

Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 7



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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. A MOUNTAINSIDE - LATE AFTERNOON

Xena and Gabrielle scale the side of a mountain. Xena is in the lead, and a rope attaches her to Gabrielle. They are both sweating, and the climb is a tough one.

GABRIELLE

Xena!

Xena pauses. She waits for Gabrielle to catch up with her, and steadies her against the mountainside.

XENA

What's wrong?

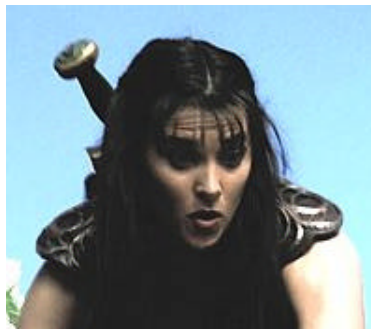
GABRIELLE

I'm hanging by my toenails off the side of a mountain. Are you sure we've got to climb all the way up here?

Xena peers down the slope.

XENA

Only if you want to avoid traveling on the Roman trade road.
Feeling lucky today?



Gabrielle sighs. She starts climbing again.

GABRIELLE

No. But Romans are not on my to-do list this moon either. Let's go.

Xena helps her up to a new handhold.

XENA

View from the top's worth it.

GABRIELLE

Promise?



XENA

Promise.

Gabrielle groans, but keeps climbing.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

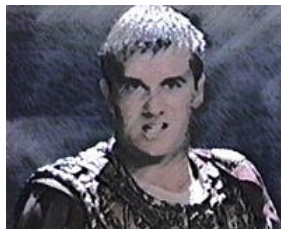
A double column of mounted Roman soldiers marches down the road. Between them is a line of captives, chained together, with the first and the last man also chained to the first and last set of horses in the column.

The prisoners are all young men, healthy, and in relatively good condition. Some are dressed in typical Greek clothing, but others wear foreign gear. The last man in line stumbles, and pulls against the horse. The soldier riding the horse lashes him in the back with his riding crop. The man jerks upright, and looks at him.

The Roman soldier raises his crop again.

ROMAN SOLDIER

Keep walking, scum! Or I'll gut you
and you'll drag the rest of the way!



The man puts his head down reluctantly and catches up with the line. The soldier laughs.

ROMAN SOLDIER

(Cont'd)

Oh, you'll make fine gladiators, all right.

(beat)

Gladiator BAIT.

The column moves on.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - EVENING

On a promontory overlooking the road there is a cave. In front of the cave a fire is burning merrily, heating a pot that is giving off the scent of venison stew.

Xena and Gabrielle are inside the cave. Gabrielle is lying on their spread out furs on her stomach, completely naked. Xena is giving her a backrub.

XENA

See? It's not so bad up here, is it?

Gabrielle's eyes are closed, and she has a blissful smile on her face.

GABRIELLE

Mmm.

Xena studies the body under her hands.

XENA

Nice scenery.



GABRIELLE

Uh huh.

XENA

(chuckling)

Ready for dinner?

Slowly, Gabrielle stretches and rolls over. She puts her hands behind her head and crosses her ankles.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, I am. How about you?

Xena slowly looks Gabrielle up and down. Xena grins. Then she hears something and she lifts her head to listen closer.

XENA

Grr.

GABRIELLE

What is it?



XENA

Soldiers.

Xena jumps up to go check it out. Gabrielle's eyes narrow.

GABRIELLE

They won't be when I
get through with them.

Gabrielle gets up, puts on her shift, and follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - NIGHT

Xena and Gabrielle creep to the edge of the rocks and peer over them. They look down to see a legion of Roman troops arriving in a clearing that is just off the road they climbed up to escape.

GABRIELLE

Whoa! Those kinds of soldiers!



XENA

Yeah. Good thing we got
up here when we did.

Xena and Gabrielle watch as the soldiers light a huge bonfire.

GABRIELLE

Look at that. They must be
burning half the forest.

XENA

Romans. Go figure. C'mon.
Let's get outta here.

GABRIELLE

You don't have to tell me
twice. Romans. Ugh.

Several soldiers push the captives past the bonfire. One man stumbles, his footwear tripping him up. He falls to his knees, and the soldiers pounce on him, kicking him viciously. One pulls his head back and threatens him with a raised short sword. The captive's face is outlined in the fire.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)
Xena!

XENA

I see him.

GABRIELLE

Beowulf! But how!



Xena's face takes on a grim look.

XENA

I don't know. But I bet
we'll be finding out.



FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - MORNING

The Roman column marches down the road. From a tree overlooking the road, Xena and Gabrielle watch. They move along the branches, hopping from tree to tree to follow the soldiers.

XENA

They're moving fast.



GABRIELLE

Looks like the slaves are all in good shape. They're all men, aren't they?

Xena leaps up and presses her body up to the next branch, shading her eyes to look. She drops back down.

XENA

Yeah. My guess is they're bound for the gladiator pits.

GABRIELLE

How can you tell?



XENA

They're all the right age, and the right size. Either that, or the emperor is putting together a set of matching litter bearers.

GABRIELLE

Great. We'd better ambush them before they get to the main road. We're close to Rome, and we'll never get to Beowulf if they reach the city.

XENA

Already thought of that.

Gabrielle walks along a branch. She gets to the end, and it sways under her. Xena reaches out to grab Gabrielle. Gabrielle grins, and makes the branch bend more, then she crouches and lets the branch launch her up. She tumbles in mid air, and successfully lands on a branch of the next tree. She looks back at Xena, and strikes a triumphant pose.

Xena follows, letting the branch throw her into a fancy triple flip with a half twist. She lands next to Gabrielle and smirks.

GABRIELLE

Show off.



XENA

Look who's talking.

They continue on after the soldiers.

GABRIELLE

At least you can't call me
Little Klutz anymore.

XENA

I never called you that.
(beat)
Did I?

Gabrielle clears her throat.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Must have been after that
time you tripped over the pig.



GABRIELLE

What pig?

XENA

Maybe it was a goat....

Gabrielle jumps to the next tree, shaking her head.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - LATE AFTERNOON

The Romans approach a narrow pass. The rock walls rise above them on either side, but the soldiers seem unconcerned. High on the top of the pass, Xena and Gabrielle wait, huge pile of rocks ready next to them.

GABRIELLE

Hope this works.

I'm tired of moving rocks.

(looking)

Ready?

Xena watches the column.

XENA

They'll have to go single file through that gap. We'll wait for the first column to go through, then push.

GABRIELLE

Uh huh. So that only leaves twenty soldiers for us to fight.



XENA

Right.

Gabrielle looks at Xena, who seems as unconcerned as the soldiers below.

GABRIELLE

You're in that mood again, aren't you?

XENA

What mood?

GABRIELLE

That fighting mood.
You've got that look in your eye.

XENA

Gabrielle, don't be ridiculous. We've got
to stop those Romans, and free the
slaves. That's all I'm thinking about.

Xena watches the soldiers. She measures angles, and adjust a few rocks. She sticks her thumb up and peers at it, checking the slope. She chuckles.

GABRIELLE

Uh huh. I know you, Xena.
You just like beating up Romans.



Xena pretends not to hear. She crawls closer to the edge, and puts her hands on the rocks.

XENA

Get ready.

Gabrielle scoots up behind Xena, and puts her shoulder against the rocks.

XENA

(Cont'd)

One... Two....

A horn sounds. Both Gabrielle and Xena drop flat on the ground in reflex.

GABRIELLE

What was that?



XENA

Trouble.

GABRIELLE

(under her breath)
Oh, that's different.

Xena crawls over to the other edge of the pass and peers over. Gabrielle joins her. They both look down, then at each other in consternation.

XENA

So much for that plan. One wrong roll of the rocks and we've got a problem.



Gabrielle looks down. On the road leading away from the path spreads a huge number of columns. It is the entire Roman army, heading home.

GABRIELLE

Now what? Xena, we'll never get him out of that crowd!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN PLAIN - JUST OUTSIDE THE CITY OF ROME - NIGHT

The army is encamped on the plain. Their tents, torches, and campfire dot the spare ground. Sentries patrol the perimeter, appearing efficient and alert.

In the scrub on the fringe of the army, Xena and Gabrielle are spending the night sheltered under a bush. It's cramped, has prickles, and they can't make a fire.

However, they are seated on their folded sleeping furs together, and Xena has her arms wrapped around Gabrielle. They do not appear all that uncomfortable.

GABRIELLE

Can't we try to get in there, tonight?



Xena feels Gabrielle's forehead.

XENA

That wasn't a serious question, was it?
Gabrielle, look at that army out there. We
don't even know where they put the captives.

GABRIELLE

(sighing)

I know. I just hate the thought of sneaking
into Rome. That place gives me the creeps.

(beat)

Always has.

Xena studies the army.

XENA

Why don't you stay out here? I'll sneak in
and infiltrate the gladiators, and get him out.



Gabrielle feels Xena's forehead.

GABRIELLE

That wasn't a serious question was it?

Xena, you can't just walk in there.

You think they won't recognize you?

(thinking)

But I bet I can.

Xena looks at Gabrielle. Her eyebrows go up.

XENA

You?

GABRIELLE

Yeah. I can pose as a Roman noble, from
the provinces. They won't recognize me.

(smiling)

And you can be my slave.

XENA

Oh I can, huh?

GABRIELLE

Yeah. They'd never connect
you with being a slave.



Gabrielle takes hold of Xena's earlobe, and gives it a tug.

XENA

Thanks, but no thanks.

GABRIELLE

(seriously)

Xena, think about it. If we don't have to
fight to get into the city, we've got more
time to find Beowulf and get him out
without getting all of us killed.

Xena watches the army for a long moment. She finally sighs and looks at Gabrielle.

XENA

I think you just want to finally
get to be the master.



Gabrielle points innocently at herself.

GABRIELLE

Me? It's just a logical plan, Xena!

Xena looks back out at the army. She looks again at Gabrielle. Gabrielle smiles.

XENA

All right.
(beat)
But no collars.

Gabrielle chuckles wickedly.

CUT TO:

EXT. GATES OF ROME - MORNING

The Roman army marches through the gates. They kick up a dust storm that almost obscures the walls. The guards at the gate salute as the soldiers pass, and the populace standing inside cheers. The soldiers raise their spears to acknowledge the accolade.

As the last soldier passes inside, the guards start to close the gates. They stop, however, when they hear the sound of a horse approaching.

Out of the clouds of dust, a golden mare appears. On her back is a woman in the flowing robes of a patrician, with sedate jewels at her throat. At the side of the horse, a slave is chained, dressed in plain fighting gear and shackled by the wrists to the horse's saddle. Xena is not wearing any weapons, and she had her hair pulled back into a braid.



XENA

Pah. I forgot armies smelled that bad.



GABRIELLE

Shh. What did we decide
my name was again?

XENA

You can use Phantasma.

GABRIELLE

Nah. She's got a bad reputation.

Xena and Gabrielle approach the gate. The guards watch them. Gabrielle pulls Argo II to a halt just outside the arches.

GUARD CAPTAIN

What is your business in Rome?

Gabrielle looks him right in the eye.

GABRIELLE

I am Tellus Astorias, from Lissae.
I have come here to bring my
slave to the great Coliseum.

Xena makes a sound something between a cough and a sneeze at the name.

GUARD CAPTAIN

To do what? Clean it?

Xena growls low under her breath. Gabrielle pats her on the head comfortingly.

GABRIELLE

To be a gladiator, of course.
She's the best.

The guards look Xena over. Xena does her best to look innocuous. The guards shrug at each other and laugh.

GUARD CAPTAIN

It's your drachmas, lady.

The guards open the gates, and gesture Xena and Gabrielle forward with exaggerated politeness. Gabrielle smiles sweetly at them as she rides past.

GABRIELLE

Why, thank you.
Such nice boys you are.

Gabrielle waves at the guards. The guards respond to her charm and wave back. They clear the gates, and the guards close the gates after them, with a loud, ominous crash.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. THE STREETS OF ROME - DAY

Gabrielle guides Argo II along the road. The streets are crowded, and they are given curious looks from those around them.

GABRIELLE

Romans always give me
the creeps. Why is that?



Xena looks around.

XENA

They're pretentious?
They smell bad? Caesar?
(beat)
They crucified us?

GABRIELLE

Hmm. Yeah. Maybe that was it.

Xena ducks to one side and snatches something, then returns and hands Gabrielle a small bag.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)
What's that?

XENA

Your drachmas, lady. Otherwise,
you'll be sleeping in the stables.

Gabrielle examines the leather bag, which jingles.

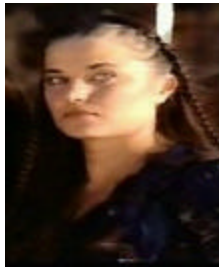
GABRIELLE

Where did you get this?

Xena gives her 'the look'. Gabrielle hastily puts the bag away in her robes, and looks around. Xena points down a pathway.

XENA

That way.



GABRIELLE

You've got some memory,
you know that?

Xena glances at the sign that says "Coliseum" with an arrow pointing the direction they are going.

XENA

Just one of my many skills.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN COLISEUM - DAY

The walls of the stadium rise above them, throwing the road into shadow. Xena and Gabrielle walk up the long ramp to the stone gates, where they are greeted by yet more guards. These guards are dressed in fine armor, however. They regard both Gabrielle on her horse, and Xena walking alongside, with evident disdain.

STADIUM GUARD

Hold. What business have you here?

Gabrielle stops Argo II.

GABRIELLE

I have brought my slave here
to be trained as a gladiator.



The guards walk forward and examine Xena. They laugh.

STADIUM GUARD

A woman? Go on with you, and take her to the harlot's house for some useful instruction.

Xena's hands tense on the shackles. Her eyes narrow.



GABRIELLE

Hey, wait a minute! I'm not kidding. Listen, I paid good drachmas for her, and the guy who sold her said she was a good fighter. Honest!

The guards laugh.

STADIUM GUARD

Citizen, you got taken. Go on and see if you can get some of it back at the slave auction.

Gabrielle hears the iron start to creak.

GABRIELLE

Now, c'mon! You guys can't just send us away! I've come all the way from Lissae just to bring my new slave here - give her a chance!

The guards roll their eyes.

STADIUM GUARD

Citizen....

GABRIELLE

C'mon, what can it hurt? Hey, she's nice and strong. Look at those legs, would you?



The guards look.

XENA

(under her breath)

C'mon a little closer, boys.
I'll give ya an eyeful.

STADIUM GUARD

Well, yeah, but....

GABRIELLE

And look at these shoulders! I'm sure
she'll be great as a gladiator, don't you?

Gabrielle slaps Xena on the back. The guards tire of the scene. They shrug.

STADIUM GUARD

Okay, fine. Give me her tether.
Let's just get this over with.

Gabrielle unclips the Xena's chain from her saddle and hands it over. She lets her hand brush over Xena's head on the way back. She leans over.

GABRIELLE

(whispering)

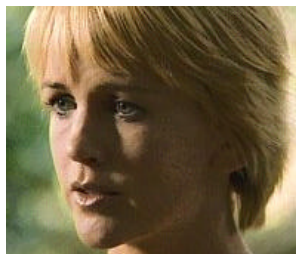
Good luck.

Xena pats Gabrielle on the calf before she is lead away by the guards. Gabrielle watches until they disappear through the gates.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Please be careful.



The gates close behind Xena and the guards. Gabrielle is left alone on the ramp. Slowly she turns Argo II around, and moves off.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PITS - DAY

A ramp descends into a dark, noisome space full of gladiators in training. It is the basement, essentially, of the stadium and there is little light. The floor is covered in dirty straw, and all around are square stalls where fighter wannabe's are hunkering.

From the top of the ramp, the guards throw Xena into this pit. She hits the floor and rolls, getting her feet under her and standing up. The guards laugh, and leave, slamming the door behind them.

Xena looks around. She is noticed by the slaves nearest her, and immediately attracts attention.

MALE SLAVE

Ooo... Look what
we've got here, boys!

Xena steps back and realizes she's being surrounded.

XENA

Hold it.

MALE SLAVE #2

We've been asking for action.
Here it is! C'mere, baby!

XENA

You don't wanna do that.



MALE SLAVE #1

Oh, yes we do. You know how long it's
been down here with all these MEN?

The two men lunge for Xena. Xena snaps the iron chains shackling her wrists and whirls the ends, using them as a weapon and wrapping them around the men's necks. She yanks hard, and they spin like tops, cracking their heads together with a very annoying noise. The men both collapse to the floor. Xena faces the rest of the slaves, arrested in mid motion across from her.

XENA

Anyone else?



Xena twirls her chains suggestively. The rest of the slaves slowly back off, tiptoeing away from her. Xena points at them.

XENA

(Cont'd)

YOU are all NOT my type.
So back off.

Xena walks forward, stepping over the two unconscious men. She starts searching the stalls one by one.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN NOBLE'S CLASSY INN - DAY

A tall, blond woman in white robes leads Gabrielle through a marble and stone hallway into a high ceilinged, light and airy room.

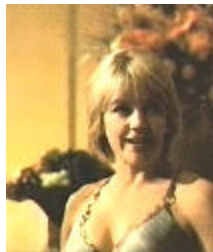
ROMAN INNKEEPER

Will this do, citizen? We have another,
but it's a bit smaller, I fear.

Gabrielle looks around.

GABRIELLE

I'll manage. Thanks.

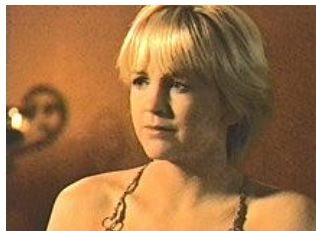


The woman ducks her head, and leaves. Gabrielle walks around the large chamber, her fingers brushing over the silken wall hangings. Against one wall is a large, soft bed.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Well. This sure beats the bushes.



Gabrielle stops, as she hears voices nearby. She walks out onto the small balcony and listens.

PATRICIAN

(V.O.)

Darling, I know you've worn that
before, but after all, it's just a party.

PATRICIAN #2

(V.O.)

Yes, darling, but Marielius will be there,
and you know I've been trying to...
Oh, hello there!

Gabrielle has been spotted. She joins the two other women near a fountain in the center of the courtyard. They, too, are dressed in togas, and wear jewels at their throats and ears.

PATRICIAN

You're new here, aren't you? I am
Seleinia, wife of Gaius Alaranus.

PATRICIAN #2

And I am Carolia, wife of no one.
(beat)
Yet.

GABRIELLE

It's nice to meet you. My name is Tellus...
Tellus Astorias. Do you live in Rome?

SELEINIA

Live here? Eek. No, my dear. We're here
for the games, of course. And you?

GABRIELLE

The games?



CAROLIA

The gladiator contests. Big men, lots of
sweat, blood flying across the Coliseum

GABRIELLE

Oh! Yeah! What a coincidence! I'm here
for that too. I have a slave I just entered.

Selenia and Carolia exchange significant glances.

SELEINIA

Really? How interesting! Why we're just on our way to a party to celebrate the contents. Come with us, Tellus!

CAROLIA

Yes, do! You must. I'm sure the others would love to... meet you!

The two nobles take hold of Gabrielle's arms and start to guide her off.

GABRIELLE

Um... okay. Sure. I love a good party.



Gabrielle allows them to escort her away.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PIT - LATER THAT DAY

Two Roman gladiator trainers enter, carrying an armful of short swords each. The first one takes out a stick and beats a gong next to the door loudly.

Xena covers her ears. She is standing near the back of the chamber, having had no success in finding Beowulf.

ROMAN TRAINER

All right, you scum! Everyone over here, and take one of these. Try not to cut your hands off while you're at it!

The warrior wannabe's shuffle forward and take swords from the two men. They obviously don't much know what to do with them. Xena is one of the last to take a sword.

ROMAN TRAINER

(Cont'd)

Hey! What's a woman doing in here! They didn't tell me they let your kind in!

XENA

Just my luck.



ROMAN GUARD

Want me to take her outta here?

Xena decides to turn on the charm. She saunters over and chucks the trainer under the chin with the hilt of her practice sword.

XENA

Oh, I'm sure a little old girl like me won't cause you any trouble. I just like to watch you boys... play.

ROMAN TRAINER

Uh....

XENA

You don't mind, do you? Nice big strong man like you? Hmm?



ROMAN TRAINER

You can stay. I'll train you myself.

XENA

I knew it was my lucky day.

The gladiators all start to mill around, waving the short swords. Xena ducks gracefully and avoids getting an unfortunate haircut. She continues to look around, searching the men's faces. The trainer catches her arm.

ROMAN TRAINER

You ready to learn from the best, sweetheart?

Xena smiles at him.

XENA

Oh yeah. Teach me, big boy.

The trainer grins broadly and leads her off.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN NOBLE'S CLASSY INN PARTY ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

The room is full of Roman nobles, drinking wine and lying to each other. In modern times, it would be remarkably like a business cocktail party, only with monochrome fashions and no pigs in blankets.

Gabrielle is standing near one of the windows, sipping a glass of wine, and appearing to listen to a large, blustering man in front of her speak.

BLUSTERING ROMAN

I tell you, Tellus, it's all in the wrist!
The wrists! My man's got the best of 'em!
He can break rocks with his wrists!

GABRIELLE

Wow. That's a really useful skill.
What about his ankles?



BLUSTERING ROMAN

Ankles? Ankles? What about 'em?

GABRIELLE

Well, my slave can break a
man's neck with her ankles.

BLUSTERING ROMAN

You don't say. Really?



The blustering man looks around carefully.

BLUSTERING ROMAN

(Cont'd)

Keep that quiet, citizen.
You and I can profit from it!

GABRIELLE

Profit? What do you mean?

The man looks around again, then motions Gabrielle to follow him.

BLUSTERING ROMAN

Shh. Let's talk.

Gabrielle also looks around, then follows the man through a nearby doorway.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PITS - EARLY EVENING

The gladiators in training are paired off against each other, and each has a short sword. The trainers are attempting to teach them basic moves.

Xena stands nearby, going through the motions with her opponent without paying much attention to him. She blocks his feeble strikes easily, but does not try to best him. He swings against her, and she steps out of the way, then she lifts the short sword and takes a clumsy swipe at him, which unexpectedly connects, ringing his bell.

XENA

Sorry.

GLADIATOR-IN-TRAINING

No. I'm learning! I'm learning.

Xena is distracted by a yell, barely heard from beyond the wall. She listens intently, then she starts nudging her opponent towards the wall.

GLADIATOR-IN-TRAINING

(Cont'd)

Okay... Okay...
To the right... To the right.....



Xena blocks the man's strike and pushes him back.

Xena leans closer to the wall. She can hear voices, but not clearly enough to hear the words. There is a voice she thinks is familiar.



ROMAN GUARD

You idiot!

Xena turns, to see the guard beating on her opponent. Her push threw the man against the guard, and now he's paying for it.

GLADIATOR-IN-TRAINING

Ow! Wait! It was an accident!

The guard swats him on the back of his head with the sword, then he knocks him down and stands over him, raising his weapon and laughing.

Xena reacts without hesitation or thought. She blocks the soldier's sword and roundhouse kicks him back. The soldier staggers, then comes at her, furious. He swings his sword at her. Xena neatly deflects it, rolling her sword over her forearm and ducking under the soldier's swing. Xena boots him in the rear.

The guard whirls and yells in outrage, leaping at her.

Xena stands her ground. She waits for the attack, then disarms the soldier easily, whirling and gracefully nailing the guard in the head with her elbow, sending him down and out.

XENA

He said it was an accident.



The guard rolls over and drops his sword.

A loud gong rings out. Everyone freezes. The Roman trainer points slowly at Xena.

ROMAN TRAINER

You.

The slaves move nervously back from Xena. The guards surround her.

ROMAN TRAINER

(Cont'd)

You are not what you seem.
I think we need to find out the
truth of who you really are.

Xena takes a step and puts her back against the wall.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. ROMAN NOBLE'S CLASSY INN - PRIVATE ROOM

Gabrielle sits with her new friend. Several other Roman nobles have joined them. The room is large, but there are curtains over the windows, and a general air of secrecy about the chamber.

GABRIELLE

Wait a minute. Let me get this straight.
The fights are rigged?



BLUSTERING ROMAN

No! That would be cheating!
(beat)

That is to say, if we knew about
it, which we don't, right?

CROWD

Right.

An older man sits down right next to Gabrielle. He stares at her curiously. Gabrielle doesn't seem to notice.

BLUSTERING ROMAN

Ah! Here's Precenius!
Let's go find out the latest odds!

The crowd all clusters around a man who has just entered. Gabrielle remains where she is, her brow furrowed in thought.

GABRIELLE

This doesn't make sense.

The older man who sat next to her leans closer.

OLDER ROMAN

No more so than finding you here, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle jumps, startled at being recognized. She studies the man carefully, but doesn't recognize him.

GABRIELLE

Who are you?

OLDER ROMAN

You don't remember me, but I remember you. What is your game this time? Perhaps I should make myself some extra drachmas by telling the authorities who it is that sits in their parlor?

GABRIELLE

You're right. I don't remember you.



OLDER ROMAN

Many who saw the champion of Rome brought down have left, moved to other parts of the Empire. But I remained, and I ask again, what is your business here?

Gabrielle realizes she's in big trouble.

GABRIELLE

It's personal this time. A friend of mine was captured to become a gladiator. I'm just trying to help him.

OLDER ROMAN

(smiling)

Of yours? Yours alone, Gabrielle?

The man looks expectantly at Gabrielle, as though he knows something and is just waiting for her to confirm it. Gabrielle thinks fast, and decides to go along.

GABRIELLE

Xena's and mine.



OLDER ROMAN

I thought as much. That would be worth many drachmas indeed. She is remembered here, in certain circles.

Gabrielle looks around, but they are being ignored. She has a queasy feeling in her stomach that does not seem to be related to the conversation, and at once she is worried about Xena.

GABRIELLE

How many more drachmas would you get if you just bet the right way?

OLDER ROMAN

(cautiously)

What do you mean?

GABRIELLE

Xena's in the pits. They don't know it. You know her. You could bet on her, and....



OLDER ROMAN

Ahh. She is a fine fighter.

GABRIELLE

Yes, she is... But they think she's just a raw recruit. So....

OLDER ROMAN

That... could be a lucrative bet, yes. Hmm.

Gabrielle gets up, feeling a sense of urgency.

GABRIELLE

Think about it. I'd love to stay and wait, but I've got to go.

OLDER ROMAN

Don't be so hasty, Gabrielle. We're not finished here... I want to know more.

Gabrielle removes the man's hand from her arm.

GABRIELLE

I can't tell you more.

OLDER ROMAN

Then perhaps the authorities would
be interested in what you have said.

Somehow, Gabrielle knows she's out of time. There is some place else she needs to be.
She faces the older man and her demeanor changes.

GABRIELLE

(sharply)

Then turn me in if you want. Turn us both in.
I'm sure the money will keep you in wine
for a quarter moon. But I have to go.

(beat)

NOW.



Gabrielle bolts from the room. The older man watches her leave, his face thoughtful.

OLDER ROMAN

So, Xena, Rome calls to you yet
again. Have you not learned YET?

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PIT - NIGHT

On a pallet on the floor, near the back of one of the stalls lays a battered, beaten figure. It is Xena. Her eyes are closed, and there is a bruise across the side of her face. Blood is evident, leaking from her nose and ears. One of the other trainees kneels next to her, cautiously dabbing at the blood with a bit of cloth.



Several other trainees stand by, watching. They whisper among themselves.

Footsteps ring out. Two people approach, and their voices grow louder as they do so.

GABRIELLE

(V.O.)

Look, just get out of my way. It's my slave, and I've got every right to....

Gabrielle appears in the doorway to the stall, and spots Xena. She stops speaking and gasps. Behind her is one of the guards.



ROMAN GUARD

I told you, lady.

Now wouldja get out of... ow!

Gabrielle turns and belts the guard in the chops violently and unexpectedly. The guard falls down.

GABRIELLE

Jerk. I told you to stay out of my way.

Gabrielle turns and rushes into the stall. The trainees back away from her in confusion. Gabrielle drops to her knees beside Xena's unconscious form. Instinctively, she reaches for Xena, touching the bruises on her face.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

What happened?



No one wants to answer her. The trainee who was tending Xena sits back on his heels. Gabrielle grabs his arm.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I asked you a question.

The trainee puts down the cloth he was using.

TRAINEE

She got too uppity. The guards
all ganged up on her.

GABRIELLE

Uppity?

Gabrielle picks up the cloth, and pulls a bucket of water closer to her.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

(under her breath)

My Xena... uppity? Never happen.

The trainee watches.

TRAINEE

She knocked a guard down. Just
like you just did. I think they'll beat
you up too, so you better hurry.

Gabrielle winces at the damage done to her partner.

GABRIELLE

They're not going to beat me up.

(looking around)

Why don't you all go find
something else to do?

TRAINEE

But there is nothing else to do.

GABRIELLE

(gritting teeth)

FIND SOMETHING.

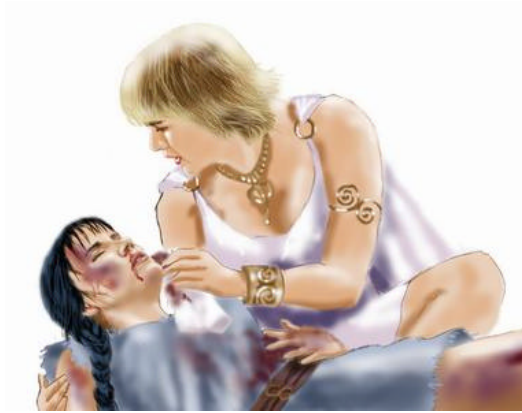


Gabrielle stares at all of them. Muttering, the trainees all wander off, leaving Gabrielle alone with Xena. Gabrielle makes a sound of dismay, as she cleans up Xena's wounds.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I can't leave you alone for
a blasted minute, can I?



Behind Gabrielle, the guard crawls off into the darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PIT - XENA'S STALL - NIGHT

It is later. It is very quiet in the pits, except for snoring. A few torches flutter nearby. Xena's injuries have been cared for, and Gabrielle sits in the straw next to the pallet, waiting.

Xena stirs. Gabrielle straightens up and looks intently at her. Xena wakes up, and sees Gabrielle.

XENA

Hmm....

Now is **that** a sight for sore eyes.



Gabrielle is not amused.

GABRIELLE

Xena, what happened? Why did you
let them do this to you? You said you....

XENA

Shh.



Xena takes hold of Gabrielle's hand.

XENA

(Cont'd)

(lowering voice)

I had to. They were convinced I was a ringer, and I had to show them I wasn't.

GABRIELLE

(outraged)

Like this? Couldn't you have just talked to them?

Xena pulls her a little closer.

XENA

No. Listen to me. I heard Beowulf's voice behind that far wall. Some of the slaves must have been separated and put there.

GABRIELLE

I know. It's a scam. They must have put the good fighters with him. The nobles are betting on those guys.

Xena puts her head back down on the pallet.

XENA

Ah. So that's the deal.



They both fall silent, as marching steps approach. Gabrielle ducks down, and a squad of soldiers marches past. They don't look into the stall. Xena and Gabrielle remain quiet until they disappear. Gabrielle leans closer.

GABRIELLE

Xena, one of the men recognized me.

XENA

Those men?

GABRIELLE

No. One of the nobles. I... he wanted to turn me in for money. I told him he'd make more betting on you.



XENA

He'd get more than money for turning us both in.

GABRIELLE

I know. I think he knows that.

XENA

Great. He could blow this all any minute.

GABRIELLE

I'll stay here. It's too risky going back to the inn.



XENA

(smiling)

You'll get your pretty robes dirty.



GABRIELLE

They've already got your
blood all over them. I'll cope.

Xena winces. She touches her head.

XENA

Ouch.

GABRIELLE

You look like Argo kicked you.

XENA

Argo would never kick me.
(beat)
Least it'll help my disguise.

Gabrielle peers over the stall divider. More guards are milling in the doorway.

GABRIELLE

How about next time you just
let me draw a beard and
moustache on you, okay?
(beat)
What's the plan?
Can we get out of here now?

Xena hitches herself up on an elbow and looks around.

XENA

Not with Beowulf. Our best bet is to
create a distraction during the matches
tomorrow, and escape that way.



GABRIELLE

That doesn't sound promising.

XENA

Got a better idea?

Gabrielle doesn't. She picks up her cloth and washes Xena's face. Xena watches her with an affectionate expression.

GABRIELLE

What if that guy does turn us in?

XENA

We'll have to play it by ear.

GABRIELLE

I hate that.

XENA

I know. Can you get in to see Beowulf?
We could use some help tomorrow.



Gabrielle seems reluctant.

GABRIELLE

I guess I can. Will you promise
not to get uppity again?

Xena chuckles. It is not a nice sound.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

What should I tell him?

XENA

Just tell him to be ready.
We won't have much time.

GABRIELLE

All right. I'll go at dawn.

Gabrielle finishes her cleaning. She leans forward and kisses Xena on the lips.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PIT - MORNING

The trainees are herded into the center of the room. Xena stands near the back, as much in the shadows as possible. Her face is still covered in cuts and bruises.

ROMAN TRAINER

Well, well. Your training is over.

The trainees mutter among themselves.

TRAINEE

Over? We just started!

ROMAN TRAINER

Consider yourselves lucky. Today
you will die for the glory of Rome.

The sound of a gathering crowd is heard.

TRAINEE

What?

ROMAN TRAINER

Each one of you will be matched in
the arena today to the death.
Make yourselves ready.

The trainer leaves. The trainees mill around in panic. One of the guards pushes some of the trainees around and laughs.

ROMAN GUARD

Anyone wanna volunteer
to be the first to die?

Xena steps out of the shadows.

XENA

I do.



Everyone turns and looks at her. Xena smiles.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PIT - DAY

The trainees all stand in line, chained to the walls on either side of them. Xena is in front. Guards stand on either side on a walkway above the trainees, pointing weapons at them.

Xena is in the front of the line. The trainees are terrified. They are whimpering like puppies. Xena finally turns around and faces them.

XENA

That's not gonna help you.

TRAINEE

Nothing will help us.
We're gonna die!

Xena looks up at the guards. They are not really paying attention.

XENA

You want to live?



TRAINEE

Of course!

XENA

Then shut up, and tell them
all in back of you to shut up.

The trainees all lean forward, and surprisingly, shut up.

TRAINEE

Well?

Xena checks the guards. They are peering out the door at something in the stadium.

XENA

When I get out there, I'll knock off
my opponent, then open the gates.
You want to live? Run out and
make all the noise you can.

TRAINEE

What?

XENA

You heard me.



TRAINEE #2

What happens when you
just go out there and die?

XENA

That won't happen.

TRAINEE

Yeah? Those guards sure beat you down.

XENA

You want to live? Trust me.



The trainees all groan.

TRAINEE

Like we've got a choice?

The guards return, and one of the kicks the trainee in the head.

ROMAN GUARD

Shut up, pig scum!

The guard goes to kick the man again, Xena loops the chains on her wrist around his foot and jerks hard. The man's feet are pulled out from under him and he lands on his butt very hard, his legs flailing in the air. Xena unwraps the chain just as another guard rushes over to see what happened.

ROMAN CAPTAIN

Hey! You sleeping on the job?
Get up, lunk head!

ROMAN GUARD

But... but....

The guard gets up. He glares at the trainees. They smile back at him. The guard storms off. The trainee taps Xena on the shoulder.

TRAINEE

Okay. We'll try it.
What the heck, right?

XENA

Right.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PITS - OTHER SIDE - DAY

Gabrielle is sneaking cautiously down a stone corridor. It is dark, but cleaner than the side Xena was in, and there are regularly spaced torches on either side of the hall.

She pauses and listens. Male voices can be heard, but not understood. Gabrielle frowns, and moves on. She keeps close to the wall, and watches carefully around her.

Ahead of her, there is an arch. Gabrielle stops next to it and pokes her head very slowly around the edge. She steps through.

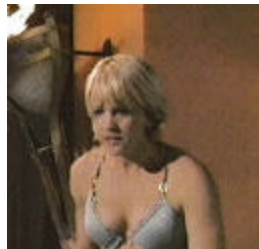
CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PITS - OTHER SIDE - BALCONY - DAY

Gabrielle is on a stone balcony. She is looking down at a large room, with a sand floor. There is a group of gladiators standing there. One of them is Beowulf.

GABRIELLE

Gotcha.



A hand falls on Gabrielle's shoulder, and she jumps and turns, to find the Guard she belted behind her.

ROMAN GUARD

And I have you.

Gabrielle pulls free and starts to run past him, but the guard grabs Gabrielle and they struggle. They move out off the balcony and back into the corridor.

GABRIELLE

Look, I'm really sorry about hitting you.

ROMAN GUARD

Not near as sorry as you will be.
Impostor! I know who you really are!
My captain will give me gold for you!

The guard pulls out his sword and tries to hit Gabrielle with it. Gabrielle grabs his arm, turns, and pulls him over her shoulder. She snatches his spear from his other hand and as he gets up, she faces him with it.

GABRIELLE

You don't know what you're
getting yourself into.



The guard attacks Gabrielle. Gabrielle defends herself with the spear. They spar in silence, their boots scraping against the sand.

ROMAN GUARD

Surrender, wench!

GABRIELLE

Kiss my butt, scumbag.

Gabrielle goes on the offensive, stabbing the guard in the arm with the spear, then hitting him with the butt of the spear across the chin. The guard bounces off the wall, then he grips his sword with both and charges at Gabrielle.

Gabrielle ducks under his arm, and pushes him hard, sending him head first into the opposite wall. The guard slumps to the floor.

Gabrielle stands over him, breathing hard. The man lies unconscious at her feet. She puts the point of his spear against his throat and pauses.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I'm sorry.

(beat)

But there are lives I value more than yours.

Gabrielle clenches her teeth and leans on the spear. The spear penetrates the guard's throat, cutting his jugular and killing him.



With a jerk, Gabrielle pulls the spear out. She looks around and spots a small alcove. She takes hold of the guard's armor, and starts to drag him towards it.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PITS - DAY

The crowd sound is much larger now. The guards swing open a set of gates, opening the way for the trainees to see into the stadium. They are still chained, so they can't move forward. The light flooding in blinds them. Xena puts her forearm over her eyes, as the sun hits her.

ROMAN CAPTAIN

Watch the little warm up.

The trainees look out into the stadium. They can see the crowd in the stands. In the center of the open space pace three lions. The trainees stir uneasily.

Xena watches as a man is thrown into the arena. He is dressed in rags, and has long hair.

XENA

Who is that? What has he done?



ROMAN CAPTAIN

A traitor. You need to know no more.

The lions spot the man and roar. The man starts to run.

XENA
(under her breath)
No! Stay still!

The lions give chase. The man panics and runs towards the opening where the trainees are. As he reaches the gates, the guards laugh and fend him off with their spears. The man frantically tries to get past them, but as he slips, the lions catch him and pull him back.

TRAITOR
Help me! Help!!!! I'm innocent!

The lions rip his throat out, silencing him.

The crowd roars its approval.

Xena stands very still. Her hands close on the iron shackles chaining her to the wall.

ROMAN CAPTAIN
No race! Get a faster one in there! He got 'em too fast!!!

The lions drag the man to the center of the arena, and rip him to pieces.

Xena watches impassively. One of the guards boots her in the shoulder.

ROMAN GUARD
Wanna take a shot?

Xena looks up at him.

XENA
Sure. After you.



The guards laugh. They whistle at the lions.

ROMAN GUARD
Here, kitty kitty! Got some fresh meat for ya!

There is nothing blocking the lions from the trainees. The lions start to trot towards the gates. The crowd cheers at this unexpected attraction.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PITS - OTHER SIDE - DAY

Gabrielle slips into the balcony again. She is wearing the guard's armor, which is only slightly too large for her. She settles his helmet on her head and walks down the steps towards the gladiators below.

She reaches the bottom and walks past two other guards. They turn and look at her, then after a moment, turn back.

GUARD #1

Hiring 'em younger and younger, ain't they?

GUARD #2

You can say that again.
Bet that one doesn't even shave.

Gabrielle keeps walking. She can hear the roar of the crowd getting louder and louder as she pushes her way between the gladiators towards the front of the room. She stops just behind Beowulf, looking outside the gates just as the lions rip the traitor to pieces.

BEOWULF

(under his breath)
Animals.

Gabrielle touches Beowulf's arm. He starts and turns, raising his hand to shield himself from the expected blow. He stops, and looks closer, through the bars in Gabrielle's helmet.

BEOWULF

(Cont'd)
G...

Gabrielle puts a finger to her lips. She takes hold of his arm, and pulls him roughly backwards, away from the other guards and the gladiators. He follows her. The guards watch them with bored amusement, then turn to watch the lions feast.

BEOWULF

(Cont'd)
Gabrielle!



GABRIELLE

Shh.

Gabrielle gives him a cuff on the chest.

BEOWULF

What are you doing in here?
This is madness!

GABRIELLE

We prefer to think of it as acting for the greater good. We need to get you out of here!

BEOWULF

You're risking your life!

GABRIELLE

Yes, and you're making it worse
by arguing. Listen to me!



Beowulf leans closer. He drinks in Gabrielle's presence with amazement.

BEOWULF

I'm listening.

GABRIELLE

Xena's going into the arena. When she's
there, she's going to start a riot.

BEOWULF

Boy, she hasn't changed, has she?

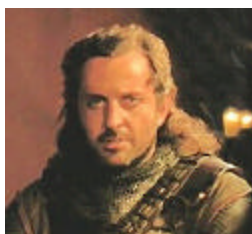
Gabrielle smiles, despite the situation.

GABRIELLE

She says our best chance to get out of here
is in whatever confusion she creates.

BEOWULF

All right. Whatever I can do to help, I will.



Gabrielle pats his arm.

GABRIELLE
Good. Good luck.

Gabrielle starts to leave.

BEOWULF
Wait... Gabrielle!

GABRIELLE
Shh. We can talk later!



Gabrielle puts her finger to her lips, and backs away from Beowulf. He watches her until she reaches the wall, then Gabrielle turns and instead of moving to the stairs, starts to walk towards the gates.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PIT - DAY

Xena is unshackled, and the guards push her forward towards the open gates. The lions spot her and rush forward.

Instead of running, as the guards expect, Xena leaps forward and confronts the lions, meeting their roar with her own battle cry. She runs towards the oncoming lions, towards the sunlight of the arena.



CUT TO:

EXT. ARENA - DAY

The lions stop, confused at the attack. They are used to humans running from them. They turn and run away just as the guards slam the gates shut in Xena's face.

The guards move after Xena, hemming her in while the animal keepers chase the lions back into their holding pens.

ROMAN GUARD

We musta kicked the sense out of her!

Xena stops. She looks through the gates, watching the lions be captured.

ROMAN CAPTAIN

All right! Let the first one out from the other side!

The guards open the gates and push Xena out to the center of the arena. The crowd roars. A gate on the other side of the circle opens, and another gladiator is pushed out into the center.

ROMAN GUARD

Fight! Or Die!

The guard tosses Xena a short sword. Xena catches it, and faces her opponent.



It is Beowulf.

CUT TO:

INT. GLADIATOR TRAINING PITS - OTHER SIDE - DAY

Gabrielle watches, as the gates open, and she is shocked when Beowulf is grabbed and thrust out into the arena.



GABRIELLE

Damn it!

Gabrielle runs to the gate. She slips through it just before it is slammed shuts.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARENA - DAY

Xena and Beowulf face off. They talk as they trade a few warm up sword strokes.

BEOWULF

Xena. I'd say it's good to see you but....

XENA

Did Gabrielle find you?

BEOWULF

Yes. I'm supposed to go along
with whatever your plan is.

Xena swings her sword into an arc, and they circle each other.

XENA

Great.

BEOWULF

So.... What's the plan?

XENA

I win, I attack the guards, the other poor bastards
behind the gates run out, and we get past
everyone down that tunnel over there.



Beowulf examines tunnel. It is where the lions went.

BEOWULF

Do I get a vote on this plan?



XENA

No.

BEOWULF

Right.

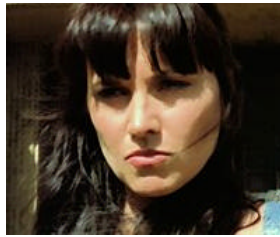
(beat)

Xena, this is a fight to the death.

They circle each other again. Xena deflects a blow, and gives one.

XENA

I know. I'll try not to hurt you too much.



BEOWULF

That's not what I... If you need to kill me,
to get Gabrielle out of here, do it.

They fence with each other, crossing swords and coming close to each other.

XENA

Nice sentiment, but I'd be in a world of
trouble if I tried it. So resign yourself to living.

They begin to fight in earnest. The crowd gets excited Beowulf and Xena put on a good show, battling furiously across the arena.

Xena leaps over Beowulf's head, and flips in mid air, then twists and lands behind him. She swats him in the rear with her sword, then ducks as he turns and sweeps his weapon at her.

BEOWULF

That was a crowd pleaser.

XENA

Not really.

They're all betting on you.

Xena jumps sideways, as Beowulf slashes directly down at her. She judges the crowd, then she reverses her direction and sweeps her sword across her body, taking his legs out from under him.

Beowulf goes down. The crowd boos.

XENA
(Cont'd)
See?

Beowulf gets up. He comes after Xena again. Xena disarms him, and his sword goes flying. The crowd boos louder.

ROMAN CAPTAIN
C'mon, you bullock! She's a girl!

BEOWULF
Easy for him to say.

Xena waits for Beowulf to get his sword, then she attacks him again. Their swords cross, and they slide down the blades towards each other. They end up nose to nose.

XENA
Fall. I'll stab past your arm into the ground. Make it look good.



Xena shoves Beowulf back, then she leaps in mid air and lets out a yell, kicking Beowulf's sword back and out of his hand. Her body hits his, and he goes down. Xena lifts her sword in triumph and drives it down into the sand.

Beowulf's body jerks and arcs twice, then settles to the ground limp.

The crowd is furious. They boo, and start throwing things at Xena. Xena turns when she hears yelling behind her. An older man is standing with the guards, pointing at her.

OLDER ROMAN
It's Xena! Get her!
The Emperor will reward you!

XENA
So much for that plan.



The guards run towards Xena. Xena grabs her sword and turns to meet them, as Beowulf jumps to his feet and joins her.

A guard bolts behind the onrushing soldiers, and reaches the gate. The guard pulls the gate open, dragging it across the sand.

The trainees all run out screaming.

BEOWULF

Your plans always work out like this?

XENA

Don't ask.

Xena ducks the first guards weapon and nearly cuts him in half with her sword. She kicks him off her blade and turns to meet a second....

... only to stop in mid blow as she recognized the guard. It is Gabrielle, who slips around to guard her back.

GABRIELLE

Time to get out of here?



XENA

Oh yeah.

The trainees crash into the guards. More guards are pouring over the walls. Patrons pour over the walls in pure excitement. The stadium is in bedlam.

Xena grabs Beowulf, and they start to back towards the dark tunnel

GABRIELLE

Xena!



XENA

What?!

GABRIELLE

That's the lion pit!

XENA

No one'll follow us. C'mon!



Xena disappears into the tunnel. After a moment, Gabrielle follows her. Beowulf takes a last look across the arena.

BEOWULF

Now I know, at last, what it is to be
caught between a rock, and a hard place.

Beowulf turns and runs after Xena and Gabrielle. They disappear into the dark tunnel.

Lions begin to roar.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. PEACEFUL HILL OUTSIDE ROME - DAY

Xena sits on a rock on the hill, looking down at the gates to the city of Rome. Argo II crops grass nearby. Xena's shoulder bears two distinct scratch marks, parallel, that go from the point of her shoulder almost to her elbow.

Gabrielle and Beowulf sit under a nearby tree. Gabrielle is still wearing her Roman armor, but she has taken off her helmet and it sits beside her on the grass. Next to the helmet lies the tip of a bushy tail, which has been cut off some large cat. Beowulf has several scratches, but appears relatively unharmed.

GABRIELLE

Some day, huh?

BEOWULF

One of the more thrilling I've had, yes.

Gabrielle picks up the lion tail and examines it.

GABRIELLE

I forgot to ask you – what brought you to these parts?

BEOWULF

Your stories, mostly. I wanted to see this part of the world.

GABRIELLE

And?

BEOWULF

And I think I'll go back home and stick to the stories from now on.

They both laugh.

BEOWULF

(Cont'd)

Thank you for coming after me, Gabrielle.
You risked a lot, and you didn't have to.

GABRIELLE

Of course we did.
(beat)

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

It's what friends do.
They stand up for each other.



Beowulf takes Gabrielle's hand and squeezes it.

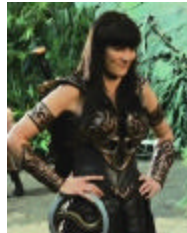
BEOWULF

Then I hope our friendship lasts forever.

They get up, and hug each other. Xena gets up and joins them, giving Beowulf a clasp on the shoulder as he turns to leave.

XENA

Have a good trip home.



GABRIELLE

Yeah. Stay away from Roman roads.

BEOWULF

That I will. Safe roads to you two
as well. Perhaps we will meet again,
on a road closer to my heart.

Beowulf shoulders a bag, then starts off down the hill. Xena and Gabrielle watch him go. Xena puts her arm around Gabrielle's shoulders, and they turn to look at Rome after Beowulf passes from view.

GABRIELLE

I do hate this place.



XENA

Me, too. Why is it all the
roads we travel lead here?

Gabrielle gazes at the city.

GABRIELLE

Maybe we need to
find some new roads.

Xena nods.

XENA

Maybe we do.



Xena and Gabrielle turn their backs on the city. They start down the hill. Gabrielle begins to unbuckle her borrowed armor, letting the pieces drop as she walks.

XENA

(Cont'd)
Got your tail?

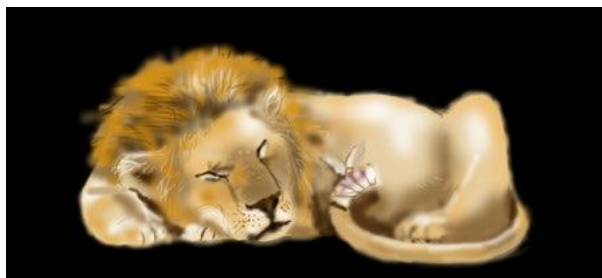
Gabrielle holds the item up.

GABRIELLE

Teach that blasted lion to
put a claw on you, won't it?

Xena chuckles, as they continue down the path.

FADE OUT.



DISCLAIMER

No animals were harmed in the making of this motion picture,
with the slight exception of a reported missing Lyon Tale.