

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT

“The Bonds We Choose”

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Logline

While on the trail of her defeated enemy Sabina, Xena meets a woman with an unusual secret. The two join forces to save a town's inhabitants from a natural disaster. Meanwhile, Gabrielle makes a new friendship that may change her life.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Fade up on a green meadow on a sunny, peaceful morning. Gabrielle and Cyane ride at the head of a column of Amazons. Their pace is slow and relaxed as they start up a small rise.

CYANE:

It'll be good to get home again.

GABRIELLE (nods):

These hunting trips keep taking us farther and farther from our lands. How long have we been gone this time?

CYANE (sighs):

Eight days so far. It was only five the last time we set out.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

Times are getting hard. Sabina's raids put a lot of refugees out on the road. Pretty soon this entire forest will be picked clean.

CYANE:

And if you hadn't negotiated with the local governments to grant us hunting privileges, the Amazon Nation would have a famine on their hands. (smiles in admiration) If only Xena could see you now. She'd be proud of you, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (her mouth curves up into a tiny but proud smile):

Yeah--I suppose she would...

Faint screams can be heard in the distance as the Amazons reach the crest of the hill. Gabrielle and Cyane both jerk their heads up at the same moment.

GABRIELLE:

What was that?

CYANE (pointing):

Gabrielle--look!

In the distance, thick plumes of smoke can be seen rising above the treetops.

GABRIELLE:

Let's go check it out.

Morai--an Amazon riding directly behind Gabrielle--rolls her eyes.

MORAI:

Queen Gabrielle--we're only a small hunting party. If we go down there, we could find ourselves outnumbered.

GABRIELLE (turns and glares and Morai a moment then turns away):

Yah! (she brings the reins down hard on her horse's neck and charges down the hill)

CYANE:

I don't think that was a request, Morai.

Cyane and the other Amazons take off, trailing after Gabrielle. Morai shakes her head slightly and rides on to catch up.

CUT TO

The village, where people are running around in a panic. A group of bandits on horseback are slaughtering the villagers and torching and looting their homes. The bandits are led by a man on horseback wearing a helmet and a mask over his face. A young woman runs through the streets, calling out amidst the chaos.

LYKIA:

Darion!

Several villagers jostle her as they run the other way in a panic. She stumbles a few times but persists. Finally she pauses, catching sight of Darion. There is a long shot of a small boy witnessing the carnage going on around him. Lykia watches in terror as the masked leader runs his sword through an elderly woman right next to the boy.

The boy turns to run as the old woman falls. The leader sees him out of the corner of his eye and leaps down off of his horse to give chase. Clearly the boy cannot outrun a grown man, but he toys with Darion anyway. He allows the boy to gain a big enough lead where he is almost able to escape. Then laughing, he makes a lunge for Darion, tripping him. The boy falls flat on his face and rolls over as the man raises his sword above his head.

LYKIA (with a shrill cry):
Darion!

The leader spins to see Lykia charging at him. Deftly he sidesteps her lunge and makes a grab for her arm, twisting it behind her back. She struggles against him but she is no match for his strength. Laughing, he backhands her across the face, picks her up and throws her over his shoulder.

Hoof beats and loud voices can be heard approaching rapidly.

BANDIT #1:
Lucius--riders are coming!

The leader reacts quickly, tossing Lykia across his saddle, then mounting his horse. He takes off at a wild pace with the other bandits close behind.

Terrified of more approaching horses, Darion retreats into his hut--which has started to burn.

The Amazons gallop in and pause, looking around and taking stock of the situation. Cyane frowns upon seeing no sign of the thugs.

CYANE:
They got away!

Screams are heard from the burning hut and a woman staggers up as close as the heat of the flames will allow her and crumples to her knees.

VILLAGE WOMAN:
Someone is in there! For Eli's sake--someone please help him!

GABRIELLE (leaps down off of her mount and slaps the flank of Cyane's horse):
Cyane--try to catch up to them. But don't take any unnecessary risks. You don't know how many of them there are out there.

Cyane nods and without hesitation takes off, the other Amazons close on her heels. Gabrielle quickly turns and charges into the burning hut. The Village Woman looks on anxiously. After several moments, Gabrielle finally reemerges, carrying a boy of eight or nine in her arms. Coughing and gasping for air, she sinks to her knees and sets the boy on his feet, clutching his hand.

GABRIELLE:
Are you-- (she coughs) all right?

The boy makes no response, nor any indication that he has even heard her.

GABRIELLE (touches his cheek):
Can you tell me your name?

He shakes violently, obviously terrified.

VILLAGE WOMAN:
That's Darion.

GABRIELLE:
What happened to his family? Were they in--? (she glances at the hut)

VILLAGE WOMAN:
His sister was carried off by one of those bastards just before you showed up.

GABRIELLE (reaches out to stroke his hair soothingly):
And his parents?

The woman shakes her head sorrowfully. Gabrielle understands and pulls Darion against her as if to shield him. A rider rapidly approaching is heard. The boy struggles with Gabrielle in order to run away, but she has a tight hold on him.

CYANE:
Gabrielle! (she quickly glances her friend over, taking note of Gabrielle's singed hair and her skin blackened in spots by the smoke and soot from the fire) Are you all right?

GABRIELLE (nods while coughing):
Fine. Did you find the bas-- (suddenly remembering herself, she glances at Darion) --party responsible for this?

CYANE:
No. They scattered into the forest.

GABRIELLE (to the Village Woman):
Do you have any idea who they were?

VILLAGE WOMAN:
No one knows. Over the past few months there's been talk of some of the smaller villages being hit by bandits but no one has been able to catch them. Rumor is that it's the son of some high ranking official out on a lark with his friends.

CYANE:
I'll organize a search party to hunt them down.

Gabrielle shakes her head and loosens Darion's hold on her neck so that she can stand. Immediately, he slips his hand into hers.

GABRIELLE:
No. They might be trying to lure us deeper into the forest where they could outnumber us.

CYANE:

Gabrielle--who ever this is, they're operating close to Amazon lands. You can't take that lightly.

GABRIELLE:

I know. (she looks despondently at the burning hut then down at the boy who is still clutching her hand. She sighs) I wish Xena was here.

CUT TO

Corinth. The camera pans over the city, which is still very much in disarray even though the rebuilding work is proceeding. We see Xena working on one of the construction sites, supervising six other men as they rig two sets of ropes in order to hoist a log upright. Xena walks around the log, checking the rigging both visually and by tugging on it. Finally satisfied, she nods and steps back.

XENA:

All right, I think that's got it. (she glances over her shoulder to speak to a young girl of about ten who is looking on) Keep back, Iole.

Iole nods and steps back barely a half step. Xena, with her back to Iole, does not notice.

XENA:

Okay--together now on "three".

Six men take hold, three on each rope.

XENA:

One.

They flex their hands in preparation of hauling the log upright.

XENA:

Two...three! Pull!

The men grunt and groan with the exertion.

XENA:

Pull!

Slowly, the log is hoisted until it is nearly vertical with the ground. One of the men loses his grip, causing a chain reaction. One by one, the other five men lose their grip on the ropes and the log falls.

Xena looks down and realizes that Iole has stepped up and is standing beside her, in the path of the falling log.

XENA:

Iole!

She shoves Iole out of the way but is herself unable to move quickly enough. Xena throws her arms above her head, catching the log before it falls on her. She staggers from the weight and her arms shake.

LABORER (to the man that first lost his grip):

Jackass! You could've killed her! Grab the ropes--and don't let go this time!

The six men grab the ropes again, hoisting the log just high enough to relieve Xena's arms of the weight. She jumps out of the way and the men let the ropes go, letting the log fall back to the ground with a loud thud.

XENA (a little out of breath):

Find four more men to help you.

The laborer nods and runs off to find more men. Xena doubles over and rests her hands on her knees, obviously shaken. Kodros, the general in command when Corinth was surrendered to Sabina in "Divided We Stand Part I," comes up beside her.

KODROS:

Xena, are you all right?

XENA (she shakes her head):

I'm getting too old for this, Kodros.

KODROS:

Oh. Ah--maybe I'll come back later then when you're feeling a bit--

XENA (catches her breath and straightens up):

No--I'm fine. What do you need?

KODROS (frowns):

Some rumors have made their way back to Corinth.

XENA:

Rumors?

KODROS:

There's been talk that Sabina was spotted in the Roman town of Pompeii just a few weeks ago. (Kodros looks away almost as if in embarrassment) She has yet to pay for her crimes against Corinth. And of course, there's always the threat that she'll raise another army--

XENA:

I'll go after Sabina, Kodros. I don't need the sales pitch.

KODROS (reddening):

Xena--I don't have any men to spare to help you track Sabina down. Believe me, if I could--

XENA:

Don't worry. I don't need help. (she pauses) *Anyone's* help.

With a strange expression, Xena gazes over Kodros' shoulder and we realize that Ares is there.

A close-up of Xena staring at an empty spot, where Ares presumably is; the corners of her mouth go up slightly in a smile as we:

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Xena atop Argo at the gates to Corinth. Several prominent citizens are there to see her off.

KODROS (reaches up to shake Xena's hand):
Corinth is in your debt, Xena.

XENA:
Corinth doesn't owe me anything. It never did. (she leans down, taking his hand) Good luck to you, Kodros. Keep your city safe.

KODROS:
Always, Xena. Thanks to you.

CUT TO

Xena riding down a long stretch of road. A bored, tired expression slackens her features and she whistles tunelessly. When she hits a high, piercing note, Argo tosses her head agitatedly.

XENA (patting Argo's mane soothingly):
Sorry, girl. (she sighs and looks around) Who would have guessed life on the road could be so quiet--and boring?

Argo neighs loudly.

XENA (frowns):
I know--I miss Gabrielle too.

CUT TO

An Amazon sings the traditional funeral dirge before a pyre.

Gabrielle steps into frame, holding Darion by the hand. The camera pulls in tighter and tighter on Darion as he watches the fire burn. Tears can be seen welling in his eyes. He turns his head to bury his face against Gabrielle's side.

GABRIELLE (stroking his hair):
I'm sorry...I'm so sorry.

Darion steps back, looking up at Gabrielle. She reaches out, wiping the tears from his cheeks.

GABRIELLE:
Don't worry, Darion. I *will* find your sister. I promise. (she pauses a moment) Did you see the men that took her? Can you help me find them?

Trembling, Darion hurls himself into Gabrielle's embrace--petrified. Gabrielle picks him up, rocking him slightly in her arms.

GABRIELLE (gently):

Okay. You're not ready to talk about it yet. I understand.

She carries him well away from the pyre and sets him on his feet dropping to her knees before him.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe we can start with something a little easier. Like...maybe you can tell me your sister's name.

Darion stares blankly.

GABRIELLE (slightly at a loss):

Are you hungry? When was the last time you ate?

He looks away as if he hasn't heard.

GABRIELLE (to herself):

Maybe a good night's rest would help. (to Darion) Are you tired?

The boy doesn't respond.

GABRIELLE (sighs in disappointment):

Right. It's going to take time.

CUT TO

A road in the dusk. Xena is riding along, lost in thought. Then she stops and looks at a spot under a tree. The corners of her mouth curve up in amusement.

XENA:

Come out, Ares. I haven't got all day.

Ares materializes in a flash of blue light. Folding his arms on his chest, he gives Xena a wry smile.

ARES:

Still busy saving the world?

XENA (smiles back teasingly):

Still busy.

There is a pause during which both Ares and Xena look somewhat uncomfortable and at a loss for words. Ares clears his throat.

ARES:

You know--if you can't wait to see Gabrielle and Eve, I could...

XENA (interrupts, frowning slightly):

Drop it, Ares. You know that's not where I'm going.

ARES (serious):

I could take you there, too.

Xena dismounts and stands facing him. She looks uncertain.

XENA (finally speaks, in a low voice):

Is she there--in Pompeii?

ARES:

I don't know. But I could check it out for you.

XENA:

Ares... (She pauses, shaking her head slightly)

ARES:

I believe your next line is "Thank you, but I've got to do this on my own."

XENA (grins a little, but her eyes are serious):

I wasn't going to say "thank you."

ARES (theatrical sigh):

Just think about the nasty shock you could have given me if you'd said yes.

XENA (sighs):

Ares...I've seen enough of gods meddling in people's lives. (lowers her eyes) All kinds of gods.

ARES:

I helped you fight the Persian army.

XENA:

That was about saving the world. Or at least Greece. This is... (she sighs) ...more personal.

Ares gives her a searching look, and then seems shocked and almost pleased.

ARES:

You're jealous, aren't you?

XENA (shakes her head):

Let's just say I'd rather not have you involved where Sabina's concerned.

Ares looks exasperated for a moment. Then, his face softening, he comes closer, reaches out and touches Xena's cheek with the back of his hand.

ARES (gently):

What would it take to make you trust me completely?

Xena is silent for a moment. Then, she slowly raises her hand and puts it on top of his.

XENA:

That's just it, Ares. You can't make someone trust you... (her voice drops) ...or love you. You just--do your best and hope that someday, they will.

Ares looks at her and nods thoughtfully. He brings her hand to his lips and kisses it, and then smiles a seductive, roguish smile.

ARES:

You know what I think? Maybe you don't want me on your side.

XENA (in an enigmatic tone that may or may not be playful):

Why not?

ARES:

Oh, I don't know. Because you have too much fun trying to kick my ass?

XENA (smiles in spite of herself, lifting an eyebrow):

Trying? (Ares chuckles) Maybe you're right. Old habits die hard.

ARES:

Well, I hope so. (he draws an arm around her waist, pulls her close and kisses her. Xena is hesitant at first but then responds fully and passionately to his kiss. Pulling away, Ares grins at her.) Yeah, you're right. They do.

He lets go of her hand and disappears. Xena looks after him and then shakes her head with a slight, amused smile.

DISSOLVE TO

Night. Xena is lying in her bedroll looking up at the moon, smiling wistfully.

XENA (in a soft voice):

Good night, Gabrielle...I miss you... (sighs) ...you and Eve. It's so strange, saying good night to you like this across hundreds of leagues...not knowing what you're doing right now... (shaking her head slightly, she turns and settles into the bedroll) What am I talking about. You're probably just doing your boring old queen stuff.

CUT TO

Morning in the village. The Amazons bustle about, readying themselves for travel. Morai paces back and forth in an agitated state while Gabrielle watches, clearly annoyed.

MORAI:

This isn't right!

GABRIELLE:

And leaving these people with nothing *is*?

MORAI:

Gabrielle, I feel sorry for these people--I do. But leaving them most of our game puts your *own* Amazons at risk.

GABRIELLE:

We can't just abandon these people, Morai. We all have to make sacrifices sometimes.

MORAI:

It seems the Amazons have gotten a *lot* of practice at that lately.

GABRIELLE (looks at Morai scathingly):

Just do as you're told and make sure this village receives ten of the best deer from our hunt.

MORAI (bows her head slightly):

Of course. I live to serve the Queen in all things.

The mockery doesn't escape Gabrielle and she turns away from Morai in near disgust and goes over to Darion, who stands beside the village woman from the teaser. Gabrielle reaches out and touches Darion's cheek.

GABRIELLE (to village woman):

You'll watch out for him won't you, Prokne?

PROKNE (nods and squeezes Darion's shoulder):

As if he was my own.

Gabrielle strokes Darion's hair gently and he stares down at his feet morosely.

GABRIELLE:

I have to go now, Darion. But I promise I'll be back soon.

Darion looks up at her, an unreadable expression on his face.

GABRIELLE:

And I swear that I'll find your sister Lykia. (she hugs him to her but the boy remains stiff and rigid. Clearly disappointed by his lack of emotion, she releases him with a sigh.) I'll see you soon.

Gabrielle turns and takes a few steps towards her horse but a child's voice can be heard calling to her.

CHILD'S VOICE:

Gabrielle! Gabrielle--wait!

Gabrielle turns and gasps in both shock and joy that Darion has spoken for the first time since she met him. Darion pulls his hand from Prokne's and runs to Gabrielle.

DARION:

Please don't leave me here! I want to go with you!

Darion throws his arms around Gabrielle's waist.

A close-up of Gabrielle's shocked face as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Fade up on the hunting party arriving back at the Amazon camp. Gabrielle rides at the head of the column at a slow, careful gait. Darion, riding in front of her in the saddle, has fallen asleep and is slumped against her. A voice can faintly be heard calling out: "Eve! They're back!"

Eve comes running. She sees Gabrielle and lets out a heavy sigh of relief.

EVE:

Gabrielle--thank the Heavens! I was about to organize a search party to go after you. (Eve glances at Darion) Oh...who's this?

Gabrielle takes Darion in her arms and gently slides from the saddle. The boy stirs but does not wake up. Gabrielle holds him protectively against her shoulder and speaks barely above a whisper so as not to disturb him.

GABRIELLE:

This is Darion. I'm going to be taking care of him for a while.

EVE (regaining herself from the surprise):

His parents--?

GABRIELLE (frowns and shakes her head):

Let me get him settled first. We'll talk later.

She carries Darion into her hut. The scene fades to Gabrielle kneeling beside Darion who is asleep in her bed. She stares at him pensively, softly caressing his hair. Finally, she leans over, gently kisses his forehead and blows out the candle on the table beside him.

CUT TO

Outside Gabrielle's hut. The sun is beginning to set and Eve slowly paces back and forth. The door opens and Gabrielle steps out, softly shutting it behind her.

EVE:

How is he?

GABRIELLE:

He's exhausted. This is the first he's slept in two days.

EVE:

Cyane told me what happened to the village--his family...

GABRIELLE:

His sister Lykia was taken in the raid. Rumor has it that it was Roman noblemen. If that's true then she was probably taken as a slave. I've promised Darion I'd find her.

EVE:

Gabrielle--Morai has been talking. She's been telling everyone about the ten deer you ordered her to leave behind for the villagers.

GABRIELLE (shrugs):

So? It's not a secret.

EVE:

She's becoming a problem. Morai has been speaking out against you ever since--

GABRIELLE:

Ever since her sister was killed fighting Sabina at Corinth.

Eve whips around to stare at Gabrielle in disbelief.

EVE:

Don't tell me you're going to let Morai get away with this because you feel guilty!

GABRIELLE:

Guilty? No. I made a decision I felt was in the best interest of the Amazon Nation. And like it or not, I have to accept responsibility for it. That's what being a leader is all about. Morai needs some time to work through her grief--and her way of doing that is finding fault with me and everything I do. It's harmless enough right now.

EVE (frowns and speaks almost to herself):

I wonder how much longer it'll continue to *be* harmless.

GABRIELLE:

Eve, I--

A noise is heard from inside the cabin, causing Gabrielle and Eve to spin around. A cry of distress that is obviously from Darion can be faintly heard and Gabrielle races into her hut. She finds Darion frantically tossing and turning while muttering in his sleep. She sits on the edge of the bed and touches his shoulder.

GABRIELLE:

Darion? Hey--

Obviously still in the grips of a nightmare, Darion suddenly sits upright swiping wildly with his fists and gasping in terror.

DARION:

Raise the roof!

Gabrielle jumps back a little, grabs his wrists and stares in puzzlement at his choice of words.

DARION:

Raise the--

GABRIELLE:

Darion, wake up! It's just me!

The boy opens his eyes. He is groggy and clearly confused. Gabrielle reaches out to stroke his cheek and he bursts into tears. Gabrielle holds him in a tight, protective hug.

GABRIELLE:

It's okay...it was just a bad dream. (she kisses the top of his head) Shh...just a bad dream. Nothing is going to hurt you here. I promise.

DARION (sobbing):

I miss Lykia!

GABRIELLE (soothingly):

I know. Don't worry...I *will* find your sister. And the people responsible for what happened to your village.

DARION:

Why...why would anyone do that?

GABRIELLE:

I don't know. I have a very close friend that wonders about the same thing. His village was attacked when he was young too. And he grew up to be a brave warrior.

A memory comes back to Gabrielle and her expression grows a little wistful.

[FLASHBACK]

From "The Inheritance":

GABRIELLE:

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

XENA (allows a grudging smile):

Yeah. I suppose I am. He's not going to make things easy for Sabina once she rears her head again.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE:

Maybe someday you'll meet him. Maybe someday you'll meet my best friend in the whole world. Her name is Xena and she's a mighty warrior princess. Do you want to hear a story about Xena, the Warrior Princess? (Darion nods and she tucks him back under the covers.) A long time ago a warlord named Draco rode into a little village named Potidaea...

Gabrielle continues telling Darion a story about Xena as her voice gets softer and softer and the scene slowly fades out.

CUT TO

Morning. Xena rides in through the gates of Pompeii. The city is bustling with activity. The camera pans over: peddlers hawking their wares, a noblewoman carried in a semi-open litter by four slaves, a bundle-laden donkey and its driver, a group of laughing children on their way to school, women workers washing wool in large vats in front of a workshop. A loud high-pitched voice obviously making

some sort of announcement rises above the general din of the streets, and as it gets closer we can make out the words, "Only today!" Then we see a boy of about twelve standing on a street corner shouting.

BOY:

Only today! See Ostorius, the famous gladiator of the Empire, fight in the grand amphitheater of Pompeii! Come and see the great Ostorius fight! Never yet defeated in the arena!

As Xena rides past the boy, the camera closes in her face, and we see her frown slightly, her lips creasing; it is obvious that the mention of the arena and gladiatorial contests brings back bad memories for her. As she continues to ride, the boy repeats his cry, his voice fading gradually behind her.

CUT TO

The dimly lit anteroom of an inn in Pompeii, adorned with a somewhat dusty marble bust of the Emperor Claudius on a shelf behind the counter. The innkeeper, a bald, stocky middle-aged man, is sitting behind the counter looking at parchments and counting something using an abacus. An insect running across the counter catches his attention; he raises a hand and swats it with an open palm, just as the door swings open with a groan and Xena walks in.

INNKEEPER (looks up with a big fake smile):

Ah! Welcome, welcome to the finest establishment in Pompeii...

XENA (wryly):

Obviously very popular with the bugs.

INNKEEPER (with a nervous, obsequious little laugh):

Just an unfortunate little accident, I assure you. (hopefully) Will you be needing a room?

XENA (comes up to the counter):

Don't know yet--depends on how long I'm staying in this town. What I'll be needing first is some information.

INNKEEPER:

Oh, let me tell you all about our tourist attractions...

XENA:

Save it for the tourists. (leans forward, resting her elbows on the counter) See, I'm trying to track down a friend of mine I've lost sight of. She would have arrived in this town sometime in the past month. A woman almost as tall as me--slender build--light brown hair--grey eyes. Probably a little secretive about who she is and where she came from.

INNKEEPER:

Anything else you can think of that could jog my memory? (he taps his fingers suggestively on the abacus)

XENA (glares at him, her eyes narrowing):

She doesn't take nonsense from anyone. Something she and I have in common.

INNKEEPER (sighs, defeated):

That sounds like Lavinia Flora. Yeah, she stayed here for a couple of days before she got her own place. (sounds a little peeved) She sure does act like she was used to giving orders. There are all sorts of strange rumors about her in the town--some say she's a criminal, in exile or on the run from justice...

XENA (poker-faced):

Her own place. And where would that be?

CUT TO

Xena stepping out of the inn into the street, a look of grim determination on her face. As she starts to walk, she suddenly frowns, stops, lifts her arm and looks at something on her skin. She picks up a small grey flake and examines it in puzzlement.

XENA (mutters to herself):

Ash...

She brushes several more flakes off her arm, and then looks down at herself and flicks them off her armor and leathers.

XENA (stops a woman passing by):

Hey. Is there a fire somewhere?

WOMAN (gives her a nervous look):

A fire?

XENA:

Either that or it usually rains ashes around here. (points to the flakes, brushing a few more of them off herself)

WOMAN (understanding dawning on her face):

Oh, these! Don't worry about that. We've had them floating about occasionally--they probably come from up there.

She points, and Xena follows the direction of her hand. She's pointing at the mountain looming over the city. There is a wisp of smoke rising over the top of the mountain, clearly visible against the backdrop of the bright blue sky.

XENA:

You live at the foot of a volcano.

WOMAN (dismissively):

Yeah, it's old Vesuvius. Hasn't bothered anyone in years.

Xena shakes her head and walks on.

CUT TO

Xena knocking on the door of a small house. A middle-aged, tawny-skinned woman, obviously a servant, opens.

XENA:

Is this where (contemptuously emphasizes the words) Lavinia Flora lives?

SERVANT (eyes her nervously, looking at her weapons and armor):

What is your business?

XENA:

Let's just say I'm here to settle a debt.

SERVANT (looks frightened):

She--she isn't here.

There is a noise inside. Xena purses her lips in determination and moves forward. The woman stands in her way.

XENA:

Stay out of this. (bitterly) Do you have an idea who you're trying to protect?

SERVANT:

A good woman who's never harmed a living soul in her entire life.

XENA:

Yeah? Well, I've seen hundreds of dead and wounded that say otherwise.

The woman gapes at her, bewildered. Xena easily pushes her aside and walks inside the modestly furnished house.

SERVANT (raises her voice):

The blood of an innocent woman will be on your hands!

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

I'm not going to hide!

A door opens and a woman comes out. She bears a slight resemblance to Sabina but this is clearly a different woman, about forty years old, with a regal bearing and an austere hairstyle, wearing a simple white dress and a silver necklace.

FLORA (scornfully):

Let it be, Smyrna. There is no point in reasoning with an assassin.

Her eyes fall on Xena, and her faces changes momentarily as if in recognition.

XENA (recovers from the shock):

I'm sorry. I was looking for...someone else.

SMYRNA (with a gasp of relief):

You're not a killer sent from Rome?

XENA (turns toward her harshly):

From Rome? I'd rather take a job cleaning out stables.

FLORA (gives her a long curious stare, then turns to her servant):

Leave us to talk, Smyrna. It's all right.

Smyrna leaves. Flora walks over to a small couch and sits down, then motions toward a chair.

XENA (remains standing):

Look, I'll be on my way. I didn't mean to scare you or your servant. I told you--I thought you were someone else. I have no business with you.

FLORA:

And what business does Xena, Warrior Princess have in Pompeii?

XENA (surprised look):

You know me.

FLORA:

I saw you in Rome...at a banquet where you called yourself Saba.

XENA (flinches slightly and lowers her eyes, reliving the memory):

Caligula...

FLORA:

You feel bad because you tricked him into killing himself. You shouldn't. You did what you had to do.

XENA (sighs):

I always do what I have to. That doesn't mean I always feel good about it.

FLORA:

Just like you would have killed that woman you mistook me for.

XENA (harshly):

No. I would have brought her back to Greece to face justice. (she pauses, then walks over to the chair and sits down across from Flora, looking at her curiously.) You and your servant were afraid of assassins from Rome--you must be someone pretty important if you think they'd be sending killers after you.

FLORA:

Important, or--dangerous.

XENA (eyes her probingly, thoughtfully):

You were at Caligula's court...the local rumors are that you're an exile... Your name isn't Flora any more than mine is Saba, is it? You're Agrippina, Empress of Rome. ("Flora" meets her gaze unflinchingly, clearly acknowledging the truth of what she has said.) Exiled for trying to poison your husband, the Emperor Claudius.

AGRIPPINA (lifts her head, a proud expression on her face):

Exiled for trying to speak up against injustice. When I married Claudius, I thought he would bring peace and prosperity to Rome after Caligula's madness. At first, he lowered taxes on the working people and promoted relief for the poor; he listened to my counsel and made peace with the Amazons. (Xena's eyes flicker slightly in response.) But now, he's fallen under the influence of

advisers who seek only their own fortunes. It's more of the same: new conquests for the Empire and oppressive taxes to finance them. I tried to speak for the common people, and the people saw me as their defender. So, something had to be done. They falsely accused me of trying to plot the death of Claudius and trying to seize the throne. I was exiled--forbidden to come within a hundred leagues of Rome on pain of death. (She pauses and stares at Xena, who is listening impassively) Xena, I had heard a great deal about you even before I saw you in Rome. I've always admired you. I don't put much stock in the gods or the Fates--but maybe they brought you here for a reason. (Xena's expression turns mocking) We have a lot in common, you and I. We could work together.

XENA:

To do what? Get you back to Rome and make you sole ruler of the Empire? (Rises abruptly from her chair) You tell a good story, Agrippina. Maybe it's even true. But if you think I'm going to put my sword in the service of someone I barely know--

AGRIPPINA (interrupts):

This isn't about my political ambitions, Xena. It's about saving the people of this town.

XENA (skeptical):

From what?

AGRIPPINA:

The volcano.

XENA (looks at her thoughtfully):

Those grey flakes of ash...

AGRIPPINA:

So you've noticed them too. I knew you were a smart woman.

XENA:

Cut the compliments. What's going on?

AGRIPPINA:

The people in this town have gotten so used to these ashes falling once in a while, they scarcely notice it. But in the past week, it's gotten worse. I've made some study of the sciences, Xena. I think there's going to be a major eruption, and it's going to happen soon.

XENA:

Have you tried to warn the authorities?

AGRIPPINA (shakes her head):

The chief magistrate has been warned against me. He doesn't know who I am--but he's not going to listen to anything I say. But maybe if he learns that the famous Xena wants to see him--

XENA (chuckles bitterly):

I'm not exactly popular with Roman officials, Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA:

He doesn't have to like you. He just has to be impressed.

XENA:

And if he isn't?

AGRIPPINA:

You're Xena--I'm sure you can think of something. Otherwise, thousands could die.

A close-up on the grim, weary look on Xena's face.

CUT TO

Inside Gabrielle's hut. It is obviously days later. Darion now sleeps in his own bed and children's items such as toys can be seen scattered around. Gabrielle sits on the edge of Darion's bed, stroking his forehead lovingly.

GABRIELLE (whispering softly):

...and so, thanks to Xena, Cupid got his bow back from Baby Bliss and was able to break the love spell. The end. (she smiles then leans down and kisses him on the cheek) Time for bed.

DARION:

Gabrielle? Will you sing me a lullaby?

GABRIELLE:

Are you sure? I've sang to you three nights in a row and my voice hasn't gotten any better.

DARION:

Please? Mama used to sing to me every night before bed.

GABRIELLE:

What would you like to hear?

DARION:

You know! That song...

GABRIELLE (sighs):

But I've sang that every night for you. Aren't you tired of it by now? How about the Amazon lullaby? (singing) Moon shines bright. By fire's light--

DARION:

No! I want to hear *my* song! *Please*, Gabrielle! You *know* it's my favorite!

GABRIELLE:

Well...okay...

She coughs uncomfortably, looks away and begins to sing. Her voice is little more than a low, indistinct mumble.

DARION:

Louder! I can't *hear!*

GABRIELLE:

Okay!

She takes a deep breath as if to steel herself to the task at hand.

GABRIELLE (singing):

Joxer the Mighty,
He roams through the countryside.
He never needs a place to hide.
With--Gabby as his sidekick,
Fighting with her little stick.

Darion sits up on his haunches and begins to bounce up and down in time to the music. He joins in with Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE and DARION (singing):

...Righting wrongs and singing songs.
Being mighty all day long.
He's Joxer,
He's Joxer the Mighty.

Darion laughs and claps his hands.

DARION:

I love that song! You'll sing it for me tomorrow night too, right?

Gabrielle presses her lips together and nods, clearly restraining herself.

GABRIELLE:

We'll see.

DARION (throws his arms around her):

Goodnight, Gabrielle!

She hugs him back and lays him down in the bed, tucking him in. The boy shuts his eyes, quickly dropping off. Gabrielle remains seated on the bed, watching him sleep. Her smile is sad, tender and loving at the same time. The door can be heard opening.

GABRIELLE (whispering):

Shh! Don't wake him.

EVE (backs up a few steps into the doorway):

I'm sorry. The council--they wish to speak with you...it's about Darion.

GABRIELLE (touching Darion's cheek, she nods gravely):

I'll be there in a minute.

CUT TO

Council chambers. The twelve Amazon Council members from "Divided We Stand, Part II" are seated in their usual circle. Gabrielle and Eve enter together. Eve's look is troubled while Gabrielle's is wary. She seats herself upon her throne.

GABRIELLE:

Kind of late for a council meeting, isn't it?

OTHILA:

The council understands that you have some different responsibilities now and that this time of the evening might be more convenient for you.

GABRIELLE (nods carefully):

That's very generous.

NARI:

Speaking of that, we were wondering how the boy is getting along.

GABRIELLE:

Every day he's a little better. He's talking more now--and the nightmares don't seem to be coming as often.

NARI:

Excellent! Then I take it you've given some thought to finding him a permanent home?

GABRIELLE:

A permanent home--?

EVE:

Nari, I don't think this is the time for Darion to be separated from--

GABRIELLE:

Until I find his sister, Darion's permanent home is here with me.

OTHILA:

Given the tragedy the boy has suffered, the council has been lenient. But as Queen, I'm sure you're well aware that keeping that boy here is in violation of Amazon law. A male child is permitted to stay with his mother only until weaned. After that, he's sent to his father.

GABRIELLE:

He doesn't *have* a father, Othila--or a mother for that matter. If he did, I wouldn't have taken him with me in the first place.

OTHILA:

I don't have to remind you how the Amazon Nation has been weakened over the years. (her glance quickly darts to Eve then away again) We raise our daughters to be productive members of this tribe. Keeping our sons here would mean using up the tribe's limited resources on someone that's going to grow up and leave us anyway, giving us nothing back in return.

NARI (in genuine sympathy):

A male child is a luxury we simply can't afford, Gabrielle. We don't like sending our sons away either. But it's a sacrifice we all have to make if the Amazon Nation is to survive.

GABRIELLE:

I'm all Darion has. You expect me to abandon him in the name of the sisterhood? (she shakes her head) He's already been orphaned once.

OTHILA:

I'm afraid I don't quite understand your reluctance. I could see if he actually *was* your child--

GABRIELLE (her face darkening in anger):

I don't think it's your place to question me, Othila.

OTHILA (drops her gaze in contrition):

You're right. I apologize. (she lifts her head) However, your rank doesn't entitle you to any special privileges, Gabrielle. You're bound by the law just as we are.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe our law should take into account that a little boy just lost his entire family.

CYANE:

I agree with Gabrielle. I think that under the circumstances--

OTHILA:

The law is a just one. It's there to protect us and our way of life. You above all people should understand that, Cyane. Your namesake--

CYANE:

I doubt the great Cyane would have thought that an orphaned little boy was a threat to our way of life.

NARI:

It's not a question of *one* child being a threat. But if we allow Darion to stay then every Amazon mother with a son will expect the same. You're our queen, Gabrielle. It's up to you to set the example for the rest of the tribe.

GABRIELLE (shaking her head in disbelief):

I can't believe that a noble people like the Amazons would abandon a child simply because he's of the wrong sex.

NARI:

We're not asking you to abandon him. We're asking you to find the boy a proper home.

GABRIELLE (menacingly):

And if I don't?

NARI (shakes her head sadly):

Don't let it come to that, Gabrielle. Failure to obey our law is punishable by exile. You're our Queen and your place is here with your people. Are you willing to forsake your vow to the Amazon Nation and threaten our way of life for this child?

A close up of Gabrielle's stricken face.

OTHILA:

You have a week.

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Gabrielle and Eve walking back to Gabrielle's hut. It is dark and the only source of illumination is the torches lighting the path. They walk quietly side by side, almost as if in mourning. Finally, Gabrielle shakes her head.

GABRIELLE:

Darion has already lost so much. How can I send him away?

Eve says nothing and Gabrielle thinks a moment.

GABRIELLE:

Then again--as queen, how can I even consider relinquishing my duty and responsibility to my own people?

EVE:

It would still have to be put before the council. Not everyone would vote against you.

GABRIELLE (smiles mirthlessly):

I know I can count on you and Cyane. But I'm not so sure about the rest of them. (she sighs and shakes her head.) Some of these women still resent me for getting them involved in a war with Sabina.

EVE (frowns and shakes her head):

This is all such a mess. (sighs) I wish my mother were here.

GABRIELLE (snorts):

Join the club!

CUT TO

A stately room in a government building, with the bust of the emperor on a pedestal. The city magistrate, Gaius Fufius, a portly man in a purple toga, sits behind a desk. Xena walks in, followed by Agrippina.

FUFIOUS (with grudging respect):

The famous Xena. To what do I owe the-- (fumbles for words)

XENA (wryly):

--surprise?

FUFIOUS (nods uncomfortably):

You can certainly say that.

Xena walks toward the desk, while Agrippina stays behind.

XENA (leans on the desk, staring at him):
You have a big problem on your hands.

FUFIOUS (leans back, clearly intimidated):
You mean, besides you being in town?

XENA:
Besides me being in town. That mountain out there could blow up at any minute.

FUFIOUS (reflects for a moment):
I've heard that you were a woman of many talents, Xena, but I didn't know that among other things you were an expert on volcanoes.

XENA (straightens up):
I'm not. *She* is. (points at Agrippina)

FUFIOUS:
And who's she? Your servant, sidekick... (lifts his eyebrows suggestively) ...companion?

XENA:
Try none of the above. You know her as Lavinia Flora.

Fufius' face changes and he rises from his chair, clearly agitated.

FUFIOUS (to Agrippina, his face reddening):
You! I've been warned about you--you're some kind of big troublemaker and that's why you were exiled from Rome. (plaintively) Why do they have to dump their problems in my back yard?

AGRIPPINA (approaches him, unperturbed):
Gaius Fufius, whatever else I am, I am also a student of the sciences, and I'm telling you that the volcano could start erupting any day. Try walking the streets sometime, if you're willing to step out of your litter long enough...

FUFIOUS (clenches his fists):
Impertinence!

AGRIPPINA (continues):
Those ashes coming down from the skies are falling more and more steadily. It means that a disaster is at hand.

XENA:
If you don't give orders to evacuate the city, thousands could die.

FUFIOUS:
Nonsense. I have it on good authority that the city is perfectly safe.

XENA (frowns):
Whose authority?

WOMAN'S VOICE (off-camera, accompanied by the sound of a door opening):
Mine.

The camera pans over to a woman who comes in through a side door. She is wearing a scarlet robe with long sleeves and a bright yellow belt, and a gold medallion on a massive chain. Her brown hair is arranged in an elaborate hairstyle that looks like a tower.

XENA:

And who are you?

WOMAN:

Camilla, priestess to the goddess Pellonia, she who protects from peril. I am skilled in divination, and my goddess gives me visions and signs.

XENA (under her breath):

She obviously doesn't give you fashion tips.

CAMILLA (glares at her):

What?

XENA (rolls her eyes):

Nothing. Go on.

CAMILLA:

No harm will come to the city from the volcano. I know it from the signs my goddess has given me.

XENA (doubtfully):

What kinds of signs?

CAMILLA (in a condescending tone):

The signs have to be properly interpreted. Even if I told you, you wouldn't understand.

XENA:

Try me.

CAMILLA (importantly):

Just three days ago, two magpies landed at the exact same time in each palm of the great statue of my lady Pellonia in the portico of the temple.

XENA (shaking her head, through clenched teeth):

You're right. I *wouldn't* understand.

CAMILLA:

If you're interested, you can receive all the necessary documentation from the College of Augurs in Rome.

AGRIPPINA:

People should rely on their own judgment, not visions that priests tell us are supposedly sent by the gods!

Xena gives her a quick, understanding look.

CAMILLA:

Blasphemy!

FUFIOUS (his face reddening again):

I knew it! They *told* me you were a troublemaker!

On the word "told," he forcefully slams his palm down on the head of the Emperor's bust. At first he winces in pain; then, as he realizes that his inadvertent gesture could be taken as a sign of disrespect to the Emperor, the flush in his face gives way to pallor. He looks fearfully from Agrippina to Xena to Camilla, who sternly shakes her head in disapproval.

FUFIOUS (recovering from shock):

Out! Out, both of you! Or I'll call in the guard to get you out!

Xena and Agrippina exchange defeated looks, sigh, and head toward the door.

XENA:

Obviously, he wasn't impressed.

CUT TO

The street in front of the majestic city hall building, with columns and gold decorations. People are coming in and out of the wide-open front doors, with an armed guard standing on each side. Xena and Agrippina emerge from the doors and come down the marble steps, brushing past Roman men and women who are going up the stairs toward the door. They stop by a bronze statue of a Roman general. A bird sitting on the statue's hand flies up, leaving a fresh dropping behind.

XENA (glances at the statue's hand):

I wonder what sort of sign *that* is...

AGRIPPINA:

Maybe we could try a different way. Go to the leading citizens of this town and try to talk to them--if we persuade them to leave, then maybe the other people will follow.

XENA (looks at her curiously):

Why don't you just save yourself?

AGRIPPINA (gives her a proud look):

I am not one to run from danger, Xena. Not when I know I can save people's lives. As long as I think I can do something, I am staying here.

XENA (looks at her with grudging admiration):

All right. Why don't you go home for now. There's something I need to do on my own.

CUT TO

A deserted back street. Xena comes out from behind a corner, looks around to make sure there are no people nearby, and stops.

XENA (in a businesslike tone):

Ares!

ARES (appears in a flash of blue light):

Don't tell me you need my help.

XENA:

No, just some information. What do you know about a goddess Pellonia?

ARES:

There's nothing to know.

XENA:

What do you mean? She's supposed to be some sort of protector from danger--

ARES:

There's no such goddess, Xena. The Romans made her up.

XENA (lifts her eyebrows):

Made her up?

ARES:

You know those greedy Romans. They can never have enough of anything, including gods.

XENA:

So they have priests serving a goddess who doesn't exist.

ARES (shrugs):

Keeps them employed. Did you know that the Romans have a god of doors, a god of thresholds, and a god of hinges?

XENA (teasing):

Makes sense. Most of the gods I know wouldn't have the brains to handle all three.

ARES:

And let me tell you about--

XENA (spots some flakes of ash on his gauntlet and suddenly turns businesslike):

Forget about those fake gods. What do you know about this volcano?

ARES (shakes his head):

Not my specialty.

The ashes start falling more quickly; now, they look almost like a light grey rain. Xena looks up at the mountain and narrows her eyes, flicking the ashes off her hair.

ARES:

Now, let me tell you about the Roman gods of sex--

Even as he speaks, Xena rushes off without another word.

ARES:

Was it something I said?

CUT TO

Xena knocking frantically on Agrippina's door. Smyrna, the servant, opens. Xena rushes inside. Agrippina, standing by the window, turns around.

XENA:

It's coming down faster and faster--look! (she points to the ash on her hair, face, and armor and leathers)

AGRIPPINA:

Yes, I know. There's no time to waste--we have to warn the people *now*. In another day, there will be no escape.

XENA:

Somehow, we have to get the message to a lot of people at the same time... (she suddenly stops, her face lighting up) Wait--I've got an idea!

CUT TO

The street outside the amphitheater of Pompeii. Throngs of people are flocking into the amphitheater, casually brushing off the ashes that continue to fall. Some are carrying parasols. A woman in a white dress with a red sash cries out an announcement.

WOMAN:

One day only! Come and see the great Ostorius fight in the arena! He has never been defeated!

The camera pans over to Xena and Agrippina, who are coming up in the crowd.

XENA:

Just stay behind me until I call you out.

CUT TO

The arena. As spectators cheer in the stands, Ostorius, a tall, broad-shouldered man with curly blond hair, in leather armor that showcases his magnificent physique, is parading around the arena brandishing his swords in the air. The camera pans over to an entrance to the arena, where Ostorius' first opponent waits nervously, and then over to Fufius, the magistrate, who sits in the central box across from the entrance. Ostorius turns to Fufius, takes a bow and gives a salute.

FUFIUS (rises to his feet and raises his hand):

Let the games begin!

The camera pans to the entrance to the arena, where the manager prods Ostorius' first opponent in the back.

MANAGER:

You're on.

XENA (behind him):

Not yet.

MANAGER (turns to her with a shocked look):

Who are you? Hey--stop her!

Xena pushes her way past the guards and runs out into the arena.

XENA (at the top of her voice):
People of Pompeii!

The camera pans to Fufius' shocked face.

FUFIOUS:
Not her again!

XENA:
I have something to tell you--

A chorus of boos rises in the stands. The camera pans over the booing spectators.

MAN #1:
Get her out of here!

XENA (struggles to shout over the boos):
--that could save your lives--

WOMAN#1 (in the stands):
We're here for a fight, not a public service announcement!

OLD MAN:
We want the fight!

Three guards run out into the arena and attempt to grab Xena. She head-butts one of them, knocking him out, and then downs the two others with well-aimed kicks. The crowd bursts into applause and cheers.

WOMAN#2:
Let her fight Ostorius!

A chorus of cheers and cries of "Yeah! Yeah!" goes up in the stands. Xena looks around, frustrated. Finally, gritting her teeth, she grabs her sword. The camera pans quickly to Ostorius' scheduled opponent, who breathes a sigh of relief and wipes his forehead.

OSTORIUS (sneers):
You want to fight me?

XENA:
No, I don't. But it looks like I have to.

She charges him. He parries her blow with such force that she staggers back for a moment, but quickly regains control. As Ostorius attacks, Xena flips in the air, avoiding his blow, and kicks him in the chest, leaving him momentarily shaken. Rallying, he advances on Xena, and they circle each other for a while, each making fake sword thrusts, before Ostorius slashes at Xena's thigh. She ducks out of the way but the tip of his sword slashes at her skin. The crowd erupts in cheers. Xena strikes back, her sword clashing with Ostorius'. They battle until she leaps in the air and lands behind him, slamming her boots into his back. He staggers and lurches forward, nearly dropping his sword. With

another leap, Xena lands in front of him, spins around and knocks the sword out of his hand, then knocks him down and plants a foot on his chest, the tip of her sword at his throat. The crowd erupts in deafening applause. The camera pans over to Fufius, who looks extremely nervous, sweat rolling down his face. Finally he gets up, raises his hand and holds his thumb up, signaling that Ostorius should be spared.

Xena steps aside and Ostorius rises, panting and grunting. The look on his face is one of disbelief as he lumbers toward an exit from the arena.

XENA (raises her sword in the air, trying to shout over the applause and cheers):
Listen to me!

The noise quiets down a little.

MAN #2:
Let her speak!

XENA:
Listen! I don't want a reward for fighting Ostorius. All I ask is for you to hear out-- (she looks over at Agrippina, who is waiting at the entrance to the arena, and hesitates for a moment) --my friend.

A chorus of cheers goes up. Xena motions to Agrippina, and the manager reluctantly lets her through into the arena. A quick close-up of Fufius clutching his head in dismay.

Agrippina walks to the center of the arena and stands confidently next to Xena.

AGRIPPINA:
People of Pompeii! Citizens! Some of you have heard of me as Lavinia Flora. (A murmur runs through the crowd) My real name is Agrippina. I am the Empress of Rome, exiled on false charges because I spoke up for the people.

There are loud gasps and cries. Fufius bends low in his box and covers his face with his toga, as if trying to become invisible. After the noise abates somewhat, Agrippina continues.

AGRIPPINA:
I am not here to seek your sympathy or your support for my cause, but to entreat you to save yourselves. Listen to me carefully and do not panic. Leave this theater calmly and safely and go home, then take your families and possessions and get out of the city.

A murmur goes up again.

WOMAN #2:
What's happening?

AGRIPPINA:
Vesuvius, the volcano. (she points to the mountain looming over the city) Any day, it will erupt and destroy the city.

MAN #1:
We've been told that the city is safe--there have been signs from the gods!

AGRIPPINA:

Never mind the signs from the gods. (she points to the falling ashes) These are all the signs you need--a sign sent by nature that the volcano is about to erupt.

There is confusion as some people start running toward the exits in a panic, others try to walk calmly, and still others try to hold back those about to leave, obviously trying to persuade them that there is no danger. More and more people are getting up and leaving.

AGRIPPINA:

Well, we did it.

XENA:

If there's a stampede, a lot of people could die.

AGRIPPINA:

Even more would have died if they stayed in the city. We had no other way. (looks appraisingly at Xena, who seems slightly taken aback by her cold attitude) You were very brave.

XENA:

So were you.

The two women clasp hands. Then, Xena looks up at the mountain. A close-up of the pinnacle of Vesuvius, with a small flame shooting out of it, is followed by a wide shot of the amphitheater, where the crowd is exiting more and more hurriedly, and the arena where the two women are standing as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

As at the end of Act 3, we see a close-up of the top of Vesuvius with a flame shooting out, and then a wide shot of the arena with the people fleeing. Then the camera pans down to Xena and Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA:

I've been meaning to ask you--

XENA (points to the mountain):

Later--let's get out of here!

They run toward the exit. The "rain" of ashes is getting thicker and thicker, so that the day is beginning to darken.

CUT TO

Outside the amphitheater, people are running in a panic. Xena and Agrippina run out as well, the stampede threatening to overwhelm them.

XENA:

This way!

She pulls Agrippina into a side street, away from the throng, where they stop to catch their breath.

AGRIPPINA:

I have to go home and get Smyrna.

XENA (looks up at the dark sky):

I'll go with you--we should stick together.

AGRIPPINA:

I was going to ask you before--where is your friend, Gabrielle? I've read her scrolls--I thought you two were inseparable--

XENA (shakes her head, her look wistful):

She's--not here. (Her lips tighten, and the look on her face changes to one of intense focus) Let's go.

CUT TO

Gabrielle stands before a mirror, adorning herself in her Queen regalia. Darion is seated on the edge of his bed. In his hand is a wooden replica of Xena's chakram.

DARION:

Remember, you promised to teach me Xena's battle cry. (not knowing what else to do with it, Darion twirls the chakram around his finger) La la la la la la...

Gabrielle chuckles softly and fastens her necklace around her neck.

DARION:

Where are you going tonight, Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE:

I'm going to have a meeting with some of my Amazons.

DARION:

They're supposed to do whatever you tell them, right?

GABRIELLE (laughs humorlessly):

Sometimes they do. Sometimes it's the other way around.

DARION:

They don't like me.

Gabrielle spins towards him.

GABRIELLE:

What? No! No, that's not it at all. (she comes over to sit beside him on the bed and puts her arm around his shoulders) It's just that there aren't any other boys your age here in the village and--

DARION:

I don't mind! I have *you*!

GABRIELLE:

Darion, we need to have a talk about where you're going to be--

DARION:

I mean, you don't have any kids, right?

Gabrielle flinches, clearly taken aback at the question. She considers her answer carefully.

GABRIELLE:

I had a daughter once but she's...gone now.

She trails off into uncomfortable silence and Darion nods. For a brief moment he looks far older and wiser than his eight years.

DARION:

You mean gone like my parents are gone, right?

GABRIELLE (nods sadly with a sigh):

Yes--gone like your parents are gone...

DARION:

So maybe you could be my mommy. I know it wouldn't be the same for you because I'm just a boy. But I bet there's lots of things I can do that your little girl couldn't. I can climb a tree, I know how to fish--

Darion continues listing his attributes as the camera pulls in closer and closer on Gabrielle's face, her expression pensive.

CUT TO

The hut of the Amazon council. A close up of Eve as she darts anxious looks between the council members and Gabrielle--who stands calm--in an almost aloof manner--at the center of the circle made up by the members.

CYANE (leaning over to Eve to whisper):

I don't like the looks of this. What's she planning?

EVE (shaking her head):

I wish I knew.

OTHILA:

A week has passed, Queen Gabrielle. I trust you've made a decision regarding the boy's care?

GABRIELLE (nods):

I have.

OTHILA:

Excellent! The council is anxious to hear your plans!

GABRIELLE (casting a steady, unfriendly gaze at Othila):

My plans... (she glances at Eve and Cyane, then clears her throat) I've decided that I'll step down in favor of my next in line.

The room erupts in shocked cries of dismay, shock and outrage. A close up of Eve's face as her mouth drops in disbelief and a touch of horror. Gabrielle gives her a small smile of reassurance as the scene slowly fades to black.

CUT TO

Outside Gabrielle's hut. Eve paces back and forth, clearly agitated.

EVE:

Me? As Queen of the Amazons? Gabrielle, what were you *thinking?*

GABRIELLE:

That I wasn't going to allow *anyone* to exile me. This way I can leave with my head held high--with my last official act being placing the Amazons into the hands of someone I trust.

EVE (shakes her head):

I'm not ready for this, Gabrielle! You know that!

GABRIELLE:

Cyane is willing to act as your Regent until you're prepared to take the throne.

EVE (snorts):

I wonder if we'll ever see that day.

GABRIELLE:

If I didn't think you were up to it, I never would have left the Amazons in your care. (she smiles sadly) Who knows? Maybe one day you'll be the one to convince them to change their ways and then Darion and I can return.

EVE (miserably):

Let's hope it's one day soon.

GABRIELLE:

I'm sorry if I've left you with my mess--

EVE (shakes her head):

No. You did the right thing. Darion needs you.

GABRIELLE:

It's not just that he needs me, Eve. These past few weeks have made me realize that I need *him* too. It's like...he's giving me back something I thought I lost a long time ago--my own innocence.

Eve squeezes Gabrielle's shoulder in understanding.

EVE:

Where will you go now?

GABRIELLE:

Tomorrow morning Darion and I are heading out towards Corinth to find Xena. (off Eve's despondent look) Stop looking so gloomy, Eve. I'll still be around, you know.

EVE:

You will?

GABRIELLE:

Once I find your mother I'll be back. I'm not about to let the bastards responsible for that village get away--especially when they're operating so close to Amazon lands. And I've promised Darion I'd find his sister.

EVE:

Still--things won't be the same without you.

GABRIELLE (nods as her eyes mist up a little):

You've got Klymene to keep you company. Besides, you don't need me to help you survive here anymore. You're capable of doing that all on your own.

EVE (her gaze drops and she shakes her head):

There's so many things I've wanted to say to you. And right now I can't think of any of them. (she looks up) Thank you. I owe you...everything.

GABRIELLE:

You don't owe me anything, Eve. We're family. We stick by one another no matter what.

EVE (smiles tenderly and nods in agreement):

Family...

The two women hug tearfully.

CUT TO

Pompeii. The volcano is now in full eruption. Close up as billows of smoke and steam rise from the volcano's peak, lava flowing down the sides of the volcano at a rapid speed. The falling ashes are now mixed with large pieces of grey stone. A montage of shots of the city in mortal panic, with people running around screaming, running into their houses, and trying to gather up their possessions. As the smoke clears for a moment, we see Xena and Agrippina.

XENA (to a man who is about to run into a house):

Is anyone in there?

MAN (wild-eyed):

All my money--if I don't go in there, I'll lose everything I have--

XENA (shouting):

You'll still have your life! Leave it all behind!

Shots of Xena and Agrippina directing the fleeing people. We can't hear what they are saying but they are obviously trying to keep people from panicking and making the scene even more chaotic than it already is.

Shots of the lava reaching the edges of the city, destroying everything in its path--leveling trees, crushing houses that moments later are engulfed in flames. The near-darkness from the ashes is illuminated by crimson flashes of fire from the volcano.

Shots of the fleeing people in the city. Many are hurt--some nearly trampled in the panic, others hit by the falling rocks, still others suffocating from the ashes. We see a man get hit in the head by a rock and fall unconscious by the threshold of a house. The falling ashes starts to cover him. The camera cuts away to show other people running and fleeing. Then it cuts back to where the fallen man was. He is now completely covered in ashes.

CUT TO

Agrippina in another part of the city pulling an unconscious woman out of a heap of ashes.

CUT TO

Xena running through the streets, dodging the falling rocks and the fleeing people. Hearing a desperate female scream, she runs to the location that it's coming from and sees Camilla, the priestess. She is lying on the ground, her arm pinned by a fallen piece of wood. She cannot move and ashes are already covering her. Next to her, a house is on fire and about to collapse. Xena leaps toward her, kicks away the board that is pinning her down and snatches her out of harm's way just as the burning house collapses.

CAMILLA:

Oh! Thank you! Thank you! (recognizes Xena) I'm sorry, I'm really sorry--

XENA:

Save it for later. Can you walk?

CAMILLA (looks over herself hastily and moves her feet):

Yes... yes, I can.

XENA:

Then get out of here as soon as you can. (points in the direction of the city gates, then stops a passing young man who seems to be calmer than the others) This is the priestess Camilla--can you help her?

YOUNG MAN:

Yeah, sure. Come on, lady. (He puts an arm around Camilla's shoulders and helps her away)

CAMILLA (turns to Xena):

Thank you...thank you!

XENA (looks after her, shaking her head):

Don't thank your goddess...

Xena takes off running through the streets again, and stops for a moment as she sees the flow of red-hot, shimmering lava rolling down the street leveling everything in its path. Screams are heard from some houses but before she can do anything, the houses are engulfed in flames. A close-up of the pained look on Xena's face.

As Xena turns and runs from the lava, catching up with the stampede of still-fleeing people, a panicked woman stops her.

WOMAN (screams):

My little girl! My little girl! She's in there!

She points to a house that is still standing but is surrounded by the fiery flow of lava. In the window is a red-haired little girl in a blue dress, crying and hugging a doll.

XENA (to the woman):

Go on, run! I'll get her!

The woman lingers. Xena makes a dash and leaps, flipping in the air, prepared to snatch the girl--but before she can reach the girl, the house collapses, and Xena lands on a pile of wood that remains. The woman screams behind her. Desperately, Xena tries to lift the fallen boards, but the pile of wood is already going up in flames and Xena has to leap out of the way. With a horrified look, she turns toward the mother, who stands petrified, covering her mouth with her hands.

Suddenly, there is a flash of blue light, and Ares appears next to Xena holding the frightened but unharmed little girl in his arms. The mother cries out joyfully, then gives Ares a baffled look.

MOTHER:

What--how did you--

XENA:

Never mind that--your daughter's safe. (She comes up to Ares, smiling at him a little, and takes the child from his arms.) Thank you.

ARES (looks around at the destruction around them, and at Xena):

Xena--

XENA (firmly):

I'll take it from here.

She hands the little girl to her mother and they run off, leaving a thoughtful-looking Ares standing behind. Then Ares turns and strides off, walking right through a burning house.

CUT TO

A river outside the city. Fleeing refugees are swimming across the river or crossing it in boats or on rafts. Agrippina can be seen helping people get into boats. Xena comes running with the mother and the little girl. There are no more boats or rafts left.

XENA:

Come on!

She hoists the little girl up on her back and then wades into the river. She swims across, Agrippina and the girl's mother swimming next to her.

As they face the camera, we see a background image of the city in the half-darkness. There are still flames and streams of lava shooting out of the top of the volcano. Lava is streaming down the sides. What is left of the city is covered by lava and engulfed in flames.

Another image is gradually superimposed on this image--that of the city a few days later. The image lightens. The sky is now clear. There is still smoke coming from the volcano. All that's left of the city is charred ground.

CUT TO

A refugee camp of hastily built tents on the other side of the city. Xena and Agrippina are tending to the wounded lying on mats on the ground. Agrippina brings some water to Fufius, whose face is badly burned. He avidly drinks the water and then looks up at her, embarrassed.

FUFIUS:

Thank you...my Empress. I won't forget this.

Agrippina's lips spread in a contented little smile. She nods and moves on.

XENA (comes up to Agrippina):

How's it going?

AGRIPPINA (shakes her head):

Not well...there are too many injured, and not enough people to care for them.

XENA (sighs):

I wish Gabrielle were here...she's good at this kind of stuff.

GABRIELLE (off-camera):

Xena!

XENA (frowns):

One of those rocks must have hit me too hard on the head.

GABRIELLE (still off-camera):

Xena! Over here.

Xena whips around. Gabrielle is smiling at her, with Darion standing at her side. Xena's face lights up with joy.

XENA:

Gabrielle!

She rushes toward Gabrielle and they embrace warmly.

XENA (after they pull apart):

How did you get here?

GABRIELLE (looks away, slightly abashed):

Uh...long story.

XENA (notices Darion):

And who's *this*?

DARION:

Wow--you're Xena! Look-- (points to the wooden chakram replica on his belt) I have a cha-cha- (finally gives up) a round flying thing just like yours!

XENA (stares at him):

Yeah...so I see. That's great. (Turns to Gabrielle, somewhat uncomfortably) This I've *got* to hear.

GABRIELLE (smiles rather tensely):

Uh...long story.

AGRIPPINA (steps forward):

So you're the famous Battling Bard of Potidaea. You know, my son Domitius is a great fan of yours. He loves the Greek poets--in fact, he's traveling in Greece right now, taking in the culture.

Gabrielle nods and gives Xena a somewhat puzzled look.

XENA:

Gabrielle, this is--Agrippina. She's been helping me with the rescue... Actually, it's kind of a long story too.

CUT TO

Inside a tent. Xena and Gabrielle are sitting on a rug talking; Darion is playing in a corner.

XENA (shakes her head):

So you've left the Amazons.

GABRIELLE (takes her hand fondly):

Xena--it was my choice. In the end, I decided that there were other things that were more important to me. Like-- (gazes into Xena's eyes, and then looks over at Darion) the people who are my family.

XENA (quietly):

It's good to have you back, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

I've missed you too.

They hug for a moment. A close-up on Xena's face, and then Gabrielle; both have tears in their eyes.

XENA (pulling away):

There's one thing you haven't told me yet. How did you find me?

GABRIELLE:

Well, when we got to Corinth, they told me you had gone off to Pompeii...

DARION (excitedly, looking up in the corner):

...and then, when we'd only been on the road for one day, a nice man showed up and offered to get us here right away!

GABRIELLE (reddening):

Darion! We weren't supposed to--

XENA (her eyes narrow):

A nice man, huh?

She shivers slightly and smiles a catlike smile. In the next instant, Ares materializes in a flash of blue light.

ARES (in pretend fury):

All right--that does it!

XENA (smiles at him teasingly):

Saving children... Bringing Gabrielle and-- (looks at Darion and fumbles for the name for a moment) Darion here...that was... *nice*.

ARES (folds his arms on his chest):

Don't push it, or I'll have to go start a war somewhere.

DARION (jumps up in excitement and runs up to Ares):

Hey--uh--sir? How do you do that blue light trick?

ARES (momentarily taken aback, finally grins at Darion):

Watch.

He glances at Xena, a twinkle in his eyes, and vanishes in a flash of blue light.

DARION:

Wow. (to Xena) Do you know how to do that too?

XENA (shakes her head with a little smile):

No, I don't.

DARION (briefly disappointed, then perks up):

Well, maybe he can teach you sometime. (to Gabrielle) Gabrielle, you think he can teach me?

GABRIELLE (slightly at a loss for words, gently puts her hands on Darion's shoulders):

I don't think so, sweetheart.

DARION (sighs):

Oh well... (to Xena) You *are* going to teach me your battle cry, right? La-la-la-la-la...

XENA (glances wryly at Gabrielle):

You taught him that?

Gabrielle blushes and looks down.

DARION:

She taught me my favorite song, too! (sings) Joxer the Mighty, he roams through the countryside...

XENA (her mouth hanging open in shock, turns to Gabrielle):

You taught him *that*?

GABRIELLE (blushes even more deeply):

Well--I was telling him all about us and Joxer and--

DARION (dances around the tent, singing):

With Gabby as his sidekick,
Fighting with--

XENA (looks daggers at Gabrielle):

Gabrielle!

DARION (singing):

Righting wrongs and singing songs,
Being mighty all day long,
He's Joxer...

Close-up on Gabrielle as she raises up her palms in a helpless gesture of resignation.

DARION (singing):

Joxer the Mighty!

FADE OUT

THE END

[Ares' title as God of War was put to shame after being called a "nice man" during the production of this motion picture.]