

Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 8



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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN - NIGHT

It is just after sunset in a peaceful, small town built on a hillside in the middle of the forest. The town is surrounded by a sturdy, well build log wall, and the gates are heavily barred but not guarded.

In a clear space just inside the walls, a wagon train is gathering in the light of pine pitch torches. The people seem cheerful, even somewhat excited, but move around at their tasks calmly and with purpose.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN INN - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

The inn's main room is not overly busy, but a good number of the tables are occupied. Set in one wall is a huge hearth, and in a nice warm corner nearby is a table with two occupants and the last remains of a nice dinner.

On the table is a square piece of parchment, weighted down on all four corners by the unusual practice of a dagger neatly nailing them in place. XENA and GABRIELLE ponder the board with serious expressions. They are dressed in nondescript peasant-type clothing, rather than their usual stand-out-in-any-crowd garb.

The parchment is drawn off into a playing board with squares, half the cream color of the parchment, and half a dark black. On the playing board are perched carved wooden pieces, also half natural wood and half darker stained. Xena is contemplating one of the pieces for an extended time.

GABRIELLE

(teasingly)

I know we've been experimenting with this new mind thing we have, Xena, but I really don't think you can move that just by looking at it.



Xena picks up the piece and moves it by a more conventional method.

XENA
Check.
(smiling, then frowning.)
I could have, way back when.



Gabrielle ponders the board with a frown herself. She considers, then a little hesitantly, moves one of her pieces.

GABRIELLE
The Lao Ma thing?

XENA
Mm.
(drumming fingers)
Y'know, you're picking up on this.

Xena moves another piece, and captures one of Gabrielle's. She leans back and takes a sip out of her nearby mug as Gabrielle sighs, and rests her chin on her fist.

GABRIELLE
After all this time, you'd think so. Ah.

She moves piece, and captures one of Xena's taller pieces.

GABRIELLE
(cont'd)
But it sure doesn't come
naturally like it does for you.

XENA
Uh huh.

Xena moves a piece and captures one of Gabrielle's taller pieces.

XENA
(cont'd)
Check.
(pause)
Mate.

Gabrielle frowns at the board.

GABRIELLE

You knew I was going
to do that, didn't you?

Xena smiles, and tips her mug back.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

So you sacrificed your piece to
trap me. How do you always know
what to do? You drive me nuts!

Xena begins to set the pieces back up.

XENA

It's all strategy. And knowing
your opponent....

She takes Gabrielle's fingers in her own.

XENA

(cont'd)

Like the back of her own hand.

Xena rubs her thumb over Gabrielle's knuckles. Gabrielle chuckles, and shakes her head.
She glances around them.

GABRIELLE

Nice not to be the center of
attention for a change. Dressing
like this was a good idea.

Xena twirls one game piece on the table.

XENA

Yeah. Tomorrow we'll be gone,
and they'll never know we were here.



CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES - NIGHT

The wagon train gets ready to leave. It consists of at least a dozen huge carts, all piled high with a variety of goods and produce. Each cart is pulled by four horses, most mismatched as though horses from any possible source were put in to pull.

More horses are brought alongside, and men mount up on them. Near the gates, an older man stands with one of the riders, who is still holding the reins of his horse, and has not yet gotten into the saddle.

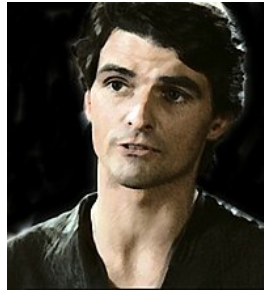
The older man clasps the younger on the shoulder. This is MEDEINUS, leader of the town, and BALAR, his son.

MEDEINUS

That's all of it, my son.
Are you ready?

BALAR

Ready as I can ever be, Father.
It seems so dangerous to leave
at night though. Are you s....



MEDEINUS

Balar, we have spoken of this many times. No one will expect us to send our wealth, our harvest out in the darkness. By day they watch the roads. By night, they sleep or drown themselves in ale.

Balar nods.

BALAR

I know you're right. It just worries me.
Theses wagons represent all we have.

Medeinus seems a little impatient.

MEDEINUS

And that is why I am sending every able man in the town with you, to make sure it gets to market, son.

Medeinus turns and motions to two men near the gates.

MEDEINUS

(cont'd)

Throw them open!

(to Balar, lowering voice)

Do not disappoint me, Balar. I am
counting on you to get what we
need to survive to the next harvest.

Reluctantly, Balar gets onto his horse. The other riders cluster around him, and we can now see that they are young, and most do not carry anything resembling a weapon. The few that do have pitchforks.

MEDEINUS

(cont'd)

(loudly)

Fare well, men of Pontus!
May the gods see you a swift
journey, and a lucrative return!

The gates swing open, and the riders move out, followed by the wagons. The sound of hooves and wheels seems very loud in the quiet of the surrounding night.

After the last wagon and man leaves, the gates swing shut. Two women struggle to put the bars into place, assisted by an old man.

Medeinus watches them briefly, then dusts his hands off and turns, walking up the path to a large, two story building nearby.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN INN - PRIVATE ROOM IN THE BACK - NIGHT

This is a smaller room at the rear of the inn, but nicely decorated. On one side is a comfortable looking bed more or less big enough for two people, and a thick bearskin rug on the floor. It is very dark inside.

The door opens and Xena and Gabrielle enter, each bearing a candle. Xena walks to the tiny table on one side and puts the candle in a clay dish, while Gabrielle walks around and lights a few other candles around the room.

XENA

Waste of wax. We're just
going to blow em all out.

Gabrielle turns and puts one hand on her hip.

GABRIELLE

Maybe I want to write for a while.

Xena walks over to her and unties the string holding closed the neck of Gabrielle's shirt. Gabrielle watches as Xena slowly removes it hole by hole, all the way down to her navel.

XENA

All right. I'll get your quills.



Gabrielle lifts her eyes and one eyebrow.

GABRIELLE

We're coming back around to this whole 'strategy' discussion, aren't we?

She pokes Xena in the arm.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I'm being outmaneuvered.



Xena smirks.

XENA

First step to good strategy is knowing it when you see it, Gabrielle. Besides, you're getting better at the game.

Gabrielle seems a touch pensive.

GABRIELLE

I don't think it's my game.

(smiling)

Now you, on the other hand....

Gabrielle puts her arms around Xena.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

... are my idea of fun,
so let's go play.

Xena douses the candles. A breeze from outside creeps through the shutters and rattles them as two shadows glide across the room and fall into bed.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE ABOVE THE TOWN - NIGHT

In a thick grove of trees, a large group of mounted horsemen wait. They watch the moon slowly set behind the mountains, and the lights just as slowly go out in the town.

At the front of the horses, two men stand, dressed in black leather armor.

FIRST MAN

(to second man)

Kill everyone you can
get your hands on.

SECOND MAN

Right.

FIRST MAN

Just try not to wreck the
place. We gotta live in it.



The men chuckle, and turn to mount their horses.

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. TOWN INN - PUBLIC ROOM - NIGHT

Medeinus enters. The room is now mostly empty. Only two serving women remain on one side, tidying up the tables, and one very old woman, MAIS, who brings over a bowl for Medeinus as he sits down near the fire.

MEDEINUS

Well, they're off.

MAIS

You think it's safe?

Medeinus snorts.

MEDEINUS

Is life safe? With some luck, they'll be
outside the hills by sundown tomorrow,
and then it's all roads guarded by
the prince to the harbor.

Mais seems unsure, but she gets up to pour Medeinus a mug of ale.

MEDEINUS

(cont'd)

Not much business tonight.

MAIS

Just them that were leaving, and
a few travelers. Odd, they were.

MEDEINUS

Odd?

MAIS

Mm. Something not
quite right about 'em.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE ABOVE THE TOWN - NIGHT

The mounted force starts moving down the hill. As they reach the bottom, their speed increases until they are at a full gallop by the time they hit the road.

In the front of the force, four horsemen carry a battering ram. But as they approach the gates, they drift open, the locking bar not in place.

FIRST MAN

Yeahhh!!!!

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN INN - PRIVATE ROOM IN THE BACK - SAME TIME

A candle flares. Xena and Gabrielle's faces are revealed as they sit up in bed, ears cocked. A soft thrumming of hoofbeats is clearly heard through the window.

GABRIELLE

Could be a herd of sheep.

XENA

Horses.

GABRIELLE

Could be wild horses.

XENA

Armed men on horseback...
headed this way.

Gabrielle sighs with deep soulfulness.

GABRIELLE

Does your hearing always
have to be so damn accurate?



Xena hands Gabrielle the candle.

XENA

C'mon.



CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES - NIGHT

The attacking force sweeps through the unlocked gates and starts to ravage the town. Women and old people run to get out of the way, but they are run down.

One of the attackers captures a woman and throws her over his saddle. The leader of the attack spots him.

RAIDER LEADER

Hey! I said kill 'em!

The man looks disgruntled, but he dumps the woman off the back of his horse. She falls in a heap and the horse kicks her as the man rides on.

The men spread out and head down the various paths in the town.

CUT TO:

EXT. INN - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

In the faint light from the torches, townsfolk run in panic away from the marauding horsemen. Three women dash between two rocks.

RAIDER

Yah! Yah! I got 'em!

The raider rides between the rocks and disappears. After a moment, he races back out, whipping his horse frantically. His armor is half destroyed, and blood coats his entire left side.

RAIDER

(cont'd)

Ah! Ah! They got me!

Xena and Gabrielle appear from between the rocks. Xena points towards the center of the town, then at the gates.

XENA

You go that way.
I'll go this way.

GABRIELLE

Xena!

Xena is already disappearing into the chaos.

GABRIELLE
(*cont'd*)
(*under her breath*)
Be careful.



Two horsemen ride right for Gabrielle. She tucks and rolls out of the way, then races past them towards the center of the town, where a ring of terrified townsfolk are being hacked at by riders.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES -NIGHT - SAME TIME

A woman darts in front of the gates. One of the raiders grabs her, and punches her in the face. She screams. The man goes to punch her again, but finds his arm held.

RAIDER
Hey!

The man turns right into Xena's fist. Xena grabs the man's hair as she slugs him, and then she yanks him backwards away from the woman. He falls to the ground.

XENA
Move! Get hidden!

The woman stumbles off towards a stack of wood. Xena spots a rider heading her way, and she jumps up onto the wood. Then she leaps towards the man and collides with him, taking him off his horse.

The man and Xena fall to the ground. The man pulls a dagger and stabs at Xena.

XENA
(*cont'd*)
Ah ah ah!

Xena grabs the man's hand and twists it backwards, breaking it.

RAIDER
Bitch! Ahh!!!

XENA

Considering what you interrupted,
be glad it was only your hand.



Xena elbows the man in the jaw, and he collapses. Xena rolls to her feet and heads for her next victim.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN CENTER - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Gabrielle is now in the center of the ring of townsfolk, fighting off the raiders.

GABRIELLE

Get down! Lie down!

The townsfolk do not know what to do, they are so frightened. Gabrielle trips one of them, and shoves them down just as a raider is about to take their head off. Gabrielle catches the man's sword on her sai, and twists her arms, yanking the weapon from his grasp.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

DOWN!

The man grabs at Gabrielle's hair and pushes his horse against her. Gabrielle takes advantage of her height and ducks under the horse, coming out the other side and grabbing the man's boot. She pulls the boot from the stirrup and throws the man off his horse.

RAIDER CHIEF

Get her!

Two horsemen head for Gabrielle.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES - NIGHT - SAME TIME

A group of children burst out of hiding behind a wagon and start to run across to the nearest building. The raiders spot them, and start shooting.

Xena sees them and yells a warning.

One boy falls, pierced in the back by an arrow. He is tall, and blond haired.

Xena watches him, and goes still, as an image of Solon flashes before her.

XENA

(whispering)

Bastards.

(yelling)

Hey! Scumbags!

The raiders turn to see her. Xena jumps into the torchlight, brandishing her sword. The children are forgotten, as the raiders find a better target.

XENA

(cont'd)

Over here! I got what you
want, boys. Right here.



Xena is right where she wants to be... in the center of a circle of raiders, all of whom are riding around her taking shots at her as they go past.

XENA

(cont'd)

C'mon, you gutless pigs! Pick
on someone your own size!

A man shoots a crossbow at Xena. Xena catches it in her free hand, tosses her sword up, pulls her dagger, throws the dagger at the man and kills him, catches her sword and twirls it, then tosses the arrow away in far less time than it took to read this.

XENA

(cont'd)

Waste of a good knife.

RAIDER SECOND IN COMMAND

Now! Get her!

All the riders wheel their horses and head for Xena.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN CENTER - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Gabrielle shoves the last of the women into the barn and slams the door. She turns, wiping her arm across her brow. There is blood on it. She looks towards the gates, and sees horses going that way. Loud yells break out.

GABRIELLE

Bet I can guess
what's causing that.

Tucking her sais into her boots, Gabrielle takes off at a run.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Gabrielle comes around the corner of the inn, and sees Xena in front of the gates, holding off what appears to be most of the raiders.

From the look on Xena's face, it is apparent she's having a great time. Gabrielle shakes her head, but appears slightly relieved.

GABRIELLE

Never know we're here, huh?

At that moment, a small boy darts through the horses legs just as three men attack Xena at once. A yell of alarm dies on Gabrielle's lips as she starts to run instead, losing sight of Xena as Xena spots the boy, and her body changes direction in mid-motion to protect him.

Xena goes down under the three men.

Gabrielle watches the spot she last saw Xena in.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

C'mon... c'mon....



Xena does not reappear. More men pile on. Gabrielle picks up a broken wagon hitch pole as she bolts towards the men, letting out a yell as she swings at the nearest and sweeps him cleanly right off his horse.

Just then, out of the nearby inn, a group of the townsfolk come bursting out, chased by half a dozen raiders. They scream and plow right into the swarm of men over Xena, causing a riot.

Men and horses and screaming women churn in a huge pile. Gabrielle slips through everything, her eyes searching frantically in the shadows.

The crowd shifts over, and her eyes spot Xena, still on the ground, pulling herself clear of a fallen horse.

With a look of utter relief, Gabrielle ducks under a sword and rushes to Xena's side.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Don't scare me like that. Here.

Gabrielle offers Xena a hand up. Xena doesn't take it. She is holding her leg.

XENA

Got a problem.

Gabrielle drops to her knees.

GABRIELLE

What is it? You twist something?

We gotta get away from these guys X....

Xena removes her hand, and in the torchlight, blood and the glint of white, broken bone is seen.

XENA

Twisted, yeah. Until it broke. I can't walk on it.



Gabrielle looks around. The raiders have spotted them, and a yell goes up. The men start to run towards them.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN GATES - CONTINUOUS

Gabrielle grabs Xena's arm.

GABRIELLE

Then I'll carry you.



XENA

No time for that.
Grab my sword.

The men close in on them. Gabrielle realizes Xena is right, and she takes hold of Xena's sword, turning to face the oncoming raiders with it in her hands.

Xena grabs Gabrielle's fallen pole and somehow levers herself up to her feet, leaning on the improvised staff as she pulls out her chakram. Her knuckles are white where she grips it.

XENA

(cont'd)
Hey.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, I know.

Gabrielle moves closer to Xena, and twists her boots into the dirt as the first wave of raiders climb past the woodpile and heads for them.

A horse without its rider suddenly bucks past, trampling the first man and kicking a second. Unexpectedly, it's not Argo.

The raiders jostle each other, getting in the way of their progress as one man trips and falls in front of them.

VOICE

Hey!

Xena turns, hearing a sound behind her. She spots a small boy waving.

BOY

Hurry! You can hide wif us!

Xena tugs the back of Gabrielle's halter, pointing when Gabrielle turns.

XENA

Let's go while we
got the chance.

Xena lets fly with the chakram, taking out the two nearest torches and throwing the area into darkness. Gabrielle puts her arm around Xena's waist, and Xena leans on her as they make their escape.

CUT TO:

INT. INN CELLAR - NIGHT -SHORTLY THEREAFTER

The cellar is dark and full of frightened children. The only way in is a double hatch door over their heads, which is crudely barred from the inside with a makeshift latch.

Their eyes grow wide as the heavy door to the cellar creaks open, and two big, shadowy figures start down the steps.

A small boy runs before them, and scampers down the steps two at a time.

BOY

I got 'em! Look!
They're here!

Xena leans against the earth wall as Gabrielle bars the hatch behind them. It is obvious she is in great pain. Gabrielle finishes and lends Xena support to get down the rest of the steps.

The children gather at the bottom of the stairs to wait for them.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

Okay, let us get past here.
Xena, can you...?

XENA

Just keep moving. I'm fine.



BOY

You was beating all those guys
up! I saw you! I saw you!

Xena slips slightly on the last step, and puts pressure on her broken leg. She turns absolutely white, but in front of all the kids, her facial expression never falters.

XENA

Yeah, you saw me.

Gabrielle helps Xena over to a pile of dusty woven hemp bags and manages to get her sitting down on them without jostling her leg too much.

GABRIELLE

Lay down, maybe I
can... oh, Xena.

The children crowd around them, dirty and frightened, and glad of this distraction.

BOY

Wow.

Even in the low torchlight, the injury looks horrific. Gabrielle sits back a little, not really sure where to start.

BOY

(cont'd)

Does that hurt?



Xena looks at the boy. She shrugs.

XENA

Nah. Not really.

One of the other children, an older girl comes forward.

GIRL

My mother sent us all in here.
She said not to go out,
but Ziggy never listens.

Gabrielle has unlaced Xena's boot, and removed her knee armor. Now, at a loss, she looks up at Xena.

XENA
You Ziggy?

Xena points at the boy. He grins.

XENA
(*cont'd*)
Great. You got some
water down here?

GIRL
Over there! Do you want
some? Are you thirsty?

ZIGGY
Hey, stupid! If she's thirsty,
we got beer! Nobody drinks
water unless they gotta!

GIRL
(*worriedly*)
Should I go get my mother?

Xena and Gabrielle exchange looks.

GABRIELLE
No. You better stay here,
like she said. But we could
really use that water.

The children all rush over to a trough against the wall of the cellar, and grab for buckets in a messy mass of juvenile eagerness.

Xena and Gabrielle just look at each other in silence for a beat.



GABRIELLE
(*cont'd*)
You're not supposed to get
hurt. Isn't that some kind of rule?

Xena smiles faintly. Then her smile fades.

XENA

You're going to have to set that.

GABRIELLE

(quietly)

I know.

She looks back.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Those kids. They're so scared,
and those killers up there....

Xena puts her hand on Gabrielle's knee. The children come back, carrying a big bucket of water sloshing between them.

XENA

First things first. Wash it out
good, then pull my leg straight.

A crash makes them all jump and look up. They hear angry yells, but cannot make out the words.

XENA

(cont'd)

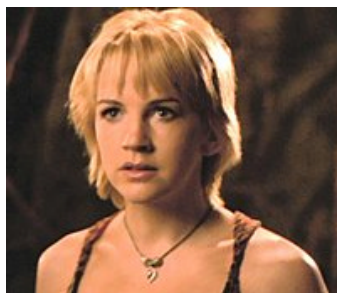
(grimly)

Better hurry.

Gabrielle takes the bucket, and takes a deep breath.

GABRIELLE

You know this is going to hurt
me as much as it hurts you.



XENA

(warmly)

Go on. Just do it.

Gabrielle tips the bucket, and begins to pour. On her far side, out of sight of the children, Xena's hand clenches around a piece of firewood so tightly it creaks.

FADE TO:

INT. CELLAR - NOT LONG AFTER

Xena is now lying flat on the sacks. Her sword lies by her hand, half hidden in the straw on the floor.

Gabrielle is wrapping a bandage around Xena's knee, being held straight by several sticks. The children are sitting around, wide eyed.

ZIGGY

Wow! My dad yells when he pulls
a splinter out. You're awesome!

Xena gives him a look. She lifts her right hand and examines it. There are several splinters embedded in the palm from the wood she was clenching. With a shake of her head, she lets her hand fall.

GABRIELLE

All right. Best I can do.

Xena inspects the result. Her leg is encased in a tight bandage from her mid thigh to her mid calf.

XENA

Good job.

GIRL

Those pirates are just cowards.
If my dad was here, boy,
they'd have run away!

ZIGGY

Yeah! Mine too!

The other children agree in a chorus. Gabrielle turns to face them.

GABRIELLE

Where are your fathers?
I didn't see any men u...
when we were outside.

ZIGGY

They all went down the river to
the prince's house. They're
gonna bring us all back toys!

Gabrielle appears confused.

GABRIELLE

All of them? You mean all
your fathers went away?

The children all nod at her. Outside, the noises have mostly faded, but the sound of
hoofbeats is still heard.

XENA

When did they leave? I saw men all
around here when we came in.



GIRL

Tonight. When it got dark.
They took all the wagons, too.

XENA

(to Gabrielle, softly)

They must have taken the harvest
to market. You can catch them.

GABRIELLE

(whispering)

Catch them?

XENA

(urgently)

If you leave now, you can get to them
by sunrise and bring them back...
No telling how long those bastards
are going to be out there, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle is not pleased, but she also realizes that Xena is right.

GABRIELLE

I don't want to leave you here.



Xena looks at the kids, then looks at Gabrielle. She lifts both of her eyebrows.

XENA

I'd love to run right along with you.

She touches leg.

XENA

(cont'd)

But I can't. G'wan. Faster you go, faster you come back.

ZIGGY

You gonna go get my dad? C'n I come?

Gabrielle takes Xena's hand and squeezes it. She looks at Ziggy.

GABRIELLE

Well, I'd like the company, but...
I'd feel a lot better if a nice strong guy like you stayed here to watch out for my friend while I'm gone.

Xena gives Gabrielle a look that would curdle milk still inside the goat. Ziggy positively beams.

ZIGGY

I can do that!

GABRIELLE

(kindly)

Thanks. I really appreciate it.

Gabrielle turns to Xena.

XENA

Oohhh... You're gonna pay for that.



GABRIELLE

(smiling)

Promises, promises.

Gabrielle gets up and dusts her knees off. She is clearly reluctant to leave, but she seats her sais and goes to retrieve the stick Xena had taken from her.

XENA

Want to take this instead?

Xena indicates her sword, then taps the stick.

XENA

(cont'd)

I might need that.

Gabrielle hesitates, then shakes her head.

GABRIELLE

I'll find another one when I
get outside the gates.
You be good, okay?

XENA

Me, good? Never. G'wan.



Gabrielle turns to go, then she stops and returns to Xena's side, kneeling next to her and putting her body between the children's curious eyes and her partner.

Xena holds her bravado for a moment more, then realizes what Gabrielle has done and she relaxes, letting her head rest against Gabrielle's shoulder as she briefly allows the pain to show on her face.



Just as briefly, Gabrielle cups Xena's cheek with her hand, and gives her a kiss on the head.

Then they part, and as Gabrielle rises, Xena pulls herself upright on her sacks and sets her sword across her thighs.

GABRIELLE

You guys just stay here, and I'll be back as soon as I can with your folks, okay? Don't go out there.

CHILDREN

Okay.

With a last backwards look, Gabrielle steps cautiously up the stairs and unlocks the hatch, pushing it carefully open just a little and peeking outside. After a moment, she is satisfied, and she opens the hatch fully, slipping outside and closing the door behind her.

The children pause, their eyes fastened on the door, then slowly they all swing their heads around and focus on Xena.

Xena looks back at them.

The children all scuttle closer and gather around Xena in a tight circle.

Xena's eye widen slightly in alarm.



XENA

Something you want?

They all look at Ziggy, their ringleader.

ZIGGY

Are you a Roman soldier?

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Gabrielle slips along the edge of the town wall, staying as much in the shadows as possible. There are still raiders riding around, though most of the townsfolk seem to have fled, or were either dead or injured. The inn is a source of loud noises, and by the singing it was evident the raiders had found the ale supplies.

GABRIELLE

Hope they find all of it.
Make my job easy.



Gabrielle sees several raiders walk past the gates, then go to stand near the edge of the path leading to the inn. She takes the opportunity to leave the shadows, slipping through the gates before anyone sees her.

Gabrielle pauses outside the gates to listen, then she starts down the road, satisfied she hasn't been seen.

CUT TO:

EXT TOWN GATES - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

The raider leader and his second stand talking.

SECOND MAN

Chief, that was too easy.

CHIEF

Piece of baklava, like I toldja. Now
let's get those gates shut and see if
anyone's sober enough to guard 'em.

SECOND MAN

You think anyone's gonna
come back here tonight?

The chief looks around.

CHIEF

Ya never know. That woman
might show up again.

SECOND MAN

(laughing)

No way! Probably dead by now.
Crawled off after we beat her up.

The chief seems doubtful, but he shrugs.

CHIEF

Maybe. Just get those gates shut!

The second man and a few others run to the gates, and swing them closed. They march to the locking bars, lifting them up with cheerful whistles, and throwing them into place.

The chief looks on, satisfied.

CHIEF

(cont'd)

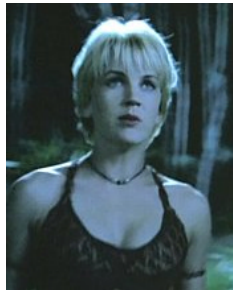
That's it. This place is ours now!
Anyone wants in, they're
gonna have to die for it!

The men all laugh.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

Gabrielle heads away from the town at a run. The moon slowly rises through the trees, lighting her way and throwing her shadow far down the road ahead of her.



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. INN CELLAR - NIGHT

The children are seated around Xena, clamoring at her with incessant questions.

ZIGGY

What's that?
(*pointing to chakram*)
A necklace?

Xena picks up the chakram and tosses a bit of straw into the air. With a swipe, she slices through the hay and sends several toothpick size pieces scattering over Ziggy's lap.

XENA

Yeah. Wanna wear it?



ZIGGY

Whoa!

GIRL

What's your name? That other
lady called you Weener. Is
that really your name?

XENA

(*barking*)
No!

The kids jump back. They stare wide eyed at her. Xena growls at them. The kids scramble away from her.

GIRL

You're mean!

XENA

(*slit-eyed*)
Yeah! I am! So don't you forget it.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

Gabrielle runs along the road at a good pace. It is very quiet around her, and she looks to either side in some concern, aware of how exposed she is in the moonlight on the road.

She looks around her. On either side of the road is a line of prickly hedges.

GABRIELLE

Smart, Gabrielle. How about thinking next time, and maybe stopping to get... oh, say, a HORSE to ride?



Suddenly, around the bend in the road ahead comes the sound of hooves. Gabrielle slows, unable to believe her ears.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Don't tell me Argo....

The hoofbeats multiply. Gabrielle leaps off the road just in time, rolling behind a bush as a group of six men ride past.

RIDER

Whoa! Hold up!
There's a spring!

Gabrielle looks behind her, spotting a pool of water less than a foot from her boot. She looks plaintively up at the sky.

The men jump off their horses and lead them to the pool, letting them drink. One man squats to fill a waterskin. From where he is standing, if he lifts his eyes, he will be looking right into Gabrielle's.

LEAD RIDER

Lookin' good, boys!
No survivors.

Gabrielle's fingers slowly close on the hilt of her sai.

SECOND RIDER

Yeah! So let's get inside,
and get some beer!

LEAD RIDER

With those walls, we'll be able
to hold off a damn army!
Jagos had a damn good plan.

SECOND RIDER

Yeah! Our new fortress! And
we didn't even have to fight for it!

The riders all laugh.

LEAD RIDER

Much.
(*snorting*)
Wish we'd found
that hellbitch, though.

SECOND RIDER

Ah, she's dead. C'mon! All the
beer'll be gone 'fore we get back!

Still laughing, the riders file past Gabrielle's hiding place, one man's boot just brushing the sole of hers. The man pauses, and glances down.

Gabrielle remains utterly motionless, only a splash of moonlight glittering off her eyes.

SECOND RIDER

(*cont'd*)
Hey, Dork!

The lead rider turns. Gabrielle slowly draws her sai, her hand out of the man's line of sight.

DORK

Yeah? What? C'mon! You were
bitching about the beer! Move it!

The man hesitates, then shrugs and walks on. Gabrielle waits for him to disappear behind the bush before she lets her sai slide back into it's sheath.

GABRIELLE

(*whispering*)
Thanks, Dork.



Gabrielle cocks her head to listen intently, until she hears the sound of the horses leaving. Then she crawls out from under the bush and stares after the men.

GABRIELLE
(cont'd)
Fortress.

She closes her eyes.

GABRIELLE
(cont'd)
Oh no.

Gabrielle gets to her feet and jumps back onto the road, then freezes, obviously torn. She starts back towards the town, then hesitates again.

GABRIELLE
(cont'd)
Damn it!

Abruptly, Gabrielle turns and breaks into a run again, heading away from the town. Now she is running full out.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN INN CELLAR - NIGHT

Xena has pulled herself more upright. She looks across the room at the water bin, then attempts to get to her feet. She doesn't make it any further than an inch off the ground before she sets herself back down hastily, her face going dead white.

XENA
Bad idea.

The children have clustered around her again, apparently having lost their fear.

ZIGGY
Does that hurt?

XENA
What do you think?



GIRL

I bet it does. I bet it hurts
more 'cause you're so mean.

Xena scowls at the girl.

XENA

I'm not mean.

GIRL

Yes, you are.

XENA

No, I'm not.

GIRL

Yes, you are.

Xena takes a breath to yell, then looks into the girl's eyes and decides otherwise. Perhaps there is something familiar there.

XENA

Wanna do me a favor?

GIRL

No. You're mean and
nasty. I don't like you.

Then again, maybe not. Xena looks at Ziggy.

ZIGGY

I'll do it! I'll do it!

GIRL

Suck up!

Xena hands him a wooden cup she found among the sacks.

XENA

Put some water in that.
(beat)
Thanks.



Ziggy beams, and runs off with the cup. A loud crash is heard overhead, and the children all cringe. Xena's head lifts and she listens intently, her brow creasing.

XENA

(cont'd)

Shoulda been
done by now....

GIRL

Done with what?

There is the sound of hammering, next. Xena listens even more intently. Then she slowly reaches up and takes hold of an iron bar. Using only her arms, she pulls herself upright.

GIRL

(cont'd)

What are you doing? Are you
crazy? I think you're crazy
AND mean AND nasty!

Xena grabs another bar, and now is dangling above the ground. She pulls herself all the way up until her head is near the ceiling, the floor of the inn.

ZIGGY

Wow. And strong!
Did you see that! Hey!

XENA

Shh.

GIRL

Why? There's nothing to hear!

XENA

HUSH!



GIRL

You are just a meanie, Weener!



Xena glares at her. The girl reluctantly shuts up. Xena listens.

RAIDER CHIEF

(V.O.)

All right! Enough drinking! Get
your butts out there and start
nailing those logs against the wall!

Xena's eyes widen.

XENA

(mouthing)

Wall?

RAIDER SECOND IN COMMAND

This is gonna be
some fortress, boss!

XENA

Fortress?

(exhaling)

Son of a BACCHAE!

RAIDER CHIEF

Find any stragglers,
kill 'em like the others!

Xena looks down at the children, and realizes they heard the man. She lets herself down onto her good leg.

XENA

Damn.

The children are panicked. They start pulling at Xena's leathers.

GIRL

What does he mean? Did they
hurt my mama? She told me to
come down here. Is she okay?

Xena sits down in the straw. The children gather around her again. Xena tries to figure out what to do now. She had not planned on this scenario.

ZIGGY

(quietly)

Are they gonna kill us?

Several of the children are crying. Xena looks at each of them as she thinks.

XENA

(softly)

No.

She looks at the children.

XENA

(cont'd)

You're gonna be all right.



But Xena looks very, very worried.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT - SOME TIME LATER

At the top of a hill, the moon shines down on the road. Suddenly, Gabrielle runs into the light, then stops, leaning against a tree as she catches her breath. It is obvious she has been running hard for some time.

Gabrielle wipes her face, then she walks to the top of the ridge and looks over. In the valley, she spots the wagon train from the town.

GABRIELLE

About time.

Gabrielle takes a deep breath, then she starts down the hill after the townsfolk. As she reaches the bottom, she starts to yell, waving her arms.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Hey! Hey there! Hey!

The wagon train does not apparently hear her. It keeps moving, the sound of the wheels drowning out her cries.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

(yelling)

HEY!!!!



The last man in line turns, then pulls his horse up when he spots Gabrielle approaching. He apparently does not know what to make of her.

MAN

Hello there! Stand clear!

We need no taggers-on!

Gabrielle slows to a halt.

GABRIELLE

I'm not... I've come
from your town!

MAN

My town?

GABRIELLE

(pointing)

Back there? In the hills?

The rest of the wagon train has pulled up, and Balar comes riding back to confront Gabrielle.

BALAR

What is it? Who are you? What
do you want? We have no
time to waste here, woman!

GABRIELLE

Your home has been attacked.

(waiting)

That enough reason to
waste some time in listening?

Shocked, the men circle Gabrielle, clamoring for details.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN INN CELLAR - NIGHT - LATER

The sounds around the cellar are getting louder. Footsteps are tramping regularly above their head, and shouts can be heard.

Suddenly, the door hatch rattles, as though someone is trying to get in.

VOICE

Hey! Whats'n here!
Can't open 'er!

RAIDER CHIEF

Get a pry!

The children scream, and run to the other side of the room.

XENA

Stop it! Be quiet!

GIRL

They're gonna come
after us! They'll hurt us!

ZIGGY

Hurt us? You stupid girl!
They'll kill us, probly!
Cut our heads off!

Xena grabs their arms and pulls them down into the straw.

XENA

(growling)

If you don't shut up,
I'll beat em to it.



The girl starts to cry. Ziggy starts to cry, but pretends he isn't.

XENA

(cont'd)

(gentler)

Listen to me. They're
not gonna kill you.

GIRL
(blubbing)
No! You are!

XENA
I'm not gonna kill you.
(beat)
What's your name?



The girl looks at Xena.

GIRL
Why do you care?

XENA
(smiling grimly)
I'm a sucker for a cute
face. What's your name?

There is the sound of banging overhead.

GIRL
Ppppatta.

Xena pulls them both closer.

XENA
All right. Listen to me. You're
not gonna die here if I can help it.

PATTA
You're horrible.

XENA
No, I'm Xena. We don't have time
for name calling. We've gotta find
a way out of here before those
big nasties upstairs find a way in.

ZIGGY
I can fight those guys!

Xena looks at him.

ZIGGY

(cont'd)

I can! My dad taught
me to fight! Look!

Ziggy makes fists and starts to flail at Xena. Xena catches his hands and lifts him up off the ground by them. He stops moving and goggles at her.

XENA

Save it. I'll need the help later.

Xena lowers Ziggy to the ground.

XENA

(cont'd)

Come over here, all of
you. We've gotta plan.

The children all crawl over to Xena, and put their heads together with hers.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT - LATER

Gabrielle sits in the middle of the ring of townsmen. They are arguing, and obviously in a state of turmoil.

WAGON DRIVER

It's crazy! We just left there! You
can't really mean our town! We
just came down the road tonight!

GABRIELLE

It's the truth. You have to believe me.

The men are angry and upset, worried about their families.

BALAR

But it makes no sense! Why would they
take over our town... our homes! Our
families! Dear gods, what of our families??

Another round of dismay from the men.

WAGON DRIVER

What are we to do!?

Gabrielle has waited for this. She raises her voice.

GABRIELLE

You have to come back with me.
We have to get your town back.



MEN

Town back? She's crazy!

BALAR

But.... What can we do? They're
soldiers... killers.... We're just....

Gabrielle stands, then realizes that doesn't help much. She jumps up onto the seat of a wagon and raises her hands for attention.

GABRIELLE

I can help you.

BALAR

YOU?

The men laugh uneasily.

Gabrielle puts her hands on her hips and exhales in annoyance.

GABRIELLE

Y'know, why doesn't anyone ever
question Xena when she says that?
Is it the leather? The boots? The sword?
That's it.... It's the sword, isn't it?

BALAR

Xena? The great warrior?
You know her?

GABRIELLE

(sighing)

I know her. But listen, that's not
important right now. I can help
you get your homes back. Don't
you want to do that?

WAGON DRIVER

He's right. What can we do?
We're not fighters.

Gabrielle looks at the men. The driver has a point.

GABRIELLE

Maybe not, but I am.



WAGON DRIVER

You? Hah. I'm more that
than you, I'm thinking!

Gabrielle draws her sai and whips it at the man, pinning his coat to the wagon. The metal has passed within a hair of his body.

GABRIELLE

Want to test that theory?



The men stir uneasily. The driver tries to pull his jacket free, and finds he cannot. The sai has been driven to its hilt into the wood.

BALAR

We should go get the prince.
He's the man to stop the raiders.

The men murmur agreement.

GABRIELLE

You don't have time for that. Every minute
we stand here, they're destroying your
homes. Is that what you want?

The men all stare at her. Gabrielle jumps off the wagon and dusts her hands off.

BALAR

You sure talk a good lot.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, well, I'm a bard too.

(beat)

I've got many skills.

The men still look doubtful. Gabrielle turns and starts to walk back down the road. She turns and looks at them, but keeps walking.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Are you coming with me? We don't have
any time to waste, not if you want to
see your wives and children again.

After a long moment, the men start moving, deciding to follow Gabrielle. Once she is sure of that, Gabrielle turns and marches on with a determined stride.

BALAR

All right. We're with you.

GABRIELLE

Good!

(under her breath)

I just hope I figure out what to
do with you before I get there.



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. TOWN INN CELLAR - NIGHT

Xena has the kids in a circle around her. On the ground are small pots, with strings attached to them. Also on the floor are a pile of rocks, and some sticks.

XENA

All right. Here's what
we're gonna do....



PATTA

What are those?

Patta picks up a jug and sniffs it.

PATTA

(cont'd)

EEEEWWW!!!

Xena takes the pot and puts it back down.

XENA

Now, at each door,
you put one of these.

PATTA

How come?

ZIGGY

Will you shut up?
You're such a GIRL!

Xena looks at Ziggy and raises her eyebrows. She pushes several pots over to him and gives him a bit of wood with a smoldering end.

XENA

Take this. Put the pot down,
then light the string.

ZIGGY
Like this?

Xena can't quite stop him in time. The string catches and burns down, and the oil in the pot starts smoking. The stench is incredible.

PATTA
EEEWWW!!!!
GROOOSSSS!!!

The children run away from the pot, leaving Xena to douse the smoke with one of her hemp bags.

XENA
Get back here. We
have to get these ready!



PATTA
(covering nose and mouth)
How come? Those guys
will just hurt us! You're crazy!

Xena looks up the ceiling, and appears to be talking to herself. After a moment, she looks at the kids.

XENA
(seriously)
Listen to me. Your families might be out
there, might be hiding, like you are.
They're counting on you to help them.
Do you want to let them down?

Slowly, the children edge back towards her.

PATTA
But we're just kids.
This is so stupid.

XENA
It's not stupid.

ZIGGY
You're stupid, Patta.

Xena rubs her head with one hand. She starts to get up, but moves the wrong way and half sits, half falls back down. The frustration at both the children and her injury is almost too much. Xena grabs one of the pots and glares at it.

Ziggy grabs Patta and another girl and pulls them over. They sit down next to Xena.

ZIGGY

(cont'd)

That hurts a lot huh?

Xena slowly puts the jug down.

XENA

Yeah.

(looking up)

You gonna help, or not?

PATTA

I don't get it. Why do we need to do this?

XENA

Remember my friend?

The rest of the children come over.

PATTA

The one who ran away?

XENA

She didn't run away. She went to get help. She went to get all your fathers, so they could come back here and beat up all the nasty guys.



ZIGGY

Yeah? Cool!

XENA

Yeah. Except when they get here, if they can't get in, they can't help us.

PATTA

Oh.
(*looking at pots*)
So... what do these
do, besides stink?

Xena picks up a stick and draws a circle in the dirt floor.

XENA

Here's your town. All around you got
lots of trees, with lots of thick leaves.

PATTA

Yeah. So?

XENA

Fill the town with stinky stuff,
where's it gonna go?

The kids all look at each other.

PATTA

Nowhere. It'll just stay
here and stink!

Xena takes her bit of wood and draws a line through the circle.

XENA

Unless?

Xena waits. The children all look at her uncomprehendingly. Then Ziggy puts his finger on the line Xena just drew.

ZIGGY

Unless they open the gates? Like when
the wind blows in from behind the barn and
they gotta do that so you don't smell the....

XENA

Yeah. You got it.

Patta picks up a pot.

PATTA

Ooohhh. Okay. You really think your
friend will come back? I sure wouldn't.

Finally, Xena smiles, just a little.

XENA

She'll be back.



Patta shakes her head as she picks up another pot.

PATTA

She must be crazy.

Xena watches the children leave the cellar through the hatch. The hatch closes and she looks at the remains of the one, ruined, stinky pot.

XENA

Crazy like a fox.

(beat)

I hope.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES - OUTSIDE - NIGHT - SOME TIME LATER

The wagon train is pulled up down the road, out of sight from the town gates. The stretch of road and the open space between the walls and where they are seems vast, and it is well lit by moonlight.

Guards stand behind the wall, just visible with crossbows at the ready. Logs have been pushed up to reinforce the gates.

Gabrielle stands behind a tree with Balar, reviewing the scene.

BALAR

To rush the gates is lunacy.

We'll all be killed.

Gabrielle stares at the gates.

GABRIELLE

You're right.



BALAR

We should go get the prince. His forces will smash these brigands!

GABRIELLE

But the people inside there will be dead by the time you get back.
Are you willing to risk that?

BALAR

If we die trying to save them, is that a risk they would want us to take?

For a long moment, Gabrielle is silent.

GABRIELLE

I don't know.
(looking at Balar)
But it's a risk I will take. Will you?



CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN INN - EXTERIOR - NIGHT

Loud voices drift out the door to the inn. It has been taken over as the raider's new headquarters, and there are many men inside.

A small figure runs over and stoops near the door. The door slams open, and a man leaves the inn, belching loudly. He walks right past the boy hiding in the shadows and heads towards the gates. The door swings shut.

Ziggy puts the pot down, and tries to light it, but his hands are shaking so badly the rope will not catch.

ZIGGY

(whispering)
Cccccome on.

Finally, it catches. Ziggy pulls another pot from his pocket, and looks around, then runs off.

CUT TO:

EXT TOWN STABLES - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Patta and her friend run over to the door to the stable and set their pots down. They look around, but the area is relatively deserted.

They whisper together, turning their backs on the path as they concentrate on lighting the rope.

PATTA

I still think this is stupid, Bean.

BEAN

Shh. Let's hurry up and get
out of here before I throw up!

Behind them, unseen, a man appears. He spots the two girls.

MAN

HEY!

PATTA

Oh!

The two girls turn around and spot the man. They get up as he starts towards them, and turn and run.

BEAN

Hurry!

MAN

Stop! Stop! Hey!
You brats! Stop!

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN ROAD - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Gabrielle stands before two groups of men. One group holds farming tools, the other sacks over their backs.

GABRIELLE

Balar, take your men and go to the spring.
Brac, you and your group run to the wall
when I give you the signal, and start digging.

BALAR

But they'll see us! This is crazy, we
can't beat these men. We'll all be killed.

GABRIELLE

No you won't. They'll be busy.
(pausing)
I promise.



The other group leader scratches his head.

BRAC

I don't get it.

Gabrielle picks up a long stick from a nearby wagon. She hefts it.

GABRIELLE

I'm going to go distract them. With any
luck, they'll be busy coming after me,
and that'll leave you free to go.

BALAR

But.... They'll kill you.

GABRIELLE

(seriously)
They might. But it's my life, and it's
the one I'm the most willing to risk.

Gabrielle walks away from the men, away from the trees, and emerges into the moonlight.

BALAR

Gabrielle!

Gabrielle turns.

BALAR

(cont'd)
Why are you doing this?
What's in it for you?

GABRIELLE

Everything.



Gabrielle resumes walking towards the walls.

BALAR

She's crazy.

BRAC

Yeah. And so are we.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SHOPS - NIGHT - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

Ziggy puts down his last pot. He looks up when he hears Patta and Bean yell.

The two girls are running towards him, being chased by a dozen men.

Ziggy panics and starts to run too.

MEN

Stop! You little bastards!
We'll roast your skinny hides!

Ziggy crashes into another boy who was putting pots out. The plan is now a rout, and instinctively they all bolt for the one safe place they know.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN INN - CELLAR - NIGHT

Xena sits alone in the cellar. Now that the children are gone, she has no need to dissemble and she leans against the wall of the cellar, her face ashen, her eyes closed. One hand rests on her injured leg; the other is clenched around a bit of broken wagon spoke.

The only sound in the room is muffled thumps and blurred voices from the inn, and a soft creak of breaking wood from the vicinity of Xena's fist.

Slowly Xena lifts her head, and tosses the wood from her. It is crushed. Xena looks around the cellar, then picks up her sword, and lays it across her lap. Her hand flexes on the hilt incessantly.



CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES - NIGHT

Gabrielle walks up the road towards the gates. The men see her, but at first do not react.

GABRIELLE

Hey!

The guards look at each other.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Hey! You bunch of losers!

GUARD

Get outta here, woman!

GABRIELLE

No way, you scum sucking pig!



Now Gabrielle has the guards' attention.

GUARD

Scram, or we'll shoot you!

Gabrielle makes a face at them, then gestures rudely.

GABRIELLE

You couldn't hit the broad
side of the Palladium!

The guards all raise their crossbows, and one man fires at Gabrielle. She jumps out of the way. Another man fires. Gabrielle leaps over the bolt. A third fires.

Gabrielle catches it, gives it a quick double take, then throws it away.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Losers! That the best
you can do!!!!

The guards are all focused on Gabrielle. Gabrielle raises her hand and waves it. The waiting townsmen start to crawl forward.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN INN - CELLAR DOORS - NIGHT - SAME TIME

The children dash for the cellar and throw the door open, scampering inside only steps ahead of the raiders. Ziggy turns and slams the door shut.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN INN CELLAR - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Ziggy frantically tugs the lock into place then overbalances, falling down the steps and rolling to a halt in front of Xena.

All the children are talking at once.

PATTA

They chased us!

BEAN

They're gonna kill us!

ZIGGY

They're right outside!

All the rest of the children are crying and yelling. Xena sits in their midst, the calm eye in the storm.

The cellar doors suddenly bow inwards, and a thunder erupts as the men bang against them. Bits of wood immediately start to fall down, littering the floor.

BEAN

Ah! Ah! We're gonna be kilt!

XENA

No, you're not.

Xena reaches over her head and grabs the iron bars again, and pulls herself up, getting her good leg under her and picking up her sword. The children all look up at her and fall silent.

XENA

(cont'd)

(quietly)

Get behind me, over there.

Xena points with her sword.

PATTA

What are you going to do?

One of the doors splinters and breaks, half of it falling into the cellar.

XENA

I'm gonna do what I do best.



The door breaks the rest of the way open, and the men come down the steps. They spot Xena and halt, pulling out their weapons.

MAN

Lookie here boys....
We hit pay dirt.

Xena smiles with absolutely no humor.

XENA

You sure did.

She flips the sword in her hand.

XENA

(cont'd)

C'mon. Who's first?



With a yell, the men charge.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES - NIGHT

Gabrielle picks up a rock, and throws it with unerring aim, hitting one of the guards. Her voice is hoarse from yelling, and she is running out of energy to dodge arrows with.

GABRIELLE

C'mon, you scum suckers!
Come and get me!

GUARD

You think we're stupid? You think we're
gonna open these gates? Hahahahaha!

Gabrielle's face goes very still. Then she suddenly launches herself at the gates, apparently intent on taking them in a single assault.

The guards start firing, rushing to the center of the wall and yelling.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN INN CELLAR - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Xena is fighting like a cornered wolf. She is holding off two men with her sword, but a third slams her in the side, and she hangs onto the iron precariously.

XENA
Damn you!



Xena somehow holds her weight on one arm and kicks the man with her uninjured leg, while deflecting a cut from the man in front of her.

Two men already lay motionless on the floor. There is not enough room for all of them to attack her at once, the only reason Xena is still standing.

A half dozen more men rush down the stairs. They hold one of the battering rams in their arms.

Xena spots them.

RAIDER CHIEF
C'mon, boys. We'll just
ram this right up her....

Xena steels herself, releasing the iron rod and throwing herself to one side as the log comes towards her.

A huge roar suddenly erupts from behind all of them.

In mid motion, Xena is suddenly picked up by a wall of water and carried forward, smashing into the children who clutch onto her like a leather covered raft.

XENA
Whooooaaa! What in the....

CHILDREN
Aieeeee!

The water sweeps them in a whirlpool circle, and without warning, they are thrown over the raiders and propelled up the steps and out of the cellar past them.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN GATES - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Gabrielle runs full tilt at the gates yelling at the top of her lungs. The men on guard turn from her, and scramble from the wall.

GABRIELLE

Yah! Yeah! Gutless cowards!
Run! That's it!
(under her breath)
I just hope they're running
for the right reason.



Gabrielle runs right at the gates, and just as she reaches them and appears to be destined to crash bodily into them - they swing open and a wall of water rushes out, picking Gabrielle up off her feet and slinging her sideways.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Whooooaaa!

Gabrielle flings her arms out to keep from going under, and her hands hit something familiar.

She grabs hold of it, pulling Xena's body up out of the swirling water and into her arms. Xena grabs hold of Gabrielle, and they tumble through the water, as the raiders wash past them on all sides.

Xena catches hold of a passing stump and they pull themselves out of the water to lie on the side of the road as the raiders keep going, the water taking them off into the darkness away from the town.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

FADE IN:

INT. TOWN INN - PRIVATE ROOM IN THE BACK - MORNING

It is midday. The room is cheerfully lit by sunlight, and the windows are open to let in the cool breeze.

Xena is lying on the bed dressed in her shift with her bandaged leg propped up on several very fluffy pillows.



At her side is a table loaded with assorted goodies, including fruit and pastries. Xena selects a grape and consumes it.

The door opens and Gabrielle enters. She is carrying a jug of something, which she brings over to the bed. She sits down and pours something from the jug into a cup, and offers it to Xena.

GABRIELLE

This should take the edge off.

Xena sniffs the cup, then takes a sip.

XENA

Nice.

She looks at Gabrielle.

XENA

(cont'd)

Thanks. I'll just let this thing rest up a little and....



Gabrielle reaches over and covers Xena's mouth.

GABRIELLE

I had to put up with how many moons
of Xena, Warrior Hen? We're not
going anywhere until that heals.



The door bursts open, and the room is suddenly filled with children. Ziggy, Patta, and Bean come forward, the rest stay back giggling.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Hi there.

Xena studies a butterfly conveniently visible only to her outside the window.

ZIGGY

We brought you something!



Gabrielle waits for Xena to pay attention. When she doesn't, Gabrielle pokes her in the arm.

GABRIELLE

Xena.

Xena looks at the kids. Ziggy pushes forward and offers Xena a basket.

ZIGGY

It's from my folks.
They think you're cool.

Xena accepts the basket with visible embarrassment.

XENA

Thanks.

ZIGGY

I think you're cool, too.



Ziggy flings his arms around Xena and gives her a hug, while Gabrielle watches in delight.

ZIGGY

(cont'd)

(whispering)

Sorry we messed up your plan.

Xena pats him on the back.

XENA

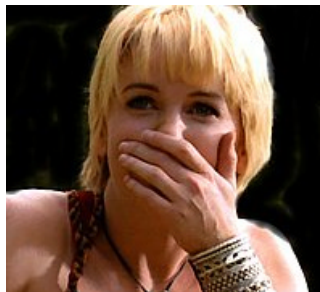
S'all right. You did your best.

Ziggy steps back and Patta comes forward. She thrusts a wrapped bundle at Xena. Xena warily takes it.

PATTA

I thought you were a
mean old crock, Weener.

Gabrielle quietly loses her mind trying not to laugh.

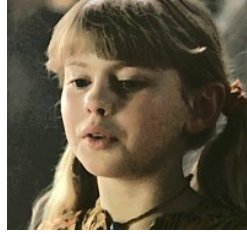


XENA

Thanks.

PATTA

But you said those guys wouldn't
hurt us, and you were right.
That was pretty cool.



Patta turns and marches away. Bean sidles up to the bed.

BEAN

(whispering)

She's just jealous 'cause the boys
all think you're prettier than she is.

Gabrielle covers her eyes. Her body is shaking with laughter.

XENA

(muttering)

Thanks.

Bean ducks her head and escapes back to the giggling group of children.

CHILDREN

Bye!

The kids leave, slamming the door behind them. For a moment, there is utter silence.
Then Xena clears her throat.

XENA

Laugh it up, blondie.



Gabrielle reaches over and strokes Xena's hair, ruffling it playfully as she finally lets the chuckles out.

GABRIELLE

They're so sweet. You really
were a hero to them, Xena.

XENA

Hmph. Yeah, but I'm damn glad
your plan worked better than mine did.

She pauses, then looks up at Gabrielle.

XENA

(cont'd)

Thanks.

Gabrielle sobers. She looks down at her hands, turning them over and examining the palms.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, well. I'm just
glad no one got hurt.

Xena watches Gabrielle's face. She puts her hand on one of Gabrielle's and clasps it.

XENA

Sometimes people do,
in war. You know that.

Gabrielle nods.

GABRIELLE

I know. But those men weren't
warriors and I knew that, but
I made them fight anyway.

She looks out the window.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I guess I have to reconcile in my heart
the fact that I was willing to risk
their lives in order to save yours.



XENA

(frowning)

Gabrielle, they were fighting for
their homes, and their families.

Gabrielle's face tenses into a pained smile.

GABRIELLE

Yeah... but I wasn't.

XENA

Fighting for their homes and families?

GABRIELLE

Mm.

Xena gives Gabrielle's hand a squeeze, and then she offers her a cookie from her basket.

XENA

No, but you were fighting for yours.



Gabrielle thinks hard about Xena's words, and then she nods slightly, taking the cookie from Xena and biting into it. She offers the other half to Xena.



Xena puts her arm around Gabrielle. Gabrielle stretches out next to Xena in the bed, and lets her head rest against Xena's shoulder.

FADE OUT.

DISCLAIMER

No small children were mortally injured in this motion picture,
but Xena lost several butch points and she is not amused.