

SHIPPER SEASON NINE



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Logline

When a mysterious gypsy grants a secret wish that turns Gabrielle back into her younger and innocent self, Xena isn't sure how the spell can be undone - or whether it should be.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Gabrielle enters a tavern. After a quick survey of the place, she takes a seat in a corner, facing the door. A serving girl approaches.

SERVING GIRL:

What can I get for you?

GABRIELLE:

Actually, I'm meeting a friend here. She's tall, dark hair, blue eyes, dressed in leather and swings a mean sword?

SERVING GIRL (shrugs):

Haven't seen anyone like that. Can I get you anything while you wait?

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Why not? I might be here a while. I'll have wine.

The serving girl moves off towards the bar. Gabrielle's gaze moves lightly over the place. After a moment, a small commotion can be heard. A few tables away, a burly man in his mid 40's and obviously drunk pulls the serving girl onto his lap.

DRUNK:

Hey, where you off to so fast, girlie?

SERVING GIRL:

Oh gods, Cletus not now! I've got work to do.

CLETUS (laughs):

That's right. And I'm just tryin' to *put* you to work.

SERVING GIRL (struggling):

Cletus, *please* let me go!

He laughs and tightens his hold on her.

CLETUS:

What for? I'm just trying to be friendly is all.

Gabrielle approaches the table, leveling a hard gaze on Cletus.

GABRIELLE:

I think the young lady has all the friends she needs. Why don't you let her go?

He looks her up and down blearily.

DRUNK:

And who's gonna make me? *You?*

GABRIELLE (unblinkingly):

If I have to. But I don't think it's going to come to that. Do you?

He looks her up and down and recognition dawns. He staggers to his feet and the serving girl slides off of his lap. She quickly runs off. The difference in the sizes between Gabrielle and him is striking. She comes up no higher than his shoulder.

DRUNK:

Hey--I know you. You're that little Xena sidekick, aren't you? I bet you're not so tough without your friend.

Gabrielle flexes her fingers.

GABRIELLE:

Do you really want to find out?

XENA:

I'm afraid the lady is spoken for...unless of course you'd like to go outside and discuss it with *me*.

Xena grins and the drunk sways, blearily attempting to assess her. Finally good sense prevails and he holds up his hands.

DRUNK:

Just a mis-understanding. I'm just trying to be friendly is all.

XENA:

Well, I think your wit and charm were lost on that girl. Maybe you should move on.

She gives him a menacing look and the drunk staggers off. Xena joins Gabrielle at her table.

GABRIELLE:

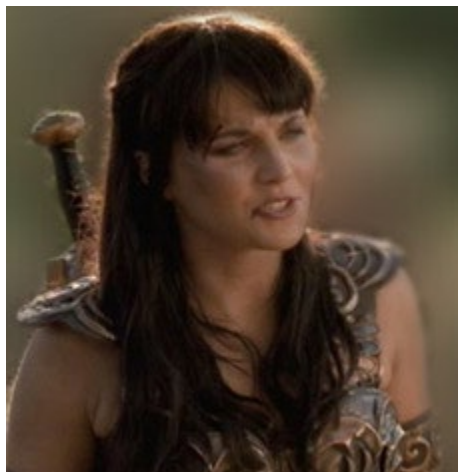
I was handling that.

XENA:

How? You looked like you were about to wipe the floor with him.

GABRIELLE:

So? Weren't you going to do the same thing?



XENA:

Threats are one thing. But I wasn't about to beat up on a defenseless drunk. I didn't think that you would either. I remember the days when you would have handled a guy like that with words alone. That was always your greatest weapon, Gabrielle.



GABRIELLE:

I'm not a kid any more, Xena. People change.

XENA:

I guess they do... (she is silent a moment, obviously trying to think of something to say) So...Darion is settled in okay with Lila?

Gabrielle nods and frowns.

GABRIELLE:

I hate leaving him. I know he understands that we have a job to do but...

XENA (smiles understandingly):

I would have understood if you wanted to stay behind with him. I could have handled Akelos.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

You know, sometimes it feels so strange going home... (she looks around the room) Where's Haimon?

XENA:

We finally caught up with Akelos's army. Haimon stayed behind to find out where they're headed next.

GABRIELLE:

Are you sure you should have left him alone out there? Maybe we--

XENA:

Haimon can take care of himself. Besides, we're trying to keep a low profile. If Akelos caught wind that the Warrior Princess and the Battling Bard were hot on his trail he might scatter his men and lay low until he lost us. Once Haimon discovers which way Akelos is headed, he'll catch up with us.

GABRIELLE:

If he's not back by tomorrow night, I'm going after him.

Xena realizes Gabrielle is in an irritable mood and merely nods.

XENA:

Okay. (she thinks a moment then speaks hesitantly) So...you and Haimon...it seems that ever since the Orb of Mimir episode you two have been--

GABRIELLE:

Everything's fine.

XENA:

Okay...

A wizened old gypsy woman approaches the table.

MAGDA:

How are you ladies tonight? I am Magda, soothsayer, palm reader and caster of spells. Care to have your fortunes told?

GABRIELLE:

Thanks, but I--

XENA:

Sure, why not? It might be fun. (Gabrielle glares and Xena shrugs) Hey, there was a time you really went in for this sort of thing.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Okay. Maybe she can tell us which way Akelos is headed.

She offers her palm to Magda and the old woman bends over, reading it.

MAGDA:

You've traveled a very long distance, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

Actually, I was raised not too far from here. (she looks at the woman curiously) How did you know my name was Gabrielle?

Magda merely smiles and bends over her palm again.



MAGDA:

Yes...a very long distance. Over land, sea and...time. You yourself have made the greatest journey of all. (she studies her palm again) I see a child--

XENA (quickly):

Darion.

GABRIELLE:

That's right. Darion. He's my son.

MAGDA:

I see a daughter...

Gabrielle stands abruptly, pulling her hand away.

GABRIELLE:

This is stupid. Forget it!

She turns and marches towards the door.

A man seated at a table in the far corner can be seen furtively watching Gabrielle. She exits the inn and he frowns and shakes his head, obviously worried. He takes a long drink from his mug, draining it and wipes his hand across his mouth.

Back to Xena. She gives Magda a sheepish look.

XENA:

I'm sorry. She's not usually like this. She's just been so tense lately.

MAGDA:

Change is hard to accept sometimes.

XENA:

I suppose it is. (she produces a coin from a leather pouch, laying it on the table) Thank you.

She exits the tavern and pauses outside, looking around for Gabrielle. She hears an altercation around the corner of the building.

CUT TO

The alley where we see the back of a man.

MICAH:

Hey! Where are you running off to so fast, little one?

We hear Gabrielle's voice but she is blocked from view by Micah's bulk.

GABRIELLE'S VOICE:

I'm meeting my best friend. She's six feet tall and fights like a harpy in a really bad mood so you'd better watch it.

MICAH (laughs):

A woman! That'll be the day when Micah of Crete can't take a woman.

GABRIELLE'S VOICE :

Well, did I mention that my friend was Xena?

MICAH:

Xena?

GABRIELLE'S VOICE :

That's right--Xena the Warrior Princess. And you'd better back off or else!

MICAH:

Or else what?

A hand reaches out and taps Micah on the shoulder.

XENA:

Or else *this*.

Xena punches him in the face. Micah lands unconscious in the dirt. Xena grins down at him.

GABRIELLE:

Xena! Thank the gods! I know you've told me a thousand times before "words before weapons" but he really didn't seem like the talking type. You've *got* to teach me how to throw a punch like that.



Xena looks up and gapes. Gabrielle stands before her, but it is an eighteen year old Gabrielle, complete with long hair, long peasant skirt and light blue blouse. This is the Gabrielle Xena first met all those years ago.



XENA:
Gabrielle?

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Xena and Gabrielle enter a room at an inn. Xena practically manhandles Gabrielle into sitting on the bed.

XENA:
Okay, what happened?

GABRIELLE:
I don't know. I went outside to get a drink of water from the well. All of a sudden that big, smelly goon was all over me.

XENA:
The last time I saw you you were...

GABRIELLE:
I know what you're going to say, Xena. I have to start paying more attention to my surroundings. I'm trying--but this constant paranoia thing you've got going on is new to me, okay? And besides, I've been thinking about writing down our adventures and I was--

Xena holds up her hands to stem the flow of Gabrielle's words.

XENA:
I need you to stay here for a little while. There's someone I need to see.

GABRIELLE:
You do? Who? Are you on the trail of some bloodthirsty warlord? Maybe I could come along and--

XENA:

Actually, the best thing you can do is stay right here until I get back.

GABRIELLE:

I'm not a kid, you know.

XENA:

I know...I know. This is just something I need to do by myself.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Okay. I suppose I can work on my scroll. Promise you won't forget about me.

XENA:

Impossible. I won't be gone long.

Xena leaves and Gabrielle frowns at the closed door.

GABRIELLE:

Hm. Sooner or later you're going to stop leaving me behind, Warrior Princess.

CUT TO

Xena enters the tavern and looks around. She spots Magda at a table and strides over.

XENA:

Okay, what have you done to Gabrielle?

MAGDA:

Me? I've done nothing!

XENA:

Don't give me that. One minute Gabrielle is fine. Then she meets you and all of a sudden she's different.

MAGDA:

Different. Worse?

XENA:

She's...changed. She's the way she used to be...back when I first met her. She was just a kid. Don't tell me you're not responsible for that.

MAGDA:

I only grant that which has been asked. Only the wisher can undo the spell.

XENA:

You mean Gabrielle has to wish herself back to...back to the way she is now? How am I supposed to make her to do that?

MAGDA:

You can't make Gabrielle wish anything, Xena. The wisher must desire it.

XENA:

Do you have any idea what you've done? Do you have any idea of the kind of life we lead? She's completely defenseless this way.

MAGDA:

Gabrielle seems like a very capable young woman to me. Besides, she has you, doesn't she? Perhaps you should look at this as an opportunity, Xena. You could find a whole new appreciation for all that you've gained...and lost.

Xena frowns skeptically.

CUT TO

Gabrielle's room. Footsteps can be heard outside the door. A man coughs softly. Slowly, the doorknob begins to turn and pushes open so that our view of the doorway is blocked. A man's voice is heard from the other side.

MAN:

Gabrielle?

He steps into view and a fist flashes, punching him in the nose. His hands fly to his face a split second after we realize it is Haimon.

HAIMON:

Ow!

Gabrielle assumes an awkward fighting stance, brandishing her scroll like a sword.

GABRIELLE:

I'm warning you! Xena, the Warrior Princess is my best friend and she's due back any minute. And she just *loves* to make mincemeat out of guys like you.

Haimon is holding his nose, trying to process all of this. He takes a step forward.

HAIMON:

Gabrielle, it's--

Gabrielle backs up and brandishes the scroll above her head.

GABRIELLE:

Back off! I'm warning you! I'm a lot tougher than I look. (a pause) How do you know my name?

HAIMON:

How do I...Oh--I get it. Very funny. The long hair, the peasant farm girl look. You're in disguise. (he grins and reaches out to stroke her shoulder.) Not that it isn't becoming--.

Gabrielle raps his knuckles with the scroll and Haimon snatches his hand away quickly.

HAIMON:

Ow! Are you mad at me for something?

GABRIELLE:

Mad is a polite word for what I'm about to be! I'll give you to the count of three to get out of here. One...get ready, here's the wind up! (she begins to swing the scroll above her head) Two...

Haimon holds up his hands and backs up to the door.

HAIMON:

Okay! Okay! I should know when you want to be left alone.

GABRIELLE:

Obviously you're a slow learner.

Haimon backs out of the room, shutting the door. He turns and stalks down the hall, running into Xena.

HAIMON:

Xena! Have you...I mean...what has gotten into--

XENA:

I see you've already run into Gabrielle.

Gingerly he touches the bridge of his nose.

HAIMON:

How did you guess? Xena, I've seen her in some pretty bad moods before, but this... (he shakes his head) How have you managed to stay alive all these years?

XENA:

I can explain.

The scene cross fades to the tavern later on. Xena and Haimon are seated at a table, two mugs before them. Haimon drinks from his mug then sets it down sharply.



HAIMON:

So this Gabrielle is Gabrielle but not the Gabrielle I know. This Gabrielle is the farm girl Gabrielle that followed you all those years ago.

XENA:

Right.

HAIMON:

And she remembers that you're her best friend but she doesn't know me at all.

Xena stares.

HAIMON:

So...

XENA:

You can take my room. Gabrielle and I will bunk together.

HAIMON:

Why don't you just tell her what's going on and get her to wish herself back to normal?



XENA:

I'm not so sure that's the right thing to do. The way things have turned out for Gabrielle... (trails off)
She deserves a second chance. I owe her that.

HAIMON:

You also owe her the right to make her own decisions. You can't make this choice for her, Xena.
Tell her. Or I will.

CUT TO

Xena and Haimon standing outside Gabrielle's room.

XENA (whispering):

I'm just saying I want to think about this. What's it going to hurt if she stays like this another day or two?

HAIMON:

It could hurt *Gabrielle*. What is she supposed to do the next time some thugs jump the two of you?

XENA:

I can handle it. I protected her before and I can do it again.

Haimon gives her a long look.

HAIMON:

Let's hope so. (Sighs) By the way, I found out what Akelos' plans are. He's headed to a village called Paratta.

XENA (nods):

About ten leagues west of here. We leave first thing in the morning.

CUT TO

A long shot of a small army advancing down a country road. Zoom in on the warlord riding at the head of the army. He is in his early forties, tall and broad shouldered, dressed in brown leather armor.

Pan to a rider coming fast down a country road. The warlord turns to look at him. The rider approaches and slows down.

RIDER (slightly out of breath):

Bad news.

AKELOS:

I knew it. What is it now? Don't tell me these yokels have organized a militia to send after us.

RIDER:

No, it's nothing like that...

AKELOS:

Well?

RIDER:

Xena's on our trail.

AKELOS (scowls):

I'd rather deal with a militia. (pauses) Alone?

RIDER:

No, she's got two others with her. A man and a woman. I think the girl is that bard, Gabrielle--

AKELOS (his face darkening):

This is getting worse by the minute. If the stories I've heard are true, she's almost as formidable a warrior as Xena herself.

CUT TO

A path through the woods. Gabrielle trying rather clumsily to twirl a stick. She drops it and it falls on her foot.

GABRIELLE:

Ow!

Pull back to show Xena and Haimon walking by her side, leading their horses.

XENA:

What are you doing?

GABRIELLE (smiles brightly):

Oh, just trying to do that thing you do with your sword.

HAIMON:

Be careful.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, I'm always careful. (nods at Xena) She can tell you.

Xena chuckles indulgently and gives Gabrielle an amused but guarded look.

GABRIELLE (continues, to Haimon):

So--you're a friend of Xena's?

HAIMON (glances at Xena a bit doubtfully):

Uh...you could say that.

GABRIELLE (grins and looks at Haimon and Xena with avid curiosity):

Boyfriend?

XENA and HAIMON (hastily):

No!

GABRIELLE:

So--just a friend, then.

She nods to herself, tries to twirl the stick again and drops it, then picks it up with a frustrated little "Uh!"



GABRIELLE (continues, to Xena):

I didn't know you had friends. (Pauses and laughs, a little self-consciously) Well, except me, of course.

She gives Xena a questioning look; just then, Xena perks up, as if hearing something.

GABRIELLE (to Haimon):

She may not always show it but we're--

XENA (holds out a hand, in a half-whisper):

Quiet!

GABRIELLE (a little hurt):

Hey, we talked about this, remember?

XENA (impatiently):

Sshh!

She gestures with her eyes toward the trees, where a faint noise is heard.

GABRIELLE (nods as her eyes widen in understanding):

Oooh--

Without another word, Xena charges at lightning-speed into the trees. With a fierce battle yell, she lunges forward at two men emerging from the foliage. She draws her sword and they spar.

GABRIELLE (to Haimon, with a star-struck smile):

Isn't she amazing?

HAIMON (gives her a bemused look):

Yes--yes, she is.

GABRIELLE:

How do you two know each other?

HAIMON (not sure what to say):

Uh...Long story.

As Xena continues to fight the two men, Haimon listens to a sound coming from the other side of the path.

HAIMON (to Gabrielle):

Stay here. I'll be right back.

He goes off to investigate the noise, while Gabrielle raptly watches Xena fight the two men.

There is a noise behind her. Gabrielle turns to see a warrior coming up behind her.

GABRIELLE (tries to be menacing):

Stay back! (As the warrior comes closer, she brandishes her stick) I'll make it hurt!

As the warrior comes closer, she swings the stick, trying to hit him. He blocks her blow, grabs the stick, wrenches it out of her hands and tries to grab Gabrielle--then, suddenly, staggers and falls back.

The camera pulls back to show Haimon, holding up his clenched fist.

HAIMON (to Gabrielle):
Are you okay?

GABRIELLE (looks at him admiringly):
Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine.

Pan to Xena as she brings down one of the men she's fighting while the other runs away. As Xena walks back to the path, the man Haimon knocked out scrambles to his feet and runs off as well, still a little shaky on his feet.



GABRIELLE (beams at Haimon):
Thanks. Saving me is usually Xena's job--but it's always good to have a back up.

Haimon gives Gabrielle an amused little smile; Xena looks at her uncertainly.

XENA:
Are you all right?

GABRIELLE:
Oh, yes. (beams at Haimon) Thanks to my knight in shining armor here. (looks over Haimon's clothes) Uh--that's a metaphor, of course.

Xena rather unsettled; Haimon is visibly embarrassed.

HAIMON:
Come on--they're getting away!

XENA:
All right. (to Gabrielle) Watch the horses--and don't go *anywhere*!

They run after the men, leaving their horses. Gabrielle stands watching them for a moment, then smiles, shakes her head and picks up the stick again. She twirls the stick, humming to herself, then points it forward, assuming a combat stance.



GABRIELLE (dramatically):

Stand back! Or else I'll run you through like--like--a pig. (frowns slightly) That doesn't sound right. (Assumes a combat stance again, then makes a forward thrust) Hah! (She trips and falls flat on her face.)

There is a flare of light behind her and Ares materializes.

GABRIELLE (unaware of his presence, scrambles to her feet, dusts herself off and rubs her knee):

Ow! (picks up the stick and thrusts it out again; the camera zooms for a medium close-up on her as she grins) You think you got me, huh? Well-- (she whips around as she speaks) I've got something for you right--

The camera pulls back to show her facing Ares, the stick is pointed straight at his chest (in a tableau somewhat reminiscent of the famous image from *The Deliverer* in which Ares materializes on the tip of Xena's sword). Gabrielle gapes, cut off in mid-sentence. Ares stares down at the stick, faintly amused, then looks over Gabrielle in her peasant togs as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

The same scene as before. Ares stares, bemused, at Gabrielle in her peasant garb.

ARES:

Getting a workout?

Gabrielle gapes at him wordlessly.

ARES (continues):

And what's with-- (indicating her outfit) that? A walk down memory lane?

GABRIELLE (finally regaining the gift of speech):

Look, I don't know what you're talking about, or how you managed to sneak up on me like that, but let me tell you, when my best friend gets back--

ARES (raises an eyebrow):

Your--best friend.

GABRIELLE:

That's right. (defiantly) Xena, Warrior Princess. (waits for him to be suitably impressed) *You* may think you're tough, but--you've heard of Draco, right? Well, Xena has beaten Draco himself!

ARES (stares at her speechlessly for a moment):

Um, Gabrielle--didn't Xena tell you to stay away from the henbane?

GABRIELLE (indignant):

Henbane? Exactly what are you-- (breaks off and gasps) Hey! How did you know my name? (narrows her eyes) Oh, you're clever all right. But wait until Xena--

Ares interrupts her by holding up his hand in a "time out" gesture and stares at her, slowly realizing that this is no act.

ARES:

All right, let's take it from the top. Xena's your best friend--

GABRIELLE (defiant):

That's right.

ARES:

And you've known her for how long?

GABRIELLE:

About a moon. (cocky) Okay, I know I need a little more training but I'm going to be a warrior just like her.

ARES (looks panicked for a moment):

I can't believe it! Thrown back in time.

GABRIELLE (puzzled):

What?

ARES:

Oh--nothing. (thinks a moment, obviously getting an idea) Say--was Xena...has Xena recently been accused of killing three peasants in some village and, umm... (squirms a little)

GABRIELLE (laughs):

Hah! I've never heard that, and I'm her best friend--she tells me *everything*. Yes, Xena has done some bad things in her past, but she's *totally* turned her life around, and--

Zoom in on Ares while Gabrielle's chatter fades into the background.

ARES:

Well, maybe this isn't so bad. Maybe--

Xena comes out of the woods and stops in her tracks as she sees him.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, thank the gods! Did you get them?

XENA:

No--they took off into the woods and I didn't want to leave you all alone out here for too long. Who knows what you'd come across... (glances pointedly at Ares)

ARES (raises his hands as if in surrender):

Xena. I know what you're thinking. You probably think I'm here to--lure you back to the fold or something.

XENA (uncomprehending):

What?



ARES:

Look, forget what I said, um--last time. I've thought about it and--well, I am *totally* with you on this new path thing. This doing good-- (shakes his head, with forced joviality) it's--really you.

Pan to Xena. Her eyes narrow as she starts to realize what's happening.

ARES:

And, um-- (nods toward Gabrielle) the sidekick? Not bad. I mean, she's a little green, but give her a few lessons with a st-

He stops abruptly as the camera pans to Haimon, who's coming out of the woods. Pan back to Ares for a close-up, the wheels turning in his head.

ARES:

Okay, what are *you* doing here? So it can't be-- (to Xena) umm...never mind. (nods toward Gabrielle) So, what's with--

XENA:

We need to talk.

Xena brusquely pulls Ares away. Gabrielle smiles and shrugs.

GABRIELLE:

She's not much for the social niceties.

Haimon chuckles and Gabrielle reaches up to brush her fingers over the left side of his head.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, you're hurt. Let me take care of that for you.

Haimon touches his head just above his left ear and inspects the blood on his fingertips.

HAIMON:

It's just a scratch--nothing to worry about.

GABRIELLE:

Well, it may not look like much now but leave it untreated and that could turn into a nasty infection. You could lose an ear--or worse!

HAIMON:

I really don't want you to go to any trouble...

GABRIELLE (squeezes his hand):

Don't be silly. It's the least I can do.

Haimon glances down at her hand. After a moment he laughs lightly.

HAIMON:

Okay--I'm putting myself in your hands.

Gabrielle smiles and leads him over to sit on a log.

GABRIELLE:

I promise I'll be gentle.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares in the woods nearby.

XENA:

So, until then--she's back to being the way she was when we first met. She doesn't know anything about--what's happened in the years since then.

ARES:

I see. (pauses) So...you want my help with this?

XENA (hastily):

No thanks. The gypsy said only the wisher could undo the wish. So--

ARES:

Well, I *am* a god. I could--

XENA (emphatically):

No. You try something and next thing, she'll be a baby, or she'll be--a hundred years old or something.

ARES:

Well, it's good to see you have so much faith in my god skills.

XENA:

She's fine the way she is...for now.

ARES:

And what happens when she runs into someone who thinks they're dealing with--Gabrielle, the Battling Bard?

XENA (wryly):

Well. They'll just have to deal with Xena, Warrior Princess. (pauses) All *you* have to do is make sure she doesn't suspect there's anything--weird going on.

ARES:

Hey, the girl's been hanging out with you for a whole month. She should be used to weird things going on.

Xena gives him a mock glare.

CUT TO

The side of the path. Gabrielle dabs gently at the cut on Haimon's head.

GABRIELLE:

It doesn't look deep.

HAIMON (smiles self deprecatingly):

I guess I've got a pretty hard head.

GABRIELLE (chuckles):

Well you know what they say--hard head, soft heart.

Haimon looks up at her with a raised eyebrow.

HAIMON:

Who says that?

GABRIELLE (laughs nervously):

Okay--you caught me. I just made that up.

Haimon grins at her in amusement. After a long moment, he blinks and clears his throat, looking away.

HAIMON:

Interesting theory though.

GABRIELLE (continuing to tend his wound):
Have I thanked you yet for saving my life?

HAIMON (nods and smiles):
Once or twice.

GABRIELLE:
Well, I guess it bears repeating. Thank you. You're a real hero, Haimon.

Haimon blushes and shrugs.

HAIMON:
I'm no Xena.

GABRIELLE:
Well, that's true. But if I've learned anything from Xena it's that you've got to be yourself.

Haimon looks up at her, a curious expression on his face.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares walking through the trees. They've almost reached the path--Haimon and Gabrielle can be seen through the leaves. Xena stops and turns to Ares.

ARES:
What?

XENA (narrows her eyes at him):
What exactly were you doing back there?

ARES:
Where?

XENA:
You know--when you thought you'd gone back in time to when Gabrielle had first left her village with me.

ARES (in consternation):
Well--

XENA:
You figured that none of it had happened yet--

ARES (innocently):
None of what?

XENA:
All the things you did trying to--what did you just call it?--lure me back to the fold. Do you really want me to give you a list?

ARES (a little sheepishly):

No.

XENA:

So you thought you'd try a different approach.



ARES:

All right--so I thought we had a second chance.

XENA (suspicious):

A second chance at what?

Ares looks at her, then draws an arm around her and pulls her into a long kiss. Finally, she comes up for air.

XENA (opens her eyes and looks at Ares, the warmth coming back into her eyes):

And that's all.

ARES:

Mm-hmm. (with a small grin) Want me to explain it again?

Xena leans toward him.

XENA (mischievously):

No, I think I got it. Come on. (As they start toward the path, she gives Ares a wry look) So you like my sidekick, huh?

ARES (embarrassed):

Look, I was trying, okay?

Xena chuckles and shakes her head.

DISSOLVE TO

A campfire. Haimon is seated on one side of the fire looking up at Gabrielle who is holding her arms out in a dramatic pose. Xena and Ares are on the other side of the fire but seated far from one another. Xena is watching Gabrielle with an impassive expression. Ares yawns and taps his foot impatiently.

GABRIELLE:

...and the baby was floated down the river in a basket in a desperate attempt to save it from the evil clutches of--.

ARES:

--of whoever wanted to do away with it for whatever dastardly reasons. But Xena was there to save the day, yadda yadda yadda, and they all lived happily ever after. Thank you very much!

Gabrielle frowns, shrugs and takes a seat beside Haimon.

GABRIELLE (to Haimon):

Maybe I should have added a few more fight scenes?

Haimon smiles and pats her hand reassuringly.

ARES (to Xena):

You know, I'm starting to miss--

Xena glares daggers at him.

ARES (in a loud whisper):

--the old Gabrielle. Yeah, yeah--short, blonde and preachy, but at least she knew how to be quiet from time to time. Xena, why don't we just give her some sais and let nature take its course?

Xena raises an eyebrow at him. She isn't amused.

ARES:

Fine, have it your way. But I can't take any more. I'm out of here. (He rises to his feet and then looks at suggestively) You're welcome to join me. I would think you could use a break right about now.

Xena is staring across the fire at Haimon and Gabrielle long and hard. Finally, she blinks and looks at him.

XENA:

Huh? Uh...no thanks. I think I should stick around here and keep an eye on...things.

ARES:

Suit yourself. But don't say I didn't warn you.

He leaves in a flash of blue light. Xena looks again at Haimon and Gabrielle. Haimon offers Gabrielle a cup of water and she lowers her eyes, smiles softly and takes it from him. Xena presses her lips together and exhales noisily.

XENA:

Gabrielle? We're running low on firewood. Why don't you go collect some so I can build up the fire before we all turn in?

GABRIELLE:

No problem. Of course that would be a lot easier if I could use someone's sword to chop--.

XENA:

There's a hatchet in my pack. Use that.

GABRIELLE (disappointed):

Right.

XENA:

And be careful.

GABRIELLE:

If anything happens, you'll be the first to know.

HAIMON:

I can collect the wood--

XENA:

No. Gabrielle can do it.

Xena gives him a meaningful look that doesn't go unnoticed by Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

Right. I guess that's my cue.

She fishes Xena's hatchet out of her pack and disappears into the woods. Unconsciously, Haimon smiles in the direction Gabrielle has gone. Xena looks at him with suspicion.

XENA:

What do you think you're doing?

HAIMON:

What are you talking about?

XENA:

I'm not blind, Haimon. From where I'm sitting things aren't looking all that...innocent.

HAIMON (offended):

Do you actually think I'd take advantage of Gabrielle when she's like this? What do you take me for?

XENA:

You two are getting very friendly.

HAIMON:

Like it or not, Xena, Gabrielle is still the woman I fell in love with. I can't just turn off my feelings like that (he snaps his fingers) But I *can* control them. (he sighs) She's just a kid...

XENA:

That's right. Remember that.

HAIMON:

But don't you think it's time to tell her the truth? (he shakes his head) When I think about what could have happened to her today...

XENA:

It *didn't*.

Haimon angrily steps up and is nose to nose with her.

HAIMON:

We were lucky. What happens the next time some warrior comes along that wants to build his reputation fighting her? Do you really want something like *that* on your conscience?

XENA:

I told you I need some time to think about this. Until I figure out what to do Gabrielle will be fine.

HAIMON:

This isn't *right*. She should be allowed to make her own choices.



XENA:

That's exactly my point, Haimon. Gabrielle hasn't been able to *make* any choices since she met me. Everything that's ever happened to her has been because of me.

HAIMON:

She made the choice to follow you.

XENA (nods self-deprecatingly):

Right--a kid who had no idea of what she was getting herself into. You call *that* a choice?

Haimon is struck by that. He thinks for a moment before he shakes his head.

HAIMON:

No! This isn't--you owe her the right to--.

They both look up at the same moment as Gabrielle stumbles back into the campsite, laden with an armful of wood. Xena and Haimon quickly turn away from one another and stalk to opposite sides of the campfire.

GABRIELLE:

I'm back! (she drops the wood in a pile beside the fire and notices the unfriendly looks passing between Xena and Haimon. It's obvious to her that they have been arguing) Don't stop fighting on my account...

Haimon frowns and turns away, crossing his arms over his chest. Xena drops down to sit on the log beside the campfire.

GABRIELLE:

...unless it *is* on my account.

HAIMON (mutters):

I'm going to check the perimeter.

He marches off angrily. Gabrielle watches him with a thoughtful expression on her face. After a moment she sighs.

GABRIELLE:

Now I understand what you see in bad boys.

Xena looks up from absently poking at the campfire.

XENA:

Who--*Haimon*?

GABRIELLE:

Well, I know he's not your *typical* bad boy. He's so thoughtful and kind and brave... (she gazes off into the woods a little dreamily) But at the same time there's something dangerous about him too.

XENA (rolls her eyes):

Yeah sure--a real killer.

Gabrielle begins stacking the firewood.

GABRIELLE:

He's not like any boy I've ever known.

XENA:

He's no boy--he's a man.

GABRIELLE:

Well, that's true. He's no Perdicus.

Xena reacts to the mention of Perdicus's name and Gabrielle notices. She comes over and sits beside Xena.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, what is it? Are you--are you worried that I might run off with Haimon? I mean, I think I like him...But our friendship still means more to me than anything else. After all we've been through do you really think I would just walk off and leave you?

XENA (smiles shyly and shrugs):

I guess not. (she reaches out and pats Gabrielle's hand) I love you, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (gasps):

Wait, did you just say--? (she pauses a moment to contemplate Xena's words then shakes her head in amazement and grins) This is a side of the Warrior Princess I've *never* seen before.

XENA (chuckles):

No, I don't suppose you have. I guess you've been a good influence on me.

Gabrielle nudges Xena playfully with her shoulder.

GABRIELLE:

Good. I'm glad I could be of help.

XENA:

I'm glad too.

They exchange a warm, tender look until Gabrielle finally grins and rolls her eyes.



GABRIELLE:

Okay--enough of this mushy stuff. I don't want to overload you all at once.

Xena moves towards the fire and busies herself building it up.

GABRIELLE:

Xena?

Xena looks back at her and Gabrielle smiles warmly.

GABRIELLE:

I love you too.

Xena grins and turns back to tend to the fire.

DISSOLVE TO

Another campfire. The camera pulls back to show the warlord, Akelos, sitting at the fire. He's holding a skewer with some dripping, juicy pieces of meat on it. His look is one of consternation.

AKELOS:

She didn't fight back?

The camera pulls back to show the warrior we saw attack Gabrielle before.

WARRIOR:

Depends on what you call fightin' back. (chuckles) She had this itty-bitty little stick an' she tried pokin' at me. (makes a poking motion) Jus' like some little village girl.

He starts to laugh, with the rest of the warriors joining in on the guffaws.

AKELOS (ponders this, unsmiling):

So what are you doing with that bruise on your face, huh? Did the little village girl poke you with her little stick?

WARRIOR (hastily):

No, no--it wasn't like that! It was the guy! An' he was only able to sneak up on me 'cause I didn't expect it. I'm telling ya, the girl's no more use in a fight than a milkmaid.

Zoom in on Akelos as he digests this information.

AKELOS (thoughtfully):

So. (pauses) The so-called Battling Bard is a legend--in her own mind.

He starts to laugh, his guffaws growing louder as he sinks his teeth into a chunk of meat. The other warriors join in the raucous laughter.

AKELOS (continues):

Pretty smart trick, getting everyone to believe her hype! Bet it worked out nicely for Xena, too. (he strokes his beard) But this time... (zoom in for an even tighter close-up) ...they've outsmarted themselves.

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Day. The village of Paratta. Xena and Gabrielle are standing in the village square. Xena is surveying the square and finally nods.

XENA:

This building is a good place to set up the hospital.

GABRIELLE:

Do you really think we'll have a lot of wounded?

XENA:

I'm doing everything I can to avoid casualties but--

GABRIELLE:

But a good leader has to prepare for any eventuality, right?

Xena looks at Gabrielle, unable to mask her shock.

XENA:

Right.

GABRIELLE (grins):

Hey, don't look so surprised. I've learned a lot from you since I left home.

Xena chuckles and Haimon can be heard hailing Xena from across the courtyard and runs over.

HAIMON:

I've been checking out the barricade along the south wall. It's weak. It won't take Akelos more than a day to breach it.

XENA (nods):

All right. We'll have to deal with that first.

HAIMON:

I've already got men out foraging for lumber.

XENA:

Good. We should give them a hand. Gabrielle? Why don't Haimon and I do that and you can work on getting the hospital set up back here.

GABRIELLE (disappointed):

But I wanted to go with you. I bet you could use my help.

XENA:

The best way you can help is to stay here. (she smiles) I need someone I trust in charge. Will you do that?

Gabrielle sighs but nods.

GABRIELLE:

Okay.

Xena touches Gabrielle's shoulder affectionately.

XENA:

Thanks. If you need us you know where to find us.

Xena and Haimon exit. A small group of villagers can be seen in the background clustered together, watching Gabrielle in awe and talking in hushed tones. A man in his mid 50's approaches her diffidently.

VILLAGE MAN:

Excuse me? Did I hear correctly? Are you Gabrielle? *The* Gabrielle? Gabrielle the Battling Bard of Poteidaia?

Gabrielle shakes her head in confusion.

GABRIELLE:

Battling Bard...

VILLAGE MAN:

The Gabrielle of *Xena* and Gabrielle?

Gabrielle is confused but she goes with it, throwing her shoulders back in an attempt at a tough posture.

GABRIELLE:

Yeah--that's right! We're a team! Xena and Gabrielle!

VILLAGE WOMAN:

By Eli and the Heavens! A living legend right before our very eyes!

GABRIELLE:

I am? I mean...*I am!*

The woman looks her up and down appraisingly.

VILLAGE WOMAN:

Funny--I always thought you'd be taller.

The other villagers murmur their assent and Gabrielle's posture deflates.

VILLAGE MAN:

Of course everyone knows about the greatness of Xena. But we've heard so many stories about *your* proficiency as well. Perhaps you could give us a demonstration?

GABRIELLE:

Sure! Why not? Uh...what kind of demonstration?

VILLAGE MAN:

With the sais, of course!

GABRIELLE:

Oh--of course! Be glad to!

CUT TO

The Village man drawing a crude target on a tree. He takes a few steps to the side, out of the way and waves to Gabrielle.

VILLAGE MAN:

Ready!

Gabrielle stands at the center of a semicircle gathered around her. She holds a sai in her right hand, squinting at the target. Finally she raises it above her shoulder.

GABRIELLE:

Okay! Get ready!

She is about to throw the sai when she suddenly stops and motions to the village man.

GABRIELLE:

Could you move back just a few more...?

He takes a few steps back and Gabrielle motions again.

GABRIELLE:

Just a few more!

He takes another few steps, now a good distance from the tree. Gabrielle raises the sai above her shoulder again, about to throw, then stops and turns to the people gathered behind her.

GABRIELLE:

You might want to move back a bit too.

They step back en masse and Gabrielle turns back to the target. She raises the sai, shifts her weight to her back foot and is about to throw.

XENA:

Hold it!

Gabrielle gasps in surprise and drops the sai in shock. She bends and retrieves it.

GABRIELLE:

I've told you before not to do that!

Xena strides over and takes the sai from Gabrielle.

XENA:

What do you think you're doing?

GABRIELLE (smiles):

They wanted to see a demonstration by the legendary Gabrielle, Battling Bard of Poteidaia. Of Xena and Gabrielle. I'm just giving the public what they want. And trust me, public relations is key in your line of work.

Xena darts an alarmed look at the villagers and frowns.

XENA:

Well--you could have killed someone. I'll take this. (she takes the sai from Gabrielle) I changed my mind. I need you over at the south wall.

GABRIELLE:

What about the hospital?

XENA:

That can wait.

Xena takes hold of Gabrielle's arm and pulls her away. Gabrielle smiles apologetically at the villagers. Xena shoots a scathing look at the villagers and marches off with Gabrielle in tow.

VILLAGE MAN (to the woman):

Living legend, huh?

VILLAGE WOMAN:

I hope Xena doesn't leave *her* in charge.

CUT TO

The walls of the town. Some villagers are just finishing boarding up a breach in the wall.

XENA (steps back to survey their work):

Well, that should hold for a while. (to Gabrielle) I'm going out to do some scouting. (She squeezes Gabrielle's arm reassuringly) I'll be back soon, all right?

GABRIELLE:

Be careful.

XENA (smiles):

Don't you worry about me. I'm going to go get Argo--come on.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle walking through the village street. The villagers passing by give them curious looks.

GABRIELLE:

Hey, Xena--did you hear what one of those people called me back there? "The Gabrielle of Xena and Gabrielle"!

XENA (gives her a warm smile):

That's right. That's us--we're a team, right?

GABRIELLE (a little too emphatically):

Right! (pauses a moment) You know-- (she tilts her head with a puzzled look) it's funny. I mean, it's been what, about a moon I've been out on the road with you, and they all knew my name?

Xena is momentarily disconcerted by the question. She gives Gabrielle a thoughtful look, obviously uncomfortable at the prospect of lying to her friend but unwilling to tell the truth.

XENA:

Word travels fast sometimes.

GABRIELLE:

I guess it does...I must have made quite an impression on *someone*. Besides you, I mean.

Because you're really not the storytelling type. (Off Xena's look, laughs a little self-consciously) Not that you--should be or anything.

XENA (smiles):
It's all right.

They walk as Gabrielle continues to talk.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):
Those must have been some pretty wild stories people tell. "The Battling Bard?" Where did *that* come from? (laughs) And me throwing those dagger-type things?

XENA (uneasy but trying to seem nonchalant):
Yeah--people sure tell some wild stories.

They are now approaching the stables.

GABRIELLE:
You know, speaking of which--

The camera follows them inside the stable as she continues to speak. Argo, who's munching on some hay, neighs in greeting.

GABRIELLE (continues):
--while you're gone, I think I'm going to work on my new scroll. You really should read the one I wrote about how we first met and how you fought Draco.

XENA (with genuine feeling):
I will--I promise.

GABRIELLE (surprised):
Really?

XENA:
Definitely.

GABRIELLE:
That's great. (grins) Now I feel *really* inspired.

XENA:
Good. (She mounts Argo) I'll be back--good luck with the writing.

GABRIELLE (as Xena rides off):
Good luck with the scouting! I'm going to work on the story of how I was almost-- (her voice flattens as she realizes that Xena is already out of earshot) the bride of--oh, never mind.

She looks after Xena a moment, shakes her head and smiles, then turns to look at the saddlebags lying in the hay.

GABRIELLE:
All right, let's see. (She kneels down and starts to rummage in one of the bags) I know I put that

scroll here somewhere--oh, here. (Pulls out a scroll and unfurls it) What's this? (reads) "Their teacher, it turned out, was none other than our dear friend Eli..." (mutters to herself) Eli...Who's--Eli? (reads on) "'I feel like I've disappointed you,' I said. 'You're walking through life preaching peace, and Xena and I have swords in our hands.'" (repeats to herself) Swords in our hands... (reads on) "She's afraid I'm becoming numb to the violence..."

Zoom in on Gabrielle's face. She looks bewildered, fascinated and alarmed.

GABRIELLE:

What *is* this?

CUT TO

Some villagers guarding the gates, Haimon among them. He's sitting on a wooden crate, leaning on his sword, obviously lost in thought.

He is approached by the same villager who had asked Gabrielle to demonstrate her skill with the sais.

VILLAGE MAN:

Say, I got a question for you.

HAIMON (looks up at him):

Yeah?

VILLAGE MAN:

That girl. You know, Gabrielle--

HAIMON (warily):

What about her?

VILLAGE MAN:

Well, we heard she was some kind of--tough warrior and that she's real good with the daggers. But... (he spreads his arms in dismay) she's just a kid!

VILLAGE MAN #2 (a somewhat younger man):

That's right! And she can barely handle them-- (stumbles, trying to think of a name for the sais) things!

HAIMON (not quite sure what to say):

I...well--she's--not quite herself today.

He falls silent, pondering his words. The villagers' talk fades into the background.

Pan to Xena riding up. Haimon looks up at her.

HAIMON:

Well?

XENA (jumps down off Argo):

No sign of them yet. All quiet here?

HAIMON:

Well, earlier one of the villagers spotted some movement out there and raised an alarm thinking it was Akelos and his army mounting an attack. Turns out it was three goats grazing beyond that treeline. Other than that it's been pretty quiet.

Xena looks at him probingly, noticing that he seems to be upset about something.

XENA (comes over and sits down next to him):

You sure everything's all right?

HAIMON (reluctantly):

Yeah, it's just... (trails off)

XENA (understanding):

Gabrielle?

HAIMON (sighs, reluctantly):

Yeah.

XENA (quickly):

She okay?

HAIMON:

Yeah, yeah--she's... (he sighs and looks directly at Xena) I've always wondered what she was like--before.

Xena meets his stare, her face grim.

HAIMON:

She's so... (looks for words, then gives up) different.

XENA:

She's young.

HAIMON:

She's warm and open--so curious about everything.

They are silent for a moment.

HAIMON:

You know, just now one of those villagers asked me why she couldn't throw the sais and I told him she's not herself today.

Xena chuckles unhappily.

HAIMON (continues):

But then I was thinking...is *this* the real Gabrielle? The way she was meant to be?

Xena gives him an odd, thoughtful look.

HAIMON:

She's not the Gabrielle I fell in love with. Or maybe she is. Or-- (he shakes his head) I just can't help wondering what would have happened if I had met her when she was--like this. (quietly) Would I have loved her?

Xena glares at him, but then her glare softens to a guilty look and she turns away.

XENA (quietly):

How could you not?

Close-up on Xena's anguished face.

CUT TO

Xena walking briskly down a village street, leading Argo behind her. As she walks through a deserted spot past a cluster of houses, there is a flare of blue light Ares appears, leaning on a house, arms crossed on his chest. He stares at Xena with a mix of sympathy and amusement.

Xena slows down and looks at him, then sighs and shakes her head.

XENA:

I'm not in the mood for this right now.

She walks on, striding past him.

ARES:

Are you worried that she'll stay this way? Or that she won't?

Xena stops and whips around on him.

XENA:

I am trying to protect her.

Ares comes slowly toward her.

ARES:

From what? From growing up?

XENA:

She didn't have to grow up that way! If I hadn't--

ARES (now standing face to face with her, interrupts):

You know, maybe you're trying to do the same thing I did.

XENA (narrows her eyes):

What are you talking about?

ARES:

You're trying to turn her back into what she was. (He touches her face) Just like--I did with you.



Xena stares at him in shock for a moment, then belatedly swats away his hand.

XENA:

I am not trying to turn her back into anything! She wished herself back. It's up to her to make that choice.

ARES:

And how can she do that if she doesn't know what she's choosing?

XENA (exclaims in irritation):

Argh! Stop trying to mess with my head.

ARES (raises an eyebrow):

Me? I'm just trying to be helpful.

XENA (sarcastic):

Well, somehow I don't think you're the person to help her.

ARES:

Are you really helping her?

Xena stares at him, stricken. After a moment Argo neighs, breaking the tense silence, and Xena shakes her head, as if snapping out of a trance.

XENA:

I gotta go.

She walks off briskly, leading Argo. Ares leans against the wall of the building and looks after her, arms folded on his chest.

CUT TO

The stables. Xena comes in with Argo and stops in her tracks. Gabrielle is sitting in the hay staring at her. She looks shocked and hurt.

XENA:

Gabrielle--what's wrong?

She dashes toward Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

Why didn't you tell me?

XENA (frowns):

Tell you what?

Gabrielle holds up the scroll.

GABRIELLE:

I read this. (pauses, searching for words) I *wrote* this.

Xena stands very still and nods.

XENA:

Yes, you did.

GABRIELLE (bewildered):

Xena, what's going on? Is this some kind of magic?

Xena sits down next to her.

XENA:

In a way. It's a spell. You were turned back to the way you were when--we first met.

GABRIELLE (gasps):

Ares! Did he do this?

XENA:

No. (she sighs and pats Gabrielle's hand) You did.

GABRIELLE:

I did?

XENA:

There was an old gypsy, a fortuneteller... (she shrugs) a sorceress, I guess. She was reading your palm and talking to you about your past, and... (she trails off)

GABRIELLE (impatient):

And?

XENA:

You must have wished yourself back to this.

Gabrielle pauses for a moment to digest this.

GABRIELLE:

Why didn't you tell me?

Xena gives her a long look, and then a rather forced smile.

XENA:

Maybe I thought you could use a vacation. You know, the fighting--

GABRIELLE (thoughtfully):

The fighting..."The Battling Bard..." (after a pause) So what happens now?

XENA:

That's up to you. The gypsy said that only the wisher can undo the spell.

GABRIELLE (after a brief pause):

So what am I supposed to do now? Am I supposed to just wish myself back?

XENA (trying to sound casual):

Well, I don't think you should rush into anything. Like I said--take a break for a few days. Have some fun.

She puts an arm around Gabrielle and tousles her hair. Gabrielle smiles grudgingly and they sit quietly for a moment; then, Gabrielle's smile suddenly gives way to a worried look.

GABRIELLE:

But what if you need my help? I mean, if I'm this Battling Bard everyone's talking about, I bet I can be--

XENA (interrupts):

Don't you worry about me, Gabrielle. I can handle it.

GABRIELLE (crinkles her face):

Sure, because you're the great big warrior princess and I'm just-- (she rails off and gives Xena a wondering look) well, I don't even know who I am. (she sighs) I guess I've got a lot of catching up to do. (gasps a little, remembering) And *you*. You've *got* to tell me why you and Ares are so friendly all of a sudden. I mean--

XENA:

That's a long story.

GABRIELLE:

Like I said...a lot of catching up.

CUT TO

The barn. It is now dark and a lantern casts a soft, golden glow. Gabrielle is pensively brushing Argo down in her stall. Haimon enters and is surprised at seeing her tending to the horse..

HAIMON (smiles teasingly):

Funny. I don't ever recall you being so attentive to Argo before.

GABRIELLE:

Xena does this whenever she's upset or has some thinking to do. (she shrugs) I thought I'd give it a try.

HAIMON:

Are you all right?

Gabrielle sighs and stops brushing, earning an impatient neigh from Argo.

GABRIELLE:

I don't know...Xena was just here.

Haimon looks at her curiously and Gabrielle hands him a scroll.

GABRIELLE:

I found this in one of the saddlebags.

Haimon takes it from her and reads a moment. Finally, looks up at her, his eyes wide.

HAIMON:

So you know...

GABRIELLE:

I feel like my whole world has been turned upside down. (she smiles wryly) On the bright side, it looks like my writing has improved.

Haimon laughs nervously and reaches out to stroke Argo's mane.

GABRIELLE:

Xena says it's my choice to make to wish myself back. (she frowns) But how am I supposed to make a choice like that? I know I'm supposed to be the Battling Bard but it doesn't feel like it has any connection to me. (she sighs) Maybe who we are is more about how those closest to us see us than how we see ourselves. Do you know what I mean?

Haimon stares at her.

GABRIELLE:

Take Xena for example. When I first met her everyone saw her as just another warlord thug. But I saw something else. I saw someone brave and gentle with a good heart. Maybe by seeing those things in her I helped her be good. (she laughs self deprecatingly) Or maybe you should just start calling me Narcissus.

Haimon laughs warmly and takes a step closer to her, touching her cheek.

HAIMON:

I don't know. But I do know if that's true then a person like you can change the world. You see the good in everything.

Gabrielle looks up at him.

GABRIELLE:

What do *you* see in *me*, Haimon?

Haimon flinches and pulls his hand back.

HAIMON:

What do you mean?

Gabrielle drifts a little closer to him.

GABRIELLE:

I mean, I get the feeling that you and I are--

HAIMON:

Good friends.

GABRIELLE:

You know, it's funny. There are times you look at me and I don't think you're seeing just a friend.

Haimon moves slightly away from her.

HAIMON:

Gabrielle, I--

GABRIELLE:

Do you like me better the way I was before?

HAIMON (shrugs uncomfortably):

You were different. Older...

GABRIELLE (frowning):

Older and different. Well let's try this a different way. Do you like who I am *now*?



Haimon pauses. After a moment, he takes a step towards her, cups her face in his hands and leans down to kiss her on the lips. Gabrielle slips an arm around his neck and pulls him in closer.

CUT TO

Two of Akelos's men hiding in the shadows of an alley across from the stables.

THUG #1:

We've been here forever! Why don't we just go in and grab her? She's a girl.

THUG #2:

Because she's not in there alone. Some young buck went in not too long ago and we can't leave anything to chance. If we come back without the girl Akelos will skin us alive. We wait until she's alone then take her.

CUT TO

Haimon and Gabrielle reclining in the hay in the stable. Haimon is lying half on top of Gabrielle as they kiss passionately. She draws her arms around his shoulders and sighs. Haimon reaches up to run a hand through her hair. Argo neighs softly in the background and Haimon gently pulls away from the kiss, his hand still entangled in her hair.

HAIMON:

Gabrielle...

Her eyes flutter open and she looks up at him, her expression soft and dreamlike.

GABRIELLE:

Hmm?

He strokes her hair between his fingers.

HAIMON:

We can't do this. It's not right. You--

GABRIELLE (frowns):

I'm just a kid?

Haimon sits up.

HAIMON:

Look--this has been a lot for you to take in and you're confused. I can't take advantage of that. (he gets to his feet, tucking his shirt back into his pants) Besides, I should be up on the barricade. (he extends his hand to her and helps her stand.)

GABRIELLE:

Right.

Haimon lays his hands on her shoulders.

HAIMON:

You'll be okay?

Gabrielle smiles brightly, though it is obviously forced.

GABRIELLE:

Great. I'll just stay back here and finish taking care of Argo. Send Xena my regards.

Haimon smiles somewhat wistfully, kisses her on the forehead then leaves. Gabrielle stares after him a moment then sighs in exasperation.

GABRIELLE:

Xena treats me like a kid, Haimon treats me like a kid and I'm stuck here taking care of a horse while they're off having all the fun.

Argo whinnies loudly. Gabrielle sighs as her eyes fall on the "Seeds of Faith" scroll lying on the ground. She bends down, picks it up and looks at it a moment, then looks up.

GABRIELLE:

Well, if this is what it's going to be like--I'd rather be back the way I was!

She pauses as if expecting something to happen. When nothing does, her expression turns resolute and she marches out of the barn.

CUT TO

Outside. Gabrielle exits the barn. Two hands shoot out and drag her into the shadows. Thug #1 has a hand over her mouth and his arm crooked around her neck.

THUG #1:

We've got her!

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

The dining room at the inn. Evening. Haimon sits at the bar, staring pensively into a half-full mug of ale.

Xena walks in, looking around. She seems worried.

XENA (walks up to Haimon, harshly):

Where's Gabrielle?

HAIMON (turns to look at her):

I don't know. I left her at the stables... (he trails off, flustered)

Xena gives him a sharp, suspicious look.

XENA:

Well, she's not there now. She's not at the inn either and I can't find her anywhere else.

HAIMON (gets up abruptly):

I'll go look for her.

XENA:

I'll find her.

HAIMON (losing patience):

Xena, you can't cut me out of this! You can't act as if Gabrielle and I are nothing to each other.

They stare.

XENA (sighs, relenting):

We'll look for her together.

CUT TO

Outside the stables. Haimon and Xena are searching the grounds, Haimon carrying a lantern.

Xena sees something on the ground and picks it up with a quick motion. Her face turns grim. The camera zooms in on the object in her hands. It's the scroll.

XENA (narrows her eyes in quiet rage):

Akelos.

CUT TO

A close-up of Gabrielle, her face lit by firelight.

GABRIELLE (nervously):

Akelos.

The camera pulls back to show Akelos sitting at the campfire. Gabrielle is standing between the two thugs who kidnapped her.

AKELOS:

Yes, that would be me. And you're Gabrielle. The so-called battling bard. (guffaws) Apparently, minus the "battling" part.

GABRIELLE (trying not to show fear):

What do you want with me? You know, Xena is going to be *really* mad when she finds out about this. I mean, you have not *seen* mad until--

AKELOS (interrupts):

That's exactly what I'm counting on. (chuckles) I don't want Xena getting in my way when the boys and I take Paratta. And if Xena's busy trying to get you out of a jam--well, that gets her out of my way, doesn't it?

GABRIELLE (feisty):

You know, you may be biting off more than you can chew.

AKELOS (laughs):

Oh, really? You mean, the little girlie may be a fearless warrior after all? (He bursts out laughing, echoed by his men.) I don't know *how* you've managed to keep so many people fooled until now.

GABRIELLE (bluffing):

Maybe I'm fooling *you*.

AKELOS:

What?

GABRIELLE:

Maybe the little girlie thing is just an act. Maybe I'm just biding my time to--lull you into a false sense of security. And then, when you least expect it--*wham!*

She makes a chopping motion with her hands. The two warriors react, grabbing her arms.

AKELOS (to the warriors, laughing):

Nah, don't worry. (to Gabrielle) Good try.

He laughs heartily again. Close-up on Gabrielle's face, worried but still trying to look feisty.

CUT TO

The stable, lit by lanterns. Xena, her face grim, is saddling Argo. Haimon stands nearby.

HAIMON:

Xena, listen to me.

XENA:

I am going after Gabrielle. (She tightens the straps on Argo's saddle with a jerk.) You can come with me if you want.

HAIMON:

Don't you realize that's exactly what Akelos wants? (Xena whips around, furious) To distract you while he loots the village? You're playing right into his hands.

XENA:

And what do you suppose I should do? Sit back and relax and hope that Akelos just invited Gabrielle over for a cup of a wine and some girltalk?

HAIMON:

You could ask Ares to help you.



XENA (vehemently):

I have *never* asked Ares for help and I'm not about to start now. I'm not going to let anyone fight my battles for me--least of all a god.

She's about to mount Argo but Haimon puts a hand on her shoulder. She gives him a startled look.

HAIMON:

Then let me handle it, on my own. While you stay here and defend the village.

XENA (explodes):

You--!

HAIMON (bitterly):

Thanks for the vote of confidence.

XENA (forcing herself to stay calm, more gently):

Haimon, look--it's not that I don't trust you--

HAIMON:

It's just that you don't trust me with Gabrielle.

Xena stares at him silently.

HAIMON (continues):

Xena, you were the one who told Gabrielle that it's all about the greater good. We're here to protect these people.

XENA:

This is different!

HAIMON:

Why? Because it's Gabrielle?

XENA:

Yes!

HAIMON:

Look, I've read her scrolls. She's told you before that the first thing is the greater good. She would want you to stay here and fight.

Xena stands still, staring at him.

HAIMON (continues):

I'm going to do this.

Xena says nothing as he goes over to his horse and mounts in the saddle. He rides off. Xena walks slowly to the doors of the stable and she stands still, watching him ride off, her face hard.

The camera pans away from Xena to the dark sky.

DISSOLVE TO

The sky turning a light gray. Pan down to an army on the move. A long shot of the soldiers marching down the road, with Akelos riding at the head of the army.

DISSOLVE TO

Haimon, riding through the woods.

DISSOLVE TO

The remnants of a campfire. Four of Akelos' men are sitting around, eating. Pan to Gabrielle sleeping on the ground.

DISSOLVE TO

The village gates. Xena is tensely pacing back and forth.

The camera pulls back to show two the two villagers who were talking to Haimon before standing in front of her, looking rather sheepish.

VILLAGER No. 1:

We do hope that your friend is going to be all right.

VILLAGER No. 2:

You know, we heard she was a warrior herself. Can't she fight?

Xena gives him a troubled look.

XENA (mutters to herself):

I wish she could...she's so--defenseless right now.

She looks away uncomfortably and resumes her pacing as she sun rises in the distance.

CROSS-FADE TO

Haimon riding through the woods.

CROSS-FADE TO

An extreme close-up of Gabrielle's face as her eyes fly open.

The camera pulls back to show Gabrielle sitting up abruptly. This is Season 9 Gabrielle again--in brown leather armor and with short hair.

The four warriors guarding her are talking and laughing about something in the background. One of them suddenly notices Gabrielle, who is now standing up, and drops the chicken leg he's been eating.

WARRIOR #1:

Hey, that's--

GABRIELLE (angrily):

--the little girlie.

The warrior rushes toward her but she beats him back with a couple of well-placed kicks and punches, slamming him into another warrior who runs up behind him so that they both stumble. The two other warriors draw their swords. Seeing this, Gabrielle yanks the sword out of the scabbard of the warrior she was pummeling before. As the two warriors charge her, she spars with one of them, knocking the sword out of his hands, and spin-kicks the other.

Off-camera, a horse neighs. Gabrielle turns abruptly and sees two horses grazing by a cluster of trees. She sprints toward them but two of the warriors she fought before charge after her. She spins around and kicks one of them while knocking out the other with the flat of her sword.

Gabrielle runs toward the horses and grabs the bridle of one of them.

HAIMON (off-camera):
Gabrielle!

Gabrielle whips around joyfully.

GABRIELLE:
Haimon!

Pan to Haimon as he rides into the clearing.

HAIMON (bringing his horse to a halt):
Gabrielle! You-- (he pauses, somewhat deflated) You don't need any help.

GABRIELLE (grins):
Maybe not. But it's always good to have backup.

Regrouping, the warriors charge them again with a disjointed chorus of yells.

GABRIELLE:
You're gluttons for punishment, aren't you.

Haimon grabs two of the warriors and slams them into each other, knocking them out, while Gabrielle quickly takes care of the other two with rapid spin-kicks.

Haimon and Gabrielle turn to each other.

HAIMON (a tender smile lights up his face):
You're back.

GABRIELLE (smiles back at him):
Yeah.

They lean toward each other and almost kiss but are interrupted by a groan from one of the warriors as he scrambles to his feet.

HAIMON (exasperated):
You've got to be kidding.

The warrior looks at them hesitantly for a moment, then turns and runs.

GABRIELLE (businesslike):

Come on, let's get out of here. Xena needs us back in the village.

HAIMON:

Wait.

GABRIELLE (puzzled):

What?

HAIMON:

First things first.

He draws her toward him and they kiss tenderly in the now-bright sunlight.

CUT TO

Akelos' army at the gates of Paratta. The gates are locked.

AKELOS (raises his voice):

All right, you pathetic sheep. Open the gates--or I'll make you.

There is silence inside.

AKELOS:

All right, boys. Ready--

The camera pulls back to show a row of archers. One of the warriors lights their arrows with a torch.

AKELOS:

--aim--

The archers lift their bows, aiming at the gates.

AKELOS:

Fire!

Just as the archers are about to release their arrows, we hear the familiar "whoosh" of the chakram. It slices off the tips of the arrows. The warriors turn their heads in shock; so does Akelos.

Pan up to Xena standing at the top of the gates. She catches the chakram and stares down at Akelos, a look of hatred and revulsion on her face.

AKELOS (startled):

Xena! You should be--

XENA:

--busy? (sneers) Not too busy to keep *this* date.

AKELOS:

You're a smart woman, Xena. I'm sure you know by now that your little friend is in my hands.

GABRIELLE (off-camera):
Not anymore.

Akelos turns around and gapes. Before him are Gabrielle and Haimon, on horseback.

AKELOS:
You!

GABRIELLE:
When you least expect it.

Pan up to Xena. Her face lights up with joy.

XENA:
Gabrielle!

GABRIELLE:
Xena! I'm all right.

The joyful look on Xena's face turns somewhat conflicted when she sees that Gabrielle is back to her old self. Then, after a moment, she smiles again.

Pan down to Gabrielle as she dismounts and walks toward Akelos.



GABRIELLE:
You want to fight me, Akelos? (grins) Or maybe you're scared? Maybe you should have listened when I said I was just fooling you. Maybe you fell right into-- (she glances up at Xena) our trap.

Looking furious, Akelos dismounts and walks toward Gabrielle. They start to spar. Akelos is much bigger than Gabrielle, but her agile movements and sword-work are giving her an edge and Akelos is clearly getting tired and exasperated. Gabrielle ducks a blow of his sword and spins around, kicking him in the stomach. He doubles over for a moment, grunting, then swings at Gabrielle and manages to get in a swipe at her face, making her stagger a little.

Pan to Haimon as he moves to dismount and come to Gabrielle's aid, but then clearly reconsiders and stays where he is.

Pan up to Xena, still at the top of the wall, as she too makes a move toward Gabrielle but then stays where she is.

Gabrielle quickly recovers. Parrying Akelos' next blow, she spins quickly and kicks the sword out of his hand, then trips him up and sends him sprawling on the ground. He finds himself with Gabrielle's sword at his neck and looks up, panting in fear and fury.

GABRIELLE:

Order your men to turn around.

AKELOS:

You're not going to kill me.

They stare each other down. Then, he tries to grab her sword but Gabrielle quickly yanks it up, flips it in her hand and hits him on the head with the hilt of the sword. He's knocked out cold.

GABRIELLE (surveys Akelos' men):

Any more questions?

CUT TO

Evening. Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon are sitting at a table in the tavern at the inn, with some food and mugs of ale in front of them.

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

A toast!

Gabrielle, Xena and Haimon turn around as the camera pans back to show the village woman who had earlier expressed doubts about Gabrielle's abilities. She is standing at one of the tables, raising a mug.

WOMAN:

To the Battling Bard!

EVERYONE IN THE TAVERN:

To the Battling Bard!

Gabrielle grins and raises her mug to them. The sound of clinking. Gabrielle clinks mugs with Xena, then with Haimon.

XENA (takes a quaff of ale):

So...I guess the Battling Bard's reputation is safe now.

GABRIELLE (grinning):

Yeah, I guess so.

A brief pause.

XENA:

So. You wished yourself back.

GABRIELLE:

It's a funny thing. I did--just before those guys grabbed me. (she chuckles) I was just so tired of-- everyone treating me like a kid.

She gives Haimon a meaningful look. He smiles at her, a little uncomfortably, and squeezes her hand.

GABRIELLE (continues):

And nothing happened. Nothing. And believe me, I really meant it.

XENA (puzzled):

And then?

GABRIELLE:

And then, at sunrise-- (she shrugs) just like that. (pauses) Maybe the spell wore off?

Xena looks at her, clearly struck by something.

XENA (whispers):

Sunrise...

GABRIELLE:

What?

XENA (quickly gathers herself):

Nothing. (tries to be casual) Maybe it did wear off. Or maybe--

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

Excuse me. Gabrielle!

GABRIELLE (turns):

Yes?

Several villagers are standing behind her.

YOUNG VILLAGE WOMAN:

Come and have a drink with us! (points to the bar)

XENA (grins at Gabrielle):

Your adoring public awaits.

GABRIELLE:

Well, all right--just one--

The villagers pull her away. Haimon stares at Xena.

HAIMON:

It was you, wasn't it?

Xena stares at him, silently.

HAIMON:

At sunrise. You wished for her to turn back.

Xena takes a gulp of ale, then forcefully puts the mug down.

XENA:

Yeah.

HAIMON:

So that means... (pauses) Only the wisher can undo the spell. It was you--

XENA:

Yeah. (She gets up) I'm going to go for a walk.

HAIMON:

Xena.

She turns around, warily.

HAIMON:

I'm not going to tell her anything. (pauses) If you want to tell her--

XENA (with a small nod):

Thank you.

Xena walks out, throwing one more glance at Gabrielle who is being feted by the villagers at the bar, her back to Xena.

CUT TO

Outside the tavern. Nightfall. Xena walks out, then stops and turns around, looking toward the tavern.

There is a flash of light as Ares appears next to her.

XENA (glances at him, with a teasing smirk):

I thought I'd lost you.

ARES:

Well, she did almost scare me away for good. (he puts an arm around Xena) Good thing she's back to normal.

CUT TO

Inside the tavern. Gabrielle motions to Haimon to come over to the bar. He comes over.

GABRIELLE:

Where's Xena?

HAIMON:

She went for a walk.

Gabrielle turns toward the door for a moment, then turns back to Haimon.

GABRIELLE:

Have a drink with us.

Haimon puts his arm around her.

CUT TO

Ares and Xena, outside. Xena is watching Gabrielle and Haimon with the crowd, through the door.

ARES (serious):

Are you glad to have her back?



XENA:

I am.

She turns to Ares and they kiss as:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Haimon's masculine pride was not harmed during the production of this motion picture.]