

Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 7



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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. THEBES - DAY

XENA and GABRIELLE are walking through the busy streets of Thebes, the noise of the city surrounding them. The air is filled with the aroma of roasting meats, sweets, and nuts. Xena is smiling and Gabrielle is glancing wistfully at every vendor's table as they walk by.

XENA

(knowingly)

You're just dying to go shopping aren't you?



Gabrielle gives Xena an exasperated look that still manages to be tinged with fondness.

GABRIELLE

We need things, Xena.
I shop so that we can live.

XENA

You live to shop.

GABRIELLE

(winking)

And it's a good life.

The bard holds up her hands to forestall Xena's next words.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Don't say it. We should find a room
first, or we'll end up sleeping in a
stable somewhere. I know.

Xena drapes her arm over Gabrielle's shoulder and gives her a squeeze, moving them both to the side of the road so a crowded wagon can pass.

XENA

C'mon. Let's hurry up and find a
place for Argo. I don't want to leave
her with that boy at the city gates
any longer than we have to.

(beat)

XENA

(Cont'd)

Besides, if we don't hurry, you'll miss the best bargains. They're gone before noon, ya know.



An unexpected, delighted grin lights Gabrielle's face as she shares an early memory with her partner.

GABRIELLE

(surprised)

I told you that the very first time we went shopping together.



Xena eyes a bit of tack on a merchant's cart, but doesn't stop walking.

XENA

(shrugging one shoulder nonchalantly)

MmHm...

GABRIELLE

Wow! I can't believe you remember that, Xena. I didn't think you were paying any attention to me as I was babbling on and on.

Xena raises an eyebrow.

XENA

Oh, I was paying attention to you, bard. I was sure that I was going to lose you in that crowd and be forced to spend the rest of my days wandering the streets of Athens pitifully calling your name.

GABRIELLE

(pleased)

Pitifully, huh?

Xena points to a merchant across the street, trying to change the subject.

XENA
Hey look!

She waggles the hand that's pointing.

XENA
(Cont'd)
That guy is selling... selling... umm....



Amused, Gabrielle glances at the stall.

GABRIELLE
(drolly)
Baby clothes.
Those are baby clothes, Xena.

She rests her hands on her hips.

GABRIELLE
(Cont'd)
(teasingly)
Is there something you want to share with me?



Xena just scowls and they continue to walk.

GABRIELLE
Tch. Lose me in a crowd? Not a chance, Oh One Of Many Skills. We'd have found each other again... eventually. Or when the sales were over. Which ever came first. Family's like that... stuck with each other.

The satisfied look on Gabrielle's face makes it very clear how she feels about that proposition. Before Xena can respond, Gabrielle turns in the direction of a vendor selling bolts of colorful cloth. Unseen, Xena rolls her eyes.

GABRIELLE

(over her shoulder)

If you're rolling your eyes it must mean you'd rather look at the booties. I'm game if you are.

Gabrielle sudden squawks as Xena rushes up behind her and begins rifling through her hair with inquisitive fingers.

GABRIELLE

(laughing)

Xena! Hey! What are you doing?

Gabrielle tries to swat away Xena's hands but her partner is too quick. Xena throws her heart into the game, pushing quickly past her natural public reticence and ignoring the stares of curious onlookers in favor of a lighthearted moment with her friend. It's easier than she imagines and soon she's trying to muss Gabrielle's hair as much as is humanly possible. Their recent adventures in Britannia had been more emotionally draining than she cared to admit. Gabrielle's laughter was good for them both.

XENA

I'm checking for another pair of eyes.



She laughs harder and tries unsuccessfully to duck.

GABRIELLE

Xena!

XENA

Seems my mother had a set there too.

FADE OUT.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. MARKET PLACE - DAY

The market place is growing busier and busier. Xena reaches behind her for Gabrielle's hand as she rounds a corner.

XENA

Gabr....

She continues to extend her hand until she turns to see that Gabrielle has vanished. Xena blinks.

XENA

(Cont'd)

How does she do that?!



Finding Gabrielle in the hundreds of people isn't going to be easy and Xena girds her mental loins. Looking around, she sees a vine-covered bell tower. She scales the side of it quickly, moving with the agility of a spider. Hanging from the sides of the tower by an extended arm, she searches the crowd for crowd for a blond head. She spots her partner, finishes the climb and stands on the edge of the bell tower, looking down into the crowd. Gabrielle is gesturing wildly to a slightly overwhelmed looking merchant, who is exchanging the single bottle of ink in Gabrielle's hands for two, both a significantly larger than the first.

Xena laughs and shakes her head.

XENA

Poor bastard. You'd better hurry up and take her dinars before she talks you out of three bottles.

When a place next to Gabrielle opens up Xena vaults from the tower, doing a corkscrew flip so that she lands neatly on her feet alongside her friend. The merchant looks on stunned as Gabrielle causally turns to her Xena and tucks the two bottles of ink into the small satchel on her back.

GABRIELLE

Didn't realize you had scheduled flying lessons today.



XENA
(smirking)
I don't need lessons.



Xena puts her hands on hips, but eyes twinkling make it clear she's not really angry. Her voice drops an octave.

XENA
(Cont'd)
Do I need to put you on
a leash, Gabrielle?

Gabrielle snorts but can't stop the light blush that colors her cheeks as the merchant's eyes widen.

GABRIELLE
In... Your... Dreams, Warrior Princess.

Xena waits for an explanation, ignoring Gabrielle's sigh.

XENA
I thought we were going to find a stable for Argo.

GABRIELLE
(biting her lip)
I got caught up in the crowd
of unstoppable shoppers?

Xena begins tapping her foot.

GABRIELLE
(Cont'd)
I was being held at knifepoint by
kidnappers and I knew you'd find me?

Xena's expression remains unchanged.

GABRIELLE
(Cont'd)
Oh, all right. We passed by a sale.



XENA

I passed it. You didn't.

GABRIELLE

Xena...

Gabrielle stops mid-sentence when a MAN and WOMAN walk past her and she hears Xena's, then her own name. She looks to Xena in question and Xena nods, acknowledging that she heard it too. Silently, they begin to follow the two strangers, listening in on their conversation as the foursome weaves through the throngs of people.

MAN

(emphatically)

I tell you, he's crazy! Crazy as a loon.

WOMAN

Hush, Cyrus, he's an old man.
He's wants his friends to help him.
Besides, he paid me to find them.

CYRUS

He paid you and a dozen others.
C'mon! You can't tell me that you
believe Xena is still alive.

WOMAN

Of course not. And that's what I'm
going to tell him. They're dead as
doornails. Everybody knows that.

The woman grasps Cyrus' sleeve and gives him a firm tug.

WOMAN

(Cont'd)

But you love me and so you'll walk with me.

Xena whispers sardonically to Gabrielle as they continue to follow the pair at a discreet distance.

XENA

Guess they don't make doornails like they used to.

GABRIELLE

Lucky for us.



Cyrus and the woman exit the main market street and turn onto a path leading away from the city and up a gently sloping hill.

WOMAN

(shaking her head sadly)
Ahh... but that reward money sure
would have been nice. I'm afraid
this news won't bring much.

FADE TO:

EXT. LARGE ESTATE - DAY

Xena and Gabrielle watch from the shadows of a large tree as Cyrus and woman explain to a servant from the estate that they're dead as doornails. It's a surreal experience and Xena and Gabrielle squirm a little at the words. The servant is dress is similar to a harem girls; a gauzy skirt with a jeweled waistband and a blouse that reveals a toned, bare midriff. When the Cyrus and woman finish their brief conversation they begin to head back to down the path towards town, counting out what appears to be a handful of dinars.

Gabrielle gestures with her chin towards Cyrus and the woman.

GABRIELLE

Well?
Them or the estate owner?
It's now or never, Xena.



Xena thinks for a few seconds before pushing off from the tree.

XENA

The estate owner. I want to know who is paying
people to look for me. I don't care about his lackeys.

Gabrielle and Xena march up to the large marble door and knock. A beautiful woman in her early forties with flowing scarlet hair answers the door, but only pulls it open a crack.

REDHAired SERVANT

Yes? May I help you?

XENA

Lady, it would make my day. We'd like
to speak to the owner of the house.

REDHAired SERVANT

(exasperatedly)
By the Gods! Don't you Followers of Eli ever
take a break? There's no one here to save!

Seeing that Xena and Gabrielle haven't budged, the servant tries another tact.

REDHAired SERVANT

(Cont'd)

We like being bad. It's fun.
Hmph. So there.

Xena smirks and the servant instantly relents, fearing she's made the wrong impression.



REDHAired SERVANT

(Cont'd)

But it's not like we do anything
really bad or illegal or....

(beat)

Well, it might be illegal but it's really
none of the governments business
what we do in the privacy of....

Gabrielle grabs the doorframe and tugs the door fully open, putting herself between Xena and the Servant.

GABRIELLE

We're not here to save you.
We don't care if you're... you're....

XENA

(helpfully)

Bad?

GABRIELLE

(under her breath to Xena)

That wasn't exactly the word I was looking for.



Xena spreads her arms out wide.

XENA

(to the servant)

Do we really look like followers of Eli to you?

The servant's eyes widen as she finally takes time to survey Xena's and Gabrielle's outfits.

REDHAired SERVANT

Not with great leather like that, you're not.
May I ask who you are? And if that....
(points at Xena's battledress)
is for sale?

XENA

It's not for sale. And my name is Xena.

REDHAired SERVANT

Xena? Impossible!
(eyes narrowing)
You're just here after the reward money.
Xena would have to be... old by now. If you're
suppose to be Xena, I guess that makes her....

GABRIELLE

Gabrielle.

REDHAired SERVANT

(shrugging)
Oh.

GABRIELLE

Zeus!

Gabrielle throws her hands in the air and turns to Xena.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

How comes nobody believes you're you, but
they have no problem believing that I'm me.
I couldn't be that old either!



Xena tries not to preen but still does.

XENA

Well, Gabrielle, I do take care of myself.

Gabrielle rolls her eyes.

GABRIELLE

Gods. Not the Oil of Aphrodite lecture again.

She ignores Xena's shocked gasp.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I dare you tell that to someone
who thinks you're so tough.

Xena shoots a mock glare at Gabrielle before returning her attention to the servant.

XENA

I understand there is
someone here looking for us.

The servant nods happily and eagerly throws up the door to the estate.

REDHAired SERVANT

Come in. Come in. And welcome to
the home of The King of Thieves.

XENA and GABRIELLE

(with twin raised eyebrows)
Autolycus?



REDHAired SERVANT

(beaming)

The one and only.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTOLYCUS HOME- SAME DAY

Xena and Gabrielle are led into Autolycus' bedroom by a scantily clad, SHORT SERVANT GIRL, who has taken over for the redhead. Several other WOMEN are milling around in equally revealing costumes. The hallway is lined with fine marble sculptures and silk tapestries from Chin.

Xena gives a low whistle at the lush surroundings.

XENA

Looks like somebody got
the life he always wanted.



Xena raises an eyebrow at a blonde servant in a particularly skimpy outfit as the woman walks past her. Calling on her warlord skills, Xena affected an air of disregard. But despite herself her gaze ventures sideways and she lags a step behind Gabrielle. Without turning around Gabrielle backhands Xena lightly in the belly.

XENA

(clutching her stomach)
Uff! How did you...?

GABRIELLE

I don't need to see. I KNOW. Just remember that.



The servant girl knocks once on Autolycus' bedroom door.

AUTOLYCUS

Enter!

GABRIELLE

(smiling at servant girl)
Thanks. We can take it from here.

Gabrielle swallows, suddenly a little nervous about meeting someone from their past. So far they haven't had much luck in this department. She glances up at Xena.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)
Right?

Xena cups Gabrielle's cheek tenderly and smiles, doing her best to allay her partner's fears.

XENA

Right.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTOLYCUS' BEDROOM - DAY

AUTOLYCUS is reclining in a king-sized bed. He's clad in a robe and lying back on a mound of silk-covered pillows. His hair is streaked with gray, and his forehead is creased from worry, but he's still a handsome man. He catches sight of Xena as she opens the door and pokes her head inside. Xena grins at her old friend and both she and Gabrielle enter his room.



AUTOLYCUS

Xena?

(appreciatively)

Amazing! I always knew you had a fix in with the Fates.

You're as beautiful as ever. And Gabrielle.

(beaming like a proud father)

Gods, let me look at you.

Xena and Gabrielle both move to Autolycus' bedside. Autolycus takes Gabrielle's hand and cradles it gently, brushing his lips against it.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)

Gabrielle, Gabrielle, what can I say?

He holds up her hand for inspection.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)

Still not using Oil of Aphrodite, I see.

(winking)

Lucky for you, I don't mind it rough.

Xena and Gabrielle both start laughing and hug their old friend.

AUTOLYCUS

You wouldn't believe how much I missed you two.



GABRIELLE

(misty-eyed)

Oh, yes we would. We missed you too.

Autolycus grins roguishly and strokes his white mustache.

AUTOLYCUS

Of course you did.

(whispering to Gabrielle)

I know no matter what she says, Xena's ALWAYS had a thing for me. The years without me must have been rough for her.

GABRIELLE

(dryly)

How ever did she manage?

XENA

Autolycus, you're like a dog with a bone.
But you do get points for persistence.



Xena slaps him in the leg and Autolycus winces in pain but recovers quickly.

AUTOLYCUS

I get points and Gabrielle here gets...
(grinning unrepentantly)
...MORE. Now where's the justice in that, Xena?

Xena doesn't bother to answer Autolycus' rhetorical question, but they both share a soft smile.

XENA

We hear you've been looking for us.

Autolycus' expression grows serious and he shifts in bed, smoothing another groan of pain. Xena and Gabrielle exchange curious glances.

AUTOLYCUS

It's my son. I need your help. Both of you.

His throat closes around the words. After a long pause, he forces himself to continue.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)

He's been kidnapped, and you and Gabrielle
are the only ones I trust... with his life.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTOLYCUS' BEDROOM - DAY

Autolycus is still reclining in bed. Gabrielle is perched on the bed beside him, holding his hand, while Xena paces the room.

XENA

You have that kind of money, Autolycus?



AUTOLYCUS

I do. The ransom will be
here in the morning.

Autolycus' jaw starts to work and it's clear that he's barely holding himself together. Even in the worst of times, Xena and Gabrielle have never seen him so upset. They both find it a little disconcerting. Gabrielle gently strokes Autolycus' hand.

GABRIELLE

So you have a son, huh?
Is there a wife to go along with him?

AUTOLYCUS

(smiling sadly)

There was. But she's been
gone for along time now.

Gabrielle lets out a slow breath, wishing she hadn't brought it up. The pain she experienced in Japa after losing Xena is still too close to the surface.



GABRIELLE

I am so, so sorry, Autolycus.
I know how you... Well, I'm just sorry.
(beat)
I... I umm... never knew you wanted kids.

AUTOLYCUS

(lips quirking)

Neither did I.

He leans forward and motions both women closer.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)

Wanna know something it took
me a lifetime to figure out?

Both women nod.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)

Some of life's greatest treasures are surprises,
and their worth can't be measured in gold.

Autolycus suddenly grows self-conscious and ducks his head.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)

How's that for sappy?

XENA

Wanna know something that took me half a lifetime to figure out, old friend?

Both Autolycus and Gabrielle look at each other then nod eagerly.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Sometimes the best things in life are utterly and completely sappy. No need to apologize. I know just what you mean.



AUTOLYCUS

(sardonically to Gabrielle)

I knew it was only a matter of time before you started to wear off on her.

Everyone shares a brief chuckle before Autolycus clears his throat.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)

My son is worth that ransom and more. That's why I've got people scouring the countryside looking for you two. They all think I'm a crazy old man.

They'd be right of course. But....

(smiling knowingly)

I knew you if you were still out there, you'd help me.

It never pays to believe rumors. I know firsthand that Xena isn't one for staying dead.

GABRIELLE

Of course we'll help you, Autolycus. But is paying the ransom really a good idea?



Autolycus heaves a heavy sigh, suddenly looking every day of his age.

AUTOLYCUS

I never thought these words would leave my lips.
(beat)

The money doesn't matter. I only have three
days left to pay the ransom or my boy dies.
(shifting awkwardly in the bed)

I'm umm... sick. And I can't go myself.

Xena sits down on the foot of the bed.

XENA

You don't need to go.

GABRIELLE

(nodding her agreement)
We'll meet the kidnappers.

XENA

And get back your son.

FADE OUT.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Xena and Gabrielle have been given a guestroom in Autolycus' very spacious home. Xena is reclined back on the bed, wearing a robe made of fine silk. Gabrielle is wearing a matching blue robe and washing her face in a large copper pan that is heated by a small flame under it. Xena runs her hand over the covers on the bed. She reaches over to the nightstand and fiddles with a small piece of decorative pottery.

While Xena is occupied with the piece of art, Gabrielle digs into their bags and pulls out Xena's bottle of Oil of Aphrodite. Covertly, she opens the jar and sniffs.

GABRIELLE

Mmm.... That's why she smells so nice.

XENA

(still studying the pot)

Gabrielle, why are we in here relaxing when we could be doing something to help?

Jumping at the sound of Xena's voice, Gabrielle decides that Xena would recognize the smell of the oil on her and that she's too much of a wimp to endure the teasing. She tucks the jar away in their bags.

GABRIELLE

He was tired, Xena. And he already looks as though he hasn't slept in days. He said there was time to talk about it more tomorrow. We just need to be patient.



XENA

Why didn't you say so? You know patience isn't one of my strong suits.

GABRIELLE

(chuckling softly)

You'll live.

Xena sets the piece of pottery back and glances around, impressed despite herself.

XENA

Who would have thought Autolycus would come into his own?

GABRIELLE

(drying her face and arms)
Mmm... I always figured he'd finish his
life on a end of a hangman's noose.

A little bored, Xena flops back in the bed wiggles her feet, eyeing the slippers a servant provided.

XENA

(absently)
Or at the end of a jealous husband's sword.

GABRIELLE

Same result.
(beat)
We've got to make this right, Xena. We....

Gabrielle starts to say something else but stops, her brow furrowing deeply. Xena sits back up, her full attention on Gabrielle.

XENA

What?



GABRIELLE

(quietly as tears fill her eyes)
We both know what it feels to
lose the person you're in love with.

Gabrielle can hear Xena swallow across the room.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)
(whispering thickly)
We also know what it's like to lose a child.
(swallowing)
I don't want that for Autolyclus.

Xena closes her eyes at Gabrielle's words as a flash of pain sweeps over her and her chest tightens.

XENA

Gabrielle?

Xena's voice is compelling and Gabrielle sniffs as she looks to her partner, her eyes glistening in the muted candlelight.

Xena opens her eyes to reveal a steely resolve.

XENA
(Cont'd)
We won't fail.

Gabrielle gives Xena a slightly watery smile.

GABRIELLE
I know. It's just nice to be reminded every now and again.



Gabrielle drapes her towel over a chair and douses the flame under the copper pot before moving to the bed. She takes a long moment to put thoughts of the past out of her mind and concentrate on the here and now. Xena smiles reassuringly at her, and the remaining tension leaves the room. Dropping her robe, Gabrielle pulls back the covers and climbs into fresh clean sheets.

GABRIELLE
(groaning)
Oh, this is nice. Don't suppose Autolycus would want a couple of extra bodyguards, do you?

Xena chuckles and removes her own robe as she joins Gabrielle under the covers. She pulls her partner into her arms so that Gabrielle's head is resting on her shoulder.

XENA
You would look great in the outfits these women are parading around here in....

GABRIELLE
So would you. Only I wouldn't be much use as a bodyguard to Autolycus.

Gabrielle clucks softly at herself, drawing a fingertip up Xena's belly. She pauses when she reaches Xena's breastbone.

GABRIELLE
(Cont'd)
My eyes would be occupied elsewhere.

Xena squeezes Gabrielle even tighter to her.

XENA
That's okay. You'd get tired of sleeping in a soft bed anyway. When you've slept on the ground for as long as we have, it gets into your blood.

GABRIELLE

And bugs get into your hair.
And snakes get into your... a....

Gabrielle yelps loudly when Xena pinches her bottom.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Well, maybe not THERE exactly.

XENA

Heh.

GABRIELLE

Xena, you don't like the thought
of being 'settled,' do you?

XENA

(sighing)

It's not that, Gabrielle. I could make a home
anywhere as long as I was with you. But take
today for instance. We were just coming
to town so that you could shop.

GABRIELLE

So that WE could get supplies, you mean.

XENA

And what did we find? What ALWAYS finds us?

Gabrielle nods and flattens her palm on Xena's chest, enjoying the feeling of warm, silky skin.

GABRIELLE

Someone looking for help, I know.
But, Xena, Autolycus is our friend.

XENA

And I would help him without question.

(yawning)

But if we settled in one spot, EVERYONE would
know exactly where to find us. We'd never know a
moment's peace. By staying on the road at least we
have a CHANCE for a quiet moment now and again.

GABRIELLE

Mmm. I never thought of it that way.



XENA

(worriedly)

I don't think we'll ever have a normal home.

GABRIELLE

Oh, Xena, I don't care.

XENA

You don't?

GABRIELLE

(yawning)

You heard me. I've never cared one centaur's butt hair about being normal...

(yawning again)

...just happy. Happiness is you and me together, Xena. Wherever that is.

Xena lies quietly for a moment, allowing Gabrielle's words to seep deep into her soul. Without letting go of Gabrielle, she reaches out and extinguishes the CANDLE next to the bed.

XENA

We've got a long day ahead of us tomorrow. Let's get some....

She's interrupted by the light buzzing of Gabrielle's snores. Xena grumbles contentedly at the familiar sound.

XENA

(Cont'd)

(closing her own eyes)

Sleep.

FADE TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Xena and Gabrielle are seated at a large dining table eating the huge meal that has been placed on the table before them. Several serving girls are waiting patiently to tend to their every want. Xena smiles gratefully when one of the girls quickly refills her goblet the second it's emptied. Gabrielle watches Xena, who has a self-satisfied smirk on her face.

GABRIELLE

Enjoy it while it lasts.

XENA

(reaching out to take her hand)

Don't worry.

(beat)

I will.

Just then the same servant girl refills Gabrielle's drink and solicitously butters a chunk of bread for her.

GABRIELLE

Mmmm....

She smacks loudly as she ignores Xena's hand in favor of the steaming bread.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Me too.

They're both smiling at each other when a NURSE brings Autolycus into the room. He's in a WHEELCHAIR of sorts, with a BLANKET tucked securely around his legs. Xena rises to meet him, wheeling him the rest of the way to the table.

AUTOLYCUS

(tiredly)

Good morning, ladies. Sleep well?

GABRIELLE

We did. Thank you.

But I won't bother asking you the same.



AUTOLYCUS

Good. Then I won't bother lying about it.

While Xena settles him at the table, Gabrielle pours him a cup of hot cider. Xena glances around the grand dining room.

XENA

Autolycus, how do you stand it in this dump?



AUTOLYCUS

A man must be willing to suffer for his craft, Xena.

Xena retakes her seat, laying her hand on his arm.

XENA

You finally gonna tell us why you're in that chair and not out robbing the good citizens of Greece?

AUTOLYCUS

Robbing?
(straightening his lapels)
I think not. Robbery implies violence. I prefer finesse to violence, Xena. You know that.

XENA

(looking pointedly at the wheelchair)
So?

Autolycus begins to fidget.

AUTOLYCUS

So, I was... hurt in a little accident.

Gabrielle pushes her plate away, taking a good look at her friend.

GABRIELLE

Yesterday you said you were ill.

AUTOLYCUS

(unexpectedly blushing)
Sick, hurt, what does it matter? I can't walk at the moment. Isn't that enough?

Autolycus' knuckles whiten against the arms of his chair.

GABRIELLE

Hey, you don't need to get upset.
We're just trying to understand....



Autolycus becomes distracted by the redhead who let Xena and Gabrielle into the estate the day before. She is now carefully sectioning an orange for him. He gazes adoringly at the woman, causing Gabrielle to smother a smile.

AUTOLYCUS

(boyishly)
Thanks, Azel.

AZEL

(shyly)
Of course.
Anything for you, Autolycus.

Xena rolls her eyes.

XENA

Gods, I think I'm gonna be sick.



Gabrielle scolds Xena with a look and decides they can't put off getting down to business any longer.

GABRIELLE

Autolycus, can we see the ransom note?

AUTOLYCUS

I knew one of you would be asking that.

Reaching into the pocket of his robe he pulls out a folded piece of parchment and stares at it almost as if he's afraid to let go of it. Xena slowly reaches out and takes hold of it, looking to her friend until he looks back at her and releases it to her with a sad smile.

Xena unfolds the parchment and carefully reads it as Gabrielle looks on and Autolycus sips his cider.

XENA

Very straight forward.

She passes the note to Gabrielle, who begins to read.

AUTOLYCUS

Yes.

(tearing up)

Ten thousand dinars by sunset day after tomorrow or my son....

His voice breaks on the last word and he looks away.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)

... dies.

GABRIELLE

It's going to be okay, Autolycus.



Gabrielle is tempted to promise but knows she can't.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)
You'll see.

AUTOLYCUS

With you two helping me,
it can't be anything else.

A short, fat man, AUTOLYCUS' BANKER, rushes into the room and over to Autolyclus. He's panting and sweating and wringing his hands nervously.

AUTOLYCUS

Ahh... this is my banker....

BANKER

(shaking his head frantically)
No time for introductions. It's gone!

The color drains from Autolyclus' face and his disbelief shows in his voice.

AUTOLYCUS

Gone?

Before the banker even answers, Autolyclus' worry explodes into anger. He grabs the banker by the front of his tunic and gives him a stiff shake, exposing the banker's portly belly.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)
What do you mean... gone?

Gabrielle blinks at the scene unfolding before her.

GABRIELLE

What's going on?



AUTOLYCUS

What's wrong is that this moron was supposed
to be escorting my money here from Athens!

Autolyclus reaches for Gabrielle's bread knife and Xena grabs his wrist, stopping him.

XENA

Whoa, Autolyclus.

Autolyclus reluctantly pauses.

XENA

(Cont'd)

(turning, sneering at Banker)

We can always kill him in a minute.
Let's hear what happened to the money first.

BANKER

(eyes wide)

St-st-st-Stolen!

The banker's words are still hanging in the air when a CLOAKED FIGURE holding a heavy bag of dinars appears in the doorway, its identity hidden.

The figure holds up bag of dinars and gives it a little shake.



CLOAKED FIGURE

Somebody lose something?

Xena and Gabrielle both jump to their feet and draw their weapons. Autolykus' head sags in relief and he lets go of the banker, who stumbles backwards in fear as he recognizes the moneybag.

BANKER

Oh, gods, it's the... the thief!

The banker's eyes roll back in his head just before passes out, hitting the floor with an unceremonious thump.

AUTOLYCUS

(to cloaked figure)

Are you trying to kill me, Talia?
Because I have to tell you... that's not
the way I've always pictured going.

TALIA

Please don't tell me the way you always
pictured going. I'm sure I don't want to know.

Talia pulls down her hood and a young woman in her early twenties is revealed. She strolls into the room and drops the bag of dinars on table. Gabrielle sheaths her SAIS but keeps a wary eye on her even as she helps pick the banker off the floor, handing him over to a couple servants.

TALIA

I'm not trying to kill you.

She leans in and kisses his cheek tenderly.

TALIA

(Cont'd)

But a girl has to have some fun in life.
(seriously)
I came as soon as I got your message.

Talia's glances up and her gaze fixes then lingers on Gabrielle in honest appreciation, causing Xena to frown. Gabrielle is oblivious to the attention.

AUTOLYCUS

(looking relieved)

I knew you would. I could always count on you. Anyone who says there is no honor among thieves doesn't know my family.

(beat)

Xena, Gabrielle, allow me to introduce my daughter, Talia.

Talia nudges Autolykus, prodding him to continue. He clears his throat.

AUTOLYCUS

The Princess of Thieves.

(smiling proudly)

Safeguard your family jewels, ladies.
She's a chip off the old block.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTOLYCUS' HOUSE - DAY

Xena and Gabrielle are gathering their gear in preparation to retrieve Autolykus' son Darius. They're almost to the door when Gabrielle notices Azel watching them from the hallway. Gabrielle passes her bedroll to Xena.

GABRIELLE

You go ahead, Xena. I'll be out in a minute.



XENA

(nodding)

We'll be waiting.

Xena silently picks up their satchel and moves past Azel as she exits the room.

AZEL

(wringing her hands)

You have to get him back, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

We'll do everything we can.
I promise you that.

Azel moves to the open window. Her hair is gently blown back and she watches as Xena meets Talia in front of the house and the two tall women walk towards the stables.

AZEL

I've been here since Darius was a baby.
(beat)
He can be difficult but he's really a
sweet kid at heart. Just like Autolycus.
It would kill him to lose Darius.

GABRIELLE

We're not going to let that happen.
(smiling)
You're in love with him, aren't you?

AZEL

(whirling around aghast)
Darius?

GABRIELLE

No! I meant Autolycus.

AZEL

(blushing)
Is it that obvious?

GABRIELLE

It is if you know what love looks like.

AZEL

And you do?

GABRIELLE

No question there.
(looking out the window)
I've got to go.

Gabrielle reaches out and squeezes Azel's forearm before heading for the door.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)
I know you'll take care of
Autolycus until we get back.

AZEL

(under her breath)
Just don't come back empty handed.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Xena, Gabrielle and Talia are riding slowly down the road. Xena turns and towards Talia, nudging Argo closer to her black gelding.

XENA

It's not too late to turn back, Talia.
This might be dangerous.



Talia's face is set in granite.

TALIA

We're talking about my brother here.
It doesn't matter how dangerous
it might be. I have to go.

Xena nods in understanding.

GABRIELLE

(curiously)

Talia, how did your father get hurt?

TALIA

(surprised)

He didn't tell you?

Talia ducks under a low hanging branch.

XENA

If he told us, would we be asking you now?

TALIA

(reluctantly)

I don't know....

GABRIELLE

Please, Talia. We're concerned.

TALIA

*(guiding her horse a little
closer to Gabrielle's)*

Really? That's so sweet, Gabrielle.

Xena doesn't like how Talia seems to ignore her but is more than willing to talk to Gabrielle.

XENA

Yes, really.

TALIA

(ignoring Xena)

Father's lucky to have a good friend like you, Gabrielle.

XENA

(breaking into the conversation)

I'm his friend to, ya know.

Talia waves her hand dismissively.

TALIA

Right.

Xena scowls at both women... a little perturbed that Gabrielle seems oblivious to Talia's interest.

GABRIELLE

So what's wrong with your father?



TALIA

Oh, that.

She begins to lose her train of thought as she gazes at Gabrielle's golden hair.

TALIA

(Cont'd)

You know... I think your hair would look great long. I'll bet I have a jeweled clip somewhere that would look beautiful on you.

GABRIELLE

No thanks. I used to wear my hair long, but I like it shorter. And...

She looks pointedly at Xena and gives her a brilliant smile.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I've been told it looks nice this way.

Xena clears her throat a little self-consciously before pinning Talia with a serious look.

XENA

Your father? His illness?
Let's try to focus here.

TALIA

Right...
(sighing)

He um... he broke his hip....

XENA

(grunting)

Ummm... painful.

(eyes narrowing)

But why didn't he just say so?



TALIA

(wincing)

He broke his hip... with Azel.

Gabrielle looks confused.

TALIA

(Cont'd)

WITH Azel, if you know what I mean. She used to be a dancer in Athens before she came to work for Father and she is... well... amazingly flexible. And athletic.

(quickly)

She didn't mean to hurt him.

GABRIELLE

(covering her eyes with one hand)

Oh, Gods.

She can hear Xena sniggering in the background and is hard-pressed not to chuckle herself.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Xena, that's not funny.

XENA

(still laughing)

I'm sorry, Gabrielle, but the Hades it's not!



GABRIELLE

And if the same thing had happened to you?
Say, at the Amazon village and all the
other warriors heard about it?

The smile slides from Xena's face and she scowls at the unthinkable scenario.

XENA

Don't even joke about that, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

(to Talia)

That couldn't have been
easy on your father's ego.

TALIA

(shoots Xena an evil look)

Exactly. That's why he doesn't tell people what
happened. Unfortunately, some townsfolk heard he
was laid up for no apparent reason and the rumors
started to fly. I've heard everything from him
escaping crucifixion to having the plague.

Xena and Gabrielle share twin shivers.

TALIA

What?

GABRIELLE

Don't ask.

(beat)

Autolycus never mentioned your mother....



TALIA

She died giving birth to Darius.
It's just been Father and us ever since.

She suddenly smiles rakishly in a gesture very reminiscent of her father.

TALIA

(Cont'd)

And all the servant girls, of course.

Gabrielle lifts both her eyebrows.

TALIA

(Cont'd)

Even without a mother, Darius and I never wanted for anything, including a good education.

Xena opens her mouth to speak, but Talia beats her to the punch.

TALIA

(Cont'd)

Not that kind of education. I'm a self-taught thief. Darius, on the other hand, has never had an interest in the family vocation. He'd rather die than be a thief. He's was away at school when somebody snatched him.

(angrily, with frustration)
He should have been safe!

Xena stares down the road with unseeing eyes.

INTERCUT:

Gabrielle being nailed to a snowy cross.



INTERCUT:

Xena and Gabrielle walking through a burning village that had been destroyed by Livia.



INTERCUT:

An old Joxer lying on the ground, mortally wounded.



INTERCUT:

Xena handing a baby Solon to Kaliepus.



INTERCUT:

Xena shakes herself out of her memories and sits up a little straighter on Argo.

XENA

There are times that no matter how badly we want to,
we can't keep the people we care about safe.

(beat)

But Talia....

Gabrielle and Talia both look at Xena intently.

XENA

(Cont'd)

This isn't going to be one of those times.



FADE OUT.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Xena, Gabrielle, and Talia are seated around a campfire. Xena is replacing a lace on one of her boots. Gabrielle is watching as Talia picks through the food she prepared for supper. Talia is seated against a tree.

GABRIELLE

Too much pepper on the rabbit?



Talia looks up, startled by Gabrielle's voice in the quiet campsite.

TALIA

No. Yes.

(rubbing her temples)

I mean... I'm just not hungry.

Gabrielle shoots Xena a meaningful look. Xena glances at her uncertainly before a mental light bulb pops on and she quickly shoves the last of her dinner into her mouth. She snatches up Gabrielle's empty and Talia's mostly full plate.

XENA

I'm uh... I'm... I'm going to the creek
to wash these so you two can....



GABRIELLE

(warmly)

Thanks, Xena.

Xena nods and disappears into the darkness leaving Talia and Gabrielle in an uncomfortable silence.

GABRIELLE

We will get him back, you know.

TALIA

(frustratedly)

We don't even know if he's still alive.

Her jaw works silently for several seconds.

TALIA

(Cont'd)

Mother is already gone.
It would kill Father to lose him.

GABRIELLE

(quietly)

I know. And believe me, Talia, so does Xena.
We'll move heaven and Earth. You need to trust us.

TALIA

How do you know you can do this?

GABRIELLE

Autolycus has never let either of us down.
We won't let him down either.
(smiling gently)
But that's not the main reason.

TALIA

The main reason?

GABRIELLE

Xena.



A little of Gabrielle's confidence appears to wear off on Talia and she relaxes. She tries to scoot closer to Gabrielle but the bard begins to move as she tidies up around the campsite. Giving up on being able to sit next to Gabrielle, Talia holds out her arms out like an expectant child.

TALIA

(wriggling her eyebrows)

How about a hug in my hour of need?

GABRIELLE

(shaking her head)

Gods, you really are a chip off the old block.

TALIA

(hopefully)

Is that a yes?

Gabrielle hasn't had a chance to reply when Xena's CHAKRAM flies out of the darkness and impales itself in the tree behind Talia, about an inch above her head. A chunk of dark hair is hacked off in the process. Talia gasps and fearfully reaches up, making a face when her fingers find the loose tuft and strands of hair sprinkle down onto her face.

TALIA
(disgustedly)
Ugh!

The expression on Gabrielle's face tells the young woman she had it coming.

GABRIELLE
(wryly)
If I were you, I'd take that as a definite 'no'.



FADE TO:

EXT. FORK IN THE ROAD - EVENING

Xena, Gabrielle, and Talia wait anxiously atop their horses.

TALIA
Where are they? It's almost sunset.

Gabrielle's gaze drifts towards the bushes.

GABRIELLE
They're already here.



XENA
(nodding approvingly at Gabrielle)
They're just waiting to come out. Making us sweat.

TALIA
(mumbling)
It's working, too.

A loud MALE VOICE suddenly booms from the bushes.

MALE VOICE

Leave the money under the big tree in front of you and ride away. Don't make me tell you twice or Darius gets it! If there are no tricks, we'll bring him back to his tutors unharmed.

TALIA

Wait just a damn minute!

GABRIELLE

(under her breath)

It'll be okay, Talia. Relax.

Wordlessly, Xena dismounts Argo, pulls the bags of dinars from the saddlebags and pads over the large tree on the edge of the fork in the road. She sets the bags down, goes back to Argo and all three riders turn around and disappear around the bend in the road. Several moments pass before a dark-haired BOY, age 12-14, peeks out from the bushes and carefully makes his way to the bags of dinars. He lifts the first bag, and peers inside. Xena sneaks up behind him and silently peers over his shoulder and into the bag.

XENA

All there?



BOY

I think... AHHH!

The boy turns and sees Xena. Wide-eyed, he stumbles backwards and right into Gabrielle's waiting arms, where she keeps hold of him by the scruff of the neck.

BOY

AHHH!

GABRIELLE

Gotcha.

Talia appears on the road holding the reins of all three horses. She rushes over to her brother.

TALIA

Darius?

(looking around)

Where are the kidnappers?

XENA

(glaring menacingly at Darius)
There aren't any kidnapers, are there?



DARIUS

(croaking)
No.

Gabrielle winces. Talia drops the reins and yanks her brother from Gabrielle's grasp.

TALIA

No kidnapers! YOU did this?

GABRIELLE

(warningly)
Talia.



Xena takes Talia by the arms.

XENA

Easy, Taila. We'll figure out what's going on, but you don't want to hurt him.

TALIA

You're right, Xena.
I don't want to hurt him.

Xena, Gabrielle and Darius all let out relieved breaths.

TALIA

(Cont'd)
I want to KILL him!

GABRIELLE

(quickly pulls Darius away from Talia)
I think...
(another pull)
...we need

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

(grunts as spins around to put Darius behind her)

...to cool off.

(to Xena)

I'll talk to him. You get Talia.



Gabrielle and Darius walk several paces into the woods and out of sight. Xena pries the bag of dinars out of Darius' hand as he passes her. She waits several moments to speak, allowing Talia some time to get a grip on her temper.

XENA

Talia, I know you're mad, but if he went to all the trouble to set this up, then something is wrong. We need to find out what it is.

TALIA

(gesturing wildly)

Doesn't he know how worried we've been?

XENA

Probably not. Didn't you see him?

He was scared to death.

Your brother needs our help, Talia.

Her brow furrows as she's reminded of the doe eyes Talia's been turning on her partner the entire trip.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Though killing someone you find annoying can be a very appealing prospect.



TALIA

Don't tell me you fell for that scared....

Gabrielle bursts out of woods alone. Panting, she wildly looks around.

GABRIELLE

Is he...?
(throwing hands in the air)
Gods, of all the rotten tricks!
(beat)

He started to cry, Xena. Cry! Big, fat, crocodile tears. I sat him on a log and glanced away to look for something to wipe his pitiful face with and when I looked back he was gone.



XENA

Oh, for Zeus' sake!
(disgustedly)
Fan out. Let's find him.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - EVENING

Darius is securely tied to a tree. Xena checks the ropes to make sure he can't go anywhere.

XENA

That should hold you.

Darius doesn't say anything. He just glares at Xena.

XENA

You're going to have to do better than that if you want to scare me. Are you hungry?

The boy remains quiet.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Have it your way. You don't know what you're missing. Gabrielle has a real knack when it comes to fish.

Xena walks over and joins Talia and Gabrielle at the fire, careful to keep one eye on Darius.

GABRIELLE

He's still not talking?

XENA

Nope.



TALIA

(poking the ground viscously with a stick)

I can't believe he did this. I love my brother. But I don't know....

Talia looks away as she tosses her stick into the woods.

TALIA

(Cont'd)

I don't know if I can forgive this.

(beat)

He's never really gotten on with Father. For some reason I can't fathom, he has an "issue" with Father being a thief.

GABRIELLE

(pushing herself to her feet)

Okay. I can do this. Let me go talk to him.



XENA

(fixing a plate of fish)

That's your specialty. Sensitive chats.



Gabrielle retrieves an apple from their saddlebags and shoulders by Argo, whose head swings around for the treat. She whispers to Argo, patting her affectionately.

GABRIELLE

Not this time, girl. Later, I promise.

She approaches Darius casually, tossing the apple as she walks.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Hi. Hungry?

Darius refuses to acknowledge Gabrielle's presence.

GABRIELLE

Okaaaay. Well, lucky for you I can hold up two sides of a conversation without any problem at all.

She sniffs the air and inclines her head toward the fire.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Mmm... wow, you can smell that flaky steamed trout all the way over here. Xena caught four really nice ones.

Despite himself, Darius licks his lips. A tiny smile etches its way across Gabrielle's face.

GABRIELLE

My name is Gabrielle.

DARIUS

(his head snapping around)

Liar!

Gabrielle jumps, startled by the volume of Darius' voice. Xena sits up straight and calls from across the camp.

XENA

Problem, Gabrielle?



Darius blanches.

GABRIELLE

Nope. We're fine.

She holds the apple to Darius' lips.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Wanna bite?

He reluctantly takes a bite.

DARIUS
(mumbling)
Thanks.

GABRIELLE
You're welcome.
Now, why do you think I'm lying?

DARIUS
I'm not stupid.
You're not old enough to be her.

Gabrielle quickly looks back at Xena hoping she heard the comment. She frowns when she sees that Xena is engrossed in her dinner and didn't hear Darius.

GABRIELLE
Rats.



DARIUS
Huh?

GABRIELLE
Never mind. I am Gabrielle and that intimidating-looking warrior across the campfire is my partner, Xena.
(sincerely)
She's really quite lovable once you get to know her, Darius. She won't hurt you.

DARIUS
Well, then I guess it's true then.

GABRIELLE
What's true?

DARIUS
What Father said about you two.

He looks back and forth between Gabrielle and begins to make obnoxious kissing sounds.

GABRIELLE
(rolling her eyes)
What exactly did your father tell you about us?

Darius continues with the kissing noise, only louder.

GABRIELLE

Very funny.
(beat)

But it's old news. Instead, why don't we talk about why you did all this?

DARIUS

Aren't you going to yell at me? Tell me how much I worried Father and how I should be ashamed?

Gabrielle purses her lips for a moment then shakes her head.

GABRIELLE

Nope. You seem to be doing okay on your own.



DARIUS

Right!
(confusedly)
I think.

Gabrielle absently buffs the apple in her hand against her skirt.

GABRIELLE

But I would still like to know why.

DARIUS

(lifting his jaw)
None of your business.

GABRIELLE

Wrong. We were sent to find you by your father. That makes it our business.

DARIUS

Would you buy that I'm a brilliant beyond my years and was bored?

GABRIELLE

This isn't a joke, Darius.

DARIUS

(quietly)
My whole life is a joke.

GABRIELLE

(her concern growing)
Why would you say that?

DARIUS

I repeat. None of your business.

GABRIELLE

If you'd just....

DARIUS

I don't want to talk!

GABRIELLE

But....



Darius lowers his voice so that Gabrielle has to lean very close to him in order to hear what he's saying.

DARIUS

You know, you're cute... for an older woman and all. If you'd could stop talking so much, you could use that pretty mouth of yours to....

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Gabrielle marches off into the woods and the sound of her muffled cursing floats over the campsite. Xena and Talia look over at Darius, who has the apple shoved in his mouth so that he can't talk. Rivulets of drool are running down his chin and he's shaking his head in an attempt to dislodge the piece of fruit. But he can't. Xena cocks her head to the side and regards Darius speculatively.

XENA

I think that probably went well, don't you?



Talia claps her hands together.

TALIA

I'd say so.

(beat)

Well, I'll just go and see if
Gabrielle needs... anything.

Xena casually unhooks her chakram holding up the razor-sharp blade and allowing it to glisten in the firelight.

TALIA

(squeaking)

Or not.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Xena rolls over to face the fire and look across the campsite at Talia and Darius. She glances back briefly when Gabrielle groans and rolls over. Xena smiles fondly at her and pulls her blankets up around her shoulders, patting Gabrielle's back gently. Looking back across the campfire, she watches as Darius slips out of the ropes around his wrists that tether him to his sister.

Xena sighs heavily as the boy slips into the woods. As she begins to rise, Gabrielle sleepily lifts her head and mumbles something unintelligible.

XENA

(whispering)

S'okay. I'll be right back.

GABRIELLE

Promise, Xena?

Xena trails her fingers through Gabrielle's hair.

XENA

No. I swear.

Go back to sleep, now.

Eyes already closing again, Gabrielle smiles.

GABRIELLE

'Kay.

Xena gets up and moves to the spot where the boy disappeared into the woods. She cocks her head and listens, waiting patiently for Darius to finish his business. After several seconds, she's still waiting, so she takes a seat on a large rock. She crosses her legs and rests her arms over them.

XENA

Gods, how much did
Gabrielle give him to drink?

She glances as Darius comes emerges from the bushes.

XENA

Everything come out all right?
I was a little worried there for a minute.



DARIUS

Is everything a joke to you?

XENA

No. As a matter of fact some things are
deadly serious. Like for instance....

DARIUS

(interrupting)

Like what I tried to do.

XENA

See, I knew you were a smart one.

Xena slides over and pats the rock. Darius takes a seat next to her.

XENA

So?

DARIUS

So?

XENA

Want to tell me about it?

DARIUS

If I didn't want to talk to Gabrielle,
what makes you think I'll talk to you?

XENA

(shrugging)

Call it a hunch.

(beat)

It might help, Darius.

DARIUS

Why should I bother?
You probably wouldn't understand.

XENA

You, know, I've done some things...Well,
I'm... I'm far from perfect myself. You'd be
surprised at the things I understand.

DARIUS

(blurting out)

Have you ever felt ashamed?

XENA

Shame? Oh, yeah.

That's one I know real well.

DARIUS

(licking his lips nervously)

Really?

XENA

MmHmm. But you don't want to talk about me. What are you ashamed of?



DARIUS

Do you have any idea what it's like being the son of the most notorious known thief in the world?

XENA

(muffling an amused snort)

The world?

(turning serious)

Ummm... No, can't say I do.

Do you have any idea what it's like to be responsible for the countless deaths?

Darius' eyes grow wide as though he's giving serious consideration to bolting.

DARIUS

Father... he... umm... sort of forgot to mentioned that.

XENA

I'm not surprised. Darius, your father is a good man.

DARIUS

Good? Do you know how he hurt himself?

XENA

(shrugging one shoulder)

Talia told us.

DARIUS

Do you have any idea how embarrassed I was when that came out?

XENA

Came out?



DARIUS

I'd been pestering Father about his illness. Finally, he broke down and told me what really happened in a letter. Some boys at school found the parchment and read it out loud to everyone in the dorm.

XENA

(wincing)
Ouch.

Darius kicks at a stone near his foot.

DARIUS

Yeah. I thought if I staged the kidnapping that I'd never have to rely on him again. I could pay for my own way. Be what I want to be.
(sighing)
It was stupid.

Xena sigh answers Darius' and she looks longingly towards their bedroll and Gabrielle. But one look at Darius, and she firms her resolve to muddle through.

XENA

He didn't mean to hurt you, Darius.
I know that for a fact.

DARIUS

He never means to, but it always seems to happen, doesn't it?

XENA

And so he's responsible for everything in your life that's not the way you want it?

DARIUS

(defensively)
Well....

XENA

That's not how it works, Darius.



DARIUS

But he...

XENA

... loves you and has made mistakes in his life just like the rest of us. Just like you will.

DARIUS

(whispering)

Like I have, you mean.

XENA

(closing her eyes briefly in relief)

He can be forgiven and so can you.

DARIUS

I don't think anyone can forgive me this.

Xena spoke, her voice tinged with wonder.

XENA

When somebody really loves you, they can forgive just about anything. Trust me on this one, kid. I would know.



Xena hears the beginning of sniffles but looks straight ahead, allowing Darius his dignity.

XENA

(Cont'd)

It seems to me that you can spend the rest of your life letting your father's reputation embarrass you, or you can embrace it and make it work for you.

Darius wipes his eyes with the back of his hand.

DARIUS

And how can I do that?

XENA

By taking responsibility for your own actions and being a stronger... a better person because of it.

Stop trying to make other people responsible for you happiness and your unhappiness.

(beat)

The only person who can make you feel responsible for something, is you, Darius.

DARIUS

You make it sound...

(sniffing)

...easy. It's not easy.

Xena's eyes soften and she puts her arm around his shoulder, giving him a little tug until his head is resting on her shoulder.

XENA

Nothing any good ever is. But you can do it.

I believe in you. And so does your family.

She searches for something more she can say to help.

XENA

(Cont'd)

You're all going to be okay. I know it.

Darius nods against her shoulder and continues to cry, while she rubs his arms slowly, her own eyes glistening.

CUT TO:

Xena watches as Darius slides back down in his bedroll next to his sister, who is still sound asleep.

DARIUS

Thanks, Xena.

XENA

Don't mention it.

DARIUS

(smiling)

I won't.

XENA

(smiling back)

I know.

Xena moves back to her own side of the fire and slides under the blankets, spooning tightly against Gabrielle's back.

GABRIELLE

(softly)
Good job.

XENA

Thanks. It wasn't as good as you'd have been.

GABRIELLE

(whispering)
Nuh uh, Warrior Princess. It was perfect.
(sleepily)
I am so keeping you.

Xena's body shakes with silent chuckles.

XENA

What a relief.

Gabrielle grabs Xena's hand and brings it to rest against her chest.

GABRIELLE

Mmm... I love you, Xena.

Xena brushes her lips against Gabrielle's neck and sighs as she looks up into a sky full of brilliant stars.

XENA

I love you too, Gabrielle.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - SUNRISE

Xena and Gabrielle are ripped out of a sound sleep by loud arguing between Darius and Talia. Xena is up immediately, Gabrielle follows, still not quite awake, but drawing her sais in defense.

GABRIELLE

Where are the bad guys?



Xena moves between the siblings and pushes them apart.

XENA

What is going on?

Talia is so preoccupied by Gabrielle and the most horrendous case of bed-head she's ever laid eyes on that for a moment she can only gape in wonder. Xena looks back at Gabrielle and snickers fondly.

GABRIELLE

What?

She uses a sais to self-consciously comb through her hair.



XENA

(to Talia)

Forget about Gabrielle.

Her voice deepens.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Permanently.

Now, I repeat, what is going on?

TALIA

Nothing. Darius is just being is
typical self. Trying to escape.

DARIUS

(lame)

I had to use the bushes.

XENA

(hands on hips)

I was there last night, Darius. You're going
to have to do a lot better than that.

TALIA

Exactly.

DARIUS

(to Talia)

And how would you know what I was
going to do? Do you often have to
keep people tied to you in order
for them to stay near you?

XENA

Darius, I've had just about
enough of your little escapes.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP - DAY

Xena, Gabrielle, and Talia are eating breakfast around their camp. Darius has been strung up by his feet and is hanging upside down from a branch of a tree. His head is dangling a few feet from Xena.

GABRIELLE

(in a stage whisper to Xena)

You can't leave him like that too long, Xena.
You know what could happen.

(wrinkling her nose)

And what a mess it makes.



XENA

I'm telling you, Gabrielle, that guy's head exploding was a fluke. A once in a lifetime thing.

Darius whimpers and Xena and Gabrielle share conspiratorial smiles.

XENA

(in a mock-aggrieved tone)

Oh, all right. Think you can stay put from now on, Darius?

DARIUS

W-w-without a doubt, ma'am.

Xena gives Gabrielle and Talia a self-satisfied smirk.

XENA

Now that's more like it.



FADE OUT.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. AUTOLYCUS' HOUSE - DAY

Three horses clop down the road slowly. The foursome is only a few hundred yards from Autolycus' home, which looms large in the distance. Darius is riding in front of Xena, who has a firm arm around his midsection.

DARIUS

Wait.

Xena pulls Argo to a stop and Talia and Gabrielle draw even with them. Darius turns pleading eyes on his sister. Talia shakes her head slowly.

TALIA

I don't know, Darius.

Why should I do you any favors after you tried to escape again this morning?

DARIUS

Please, Talia. He doesn't have to know

I was behind my kidnapping. I...

I was just scared this morning.

(bites his lip)

I kept thinking about what he was going to say when he found out.

(quickly)

I'm going to try to make things better between us. I swear.

Talia exhales loudly and eyes her brother skeptically. She's surprised to find that she actually believes him. She looks to Xena and Gabrielle for advice but both women remain silent. This is something that needs to be worked out between the siblings.

TALIA

(shifting in her saddle)

Swear to me you'll never again do anything even remotely this devious.

Her stern face begins to fade and is replaced by a small grin.

TALIA

(Cont'd)

Unless of course ... it involves going into the family business.

Then deviousness is generally a plus.

Xena and Gabrielle roll their eyes at Talia's persistence. But Darius nods enthusiastically, instantly promising. As Gabrielle and Talia dismount in front of the stables, Xena leans over and whispers into Darius' ear.

XENA

Now listen and listen good. Don't blow this chance, Darius. You never know when your second chances are going to run out.

DARIUS

I won't.

XENA

(squeezing his shoulder gently)
I knew you were smart a kid.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTOLYCUS' BEDROOM - DAY

Autolycus is in bed, leaning back against the wall, eyes closed, but not asleep. The worry and concern over his son is clearly written in the lines on his face. Azel is sitting in a chair next to the bed, quietly sewing a shirt. She's doing a terrible job and holds up her work, wincing at the crooked line of stitches. She glances over to Autolycus from time to time with her own worried expression, but remains quiet.

The door slowly opens, Xena peaks around it to see Autolycus.

XENA

We're back.



Autolycus' red-rimmed eyes open snap open. It's clear he hasn't known a moment's peace since this all this happened. He looks for Darius, his heart sinking when he doesn't see him with Xena. Autolycus tries to muster a smile at his friend, knowing she would have tried her best to get him back, but he just can't. He stroked his mustache nervously.

AUTOLYCUS

What happened?

Xena pushes the door open further to reveal the boy standing beside her. Autolycus' face lights up and he opens his arms in welcome to his son home.

AUTOLYCUS

(Cont'd)

Darius!

(emotionally whispering)

My son.

Xena gives him a little shove and the boy moves to the bed where he is immediately engulfed in a bear hug.

AUTOLYCUS

I've been so worried.
Gods, you're all right?

DARIUS

(nodding against his father's shoulder)
I'm fine. Thanks to Talia and your friends.

From the door Xena, Gabrielle and Talia watch the pair. Talia breathes a sigh of relief, seeing the tension and stress leave her father as he holds Darius.

Azel stands and puts her hand on Darius' shoulder.

AZEL

It's good to have you home, Darius.
You're father and... well, your
father has been sick with worry.

Autolycus turns adoring eyes on Azel and Darius looks between them, realizing for the first time that his father really cares about this woman. Darius sniffs, doing his best to hold back his tears.

DARIUS

It's good to be home.

Xena joins Gabrielle and Talia as they exit the room, quietly closing the door and allowing Autolycus and his son the reunion they deserve.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUTOLYCUS' HOUSE - DAY

Talia and Gabrielle are in the yard sparring with staffs, the cracking sound of wood meeting wood ringing out loudly in the quiet afternoon air. Xena is on the porch watching them and smiling fondly at the alternating looks of concentration and wild happiness on her partner's face. She glances back down at a parchment in her lap as she chews on the tip of the quill she's using. She nods a little and finishes the letter with a bold 'X', waving the parchment out in front of her to dry the ink.

Darius steps out of the house and takes a seat on the porch next to Xena. Neither of them speak for a moment, instead focusing on Talia and Gabrielle. He gestures to Gabrielle with his prominent chin.

DARIUS

Gabrielle is very good.

XENA

Yes, she is.

DARIUS

Talia used to love to practice.
But I haven't seen her do it in a long time.

XENA

(thoughtfully)
Mm.

DARIUS

(taking a deep breath)
Thank you.

XENA

You're welcome.

DARIUS

He really loves me.

XENA

(matter of factly)
Of course he does.

DARIUS

I never knew. Well, I did, but I guess I didn't care. I was too busy being embarrassed by him and Talia to see it.

XENA

What changed?

DARIUS

Me, I guess. The look on his face when I came home... what you said. I dunno. Maybe I finally just woke up or somethin'.

Xena's eyes stay fixed on Gabrielle as the sounds of clashing staves fill the air.

XENA

Sometimes it's hard to see what's right in front of you. But if you're very lucky the people who love you most will always be there for you and never give up on you. Even when you give up on yourself.



DARIUS

I am very lucky.

XENA

Yup.

DARIUS

They're getting married, you know, Father and Azel.

XENA

I know.

He told me last night after you went to bed.

(beat)

He also told me what it is you want to do with your life. And now I know what you were going to do with the ransom money. It can cost a lot of money nowadays to be trained as a healer.

Embarrassed, Darius drops his head.

DARIUS

Pretty stupid, huh?

XENA

The kidnapping? Absolutely. Wanting to be a healer? Not at all. As a matter of fact, I have a friend who can probably help you.

Xena hands Darius the parchment, but doesn't look at him. She keeps watching Talia and Gabrielle.

XENA

(Cont'd)

His name is Hippocrates. I hear he runs a school in Athens. I'm wagering that letter will be enough to get you in. But you have to promise me something.

DARIUS

(warily)

What?

XENA

Don't ever be ashamed of who you are or where you come from. It won't bring you anything but pain.

DARIUS

I... I'll do my best, Xena

XENA

(turning towards Darius)

Good answer.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Xena and Gabrielle are walking along leading Argo by the reins. a look of intense concentration graces Xena's face.

XENA

It felt strange watching you spare today,
while I was on the porch writing.



GABRIELLE

Strange bad or strange good?

XENA

(nodding)
Good.

GABRIELLE

(thoughtfully)

Things change, Xena.

Me drilling... you doing the sensitive chats.

These days I think we're a little more like each other.

(nodding firmly)

And I think I like that.



XENA

(purring)

Have I mentioned how much I
enjoyed watching you spar today?

The bard scrunches up her nose as she smiles.

GABRIELLE

Then again, it's very comforting to know
that some things don't change at all.
You just like to see me sweat.

XENA

That goes without saying... But....
(pausing awkwardly)

GABRIELLE

(Curiously)
Xena?

XENA

Watching you today... for the millionth time
I wished that I'd tried to stop you when
you threw your staff away... in India.

(frowning)

You seemed so sure about your decision.
But it was a part of you.



GABRIELLE

Mm. Like your Chakram is a part of you?



Xena unconsciously lays her hand on the weapon.

XENA

All those weeks when you had it
and we were apart... it was just one
more part of me that was... missing.



GABRIELLE

(smiling wistfully)

You don't know how many times I've wished
I wished I hadn't thrown my staff away.

XENA

(surprised)

You never said....

GABRIELLE

I know I didn't. You couldn't have stopped me, Xena.
It was the choice I needed to make at the time.

(beat)

I know now that you don't have to throw your
past away to grow beyond it. Sort of
like what you told Darius today.



XENA

You heard that?

GABRIELLE

(feigning insult)

I had a good teacher.
Listen behind the sounds.
Sound familiar?

XENA

(chuckling)

Oh, right. I forgot.

Xena reaches out and takes Gabrielle's hand as they walk.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Talia's gonna miss you, my bard.

GABRIELLE

She'll get over it.

The warrior is clearly smitten and clearly embarrassed by it.

XENA

She wouldn't if she knew you better.



GABRIELLE

(beaming)

That was all mushy and romantic!

She stops and peers at Xena's face.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Gods. Is that a blush I see too?



XENA

(with mock gruffness)

Well, don't get used to it.

In a lightning quick move, Xena drops Argo's reins, sweeps Gabrielle into her arms, dipping her way back for a passionate, soul-searing kiss. She only releases Gabrielle when the need for air becomes too great to ignore.

GABRIELLE

(whispering dazedly)

Oooo, too late, Warrior Princess.

Xena sets Gabrielle back on her feet and continues to walk down the road as though nothing happened. She tries, but isn't quite able to hide her happy smirk. Gabrielle stares at Xena's retreating form, still too stunned to move. After a moment, she blinks.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Wow.

Gabrielle is tempted to run after her partner but doesn't give into the urge. Instead she begins a happy stroll, her step a little bit spryer than it was a few moments ago.

Xena isn't going anywhere.

FADE OUT.

DISCLAIMER

Darius' head didn't explode during the making of this episode. Which is a good thing, since Woolite wouldn't be invented for several thousand years.