gabrielle's side. For a moment the camera focuses on Eve, who is not wearing war paint. She fights with a staff, apparently making an effort to knock out or push back her opponents without killing them.

Some of Sabina's men regain their bearings but they are no match for the stealth and quickness of the Amazons, who soon start pushing them back through the woods.

An overhead shot of the field. The sounds of battle--clashing metal, battle cries, screams of pain--are now heard from the woods. Finally, Sabina's troops start streaming out of the woods, some of them running, some backing up and trying to contain the Amazons. The camera pans down to focus on Sabina, who gallops across the field, a look of rage on her face.

SABINA (to running soldiers):

Stop, you cowards! We've got them outnumbered! There must be at least three of us for every one of them!

Quick cut to Gabrielle spinning around and knocking one of Sabina's soldiers down on his back with a powerful kick to his midsection, running her sword through another soldier at the same time, and striking down a third soldier who runs up to her. The camera pans over to Haimon, who looks somewhat uneasily at Gabrielle, clearly taken aback by her rage. Then he turns to parry a blow from one of Sabina's soldiers.

The camera pans back to Sabina, following her as she rides around the battlefield trying to rally her soldiers. Several shots of Sabina's soldiers striking back at the Amazons. We see shots from the flashback in the teaser: A tight shot of an Amazon being pierced by an arrow and crumbling to the ground with a gasp. The camera pans closer for a close-up of her face, her eyes open and frozen in death, a thin trickle of blood dripping from the corner of her mouth. Then the camera pulls back and up, for an overhead shot of the battle. Sabina's soldiers are starting to regroup and push back the Amazons.

Just then, Xena's battle cry, "A-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi!" pierces the air.

A close-up of Gabrielle turning her head abruptly, a quick flash of joy on her face.

A close-up of Eve turning her head abruptly, smiling.

A close-up of Sabina turning her head abruptly, her jaw clenching as her eyes flash with anger.

The camera pulls back for a long shot of Xena riding in at the head of several columns of soldiers.

HAIMON:

Praise the gods--it's the Athenians!

GABRIELLE (with a harsh, edgy laugh):

Are you implying that the Amazons aren't good enough?

HAIMON:

No, just that we need any help with can get. (he strikes back at one of Sabina's soldiers, then glances at Gabrielle, who is breathing hard, her eyes sparkling, her right arm and her chest spattered with blood) Are you all right?

GABRIELLE (looks at him and blinks hard, as if coming out of a daze):

Yeah...

Haimon tenderly touches her arm and she gives him a tense smile.

A wide shot of the battlefield. The camera pans down to focus on Xena just as she comes face to face with Sabina.

SABINA (with a forced smile):

Xena. I knew we'd meet again like this.

XENA:

Still trying to play it cool? (smiles coldly) By the way, I have bad news. Theron isn't going to keep his date with you.

SABINA (flinches and gives her a slightly shocked look):

How did you--

XENA:

Let's just say I have my sources.

With a piercing battle cry, Xena dismounts in a leap and flies at Sabina, knocking her off her horse. The two women roll on the ground, then leap to their feet and face off, sword in hand. They fight, both displaying impressive combat moves, spinning, kicking, leaping in the air, parrying the blows of each other's swords. At one point they find themselves staring at each other up close, their swords crossed.

XENA:

You know something, Sabina? I have no idea what Ares told you about Mavican, but you and she do have something in common. (off Sabina's glare) You both bit off more than you could chew.

With a cry of rage, Sabina pushes her back. The two women charge at each other again.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Eve in another part of the battlefield, Gabrielle fighting with a sword, Eve with her staff. Eve pauses for a moment, a strange look on her face.

GABRIELLE (turns to Eve):

Are you all right?

EVE (nods):

Yeah...I just never thought I'd find myself on a battlefield again.

GABRIELLE:

Hang on, Eve. It'll be over soon.

She looks over at Xena, who is battling Sabina just a few paces away. Then, she looks around.

GABRIELLE (an anxious look on her face):

Where's Haimon?

EVE:

I don't know--I haven't seen him...

Gabrielle grabs the arm of an Amazon who is racing by. The Amazon spins around and almost strikes Gabrielle before recognizing her.

AMAZON:

Queen Gabrielle? Is something--

GABRIELLE (trying to keep her emotions under control):

Haimon, the young man who was with us--have you seen him?

AMAZON:

I have, my queen.

GABRIELLE:

Where is he?

AMAZON:

I don't know, my queen--I saw him before, when he was fighting next to you in the woods...

Exasperated, Gabrielle lets go of her and stops another Amazon.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon--have you seen Haimon?

AMAZON #2 (puzzled):

Oh, the young man? I did see him just a few minutes ago, over on the southwest side of the field-- (waves in that direction) --battling some of the Persians.

GABRIELLE (wild-eyed):

Was he all right?

AMAZON #2:

Well, there was a lot of blood on him--whether his own or someone else's, I don't--

Without listening any further, Gabrielle rushes in the direction the Amazon pointed out. As the two Amazons and Eve look after her, puzzled, they are attacked by several soldiers and start fighting back.

CUT TO

Xena fighting Sabina. Sabina's movements are becoming less coordinated, more enraged and less controlled, until finally Xena knocks the sword out of her hand. Sabina lunges to pick up her sword but, in a quick leap, Xena puts her foot down on it, even as she holds Sabina at sword point.

XENA (sarcastic):

You and your men have fought well, Sabina. I think it's time to call it off and surrender the city.

Off-camera, Eve is heard crying out, and an Amazon's voice cries, "Princess Eve!" Xena turns, a panic-stricken look on her face, and sees Eve on the ground, with one Amazon (Amazon #2) standing next to her fighting off several soldiers from Sabina's army.

XENA (in a terrified near-whisper):

Eve!

She rushes toward Eve. Sabina takes a deep breath and picks up her sword; she looks after Xena, frowning, as if pondering her options, and runs off.

CUT TO

Xena, who makes short work of the soldiers threatening Eve and, with the help of Amazon #2, helps Eve to her feet. Eve has a bleeding cut on her side.

XENA (looks at the wound, then breathes a sigh of relief):

It's all right--it's not deep. We need to get you to safety. Come on. (puts her arm around Eve's shoulders)

EVE (weakly):

No, Mother--you have to stay on the field--they need you. (she winces in pain) You can't let Sabina's army regroup--

XENA:

Eve, I have to make sure you're--

EVE:

They'll take care of me. (points to Amazon #2 and two other Amazons who approach) Go on.

XENA (frowns suddenly):

Where's Gabrielle?

EVE (moans slightly):

She--she had to help someone... Mother, please...

XENA (looks around her):

They're retreating. Look, Eve!

An overhead shot of the field. Under relentless attack, some of Sabina's men are retreating back inside the city gates, while others are running off in all directions and still others falling to their knees and throwing down their weapons in surrender.

A tight shot of Xena and Eve, leaning on Xena's arm.

XENA (her face impassive):

It's over. Now it's only a matter of time.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Gabrielle stands by the ceremonial pyre. She turns to look at Ares.

GABRIELLE:

Still here?

ARES:

Yeah. I guess I just wanted to say, uh... (he clears his throat and looks up, tapping his fingers on the handle of his sword)

GABRIELLE (with a small, tense smile):

"Thank you"?

ARES:

Hmm. Something like that.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

Maybe I should be thanking *you*.

ARES:

That would be a first.

He gazes at her thoughtfully. A quick burst of white light flashes across the screen and dissolves to:

[FLASHBACK]

The headquarters hall in the Corinthian palace. Sabina paces back and forth, her face grim. Finally, she stops and stands very straight and still.

SABINA (her voice steady):

Ares! (after a long pause, as nothing happens) Ares! (There is no response, and she continues to pace around the hall, then stops again, leaning on the desk, and raises her voice) Ares!

There is a flash of light, and Ares appears.

ARES:

Care to dedicate this battle to my glory?

SABINA (bites her lip):

I may still have a victory to dedicate. I don't give up that easily. But--

ARES (mockingly):

But--?

SABINA (with an effort):

But a lot of my men do. They're deserting me. (she tries to smile) Ares, I was thinking--one little appearance by the God of War to show that he's on my side, and it could turn things around.

ARES (looks conspicuously bored):

Motivational speaking? Not quite my thing.

Sabina turns away. Ares looks at her thoughtfully, with a sudden flash of sympathy in his eyes.

ARES:

Look at it this way, Sabina. You wanted to be like Xena--the old Xena, didn't you? Well, I think you're about to relive her experience at Corinth.

SABINA (stares at him pensively):

Maybe with a different ending.

ARES (smirks):

I wouldn't count on that.

Ares vanishes. Sabina stands still, looking bitterly at the spot where he vanished. Then she smiles slightly and shakes her head.

SABINA:

All right, Xena. The city is yours.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Gabrielle stands by the pyre, her face illuminated by its glow.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

Thank you, Ares.

The camera pulls back to show Ares gone. Gabrielle sighs and stares into the fire, its orange flames dancing and leaping in the night. A quick burst of white light flashes across the screen and dissolves to:

[FLASHBACK]

Night. A zoomed-out shot of the Amazon encampment outside Corinth. The camera slowly pans down to show Gabrielle asleep next to Haimon, his arm around her, her head resting in the crook of his shoulder; then over to Xena, who is sleeping nearby, and finally to Eve, who is also asleep, her side bandaged.

AMAZON (off-camera):

Alarm!

Xena sits up abruptly, rubbing her eyes and staring. The cry of "Alarm!" is repeated. Another off-camera female voice cries, "Fire!" Gabrielle and Haimon sit up as well; Eve raises her head with a slight groan.

GABRIELLE:

What's going on?

CUT TO

An Amazon, who is breathing hard. Behind her, the sky has a strange orange glow.

AMAZON:

The city is burning!

Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon and Eve stare. The camera pans closer to the walls of Corinth. Flames are seen leaping above the city walls. Distant screams echo through the night as people start streaming out of the city gates.

A close-up of Xena's face, bitter and hard as stone.

A close-up of Gabrielle's face, her eyes wide open in shock, her lips trembling slightly.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

Sabina...

CUT TO

Daytime. Xena, Gabrielle, Eve, and Haimon are riding slowly through the streets of Corinth, looking around them with sadness and horror. There are charred remnants of buildings everywhere; some houses are still on fire. Dazed people, some of them half-naked, some with singed hair or with soot on their hands and faces, wander aimlessly around.

Arriving at the end of a square, Xena and her companions stop.

MAN'S VOICE (off-camera):

Run! It's going to fall!

People run past in a panic. The camera pans over to a large marble building with columns, enveloped in flames (from the teaser flashback). The building crumbles in slow motion.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Sunset in the Amazon village. A long shot of Gabrielle and Haimon standing beside Haimon's waiting horse. They clasp hands and bend their heads. Gabrielle rests her forehead against Haimon's cheek for a long, mournful moment. He pulls back slightly and she gazes up at him forlornly. He reaches up, grips her shoulders lightly and leans down, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. Haimon then turns resolutely and mounts his horse.

CUT TO

Eve leaning against Xena, gingerly holding her hand against her bandaged side. The two women are sitting outside Gabrielle's hut, watching Haimon and Gabrielle from a distance. Eve looks up at Xena sadly. Xena can only bow her head, as if unable to watch the scene being played out before her.

CUT TO

Haimon in the saddle. He reaches down and lightly brushes Gabrielle's cheek with his fingertips as Gabrielle briefly grazes the back of her hand over his knee. Haimon turns his horse away, brings the reins down with a hard flick and rides away at a fast gallop.

Close-up of Gabrielle staring after him miserably, tears welling in her eyes. A hand comes down on her shoulder and gives it a light squeeze. Gabrielle turns her head slightly to gaze down upon the hand.

XENA (off camera, in a hushed tone):
So that was goodbye?

Gabrielle nods sadly and sighs, turning to Xena. Eve can be seen in the background, still seated and looking on.

GABRIELLE:

I had to let him go, Xena. When we were on that battlefield, I was so worried about what could happen to Haimon that I lost focus. (she bows her head in shame) And because of that, Eve was almost killed.

XENA (touches Gabrielle's cheek in reassurance):
But she wasn't.

GABRIELLE:

Only because you were there to save her. I can't keep counting on you. Not anymore. These are my people and they're counting on me. (she gazes wistfully over her shoulder in direction Haimon rode off in) There's no room in my life right now for-- (her voice breaks off)

XENA (smiles ruefully):
So it's the Amazons for you, huh?

GABRIELLE (nods and looks up at Xena with a gentle, knowing smile):
And it's Corinth for you, isn't it? You're going to help rebuild the city.

XENA (shrugs apologetically):
Maybe this way I can make up for... (trails off)

Gabrielle reaches out and grasps Xena's hand. Xena looks at her with an anxious, imploring gaze.

GABRIELLE:

And put another piece of your past to rest? You don't have to explain, Xena. I understand. I always have.

XENA (smiles gratefully):
I know.

Xena looks almost restlessly towards Argo. Gabrielle follows her gaze and just then notices that Argo stands ready for travel.

GABRIELLE:

You're leaving now? You could wait until tomorrow. We're preparing the pyre for Klymene's Rite of Caste ceremony.

XENA (shakes her head):

No. I've already said my goodbyes. The sooner I get to Corinth, the sooner I can lend a hand. And Sabina is still out there somewhere. She may not have an army anymore, but she still needs to pay for what she did to Corinth. (Xena looks off towards a group of Amazons preparing the pyre) Besides...this ceremony...

GABRIELLE (purses her lips in a reflective smile):

Amazons only.

The two women share a soft laugh and make their way over to Argo. Xena is reflectively silent for a moment.

XENA (hesitantly):

Gabrielle...remember, before, when I said something to you about letting Haimon down easy? (off Gabrielle's stiff nod) You thought I was saying he was wrong for you. (she looks away) But I...maybe I was trying to say that I didn't think you'd ever be able to put anyone ahead of the Amazons.

GABRIELLE (quietly):

You were wrong. (looks up to see Xena's quizzical look) Xena, don't you know by now? You come before anyone. You always have. (she touches Xena's arm tenderly) And you always will.

The two women hug for a long, emotional moment. Then, as if afraid of the heavy emotion of the moment, Xena steps back and hastily brushes the tears from her eyes.

XENA (tries to sound flippant):

All right. Enough of this sappy stuff. I've got a city to rebuild.

Gabrielle gives her an understanding smile and watches as she mechanically checks and rechecks Argo's preparedness for travel.

CUT TO

Ares, perched in a tree limb as he was in the teaser. He is watching Xena, a pained look in his eye.

CUT TO

Xena climbing into the saddle, her usual impassive stone face set in place.

GABRIELLE (looks off into the distance):

I guess things didn't exactly turn out the way we expected.

XENA:

Sometimes they don't. (nods towards Eve) Make sure she stays out of trouble.

GABRIELLE (glances over her shoulder at Eve):

That's one thing you won't ever have to worry about again.

XENA (nods crisply, as if trying to keep a tight rein on her emotions):

I know.

Xena glances over at Eve then at Gabrielle.

XENA:

I'll see you.

She flicks the reins and Argo begins to head away. After only a few steps, Xena stops her and turns back.

XENA:

Gabrielle? (she looks away, her emotions threatening to get the best of her) I'm sorry about Haimon.

GABRIELLE (nods and smiles sadly):

I know.

Xena nods in farewell to Gabrielle, then turns Argo around again. She flicks the reins sharply and Argo takes off at a well-paced gallop.

CUT TO

A deserted stretch of the road that cuts through a hilly plain, bathed in the glow of the rising sun, which glows golden above the horizon. Xena is riding at a trot.

Ahead of her, there is a flash of blue light. Ares appears in the road and stands still, his arms crossed. A close-up of his face. He's keeping a tight grip on himself but one can see the tension in his features.

Xena, facing the camera, slows Argo down to a walk. As she approaches Ares, her eyes flicker, with a hint of warmth and her lips twitch slightly. Ares remains silent. Xena rides past him and then brings Argo to a halt. Watching her, Ares swallows convulsively. Xena dismounts and walks up to Ares. The look on her face reflects conflicting emotions--wariness, hopefulness, apprehension, tenderness. He looks at her anxiously.

Xena stops, facing Ares up close. Both are silent for a moment.

ARES:

Did you lose something?

Xena looks at him expectantly. He holds out his hand, his fist closed. When he opens it, the medallion and the pearl pendant are on his palm.

After a pause, Xena reaches out, takes the medallion and the pendant and drops them inside her breastplate. She smiles warmly and a little wistfully, and he smiles back at her. Slowly, they extend their hands toward each other. Their hands clasp as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Corinth was not actually damaged in the production of this motion picture. It was, however, destroyed by an earthquake in 1858.]