

Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 8



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WRITTEN BY

Susanne Beck

PRODUCED BY

Carol Stephens

DIRECTED BY

Denise Byrd

SCREENGRABS

Judi Mair

ARTWORK

Lucia

TITLE GRAPHIC

Linda (Calli)

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TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. FOREST CLEARING - MORNING

GABRIELLE stands alone in the center of a forest clearing. Blindfolded, her posture is relaxed but alert. A small, almost secretive smile graces her face.

With a soft whirring sound, Xena's CHAKRAM burst forth from the woods that ring the clearing. Gabrielle's head cocks and at the last possible moment, she reaches up and catches the weapon, grinning as she tosses it back the way it came.

A battle cry frightens the wildlife and Xena flips into view, catching the chakram in midair and hooking it to her leathers before landing and withdrawing her sword. There is an almost-feral smile on her face, and her eyes are flashing.



With true economy of motion, Gabrielle bends, releases her sais, and parries Xena's first blow easily, seeming to relish as her opponent does, the clash of steel against steel. Xena's blows come from all angles, fast and furious, and while it's obvious she's not going full out, it's equally clear that she's going full out enough to best anyone except perhaps Ares or Hercules.

Gabrielle parries every blow, sometimes using the butts of her sais to punch the sword away, sometimes using the tips to catch and deflect the sword strokes. She gives some ground, but is always ready for the next stroke, no matter when or from where it comes.

Springing up, Xena flips over Gabrielle and strikes at her back. Gabrielle twists her torso and locks her sais onto Xena's blade. A quick twist and the sword flies from Xena's hand.

Grinning, Xena stomps the ground. A staff flies up. Dropping her sais, Gabrielle catches the staff, turns to face Xena, and twirls the weapon in her hands too quickly for the eyes to follow. Xena flips a second staff into her own hands and the battle begins in earnest.

The sound of wood hitting hard against wood once again startles the morning birds who had come back to roost in the trees surrounding the clearing. With a great whoosh of wings, they take off once again, bound for safer, quieter nesting grounds.

Though still blindfolded, Gabrielle is a master of the staff, and it shows. Her blocks are picture perfect, and her thrusts are thrown with true power and precision. When Xena turns up the heat a bit, Gabrielle responds smoothly, arcing her hip out of the way a split second before it would have been dealt a truly stinging blow.

Xena begins to circle in an effort to disorient her opponent. To the left two steps. Three steps to the right. Then a complete circle and back three-quarters of the way, raining blows down on Gabrielle without pause.

Gabrielle is beginning to tire, though no-one but Xena would notice. She tries for a leg sweep. Laughing, Xena vaults over her partner's head and lands pressed up against her so that they are back to back. Her boot toes a fine cord lying on the ground, which triggers a hidden pair of loaded crossbows. As the quarrels head for the duo, Gabrielle thrusts her staff over her head. The metal arrowheads imbed themselves at either end of her staff simultaneously.

Darting out of the way, Xena trips another hidden line.

Gabrielle spins and repositions her staff so that it is held before her, parallel to her body. The arrows bury their heads into her staff scant inches away from either hand.

Sliding in behind Gabrielle, Xena removes the blindfold and dangles it in front of her partner's face.

XENA
(*smiling*)
Very nice.

Gabrielle grins as she looks down at the perfectly positioned arrows.

GABRIELLE
Pretty impressive, if
I do say so myself.

XENA
And you do.

Laughing, Gabrielle turns so that she is facing Xena, face flushed with exertion, and eyes sparkling with not-quite-hidden pride.

GABRIELLE
Thank you.



XENA
My pleasure.

Suddenly, Gabrielle lashes out to the side with her staff, catching yet another arrow.

GABRIELLE

Sneaky, Xena. Very....

Her words are cut off as Xena reaches around her waist and catches another arrow inches away from penetrating Gabrielle's thigh.

The two look at one another then quickly separate, circling towards the woods from where the arrows came.



FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS – MORNING

A YOUNG BOY of no more than ten stands in the woods. He has a cocked bow in his hands and is just about to release another arrow blindly ahead.

As he releases the string, one hand clamps hard on his shoulder, and the other deftly catches the arrow as it shoots from the bow.

Gulping, the boy looks up into icy blue eyes.

XENA

Didn't your mother ever teach
you not to play with weapons?



A rustling in the bushes produces a tall, attractive woman. Dressed immaculately, her blonde hair is perfectly coiffed, and she wears a strand of pearls around her neck.

JUNOS

Castor! Where... oh, there you are!
Your father and I were worried sick
about you! Oh, and look! You've
found some friends. Isn't that nice?

(beat)

Weardus! Weardus, come look.
I've found Castor and he's
made himself new friends!

A tall, stern looking man approaches the group, followed by a gangly teen-aged boy.

WEARDUS

Now Castor, what have
I told you about running....

He notices Xena and Gabrielle.

WEARDUS

(cont'd)
Oh. Hello.

The teenaged boy comes to a dead stop as he sights Xena and Gabrielle. He draws himself up to his full, inconsiderable height as a broad smile creases his face.

WALLIUS

(voice cracking)
Golly, Castor, you
sure can pick 'em!

Weardus turns on his son.

WEARDUS

Now, Wallius, I've warned
you about oogling women.

WALLIUS

Gosh, Dad! I wasn't oogling
them! I was just being friendly!

GABRIELLE

(hesitantly)
Um, excuse me?

WEARDUS

Regardless, I will not have that
sort of behavior in my house.
Now go to your room.

WALLIUS

Jeepers, Dad! We're in the middle
of a forest! I don't have a room!

GABRIELLE

(louder)
Excuse me!



WEARDUS

Wallius....

JUNOS

Weardus, don't you think you're
being a little hard on the boy?
After all, it isn't every day
that we have too such....

She carefully looks over Xena and Gabrielle.

JUNOS

(cont'd)

...imposing guests visiting us.

WEARDUS

Now Junos, I'm responsible for the discipline in this family. And if....

A piercing whistle interrupts the family tiff. The group freezes, looking at Xena through wide eyes.

Clearing her throat, Gabrielle puts on her brightest smile and steps forward.

GABRIELLE

Thanks.

(beat)

Now, we were just trying to make sure that your son....

She eyes the boy in question.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Castor, is it?

Castor nods frantically, still within Xena's hard grip.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Castor knew not to shoot without knowing what he was shooting at.

Red faced, Weardus stalks over to Gabrielle and begins wagging his finger in her face.

WEARDUS

Now see here, young... lady.

I'll have you know that my son knows exactly... ow!

Xena has his finger in a tight grip while still holding onto Castor.

XENA

Now that's not very nice.

WEARDUS

Unhand me, you... you...
you... rascalion!

Xena and Gabrielle look at one another.

GABRIELLE

(mouthing)

Rapscallion?

Unhanding father and son, Xena pulls the arrow from her bodice and shows it to both of them.

XENA

This....

She indicates the arrow.

XENA

(cont'd)

... is not a toy.

She whips the arrow into a nearby tree, burying it shaft deep into the trunk. The feathered tail thrums madly with the force of her throw.

XENA

(cont'd)

Got me?



Everyone including Gabrielle, nods.

XENA

(cont'd)

Good.

Weardus looks as if to speak, but is stopped by a gentle finger against his lips.

GABRIELLE

I wouldn't.

His eyes widen.

She shakes her head.

He nods, reluctantly.

XENA

Gabrielle.

Gabrielle smiles.

GABRIELLE

We're... just... gonna head out now. Nice to have met you all.



As they leave, the family gathers into a tight knot. The boys' heads are pressed into their parents' chests, eyes averted as if Xena and Gabrielle will turn them to stone with just a look.

Once safely out of sight, a stern voice drifts through the trees.

WEARDUS

Maybe you two should spend some time at Aphrodite's temple! Maybe then you'll learn some manners.

GABRIELLE

(to Xena)

Manners? Aphrodite?

XENA

Boy, has he got the wrong goddess.

Chuckling, Gabrielle casually threads an arm through Xena's.

GABRIELLE

Maybe he's got the right idea, though.

Xena looks down at her, eyes wide.

XENA

Are you saying I don't have manners?

Gabrielle smirks.

GABRIELLE

Well....

Xena's eyes narrow. Gabrielle swats lightly at her.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I meant visiting Aphrodite, silly. It's been a few since we saw her last, and with everything that went on with Ares, I'd like to see how she's doing. I mean she seemed like her usual Aphrodite self, but.... I just need to know.

Xena pretends to think about it.

XENA

I suppose we could squeeze a visit into our already hectic schedule.



GABRIELLE

(smirking)

You're a true princess among warriors.

Xena gives a mock curtsy.

XENA

(blithely)

Thank you. I do try.

CUT TO:

EXT. APHRODITE'S TEMPLE - DAY

From the outside, the temple looks normal. Of medium size, it is made up of white marble and is distinctly feminine, as befits the goddess it honors.

A few steps from the entrance, Gabrielle stops dead. Her face is screwed up in an expression of extreme distaste.

GABRIELLE

What is that smell?!?

XENA

Don't look at me.

GABRIELLE

I'm serious, Xena. It
stinks like rotting fish!

(beat)

No comments from
the peanut gallery.

XENA

Not a word.

CUT TO:

INT. APHRODITE'S TEMPLE - DAY

Resisting the impulse to hold their noses, both women step into the temple. The interior looks like a cyclone has hit it. Broken statues and furniture litter the floor space. Gifts left for Aphrodite are rotting on the altar, casting a stench that lingers over everything like a pall.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

What happened?

XENA

Only one way to find
out. Aphrodite!

A long moment of silence.

XENA

(cont'd)

Aphrodite!!

A moment later, Aphrodite pops in with a blast of pink sparkles.

APHRODITE

(heartily)

Well, if it isn't my favorite girl group!
What's the haps, ladies?



She appears to be moving to a beat only she can hear. Her body sways in constant motion, and her fingers, perched on her hips, constantly drum.

GABRIELLE
(uncertainly)
Are you all right?

APHRODITE
(laughing)
Moi? Absolute perfection, as
always. Why wouldn't I be?

Gabrielle exchanges a quick glance with Xena

GABRIELLE
No reason... I guess.
(beat)
What's up with this temple?



Aphrodite looks around. Shrugs.

APHRODITE
I'm a busy Goddess, Gab.
Places to see, people to
do. You know how it is.

GABRIELLE
Aphrodite, I've seen you almost
come unglued if there's even a
mote of dust on one of your altars.

APHRODITE
Things change, ya know?
Like I said....

GABRIELLE
You're a busy Goddess.

APHRODITE
Exactly! Speaking of which, how
come you called me out of an
absolutely rockin' party, ladies?
You guys need help from the
loooove goddess, hmm? No
troubles in paradise, I hope.

Xena rolls her eyes. Gabrielle blushes slightly. Aphrodite smirks.

APHRODITE

(cont'd)

Didn't think so. So... what's up?

GABRIELLE

(offhandedly)

Oh, nothing much. We were just, you know, in the area and decided to stop by and see how you were doing.

APHRODITE

Awww. That is so sweet!

(beat)

But you guys don't have to check up on me. As you can see, I'm groovin' along, just like always.

So... bye-bye now. Hope you have fun on your little adventures!

GABRIELLE

Aphrodite, wait!

APHRODITE

Yesssss?

GABRIELLE

(impulsively)

Why don't you come with us?

Xena looks at Gabrielle as if she's just grown a third head. Even Aphrodite's eyes go wide with shock.



APHRODITE

Excuse me?

GABRIELLE

Come with us! Xena says there's some warlord trouble in the next town over. We're heading over there to check it out.

Aphrodite looks over at Xena.

APHRODITE

You been giving her the spiked
nutbread again, haven't you?

GABRIELLE

I'm serious!

APHRODITE

Hel-lo little bardling, it's me...
the Goddess of Love? Why
would I want to set one gorgeous
foot inside a war zone?

GABRIELLE

I wouldn't exactly call it a war zone.
Besides, you're still a goddess,
right? If there's any trouble....

Gabrielle snaps her fingers

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

You just... poof!

APHRODITE

Poof?

GABRIELLE

Poof. C'mon.
It'll be interesting.

APHRODITE

Your idea of interesting and
my idea of interesting are
like totally far apart, Gab.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, but at least it'll be something
different from all those parties
you say you're having.

APHRODITE

And that's a good
thing because....?

GABRIELLE

Please?

Gabrielle looks at Aphrodite.

Aphrodite looks back at Gabrielle.

Xena looks like she wants to kill something.

Gabrielle continues to look at Aphrodite.

Aphrodite continues to look back at Gabrielle.

Finally, Aphrodite sighs.

APHRODITE

Fine. I'll go on your little
adventure with you, all right?

GABRIELLE

(beaming)
Great!

APHRODITE

Ok, then, let's get this show on
the road, ladies. I meet with
my masseuse in a few hours.
Real talented hands, if you
know what I mean.

GABRIELLE

Aphrodite, you can't
come with us in that!



APHRODITE

Why's that? This is
sheer perfection!

XENA

Perfect for starting
a riot, maybe.

APHRODITE

Well, I am the goddess
of love, Xena. Love
riots are my thing.

GABRIELLE

Maybe you could try something
a little more... sedate?

APHRODITE

Sedate?

Gabrielle nods.

Aphrodite frowns.

APHRODITE

Fine.

With a snap of her fingers, she poofs away to return a second later sporting a much more sedate, yet still eye-popping, ensemble.



APHRODITE

(cont'd)

Better?

Xena sighs.

XENA

It'll do.



APHRODITE

Groovy! So, where's this town
thingie that we're headed to?
Just give me the directions and
I'll pop us right there in a flash!

XENA

Oh no. No popping.
(beat, to Gabrielle)
No poofing.
(beat, to Aphrodite)
Walking. That's how we get there.
Good, old-fashioned walking.

APHRODITE

Walking?!? Nobody told me
about walking when I signed
up for this gig of yours.
Goddesses don't walk, Xena.

XENA

If they want to go anywhere
with us, they do.

Aphrodite heaves a dramatic sigh.

APHRODITE

Oh, fine. Lead the way,
warrior babe. I can
struggle along.
(beat)
For now.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. TEMPLE COURTYARD - DAY

Walking away from the temple, Xena looks over at Gabrielle.

XENA

Tell me again why we suddenly have the Goddess of Love as a sidekick?

GABRIELLE

Xena, I'm worried about her. I mean, doesn't seem a little... off to you?



XENA

Gabrielle, we're talking about Aphrodite here. She's always a little off.

GABRIELLE

No, no, this is worse than usual. I mean, given what happened with Ares and everything, you'd think she'd be sad. Or angry. Or something. Not this... this... manic 'I'm the Love Goddess and nothing can touch me' attitude she's got going on.

XENA

(shrugging)

Gods react differently than humans do. And Aphrodite is about as different as you can get.

GABRIELLE

I just get the feeling that there's a lot going on beneath the surface.

(softly)

Xena, I'm worried about her, and I want to help.

XENA

(doubtfully)

I'm just not too sure putting her in the company of the two people who destroyed her family is the best help she can have right now, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

Do you trust anyone else to make sure she's okay?

XENA

(softly, defeatedly)

No.

GABRIELLE

Can we please just try this?

After a moment, Xena nods.

XENA

Okay. I think you're asking a lot of her, but okay.



GABRIELLE

I know, but I think she's worth it.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Xena heads the group, leading Argo by her reins. Gabrielle follows along slightly behind. Aphrodite lags far to the rear, then stops, looks at her hand, and stomps her foot.

GABRIELLE

Aphrodite, what is it?

APHRODITE

Oooo, I broke another nail!
I'm telling you, Gab, this walking stuff is for the birds.

GABRIELLE

Birds fly.

APHRODITE

You know what I mean.
How much further?

GABRIELLE

Quite a while yet.
Just stick close to me.
You're doing fine.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL - LATER

Xena is still in the lead. Gabrielle lags further behind, frustration evident. Aphrodite has stopped again.

GABRIELLE

Yes?

APHRODITE

Do you know what I have
to go through to get a good
pedicure up there?



CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL - STILL LATER

Xena is watering Argo by a small stream. Gabrielle is sitting against a rock, her eyes turned heavenward. She looks almost comatose.

APHRODITE

....And this! Do you call this
hair? And my favorite dress!
Look at it! It's ruined!

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL - LATER STILL

Aphrodite continues to lag further and further behind. If anything, she looks worse than when they met her earlier in the day. Her hair hangs in sweaty ropes around her face. Her dress is dirty and torn. She limps along with the heel of one dainty shoe broken beyond repair. In short, she's a mess.

GABRIELLE

Xena....

Xena stops and turns. She stares at Gabrielle, then beyond her at Aphrodite.

XENA

Fine. Pop, poof, whatever you do, just do it. We'll see you when we get there.

Aphrodite grins, completely revived.

APHRODITE

Thanks, guys!
You're the best!!

With a poof of pink sparkles, Aphrodite is gone.

GABRIELLE

(softly)
Sorry.

Gabrielle puts a hesitant hand on Xena's arm. With the touch, Xena's anger dissolves completely away. She smiles slightly.

XENA

It's all right. I'm the one who made her walk, anyway. At least we'll have a little peace and quiet for awhile.

GABRIELLE

Watch it. You know what happens when you say those words.



XENA

Right now, a fight with a dozen smelly bandits would be peace and quiet.

After a moment, Gabrielle laughs, and the pair move ahead, linked arm in arm.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - EARLY EVENING

Xena and Gabrielle finally catch up with Aphrodite just as the sun is beginning to set behind the hills. The rays highlight Aphrodite in all her golden beauty. Xena and Gabrielle can see a suspicious wetness glimmering on her cheeks. They look at one another in silent communication. Gabrielle nods and Xena moves off to the side, leading Argo to a small stream that runs along the town's outskirts.

Gabrielle approaches Aphrodite and lays a hand on the sun-warmed rock that serves as the goddess' seat.

GABRIELLE

Hey.

Aphrodite gives her an overly bright smile.

APHRODITE

Hi, Gab. What took you two so long?

GABRIELLE

(playing along)
Getting slower in our old age, I guess.

APHRODITE

As if. I'm surprised she didn't make you try to outrun her horse to get here.

Gabrielle doesn't laugh.

GABRIELLE

(seriously)
Aphrodite.

APHRODITE

Yes?

GABRIELLE

It... I....

APHRODITE

Spit it out, Gab. We're missing a totally awesome sunset, here.

After a minute, Gabrielle sighs and shakes her head.

GABRIELLE

It's nothing.

Both turn to watch the sun set behind the mountains, painting the sky with a riot of pinks, purples, golds, and deep reds.

APHRODITE

(softly)

You know, when we were younger... not that we were ever 'young', mind you... Ar and I used to fight over who'd get to ride with Apollo during the sunset.

GABRIELLE

(surprised)

You? Fought with Ares??



Aphrodite laughs.

APHRODITE

Cool, huh?

GABRIELLE

I'll... take your word for it.

APHRODITE

I'll tell you a secret, though.

(beat)

He knew how much I loved the beautiful colors, and he used to let me win. A lot.

She draws up her knees and wraps her arms around them.

APHRODITE

(cont'd)

I think that's one of the things I'll miss the most about him. He didn't show it very often, but there was a little warm spot in him. You had to dig really deep to find it, but when you did... He wasn't such a bad brother to have.



With no words with which to reply, Gabrielle simply stands beside Aphrodite as the sun sets behind the hills.

CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN - EVENING

Like the rest of the town, the tavern has suffered the ravages of war. Though kept as clean as is humanly possible, it nonetheless bears its own battle scars which nothing, save a tear-down and rebuild will erase.

Xena, Gabrielle and Aphrodite sit at a scarred wooden table. Xena and Gabrielle sit across from one another. Aphrodite sits to Gabrielle's right. After a moment, a SERVING GIRL approaches their table. She, too, bears the scars of war. Her left hand ends in a ragged stump, and a horrid scar runs from her left temple all the way to the left corner of her mouth, twisting her lips up in a perpetual sneering grin. Her eyes, though, are kind, and her voice is softly pleasant and shy.

Aphrodite stares, open mouthed, as Xena gives the young woman their order. Gabrielle pinches her on the thigh, causing Aphrodite to switch her stare to the bard. After the woman leaves, Gabrielle looks to Aphrodite.

GABRIELLE

It's not polite to stare, you know.

APHRODITE

I couldn't help it, Gab!
Her poor face! Her poor hand!

XENA

(flatly)

War does that to innocents.



Aphrodite's face falls. She and Xena exchange a long, poignant look. Xena's eyes shift to Gabrielle. Their shared look is even more poignant.

Xena then returns to the ale she's sipping.

The young girl returns with their order, and places the bowls of steaming stew before Xena and Gabrielle. Aphrodite stares again. The girl pretends not to notice and slips away.

GABRIELLE

(hissing)

Aphrodite....

APHRODITE

Sorry.

She smiles.

APHRODITE

(cont'd)

Ooo. Would you look at that?

Gabrielle turns.

GABRIELLE

What?



APHRODITE

Her. Making googly eyes
at Farmer Fred there.
Aww. Isn't that sweet?

Spoon halfway to her mouth, Gabrielle looks over at the “Farmer Fred” in question. Of average height and average build, he doesn’t appear to be anything other than a perfectly ordinary man sitting at a table with his friends.

As if feeling eyes on his back, he turns to look to, or rather through, the young waitress.

GABRIELLE

(sadly)

He doesn’t even
know she’s alive.

Aphrodite grins.

APHRODITE

I can fix that in a jiffy. This
calls for a little loooove action,
and I’ve got just the thing.

Gabrielle grabs her hand as she lifts it. Aphrodite shoots her a look.

APHRODITE

(cont’d)

Why so grabby, Gabby?

GABRIELLE

You can’t just put a spell on him
so that he’ll fall in love with her.

APHRODITE

Like, duh? That’s what
I do! Hel-lo.

Gabrielle sighs.

GABRIELLE

Aphrodite, that’s not fair to
either of them. You shouldn’t
force people to fall in love.

APHRODITE

C’mon, Gab, once I hit them with a
little love bolt, they’ll never know why
they were apart! It’s perfect. Now, let
me do my job and you can go beat up
some smelly warlords or something, ok?

GABRIELLE

Aphrodite, I think they’d kind of like to
have a say in the matter, don’t you?

APHRODITE

What, like you and....

Aphrodite tilts her head in Xena's direction.

Xena keeps eating, ignoring the conversation.

GABRIELLE

Yes.

APHRODITE

Sorry, Gab, but you're a special case, you know? Some people need my help.

GABRIELLE

I didn't say you couldn't help them. I'm just asking you not to force them.

(beat)

Why don't you go over and talk to her? Find out who she is, what she likes, stuff like that.



Aphrodite looks doubtful.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

She looks like she could use a friend. I'm sure she could benefit from your wisdom.

APHRODITE

(smiling)

Wisdom, huh?

GABRIELLE

Yep.

APHRODITE

All right. Why not? I can always work my magic after I talk to her.

GABRIELLE

Aphrodite....

Aphrodite stands. Waggles her fingers at Gabrielle.

APHRODITE

Toodles!

Xena gives Gabrielle a little smile before returning to her food. Gabrielle grins, and begins eating with gusto.

A moment later, she looks up. Several older men, far in the back of the tavern, are staring at Xena and talking among themselves. Gabrielle well knows that while her back is to the men, Xena is aware that she is the subject of their attention, so she says nothing.

XENA

(softly)

Five. Four. Three.

Two. One.



At “one”, the oldest of the men stands, cap in hand. Xena turns her head enough to look over her shoulder at him.

XENA

(cont'd)

Yes, my name is Xena, yes,
I'll help you with your problem,
no, I'm not gonna do it right now.
Sit back down and finish your
meals. I'll see you when
I'm through with mine.

Xena returns to her food, leaving the man standing, gaping at her.

Gabrielle gives him a sunny grin.

GABRIELLE

(to man)

She has many skills.

Xena just shakes her head.

CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN – EVENING - APHRODITE'S POV

The young waitress has just taken a seat at a table near the bar, and is hastily eating her dinner. Aphrodite slides in next to her.

APHRODITE

Hi.

WAITRESS

(shyly)

Hello.

APHRODITE

I... um... wanted to say
I'm sorry for staring earlier.
That was totally uncool of me.

WAITRESS

That's ok. I'm kind
of used to it by now.

APHRODITE

Yeah, but it was still
a pretty grody thing
to do. I'm sorry.

WAITRESS

(softly)

Thank you.

Aphrodite smiles.

APHRODITE

So, what's your name?

WAITRESS

Lira.

APHRODITE

That's a groovin' name.



Lira actually laughs softly, which causes Aphrodite to grin.

LIRA

Thank you. What's yours?

APHRODITE

Aaaaa...far!

LIRA

(quizzically)

Aaaafar?

APHRODITE

Pretty cool, huh?

It's Egyptian!

LIRA

You don't look Egyptian.

APHRODITE

(brightly)

On my mother's side.

LIRA

Oh.

APHRODITE

So... how'd this happen?

As she reaches up to gently touch the scar on Lira's face, the young woman flinches away, hiding both face and hand.

APHRODITE

Oh, I'm so sorry, sweet pea!

I didn't mean to upset you.

LIRA

It's... it's okay. I know you weren't asking that to be mean.

APHRODITE

Cross my heart.

Lira looks up. Her eyes are distant, her mind far away.

LIRA

It was just some warlord. We never even knew his name. All I can remember is that he and his men were marching under the banner of Ares.

APHRODITE

Ares?!



LIRA

Yes. He and his men came like demons from Tartarus, slashing, burning, killing.

(beat)

My... my brother, Tomus, he was only ten and couldn't even hold a sword, but he was determined to protect our homestead.

They came for him. All these big men swinging their swords at a ten year old boy.

I... I tried to fend them off. They did this.

(beat)

And they killed my brother.

APHRODITE

(with feeling)

I'm so sorry.

LIRA

He was all I had. The only family I had left. He was everything to me, and they cut him down like a lamb to slaughter.

Reaching out, Aphrodite touches Lira's shoulder, and when the young woman slumps into her, she wraps her arms around the trembling body in a tight hug.

APHRODITE

(whispering)

I know what it's like to lose your family. I know, and I'm so sorry it happened to you.

As Lira continues to weep, Aphrodite holds her, rocking her gently, tears shining in her own eyes.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. TAVERN – EVENING - XENA AND GABRIELLE'S POV

Xena and Gabrielle are sitting around a table with several older men. The men are staring at them both, but particularly Xena with a mixture of awe and trepidation. Xena is sprawled comfortably in a chair and Gabrielle is sitting next to her, elbows propped on the table.

XENA

Who's your warlord?



The men look surprised, then chagrined.

SAMOR

He calls himself Katos the Cruel.

GABRIELLE

Charming name.

SAMOR

He's less charming in person, believe me. He sets up a war camp outside our borders from spring to fall, and raids our town every month for his supplies and 'tribute'. If we don't have what he demands, he starts killing.

LINKOS

He's also conscripted most of our able-bodied young men into his army. If they refuse, he kills them. He leaves a few behind to help farm the land, but mostly, we're now a village of old men, children, and women, unable to defend ourselves against his demands.

SAMOR

We wouldn't ask for your help
if we weren't in dire need, Xena.

(beat)

Please. Will you help us?

XENA

When is he due to attack next?

LINKOS

He demands his tribute on
noon of the day the moon is full.

XENA

Which is tomorrow.

SAMOR

Exactly.

XENA

How large is his army?

SAMOR

None of us has ever gotten close
enough to find out. But he sends
in a raiding party of twenty to thirty
men. More than enough to
deal with the likes of us.

GABRIELLE

Does he come with
the raiding party?



LINKOS

Never. He always sends
his henchmen in to do his
bloody work and return
his tribute to him.

GABRIELLE

Charming.

SAMOR

So, will you help us?

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a look. They both rise up from the table.

XENA

Excuse us for a moment.

SAMOR

Certainly, certainly.

Walking a few steps from the group, Gabrielle turns to Xena.

GABRIELLE

(whispering)

Xena, we have to help them.

XENA

I know that. The question is, how?



GABRIELLE

How?

XENA

The way I see it, we have two basic options. Option one: you and I take a ride up to this warlord's camp, check it out, and bust some heads. Hopefully, that'll make his army scatter to the winds.

GABRIELLE

Or?

XENA

We let what's going to happen happen. We gather up all the able-bodied men and women, arm them, build up some kind of fortifications around the perimeter, and fight them off.

Gabrielle is silent for a moment as she ponders the possibilities.

GABRIELLE

Well, I have to admit I like the first option better. It keeps these people out of the fighting.

XENA

True, but that can also be its drawback.

GABRIELLE

What do you mean?

XENA

Look around you. These people are already defeated. They've lost the battle before it's even begun. If you and I destroy this Katos, nothing will stop another warlord from stepping in and taking his place. This is fertile land, something every good warlord needs to keep up his campaign.

GABRIELLE

(thoughtfully)

True....

XENA

If we teach these people how to defend their land, give them back their respect for themselves, they may be able to stop the next two-bit warlord wannabe from taking what is theirs.



GABRIELLE

That's understandable, Xena, but we'll never be able to do all that in a night. Some of these people could die.

XENA

The hard facts of life. If not today, then next month, or next year. If they don't learn to defend themselves, or at least try, anyone with a sword and an agenda will walk right in and start hacking.

Gabrielle thinks a moment more, then sighs.

GABRIELLE

You're right. Of course, you're always right about stuff like this.

XENA

Not always, but yes, this isn't something I'm unfamiliar with.

Gabrielle nods and as one, they turn back to the table.

XENA

(cont'd)

We'll help.

Samor looks ready to faint from relief.

SAMOR

Oh thank you.

Thank you so much!

XENA

Don't thank me yet.

(beat)

Gather up every able-bodied man and woman strong enough to wield a weapon and meet me out in the central square.

We have a battle to plan.



CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN – EVENING - APHRODITE'S POV

As Samor makes his announcement to the tavern, Aphrodite looks on as Lira watches the young farmer get up from the table and follow the others outside.

APHRODITE

So, you're pretty
sweet on him, huh?

LIRA

(startled)
Who?

APHRODITE

Farmer boy over there.
You like him, huh?

Lira blushes. Then she turns sad eyes to Aphrodite.

LIRA

He was my betrothed.

APHRODITE

Was?

LIRA

(nodding)

Yes. Our parents thought it
would be a good match. And
it was. Falin could be so
sweet and sensitive. And he
looked at me like I was the
most precious jewel on earth.

APHRODITE

(impressed)

Mmm. Not bad.

LIRA

Until this happened.

She holds up her mangled hand.

LIRA

(cont'd)

Now he won't even look at
me. He looks through me,
as if I weren't even there.

APHRODITE

Awww, sweetie, you're still a beautiful woman. And if he doesn't appreciate that, well, maybe he's not the guy for you.



LIRA

But I still....

APHRODITE

Dig him?

LIRA

(softly)

Yes.

APHRODITE

Well... maybe not all hope's lost yet.

LIRA

(hopefully)

No? But how?

APHRODITE

(grinning)

Let's just say that I've made a few love matches in my time. Here's what we're gonna do.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Xena is helping a group of men set up fortifications. With a mighty heave, they overturn a broken wagon to join with several other such wagons near the front gate.

INTERCUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Gabrielle is teaching a group of twenty women how to wield crude, wooden staves. She calls out encouragement as the women begin their first tentative thrusts and parries.

INTERCUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Xena and the men are sharpening long wooden stakes and setting them at low angles into the soft soil to take out the legs of the horses the soldiers will be riding.

INTERCUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Gabrielle is helping several bowmen gather up discarded arrows. The women continue to practice with their staves behind her.

INTERCUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Xena is drilling with a group of nearly thirty sword-wielding men and women.

INTERCUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Gabrielle helps the women and children who will not be fighting set up a crude, but effective infirmary in the town's largest building. Water is drawn and set close to the blazing fireplace. Furs line the floor to make beds, and bundles of cloths are stacked neatly by each bed.

INTERCUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Xena is helping several men, women and children heave large bundles of straw into strategic areas to be used as shields and hiding spots for the bowmen and other warriors.

INTERCUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Stretching and rubbing burning eyes, Gabrielle walks over to join Xena, who is looking over the last of the preparations for tomorrow's battle.

GABRIELLE

I never thought we could
get this much done in a night.



Xena smiles.

XENA

(kidding)

Have a little more
faith in yourself.

(beat)

Your staff wielders
look pretty good.

GABRIELLE

(proudly)

They do, don't they?

XENA

Yup. I think that's as much as
we're gonna get done tonight.
Might as well have everyone
rest up before the battle.

GABRIELLE

(eyes narrowed)

You too.

Xena smiles again.

XENA

Me too. Samor!

Samor comes rushing over.

SAMOR

I can't thank you enough for
all you're doing here, Xena.

XENA

No thanks are necessary. I
need four lookouts to patrol
the perimeter tonight. People
who won't be in the battle
tomorrow. People you trust
not to fall asleep at their posts
or run if danger comes
sooner than you expect.

SAMOR

I know just the ones, Xena.
I'll get them right now.

XENA

All right, then. Gabrielle and I
are going to our room. Tell
everyone else to get some sleep.



SAMOR

I will. Thank you again.

Nodding, Xena takes Gabrielle's hand, and together they walk back to the tavern.

CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Aphrodite is sitting at the table alone as Xena and Gabrielle enter.

GABRIELLE

(to Xena)

Let me say goodnight to her.
I'll meet you upstairs in a minute.

Nodding her own goodnight to Aphrodite, Xena turns and heads for the stairs.

APHRODITE

Hey! How are the
battle plans coming?

GABRIELLE

Better than expected, actually.
How 'bout you? Are you
gonna stick around?

APHRODITE

Yeah, I think I will. I really
like Lira, and I think
I can help her.

GABRIELLE

Aphrodite....

APHRODITE

(laughing)

No, not like that, Gab.
It's all cool, believe me.
I might even help her in
the infirmary tomorrow.

GABRIELLE

Aphrodite, you faint
at the sight of blood.

APHRODITE

Yeah, well, maybe I want
to help a little, you know?

GABRIELLE

(softly)

Are you sure? It could
get pretty bad.



APHRODITE

I'm sure.

Gabrielle smiles.

GABRIELLE

Okay, then. Goodnight.
I'll see you tomorrow.



APHRODITE

Night, sweet pea. Don't
let the warrior-babe
keep you up too late.

A blushing Gabrielle turns and heads for the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Xena and Gabrielle are lying in bed, cuddled close together. Both are almost asleep.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

XENA

(sleepily)

Mm?

GABRIELLE

If I had asked, would you have
gone with the first option?
Of going after Katos directly?

XENA

If you had given me a convincing
enough argument, sure.

Grinning, Gabrielle leans up and places a gentle kiss on Xena's lips.

GABRIELLE

Thanks!

XENA

No problem.
Now get to sleep.

Gabrielle falls asleep with a smile on her face.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. LIRA'S DRESSING ROOM - MORNING

Lira is looking doubtfully down at her body, now clad in an attractive, though slightly worn, dress.

LIRA

I don't know about this, Afar.

APHRODITE

Well I do. You look absolutely scrumptious in this dress. When the guys see you, they're gonna be picking their eyeballs up off the floor.

Lira giggles at the image. Then she sobers.

LIRA

I'm still not sure.

Aphrodite lays a hand on her shoulder.

APHRODITE

Sweet pea, how can anyone appreciate your beauty if you hide it all the time? Those black rags you were wearing could scare anybody away. Trust me, you look fabulous. I wouldn't lie to you. I promise.

After a moment, Lira nods.

LIRA

Ok. I'm ready.

APHRODITE

Great! Now remember, eyes bright, chin up, shoulders back, chest out. You're a beautiful, confident woman. Let everyone else see that for a change, ok?



LIRA

Okay.

Smiling, Aphrodite opens the dressing room door and ushers Lira from the room.

CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN - MORNING

Xena and Gabrielle, having spent most of the pre-dawn hours fortifying the perimeters and drilling the soon-to-be combatants, are about to walk out once again into the breach when the door opens and Aphrodite ushers Lira in. Gabrielle's eyes widen in shock and appreciation. Even Xena looks impressed.

True to Aphrodite's promise, the men in the room cast their own admiring and appreciative looks at the young woman, causing her smile to broaden and her confidence to grow.

Spotting Xena and Gabrielle, Aphrodite beams and makes her way over to the pair.

GABRIELLE

Aphrodite! She looks wonderful!

APHRODITE

(proudly)

She does, doesn't she?

GABRIELLE

What did you do?

APHRODITE

(offhandedly)

Oh, a little of this, a little of that. You know, girl talk.

She looks over at Xena.

APHRODITE

(cont'd)

Or maybe you wouldn't.

Xena smirks and Gabrielle laughs softly. All watch as Lira carries out her duties with the confidence and poise she used to possess in spades before the attack that took her brother.

GABRIELLE

I can't believe it. She hardly seems like the same woman.



Aphrodite smiles and gives Gabrielle a significant look

APHRODITE

Sometimes you just need a friend to help you get your groove back, you know?

Gabrielle grins, then sobers as the outside door opens and Falin enters with a group of his friends. The trio watches as the men first stare in amazement at Lira, then, one by one, turn away and sit at their customary table without comment.

To her credit, Lira takes the blatant rejection in stride, continuing to carry herself proudly and with confidence.

Aphrodite, on the other hand, looks devastated.

APHRODITE

I don't get it! What happened?

XENA

Idiot's got rocks in his head.



With a shake of her head, Xena turns and walks out of the tavern. Gabrielle wraps a brief arm around Aphrodite's waist in a conciliatory hug.

APHRODITE

What a loser! Makeover courtesy of the Goddess of Love, and he ignores it.

GABRIELLE

Maybe, but look.

Following the direction indicated, Aphrodite looks on as Lira continues with her tasks, trading friendly, laughing and confident banter with her customers. Sensing Aphrodite's attention, Lira looks up, tucks a strand of hair behind her ear, and smiles, eyes sparkling with a happiness that hasn't been seen in years.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

You did good, Aphrodite.

Beaming, Aphrodite crosses her arms over her chest and gazes on.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN - JUST BEFORE NOON

With the sun nearly directly overhead, the town is silent and waiting. Swordsmen and staff wielders hunker down behind bales of straw while the bowmen, hidden behind the overturned wagons, awaiting the signal from Xena. Xena and Gabrielle have separated. Xena is to the left of the gate, Gabrielle to the right. Peering over the barricade, Xena can see the dust as it rises up from the hooves of thundering horses.

Xena lifts an arm. Gabrielle copies her motion.

XENA

(softly)

Steady... steady....

The horses can be heard now, and as the raiders come into view, Xena notices that the group is closer to fifty strong than twenty. She shoots a look to Gabrielle, who nods.

XENA

(cont'd)

Steady... hold steady....

The raiders spread out, and begin to funnel toward the gate.

XENA

(cont'd)

NOW!



On both sides of the gate, bowmen rise up from their hiding places and let fly their arrows. The screams of men and horses are heard. Xena launches her chakram, and it slices through the ranks, taking out five men before returning to her hand.

GABRIELLE

NOW!

The second rank of bowmen rise up and release their arrows as well. More men and horses go down. The rest of the group, still almost forty strong, surges forward. Horses scream as their fragile legs come in contact with the sharpened spikes. Rearing up, they toss their riders, and a logjam forms at the mouth of the gate.

XENA

Swordsmen, forward!

As the first raider climbs out of the jumble, the swordsmen converge upon him, cutting him quickly down. More men begin to stream through the gate, and their superior skills soon turn the battle to their favor.

GABRIELLE

Staff wielders, forward!

With her own staff, Gabrielle jumps into the fray, cutting down her attackers with ease. Seeing her example, the other women wade in with confidence, pummeling the men streaming through the gate.

CUT TO:

EXT. BATTLEGROUND - DAY - XENA'S POV

Her back to an overturned wagon, Xena attacks six men in the semicircle around her. She easily deflects their somewhat clumsy thrusts, then deliberately opens herself for a killing shot by the man directly before her. As he takes the bait, she sweeps his sword aside and plunges her own deep into his belly. The others fall on her, bearing her to the ground. She throws them off, disabling a second and third with vicious swipes to the belly and legs.

CUT TO:

EXT. BATTLEGROUND - DAY - GABRIELLE'S POV

In the very thick of the battle, Gabrielle uses her staff with finesse, twirling it so quickly that she succeeds in making one of the raiders dizzy, which gives her an easy opening for a one-two shot to the chin. He drops like a stone and stays down. Swiping the feet out of a second man, she watches as he falls back into a third, taking them both out for the moment.

Spinning, she looks for another opponent, and heads over to where two women are trying to fend off five men.

CUT TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

The first several casualties are being brought in, bruised, battered and bleeding. An elderly healer uses her hands to direct the placement of her patients. Lira goes right to work. Aphrodite, eyes wide, stands off to the side staring.

LIRA

Afar?

Aphrodite continues to stare as a man screams in agony, his leg broken in several places and blood spurting from a hole in his side.

LIRA

Afar! Snap out of it!
We need help!

APHRODITE

I....

LIRA

Hurry!

Blinking, Aphrodite shakes her head slightly and biting her lip, steps hesitantly forward.

APHRODITE

W-what can I do?

LIRA

Hold this cloth over his wound.
Press hard. We need to stop the
bleeding, and I can't with this hand.

Wincing, Aphrodite slowly reaches out a hand, touches the already blood-covered cloth, pulls away, then touches it again.

LIRA

(encouragingly)

Good. That's good. Push
a little harder. That's it.

APHRODITE

(sotto voce)

Blood. Gross.

LIRA

Excuse me?

APHRODITE

Nothing. I'm fine... I think.

Lira smiles.

LIRA

You're doing fine.

CUT TO:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Xena and Gabrielle are fighting back to back.

XENA

Having fun yet?

She smashes the pommel of her sword in her attacker's face, rearranging his dental work for him, then punches another away with a swift uppercut to the jaw.

GABRIELLE

A blast!



She gives a swipe across the face of one man, the butt of her staff into the gut of a second, and an over-the-shoulder clonk on the head of a third.

CUT TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Falin is brought in by two litter-bearers. He is conscious, but bleeding badly from a cut to his thigh. The healer beckons and Lira rushes over, already holding several cloth rags against her chest. Aphrodite looks a bit worse for wear, and watches with interest from her position near the next bed over, dabbing a cool cloth on the head of a feverish woman.

HEALER

Wash as much of his blood away as you can. I need to see how bad the wound is.

LIRA

Yes, Hester.

Opening his eyes, Falin looks down at the woman tenderly washing the blood away from his thigh. Their eyes lock. Lira smiles. Falin deliberately turns away.

Aphrodite's heart clenches at the blatant rejection, but swells at the quiet dignity Lira displays when caring for the man.

A moment later, Lira steps away, allowing the Healer to take over. Aphrodite rises from her spot on the floor and walks over to Lira, putting a hand on her shoulder.

APHRODITE

(softly)

You are one classy lady.

Lira laughs quietly so as not to disturb the patients.

LIRA

Thank you.

(beat)

You helped me see things in myself that I thought were gone forever. I don't know how I'll ever be able to thank you.

APHRODITE

(grinning)

Forget about it. That's what friends do for each other, right?



Lira's smile broadens.

LIRA

Right, friend.

They share a brief hug.

APHRODITE

Now, if you don't mind, I'm gonna go see how things are looking outside.

LIRA

Please, be careful.

APHRODITE

Count on it. Later, gator!

CUT TO:

EXT. BATTLEGROUND - DAY

The battle is close to ending. Many of the raiders lie dead or disabled across the bloody ground. Still others have turned tail and run. Xena is dealing with a group of five men in her usual style, belting them with sword, feet and fists.

Gabrielle, on the other hand, isn't doing quite as well. Crouched over a fallen woman, she is trying to staunch the blood coming from the woman's midsection with one hand while trying to fight off two goons in leather with the other, which holds a lone sai.

Distressed, Aphrodite looks around for a way to help her friend. Spying a rock laying nearby, she picks it up and heaves it at the soldier. Being Aphrodite, it's pretty much of a girly throw, and the soldier notices only long enough to pin her with a glare that promises she'll be next before going back to attacking Gabrielle.

As Gabrielle's remaining sai gets wrenched from her hand, Aphrodite becomes desperate. Looking around to make sure she is unobserved, she does the only thing she can think of. Unobtrusively wagging the fingers of both hands, she shoots pink and silver sparkles toward the two raiders.

Dropping their swords, they straighten, stare at one another, and begin kissing passionately as Gabrielle stares at them, completely dumbfounded.

After a moment, she looks over her shoulder and shoots Aphrodite an incredulous look, which Aphrodite returns with an abashed smile.

APHRODITE

It doesn't hurt if I use
my love whammy on
the bad guys, right?

Gabrielle can't help but laugh as she jumps back to her feet and easily lifts the fallen woman to her own. Aphrodite rushes over and helps Gabrielle steady the woman whose wound looks worse than it really is.

GABRIELLE

You're amazing. You
saved both our lives.
You know that, right?

APHRODITE

Yeah, yeah, I'm, like,
a total hero. Now,
lets get her inside.

Before they can move, a mighty cheer goes up as Xena chases the last of the raiders from the town... except for the two who are still kissing.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

Um... maybe you'd better
take that off them now?

APHRODITE

Sure thing!

Another waggle of her fingers and the men immediately pull apart, stare at one another, and take a careful step back. Then, remembering they are supposed to be in a battle, they bend to retrieve their swords. The one who Aphrodite pegged with a rock spies her and growls, stepping forward.

Until Xena steps in front of him, brandishing her own sword and a smile cold enough to give him frostbite.

Hard on her heels, the rest of the town closes in.

The men gulp and drop their swords again.

XENA

Smart boys.

(beat)

If you wanna be 'breathing'
boys, you'll do something for me.



Both men nod.

XENA

(cont'd)

I want you to go back to
your Master like the good
little puppies you are and
deliver a message for me.
Am I clear so far?

Both men nod again.

XENA

(cont'd)

Good. Tell him that Xena sends
her regards, and that if he wants
to see so much as an olive pit
in tribute, he'll get his ass back
here before the sun sets tonight.
Otherwise, I'm coming to get
him, and it won't be pretty.
Understood?

Another nod.

XENA

Then get outta here before
I change my mind.

Only dust is seen as the men run out of the town and back to the camp as fast as their legs can carry them.

CUT TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - EARLY EVENING

The infirmary is quiet, and nearly empty. Most of the wounded have gone home to convalesce in their own beds. Only the most seriously injured remain behind. They are clean, comfortable, and obviously well cared for.

GABRIELLE

You did a fantastic
job here, Lira.

Lira smiles.

LIRA

Thanks, but I wouldn't have
been able to do anything if it
wasn't for the Healer and Afar.

HEALER

(agreeing)

A godsend that one was.

Xena and Gabrielle share looks over the unintentional pun.



HEALER

(cont'd)

She cleaned out the wounds,
helped me with my stitching,
even comforted the men so
they didn't even cry out when
I was tending to them. We
might have lost a lot more lives
without her here, and that's a fact.

Grinning, Gabrielle looks over at Aphrodite.

GABRIELLE

So, how's it feel to be
the hero of the day?

Instead of answering, Aphrodite merely smiles with a quiet pride that is a huge departure from her usual vanity. Gabrielle can't help but smile back, proud of her friend and how much she's grown. Even covered in blood and dirt, with her hair drooping in sweaty rings, she's never looked more beautiful.

The moment of peace is shattered by the door opening.

SAMOS

Xena! He comes!
Katos comes!

XENA

All right then. You guys
stay here. Gabrielle, let's go.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTYARD - EVENING

His army stopped behind him, Katos approaches the gate with a giant of a man riding beside him. Katos himself is bald, fat, and dressed in an alarming variety of colorful silks, none of which match.

At the gate, he lumbers off his horse followed by his second, who appears to be nearly seven feet tall and broad as a tree trunk. The warlord approaches the gate, laughing.

KATOS

Well, well, well, if it isn't
the great Xena. It appears
that my lackeys weren't lying.

(beat)

Too bad I killed them.

He laughs again, holding his protuberant belly which jiggles like jelly beneath the thin silk covering it.

XENA

Do I have the dubious honor
of addressing Katos the Crud?



KATOS

Cruel. That's 'Cruel', Xena.

Xena shrugs.

XENA

Same difference.

Katos laughs.

KATOS

You are a saucy wench, aren't you?
I'll have great fun beating that out
of you before I cut you into small
pieces and feed you to my dogs.

XENA

I'm sure you will. You'll have
to beat me in battle first.

KATOS

Beat you? In battle? Apparently you
have very outdated notions of how we
do things, Xena. No, I'm not going to
fight you. You're not going to fight
me. Your second, whatever unlucky
devil he might be, will fight....

He waves an extravagant arm toward the giant.

KATOS

(cont'd)
... mine.

XENA

Is that so?

KATOS

Oh yes! Yes. Indeed it is.
(beat)

So, where is the man
unfortunate enough to
call himself your second?

Before Xena can say anything, Gabrielle steps forward.

GABRIELLE
That would be me.



KATOS
YOU?!?!?

The warlord laughs so hard his face begins to purple and veins stand out on his bald head like live wires.

Gabrielle patiently waits for the fit to pass, a look of polite interest on her face.

KATOS
(cont'd)
Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.
I never knew you were
such a prankster, Xena!

XENA
I'm not.

KATOS
But... her?!?

XENA
Her.

KATOS
Surely you're....
you're not kidding.

Gabrielle smiles sweetly.

GABRIELLE
No, she's not. Now if we
could get on with this?

After a moment, Katos shrugs.

KATOS
Your funeral. When I win,
I will possess this town
and you with it, Xena.

XENA

And when Gabrielle wins....

Katos snorts laughter.

XENA

(cont'd)

Not only will you leave this town alone in the future, you will also protect it from any other warlord who wants to raid it for as long as you have an army.



Katos looks at her, eyes wide.

XENA

(cont'd, offhandedly)

Unless you don't think your man is good enough, of course.

Katos looks at his man, then back at Xena. He carelessly flaps a hand dripping with jeweled rings.

KATOS

Fine, fine.

XENA

We have a deal, then?

KATOS

Fine. Let's just get this over with. I have a raping and pillaging to plan.

Xena nods to Gabrielle, who returns the nod with a quick, confident grin.

The man draws his sword, but before it is completely away from its scabbard, Gabrielle is armed with both sais. He swings at her with his huge weapon. Using her much smaller size, she ducks beneath the swing, stepping forward and punching him in the belly with the butts of her sais.



He seems not to feel it as he reverses the grip on his sword and tries a downward thrust. Gabrielle blocks the thrust, catching the blade in her sais and twisting it away. He comes at her again; she blocks him again and again and again, quickly on the defensive as his superior strength pushes her back and back again.

Reversing his blade, he tries a pommel shot to the head. She jerks away enough so the blow impacts with her shoulder, sending her to the ground. With a neat backward roll, she's up again, managing to gain the upper hand in an impressive series of punches and kicks that has him wheeling back several steps until his back hits against an overturned wagon and he starts forward again, swinging his sword with agile skill.

Gabrielle brings her sais up in a perfect block, catching his sword snugly. With a growl, he wrenches his sword away, taking Gabrielle's own weapons with it. Smiling slightly, he moves in for the kill.

Without blinking, Gabrielle stomps the ground, and a discarded staff pops into her hands just in time for her to block his blow and send the momentum of it back his way, which causes him to stumble just slightly. Gabrielle takes advantage by moving in quickly, hitting him with blow after blow to his arms, chest and belly. A lash of her foot causes his knee to buckle and he only keeps himself from falling by grabbing onto her in a giant bear hug.



Grunting, she pushes him away, and he gathers up his strength for one final, killing blow.

Just before the decapitating strike impacts, Gabrielle goes down in a perfect split, and rams the butt of her makeshift staff squarely between his legs.

With an almost womanly squeal, he drops to his knees, hands cupping his groin. Jumping to her feet, Gabrielle presses her staff into his chest, urging him to his back and keeping him there.

KATOS

Finish him! Finish him!!

Gabrielle looks up.

GABRIELLE

I don't kill unless I
have a reason to.



KATOS

Fine! Then I'll....

His words and his sword stroke are interrupted by a much larger blade that first disarms him, and then positions itself neatly under his chin.

XENA

Me? I don't need a reason.

(beat)

Do we understand one another?

Gulping, Katos nods gingerly.

XENA

Good. Gabrielle won. Are you going
to keep up your end of the bargain?

Though he looks like he wants to renege, the sharp sword point forces him to change his mind. Swallowing convulsively, he nods again.

XENA

(cont'd)

Just make sure you do. Because
if I find out you backed out....

She pushes the tip just hard enough to cause a trickle of blood to flow.

XENA

(cont'd)

... I'll be back. And
I'll be very angry.

KATOS

I... I won't. I swear!

After a long moment, Xena removes her sword and Katos gasps for air, rubbing the area on his neck.

XENA

Now get outta here before I
change my mind and cut
you to ribbons just because.

With alacrity, the warlord turns and is ready to mount his horse and be gone, but not before kicking at his former second.

KATOS

Don't show your face to me
again, or you'll be a dead man.

Then hopping aboard his horse, he storms away, the rest of his army following.

The cheering of the townspeople is almost deafening and with a little grin, Gabrielle rises to her feet and helps the man she has just defeated do the same.

MAN

(eyes downward)

I am your prisoner.

GABRIELLE

I... don't think that'll be necessary.

MAN

(shocked)

But... but... I would have
killed you if I could!

GABRIELLE

Do you want to kill me now?



Dropping her staff, she opens her arms wide.

GABRIELLE

You can if you want to.

The man shakes his head.

MAN

No. I cannot. But...
I am your enemy.

GABRIELLE

What's your name?

MAN

Mikos.

GABRIELLE

Hello, Mikos.
I'm Gabrielle.

They shake hands.

GABRIELLE

We're not enemies anymore.

Mikos looks dumbfounded. Gabrielle laughs and pats him on the back.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Don't worry.
You'll get used to it.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTYARD - EVENING - APHRODITE'S POV

Hearing the cheering, Lira and Aphrodite, who are clean and dressed in fresh clothes, step outside of the infirmary to witness the celebration.

APHRODITE

We did it, huh?
Pretty cool.

When she notices she's not receiving a response, she turns to look at Lira. The young woman is frozen to the ground as if rooted there, staring forward. Following the line of the young woman's gaze, Aphrodite notices a tall, giant of a man being aided by Gabrielle. A knowing smile crosses her face.

APHRODITE

Lira? Yo, earth to Lira.

Lira blinks.

LIRA

Sorry. What?

APHRODITE

Don't you think you should go over there and help him?

LIRA

What?

APHRODITE

You know, injured, bleeding. Help?

LIRA

Oh. OH. Help!

Grabbing a clean rag from Aphrodite's hand, Lira walks through the milling, cheering crowd toward Mikos, who freezes the moment he lays eyes on her.

LIRA

You're hurt. Let me tend to your wounds.

MIKOS

(softly)

You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.

He gathers himself.

MIKOS

(cont'd)

Oh. I'm sorry. That was presumptuous of me to say.

Lira smiles shyly.

LIRA

That's all right. I don't mind. May I tend your wounds?

MIKOS

Oh no, my lady. I can
tend to them myself.



LIRA

Please. I'd like to
help. I'd....

Lifting her mangled hand, she begins to drop it, but before she can, Mikos takes hold of her wrist and brings it to his lips, bestowing a tender kiss on the mangled flesh.

MIKOS

I would be honored,
my lady.

The two walk toward the infirmary arm in arm, brushing past a beaming Aphrodite.

The crowd then closes in bearing Gabrielle up on their shoulders, and heads for the tavern and a much-deserved celebration.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - SUNSET

It is the day after the victorious battle, and the party is still in full swing. On the outskirts of town, Aphrodite stands in a quiet nook watching the sun set low in the sky. In an irony she recognizes, she is actually enjoying the peace, quiet and solitude of the moment.

A soft tread and Xena appears next to her. They exchange a quiet look, then both turn their heads back to the sky, watching as the sun leaves its last trails of color.

Aphrodite turns to Xena, examining her profile.

APHRODITE

It hurts to look at you
sometimes, you know?

Xena turns to her, eyebrow raised.

APHRODITE

(cont'd)

There's so much of him
in there. His fire, his temper,
even his looks. I miss that.

(beat)

I miss him.

XENA

(somberly)

Part of me misses him, too.



Aphrodite nods.

APHRODITE

I know.

Silence falls between them again. Aphrodite appears to gather her courage.

APHRODITE

(cont'd)

You know, I was really angry at you Xena. Majorly angry. I mean, you had everything; your soulmate, your daughter, everything. And you took away the one thing I had left. Just... took it away, threw it away like it didn't mean anything to you.

XENA

Aphrodite, I....

APHRODITE

(over Xena)

I didn't get it, ya know? I didn't get how you could be like that.

It just didn't, like, make any sense to me at all.

(beat)

But now, I think it does. Sorta.

Xena's eyebrow raises again. Aphrodite laughs.

APHRODITE

(cont'd)

Ar used to do that a lot, too.

XENA

Mm.

APHRODITE

Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that maybe I learned some stuff. Maybe I learned that we gods can be pretty full of ourselves most of the time.

Xena gives her a look.

APHRODITE

(cont'd)

Yeah, like duh, right? But I really didn't know! It's, like, what I do, ya know?

XENA

One of Ares' favorite sayings.

Aphrodite laughs.

APHRODITE

Yeah, well, like brother, like sister. But I never realized that what I do can hurt you guys. I never really thought about it. I was just doing my thing, cause that's who I am.

XENA

(thoughtfully)

I think Ares realized that, once.

APHRODITE

Yeah, wasn't that cool the way he rescued Gabs and your kid? He did a rockin' thing, didn't he?

XENA

Yes, he did.



Aphrodite's smile slowly fades.

APHRODITE

But then you gave him back his godhood, and he forgot most of what he learned.

(beat)

I won't forget, though. I mean what if I had just totally blown Gab off and shot that Falin loser with my love dust? Lira might never have been able to be with, like, her true love. I won't ever forget something like that. Not ever.

Silence falls again, until Xena begins to speak.

XENA

Aphrodite, I want you to know that
if there had been any other way,
Gabrielle and I would have taken it.

Aphrodite smiles and nudges Xena with her shoulder.

APHRODITE

I know, Xena. I might not have known
it then, but I do now. It might take me
a little more time to be cool with it
and all, but... I know I'll be all right.
I am the Love Goddess, after all.

Gabrielle enters the clearing and gives them both a smile.

APHRODITE

(cont'd)

Hi, sweet pea! How are
things back at the party?

GABRIELLE

Loud. How 'bout over here?

Aphrodite gives Xena a smile, which Xena returns in full measure.

APHRODITE

Oh, I think we got things
pretty under control here,
right warrior-babe?

XENA

Riiight.

APHRODITE

So, how about you guys?
Ready to move on?

GABRIELLE

I think so. You?



APHRODITE

I think I'll stick around awhile. I mean, Lira is gonna probably need a few love tips from the master.

Besides, I'm kinda digging this walking with the mortals gig.

GABRIELLE

Will you ever tell them who you really are?

APHRODITE

Mm, probably. But not for awhile though. It's cool to be treated like one of the gang. Almost like I have a family again.

GABRIELLE

You always have one with us if you want it, Aphrodite. And I mean that.

Reaching over, Aphrodite gives Gabrielle a warm hug.

APHRODITE

I know you do, sweet pea. I love you guys. You know that, right?

GABRIELLE

We love you too, Aphrodite.



After a moment, they pull away.

APHRODITE

So, I'll be seeing you guys, huh?

XENA

Count on it.

APHRODITE

Groovin'!

After a final goodbye, Xena and Gabrielle turn and begin to walk down the road out of town. Aphrodite looks after them with an almost wistful expression before making her way back to town and the adventures that await her there.



FADE OUT.

DISCLAIMER

No "pretty women" were harmed during the making of this motion picture.