

SHIPPER SEASON NINE

“World’s Apart”

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Logline

Thrown into the vortex created by a battle of two gods, Xena and the now-mortal Ares find themselves in a world at once familiar, strange, and terrifying--neither of them knowing the other is there as well. Xena and Gabrielle's paths cross once again, while Ares faces an uncertain fate after falling into the hands of a cruel tyrant.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Previously on Xena...

[MONTAGE]

Ares is facing the Fates at a crumbling loom.

CLOTHO:

You--God of War--

LACHESIS:

--will be--

ATROPOS:

--the next to fall.

Fear begins to fill Ares' face.

CUT TO

Ares and Xena in a temple.

ARES (quietly):

Being the God of War--isn't what it used to be.

XENA (puts her hand on his arm):

You were mortal, Ares--and it's changed you.

CUT TO

Under a gray sky, Ares stands before Apollo and Artemis. He holds up both hands with the palms outwards. Apollo and Artemis each hold up a hand; Apollo's hand begins to glow gold, Artemis' a bright green. A blue glow starts to radiate from Ares' hands.

CUT TO

Apollo and Artemis stand in front of a tomb.

ARTEMIS:

If we can increase our power at another god's expense...

APOLLO:

You can count on me, sis.

CUT TO

Althea, at the head of her army, raises her sword.

ALTHEA (shouts):

For you, great goddess!

CUT TO

A hilltop. It's raining. Artemis and Apollo stand completely dry, looking down on the battlefield. There is a flash of blue light and Ares appears standing between them.

CUT TO

ZEUS (shakes his head):

Those fools.

CUT TO

The hilltop. Apollo falls, the dagger of Helios sticking out of his chest.

ZEUS (voice-over):

Fighting amongst ourselves will only ensure our destruction.

ARTEMIS (screams in anguish and rage):

Noooooooooooooooooooo!

CUT TO

Xena and Ares in the temple, in the earlier scene.

ARES:

Xena, if I decide to give it all up, it's going to be *my* choice--on *my* terms.

CUT TO

The hilltop. Artemis is holding a struggling Antigone with the right hand, Darion with the left.

ARTEMIS:

I'll make it simple, Ares.

Artemis and Apollo drain Ares of his powers.

ARTEMIS (voice-over):

Give up your godhood to us--or these two die.

CUT TO

Xena, Ares, Gabrielle, Hercules and Darion on a country road. Artemis stands in their path.

ARTEMIS:

You killed my brother, Xena.

CUT TO

Artemis extends her hands and launches a surge of green lightning.

CUT TO

Xena dives away from the bolt, pulling Ares with her.

CUT TO

ATHENA:

You aren't going to harm them!

Artemis sends another surge of lightning toward Athena; the lightning bolts of the two goddesses collide. The explosion creates a great ball of energy with a blue vortex at the center. The ball explodes and then dissipates, creating waves that ripple through the air.

CUT TO

Gabrielle, Hercules, Darion, and Athena are standing on the road. Argo and Klio are behind them. There is no sign of Xena or Ares.

HERCULES (shouts):

Xena? Ares?

There is only silence.

GABRIELLE:

What happened to them?

[END OF MONTAGE]

Gabrielle, Hercules, Athena, and Darion are in the field, with the two horses nearby.

ATHENA:

That--vortex that opened up... (she shakes her head) they could have been thrown to some distant land. Or even to another world. I will try to find out what I can.

She vanishes.

DARION:

What if they're dead?

Gabrielle whirls around and grabs Darion's shoulders.

GABRIELLE (vehemently):

Don't say that! Xena is not dead! She can't be--

CUT TO

Xena lies in a field, unconscious, on her back. She stirs and groans.

CUT TO

Gabrielle clutching at Darion's shoulders.

GABRIELLE:

She can't be dead.

Darion's face crumples and he bursts into tears.

GABRIELLE (continues):

She--

She stops suddenly in her tracks, realizing that she has frightened Darion. Hercules comes up and puts a calming hand on her arm.

GABRIELLE (takes a deep breath):

I--I'm sorry. Darion, I didn't mean to-- (she hugs him, then lets go and stands up) I'm just--so worried about...

She shakes her head, trailing off.

Hercules picks up the still-tearful Darion in his arms.

HERCULES:

It's all right, Darion. (To Gabrielle) It's going to be all right.

CUT TO

Close-up on Ares. He is lying face down on the ground. Slowly, he opens an eye and looks around.

The camera pans around to show a brick wall and a garbage heap, from the angle of someone lying on the ground. Then we see a beggar rummaging in the garbage.

Ares groans and sits up, rubbing his forehead. The beggar, a middle-aged man with shaggy hair and graying beard, turns toward him.

BEGGAR:

Well now, my friend. You were out for a while. (He chuckles)

ARES (still somewhat groggy):

How... (he clears his throat) how did I get here?

BEGGAR (chuckles):

Funny you should ask. Strangest thing--I could'a sworn there was a *huge* ball of light that came outta nowhere, and then it was gone and--well, there you were. (chuckles again) But you know how it is, sir. The cheap wine sure does play tricks on the eyes.

ARES:

Right.

He scrambles to his feet and walks unsteadily toward the beggar. The beggar contemplates him with evident curiosity.

BEGGAR:

Then again--looks like you don't know how you got here, either, huh? (he bursts into a hoarse laughter that turns to a cough) Looks like you've been hitting the wineskin yourself, haventch'a!

With another guffaw, he slaps Ares fraternally on the shoulder. Ares gives him a startled look.

ARES:

So--where *is* "here," anyway?

The beggar gapes at him, then starts laughing again, breathing wine fumes right in Ares' face. Ares backs away a little.

BEGGAR:

Ooh-hoo-hoo! It's worse than I thought.

ARES (winces at the smell):

Yeah, it sure is.

BEGGAR (shakes his head and finally manages to control his mirth):

You want to know where we are? I'll tell you, my friend. You're in the great city of Corinth.

ARES (stares at him, nonplussed):

You mean Thebes?

BEGGAR (starts laughing again):

Thebes. Oh, you are a joker. No, no. Not Thebes. (chokes back laughter) This is Corinth all right.

ARES (mutters to himself):

Corinth. How in Tartarus-- (glances at the beggar) Oh, never mind. (mutters) I've got to find Xena.

He starts to walk away.

BEGGAR:

Hey, my friend! How 'bout a little--somethin'?

He makes a "give me money" gesture with his fingers. Ares walks away, ignoring him.

BEGGAR (yells after him angrily):

Thanks for nothin! Ya lousy drunk! (pauses) Shouldn't be walking around like that, anyway! Ya'll only get into trouble!

Ares glances back at him but and continues to walk away.

CUT TO

Xena sits up in the field, rubbing her head.

XENA:

Gabrielle? (after a pause) Ares?

She looks around. She is in the middle of a wheat field. A tattered scarecrow is perched on a pole nearby.

XENA:

What in the--

[FLASHBACK]

ARTEMIS (yells):

Athena, get out of my way!

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena scrambles to her feet, looking somewhat disoriented.

[FLASHBACK]

Artemis and Athena throw lightning bolts and fireballs at each other. Argo and Klio whinny in fright. Gabrielle pulls Darion back.

GABRIELLE:

Xena! Move back!

Artemis sends another surge of lightning toward Athena; once again, the lightning bolts of the two goddesses collide. The huge explosion creates a great ball of energy with a blue swirling vortex at the center.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena looks around. The scarecrow seems to be staring at her with an expression resembling curiosity.

XENA (sighs):

Zapped into the middle of nowhere by a psycho goddess... without my horse. (to the scarecrow) Don't you just hate when that happens.

She starts walking toward the edge of the field.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena walks down a road, looking around suspiciously.

A long shot of the road. Ahead, a crowd seems to have gathered; there are five tall poles looming over the crowd.

Close-up on Xena. She frowns and walks faster.

DISSOLVE TO

A crowd of shabbily dressed, grim-looking peasants. The camera pans over the crowd, then to the several warriors in black and silver uniforms, two on horses and others with horses by their side, and finally to five crosses with people hanging from them--four men and one woman. All five look badly beaten, their clothes torn. All seem either dead or unconscious.

One of the soldiers nudges another, pointing to something.

Pan to Xena, who approaches, a look of horror and revulsion on her face.

XENA:

What have these people done?

One of the men on horseback, who seems to be the leader of the group, turns toward her.

CAPTAIN:

Done? They incited rebellion. I don't know who you are, but you should keep out of this for your own good.

XENA (contemptuously):

Yeah, I've heard that one before.

The villagers look up at her, shocked, as a nervous murmur runs through their ranks.

XENA (continues):

I never seem to listen.

She throws her chakram. It slams into the Captain's helmet, knocking him off his horse, then slices the tops of three warriors' spears as they gape in shock, and returns to Xena who hooks it on her belt.

The second warrior on horseback charges her with a yell. With an ululating battle cry, Xena leaps into the air, somersaults, and slams her feet into his chest, knocking him off his horse.

Drawing her sword, she spars with two men, using a spinning kick to repel a third; then jumps and downs her two opponents with a split kick. Another soldier comes at her from behind; with a grimace of rage, she drives her sword into him with a backward thrust. He falls.

Pan to the villagers, who gasp and murmur, terrified; one of them can be heard saying, "She killed him!"

XENA:

Had enough?

Four soldiers still standing advance on her, driving her toward the crosses. Xena backs away, holding them at bay; then, gaining enough distance to charge, she sprints forward and leaps up, somersaulting over the soldiers' head. On landing, she slams her boots into two of the soldiers just as they start to turn around, and knocks down all four. As the first of them tries to rise, she points a sword at his neck.

XENA (dangerously suave):

I don't know who *you* are, or who you serve--but you better get out of here before I start to play rough.

WARRIOR:

All right...all right!

He drops his sword. Xena steps back, allowing him to get up. The other soldiers go to their horses; two pick up the still-unconscious captain and sling him over the saddle of another warrior's horse, then mount their own horses, glancing back at Xena in fear and bewilderment. They ride away leaving the dead soldier and two horses behind.

Xena looks at the five crucified people, then at the villagers, who are standing still, staring at her.

XENA:

Come on. (gestures toward the crosses) Help me get them down.

No one moves. One of the crucified men groans.

CRUCIFIED MAN (off-camera, hoarsely):

Help me!

XENA:

Didn't you hear me? I said, help me--

A middle-aged villager interrupts her, stepping forward.

VILLAGER #1:

Are you mad? Now, they'll be back with an army and they'll be after *us*!

XENA:

Whose army?

VILLAGER #1 (looks at her with an expression of shock and disbelief):

Whose army! The Monarch's army, of course.

XENA (shocked and disbelieving in turn):

The monarch? What monarch?

VILLAGER #2 (an old woman):

Maybe she *is* mad! (to Xena) *The* monarch. The one that rules everything.

XENA (puzzled):

Everything. You mean, this whole province?

VILLAGER #2 (laughs bitterly):

Province! How about all Greece--all of the Roman Empire--the lands to the North--Britannia. Where have you been the last five years? Asleep in a cave?

Close-up on Xena's face, willed with bewilderment and shock as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

On the same scene as before. A shocked Xena faces the villagers.

XENA (bitterly):

So, they (she gestures toward the crucified people) were only ones in your village who were willing to stand up to this--Monarch.

VILLAGER #1 (sighs):

Look, we're not bad people. But we don't want the Monarch's men burning down our crops and our houses--and we don't want to end up like *them*. (He gestures toward the crosses)

A third villager speaks up--a woman who looks only in her mid-twenties but is already worn out by life's hardships.

VILLAGER #3:

We've all heard about what happened in Laotia, in Aleta--in Potidaea--

On the word "Potidaea," Xena whips around and gives her an alarmed look.

XENA:

What happened?

The woman is about to speak but is interrupted by Villager #1.

VILLAGER #1:

Come on, what are we waiting for? Let's get out of here before there's more trouble!

The villagers start walking away, some of them looking back regretfully at the people on the crosses.

Xena turns and walks toward the crosses. Using her sword, she hacks at the ropes that tie the woman's legs to the cross, then throws the chakram to cut the ropes on her left wrist; the camera follows the chakram back to Xena and then back to the cross where it cuts the ropes on the woman's right hand. With a groan, the woman falls into Xena's arms.

XENA:

Easy--easy...I've got you.

DISSOLVE TO

The same scene, a little later. The woman and one of the men are sitting by the side of the crosses; the other three men lie nearby, motionless. Pan to Xena, who is taking a waterskin off one of the horses. She brings it to the two survivors. The woman takes the waterskin and drinks avidly, then hands it over to the man.

XENA (anguished):

There's nothing I can do for your friends... (gestures toward the bodies) I'm sorry. I was too late. At least I'll give them a decent burial.

WOMAN (raises her head and speaks with unexpected forcefulness):

No. You must leave before those soldiers come back. All of us have to leave--now.

XENA (thinks a moment):

Do you have a place to go? To hide?

MAN:

We'll try to make it to Amazon lands.

XENA (shocked):

The Amazons. They're still free?

WOMAN:

The ones that survived the Monarch's raids are hiding out in the forests, the swamps and mountains--led by Queen Velasca. (Off Xena's visibly shocked reaction) You know her?

XENA (her face hard):

Yeah. I know her. Go on.

WOMAN:

A lot of people are joining them now--the ones who want to fight against this monster. (She leans on the man's shoulders and gets to her feet, facing Xena.) Come with us. They could use a fighter like you.

Xena thinks a moment, then shakes her head.

XENA:

Later. I have to find--a friend of mine.

She walks to one of the horses, then stops and looks back as the woman helps the man to his feet.

MAN (to Xena):

Thank you.

XENA:

What happened in Potidaea?

WOMAN:

We heard someone there sheltered a rebel on the run--and the Monarch's troops wiped out half the town in retaliation.

Xena shudders, horrified.

XENA:

Is it a long way from here?

MAN:

Well, we're about twenty leagues north of Amfissa. (Pan to Xena, who looks confused) You keep going north, you should make it in four or five days, on a good horse like this one. I'd suggest you wear something that... (hesitates) doesn't attract as much attention.

Xena nods, understanding.

XENA:

Thanks for the advice. Now--take the other horse and go as quickly as you can.

WOMAN:

What about you?

Xena reflects for a moment, looking at the dead bodies.

XENA:

There's something I have to do here first.

DISSOLVE TO

A montage of dissolving shots:

- * The man and the woman ride off on one of the horses.
- * Xena uses her sword to dig a shallow grave off the side of the road
- * Xena carries one of the dead
- * Xena scoops up the soil and covers the bodies
- * Xena mounts the horse and rides off
- * A wide shot of the fields and the road, with five empty crosses.

DISSOLVE TO

A city street. There seems to be a stamp of shabbiness, bleakness and gloom on everything, from the buildings to the people's faces.

Ares wanders into view, looking around in obvious bewilderment.

MAN (off-camera):
Hey! You!

Ares continues to walk on.

Medium close-up on Ares as a hand comes down on his shoulder.

MAN (off-camera):
I'm talking to *you*, scum!

ARES (whips around):
What the--

He finds himself facing three brawny soldiers, uniformed exactly like the ones at the crucifixion in the previous scene.

SOLDIER #1:
Yeah. You.

ARES:
Is there a problem?

SOLDIER #2:
Oh yeah, there is. *Your* problem.

He laughs, the other soldiers joining in the laughter.

SOLDIER #1:
You don't serve in the Monarch's army, do you?

ARES:
Can't say I do.

SOLDIER #1:

Then what are you doing with that, you dog? (points to Ares' sword)

ARES (puts his hand on the hilt of the sword):

You keep that up and maybe I'll show you.

WOMAN (off-camera):

Don't even think about it.

The camera pulls back to show a woman with her sword drawn and pointed at Ares. Along with Ares, we recognize her as Mavican. She is dressed in a uniform like the others', except in a leather skirt instead of pants and with an ornate silver emblem on her chest. There are two more soldiers standing behind her.

Close-up on Ares, who gapes at her, speechless. In his astonishment he lowers his hand from the hilt of his sword.

MAVICAN:

Now, give it up. (off his uncomprehending look) The sword. Drop it!

ARES:

Mavican?

Mavican slowly strides up to him until she is right in his face.

ARES (recovering from the shock):

Well, well. I guess I shouldn't have left you hanging from a vine all those years ago. So--where'd you get the ambrosia? Or was it Odin's golden apples?

MAVICAN:

I have *no* idea what you're talking about--or how you know me-- (she studies him for a moment) but it's *Captain* Mavican to you.

She punctuates this by punching him in the stomach with her left hand, so hard that he gasps and grimaces with pain.

ARES (catching his breath):

What'd you have to do to get *this* job? (He smirks at her) Or should I say--*who*?

Enraged, Mavican moves to punch him again; Ares blocks her punch and simultaneously grabs and twists the wrist of her right arm, making her drop her sword. Furious, Mavican wrests her arms free.

MAVICAN:

Don't--make--another move.

The camera pulls back to show two of the soldiers with crossbows pointed at Ares. Ares looks from one to the other, breathing hard.

ARES:

Pity, I was just warming up.

Mavican picks up her sword and glares at him.

MAVICAN:

Drop the sword!

ARES:

No chance of a rematch? (off her glare) Guess not. (He unhooks the sword from his swordbelt and drops it on the ground.) Well, you did win fair and square--

He is interrupted by the tip of Mavican's sword pressing up against his face.

MAVICAN (hisses):

One more word out of you--and that'll be the last word you ever speak. You got that? (She pauses, then removes the sword) Yes, I think you have.

She steps back. The two soldiers taking aim at Ares lower their crossbows. Mavican nods to one of the other soldiers, indicating Ares' sword.

MAVICAN:

Pick it up.

The soldier picks it up and admiringly examines the hilt and scabbard.

SOLDIER #1:

Nice workmanship.

MAVICAN (nodding toward Ares):

Chain him up.

Two of the soldiers grab Ares' arms, one of them taking a pair of manacles off his belt.

SOLDIER #3:

Hey, Cap'n--take a look at them gauntlets!

He holds up Ares' forearm, showing off the gem-studded gauntlet to Mavican. Ares wrenches his arm free with a snarl. Mavican purses her lips, exasperated.

MAVICAN (to a soldier with a crossbow):

Shoot him.

The soldier raises the crossbow, aiming it straight at Ares' chest. Ares gulps down nervously, then manages to steady himself.

ARES:

That's a little extreme, don't you think?

MAVICAN (to the soldier):

Kill him if he gives us any more trouble. (To the soldiers, nodding at the gauntlets) Get them off him.

Two of the soldiers take off Ares' gauntlets.

ARES:

Well, now that that you ask nicely...

The soldiers chain Ares' hands; Mavican looks him over, then takes hold of the pendant on his neck.

ARES (smirks at her):

Still can't keep your hands off me, huh?

Mavican contemplates him for a moment, then hits him in the face so hard that he staggers and nearly falls. He coughs and spits out some blood. He looks like he's about to say something but stops under Mavican's glare.

Mavican smiles with satisfaction and steps back, then nods to the soldiers.

MAVICAN:

Let's go.

CUT TO

A cell in a dungeon, with four bedraggled men lying on piles of straw. A guard opens the grill door.

GUARD:

You got company!

Ares is shoved into the cell and the door is slammed shut and locked behind him. He stands looking around, disoriented, his eyes still not used to the dark.

Two of the prisoners stir and sit up.

PRISONER #1 (with bitter irony):

Make yourself at home.

He waves toward a pile of straw in a free corner of the cell. After a moment's hesitation, Ares stumbles toward it and sits down, dropping his head in his hands.

PRISONER #2:

What'd they get ya for?

ARES (shrugs):

You know--wrong place, wrong time. (he ponders this for a moment) *Really* wrong. (pauses) Say--who's this *monarch* they were talking about?

The prisoners stare at him silently.

ARES:

What? The king of Corinth?

The prisoners continue to stare at him, the fourth man now sitting up as well.

PRISONER #2:

Buddy, either they hit you on the head real hard when they grabbed you, or you should 'a been locked up for making bad jokes.

CUT TO

A forest at dusk. The exterior of a cave. The horse Xena took from the dead soldier is grazing nearby. Xena, in her white linen tunic, is on her knees, burying her armor and her sword. She pauses, contemplating her chakram, then puts it into a saddlebag lying on the ground. She slips her breast dagger there as well. The camera pans to the freshly loosened ground where the sword and armor are buried; then to Xena, who is now on her feet, slipping into a peasant-style blue dress similar to the one she wore in *Chariots of War*.

Xena stands still for a moment. She looks around, then calls out hesitantly.

XENA:

Ares...

There is no response. Xena sighs and shakes her head.

XENA (mutters to herself):

What am I doing...

After a moment she sinks on one knee and looks up, in a pose reminiscent of her prayer in *Return of Callisto*.

XENA (quietly):

I...I don't know if anyone can hear me. I don't know what this is or where I am--but I have nothing here--nothing and no one. Except--maybe--Gabrielle. (pauses, then quietly) Please let her be all right.

She stays still on her knees, as the dusk deepens around her.

CROSS-FADE TO

The sky at sunrise.

CROSS-FADE TO

City. Morning. An exterior view of a castle. There is something gloomy and forbidding about its look, as if it could be either a fortress or a dungeon.

CUT TO

A hallway inside the castle. A long shot of Mavican talking to a guard outside a pair of massive, ornate doors. She is holding Ares' sword. We can't hear the conversation.

Two guards push open the doors and Mavican goes inside, carrying Ares' sword.

CUT TO

Mavican comes out, without the sword, and walks briskly down the hallway.

CUT TO

The dungeon. Mavican, accompanied by a guard, comes up to the cell where Ares is locked up. Ares is stretched out on the straw, his still-manacled hands folded on his stomach, staring into the ceiling.

MAVICAN:

You!

Ares sits up, startled. So do the other prisoners.

MAVICAN (to Ares):

It's your lucky day. The Monarch wants to see you in person.

Ares stands up as the camera zooms in on him. He tries not to show his fear.

The guard unlocks the door.

CUT TO

A long shot of Ares walking down a hallway between two guards, Mavican walking briskly ahead of them.

CUT TO

Ares is ushered through the ornate doors we saw Mavican enter before, inside a large hall.

This is a throne room, large and richly decorated but austere. A throne of black stone with golden ornament stands on a pedestal at the far end of the room. The throne is empty; there are two guards standing at the bottom of the pedestal.

The two guards who brought in Ares march him toward the ornate empty throne, Mavican walking ahead of them. Mavican goes over to speak to one of the two guards by the throne. He walks toward a red-and-gold curtain to the side of the throne, moves the curtain aside and says something, while Mavican walks back toward Ares and the two guards.

MAVICAN (to Ares hisses):

On your knees.

She nods to the guards, who roughly shove Ares down.

The camera, from Ares' point of view, pans to the pedestal of the throne. A woman enters the frame; so far, all we can see is the red dress and the gold sandals and ankle bracelets. The feet go up the steps of the throne, then disappear from view.

MAVICAN:

As you ordered, Conqueror--that's the man.

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

Get up.

Startled by the familiar voice, Ares raises his head...

and finds himself staring straight at Xena. She is wearing a Roman-style red dress and a golden tiara--a very similar outfit to the one she wore in *When in Rome*.

Close-up on Conqueror Xena; she shows a slight sign of shock as she recognizes Ares but her face remains hard.

Close-up on Ares' face, filled with shock, fear, and confusion, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

On the same scene--Ares facing Conqueror Xena.

CONQUEROR XENA (to Mavican and the guards in the throne room, in a steely tone):
Leave us.

Mavican salutes her and walks out in a determined stride. The guards follow, the last two closing the doors behind them with a heavy bang.

Slowly, Conqueror Xena rises, walks down the steps of the throne and approaches Ares, eyeing him with guardedly. He rises gingerly to his feet.

CONQUEROR XENA:

I recognized the sword Mavican took off you. So...what exactly are you up to, hmm?

Ares is silent, still too stunned to speak.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Oh, I get it. You're pretending to be mortal to test my loyalty--is that it? To see if I'll help you when you're without powers? (Sneers) Oh, *please*. Why should I? My loyalty is to Ares, God of War, not to (gestures toward his bruised face) some bashed-up mortal has-been. I don't have time for games. So--drop the act. (She looks at his manacled hands and shakes her head scornfully)

ARES:

Trust me, I wish I could. (He raises his chained hands) This is really not my thing.

Conqueror Xena circles him, looking him over skeptically, then stops.

CONQUEROR XENA:

So you really are mortal. That's what you want me to believe.

She slowly runs her hand up his chest, looking at him with a dangerously seductive smile. Ares gulps down as he looks at her, trying not to show that he is both afraid and affected by her touch.

CONQUEROR XENA:

So--if I were to do this--

Suddenly, she jabs two fingers into his neck. Wheezing, Ares staggers and collapses to his knees.

CONQUEROR XENA (strokes his face, looking at him with a chilling smile):

--you would just--die?

ARES (hoarsely):

Xena--don't--

His nose is bleeding and his eyes start to dim. He seems about to pass out when Conqueror Xena jabs her fingers into his neck again, releasing the pinch. Still on his knees, Ares gasps for breath and lifts his chained hands to rub his neck.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Well. I suppose the only way to find out for sure would be to kill you.

ARES (in a raspy voice, still rubbing his neck):

That would be--a little too final.

CONQUEROR XENA (chuckles):

You're right.

She extends a hand and helps him to his feet.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Want some wine?

ARES (regaining some of his cockiness):

Sure. How about a nice Chian re-- (off her withering glare, finishes, somewhat deflated) --red.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Sit over there.

She nods toward a bench by the wall. He goes over and sits down, watching her warily. Conqueror Xena goes over to a table with some wine jugs and goblets, pours wine into a goblet and brings it over to Ares. He drinks.

CONQUEROR XENA (after a pause):

So. What happened to you?

ARES (after a brief pause):

You know--if I knew that--I'd be glad to tell you.

CONQUEROR XENA (narrowing her eyes at him):

Don't play games with me.

ARES (frustrated):

It's not a game! Athena and Artemis were fighting each other and throwing fire-bolts, in a field near Thebes--and then some sort of portal opened up and next thing I know, I'm here in Corinth. Only

everything's different. I'm not sure if this is a different timeline, or another world. In my world, you-- (he breaks off and looks at her warily)

CONQUEROR XENA (dryly):
I was what?

ARES:
You didn't have any of this. (He nods toward the throne) You were a warrior--that's all.

Conqueror Xena looks at him thoughtfully.

CONQUEROR XENA:
So...when you went through that portal, you lost your godhood?

ARES (looks at her thoughtfully, as if trying to figure out how much to tell her):
Something like that.

In an almost tender gesture, Conqueror Xena puts her hand on his shoulder.

CONQUEROR XENA (in a gentle voice):
You're not really used to pain, are you?

ARES (looks up at her nervously):
I, uh--well. (He fidgets a little) I can handle it.

CONQUEROR XENA (with a catlike smile):
Really. You know, I don't think we're talking about the same kind of pain. (She runs her fingers over Ares' neck and his face, lightly scraping his skin with her fingernails which are painted a dark red. He flinches a little.) And I don't think you want to find out. So, I'll tell you what. If I ask a question-- you better give me a straight answer. (She pauses, letting this sink in) How did you lose your godhood?

ARES (clears his throat):
I--gave it up to Apollo and Artemis to protect someone. Someone close to Xena--*my* Xena.

Conqueror Xena contemplates him for a moment, then walks over to a large gong by the throne and strikes it.

The doors are thrown open and two guards come in. Conqueror Xena beckons to them and to Mavican. They approach.

MAVICAN (salutes):
Conqueror.

CONQUEROR XENA (points to Ares):
Unchain him.

Mavican gives Ares a frankly hostile look as she comes up to him; she takes a key on a chain off her belt, unlocks his manacles and takes them off. Ares winces a little as he rubs his wrists.

CONQUEROR XENA:

I'll be back. Watch him.

She walks toward the doors, then turns.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Don't hit him again if he behaves.

She walks out. The guards shut the doors.

CUT TO

An ornate bedroom. Conqueror Xena stands leaning against a bedpost, her arms folded casually on her chest.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Ares!

A moment passes and she frowns a little.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Ares!

There is a flash of blue light. Ares, God of War, materializes before her. He looks like Season 3 Ares, with long hair and sideburns.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Did you want something, my dear?

CONQUEROR XENA:

Just a little face time with my patron god.

She pulls him toward her and kisses him hard on the mouth. As he takes her in his arms, she pulls back and smiles teasingly.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Unless you're busy, of course. Even a god can't be in two places at the same time...right?

She kisses him again.

CUT TO

The throne room. Seated on the bench, Ares finishes the wine in his goblet under the watchful eye of the two guards, while Mavican paces impatiently back and forth.

The doors open and Conqueror Xena comes in, adjusting her dress a little. She is followed by a plain-looking middle-aged woman in a gray dress, clearly a servant.

Conqueror Xena walks up to Ares, looking at him with a new expression, curious and thoughtful. For a moment, she looks as if she wants to say something; then, she turns to the servant.

CONQUEROR XENA (nods toward Ares):

Put him up in the Egyptian chambers. Let him have everything he needs. (She gives Ares another look; then, with slight mockery) Starting with a bath.

Ares eyes her nervously as he puts down the goblet and gets up. Pan to the guards, who look at him, clearly intrigued; then to Mavican, who is obviously displeased.

SERVANT (inclines her head):

Yes, Conqueror.

She gestures to Ares. He looks at Conqueror Xena, somewhat at a loss for words, then nods to her and follows the servant. The camera tracks them as they walk toward the door.

Pan back to Conqueror Xena.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Wait!

With a start, Ares stops and turns around.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Come here.

Ares approaches her.

ARES:

What?

She looks at his arms and points.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You're not wearing gauntlets.

Pan to Mavican, who flinches visibly; then, to Ares.

ARES (with a smug look at Mavican):

I think you should ask the captain over there about that.

Conqueror Xena turns toward Mavican, her face cold and hard.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You took his gauntlets?

MAVICAN (visibly shaken):

I--I--great Conqueror--I was going to turn them in, I swear--may Ares be my witness--

Conqueror Xena glances wryly at Ares.

MAVICAN (continues):

I'll bring them--right now--

CONQUEROR XENA (coldly):

They're in your quarters?

MAVICAN (pale):

Yes, Conqueror. I--I--

CONQUEROR XENA (steely voice):

Your sword, Mavican.

She holds out her hand. The two guards stare nervously. With trembling hands, Mavican surrenders her sword.

CONQUEROR XENA:

What else did you take?

MAVICAN (stammering):

A p-pendant. T-that's it. The pendant and the gauntlets--but I was going to--

Conqueror Xena extends a hand and presses a finger to Mavican's lips, then strokes her face with a deceptive gentleness.

CONQUEROR XENA (quietly):

An officer of my guard--a common thief. (shakes her head) I'm disappointed.

MAVICAN (sinks to her knees):

Conqueror--*please*--I beg your forgiveness--

CONQUEROR XENA (harshly):

Don't be pathetic. (to the guards) Take her away. I want her hanged in front of the guard at sunset.

MAVICAN (stunned):

What? No. No, you can't--*please*--

She grabs the hem of the Monarch's dress and tries to kiss it.

Pan to Ares. His smug grin fades and he looks somewhat uneasy.

CONQUEROR XENA (yanks away her dress in disgust):

Stop that. (to the guards) Take her.

After a moment's hesitation, three guards come up to Mavican. One of them pulls her up roughly her to her feet, the other takes the manacles that she had taken off Ares off her belt and cuffs her hands behind her back. Mavican seems too stunned to resist.

The guards drag Mavican toward the doors.

MAVICAN (screams):

Nooooooooooooooooo!!!! Nooooooooooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!

Close-up on Conqueror Xena as she looks after Mavican with a slight, contemptuous smile.

CUT TO

Xena walks down a dirt road. Rounding a bend, she suddenly stops and gasps softly. Before her is Herodotus and Hecuba's farm in a state of disrepair. The roof of the house is half burnt away and the barn is a pile of rubble. A cow wanders across the yard and Xena moves quickly to corral it, tethering it to a fence post. The creak of a wagon can be heard in the distance and Xena looks down the road and sees a donkey drawing an old man in a cart. He pulls up alongside her.

OLD MAN:

Afternoon.

Xena makes no response, gravely assessing the farm.

OLD MAN:

Don't know as I've seen you around these parts before. (he indicates the house) Kinsmen of yours?

XENA:

Not exactly.

The cow moos loudly and the old man points.

OLD MAN:

She's in need of a milking. Do you mind if I--?

XENA:

What? Go ahead.

The man climbs down from the cart and grabs a rusty bucket, smiling sheepishly at her.

OLD MAN:

Times are hard all over.

He places the bucket beneath the cow and crouches slowly. He begins to milk.

XENA:

What happened here?

OLD MAN:

Why, the Monarch, of course. (he eyes her suspiciously) You mean to tell me you ain't heard the story?

XENA:

I've been...away.

Shakes his head in astonishment and shrugs, continuing his milking.

OLD MAN:

Three months ago an attempt was made on her life during her victory march in Corinth. (he frowns) Damned fools. They say they spent seven months hatching a plot and the closest they got was wounding one of her slaves. All but one were captured and crucified on the spot. There was one

that escaped--he gave the Monarch's men a good run for their money. They finally caught up with him in Megara and dragged him back to Corinth.

XENA (impatiently):

What does any of this have to do with Potidaea?

OLD MAN:

When they questioned him, he admitted he spent a night here--hiding out in some poor fool's hay loft.

XENA:

So they leveled the town in retaliation.

OLD MAN (nods):

As an example to anyone else who'd shelter rebels or assassins.

XENA (a sick expression on her face):

What did they do?

OLD MAN:

Rounded up all the men between 16 and 60 and crucified every third man right in the town square. (he sighs sadly) Under pain of death the bodies were ordered left for the vultures. (he indicates the farm house) They lost the father--as well as the intended of their oldest girl, just days before the wedding. (He spits as if in scorn) Herodotus wasn't a bad man--certainly the last that would ever stand against the Monarch. Matter of fact, the only one in the family with any real spunk was the oldest girl, Gabrielle.

XENA (looks up at him in shock):

Gabrielle? (she thinks a moment and mutters to herself) So Herodotus is--? (she looks up at him) What happened to the rest of the family?

OLD MAN:

The womenfolk are all that's left. Lost their barn--burned to the ground. Would have lost the house too had not the gods smiled on them and sent rain. (he shakes his head sadly) Three womenfolk trying to eke out a living on this farm alone.

XENA (her voice betraying excitement):

You mean they're still here?

OLD MAN (nods):

Out in the fields. (he squints up at the sky) Judging by the light they'll probably be back soon. (he eyes her suspiciously) You say they ain't kin of yours. Friends?

XENA:

Not exactly--but maybe I can help.

The old man finishes his milking and slowly gains to his feet.

OLD MAN:

Don't know that they can offer you anything in return except a corner to sleep in their house.

XENA:

That's my problem.

He shrugs nervously under her gaze.

OLD MAN:

Well, none of my affair really. These days you live a lot longer minding your own business. Pass along my best to Hecuba when you see her. I went to school with her father back in the day.

XENA:

I'll do that.

He climbs back onto his cart and takes off slowly down the road.

CUT TO

Later in the evening. The cow now stands in a pen. Lila, Hecuba and Gabrielle can be seen walking towards the house.

LILA:

We planted twice as much today as we did yesterday.

GABRIELLE:

But at this rate we'll never have the entire field planted in time. Not with just the three of us.

LILA:

And certainly not with that negative attitude. We can do it if we set our minds to it.

Gabrielle turns to Hecuba.

GABRIELLE:

You look tired, Mother. Why don't you go lie down. Lila and I can start dinner.

Hecuba ignores her and looks toward the cow pen.

HECUBA:

Did one of you girls repair the pen this morning?

Gabrielle and Lila look at one another and shake their heads. Gabrielle slowly approaches the cow, as if expecting an ambush. She reaches out to touch the cow's head.

GABRIELLE:

Who could have done this?

XENA:

That would be me.

All three women gasp and spin towards Xena who emerges from behind the house.

GABRIELLE:

Who are--? What are you--?

Xena takes a cautious step forward.

XENA:

My name is Xena. I was just passing through your town when a neighbor of yours told me what happened. (she pats the cow's flanks) And I found her wandering around the yard so I corralled her and repaired the gate for you.

The women stare in stunned silence.

XENA:

I thought you could use my help.

GABRIELLE (quickly):

We don't have any money.

XENA:

I wasn't asking for money. Just a place to stay for a few days in exchange for helping you get the farm back on your feet.

Gabrielle glances at Lila who smiles in relief.

LILA:

Well, we would certainly welcome the help. We don't have much but we'll be happy to share whatever we do have. (the cow moos and Lila laughs lightly) We have plenty of milk, you see. I'm Lila and this is my sister Gabrielle and our mother Hecuba.

HECUBA:

I should probably milk her right away.

XENA:

No--you've all been working in the fields all morning. I can do that.

HECUBA (smiles gratefully):

Then I suppose I'll get dinner started.

She glances at Gabrielle who looks to have to intention of moving.

LILA:

I'll help you, mother.

Lila and Hecuba enter the house. Gabrielle stares at Xena a moment, an awkward silence between them. Finally, Gabrielle turns away wordlessly. Close-up on her troubled face.

DISSOLVE TO

Close-up on Gabrielle (in "our" world), staring ahead, looking troubled. It's evening.

The camera pulls back to show Gabrielle and Hercules seated at a campfire. Gabrielle stares pensively into the fire as Darion approaches carrying a small jug. He offers it to her.

DARION:

I found you some goat's milk, Gabrielle. Xena said it's good for the baby.

Gabrielle looks up and blinks as if coming out of a haze.

GABRIELLE:

What? Oh-- (she takes the jug and strokes his cheek) Thank you, Darion. I promise I'll drink it all. Why don't you get some sleep?

Darion nods and heads toward his bedroll. He stops and turns back.

DARION:

Gabrielle? Are Xena and Ares ever coming back?

HERCULES:

We're going to do everything we can.

Gabrielle nods and smiles faintly. Darion settles into his bedroll and Hercules turns back to Gabrielle, noticing her troubled expression.

HERCULES:

Gabrielle, tell me what's wrong.

GABRIELLE:

I've been with Xena a long time. We've been through--everything together. When I lost her in Jappa I felt so... empty and lost.

HERCULES:

Xena will be back. Count on it.

GABRIELLE:

Well that's just it. I want her to come back, Hercules--more than anything. But whether she does or not, I have to remember I have other responsibilities now. (she looks at Darion) I can't let this affect Darion or the baby.

HERCULES:

I've seen you with Darion. You're a good mother.

GABRIELLE (smiles bitterly):

I'm such a good mother that I drove the father of my child away.

HERCULES:

I've known you a long time, Gabrielle. You've always had a big heart.

GABRIELLE:

People change, Hercules.

HERCULES:

Maybe... (he glances warily at her) I have to admit I never expected Xena to start an affair with Ares.

GABRIELLE:

It's not like that. Xena and Ares aren't--

She trails off, unsure of what she wants to say and Hercules watches her expectantly.

GABRIELLE:

Let's just get them back--Xena *and* Ares.

Hercules nods in understanding. Gabrielle sighs and looks away as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Ares (now wearing gauntlets and pendant again) is sitting at a table laden with what looks like a sumptuous meal: fruit, roasted meat and fowl, other delicacies, as well as wine. He is eating a piece of meat. He drinks some wine, then puts down his goblet and glances a little tensely to his right.

The camera pans to show Conqueror Xena sitting near him, leaning back in a black chair with gold-plated armrests and back.

The room is richly decorated in Egyptian style, with carvings and Egyptian-style paintings on the walls.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Tell me about her.

ARES:

Who?

CONQUEROR XENA:

The other Xena. The one in your world.

Ares eyes her guardedly. Finally, he shrugs.

ARES:

There's not much to tell.

The Conqueror leans forward and gives him a feral, chillingly seductive smile.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Oh, but I think there is. You said she was a warrior. Tell me more. (she smiles again) If *your* Xena is anything like me, you should know I'll be able to tell if you're lying.

ARES (sighs):

She was a warlord once. I used to think she'd end up like you, the greatest Warrior Queen ever to

rule an empire. Then she left all that behind and started... (he stumbles, searching for words under her piercing gaze) helping others. Stopping wars, putting slavers out of business--defending villages from warlords--

He trails off. There is a long pause. The Conqueror drinks some wine from her goblet, then puts it down. There is a droplet of red wine trickling down from her lip.

CONQUEROR XENA:

So--she decided to become a good person.

ARES (somewhat at a loss for words):

Well, that's not to suggest you're--bad--

Conqueror Xena laughs lightly but with a bitter undertone.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You haven't been around this world very long, have you? You should hear what they call me in the countryside--"the monster," "the she-demon." (She pauses) You know what kind of tales the peasants tell about me? (She leans toward Ares and lowers her voice) They say I kill virgins and bathe in their warm blood to improve my complexion.

Ares looks slightly apprehensive before reverting to flippancy.

ARES:

Talk about a bloodbath.

CONQUEROR XENA (leans back, picking up her goblet again):

Not that I--actually do.

She licks up the wine from her chin.

ARES:

Oh, good. That would be such a waste of perfectly good virgins.

Conqueror Xena is silent for a moment, looking off into the distance with an unreadable look on her face. Then she turns back to Ares.

CONQUEROR XENA:

So, what changed her?

ARES (reluctant):

Her army raided a village called Ikaros. While she was away, her lieutenant, Darphus--

Conqueror Xena gives him a sharp look, obviously recognizing the name.

ARES (continues):

.... had everyone put to the sword--even the women and children. One child survived, and Xena stopped Darphus from killing him. Then Darphus turned her army against her and made her walk the gauntlet...

The Conqueror stares at him, her face hard.

ARES (continues):

She survived. Then she decided to go up against Hercules...

Close-up on the Conqueror, who reacts visibly to the mention of Hercules.

ARES (continues):

Hercules had been on her trail--she'd tried to kill him before--and she knew that with his head as her trophy, she'd win her army back. Except that he defeated her, and spared her life. Next thing I know--she's teaming up with him to stop Darphus. (He pauses) And then--I guess she chose her new life.

CONQUEROR XENA (wryly):

Please don't tell me she and Hercules were an item.

ARES (grimaces slightly):

Enough to kill your appetite, huh? Then she went off by herself--looking to redeem herself for her past, yadda yadda yadda... started traveling with this girl she picked up in some village who became her best friend... (off Conqueror Xena's amused look) That's about it.

There is a brief silence.

CONQUEROR XENA:

So--she had tried to kill Hercules before, and failed. (She looks at Ares with a feral smile) Well, I succeeded. I suppose that's the main difference between me and *your* Xena. (pauses) Well, and--I have better taste in men.

Ares stares at her in shock.

ARES (slowly):

You--killed Hercules.

CONQUEROR XENA:

His friend Iolaus turned out to be good bait. See, at first, my plan was to get them to fight each other so Hercules would kill Iolaus--and after that--he'd be easy pickings. But then-- (she grins a little and snaps her fingers) I figured that for that to work, I had to count on Hercules killing his best friend, and--I just couldn't be sure of that. So instead--

DISSOLVE TO

[FLASHBACK]

Xena's army camp. Iolaus is tied between two horses. A warrior with a whip stands nearby.

CONQUEROR XENA (voice-over):

--I thought Iolaus would make a good distraction while I fought Hercules.

Pan to Warlord Xena (in her "Warrior Princess" armor) and Hercules sparring. Hercules is clearly distracted.

HERCULES:

Iolaus, hold on!

Xena leaps up, vaulting over Hercules, and slams her feet into the back of his head. He staggers but manages to turn around and punch Xena as she lands in front of him so that she stumbles back. They spar briefly and trade kicks. Iolaus groans off-camera and Hercules looks back to make sure he's all right. Xena takes advantage of this to kick the sword out of his hand and send it flying upward; then she catches it and somersaults in the air, slamming her boots into his chest. This time she manages to knock him down. With a fierce cry, she drives the two swords into Hercules' chest. Zoom in on Xena as she yanks out the two swords. Close-up on her face, spattered with blood and filled with glee.

CONQUEROR XENA (voice-over):

Once people knew the great Hercules had been struck down by my hand--my army grew unstoppable.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

CROSS-FADE TO

Medium close-up on the Conqueror, reclining in her chair. The camera pulls back slowly as she speaks.

CONQUEROR XENA:

And seven years later--here I am-- (gazing into the distance) Monarch of the Empire--Conqueror and Ruler of Greece, Rome, Egypt, Gaul-- (a small headshake, as if snapping out of it) ...it's a long list.

After a somewhat tense silence, she turns to Ares.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Must have been--quite a disappointment when your Xena went over to the other side.

ARES (chuckles bitterly):

You could say that.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You tried to get her back?

ARES:

Didn't work.

He picks up his goblet, gulps down the wine that's left and puts it down, almost slamming it down on the table. The Conqueror contemplates him with obvious curiosity.

ARES:

It's funny--you're everything I wanted her to be... (trails off)

CONQUEROR XENA (a hint of mockery in her tone):

...but?

Ares stares at her silently. The Conqueror rises from her chair and comes up to him.

CONQUEROR XENA (softly):

I think you should get used to the fact that I'm the only Xena you're ever likely to see from now on.

He looks up at her, his face reflecting a struggle of emotions--uncertainty, fascination, anguish, anxiety.

She leans down and kisses him on the lips.

After a moment she breaks away. Ares looks up at her, breathless.

ARES:

Wait--

CONQUEROR XENA (in a playful tone that has a hint of a threat):

You're not saying no to me, are you?

She kisses him again, clutching at his vest and pulling him up to his feet. This time, it's a long, hard, passionate kiss that makes him moan and shudder. Conqueror Xena lifts her hands, clutching at the back of Ares' head; he draws his arms around her waist, pulling her closer.

She pulls back, looking at him with a wicked gleam in her eye, and moves to undo his belt. The camera tracks the belt falling to the floor, pans to Conqueror Xena's headdress (tiara and veil) dropping to the floor as well; then moves up to show Ares and Conqueror Xena in medium close-up.

ARES (hoarsely):

You don't think we're--

He gasps, his voice breaking off as his face convulses in pleasure. She kisses his neck, then pushes his vest open and dives down to kiss his chest while his hands roam over her back.

After a moment Ares pulls her up, his hands at her shoulders, so that they are face to face, his eyes searching hers. Conqueror Xena lifts a hand and strokes his face, then runs her fingers over his lips.

CONQUEROR XENA (huskily):

You know--if you don't want this-- (she runs her hands down, over his neck and his chest) all you have to do is--say the word.

Ares stares at her, breathing hard. Then he pulls her toward him in an almost violent gesture and kisses her passionately.

DISSOLVE TO

A bedroom, also with Egyptian design, bathed in soft golden candlelight.

A montage of images:

- * The Conqueror pushes off Ares' vest and they kiss
- * A shot of the Conqueror from the back, as her dress slides down
- * Ares leans back on the pillows
- * Conqueror Xena on top of Ares, kissing him, her hair cascading down
- * Close-up on Ares, his eyes half-lidded, his mouth open slightly in a moan of pleasure
- * Close-up on the Conqueror, her head thrown back and her eyes closed, a look of ecstasy on her face

DISSOLVE TO

Ares lies back, his eyes closed, Conqueror Xena's head resting on his shoulder, his hand in her hair. His breath grows soft and steady; he is obviously drifting off to sleep.

The Conqueror pulls herself up and kisses him gently on the lips; Ares stirs slightly.

ARES (mutters drowsily):
I love you, Xena...

Close-up on the Conqueror's face. There is a strange, startled look in her eyes, as if she doesn't know quite how to react.

CUT TO

A little later. Conqueror Xena is adjusting her dress. She walks out of the bedroom, trying not to make any noise.

CUT TO

Conqueror Xena (with her headdress back on) walks down a hallway in the palace. The guards salute as she passes.

CUT TO

An austere room in the palace. Conqueror Xena sits at a desk, writing on a scroll. There is a sealed wine jar at her side.

The door is heard opening. A man in an officer's uniform, seen from the back, enters the shot.

CONQUEROR XENA (without lifting her head):
General Kirillus.

A medium close-up of the officer. It's Kirillus from "Ties That Bind."

KIRILLUS (salutes):
Conqueror. At your pleasure.

The Conqueror lifts her head and smirks slightly.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Oh, *that* won't be necessary. (She pauses) You've always wanted to be governor of a province, haven't you?

Kirillus looks at her, his eyes lighting up, then presses his fist over his heart.

KIRILLUS:

You know my only wish is to serve you, Conqueror.

CONQUEROR XENA (smiles):

Don't be so modest. You're an ambitious man. Very well--Sparta is yours. You leave tomorrow.

KIRILLUS (gasps):

Sparta! Conqueror--I never expected-- (he pauses, surprised) You're recalling Darphus?

CONQUEROR XENA:

Not exactly. (she points to the scroll) You'll take this to Governor Darphus and tell him I'm transferring him to Gaul.

Kirillus nods.

CONQUEROR XENA (continues, rising to her feet):

But--there's something else. (she approaches Kirillus, who looks at her with some apprehension) Can I--rely on your discretion, General?

KIRILLUS (drops to one knee and kisses her hand):

And my loyalty--to the death.

CONQUEROR XENA (smiles):

Get up.

Kirillus rises and looks at her expectantly.

CONQUEROR XENA (motions to the jar on the table):

This is a rare Falernian wine. Take it to Darphus--as a gift from me. You'll share it with him in a toast to the Monarch. But first-- (she hands him a vial) make sure to drink the antidote.

Kirillus stares at her, stunned.

CONQUEROR XENA (continues):

You see, Kirillus, I've learned from--a reliable source--that Darphus plans to betray me.

KIRILLUS:

Then why not a public execution?

CONQUEROR XENA (narrows her eyes):

You're not questioning my judgment--are you?

KIRILLUS (shakes his head):

No, Conqueror--of course not.

CONQUEROR:

I have my reasons. (pauses) You'll do it, then?

KIRILLUS (takes the vial and hides it in his vest, bows his head):

Consider it done.

CONQUEROR XENA (with a nasty smile):

Good. (pauses, then adds in a casual tone) Oh, and after the toasts--I wouldn't stick around too long if I were you. It won't be pleasant.

CUT TO

A wide shot of Gabrielle's family's farmhouse and yard. It's sunrise. The sky is clear and the air is filled with birdsong.

Zoom in on the chicken coop where Gabrielle is feeding the chickens.

Pan to Xena coming out of the house. She sees Gabrielle, smiles softly and approaches.

XENA:

You're up early.

GABRIELLE (shrugs):

I couldn't sleep. (she is silent a moment) I'm sorry if I've been rude. We don't see many strangers in Potaideia. The last time was-- (she trails off into silence. After a moment she steels herself and looks up.) This is your first time in Macedonia?

XENA:

Not exactly.

GABRIELLE:

So you've done a lot of traveling?

XENA (smiles):

I guess you could say that.

Gabrielle continues scattering feed for the chickens.

GABRIELLE:

I did some traveling myself a few years back.

Xena is clearly shocked at this.

XENA:

You did?

GABRIELLE (nods):

When I was eighteen I was betrothed to a boy. Perdicus and I had been friends all our lives but--

(she sighs) I was young and idealistic. I was looking for... something. I felt so... empty here. I just knew that I was meant for something more. So one night I ran away.

XENA:

How long were you gone?

GABRIELLE:

Three years, wandering from town to town, telling stories to support myself.

XENA:

All by yourself?

GABRIELLE:

Sometimes a friend would meet up with me in a town. (she chuckles lightly) He told me a young girl needed someone to look after her. (sighs) Poor Joxer. He really wasn't much of a fighter. We depended more on me being able to talk our way out of trouble than on him. But still, he was a good friend to me.

XENA:

What happened to him? Is he--?

GABRIELLE (flinches):

He joined up with the rebels to fight the Monarch and-- (she lifts her hand in a futile gesture.)

Xena presses her lips together in an effort to hold back her own emotion.

XENA:

I'm sorry, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle sniffs and looks away.

GABRIELLE:

Anyway, after that...I guess I realized that I was just acting out some silly romantic fantasy.

XENA:

So you came home?

GABRIELLE (nods):

I knew that whatever I was looking for, I'd never find it--so I came home and agreed to marry Perdicus.

XENA:

You loved him?

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Yes. What we had was steady and dependable. It wasn't some grand, passionate thing where two people share each other's souls--but by then I'd realized that that kind of love doesn't really exist.

XENA:

I don't know. I think it does.

GABRIELLE (snorts):

You would.

Gabrielle falls contemplatively silent. Impulsively, Xena reaches out to touch her shoulder and Gabrielle steps back.

GABRIELLE:

I should feed Gideon.

XENA:

Gideon?

GABRIELLE:

My pet goat--mine and Lila's. He's not much use to us and he's just an extra mouth to feed--but Lila and I have had him since he was a kid. I missed him when I was gone and I-- (she takes another step back and shakes her head) I'm sorry.

Gabrielle spins around and rushes off. Xena stands still, looking after her.

CUT TO

A hallway in the palace. The Conqueror, clad in a kimono, approaches a massive ornate door with Egyptian-style design and is about to pull the handle when hurried steps are heard behind her.

WOMAN (off-camera):

Conqueror--an urgent message!

The Conqueror turns. The same female servant we saw in Act 2 approaches, almost running.

CONQUEROR XENA:

What is it, Marissa?

MARISSA:

One of your officers is here with news--says he needs to see you right away. He's waiting in the throne room.

CONQUEROR XENA (her face hardening):

Bad news, then. I'll be there.

CUT TO

An officer with a rather sheepish expression on his face stands facing the camera.

CONQUEROR XENA (off-camera):

This woman. What did she look like?

The camera pulls back to show the Conqueror on her throne, dressed in the same style as in Act 2 but in a dark blue dress this time. The officer stands in front of her.

OFFICER:

Well--to be honest, Conqueror--I wondered if the men were making it up, because the description they gave sounded a little like...

CONQUEROR XENA:

Yes?

OFFICER:

Well, like--you. Of course, none of them had ever seen you, except from a great distance at parades--only the statues, and the images on the banners--

CONQUEROR XENA:

Go on.

OFFICER:

And the description they gave of her weapon... (squirms a little) It sounded much like the stories of your chakram.

CONQUEROR XENA:

I see.

She rises and walks down the steps of the throne, looking thoughtful.

CONQUEROR XENA:

The men were lying all right--when they said the peasants came to this woman's aid. (She chuckles) Probably too embarrassed to admit she beat them all by herself.

OFFICER (puzzled):

You know who she is?

CONQUEROR XENA:

I have a pretty good idea. (she stares into the distance, her face unreadable, then turns to the officer) As for that village-- (coldly) wipe it off the map.

As she speaks, we:

DISSOLVE TO

A village being raided by the Conqueror's troops. Houses are burning, armed men are galloping through the village, the villagers are running around in a panic.

The Conqueror continues to speak, her voice heard over a montage of images.

CONQUEROR XENA (voice-over):

Anyone who can tell you anything useful about this woman or where she went--bring them to me. As for the rest--

Montage:

* A villager armed with a pitchfork tries to defend his home. He is struck down by a sword-wielding soldier who then runs into the house and comes out dragging behind him a struggling teenage girl.

* A woman runs screaming

* A house is torched

CONQUEROR XENA (continues, in voice-over):
...show no mercy.

* A woman throws a rock at a soldier, hitting him in the heck and knocking him off his horse

* A soldier gallops on horseback, raising a spear

* The woman falls

CONQUEROR XENA (continues, in voice-over):
Crucify fifty of the peasants along the main road. Kill anyone who resists. And burn everything.

* A terrified old man is seen in the window of a burning house, which collapses a moment later

* A little boy runs through the burning village

DISSOLVE TO CROSS-FADING IMAGES:

The village lies in ruins.

Crosses with bodies hanging over them loom over a road

as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Inside a temple, sunlight shines in through many windows, lighting up the ornate tiled floor. The doors open and Hercules walks in slowly. His eyes fall upon a gray-haired man in white and red robes who stands facing one of the windows looking out. Hercules stops and looks at him for a moment before stepping further into the room.

HERCULES:
Father.

Zeus turns his head to look back at Hercules and then returns his gaze toward the window.

ZEUS (after a pause):
I know why you're here, son. You want to know--

HERCULES:

--what happened to Xena and Ares.

ZEUS (turns around):

I don't know where they went after that portal opened up.

HERCULES:

You don't know anything? (thinks for a moment) Could they have ended up in that other world where the Sovereign ruled?

ZEUS:

That was just one of the many worlds that exist--side by side--worlds that are both like our own and very different. It's possible they ended up there; or maybe somewhere else. I have no way of knowing for sure.

HERCULES:

Can't you--

ZEUS:

Hercules... (moves closer to him and reaches out his hand) ...there are limits to even *my* powers. Especially now with the Twilight... (looks at his hands, then looks up) If I could do something to help Ares, I would. He's mortal now--vulnerable to all the hardships of--human life. He's the first of us to face that fate.

HERCULES:

You're worried about Ares? (Zeus is silent; Hercules turns somewhat skeptical) Or are you just thinking about the day you'll have to face your *own* mortality--just like him?

ZEUS (after a brief pause):

Ares is my son. For thousands of years, I didn't acknowledge it as I should have--and he wasn't... (pauses) the son I wanted him to be. I think you know he's changed. He went down to Hell to save me and--the rest of us. And now... (pauses) He is my flesh and blood. (He turns and looks out the window again) I've already lost several members of my family. (pause, then very quietly) I don't wish to lose him, too.

Hercules stares silently at Zeus, surprised and moved.

HERCULES:

I'm going to do what I can to find out what happened to them--and bring them back.

Zeus looks back at him and, for a moment, they share a gentle, understanding look.

ZEUS:

Thank you. (sighs) I wonder what kind of danger he could be in--right now.

CUT TO

Ares is asleep in the bedroom in the Conqueror's palace, under a fine linen sheet--white and embroidered with an Egyptian-style design--that reaches up to his chest.

The camera pulls back to show the Conqueror sitting on the edge of the bed. She is wearing the same silk kimono we saw her wearing in Act 3. After a moment she reaches out and touches Ares' face.

Ares stirs and opens his eyes; then he looks startled and sits up with a jolt.

CONQUEROR XENA (with a soft laugh):

Relax. Rumors to the contrary--I don't bite. (mischievously) Unless it's called for.

Ares stares at her, confused.

[FLASHBACK]

From the night before:

* Conqueror Xena is kissing Ares

* Conqueror Xena and Ares in bed, with her on top of him

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Close-up on Ares as he stares at the Conqueror.

[FLASHBACK]

From "Showdown":

Xena and Ares kiss in front of a fireplace.

XENA:

I love you.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares looks down, obviously feeling guilty.

CONQUEROR XENA:

What's wrong? (teasing) Did I rob you of your virtue?

Ares gets up from the bed, wrapping the sheet around his waist.

ARES:

If you think I'm going to be your boy toy--

Close-up on the Conqueror; for a moment, she looks almost hurt.

CONQUEROR XENA (softly):

Is that what you think this is?

ARES:

What am I supposed to think it is? Love at first sight? Please.

CONQUEROR XENA (comes closer to him):

You think I just want to--keep you here in a gilded cage until I get tired of you and find a new pet?

ARES:

Look--I don't care what your game is. I'm not playing.

The Conqueror comes even closer. She puts her hands on Ares' shoulders and he flinches slightly.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Maybe there's no game. Maybe--I like you.

ARES (swallows nervously):

Xena--

His voice breaks off before he can quite finish the word. For a moment, his face is full of emotion, as he obviously realizes that the woman he just called "Xena" is not his Xena.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You're free to go if you want.

Ares looks at her, pondering this.

CONQUEROR XENA (gently):

But I'm asking you to stay. And I'm not used to asking.

He stares at her uncertainly. The look in her eyes is soft and vulnerable.

CONQUEROR XENA (continues):

Besides--who knows what might happen to you if you *do* leave? (Her voice is still gentle but now has a barely noticeable edge of a threat.) Remember, Ares--you have nothing in this world--no friends--nowhere to go. Here in the palace, I can vouch for your safety. Out there... (She trails off)

Ares looks at the Conqueror, weighing her words. After a moment he takes her in his arms, pulls her up against him almost forcefully and kisses her.

When they pull apart, Conqueror Xena lifts a hand to caress Ares' face and run her fingers through his hair.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You'll need some new clothes, you know. Can't have you walking around the palace looking like the God of War.

ARES (digesting this):

The--God of War.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Well, of course. This world's Ares. Some of my people have seen him--I don't want them talking.

ARES (looks at her thoughtfully):

Are you and he--?

CONQUEROR XENA (smirks):

Already jealous? Don't worry. We have a good business relationship. (off his skeptical look) You still don't trust me.

ARES (with a wry grin):

I'm mortal, not stupid.

CONQUEROR XENA (chuckles):

Come here.

She pulls him into another kiss, then draws away, contemplating him with a smile that manages to be tender and smug at the same time.

CONQUEROR XENA:

If anyone asks--your name is Aristos. You fought with me at Corinth, years ago; you've lived in Miletos since. Got that? (off his uncomfortable nod) Good. Come on. Breakfast's waiting. After that--I have plans.

ARES:

So do I. (off her surprised look) I'm going out for a walk in the city--by myself.

The Conqueror opens her mouth to protest but he cuts her off.

ARES:

You wouldn't want me to feel like I'm in a gilded cage--would you, now?

The camera pulls back for a wide shot of Ares and the Conqueror in the luxuriously decorated room.

CROSS-FADE TO

An exterior view of a massive, forbidding temple.

CUT TO

Ares, dressed in a black shirt with wide long sleeves and a red vest, walks through the temple's massive open doors, decorated with friezes of battle scenes, and into the torch-lit antechamber of the temple. Two temple warriors in black, red and silver stand at the doorway to the main hall of the temple. They cross their pole-axes, barring his way.

TEMPLE WARRIOR #1:

What do you want? Only warriors in the Monarch's army are allowed inside.

ARES (sarcastic):

I see! Members only.

TEMPLE WARRIOR #2:

Except by special permission. Same as in all the other temples.

ARES (taken aback):

What--all the temples of all the gods?

TEMPLE WARRIOR #2 (scoffs):

All the gods? Are you drunk? Ares is the only god worshipped in the Empire! Everyone knows that!

ARES:

Of course they do. (with fake bravado) Now, that's the kind of one-god religion I can get behind. And now that we've cleared that up--I've got some business with your boss.

TEMPLE WARRIOR #1:

What kind of business?

ARES:

Well, that would be between me and him, wouldn't it.

The warriors contemplate him for a moment; then, one of them turns and calls out to a female attendant passing by.

TEMPLE WARRIOR #2:

Nikia! Tell Geras someone wants to see him.

The young woman nods silently and walks off. In a long shot, the camera tracks her as she walks up to the altar and talks to the priest, a tall, balding man clad in black and silver vestments. The priest turns to look in the direction of the doorway, then walks toward it.

Pan to Ares, who clears his throat and fidgets slightly under the glare of the warriors.

The priest approaches.

PRIEST (to Ares):

You asked to see me?

ARES:

You'll do. I need to talk to Ares.

PRIEST (scoffs):

Ares doesn't talk to just anybody.

ARES:

I'm not just anybody.

The priest looks him over with curiosity, then sighs and rolls his eyes.

PRIEST:

Dear me...not another would-be son of Ares.

Ares stares in shock, obviously unprepared for this turn of events.

PRIEST (continues, looking him over):

Yes, yes--the resemblance is quite remarkable... (shakes his head) but I hate to disappoint you--

doesn't matter if you are. (condescendingly) My Lord Ares doesn't really take an interest in these cases--except for a chosen few he singles out from childhood. So--run along.

He starts to turn around.

ARES:

Hold on.

The priest half-turns toward him, looking conspicuously bored and impatient.

ARES (bracing himself):

What if I told you I *am* Ares in another world and--I could use some help getting back home?

PRIEST (momentarily interested):

Well, that's a new one. (sighs and shakes his head) Very lame. You're lucky you didn't get to try that one on my lord Ares--he probably would have fried you on the spot.

He turns and walks away. Ares stares after him. As he walks toward the altar, the priest motions to two more temple warriors who starts heading toward the doorway, their hands on the hilts of their swords.

CUT TO

An exterior view of the massive temple. Ares comes down the temple steps. He stops and looks back at the temple, then turns and sighs.

ARES:

Gilded cage it is.

CUT TO

Close-up on Xena staring ahead. The camera pulls back to show her standing in the yard of Gabrielle's house, looking at Gabrielle as she draws water from the well. In a brisk stride, Xena approaches Gabrielle. Gabrielle puts down a full bucket and turns to look at her.

XENA:

Here, let me help you with this.

GABRIELLE (after a brief silence, a hostile undertone in her voice and look):

Why do you keep looking at me that way?

XENA (a little flustered):

What way?

GABRIELLE:

Like...like you think that maybe I'm your long-lost sister or something. (harshly) Because I'm pretty sure I'm not.

XENA (sighs):

Gabrielle...the truth is--

She breaks off. Gabrielle stares at her warily.

GABRIELLE:

What?

XENA:

The truth is--you look so much like someone who was-- (her voice nearly breaking with emotion) more than a sister to me.

Gabrielle looks at her mistrustfully.

GABRIELLE:

Really. (after a brief pause) *Was*. Is she--

XENA (shakes her head):

We--became separated. I don't know if I'll ever find her again. I hope to the gods she's all right.

A brief pause.

GABRIELLE:

What was she like?

XENA:

She was...a girl much like you, who left her village because she knew she was meant for something more. (with warmth in her voice) She was brave, caring--compassionate--she believed in love and forgiveness... (sighs) She believed she could change the world. (after a pause) So did I.

GABRIELLE (wistfully):

I used to be like that. (brusquely) Then I grew up. (off Xena's anguished look, her voice softening) I'm sorry, but--it's true. If your friend is everything you say... (she shakes her head, trailing off, then looks at Xena) What was her name?

Xena is momentarily taken aback, then rallies quickly.

XENA:

Flora.

GABRIELLE (frowns):

Flora. Not the Black Wolf? (Off Xena's shocked look) You know, the rebel leader. (sighs) She was put to death in Corinth about two years ago. (snorts) Not that I could look anything like her--people tell stories about how beautiful she was...

Xena lowers her eyes for a moment, then looks up.

XENA:

No. No, that wasn't her. (pauses) My friend was...is very beautiful.

There is an awkward pause. Then, Gabrielle comes closer to Xena.

GABRIELLE:

I...look, there's something I have to tell you. Ever since you showed up, I've had this weird feeling

that... (shakes head) it was as if we knew each other. (chuckles bitterly) Though I'm pretty sure I've never had a friend who looked like you. (she grows pensive) Actually, when I first saw you, I thought you looked a little like...that she-demon. Of course, I've only seen her face on coins... (she sighs and looks away, and finishes in a near-whisper) and on a banner her troops carried when--they came to this village.

XENA (stares at her):

She-demon. You mean--

GABRIELLE (spits out the word):

The Monarch. (pauses) It's so strange, too--you having the same name. I don't know if I'll ever get completely used to it.

Xena stares at her, realization gradually dawning on her but her mind still refusing to accept it.

XENA (heavily):

The same--name.

GABRIELLE:

Well, of course. (with disgust) Xena of Amphipolis. (disbelieving) You didn't know?

XENA:

I, uh--

She looks away. Close-up on her face, racked with shock, horror and guilt. Then she manages to compose herself and turns to Gabrielle again.

XENA:

I try not to think about it.

GABRIELLE:

I don't blame you. (Pauses) Of course, you're nothing like her.

Close-up on Xena as she stares ahead, her face hard and impassive.

CUT TO

Close-up on the Conqueror, giving a shout as she blocks the thrust of a sword.

The camera pulls back to show the Conqueror sparring with Ares in an inner courtyard of the palace, framed in stern marble columns.

The Conqueror is wearing leathers similar to those of Empress Xena in "When Fates Collide"; Ares, the same outfit as in the previous scene (black shirt and red vest). It's a spectacular fight somewhat reminiscent of Ares sparring with Livia ("Livia"), as both opponents thrust, parry, block, spin, kick and leap in a complex martial ballet.

Conqueror Xena vaults over Ares and thrusts her sword at his back; he swings his arm, spinning at half-turn, and blocks her thrust from behind, then spins around and kicks her sword upwards, out of her hand. Before he can take control, she catches it and spars with him again. He is now clearly on the defensive as she presses on and he merely parries her thrusts and backs away. Finally she

knocks his sword out of his hand with a hard blow of her own blade, and then, before he can recoup, leaps up, somersaults, and slams her boots into his chest, knocking him down on his back. She lands next to Ares and plants her left foot on his chest, pointing her sword at him.

She is breathing hard, her eyes glistening. Ares looks up at her as he tries to catch his breath; his face reflects a mix of frustration and fascination.

CONQUEROR XENA:

So. Am I as good as *your* Xena, hmm? (pauses, then teasingly) Better?

The look on Ares' face changes to anger. The camera zooms in on his hand as he reaches toward Conqueror Xena's right foot, grabs her ankle and yanks at it hard--then zooms out to show the Conqueror sprawling on her back, a look of shock on her face.

Ares leaps up and grabs his sword; Conqueror Xena scrambles to her feet just as he charges at her. Their swords clash again as Ares swings his blade with an angry grunt. As they spar, Ares clearly has the advantage this time and the Conqueror backs away toward the wall of the courtyard. She seems surprised by his aggressiveness.

Briefly, the Conqueror seems about to take control again, but Ares blocks her thrust with a forceful move and then kicks her in the side so hard that she staggers a little. She kicks out; he catches her ankle and flips her over. She lands on her feet--but his next kick knocks the sword out of her hand, and he manages to catch it a split second before she can.

With a harsh cry, the Conqueror delivers another spinning kick that knocks her sword out of Ares' hand and sends it flying--but, at the same time, he body-slams her into a marble column, pressing up against her.

ARES (breathing hard):

Don't--talk about her-- (she tries to strike out but he grabs her wrists, pinning them down) --again.

The Conqueror laughs gleefully.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You're beautiful when you're angry.

The camera zooms in as she leans forward and captures his lips in a hard kiss.

As he pulls away, we:

CROSS-FADE TO

Ares and Conqueror Xena in a hot tub. Ares is leaning back, his eyes closed. The Conqueror runs a playful hand over his chest.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Being mortal hasn't robbed you of your--technique.

ARES (sarcastically, without opening his eyes):

I'm so glad you approve.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Stop sulking. It doesn't become you.

ARES:

Why should I sulk? My life is perfect.

The Conqueror shoots him a sharp look; then leans back, settling against his shoulder and closing her eyes. For a moment her face looks peaceful. He slips an arm around her and she squeezes his hand.

CONQUEROR XENA (her eyes still closed):

You know, the girl you told me about? The one that became Xena's best friend in your world? The bard?

Ares sits up, opening his eyes, and abruptly moves his arm away from the Conqueror's shoulders.

ARES:

I told you--I don't want to talk about her.

CONQUEROR XENA:

I'm not talking about *her*. I'm asking about her friend.

Ares climbs out of the tub, wrapping a large dark red towel around his waist, and turns to face Conqueror Xena, who remains in the water, looking up at him expectantly.

ARES:

Short, blonde and preachy? What about her?

CONQUEROR XENA:

What was her name?

ARES (reluctantly):

Gabrielle.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Where's she from? You said that--Xena picked her up in some village.

Close-up on Ares as he glances at the Conqueror, clearly suspecting she's up to no good. He shrugs.

ARES:

How would I know? Some rat hole that was probably too poor to have a name.

The Conqueror gives him a piercing look, trying to figure out if he's telling the truth.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You--don't know.

ARES:

You know, I'm so glad trust is not an issue in this relationship. (He picks up an apple from a tray of fruit on a tripod table by the tub and bites into it) What do you want with her, anyway? Looking for another pet?

CONQUEROR XENA:

Hmm. Maybe I'm looking for a bard to chronicle my deeds.

ARES (takes another bite of the apple):

Trust me, she's not the type.

The Conqueror comes out of the tub and approaches Ares, making no move to cover herself. Ares can't help but look at her.

CONQUEROR XENA:

So, you *really* don't know where she's from.

ARES (nonchalantly):

Want to put the pinch on me?

Medium close-up on Conqueror Xena as she slowly raises a hand and touches her fingers to Ares' neck, while he does his best to hide his nervousness. After a long moment she finally speaks.

CONQUEROR XENA:

No.

She leans forward to kiss his neck.

CROSS-FADE TO

Outside Gabrielle's house, at dusk. Xena and Gabrielle walk toward the door. There is something lighthearted in their demeanor.

GABRIELLE:

We make a pretty good team, huh? We've almost got half the field cleared.

XENA (chuckles):

As long as you remember to save the storytelling for after work.

Gabrielle jostles her playfully.

GABRIELLE:

I didn't hear you complaining at the time!

XENA:

Never. Nothing like a good story about Ulysses to get the blood pumping.

Gabrielle laughs. They walk into the house, the camera following them. Hecuba and Lila are seated at the table.

GABRIELLE:

Mother, you'll never believe how much Xena and I got done today...

She stops, noticing something is wrong. Hecuba is seated with her head in her hands. Lila rubs her shoulder soothingly.

GABRIELLE:

What's wrong?

Hecuba looks up, her eyes red from crying.

HECUBA:

We've just gotten word from your Uncle Petros and Aunt Ruth. They've lost their farm. And their boys... (she sighs and shakes her head)

GABRIELLE:

Cledus and Isaachar? What happened?

LILA (with hatred in her voice):

The Monarch. What else? She ordered the village destroyed because someone cut down some rebels crucified by her men.

A look of realization dawns on Xena's face.

HECUBA (sniffing):

Cledus and Isaachar were killed trying to protect the livestock.

GABRIELLE:

By the gods...

XENA (quietly):

What village was this?

LILA:

Ophion. It's about twenty leagues north of--

XENA:

Amfissa. I know it.

HECUBA:

I've told Petros and Ruth they could come here. We'll be crowded--but what choice do we have?

GABRIELLE:

We'll make it work, Mother.

Xena looks sickened.

XENA:

Excuse me. I need to--

She turns and rushes out of the house.

CUT TO

Outside. Xena leans against the porch railing. Gabrielle exits the house.

GABIRELLE:

Xena? What is it?

XENA (sighs):

I'll be heading out tomorrow at first light.

GABRIELLE:

Things will be crowded here but that doesn't mean you have to go. (she touches Xena's arm) We need you.

Xena looks out as if at some distant point.

XENA:

I don't belong here, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle pulls back as if stung.

GABRIELLE:

Well, I thought that you...I mean--I thought that we... (she shakes her head and smiles bitterly.) Never mind.

XENA:

I didn't mean it like that. I meant that I don't belong *here*. (She throws her arms out wide. After a moment she sighs and shakes her head.) This world...Gabrielle, you're not going to believe what I'm going to tell you. (she pauses) I'm from some kind of...other world.

Gabrielle stares at her in shock.

XENA (continues):

A world that's almost an exact copy of this one--except that some things in it have happened--so differently. I ended up here because a battle between two gods opened up a window between worlds--and now I have no idea how to get back.

GABRIELLE (laughs incredulously):

You're right, I don't believe you. Xena, if you wanted to leave, all you had to do was--

XENA (interrupts):

My best friend in that other world was Gabrielle of Poteidaia, daughter of Herodotus and Hecuba. She was also betrothed to Perdicus--she also wanted to leave her village because she knew she was meant for something more. The only difference is that she left with me.

Gabrielle stares at her, disbelief mingled with outrage.

XENA:

You don't believe me? When you were fourteen, you used to sneak out at night after everyone was asleep and meet Perdicus down at the lake. (she pauses) You got your first kiss then. One night, you told him a story you had made up, about a goat who had an easy life on a farm but dreamed of running free in the mountains.

Gabrielle backs away slightly, her eyes widening.

XENA (continues):

So she ran away and was attacked by a wolf--but Athena saved her and made her a constellation among the stars. (she chuckles) Perdicus didn't understand a word of it and it made you angry.

GABRIELLE (vehemently):

How could you know that? I never told anyone about that--not even Lila.

XENA:

Because you told me. You told me a lot of things.

Gabrielle thinks a moment, recovering from the shock.

GABRIELLE:

If what you're saying is true--if there's another me in another world, that means there's also...

Xena turns away, then turns to face Gabrielle again.

GABRIELLE:

So I guess it isn't a coincidence that you and the Monarch have the same name.

XENA:

She's my responsibility, Gabrielle. I have to stop her--maybe I'm the only one who can. I *am* her.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

That's not true, Xena. You might bear the same name and face, but you are nothing like her.

XENA:

You're wrong. (anguished) Gabrielle, I was on that path once--leading an army, living a life full of violence and greed and conquest. I turned my life around thanks to--two people...one of whom was y- (she stumbles) my world's Gabrielle. I could have been the Monarch. Even now--there's still a piece of me that's her...and that's what's going to help me defeat her. (after a pause) Tomorrow morning, I'm off to the Amazon lands to join the rebels.

A long pause.

GABRIELLE:

If you're going--I'm not letting you leave me here. You've got to take me with you.

XENA (frowns):

No, Gabrielle. You've got your family to think about. Besides--do you have any idea how dangerous this is? I'm going up against the Monarch--and you've already lost so much to her. You're my friend and I don't want you following me into that.

Gabrielle reaches out to squeeze Xena's hand.

GABRIELLE:

That's what friends do, Xena. They stand by each other when there's trouble.

Xena thinks a moment, moved; Gabrielle's words have clearly struck a chord. She smiles and squeezes Gabrielle's hand back.

XENA:

All right, friend.

CROSS-FADE TO

Dawn. A long shot of Xena and Gabrielle, with the horse Xena rode into Potidaea, walking down the road.

CROSS-FADE TO

Afternoon. Outside the cave where Xena buried her armor.

A succession of shots follows that looks deliberately like the opening-credits shots of Xena putting on her leathers, armor and boots, accompanied by music from the opening credits. The camera then pulls back to show Xena in full gear and Gabrielle standing next to her. Gabrielle looks at Xena with undisguised admiration.

Xena puts on a cloak that covers her armor, mounts the horse and holds out a hand to Gabrielle, helping her into the saddle.

They ride away into the woods as we:

FADE OUT

TO BE CONTINUED...

[Xena and Ares lost their way home during the production of this motion picture.]