

SHIPPER SEASON NINE

“For Better, For Worse”

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Logline

When Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are invited to attend the wedding of Autolycus' daughter, Anticlea, some trouble arises when Aphrodite intervenes on behalf of another queen who is in love with the groom. Meanwhile, a small band of thugs set a plan to get their revenge against Autolycus because of a grudge they have against him.

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TEASER

FADE IN

The camera pans in on a dark night and a glowing, large campfire with several hooded figures sitting around it. An ominous wind is howling. The fire glows brighter, and then settles down to a low simmer, as the assembled crowd 'oohs' appreciatively.

A hooded figure, obviously the leader since he did not seem impressed by the fire, stands and dramatically flips his hood back. We see that he is only a common thug, looking a little worse for wear.

THUG LEADER:

Welcome. This session of Hatred and Personal Vengeance Addicts Anonymous is now open. We have several new members tonight, if they would like to share?

The camera pans back around the circle as hooded figures turn towards one another. Finally, a lone figure rises shakily and pulls off the hood of his cloak. It is a young man, with long, slightly flowing blonde hair and a nasty scar on his right lip.

YOUNG THUG (nervously):

Hi, uh, I'm Deik--

ASSEMBLED CROWD (monotone):

Hi, Deik.

DEIK (blushing):

Uh, yeah... I'm Deik and I have an intense hatred of Gabrielle, the "battling bard." I have just (he gives a long sigh and looks about to tear up) --I've always felt that I could have *been* in her position, y'know? Xena saved my village once, rescued me and a bunch of others, and I just can't help but think (wistfully) if I'd been a young village maiden, she would have taken me off on all those adventures, fighting all those big strong men... But no, there's always been (spits the name out) Gabrielle. What's wrong with me? (Breaks down into tears) What's wrong with me?

The camera moves in for a close-up of Deik's tearful face, and then pans back out to the crowd, who stand stock still for a moment, before applauding.

CROWD (with a few 'I know how it is, man's' thrown in):

Thank you for sharing, Deik.

The hooded figures immediately next to Deik help him to sit down, when we hear another voice speak up.

WOMAN'S VOICE (off-camera):

I'm Nell the Nasty (rushes on before the crowd can interrupt her), and I want vengeance against Deik's precious Xena. She crippled my soul when I was just a child, and she *never* paid for her crime! (Sniffles) She didn't even remember what she'd done to me!

The camera focuses on Nell the Nasty, looking just as psychotic as ever.

[FLASHBACK]

From "Lost and Found":

XENA:

Are you kidding me? This is about a game of ball when I was ten?

[END OF FLASHBACK]

The crowd erupts in agreement.

MEMBER #1:

That Banshee!!

MEMBER #2:

I know how you feel--sing it, woman!

MEMBER #3:

Let's get 'er!

THUG LEADER (raising his voice above the general ruckus of the crowd):

QUIET! Please! (it quiets down quickly) Now, I know that many of you have specific anger towards Xena and Gabrielle, but this is a peaceful group. We're here to support our members, help them deal with their unrequited hatred, not to encourage them to rash acts. (To Nell the Nasty) Thank you for sharing, Nell the Nasty. (to the group) Would anyone with a grudge against another source like to come forward?

After a few moments, the camera circling the crowd, two hooded figures rise. They remove their hoods and we see that it is Greba and Gascar.

GREBA (tentatively):

Hi. I'm Greba, and this is Gascar.

CROWD (dutifully):

Hi, Greba, Gascar.

GREBA (warming under all the attention):

Although we certainly have our bones to pick with that *Xena* (mutters under her breath) teach her to steal my-- (at Gascar's look, hastily raises her voice), our greatest desire is the utter destruction of-- (pauses dramatically)

DEIK (pipes up):

Gabrielle?

THUG LEADER:

Shh! Don't interrupt, Deik.

GREBA:

--Autolycus, the "King of Thieves." He stole our money and ruined our warlord racket. (Whining) It's just not fair!

CROWD (nervously glancing at the leader before replying):

Thank you for sharing, Greba.

The two are about to sit down and make way for the other thugs and warlords to step up and share. Suddenly, Gascar stands up straight, waving his good arm for the attention of the group, which has already turned away.

GASCAR:

Listen to me! This twelve-step stuff isn't for us! We're men and women of action--determination--hatred. If anybody wants to get some satisfaction--Xena, Gabrielle, *and* Autolycus are all going to be in Tiryns for (mock-sweet) a wedding. Anyone who wants vengeance, come with us. We'll make sure it's a wedding nobody will ever forget.

Gascar attempts an evil cackle, but it's drowned out by noise from the crowd.

THUG LEADER (panicked):

No, no! Don't listen to him. Everybody, remember the program, remember the steps!

Several people in the group get up and walk toward Gascar. The thug leader runs after them, trying to stop them.

THUG LEADER:

Remember the prog--

He is cut short by a punch in the face from Gascar, using his one good arm to impressive effect, and tumbles on his back with a groan.

Some group members rush to the leader's defense while Nell and a few others join Gascar at his side. A melee erupts.

DISSOLVE TO

Some time later. The group, its ranks much thinner now, sits dejectedly around the remnants of the fire. The thug leader, looking somewhat bruised and battered, stands up.

THUG LEADER (irritably):

All right, all right people. (He glares in what is supposed to be a menacing manner, but looks more like a spoiled child pouting) Who let those two in? Huh? I want answers!

DISSOLVE TO

The camera pans in on a swampy area. The ground is wet and muddy, while other sticks, weeds, and thorns fill the rest of the area. The sound of mosquitoes can be heard in the background. It looks humid and miserable, with no semblance of civilization to be found.

GABRIELLE (voice over, full of rage):

Xena, this is ridiculous!

The camera focuses in on Gabrielle, covered in mud and scratches, as she makes her way through the swamp. She doesn't look like a happy camper.

On top of her horse is Darion who is swatting all of the mosquitoes that keep landing on him.

The camera then pulls in on Xena, who is obviously in the same situation as she drags Argo behind her. She tries not to show her irritation.

GABRIELLE (complaining):

If we had just stayed on the main road we would have been there by now.

Xena doesn't say anything, obviously Gabrielle was right in this situation but she just doesn't want to admit it. Determined, Xena grabs her sword and starts hacking away at the thorn bushes lying in front of her path.

XENA (sighing):

Well, we can't turn around now.

GABRIELLE (irritated):

No, but you could have at least stopped at that tavern and asked for directions.

XENA (rolling her eyes):
Gabrielle, I know where we're going.

The camera pulls up on Darion.

DARION (in a smart-aleck way):
Where? To Tartarus?

Gabrielle snickers.

XENA (taken aback; to Gabrielle):
Looks like your smart-aleck comments are rubbing off on him.

GABRIELLE (laughing):
My smart-aleck comments?

Xena says nothing; pursing her lips, she continues to hack away with her sword.

DARION (sighs):
I thought you said this was a shortcut?

XENA:
It was.

GABRIELLE (chuckling):
Yeah. Thirty years ago.

Silence as Xena continues to hack.

DISSOLVE TO

The main road; Xena and Gabrielle are riding on horseback, with Darion asleep in the saddle in front of Gabrielle.

XENA:
See, I told you we were on the right track.

GABRIELLE:
Yeah, we're back on the main road. If we had just stayed here all along we'd have been in Tiryns already. And we wouldn't need a bath. Come on, Xena, admit it! It was a bad idea.

Xena glances at her with obvious displeasure, then changes the subject.

XENA:
You know, I still can't believe Autolycus agreed to this marriage. He really didn't like Laertes much and he was so protective of Anticlea...

GABRIELLE (letting the change in subject pass):
Well, you know fathers. (Glances at Xena a bit nervously) Uhh--what I mean is, she'll always be his little girl to him. But she's a grownup. And besides, Laertes is a good man. I'm sure they'll be very happy together, even if it takes a while for Autolycus to get used to it.

Darion wakes up and rubs his eyes.

DARION (plaintively):
Are we there yet?

Xena rolls her eyes impatiently while Gabrielle peers ahead and points toward something in the distance.

GABRIELLE:
Yes, we are!

Pan for a long shot of a city ahead of them.

DISSOLVE TO

A dark room, so dark that the camera appears to be staring into nothing but blackness. After a moment, a spark of light can be seen.

The camera focuses in on the lone light, where a figure can be seen, huddled over bottles and shaking.

The sounds of rattling bottles can be heard; gradually, a female voice rises above the general racket.

WOMAN (in tragic voice):
All doomed...doomed... Destruction and devastation. *Doomed!*

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

On a white veil with a diamond tiara.

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):
I just don't know...I'm just--not sure if it screams "perfect," you know?

The camera pulls back to show a middle-aged woman kneeling amongst a mass of white fabrics--a dressmaker.

DRESSMAKER (exasperated):
I'd be worried if the dress started screaming anything, dear.

The camera slides upwards from the frustrated face of the shop owner to reveal Anticlea, standing in front of a mirror with a frown marring her face. The wedding dress she is wearing is quite elegant and fits her stunningly.

ANTICLEA (biting her lip nervously):

Maybe if you just took it in a little...here...and here...what about this?

The shop owner examines the parts of the dress Anticlea is referring to, but it is impossible to see any flaw in either the dress or the fabric.

DRESSMAKER:

If I make any more alterations, you might want to just start over with another dress.

ANTICLEA (near tears):

Another dress? I can't possibly...there's no time! I just so want it to be (sniffle) perfect.

CUT TO

The dark room we saw before. The woman tosses a bottle into a cauldron from which a green light emanates.

WOMAN:

Bad, bad, bad, bad.

The camera pans in on her wide-eyed face as she leans over the cauldron.

CUT TO

The room where Anticlea is trying on her dress.

Anticlea snuffles. The dressmaker rushes to hand Anticlea a spare piece of cloth before she can blow her nose on the dress. Oblivious to the near disaster, Anticlea snuffles into the cloth for a moment, before turning back to the mirror.

ANTICLEA (suddenly perks up):

What about this line? Do you think the neckline is too low? Do you think--

DRESSMAKER (puts a comforting hand on her shoulder):

Darling. The dress is perfect. Just like I'm sure the wedding will be perfect.

CUT TO

The dark room.

WOMAN:

Doomed. All doomed. Bad, bad, bad. The wedding will fail!

A door is flung open with a loud bang, flooding light into the room, which we can now see is decorated with mythological creature wallpaper and a comfortable bed, all littered with potion bottles.

MAN'S VOICE (off-camera):

Are you hiding in here with the curtains drawn again? It's time to get ready for the wedding preparations.

The camera is still focused on the woman above the cauldron, who is still shaking slightly, with a faraway look in her eyes.

WOMAN (getting even more dramatic, obviously irritated about being interrupted):
Doomed. It's all DOOMED!!

MAN'S VOICE (obviously not paying any attention):
Yes, yes. Come on now. It's time.

The woman snorts indignantly and moves off-camera.

CUT TO

The room where Anticlea is trying on her gown.

ANTICLEA (obviously continuing an ongoing conversation):
You don't think the train is too long? I don't know--

XENA (off-camera):
The dress is perfect.

Anticlea whips around and sees Xena and Gabrielle. Her face lights up with joy.

ANTICLEA:
Xena, Gabrielle! I thought you'd never get here!

GABRIELLE:
We, um, took a shortcut-- (glances at Xena) and then we needed a good bath.

Xena shoots her a displeased look.

ANTICLEA:
It's so good to see you!

XENA (smiles, overcoming her obvious irritation at being reminded of her mistake):
It's good to see *you*. You look great.

ANTICLEA (eagerly):
Yeah?

GABRIELLE (looks her over admiringly):
You do. You look... (smiles a bit wistfully) you definitely look like--someone who's about to get married.

XENA (chuckles):
No kidding.

ANTICLEA:
Do you really like this dress? You don't think it's--it's-- (makes a vague gesture with her hands indicating the dress) I mean (hopeful) --does it really look good on me?

Xena and Gabrielle exchange an amused look.

XENA:

It's not like you to worry about how a dress looks on you.

ANTICLEA (almost wailing):

But this is my wedding! My special day! (looks herself over) I still think the bodice is just too--too--

DRESSMAKER (impatient but indulgent):

Too *what*, darling?

ANTICLEA (obviously lost for words):

Too, too-- (gestures frantically) I don't know!

XENA (aside, to Gabrielle):

If I ever decide to get married, just kill me.

Gabrielle gives her an amused look but her smile fades and becomes wistful, and Xena looks guilty for a moment.

XENA (obviously looking to change the subject):

Where's Autolycus?

ANTICLEA (distracted by an imagined piece of lint):

Who?

XENA:

You know--Autolycus? Your *father*?

ANTICLEA (turns before the mirror trying to see how she looks from behind):

Oh. I think he's in the gardens. Say, do you think--

CUT TO

The palace gardens. Vines of roses climb up one side of the palace and there is a fountain in the garden, surrounded by bushes blossoming with pink and white roses. There is the sound of multiple voices chattering off camera.

Pan around to show Autolycus, with two middle-aged men and three middle-aged women circled around him. The two men look regal and refined, standing up straight and looking down at Autolycus with an air of snobbery. Two of the women look the same way; the third is a gray-haired woman who has a shawl wrapped tightly around her shoulders and looks into the distance, her face turned away from the camera.

SNOBBY WOMAN #1:

So, have our dear children decided on a honeymoon location yet?

SNOBBY WOMAN #2:

Yes, that is the most important part of a marriage.

SNOBBY WOMAN #1:

I sure hope your little Anticlea can give us a grandchild soon--I've never had a grandchild before.

AUTOLYCUS (not sure what to say):

Well, uh, you know how you can't push these things.

SNOBBY MAN #1 (slightly threatening):

Anticlea had better be the one for our Laertes. We wouldn't want to bring the shame of a divorce down on our family.

SNOBBY MAN #2:

The cost of that alone would send us into debt for months. (pause) Speaking of expenses, your daughter has quite fancy taste--this is what, the third dressmaker we've been through? I really hope the cost of this wedding is worth it.

Autolycus goes to answer them when he hears someone walking up behind them. He turns to see Xena, Gabrielle, and Darion walking up. Autolycus looks relieved.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

Autolycus.

AUTOLYCUS (too enthusiastically, arms extended out):

Xena! Gabrielle! (he walks up to them and puts his arms around Gabrielle and Xena's shoulders) It's so good to see you.

XENA (taken aback slightly by his enthusiastic welcome):

Hello to you too. You know, I think last time you were so happy to see us, we were rescuing you from the long arm of the law.

AUTOLYCUS (in a loud whisper):

Yeah, and this time you're rescuing me from the long arm of my future in-laws. Let me tell you--

One of the men behind Autolycus clears his throat. Autolycus spins around.

AUTOLYCUS (with a fake cheerful grin):

Xena, Gabrielle. These are Laertes' aunts and uncles. This is King Gordus and Queen Emma from Iphis and King Lycaon and Queen Hermonia of Amgoros and their aunt, Sileni.

Xena and Gabrielle acknowledge the greeting with a little nod--snobby looking royalty is nothing new to them.

QUEEN HERMONIA (Snobby woman #2):

Well, we must be going. There are still a lot of preparations for us to tend to and we must make sure that everything is perfect

The two men and two women begin to walk away. The older woman with the shawl stays in place, still in the same position.

AUTOLYCUS (wipes his forehead):

Whew!

GABRIELLE:

That bad, huh?

AUTOLYCUS (in a loud whisper):

I feel bad for all couples everywhere who have to deal with uptight, perfectionist, bossy in-laws. I'm just thankful that when I married Penelope, she had no relatives.

Xena and Gabrielle chuckle.

The older woman begins to sway back and fourth, mumbling to herself. King Lycaon, already some distance away, stops looks back at her.

KING LYCAON:

Sileni, it's time to go.

He walks up to her and puts his hand around her shoulder to lead her away. She suddenly looks up and gasps.

We see that it is the woman from before, in the wallpapered room with the cauldron.

SILENI:

Bad, bad, bad, bad. Trouble, trouble. Wedding doomed, doomed, doomed.

She begins to mumble quietly as she walks away. Xena, Gabrielle and Autolycus look after her, startled.

KING LYCAON:

Sorry about that. That's my aunt Sileni. She's an oracle...well, she thinks she is. Nothing she has predicted has ever come true so far, so...wouldn't worry about what she says. (He meaningfully taps his finger on his forehead) I better go and make sure she doesn't get in trouble.

He walks away after Sileni.

They walk away. Xena, Gabrielle and Autolycus watch her leave.

GABRIELLE:

An oracle, huh? (mimicking Sileni, in a dramatic sing-song) Wedding doomed, doomed, doomed. (in a normal voice, joking) Think she's on to something?

AUTOLYCUS (sighs):

Sadly, probably not.

GABRIELLE:

So... (smiles) ...how's Anticlea?

AUTOLYCUS:

Very excited. (sighs) She, um--turned out to have this fussy side that I didn't know about. She's been awfully picky about her dress--

GABRIELLE (chuckles):

We noticed.

AUTOLYCUS:

Oh, you saw her. (shakes his head) The caterer didn't have the fish she wanted, so they had to send out for them. And the artist, for the after-wedding paintings? Anticlea practically had his whole *family* investigated before she chose him!

Xena and Gabrielle laugh.

XENA:

And what about you?

AUTOLYCUS (grudgingly):

I'm...happy for her. But...

XENA (nods, understanding):

It's hard, letting her go.

GABRIELLE:

Well, you know what they say--

AUTOLYCUS (disgusted):

Oh no--not the "You're not losing a daughter, you're gaining a son" line!

Gabrielle gives him a sheepish look.

AUTOLYCUS (continues):

If I hear that one more time, I'll-- (thinks a moment, then with forced bravado) I'll have to steal something from one of my pompous in-laws just to make myself feel better. And you wouldn't want that, would ya? So (points a finger at Gabrielle) don't say it. (He strikes a pose, hands at hips, and sighs) Well, I'd better get ready for the--big event. See you later.

Autolycus walks off toward the palace.

Xena watches him, shaking her head in amusement.

GABRIELLE:

Come on. I think it's time to wake Darion up from his nap.

CUT TO

A beautiful lake with a waterfall flowing into the water from a high cliff above. There are large trees surrounding the lake. There is a clearing in front of the lake where chairs are set up. In front of the several rows of chairs is a garden of lush flowers and an arch covered with vines and red roses. An old man with a white beard, draped in an elegant white robe with gold trim, is standing behind the arch, a podium in front of him. He is flipping through a book that sits on the podium.

As the camera moves in, a din of voices is heard. People are walking into the clearing and seating themselves. Pan to Xena, Gabrielle, and Darion, who are taking their seats.

Gabrielle looks around, clearly awed by the beauty of the garden.

GABRIELLE (in awe):

This place is incredible...

Darion is playing with a garland of flowers woven around the chair in front of him.

XENA (bored):

Wasn't this thing supposed to have started already? She's probably still fussing with that dress.

GABRIELLE (trying to be positive):

Isn't this spot beautiful?

AUTOLYCUS (off-camera):

Nothing but the best for my girl.

Gabrielle, Xena and Darion turn to see Autolycus walking toward them. He is well dressed, wearing a white shirt with long sleeves and a red vest (just like in "King of Assassins").

XENA:

You're certainly dressed for the occasion.

AUTOLYCUS:

Hey, I'm the father of the bride. (winces slightly) I gotta look my best. I've got a reputation to uphold.

Laertes comes up, dressed in an elegant purple and green robe and a white shirt with gold trim. He looks happy but nervous.

LAERTES:

Xena, Gabrielle! (to Autolycus) Uh... (nervously) Dad.

AUTOLYCUS (rolls his eyes):

Yeah, yeah. Let me go get Anticlea, or we'll be holding this we-- (he pauses and stumbled) this ceremony under a full moon.

DISSOLVE TO

A mixture of regally dressed figures (from Laertes' side) and random people (Autolycus' friends) are seated for the wedding. There is not a spare seat to be found. Laertes is standing in front of the arch.

Music begins to play. Everyone looks down the isle to see Anticlea walk up from behind the trees Autolycus by her side, holding her arm. She is wearing the white wedding dress with a veil and a tiara and carrying a bouquet. She walks slowly toward Laertes with a smile on her face and tears in her eyes. Autolycus is clearly beginning to choke up but he makes every effort not to show it.

Anticlea stops in front of the arch, facing Laertes. Autolycus steps back. The priest looks at the two of them with a gentle smile. Anticlea and Laertes hold hands.

PRIEST (looking at the crowd):

We are here today to unite in marriage this man, King Laertes, and this woman, Anticlea of-- (whispers to Autolycus) excuse me, where is she from?

AUTOLYCUS (whispers back loudly):

Oh, never mind...

Pan to the crowd; the people on the groom's side start to mutter.

AUTOLYCUS (irritated):

Okay, okay--Cyros.

PRIEST (continues):

...to unite in marriage this man, King Laertes of Tyrins, and this woman, Anticlea of Cyros. (looks out at the crowd) If anyone should know of a reason these two should not be joined in matrimony--

FEMALE VOICE (off camera):

Me!

The entire crowd turns in their seats to look behind them. At the very back of the beautiful clearing stands Aphrodite.

The camera pans over the faces of Laertes, Anticlea, Autolycus and the priest as they look on in shock; then to Xena and Gabrielle, who do not look pleased.

Gasps go through the crowd.

DARION (excited):

Aphrodite!

MAN #1:

That's Aphrodite?

WOMAN #1:

The Goddess of Love? Get out of here!

Aphrodite grins and strikes a pose, obviously pleased by the recognition.

XENA (grimly):

Yeah, it's her.

Xena and Gabrielle get up and start making their way toward the aisle.

WOMAN #1:

The Goddess of Love...objecting to a wedding?

WOMAN #2:

The wedding must be jinxed.

Xena and Gabrielle walk up to Aphrodite as the crowd continues to murmur. Darion tags along.

GABRIELLE (bewildered):

Aphrodite. What are you doing?

XENA (annoyed and suspicious):
Are you trying to break them up?

APHRODITE (holds up her hands in a time-out gesture):
Hey, calm down. It's not how it looks. (thinks and makes a face) Well, okay, it is how it looks, but it's not why you think.

XENA (cutting her off):
Then explain.

APHRODITE:
I'm only trying to spare Anticlea a lifetime of heartache.

XENA:
What, because she's marrying Laertes? That's not a very good excuse.

APHRODITE:
No, Warrior Babe. Laertes is a great guy. (smiles) And they make a really hot couple, if you ask me. But if they get married, he'll just end up hurting her.

Laertes comes down the isle toward Aphrodite with Anticlea in tow, just in time to hear the last comment.

LAERTES (furious):
That's not true! I would *never* hurt her. (sincerely) I love Anticlea with all my heart--as I've never loved any woman.

Anticlea is obviously moved by his words.

WOMAN'S VOICE (off-camera):
More than me?

Aphrodite steps aside and we see a young woman with blond hair, in a simple white dress.

LAERTES (shocked):
Alesia?

ANTICLEA:
You know her?

Laertes is silent for a moment. Move in closer on his face.

LAERTES:
We were to be married.

Medium close-up on Xena, Gabrielle, and Anticlea, all in shock, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

The crowd is dispersing and the chairs are being taken away. Autolyclus is standing in front of Xena and Gabrielle. Darion is standing with Gabrielle.

AUTOLYCLUS (angry):

I can't believe I was going let my daughter marry that--

GABRIELLE (puts her hand on Autolyclus' shoulder):

Calm down, Autolyclus. Laertes just needs figure things out first. It doesn't mean that he loves your daughter any less. The wedding isn't canceled, just postponed.

AUTOLYCLUS (snorts):

And that's supposed to make me feel better? What makes you think he *does* love Anticlea, hmm? If he was going to marry this other woman--

GABRIELLE:

It'll be okay. Don't be too hard on Laertes. At least not until we know the whole story. Why don't you take your daughter inside?

Autolyclus nods and walks over to the arch where Anticlea is standing, looking off into the distance. He puts his hand on her shoulder and she turns to him, tears in his eyes. She breaks down, bringing her face to his chest. He gently wraps his arm around her.

AUTOLYCLUS (awkwardly):

It's going be okay.

ANTICLEA:

But he loves someone else!

AUTOLYCLUS (trying to be comforting despite his own ambivalence):

We don't know that. Let's just...get out of here and go to your quarters. You need some rest.

Anticlea sniffles and nods. They start to walk away. Then Anticlea stops, visibly angry.

ANTICLEA (with a bitter chuckle):

And I was so worried about having the perfect wedding... She (pointing an accusing finger at Aphrodite) ruined everything! Who invited *her*?

Her father gently lowers her hand and steers her along.

AUTOLYCLUS (fading out as they walk away):

Actually, gods don't really need invitations--they just pop in whenever they want. But now that you mention it...she *is* family...

Xena and Gabrielle look after them with obvious sympathy.

Aphrodite looks over at the lake where Alesia is sitting at the water's edge, throwing stones into the water, her hand rested on her chin.

APHRODITE:

Alesia's totally torn up about all of this. But she loves him.

Xena and Gabrielle turn towards Aphrodite, their reverie lost.

XENA (sarcastically):

So you're just helping out this girl out of the goodness of your heart?

APHRODITE:

Hey, Warrior Babe, chill. I'm still her fairy godmother, after all.

[FLASHBACK "If the Shoe Fits"]

XENA:

Your evil fairy godmother? Who's that?

ALESIA:

Her!

APHRODITE:

Moi?!

XENA:

Let's hear it, Aphrodite. What's all this about?

APHRODITE:

The little rugrat wandered in yesterday and said something about her dad and her wicked stepmom. So you know me. I was just trying to help. Then she became like-- totally bizarro! And now she's calling me--

ALESIA:

-- my evil fairy godmother.

APHRODITE:

Uh-h-h-h! That's it! As if! Dear child-- do these features *look* evil?

GABRIELLE:

Do you mean the fairy godmother from the fairy tale?

ALESIA:

Mm-hmm.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE (stunned):

You mean--that's Princess Alesia of Cyra?

XENA (recognition visibly coming over her):

Of course. Queen Alesia now.

APHRODITE (squeals):

Would you believe it? My little pookie, all grown up and having boy problems. (She shakes her head, then suddenly beams at Gabrielle) Speaking of which-- (she points to Gabrielle's belly) *congratulations!* And where is the lucky daddy? I thought he'd--

GABRIELLE (blushes):

Aphrodite--it's, um--complicated.

APHRODITE (deflated):

Oh. (brightens up) Hey, that sounds like something I could fix if--

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

I don't need anything fixed, Aphrodite. Thanks. (quickly) Let's talk about Alesia. You meddled in her life once before. What are you playing at now?

[FLASHBACK "If the Shoe Fits"]

GABRIELLE:

I want you to leave Alesia alone.

APHRODITE:

She came to me. You heard what she said. She hates her family.

GABRIELLE:

All I see is this confused little girl. She doesn't realize how much she misses her family-- all these people who love her. If you don't stop meddling, you're going to break them up.

APHRODITE:

I just wanted a happy ending for her.

GABRIELLE:

No, you just want your happy ending-- regardless of her. Tell me, Miss Expert-- is that what you call love?

[END OF FLASHBACK]

APHRODITE (haughtily):

Well, like I said--she's having boy issues. And unlike *some* people--*she* didn't have a problem admitting she could use some help from the love goddess. She totally came to me!

XENA (suspiciously):

And would that, by any chance, have anything to do with...worshippers?

APHRODITE:

Well all right. She did promise to make me the patron goddess of Cyra and to build me a totally

rocking new temple. I mean, do you even know how long it's been since anyone has built me a new temple? (pouts)

GABRIELLE:

So you get some more worshippers, and to Tartarus with Laertes and with Anticlea, or what they want!?

APHRODITE:

That is so *totally* not true! Laertes doesn't even know what he wants. I'm so not trying to hurt anybody!

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, well tell that to Anticlea.

XENA:

Aphrodite--if you really want to be Alesia's friend, you should know by now to let her work it out for herself. (glancing towards the direction that Laertes went) Laertes will have to decide for himself. If you do any prodding--

APHRODITE:

As if! I delivered Alesia--the rest is up to the kids. (as an afterthought) She'll get her happy ending.

Aphrodite disappears with a bright grin and a wave.

XENA (turning to Gabrielle):

She did the right thing last time, Gabrielle. Aphrodite cares about Alesia...in her own way.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Well, this time it's already cost a wedding. Did you see Anticlea? She's heartbroken. And I thought Aphrodite had learned some lessons.

XENA:

Well, give her a chance. Maybe she has.

GABRIELLE:

Why don't you go check on Alesia? Once upon a time, I seem to remember that you were her fairy godsmother as well.

DARION:

You were a fairy godsmother? Wow, I got to hear this. Can I come with you? I promise I'll be quiet. (to Gabrielle) Can I?

GABRIELLE:

Sure. (to Xena) Go on. I'll talk to Laertes.

XENA (to Darion, a little dubiously):

Okay, come along.

She and Darion walk off, their voices fading.

DARION:

So, there's not going to be a party?

XENA (not too confident):

Maybe later.

Gabrielle looks after Xena as she and Darion approach Alesia, then walks off.

CUT TO

Another portion of the garden, with many gorgeous rosebushes and statues. Laertes sits along on a bench, lost in thought. Gabrielle approaches.

GABRIELLE:

Laertes? (Laertes looks up as Gabrielle sits down next to him) Bet you didn't expect your wedding day to be like this, huh?

LAERTES:

I--I never thought I would see Alesia again...especially not now... Twelve years ago we were going to be married on the eve of the summer solstice.

GABRIELLE:

So what happened?

LAERTES:

The night before our wedding she...disappeared. I went to her room so that we could go to the ceremonial ritual to cleanse our bodies before our wedding day...but she wasn't there. I asked her servants where she'd gone and they told me she had packed up and left hours before. I was crushed.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe she just got cold feet.

LAERTES:

Obviously ice cold because I never saw her again after that.

GABRIELLE (determined):

I'm sure there was a good reason.

LAERTES:

Maybe. (sighs) We had so many plans for after we got married. We wanted to see the world. She was always talking about Xena, and you, and all your adventures that she'd heard about. She loved stories. And she had such spirit. That was one of the things I loved most about her.

GABRIELLE:

Do you still love her?

LAERTES (wavering):

I love Anticlea.

GABRIELLE (gently):

How do you feel about Alesia, then?

Laertes looks down.

LAERTES:

I...I don't know what to do.

GABRIELLE:

You have to go with your heart.

LAERTES:

Except I don't know what my heart is telling me!

GABRIELLE (sighs):

It's a mess, isn't it.

DISSOLVE TO

Aphrodite stands in front of a large mirror, staring absently at her reflection. She fixes one of her straps and sighs loudly.

APHRODITE:

This wasn't how it was supposed to go.

Aphrodite's mirror image suddenly moves, placing its hands on its hips and looking put out, while Aphrodite still looks confused.

APHRODITE'S IMAGE:

Oh, 'cause crashing a wedding is so totally cool?

APHRODITE:

I just wanted Alesia to be happy!

APHRODITE'S IMAGE:

Makes sense. She's probably the closest you have to a friend anymore. Gabby's pretty pissed at you. Keep this up and you'll lose both of 'em.

APHRODITE (flustered):

She's not--Alesia worships me. I'm trying to stay on top of this whole not-dying thing.

APHRODITE'S IMAGE:

You want to keep Alesia happy, no matter the cost?

APHRODITE:

Well, duh. She gets the boy. I get the worshippers. The world gets a love goddess, and it's totally cake.

APHRODITE'S IMAGE:

Shut it, babe. What kind of Goddess of Love sacrifices other people's hearts? You're being totally selfish.

APHRODITE (irritated, crossing her arms over her chest and pouting at her mirror image):

I'm, like, not sacrificing anybody. Laertes has feelings for Alesia. He totally admitted to them.

APHRODITE'S IMAGE (with a little shrug):

And Anticlea?

APHRODITE (looking troubled):

Hey! Everybody's picking on me, and I'm only trying to help. Doing the love thing. You know, my job!?

APHRODITE'S IMAGE:

Face it babe. You're not helping Alesia--she's a complete wreck. You're totally out for yourself.

APHRODITE:

No fair! I--I...like Alesia. She's still a cute kid.

Aphrodite's image doesn't respond.

APHRODITE:

Fine, be like that.

She waves a hand and the mirror fades back into just Aphrodite's reflection--minus the commentary. But the reflection looks troubled, and so does Aphrodite. She seems to be contemplating the situation. Instead of slipping back into her perky self, she flashes out of the lavish room, still looking morose.

The camera pans in for one more shot of the still mirror and then:

DISSOLVES TO

Xena, Darion and Alesia are wandering the wedding grounds, taking in the beautiful sights and looking far too serious for the setting.

ALESIA (sighs):

This certainly is a beautiful place for a wedding--reminds me of when I was to be married here.

XENA (uncomfortable):

Alesia, that was...a long time ago, wasn't it?

ALESIA (with a short laugh):

And you want to know why now? Why would I come back to a man I left at the altar? What brought on my change of heart? Well, let me tell you, then. I was young and foolish when I was with Laertes. We'd known each other for most of our lives. I loved him...I've always loved him. But I was convinced that there was something more to life than being the princess and marrying the prince. (she looks wistful) I wanted a happily ever after that kicked ass, like the ones you showed me.

DARION (interrupting approvingly):

Xena kicks the best ass.

XENA (suppressing a smile):

Darion! I thought you were going to be quiet.

DARION:

Sorry. It's true, though!

ALESIA (smiles, in spite of herself):

Yes, it is.

XENA (trying to get back to the point):

What happened after you left Laertes?

ALESIA:

I traveled. I wanted to see the world--or at least Greece. I'd read and listened to all these wonderful stories, and I was so sheltered from all of that. I figured that, if I married Laertes, I'd never get my chance to explore. So I went to find myself. Then I heard that my father was dying, so I went back to Cyra and became queen. I thought I had a good life. But I never stopped wondering if I had made a terrible mistake leaving Laertes. He never tried to get in touch, and I figured he wanted nothing to do with me anymore. Then I heard of his impending marriage. Believe me, it wasn't jealousy... (with a meaningful look at Xena) I had already learned my lesson about that, as a child. But I knew it was now or never, and I didn't want to face a lifetime of regrets. So...I went to find her.

XENA (sarcastically):

Aphrodite.

ALESIA:

That's right. I went to one of her temples. I was on my knees, praying, and she appeared, told me to get up, and talked to me about everything that was wrong. Aphrodite helped me decide to come back. I don't know if Laertes still wants me, but he deserves the chance to choose.

XENA (deep in thought):

You're not giving him much time. Laertes obviously cares for you--but he loves Anticlea. This was her wedding.

ALESIA (somewhat regretfully):

I know. But what if, somewhere deep down, Laertes does still love me? Then he'll only hurt Anticlea by marrying her.

Xena gives her a thoughtful look.

CUT TO

Laertes and Gabrielle on the bench.

LAERTES:

How am I supposed to follow my heart if my heart doesn't know what it wants? (glances guiltily at Gabrielle) Sorry. I know I've said that before.

GABRIELLE (smiles wistfully):

Only about a dozen times.

LAERTES:

I love Anticlea. She's brave and stubborn and bright and kind. (chuckles) Plus, having her around is pretty good theft insurance.

Gabrielle chuckles and shakes her head.

LAERTES (staring into the distance):

But Alesia was my life for so many years! When she left, I didn't know what to do with myself. It was easier when I could distract myself with my father's obsessions, but now...

He gets up and begins to pace frantically.

LAERTES:

I have to know why she did it. Why she left. Did she get amnesia? Was she captured by one of those giants that she was always rambling on about? I need to know what took her so long to come back. I mean, by the gods--I thought maybe some dragon ate her, or worse--

GABRIELLE (grins unhappily):

Worse?

LAERTES (sits down again):

I don't even know what I'm saying anymore. So now she's back, and--I just want to know.

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

Maybe I should start at the beginning, then. When I was a little girl, listening to fairytales from the Warrior Princess and all her friends.

The camera follows Laertes' eyes as he looks up to see Alesia standing in front of him.

LAERTES:

Alesia...

GABRIELLE (looks from Alesia to Laertes):

I--I'm sure you--have a lot of catching up to do.

She gets up and walks away. Laertes and Alesia stare at each other as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

The camera pans in on a decrepit old barn. It looks like even in its better days, it was still little more than a rundown shack. Candles sit upon up-turned crates, attempting to light the shabby room. They appear somewhat of a fire hazard.

Indeed, as the camera pans around the room, several scorched areas become apparent. Still, there are fur rugs covering the dirty floor and several figures huddled around a well-tended fire.

GREBA (whining):

I still don't understand why we have to be *here*.

GASCAR (irritably):

We're in hiding.

GREBA (shrieking as a rat scurries past):

Still. This is disgusting.

NELL THE NASTY:

She's right, you know. Most thug hideouts are much better. But we can't be picky with so little time.

GASCAR (obviously affronted that his hideout choice is taking such a beating):

Could we please get back to the list?

GREBA (dutifully holding up a piece of parchment and a list):

Right. Hideout--if that's what you call this. Check.

There are grumbles from the assembled group, including several random thugs.

GREBA:

We didn't get to ruin the wedding because someone beat us to it. But, we do have Autolykus, Xena and Gabrielle right where we want them--and they don't even know it!

NELL THE NASTY:

Gimme that. (snatches the parchment) You forgot world domination! That's the most important one!

GASCAR:

We have to get those three out of the way first. I say kidnap 'em.

GREBA (rolling her eyes):

Yeah, 'cause that worked so well last time--and that was just Gabrielle.

The assembled thugs look nervous at the proposition of kidnapping Xena.

NELL THE NASTY (nastily):

Well, then, we'll just have to pick new targets. Someone close to them all. Hold on. (she stares intently at the parchment) Does kidnapping go directly under world domination, or under torturing enemies?

GASCAR (holding out his one arm):

Let me see the list. (Nell the Nasty gives it to him) Hey, I want some new armor too. Where's that? And let's not forget about money.

NELL THE NASTY:

Yeah, 'cause we're going to need serious dinars to raise an army and take over the world!

GASCAR:

And it's not even on the list!

DISSOLVE TO

A guest room in the castle. Alesia is at the foot of a bed, staring into a large wall mirror in front of her and pensively combing her hair.

With a golden flare, Aphrodite materializes in the mirror. Alesia barely reacts.

APHRODITE:

Hey babe, what's up?

ALESIA:

I told Laertes...everything.

APHRODITE (excited but anxious):

And?

ALESIA (with a small smile):

He didn't believe half of it. Except the giants, he bought that right away.

APHRODITE:

So, he's totally going to go for you, right?

ALESIA:

I don't know. It was good just talking with him.

APHRODITE (sits on the bed next to Alesia):

You know I'm here for you. Whatever you need for that happy ending.

ALESIA (a little bitterly):

I bet it'd be easier for you to just forget about me and give Anticlea her dream wedding. You'd have the new queen of Tiryns singing your praises to everyone.

APHRODITE (impulsively):

Hey, that's not what this is about! (pats Alesia's hand) I want you to be happy, kiddo.

They stare at each other. Alesia is clearly moved, while Aphrodite is shocked as she realizes the meaning of what she just said.

ALESIA:

Thank you for being here for all this. No matter what happens, I'm going to see to it that you get a new temple in Cyra.

APHRODITE:

Aww...that's so *sweet* of you! (They hug, Aphrodite patting Alesia's back) Whatever floats your boat, chicky. Toodles.

The camera focuses in on Aphrodite's faint, somewhat confused smile as she disappears in the customary bout of hearts and golden sparks.

Alesia is left sitting alone. She lies back on the bed, staring up at the canopy.

ALESIA (musing):

Maybe there will be a happily ever after.

The camera follows her line of sight until it is focused on the canopy, which almost seems alive in the dim light.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, Darion, and Autolykus are sitting around a table in a room at the palace, eating.

AUTOLYCUS (irritably):

Gods.

XENA (dead-pans):

Yep. Those pesky gods--always ruining a well-planned event.

GABRIELLE:

You'd think they would learn not to meddle--

A woman comes shooting through the room, hobbling at an extremely rapid rate. She is closely followed by King Lycaon and King Gordus, but they are obviously having a hard time catching her.

WOMAN (screeching):

Doomed. Doomed! Trouble, everywhere, always making trouble. Nobody ever learns. Doomed wedding and doomed people and doom!!

Darion shrinks back, obviously scared.

AUTOLYCUS (rolls his eyes):

Oh, not *her* again!

Sileni is leading the two kings on a merry chase around the room.

KING LYCAON (stopping to catch his breath near them):

Sorry about this--she got all worked up and...she's not well right now...last time she got like this, she bit one of the palace guards and he almost sued for work-related injuries!

SILENI:

Trouble! Grudges everywhere.

She suddenly marches up to Xena, Gabrielle and Autolykus and stops, staring straight at them.

SILENI:

The one-armed man. With a grudge... (she stares intently at Xena) at you... (she shifts her stare to Gabrielle) and you... (she pauses a moment and then turns to Autolykus and spits out the last words almost triumphantly) and *you!* He's the one to watch!

XENA (suddenly interested):

One-armed thug?

GABRIELLE:

You don't think--

[FLASHBACK "Surprises"]

GABRIELLE:

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

GASCAR:

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

[END OF FLASHBACK]

SILENI (nodding so vigorously that it appears she may tip over):

The one-armed man--and his ally--a woman with a grudge... (her eyes light up and she points a shaky finger at Xena) against you!

Xena and Gabrielle look at one another and shrug.

XENA (dubiously):

Greba?

AUTOLYCUS:

Hey, you're a little ahead of me. Who's *Greba*?

SILENI:

A grudge. Yes. A grudge from a long time ago...a childhood grudge...over a game. (mumbles) Trouble-makers all. Trouble, I said. (screeches) Doomed!

The two kings finally catch up with Sileni and take her by the arms. She falls silent, allowing them to lead her out of the room.

DARION:

Hey, didn't they say nothing she predicts has ever come true?

XENA (sighs):

Well, maybe this is her lucky day. A one-armed thug and a woman with a childhood grudge against me? Sounds a lot like...

GABRIELLE:

Gascar and Nell the Nasty.

A moment of tense silence falls across the room.

XENA:

Talk about a lucky day.

AUTOLYCUS:

Uh, ladies--did you say Nell the Nasty? I think I may have known a few strippers who would have considered that name beneath them, back in the day.

[FLASHBACK "Lost and Found"]

BARCANOR (still struggling):

My mom has your chakram. She wants revenge for what you did to her many years ago.

Xena looks confused and guilty.

XENA:

Who's your mom?

BARCANOR:

Her name is Nell the Nasty, and she is the baddest mother thugger around.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

GABRIELLE (laughing):

Auto, this is one story that--

XENA (interrupts):

-- can wait for some other time.

DARION (giggles):

Xena doesn't like to talk about it because Nell almost stole her chakram.

AUTOLYCUS (his curiosity piqued):

Really? Sounds like a woman of considerable talent.

XENA (rolls her eyes):

Believe me, she's not your type. (She pauses suddenly and gives Autolykus a curious look) Say-- Sileni said the one-armed man had a grudge against you as well. If it's really Gascar, what would he want with you?

AUTOLYCUS (sheepishly):

Well...it may have something to do with a recent, um--equity sharing project of mine.

XENA (raises an eyebrow):

Equity sharing. Why don't I like the sound of this?

GABRIELLE:

Let me guess. You stole money from Gascar.

AUTOLYCUS (winces):

Let's just say I redistributed his wealth.

XENA (sarcastic):

To yourself.

AUTOLYCUS:

You never want to see the Greater Good in my work! Look, the guy's a warlord. He probably got it

in some--disgustingly dishonorable way. And he was probably going to use it for more conquering and pillaging and other bad stuff.

XENA:

So let me guess. Gascar didn't see the Greater Good in your work either.

AUTOLYCUS (shrugs):

He's a warlord--what do you expect?

GABRIELLE:

And he wants to either get back at you or get his money back.

AUTOLYCUS:

Or both.

GABRIELLE (looking hesitantly between Xena and Autolycus):

And you think he's actually teamed up with Nell the Nasty? Xena, this is--

She is interrupted by a burst of golden sparks and pink hearts. Aphrodite appears.

APHRODITE:

Hey, you three! Time to party!

XENA (puzzled):

What are you talking about?

APHRODITE:

Well, duh--just trying to cheer you up. I decorated the hall, invited back all the wedding guests, opened the main doors, and threw a party. (Off Xena's disbelieving look, sheepishly) Look, I was kinda bummed about my total lack of wedding timing. So I figured--what better way to forget that ickiness than a party!

DARION (jumps up, excited):

A party! Let's go, everyone!

APHRODITE:

Good to see *someone* appreciates me.

GABRIELLE:

Aphrodite, that's very nice of you.

XENA:

All right, all right. (She gets up, exchanging amused glances with Gabrielle and Autolycus) Lead the way.

CUT TO

The main hall of the castle, which is done up completely in pink. There's a large dance floor filled with people, tables of fruit, and a music band with flutes and lyres. Sparkles and streamers are floating around. There is a large pink banner with golden lettering. Subtitles appear on the screen to translate the inscription:

Party the Love Goddess Way!

GABRIELLE (in disbelief):
Isn't this...a bit much?

APHRODITE:
Honey, you can't have too much of a good thing.

DARION:
This is so cool! Yay!

He runs off toward the table with fruit.

APHRODITE (with a wink):
See, the kid likes it. It's totally rockin'. Well, gotta go check on my girl. See ya!

She vanishes in a flash of golden sparks.

AUTOLYCUS (shakes his head):
I need a drink.

Xena, Gabrielle and Autolykus head toward the bar.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Autolykus making their way through the crowd of guests, sipping from their goblets.

The camera pans out to the terrace, where the sun is setting and the sky is painted in gorgeous colors. Alesia is standing by the railing of the balcony, next to a gaudy gold statue of a scantily clad Aphrodite, deep in conversation with the goddess herself.

CUT TO

Aphrodite and Alesia in medium closeup.

ALESIA:
You know what I realized? Yes, I care about Laertes. But what I was really *in love with* was this fairy-tale romance when I was innocent and young... I had always wondered if I had made a terrible mistake leaving him. And now...

APHRODITE:
And now?

ALESIA:
And now, I know that I should stop living in the past. I'm the person I am today because I went on the road and had those adventures. Maybe I'll find true love, maybe not. But I should let Laertes get on with his life.

APHRODITE:
You sure?

ALESIA:

Yeah. (sheepishly) Are you mad? I mean, it looks like you did all this work for nothing and all because--

APHRODITE:

Nah, sweet pea, don't worry about it. (smiles warmly) You needed to figure this out for yourself. And without help from your fairy godsmother, you never would have gotten that chance, would you now?

ALESIA:

Thank you.

They hug affectionately.

APHRODITE:

Well, enjoy the party, babe. I'm due back on Olympus.

She vanishes in a shower of golden sparks, blowing Alesia a kiss. Alesia turns and leans on the railing, looking out at the sunset.

The camera pulls back to show Anticlea standing nearby, intently examining the leaves and flowers of a potted plant.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Autolykus standing inside the room.

AUTOLYCUS (worried):

I don't like this.

XENA:

Well, it's Aphrodite's taste in decorating. (to Gabrielle) Better watch Darion, or he'll--

AUTOLYCUS (interrupts):

No, no--I don't mean the party. Look! (he points to Anticlea) See how close she is to Alesia? I really hope Anticlea doesn't do...anything I would do.

GABRIELLE (shocked):

Autolykus! How can you say that about your own daughter?

AUTOLYCUS:

Well, that's just it. She *is* my daughter.

GABRIELLE:

Point taken.

XENA:

And she's got a pretty good reason to be pissed off at Alesia. I better go and--

Before she can finish, a window shatters, causing guests to shout and squeal. An incendiary device falls on the floor, emitting thick clouds of smoke. A second window shatters and a second device lands on the floor. A panic erupts. A third bomb lands on the terrace.

Through the smoke, some thugs are seen leaping onto the terrace. In the smoke and the general melee, it's almost impossible to figure out what's going on.

As the smoke clears for a moment, we see Nell the Nasty on the terrace.

NELL THE NASTY (cackling):

There! Grab 'em!

Pan back to Xena, who spots Nell and scowls.

XENA (in a low, half-growling voice):

Nell...

Xena tries to make her way toward the terrace but is trapped amongst the stampeding crowd of frightened guests.

GABRIELLE:

Darion! Where are you?

The camera pulls back to show Gabrielle making her way through the room.

CUT TO

Xena and Autolycus finally make their way out onto the terrace. As the smoke clear, Anticlea and Alesia are nowhere in sight.

XENA:

Alesia?

AUTOLYCUS:

Anticlea?

The camera pans down to a piece of parchment on the floor. Autolycus bends down and picks it up, then scans the contents.

AUTOLYCUS (dismayed and shocked):

No... this can't be! This is ridiculous!

XENA:

What's going on?

AUTOLYCUS:

They've been kidnapped for a million dinar ransom! I didn't even steal nearly that much!

GABRIELLE (coming out on the terrace with Darion):

Oh, you've got to be kidding.

The camera pans to Laertes, who is seen pushing his way through the crowd as he looks around, clearly searching for someone. Finally he runs out on the terrace.

LAERTES (excited):

That's it--the wedding is back on, for midday tomorrow. I've got it all figured out! I--

He stops short and looks around.

LAERTES:

What's going on? (looks around) Where's Anticlea?

Medium close-up on Xena, Gabrielle and Autolykus, looking dejected, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

FEMALE GUEST #1:

Oh, Helga, this is absolutely ridiculous!

HELGA:

I know. We all show up, and now the wedding party is missing!

FEMALE GUEST #1:

If it weren't such a good excuse to show off my new dresses, I'd stop coming. This wedding is never going to happen.

The camera pans around the same beautiful clearing as the near-wedding ceremony. Once again, chairs are set up and the guests are gathered. From the angle of the sun, it is easily recognizable as midday--the wedding that Laertes had called back on.

The guests are muttering irritably to themselves and using the opportunity to gossip about this latest failure. The priest has fallen asleep behind the podium.

King Gordus, Queen Emma, King Lycaon and Queen Hermonia are all huddled near the podium, clearly upset.

KING GORDUS:

That boy... (shakes his head) too much like his father...

QUEEN EMMA:

And which bride, exactly, were we expecting?

KING LYCAON (muttering to himself):

Sileni's never going to let us hear the end of this...she just *had* to be right this one time...

QUEEN HERMONIA (sighs dramatically):
There better be a good excuse for this!

DISSOLVE TO

A field with a barn sitting in the middle of it.

XENA (voice-over):
There is just no excuse for this--this...

Zoom in on Xena, Gabrielle, Autolykus and Laertes standing in front of the barn--the same one where we saw Gascar, Greba and Nell the Nasty earlier. The shack even has a banner stretched across it: *Princesses inside. Dinars to enter.*

LAERTES:
Come on, let's do it. They're just a bunch of stupid thugs.

XENA:
Never underestimate stupid thugs.

GABRIELLE (teasing):
Afraid of facing Nell the Nasty again?

AUTOLYCUS:
Guys, come on! This is serious. Those stupid thugs could hurt my kid in there.

XENA:
Or Alesia.

AUTOLYCUS (grudgingly):
Yeah, yeah.

Cautiously, they approach the barn.

CUT TO

Inside the barn. Barcanor is looking out a tiny window in its side.

BARCANOR (turns around):
They're coming!

Pan to Gascar, Greba and Nell at the other end of the barn. Alesia and Anticlea are also there, tied up with ropes.

ALESIA (contemptuously):
You realize you're all about to get your butts kicked.

NELL THE NASTY (snarls):
Been there, done that, got the bruises to prove it.

GASCAR (with an evil chuckle):

Let them come. This time, we're ready for them. (to the thugs) Haul 'em up!

Pan to a couple of thugs putting on ropes. Alesia and Anticlea cry out as they're hauled up to their feet and lifted off the ground.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, Autolykus and Laertes at the door of the barn. They walk in.

CUT TO

Inside the barn. Xena and the others survey the situation.

There is a muddy pool dug into the ground, with two poles on each side and two ropes stretched between the poles over the pool. Anticlea and Alesia are suspended from the middle of the ropes, dangling over the pool, their hands tied in front of them.

LAERTES and AUTOLYCUS (in unison):

Anticlea!

ANTICLEA:

I'm all right!

LAERTES (looks a little guiltily at Alesia):

Alesia--are you okay?

ALESIA:

Fine--nothing to worry about. (Tries to laugh) I did always say I wanted adventure...

XENA:

Don't worry, we'll get you out of here.

NELL THE NASTY:

Oh no you won't. Try anything funny, and we'll cut them down!

GABRIELLE (looks down):

You'll...drop them into the mud? That's supposed to scare us?

GASCAR:

Not just any mud.

A pair of jaws snaps up from the mud at the two young women's dangling feet. They scream and try to pull up their feet.

LAERTES (frightened):

What was that?

GASCAR (waving his good arm cheerily):

Crocodiles, boy. One false move--and they'll make you--or your girlfriends--look like me. (points to the stump of his other arm) And that's the best-case scenario.

Pan to the pool from Alesia and Anticlea's point of view. We see the two young women's dangling feet and several crocodiles swimming around in the muddy water underneath. Another croc reaches up, snapping his jaws. The two women cry out and try to tuck in their feet.

Xena, Gabrielle, Autolykus and Laertes exchanged alarmed looks.

AUTOLYCUS:

How do you even get crocodiles to Greece?

XENA (shrugs):

Just--go with the flow.

She turns back toward Gascar and his confederates.

XENA:

What do you want?

GASCAR:

What, you don't know how to read ransom notes? We want the gold! So you better have it with you.

GREBA:

For starters--you can put down your weapons. Now! Or we'll cut them down!

AUTOLYCUS:

Hey, if you get them killed you can forget all about that ransom!

GASCAR (grins evilly):

Maybe we'll just kill one and collect for the other. (looking at Autolykus) I'd say a queen is worth a lot more than the daughter of some has-been thief.

AUTOLYCUS (insulted):

Has-been thief? Oh, you're asking for it!

Xena puts a hand on his shoulder and he makes a visible effort to restrain himself.

GREBA:

Like I said--weapons down!

With a sign, Autolykus throws down his dagger, Laertes his sword, Gabrielle her sais. Xena puts down her sword and chakram. She notices something; the camera follows her line of sight and we see Nell looking at the chakram with a covetous glint in her eye. Zoom in on Xena as she obviously gets an idea.

XENA (picks up the chakram and stands up straight):

I've got a deal for you, Nell!

NELL THE NASTY (mistrustful):

What's that?

XENA:

You can have this (gives the chakram a twirl on her finger) if you release one of the girls. Let Anticlea go.

NELL THE NASTY:

You'll let me have your toy? (eyeing Xena's chakram with licked lips) Oooh. (with an evil cackle) That would *really* sting, wouldn't it, Warrior Princess? You'd know how I felt when you wouldn't let me play ball!

XENA (nods carefully, humoring her):

I--sure would.

GASCAR (to Nell):

Hey, wait a minute! We didn't agree to any deals. We're in this for the gold.

NELL THE NASTY:

Vengeance is worth more than gold! (she gnashes her teeth at Xena)

GREBA:

Wait, wait, wait--

NELL THE NASTY:

Shut up, you--bird-brained bimbo!

GREBA (to Gascar, with a gasp):

Gascar! Did you hear what sh--

GASCAR (interrupts, holding up his one hand in a "time-out" gesture):

Wait a minute! That's exactly what she wants--to pit us against each other! Then, while we're distracted, she'll pull off something smart. (to Xena, with a nasty grin) Oh, you're good. But I've got you figured out.

XENA (with a small, cold smile):

Have you. (To Nell) How about it, Nell? Let her go and you can have the chakram.

NELL THE NASTY (after a moment's hesitation):

All right. (to Gascar and Greba) Out of my way! We still have the other girl. We'll get our money. (to Barcanor) Pull the rope!

Barcanor pulls on the rope and Anticlea is pulled toward Nell and the other thugs. Gascar and Greba eye Nell with displeasure but do not interfere. When Anticlea is nearly on the ground, Nell motions to Barcanor to stop.

NELL THE NASTY (growls):

Now throw it! And no tricks, Xena!

Xena throws the chakram; Gabrielle gasps. The camera follows the chakram as it lands at Nell's feet. She snatches it up.

NELL THE NASTY (with a maniacal cackle):

It's mine! Eat your heart out, Warrior Princess!

She hangs the chakram on her belt, then grabs a dagger, cuts the rope that fastens Anticlea to the rope over the pool and then the rope binding her hands, and pushes her in the direction of Xena, Autolycus and the others. Autolycus and Laertes gasp with joy and relief.

GASCAR (to Nell):

That wasn't the plan, you crazy old hag!

NELL THE NASTY (snarls):

Shut up, hairball, or you might lose that other arm!

Anticlea runs toward her rescuers.

ANTICLEA:

Laertes! Daddy!

GASCAR:

All right--now let's have the gold!

GABRIELLE (quietly, to Xena):

I hope there's a second part to this plan.

XENA (smirking):

Yeah, watch. (quietly, to Laertes) Don't make a sound.

Laertes gives her a puzzled look. She shrugs her shoulders, ejecting the breast dagger from her breastplate (like in "Death Mask"); catching the dagger, she throws it at Alesia. Laertes gasps.

Close-up on the dagger as it swishes through the air, then cuts the rope that binds Alesia's hands. Alesia catches the dagger, grabbing the rope stretched over the pool with her free hand; then, she cuts the rope on which she's suspended, throws the dagger back to Xena (who catches it with a smile) and then grabs the rope over her head with her other hand.

GASCAR:

Hey, what's going on? Get her!

Alesia swings on the rope back and forth like an acrobat, while several crocodiles rear up trying to snap at her. Finally, she gains enough momentum and leaps. Quick pan to the amazed faces of Laertes, Gabrielle, Autolycus and Anticlea. Xena is smiling.

LAERTES (shouts):

Alesia!

Alesia lands on the side of the pool and runs toward the group. The camera pulls back and we see that Autolycus now has his arm around Anticlea's shoulders.

ALESIA (joyfully):

Xena!

Xena hugs her.

XENA:

I knew you could do it.

GABRIELLE (amazed):

How?

XENA:

I'll tell you later. (She gestures toward Gascar, Nell, Greba and the thugs.)

GASCAR (furious):

You think you've won, don't you, Xena? Well, think again! (he draws his sword with his one good hand) Charge!

NELL THE NASTY (grabs the chakram off her belt):

You're about to get a taste of your own chakram, Warrior Princess!

Snarling, the thugs draw their swords and charge after Gascar and Nell.

GREBA (cheers from the sidelines):

After them!

GASCAR:

Kill them all!

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

Not so fast there, Mister. You have one serious attitude problem.

Pan to Aphrodite, the golden sparks still clearing around her. She glances at the dirt around her, then makes a face and floats up above the floor, then blows a stream of hearts in a kiss at the thugs behind Gascar and Nell.

The thugs suddenly drop their weapons and begin to bawl, hugging amidst exclamations of "I love you, man!"

Furious, Gascar turns toward them, brandishing his sword.

GASCAR:

Pulls yourselves together, you wimps!

GREBA:

Go get 'em, Gascar!

APHRODITE (looks at Greba):

And you, Miss Thing, need to settle down.

Aphrodite waves her arm and Greba's eyes suddenly cloud over in a way that usually only occurs when Ares is around. She launches herself at Gascar, catching him around the waist and dragging him to the ground.

GREBA:

Oh, Gascar, let's get married. And buy a nice little cottage. And we'll hang your sword in the living room and hustle old women for their money and...

GASCAR:

Woman! Let go of me!

Meanwhile, Nell the Nasty approaches Xena.

NELL THE NASTY (awkwardly brandishing the chakram):

You think it's over, Xena? I will always be after you!

Meanwhile, Greba's squeals and Gascar's protesting grunts are heard in the background as we see them rolling around, Gascar trying in vain to free himself from her clutches.

APHRODITE (looks at Nell):

Eww, that is one nasty chicka.

She blows some hearts at Nell.

NELL THE NASTY:

I will al--

Close-up on Nell as the hearts reach her. She pauses for a moment, her expression changing suddenly to a mellow and sentimental one.

NELL THE NASTY (continues):

--always love you with all my heart!

Pan to Xena, who gives her a startled look, then back to Nell as her face crumples and tears start rolling down her face.

The camera pulls back for a medium wide shot. In the blurry background, we see Gascar and Greba still rolling around on the floor. Their voices can be heard in the background as Greba squeals, "I love you, you big hunk of--" and Gascar snarls "Stop it!"

NELL THE NASTY (continues, tearfully):

All I ever wanted was to be your friend! Here, take it! (gives Xena the chakram)

XENA (taken aback):

Umm--thank you, Nell.

She takes the chakram and hangs it on her belt.

In the background, where Gascar and Greba are still rolling around, muffled kisses are heard. Gascar's growl turns to a satisfied grunt followed by "Oh, yeah!"

Nell, still sniffing, throws her arms around her as Xena tries gingerly to back away without pushing her.

XENA:

That's all right, Nell. (pats her on the back)

Aphrodite giggles while Nell lays a big sloppy kiss on Xena's cheek. Xena does not look happy.

GABRIELLE (amused):

At least this time, she didn't bite you.

XENA (turning toward the group of thugs, with Nell's arms still locked around her):

Barcanor. Barcanor--come get your mother!

Barcanor breaks free of a group hug with his fellow thugs and shuffles toward Xena.

BARCANOR (sniffing):

Thank you so much, Xena. (touches Nell's shoulder) Come along, mom.

NELL THE NASTY (sniffing):

We're friends, aren't we?

XENA (playing along, uncomfortably):

Um--yeah. Sure. (smiles as if at a child) Sure we are.

Nell finally disengages. Barcanor starts bawling again and leans in for a hug that Xena dodges.

BARCANOR (to his brothers, who are still with the other thugs, hugging and weeping):

Come on, guys!

He leads his mother away as his three brothers follow, sniffing. At the door of the barn, Nell the Nasty turns and blows Xena a kiss.

NELL THE NASTY:

Bye, Xena! Come and visit us at the old fortress! I'll bake cookies!

Xena smiles awkwardly and waves at her.

The other thugs trudge toward the door as well. Gaspar and Greba are the last to leave, stopping a few times to kiss passionately.

AUTOLYCUS (shakes his head):

Get a room, guys.

APHRODITE (giggles):

I'm sure they will.

XENA (to Aphrodite):

What did you do to them?

APHRODITE (shrugging one shoulder):

Duh! Just got them in touch with their emotions. It'll wear off in a few hours, so if I were you, I wouldn't drop by for those cookies.

XENA (dryly):

I'm so disappointed.

Pan to Alesia, Laertes and Anticlea.

LAERTES:

Alesia, I... (awkwardly) I'll always care about you, but--

ALESIA (finishes for him):

--but Anticlea is the one you truly love.

Laertes nods.

ALESIA:

I think I knew that. (she kisses Laertes' cheek) Be happy.

ANTICLEA (to Alesia):

By the way, this belongs to you. (Hands Alesia a diamond bracelet)

ALESIA (gasps):

What! (glances at her wrist) How did you--

ANTICLEA (grins at her):

Trade secret. I just wanted to make a point.

ALESIA (takes the bracelet and puts it back on, not quite knowing how to react):

Uh--thank you.

AUTOLYCUS (puts an arm around Alesia):

Ah, that's my girl.

LAERTES (to Alesia, still uncomfortable):

Are you going to stay for the wedding?

ALESIA (thinks a moment):

No, thanks. I think I'm going to... (glances at Aphrodite) catch up with an old friend.

APHRODITE (smiles proudly):

Aww--isn't she sweet?

XENA:

Aphrodite, you let them sort it out for themselves. I'm very proud of you.

APHRODITE (with a little wink):

I'm touched, Warrior Babe. But hey, I still want to help. (lowers her voice) Are you and Bro--

XENA (her face unflinching, holds out a hand to stop her):

We'll sort it out.

APHRODITE:

I know you will. (To Gabrielle) Bye, Gabby! (to Laertes and Anticlea) Good luck, you two. (to Autolykus) Congratulations. (to Alesia) Come on.

She walks off arm in arm with Alesia. The two disappear mid-stride in a shower of golden sparks.

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

GABRIELLE:

So, how did you know Alesia would be able to free herself and make that jump?

XENA:

She told me. See, in the five years she spent seeking adventure, she traveled with a group of acrobats for a while. Apparently, she really wanted to learn how to do jumps and flips because, well-- (she clears her throat self-consciously)

GABRIELLE:

Let me guess. She wanted to be like you?

XENA (nods):

Uh-huh.

GABRIELLE (smiles warmly):

It happens.

The two women look affectionately at each other.

LAERTES:

She's a remarkable woman. (to Anticlea) Don't worry. I know whom I love.

They kiss.

AUTOLYCUS (clears his throat and averts his eyes):

Come on, you two. We've got a wedding waiting to happen.

Autolykus, Anticlea and Laertes walk off together.

Xena and Gabrielle walk after them, out into the field.

GABRIELLE (shaking her head):

Maybe Aphrodite did learn her lesson. Who knew that all a god needs is--

XENA (embarrassed):

Don't say it.

GABRIELLE (blithely):

--The love of a good princess.

XENA:

So not funny.

A long shot of the two walking through the field.

GABRIELLE (fading out):

Oh, yes it was. You're just too close to see the humor.

DISSOLVE TO

A mixture of regally dressed figures (from Laertes' side) and random people (Autolycus' friends) are seated for the wedding--again. Despite everything, there is not a spare seat to be found. Some people are even standing in the back, eager to see if this wedding will actually go on. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are sitting together in the front row.

Laertes is standing in front of the arch, dressed in an elegant purple and green robe and a white shirt with gold trim. He looks very happy, if slightly nervous.

Music begins to play. Everyone looks down the aisle to see Anticlea walk up, arm in arm with Autolycus. She is wearing her white wedding dress with a veil, a wreath of flowers on her head and carrying a bouquet in her hand. She walks slowly toward Laertes with a smile on her face and tears in her eyes. Autolycus, this time, is nearly bawling.

Anticlea stops in front of the arch, facing Laertes. Autolycus steps back. The priest looks at the two of them gently, if curiously and a little apprehensively. Anticlea and Laertes hold hands.

PRIEST:

We are here today... (pauses) ...*again*... to unite in marriage this man, King Laertes of Tyrins, and this woman, Anticlea of Cyros. (looks out at the crowd) If anyone should know of a reason these two should not be joined in matrimony--

CHILD'S VOICE (pipes up off-camera):

Hey!

A murmur goes through the crowd. Autolycus looks ready to kill; Laertes and Anticlea blanch.

The camera pans back to show a little girl in a pretty blue dress stand up. The astute viewer will recognize her as Annabel from "Lost and Found."

ANNABEL (innocently):

I've got to go to the bathroom.

A general sigh of relief runs through the crowd as people turn back to look at the child. Autolycus wipes his forehead, as do Laertes and the priest with an identical gesture.

Annabel's mother shushes her, takes her hand and leads her away. At the end of the aisle, Annabel turns around and sticks out her tongue at the priest.

Pan to Xena and Gabrielle, looking in Annabel's direction.

XENA (quietly to Gabrielle):

Wait, was that--?

GABRIELLE (quietly):

Nah, it couldn't be.

AUTOLYCUS (nudges the priest from the side):

Could we hurry it along here?

PRIEST:

Right. Do you, Laertes, take Anticlea to be your wife?

LAERTES (sincerely):

I do.

PRIEST:

And, Anticlea, do you take Laertes to be your husband?

There is a pause, and the crowd waits with baited breath.

ANTICLEA:

Yes. (nervously) I mean...I do.

A general sigh of relief.

PRIEST:

Then, I pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.

Anticlea and Laertes move in, tentatively at first, for a kiss. As soon as their lips touch, all reservations are gone, and they kiss passionately and happily. Autolycus averts his eyes, while the crowd cheers.

DISSOLVE TO

An overhead shot of the reception, being held conveniently in the same beautiful clearing as the wedding. It's late afternoon. People are dancing, eating and drinking. The camera moves in to show Anticlea and Laertes dancing, lost in each other. Autolycus stands to the side, watching them, clearly moved.

DISSOLVE TO

Back in the outdoor temple in Cyra (from "If the Shoe Fits"). It is in significantly more decay than when we last saw it. Aphrodite and Alesia are sitting next to a golden statue that has lost its head.

ALESIA (sighs):

I know this was the right thing to do. But... (trails off)

APHRODITE:

But what? Remember, this is your fairy godsmother you're talking to.

ALESIA:

But I still can't help thinking that maybe I missed my chance at true love.

APHRODITE:

Well, I could get you (mimes snapping) some hot boy right now. (with a little sigh) But sometimes, you gotta wait for things to happen the (she wrinkles her nose) *mortal* way. (pauses) And besides...you still got me.

Alesia looks up and smiles. Aphrodite's eyes light up and she smiles as well, pulling Alesia into a tight hug and laughing.

The camera slowly pulls back as the goddess and her mortal friend laugh amidst the ruins of Aphrodite's temple.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion walking toward the stables. The sun is starting to set.

DARION (dazed and joyous):

Xena, Gabrielle--guess what!

XENA (teasing):

What, you wanna get married now too?

DARION (nodding):

Yeah! I met this *really* pretty girl at the party.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange shocked looks.

GABRIELLE (trying not to laugh at Darion's crush):

Well, before you get married, young man, you better tell us her name.

DARION (excited):

Her name is Annabel!

Xena and Gabrielle exchange horrified looks as ominous-sounding music is cued in.

GABRIELLE:

Annabel.

DARION:

Yeah. Her mom is the new royal cook. She was telling me about all this cool stuff she used to find on the beach, and once--

His voice trails off as they continue to walk. Xena's voice rises for a moment.

XENA:

Must be in the air.

They continue to walk away from the camera as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[The Hatred and Personal Vengeance Addicts Anonymous twelve-step program suffered a minor setback during the production of this motion picture.]