

SHIPPER SEASON NINE



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Logline

Xena and Gabrielle go in search of a missing statue that seems to have a past of it's own. When the past involves two angry two gods, they must help set things right for the victims involved.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Night. The camera pans around revealing a garden lit only by the moonlight. It's a luxurious garden, surrounded with stone walls and filled with flowers and statues.

Zoom in on a flowerbed as the flowers start to move, as if stirred by a breeze. Then a clump of flowers starts to rise and wobble, finally falling over with a "PLONK!" sound effect.

The ground starts to move and finally opens up; a head covered with a dark hood sticks out of the ground and turns, looking around carefully. Then a person (who seems to be a man), wearing a long, dark cloak, climbs out of the hole. His face is still hidden.

The man looks around and then walks forward, stopping in front of a statue that stands near a tall fountain. The camera pulls around to show the statue. It is painted, depicting a woman with long dark hair and blue eyes, wearing a beautiful dress and a gold necklace with jewels. The statue bears some resemblance to Xena, though not quite look-alike material.

The camera pulls back on the cloaked figure and the moon lights up his face as we recognize none other than Autolycus, the King of Thieves.

AUTOLYCUS (grinning):

Bingo...

CUT TO

Morning. An abandoned building that looks like an old and decrepit temple.

DISSOLVE TO

Inside the building. Sunlight peeks in through the cracked boards covering the windows and shines across the room, revealing dust and debris. Two people, a man and a woman who seem to be in their twenties, are pacing around the temple expectantly. The man is fairly tall and well-built, with short dark hair and green eyes; the woman has similar features, only she's of shorter stature and with longer hair. The woman comes up to a window and looks out.

WOMAN (points at something):

Lichas, look--there he is!

The man comes up to her. The camera pans down to show Autolycus coming up along the path to the temple, pulling behind him an object on a small cart that looks like a statue draped with a black cloak.

CUT TO

Autolycus enters the temple, pulling the cart behind him. He stops, grinning triumphantly.

AUTOLYCUS:

Lichas--Cynthia! I present-- (with a flourish, he yanks the cloth off the statue)

Pan to Cynthia and Lichas. The hopeful look on their faces fades to disappointment.

LICHAS:

--the wrong statue.

AUTOLYCUS (confused):

What? (grimaces) What do you mean, the wrong statue? You said a statue of a woman in the palace garden, black hair, blue eyes, gold necklace--

CYNTHIA (looking it over):

Well, it's still the wrong statue. The one we want is supposed to have a necklace with 12 sapphires in it. (Pan to Autolycus, who whistles appreciatively) And a tear rolling down her cheek.

AUTOLYCUS (mimics her):

A tear rolling down her cheek. (in his normal voice) Lady, I've just about got a tear rolling down *my* cheek because I spent a whole night doing a job for people who can't even give me a proper description of the goods!

CYNTHIA (almost tearful):

I'm sorry. I had no idea... (looks at Lichas) What are we going to do?

Autolycus gives a long sigh as he looks over the statue and then turns to his unsatisfied customers.

AUTOLYCUS (giving in):

All right, all right. I'll go back tonight and get the other statue. I guess you can always keep this one as a lawn ornament, or maybe a towel rack...

LICHAS (shaking his head):

No. You can take that back to the palace.

AUTOLYCUS (bursts out laughing):

Back to the palace? Hahaha! Sorry, kid, that's the funniest thing I've heard in a long time.

CYNTHIA (angrily):

What do you think we are, thieves?

AUTOLYCUS (offended):

Hey--you say that like it's a bad thing!

LICHAS:

You know we only want the statue that rightfully belongs to us. We can't take this one. You have to return it tonight when you go to get the other one. (pauses) That is, if you want your money.

AUTOLYCUS (mocking Lichas):

That is, if you want your money. (sighs) All right, all right... I'll take it back. But you're lucky I'm not doubling the price. (muttering) Goody-two-shoes.

LICHAS:

Then we'll meet you here tomorrow. Come on, Cynthia.

Lichas and Cynthia walk away, leaving Autolykus along with the statue. He makes a face and makes an exasperated gesture at the statue.

AUTOLYCUS (mimics Cynthia in a falsetto):
What do you think we are, thieves?

CUT TO

A palace terrace overlooking a garden. Three richly dressed women are sitting at a table sipping tea and talking about something (we don't hear the conversation). One of them is seen from the back. She seems to be middle-aged, her graying dark hair gathered in a bun on the back of her head. She is wearing a long silk red dress decorated with golden lace.

The camera then pulls back as a guard enters the room; behind him are Xena and Gabrielle.

GUARD (clearing his throat):
My Queen--

The woman turns. We see that it's Diana, looking much older but still quite beautiful.

GUARD (continues):
--these two women say they are friends of yours. Xena--

Diana's face lights up with excitement and amazement.

QUEEN DIANA:
--and Gabrielle! Oh, my! (to the women at the table) If you would excuse me, ladies...

She gets up from her chair and walks over to Xena and Gabrielle, who are coming in the entryway.

XENA:
Diana. It's good to see you again.

QUEEN DIANA (overwhelmed):
My goodness, it's so wonderful to see you both! Talk about a nice surprise!

Diana (well, a stunt double in a fake wig, really) embraces Xena in a hug, then turns to hug Gabrielle.

QUEEN DIANA (pulls back from the hug to look at the two women):
I can't believe it--after all these years! And you *must* tell me, what is your secret?

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a confused look.

GABRIELLE:
Secret?



QUEEN DIANA (laughs):

Your beauty tips. Did you stumble upon a fountain of youth? It's been.... (she pauses, thinking) oh my--thirty years, and you've barely changed since I last saw you!

Pan to the two women still seated at the table behind her as they perk up and listen eagerly.

XENA:

We slept in an ice cave for twenty-five years.

Pan to the two ladies as their faces fall in disappointment.

QUEEN DIANA (disappointed):

Oh my...I was hoping for a skin cream. (her eyes drop to Xena's belt and widen in amazement) By the gods! I don't believe it!

XENA (looking herself over):

What is it?

Queen Diana points to Xena's side--her chakram.

QUEEN DIANA:

You got a new, a new... (pauses, searching for a word) ...round killing thing!

GABRIELLE (smirks):

Chakram.

QUEEN DIANA (politely to Gabrielle):

Bless you. (to Xena) You know, all these years, I have been *dying* to get my hands on one of those. It was so *exciting*, that time I got to throw it! (to Gabrielle) You remember, don't you? I took Papa's crown right off of him.

GABRIELLE (laughing):

Oh, I remember all right.

QUEEN DIANA:

Philemon doesn't believe me when I tell him. (excited, puts her hand on Xena's arm) Oh, we simply *have* to find Philemon--he will be absolutely *thrilled* when he finds out you're here!

CUT TO

The palace garden. King Philemon, now having a short gray beard and wearing a crown, is walking with Diana, Xena, and Gabrielle. If you were paying close attention in the teaser, you may recognize this as the same garden that Autolycus stole the statue from--only now it's seen in daylight.

KING PHILEMON:

Well, it's amazing. We weren't even sure you were still alive. Why didn't you come see us sooner?

GABRIELLE (smiling):

Oh--we've been busy.

KING PHILEMON:

What brings you here? A mission?

XENA:

No, a vacation.

GABRIELLE:

At least I hope so. It seems every time we go somewhere just to relax, something happens--an attack by a warlord, an invading army--a monster on the loose--

QUEEN DIANA (chuckles):

Oh, the gods bless you--we've been at peace for years now. It's been a while since we've had any trouble.

KING PHILEMON:

Well, dear, I wouldn't go that far. Remember, just the other night someone stole your mother's statue from the palace garden.

QUEEN DIANA (angrily):

Oh yes, I forgot about that. (She tries to sound tough but comes off as pouty) No-good dirty thieves! I am *still* trying to figure out how on earth they managed to steal it and get it out of the garden. I mean...it's not as if they could have gotten it over those walls! (points to the walls)

XENA (surprised):

Why would anyone want to steal the statue of your mother?

QUEEN DIANA (shaking her head):

Oh, who knows. Maybe for the gold necklace.

Xena gives Diana a thoughtful look, then exchanges a glance with Gabrielle.

QUEEN DIANA (continues):

But, of course, I cherished it for the sentimental value. (sighs) It was *such* a shock...it was here the night before, and then the next morning--it was as if it had vanished into thin air, or--or--fallen through the ground!

She starts to sniffle and King Philemon puts a comforting arm around her shoulder

XENA:

Diana, where exactly was this statue?

They walk on through the garden.

QUEEN DIANA (still sniffing):

It was over by the fountain...

Suddenly Diana stops, a perplexed look on her face.

KING PHILEMON (shocked):

By the gods!

Pan to show the statue--the same one Autolycus stole in the teaser.

KING PHILEMON (shocked):

It's back!

QUEEN DIANA (plaintively):

Well, I don't understand. Is this someone's idea of a trick?

GABRIELLE (looking at the statue):

So this is it? It's really beautiful.

XENA:

Something funny is going on here.

QUEEN DIANA (offended):

Well, I *must* say I didn't find it funny at all.

KING PHILEMON (looking around the garden):

Wait a minute, Diana...where's The Weeping Lady?

GABRIELLE (gives him a puzzled look):

The *who*?

KING PHILEMON:

The Weeping Lady. It's a statue I gave Diana for our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.

QUEEN DIANA (scanning the garden):

Why, dear, it's here, of course--I just saw it the other day when we were looking for my mother's statue... (points) It's right--

Pan to an empty spot by a wall.

QUEEN DIANA (deflated):

--there. (she pauses for a moment, then gasps) It's gone!

GABRIELLE:

So, someone is going around stealing statues.

KING PHILEMON:

And putting them back! (looks around) It's impossible.

Zoom in on Xena's face as she looks at the empty spot, then at the statue and then at Diana and Philemon, and breaks out into a mischievous smirk.

XENA (turning to Diana):

Diana--I think I know how to get your statue back. (grins)

QUEEN DIANA:

You mean--you know who took it?

XENA (chuckles):

Oh, I have a pretty good idea. (to Gabrielle) Come on, Gabrielle, we've got lots of taverns to search.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

So much for a vacation.

Close-up on Xena, determined and somewhat ticked off but also grinning a little, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

A tavern, not too crowded since it's fairly early in the day; mostly, it's filled with traders and other travelers.

Pan to the doorway as Xena and Gabrielle come in and scan the place, obviously looking for something--or someone.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, this is the fifth one. How can you be so sure he's going to be in a tavern?

XENA (raises an eyebrow):

I know Autolykus.

GABRIELLE:

Well, how can you be sure it's Autolykus?

XENA:

Let's see. Someone pulls off an impossible stunt and steals a valuable object. (sarcastic) Now why would I think it was Autolykus? Come on.

They walk toward the bar. The camera glides over some of the tables; most are empty, but a lone figure wearing a black cloak with a hood is sitting at one of them, eating from a bowl of soup.

The short, plump, balding bartender notices the two women and ogles them rather transparently.

BARTENDER (flirtatious):

Ladies, what can I get you?

GABRIELLE:

We're looking for a man.

BARTENDER (preening):

At your service.

XENA (gives him an exasperated look):

The guy we're looking for is tall, black hair, mustache--smartly dressed--

Pan to the cloaked figure at the nearby table. The person in the cloak, his or her back to the camera, fidgets and sits up.

Pan back to the bartender.

BARTENDER (crestfallen):

Right. Mr. Tall, Dark and Handsome. (turns away and starts putting away some wine jars) Haven't seen him.

Pan to the cloaked figure as it whips around suddenly. Its face comes into view. It's a withered old woman.

OLD WOMAN (pointing to the doorway):

You mean--like him?

Xena and Gabrielle turn. Pan over to show a cocky-looking Autolycus, his cloak slung elegantly over his shoulder, entering the tavern. Seeing Xena and Gabrielle, he stops in his tracks and tries to back away.

XENA (with a wicked grin):

Autolycus. (heads toward him) What a surprise.

Realizing that he won't be able to get away, Autolycus comes toward them with a big fake grin.

AUTOLYCUS:

Xena! Gabrielle! Yes, it's quite a surprise. What brings you to this fine town?



XENA (crossing her arms):

You know, I could ask you the same question. (off Autolycus' nervous laugh) You see, a friend of mine had a statue stolen from her garden.

AUTOLYCUS (playing innocent):

Really!

XENA:

Yeah. Seems like it's just not humanly possible but someone did it.

AUTOLYCUS (trying to hide nervousness underneath false bravado):

Well, well, well. (laughs nervously) Good for them.

GABRIELLE:

And then it gets better. They put it back and stole another statue.

AUTOLYCUS (laughs):

Now that's just crazy. Who would do a thing like--

Xena's glare cuts him off.

XENA:

I want it back, Autolycus.

Pan over to Autolycus, who now looks even more nervous but tries to maintain his cool.

AUTOLYCUS (smoothly):

You mean, you want me to help you get it back? Well Xena, I'm flattered but--

XENA (growls):

Cut the crap, Autolycus. Only the King of Thieves could pull this kind of stunt without getting caught.

AUTOLYCUS (caves in):

All right, all right--you got me. It was brilliant.

GABRIELLE:

So where is it?

AUTOLYCUS (sighs):

Well, I--I don't really have it anymore.

Gabrielle gives a long sigh.

XENA (glares):

Oh, that's great.

The camera pulls back to show Xena and Gabrielle standing in front of Autolykus glaring at him, their hands folded on their chest--they obviously aren't happy campers.

XENA:

So what did you do? Sell it?

AUTOLYCUS:

Well...not exactly.

XENA (sarcastic):

Don't tell me you gave it away to charity.

AUTOLYCUS (sighs):

Well...see, these two people, brother and sister, they hired me to steal a statue for them from the palace garden. They just wouldn't stop bugging me about it. I don't know, it sounded like it was some kind of family heirloom that fell into the wrong hands, or something. They had some sappy story about a great-grandma that I really didn't want to hear. (A little irritated at sounding like too much of a good guy) Look, it sounded like it was really important to them, okay? They really weren't too thrilled about stealing it. So when I stole the wrong one, they made me return it back to the palace.



GABRIELLE (grins):

So the King of Thieves still has a heart of gold.

AUTOLYCUS (sarcastically):

Yeah, yeah, yeah--whatever.

XENA:

Well, either way, I promised Diana I'd find her statue for her. Where are these two?

AUTOLYCUS (thinks a moment):

They mentioned something about heading to Pelius to find some freak with special powers. They figured he could help them.

The camera zooms in on Xena and Gabrielle's confused faces.

XENA:

Evander?

AUTOLYCUS (shakes his head):

That doesn't sound like it.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a surprised look; then Gabrielle's eyes light up--she has just gotten an idea.

GABRIELLE:

Paeonis?

AUTOLYCUS (nodding):

Yeah, yeah, that's it!

XENA:

Same guy. Evander's his real name. So--they wanted him to help them with what?

AUTOLYCUS:

Hey, how would I know? My job was just to get the statue.

XENA:

When did they leave?

AUTOLYCUS:

Last night, right after I brought back the statue. They sure seemed in a hurry to get there.

Xena nods.

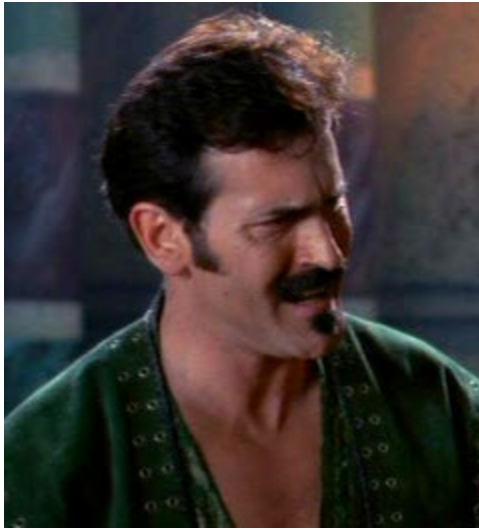
GABRIELLE (to Xena):

It doesn't make sense. Why would they want to see Evander about a statue...? (gasps slightly)
Maybe it's under some kind of spell.

XENA:

I'm sure we'll find out the whole story soon enough. (to Autolycus) All right, let's go.

Autolycus looks over his shoulder ("who the hell is she talking to?"), then turns to Xena.



AUTOLYCUS (laughs, pointing at himself):

You're talking to *me*? Oh--no thanks, I think I'll pass on this little adventure.

XENA:

A little late for that, Autolycus. You stole it, you're going to help us track it down.

AUTOLYCUS:

I'm sure you'll do *just* fine without me, Xena. I have every confidence in you too.

XENA (wryly):

Thanks. But you know what your friends look like.

Autolycus shakes his head, laughs and is about to say something when the doors burst open and four guards come into the tavern. Autolycus looks slightly nervous and steps behind Xena and Gabrielle.

One of the guards unravels a scroll and clears his throat.

GUARD #1:

Attention, everyone! By order of King Philemon and Queen Diana, Autolycus, also known as the King of Thieves, is wanted for stealing a statue from the palace garden. The reward--

His voice fades as we pan to Gabrielle and Xena.

GABRIELLE (in a stage whisper, to Xena):

Hey, how much do you think we'd get for turning in the King of Thieves?

Pan back to the guard as his voice fades in again.

GUARD #1:

--fifty dinars.

Pan to Xena and Gabrielle.

XENA (playing along):

You know, I could *really* use the money to get Argo that new saddle I wanted...

AUTOLYCUS:

You wouldn't.

Pan to the old woman in the cloak who identified Autolycus before. She points at Autolycus.

OLD WOMAN (screeches):

There's your King of Thieves!

The guards step toward Autolycus.

XENA (grabs Autolycus' arm):

That's all right--we already got him!

She gives Gabrielle a kick and Gabrielle grabs Autolycus' other arm.

GABRIELLE (smiles brightly):

Yeah, we spotted him first. We'll bring him in.

OLD WOMAN:

No, you don't! That reward is mine!

GUARD #2:

We'll take it from here. Turn over the criminal.

AUTOLYCUS (insulted):

The criminal? That's incredibly rude.

The guards charge forward, trying to grab Autolycus. He slams his foot down on the foot of the first guard to reach him. The guard yelps in pain and hops around clutching his foot. Meanwhile, Autolycus punches out another guard but the third manages to land a punch to Autolycus' stomach that makes him double over coughing. The two guards manage to grab him, pinning his arms behind his back. Meanwhile, the guard whose foot Autolycus stomped on before hobbles menacingly toward him, pulling out a pair of manacles.

XENA (smiling):

Seems like you could use a little help, Autolycus.

AUTOLYCUS (gritting his teeth):

Okay, okay, you win. I'll come along.

Xena and Gabrielle approach the guards holding Autolycus. The guards look at them nervously.

GUARD #2:

If you help the prisoner, you're going to be in trouble too.

XENA:

I'll take my chances. (She grabs the guard, wrenches him away from Autolycus and throws him across the room) Give my apologies to Queen Diana.

Meanwhile, Gabrielle trips up the other guard and sends him crashing to the floor. The guard with the manacles charges forward but the now-free Autolycus brings him down with a kick.

XENA (dusting her hands, to Autolycus):
All set? Let's go.

Xena and Gabrielle walk out of the tavern, as Autolycus gives a long deep sigh and follows them.

CUT TO

A long shot of Xena, Gabrielle and Autolycus riding through a valley.

DISSOLVE TO

Montage of the sun rising across the sky and then going down.

CUT TO

Night. Xena, Gabrielle and Autolycus sitting at a campfire eating and talking.

AUTOLYCUS (amazed):
Xena, Goddess of War? I wish I'd been around for that.

GABRIELLE (smirks):
It was...different.

AUTOLYCUS:
So what *haven't* you guys done?

GABRIELLE:
Had a vacation.

XENA (smiles):
People in our line of work don't get vacations.

GABRIELLE:
Maybe you should have told me that *before* I got into this line of work. (to Autolycus) So, what have you been up to?

AUTOLYCUS:
Do you just want to hear the legal part?

GABRIELLE:
Uh--yes, please.

AUTOLYCUS:
Well--mostly helping get ready for the wedding.

XENA:
You're getting married?

AUTOLYCUS:
No, no-- (laughs nervously) Anticlea, my daughter. (a bit grouchy) She's engaged to that Laertes guy.

GABRIELLE (thrilled):

That's great!

AUTOLYCUS (grumbles):

Yeah, yeah... Anyway, you're both invited. (slightly worried) Just don't bring any warlords, or monsters, or--

There is a "whoosh" sound and a flash of blue light. Ares materializes on the other side of the campfire. Startled, Autolycus almost jumps.

AUTOLYCUS (finishes the sentence, nervously):

--gods.

XENA (grinning):

Well, I won't make any promises.

ARES:

Hello, Xena. What are you doing here? I thought you'd be in Treus.

XENA:

Oh, having a little adventure tracking a (glances at Autolycus) stolen statue...

ARES:

Ah. The King of Thieves.

He walks over and sits down next to Xena.

XENA:

Autolycus, this is--

AUTOLYCUS (angrily):

Yeah, yeah. Ares, God of War. We've met.

GABRIELLE:

You have? What happened?

ARES:

Well--I played a little prank on him and lolaus, I imagine he's still a little sore about that.

AUTOLYCUS (suddenly nervous):

You know what? Why don't we, er...let bygones be bygones.

Xena gives him a curious look.

XENA (to Ares):

All right. What did you do?

ARES:

Just had them chained together for a while.

GABRIELLE:

That's all?

Autolycus breathes a sigh of relief.



ARES:

Naked.

Autolycus winces and squirms as Xena and Gabrielle give him strange looks, then glares at Ares and goes on the offensive to change the subject.

AUTOLYCUS:

Yeah, and don't forget you had us attacked by a giant chicken!

Ares laughs.

GABRIELLE (to Xena):

And we thought some of our adventures were bad. At least we were never chained together naked...

Ares looks at her, raising an eyebrow.

AUTOLYCUS:

I wouldn't give him any ideas if I were you.

XENA (brightly):

So. Why don't we forget about the past.

ARES (grins):

Never thought I'd hear you say that. (Xena gives him "the look" as he continues) So, where are you headed now?

XENA:

Pelias.

ARES (suddenly serious):

Why Pelias?

XENA:

Well, Autolycus stole a statue from Diana's garden. The people he got it for were headed to Pelius.

ARES (smirks):

So now the Greater Good includes going after stolen statues? (laughing) You guys have certainly gone downhill...

XENA (ignoring his remark):

I think it's something bigger than just a statue. They're looking for Evander.

Ares clears his throat and looks away uncomfortably.

XENA (continues):

So we need to get to Pelius and figure out what's going on.

ARES (wryly):

Well you'd better hurry up then, I heard some lady in Corinth got her cat stuck in a tree...

XENA (grins):

One adventure at a time. (She looks at Ares, her grin fading, and speaks softly) How are things with you and Evander?

ARES (grimly):

They're not. (he gets up and gives Xena a wry look) Good luck with the statue hunting.

He vanishes. A close-up of Xena as she gazes thoughtfully at the spot where he stood.

AUTOLYCUS (off-camera):

Xena?

With a start, Xena looks at him.



AUTOLYCUS:

I ran into Hercules a while back. He told me you and Ares were--well-- (he falters under Xena's glare, then speaks up again as Xena turns away) I--I don't get i-- (Xena glares at him even more harshly and he falters again) Well, I guess it's none of my business, really.

XENA (chuckles):
Autolycus, I'm a big girl.

AUTOLYCUS (nods):
And in all the right places, too.

Xena elbows him and he gives her a look of pretend innocence. Xena and Gabrielle chuckle.

DISSOLVE TO

Morning. Xena, Gabrielle and Autolycus riding through the countryside.

DISSOLVE TO

Day. The streets of Pelius. It seems like a much happier place than in *The Rebel*. A lot of people are out in the street going about on various errands, buying things from street vendors, and the like.

Pan to Xena, Gabrielle and Autolycus walking down the street.

XENA:
Well, no point in wandering around the whole city looking for your friends. Let's just go to the palace and find Evander and--

AUTOLYCUS (yells and points):
There they are!

The camera pans to show Lichas and Cynthia talking to a man who seems to be giving them directions, pointing and explaining something. They're standing next to a small cart pulled by a donkey. Something is lying in the cart, covered with cloth.

Pans to Xena as she heads toward them, then back to Lichas and Cynthia, zooming in on them.

LICHAS:
Thank you for your help, Sir.

MAN:
No problem. Good luck to you two!

He walks on as Lichas and Cynthia go back to their cart. Lichas picks up the horse's reins.

Close-up on Xena's hand firmly gripping his wrist.

Lichas turns, startled, and finds himself facing Xena, with Gabrielle and Autolycus behind her.

LICHAS (noticing Autolycus):
Autolycus? What are you doing here?

AUTOLYCUS (sheepishly):
Uhh...sorry, guys...

CYNTHIA (confused):

What's going on? (suddenly angry) You sold us out, didn't you!

AUTOLYCUS:

Well...I didn't really *want* to... (points to Xena) You have no idea how persuasive she can be.

XENA (to Lichas and Cynthia):

I believe you have a statue that belongs to a friend of mine.

LICHAS (defiant):

I have no idea what... (off Xena's probing look, breaking down) All right, I'm not going to lie. We have the statue. But it belongs to us.

CYNTHIA (stepping in, defensively):

Look, we would have bought it and paid good money for it. But you can't exactly walk into a royal palace and tell the king and queen you'd like to buy one of the statues from their garden. Don't you understand?

Xena backs off and looks at them curiously.

GABRIELLE:

Is this statue really important to you?

LICHAS:

You have no idea.

XENA:

A family heirloom?

CYNTHIA:

It's our great-grandmother.

GABRIELLE:

Oh... Well, I can see how that would mean a lot to you. A statue of your great-grandmother--

LICHAS:

You don't get it. This isn't a *statue* of our great-grandmother.

He turns and yanks the cloth off the statue in the cart. We see the statue. It's a beautiful dark-haired woman, looking very life-like. Close-up on the statue's face. Her expression is anguished; there is a tear frozen on her cheek

LICHAS:

This *is* our great-grandmother.

Pan to Xena, Gabrielle and Autolycus, staring at Lichas, Cynthia and the statue in complete shock, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Xena, Gabrielle, and Autolycus look extremely confused.

XENA:

Your...great-grandmother.

LICHAS (nodding, serious):

Yeah, and we plan on getting her back.

XENA:

I don't get it. Did someone put a spell on her?

CYNTHIA (sadly):

Have you ever heard the story of Niobe?

GABRIELLE (gasps):

Niobe! I heard that she was a woman who suffered the wrath of the gods--

XENA:

They turned her into stone?

LICHAS:

They did a lot more than that.

CYNTHIA (becoming the "bard"):

Nioba was the Queen of Megara, the wife of King Amphion. She had twelve children. Six boys and six girls...

[FLASHBACK]

The great city of Megara comes to view. It's your typical ancient Greek city. People are walking around the city streets, shopping or peddling wares or conversing with other citizens. In the background is a great palace with marble columns.

Writing onscreen appears:

FIFTY YEARS AGO

DISSOLVE TO

Inside the palace. We see a table in the main hall. There are twelve people seated at the table, apparently discussing matters of state. At the head of the table is King Amphion, a still-handsome man in his late forties with a black beard and mustache. Sitting next to him his Queen Niobe. She looks just like the statue we saw before, come to life. Her long dark hair hangs over her shoulders; strength and nobility are

evident in her bearing. She wears a dark blue dress and a golden necklace with twelve sapphires. She seems to be arguing with one of the men seated at the table.

CYNTHIA (voice-over):

Niobe cared a lot about the people of Megara, and always spoke her mind. She believed people should be in charge of their own lives, instead of blindly worshipping the gods.

Zoom in on Niobe as she argues with one of the men seated at the table.

NIOBE (shaking her head):

Intius, this city can't afford any more temples. There's not enough money in the treasury. You know very well that we're building a new hospital--

INTIUS:

But my Queen, the priestess of Apollo said--

NIOBE (interrupts, sarcastically):

And of course, a priestess of Apollo should have the final word in these matters. (chuckles) Leto isn't even an Olympian! Why should this city honor her with a temple?

INTIUS (scandalized):

My Queen! She is the mother of Artemis and Apollo!



NIOBE:

And I bore twelve children. (smiles with a superior air) All of them fathered by my own husband--not someone else's. Maybe I deserve a temple more than Leto does.

There are gasps of shock around the table.

NIOBE (continues):

We're not building this temple. The discussion is over.

AMPHION (puts his hand over hers):

I agree.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE:

So when Niobe insulted Leto, it angered the gods.

LICHAS:

Especially her two children. Apollo and Artemis.

[FLASHBACK]

Niobe's chambers. Niobe is sitting on a chair, looking into an ornate mirror truly fit for a queen. She carefully brushes her hair, watching her reflection. It seems to ease her mind after a long day.

The camera is focused on Niobe's reflection in the mirror; suddenly we see a green flash of light behind her, and a woman's form. Niobe drops her hairbrush and turns around, startled.

The camera pans around to show a woman wearing a golden outfit with a short skirt. Her red hair hangs over her shoulders and covers the bow and quiver on her back. She is the goddess Artemis.

NIOBE (trying not to show fear):
Who are you?

Artemis stares at her silently, with obviously hostility. There is a flash of gold light next to her, and a man materializes. He has short curly gold hair, and looks like he just came from a tanning salon, his dark skin a contrast to his golden vest. It is Apollo, God of Music, Poetry, and Light--and he's obviously not there to sing a song.

NIOBE (forcefully):
Who *are* you?!

ARTEMIS (viciously):
You *will* build the temple in our mother's name.

Understanding dawns on Niobe's face.

NIOBE (whisper):
Apollo and Artemis.

They remain silent. Niobe stares at them, then manages a defiant smile.

NIOBE:
I'm not afraid of you.



APOLLO (caustic):
You should be.

NIOBE:
I will *not* build that temple! Megara has more important things to spend money on than satisfying the vanity of the gods.

Artemis and Apollo look shocked and peevish; they obviously aren't used to having mortals stand up to them.

ARTEMIS (hisses):
Have it your way.

Artemis vanishes. Apollo watches Niobe for a beat and then vanishes as well.

Niobe lets out a long shuddering breath; she was obviously more frightened than she let on.

DISSOLVE TO

Niobe walks over to the window and closes the curtains, getting ready for bed.

LICHAS (voice-over):
Artemis and Apollo were angered by her defiance--so they decided to get even.

We hear a pounding on the door. Niobe walks over to the door and opens it. A guard, looking scared and breathless, stands in the doorway.

GUARD (panting):
My Queen--King Amphion...

NIOBE (fearfully):
What happened?

GUARD:
He's...he's been hurt. You better come quick.

Niobe runs out of her room, following the guard.

CUT TO

The palace garden, lit by moonlight and torches. A crowd of people, mostly servants in the palace, stand gathered around something.

Pan to Niobe as she comes running.

GUARD:

Make way for the queen!

Niobe pushes her way through the crowd as the camera zooms in to show a body lying on the ground. It's King Amphion. He's dead, his mouth open, a golden arrow buried deep in his chest.



NIOBE (cries out):

No! Amphion!

She drops to her knees, sobbing, and cradles his head in her arms.

NIOBE (crying):

Amphion, please--you can't be dead, no... (screaming) *No!*

MALE VOICE (off-camera):

Father!

Pan to show a handsome, richly clad young man in his mid-twenties standing in front of the crowd. He looks horrified.

PRINCE #1:

Mother--what happened?

NIOBE (weeping):

I don't know.... I don't *know!* Amphion--

There is a commotion and more voices, male and female, are heard off-camera.

PRINCE #2 (off-camera):
What's wrong?

PRINCESS #1 (off-camera):
I don't know--

PRINCESS #2 (off-camera):
I think it's Father!

PRINCE #3 (off-camera):
He's dead!

PRINCESS #3 (off-camera):
Mother! Oh, Mother--no--

PRINCESS #4 (off-camera, weeping):
It can't be!

PRINCE #4 (a teenage boy, off-camera):
What's wrong? Is it Dad?

PRINCESS #5 (a child, off-camera):
Daddy!

The camera pans to her. She's a girl of about ten, her braided hair half-undone. She rushes toward her parents and screams.

PRINCESS #5:
Daddy!!!

NIOBE (turns to her frantically):
Cassie--no! (to her older children) Please, take her back to her room!

CASSIE (sobbing):
No, daddy--no!

One of her older sisters, a tall young woman of about twenty, grabs her and tries to pull her away as the girl kicks and screams.

NIOBE (looks up in anger and despair):
Who did this?!

Suddenly there is a flash of golden light. Everyone gasps as Apollo appears standing on the banister of a marble staircase leading down to the garden.

APOLLO (smiling wickedly):
Foolish woman. This is what you get for defying the gods.

Niobe rises to her feet, rage filling her eyes.

NIOBE (screams, angry tears rolling down her cheeks):

You bastard! Because I refused to build a temple for that whore you call mother, you had to kill my husband?

APOLLO:

That's only the beginning.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Back in the city streets of Pelius. The camera pans over the faces of Xena, Gabrielle, and Autolycus. All look saddened and horrified.

LICHAS (grimly):

And then, Artemis appeared next to her brother...

[FLASHBACK]

There is a flash of green light. Artemis appears, standing at the top of the stairs. There are more gasps and the servants start to back off.

ARTEMIS (mockingly):

Queen Niobe. Not so long ago, you bragged that you had twelve children, and our mother Leto, only two. Who do you think will have the higher score once this night is over?

Close-up on Niobe as her eyes widen in horror.



NIOBE (screams):
Children-- run!

Zoom in on Artemis as she pulls back her bowstring, letting an arrow fly through the air. Quick pan to one of the princesses, a girl of about 18, who clutches at her chest and falls. Pan to Niobe as she screams.

Quick montage of cross-cut images:

- * Apollo releases a golden arrow
- * The eldest of the princes, Prince # 1, cries out and falls
- * a wide shot of the scene as pandemonium reigns, the servants and guards dashing about and running away in a panic
- * a golden arrow whizzes through the air
- * a teenage boy runs desperately only to be struck down
- * Apollo smirks
- * Niobe screams, raising her hands to her mouth



- * Artemis releases another arrow with a gleeful smile
- * one of the princesses falls face down, her hand reaching feebly toward her back where an arrow is embedded
- * close-up of Niobe's face as she screams, "No!"
- * Artemis reloads her bow



- * Apollo reloads his bow
- * an arrow whizzes through the air
- * a prince falls dead
- * a princess falls dead
- * an arrow whizzes through the air
- * another prince falls dead
- * Niobe screams
- * Apollo fires another arrow

An overhead shot of the site of the massacre. In the distance, the servants can be seen running away. Some statues and vases have been toppled in the panicked stampede. A half-extinguished torch lies in the grass. Niobe, now silent, stands over her husband's body. Apollo and Artemis stand at the top of the stairs. Dead bodies are scattered on the ground.

The camera slowly zooms down. Artemis raises her bow and takes aim.

CASSIE (off-camera):
Momma!

Pan to the terrified girl as she runs toward her mother.



NIOBE (desperate):

Cassie! (she turns to Apollo and Artemis, sobbing) Not her! Not my baby! I've got no one else left! (she drops to her knees and extends her hands in supplication toward the two gods) Spare only one! *Please!*

ARTEMIS (lowers her bow, smirking):

Not so proud now, is she.

APOLLO (glances at her with a slight frown):

What, you're gonna let the brat live?

ARTEMIS:

Maybe. (pauses) On second thought... (she raises her bow; the camera zooms in on her hand as she releases the arrow) *No.*



Niobe's scream fills the air as we:

DISSOLVE TO

[END OF FLASHBACK]

LICHAS:

They killed them all, even the youngest child.

Angry tears glitter in his eyes; Cynthia has a similar expression.

Pan to Xena, Gabrielle, and Autolycus; they look horrified, disgusted and angry. Gabrielle is teary-eyed.

GABRIELLE:

And then...they turned her to stone?

CYNTHIA:

They must have. In the morning, when the servants dared to come out of the house, they found her-- (gestures toward the cart) like this.

Pan to Xena, her face filled with pain.



XENA (softly):

I'm so sorry.

CYNTHIA:

We're the grandchildren of Niobe's eldest son, Teragon. When he died, his wife, our grandmother, was pregnant with our father. Fearing the wrath of the gods, she left the palace and lived in hiding for years. When Dad grew up, he began to search for the statue but he was never able to find it. He died last year--his dying wish was that we should carry on this search.

GABRIELLE:

It can't be easy searching for a statue all over Greece.

LICHAS:

We had a good description: long dark hair, dark blue dress, a single tear rolling down her cheek.

CYNTHIA:

And the necklace.

LICHAS:

Oh yes, a golden necklace with twelve sapphires. (He sighs) The necklace was a gift to Niobe from Amphion--with one stone representing each child.

XENA:

So you tracked down the statue.

CYNTHIA:

We found a merchant who recognized the description. He told us he had sold the statue to King Philemon of Treus. That's when we hired Autolykus to--get it for us.

LICHAS:

We heard that the ruler of Pelius, Paeonis, had special powers--some said greater powers than those of the gods--and that he wasn't too fond of the Olympians. (Quick pan to Xena and Gabrielle who exchange a brief look) So we figured he'd want to right a wrong the gods had done.

AUTOLYCUS (clears his throat):

That's, uh--quite a story. (clears his throat again and looks away) Look, uh--guys, I think my work here is done. (to Xena) You don't need me any more, do you?

XENA:

Thanks for helping out, Autolykus. (smiles) Listen, I'll--smooth things over with Diana and Philemon.

AUTOLYCUS:

I appreciate that. (strutting a bit) Not that the King of Thieves would ever have to worry about being captured... (He turns to Lichas and Cynthia and slaps them on the shoulders) Well--bye, kids! (nods to Gabrielle) Bye, Gabrielle.

He walks away, whistling a tune.

GABRIELLE (looks at the ground):

Hey, Autolykus--wait, you dropped--

Autolykus has already disappeared into the crowd. The camera pans down to a small leather pouch on the ground.

LICHAS (bends down and picks it up):

Hey, that's--

CYNTHIA (gasps):

Our fee!

LICHAS (looks inside the pouch):

It's all here.

GABRIELLE (grins):

Like I said--a heart of gold.

XENA:

Don't put that in your scrolls--I don't think Autolykus would like that. (her smile fading, she turns to Lichas and Cynthia) So you think Evander can bring Niobe back to life?

LICHAS (mystified):

Who?

XENA:

The man who goes by the name Paeonis.

CYNTHIA (a flash of joy in her face):

You know him? What they say about his powers--is it--

XENA:

Yes, it's true. His powers are real.

CYNTHIA:

Then he's our only hope. (bitterly) Somehow, I don't think we can ask one of the Olympians to help us out.

XENA (gives her a thoughtful look):

Well, we'll see about that. But first things first. Come on, let's go see Evander and try to get your great-grandma back.

CUT TO

Nemesis' quarters. It's a grand bedroom with purple drapes and a window that offers a breathtaking view of the city. Nemesis, as seen in *The Rebel* (Season 8), sits in a chair embroidering. She is wearing a beautiful long red dress.

There is a knock at the door.

NEMESIS (raises her head):

Come in.

The door opens to show a servant girl in the doorway.

SERVANT GIRL (bowing):

My lady, two visitors to see you. (off Nemesis' surprised look) Xena and Gabrielle.

Nemesis looks rather startled but nods.

NEMESIS:

Send them in.

The girl stands aside to let in Xena and Gabrielle.

NEMESIS (to the girl):

You may leave us.

The girl leaves, closing the door. Nemesis rises to greet Xena and Gabrielle.

NEMESIS (a little warily):

Xena, Gabrielle...I wasn't expecting you. Is this--a social visit?

XENA (smiling awkwardly):

Nemesis...

NEMESIS (slightly nervous):
Is something wrong?

GABRIELLE (softly):
We need to see Evander.

NEMESIS:
He's in his quarters. (worried) What's going on?

XENA:
Two people are in need of his help. It's about their great-grandmother.

NEMESIS (regretfully):
Xena...Evander can't heal people. His powers don't extend that far.

XENA:
It's not that. She's...she's a statue.

Nemesis raises her eyebrow and looks skeptically at Xena.

GABRIELLE (trying to explain):
Years ago, Niobe the Queen of Megara refused to build a temple to Leto. (Nemesis looks troubled) This angered Leto's children, Artemis and Apollo. So...they killed her entire family and turned her to stone.

Nemesis looks shocked and opens her mouth as if she is about to say something.

XENA (look of realization on her face):
You know about this. You were a goddess at the time.

Nemesis looks guilty, as ghosts from the past begin to haunt her.

NEMESIS (softly):
I remember...

DISSOLVE TO

[FLASHBACK]

A hall on Olympus. Nemesis is facing Artemis and Apollo.

ARTEMIS:
You don't get it, Nemesis. She insulted our mother.

APOLLO:
She--a wretched mortal--insulted a *goddess*.

ARTEMIS:
This is justice.



NEMESIS (troubled):

Justice? But--you don't even want me to kill the guilty woman herself. You want--

APOLLO (laughs):

Killing *her* would be way too easy.

NEMESIS (resolutely):

I won't do it. Not unless Zeus or Hera order it. They're the only ones I have to obey, not you.

ARTEMIS (her eyes glowing with barely controlled rage):

Have it your way. With you or without you--we'll have our revenge.

She vanishes in a green flash, while Apollo lingers a moment.

APOLLO (gives Nemesis a sarcastic look):

You know, Nemesis, you're a softie. Watch out--some day it may cost you your job.

He smirks at her and vanishes in a golden flash. Nemesis stands still, looking thoughtful and troubled.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE:

So they did it themselves...

NEMESIS (nods):

I found out about it afterwards. (sadly) It's bad enough to kill someone out of revenge--but their children... (she shakes her head) So they turned her into a statue? I didn't know that.

XENA:

Her grandchildren have the statue now. They think she can be brought back to life. That's why we need Evander.

Nemesis gives her an anguished look and nods as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

A close-up of Evander. He looks very angry.



EVANDER:

Isn't that just like the Olympians.

The camera pulls back to show Evander in his quarters at the palace. He is facing Xena, Gabrielle and Nemesis.

EVANDER (continues):

They destroy a whole family--rip everything a woman has away from her, and then turn her into a piece of rock--just to protect their egos! (scoffs) And you told me I was wrong to hate them!

NEMESIS (gently):

Evander, let's not go over that right now. These people need your help.

EVANDER (frustrated and angry):

So Artemis and Apollo are going to get away with this?

XENA:

Not if I can help it. Now let's go.

CUT TO

The palace courtyard. The statue of Niobe is now standing on the ground. Lichas and Cynthia stand next to it. Evander, Nemesis, Xena and Gabrielle come up.

LICHAS (looking at Evander):

That's him?

EVANDER (to Lichas and Cynthia):

I'm sorry about what your family has suffered at the hands of the gods. (sighs) Let me see if there's anything I can do.

Lichas and Cynthia back off from the statue as Evander steps towards it. Lichas and Cynthia exchange nervous but hopeful glances as Evander examines the statue.

Pan over to show Evander extending his hands forward towards the statue and closing his eyes. The statue begins to shake.

The camera pulls back as everyone looks on, expectantly and nervously. Suddenly Evander brings his hands down and the statue stops shaking. He opens his eyes, a disappointed look on his face.

LICHAS (to Evander):

What is it?



EVANDER (sighs):

I--I can't do anything. I could only destroy it if I go on. (Close-up on his face) My powers aren't any good here.

Pan over the stricken faces of Lichas and Cynthia, then to Xena, who looks grim.

CYNTHIA (heartbroken):

That was our only hope....

XENA (brusquely):

There are always other options. (after a brief pause) The gods turned her to stone; a god can bring her back.

EVANDER (scowls):

You mean-- (trails off)

NEMESIS (spits out the name with palpable disgust):

Ares.

XENA (brusquely):

What else would you do? Deny this woman a new chance at life, at having a family--at seeing justice done--because you're still holding grudges over the past?

EVANDER (curtly):

Fine. Just allow me to skip the family reunion.

He strides off, walking back into the palace. Nemesis gives Xena and the others a guilty glance and follows. Xena looks after them with a sigh and shakes her head, then turns and stands up straight.



XENA (calls out):

Ares!

After a moment Ares materializes. He looks at the statue, then turns to Xena, raising a sarcastic eyebrow.



ARES:

Statue hunt going well?

Xena isn't in the mood for jokes, and Ares can tell.

ARES:

What's going on?

XENA:

Ever heard of Niobe?

ARES (thinking for a moment):

Niobe...rings a bell. Wasn't she the one whose kids were killed by Apollo and Artemis as payback for something or other?

XENA (bitterly):

Yeah, she's the one. And then they turned her to stone. (motions toward the statue) That's Niobe.

ARES (disbelief):

That's Niobe? (pauses and nods, digesting this) Let me guess. You want me to change her back.

Cynthia steps forward and faces Ares, obviously not afraid of a god.

CYNTHIA (demanding):

Can you? Can you free her?

Ares looks at the statue, runs his hand over its arm, then shakes his head no.

ARES (staring at the statue):

The only god who can do that is the one that turned her to stone.

Cynthia looks dejected; Lichas puts his arm on her shoulder.

XENA (through clenched teeth):

Then I'm going to have a chat with Artemis. (to Ares) Take me to Olympus.

ARES (shakes his head):

She doesn't spend much time there. She's off hunting in one of her forests.

XENA:

Fine. I know a way to get her attention.

ARES (worried):

Just--be careful.

XENA (with a short, nasty smile):

Save that advice for your sister.

Gabrielle walks up to Xena, looking worried, and puts her hand on Xena's arm.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--

XENA:

I'm going to get this fixed, Gabrielle.

Pan to Lichas and Cynthia, who look at her hopefully.

CUT TO

Artemis' temple. Statues of the goddess line the room, as do bowls of fruit, vases, and various other objects. The walls are painted with pictures of a woman hunting, warrior women dancing, and the crescent moon hanging above them. It has an Amazon-type feel to it.

Xena strides in, a "don't mess with me" look on her face. She stops and looks around.

XENA (shouts):

Artemis! (nothing happens, she shouts louder) *Artemis!*

Again, nothing happens. Xena looks even angrier, obviously in the mood for a hide and seek game. She pulls her chakram from her side and whips it forward. The chakram flies through the air and strikes a large vase, sending it crashing to the ground; then it bounces off the walls a few times, leaving nasty marks, and knocks down a couple of fruit bowls. As it makes its way back to Xena, it takes the hand off one of Artemis' statues, rips a large banner, and knocks down a large weapon rack of bows and arrows. The chakram returns to Xena as she catches it with a grim but satisfied grin.

XENA (blows on the chakram before placing it on her belt):

Want an encore?

There is a bright flash of green light and Artemis materializes in front of the altar.

ARTEMIS (angry):

What in Tartarus... (noticing Xena) *Xena*. This isn't exactly a pleasure. (with a nasty smirk) I'm sure the feeling is mutual.



XENA (quietly seething):

You have *no* idea.

ARTEMIS (looking around):

Well, you got my attention. What do you want?

XENA:

I want you to make it up to someone you wronged.

Artemis stared at her uncomprehendingly.

ARTEMIS (incredulous):

Are we talking about Eve?

XENA (shaking her head):

No, not Eve. Niobe.

Artemis' eyes flash with realization.

ARTEMIS (irritated):
What about Niobe?

XENA (disgusted):
You know what you and Apollo did to her.

ARTEMIS (brutally):
We did what we had to do. We are gods, Xena! When people defy us, they're going to be punished.

XENA (furious):
You killed her *family*!

Artemis shakes her head, almost in disbelief, and laughs wickedly.

ARTEMIS:
Well--you killed mine.

Xena's eyes narrow, as Artemis stares her down.

XENA:
And I went down to *Hell* to bring you and your family back!

ARTEMIS:
Oh, really. What about my son, Xena? (Off Xena's stricken look) That's right--you killed my only son. (with a cruel smirk) It's ironic, you know. I decided to have a child when I found out about the Twilight prophecy. He was my insurance--the one who was supposed to keep my legacy alive.

XENA:
I killed your son to protect the Amazons--your own people!

Artemis doesn't say anything as she walks towards Xena, stopping as she comes face to face with her. She has a crazy-pyscho-Callisto presence to her.

ARTEMIS (whispering):
Well, Xena, looks like we have more in common then we knew, hmm? We both have children who attacked the Amazons and slaughtered a lot of them. (with a sinister smile) But isn't it funny. *Your* child got off the hook.

Zoom on Xena's distraught face. Artemis has obviously made her point.

ARTEMIS (pushing it a little further):
The Bitch of Rome becomes the Queen of the Amazons. Bellerophon has to die.

Xena stares at her for a moment; then her distraught look gives way to hardened resolve.

XENA:
Artemis, this isn't about my daughter or about your son. It's about Niobe's children. They hadn't

harmed anyone. And you and your brother killed them--just to punish their mother for defying the gods.

ARTEMIS:

And I would do it again.

Xena yells as she draws her sword and swings at Artemis. Artemis smiles as she catches Xena's sword with her hand.

ARTEMIS (hissing):

Now, now, Xena...don't forget--you've lost the power to kill gods.

Artemis pushes the sword away and then kicks Xena in the stomach sending her back. Artemis then screams and releases a fireball towards Xena, who flips up in the air and dodges it causing it to strike the door behind her.

Artemis throws another fireball at Xena; she swats it aside with her sword, causing it to hit a statue and make it explode into pieces.

XENA:

What's the matter, aim's a bit off?

ARTEMIS:

I'm just going easy on you because my brother doesn't like other gods frying his girlfriends.

XENA:

Going easy, huh?

Artemis launches another fireball at Xena, who extends her sword and blocks it, sending it right back at Artemis. It strikes her in the chest, sending the goddess to the ground.

XENA:

Well, I'm not going easy on *you*.

She rushes over to the fallen goddess, stepping on her stomach and putting her sword to her neck. She forcefully brings down her sword, ramming into Artemis' chest--which does the goddess no harm but causes her to wince and flinch instinctively.

ARTEMIS:

Hey! Move it! Don't make me start playing rough.

XENA (forcefully, jabbing at the sword):

I want you to free her.

ARTEMIS:

Free who?

XENA (dangerously):

Don't play stupid with me. Niobe.

ARTEMIS:

I can't. I wasn't the one that turned her to stone.

XENA:

Apollo did?

ARTEMIS (shaking her head):

No.



XENA (angry):

Don't play games with me!

ARTEMIS (irritated):

I'm not. *It wasn't us!* Why would we turn her to stone? We wanted her to *suffer!*

Xena's expression changes as she steps back, pulling out the sword. Artemis rises and smiles wickedly as Xena stares daggers at her.

XENA:

So which god did?

ARTEMIS (shrugs):

I don't know that. Someone that wanted to show her mercy.

Artemis laughs as she vanishes in a flash of green light. The camera pans over to Xena, her eyes narrowing.

CUT TO

Apollo's temple, decked out in white and gold. The camera zooms in to show a large couch. Apollo is lying on the couch with his shirt off, being attended by three women in skimpy outfits. Two of them are rubbing oil into his chest while the third is feeding him fruit. Not surprisingly, Apollo seems to be enjoying it.

Artemis materializes beside the couch with her hands on her hips.

ARTEMIS (rolling her eyes):

Apollo.

Apollo's attention is on the women as they giggle.

APOLLO (reaches up to kissing the neck of one of the women massaging him):
I'm kinda busy here, Sis.

ARTEMIS (irritated):
It's important!

One of the women begins running her hands over his shoulders. Apollo is obviously paying no attention to Artemis. Finally Artemis comes up, shoves the girls aside, grabs Apollo by the ear and pulls him off the couch, causing him to fall hard on the floor. The girls give her fearful looks.

ARTEMIS:
Scram!

The girls run off, leaving Apollo on the ground. He gets up and dusts himself off, looking furious.

APOLLO:
What was that for?!

ARTEMIS (angrily):
Maybe if you weren't fooling around with your priestesses all day, you'd pay a little more attention to what's going on around you.

APOLLO:
Like what?

ARTEMIS:
Niobe.

APOLLO (gives her a disbelieving look):
Niobe? That was *years* ago.

ARTEMIS:
Yeah, but now Xena knows about it.

APOLLO:
Xena? What's it to her?

ARTEMIS:
What's it to her? (scoffs) You know how Xena always has to stick her nose into everything. (waves dismissively) It's what she does. You know, it's that whole business with how she was bad before, so now she has to do all this *good* stuff to make up for it.

APOLLO:
What does she want to do about Niobe?

ARTEMIS:
It seems Niobe has some descendants. (off Apollo's questioning look) From a grandchild who survived. They want their great-grandma back and Xena's helping them. Got the picture?

APOLLO:

Well...maybe we should just let her. (off Artemis' withering look) Or--maybe not.

ARTEMIS:

That bitch is not going to have the last laugh.

APOLLO:

Which one? Niobe or Xena?

ARTEMIS:

Neither of them. The statue has to be destroyed.

APOLLO:

You're right. Okay, I'll send some of my worshippers over to do the job.

ARTEMIS (laughs):

Your worshippers? (nods toward the skimpily dressed girls who are hovering in the doorway) And what are they going to do when they run into Xena? Rub her with oil and fondle her to death?

APOLLO:

No not, *them*. I'll send my priests.

CUT TO

Pelias. The courtyard of Evander's palace where the statue is still standing.

CUT TO

Inside the palace. Gabrielle, Lichas, Cynthia, Evander and Nemesis are sitting around a table having a meal.

CYNTHIA (worried):

What's taking her so long?

GABRIELLE (a little testy):

She'll be here.

The door is thrown open and a guard rushes in.

GUARD (out of breath, to Evander):

My lord-- we're under attack!

Evander leaps to his feet.

CUT TO

The courtyard. A group of about fifteen men in red and gold outfits--temple warriors of Apollo, dressed as they were in *Eternal Bonds* and armed with swords, clubs and maces--are battling the palace guards, several of whom lie wounded or knocked out on the ground. Evander and Gabrielle come running.

They are all holding onto weapons, which are mostly swords and clubs. They are Apollo's priests.

TEMPLE WARRIOR #1 (seeing Gabrielle and Evander):
Hand over that statue, and no one gets hurt.

The fight momentarily stops.

GABRIELLE:
What do you want with the statue?

TEMPLE WARRIOR #2:
It belongs to our god, Apollo.

Gabrielle draws her sais from her boots, and holds them up in a defensive position.



GABRIELLE:
Your god has done enough damage already. He's not getting the statue.

The warriors charge. Gabrielle whips around and hits one of them in the face with the blunt end of a sai, sending him to the ground. She then spins around and kicks another priest in the chest.

Quick pan to show Evander stepping forward, merely extending his hand and sending one of the temple warriors rolling on the ground. Another warrior charges Evander, and Evander uses his powers to throw him against the wall.

Pan to two of the guards who are still standing, fighting the temple warriors.

The camera pulls back for a wide shot of the courtyard. Evander is using his powers to stop some of the temple warriors. Meanwhile, Gabrielle twirls her sais around and uses them to knock out one of the warriors while kicking back another.

A temple warrior, screaming and flailing, goes flying over Gabrielle's head. She looks up at him and then at Evander. Suddenly she looks worried.

GABRIELLE (shouts):
Evander, behind you!

Pan to show a temple warrior behind Evander charging him with a sword. Just as Evander turns his head, the warrior is knocked out cold. Behind him we see Nemesis holding a club in her hand, grinning slightly.

EVANDER (laughing, shocked):
Mom...thanks.

NEMESIS (smiling):
What, you didn't think your old mom could handle the action?

Evander laughs, but then quickly turns around to send another warrior flying across the courtyard.

Suddenly, two warriors tackle him from behind and throw him down on the ground, while three more charge Gabrielle. While she is trying to fend them off, a warrior with a club advances toward the statue.

The camera pulls back for a wide shot of the courtyard. Evander is struggling with the warriors while Gabrielle has her hands full with her attackers, and one of the warriors has Nemesis in a headlock.

Zoom in on the temple warrior raising his metal-tipped, spiked club and aiming it at the face of the Niobe statue as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Replay of previous scene. Apollo's temple warrior slowly swings his metal-tipped spiked club at the Niobe statue, ready to smash its head.

A familiar whooshing noise is heard, and the chakram strikes the man's club, causing it to fall to the ground. The temple warrior quickly turns. Pan to Xena as she catches the ricocheting chakram.

XENA (yells):
Alalalala-sheeya!

Xena flips in the air, grabs the temple warrior by the back of his shirt and throws him across the courtyard.

XENA:
Some people just don't know good art when they see it.

Several of the temple warriors charge toward her, obviously gluttons for punishment. Xena jumps up and side-kicks one, then spins around and backhands another.

Another warrior attacks her from behind; she spins around and kicks his legs out from under him, causing him to sprawl on the ground. She leans down and grabs him by the collar.

XENA (snarls in his face):

Tell Apollo he's not getting the statue. And if he comes after Niobe again, I'll make sure he hears from me.

She lets go of the warrior, dropping him to the ground. The camera spins around to show Evander and Gabrielle knock down a few more warriors while the rest of them beat a hasty retreat.

GABRIELLE (sheathing her sais; to Xena):

So, I take it your chat with Artemis didn't exactly go well.

XENA:

I can tell you one thing. It wasn't Artemis and it wasn't Apollo that turned Niobe to stone.

LICHAS (angrily):

What do you mean?! Of course it was them, who else?

XENA (shaking her head):

No, don't you see--they wanted her to suffer. Artemis said some other god showed her mercy, by turning her to stone.

CYNTHIA (disbelief):

Mercy? It sounds worse than death...

GABRIELLE (shaking her head):

Not if they were protecting her from Apollo and Artemis. But who could it be?

NEMESIS (speaks up):

It sounds like something Athena would do. She was one of the few gods that ever showed mercy to mortals.

XENA (nods slowly):

That was my guess, too.

There is a flash of golden light, and Athena materializes next to them.

ATHENA (calmly):

Good guess.

She turns toward Nemesis, eyeing her with some amazement.

ATHENA:

Nemesis?

NEMESIS (softly):

Hello, Athena.

Athena looks as if she doesn't know what to say, then quietly walks towards her, embracing her in a hug.

NEMESIS (whispers):
It's been a long time.

Athena nods slightly as she pulls away from Nemesis, then turns and sees Evander, recognizing him immediately.

ATHENA (smiling):
Evander. You've grown.

Evander looks away uncomfortably.

XENA (impatiently, to Athena):
So. You're the one who turned Niobe to stone after Artemis and Apollo killed her children.

ATHENA (gently but firmly):
Yes, I did. As an act of mercy.

LICHAS (angrily):
An act of mercy? Turning her into a piece of rock?

ATHENA (shaking her head):
As stone, she feels nothing. You didn't see the pain she was in.

CYNTHIA:
She would have been better off dead!

ATHENA:
Would she? Dead, she'd be spending eternity in Tartarus.

CYNTHIA (shocked):
What are you talking about?

ATHENA (taking a deep breath):
After her children were killed, Niobe wanted revenge...

[FLASHBACK]

The city of Megara. Night. We see Niobe, her dress torn, her eyes mad, her eyelids puffy with tears. She walks through the streets holding a torch in her hand. In the background, there are two buildings on fire.

ATHENA (voice-over):
And so she set fire to the temples in Megara.

Niobe makes her way up the steps of a large temple and enters. Her face is full of hate, rage, and determination. The camera follows her into the temple, which seems to be a temple to all of the Olympian gods with twelve statues standing along the walls.

Niobe walks up to the altar, shaking with rage as she holds the torch.

NIOBE (shouts):

Are you happy now?! You've made your point! *You won!* You took everything I had! My husband--my children! (She is silent for a moment, as the fire from her torch bathes her face in an eerie light; then she speaks quietly, a frightening intensity in her voice) You're immortal. You will never know loss--you will never know pain. You know nothing of true love. You've taken my family. So I will take the only thing that you really care about--the only thing you hold dear. Your precious temples.

She hurls her torch onto the altar. The altar's cloth covering catches fire and starts to blaze. Niobe grabs a large jar of oil and hurls it at the altar as well. It smashes, and the oil causes the flames to flare up, igniting a curtain behind the altar.

NIOBE (screams as she stares at the flames):

I curse the gods!

DISSOLVE TO

The palace garden. Night. The twelve bodies, now covered with cloth, are lying on the ground. All twelve of the dead children are lying on the ground. Niobe is standing over them, looking into the distance where fires can be seen burning.

Zoom in on Niobe as she pulls a dagger from her dress.

NIOBE (softly):

Hold on, my darlings... Mama will be with you soon...

There is a flash of golden light next to her. Niobe flinches back. Before her stands Athena.

ATHENA (gently):

Niobe, don't.

Niobe looks at her uncomprehendingly.

NIOBE (mutters):

You're...one of *them*, aren't you? One of the gods?

Athena doesn't reply or even nod; she just stares silently at Niobe. Niobe spits in her face. Athena flinches slightly, her expression unchanged.

NIOBE (angrily):

What do you want? To kill me yourself?

ATHENA (calmly):

Niobe, if you die now, Tartarus awaits you. You've cursed the gods. You've burned down temples.

NIOBE (whispers in shock):
And my family?

ATHENA:
They've done nothing wrong. They will go to the Elysian Fields.

Niobe lets out a hoarse, tearless sob.

NIOBE (hoarsely):
So they will be ripped away from me...not only in this life but for all eternity?

ATHENA:
If you die now--yes. If you go on and lead a good and pious life in the time remaining to you...you could be forgiven.

NIOBE (furious):
Forgiven? They slaughter my husband and children over some petty insult and they have to forgive *me*?

Athena looks at her thoughtfully.



ATHENA:
You're a proud woman, Niobe. (sadly and solemnly) In a mortal, arrogance like yours--leads to downfall. But the vengeance you suffered has been beyond all measure of justice. (gently) You have been wronged.

Niobe drops the dagger and starts to weep; then her tears give way to anger.

NIOBE (angrily):
And what are you going to do about that?

ATHENA:
There isn't much I *can* do. When one of the gods chooses to punish a mortal, the rest of us can't interfere--it's the law. But there is a way I can end your suffering...and protect you from their further wrath.

Athena slowly raises her hands. A golden wave of energy flows from her hands into Niobe's body. Niobe freezes, a single tear rolling down her cheek. Then, the golden light turns to a bright flash; when it dies down, Niobe has become the statue.

ATHENA (quietly):
May you find peace.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Athena has just finished the story; Lichas and Cynthia look at her, teary-eyed.

XENA (to Athena, pointing to Lichas and Cynthia):

These are her great-grandchildren, Lichas and Cynthia. They want you to free her--to restore her to life.

ATHENA:

All right. (looks at Cynthia and Lichas) Are you sure she would want this?

LICHAS:

Anything is better than being trapped in stone!

ATHENA:

She wanted to die.

CYNTHIA:

Back then, she had no one left. Now, she has us.

ATHENA:

So be it.

Athena approaches the statues and raises her hands, radiating golden energy into the stone. Suddenly a bright light flares; when it fades, we see Niobe alive. She gasps as air fills her lungs, winces at the light, lifts her hands to her eyes. Her vision clearing, she looks around and blinks in confusion, noticing all the people looking at her. Lichas and Cynthia, beside themselves with joy and disbelief, cautiously approach her.

NIOBE (confused):

Who are you? (to Cynthia) Medora? (shakes her head in confusion) No...you look like my daughter Medora, but you're not. (to Lichas) And you...no, you're not my son. Who are you? Where am I?! (Her eyes widen suddenly and fill with tears as her memory returns) My children... (in a half-whisper) They're dead. My whole family--dead.

LICHAS (softly):

No--not your *whole* family. (off her bewildered look) I'm Lichas, your great-grandson. And this is your great-granddaughter, Cynthia.

Niobe stares at them in utter confusion.

NIOBE:

But--how is that--

CYNTHIA (smiling wistfully through tears):

It's true. It's been fifty years since your children were killed and Athena turned you to stone.



NIOBE (in disbelief):

Great-grandchildren? I don't understand--

LICHAS:

After your son, Teragon, died, his wife Melena found out she was pregnant. She had a son--she named him after his father. He searched for you for years until he died recently. (he sighs) I'm so sorry he didn't live to see this day. But we found you.

Niobe is momentarily speechless.

NIOBE (looking at Lichas and Cynthia):

I...this is just too much... (shakes her head) I have a family?

There is a "whooshing" sound off-camera.

APOLLO (off-camera):

Not for long.

Pan to Apollo and Artemis standing on the other side of the courtyard. Apollo has a fireball in his hand and is about to launch it.



Apollo releases the fireball, and everything goes in slow motion as Xena flips over his head. She lands in front of Niobe, Lichas, and Cynthia. She grabs her chakram and deflects the fireball, sending it exploding on the courtyard wall. Xena puts her chakram on her side and draws her sword.

Artemis pulls out an arrow, pulling it back on her bow and releasing it towards Cynthia. The arrow flies toward her but Xena catches it. Zoom in on another arrow flying toward Cynthia; Xena catches this one too.



ATHENA (yelling):
Artemis. Apollo. Stop this at once!

XENA (to Lichas and Cynthia, nodding toward Niobe):
Get her out of here--*now!*

NEMESIS:
This way! Follow me!

She runs toward the palace.

CYNTHIA (grabs Niobe's arm):
Come on!

NIOBE (stands still, staring at Artemis and Apollo, her face full of anger and anguish):
They killed my family--

Apollo throws another fireball, as Xena bounces it off her sword.

XENA:
And they'll kill the rest of you if you stay here!

Lichas and Cynthia pull Niobe away.

Artemis places another arrow in her bow and pulls back, aiming at them. Before she can release it, Gabrielle runs up behind her, spins around and kicks her foot out from under her, causing Artemis to stumble and her arrow to fly harmlessly into the shrubbery.

Artemis turns, her face distorted in a snarl, and is about to grab Gabrielle's throat when something causes her to fly back, screaming, and land in the same shrubbery where her arrow fell.

The camera pulls back to show Evander lowering his arm.

Pan to Apollo as he readies another fireball. Evander extends his hand and sends Apollo flying, hitting the side of the palace wall as the fireball fades harmlessly in his hand. He lands on the ground, looking worriedly at Evander.

Artemis, back on the ground, approaches him and they stand side by side, aiming fireballs. They release their fireballs simultaneously only to have them both deflected by Evander; meanwhile, Xena throws her chakram and the two gods duck as it flies around the courtyard.

Evander raises his hand, concentrating hard, and Apollo is lifted off the ground and held in the air where he flails helplessly, glaring furiously at Evander. Finally Evander lowers his hand, unceremoniously dropping Apollo who stumbles and nearly falls as he lands. Xena's chakram whizzes by again, nicking his ear; it doesn't cause any damage since Xena can no longer kill gods, but Apollo instinctively flinches back, and this time stumbles and lands on his backside.

EVANDER (brusquely):

I don't much care for the gods. I *especially* don't like the two of you. So why don't you do yourselves a favor and get out!

Apollo scrambles to his feet, looking scared.

ARTEMIS (to Apollo):

Stay here and fight, you wimp!

Apollo and Artemis face off against Xena, Gabrielle, and Evander. In a flash, Athena teleports to stand between them.



ATHENA (raising her voice):

What are you doing?! All this for a fifty-year-old grudge over a temple? Haven't you learned anything?

ARTEMIS (angrily):

Learned what? To let the mortals say and do whatever they want? Athena, the gods have become *jokes*! We've lost most of our followers! Back in the days when we killed Niobe's children, we were feared--we were worshipped. Tell me you don't miss that.

ATHENA:

You don't get it, do you? It's because of such acts of senseless cruelty that we did lose worshipers!



ARTEMIS (nastily):

It wasn't senseless.

Artemis and Apollo dematerialize, leaving an angry Athena behind.

ATHENA (to Xena):

They won't ever harm Niobe or her family again, I'll make sure of it.

XENA (moved):

Thank you, Athena.

ATHENA (softly):

Thank you, Xena and Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (puzzled):

For what?

ATHENA (smiling):

For everything. (turns to Evander, smiling) Evander. Years ago, I took your powers from you because your mother wanted to protect you. Now that you have them back--use them well.

Athena begins to dematerialize.

GABRIELLE:

Athena, wait.

ATHENA (the light around her fading):

What is it?

GABRIELLE:

When Niobe dies--will she...

ATHENA (shaking her head):

Don't worry. Her soul will be safe.

Athena vanishes. Xena and Gabrielle look thoughtfully at the spot where she vanished.

CUT TO

Nemesis' quarters. Niobe is sitting on the bed, her sapphire necklace in her hands. She is running her fingers over the sapphires. Lichas and Cynthia are sitting next to her. Nemesis is sitting in a chair nearby, while Xena, Gabrielle, and Evander are standing, watching Niobe and her grandchildren.

XENA (to Niobe):

Artemis and Apollo aren't going to hurt you anymore. You're safe.

Niobe manages a warm smile.



NIOBE (softly):

I've had everything ripped away from me...

Lichas carefully touches her hand, Cynthia placing hers on top of his.

CYNTHIA (softly):

Not everything.

Niobe smiles, tears coming to her eyes, and embraces Lichas and Cynthia.

XENA (looks at them, then quietly motions to the others):

Come on.

She and Gabrielle leave the room, followed by Evander and Nemesis.

CUT TO

Hallway. Xena and Gabrielle stand in front of Nemesis and Evander.

NEMESIS:

I think they're going to be all right. They can stay here as long as they want.

XENA (to Evander and Nemesis):

Thank you for your help.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle leaving the palace. Xena seems lost in thought.

GABRIELLE (glances at her):

What is it?

XENA:

For a long time, I wondered if I did the right thing when I killed the gods. Now, I sometimes wonder if we did the right thing bringing them back.



GABRIELLE (thinks a moment):

Well...without Athena, Niobe would have been trapped inside that statue forever. This way, she has a new chance at life.

XENA:

You're right. I suppose it's the closest she could have to a happy ending... (after a pause) You know, I once told Athena that among all the Olympians, she was the one who had my respect. I'm glad to see I was right.

They walk on in silence for a moment.

GABRIELLE:

So I guess Ares and Evander never really got into the father-son thing, huh. (after a pause) You know, I could try to talk to Evander--



XENA (shakes her head, grimly):

Leave it alone, Gabrielle. (off Gabrielle's questioning look) Not every story gets to have a happy ending.

A wide shot of Xena and Gabrielle walking down the hallway as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Xena developed a new appreciation for sculpture during the production of this motion picture.]