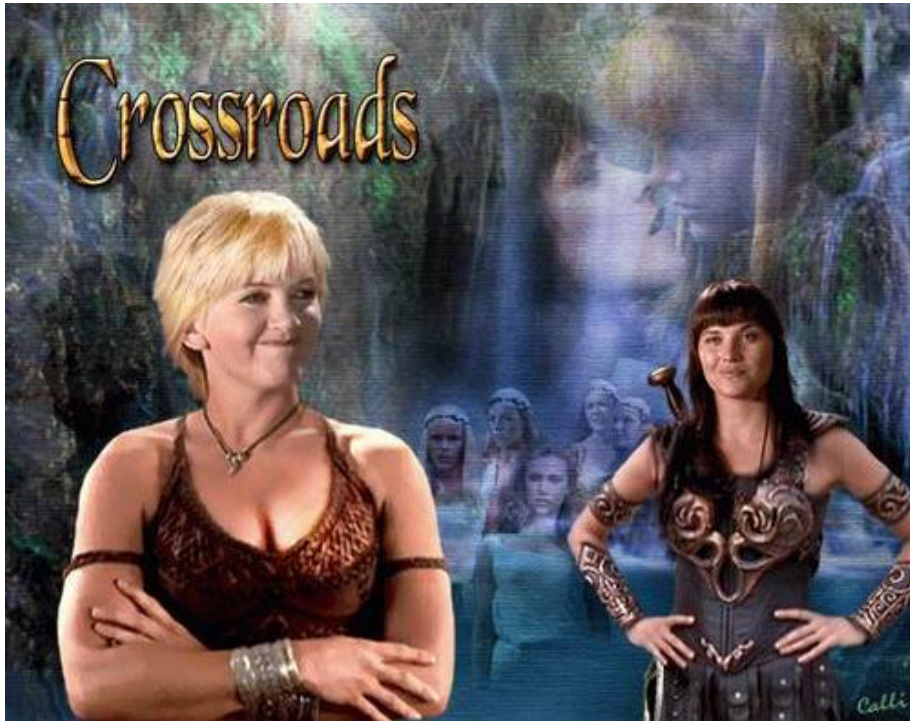


Xena: Warrior Princess – Subtext Virtual Season 7



Production #V711 – Crossroads

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

A drop of water falls into a shallow pool, sending concentric ripples across the calm surface. The ripples elongate as the water begins to move, forming a chuckling brook that runs across a rocky bottom.

The water picks up speed as it becomes a shallow stream, and then a roaring river that proceeds at a breakneck pace down a small mountain.

The mountain cliff abruptly ends and the river goes tumbling over the side in a massive waterfall, plunging into the chilly depths of a murky lake.

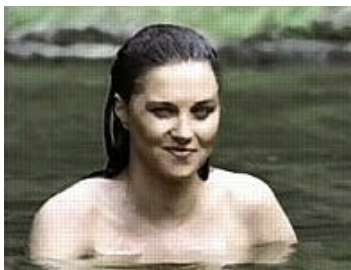
From beneath the surface, two sets of legs are seen, kicking strongly in the churning water. Above the surface, laughter and joyful shouts are heard over the roaring of the waterfall.



XENA and GABRIELLE swim and splash in the lake near the churning waterfall. Xena comes in close to her partner and whispers something in Gabrielle's ear. The whisper causes a brilliant flush to rise up from Gabrielle's throat, and with a wicked laugh, Xena swims for shore. After a moment, Gabrielle shakes off her daze and races after her partner.



Xena slows deliberately, bringing her feet beneath her, and rises up out of the lake. Water sheets in a miniature waterfall down her body, and she smiles, listening to Gabrielle's noisy approach.



Three easy steps and she is ashore, bracing herself against the rocky soil at her feet just as Gabrielle tackles her around the waist from behind.

Xena's wet skin hinders Gabrielle's grappling grip. As Gabrielle reaches for a better hold, Xena freezes in place, head cocked to one side, listening.

Gabrielle likewise freezes, and her head pops out from around Xena's side in time to see a dozen WOMEN of various ages enter the clearing. All are clad in white robes and have simple golden headpieces atop their flowing hair.

The eldest, a young woman of twenty, steps forward, a look of beatific radiance on her face.

WOMAN

(awed whisper)

By Hestia's sweet mercies.

Priestess Leah!

You've returned to us
in our time of need!

The other women gasp and fall to their knees in reverence.

Xena and Gabrielle stare at the women, then at one another.

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Still standing safely behind her taller partner, Gabrielle looks back at the young woman.

GABRIELLE

(kindly)

I'm sorry, but you've made a mistake.



Getting to her feet, the woman smiles at Gabrielle and rushes forward.

WOMAN

No! You're wrong! This is Leah!
Her painting hangs in a place of honor in
our temple! We'd know it anywhere!
(to Xena)

And now she has answered our prayers
and returned you to us. Praise Hestia!

VIRGINS

Praise Hestia! Praise Hestia!

Xena rolls her eyes.

WOMAN

Please, Priestess. You must cover your modesty.
Anteia, get her gown and bring it here.

The woman reaches them and throws herself at Xena, wrapping her in a fervent embrace.

WOMAN

I'll protect your virtue, Priestess.

Xena stares down at the woman's head, one eyebrow raised high.



Gabrielle, a frown creasing her brow, straightens and steps out from behind Xena, tapping the young woman on the shoulder.

GABRIELLE

Excuse me....



The woman stares wide-eyed at Gabrielle's nakedness.

WOMAN

Sweet Hestia! Both of you!

Reaching out, the woman grabs Gabrielle's arm and pulls her in tightly. Gabrielle shoots Xena a beseeching gaze.

XENA

(smoothly)

That's enough.

Plucking the woman's arms from around them both, Xena gently pushes her away. Reaching down, she retrieves a square of linen from the ground and hands it to Gabrielle to dry herself.

Another VIRGIN, ANTEIA, approaches with Xena's LEATHERS in her hands.

ANTEIA

Someone has stolen her gown, Vesta.
All I could find was this... this... thing.

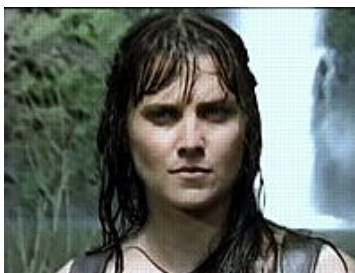
Xena plucks her leathers from the Virgin's tight grip, scowling.

XENA

My partner told you that I wasn't
Leah, and she doesn't lie.

(beat)

My name... is Xena.



The woman, Vesta, stares.

VESTA

That's impossible! The painting!

XENA

... is of Leah. I'm not her.

ANTEIA

(to Vesta)

Perhaps she was hit on the head?

VESTA

Perhaps. Perhaps.

She reaches for Xena head. Xena dodges.

ANTEIA

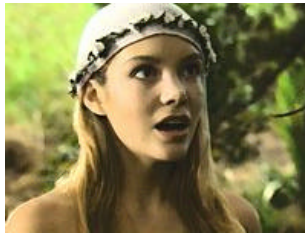
We could take her to the temple with us. Surely
Hestia would cure one who served her so well.

VESTA

An excellent idea, Anteia!

(to Xena)

Come with us, Priestess.
Hestia will make you well again.



VIRGINS

Praise Hestia! Praise Hestia!

Gabrielle, who has just finished dressing, approaches the small group.

GABRIELLE

All right. That's enough.
This isn't Leah. This is Xena.

The Virgins stare at one another, then at Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

The Warrior Princess?



The Virgins continue to stare.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Oh boy.

ANTEIA

(to Vesta)

Perhaps she was accosted as well?

VESTA

Poor, poor dear. And so young, too.

(beat)

Come, Virgins! We will take our wounded sisters to the temple so that Hestia may return their senses to them!

The Virgins rush forward, intent on surrounding the duo.

The air is pierced by Xena's battle cry. She leaps up into the air, and tucks into a somersault. She lands, draws her sword, twirls it from hand to hand, and reseats it. Then she grabs Gabrielle, gives her a sound kiss, and pulls away.

The Virgins faint.

GABRIELLE

(smirking)

That's one way to prove a point.



DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The Virgins, now recovered, mill in a tight circle, occasionally shooting mistrustful glances at Xena and Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

You want to take this one?

XENA

No, no. Please, be my guest.



GABRIELLE

Gee. Thanks.

Dusting her hands off on her skirt, Gabrielle approaches the Virgins, who stare at her and begin to back away. Gabrielle holds up her hands.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I'm not going to hurt you.

(beat)

Maybe we can help.

VESTA

Who says we need your help?

GABRIELLE

Well... nobody, really.

But you're Virgins, unescorted, in the forest miles from the nearest temple.

(beat)

Are you lost?

VESTA

We're not lost.

GABRIELLE

Okay, then.

Well, good luck on your journey.



She turns to leave.

ANTEIA

Wait!

VESTA

Anteia!

ANTEIA

(loudly whispering)

Vesta, we need help.

VESTA

Yes, but not from them!

ANTEIA

Better them than those men who attacked us!

Gabrielle turns.

GABRIELLE

You were attacked?
When? Where?

Anteia shrugs from Vesta's grip and steps forward.

ANTEIA

We've been called by our sisters at the Hestian Temple in Thebes to meet our new High Priestess. Yesterday, we were accosted by a band of men. They said they wanted to sell us as slaves!

GABRIELLE

How did you get away?



ANTEIA

Hestia saved us!

VIRGINS

Praise Hestia! Praise Hestia!
Praise Hestia!!

Gabrielle looks at Xena over her shoulder. She looks back at the Virgins.

GABRIELLE

(slowly)

How did Hestia save you?

ANTEIA

They took our sacramental wine, and after they drank it, Hestia put a spell on them and made them fall asleep!

VIRGINS

Praise Hestia! Praise Hestia!!

GABRIELLE

Ookay....

Would... you excuse me a minute?

VIRGINS

Praise Hestia! Praise Hestia!!

Rubbing her chin, Gabrielle returns to Xena's side.

GABRIELLE

And I thought Leah was strange.



XENA

Hard to believe she was
the best of the bunch.

GABRIELLE

Looks like another job for the
Warrior Princess and Battling Bard, huh?

XENA

Mm.

GABRIELLE

So much for having a nice,
quiet day to ourselves.

Xena pulls a dinar from her cleavage and flips it in the air.

XENA

Heads or tails?



GABRIELLE

Tails.

Xena flips the coin and catches it, then displays the results on the back of her hand.

XENA

Heads it is. I'll backtrack to the bad guys.
You escort the Virgins to their temple.

GABRIELLE

(muttering)

It's not fair. You always get to track the bad guys, and I always get stuck escorting the Virgins.



XENA

(sotto voce)

They wouldn't remain virgins very long if I escorted them.

GABRIELLE

(hands on hips)

Excuse me? What did you just say?

XENA

(smugly)

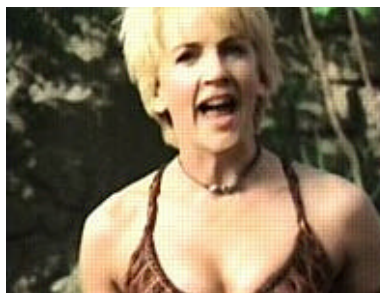
I said, "You always call tails".



Smirking, she shows Gabrielle the coin, which, indeed, has two heads on it.

GABRIELLE

Hey!!



Her eyes twinkling, Xena flips the coin again and tucks it safely back in its resting place before gathering her weapons and Argo's saddle.

GABRIELLE

Cheater!!

Wagging her fingers at her partner, Xena quickly saddles Argo and hops aboard.

XENA

I'll meet you back here in
three days, all right?



GABRIELLE

(still miffed)

All right.

XENA

Gabrielle....

GABRIELLE

Just get going, Xena.
I'll see you in three days... if I don't
die from boredom before then.



Xena laughs, and with a gentle nudge to Argo's flanks, is off.

Gabrielle gathers up the rest of her gear and walks over to the waiting women.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

All right, ladies, let's get going.
The day's not getting any younger.

The group leaves the clearing with Gabrielle in the lead.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FOREST PATH - LATE AFTERNOON

Gabrielle strides along a well-used trail, muttering under her breath and kicking stones.

GABRIELLE

You escort the Virgins, Gabrielle.
I'll take care of the bad guys.



Another kick. Another stone disappears.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

They'll be safe with you, Gabrielle.
Sweet... demure... little... graaaah!

The Virgins, following a bit behind, talk among themselves. They push Anteia toward Gabrielle.

Anteia approaches hesitantly.

ANTEIA

Um... excuse me?

GABRIELLE

Yes?

ANTEIA

We were... wondering
if you were okay?

GABRIELLE

I'm fine.

She kicks another stone, hard. The stone flies up into the trees.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Couldn't be better.

The stone hits a bird sitting in the tree. It squawks. Feathers fly. The bird plummets from the tree, stunned.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Why do you ask?

Anteia pales and steps back.

ANTEIA

No reason. Really.

Gabrielle sighs.

GABRIELLE

Listen, it's going to be dark soon.
Why don't we just look for a place
to camp for the night, all right?

ANTEIA

Sure! Sure! Fine!
That would be great!
Right, Virgins?

VIRGINS

Praise Hestia! Praise Hestia!!

Gabrielle rolls her eyes and looks up at the sky.

GABRIELLE

Kill me now. Please?



CUT TO:

EXT. WOODED TRAIL - LATE EVENING

Three ill-kempt, unwashed THUGS walk down a wooded trail in search of their lost Virgin quarry, totally unaware of the blue eyes staring down at them from a tree not far ahead.

THUG #1

Stupid Virgins. When I get
my hands on them, I'll....

THUG #2

You'll what? You wouldn't know what to
do with a Virgin if I drew you a map!

THUG #1

You can't draw!

THUG #2

Shut up!

THUG #1

You shut up!

THUG #2

I'm not shuttin' up. You shut up!

THUG #3

Both of you shut up or I'll
do it for you. Morons.

THUG #1

Sorry boss.

THUG #3

Just keep your yaps shut
and look for signs.

THUG #2

Uh... what kinda signs, boss?

THUG #3

The Virgins, you idiot!
(beat)
And spread out. Ya look like a couple
of lovebirds all bunched up like that.

Thugs 1 and 2 stare at one another, then quickly move away. The small group continues on in a more or less straight line, several feet separating them.

As the third thug passes beneath Xena's tree, she swings down, legs hooked to a sturdy branch. She grabs the front of his shirt, and slams him headfirst into the thick trunk. He slithers soundlessly to the ground, out for the count.

Grinning, Xena sits back up, then gets to her feet and jumps nimbly to the next tree just as the second thug passes beneath her.



Dropping to the ground in front of the thug, her grin widens before she flattens him with a right cross to his jaw. Then, turning, she comes up behind the thug leader and taps him on the shoulder. He spins, and a fist headed straight between his eyes is the last thing he sees for a long while.

XENA

Sorry boys. I've got plans,
and you're not part of 'em.

Reaching down, she grabs the thug leader by his shirt collar and drags him over to his compatriot. Then she drags the two unconscious men over to the third and drops them in a pile.

After a moment, a wicked grin crosses her face.



XENA

This oughta keep you
out of trouble for awhile.

Bending down, she begins quickly divesting the thugs of their trousers and boots, grimacing at the stench arising from their noisome bodies.

XENA

Didn't your mothers ever
teach you how to bathe?

Within moments, the unconscious thugs are stripped bare, and their clothing is making its way down a swift-moving stream.

One last look at the pitiful excuses for men, and Xena is off, disappearing into the woods as if she'd never been there at all.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMP - EVENING

A fire blazes merrily in the center of a well-laid camp. Plates heaping with food that Gabrielle has caught and prepared sit around the fire, unattended.

Near a tree at the outer edge of the camp, the Virgins are grouped, staring down with fascination at two rabbits in the bushes.

ANTEIA

What are they doing?

VESTA

Perhaps it's a ritual?

ANTEIA

Can animals even perform rituals?

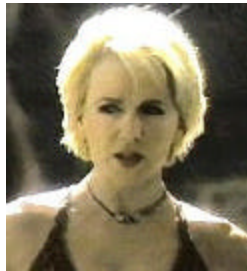
VESTA

Maybe they've been blessed.

Gabrielle walks over to the group and looks down at the scene.

GABRIELLE

You guys don't get out much, do you?



ANTEIA

(proudly)

This is our first time outside the temple walls!

GABRIELLE

(falsely smiling)

Really?

VESTA

Anteia, look! They're doing it again!



ANTEIA

Definitely a ritual.

VESTA

But to which god?

GABRIELLE

(dryly)

Aphrodite.



ANTEIA

Really? How do you know?

VIRGIN #1

It's a sex-act thing.

The Virgins gasp. Several swoon. The rabbits dart away.

VESTA

Blasphemer!

ANTEIA

Unclean! Unclean!

VIRGIN #1

Well, that's what they're doing!
My mother said so, and she should know!

VESTA

Oh, Hestia, save your child Peony from her
wanton thoughts! Protect her this vile evilness!

GABRIELLE

She's right, you know.



VIRGINS

What?!?

GABRIELLE

There's nothing evil about it.
That's how babies are made.
(beat)
Among... other things.

The Virgins gasp again. Several more swoon.

VESTA

Certainly not! A giant bird brought
me in his beak and laid me
in my mother's arms.

ANTEIA

My parents found me
in a cabbage patch.

VIRGIN #2

They found me under a lily pad!

Stunned to silence, Gabrielle can only shake her head in amazement.

PEONY

My parents did the sex-act thing.

Absolute silence.

Then the Virgins begin chanting in the language of Hestia, beseeching their goddess to purify her poor, witless child.

Gabrielle puts her head in her hands and sighs.

GABRIELLE

Xena, I swear to you, this is the last time
you're going to sit around and have all the
fun while I'm treading through Tartarus
with a boulder strapped to my back.

(beat)

Next time, Warrior Princess,
you do the dirty work.



CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN MARKET - EVENING

Xena walks through a bustling MARKET, her arms piled high with a number of articles she's purchased. Her steps are weary, and it's obvious she's having anything but fun. Stepping up to a merchant stand, she lays her purchases on the counter and fixes the garishly clad proprietor with a steely gaze.

The MERCHANT looks her up and down, batting his eyelashes and fanning his face.

MERCHANT

Ooooh. Now you're a big girl, aren't you?

XENA

In a really bad mood.



Pulling a hastily scrawled list from her bodice, she shoves it across the counter top.

XENA

(Cont'd)

How much?



The merchant scans the list, then looks back up at Xena, false pity in his eyes.

MERCHANT

Oh, sweetheart. You're not much of a gourmand, are you?

Putting the list aside, he pats one of her hands.

MERCHANT

(Cont'd)

Maybe you should just let the cooks in your army buy the food, hmm?

(beat)

Serve them this slop, and they'll desert for sure.

Growling, Xena leans forward, forcing the merchant to bend back until he stumbles. Xena reaches out and snags the front of his shirt, pulling him up so that their faces are inches apart.

XENA

How. Much.

MERCHANT

(squeaking)

F-F-Five d-d-dinars?

XENA

How about three?

MERCHANT

Th-Th-That's good.

Smirking, Xena releases him, and he stumbles again before righting himself and darting off to find the items on her list.

XENA

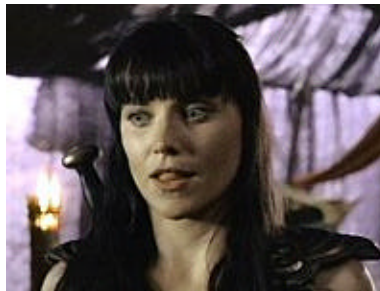
And Gabrielle thinks I can't haggle.

She dusts her hands off.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Nothin' to it.



CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP - NEXT MORNING

Packed and ready for travel, the Virgins stand in a tight group, staring at Gabrielle and the young Virgin who mentioned sex.

PEONY

(sobbing)

How can they banish me for telling the truth? I'm not hurting anybody!

Gabrielle puts her arm around the young woman, comforting her.

GABRIELLE

Shh. It's all right.
They won't banish you.

PEONY

But Vesta said....

GABRIELLE

You let me take care of Vesta, all right?



PEONY

Will you?

GABRIELLE

(smiling)

You bet.

PEONY

Thank you. You're very kind...
even if you aren't a virgin.

GABRIELLE

Thanks. I think.

Gabrielle pats the young woman on the back, then approaches the warily watching group, plastering a smile on her face.

GABRIELLE

Ready to go?

ANTEIA

Yes. Without her.

GABRIELLE

Afraid that's not possible.

(beat)

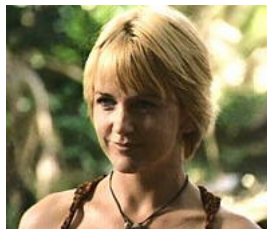
Either she comes with us, or I walk right
back to Xena and leave you all alone.

VESTA

Fine. We'll find our own way.

GABRIELLE

Be my guest. Have a nice trip.



Gabrielle grins at the Virgins. The Virgins stare at Gabrielle. Gabrielle begins to whistle the Xena Theme Song. The Virgins begin to sweat. Finally, Anteia steps forward.

ANTEIA

All right, you win. She can travel
with us as far as the temple.
After that, she'll need to leave.

GABRIELLE

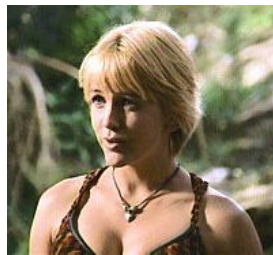
Tell me something.

ANTEIA

Yes?

GABRIELLE

What did she say that was so wrong?



Anteia blanches. Vesta steps forward.

VESTA

She said that... that... that "S" word!

GABRIELLE

Sex?

The Virgins gasp.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Sex isn't something evil or dirty, you know.
It's one of the ways that two people
who love each other share that love.

VESTA

(frowning)

That's not possible.

GABRIELLE

Why not?

VESTA

Because without Hestia, there is no love. She loves us,
protects us, and cherishes us because we do not
use our bodies in that vile, unclean way.

ANTEIA

Without being a Virgin, you can know nothing of love.

GABRIELLE

I can't, huh?



VESTA

No.

Gabrielle smiles and brings her hands together.

GABRIELLE

Okay, then.

How about I make you a deal?

ANTEIA

(suspiciously)

What kind of deal?

Gabrielle's grin broadens.

GABRIELLE

I'll tell you a story about the wonder and beauty of love. If even one of you likes my story, you'll apologize to Peony and accept her back into your fold.



ANTEIA

And if we all hate it?

GABRIELLE

You can do what you want with her.

Peony sobs.

The Virgins look at one another. They nod.

VESTA

Our faith is strong. You'll never sway us.

GABRIELLE

We'll see.

(beat)

If you're all ready, let's get going.
I'll tell the story on the way.

The Virgins gather their things and start off after Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I sing a song of two travelers who
searched the world for love, only to find
it standing beside them the entire time.



DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS - 30 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Gabrielle, in her green top and rust skirt, staff in hand, drags a reluctant Xena by the hand through a crowded, lively town square.

GABRIELLE

(slightly exasperated)

Come on, Xena!

This is supposed to be fun, remember?



Xena grumbles, but holds her tongue as she walks past a teeming hoard of garishly dressed townsfolk. Many of them are holding cups of wine they seem determined to spill on her at any given opportunity.

The glare she gives a stranger who takes her passing as an opportunity to grab a handful of flesh that doesn't belong to him causes the man to blanch and shrink away in abject terror.

XENA

Please tell me when the fun starts,
Gabrielle. I wouldn't want to miss it.

Gabrielle sighs, stops, and turns to her friend.



GABRIELLE

Xena, you agreed that
we needed a break...

She raises her hand.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

And before you say it, no, being
dead for a week doesn't count.

Xena opens her mouth, then closes it, and instead settles for a somewhat melodramatic sigh.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Can you at least act like you're
enjoying yourself? Please?



Growling low in her throat, Xena appropriates a mug of wine from a passing townsman. She downs it in one gulp, and wipes her mouth with the back of her hand.

XENA

I'm ready. Let's go have some fun.



Gabrielle grins happily, then stumbles as Xena grabs her hand and starts pulling her through the crowd.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WOODS – AFTERNOON - PRESENT DAY

GABRIELLE

Excuse me, Anteia?
Did you have a question?

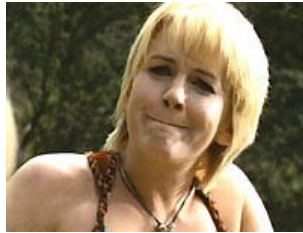
ANTEIA

Yes. What's a Bacchanalia?

Gabrielle scratches the back of her neck.

GABRIELLE

It's a... um... well... it's a festival!



VESTA

Oh, I love festivals!

ANTEIA

So do I! The Festival of Hestia is so beautiful.
We get to wear our prettiest gowns. We recite
poetry, and when Thelea plays her harp, oh!
Even the gods weep!

VESTA

And don't forget the statues!
All those beautiful flowers!

ANTEIA

Is that the kind of festival
you're talking about, Gabrielle?

Gabrielle winces.

GABRIELLE

Yes!
(beat)
Kind of.

ANTEIA

Wonderful! Can we hear some more, please?

GABRIELLE

Sure.

Now, as I was saying, the two travelers made their way into the festival, determined to have a good time.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS - 30 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Gabrielle sits at a small table that gives an unobstructed view of the large dance square directly in front of her. A fully picked-over platter of meats and cheeses lies before her, and in her hand is a half-filled mug of overly sweet wine.

The air is thick with incense, and the throbbing, enticing beat of the drums causes Gabrielle to sway unconsciously in her seat as she watches the dancers move around one another, lightly touching.

A shadow falls over her, and she looks up to see a young man, roughly her own age and quite handsome, smiling down at her.

YOUNG MAN

Would you like to dance?

Gabrielle returns his smile, flattered.

GABRIELLE

It's very nice of you to ask, but I think I'm just going to sit here and relax awhile. It's been a rough day.

(beat)

Thank you, though.



The young man looks crestfallen, but manages a smile.

YOUNG MAN

Maybe later?

GABRIELLE

Maybe.

The young man nods again, then moves off. Gabrielle watches him until a small disturbance to her right reveals Xena easing through the dancers with two mugs of wine in her hand.

Her grin broadens as Xena sits down beside her, and passes one of the mugs over. She stretches out her legs, sipping on her wine.

The tense lines of Xena's face and body have relaxed somewhat, as if she's taken Gabrielle's request of her to heart.

Knowing she's being watched, Xena slowly turns her head and fixes Gabrielle with one of her more intimidating stares.

XENA

Yes?



Gabrielle laughs lightly, not intimidated in the least.

GABRIELLE

Oh, nothing.

(beat)

Just making sure you're all right.



XENA

(raising her eyebrow)

Is there some reason why I shouldn't be?

GABRIELLE

No, no. Just... you know....

XENA

Mm. And you?

GABRIELLE

Me? I'm doing great!

Of course, I'd probably feel great doing anything that didn't involve being hunted down by vengeful goddesses and hanging by my fingertips from rope bridges.

Catching Xena's slight wince, Gabrielle reaches over and lays a hand on her bracer.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Hey, it's over, right?

(beat)

It's over, we're in one piece, we're here, and we're going to have fun.

(beat)

Right?

XENA

Right.



After a moment, Xena turns her wrist so that her palm is facing up. Gabrielle's smile is brilliant as she slides her own hand down until it presses snugly against Xena's. Their hands clasp and hold.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WOODS - EARLY EVENING - PRESENT DAY

Gabrielle's voice trails off, and she grins at the rapt faces of her listeners.

ANTEIA

It doesn't sound like the
Festival of Hestia to me.

VESTA

Me either.

VIRGIN #2

I kind of like....

Vesta elbows the Virgin in the side.

VIRGIN #2

(Cont'd)

...this tree! Isn't it beautiful?



Gabrielle smirks.

VIRGIN #3

(hesitantly)

Is there any more?

Anteia quickly steps in.

ANTEIA

After all, it wouldn't be fair for you
to lose your bet on a half-finished story.

GABRIELLE

Oh, don't you worry. There's plenty
more where that came from.

She spies several Virgins smiling before they quickly cover their mouths with their hands.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

But first we need to find a
place to camp for the night.

VESTA

Delaying the inevitable won't
change the outcome of our bet.

GABRIELLE

I'm just giving you a chance to save face.

ANTEIA

Hmmph. That will never happen.

GABRIELLE

We'll see.



CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

Gabrielle arrives back at the campsite to find the group of Virgins staring up at her with expectant faces.

She grins as she slowly makes her way to her place by the fire. All heads turn to follow her. She stretches leisurely, then picks up a skin of water, taking a healthy drink before laying it back down beside her.

GABRIELLE

The perimeter is clear. Xena's
probably already taken care of your
kidnappers, so I don't think we'll
have anything to worry about tonight.

Anteia fakes a yawn.

ANTEIA

I guess we'd better turn in then.
Our new Priestess awaits us in Thebes.

GABRIELLE

(under her breath)
Now who's stalling?

VESTA

Excuse me?
Did you say something?

GABRIELLE

No, no.
(beat)
It's pretty early yet.
Are you sure you wouldn't want
to hear some more of my story?



Gabrielle's keen eyes catch several of the Virgins leaning forward in anticipation. She smiles inwardly while outwardly maintaining an innocent expression.

VESTA

Well....

ANTEIA

I suppose it's ok.

Gabrielle grins.

GABRIELLE

Good.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS - 30 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Xena and Gabrielle sit in comfortable silence, watching the dancers as they move in intricate patterns along the dirt square.

Gabrielle's eye is caught by an extremely handsome man as he gracefully makes his way through the revelers, heading directly for their table. Obviously a warrior, he is tall and well built, clad in shining black leather. His long, black hair is tied in a tight braid, and his brilliant, deep-green eyes stare avidly at the woman sitting at Gabrielle's side.

Swallowing hard, Gabrielle turns to Xena as the man stops before their table. Her eyes widen, then narrow, as Xena, surprisingly, returns the man's look with seeming interest.



WARRIOR

Would you do me the
honor of dancing with me?

Xena smiles and grasps his proffered hand.

XENA

Why not?

Xena rises from her seat and allows the warrior to guide her through the milling crowd. Gabrielle's eyes follow Xena's movements as she watches Xena dance with the tall, handsome stranger.

GABRIELLE

(under her breath)

You told her to have fun, didn't you?

She takes a quick sip of her drink.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

So why be disappointed
when she does?

The music fades away, and the dancers clap. Gabrielle watches as Xena exchanges a few words with her dance partner. His face falls at whatever Xena is telling him. She turns and leaves him on the dance floor while she returns to the table.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

That was fast.

Shrugging, Xena grabs Gabrielle's mug, takes a sip of wine, and sets it back down on the table.

XENA

Lousy dancer.

Gabrielle looks surprised. She lifts the mug and peers at it, then up at Xena.

GABRIELLE

You're kidding, right?
You guys looked great out there.

XENA

(shrugging)

Looks can be deceiving.



GABRIELLE

(muttering)

You wouldn't say that if you saw me dance.

Xena grins and shakes her head.

XENA

Think so, huh?

GABRIELLE

Think so? Xena, I know so. Remember
the story I told you about the Harvest Dance?
And how my own family almost exiled me?

Crossing her arms, Xena fixes Gabrielle with a stare.

XENA

You were just a kid then.

GABRIELLE

And I'm an adult now.
With two feet, both of them left.
(beat)
I'm telling you, I can't dance.



XENA

(mischievously grinning)
Sure ya can.

She holds out a hand.

XENA

(Cont'd)

C'mon.

Gabrielle's eyes widen, but she takes Xena's hand trustingly.

GABRIELLE

Where are we going?

XENA

Dancing.

GABRIELLE

Xena, no. C'mon now. I told you I can't dance.
Everyone's gonna laugh at me like last t...

XENA

No, they won't. Not if you're
dancing with me. Let's go.

GABRIELLE

With you?



CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

Gabrielle notices again, as her voice trails off, that her audience is hanging on every word. The young faces are smiling back at her, and she feels an unexpected warmth wash over her that has nothing to do with the bet she knows is all but hers for the taking.

VESTA

That was very nice of the older one
to look after her young friend like that.

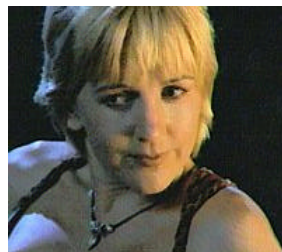
ANTEIA

Yes, just like sisters!

Gabrielle's eyebrows go up.

GABRIELLE

Sisters?



ANTEIA

Yes! Like you and Xena?

GABRIELLE

Sisters. Riight.

(beat)

So, does that mean you like it?

VESTA

The affection between two sisters doesn't compare to the love of Hestia, Gabrielle.

I'm afraid you still haven't swayed us.

ANTEIA

She's right.

GABRIELLE

I'm not done yet.

VESTA

Perhaps it's best if you stopped for the night, though. You can start again in the morning, if you still want to.

GABRIELLE

Oh, I'll still want to all right.

Gabrielle snuggles down into her furs, laying her head on her satchel.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Goodnight, ladies.

(to self)

Goodnight, Xena, wherever you are.

You owe me big for this one, and

I'm not going to let you forget it.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODED TRAIL – MORNING - PRESENT DAY

The group is on the trail. There is a sense of excitement in the air because the journey is coming to an end.

Gabrielle launches into her tale without preamble.

CUT TO:

EXT. FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS - DANCE FLOOR - 30 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Xena leads Gabrielle to the dance floor. They face one another. Gabrielle is nervous, and a little embarrassed.

GABRIELLE

Xena, this is crazy.



XENA

(smiling)

No, it's not. Listen, you said we should have fun, right?

GABRIELLE

Yes, but I also said I couldn't dance.

XENA

Sure you can.

Just follow me and do what I do.

Gabrielle watches Xena intently. The music starts and Xena begins to dance.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Here. Hold your hands up, like this.

Gabrielle imitates Xena's posture. Xena begins to move her upper body in a slow, swaying motion. Gabrielle copies her.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Good! Now, do this.

Xena sways her hips to the beat of the drums. She moves slowly at first, but quickens her movements as the music's pace increases.

Gabrielle stares, wide-eyed.

GABRIELLE

If I did that, I think I'd be arrested.

Gabrielle watches Xena's body as she dances, her face frowning in concentration.

Awkwardly at first, she copies Xena's moves, then after a few steps, the motion becomes more natural.

GABRIELLE

(pleased)

Hey, this isn't so bad.

Xena reaches over and pats Gabrielle on the cheek.

XENA

Let's have some fun.

The music gets a little faster. The dance area fills in, forcing Xena and Gabrielle closer together. More confident now, Gabrielle goes through the dance, a broad smile growing on her face. The steps change, and Xena puts her hands on Gabrielle's shoulders as they move sideways.

Gabrielle glances at the couple next to them. She lets her hands rest on Xena's waist timidly, looking up to see Xena's reaction. Xena just smiles, and moves closer.

The music gets even faster. Xena and Gabrielle move confidently within the group of dancers. Xena swings Gabrielle around in a circle. They part and catch hands. Gabrielle turns and their arms cross, then Xena pulls her back in the other direction and wraps her arms around Gabrielle's body as she turns, bringing them face to face against each other. Their eyes meet. They both smile at each other, then Xena releases Gabrielle and they sway to the music together.

Gabrielle is suddenly jostled from behind and she stumbles forward. Xena catches her, and then she puts a protective arm around Gabrielle, her hand resting in the small of Gabrielle's back.

Gabrielle finds a comfortable spot to rest her hands around Xena's waist as the music slows and dwindles. They end the dance in each other's arms, a position they hold as the last echo fades.

Then the dancers all part and the spell is broken.

Xena releases Gabrielle.

XENA

(Cont'd)

See? Told you you could dance.

Looking into Xena's eyes, Gabrielle smiles.

GABRIELLE

Must be your influence.
(beat)
Thanks.



Gabrielle gives Xena a big hug. Xena, surprisingly, returns the hug just as fiercely. They walk from the dance area hand in hand, and return to their table.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODED TRAIL - DAY - PRESENT DAY

Gabrielle shoots not so covert looks at her listeners. Some are looking decidedly flushed. One is even wiping sweat from her brow with the edge of her gown.

Gabrielle resists the urge to laugh out loud as another walks blindly off of the trail, almost hitting a tree before coming to her senses.

Anteia and Vesta appear somewhat less than comfortable, but before they can say a word, Gabrielle continues with her story.

CUT TO:

EXT. FESTIVAL OF BACCHUS - SERVING AREA - NIGHT - 30 YEARS AGO

Xena and Gabrielle sit down side by side at their table. Both are sweating lightly. A man, tray of mugs in hand, stops before them, smiling. Xena nods and is presented with two mugs. Accepting them, she tosses a couple of coins on his tray and hands one of the mugs to Gabrielle.

The wine and heady atmosphere are taking their toll on many of the revelers. Nearby, a man is deeply kissing a woman sitting on his lap. Gabrielle flushes at the display and turns away, taking a quick sip from her mug before putting it down on the table.

XENA

You ok?



GABRIELLE

Oh, sure. Sure. Just... hot. You know...
with all the dancing and... everything.



Concerned, Xena lays a gentle finger on the pulse point on Gabrielle's neck, frowning when Gabrielle's eyes flutter closed and she gasps.

XENA

You sure? Your heart's beating
faster than Argo's at full gallop.

GABRIELLE

Really, I'm....

Gabrielle jumps as an amorous couple, oblivious to anything but themselves, crash atop the table. Xena boots them off.

XENA

Must be the wine.

GABRIELLE

(smiling)

Well, you know what they say
about the Festival of Bacchus.

XENA

It's worth the hangover?



Gabrielle laughs.

GABRIELLE

No.

(beat)

They say that if you drink the wine,
you also drink the spirit of Bacchus.

Xena lifts her mug and peers into it.

XENA

Comforting thought.

GABRIELLE

They also say that if, on this night,
you don't express your deepest
passion, Bacchus will become so
angry that he'll drive you insane.



Their eyes lock for a moment, before Gabrielle turns away, covering her discomfort with a small laugh.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Kinda silly, huh?

XENA

(shrugging)

It's a god thing.

GABRIELLE

I suppose.

Gabrielle stiffens as she looks out onto the dance floor.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Xena.

Xena follows Gabrielle's gaze to spy five young women, all dressed identically in tight black corsets and long capes, their hair slicked back and their skin unnaturally pale.

XENA

'S'all right.

They're just Bacchae wannabes.



GABRIELLE

How can you be so sure?

Xena points to the women as they laugh and joke with the dancers.

XENA
No fangs.

Realizing Xena's right, Gabrielle relaxes, and even manages a laugh.

GABRIELLE
That was quite a time, wasn't it?

Xena snorts.

XENA
You weren't the one bitten by a Bacchae.

Gabrielle looks over at Xena, then blushes furiously.



XENA
(Cont'd)
It's all right, Gabrielle. I asked you to, remember?

The blush doesn't fade.

GABRIELLE
What... um....

Xena lifts an eyebrow.

GABRIELLE
(Cont'd)
What was it like?

XENA
What was what like? Being bitten?



Gabrielle nods. Xena smiles slightly.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Judge for yourself.

Xena leans over and moves Gabrielle's hair out of the way, then bites her on the neck. Xena draws back, and waits for Gabrielle's reaction.

Gabrielle's eyes are tightly closed; her face, completely still. As Xena watches, her eyes flutter open and she fixes Xena with a stare of a kind Xena's never seen from her before.

GABRIELLE

Xena?



XENA

Yes?

GABRIELLE

I... I don't want Bacchus to drive me insane.

Gabrielle impulsively cups Xena's cheek and kisses her on the lips, the hesitant gesture rapidly becoming far more. Xena responds, and the moment draws out much longer than either intended.



They break apart. Xena's eyes widen in surprise and consternation. Gabrielle stares at her in shock for a brief moment, then realization hits.

GABRIELLE

I... Gods, Xena... I'm sorr...

I didn't mean to... oh no. No.

Gabrielle is on her feet before Xena is able to gather her wits and put a quick hand on Gabrielle's wrist.

XENA
Gabrielle....

Gabrielle tries to pull away. Xena tightens her grip and stands.

GABRIELLE
Xena, just... I need to....

XENA
Let's get some air. C'mon.



Gabrielle stiffens as she feels Xena's hand descend lightly on her shoulder. Then she nods, reluctantly, and allows Xena to guide her away from the crowd.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN - 30 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Xena and Gabrielle walk silently through the mostly deserted town. Though they walk side by side, it is as if a chasm separates them. Gabrielle's expression is one of misery. Xena radiates concern.

They walk toward a shadowed Inn whose owner is standing outside, the smoke from his crudely carved wooden pipe fragrant in the cool, still air. He nods to them as they cross the threshold into his Inn, but neither responds.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ROOM - 30 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

The sleeping room Xena and Gabrielle share is large, clean and well appointed. A large, down-filled mattress sits atop a wooden platform placed along one wall. An unlit fireplace takes up most of the wall opposite. A circular, braided rug covers the weathered floor in between.

Following Gabrielle inside, Xena closes the door and leans against it, watching as Gabrielle strides into the room, headed straight for their gear.

Gabrielle picks up her staff and stares at it for a moment, rolling it in her hands. She begins hitting it up against an exposed, sturdy beam in the corner of the room; not hard, but with purpose.

GABRIELLE
(muttering)
Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.
Of all the... Gods!... idiotic....

Having seen enough, Xena crosses the room and catches the tip of the staff in her hand before it can make contact again.

XENA

Gabrielle. That's enough.

Gabrielle looks up at Xena, blinking, as if just realizing that she's there. She pulls the staff. Xena lets it go. Gabrielle places the butt of the staff on the ground, holding onto the weapon as to an anchor. Her eyes examine the floor at her boots.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

Why are you here?



XENA

Why am... Gabrielle....

GABRIELLE

I'm serious, Xena. How can you even stand to be here with me?

(beat)

By the gods, I threw myself at you like... like some kind of love-sick harpy!

XENA

Gabrielle, it was a kiss.
And a very nice one, as kisses go.

Gabrielle looks at Xena, her expression a mixture of hope and disbelief.

GABRIELLE

You didn't ask for it.

XENA

You're right. I didn't.

(beat)

But not asking for something and not wanting it are two different things.



Gabrielle's eyes widen.

GABRIELLE

Are you... are you telling me that
you wanted me to kiss you?

It's Xena's turn to look away.

XENA

It's... complicated. Look, why don't
we sit down and talk about this.

Gabrielle looks from the only piece of furniture in the room, the bed, back to Xena. Xena smiles.

XENA

(Cont'd)

I promise not to bite.



Despite herself, Gabrielle laughs at Xena's attempt at humor.

GABRIELLE

Not even if I ask you to?



Xena smirks and eases an arm around Gabrielle's shoulders, turning them both in the direction of the bed.

XENA

C'mon.

Xena and Gabrielle sit on the bed, close, but not touching. The silence is thick between them as both attempt to come up with the best way to articulate their thoughts. Gabrielle turns to Xena.

GABRIELLE

You know, Xena, I can't tell you
how many times I've thought about
us having this talk, and what kind of
talk it would be, and where we'd have
it, and what I would say, and I... um....

XENA
Gabrielle....



GABRIELLE
(blushing)
I know. I'm babbling, aren't I?
(beat)
Xena... I'm scared.

Xena goes very still.

XENA
(softly)
Of me?

GABRIELLE
No, Xena. No. Never.

She gathers her thoughts.

GABRIELLE
(Cont'd)
You're my friend... my best friend.
And I'm scared that... that the way
I feel could... change things.
Does that make sense?



Xena nods.

XENA
Yes. And to tell you the
truth, I'm... scared... too.

GABRIELLE
(with wonder)
You?

Xena shifts slightly on the bed, her clasped hands hanging between her knees.

XENA

Face it, Gabrielle. My track record when it comes to relationships isn't great. And you... our friendship... is the most important thing in the world to me.

(beat)

I don't want to mess that up.



Gabrielle nods, and bites her lower lip.

GABRIELLE

Can I ask you something?

XENA

Sure.

GABRIELLE

You said that not asking for something and not wanting something are two different things.

Xena nods.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Did you want me to kiss you?

After a moment, Xena raises her head and stares Gabrielle directly in the eyes.

XENA

Yes.

A slow smile of happiness and relief brightens Gabrielle's face.

GABRIELLE

Do you think that maybe our hearts are trying to tell us something?

XENA

Maybe they are.

Gabrielle's smile grows until her entire face seems wreathed in it.

GABRIELLE

Can I ask you something else?

XENA

Yes.

GABRIELLE

Do you... think I could kiss you again?

XENA

Yes.

Shyly, tentatively, Gabrielle leans forward and presses her lips against Xena's in a sweet, tender kiss. Xena responds in kind, letting Gabrielle set the tone for this, their first "real" kiss.

Gabrielle's hands move up to thread through Xena's hair and the kiss deepens naturally until both sets of breathing go ragged.

Gabrielle pulls away, reluctantly. Her face is flushed; her eyes, vibrant and shining.

GABRIELLE

Wow. That was....

XENA

(huskily)

Very nice.

GABRIELLE

I'll say. Can we do that again?

Xena chuckles.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I'm serious, Xena. It was like... poetry.

Soft and warm. Exciting. Passionate.

A girl could get very used to it.

Gabrielle frowns.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Except....

Xena's eyebrow rises.

XENA

Except...?

GABRIELLE

(blushing furiously)

Except that... well... I don't have a lot of experience with this kind of thing.

I mean, except for Perdicus, and that was only one night. And even then...

XENA

Gabrielle....

GABRIELLE

...it wasn't as if I knew what I was doing then, either, and....



XENA

Gabrielle....

GABRIELLE

...he was very sweet and kind and....

Gabrielle's babbling is cut off by gentle fingers to her lips. Her eyes widen.

XENA

(smiling)

Trust me.

Gabrielle nods, a little nervously, and Xena removes her fingers and looks down at her, her expression deadly serious.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Are you okay?



GABRIELLE

Yes! Yes, I'm... um... I'm... fine.

XENA

Gabrielle....

GABRIELLE

No, really! I want this. I want....

Gabrielle looks down at her hands, then back up, shyly.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I love you, Xena.

Xena lifts a hand and tenderly cups Gabrielle's face.

XENA

(murmuring)

I love you too, Gabrielle.



Gabrielle brings forth another beaming smile at Xena's words, and her body visibly relaxes.

Xena's head lowers as Gabrielle's lifts and their lips meet again in gentle exploration. Gabrielle's hands trail up Xena's arms, over warm flesh and soft leather, until they tangle in her hair, pressing them more closely together.

Xena settles Gabrielle more comfortably against her, lost in a feeling of love and warmth that far surpasses any passion she's ever known. She has no time to dwell upon that, however, as Gabrielle's mouth grows more insistent. With a small smile, she lowers them both to rest on the bed, stretched out on their sides, facing one another.

Pulling away just slightly, she reaches over to stroke tangled bangs from Gabrielle's forehead. She smiles as Gabrielle's eyes flutter open to focus on hers.

XENA

How you doing?

GABRIELLE

(smiling brilliantly)

Wonderful.

Propping her head up on her free hand, Xena brushes her fingers along the exposed flesh of Gabrielle's neck and belly, watching as her eyes flutter closed again as her breathing increases.

Gabrielle feels as if she's flying. Xena's touches, so tender and sure, set off small explosions of sensation each time they brush against her. Her heart races, and her lungs draw in deep. She feels a slight tugging, then shivers as her top is gently parted and the coolness of the night air grazes across her skin as if in worship.

The cool air is replaced by the warmth of Xena's hands, and then the deeper warmth of her mouth. Gabrielle cries out softly as her body responds, requesting more.

All too soon, the warmth is replaced by the night air's chill as the body lying next to her seems to vanish. Gabrielle reaches out blindly. Her eyes open in time to see Xena stripping her leathers off, her skin bathed in the moonlight streaming in through the open shutters.

Gabrielle's mouth becomes suddenly dry, and she tries, unsuccessfully, to swallow.

GABRIELLE

By the gods....

Xena smiles, looking down at Gabrielle as she removes the last of her clothing. She is awed by the absolute beauty of the woman she loves.

With easy grace, she returns to the bed. She wraps Gabrielle in a strong embrace, needing to feel every part of the smaller body against her own. She shivers as she feels Gabrielle's lips explore her neck and the top of her chest, and her head lolls back to give her more access.

Xena lets her hands roam, reveling in the soft skin beneath her sensitive fingertips. She gauges Gabrielle's reactions to each touch and caress even as she feels a fresh wash of passion break over her from Gabrielle's increasingly bold explorations.

Gabrielle cries out again as she feels her belt loosened and her skirt unwrapped. Any chill is immediately overridden by the all-encompassing warmth of Xena's legs as they tangle around her own. The feeling is almost overwhelming, and when she feels a hand slide gently along her thigh, she becomes lost in the sensation of sweet love and burning desire.

Her body demands what her mouth cannot, and her unvoiced wish is granted, consuming her completely. Her thoughts shatter and are driven away by a need so powerful that she can do nothing but give in to it.

Warm lips meet hers again, and she takes them greedily as her body responds to the gentle, coaxing touches. With a soft moan, her body releases its tension in a surge so powerful that nothing else exists but waves of indescribable sensation.

Gabrielle comes back to earth held in strong arms that rock her gently as a deep voice whispers nonsense words into her ear.

Heavy eyelids finally open and she stares, dazed, into the moon-shadowed room, totally unaware of the blissful smile covering her face.

Grinning, Xena brushes sweat soaked bangs away from Gabrielle's eyes.

XENA

You ok?

GABRIELLE

Me? Ohhh yeah. I'm just... just great.

(beat)

I can't feel my legs, but I'm... wow!

Chuckling softly, Xena gathers Gabrielle tight against her. Gabrielle's head tips back and they kiss.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. TEMPLE GROUNDS – DAY - PRESENT DAY

Gabrielle's voice trails to silence. Looking around, she immediately notices that the group is somewhat more disheveled than before. It's also a bit smaller.

GABRIELLE

Where are Anteia and Vesta?



A young Virgin, sporting a beautiful rosy flush, points over Gabrielle's left shoulder.

VIRGIN #3

(hoarsely)

They....

The Virgin clears her throat and tries again.

VIRGIN #3

(Cont'd)

They... fainted... back there.

Gabrielle whirls around, immediately spotting the two slumped forms attended by two Virgins frantically fanning their faces. As she watches, another Virgin uncaps her water skin and douses the two with water. Anteia and Vesta come to, sputtering and gasping. They sit up, spy Gabrielle, and faint again.

Gabrielle turns back, smirking.

GABRIELLE

Wonder if that means they liked it.

VIRGIN #3

(enthusiastically)

I sure did!

VIRGIN #4

So did I!

VIRGIN #5

Me too!

Gabrielle notices that this young woman is dripping wet, from head to toe.

GABRIELLE

What happened to you?

The Virgin cocks a thumb over her shoulder.

VIRGIN #5

Cold pond.

Gabrielle stares off in the indicated direction and watches as two more Virgins struggle out of the pond, pulling the sodden fabric of their gowns away from their bodies.

GABRIELLE

Not exactly how I imagined
winning my bet but....

She looks over at Peony, who smiles shyly.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Guess this means you can go
to the Temple then, huh?



PEONY

I think I changed my mind.

VIRGINS

What?

PEONY

After hearing Gabrielle's story, I don't
think life as a Hestian Virgin is for me.

The Virgins look at one another, then back at Peony. Their gazes, this time, are kind.

VIRGIN #2

I wish I had your courage.

PEONY

Courage?

VIRGIN #2

Yes. I mean... now I can understand
Gabrielle's point. You don't have to
be a Hestian Virgin to feel love.

VIRGIN #3

And that sex-act stuff is pretty good too!

The other Virgins nod vigorously.

VIRGIN #2

It's just that... being a Hestian is all I know.
I've served her since I was a child.
(beat)
I don't think I could give that up.

Gabrielle looks at the rest of the group. They look away shyly, heads lowered in shame.
Gabrielle smiles.

GABRIELLE

Don't feel bad. It takes a great deal
of courage just to open your mind.
And you did that, right?

The Virgins nod.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)
There you go then.
(beat)
Well, I guess this is it, then. I'm sure
your new Priestess is waiting for you.



One by one, the Virgins come forward to hug both Gabrielle and Peony. Then, after final smiles, they take their leaves, heading for the TEMPLE DOORS, which open to them in welcome.

PEONY

Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE

Yes?

PEONY

That story... it was about
you and Xena, wasn't it.

Gabrielle looks a little surprised, but nods.

PEONY

(Cont'd)
I thought so.
(shyly smiling)
That kiss she gave you when
we met was pretty nice.

Gabrielle laughs.

GABRIELLE

That was Xena being Xena.



PEONY

Can I ask you something else?

GABRIELLE

Sure.

PEONY

Are you... an Amazon?

GABRIELLE

Yes, I am. Why?

PEONY

Oh. I just....

Is it true what they say about the
Amazons? That they're wonderful....

Her voice trails off as the Virgins attending Anteia and Vesta close in.

PEONY

(Cont'd)

...fighters?

GABRIELLE

(smirking)

Some of the best around.

PEONY

Do you think they could use another...
you know... fighter? Even if she
hasn't ever... fought... before?

GABRIELLE

I think they'd welcome
you with open arms.



Peony grins happily.

PEONY

Thanks!

Well, I think I'd better go before
Anteia and Vesta wake up again.

GABRIELLE

Will you be okay here?

PEONY

Oh sure! I have an aunt who lives
in the city. I'll stay with her until
I decide what to do with my life.

GABRIELLE

Well, as I said, the Amazons
would be happy to have you.

Stepping forward, Peony hugs Gabrielle tightly.

PEONY

Thank you for everything, Gabrielle.
And thank Xena, too, ok?

GABRIELLE

Xena?

PEONY

Sure! If she'd been the one escorting
us, I don't think we'd have learned
what we did from you, you know?

GABRIELLE

Hm. I never thought about it like that.

Peony laughs, and pulls away.

PEONY

Well, goodbye, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

Bye, Peony. Be well.

After watching Peony leave, Gabrielle, still smiling, turns to retrace her steps back to Xena. On the way, she passes Anteia and Vesta, who are just beginning to wake up. She gives both an engaging grin and waggles her fingers at them in farewell.

They faint again.

Gabrielle's laughter rings through the air.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLEARING - NEXT EVENING

Gabrielle enters the clearing where she and Xena parted ways three days previous. Her face falls when she sees the area completely empty. Concern mixes with disappointment as she takes another step, scanning the clearing intently.

GABRIELLE

Xena?



She senses the presence a split second before it materializes behind her, and stiffens as a warm hand is placed over her eyes. Then she relaxes and a smile blooms.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

(happily)

Xena.

XENA

Close your eyes.



GABRIELLE

Close...but....

XENA

Close your eyes.

A little thrill of excitement runs through Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

Okay. They're closed.

XENA

Good.

Xena removes her hand. Gabrielle then feels a soft cloth as it is drawn over her eyes and tied in the back of her head, blindfolding her.

Stepping from behind Gabrielle, Xena takes her arm at the elbow.

XENA
(Cont'd)
C'mon.

GABRIELLE
Xena?

XENA
Trust me.

Gabrielle smiles, remembering the story she's told, and willingly allows Xena to lead her onward.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEW CLEARING - EVENING

Xena escorts Gabrielle to a new, smaller and more private clearing very close to the water. A gently steaming bowl of water sits beside a large sea sponge atop a rock beside a tree.

Releasing her grip on Gabrielle, Xena moves behind her and gently slides the straps of Gabrielle's top over her shoulders and down her arms. Pulling the back ties free, she removes the garment from Gabrielle and places it on the ground beside the rock.

Pressing a languid kiss against one bare shoulder, Xena then unwraps Gabrielle's skirt and sets it aside. Gabrielle's undergarment and boots are next, drawn off with slow seduction.

Xena moves to the rock, picks up the sea sponge, and dips it into the warm water. She begins to bathe Gabrielle's shoulders and back.

Gabrielle sighs in pure pleasure.

GABRIELLE
Ohh, I like this.

XENA
I thought you might.

The rest of Gabrielle's body receives the same loving attention, as every part of her is gently cleaned, then patted dry with a soft piece of linen.

She shivers slightly as an incredibly plush fur is drawn carefully around her shoulders, the edges brushing against her calves.

With a guiding touch to her back, Xena leads Gabrielle to a spot closer to the water where a variety of food and drink is laid out, picnic style. A small fire blazes merrily nearby.

Gabrielle smells the food. Her stomach grumbles. She blushes.

GABRIELLE
Sorry about that.
I haven't eaten in awhile.
(beat)
Gods, it smells delicious!

Chuckling, Xena helps Gabrielle sit atop a luxurious, deep black bearskin. Gabrielle moans in pleasure as the thick, soft fur slides along her limbs.

Xena lowers herself to a matching fur, sitting cross-legged facing Gabrielle so that their knees casually brush.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Xena?

XENA

Yes?

GABRIELLE

This is a wonderful surprise.
And I'm not complaining at all, believe me.
But... why are you doing this for me?

She grins.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Is it because you cheated and
stuck me with the Virgin Horde?

Xena chuckles softly.

XENA

No, that's not why. Though I
do apologize for cheating.

GABRIELLE

Apology accepted. And though I'd
probably rather get my toenails
pulled out than admit this....
I kind of enjoyed myself.
(beat, softer)
So... why?

Xena smiles and cups Gabrielle's cheek.

XENA

Gabrielle, in all the time we've known
one another, you've taken care of me
in ways that no one ever has. You've
made me feel cherished, and loved.
I want to give that back to you.

Gabrielle places her hand over Xena's and squeezes.

GABRIELLE

Xena, not a day goes by that
you don't make me feel like the
most treasured person alive.

Xena smiles shyly.

XENA

If I could, I would give you the
world, and everything in it.

(beat)

Allow me to give you this one night.

Turning her head, Gabrielle places a kiss in Xena's palm.

GABRIELLE

I love it already.

XENA

Good.

Pulling her hand softly away, she resettles herself, reaching into a bowl of oiled, salted olives.

XENA

Open your mouth.

Gabrielle readily complies. Xena places the olive on Gabrielle's tongue.

Gabrielle hums as she rolls the fruit around in her mouth, savoring the flavor as she separates the meat from the pit and swallows.

Disposing of the pit, she opens her mouth again, and Xena feeds her another olive, and then another.

A piece of lamb, warm and expertly seasoned, is next, and Gabrielle groans as she takes the morsel from Xena's fingers.

A sip of wine from a silver chalice follows.

GABRIELLE

This wine... it's the same kind we
had at the Bacchanalia, isn't it?

XENA

(smiling)

Yes.

GABRIELLE

But how?

XENA

I have many skills.

Gabrielle's laughter is halted by another olive, this time delivered from Xena's own mouth. They share a deep, sensual kiss as the exchange is made.

Xena pulls away and spits the pit into the fire. Gabrielle swallows the olive.

Breaking into a small loaf of warm bread, Xena soaks it in herbed oil, and feeds the bread to Gabrielle, a small bit at a time. Gabrielle's lips linger over Xena's fingers as much as the food she's being offered and Xena growls, low in her throat. Gabrielle grins.

Another olive, and another kiss that leaves them both breathless and wanting more. Xena pulls away again, fingers trailing over Gabrielle's arms as she does so.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Would you like some dessert?

Gabrielle nods, rapidly.

Xena smirks.

Reaching into a bowl filled with fresh, cool fruit, she selects a large, ripe strawberry. Lifting it to Gabrielle's mouth, she draws the tip of it back and forth across Gabrielle's slightly parted lips.

Gabrielle moans.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Open.

Gabrielle bites into the sweet fruit, breathing deep as the taste bursts inside her mouth, filling it with the flavor of summer.

Xena draws the remaining half of the strawberry down the underside of Gabrielle's chin, down her neck, her chest, and into the valley between her breasts.

GABRIELLE

(huskily)

By the gods.

A hot mouth descends on her flesh as Xena's tongue slowly removes the trail of juice she's just laid. Lips meet again in a kiss of dizzying passion.



Sensing Xena is readying herself to pull away, Gabrielle holds her tightly and tips back, pulling Xena with her until they are both lying full out on the bearskin.

Gabrielle squirms on the fur, plucking at her blindfold.

GABRIELLE

Xena, please. I need to see you.

Smiling, Xena rises up on one elbow and gently slips the cloth from Gabrielle's eyes. Gabrielle breathes deeply as she watches the moon bathe Xena's soft skin and bring special radiance to the blue of her eyes.

XENA

(very softly)

Many years ago, in a clearing
much like this one, I met my destiny.

She strokes Gabrielle's hair.

XENA

(Cont'd)

I fell in love with her that very day.

Leaning down, Xena kisses Gabrielle with all the love within her, then pulls away only enough to whisper into her ear.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Happy Anniversary, Gabrielle.



FADE OUT.

DISCLAIMER

Rob Tapert's reputation was not harmed by the making of
this motion picture. And Xena and Gabrielle are *forever* grateful.