

# **Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 10**



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## TEASER

FADE IN:

### EXT. DESERT HILLS - DAY

It is a bright sunny day. Too sunny, in fact. Across the hills, the heat rises from the desert floor in mirage-like fashion. The only vegetation in sight is a few bits of brown scrub. The wind whips across the terrain, lifting the sand in swirling dust devils.

Over the top of a hill, Xena and Gabrielle appear dressed in appropriate desert garb. They trudge slowly over the crest of the hill and down the other side, their high soft boots leaving deep prints in the sand behind them. Neither one appears very happy.

#### GABRIELLE

Are you sure we turned the  
right way at the Dead Sea?

#### XENA

Yeah, yeah, I'm sure.

#### XENA

(cont'd, to herself)  
I think.

Gabrielle stops and spins around a few times, untangling the ends of her long tunic which has wrapped itself around her legs. She sighs in frustration and then spits.

#### GABRIELLE

Pah! Bleck! I hate  
the taste of sand.

#### XENA

Then keep your  
mouth closed.



Xena's eyes twinkle mischievously and she glances sideways at Gabrielle, who opens her mouth to protest just as another dust devil swirls between them, giving her another mouthful.

#### GABRIELLE

Ugh!

She spits again and glares at Xena, who flashes her a cheeky grin.

**XENA**

Told ya.

She walks on and Gabrielle shuffles to catch up with her.

**GABRIELLE**

Yeah, well, my mouth isn't the only place full of sand. Think we might find a place to wash up a little?

**XENA**

Getting a little edgy, my bard?

**GABRIELLE**

(grumbling sarcastically)  
You know how fond I am of the desert.

**XENA**

That makes two of us. But let me point out that I'm not the one who necessitated this little trip.

Gabrielle stops and places both hands on her hips.

**GABRIELLE**

What is that supposed to mean? Huh?

She catches up again.

**GABRIELLE**

(*cont'd*)

You think this is my fault?  
Xena! There is no 'Gabrielle effect.' I swear.



**XENA**  
(drolly)  
Uh huh.

**GABRIELLE**  
Xena!

**XENA**  
I love it when you  
say my name.

Gabrielle gives her a close approximation of THE LOOK, and storms ahead of her. Xena laughs lightly and shakes her head, then lengthens her stride until they are even, and places a hand on her shoulder. Gabrielle shrugs her off.

**XENA**  
(*cont'd, softly*)  
Gabrielle, I'm sorry.

Gabrielle's eyes narrow as she considers the apology. Xena smiles and she can't help but smile back. She reaches out and Xena accepts the invitation, twining their fingers together as they continue to walk.

**GABRIELLE**  
Thank you. Xena, it's really  
not my fault the grail  
ended up in my pack.

**XENA**  
I know, but I'll be damned glad to  
be rid of it and the bad luck.  
Fire-breathing dragons.  
Ghosts. Minion-wannabes.

**GABRIELLE**  
(*chuckling*)  
Xena, that was no bad luck.  
Our life was like that before  
we came to possess the grail.

**XENA**  
True. All the same, it needs to go  
back where it belongs. Merlin's  
voice calling out from your bag in  
the middle of the night gives me  
the heebie-jeebies. Not to mention  
he has some lousy timing.

Gabrielle blushes.

**GABRIELLE**

I wonder why Galahad wanted  
it so badly if it's supposed  
to be such bad luck?

**XENA**

Beats me, but knowing Merlin, he  
put it in your bag knowing we'd do  
the responsible thing and return  
it to the temple they took it from.

She stops and sniffs the air, and smiles broadly.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Come on, your bath awaits. There's  
water just over that next rise.

She sniffs again and frowns.



**GABRIELLE**

What is it?

Xena doesn't answer, but leads them quickly to the top of the hill. Below them is a beautiful oasis with a sparkling blue pond, surrounded by lush green grass and several tall palm trees. On the other side of the pond is a herd of Arabian horses in various colors, some grazing and some lapping at the water.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

Oh. They're gorgeous.

Xena's face is pained and her answer is almost whispered.

**XENA**

Yes, they are.

Gabrielle places a hand on her shoulder.

**GABRIELLE**

You okay?

**XENA**

Yeah. Just... I found Argo in a herd like that one. Not too far from here, as a matter of fact.

**GABRIELLE**

Really? Xena, you never told me you'd been this way before we met.



**XENA**

*(sadly)*

Never came up.

Gabrielle places her arm around her waist.

**GABRIELLE**

You wanna talk about it?

Xena manages a smile and returns the side-hug, nodding slightly.

**XENA**

It was right after I met Hercules.  
Right before I met you. It was  
one of the loneliest times of my life.

**GABRIELLE**

If you were so lonely, why didn't you  
go back to Hercules? He was  
your friend. He would've welcomed  
you, Xena. After what he did for  
you, wasn't he your hero?

**XENA**

*(quietly)*

Hero? No. Mentor, maybe, but I never  
thought of him as my hero. Besides, I  
was too pig stubborn. I had to figure  
out a few things on my own.

Xena smiles down at Gabrielle, and ruffles her hair.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Come on, let's go  
check out the water.

Gabrielle studies her intently and slowly nods in agreement, apparently accepting the change of subject. They walk hand-in-hand toward the pond as we....

**FADE OUT.**

**END OF TEASER**

## ACT ONE

FADE IN:

### EXT. DESERT OASIS - DAY

Xena is standing in the water up to her knees, her head tilted to one side. Gabrielle is sitting on the bank with her feet dangling in the water. Their hair is wet, and their desert clothing is hanging from a line tied between two palm trees. The horses are still grazing, while keeping a wary eye on their two-legged visitors.

**GABRIELLE**

You really think there's  
fish in there?

**XENA**

Sure.

**GABRIELLE**

How do you know? Do you  
hear them? Or do you just  
sense their presence?

Xena grins like a kid in a candy store. Suddenly she plunges both hands in the water and comes up with two good-sized fish. She tosses them on the bank and then dunks beneath the surface. She rises and exits the water, the sunlight creating interesting patterns on her wet skin. Gabrielle appears mesmerized as she watches her, and smiles sheepishly as Xena gives her a knowing look. Xena plunks down next to her and they each go to work cleaning a fish.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

Xena, how did fish get in there? There's  
no river or creek feeding it. Its source  
is obviously underground. There's no  
other water around for miles. I can  
see tree seeds and grass seeds  
floating on the wind, but fish?

**XENA**

One of the great mysteries of life.  
Maybe they're subterranean fish  
and swam here underground.

Gabrielle peers at her skeptically, unable to read Xena's poker face.

**GABRIELLE**

Hmmmm. I think  
you're teasing me.



Xena starts to answer, but when she looks up, a Palomino very much like Argo, moves closer to them and studies them, before it begins to drink. Bubbles snort up from the water and it swishes its tail in a slow contented rhythm.

**XENA**

It was like this.

Gabrielle merely glances at her as if she's been expecting the sudden change of subject, and keeps working on her fish.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

I'll always be grateful to Hercules for taking a chance on me, and for helping me take those first baby steps toward turning my life around. I tried to convince myself I loved him, but honestly, what I really wanted was to be like him.



Gabrielle starts to laugh and Xena stops, and stares at her in outrage.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

What's so funny?

Gabrielle briefly touches her on the arm, and pulls herself together.

**GABRIELLE**

I'm sorry. I was just thinking the opposite was true when I met you. I tried to convince myself I was following you because I wanted to be like you, when I was really following you because I was in love with you.

**XENA**

At least you had an excuse. I spent many sleepless nights trying to come up with some logical reason why I let you keep traveling with me.

They glance at each other almost shyly, and Xena reaches out and brushes her hand against Gabrielle's cheek, before she continues.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Anyway... Hercules... I couldn't have stayed with him. I don't think there would have been room for two warrior egos in that mix. Add in Iolaus, and frankly I would have been upsetting a partnership that already worked quite well without me. So I struck out on my own.

**GABRIELLE**

Where did you go?

**XENA**

Nowhere. Everywhere. I was lost and my own skin didn't fit me anymore. I wandered around Greece for a while. But I had no friends, and a whole lot of enemies. I didn't even know what I was looking for, other than to stay out of fights with well-meaning people who wanted me dead.

**GABRIELLE**

Guess they don't automatically remove the bounties from your head just because you've decided to reform, huh?

**XENA**

No.

Xena stares across the pond, and watches a mare with her foal for a moment, and smiles sadly.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

I remember telling Hercules that everything he did was to honor the wife and children Hera took from him. That was his inspiration. And I remember telling him I didn't have anything like that in my life. I knew in my heart I wasn't going to find that if I stayed with him. So while I wandered, I was looking for something, anything, to give me a sense of direction.

She looks over at Gabrielle and their eyes meet for a very long moment. Xena finishes cleaning her fish and takes Gabrielle's to finish it. Gabrielle squeezes her shoulder and gets up.

**GABRIELLE**

I'm listening. Just thought I'd get the fire going.

She moves to a nearby fire ring and stacks up some dried palm branches.

**XENA**

After a while I grew weary of running  
from bounty hunters. I had no dinars,  
and I couldn't use my preferred  
method of getting them anymore.

**GABRIELLE**

*(softly)*

Stealing.

Xena reddens in shame and looks down.

**XENA**

Yeah. So I sold my horse and hired on to  
a boat headed to Egypt. It was taking the  
long way from Crete to Cyprus and along  
the coastline, delivering and picking up cargo  
as we went along. I hoped maybe the honest  
work and the salt air would clear my head.  
It did, in a way, because the captain worked  
us so hard I didn't have time to think about  
much else. Things went okay for a while....

**GABRIELLE**

But you ended up here. I take it you didn't  
make it all the way around to Egypt.



**XENA**

Nope.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. BOAT DECK - DAY - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Rob's Folly bobs up and down on the ocean waves, its familiar painted eye readily visible. On the deck several figures toil at various tasks - trimming sails, mending nets, fishing, and cleaning the catch. Xena is swabbing the deck, her attention partly on the mop and partly on the open sea before her. The captain walks along, eyeing the work in progress, making comments here and there. He passes by Xena and pokes her in the back with the end of a spyglass.

**CAPTAIN**

See to it that ya keep yer  
mind on yer work. No  
daydreaming on my watch.

Xena snarls at him behind his back.

**XENA**

Aye, Cap'n.

She re-doubles her efforts for a while, but then she stares out to sea again and her motions slow down. Her expression is one of great sadness, and we see flashbacks of some of her past pillaging and plundering. The captain passes by again and this time gives her a firm smack to the backside.

**CAPTAIN**

Ya hired out to work for  
me, and work ya will!

Suddenly, Xena is on him, her hands around his neck, and they roll around the deck, slinging several healthy punches at each other. The bored crew surrounds them, glad for the entertaining diversion. Soon the men are all cheering them on, and exchanging a few bets on the side.

They continue to struggle and end up on their feet in an all-out fistfight. One sailor tries to intervene and Xena merely lands a roundhouse kick to his middle, sending him flying across the deck, as she continues to pound on the captain. She jumps him again and draws a dagger from her boot, pinning him and pressing it against his throat.

The captain strains against her as much as he can, but she's got him trapped. Her fingers twitch on the dagger hilt, and there is a murderous gleam in her eyes.

**CAPTAIN**

*(cont'd)*

What are ya gonna do?  
Bloody kill me?

Her eyes blink with clarity, as she realizes what she's doing.

**CAPTAIN**

*(cont'd)*

Better make up yer mind now, but either  
way, ya lose. Ya let me live, I'm busting  
ya for mutiny. Ya kill me, me first mate  
over there is gonna bust ya for mutiny  
and murder. Is that what ya are?  
A bloody murderer?

Xena blanches at the word murderer and her entire body jerks as if he physically struck her. She glances over at the man she kicked and winces, realizing he is the first mate.

She studies the dagger in her hand and slowly drops it to the deck. She stands in surrender, and two sailors move in and take her into custody.

The captain stands, rubbing his neck and eyeing the chains at her wrists and ankles with great satisfaction. He circles her, tugging at his beard.

**CAPTAIN**

*(cont'd)*

Keelhaul 'er.

In the blink of an eye, the sailors tie Xena to the yardarm and hoist her out over the water, hanging upside down. Her ankles are tied to ropes looped over the yardarm, her wrists to ropes that disappear beneath the ship. She does not fight her captors.

All the crew hangs over the railing, watching in anticipation. Xena stares steadfastly out to sea, her eyes fixed on the horizon. As they drop her downward, she takes a deep breath and vanishes below the boat.

The crew rushes to the other side of the boat, waiting until finally her dark head breaks the surface. She splutters, gasping for breath, as they haul her aboard and begin to untie her.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT OASIS - EARLY EVENING - PRESENT X&G TIME**

Xena and Gabrielle are sitting beside the fire, eating their fish.

**GABRIELLE**

Xena! By the gods.

**XENA**

Relax. I can hold my breath a long time. I swam to Tartarus, remember?



**GABRIELLE**

I try not to think about that too much. That was a pretty scary time for me. I'd not been back from the Academy that long. I was still feeling badly that I'd left you like that. And then you just took off to help Marcus. I... I wondered if you really wanted to come back.

Xena puts down her plate and takes Gabrielle's hand.

**XENA**

You wanna know what kept me  
going during that long swim back to  
the surface that second time?

**GABRIELLE**

What?

**XENA**

With every kick, I prayed to any god  
who would listen that you were still  
waiting for me beside that lake.

**GABRIELLE**

*(softly)*

Xena, you don't pray....

**XENA**

... unless I'm at the end of my rope.  
If you were on shore, I had every  
reason to keep going. If not....

Xena swallows and looks down at their joined hands. She takes a deep breath and blinks hard and looks back up.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

You tossed me a lifeline that day. When  
I broke the surface and saw you sitting  
there, I think I could have walked  
on water the rest of the way.

Gabrielle squeezes her hand and swipes her other hand across her own eyes once, before she picks up her plate and begins to eat again.

**GABRIELLE**

So what happened after  
they keelhailed you?

**XENA**

The captain was so disgusted I survived it, he  
tossed me in the brig and put me ashore the  
first chance he got. Gave me three days' rations  
and a water flask, and took off. At least he had  
the good grace to leave me with my weapons.  
Unfortunately, he put me off in the middle of  
godsforsaken nowhere. I'd seen some barren  
land in Chin, and some wild country across the  
northern steppes with the Amazons, but nothing  
prepared me for the Arabian desert.

**CUT TO:**

## EXT. DESERT HILLS - DAY - 36 SUMMERS AGO

A fierce sandstorm is blowing. Xena stumbles across the terrain, barely able to see. She shelters her face with the end of her turban, and holds one hand out in front of her.

**XENA**

Son of a bacchae!

She ambles on, coughing as the sand swirls around her face. All of a sudden she bumps into something and feels it all over, and puts her face right next to it, squinting.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

A tree? It can't be.

She grabs the tree with both hands and slowly kneels, leaning back against the trunk with both knees drawn up. She buries her face into the long loose tunic she's wearing. One arm wraps around her head, and the other drops limply beside her. Her fingers begin twitching and she grabs up a handful of something, first sniffing it and then tasting it. She spits it out.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Grass.

She sniffs the air cautiously and coughs again several times, then sniffs some more.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Aaggghhhhh!

She crawls on her hands and knees, feeling in front of her as she goes. She stops and we hear a splash, as she dunks her head into some water. Her head flies up and she whoops loudly, then goes back in again, this time immersing her entire body, clothes and all. She surfaces with another loud whoop and we hear a slurping sound as she drinks greedily.

**CUT TO:**

## EXT. DESERT OASIS - DAY - 36 SUMMERS AGO

The storm has subsided and it is obvious some time has passed. We can see the oasis clearly now, a large herd of horses grazing around it. A golden Palomino mare trots down to the water, snorting and kicking up her heels. It is Argo I. She stops as she reaches the edge, suspiciously eyeing a large sandy lump which appears to be sitting on the water's surface. Cautiously, she enters the water until she is almost up to her belly. She nudges the lump and it shoots out of the water.

**XENA**

*(yelling)*

Yahhh! What the?!

The lump shakes and the sand sifts off, revealing Xena's head. She has fallen asleep during the storm, sitting shoulder-deep in the water. She ducks under and her head reappears. She swirls around and sees Argo standing there only a few feet away. She smiles.

**XENA**  
(cont'd)  
Hello there....

Xena tilts her head to the side.

**XENA**  
(cont'd)  
... girl.

Xena rises up a little bit and holds out her hand. Argo eyes her and whinnies, then carefully sniffs her hand, lipping it just a little. She snorts and takes off, stopping a short distance from the water's edge. She whinnies again and rears up once, pawing the air with one hoof before she lands on all-fours again.



Xena chuckles.

**XENA**  
(cont'd)  
Same reaction I get everywhere. They  
either run or want to yell at me. You're  
one of the first to manage both, though.

Xena stands and walks laboriously to the bank in her waterlogged clothing. Argo backs up but still doesn't run. Xena watches her, but makes no threatening moves. Finally she shrugs and moves toward a palm tree where she removes the heavy, wet clothing and rummages around in a bag she left tucked under the tree. She dons the tunic she usually wears under her leathers and sets about making camp.

Argo moves further away and begins to graze, but continues to eye her curiously. Xena shimmies up a tree and plucks a few coconuts, and splits them open, drinking the milk before she begins digging out the sweet flesh with a dagger. She quirks an eyebrow at the mare, and then carefully lays a path of coconut from where she sits, halfway to Argo.



Argo takes halting steps to the first coconut bit, and licks it a few times, before eating it. She makes her way down the trail, taking her time. Her ears twitch constantly, and her tail swishes in nervous agitation. Finally she reaches the last bit, only a few feet from Xena. She eats it and looks up expectantly.

Xena smiles and holds out another piece, her arm fully extended away from her body. Argo snuffs it and nips it up, crunching the treat loudly. She finishes it and closes the distance, nudging Xena's arm and pawing at the ground.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Ah. A sucker for sweets.  
I'll have to remember that



She offers another bite and scratches Argo's nose and forehead, as she finishes off the coconut.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT OASIS - EVENING - PRESENT X&G TIME**

It is now full dark, and the fire is blazing brightly. Xena and Gabrielle are sitting together on their bedroll, snuggling. The sky overhead is covered in a blanket of twinkling stars. The horses are still there, apparently settled in for the night.

**GABRIELLE**

*(laughing)*

'A sucker for sweets.' Boy, I'll say.  
Her sweet tooth sure got us in trouble  
that time with the Scythians.  
All for a few lousy apples.

**XENA**

I'm not sure what was worse... Argo's  
sweet tooth or Joxer's turnip stew.

**GABRIELLE**

*(holding her stomach)*

Ugh! Please. I just ate.

**XENA**

But I think the apples  
started the whole thing.

Xena smiles knowingly and pulls her pack closer, digging around and coming up with a wrapped bundle.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Yeah, it seems the girls in  
my life are always getting  
into trouble over sweets.

She hands Gabrielle the bundle. Gabrielle takes it and sniffs it and her eyes grow wide with delight.

**GABRIELLE**

Nutbread!

She tears the wrapping open and breaks the loaf apart, offering Xena half. As Gabrielle begins to devour the sweet dessert, Xena's meaning hits home and she stops, blushing.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

Oh gods. Will I never  
live that down?

Xena pulls her into a headlock and gives her a noogie on top of her head before releasing her.

**XENA**

Nope.

**GABRIELLE**

*(laughing lightly)*

I was such a kid then.

**XENA**

A very cute kid, if I recall.  
I remember....

She trails off and smiles wistfully for a moment.

**GABRIELLE**

Remember what?

**XENA**

When you told me I was beautiful,  
I was floored. Not literally floored  
like you were, of course, but....

Gabrielle elbows her in the ribs.

**GABRIELLE**

You!

**XENA**  
(chuckling)  
Hey!

She scoots a few inches away and they tussle a little bit before they settle back down into their snuggling.

**XENA**  
(cont'd)  
I remember wishing you felt that way  
about me when you weren't high on  
henbane. And just how much it surprised  
me when I realized I wished that.

**GABRIELLE**  
(softly)  
I did, you know... feel that way.

**XENA**  
Yeah, I know now. But then... all I  
knew was that I had some feelings  
I didn't know what to do with.

**GABRIELLE**  
At least you recognized what they were.  
I just thought I'd come down with some  
permanent fever that caused me to  
daydream all the time and bump into  
things on perfectly clear days.

Xena leans over and kisses Gabrielle lightly, then pulls her even closer until their heads are touching.

**XENA**  
Oh, I knew what I was feeling all  
right. I was falling for a kid. I  
remembered wondering if I could  
keep you until you grew up.

**GABRIELLE**  
You make me sound  
like a puppy.

Xena rubs her head playfully.

**XENA**  
Whoof. You proved just how grown  
up you were, not too long after that.  
Remember Salmoneus and the fizzy water?

Gabrielle's eyes grow sad and she looks down.

**GABRIELLE**

That's another time I try not to think about. But boy, did Argo come through for you. She was one smart horse.

**XENA**

*(dreamily)*

She sure was.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT OASIS - DAY - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Xena is standing petting Argo, scratching underneath her mane and forelock, and feeding her more bits of coconut. Xena sighs and steps back, and picks up her pack, and slings it over her shoulder. She is wearing her bulkier clothing again.

**XENA**

I can't stay here forever.



She looks around the peaceful setting.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Then again....

She looks up at the sun and off into the distance, and shakes her head slightly. She walks over to Argo and gives her one last friendly scratch.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Thanks for sharing lunch,  
but if I'm ever going to get  
back home, I have to go.

Xena walks away, and stops at the edge of the grass. She turns around and looks back wistfully.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Bye, girl.

She turns resolutely and walks away, tramping over the sand toward a nearby rocky canyon. She hasn't gone far, when Argo catches up and nudges her in the back. Xena draws her sword and spins around and gasps. She drops the sword back into its scabbard, and puts her hands on her hips.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Sneaky. I didn't  
even hear you.

She taps her own head near her ear.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

And I don't miss much.

Argo nudges her again.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

You sure you wanna leave  
paradise to follow an ex-warlord  
to gods know where?

Argo whinnies loudly and paws the ground.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

All right, but just remember  
following me was your idea.

She eyes the mare skeptically.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Don't suppose you'd let  
me ride, would ya?

Argo's ears flatten and she snorts indignantly, a sound that almost sounds like laughter. Xena laughs back at her.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

We'll see. You stick with me,  
you might have to earn your keep.

They walk on and reach the canyon, and traverse down one side into it until high jagged cliffs tower over them. The path through the canyon is narrow, winding back and forth between tall boulders and a few desert-hardened scrubby trees.

The sun casts deep shadows in the lower parts of the canyon, creating blessed shade all along the path. It takes them quite a while to make their way through, walking along in silence, save the sound of their own footsteps and the whisper of the wind between the rocks.

As they near the other side and a path leading up and out, Xena stops and looks all around. She looks up to the top of a cliff and sees a few small pebbles bounce down, their sound almost deafening amid the mostly quiet canyon. Xena backs up to a stalagmite-like rocky protrusion, and slowly draws her sword with a metallic hiss.

**XENA**

*(cont'd, whispering)*

Better get behind this rock, girl.

Argo stands her ground, and makes low uneasy rumbling noises. Suddenly three well-armed bandits appear and begin scaling their way down the canyon wall. Xena stands up taller, her sword ready. They are almost to her when out of her peripheral vision, she spies a couple dozen more bandits approaching at a run from quite a distance away. She is vastly outnumbered.

**XENA**

*(cont'd, quietly)*

There go those odds.



She engages the first three, neatly disarming one right off the bat. She then finds herself fighting the other two simultaneously, using both sword and chakram in tandem, against their larger, sharp, shining weapons. They back her against the rock and she fends them off, one eye constantly checking the progress of the others, who are still approaching. Finally, she jumps up and kicks both of them in the head, sending them to their backs, just as the first one retrieves his weapon and the others close in.

Down the path a little way, Argo whinnies loudly and Xena looks over to see the mare crouched partway down, inviting her to climb aboard. Xena doesn't have to be asked twice. She makes a running start and goes into a set of backward handsprings, flipping up in the air and landing on the surprised mare's back.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Yahhhh!

Argo stands up, as Xena looks back at her pursuers, one of whom has pressed into a sprint and caught up with them. Xena whistles low under her breath, and unexpectedly, Argo kicks out backward, sending the man flying behind them.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Well I'll be damned.

Come on, girl.

Time to fly. Yahhh!

Argo takes off and quickly reaches the path upward. In no time she climbs up and over the canyon wall, and then really takes off, flying like the wind, speeding across the desert, her legs a blur of motion. Xena crouches low, and her turban comes unwrapped. She catches it just before it flies away, and holds on, the wind blowing her hair back wildly. Finally, when she is certain they've put enough distance between them and the bandits, she urges Argo back into a walk.

Xena looks down at Argo in amazement, just as Argo turns her head to look back at her, her expression as smug as a horse can get. She is barely breathing hard, and she curls her lip up impudently almost as if she's grinning at Xena.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Thanks. Whistling? I think we might be able to work with that. Guess the least I can do is give you a break for a little while.

She slides down and they begin walking again. Argo occasionally nuzzles her arm, nibbling at the material covering her shoulder.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

What am I gonna call you, huh, girl? You're bigger than life.

She stops and turns to the mare and rubs her neck.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

How about Argo?

Argo snorts in approval.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Argo it is, then.

**CUT TO:**

## EXT. DESERT OASIS - EVENING - PRESENT X&G TIME

Xena and Gabrielle are now stretched out on the bedroll, looking up at the stars. The fire is burning low, snapping occasionally. The only other sound is wind rippling across the pond, the gentle breathing of several horses and two quiet voices.

**GABRIELLE**

Argo?

**XENA**

Yeah. When Jason commissioned Argus to build the Argo, no one had ever seen a boat like it. It was larger than life.

**GABRIELLE**

Oh. Okay. I get it. She was an amazing horse. Guess she got you out of lots of jams.

**XENA**

That's an understatement.

**GABRIELLE**

That time with Salmoneus and the fizzy water, I think that was when Argo and I bonded. After that, I wasn't really afraid of her anymore.

Xena rolls to her side and idly plays with Gabrielle's hair, pushing it back off her face.

**XENA**

I remember telling you then that I knew I'd make it home again... that you risked your life to take me back to Amphipolis. Truth is, Gabrielle, that night I lay awake for a long time, just watching you sleep across the fire. I think that was when something inside of me realized I was already home.

Gabrielle looks up at her, her eyes reflecting the strong bond between them. She reaches up, and wordlessly pulls Xena down for a lengthy kiss.

**FADE OUT.**

**END OF ACT ONE**



## ACT TWO

FADE IN:

### EXT. DESERT OASIS - DAY - PRESENT X&G TIME

It is early morning, and Xena and Gabrielle are packing up camp. Gabrielle tosses sand on the remains of their breakfast fire, while Xena is off to the side under a palm tree, using her coconut trick to win over a beautiful white and gray dappled horse. While feeding the white horse, she's sitting atop a chocolate brown horse with a white star on its forehead. The brown horse is placidly munching on yet more coconut.

Gabrielle looks over at them and shakes her head, a little smile tugging at her lips. She shoves some cooking utensils into her pack and walks over to them, stopping a few yards short.

**GABRIELLE**

We riding the rest of the way?

**XENA**

Sure beats walking.

**GABRIELLE**

You're certain this one is going to be gentle enough for me to ride?

**XENA**

This white one's a gelding, so I think he's been domesticated at some point. He'll be a lot more gentle than a stallion would be, and no worries about the moodiness of a mare in season.

**GABRIELLE**

How on earth did you figure out he's a gelding and not a stallion?

Xena just looks at her pointedly.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

Never mind.



**XENA**

Both of these are a little older. Old enough they won't be feeling their oats so much, but not so old the travel would make 'em keel over.

**GABRIELLE**

How do you know  
how old they are?

Xena slides down from the brown horse.

**XENA**

I checked their teeth.

Gabrielle appears to think about this, and unconsciously opens her own mouth a little bit, and runs her tongue over her teeth as she contemplates it. Xena chuckles and leans over, planting a firm kiss on her lips.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Doesn't work the  
same on people. Here,  
you want a boost?

Gabrielle eyes the gelding warily.

**GABRIELLE**

What do I do if he  
starts bucking?

**XENA**

You'll be hanging onto fistfuls  
of mane anyway. Hang on tight,  
or get him past the grass and  
fall off. Sand's deep and soft.  
You'll be fine. You've won  
over a few horses, if I recall.

**GABRIELLE**

True. Okay.  
Boost me up.

Xena grabs her by the hips and lifts her up. She lands solidly on the horse's back. He looks back and flattens his ears, then takes off running. He kicks up his heels a little, but doesn't buck or rear full-out.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

Whoa! Easy there, boy.

She leans over and hangs on, and talks quietly to the horse whose ears prick up and turn backward so he can hear her talk. He nickers and slows down some, and finally begins to walk. Gabrielle continues to whisper to him and the horse stretches out his neck, walking proudly as Gabrielle guides him back to the tree.

**XENA**

Well done. What in Hades  
did you say to him to get  
him to settle down so quickly?

Gabrielle smirks at her.

**GABRIELLE**

Told him if he didn't calm  
down, you were going to  
ride him instead of me.

Xena curls up her lip, but her eyes are twinkling.

**XENA**

Hardee-har-har. Fine.  
Let's get moving, horse-  
whisperer. Daylight's burning.

Gabrielle looks up at the already-blazing sun.

**GABRIELLE**

Good thing we have these  
clothes, or that's not all  
that would be burning.

Xena also looks up.

**XENA**

That reminds me. I checked the stars  
last night, and we need adjust our  
direction. We were walking too far east.  
We need to head more to the north.

**GABRIELLE**

Fine by me. It got a little tiring facing  
the sun all morning yesterday.

Xena hands Gabrielle her bag and shoulders her own, then re-mounts the brown horse.

**XENA**

Yeah, last time I was here, I was heading  
mostly east, just trying to reach civilization,  
but honestly, I wasn't quite sure where I  
was when they put me off the ship. The  
mornings then were pretty brutal too.

**GABRIELLE**

Where did you end up?

**XENA**

I finally ran into the Euphrates River, and followed it all the way to the Persian Gulf. Then I traveled the western coastline for a while, until I reached a village. But eventually I ended up in Gaza.



**GABRIELLE**

Gaza? Xena, that's in the opposite direction. That's a very long way from the Persian Gulf, isn't it?

Xena stares off into the distance.

**XENA**

A thousand miles.

**GABRIELLE**

A... a thousand miles?  
A thousand miles!?  
How did you get there?

**XENA**

I rode Argo.

Gabrielle stares at her incredulously.

**GABRIELLE**

You rode Argo a thousand miles across the desert? That must have been a very long hot ride.

Xena looks over at her for a long moment, her features somewhat stoic.

**XENA**

Hot. Oh, yeah. But it only took five days.

**GABRIELLE**

Five days? That's...  
Xena, that's impossible.

**XENA**

No it's not. There  
was this race, see....

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. PORT TOWN ON THE PERSIAN GULF - DAY - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

It is a bustling little town with a very busy harbor, ships of all sizes coming and going. Slaves carry heavy bundles of cargo on their backs, and the streets bear steady traffic of man, woman and beast. Xena is riding Argo, staying to one side of the street close to the buildings. Her eyes dart everywhere as she takes in the crowd and activity around her. They are barely moving, the street is so packed.

Without warning, she reaches down and grabs hold of a wrist, its hand halfway into her belt pouch. She looks down into the face of a very surprised thief, his dark eyes bulging as she squeezes his arm tightly.

**XENA**

*(growling)*

See anything you like here?

He shakes his head furiously as she twists his arm slightly.

**THIEF**

Auggggghhhhh.

Xena continues to squeeze until his fist opens, and a large gold coin pops out. Xena catches it handily and tucks it back into her pouch, and laces it closed again.

**XENA**

Didn't think so.

She loosens her grip slightly and leans over, getting in his face.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

I catch your fingers anywhere  
near me again and I'll  
cut 'em off. Got me?

The thief backs away and rubs his wrist as she releases him. He admires Argo and smiles broadly, gesturing.

**THIEF**

Ocean of fire, no?

Xena looks at him and then down at Argo, and then back.

**XENA**

No. Last time I checked,  
she was a horse.

She shakes her head and moves on.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Takes all kinds, my  
mother used to say.

She smiles sadly and urges Argo to walk a little faster, guiding her down a less crowded side street. She spots a tavern and pulls over, then jumps down to the ground and ties Argo to a hitching post near the door. As she walks through the entrance, she sees a man approaching Argo from behind. Xena lets loose a whistle, and Argo kicks backward, knocking the man across the street and into a water trough.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Good girl.



Argo looks at her and snorts.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Keep watch, will ya? I'll only  
be in here long enough to  
grab a bite and a drink.

Argo whinnies and snorts again.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. TAVERN - DAY - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Xena ducks inside and bellies up to the bar. The tavern keeper spies her and makes his way down to her, swiping the bar surface with a rag as he goes along.

**TAVERN KEEPER**

What'll you have?

**XENA**

A strong drink and a plate  
of whatever is cooking  
over there on the fire.

**TAVERN KEEPER**

Lunch special, coming up.

He turns and fills a plate and a mug, then plunks both down in front of her. Xena studies the unidentifiable mixture of grain, vegetables and bits of meat, and then sniffs the drink and blinks as the strong alcohol scent assaults her nose.

**XENA**

What's that?

**TAVERN KEEPER**

Liquor of date palm. It'll  
grow hair on your chest.

As he says this, Xena is in mid-sip, and she spews the liquor back into the mug. She looks down at her chest and back up at the man, who reddens as he realizes what he said. Xena grins wickedly, and then slugs down the drink in one gulp. She plucks a bit of the meat from the grain mixture and waves it in front of his face.

**XENA**

What's this?

**TAVERN KEEPER**

Goat.

**XENA**

Goat? You're sure?  
Not camel? Or dog?  
Or horse?

**TAVERN KEEPER**

Goat.

Xena's eyes narrow and she sniffs the small bite, before popping it in her mouth and tasting it carefully.

**XENA**

Goat. Not bad.



The tavern keeper smiles and nods graciously at the compliment. He leans over, and rests one arm against the bar top.

**TAVERN KEEPER**

Nice horse out there.  
She's yours, right?

Xena glances behind her, where she can see Argo through the open doorway.

**XENA**

Yeah.

**TAVERN KEEPER**

How much?

Argo apparently hears him, and whinnies in protest.

**XENA**

Heh. Like owner, like  
horse. Not for sale.

**TAVERN KEEPER**

Look at those legs.  
Bet she can run for days.  
Not pure Arabian, is she?

**XENA**

Caught her in the desert.  
I have no idea her parentage.

**TAVERN KEEPER**

She's too big to be pure  
bred. That's too bad.

**XENA**

Why?

**TAVERN KEEPER**

She won't qualify for  
the Ocean of Fire.

Xena stops in mid-chew, and swallows.

**XENA**

Excuse me?

**CUT TO:**



## EXT. DESERT HILLS - DAY - PRESENT X&G TIME

Xena and Gabrielle are riding side by side on the horses. It is sunny and relatively calm, a welcome respite from the sand-filled wind of the day before.

**GABRIELLE**

Ocean of fire.  
What does that mean?

**XENA**

That was the race.  
The Ocean of Fire.

**GABRIELLE**

What an odd thing to call it.

**XENA**

Not really. That was the thousand miles,  
Gabrielle. It was a race across the  
Arabian Desert from the city of Hajar  
near the Persian Gulf to Gaza on the  
Mediterranean Sea. Some of the  
most scorching and barren territory I  
ever hope to see. The desert, it was....

**GABRIELLE**

An ocean of fire.

Gabrielle looks across the sand, where she can see the heat rising in shimmering waves.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

That must have been pure  
torture for poor Argo. That's  
not like you. Xena, why?

**XENA**

The purse.

**GABRIELLE**

But Argo.... Didn't you care  
what that might do to her?

**XENA**

*(sadly)*

At the time, no.

**GABRIELLE**

She saved your life  
from those bandits.

**XENA**

*(sighing)*

I didn't see it that way, not initially.  
You forget the ego. I was convinced I  
could've fought my way out of that  
canyon if Argo hadn't been there.  
Things changed later, but  
I'm getting ahead of myself.



**GABRIELLE**

Must've been a big purse.

**XENA**

Enough I could've lived comfortably  
for the rest of my life. And mother and  
Toris too, if they would've let me....

Gabrielle steers her horse closer and reaches out and briefly touches Xena's arm.

**GABRIELLE**

So you wanted to win so  
you could try to get back  
in your family's good favor.

**XENA**

That was part of it, but not  
exactly, no. You have to  
remember who... what... I was.

**GABRIELLE**

A reformed warlord?

**XENA**

A warlord who was trying to reform might  
be more accurate. Other than selling my  
horse before hiring onto that boat, I hadn't  
earned an honest dinar in years. There  
were bounties on my head all over Greece  
and beyond. I had no idea how to go on or...  
how to live my life. All I knew how to be was  
a warrior, yet for a while after I met Hercules,  
almost every time I drew my sword, I felt  
guilty, unsure if it was the right thing to do.

**GABRIELLE**

Even to defend yourself?

**XENA**

I didn't feel I deserved defending. But that purse, if I had that kind of money, I could have traveled somewhere far away and started over and not worried about what I was going to live on. It was the easy way out. You know me; I almost never take the easy way. But I was just so tired... of everything.

Gabrielle reaches over and squeezes her leg.

**GABRIELLE**

But you couldn't enter the race because Argo wasn't pure Arabian?

Xena smiles, a wicked little glint in her eyes.

**XENA**

It was a very elite race, for only the finest Arabian horses, run by a pair of twin brothers. One lived in Gaza, and the other in Hajar. They were Arabian sheiks and wealthy princes of the highest order. I joined a caravan to Hajar and hunted down the brother who lived there, Gabel. I learned as much about him as I could from the caravan, and I talked up Argo to anyone who would listen.

**GABRIELLE**

You conned your way into the race, didn't you?



**XENA**

Let's just say by the time we reached Hajar, I think that caravan expected Argo to sprout wings and fly.

**GABRIELLE**

But how did you get past  
Argo not being purebred?

**XENA**

I learned Galeel had a weakness.  
He was a Tabula champion.

**GABRIELLE**

Tabula?

**XENA**

It's a strategic board game. I've played  
a fair share of Tabula. You toss dice and  
move pieces around a series of gridlines.  
During the long nights on the caravan, I  
watched Tabula games and played until I  
was dreaming about those damned grids.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. TAVERN - EVENING - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Xena makes her way through a crowded room. Every table is full with predominantly male patrons, and the atmosphere is one of a carnival. The Ocean of Fire is the topic of conversation at each table she passes. Beautiful girls in harem costumes glide between the tables, serving food and drink. To one side is a stage of belly dancers, swaying to the beat of hypnotic music. It is an upscale place, with elaborate tapestries on the walls and plush carpeting on the floor. The air is thick with cloying opium smoke, and Xena takes a hit off a pipe that is passed to her.

In a back corner, a throng of wealthy-looking men is gathered around a table. Seated at the table are two more men, decked out in fine clothing. They are both smoking and drinking and hovered over a game board. Xena is dressed similarly to the harem girls, and she smooths her hair back before approaching the table. One of the seated men looks up and smiles approvingly.

**MAN**

Ah, just in time. Girl, bring us  
another round of drinks.

**XENA**

I'm not a servant.

She rests one hand on the table and leans over to give him a better view of her assets, and smiles fetchingly.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

You Prince Galeel?

The man continues to smile, checking her out as he talks.

**MAN**

Yes. And who might you be?

**XENA**

The name's Xena. I'll get you that round of drinks, on me, on one condition.

**GALEEL**

*(mesmerized)*

And that would be?

**XENA**

Let me play.

Galeel and all the men around them laugh heartily.

**GALEEL**

This is no woman's game. Are you sure you know how to play?

Xena leans closer still, her own face inches from his.

**XENA**

I have many skills.

Galeel swallows hard and licks his lips.

**GALEEL**

Very well, then. It would be my pleasure. Get us those drinks, and I'll play you.

She bats her eyelashes at him and purrs.

**XENA**

I'm sure the pleasure will be all mine.

She disappears and returns with a tray full of drinks and passes them out, then takes the seat across the table from Galeel. She wordlessly removes a gold coin from a small belt purse and places it on the table. Galeel's eyebrows rise in surprise, and he digs in his pocket and matches it.

**GALEEL**

I see. You want to make it interesting.

**XENA**

*(still flirting)*

I make everything interesting.



**GALEEL**

I'll just bet you do.

He hands her the dice.

**GALEEL**

*(cont'd)*

Ladies first.

**XENA**

I'm no lady.

Galeel is practically panting as she takes the dice, trailing her fingertips across his palm in the process. She tosses them on the table and makes a move. He quickly makes a move that obviously out plays hers. Xena raises her fingers to her lips.

**XENA**

*(giggling)*

Oops.

She takes her turn, and they go back and forth for several moves, while the others look on. Most of them watch Xena rather than the game. She plays a fair game, but finally, Galeel makes a move and sits back and crosses his arms in triumph.

**GALEEL**

That's it. You've nowhere  
else to move. I win.

Xena looks down at the board and back up at him with a sensual pout.

**XENA**

I tried so hard.

She reaches across and touches the back of his hand.

**XENA**  
(*cont'd*)  
You obviously  
tried... harder.

Her fingers tease back and forth across his hand, and his forehead breaks into a sweat.

**XENA**  
(*cont'd*)  
One more game, please?  
I'll make it worth your while.

**GALEEL**  
(*breathlessly*)  
One more game? Sure.  
What can it hurt?

Xena withdraws her hand and smiles coyly, then places two gold coins on the table, which Galeel promptly matches, his eyes never leaving Xena's. Xena puckers her lips in Galeel's direction, then she lifts the dice up and blows on them. She tosses them and makes a move.

**GALEEL**  
(*cont'd*)  
Your eyes are the most  
amazing blue. So different.

**XENA**  
Different? You got that right.

She watches him make his move and then takes up the dice. She smiles charmingly, then tosses the dice and her smile disappears. She moves her pieces, evicting a few of Galeel's from their spot. He looks at the board and then at her, his features puzzled. Her eyes gleam evilly, and then the game is on in earnest, dice flying and pieces moving in rapid succession. A larger crowd begins to gather around the table, watching a woman best the crown prince. It ends in a flurry, as Xena makes a final move, snatches up the coins and tucks them into her pouch.

**GALEEL**  
You tricked me!

**XENA**  
I played a fair game.

**GALEEL**  
(*angrily*)  
One more! Best  
two out of three.

Xena looks at him like a rabbit caught in a trap. She leans forward, getting in his face again, but this time all pretense is gone.

**XENA**

*(in a throaty voice)*

All right. But let's make  
this really interesting.

**GALEEL**

*(gulping)*

Anything. Anything at all.

**XENA**

*(under her breath)*

Gotcha.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

I have a horse. Argo.  
She's outside.

**GALEEL**

Argo? I've heard of this  
horse. You were with  
the caravan that arrived  
yesterday for the race.

**XENA**

That's right.

Here's the deal.

I lose, you get Argo.

**GALEEL**

If she's as fine as  
I've heard, I look  
forward to beating you.

He leans closer, plucking at his moustache.

**GALEEL**

*(cont'd)*

On the off chance you  
win, what do you get?

**XENA**

Argo and I get to  
enter the Ocean of Fire.

**GALEEL**

You're a woman.



**XENA**

No kidding.  
That a problem?



The crowd laughs.

**GALEEL**

*(hastily)*

No. No, no problem. But Argo,  
do you have her papers?  
Can you prove she's pure?

**XENA**

She's a wild pony from the desert.  
I can't prove a damned thing,  
except she can run like the wind.

**GALEEL**

Impossible! Only the finest  
Arabians can enter the race.

**XENA**

You said 'anything.'  
Are you not a man of  
your word? Hmmmm?

She allows just a hint of flirtation to surface again.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

What've you got to lose? At best,  
you get my horse. At worst, you  
let a woman and a half-breed mare  
enter a race against Arabia's finest.  
Come on, Galeel, what'll it be?

**GALEEL**

Very well, then. One more game.  
I win, I get your horse. I lose,  
you enter the Ocean of Fire.

Xena stares steadily at him, and lifts the dice again. This time, she spits on them.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT HILLS - DAY - PRESENT X&G TIME**

Xena and Gabrielle are still riding across the desert.

**GABRIELLE**

What happened?  
I take it you won.



**XENA**

I won all right. The tavern all but named me the new Tabula champion, but I refused. I'd gotten what I wanted, and I didn't want Galeel any angrier at me than he already was.

**GABRIELLE**

So you entered the race?

Xena sighs and her eyes take on a faraway look.

**XENA**

Mmmm. Yeah. I thought I'd seen it all in my travels, but I hadn't a clue what I was getting myself into.

They ride on in silence, the sun beating down from overhead, as we....

**FADE OUT.**

**END OF ACT TWO**

## ACT THREE

FADE IN:

### EXT. DESERT - EDGE OF THE CITY OF HAJAR - MORNING - 36 SUMMERS AGO

A crowd is gathered, and the wealthier citizens of Hajar are seated under open-sided tents. Forty horses and riders meander around near a banner that marks a starting line. Some riders are busy making last-minute checks of buckles and packs, while others are walking around with the more high-strung steeds. All of the riders are wearing fine clothing, and their horse's saddles and bridles are overly adorned in bright colored ribbons and silver trinkets.

Xena and Argo are standing prudently in the shade of a large tree, calmly watching the goings on. Xena is dressed in her same sensible desert attire, and Argo has no extra ornamentation on her tack. Xena sizes up the competition. She is the only woman rider and Argo is a bit larger than the smaller purebred Arabians.

**XENA**

They think you can't win, girl.  
They think your blood's not good  
enough, and they say you're too  
heavy to run as fast through  
the sand as the Arabians can.

She scratches Argo between the ears, whispers conspiratorially.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

I say you've got longer  
legs, and you're gonna  
leave 'em all in the dust.

Argo whinnies and appears to nod in agreement.

Across the way, Galeel watches her, his eyes narrowed in anger. He paces back and forth and finally stops and looks around.

**GALEEL**

*(shouting)*

Fajer!

One of the riders looks up and Galeel motions at him to come over. Xena notices this, and surreptitiously watches them as they begin to talk.

**FAJER**

Yes?

**GALEEL**

You see that woman?

**FAJER**

*(leering)*

It is difficult to see  
anything else, why?

**GALEEL**

If she even comes close  
to winning, kill her...  
and her horse too.

Fajer stares at him in surprise.

**FAJER**

Such loveliness. Both the  
woman and the horse.  
It would be a waste.

**GALEEL**

*(snarling)*

I hired you to keep an eye  
on certain riders in this race.  
She is one of them. Now go be  
friendly with her and stick close.

Fajer smiles broadly at the prospect.

**FAJER**

Tsk. Such terrible assignments you  
give me. Be friendly, eh? I think I  
can manage that. No worries. She's  
not going to win on that large horse.

**GALEEL**

See to it that she doesn't.

Fajer trots off on his horse and sidles up to Xena, who flashes him a huge fake smile.

**FAJER**

Good day, lady.

Xena looks up at the blazing sun and back at him.

**XENA**

What's so good about it?

**FAJER**

*(chuckling nervously)*  
It is a good day for racing.  
I have a tip for you.

**XENA**

Yeah? And what's that?



**FAJER**

When the race starts, they will all take off running as fast as they can until we are out of sight of the crowd. After that, they will all slow down to a more bearable pace. It's all for show, the beginning.

**XENA**

I'll keep that in mind. What else?

**FAJER**

They told you about  
the two checkpoints?

**XENA**

Yes.

**FAJER**

Galeel sent riders out a week ago from here, and his brother, Majeed, has also sent riders out from Gaza at the other end. Each group has a caravan of supplies, and has set up a checkpoint where you can be sure to get fresh food and water, if you're running low. It's best to time your race to reach those checkpoints on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> day.

**XENA**

Sounds logical enough.  
Anything else?

**FAJER**

Keep an eye on your map  
and watch your back at night.

Xena's eyes shine with danger, and she sits back just enough that her chakram is visible from beneath her long wrap. Her sword is already in plain sight in a scabbard strapped onto Argo's saddle, along with her coiled whip.

**XENA**

Always.

**FAJER**

One more thing.

He guides his horse closer.

**FAJER**

*(cont'd)*

Half these riders won't finish  
the race. Several of them won't  
live through it. Why does a  
beautiful woman like you want  
to take on such a challenge?

**XENA**

Because I can.

She looks away from him dismissively, just as Galeel steps up on a raised podium at the starting line.

**GALEEL**

*(yelling)*

All riders, line up at  
the start, please!

An excited buzz travels through the crowd, as the horses and riders all make their way to the starting line. Xena and Argo amble over, taking a spot near one end of the line-up. Galeel holds up both hands, quieting the crowd. In one hand he holds a bright purple silk scarf.

**GALEEL**

*(cont'd)*

Riders! I am going to raise this scarf  
over my head and drop it. When you  
see it hit the ground, that is your cue to  
take off. I wish all of you luck. My  
brother will be there to greet you  
by the sea in Gaza at the finish.

He raises the scarf, and the crowd goes deathly silent. A few horses snort and whinny, while others stomp their hooves and flick their tails nervously. Argo stands a head taller than most of them, calmly chewing on a bit of fig Xena has given her.

Galeel releases the scarf and it floats to the ground, almost in slow motion. As it drifts into a crumpled pile on the podium base, the horses erupt into motion. They leave a cloud of dust behind them as they take off, their hooves sounding like thunder across the landscape.

As the dust begins to settle, all the horses are way ahead, except Argo, who is cantering steadily behind the rest. Xena watches them. Just as Fajer predicted, once the crowd is a speck on the horizon behind them, the horses begin to slow down, many of them to a walk. She smiles and leans over.

### XENA

Just go at a comfortable pace, girl.  
We've got 200 miles to cover, and  
16 hours of daylight to cover it in.

They continue to canter, and gradually passes some of the other riders. She spots Fajer near the front of the herd, and grins as they begin to gain on him. Finally, she passes him, giving him a little wave of her fingers as they travel on by. After a few more minutes, Argo and Xena are in the lead, still keeping the same pace they started at until they disappear over a rise.

Another rider moves in next to Fajer.

### RIDER

Such an insane pace  
she is keeping.

### FAJER

Ah, Wahed. No worries. At  
that pace, her horse will be  
dead before the day is over.

### WAHED

*(scornfully)*

Good. No woman has ever entered  
the race before. It's an insult.



**FAJER**

Galeel would not have let her enter  
if there was a chance of her winning.  
Relax, my friend. She'll be out  
of the running before nightfall.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT CAMPGROUND - SUNSET - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Several of the front-running horses approach a campground below a range of low-lying hills. It is obviously used by desert travelers, with several smooth areas for laying out bedrolls and tents, and there is a large stone water well in the center. Fajer and Wahed are among the first group to reach the campsite. Their horses appear weary and are foaming at the mouths a little, while their coats are sleek with sweat. As they pull into camp, they spot a campfire at the far end and a tiny tent is pitched near the fire. Fajer sniffs the air.

**FAJER**

Whoever that is, they are  
roasting something delicious.

**WAHED**

I'm so hungry I could eat these  
stones. Maybe it's a vagabond  
traveler, willing to share.

**FAJER**

Let's go find out.

They dismount and walk the rest of the way over. They gasp in unison as they realize it is Xena. She's seated against a boulder with her feet propped up on a smaller stone. In one hand she's holding a mug of something, while with the other she's tending to something on a spit over the fire.

**XENA**

*(cheekily)*  
Hello, boys.





**FAJER**

Impossible!

**WAHED**

*(suspiciously)*

How long have  
you been here?

**XENA**

Oh, not long. I brushed down  
my horse, cleaned her tack,  
sharpened my sword, mended a  
bridle strap, washed up, pitched  
my tent, built a fire, refilled my  
water flasks and went hunting.

She indicates the roasting meat over the campfire.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Did you know spiny  
tailed lizard tastes  
just like chicken?

She smiles innocently at them, but her eyes are full of mischief.

**FAJER**

Where is your horse?

**XENA**

Who, Argo? She got bored  
and went exploring.

Xena whistles and cocks her head to the side, listening. In a moment, Argo comes running up from near the hills, fresh as a daisy. She whinnies and stops next to Xena and nudges her with her nose.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

She's fine, see?  
Want some lizard?

She sticks a knife through a bit of the meat and holds it up toward the men in offering.

**WAHED**

*(angrily)*

No, thank you.

**FAJER**

Good night, Xena. We'll  
see you in the morning.

Xena watches as they practically stomp away in disgust. She shrugs and removes the rest of her catch from the fire. She sits back with a satisfied smile and begins to eat.

**XENA**

Goody. More for me.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT HILLS - DAY - PRESENT X&G TIME**

Xena and Gabrielle have stopped in the shade of a tall rocky hill. They are seated on a blanket, eating lunch. The horses are grazing at dried scrubby vegetation.

**GABRIELLE**

*(laughing)*

Oh, that was mean, Xena.  
You did all of that before  
they ever arrived at camp?

Xena stops in mid-bite and smiles naughtily.

**XENA**

Yeah, but I left out the part  
where I re-stacked half the  
well. The rocks had been  
knocked over. I thought that  
might push them over the edge.

Gabrielle laughs even harder.

**GABRIELLE**

So after that hard day of riding,  
Argo was ready for more?

**XENA**

It was a lark for her, at least  
the first couple of days.

**GABRIELLE**

Then what happened?

**XENA**

*(wistfully)*

Everything changed.

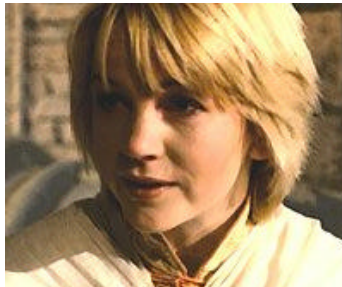
Gabrielle scoots closer and stretches out her legs and pats them. Xena smiles at her and lies back, resting her head in Gabrielle's lap. Gabrielle begins to play with her hair.



**GABRIELLE**

*(softly)*

Tell me about it, please?



**XENA**

On the third day, Tartarus  
came to earth....

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT HILLS - MORNING - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

The sun is rising, and all we can see is sifting brown sand dunes and rocky ground. There is no campsite, but horses and sleeping riders are scattered all across the terrain.

Xena is asleep in her tent with just the top of her head poking out. Argo walks around nervously and keeps looking off toward the east where the sun is peeking over the horizon. She walks over and nudges Xena.

**XENA**

*(grumbling)*

Give me another few  
minutes, will ya?  
Sun's not even full up.

Argo insists and nudges her harder. She whinnies and paws at the bedroll, and finally gives Xena a big sloppy lick on the face. Xena shoots straight up, brushing her head against the tent roof.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Argo! For crying out loud,  
I know you're eager  
to get going, but....

She stops and frowns, as a herd of gazelle appears and goes flitting past her, fast as lightening. Some of the other sleeping riders are disturbed by them and begin to rise.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Weird.

Argo is as jittery as Xena has ever seen her and nudges Xena a few more times, then walks over and pushes her saddle toward Xena with her nose.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

All right already. I'm awake.  
I'll even eat on the trail  
so we can get moving, if  
that'll make you happier.

She gets up and stretches and saddles up Argo, who is dancing nervously from hoof to hoof. She pauses again, as a herd of oryx comes racing past. Xena grows completely still, listening. A low rumble is heard growing steadily louder, along with an odd whistling sound. Xena squints toward the east. The noise begins to sound like thunder. All at once, the sun pops up into full view, and just as quickly is blotted out by a brownish haze. Xena's eyes widen.

**XENA**

*(cont'd, yelling)*

Run!

She grabs her pack and weapons, leaps onto Argo and takes off, leaving her bedroll and tent behind. Argo needs no urging, her hooves clipping along in a blur. A few other riders are also racing behind them.

To the east, a great cloud of sand rises 100 feet from the desert floor. It rolls toward them, resembling an angry reddish-brown tidal wave. The wind is howling furiously, and the storm is gaining on the desperate riders.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Sorry girl, just keep running  
as long as you can.

Argo is frothing at the mouth, and she's stretched out low to the ground. They pass some more hills and Argo veers off away from the others, who keep going. She races through a narrow passage, and skids into a turn, stopping beneath a long, low rocky outcropping off a westerly-facing hill.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Been this way  
before, huh?

She slides out of the saddle and digs in her bag, and pulls out a large square of material, and wraps it over Argo's face. She kisses Argo on the nose, then covers her own face and buries it into Argo's mane, just as the sandstorm reaches them, and rolls overhead. The noise is deafening, and blinding sand scours them from all sides. It lasts several minutes, before it grows deathly silent.

Xena slowly looks up. They are both covered in a coat of sand, and beyond the outcropping the ground is covered in a few fresh feet of it. She coughs and Argo sneezes, as Xena unwraps her face.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Hey. You okay?

She gives Argo a pat on the neck, and receives a contented whicker in return.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Let's brush you off.

She digs in her pack and comes out with a handful of sand. Her eyes grow wide in panic, and she uncaps her water flask and cautiously tips it over. Muddy brown liquid pours out.

**XENA**

*(cont'd, hissing)*

Bacchae!

A second flask yields the same result, but on the third one, she gets lucky as clear, sweet water drips out. She tilts it up to her mouth and takes a few sips, then offers Argo some in her cupped hand.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

We're gonna have to ration water  
until we reach the next well.



She finds the brush and takes care of Argo, then climbs back in the saddle. They cautiously walk back out to the open desert, which is now a vast landscape of newly-formed sand dunes. As they walk, she sees lumps in the sand. The wind blows over one as she passes it, uncovering the face of one of the riders. He is dead. Xena looks all around at the lumps and her face is very sober.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT HILLS - DAY - PRESENT X&G TIME**

Xena is still stretched out on the blanket with her head in Gabrielle's lap.

Lucia

**GABRIELLE**

*(quietly)*

Xena, you could  
have been killed.

**XENA**

If not for Argo, I would have been killed.  
I'd never felt so alone. There I was in the  
middle of the desert, and every living thing  
around me had been flattened. If not for  
Argo's company, I think I would've gone mad.

**GABRIELLE**

You said everything  
changed. How so?

**XENA**

After that storm, winning the race became  
less important than Argo surviving it.  
She saved my life and I owed her the same.  
From then on, I tried to slow the pace.

**GABRIELLE**

*(incredulously)*

The race went on after that?

**XENA**

Yeah. By the third day there were some way behind us, and some way ahead of us. And even a few with us ended up surviving by ducking into spaces in the hills like Argo and I did. So no, not everyone was trapped by the storm.

**GABRIELLE**

How did you make it all day with only one water flask?

**XENA**

That was the longest day of the race, Gabrielle. That night, I gave up.

**GABRIELLE**

Really?

**XENA**

Yeah, really. We pulled into another campground completely out of water, and all our food had been ruined in the storm. Neither of us had eaten all day. The oats I carried for Argo were so mixed with sand after the storm, they weren't edible.

**GABRIELLE**

What did you do?

**XENA**

Luckily, the camp had a well, and I was able to hunt down some more lizard. Even found some plants Argo was able to eat. But I was done with it. I was exhausted and dirty and hotter than Hades. And I was afraid much more might kill Argo. She was weary. We were down to twenty riders. A few had dropped out of the race, but the rest were killed in the storm. It was damned quiet in camp that night.

**GABRIELLE**

So what happened? You went on to Gaza, but didn't race anymore.

Xena rolls over to her side and lounges on one elbow. She pops a fig in her mouth and chews with great satisfaction, her eyes full of renewed energy.

**XENA**

Yep. We went on  
to Gaza all right.



**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT CAMPGROUND - EARLY MORNING - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Xena is sleeping on top of Argo's saddle blanket, having lost her tent and bedroll in the sand storm. All around her, men are breaking camp for another day of racing. Xena rolls over, face down, and covers her head with one arm. A man approaches her and gives her a little shake.

**XENA**

*(grumpily)*

Go on. I'm not racing today.

**MAN**

But your horse is. Better hurry, or  
she may take off without you.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Huh?

She sits up and blinks, and looks over to where the riders are all getting ready, saddling up their horses. Argo is standing with them. She has somehow managed to drag her saddle and bridle along with her and is standing next to the tack, waiting patiently for another day of racing. Fajer and Wahed are nearby saddling up their horses. They snicker at the riderless Argo.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Well I'll be damned.

She whistles, but Argo whinnies back at her and shakes her head and refuses to come. Xena gets up and stumbles over to her and receives a reprimanding whicker. Fajer and Wahed continue to laugh until Xena gives them a withering stare. She turns back around and concentrates fully on Argo.



**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Okay. Fine. We'll race.  
Just give me a minute  
to break camp.

In short order, she packs everything up, and they take off to the west, only a little bit later than the others, who are all out of sight. As she passes by some low-lying hills, Fajer and Wahed slip out of the shadows on their horses and fall in way behind her.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT CHECKPOINT - EARLY EVENING - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

It is the last checkpoint on the last night of the race. Xena is sitting by a campfire, a ways off from the rest of the riders. Argo is standing close by, munching on a fresh bag of oats. Xena quietly observes the remaining fifteen horses and riders, all of whom are bustling about, taking advantage of the stores at the checkpoint.

**XENA**

Good thing we got  
here early again, girl.

Argo's ears prick forward, and she makes a rumbling noise while she continues to eat.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

I got the only extra blanket they  
brought with 'em, so I don't have  
to sleep on yours tonight.

Argo's nose comes out of the feedbag and she nickers in response.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Lost a lot of 'em today.

She looks around, and her eyes narrow as she spots Fajer and Wahed making camp not too far from her - close enough she can watch them, but not so close they can hear her.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

A few we wish we  
would've lost, huh?

Argo whinnies and nods her head in agreement. Xena continues to take stock of who is left. She studies another campsite on the other side of hers. Its tall lanky occupant has kept to himself for the entire ride and is currently hastily pitching a tent. He looks at Xena and quickly covers his face and disappears inside the tent.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

What in Hades? He's just a boy.  
First time I've seen him with his face  
uncovered. Bet he can't even grow a  
beard yet. Wonder what his story is?

She stands and stretches and pours herself a mug of something to drink, then sits back down on her blanket.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Not that I plan to bother him.

She peers back over at Fajer and Wahed. Fajer nods at her politely, while Wahed ignores her existence. She nods back at Fajer but doesn't smile.

**XENA**

*(cont'd, whispering)*

Wish I had a tent to  
put this blanket in.

She stokes the fire and packs up her travel bag, placing it next to Argo's saddle and bridle. She fluffs out the blanket and places her sword on one side and chakram on the other, and stretches out, using her turban for a pillow. She crosses her ankles and rests her hands on her stomach, looking up at the almost-dark sky.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Whoa. Did you see  
that shooting star?

Argo moves closer and nuzzles her head, then nibbles at a strand of her hair.



**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Hey! Finish your oats.

Another star blazes across the sky as slowly the rest of the stars begin to appear, one by one, twinkling down on the campsite. Xena sighs and closes her eyes.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Gave up wishing on those things  
a long time ago. But why not?  
I can use all the luck I can get.

She turns her head to the side and looks over at Argo.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Gonna make a fresh start  
after this race is over, girl.  
One way or the other.



She closes her eyes again.

**FADE OUT.**

**END OF ACT THREE**

## ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

### EXT. DESERT CAMPGROUND - NIGHT - PRESENT X&G TIME

Xena and Gabrielle are stretched out on a blanket, studying a similar blanket of stars to the one 36 years prior. Their fire is also crackling warmly, and the horses are over nibbling at some tough-looking grassy growth. The terrain has changed slightly, there is more vegetation and the hills are taller than the ones from the morning.

**GABRIELLE**

I didn't know you were into  
stargazing before we met.

**XENA**

I wasn't, other than  
to get my bearings.

**GABRIELLE**

But you wished on that shooting  
star. There must have been  
some magic in them for  
you, even back then.

Xena smiles and rolls to her side, and traces Gabrielle's bare forearm with her fingertips.

**XENA**

There was no magic in the  
stars, Gabrielle, until you  
taught me how to see it there.

Gabrielle's face is at first surprised. Slowly, she smiles, and then pulls Xena into a hug.

**GABRIELLE**

*(whispering)*

You wanna know a secret?

**XENA**

*(whispering back)*

What?

**GABRIELLE**

There was no magic in them  
for me, until I had someone  
to share them with.

They hold each other close for a long moment, then separate just enough to lie on their sides on the bedroll facing each other, with very little space between them.

**XENA**

I was glad of those stars  
that night, though for  
a very different reason.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT CAMPGROUND - NIGHT - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Xena is asleep on her bedroll. There are so many stars overhead, they illuminate the ground enough to make out basic detail. She hears a sound like a twig breaking, and she slowly reaches out from beneath the blanket on both sides, her fingers curling around her chakram and her sword hilt. She continues to lay still, her eyes closed.

We hear a shuffling noise and Xena's fingers twitch against her chakram, but her eyes remain closed. A shadow passes over her face and starlight glitters against metal, revealing a scimitar blade raised directly over her throat. As it descends, Xena's sword pops up, stopping it. At the same time, she lets her chakram fly. It ricochets off two rocks and whizzes past Argo. Several yards behind Argo, a shadowy figure looms with a dagger raised, ready to be hurled at Argo. The chakram knocks the blade from the man's hand.

Xena jumps to her feet and catches the chakram on the rebound. She engages the man with the scimitar, while keeping one eye on Argo's would-be attacker. The man rushes Argo and Xena whistles. Argo spins and rears, pawing the air before she comes down, knocking the man to the ground. Starlight reveals his face. It's Wahed, his features contorted in anger. He's holding his arm as if he's in pain.

**WAHED**

Auuuuuuuugghhhh!

He jumps up and searches around for his dagger. He sees it and kneels down to grab it, then stands, facing Argo.

**WAHED**

*(cont'd)*

I'll teach you your last  
lesson, you bloody beast!

Xena is still fighting her attacker. She sees Wahed and flings the chakram again, embedding it in his chest just as he lunges at Argo with the dagger.

**XENA**

No one teaches my horse  
lessons, but me! Sheeee-ya!

She fights with renewed vigor, forcing her attacker on the defensive. He swings around with the scimitar using both hands, and she meets it with an equal movement and knocks it from his hands by sheer force. The scimitar clatters away and Xena jumps the man, pinning him to the ground with her sword at his throat.

**XENA**

*(cont'd, growling)*  
Fajer.

**FAJER**

Xena. I can explain.

**XENA**

I'm sure you can.

**FAJER**

I was coming to save  
your horse from Wahed.

**XENA**

You were coming to  
cut my head off.



He opens his mouth to speak, and Xena presses the blade closer and he closes it.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*  
I saw you and Galeel talking.  
Remember? Before  
the race started.

**FAJER**

*(choking)*  
Yes. So?

Xena leans closer and draws a dagger from her belt, dragging the flat of the blade down the side of his face.

**XENA**

*(purring)*  
So I can read lips.

His eyes are wide with fear and comprehension.

**FAJER**

It would be in your best  
interest to let me go.

**XENA**

Yeah? And why's that?

**FAJER**

You killed Wahed. Galeel handpicked  
him to win this race. He won't be  
happy when he hears about this.

Xena looks around. The campground is mostly silent. Stirring noises can be heard inside  
some of the tents, but no one dares to come out and intervene.

**XENA**

He's 800 miles away.

She drags the dagger up and down his face again.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

And if I kill you, who's gonna tell?  
HMMMMM? They all heard you  
just now. Tent walls are damned thin.  
Now they all know the race was  
rigged. You think any of them  
are gonna care to rat on me?

**VOICE FROM A TENT**

I won't rat on you!

**ANOTHER VOICE FROM A TENT**

Me neither!

**ANOTHER VOICE**

*(squeaking)*

Don't hurt me! I won't tell.

**STILL ANOTHER VOICE**

What does it mean, to rat?  
Whatever it is, I won't do it!

Xena laughs evilly, then her face goes cold. She withdraws her dagger and sword and  
shoves against Fajer hard then stands.

**XENA**

*(growling)*

You come within twenty yards  
of me or my horse again,  
I'll kill you on sight.

She turns in disgust to check Argo and hears a whooshing noise behind her. She spins around, sword first, and runs it through Fajer as he charges her with his scimitar. He gasps and blood dribbles from his lips. As Xena withdraws her sword, he falls to the ground with a thud. She studies her sword with satisfaction, then walks over to Wahed, bracing a booted foot against his chest as she tugs her chakram free. She wipes the blood on both chakram and sword on his tunic, then gives his body a little push with her foot.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Pig.

She walks over to Argo and checks her all over, petting her profusely in the process.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

You okay, girl? He didn't  
get to ya, did he?

Argo nuzzles her stomach, making whickering noises.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

We're both wide-awake. Might  
as well get started early, huh?

Argo rumbles as if in agreement. Xena turns around and addresses all the tents.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Listen up! I'm giving you fair warning!  
There's no rules about start time each  
morning. I'm packing it up and starting  
my last day now. Sun'll be up in  
a couple more hours anyway.



She turns and begins saddling Argo. The campground erupts with activity and much grumbling as the others follow suit. Xena finishes the saddling, secures her pack and weapons, and mounts Argo. She looks around the camp and the bustling riders, and shakes her head. Her eyes fall last on the two dead bodies on the ground and a wicked grin appears on her face. She spits between them, then turns Argo away from them and they ride away toward the west. Back behind her, the faintest hint of pink sky is already seen over the eastern hills.

**CUT TO:**



## EXT. DESERT CAMPGROUND - NIGHT - PRESENT X&G TIME

Xena and Gabrielle are still lying close together under the stars, facing each other. Xena is looking down and keeps looking down as she starts to speak.

**XENA**

The thing is, Gabrielle,  
I enjoyed killing them.

**GABRIELLE**

But you were defending  
Argo. And yourself.

**XENA**

But I enjoyed it.

Gabrielle reaches across and touches her face.

**GABRIELLE**

After all this time, you think  
I haven't seen that side of  
you? Xena, look at me.

Soulful blue eyes slowly peer upward.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

It's part of who you are.  
Gods, it's part of who I am  
too. I know how that feels.

Xena gasps, as if she's in pain.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

Xena, it's survival. It's part  
of the world we live in. Kill or  
be killed, isn't that what it  
sometimes comes down to?

Xena nods slightly.

**GABRIELLE**

I once told you I had a warrior's  
reflexes, but not a warrior's  
judgment. Remember?  
With Virgil and the cannibals?

**XENA**

Yeah. I remember.

**GABRIELLE**

But that adrenalin rush, Xena. I know what that feels like. That rush when you know you've just escaped death.

**XENA**

But you've never enjoyed killing.

**GABRIELLE**

*(sighing)*

No. But sometimes in the heat of battle, I think things get all mixed up inside. That rush - sometimes it's what keeps you going, and sometimes it feels good, you know? But sometimes that what it takes to survive.

**XENA**

But you're not a murderer.

Gabrielle touches her face again.

**GABRIELLE**

And neither are you. Not even then. Xena, since you met Hercules, have you ever murdered anyone? Not killed in self-defense or killed to protect someone else, but out and out murdered anyone?

**XENA**

I... Ming....

**GABRIELLE**

No! Would we have made it out of Chin alive if he had lived?

**XENA**

*(softly)*

No. He would've come after us.

**GABRIELLE**

Anyone else? Anyone at all you can think of?

Xena closes her eyes to think, as Gabrielle continues to cup her face. Slowly, Xena raises a hand and covers Gabrielle's and opens her eyes.

**XENA**

No. You know what I think?

**GABRIELLE**

What?

**XENA**

I think I wish I'd had a Gabrielle back then to talk some sense into me. Then, all I felt for the rest of the race was the guilt. I'd left Greece and come all that way, only to discover that deep down inside, I still enjoyed the kill. It was one of my lowest moments.

**GABRIELLE**

I take it you finished the race?



**XENA**

I won it.

**GABRIELLE**

What?!

She looks around.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

Not to state the obvious, but how come we're lying here in the middle of the desert on this blanket instead of in your fine house somewhere?

Xena laughs.

**XENA**

It was pretty anti-climactic, really.  
Some of the others kept challenging  
us, but every time anyone caught up,  
Argo would press harder. Didn't have  
to do much but hang on for the ride.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. TOWN OF GAZA - DAY - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Xena and Argo are running through the town with several riders right on their heels. All along the streets a crowd cheers them on. One rider gains on them and almost catches up with them, riding side by side. Xena glances over at him and turns as she hears yet another one not too far behind. He flanks her on the other side, and all three ride neck-in-neck to the edge of town.

As they pass the last building, they ride out onto a wide expanse of open beach. Xena crouches low and laughs wildly, as the wind whips her hair back and Argo takes off, leaving the others in the dust. She sees a bright banner and another crowd, and laughs again as they approach it and break through it. The crowd erupts in roaring applause, and they keep riding, right up to the edge of the surf. Xena jumps off Argo and hits the water, wading in and dunking under. She comes back up and splashes some water on Argo's legs and body. Argo appears to enjoy it, shaking her head up and down and urging Xena on.

A finely dressed man approaches her and she straightens up and walks out of the water to meet him, leading Argo behind her by the reins.

**MAN**

I am Majeed.  
Congratulations! You've  
won the Ocean of Fire.

He studies Argo.

**MAJEED**

*(cont'd)*

She's not Arabian.

He sucks in a shocked breath.

**MAJEED**

*(cont'd)*

You're the one! Galeel, he sent  
word by carrier pigeon. He  
thought it was a good joke.

He smiles, and bows slightly.

**MAJEED**

*(cont'd)*

I see he was wrong. Go with  
Allah, my lady. And always  
know you've won the greatest  
race in the history of man.

He hands her a large sack that jingles with a metallic sound as she accepts it. Xena opens it and peers inside, and grins from ear to ear.

**XENA**

Thank you.

They clasp arms and she and Argo start to walk away. She stops and turns.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Majeed, you're nothing like  
your brother. Stay that way.

Majeed tilts his head in puzzlement, as she turns and walks back toward the town, and the crowd cheers wildly behind her.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT CAMPSITE - NIGHT - PRESENT X&G TIME**

It is the same night, same blanket, same stars. They are still lying close together, talking.

**GABRIELLE**

So what happened  
to the money?

**XENA**

First things first. I rode out into  
the desert and found another  
herd of wild ponies and let Argo go.

**GABRIELLE**

But....

**XENA**

Hold on. I'm getting to that. I let her  
go because I felt I owed it to her. She'd  
carried me all the way to the Persian  
Gulf and back and made me a wealthy  
woman. The least I could do was  
give her back her freedom.

**GABRIELLE**

That sounds fair enough.  
But....

Xena covers her mouth and laughs, then uncovers it. Gabrielle smiles at her charmingly.

**XENA**

Then I walked back into town. I planned to get a room for the night and book passage back to Greece the next morning. But first I went back down to the beach where we'd won. I wanted to get away from the crowd of the town for a while and just think and rest. Sure enough, the beach was empty by then, except for one boy.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. BEACH - DAY - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Xena is walking along the beach barefoot, carrying her pack and boots. Way down the beach she can see someone sitting in the edge of the surf. She starts to turn away, when she cocks her head to the side, and we hear a sobbing noise. She frowns and keeps walking toward him. As she gets closer, we can see it is the same boy who was riding in the race. He looks up and sees her and stands and starts to walk away.

**XENA**

Hold on.

He appears to think about it and his shoulders slump. He waits until she catches up to him. His face is streaked with tears.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

You ran in the race, didn't you?



**BOY**

*(sniffing)*

Yeah.

**XENA**

What's your name?

**BOY**

Shabab.

**XENA**

Where's your horse?

**SHABAB**

I... I sold him.

Xena sighs and looks as if she'd rather be anywhere else.

**XENA**

Why? Hey, how old  
are you, anyway?

**SHABAB**

I'm twelve summers.  
I sold my horse to buy food.  
And passage home.

**XENA**

Where's home?

**SHABAB**

Cairo. My family is there.

**XENA**

Cairo? Your family let a kid like  
you travel all the way to Hajar alone  
to ride in a thousand mile race  
across the desert. Right.  
Kid, you tell a good story.



**SHABAB**

*(defiantly)*

No one let me do anything. I ran away two years ago. I heard about the race and begged my way from caravan to caravan until I made it to Hajar. I worked for months in a wealthy sheik's stable. Finally, I convinced him to partly pay me with one of his horses. He wasn't the finest horse, but he was pure Arabian. And I saved enough money to buy a spot in the race. Now... now everything is ruined.

He looks down and his entire body heaves with one last shudder. Xena claps him on the shoulder, and digs into her pack, withdrawing a few gold coins from her winnings. She hands them to him.

**XENA**

Listen kid. I'm sorry you lost, but it isn't the end of the world. So you had a big adventure you can tell your grandchildren about someday. You ran a good race. Maybe when you've grown to be a man, you can come back and try again. Now quit crying and go back home to your family. Kid your age, that's where you belong.

**SHABAB**

*(sadly)*

I will go home, but I can't go back to my family.

**XENA**

Why not?

**SHABAB**

My family are all slaves in Cairo. I ran away from our master. Runaway slaves are punished severely. I... I was running the race to win, so I could buy my family's freedom.

Xena jerks a little bit, and her hand drops from his shoulder.

**XENA**

The entire purse?  
That's a lot of money  
to buy one family.



**SHABAB**

I have a large family. Brothers, sisters, my grandparents, mother and father, my uncles and aunts and cousins. There's over fifty of us, altogether. The purse, it would have been enough to buy all of them and buy us a place to live somewhere.

Xena tilts his chin up and looks deeply into his eyes.

**XENA**

You're telling me the truth?

Shabab nods affirmatively and reaches up and slowly opens his tunic, lowering it to his waist. He turns to show her his back. It's crisscrossed with healed whip scars. On one arm, he bears a tattoo marking him as a slave. He pulls his clothing back up and closes it, turning back around to face her. Xena can see the truth in his eyes. Wordlessly, she opens her pack and takes out the entire sack of money, and hands it over to him.

Her voice shakes when she speaks again.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Good luck with  
your family, kid.

She turns and walks away down the beach, leaving a stunned Shabab to stare after her.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT CAMPSITE - NIGHT - PRESENT X&G TIME**

It is the same night, same blanket, same stars. They are still lying close together, talking.

Gabrielle is also stunned silent, just staring at Xena. Pride shines in her eyes and she reaches over, taking Xena's hand and squeezing it.

**GABRIELLE**

You went through all of that and gave it up, just like that. That must have been very hard for you to do.

**XENA**

*(chuckling)*

I was shaking like a leaf inside. I couldn't ever remember doing anything like that before. Afterward, I felt so light inside. But then night came. And everything weighed back down on me as if I'd never left Greece. I was back where I started from. All I had was some of the money I'd made when I sold my horse... just enough to buy passage back across the Mediterranean.

She flops down on her back and tucks her hands behind her head. Gabrielle continues to lie on her side, curled up next to her with one hand on Xena's stomach.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

I felt like nothing had changed at all. I had nothing, not even a horse. I had no home to go back to. I enjoyed being a warrior, but I couldn't do that anymore.

**GABRIELLE**

What about Argo?

**XENA**

Oh, yeah. I had to save all I had to get home, so I ended up camping out on the edge of town that night.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. EDGE OF HAJAR - NIGHT - 36 SUMMERS AGO**

Xena is sitting on a boulder, poking at a campfire. She hears a noise and quickly picks up her sword and swings around. Argo is standing behind her, looking as sad as a horse possibly can.

**XENA**

Argo?

She lays down her sword, and stands, and walks over to the mare. Argo nudges her stomach and whinnies loudly in reprimand.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

You wanna go to  
Greece with me?

Argo nuzzles her again, making a contented rumbling noise.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

You're crazy, you  
know that?

Argo whinnies and shakes her head up and down. Xena laughs and digs in her pack, pulling out a feedbag.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Here. I have some oats left. We can get you some more tomorrow for the ride back to Greece. You know it won't be an easy road. Just look what happened the first time you followed me.

Argo gazes at her sagely and begins to munch on the oats.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. DESERT CAMPSITE - NIGHT - PRESENT X&G TIME**

It is the same night, same blanket, same stars. They are still lying close together, talking.

**GABRIELLE**

*(laughing)*

I know how she felt.

Xena pats Gabrielle's hand, which is still resting on her stomach.

**XENA**

Yeah, I guess you would.

**GABRIELLE**

Then what?

You went home?

Xena remains silent for a long moment, staring up at the stars.

**XENA**

*(slowly)*

Yeah. Went back to Greece, wandered around for a while and wandered right into a clearing near Potadeia. The rest, as they say, is history.

She smiles, but there is a hint of sadness in her eyes. Gabrielle frowns and makes a little incoherent puzzled noise. She also rolls to her back and looks up at the stars. She looks over at Xena and sees her swallow hard and knows Xena knows she is watching her. Gabrielle looks back up at the stars, but her hand creeps across the blanket and finds Xena's and she laces their fingers together. Xena swallows again and glances over at Gabrielle, who is still looking up at the sky. Xena looks up as well.

**GABRIELLE**

*(softly)*

Xena?

**XENA**

Hmmm?

**GABRIELLE**

When we met... when you rescued us from those slavers, your weapons were buried. I... I just remembered that. Funny, how little things come back to you.

**XENA**

Yeah. Funny, that.

**GABRIELLE**

Xena?

Xena draws in a breath and blows it out slowly.

**XENA**

Yeah?

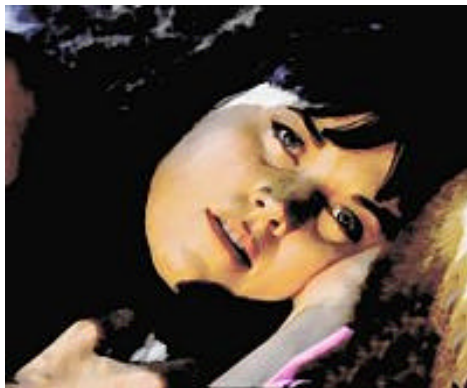
**GABRIELLE**

Why were your weapons buried?

Xena rolls to her side again, still holding Gabrielle's hand.

**XENA**

I didn't need them anymore.



**GABRIELLE**

*(whispering)*

You were going to kill yourself, weren't you?

Xena nods slightly.

**XENA**

I'd... reached the end of my rope.  
I had nothing left to live for. I was  
going to ride home and say goodbye  
to Mother, and leave Argo with her.  
I felt I owed Argo a good home.

**GABRIELLE**

What changed your mind?

**XENA**

*(sadly)*

Nothing, at first. After I got you and your  
village safely back to Potadeia, I just figured  
it was silly to travel all the way to Amphipolis  
without weapons. If I was attacked, I needed to  
stay alive long enough to get Argo to Amphipolis.  
When I got there, Mother... there was so much  
hatred in her eyes that I thought I was doing the  
right thing. Then when I heard Draco was headed  
that way and tried to talk some sense into them,  
well, you saw what they wanted to do.

**GABRIELLE**

They were going to stone  
you to death. You would have  
let them, wouldn't you?

**XENA**

It would have been poetic justice,  
Gabrielle. They felt I'd taken their  
sons' lives. I'd certainly brought  
shame on them in the years after  
Cortese. But you... just busted right in  
there and stood up for me. No one  
had ever done that. You saved my life,  
Gabrielle, three times that week.

**GABRIELLE**

Three times?

**XENA**

Once in that clearing in Potadeia,  
once in Mother's tavern and later,  
when you showed up at my  
campfire after I fought Draco.

**GABRIELLE**

By the campfire?  
I don't understand.

**XENA**

After Draco left, the village elder of Amphipolis, he offered me the loot they'd put together for Draco and his men. Gabrielle, he was still afraid of me. They... were still afraid of me. They had every right, after all I'd done. He saw me as just another warlord like Draco, and he wanted to appease me to keep me from turning on them. It seemed like there was no hope for me anywhere. If Amphipolis didn't want me, why on earth would anyone else? So I made my peace with mother and went out to make camp. I watched the sun go down that night, and I figured it would be the last sunset I'd ever see.

**GABRIELLE**

You were still going to  
kill yourself? Xena....

She sits up and scoots closer, looking down at Xena.

**XENA**

Yeah. And then this scruffy kid showed up, and that... changed everything.

**GABRIELLE**

How? I... Xena, all I did was barge in and demand you take me with you.

**XENA**

Yes, you did. I'd planned on going to Tartarus next. I could hardly take you there with me, now could I?

**GABRIELLE**

N... no.

**XENA**

Gabrielle, what you did was believe in me. When I didn't believe in myself. You gave me something to live up to. What I decided was, I didn't need to kill myself right away. I'd just take things one day at a time and see what happened.

**GABRIELLE**

*(warily)*

When did you decide  
not to kill yourself?

**XENA**

I can't say exactly when. Just... one  
day, I looked across the fire, and I  
realized I'd found that inspiration I'd  
been searching for. It didn't matter  
so much where I went anymore,  
or even what I did, as long  
as you and I did it together.

Gabrielle pulls her close and kisses her softly, then hugs her tightly.

**GABRIELLE**

*(softly)*

I never knew.



**XENA**

You're my hero, Gabrielle.  
I hope you know that by now.

Gabrielle begins to cry quietly, and Xena kisses away her tears.

**FADE OUT.**

**END OF ACT FOUR**

**TAG**

**FADE IN:**

**EXT. TEMPLE GARDEN - DAY - PRESENT X&G TIME**

Xena and Gabrielle approach a temple, ride through the gate and dismount. The temple grounds are green and well-cared for. Both horses immediately drop and roll, then stand and begin munching away at the feast before them.

**GABRIELLE**

I sympathize with them.

**XENA**

You wanna get naked  
and roll in the grass?



Gabrielle's eyebrows disappear beneath her bangs. Xena has a devastating smile on her face and looks Gabrielle up and down slowly from head to toe.

**GABRIELLE**

Hold that thought until we  
find some grass that isn't  
surrounding a holy place.

**XENA**

We could pretend we're  
celebrating fertility rites.  
That's a religious ceremony.

**GABRIELLE**

Considering we're both fertile, that  
might be a dangerous prospect,  
especially since we don't know what  
kind of gods we're dealing with here.

Xena appears to consider this.

**XENA**

You have a point. Okay, let's  
finish up and get back to  
Greece where the gods are...



**GABRIELLE**

... dead, mostly.

They climb a tall set of stone steps.

**XENA**

You do have it with  
you, don't you?

Gabrielle pats her travel bag.

**GABRIELLE**

Right here handy.

They knock on a set of heavy, double cedar doors. After waiting and knocking a few more times, they look at each other and shrug and Xena pushes the door open.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. TEMPLE - DAY - PRESENT X&G TIME**

They step inside. It is a large cool room with high vaulted ceilings and stone walls and floors. The music of chimes can be heard, along with a low musical chanting sound and candles light the interior. All across the floor are robed monks kneeling on rugs. At the front of the room is an empty cedar altar. Xena clears her throat and the sound echoes across the chamber. All the men stop chanting and turn to face them.

**GABRIELLE**

Um, hi.

One of the monks rises, and moves to greet them, but he does not speak. He nods graciously and gestures toward some stacked prayer rugs on a table beside the wall.

**XENA**

We're not here to pray.

The monk frowns and nods again.

**GABRIELLE**

Do you speak?

The man shakes his head negatively.

**XENA**

Ah. Vow of silence.  
Pity more people don't....

Gabrielle glares at her in outrage. Xena appears smug.

**GABRIELLE**

*(to Xena)*  
Behave.



**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd, to monk)*  
We brought you this.

She looks down and digs in her bag, as she continues to talk.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*  
We thought it  
might belong here.

She produces the grail and all the monks save the one standing immediately supplicate themselves before her.

**MONK**

You must be angels, sent  
to return the holy relic.

**XENA**

We're no angels, trust me.

**GABRIELLE**

No. We got it from a... friend,  
who told us to bring it here.

She starts to hand it to him and he refuses.

**MONK**

Please, you have been blessed.  
Go place it on the altar. We  
are not allowed to touch it.

Gabrielle glances at Xena and does as he asks, placing the grail in the center of the candle-lit table. She returns to Xena's side.

**GABRIELLE**

You said you don't speak.

**MONK**

I am the leader of these men. We took a vow of silence from the day the grail was taken from us. Now that it has returned, we will go through a period of purification, after which we all will be permitted to speak again.

**GABRIELLE**

I see.

**XENA**

We also have a couple of horses, if you need them.

Gabrielle tugs at her sleeve and pulls her aside to whisper something in her ear.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

You're sure?

Gabrielle nods and smiles.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

All right.

**XENA**

*(cont'd, to monk)*

Make that one horse, if you want her.

**MONK**

We would be most grateful for the gift of a horse. Please. Will you join us for supper? It's the least we can offer, after you've brought back the grail.

**XENA**

Thanks, but we have a ship to catch in a little while.

**MONK**

As you wish. Go in peace my children and may the love of god bless you all your days.

**GABRIELLE**

Thank you.

**CUT TO:**

## EXT. TEMPLE GARDEN - DAY - PRESENT X&G TIME

Xena and Gabrielle leave the temple and go back down the steps.

**XENA**

So you wanna keep 'im, huh?

**GABRIELLE**

I've grown kind of fond of him.  
Besides, I haven't had a horse  
of my own in a long time.



**XENA**

Fair enough. Argo will be glad of  
the relief when we're both riding.

Gabrielle mock-sowls and backhands her in the stomach.

**XENA**

*(cont'd)*

Oof. That was uncalled for.  
So what are you gonna call 'im?

**GABRIELLE**

I've been thinking  
about that. Jace.

**XENA**

Jace? You're going to name  
him after Joxer's brother?

**GABRIELLE**

No, silly. After Jason, for Jason  
and the Argonauts. You know,  
Jace and Argo. Has a nice  
sound to it, doesn't it?

**XENA**

It does. I like it.

They say their goodbyes to the other horse, collect Jace and leave the garden.

CUT TO:

**EXT. DESERT - DAY - PRESENT X&G TIME**

Xena drapes an arm over Gabrielle's shoulders, as they walk across the rocky sand.

**XENA**

I'll be glad to introduce Jace  
to my first Argo's daughter.

**GABRIELLE**

It's probably time she met a  
little piece of her heritage.

**XENA**

Yeah. That'll be nice. Looks like  
we're a two-horse family again.

**GABRIELLE**

Shhhh. Don't say the 'family'  
word so close to the temple.  
We still don't know about their  
god and that fertility thing.

**XENA**

They're all men, Gabrielle.  
It's probably safe to say fertility  
isn't a big part of their worship.



**GABRIELLE**

True.

They both laugh.

**GABRIELLE**

*(cont'd)*

So, where to next? You ready  
to catch that ship home?

**XENA**

Doesn't matter to me, Gabrielle, as  
long as you take me with you. I've  
been home for a very long time now.

Gabrielle appears deeply touched. She stops and takes Xena's hand, and twines their fingers together. They walk on into the sunset, swinging their arms and talking. Off in the distance, faded behind them, we see the ghost of a golden palomino mare, running free across the desert.



**FADE OUT.**

### **DISCLAIMER**

No sand or sun was harmed during the making of this episode.  
In the present-day, however, the surf is still missing.