

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT

“Blood Feud”

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Logline

On their way to Thebes for Antigone's coronation, Xena and Gabrielle find out that Thebes and Plateia are on the brink of war. But a lot has changed since they were last there and when they learn about the cities reasons for fighting, it becomes even more urgent that they try to stop the bloodshed.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Sunset. A lush green valley. It's completely quiet; the only sound comes from the breeze that brushes over the long grass that covers the valley.

There is the sound of horse hooves and a quiet whinny. The camera pulls back and we see a horse and then the rider on its back. The man sits on the horse with grace and dignity; he is in his early twenties and has a commanding presence but also an air of innocence. He has almost shoulder-length curly golden hair and hazel eyes. His rich garments are green and blue, laced with gold that forms intricate and elegant patterns on the fabric. He wears an emerald cape that flows down over the horse's hindquarters, and a small golden crown.

CUT TO

A man, in his mid forties, rides through a green valley. He is dressed just as richly as the other man, in fabrics of purple and black, but this man has a much more regal and experienced bearing about

him. He bears a resemblance to the younger man but his shoulder-length hair is darker and he has a brown goatee. This is King Capaneus.

CUT TO

Wide shot of the entire scene. We see the two riders riding slowly toward one another. When they bring their horses to a halt, they are at the base of a steep hill that is covered with small dense trees and bushes, and above that, the hill has a rocky face of tan colored stone. The hill rises high and out of the camera's view; the peak is not visible. The two men look at each other in silence for a moment. The younger man seems to be struggling with something, as if unsure how to begin.

CAPANEUS (looks at the young man, a bit annoyed):

Well? I'm here as you requested, Actaeon, and yet you will not speak to me?

ACTAEON:

You know why I wanted you here.

CAPANEUS (nods):

Yes, you want to negotiate a truce. (Actaeon nods slowly; Capaneus shakes his head in obvious disgust) Let's keep these negotiations short. The answer is no.

ACTAEON (blurts):

Father, it isn't right that we go to war against each other!

CAPANEUS (chuckles):

Some say this is the kind of war Ares likes best. Father against son, brother against brother--

ACTAEON (hotly):

I would never serve Ares if I believed that!

CAPANEUS (shakes his head and sneers):

Such youthful idealism. (grows serious and stern) Actaeon, you know perfectly well why we are going to war. You could have avoided this.

Actaeon looks at Capaneus, a regretful but also decisive look on his face. After a moment of silence between them and hesitation on his part, Actaeon rides forward so that he is side by side with his father.

ACTAEON:

Then in the spirit of honorable warfare... (he extends his hand toward his father) ...may the best man win.

Capaneus looks at his son's outstretched hand, then grasps it. They clasp each other's forearms in the traditional Greek handshake.

CAPANEUS:

May the best man win.

A close up of Capaneus' face, full of determination, with a gleam in his eye.

The camera pulls back to show the two kings, their backs to each other, riding away, the large hill looming behind them; we still do not see the top of the hill. The screen fades to black for a moment before there is a loud boom and flash of light as we:

CUT TO

Night. A fierce thunderstorm is raging. Lightning brightens the night sky and thunder fills the air with a deafening boom. Wind whips through the trees, howling and whistling, blowing the pouring rain so hard that it nearly flattens the small ferns and shrubs.

We see Xena and Gabrielle running through a dense forest, carrying two large satchels, splashing water and mud as they run. A flash of lightning illuminates the forest and they glimpse what looks like a cave entrance overgrown with branches and shrubs. Gabrielle points to the cave, trying to shield her face from the rain; Xena nods and says something, though another rumble of thunder makes her voice inaudible. They run as fast as they can toward the cave.

CUT TO

Inside the dry cave. From inside, we see water coming down over the entrance like a waterfall or a curtain. Vines grow along the walls, covering both sides of the entrance.

Xena and Gabrielle burst into the cave and stop once they've hit dry ground. They drop the satchels onto the ground. They are sopping wet and splattered with mud, bits of twigs and leaves tangled in their hair and clothes; they look like two kids who've just had the greatest time splashing around in a puddle of mud.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Springtime in Greece...it's--full of surprises.

XENA (gives her a mock-nasty look and sighs):

And of course you would *have* to pick tonight of all nights to talk me into letting Argo and Klio roam free.

Xena tries to brush the excess water off of her leathers while Gabrielle shakes herself off like a dog.

GABRIELLE (grins):

Oh, I'm sure they found a nice warm, dry place to get out of the storm. You know what they say about animal instinct--

XENA:

I'm not worried about *them*! If we had the horses, we probably would have gotten to a dry place long ago instead of-- (she wrings out her wet hair) --getting an unscheduled bath.

GABRIELLE:

Well, look on the bright side, Xena. At least the dry spell's over. The rain is good for farming.

XENA (still wringing out her hair and getting out the wet twigs):

Right. Too bad it's not so good for wearing leather.

As they speak, Xena and Gabrielle continue to shake themselves off.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe we need to take a vacation from leather and switch to something more practical. You know, something that--

ARES (off-camera):

I object.

Xena and Gabrielle turn to see Ares standing outside the cave, completely dry as the rain comes down on him, his arms folded across his chest, a grin on his face.

XENA (teasingly):

So you're interested in what I'm wearing?

ARES (raises an eyebrow and drops his voice a little):

Or--*not* wearing.

Xena smirks; Gabrielle blushes and looks away. Grinning, Ares starts to walk into the cave, passing under the waterfall door. Just before he steps into the dry cave, Gabrielle puts her hand up.

GABRIELLE:

Hey, hey, hey!

He stops, looking at her with a questioning eye.

ARES:

What--no men allowed? Or no gods?

GABRIELLE (with mock outrage):

You're going to track water and mud all over our nice, clean, dry dirt floor.

ARES:

Who, me?

He steps into the cave, completely dry. Gabrielle shakes her head and goes over to pick up her bag. It's drenched. She turns it over and dumps out the contents, including a frying pan, some utensils and plates, some blank scrolls and a tightly rolled bedroll which is also dripping wet.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Looks like we'd better start a fire--a *big* fire. This is going to take ages to dry.

Xena looks at Gabrielle, then grins and turns to Ares.

XENA:

Well, since you're here, you might as well make yourself useful.

CUT TO

Close up of a fire blazing. The camera pulls back a little to reveal a large fowl turning on a spit above the flames, and then pulls back some more to show Gabrielle, in a red velvet wrap, sitting beside the fire and turning the spit, watching the bird cook.

The camera continues to pull back. We see a twine rope over the fire, stretched out between two walls of the cave, with the two bedrolls hanging from it. Xena and Gabrielle's leathers are slung over a rock nearby; next to it on the floor are Xena and Gabrielle's boots, Xena's armor and armbands, Gabrielle's sais, and Xena's chakram and sword.

A soft, contented sigh is heard. The camera pans right of the fire and we see a close-up of Xena's face, her eyes closed, looking very content. The camera pulls back and we see two large hands, with a silver ring on the ring finger of the left hand, kneading her shoulders. As the camera pulls further back we see that Xena is wrapped in a dark fur stole that leaves her shoulders bare, and is leaning back against Ares.

There is a loud crash of thunder and lightning outside.

GABRIELLE:

Well, it doesn't show any sign of letting up. Xena?

XENA (looks up, opening her eyes):

Hmm?

Ares rolls his eyes, visibly annoyed by the interruption.

GABRIELLE:

Remember how when we were in India, we passed through an area where they had monsoons?

XENA:

Oh yeah.

GABRIELLE:

Seasonal rains. Isn't that something? We're complaining about one little rainstorm ... (looks out at the downpour) well--one *big* rainstorm. But over there, once the winds came and brought with them the heavy rain clouds (she shifts to a storytelling tone), it would rain for weeks. It is heralded by the call of the male peacock, who dances and courts the female. The villagers believe it is the peacocks who summons forth the rain. To them the monsoon is a gift from the gods--if the people are pious, then the rain will bring nourishment to the soil and bless the land; if they are wicked, then it will bring tragic devastation. So every year, they wait for the monsoon. The peacock calls out, and then great purple clouds gather, lightning flashes and thunder rolls, and then for two or three moons, it rains and rains and never stops...

ARES:

...just like you.

GABRIELLE and XENA (in unison, Gabrielle glaring at him):

Hey!

ARES:

What? You're going to tell me this isn't boring? (rolls his eyes) Only you would tell a story about *weather*.

XENA (teasing):

I suppose you can do better?

ARES:

Sure I can. At least if I was telling a story, it would have some action.

GABRIELLE (piqued):

Well, go ahead. Tell one.

ARES:

Well, for instance...did you know that right now, we happen to be very close to my oldest temple in Greece?

XENA (mockingly):

So that's your idea of a story--an ego trip!

ARES:

That's only the beginning. Inside that temple, in a secret chamber, is a medallion that was once worn by my first priest. Long ago, seven cities fought each other for possession of this temple, all in the hopes of claiming the medallion. It was a war that continued for ten years. (dreamily) Great battles were fought and thousands of warriors died...

XENA (with an undertone of bitter irony):

Those were the days, huh?

ARES (glances at her):

Those days...had their moments. (He strokes her hair, then leans closer to her and whispers in a voice too low for Gabrielle to hear) But this is better.

Xena smiles slightly and presses his hand.

GABRIELLE:

So what is it about this medallion that makes it so special? Why did everyone want it?

ARES:

The medallion was forged after the first great battle that was ever fought in my name--the biggest, bloodiest battle the world had ever seen until that day. The two opposing armies were led by two great warriors evenly matched, each vying to become my champion...

GABRIELLE (abruptly):

Wait a minute!

ARES:

What? A little too much action for your taste?

GABRIELLE (excited):

This is such an amazing opportunity for a bard. I'm getting a story about an ancient battle from an eyewitness. I have to write this down.

She reaches over toward the pile of her things, picks up a scroll and a quill and starts to write.

ARES:

So. Starting at sunrise, they battled each other until it was almost sundown--until both collapsed and died of their wounds. (We see a brief close-up of Xena's face with a somber expression, as she

moves slightly away from Ares) My first priest, Pontus, came to the battlefield when the battle was over. He picked up the swords of the two fallen heroes, brought them back to the temple and melted them down--and from their metal, he made a medallion bearing the symbol of the God of War. Like this one.

He holds up his hand and tosses something to Gabrielle. She picks it up and examines it. It's a silver medallion bearing the shape of Ares' rune symbol (like his Season 1-2 pendant), on a black metal chain. Gabrielle starts to examine the pendant when it suddenly shimmers out of existence in her hand, startling her.

ARES:

As Pontus forged the medallion, he prayed that it be imbued with special powers. And in a sacred scroll, he recorded that so it was done. Whoever wears the medallion would gain supreme knowledge of the art of war, the strength of a hundred men, and combat skills that match my own. He would be the God of War personified among mortals. (As he talks, Ares glances over at Gabrielle, who is scribbling furiously; he smirks and goes on in a somewhat mysterious tone.) But it is said that the medallion can do much more than that. It can enable its wearer to see into the past and to witness any battle that has ever been fought--and learn from it. It can even give him the power to shape-shift.

Xena looks puzzled, then grins a little. Gabrielle continues to write, then looks up at Ares, catches the mischievous look in his eye and puts down the quill, narrowing her eyes at him.

GABRIELLE:

Shape-shifting. (chuckles) You made it all up, didn't you?

ARES:

Maybe I did, maybe I didn't. You'll never know, now will you?

Gabrielle throws the scroll at Ares.

CUT TO

Night. The storm is over and the moon is out. Wide shot of the spot where Actaeon and Capaneus had met earlier that evening.

In the moonlight, we now clearly see the hill; on top of it stands a grand temple with majestic stone columns. The camera closes in on the temple and we see that it's quite old; some of the wall carvings, depicting battle scenes, are nearly worn off or chipped. Two torches burn at the entrance, indicating that the temple is still in use as a place of worship.

Off-camera, we hear a male voice crying out in shock and pain. There is the sound of a blow, then the sound of swords clashing and another cry, and more sounds of grunting and blows that obviously indicate a fight. The camera pans down and we see two swords clashing in the moonlight, and a sword piercing chain-mail armor on a man's chest. A mace comes down on a helmeted head and a man falls to the ground as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

A bright sunny morning. We see the temple at the top of the hill. The camera pans down; the trees and bushes are still glistening with moisture from the storm, light twinkling off the water dripping off of the branches. The camera pans further down and we see Xena and Gabrielle, leading their horses beside them, on a road on the plain surrounded by shrubbery and sparse trees.

GABRIELLE:

It will be good to see Antigone again. I can't believe that less than two years ago we saved her from execution, and now she's about to be crowned as the queen of Thebes.

XENA:

I hope she's ready for it.

GABRIELLE:

You mean, because she's so young?

XENA:

I mean, because last time we saw her she was an angry little girl. (sighs) I'm sorry Creon died so soon after he made peace with her. He made his share of mistakes, but he was a good king.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

I'm sure Antigone will be a good queen. (after a brief pause) I can't wait until we get to Thebes.

XENA (teasingly):

Why? Because you're looking forward to seeing Antigone again or because Haimon is going to be there? Looking forward to spending some quality time with your boyfriend?

GABRIELLE (responds in the same playful tone):

So what if I am? Why should *you* be having all the fun? (Suddenly, she grows pensive) Darion would have loved to see Haimon again... I bet he would have liked Antigone, too.

XENA (gives her a guarded look):

Gabrielle...I'm sure Darion is happy where he is. He's got his sister back. And he's good friends with Klymene.

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, I'm sure he is...it's just that I--I still miss him.

Xena stops, reaches over and gives Gabrielle's arm a comforting squeeze; Gabrielle squeezes her hand, looking as if she's about to tear up. Then she looks at Xena.

GABRIELLE:

Don't *you*?

Xena looks startled and doesn't quite know what to say. Her face reflects shifting emotions of tenderness, confusion, and dismay.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Look, I know it's better this way. Life on the road is no place for a child. And yet...sometimes I feel like--I've abandoned him.

XENA (puts her hand on Gabrielle's shoulder):

You didn't abandon him. You gave him back to his sister... (for a moment her face clouds over and it looks like she's about to say something, then she shakes her head) It was the right thing to do.

They walk on in silence.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena and Gabrielle further along then road. Gabrielle points toward something.

GABRIELLE:

Look at that! What do you think it is?

Xena looks ahead. The camera pans up to the hill with the temple at the top.

XENA:

It looks like a temple...

GABRIELLE:

Hey--maybe it's Ares' temple, the one he told us about last night.

XENA (thoughtfully):

Maybe it is.

GABRIELLE:

Hah...so maybe he didn't make it up after all. (off Xena's amused look) I mean--not all of it. But who knows--maybe there really is a medallion hidden in some secret chamber inside, huh?

XENA (amused):

Oh, that's right...a medallion that will give you the strength of a hundred men, the fighting skills of Ares himself, and maybe even...what was it? Oh yes--the power to shape-shift.

GABRIELLE (chuckles):

Come on, Xena. Seriously--do you think that maybe there was a bloody battle fought over this temple?

XENA (the tone of her voice suddenly serious and her face grim as she looks at something ahead of her):

Maybe there was.

GABRIELLE (puzzled):

Xena...?

She follows the direction of Xena's gaze and sees a dead body half-hidden by shrubbery at the bottom of the hill. Argo neighs in alarm.

XENA (pats Argo on the neck):
Shh--it's okay. Let's go check it out.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle are at the foot of the hill, off their horses, examining the bodies of about a dozen soldiers.

GABRIELLE (looking at the soldiers' armor):
Thebans...

XENA:
They're all dead--have been dead for several hours.

GABRIELLE (shakes head):
Who do you think could have done this? Argives again?

XENA (points to a soldier in a different kind of armor, wearing chain mail and crimson leather stripes on his shoulders):
No, these aren't Argives. (thoughtfully) I'm not sure what kind of armor this is. Maybe they'll know in Thebes. (She stands up straight) Come on--let's get moving.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle riding at a slow trot through the woods.

GABRIELLE:
Xena, do you think that maybe Thebes is at war?

XENA:
Not that I know of. But you know how it is with wars. One moment you're at peace, and the next...

She suddenly falls silent and tenses up, as if listening to something. Gabrielle gives her a quizzical look. Xena whips her head to one side, listening intently; then, without hesitating another moment, she dismounts, leaps into the trees and pulls out two men who are hiding there. They fight their way out of Xena's loose grip and run off. Xena grins and runs after them, Gabrielle following on horseback.

Xena flips in the air and lands in front of them, blocking their path.

XENA (grins):
Going so soon?

The men draw their swords.

SPY #1:
You're not taking us alive!

XENA (shrugs):
Dead is fine, too.

She draws her sword. Gabrielle dismounts and runs up to Xena, her sais firmly in hand. Xena laughs as the two men lunge forward; she briefly spars with one of them while downing the other with a powerful kick. While she continues to spar, the man she has kicked down rises and charges at Gabrielle, but she is ready for him, disarming him with her sais and then punching him out. In the meantime, with a fierce yell, Xena kicks the sword from the hand of the man she has been fighting. He draws a dagger and charges her again. She easily kicks him down onto his back and puts a foot down on his chest to keep him from moving. He looks terrified.

SPY #1:

Please...don't kill me!

XENA (grins):

I thought you didn't want to be taken alive? I guess you changed your mind. (she sheathes her sword) Well, here's a solution that should work for both of us. You tell me who sent you to follow us and I'll let you live.

SPY #1 (defiantly):

I'm not telling you anything!

XENA:

Suit yourself. (she kneels and jabs her fingers into the man's neck) I've just cut off the flow of blood to your brain--so if you *do* change your mind, you've got exactly thirty seconds to start talking.

The spy nods furiously, showing that he has surrendered, blood dripping from his nose. Xena takes the pinch off him. He grabs his throat, gasping for breath, then looks at Xena and Gabrielle.

XENA:

I'm listening.

SPY #1 (hoarsely):

I was sent by King Capaneus of Plateia to watch you and the blonde.

GABRIELLE (grumbles):

These people could at least take the trouble to memorize my name...

XENA:

Why?

SPY #1:

Capaneus thinks you're here to help Thebes in the war.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange startled glances.

XENA:

What war?

CUT TO

Inside a great temple of Ares. It is magnificently decorated in black and silver, with marble columns; there are candles sitting in human skulls mounted into the walls, light coming through the eye sockets like a jack-o'-lantern. The weaponry hanging from the walls and the carvings of human and animal

skulls add to the eerie atmosphere. At the back of the temple stands a large, almost ceiling-tall, very life-like statue of the God of War carved out of black stone, with a fierce expression on his face, his sword raised. At the base of the statue, raised up on a platform a few feet above the floor, is a throne decorated with skulls and weaponry, with small stairs leading up to it.

In front of the throne stands a long altar, draped in black velvet, that stretches almost the entire the width of the temple, laden with offerings to Ares. In the center of the altar is an empty space with a thick slab of granite.

The camera pans and then moves in to show Ares standing at the end of the altar surveying his gifts. His eyes glide over a dead chicken lying on the altar. He picks it up, drops it and shakes his head in disgust.

ARES (lifts his eyebrows):

I really should send out a memo about sacrificing poultry.

He moves on and shrugs as he looks at a basket of ripe red apples. Then he picks up a ring with a sparkling black stone and holds it up, examining it curiously.

ARES (approvingly):

I can think of a use for this.

Steps are heard and we see a priest in black and silver robes usher in Actaeon. Ares glances back at them; he is clearly invisible to them both. Actaeon approaches the statues and gets down on one knee. The priest leaves while Ares goes back to surveying his gifts, paying no attention to Actaeon (whose back is to him).

ACTAEON:

Great Ares. Hear my prayers. Any day now, I am going to go to war against my own father. I didn't want this, but my efforts to avoid it were in vain. (pause) I ask that your presence and power be with Thebes as we go to war and that you grant Thebes, your greatest city, glory in your name.

As Actaeon speaks, Ares continues to survey his offerings; some daggers catch his attention and he picks one up, spinning it around.

ACTAEON (regretfully):

It's hard for me to fight my father, but I know that this is right.

Ares twirls the dagger around, then notices that the handle is chipped with one of the stones missing and clucks his tongue in disapproval.

ARES:

Mortals have no respect for craftsmanship.

With a wave of his hand, he melts the daggers into a pile of metal. This goes unnoticed by Actaeon, who continues to pray.

ACTAEON:

My Lord Ares! I know many people believe that you'll back any side in a war or favor both opponents and pit them against each other for your power or even your amusement. My father

believes that. (He shakes head) I do not. (Ares turns around and looks at Actaeon) I believe that you do care about right and wrong--I could never worship you if I didn't believe that.

ARES (raises an eyebrow wryly):

You know, if you ever need a date, I know just the girl. If you don't mind short blondes.

ACTAEON (not hearing him):

Thebes has always been loyal to you, my lord. I hope you will see the righteousness of our cause and reward our loyalty...

ARES (twirls a finger):

Yadda, yadda, yadda...

ACTAEON:

...and grant us your favor. Especially if we have Xena fighting on our side.

The sarcastic expression fades from Ares' face and he gives Actaeon a very thoughtful look.

CUT TO

The path in the woods. The two spies Xena and Gabrielle had beaten before are lying on the ground, groaning.

MAN'S VOICE (off-camera):

Are you all right?

SPY #2:

We've been attacked...

Pull back a little to see both spies lying on the ground. A man's boot comes into view as he approaches the two spies. A hand reaches down, offering to help the two spies up but we still do not see a face. Spy #1 grabs onto the man's hand and he is pulled up. We now see two sets of boots standing. Spy #2 is still lying on the ground, rubbing his head. The man offers his hand to Spy #2 and just as Spy #2 begins to grip the man's outstretched hand, there is the sound of running footsteps off camera. The camera pans over to see several Theban soldiers running toward them.

THEBAN SOLDIER:

In the name of Thebes, surrender!

We pan back to Spy #2 still lying on the ground as he is attacked by the soldiers. Spy #1 is also attacked and the man, whose face we still cannot see, is attacked as well. There is a tussle between the men.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle are riding through the streets of Thebes. The entire place is decked in festive décor for the coronation. Streamers are stretched out between the buildings and there are bouquets of flowers tied to the houses' doors and windows. The camera pans over to men unloading barrels of wine and ale from a wagon, and some women unloading roses, fruit, and pastries from another wagon.

GABRIELLE:

That's quite a celebration they're planning.

XENA:

I wonder if they know they're about to have a war on their hands.

CUT TO

A lavishly decorated chamber in the Theban royal palace. A woman in a long gown of purple and gold, with a small golden crown on her head, stands by the window with her back to the camera.

A guard ushers in Xena and Gabrielle.

GUARD:

You Majesty...

The woman turns around. It's Antigone; she looks much more mature than she did in BURYING THE DEAD.

GUARD:

... Xena and Gabrielle are here.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

Antigone.

ANTIGONE (to the guard):

Thank you.

She dismisses the guard with a nod and he leaves. Smiling, Antigone walks up to Xena and Gabrielle. She and Gabrielle embrace.

ANTIGONE:

It's good to see you.

GABRIELLE:

Likewise. (smiles)

Antigone turns to Xena, looking slightly intimidated.

XENA:

Hello, Antigone. (she holds out her hands and Antigone squeezes them) It looks like your coronation is going to be a big event.

ANTIGONE (looks from her to Gabrielle):

I'm so glad you're here.

GABRIELLE (puts a hand on her shoulder):

Antigone, we are so sorry about your uncle. He was a good king--and (hesitates for a moment) a good man.

ANTIGONE (sadly):

Yes, he was. After the war was over, he did a lot of good for Thebes. He opened a new school for the children of the poor, and eased the duties on traveling merchants to increase our trade with other cities. We were able to make a treaty with Argos and we haven't had any trouble with them ever since.

GABRIELLE (hesitantly):

And there was never any trouble between you and him over--what happened?

ANTIGONE:

No, never. I know that Uncle never meant me harm--he was just trying to do what he thought was right. He believed in me--he even encouraged me to get involved in affairs of state, and attend the meetings of the council so that I would be prepared to assume my responsibilities as queen. After he fell ill, we grew closer than ever. (smiles wistfully) I still remember how happy he was at my wedding...he wept and told me that I looked just like my mother on her wedding day.

Xena and Gabrielle stare in shock at her.

XENA:

Your wedding?

ANTIGONE (nods):

Didn't you know? When my uncle found out he was ill, he arranged for me to marry.

GABRIELLE:

Arranged...so it was an arranged marriage, then.

ANTIGONE:

I agreed, for the sake of Thebes--to give the people faith in the future. They would be getting so young a queen, with so little experience; it would be good for them to know that I would not be making decisions alone, and that the royal line would have an heir. Besides, my marriage was supposed to unite two kingdoms that have often been at odds in the past. My husband, Actaeon, is son and heir to the king of Plateia.

GABRIELLE (gasps slightly):

Plateia! But Antigone--

Before she can continue, the door opens and Actaeon walks in. He smiles at Antigone and then looks questioningly at Xena and Gabrielle.

ACTAEON:

Antigone, are these--

ANTIGONE:

Yes, it's them. Xena. Gabrielle. This is my husband, Actaeon.

Xena and Gabrielle nod at him.

ACTAEON:

I'm so glad you two are here.

XENA:

So your marriage was supposed to promote an alliance between Thebes and Plateia, huh? I hope you know it hasn't worked.

ANTIGONE:

I know. We're still hoping to avoid war.

XENA (to Actaeon):

I don't think your father feels the same way. He sent spies to follow Gabrielle and me on our way to Thebes.

Actaeon shakes his head in exasperation. Before he can speak, there is a knock on the door.

ACTAEON:

Yes?

The door opens and the same guard comes in.

GUARD:

My lord--my lady. Some soldiers were out patrolling the perimeter and caught three spies from Plateia.

ANTIGONE (firmly):

Bring them in.

The guard nods and walks back out the door. Several soldiers come in with three men, their hands tied, black hoods over their heads. The men struggle against the soldiers' grips. While trying to restrain them, one of the soldiers bumps into a pedestal with a blue, white and gold decorative vase on it. It sways, nearly falling off the pedestal.

ACTAEON (agitated, snaps at the soldier):

Watch it!

He reaches out and extends his hands, ready to catch the vase if it falls. The pedestal soon steadies and the vase straightens again. Actaeon is visibly relieved. Xena gives him a puzzled look and he looks back at her.

ACTAEON:

It was a wedding gift from my--father. It's been in my family for generations.

The soldiers yank the hoods off of the spies, one after the other. Two of the men are the two spies Xena and Gabrielle took care of earlier.

GABRIELLE:

These men were the two spies sent to follow us.

The soldiers take the hood off the last man. We see a close-up of his face.

It's Haimon.

GABRIELLE (gasps):

Haimon! (turns to Antigone and Actaeon) This is no spy. He's our friend.

SOLDIER:

We caught him with the spies, defending them!

ANTIGONE (to Haimon):

What happened?

HAIMON:

I was on my way to Thebes--I was supposed to meet Xena and Gabrielle here. I saw these two men lying on the ground, badly beaten. I thought they'd been attacked by thugs.

XENA (dryly):

Thugs, huh? That was *our* handiwork.

ACTAEON (turns to the soldiers, who are still holding on to Haimon):

Release him.

The soldiers untie Haimon's hands.

ANTIGONE (apologetic):

I'm very sorry, Xena, Gabrielle. It was an honest mistake.

XENA (nods):

I understand. War is war... (glances over at Actaeon) even when it hasn't started yet.

When Haimon is released, Gabrielle goes up to him. He has several cuts on his face and bruises on his arms. She raises her hand to his cheek to inspect his injuries. He catches her hand and kisses it; Gabrielle blushes visibly and, after a moment, pulls back her hand, smiling.

ACTAEON (to the soldiers, pointing at the spies):

Take those two to the dungeon.

SOLDIER:

Yes, sire. (pushes the two spies to the door, the other soldiers follow) Move it, you Plateian dogs!

The soldiers and spies leave and Antigone turns to Gabrielle, Xena and Haimon.

ANTIGONE:

Again, I'm very sorry. If there's anything we can do to make up for this--

HAIMON (with a crooked smile):

It's all right. I've been through worse.

GABRIELLE:

It's good to see you again, Haimon.

ANTIGONE:

You are free to stay as a guest in the palace for as long as you like. I'll take you to the guest quarters. This way.

Antigone heads out, Haimon following, Gabrielle by his side. When they are gone, Xena turns to Actaeon.

XENA:

So, Actaeon, what's going on with this war?

ACTAEON (takes a breath):

It's my father, Capaneus. He's trying to take control of a hill just outside of Thebes--on Theban land.

XENA:

A hill? What's so special about the hill?

ACTAEON:

It's called the Areopagus--the Hill of Ares. (A close-up on Xena's face as her eyes widen.) It's where the worship of the God of War began hundreds of years ago, shortly after Thebes was founded by Cadmus. It's where the first sacrifice to Ares was made and the first battle in Ares' name was fought. It's a sacred hill.

Xena listens uncomfortably, her face reflecting wariness and uncertainty.

XENA (under her breath):

What is it with gods and sacred pieces of land, anyway?

ACTAEON:

What?

XENA (speaks up):

Has Ares instigated this war?

ACTAEON:

No. (Xena looks relieved but still wary) My father thinks that he'll have Ares' favor if he gains control of the hill. You see, my father is one of those people who only worship the God of War because they see him as the most ruthless and power-hungry of all gods... (he walks over to the table and pours wine into a goblet, then turns to Xena) Wine?

XENA (tensely):

No, thanks.

ACTAEON (takes a drink from the goblet):

But I don't believe that myself. (Xena looks curiously at him) Ares may be war itself--but Xena, you and I know that war isn't just about bloodlust and power. It's about courage and strength, it's about fighting against oppressors--fighting in defense of your homeland and everything you care about... (He walks toward Xena, who listens to him intently) So, you see...I am fighting not only to save Thebes from my father but also to preserve the good name of Ares--so that generations to come see him as the god of honorable war--not the god of slaughter.

Xena is silent for a moment, her face unreadable. Finally she speaks.

XENA:

So what kind of king is Capaneus?

ACTAEON (looks down):

A tyrant--to his family and to his kingdom. His brutality and his devotion to the ways of war drove my mother away when I was just ten winters old--she could no longer stand to live with him. I wish I had gone with her... It wasn't easy growing up in my father's shadow. When he wanted me to marry Antigone, I finally saw my chance to get away from Plateia forever--start a new life. I never would have guessed that so soon after I left, I would be facing a war against my own father. He's become obsessed with this hill. Xena, he will stop at nothing to get what he wants--not even at going up against his own blood.

Close up of Xena's face, who listens intently.

CUT TO

In a bed chamber, Gabrielle is sitting on the bed with Haimon beside her. She has a bowl of water in her lap. She dips a sponge into the water, squeezes it and then dabs it on a small cut across Haimon's neck. He smiles a little.

HAIMON (chuckles):

You know, it's funny.

GABRIELLE:

What? (rubs the sponge over another cut on his face)

HAIMON:

It seems that every time I meet with you, I get the stuffing beaten out of me by *someone*.

GABRIELLE (chuckles):

I guess we just have a way of keeping things interesting.

Haimon reaches out and touches her hand. She sets the sponge down in the water and he rubs her fingers gently.

HAIMON:

Or maybe...it's a message from the Fates.

GABRIELLE (joking):

That we've got to stop meeting like this?

HAIMON:

That we're meant to be together.

Gabrielle turns away uncomfortably.

GABRIELLE:

The Fates must have funny ways of expressing themselves...

HAIMON:

Speaking of beating the stuffing out of people--you and Xena did quite a job on those spies!

GABRIELLE (her back still turned to him, gets up and sets the bowl of water and the sponge on the table):

All in a day's work. You know I try to avoid bloodshed...

HAIMON (facetiously):

I'd hate to see what would happen if you didn't. (She whips around, looking stricken) I'm sorry--I didn't mean it that way. I'm sure you know what you're doing. (Her face softens and she smiles tentatively; Haimon changes the subject) You know, I've just come from Amazon lands.

GABRIELLE (looks up anxiously):

Really? How's...Eve?

HAIMON:

She's okay. (He pauses, looking at her expectantly.) Darion is fine too.

GABRIELLE (breathes a sigh of relief):

Good.

Haimon hesitates a moment.

HAIMON:

He misses you.

GABRIELLE (sadly):

I know. I wish it didn't have to be like this. (she sighs) But Darion is where he belongs. He's with his sister now--his own family. For me to hang around wouldn't be fair to Lykia...or to him. It would just-- (looks away) --confuse things.

HAIMON (frowns):

Confuse things? Gabrielle, after everything you've done for him--you're his family too.

Gabrielle looks away, then looks at Haimon with a tender, wistful smile.

GABRIELLE:

His family...

CUT TO

Xena and Actaeon are talking.

XENA:

Actaeon, you don't need Ares to make Thebes great--you can do just fine on your own. I don't want to get involved in a war just because two kings are trying to win the good graces of the God of War--or any god, for that matter. I've got better uses for my time--and my sword.

ACTAEON (dismayed):

You're not going to help us then? Xena, we need you help!

XENA:

I never said I wasn't going to help. I'm just trying to get you to see how stupid it is to go to war for the sake of some god or some sacred hill.

ACTAEON:

I already told you, this war wasn't my--

XENA:

I know, it was your father's. But, Actaeon, your devotion to Ares is just as blind as your father's...it's just different.

Xena turns around and walks toward the window.

ACTAEON (softly):

So it's not true--what I've heard about you and Ares?

XENA (stops, the tension visible in her body):

What you've--heard.

ACTAEON:

That you helped him when he was mortal. That since then, you've had a (Xena whips around, glaring at him) special relationship. (She looks down while he continues) You know, Xena, maybe Ares *used* to be the way my father thinks he is, but not anymore. And if the soul of war can change--then there's hope for the rest of us, too. (Xena looks at him pensively) I know you must see the good in Ares. (pause) Well, so do I.

Xena walks back toward him.

XENA:

Actaeon...those spies that were brought in today were not the only Plateians who've been prowling around Theban lands. (off his questioning look) The armor of your father's army--is it chain mail, with red leather stripes on the shoulders? (She sees the alarm in his face, and her face hardens as she knows she was right.) Last night, about a dozen Theban soldiers were killed at the base of the Areopagus. They must have been guarding the place. (close-up of Actaeon's horrified face as Xena continues) Gabrielle and I found them this morning--along with a couple of bodies of Plateian warriors.

ACTAEON (staggered):

Then blood has been shed. This war cannot be avoided.

The camera pans around to the doorway where Antigone is standing, a shocked look on her face. She walks slowly into the room.

ANTIGONE (echoes him):

Cannot be avoided...

ACTAEON:

I'm afraid it's true. I'm sorry. (after a moment's pause) We have to dispatch more soldiers to guard the temple right away.

ANTIGONE (shakes her head):

I kept hoping... (trails off and looks at Actaeon) What about your father?

ACTAEON:

He's obviously determined to go through with this. There's nothing I can do.

Antigone comes toward him and stops, leaving some distance between them.

ANTIGONE:

What I want to know is--what *will* you do. Are you prepared to fight him--perhaps to the death?

ACTAEON (regretfully):

If I have to.

ANTIGONE (warily):

Why? Thebes is not your city.

Actaeon walks up to her and takes her hands, covering them with his; she looks at him rather uncomfortably but doesn't pull away.

ACTAEON:

It is now.

Antigone looks at him, her wary expression softening into a small smile. Pan over to Xena, who is looking on thoughtfully as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Afternoon. Outside the temple at the top of the Areopagus. A few Theban soldiers stand around beside the temple and the surrounding trees. There is a whizzing sound in the air and a feathered arrow comes into view, flying toward the camera. Just as we see the tip of the arrow in extreme close-up, the camera pans to a circular shooting target pinned to a tree. The arrow embeds itself in the bulls-eye at the center of the target.

The camera pulls back to show a grinning Theban soldier with a bow in his hand and a quiver full of arrow on his back. A few other soldiers with bows and arrows are standing beside him. The first soldier walks over to the target and yanks the arrow out.

SOLDIER #1 (walks back toward the other soldiers):

You know what I think? We don't get enough money for this work. They've sent us out here to guard this temple, and for what?

SOLDIER #2:

To get our throats cut by the Plateian cowards in the middle of the night.

SOLDIER #1:

Either that, or we'll be stuck here for days dying of boredom.

VOICE (off-camera):

They're coming!

The soldiers turn and look toward a sentry standing on a ledge over the temple's portico, looking out over the plain through a looking glass.

SOLDIER #2 (looks up):
Who's coming?

SENTRY (yells):
Who do you think?

The soldiers rush toward the edge of the hill. In the distance, they see what looks like a black cloud at the horizon, advancing across the valley toward the hill.

SENTRY:
It's the army of Plateia! I can see their banners!

SOLDIER #1 (sighs):
Guess I was wrong. (turns to a young man) Lucan. Go back to Thebes and let them know the Plateians army's advancing.

LUCAN:
Yes, sir.

He mounts a horse and rides down the hill.

CUT TO

A council room at the palace in Thebes. Xena, Gabrielle, Antigone and Actaeon are sitting at a round table with some officers and council members.

ACTAEON:
I know my father. Once he's made up his mind about something, he doesn't tarry. The attack may come at any minute. (pauses) I will lead the Theban troops into battle.

He looks to Antigone for agreement; after a moment she nods and turns to one of the officers.

ANTIGONE:
Braxus, get the troops ready. You will fight under my husband's command.

BRAXUS:
Yes, my lady.

He gets up and leaves. Antigone turns to Xena.

ANTIGONE:
You will fight with us, won't you, Xena?

XENA (after a brief pause):
Yes. But maybe there is still a way to stop this war.

ACTAEON (shakes his head):

It's too late. (to one of the officers) Antippus. Did you order the sacrifice to Ares to be held at the temple?

Xena flinches and looks up at his words.

ANTIPPUS:

Yes, your majesty. The ceremony should be starting just about now.

XENA:

Sacrifice to Ares...at the temple on the Areopagus?

ACTAEON:

No. Right here in town.

Without another word, Xena gets up and storms out of the room. Antigone, Actaeon, the councilmen and the officers stare after her, puzzled.

ACTAEON (to Antigone):

Is she always like this?

ANTIGONE:

I know Xena enough to know one thing.

ACTAEON:

What's that?

ANTIGONE:

When she does something--she knows what she's doing.

CUT TO

Inside the temple where we saw Actaeon before. There are several priests and priestess of Ares dressed in robes of black, red and silver, kneeling before the altar chanting prayers. There are soldiers in the temple as well, watching the ceremony.

Four beautiful young women in scanty outfits of crimson and black (somewhat similar to the Furies' outfits) sashay toward the altar, each carrying a ceremonial silver sword. As music swells, they start a dance that mimics combat, sparring and spinning as they dance, kicking out their feet, constantly exchanging sparring partners. One girl, pretending to be struck down, sinks to the floor with sensuous undulating movements and sprawls on the floor with her sword at her side. Then she rises, picks up the sword again and resumes the dance; after a few moments a second girl repeats the same motions. The soldiers eye them appreciatively while the priests and priestesses continue to chant.

A blue light flares up over the throne in front of the statue. When it dissipates, it reveals Ares sitting on the throne, leaning back a little, his posture relaxed.

There are gasps amongst the priests, priestesses and soldiers as they look at Ares. The girls stop their dance. Murmurs of "Ares!", "Ares, God of War!" roll over the assembled crowd.

ARES (nods and waves his hand):

Carry on.

The dance resumes.

CUT TO

Outside the temple. It is an imposing building, with grey granite columns, decorative weapons, and two large statues of wolves at the entrance. Xena strides up to the temple, looking very determined.

CUT TO

The temple girls continue their dance. Meanwhile, a priest (a tall middle-aged man whose dark hair and beard are streaked with gray) and a priestess (a younger blonde woman) walk toward the altar, leading a goat by the horns. The goat is all black with a spot of white on its chest. The priests hoist the goat up on the altar. It bleats in alarm and tries to break free but the priest and priestess are holding it tightly. The priest draws a bejeweled dagger.

PRIEST (holds up the dagger):

My lord Ares! Accept this sacrifice and grant us your favor.

Ares nods, stroking his beard. The music stops and the dancing girls retreat.

CUT TO

Xena marches up the steps of the temple toward the wide-open door.

CUT TO

Close-up on the goat as it looks up and bleats in fear.

The camera pans to the dagger in the priest's hand, then to Ares as he watches with a rather bored expression.

CUT TO

Xena strides into the temple and stops for a moment, surveying the scenes. The camera zooms in quickly on the altar and the goat.

Pan back to Xena as she grabs her chakram and hurls it at the priest, knocking the dagger out of his hand. The dagger clatters to the floor; we see a close-up of the priest's startled, angry face as he whips around. The chakram ricochets off the temple wall and comes flying back to Xena, who catches it.

Everyone gasps and turns around. Xena is standing in the doorway, chakram in hand, looking very angry. The camera pans over the startled faces of the worshipers and the priests. Ares sits up, looking slightly annoyed but also interested. Xena strolls up toward the altar, re-hooking the chakram on her belt. She is confronted by the priest who was going to kill the goat.

PRIEST (sputtering):

What do you think you are doing? You can't just come in here and--and--

ARES (rises from the throne, smirking):

Oh yes, she can.

The priest looks back at him in shock while Xena walks toward the altar. The priestess is so shocked that she lets go of the goat. The animal jumps off the altar.

XENA (to the goat, grinning):

I guess this is your lucky day. (She gives the goat a slap on the rump and sends it scurrying out of the temple, then turns to the priests, dancers and worshippers.) Not so lucky for you. Party's over, folks. I've got business with (nods toward Ares) your boss.

The priests and worshipers look from her to Ares, as if not quite sure who they are more afraid of. Ares stands up and waves them away. As the temple clears, Ares strolls down toward the altar. He and Xena stand facing each other on opposite sides of the altar.

ARES (suavely):

Grape?

He picks a grape off a bunch of grapes lying on a plate of offerings and holds it out to Xena. She glares at him. Ares shrugs and pops it in his mouth as they continue to stare at each other.

ARES (sarcastic):

Congratulations, Xena. That was an impressive performance. Is that what you expect me to say?

XENA (smiles dangerously):

Oh, I'm not done yet.

XENA and ARES (as she speaks, he mimics her, speaking along with her and slightly ahead of her in a teasing tone):

I am not going to let this war happen.

Xena shoots Ares a very annoyed look.

ARES:

So what else is new? You're going to stop the war? Right. It's what you do. You know that, I know that--

XENA (bitterly):

And starting wars is what *you* do, Ares.

ARES (brusquely):

Not *this* war.

XENA:

It still started because of you. And you're still enjoying it, aren't you. Not to mention all those worshippers.

ARES (sighs):

Look--

ARES and XENA (this time, she's the one mimicking him and anticipating his words):

Go ahead, stop this war. I won't get in the way.

Ares gives her an exasperated look. Xena shakes her head, then turns around and starts to leave the temple. Ares materializes in her path. She walks around him, avoiding eye contact. As she reaches the doorway he materializes in front of her again.

XENA (her voice is hard but without real anger):

I hate it when you do that.

ARES (grins a little):

And I hate it when you walk away, so we're even. Xena... (he slowly raises his hand, touching her cheek with the back of his hand and making her shiver a little) ...yeah, you bet I'm enjoying it. But... (he leans closer to her) I enjoy this even more. (He kisses her briefly then pulls back.) I'm not going to let anything get between us. Not even a war.

Xena eyes him silently, then leans forward and kisses him. Gradually their kiss turns passionate.

There is a discreet cough off-camera.

ACTAEON (still off-camera, uncertainly):

Xena?

Xena and Ares break apart, Ares looking annoyed and Xena somewhat sheepish.

ARES:

Do all your friends do that?

With a slight smirk, he disappears in a flash of light. Pan to Actaeon, who stares at the spots where Ares vanished; he is speechless, his eyes wide.

ACTAEON (murmurs):

M-my--my lord--Ares?

He drops on one knee.

XENA (chuckles):

Come on now, get up.

ACTAEON (rises gingerly):

I, I--didn't realize your relationship was--*that* special.

XENA (crosses her arms on her chest):

You were looking for me?

ACTAEON:

The Plateian army is on the move--advancing on the temple. We're going out into the field.

CUT TO

The temple on the Areopagus. The camera gradually pulls up until we see an overhead shot of the plain with two armies advancing toward each other. When they stop at a distance of a few paces, the camera starts to zoom in. We see Actaeon, now wearing royal armor and a helmet with a crest, riding out in front of the Theban troops. Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon are right behind him, on foot. Then the camera pans over to Capaneus riding in front of his troops, wearing chain mail armor like the rest of his troops but with golden decorations, and with a glittering silver helmet. A murmur runs through the Plateian army when they see Actaeon; some also point at Xena.

ACTAEON (raises his voice):

King Capaneus. *Father*. We still have a chance to stop this war.

CAPANEUS:

No, *you* had a chance to stop this war. You missed it a long time ago.

Xena gives Actaeon a curious look.

ACTAEON:

So be it, then.

He raises his sword and Capaneus does likewise. Before they can call a charge, however, Xena runs past Actaeon and stops between the two front lines of troops. There are gasps and murmurs on both sides.

ACTAEON:

Xena?

XENA:

Listen to me! People of Thebes, people of Plateia--you don't need to fight each other just for a piece of land that some priests have said is sacred to a god! Do you really think that conquering some temple will ensure you a god's favor? The gods may favor one side today, and the other side tomorrow--they're as fickle as children! Children who have more power than they know what to do with. Don't risk your lives in a senseless battle!

The murmur among the Plateian troops grows louder, and Actaeon looks cautiously relieved. Capaneus glares at Xena and turns to address his men.

CAPANEUS:

She's lying to you, don't you see? She's an ally to these lying, conniving Thebans. She wants you to forget the power and glory that await those who are loyal and dear to Ares. You have pledged yourselves to the God of War. Give up this battle, and you don't just disgrace me--you disgrace *him*! Is that a gamble you're willing to risk?

There is a momentary silence in the Plateian troops; then, a few voices cry out "No!" and then soon grow to a chorus in which one can distinguish individual shouts of "Death to the Thebans!", "Kill the dogs!", "Fight for the glory of Ares!"

Actaeon looks dismayed; Xena shakes her head as she exchanges a somber look with him, and then with Gabrielle. She walks back to rejoin Gabrielle and Haimon.

XENA:

There's no stopping them.

The sound of a trumpet pierces the air off-camera. Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon look over to the Plateian army to see one of the men blowing a trumpet. Capaneus raises his sword, then brings it down.

CAPANEUS:

Charge!!

Their swords at the ready, the Plateian soldiers charge toward the Thebans. Actaeon points his sword forward.

ACTAEON:

Charge!!

The Thebans charge toward the Plateians. Xena, Gabrielle, and Haimon join the thick of battle.

The two armies clash and the battle rages. We see a montage of a battle, with shots of Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon fighting--Xena with her usual dazzling array of combat moves using her sword as well as her fists and feet, Haimon fighting with his sword, Gabrielle using her sais to parry her opponents' swords and downing Capaneus' men with swift kicks.

The scenes of Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon fighting are cross-cut with scenes of Capaneus and Actaeon riding around the battlefield. Most of the time they are seen directing their troops; sometimes they are seen fighting and taking down a few enemy soldiers. Twice, their eyes meet and linger on each other but then they move on.

CUT TO

Some time later. The sun is now low above the horizon as the battle continues to rage. Both armies seem to be evenly matched, and it's clear that the men on both sides are getting tired; many of them are staggering and seem almost about to collapse. Many dead bodies are littering the ground and many other men are wounded.

Xena runs through one of the men she is fighting, then looks over to see Gabrielle and Haimon fighting. A man charges Xena from behind and Xena shrieks, twirling her sword backwards and ramming it into his chest. He falls down dead; Xena yanks her sword out of his body and takes a deep breath. She sees a group of Capaneus' soldiers charging toward Gabrielle and Haimon.

XENA:

Gabrielle!

She runs toward Gabrielle and Haimon, taking on three of the attackers and fighting them with her sword and with powerful kicks. Gabrielle knocks one of the soldiers out with her sais and battles the other. Meanwhile, Haimon is fighting two men. Just as Gabrielle brings down her opponent with a kick to the midsection, she sees Haimon struggling; one of his opponents manages to slash him in the side while the other knocks his sword out of his hand. With a cry of pain, Haimon falls to the ground. Gabrielle's eyes widen.

GABRIELLE (screams):

Haimon!!

She rushes toward the two warriors, knocking down one of them and stabbing the other with her sais, showing no hesitation. The man she kicked down gets up and moves toward her; her face contorted with anger and fear, she throws one of her bloodied sais at him. He falls back, the dagger protruding from his chest.

Gabrielle kneels down next to Haimon, fear in her eyes and in her voice.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon... (touches him gently) Haimon...

He doesn't move and his eyes are closed. Gabrielle grabs her shoulder and shakes him, becoming frantic.

GABRIELLE (her voice shaky):

Hai-Haimon...

Haimon stirs and opens his eyes.

HAIMON (winces in shock and pain):

Gabrielle...

GABRIELLE (relieved):

You're all right.

HAIMON (smiles weakly):

I've been better.

She touches his face, smiling through tears.

GABRIELLE:

We need to get you out of here. (Haimon groans and Gabrielle clasps his hand.) Hold on... (she looks around and sees a dead soldier's cloak) I'm going to bind your wound.

CUT TO

Xena is still fighting, surrounded by several of Capaneus' soldiers and unaware of what has happened to Haimon. She has a bleeding cut on her arm. She kills one man with a backward thrust of her sword, then brings her sword down on another soldier; then, using her sword as a pivot, she lifts herself off the ground and spins around, kicking down a few more men. She stops and looks around at the death and carnage around her. Suddenly she tenses. She looks up and the camera follows her gaze up the hill. We see Ares standing at the hilltop, clearly invisible to everyone but Xena. The camera zooms in on him; his arms are folded on his chest, his face impassive. His eyes meet Xena's. Pan to a close-up of Xena's face as she stares at him, then looks away.

Xena sees Gabrielle walking toward her, helping Haimon walk; he is leaning heavily on Gabrielle's shoulders, holding his hand to his hastily bandaged side. There is blood seeping through the bandage fingers. Xena looks on in shock.

XENA (rushes toward Gabrielle and Haimon):

Haimon! Are you--

HAIMON (tries to smile bravely):

I'll be okay... (squeezes Gabrielle's arm) ...with her taking care of me.

GABRIELLE:

We need to get him to a medic.

Xena looks around and sees a riderless horse galloping around the battlefield. She leaps toward it and grabs it by the bridle, calming it down as it neighs and rears up in fright.

XENA:

Here. (leads the horse up to Gabrielle and Haimon) Get him out of here!

Gabrielle mounts the horse and holds out her hand to Haimon; Xena helps him up. He groans as he gets up into the saddle.

GABRIELLE (looks around):

Xena, we have to retreat! The losses are too heavy.

XENA (grimly):

I know. I'll find Actaeon...you two get to safety.

GABRIELLE (reaches down and squeezes her hand):

Stay safe. (They smile at each other, then Gabrielle picks up the reins) Yah! (she rides off, Haimon holding on to her, his arms around her waist.)

CUT TO

Xena runs up to Actaeon and catches the bridle of his horse. He looks down at her, startled.

XENA (yells over the noise of the battle):

How much longer are you going to let this slaughter continue?

ACTAEON:

We can't retreat, Xena. Otherwise, they'll take the temple.

XENA:

Is that really so important?

ACTAEON (hesitates for a moment):

Xena, if the people of Thebes lose this temple, they lose their faith--their future. Don't you understand?

Xena looks at him thoughtfully.

XENA:

Then we have to make sure your father's troops retreat as well.

ACTAEON (laughs bitterly):

How are you going to do that?

XENA (thinks a moment):

You know who his three top generals are, don't you? The ones he values most?

ACTAEON:

Sure. (he peers into the distance, then points to a warrior with a crest of purple feathers on his helmet) That's one of them, Lyctor. The other two--

XENA:

Try to get all three of them within my line of sight. (off his questioning look) Just do it! (glances at the setting sun) Now, before we lose the daylight!

CUT TO

A little later, Xena, now mounted on a brown horse, is galloping across the battlefield. Actaeon gallops toward her, pursued by a group of warriors headed by the general in the helmet with the purple crest. Xena whips around and looks to the left, where she sees the Theban officer, Braxus, coming toward her pursued by a group of Plateians led by another general, with a red and black crest on his helmet; and then to the right, where another top Theban officer is likewise being pursued by the enemy led by a general in rich armor that shines in the setting sun, in a helmet with a crest of emerald green and gold.

As they get closer, Xena draws her chakram and aims it, calculating its trajectory. Then she throws it. We see it fly toward the general with the purple crest and shatter his helmet; he falls off his horse. The chakram flies toward the general with the green and gold crest; we see a close-up of his face, his eyes widening in shock, and hear the sound of the chakram striking. The camera follows the chakram as it flies toward the general with the red and black crest and strikes him in the chest, cutting through his chain-mail armor; with a cry of shock and pain, he clutches at his chest and falls from his horse.

Pan to Xena, who catches the chakram, her eyes glittering.

The camera pans over the battlefield. There is evidence of panic among the Plateian troops. Some soldiers stand in shock while others start to run. An officer rides up to Capaneus and tells him something that we don't hear over the noise of the battle. Capaneus' face is distorted with rage. He turns and sees Xena holding the chakram and replacing it on her belt.

A close-up on Capaneus and then on Xena as they glare at each other.

CAPANEUS (shouts):

This isn't over!

Plateia's troops begin to retreat.

CUT TO

The chamber at the palace in Thebes where we saw Gabrielle and Haimon before. It's evening; the chamber is lit by candles and oil lamps. Xena sits on a bench while Gabrielle is putting ointment on the cut on her arm. Meanwhile, Haimon is on the bed; a female medic in a long grey robe is tending to his injury. She finishes putting on a bandage.

MEDIC:

There you go. You'll be fine--but I wouldn't go out fighting for a while if I were you.

GABRIELLE (turns toward them):

He won't have to.

HAIMON (smiles at her, then looks at the medic):

Thank you.

The medic nods, picks up her bag with ointments and bandages and walks out.

GABRIELLE (to Xena):

All done. (she glances back at Haimon)

XENA (rises from the bench, looking from Gabrielle to Haimon with an unreadable expression):

I should leave you two alone.

There is knock on the door.

GABRIELLE:

Come in!

The door opens. Antigone and Actaeon come in.

ANTIGONE:

How's your friend?

HAIMON (tries to be facetious):

Not bad--under the circumstances.

Gabrielle gives him a guilty look.

ACTAEON:

Xena--thanks to you, we were able to hold them off today.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

And then what? There will be another day and another pointless battle. When will this end?

ACTAEON:

When my father wins the hill--or loses his army.

XENA (narrows her eyes at him inquisitively):

He's *that* single-minded?

ACTAEON (chuckles bitterly):

More.

Xena looks at him thoughtfully.

CUT TO

A chamber in the royal palace in Plateia. Capaneus, with his armor off, is pacing around the chamber. An officer stands in the middle of the room, fidgeting nervously. An elderly priest of Ares, dressed in the customary red, silver and black, stands in the back of the room, watching.

OFFICER:

The physicians say Lyktor and Aminias will recover--but no one knows when they'll be able to fight again...

CAPANEUS (brusquely):

Enough! With or without them, we attack again tomorrow. (He paces around the room, then turns to the officer and snarls) What are you waiting for?

OFFICER (sheepishly):

Y-your orders, sire...

CAPANEUS:

Your orders are to make sure the men are ready to fight again. Dismissed!

The officer bows and leaves.

PRIEST (timidly):

Sire--perhaps you should reconsider... (he stammers as Capaneus glares at him) ...wh-while you still have an army left...

CAPANEUS (strides toward him, furious):

Reconsider? Hah! You deal with the sacrifices and the prayers, old man. Leave war to me.

PRIEST:

S-sire...you forget that I'm a priest to the God of War--I--

CAPANEUS (comes even closer to him):

And you forget that you're the one who told me what's inside the temple. (He walks over to a table and pours himself a goblet of wine.) Once the temple is mine, the medallion is mine. (He takes a sip of wine, then grins as the camera zooms in on his face.) And then--I'll be unstoppable.

The camera starts to pull back until we see the room in an oval-shaped opening. We see Ares in the Halls of War, watching Capaneus in the portal. Ares grins and shakes his head as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Thebes. The palace garden at dawn. Xena is wandering about, lost in thought. She passes a large rose bush that grows up the side of the palace walls, the vines intertwining, the rose blooms just beginning to open.

ANTIGONE (off-camera):

There you are.

Xena turns around to see Antigone walking toward her.

ANTIGONE:

We're about to have breakfast. Are you coming?

XENA (distracted):

Sure...maybe later.

ANTIGONE:

What's wrong?

XENA (hesitates for a moment):

I think Capaneus may want something more than just the hill and the temple.

ANTIGONE:

Like what?

XENA:

I'm not sure... (gives her a probing look) Antigone--do you trust your husband completely?

ANTIGONE (taken aback):

He's shown himself to be very loyal to Thebes. Why shouldn't I trust him?

XENA:

I think he's hiding something. (shakes her head) Antigone, go back to the palace. I'll join you later.

Antigone gives her a wary, puzzle look and walks off. Xena watches her thoughtfully.

CUT TO

Haimon's chamber. Haimon is in bed, asleep. Gabrielle comes in, wearing a light blue robe; she is carrying a tray with a jug, a goblet, a plate of fruit and two plates with pancakes and honey. Haimon opens his eyes and sits up. Gabrielle comes up, smiling, and sits down on the edge of the bed.

GABRIELLE:

I thought we'd have breakfast here. Antigone claims the cooks at the Theban palace make the best pancakes in Greece.

She sets down the tray on the bed.

HAIMON (smiles):

I guess we're about to find if that's true.

They start to eat. After a moment Gabrielle speaks again.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon...I'm sorry.

HAIMON (raises his eyebrows):

For what? The pancakes are excellent.

GABRIELLE (smiles weakly):

For not having seen you in months.

HAIMON (shrugs a little and smiles):

Well, with the kind of lives we both lead--it's not exactly like we can schedule regular visits.

GABRIELLE:

Still... (She trails off and slips her hand into his) I've missed you, Haimon.

Haimon squeezes her hand.

HAIMON:

Me too. (there is silence for a moment as they look at each other) I've heard you and Xena were in Rome and saved some Elijans from Nero.

GABRIELLE (nods):

We did.

HAIMON (chuckles):

I also heard a rumor that Xena retired. The stories people tell...

GABRIELLE:

Actually, she did. (off his shocked look) Well...for a while. It was...complicated.

HAIMON (smiles):

With Xena, it usually is.

CUT TO

Xena is still wandering through the garden, thinking.

DISSOLVE TO

Outside the temple on the Areopagus. Ares stands on the steps of the temple, looking down on the battlefield below. He looks very thoughtful.

CUT TO

Haimon and Gabrielle are still sitting together on the bed.

HAIMON (shakes his head):

Sabina helped you rescue the Elijans? Sabina befriended an Elijan slave girl? Are we talking about the same Sabina?

GABRIELLE:

Xena changed, remember? Maybe Sabina can too.

HAIMON:

Xena's one of a kind. (pauses, holding Gabrielle's stare, then touches her hand tenderly) So are *you*.

Gabrielle smiles. He leans toward her and kisses her gently.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena walks around the garden alone, and stops under a lattice archway, leading toward a small fountain. Beside the fountain is a marble statue of Ares. Xena glances at the statue.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Haimon pull apart.

GABRIELLE (tenderly):

It's *really* good to see you again, Haimon.

HAIMON:

You know, we could... (he trails off)

There is an uncomfortable silence. Gabrielle glances down at the bandage around Haimon's side. She touches it gingerly then looks into Haimon's eyes.

GABRIELLE (quietly):

Haimon...you gave me such a scare today.

HAIMON (touching her cheek with the back of his hand):

You worry too much.

GABRIELLE:

Just take care of yourself, okay?

HAIMON:

Okay.

GABRIELLE:

Promise?

HAIMON (nods, leaning toward her):

Promise...

He leans forward and captures her lips. They kiss again.

CUT TO

Xena is standing in an isolated spot in the garden, beneath the rose arch.

XENA:

Ares.

DISSOLVE TO

Ares standing in the doorway of the temple on the Areopagus.

XENA'S VOICE:

Ares.

Ares straightens up and blue light flares up around him.

DISSOLVE TO

The garden. There is a blue flash and Ares appears beside Xena. He starts caressing her arm and shoulders with his hand. Xena closes her eyes, lost in his touch. He nuzzles his head against her neck and sniffs her hair. He pulls one hand around her waist so that she is leaning against him. He lifts one of her hands up to his lips and kisses it.

ARES (in a husky voice):
I take it this is business.

XENA (her voice breathy and sensuous):
Yes...

ARES (nuzzles her again):
Well...?

XENA (sighs with pleasure):
I need to know something.

ARES (his tone still very sensuous and far from businesslike):
What?

XENA (huskily, her eyes still closed):
That story you told Gabrielle and me...about the temple and the medallion... (Ares bends her back slightly and kisses her neck, making her gasp) is it--true?

ARES (whispers seductively into her ear):
Yes.

Xena whips around suddenly to face him.

XENA:
You mean--this medallion can actually give all those powers to whoever wears it?

ARES (smirks):
Not exactly. The medallion doesn't have any powers.

XENA (frowns):
But you said--

ARES (grins):
Xena, I'm disappointed. What I said is, my priest wrote down in a sacred scroll that whoever had the medallion would gain all these powers. I didn't say it was *true*.

XENA (understanding):
But a lot of people believed it.

ARES (shrugs):
Sure. Mortals believe a lot of crazy things.

XENA (fixes him with a steely gaze):

Something tells me you didn't exactly discourage that belief. Not when it had seven cities going to war over a worthless trinket...

ARES:

Well, it's not exactly *worthless*. It's a nice antique. Sentimental value and all that... (a little dreamy) ...big battles fought over it in my name....

XENA:

Is Capaneus after the medallion?

ARES:

Oh yeah. (anticipating her next question) See, the scroll was lost for centuries. During that big war, a fire broke out and gutted the temple. A lot of the scrolls burned in that fire. Eventually, everyone forgot why the war was even fought.

XENA (wryly):

What a surprise. (pauses) And then the scroll with the story of the medallion somehow turned up in Plateia?

ARES:

Right.

XENA:

And now Capaneus is obsessed with it. (She looks at Ares sharply) Does Actaeon know about all this?

ARES:

I have no idea.

XENA:

I have to talk to him. (She turns away, then turns back to Ares and smiles) Thank you.

Ares nods, almost imperceptibly smiling back at her.

CUT TO

The chamber where Xena and Actaeon first met. Actaeon is pacing back and forth; he seems agitated and preoccupied. The doors are pushed open and Xena comes in.

XENA:

Actaeon.

ACTAEON (stop and looks at her):

Xena. (pauses) You didn't join us for breakfast.

XENA:

I wasn't hungry. (comes closer to him, then stops) Actaeon, why does your father want the hill so badly?

Actaeon shifts his feet, then looks away, visibly uncomfortable.

ACTAEON:

I told you--it's sacred to Ares. Capaneus thinks that if he can gain control of the temple, his influence--

XENA (comes up to him and looks him in the eye):

It's not just that, is it?

ACTAEON (nervously):

What else would it be? You don't know my father. It's just like him to go to war just to boost his ego.

XENA:

Even if it means losing his entire army? Actaeon, you're obviously convinced that he'll never give up on his quest for the temple--and I believe you. But he'd have to be insane to be that determined to get it if it was just about an ego boost. (She moves closer to Actaeon) And I don't think he's insane. (lowers her voice dangerously) So what is it that you're not telling me?

Actaeon looks away again; then, after a tense pause, he looks up at Xena.

ACTAEON:

All right. My father believes there is something in that temple--something sacred to Ares...something that will give him special powers if he can get his hands on it. Some kind of amulet--I'm not sure what it is.

XENA:

And he told you this?

Actaeon hesitates and averts his eyes. Xena intercepts his look; he glances over at the vase from Act One.

[FLASHBACK]

Several soldiers come in with three men, their hands tied, black hoods over their heads. The men struggle against the soldiers' grips. While trying to restrain them, one of the soldiers bumps into a pedestal with a blue, white and gold decorative vase on it. It sways, nearly falling off the pedestal.

ACTAEON (agitated, snaps at the soldier):

Watch it!

He reaches out and extends his hands, ready to catch the vase if it falls. The pedestal soon steadies and the vase straightens again. Actaeon is visibly relieved. Xena gives him a puzzled look and he looks back at her.

ACTAEON:

It was a wedding gift from my--father. It's been in my family for generations.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena charges toward the vase.

ACTAEON:

What do you think you're doing?

He tries to bar her way but she pushes him aside and grabs the vase.

ACTAEON:

No!

XENA (holding the vase):

A family heirloom, huh?

She shakes the vase and hears something rustling inside.

ACTAEON (tries to grab it from her):

Give it back!

In the tussle, Actaeon is able to wrench the vase from Xena's hands but he can't hold onto it and it falls to the ground, shattering to pieces as Actaeon looks on in dismay.

ACTAEON:

What have you done!

Among the shards of the vase, Xena notices a rolled-up scroll. Actaeon lunges for it but she grabs it first and pushes Actaeon away, so hard that he slams into the wall and slumps with a groan.

CUT TO

Outside the chamber, Antigone is walking through the hall. She stops in puzzlement when she hears the noise.

CUT TO

Xena unrolls the scroll. As she reads it, she has an angry and disgusted look on her face. Behind her, Actaeon is slowly getting to his feet, still a little stunned.

CUT TO

Antigone walks up to the doorway of the chamber but doesn't go in. She stands back behind the doorframe, listening to what's going on inside.

CUT TO

Xena finishes reading the scroll and whips around to look at Actaeon. She forcefully throws the scroll back at him and he catches it.

XENA:

You made an agreement with your father? (before Actaeon can speak, Xena cuts him off) So that was your plan all along. Once you became king of Thebes, you would use your new position to your own advantage and would willingly hand the hill over to Capaneus.

ACTAEON (nods, reluctantly and looks down, ashamed):

That's right.

Xena shakes her head in disgust.

CUT TO

Antigone is still outside the chamber, listening. She looks shocked.

CUT TO

Xena is glaring at Actaeon.

ACTAEON:

My father arranged my marriage to Antigone for one reason and one reason only--to take control of the temple...and eventually of Thebes. (sighs) He thought Antigone, a young princess with no experience of governing, could be easily manipulated. (shakes head) My father never wanted peace--he just wanted the hill, and whatever's in that temple. I don't know what it is, except that it has something to do with Ares. I know my father thinks that once he gets it, he'll be the most powerful man in all Greece.

CUT TO

Antigone listens to all of this. She looks hurt, betrayed and angry. She stalks off.

CUT TO

Xena is listening to Actaeon. She looks wary.

ACTAEON:

Please believe me--I hated this whole plan. But my father was intent on taking control of the Areopagus one way or the other; if I didn't agree, he was going to declare war on Thebes as soon as Creon died. I didn't want that; I wanted to avoid senseless bloodshed--so I agreed to go along. I thought it would be the best for everyone.

Xena looks at him, her look softening a little.

ACTAEON:

After the wedding, I was supposed to talk Antigone into exchanging the hill for a worthless piece of land that belongs to Plateia. But--I just couldn't go through with it. I realized how much the Areopagus means to the Thebans and I couldn't betray them...and besides... (he hesitates) ...I couldn't betray my wife. You may not believe me--but I realized that I was falling in love with her. So I refused to do my father's bidding and he declared war. (looks down shamefacedly) He had me sign two copies of this agreement before we married. He put one of them in this vase and gave it to Antigone and me at our wedding...he wanted something to hold over me. (bitterly) Probably planning to tell Antigone about it if he lost the war.

A long pause. Actaeon looks at Xena, who remains silent.

ACTAEON (vehemently):

Please believe me, Xena. I don't want to hurt Thebes--I don't want to hurt Antigone. I did what I thought was right.

XENA:

I believe you. And I may know a way to stop your father.

ACTAEON:

How?

Just as Xena is about to speak there are voices in the hallway, and the doors are flung open. Antigone storms in followed by a few guards.

ANTIGONE (pointing to Actaeon):

Arrest him! He's a traitor to Thebes!

Actaeon looks startled as three guards grab onto him.

ACTAEON:

No! You've got it all wrong! Please, let me explain!

XENA (rushes forward):

Antigone, you don't understand.

ANTIGONE:

No, I *do* understand. I heard everything. (She glares at Actaeon and grabs the scroll from his hands) And I've got the proof right here. (venomously) To think I ever trusted a *snake* from Plateia. (to the guards) Take him to the dungeon.

The guards haul Actaeon away. Actaeon glances once more at Xena as he is taken from the room.

XENA (gently):

Antigone...

ANTIGONE:

Don't try to defend him. (she shakes her head) I--I want to be alone right now.

She storms out right past Gabrielle, who walks into the chamber.

GABRIELLE (dismayed):

Xena, what's going on? I was looking for you--I just saw some guards leading away Actaeon...

XENA (a pained look on her face):

Actaeon is accused of being in league with his father.

GABRIELLE:

What? That's ridiculous.

XENA:

Gabrielle--Capaneus arranged Actaeon's marriage to Antigone so that Actaeon could hand over

the temple to Plateia. (off Gabrielle's appalled look) But Actaeon refused to abide by the agreement. I don't believe he's a traitor.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):
All this for some temple...

XENA:
I'll explain it all later. Right now, I have business with Capaneus.

Xena begins to leave but Gabrielle grabs her arm.

GABRIELLE:
Do you need any help?

XENA (shakes head):
If anyone can help me now, it's Ares.

She walks off, Gabrielle staring after her in shock.

CUT TO

A montage of Xena riding out of the Theban gates; Xena riding past the Areopagus; Xena riding up to the gates of a city--Plateia.

CUT TO

A chamber in Plateia. Capaneus, dressed in a lavish embroidered robe of red silk, is sitting at a table, reading a map. A sheepish-looking guard comes in.

GUARD:
My lord? Xena, Warrior Princess, is here.

Capaneus looks up, annoyed but also intrigued.

CAPANEUS:
Show her--

Before he can finish the sentence, Xena storms through the door.

CAPANEUS:
--in. (sneers) Not that she needs the invitation.

He waves the guard away and he leaves. Xena stands in front of him, staring at him probingly.

CAPANEUS:
You have some nerve showing up here. (mockingly) So, have you decided that fighting on our side will be more profitable? Or are you going to try to talk me into calling off the war?

XENA:
You'll call it off if you know what's good for you.

CAPANEUS (chuckles):

Oh, really?

XENA:

I know what you're after, Capaneus. Special powers.

CAPANEUS (suddenly agitated):

What are you talking about?

XENA (wryly):

I have my sources. (Capaneus eyes her suspiciously) Well, take my word for it--special powers really aren't everything they're cracked up to be. More often than not, they're more trouble than they're worth.

CAPANEUS (snorts):

I can make that decision for myself.

XENA:

Want to hear more? This medallion you are after (the camera pans quickly to Capaneus' face, which registers shock at Xena's mention of the medallion) has no powers. It's just a piece of metal--good workmanship, to be sure, but there's nothing special about it. Do you really want to waste your soldiers' lives in pursuit of some antique?

CAPANEUS (shakes his head):

Oh no, Xena. I know what powers the medallion has. (looks at her probingly) You just want it for yourself, don't you?

XENA (rolls her eyes):

If you don't believe me, maybe you'll believe your god.

CAPANEUS (with a crooked sneer):

Ares? Sure. Ares is going to show up and help you stop a war. (he laughs)

Xena nails him with a steely gaze.

XENA (looks up):

Ares!

There is a tense moment as both Xena and Capaneus stand, waiting for Ares to appear, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

The same scene as before. Xena and Capaneus are standing. Capaneus starts laughing again; Xena scowls at him.

CAPANEUS:

You expect the God of War to come here and do his girlfriend's bidding? I don't think so.

He stops laughing abruptly as the familiar "whoosh" is heard. Pan to Ares as the blue light fades around him; he looks rather somber, his hand resting on the hilt of his sword.

XENA:

Go on, Ares. Tell him what you told me about the medallion.

Ares looks at her expectantly, then turns to Capaneus.

ARES (with gusto):

The medallion--possesses an amazing power...

Xena stares at him in shock while Capaneus' eyes widen with joy.

CAPANEUS (an almost maniacal gleam in his eye):

Yes! I knew it!

XENA (explodes):

Ares, you--

Ares holds out a hand, stopping her, and turns to Capaneus, his face suddenly breaking into a sarcastic grin.

ARES:

...the power to make grown men like you fight over nothing.

Xena breathes a sigh of relief and shakes her head, smirking a little.

CAPANEUS (momentarily speechless as the excitement drains from his face, then sputtering):

Wh-wh-what?

ARES:

The medallion is just a trinket from my temple.

CAPANEUS (uncomprehending):

You mean--the tales of its powers are--exaggerated?

ARES:

You might say that. Or, maybe a better word is--I don't know-- (emphatically) *made up*? So I suggest you give up your quest. (grins again, glancing at Xena) 'Cause otherwise, you'll have to deal with her and I don't think you want that.

CAPANEUS:

But the stories! People fought and died for this medallion--

ARES:

So you're not the first one to fall for a fairy tale. That should make you feel better. (chuckles) Do you really think I'll make someone my right-hand man just because he's managed to get hold of a piece of jewelry? Please. I do have my standards.

CAPANEUS (savagely):

I don't believe you. You're just trying to throw me off the trail so that your little Xena can get her hands on the medallion instead. (Xena and Ares roll their eyes) Everyone knows she's *always* been your favorite.

Xena glares at him.

XENA:

If that's the way you want it...you'll be sorry.

She gives Ares a brief amused glance, then turns around and walks out. Ares gives Capaneus a pitying look, shakes his head and vanishes. Capaneus looks thoughtful for a moment; then, his look turns decisive.

CAPANEUS (shouts):

Melander! (Guard #1 rushes in) Get my horse! (thinks a moment) And stop that woman before she leaves the palace!

GUARD #1 (stammers a little):

That--*that* woman? You mean--Xena?

CAPANEUS (furiously):

Yes, I mean Xena. Go do your job, you fool!

CUT TO

Xena walking down a palace corridor at a brisk pace. Ares materializes in mid-stride as he walks by her side, half-turned toward her.

ARES:

That didn't go too well. Maybe I should have been a little more creative. (Dreamily) I could have told him that the medallion came with some terrible curse that would haunt him and his descendants for generations...

XENA (gives him an amused but slightly irritated look):

I suggest you leave the storytelling to Gabrielle.

As she reaches the top of a large staircase, several guard come running up the stairs, blocking her way, swords at the ready. They apparently don't see Ares. Xena stops and looks at them mockingly.

GUARD#2:

We've got orders to stop you.

XENA (smirks a little):

Go ahead.

The guards stare at her nervously and then start moving in on her. Just as they get close, she grins and grabs two of the men by the collars.

XENA:

Nice try.

She slams the two guards together, knocking them out and throwing them down the stairs. Two of the other guards charge her while four more try to get around her. She finds herself in the middle of a small skirmish. Grinning, she draws her sword and fights with relish, parrying their blows, spinning and kicking, then leaning on her sword to kick out her feet to the left and then to the right, knocking out two guards.

Pan over to Ares, a short distance away, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, casually watching Xena fight. Xena punches a guard in the face and he staggers backward, falling down the stairs; at the same time, she kicks back and hits one of the other guards behind her, sending him flying. The two guards who are left standing start backing up slowly; they reach the bottom of the stairs and stand there with their swords drawn. With an ululating cry, Xena jumps, flipping in the air and knocking them both out as she lands. She pauses, catching her breath.

Ares materializes next to her and sighs contentedly.

XENA (glances at him wryly):
Aren't you tired of this yet?

ARES (grins):
Never.

A few more guards come running down the steps.

ARES (casually):
Need any help?

XENA:
Nah, I've got it under control.

She throws her chakram, cutting a rope on which a large chandelier is suspended. The chandelier falls, knocking down and trapping several guards. The three who are still standing rush toward Xena but she is ready for them, punching out one of them, dodging a blow from another's sword and then spinning around and knocking the two guards together. They fall.

One of the guards Xena knocked out before starts to rise. Seeing this, Ares smirks and flicks a finger at the man, sending a small blue spark through the air that zaps him back into unconsciousness. Noticing this, Xena gives him a mock glare and he responds with a wry, mock-apologetic shrug. Xena shakes her head slightly and smiles; then she races out of the palace.

CUT TO

Outside Capaneus' palace. Xena runs out and whistles; Argo comes running, she mounts in the saddle and rides off, keeping to the edge of the palace square. Hearing a noise behind her, she slows down momentarily and looks back. Capaneus troops are lining up, ready to move again.

CUT TO

Xena galloping out of the gates of Plateia.

CUT TO

The palace in Thebes. Antigone is standing in the chamber room. Gabrielle is next to her.

ANTIGONE (shakes head):

I can't believe Actaeon would do this... He seemed so sincere... (hurt) But he lied to me--to all of us...

GABRIELLE (comforting):

Antigone... (Gabrielle touches her shoulder) ...you need to talk to him. Xena seems to think it's all a big mistake. If she can give him the benefit of the doubt, maybe--

ANTIGONE (her face hardens):

No, I'm not talking to him--ever again.

Gabrielle sighs. An officer comes in and bows down before Antigone. She looks at him.

OFFICER:

Your majesty--Plateia's troops are advancing toward the hill again.

ANTIGONE (distressed):

Thank you.

He bows and leaves. Antigone turns to Gabrielle.

ANTIGONE:

What am I going to do? Actaeon led the Thebans last time. And now, he's--not here--and neither is Xena. (Suddenly, her eyes light up--she clearly gets an idea) Gabrielle, you could do it. (Off Gabrielle's skeptical look) You could lead the Theban troops against Plateia.

GABRIELLE (uncertain):

Antigone--I--

ANTIGONE:

I know you've led an army before... I've read your scrolls. Here. (Antigone takes a gold ring with the Theban seal off of her finger and hands it to Gabrielle who takes it hesitantly) Take this. With this ring, I give you full authority to command.

GABRIELLE:

I... (sees Antigone's pleading eyes) All right.

Gabrielle closes her hand around the ring.

DISSOLVE TO

Gabrielle is walking through the hallway in the palace. She stops for a moment, looks like she is considering something and then opens her hand to look at the ring. She pauses, then walks off at a determined stride.

CUT TO

The dungeon. It is dark and dank; prisoners are in their cells behind metal bars. A door is heard creaking open and light floods into the room briefly and then dissipates as the door closes. Pan over

to see Gabrielle walking in and up to a guard who sits at a table to the side of the cell area. He is a portly, burly, intimidating bald-headed man. He is playing a game of solitaire with cards cut out of wood.

GABRIELLE:

I need to see Actaeon.

PRISON GUARD:

The traitor? What do you want with him?

GABRIELLE:

Just take me to him. (pauses) By order of the queen.

The prison guard sighs and stands up.

PRISON GUARD:

Fine. This way.

He walks down the corridor, Gabrielle following him. At the end of the corridor is a cell where we see Actaeon, sitting on a rickety bench. The guard unlocks the door and Gabrielle walks in, the guard locking the door behind her and then walking away.

GABRIELLE:

Actaeon.

Actaeon looks up at her when he hears her voice and stands.

ACTAEON:

Gabrielle. Please believe me, I never wanted--

GABRIELLE:

What's going on, Actaeon? Xena didn't have a chance to tell me.

ACTAEON (hesitates):

Well--my father--

As he begins to tell her what happened, we pull back and his voice begins to fade.

CUT TO

Xena is riding up to a small encampment of Theban soldiers at the foot of the temple. They are playing dice and relaxing, and are startled when Xena gallops up. She hops off Argo and rushes toward them.

XENA (grabs one of the soldiers who is sitting on the ground and pulls him to his feet):

Get up! (looks around at the other soldiers) There is no time to relax. Capaneus' army is on the move again. They'll be here in no time.

An officer who seems to be in command of the group walks up to her.

OFFICER:

I know. We're expecting reinforcements from Thebes, led by King Actaeon himself.

XENA (grimly):

I wouldn't get your hopes up about that.

The soldiers look at her, puzzled.

CUT TO

Gabrielle is still in the cell with Actaeon. She walks up to the bars.

GABRIELLE (shouts):

Guard!

The prison guard comes up to her and unlocks the cell. Gabrielle walks out and just as the guard begins to lock the cell again, she reaches out, stopping him. He looks at her.

PRISON GUARD:

What are you doing?

GABRIELLE:

Antigone has ordered him released.

PRISON GUARD (disbelieving):

She was the one who sent him down here.

GABRIELLE:

And she's the one who gave me this--to act on her authority.

She shows the guard the ring bearing the royal seal. The guard nods, clearly impressed.

PRISON GUARD:

All right.

Actaeon walks out of the cell and follows Gabrielle as she heads out of the dungeon.

GABRIELLE (walking):

Make sure Antigone doesn't see you. Who knows what she'll do if she finds out I set you free. Right now--let's just say she's pretty upset with you.

ACTAEON:

She has every right to be.

GABRIELLE:

This is your second chance to prove yourself to her. (smiles at him) Use it well.

They open the door to exit the dungeon.

CUT TO

The Thebans guarding the temple are now lined up at the base of the hill in military fashion, swords drawn, ready for combat. Capaneus' army advances, with Capaneus and his officers riding amidst their troops. The Thebans are vastly outnumbered and it looks like they will be easily crushed. The camera pans over the soldiers' nervous-looking faces.

The front lines of Capaneus' army approach the hill.

Xena's ululating battle cry pierces the air. Quick close-ups of the frightened faces of some of Capaneus' soldiers, and of Capaneus himself, looking very annoyed. The camera pans to show Xena riding out from behind the hill. She dismounts in a spectacular flip, charging into the front rows of Capaneus' army and knocking down several men at once. Laughing gleefully, she easily dodges the blows of their swords as she kills one of her attackers with a backward thrust and, without pausing, head-butts another.

A quick montage of the battle as the Thebans fight back. Several Thebans are seen fighting the Plateians. One Theban falls under the blows of several opponents. Xena is surrounded but then she is seen leaping into the air and leaping over the heads of several opponents; she lands, spins and punches out two soldiers with a furious yell.

THEBAN SOLDIER (off-camera):

They'll kill us all!

Xena whips around to see a group of Plateian archers aiming their arrows at the Thebans. She grabs her chakram and throws it. It whizzes through the air and slices several of the archers' bows in half. The other archers flinch back, obviously frightened. Pan back to Xena as she catches the chakram with a victorious grin.

THEBAN OFFICER (to Xena):

We can't hold out much longer!

Pan to Capaneus as he gallops across the field, his sword raised.

Pan to another Theban soldier who falls dead.

VOICES (off-camera, heard through the noise of the battle):

--Look!

--They're coming!

--It's Actaeon!

Xena whips around, an expression of surprise on her face.

Pan to the Theban troops coming toward the hill. Zoom in on Gabrielle and Actaeon riding at the head of the troops. Gabrielle's face lights up with joy as she sees Xena. She rides toward her and dismounts.

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

XENA:

Actaeon. What's he doing here--how?

GABRIELLE:

I'll explain later.

Several Plateians run up to attack them. Xena and Gabrielle fight side by side, their backs half-turned to each other, Gabrielle parrying her opponents blows with her sais and repelling them with kicks, Xena sparring with a Plateian and then killing him.

As the Theban reinforcements join the battle, the camera pans over the battlefield and lingers on a cloaked figure in the back of the Theban troops; the person's face is hidden by the black cloak wrapped around their head, only the eyes visible.

Wide shot of the battlefield, with the battle raging everywhere.

Pan to Xena and Gabrielle taking a quick break from fighting, several dead or unconscious bodies lying around them.

XENA:

So what happened with Actaeon? Did he and Antigone kiss and make up?

GABRIELLE:

No, I let him out of the dungeon. (off Xena's curious look) I didn't tell her.

XENA (shakes her head):

You'll have some explaining to do.

GABRIELLE (glances over at Actaeon, who is now on foot, leading the Thebans into battle):

Let's hope his actions speak for themselves...even for someone as stubborn as--

She is cut off as a man screams and lunges at her. She ducks his blade and kicks him back.

The battle continues. As the camera pulls back, we see that the Theban army is starting to push the Plateian troops away from the hill.

Pan to Actaeon, alone at the steep side of the hill, fighting off two Plateian soldiers. He kills one of them, running him through with his sword, and knocks out the other, hitting him on the head with the flat of his sword. As he stands over them, breathing hard and looking down, he sees a pair of dark leather boots with dragon-shaped silver buckles come into view, walking slowly. He looks up and finds himself staring at Capaneus.

ACTAEON:

Father. (holds up his bloodied sword)

CAPANEUS (sarcastic):

Son. How does it feel to have your countrymen's blood on your blade?

ACTAEON:

I'm fighting for what's right.

CAPANEUS:

And I'm fighting for what's rightfully mine.

ACTAEON:

Rightfully yours? Why? Because you're willing to kill people to get it?

CAPANEUS (sneers):

And you call yourself a follower of Ares. Do you really think Ares appreciates sentimental fools like you?

ACTAEON:

Ares appreciates good warriors. Maybe the better warrior is the one who fights for a good reason.

Capaneus looks at his son, his lip curling up in a sneer. He looks almost disappointed.

CAPANEUS:

Shall we test your theory?

Capaneus charges Actaeon and they begin to fight, skillfully parrying and dodging each other's sword thrusts. Actaeon seems to be limiting himself to defensive moves, not really going on the offensive against his father.

Seeing Actaeon's hesitation and reluctance to attack, Capaneus distracts him with a fake move and then slashes at him so quickly that Actaeon doesn't have time to block Capaneus' attack. Capaneus' sword slashes across Actaeon's thigh; as he gasps in pain, Capaneus kicks the sword out of his hand and advances on him. Limping from his wound, Actaeon retreats, his back against the hillside. Capaneus raises his sword toward his son's chest.

CAPANEUS:

Don't expect help from Xena--or anyone else. You're cut off from your troops.

With a curt nod, he indicates the Plateian soldiers around them, their backs to Capaneus and Actaeon, fighting the Thebans.

CUT TO

Another part of the battlefield. Xena and Gabrielle are fighting side by side. The Theban officer we saw before comes racing toward them.

THEBAN OFFICER:

The king! Actaeon--he's surrounded!

Xena and Gabrielle exchange worried looks and follow him.

CUT TO

Capaneus, holding Actaeon at sword point.

CAPANEUS:

Tell the Thebans to surrender. Then I'll let you live.

ACTAEON (defiantly):

Never! You don't deserve to win.

Capaneus snarls and raises his sword to Actaeon's throat. Actaeon looks at the blade's point, then back at his father.

ACTAEON:

Go ahead, do it. After all the people you've sacrificed to your lust for power, sacrifice your own son.

CUT TO

The Thebans trying to break through the Plateian ranks to get to Actaeon.

CUT TO

CAPANEUS:

It was your choice. You know that.

ACTAEON (bitterly):

You keep telling yourself that and maybe after the hundredth time, you'll actually believe it.

Pan to Xena, in the thick of the battle, trying to take aim with her chakram. A soldier slams into her and she momentarily loses her footing.

Pan to Capaneus, still holding his sword at Actaeon's chest.

CAPANEUS:

Oh, I believe it already. (Draws his arm back to strike the fatal blow) Goodbye, son.

Close-up on Actaeon's face as he closes his eyes.

Pan to Xena; with an ululating cry, she soars into the air over the heads of the Plateian soldiers and lands on the ground, reaching for her chakram.

A close-up on Capaneus; his face looks hard and cruel. Suddenly, his eyes widen and he makes a gulping sound. The camera pulls back to show him drop his sword and raise his hand toward his throat, from which an arrow is protruding. He starts to stagger.

ACTAEON (opens his eyes):

Father?

Pan to Xena, who stares in shock as Capaneus falls slowly to the ground. The cloaked figure we saw before comes out from behind a tree. The person pulls off the cloak. It's Antigone, wearing pants and a shirt; she is holding a crossbow. She walks toward Actaeon.

ACTAEON (stares in disbelief):

Antigone? You--here?

ANTIGONE:

I noticed you with the troops. I had to see if could trust you. (pauses) I'm sorry.

ACTAEON:

No, I'm sorry--for having agreed to that deal in the first place.

They stare at each other for a moment. Then Actaeon turns to Capaneus and kneels by his side. He is dead, his eyes staring blankly into space. Actaeon places his hand over his father's face and closes his eyelids, then lifts his hand. Actaeon closes his eyes for a moment and rises to his feet a little gingerly, his leg bleeding.

ANTIGONE (regretfully):

I know you wish it hadn't ended this way...so do I.

ACTAEON:

You did--the only thing you could have done. (He takes her hand as they stare at the body of Capaneus.) Thank you, Antigone.

She smiles slightly and puts a hand on his arm.

ANTIGONE:

Come on. We've got a war to stop.

Pan to Xena, who looks at them with a bittersweet smile.

Meanwhile, the fighting slows down as Plateian soldiers realize that their king is dead and look around in confusion.

ACTAEON (raises his voice):

Soldiers of Plateia! Listen to me! Your king--my father--is dead. (he waits for the murmurs to die down) He started this war between our two cities for his own selfish goals. I am his rightful heir--joined in marriage to the queen of Thebes. (points to Antigone)

ANTIGONE:

I'm willing to put our past hostilities behind us--for the sake of my city-- (she looks tenderly at Actaeon) --and my husband.

The camera pans over the battlefield. Some of the soldiers on both sides are throwing down their weapons; as others look at them, more follow their example.

GABRIELLE:

Long live the king and the queen!

She is echoed by some of the soldiers. Soon their exclamations grow into a chorus of "Long live the king and the queen!" Antigone and Actaeon smile slightly to each other and clasp hands.

CUT TO

The battle aftermath. Soldiers on both sides are carrying away their dead and wounded.

Pan to some Plateian officers carrying away Capaneus' body as Actaeon looks on sadly. Antigone, Xena and Gabrielle stand by his side.

Xena puts a comforting hand on Actaeon's shoulder.

XENA:

You did everything you could to prevent this war. He made his choice.

Gabrielle, Xena, Actaeon, and Antigone look out over the battlefield in silence.

Then Xena shivers slightly and raises her eyes to the top of the hill, where she sees Ares standing in front of the temple. He looks down at her. They stare at each other. A close-up of Ares' face, his gaze thoughtful and grave, and then of Xena's face, as her expression grows anxious and doubtful.

The camera pulls back for a wide shot of the entire scene: the dead and injured soldiers being carried away from the field, Xena, Gabrielle, Antigone and Actaeon looking on quietly, and Ares at the top of his hill, looking down at the valley below. The camera lingers on this scene for a few seconds.

DISSOLVE TO

Close up of a sparkling crown, studded with small diamonds. We pull back to see a man in a robe holding the crown and pulling back further reveals Antigone in front of him, dressed in an elegant royal gown. The man sets the crown on her head. A loud cheer goes up and we get a wide shot of the entire court room--people all around, cheering "Hail, Queen Antigone!" White and red rose petals are tossed down from the balcony, showering the room. Antigone looks out over her people smiling. She glances over to the side where we see Gabrielle, Xena and Haimon standing. They are smiling.

Actaeon, who is also dressed in an elegant outfit, comes up to her and takes her hand. She smiles at him. They kiss, and the crowd cheers even more.

Pan to Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon as they applaud.

GABRIELLE:

It's amazing. Their marriage started out as a lie--and now it's turned into the real thing.

HAIMON:

Just goes to show you how the best can come out of the worst.

Xena gives him a silent, thoughtful look.

DISSOLVE TO

The Theban palace gates. Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon are on their horses, starting to ride away.

ANTIGONE:

Have a safe journey!

ACTAEON:

You're welcome back in Thebes or Plateia any time.

XENA:

Thank you.

GABRIELLE:

Antigone--Actaeon--I hope you're going to be very happy. (smiles) Good-bye.

They ride away, looking back to see Actaeon and Antigone standing together, their arms linked. Gabrielle smiles; then she reaches out to Haimon and squeezes his hand. He smiles at her.

CUT TO

Night. Xena and Gabrielle are sitting at a campsite. Gabrielle is tending to the fire. She glances over at Haimon who is sleeping in a bedroll nearby, his blanket half off. She gazes at him tenderly, then gets up and goes over to fix his blanket. When she returns and sits down, Xena gives her a probing look.

XENA (in a hushed voice):

You love him, don't you?

Gabrielle looks at her, startled, then turns away and is silent for a while.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--when you were leaving for Plateia, you told me Ares could help you stop the war. What happened? Did he refuse?

Xena looks away briefly, then looks back at Gabrielle, their eyes meeting.

XENA (sighs):

Gabrielle, Ares has been starting wars for thousands of years. When he finally tried to stop one, the most loyal of his worshippers wouldn't obey him. For Capaneus, Ares is war. And it was the call of war that he continued to follow...rather than listen to what Ares was actually trying to tell him. (sadly) Maybe the God of War can change--but war cannot.

Xena looks on, staring into the fire, a sad, wistful look on her face as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Ares' storytelling abilities were not appreciated during the production of this motion picture.]