

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT

“Surprises”

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Logline

It's Xena's birthday and all of her friends have a good time in store for her. The fun gets underway but as always, where Xena is concerned the fun is short lived and trouble arises, though it's nothing a Warrior Princess can't handle.

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TEASER

FADE IN

A forest, with a large full moon visible between the tree-tops. The indistinct sound of conversation can be heard, and then a single word--*Gabrielle*.

The camera focuses on a crackling fire, around which several shadowy figures huddle. Their murmurings are initially inaudible, but suddenly a voice is raised.

VOICE 1:

Then we go after Gabrielle.

VOICE 2:

But...

VOICE 1:

You're telling me you can't kidnap a single woman? (snorts) What use--

VOICE 3:

He never said that--you never did, did you? We'll get her all right...oh, it'll be nice and easy. We'll get her...

The voice fades into the night once again. But as the camera moves away from the figures, we hear:

VOICE 2:

But what about Xena?

VOICE 1:

See, that's the beauty of this plan...

CUT TO

A colorful market square in a bustling village. Xena, with Argo by her side all packed up and ready for a journey, is staring with disbelief at Gabrielle, who looks like she's in the middle of trying to explain something. Darion is wrapped around Xena's legs.

XENA:

You're telling me we can't leave yet because of a toy fair?

GABRIELLE (sheepishly):

Yeah.

DARION (beseechingly):

Pleeeeeease, Xena? Can we stay just one more day? I'll be good, I promise!

XENA (disbelieving):

Well, that's got to be--

She is interrupted by a child's scream. Startled, she turns to look. A girl of about seven is running toward her holding a doll in a pink dress.

CHILD'S VOICE (shouts off-camera):

The Aegean Beach Aphrodite Doll! She got the last one!

Several other girls come into view, in hot pursuit of the girl with the doll. They catch up with her and one grabs her by the hair. Just as Xena is about to step in, the child whirls around and turns on her assailants, using the doll as a weapon to beat back the girl who has her by the hair and then spinning and kicking in best Xena fashion.

Pan back to Xena, who looks on, open-mouthed; she and Gabrielle exchange a startled look and then a shrug.

Pan back to the children. The attacking girls turn around and flee. The girl with the doll shakes herself off with the air of a seasoned fighter, smoothing her dress.

DARION (admiringly):

Nice moves!

The girl looks toward him, Xena and Gabrielle.

GIRL (her eyes light up with excitement):
Hey! A Xena impersonator!

XENA (straightens up, glaring):
A what?

GIRL (comes closer):
You're a Xena impersonator, right? We had one at the fair last year. That's how I learned my fighting moves. (she spins around and kicks an imaginary opponent) I even got myself a Xena doll--I have one at home.

GABRIELLE (mischievously to Xena):
Sounds like toy fairs are more exciting than you think. (to the girl) She's not an impersonator. She's the real thing.

GIRL:
You're kidding me. (she eyes Xena curiously) Say, what did you think of my moves?

XENA (smirks):
Not bad at all.

GIRL (pumps her fist in the air):
Yeah! Hey, if you're still around later maybe you can sign my Xena doll for me!

She runs away.

Xena looks after her and shakes her head, then turns to Gabrielle and Darion.

XENA:
So--where were we?

DARION (hugs her legs again):
Please, Xena? Please? Can we stay for the fair? I'll be--

XENA:
Oh yeah. You'll be good, you promise. I remember.

GABRIELLE:
Come on, Xena--it will be a good chance to relax. We've been pretty busy, and Darion needs a rest. We can't keep moving like this.

Xena looks down into Darion's pleading eyes and sighs. Shaking her head, she carefully untangles the child from her legs, then grabs Argo's bridle and heads towards the stables.

XENA (calling back over her shoulder):
One day, that's all!

Close up of Darion and Gabrielle's smiling faces as they high-five each other.

CUT TO

Inside a tavern. Xena is sitting at the bar, finishing her dinner; she stares out the window where we can see the busy village square. The day is starting to turn to evening. Gabrielle and Darion are sitting next to Xena.

Suddenly, Xena perks up, a puzzled look on her face.

XENA:

Say, was that--

Gabrielle knocks over her mug of ale, which falls with a loud clatter, spilling ale all over the counter and into Xena's bowl of stew. Xena gives an exclamation of annoyance.

DARION (erupts in laughter):

That was funny!

XENA (gives him a displeased look):

That was my dinner.

GABRIELLE (laughs nervously):

Sorry, I guess I'm being a bit clumsy today.

XENA:

I'll say. (sweeps some of the ale off the counter, then tastes the stew with a cautious look on her face and then nods with unexpected satisfaction) It's not so bad, really.

GABRIELLE (crinkles her nose):

Lamb stew and ale, huh? You know, sometimes the best recipes are invented in mysterious ways.

Xena nods and chuckles, then looks up at Gabrielle as if she has suddenly remembered something.

XENA:

Hey, almost forgot--I thought I saw someone out there in the square who really looked like Virgil.

GABRIELLE (laughs):

Is it something we ate? I'm knocking things over, you're seeing things--

XENA (frowns):

What are you trying to say?

GABRIELLE:

Xena, there's no way Virgil would be here in this village.

DARION:

Maybe he wanted to see the toy fair.

Gabrielle laughs; Xena starts laughing too.

GABRIELLE:

Speaking of the toy fair--Darion, I think we'd better get going. (to Xena, teasingly) You sure you don't want to come along? Maybe you could sign some Xena dolls.

XENA (not amused):
I'll pass.

Gabrielle and Darion exchange a mischievous look, then get up and walk out.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Darion walking across the square. She bends down and says something to him.

CUT TO

The tavern. Xena finishes her stew, looks into the bowl and shrugs. Then she gets up, walks to the staircase and makes her way upstairs.

In the corner of the tavern, the three hooded figures watch silently as the Warrior Princess climbs the stairs.

FIGURE #1 (in a hoarse whisper):
Well? Are we going after the blonde now?

CUT TO

A room in the tavern. Xena comes in and stretches lazily, then takes off her sword and her chakram and puts them down.

CUT TO

A nearly deserted village street. Darion is pressed firmly against a wooden fence, slowly making his way along it. A toy sword is clutched tightly in his right hand; his face wears a deep look of concentration in the form of puckered lips and a raised eyebrow. He looks around cautiously, as if to make sure no one notices him. A few people hurry by but no one is looking at him.

Darion reaches the end of the fence, looks cautiously back and forth--in the direction he came from and then in the direction where he's going--and starts running towards the tavern as fast as he can.

CUT TO

Xena, in her room at the inn, sits down and, out of sheer habit, examines her sword, running a finger along its edge to make sure it's sharp enough.

CUT TO

Darion steals into the tavern, looking around cautiously, and starts to make his way upstairs. Then, once he's no longer visible from downstairs, he starts to bound over the steps.

CUT TO

Xena puts her sword down and reaches behind her back to remove her breastplate.

Darion bursts through the door and propels himself at Xena with such force she falls back on the bed. He's short of breath.

DARION (hoarsely):
Xe-nah! Xe..na...

XENA (worry clearly showing through her voice):
What is it, Darion--what's wrong?

DARION (through tears):
It's Gab...Gabrielle!

XENA (sits up and grabs Darion's shoulders, alarmed):
What happened to her, Darion? Where is she?

DARION (sniffles):
She's in a barn on the other side of the square... Some bad men have her trapped!

Xena jumps to her feet as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Xena heads toward the door, the chakram already on her hip and sword in her hand. Darion runs after her. The camera follows them as Xena races toward the stairs; Darion has a hard time keeping up with her.

DARION:
Wait up! (Xena looks back, startled.) I have to show you the way.

A quick montage as Xena and Darion run down the stairs and out of the tavern, then across the square and along the street where we saw Darion before.

DARION:
Stop!

XENA (taken back):
What now?

DARION:
We have to be quiet and sneak up on them.

Xena stops and narrows her eyes and looks at him, hand on chakram just in case.

XENA:
How many of these bad men are there?

DARION (stares at her--the question has obviously taken him by surprise, and he thinks hard, his tongue hangs out slightly in deep concentration):

Um...maybe two thousand.

XENA (raised eyebrow):

Two thousand? (she looks suspicious but somewhat relieved, sensing that maybe Gabrielle is not in trouble after all) Just how big is that barn, Darion?

DARION (thinking hard):

Umm...did I say two thousand? I meant two hundred.

XENA (still suspicious):

Then shouldn't we be moving a little faster?

DARION:

We have to be quiet--then we can catch them by surprise.

He puts a finger to his lips as they approach the barn entrance. Xena pushes the door open and takes a step forward, Darion at her heels. The barn is pitch black, the only light coming in through the open door; everything is quiet.

XENA (warily):

Gabrielle?

They both take a few steps into the barn, with Xena holding Darion back behind her.

Suddenly, an oil lamp ignites in the center of the barn, its bright golden shine dispelling the darkness. Then, more lamps light up in succession, instantly filling the room with light. Xena squints, shielding her eyes.

CHORUS OF VOICES (yells loudly):

Surprise!

Gabrielle rises from behind a pile of bright-colored cushions; then, Eve and Klymene rise at her side, and on the other side of the barn, Virgil, Kara, and Theon.

The barn has been turned into an over-decorated function room. Pink adorns every corner; cushions, rugs and roses--pink, red, white and pale yellow--are strewn all over the place. There is also a long table laden with food. In the middle of the barn, a banner is strung up with swirly lettering, red on a pink background. A caption appears onscreen, translating the inscription:

HAPPY BIRTHDAY XENA!

A close-up of Xena's shocked face. Gradually recovering from the shock, she looks around, with enough presence of mind to notice that Eve and Virgil are exchanging covert glances. She smiles--and then, scanning the gathering once more, looks subtly disappointed.

There are two flashes of light and puffs of smoke, one golden, one blue; when the smoke and the sparks clear, Ares and Aphrodite are standing in the middle of the barn.

APHRODITE (claps her hands):
Surpriiiiiise!

Ares says nothing, lifting a sardonic eyebrow at Xena. She smiles. Meanwhile, Gabrielle grins and walks over to Xena.

DARION (jumping up and down at a thousand miles per minute):
Were you surprised? Wasn't I good at pretending something bad had happened?

GABRIELLE (interrupting):
Darion...

DARION (still beside himself with excitement):
Bet you didn't know what we had planned! Really fooled you, huh? (proudly) I did everything Gabrielle told me to do!

ARES (looks sarcastically at Gabrielle):
Corrupting the innocent, I see?

GABRIELLE (reddens):
Darion!

DARION (innocent look):
What?

XENA:
You know you shouldn't tell tales; haven't you ever heard of the boy who cried wolf?

DARION (puzzled):
Wolf? When I cry, it sounds more like WAHHHH!!!

XENA (hides a grin):
Thank you, Darion. (turns to Gabrielle) Now what do I do with you, huh?

She steps up to Gabrielle and gives her a hug.

GABRIELLE:
Hey--you can't blame this one on me! Although I agree that it's about time we celebrated your birthday--

XENA:
You mean, to remind me that I'm getting older?

ARES (in feigned shock):
You *are*?

Xena gives him a "cut the crap" smile.

GABRIELLE:
Anyway, the surprise party wasn't my idea.

XENA:

Then whose idea was it?

Gabrielle raises an eyebrow and turns. The camera follows her gaze over to Ares standing side by side with Aphrodite.

XENA (with a mock look of anger):

You're the one responsible!

APHRODITE (pushes forward):

For all the decorating? Yeah, isn't it just--perfect?

XENA (gives a tight smile):

Oh yeah. (looks around) Well, at least you didn't use pink...

Aphrodite frowns, confused; Gabrielle unsuccessfully tries to steer her toward the other guests.

XENA (to Ares):

So I have you to thank for this, huh?

ARES (smirks):

Want to punish me? (Aphrodite elbows him) Ow...I take no credit for the decor, trust me.

XENA (grins):

I hope not. It's bad enough without the décor.

ARES (raises his eyebrows):

Bad? What now?

XENA:

Oh...just wondering if you're going a bit soft. (she raises an eyebrow, and looks him over) Well--not everywhere--

GABRIELLE (blushes furiously and puts her hands over Darion's ears):

Xena!

XENA (places her hand on Ares' muscular arm and smirks):

What did you *think* I meant?

Gabrielle shakes her head ruefully and takes her hands off Darion's ears.

DARION (oblivious):

You should've seen it, Xena! Aphrodite just went--bang! And then it all changed... (turns to Ares) Can you do that too, Ares? Huh? Can you?

ARES (glances at Gabrielle):

I'm not sure it would be properly appreciated, but--

He flicks a finger. The decor shimmers and then changes: the cushions become heaps of skulls, the curtains turn black and scarlet, the garlands of roses turn to bones and polished weapons, the stands with flower vases to severed heads and polished weapons. Darion looks somewhat taken aback but

then claps, obviously trying to put on a brave face; Kara and Theon squeal; Eve, Virgil, and Gabrielle wince visibly, and Klymene looks around, both disturbed and clearly impressed.

APHRODITE (rolls her eyes):

Bro, this is so not cool for a birthday party...

Xena simply stares at Ares. He sighs, clicks his fingers and changes everything back.

DARION (excited):

Wow! Can you do that for my birthday?

Gabrielle looks dismayed.

CUT TO

A large forest, with tall trees on both sides of a narrow, dimly-lit path. It's late, and the last rays of light are disappearing from the sky. As the camera moves through the forest, two male voices break through the silence.

VOICE 1:

I can't believe we're late.

VOICE 2:

Well--if we hadn't stopped to help that woman who said a hydra was after her, we'd be on time.

VOICE 1:

She could have been in real trouble!

VOICE 2:

Hmm... From a hydra described as pink and fluffy?

The camera stands still for a moment and focuses on a tree.

VOICE 1:

It could have been some other monster.

VOICE 2:

What, a killer bunny?

A pause.

VOICE 1:

You may laugh, but I have it on very good authority that killer bunnies are very often underestimated...

The camera starts moving forward again.

VOICE 2 (sighs):

This is going to happen forever, isn't it? Even when I'm long gone, you'll continue to have your admirers inventing monsters from which you have to rescue them...

VOICE 1 (sheepishly):
Maybe not forever.

CUT TO

The party. Aphrodite and Klymene are deep in discussion, while Gabrielle is talking to Virgil and simultaneously keeping an eye on Darion, Kara and Theon, who are hanging near the table looking at the food with intense interest.

Eve approaches Xena and gives her a hug.

EVE:
Happy birthday, Mother.

XENA:
Thanks, Evie. (Xena looks over at Virgil, who turns to look at them, apparently only half-listening to what Gabrielle is saying) It means a lot to have the people I love here today--

Eve follows Xena's gaze and blushes.

EVE:
It does, doesn't it... (obviously wanting to change the subject, looks around the barn and notices Aphrodite talking to Klymene) I wonder what *they're* talking about--I'd better go over there and find out.

XENA (chuckles):
You'd better. I think that was about as long as Aphrodite can talk about things that are appropriate for children.

Eve walks over to Aphrodite and Klymene.

APHRODITE:
So, if a boy wants to kiss you--

EVE (looks panicked):
Uh...maybe we should open the presents and start eating?

APHRODITE:
Oh no--not everyone is here yet!

XENA (creases her brow):
Who else are we expecting?

APHRODITE:
Uh-uh, warrior babe! You just go and mingle and you'll find out soon enough...

Aphrodite draws Eve aside while Klymene goes over to Darion, Kara and Theon at the food table; Darion is sneaking bits of icing off the cake. Xena's gaze wanders over to Ares, who stands to the side all by himself, looking with obvious disapproval at his pink surroundings. Xena walks toward him.

ARES:

Like your surprise? (he touches the back of his hand to her cheek)

XENA:

Yes. (smiles) I haven't had a birthday party since I was a child. (looks at him and chuckles) You knew it was my birthday. Now *that's* a surprise.

ARES:

Come on, Xena. I-- (he stumbles a little and pauses)

XENA (teasing):

You're a god?

ARES (smiles a little tensely):

Yeah, that's obviously what I meant to say.

She covers his hand with her own. They move together into a tender kiss. Just as their lips meet, the door flies open and in marches Hercules followed by a familiar-looking old man--it's a much older Iolaus.

Hercules smiles and waves at everyone as he strolls toward the table and grabs a puff pastry, stuffing it in his mouth. Then he stops dead in his tracks as he notices Xena and Ares sharing a kiss, and promptly starts choking. Meanwhile, Iolaus, who has stopped in the doorway, sees Xena and Ares from the back, with Ares' arms around Xena and Xena leaning back a little.

IOLAUS:

Hercules? Is that Ares trying to strangle Xena? (he steps closer and gets a better view, just as Ares and Xena pull apart) Oh--never mind...

A close-up of the shocked look on Iolaus' face.

Meanwhile, the camera pans over to Hercules, who is still choking. Before anyone can do anything, Darion hurls himself at Hercules, knocking them both over. As Hercules lands flat on his back, the pastry goes flying across the room. Hercules takes some deep breaths, his life saved. Darion stands up, looking rather pleased with himself as the hero of the night. Hercules scrambles to his feet.

ARES (sourly):

Surprise, surprise.

Xena gives Ares a swift look, then moves quickly towards Hercules.

XENA:

I can't--I can't believe it!

She hugs first Hercules, and then Iolaus. Gabrielle comes over quickly and also embraces the pair.

HERCULES:

Who's my young savior, here?

DARION:

I'm Darion, I travel with Xena and Gabrielle.

XENA:

Oh! And you must meet my daughter Eve--and Joxer's son, Virgil--and--

Everyone moves over and introduces themselves. Ares stays back and then fades away.

GABRIELLE (to Iolaus):

I thought you were dead--we heard--

IOLAUS:

So did we. (he shakes his head). I didn't think we'd ever make it back to Greece, but then Aphrodite told us that you were alive, and--we just had to see you again. (he takes a look at her brown leather outfit). Well, look at you! Little Gabrielle, all grown up. You're definitely not the village girl I used to know...

GABRIELLE (laughing a little bitterly):

No. Not anymore.

Pan to Xena, Eve and Hercules.

HERCULES:

I saw you on the day you were born, Eve--you've grown up to become a beautiful woman, just like your mother.

EVE (uneasily):

Thank you.

HERCULES (to Virgil):

And you're Joxer's son--I was so sorry to hear of his death--he was... (pauses, searching for an appropriate description) ...one of a kind.

VIRGIL (awkwardly, looking between Hercules and Eve):

Thank you.

XENA (takes pity on the pair):

Maybe you two can get us something to drink--

Eve and Virgil speak simultaneously, then stop.

EVE:

Oh--all right-I--

VIRGIL:

I think it's this way, Eve--

They look at each other and smile, then walk over to the table together.

XENA:

Hercules--so much has changed since you left...

HERCULES:

Except you--you look just the same as ever! (then he frowns) Wait, wait--I know I saw something before, just before I choked on that pastry... Did I see Ares?

XENA (uncomfortably):

Yes, you did.

HERCULES:

Last time you had a party, he sent Discord to ruin it. What's he up to now? (frowns again as the memory comes back to him) Wait--were you two--

Ares appears behind Xena and puts his hand on her shoulder. Hercules stares.

ARES:

Maybe I shouldn't have left the decorating up to Aphrodite after all. (he looks around, then stares directly at Hercules) Some of the decorations really *are* looking the worse for wear.

APHRODITE (walking by):

It's called "retro", bro!

XENA (in a warning tone):

It's called my birthday. I don't want any trouble--I mean it. From either of you. (grins a little) Be nice.

Eve and Virgil return with drinks, and Eve absently hands one to Xena and one to Ares while Virgil is handing out smaller cups to the children. Hercules stares.

HERCULES:

You and Ares--?

ARES (sarcastic):

Aren't *you* full of insights, little brother.

DARION (excited, to Ares):

He's your *brother*?

HERCULES (pointedly):

Half-brother.

XENA:

Hercules, look--as I said, a lot has changed--a lot has happened while you were away--

HERCULES (smiles a little, trying to be lighthearted but still worried and slightly bitter):

You lost your mind?

IOLAUS (comes up):

Now, come on, Herc, that's not really fair to Xena. She always has good reasons for everything she does. (pulls Hercules aside and whispers rather loudly) Look, she's probably just pretending to play along with Ares as part of some plan--

Gabrielle coughs loudly; Ares glowers while Xena gives him an uncomfortable look and then directs a steely gaze at Iolaus.

VIRGIL (bravely):
How about a toast?

XENA (glaring):
Good idea. (she pauses as Virgil hands goblets to Iolaus and Hercules, and Eve to Gabrielle and Aphrodite) To friends. (empathically) Old and new.

There's a short silence. Xena coughs meaningfully.

ALL (muttering in unison as they raise their goblets):
To friends, old and new...

Everyone drinks (Hercules and Ares glaring at each other over the rims of their goblets). Aphrodite drains her goblet first and puts it down, then claps her hands, laughing and squealing with joy.

APHRODITE:
Cool! Now let's--

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):
Xena!

The party is interrupted by a crash as the barn door swings open and somebody bursts in. Xena steps forward.

XENA (disbelievingly):
Greba?

She turns to Gabrielle, staring at her in shock as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

On the same party scene. Xena is staring at Gabrielle. Before Xena has a chance to say anything, Gabrielle shakes her head and holds up her hands in an "It wasn't me" gesture. Xena looks over to Ares and Aphrodite, who do likewise.

GREBA:
Xena! Oh! Thank goodness I've found you--I've been looking everywhere!

ARES (sardonically):
Except the most obvious place...

HERCULES (moves forward):

Are you in some kind of trouble? You look--

GREBA (gratefully):

Yes--that's it! Enormous, terrible trouble, the kind that only... (she eyes Hercules adoringly, then abruptly turns her back on him) *Xena* can help with!

XENA (hiding a smirk):

That kind of trouble, huh? (looks around) All right, Darion, Kara, Theon--you can start on the honeycakes.

The children race off towards the food table; Klymene, Virgil and Eve follow.

GREBA (bats her eyelashes):

Oh--it looks like you're having a party... I didn't mean to interrupt but... (impatiently) ...this is serious, *Xena*--you need to come *now!*

XENA (raising an eyebrow):

Oh?

GREBA:

I--I got into some trouble after you all left the farm. A young, lonely widow...what was I to do? (looks imploringly at *Xena*) I had no one to guide me, no one to turn to. So... (she lowers her eyes, abashed) ...it's only natural that I'd get involved with the wrong kind of people.

Hercules, Iolaus, *Xena* and Gabrielle stare back at her, unimpressed. Ares is no longer listening; he's playing with a buckle on *Xena*'s shoulder. She slaps at his hand.

XENA (smirks):

Oh yeah--I imagine that was nature taking its course all right...

GREBA:

Look, I didn't realize what kind of things they were mixed up with...a little theft here, a little mayhem there--but then they mentioned something (she gulps) so terrible--so shocking...well I just *knew* I had to come and tell you!

HERCULES (reassuringly):

Of course you did!

GABRIELLE (patiently):

And the problem is...

GREBA (dramatically):

Gabrielle!

GABRIELLE (puzzled):

Yes?

GREBA:

No, I mean the trouble is Gabrielle!

VIRGIL:

Now, wait a minute...

GREBA:

She's in terrible danger...you see, these people, they want to--oh, I can't even say it! Xena, you've got to hurry!

XENA:

Let me get this straight. You've gotten yourself mixed up with a bunch of thugs who want to do something terrible to Gabrielle.

GREBA:

Well--er, yes. (rather deflated) Anyway, you need to come with me, now, before it's too late!

HERCULES:

I think that everyone's a lot better off staying here, don't you? There's not much chance anything's going to happen here...

IOLAUS:

Hercules is right. If anyone decides to do away with Gabrielle, I'm sure there's enough of us to sort them out.

GABRIELLE (snorts):

Excuse me. I think I can look after myself... (her voice trails off) ...I know I can. (she looks away)

Xena sighs. She's as suspicious as the others, but also mildly curious.

XENA (to Greba):

And why exactly am I supposed to come with you?

GREBA:

Well, you see, one of those people in the gang--he's not a bad sort, really. I mean, he got mixed up with them the same way I did...

XENA (smirks):

What, because he was young and lonely?

GREBA:

N-no--I mean because he, er, didn't know any better. Anyway, he knows exactly what their plan is and he wants to talk to you. But he said you have to come alone--you see, the poor soul is too scared to show himself to anyone else. He's waiting in the woods not far from here.

XENA (turns to the others):

Look, why don't you start the food--I'll be back to cut the cake.

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

AREA:

Oh, come on, Xena. This is Greba, after all...

XENA (acidly):
I know who it is.

HERCULES:
Don't you think it's a little odd that...

XENA (cutting him off):
I won't be long.

She moves over to the door, then looks over her shoulder at Greba.

XENA:
Well?

GREBA (humbly):
Oh--of course. This way...

They walk out; Gabrielle, Iolaus, Hercules and Ares find themselves exchanging glances at one another at Xena's stubbornness.

HERCULES:
The more things change...

IOLAUS:
Yeah, yeah. Now what happened to that ale?

GABRIELLE (gratefully taking any excuse to defuse the situation):
It's right here. (gets a pitcher of ale and pours it into Iolaus' goblet)

IOLAUS (grumbling):
And I believe somebody mentioned honeycakes...

There is a knock on the barn door.

DARION (with his mouth full):
Hey, maybe Xena's back!

EVE:
She wouldn't knock.

The door opens. A boy of about ten stands in the doorway.

BOY:
Excuse me--which one of you is Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE (steps forward):
That would be me.

ARES (sarcastic):
Oh, that must be one of those ferocious kidnappers.

BOY:

There's a letter from your sister just delivered to the inn.

GABRIELLE (her face lights up with joy):

A letter from Lila! (turns to the others) I'll be right back.

HERCULES (cautiously):

Gabrielle, how about if I go with you? I mean, it *could* be a setup if there really is a plot to--

GABRIELLE (impatiently):

Oh, come on! You're not going to take Greba seriously, are you? (scoffs) A plot! Listen, I bet I know exactly what happened. Greba got in some kind of trouble and she needed Xena's help. She just thought she needed to tell Xena this ridiculous story to get her to come along.

IOLAUS:

Well, if you're sure...

GABRIELLE (smiles at him):

Besides, I told you--I can take care of myself. (to the boy) I'll be right there.

CUT TO

The tavern where Xena, Gabrielle and Darion had shared a meal earlier. Outside it is now dark; inside, the place is lively and busy. A barmaid is moving around with a large tray of drinks, while the innkeeper is swapping jokes and laughing with a few men at the bar.

Suddenly the tavern door bursts open. A dagger swishes through the air and goes right through a roasted partridge that a man at a table was lifting to his mouth, nailing the bird to the table's wooden surface. The man turns and gasps in horror.

Pan to the open door. Abderus and Balasi, the two thugs from FIVE IN THE BED AND THE LITTLE ONE SAID... are standing in the doorway, armed with daggers.

ABDERUS (appreciative):

Nice shot.

BALASI:

Thanks, I've been practicing on rabbits--

ABDERUS:

Shut up! (casts his eyes around the room, then raises his voice) Anyone makes a move and the next dagger goes right through your neck! (as the customers cower, he stares at the trembling innkeeper) Bet you made a nice profit tonight. (Goes over to the bar, lifts a mug of ale, and swigs a mouthful, before spitting it out onto the counter.) Watering down your beer, too! (he grins). Nice. All right--hand over the gold!

GABRIELLE:

Or don't.

Abderus and Balasi turn around; Gabrielle is standing in the middle of the tavern, sais in hand. Everyone else is huddling by the walls or hiding under the tables. The frightened innkeeper leaps behind the bar and hides as well.

GABRIELLE:

Last time I saw you, you were running for your life. Care for a repeat performance?

She raises her sais threateningly; Balasi cringes but Abderus laughs.

ABDERUS:

Last time I saw *you*, you had a couple of friends with you for backup--and a couple of gods, too. Think you're going to get any help from this lot?

GABRIELLE:

Think I'm going to need it?

Gabrielle moves swiftly to one side as Abderus throws a dagger; it buries itself in the wooden door behind her. She smirks.

GABRIELLE:

Apparently not.

Abderus and Balasi roar and run towards her, but she manages to bring down Abderus with a swift kick and then spins, striking Balasi with the hilt of her right sai; he groans and falls back on the floor in front of her. Gabrielle smirks in triumph...

...and then cries out as the back of a chair crashes down on her head. She slumps down, unconscious. Her sais drop on the floor.

ABDERUS (scrambles to his feet):

Oh yeah, I think you'll need all the help you can get.

He laughs. Balasi sits up and looks at the unconscious Gabrielle. A pair of leather boots come into view, seen in close-up as they step closer. Balasi looks up.

CUT TO

The party scene. Iolaus is busy with the honeycakes, while Hercules has Darion perched on his knee.

HERCULES:

So, you see, every time I would cut off one of the hydra's heads it would just grow back.

DARION (listens, rapt):

What did you do, then?

HERCULES:

Well, I got Iolaus over there (nods toward Iolaus) to take a torch and burn the hydra's necks after I cut the heads off. See, that way, they didn't grow back.

IOLAUS (with his mouth full):

Yep, that's exactly how it happened. (chuckles) Of course, I had a lot more energy back then--

DARION:

And that's how you killed the hydra?

HERCULES:

That's right.

DARION:

Wow! That was *smart*.

ARES (approaches them, sourly):

Found an audience for your legendary journeys?

HERCULES (rolls his eyes):

Just be grateful I haven't gotten to any stories where you're a guest star...

Ares glares at him and growls.

DARION:

Now, remember--Xena said you had to be nice--

Ares stalks away with an angry grunt.

HERCULES (looks after him):

I think this is us being nice to each other.

DARION (tugs on his shirt):

Come on, Hercules, tell me another--

The door crashes open again. Everyone looks over. The barmaid from the tavern is standing in the doorway.

BARMAID:

Help! Please--we're in terrible trouble!

ARES:

Been there, done that. Sorry, Xena and Gabrielle are both taken. You'll have to make do with... (he stares at Hercules, then shifts his stare and grins) ...Darion.

DARION (jumps down from Hercules' knee, excitedly):

Really?

HERCULES (gives Ares a reproachful look, then looks over to the barmaid):

What's happened?

BARMAID:

Someone just tried to rob our tavern! (Hercules leaps to his feet) There were two men...and then a young woman who stays at our inn tried to help us--

EVE (looks across at Virgil):

Gabrielle?

BARMAID:

Yes--she saved us...but then this terrible one-armed man showed up--she fought well, but she was outnumbered. One of them hit her over the head with a chair and then they took her away--but they left behind her weapons... (she produces the sais, to scattered gasps)

VIRGIL:

Gabrielle!

Everyone moves towards the barmaid.

EVE (suddenly gets an idea):

Tell me something--is there a letter for Gabrielle back at the inn?

BARMAID (puzzled):

What?

VIRGIL:

You didn't send a boy here to tell Gabrielle there was a letter from her sister?

The barmaid shakes her head uncomprehendingly.

HERCULES:

So...Greba was telling the truth.

IOLAUS (his mouth still full):

Come on, Herc--we've got to go-- (swallows whatever he's eating) --we've got to go rescue Gabrielle--

DARION (about to cry):

What's happened to Gabrielle? What's--

KLYMENE:

Shh--she'll be all right.

She pulls Darion away, while Hercules and Iolaus move with the barmaid towards the door.

IOLAUS (to the barmaid):

Was there anything else?

BARMAID:

No-- (frowns) --except that that one-armed man went upstairs and got something from one of the rooms...

HERCULES:

Did you see what it was?

BARMAID:

No, he was hiding it under his cloak when he brought it back...

Everyone exchanges puzzled looks and shrugs.

HERCULES:

Let's go start looking.

VIRGIL (suddenly):

Wait!

Everyone stops and looks over at him.

VIRGIL:

Ares!

ARES (defensively):

What?

HERCULES (looks warily from Ares to Virgil):

You think Ares has something to do with--

ARES (explodes, clenching his fists):

Oh--that's great!

VIRGIL (hastily):

No, no--I meant--can you--can you see where she is?

Hercules looks slightly disappointed, then gives Ares an expectant and almost-apologetic look.

ARES (nods):

Oh. Of course. She's--

He focuses; then a strange look comes over his face. He frowns, grimaces. Then he looks at Virgil.

ARES:

I can't. I could tell you almost everyone else-but--for some reason, I can't pick up Gabrielle at all.

Hercules shakes his head.

HERCULES:

We'll have to search the place. Iolaus and I will start at the tavern--maybe the rest of you better stay here and wait for Xena.

EVE:

Wait here? You've got to be kidding...

Virgil lays a restraining hand on her arm, but she shakes it off.

EVE:

You start at the tavern--I'm heading towards the other side of town.

VIRGIL:

Then I'm coming with you.

HERCULES:

We can't all go--what if Xena comes back?

IOLAUS:

Maybe by now, what's her name--

ARES:

Greba.

IOLAUS:

Yeah--maybe Greba has already led her to Gabrielle's kidnappers by now, anyway!

ARES (raising an eyebrow):

Oh yeah. I bet that's exactly what Greba did... (he focuses)

CUT TO

Xena wandering around a dark forest, alone.

XENA (looks around, then stops and shouts):

Greba?

CUT TO

The barn. Ares looks at the others.

ARES:

Looks like Greba got lost.

IOLAUS (wryly):

Oh, that's--tragic.

ARES:

You know what? I'm going to go and get Xena.

HERCULES:

Oh no you're not.

They stand and glare at each other. Eve steps uneasily between them.

EVE:

Maybe it's best if we try to find Gabrielle ourselves. If Mother gets back and finds Gabrielle gone, she's going to feel really guilty that she went off and left her alone--

VIRGIL:

You're probably right. Look, with two gods and one demigod between us, we should be able to find Gabrielle, wherever she is.

CUT TO

Gabrielle is lying motionless on the stone floor of a small room, her arms tied behind her back. The room is quite dark, with only a little moonlight coming in from a small window behind her.

Close-up on Gabrielle as she groans and moves a little, then opens her eyes. She manages to sit up and tries in vain to free her hands.

GABRIELLE:

What in Tartarus--

Suddenly there is a sound at the door--a rattle of chains, then a lock being slid open. Gabrielle moves back a little against the wall. The door swings open. The camera pans to the boots of the person standing in the doorway--they are the same boots we saw in the tavern. Then it pans up, revealing a cloaked and hooded figure holding a torch that casts a reddish light on the cell.

GABRIELLE:

Who are you? What--what do you think you're doing? (the figure comes closer) You know--I've got to warn you--I've got friends who are *not* going to be happy about this...

There is a horrible laugh as the figure inserts the torch into a holder in the wall, and then starts to remove the hood from its face. A close-up on Gabrielle's face as she gasps. The figure laughs again, and steps into the light.

It's Gascar.

A close-up of his laughing face as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

On the same scene.

Gabrielle is staring with some horror at Gascar, standing before her. He's uglier than ever; he is also missing his left arm below the elbow.

GABRIELLE:

Gascar? But--but you're supposed to be--

GASCAR:

Dead? Nah. (laughs) Took that beast eight heads just to get my arm off. (Gabrielle winces.) Clever trick, pretending to fight Xena, and sending me to those caves--oh, very clever. You appreciate clever tricks, do you?

GABRIELLE (faintly):

Not especially...

GASCAR:

Well, here's one for you. Last time I saw you, you were fighting with Xena over Ares, weren't ya? Well, Xena's *with* Ares now. Sounds to me like the two of you have had a bit of a falling out.

GABRIELLE:

That's not true!

GASCAR:

True? Who cares? It's what people will think, anyway--when they see you lead a raiding party into Geilia.

GABRIELLE:

When they see me *what*?

GASCAR:

Or maybe that's not what they'll think at all. Maybe they'll think that Ares has succeeded at last in turning you *and* Xena over to his side. (shrugs) Sounds like a clever trick either way, don't you think?

GABRIELLE:

Sounds like there's a flaw in your plan. There's no way I'm taking part in a raid on any village.

GASCAR (chuckles):

Oh yes, there is.

A noise is heard outside the cell. Gabrielle looks up; Greba appears at the door.

GREBA:

Hello, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

Greba! But--where's Xena?

Gascar and Greba laugh.

GASCAR:

That cave wasn't the only lair of a man-eating beast in Greece, you know... (off Gabrielle's horrified look) Oh, I don't expect Xena can be finished off that easily. But who knows, maybe the next time we meet, we'll have a pair of arms between us!

He laughs again; Greba giggles and moves over towards Gascar.

GREBA (simpering):

Did I do good, sweetie?

Gabrielle stares in horror as Greba brushes a hand through her hair and looks into Gascar's face eagerly.

GASCAR (roughly):

It's not over yet.

Greba's face falls.

GABRIELLE:

Greba--I can't believe you're doing this! After we saved you--twice! And then you go team up with them?

GASCAR:

Kind of a wasted effort, wasn't it?

GREBA (defensively):

I was a young widow, all alone! Maybe if a good man had tried a little--but, no! (sneers) Too keen on his slave girls!

GABRIELLE:

A good man? (she looks puzzled, then works it out) You mean--Ares? (she grins and shakes her head) Well, I'm not sure it's a word I'd use to describe him...besides, he's a one-woman man. You'd never have gotten anywhere with him...

GASCAR (dangerously):

And why would you want to?

GREBA:

Well, he *was* the God of War... (She begins playing with her hair again, unaware of Gascar's darkening face) An older man, to be sure, but (sighs) widows can't be choosers--he was quite a handsome man, even if he did have a little gray in his hair...but of course he'd rather play around with someone who wiped out his entire family!

GABRIELLE:

We brought them back again...

GREBA (not listening):

Well, he's going to regret it! He'll realize what he did when he turned me down--and--

GASCAR (menacingly):

And?

GREBA (finally realizes what she's been saying):

And...and I--I'm--glad?

GASCAR:

Glad? You don't sound glad to me! Two arms are better than one, is that it?

GREBA:

No, no!

GASCAR:

You'd rather be hanging around a god than a mere warlord, is that right?

GREBA (stammers):

Not at all--I--I think it's great that you're just a warlord!

GASCAR:

Just a warlord? (Forgetting all about Gabrielle, he glares at Greba and grabs her arm.) We need to talk.

They walk toward the door and step outside. Gabrielle tries to scramble to her feet, then slumps down as the door slams shut. Gascar's and Greba's muffled voices are still heard from the corridor.

GREBA:

Honey--what I meant is--

GASCAR (off-camera):

It's the leather, isn't it? I know it's the leather!

CUT TO

The deserted village square. Xena appears, with a very annoyed look on her face. She stops, looks down at her right shoulder, then pulls a large pointed tooth out of it. She flings it aside, and walks on.

Suddenly a figure races towards her. It's Darion. He flings himself at her, and starts babbling wildly.

DARION:

Xena! Gabrielle's been kidnapped, and everyone's gone, and we have to go look for her!

XENA (amused):

You've already done that bit, remember?

DARION:

No, no--this time it's true!

XENA:

There's a thousand bad guys in the barn--or maybe two thousand?

DARION:

No, there's no one in the barn! Well, except Kara and Theon and--

XENA:

Rrrright. (grins) I know--I bet you people had Greba take me on some wild goose chase so you could set up another surprise. Well, I lost her in the woods somehow--and then I found one of the hydras that Hercules must have missed way back when. I'll have to tell him...

DARION (pulls on her arm):

Xena! We need to look for Gabrielle!

Xena sighs, and crouches down.

XENA:

Okay, okay--I'll play along. Where are we looking? Are you going to give me some clues, huh?

DARION:

She was in the tavern when the bad men took her...

XENA:

You want me to go to the tavern, huh? (she shakes her head) I don't even want to imagine what they've got planned this time...

She takes Darion's hand and they walk together towards the tavern. Just as they turn the corner, Ares and Iolaus come into the square from another lane.

ARES (brushing cabbage leaves and other refuse off himself):

Got any more clever ideas?

IOLAUS:

Look, Hercules saw something moving in that garbage cart--it could've been her!

ARES:

I *knew* it was a rat.

IOLAUS:

Well, you're not sensing Gabrielle--she could have been in there too!

Ares rolls his eyes as Hercules comes walking up behind them.

HERCULES:

Well, we've checked out those possibilities at least... I think they've left the village.

ARES:

Or maybe that's what they want us to think!

Hercules and Ares glare at one another. Iolaus coughs, and slaps a hand on Hercules' back.

IOLAUS:

Maybe we'd better go back and see if anyone else has found anything yet...

They head off together towards the barn. Just as they move out of sight, Virgil and Eve enter the square.

EVE:

Nothing. Virgil--they've taken her somewhere...

VIRGIL:

We'll find her, don't worry. And if anyone can look after herself, it's Gabrielle.

EVE:

What a way to spend a birthday. Sometimes it doesn't seem as though anything can go right for us...

Virgil grabs her hand and presses it firmly.

VIRGIL:

That isn't true.

Eve smiles a little. They walk slowly towards the barn.

CUT TO

Inside the barn, where everyone is now back from searching for Gabrielle. Everyone is talking at once so that not a word can be heard.

Xena walks in with Darion, stops still and then in a moment gives a shrill whistle. Silence falls as everyone stares at her.

XENA:

Where's Gabrielle?

DARION:

I *told* you--she got kidnapped!

Everyone rushes up to Xena.

EVE:

Somebody came and said there was a--

VIRGIL (cuts in even as Eve continues to talk):

She went to the tavern--

HERCULES (talks over Virgil and Eve):

The barmaid came back and said--

IOLAUS (talks over Virgil, Eve and Hercules):

We really wanted to find her before--

The din of voices becomes unintelligible again. Xena fixes everyone with a steely gaze; they step back and stop talking.

ARES:

Hey--what happened to your shoulder?

He frowns and puts a hand over the cut.

XENA (shrugs):

Greba took me by the scenic route... I ended up teaching some many-headed monster how to share. (she grins) He was a slow learner. (looks around again) Now come on--where is she? Is everybody in on the joke?

VIRGIL:

It's not a joke, Xena. Two men took her from the tavern, and--

Xena's face grows very serious as she realizes that Gabrielle really is missing. She holds up her hand and turns to Ares.

XENA:

Where is she?

Ares shakes his head.

ARES:

I can't tell--for some reason, I can't see where she is!

Xena opens her mouth to argue, but Aphrodite interrupts.

APHRODITE:

It's true, Xena. It's like, the vibes aren't working somehow, or--or--some crazy god has like blocked the signal or something. (she frowns as she focuses, trying her hardest). Whoah! (shakes her head)

HERCULES:

Some god? (He looks accusingly at Ares, who still has his hand on Xena's shoulder). Maybe you're right. After all--who ruined the party last time?

Ares just smirks at Hercules and moves a little closer to Xena.

XENA:

Wait.

She steps away from Ares and looks from him to Aphrodite to Hercules.

XENA:

You might be on to something there, Hercules...

ARES (disbelievingly):

What?

XENA:

Think about it. Ares, you can't pick up where Gabrielle is--it must be another god. But who'd bother? Who has a grudge against us now? Who'd ruin another party?

APHRODITE:

Uh--Aunt Hestia? She always was a bit of a party pooper. Although hitting Gabby over the head doesn't really seem like her style...

But Xena is shaking her head, and moving back towards Ares.

ARES (slowly):

You mean Discord.

Everyone exchanges worried looks as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Gabrielle's cell. She manages to get her hands free from the rope and gets up. She tries to reach the window, but it's just a little too high. Voices are heard outside the door. Gabrielle looks around for a place to hide.

GABRIELLE (to herself):

I hope they're not too smart...

She runs up to the door and stands against the wall so that she will be behind the door when it opens.

Abderus and Balasi push the door open and walk in. They can't see Gabrielle.

BALASI:

Hey--where is she?

ABDERUS:

Maybe it's the wrong cell.

BALASI:

Gascar definitely said it was the second cell down the corridor...

ABDERUS:

Well--maybe when he said "down," he really meant down at the end of the corridor--

BALASI:

Huh?

ABDERUS:

Did he say "up" or "down"?

BALASI:

You're getting me all confused. Come on, we've got to find her. Hurry up--Gascar wants us to get going on this raiding party. If we don't do it right, well--forget Gascar, *she'll* be furious with us!

BALASI (trembling):

Oh no! We wouldn't want to get her angry...remember what happened last time--?

ABDERUS (shoves him roughly):

Shut up about that!

They walk out of the cell, shutting the door but not locking it, and move down the corridor. Gabrielle looks around carefully.

GABRIELLE (smiles to herself):

They're not too smart. (frowns a little in puzzlement) Greba? They're scared of Greba?

She shakes her head, then carefully opens the door and dashes out of the cell and toward the near end of the corridor. Hearing voices, she hides in a doorway. A guard passes, and then she moves on. Finally, she sees an open courtyard, and a door. She waits around the corner, and is about to make a dash for it--when a hand claps onto her shoulder.

GASCAR:

Going somewhere?

Gabrielle tries to fight back but she is quickly surrounded by guards. Abderus and Balasi approach as well.

GASCAR:

Take her down to the stables and put her on a horse. Let's get this raiding party going!

GABRIELLE (disbelieving):

You're going to *make* me take part in a raid? And how do you propose to do that?

GASCAR (sneers):

You know that little boy you're so fond of? (Gabrielle turns pale) You wouldn't want anything bad to happen to him, would you?

GABRIELLE (trying to stay calm):

You haven't got Darion.

GASCAR:

No? Well, how do you explain this?

He waves his one hand. Greba approaches and, with a flourish, holds up the toy dragon we saw Darion buy in Britannia. Horrified, Gabrielle covers her mouth with her hands.

GABRIELLE:

You wouldn't--

GASCAR (sneering):

I think you'll cooperate. Now go get up on that horse. I can't wait to see Xena's face when...

XENA (off-camera):

You don't have to wait.

Pan to Xena, who is standing behind Gascar, a chilly and unpleasant smile on her face. Gascar whips around. She punches him directly in the face, and he falls to the ground. Gabrielle shakes herself free of her captors.

GABRIELLE:

Xena! (runs up to Xena) Where's Darion?

XENA:

What do you mean, where's-- (Gascar gets up behind her and she knocks him down again with a backward punch) --Darion? Back at the barn with Klymene and the other kids--Aphrodite's keeping an eye on them.

Gabrielle lets out a sigh of relief. The courtyard is suddenly filled with people--Ares, Hercules, Iolaus, Eve and Virgil.

The guards hold back a moment, until Gascar gets up again and lets out a roar. Then they rush at the intruders. Virgil pulls Gabrielle back, but the others rush into the fray, with swords clashing and

punches flying. Several guards rush at Hercules, but he flicks them off and they crash against a far wall. Iolaua participates in a particularly intricate sword fight with Balasi, who looks thoroughly confused.

Ares and Xena fight side by side, making short work of the guards who rush at them, and exchanging occasional grins. Hercules, after throwing one man across the yard, pauses and watches them for a moment before shaking his head and getting back into the fight. Gabrielle and Virgil join the fray as well.

Xena backs Abderus up against the wall, her hand at his throat.

XENA:

I remember you. Over at the farm-- (shakes her head) Up to your old tricks, huh?

ABDERUS (wheezing):

He led me astray! (nods toward Balasi, who has lost his sword and raises his hands in surrender)

BALASI:

Me? You were the one who led *me* astray!

ABDERUS (gasps):

It was her, really...it was all *her!*

GABRIELLE (shocked):

Greba?

BALASI (nervously):

No, not Greba--

XENA (narrows her eyes):

Discord.

Suddenly Discord appears in the fray. She clicks her fingers, and the guards fall back.

ARES (chuckling):

You know, when Zeus hears about this, you are so grounded.

DISCORD:

Hey, it was only a joke! (turns and growls at her guards to get out of there)

XENA:

Not so fast.

GABRIELLE:

Where's Gascar?

XENA (rubbing her shoulder):

And where's Greba?

They look around, but there's no sight of them at all. Xena still has Abderus by the throat, and he croaks something. She throws him down, and he rubs his neck, wincing.

ABDERUS:

They got out of here when the fight began...they've been gone for ages!

Gabrielle throws Balasi down next to the pitiful Abderus. They look terrified and repentant.

XENA:

Last time I saw you, you were on your way back to Mamma! What happened--she wouldn't take you?

DISCORD:

I recruited them again--once I got my head back on. (glares at Xena) Didn't realize they were particular pets of yours...

BALASI (whines):

I never wanted to do this, honest! It was all his fault. (nods toward Abderus) I was back on the farm with Mamma and he talked me into this!

ABDERUS:

This isn't what we were hired for, anyway... I thought it would be more indoor work--

Xena looks disgusted.

DISCORD:

Well, I don't want them either. Get out of here!

They stumble, weeping and whining, out the door.

Xena stands threateningly over Discord.

XENA:

If you ever crash one of our parties again, you'll lose more than a head, y'hear?

Discord holds her hands up.

DISCORD:

All right, all right. (rolls her eyes) No one has any sense of humor around here, do they?

She disappears. The guards slink away.

HERCULES (shakes his head):

Well, what happens now?

Xena claps a hand on his back.

XENA:

I think cake is in order. Come on--let's go party!

CUT TO

The party, going at full blast once more. Everyone's talking, drinking, eating and laughing. The kids are racing around the room, screaming excitedly.

KARA:

Let's do this again! This time I can be Gabrielle... (to Klymene) ...and you can be Xena.

DARION:

Can I be Hercules?

Pan to Xena, Gabrielle and Eve standing by the table.

GABRIELLE:

How'd you work out where I was?

EVE:

Well, neither Ares nor Aphrodite could pick up where you were. They figured out that it meant a god was involved...

XENA:

And we knew who was an expert at crashing parties. Discord's fortress happened to be not far away, either, and from the description of the two men in the tavern, I thought they could well be her boys.

GABRIELLE:

They must have stolen Darion's toy dragon from my room after they knocked me out. Good thing you showed up when you did, or I would have spent years trying to explain to everyone that I was framed by a one-armed man...

XENA:

I didn't expect Gascar--though maybe I should have, after Greba led me to that cave...

GABRIELLE:

Are you all right? How many heads did that thing have, anyway? Gascar got his arm torn off with eight...

XENA (smugly):

Ten, actually, and not one of them friendly.

They laugh, and Gabrielle puts her arm around her friend.

GABRIELLE:

Happy birthday.

XENA:

Thanks.

Suddenly, she turns her head as a knife is heard swishing through the air. She catches it expertly and turns--to look at Ares, who stands across the room, grinning at her. Xena raises an eyebrow. Pan to Hercules, who looks between the pair with some anxiety.

ARES:

Cut the cake already!

Everyone laughs. Aphrodite brings out the cake, colorful and lit with many candles. They all gather around as Xena blows out the candles. Only one--one in the center--remains lit. She grins and looks up at Ares, before plunging a knife into the cake. Everyone cheers, as Gabrielle hurriedly rescues the cake before it is ruined.

She starts cutting the cake at the table, while Eve and Virgil find themselves engrossed in conversation in another corner. The children are still running around while Hercules and Iolaus are talking to Aphrodite.

APHRODITE:

So, you like the decorations? That's so majorly cool! (to Hercules) Say--maybe I'll decorate for your next birthday party...

HERCULES (taken aback):

Thanks, Aphrodite--but really I wouldn't want you to go to all that trouble--

APHRODITE (laughs and pinches his cheek):

Are you kidding? It's no trouble at all!

Pan to Xena and Ares.

ARES:

Kidnapping, sword-fights, ten-headed monsters, cake...I want a birthday too!

XENA (grinning):

Sometimes I wonder what I've done to deserve this...

ARES:

What, a birthday? All you need to do is live another year, right?

Xena slips her hand into his.

XENA:

I think I can manage that.

ARES:

Promise?

Xena moves closer and they kiss. Pan to Hercules, who stares at Xena and Ares, still unable to get used to this sight. Iolaus tugs discreetly at his shirt and coughs; Hercules turns to him.

IOLAUS:

I guess when you catch up with old friends, you never know what you're going to find.

HERCULES:

Yeah... (slaps Iolaus on the shoulder) Good thing some friends never change...

IOLAUS (winces slightly and rubs his shoulder):

...they just get older.

Just as the camera starts to pull back, Xena and Ares draw apart.

ARES:

Another year of kidnappings, sword-fights, and ten-headed monsters?

XENA:

As long as I get cake, too...

They move in for another kiss as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Greba and Gaspar remain at large. If you see them, do not attempt to apprehend them yourself, as Gaspar is one-armed but extremely dangerous.]