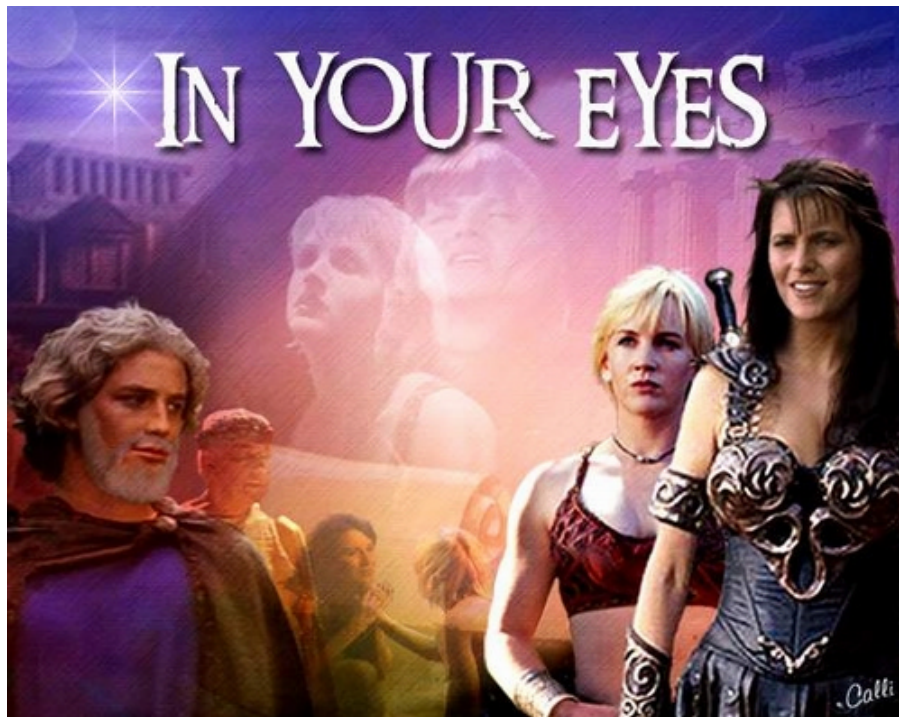


Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 8



Production #V813 – In Your Eyes

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. MEADOW - SUNRISE

It is a beautiful mountain meadow with a profusion of flowers of every color of the rainbow, their heads bobbing in the gentle, spring breeze. The air is filled with birdsong and the fresh scent of growing things.

Gabrielle stands atop a very gentle hill, watching the sun as it comes into view in all its radiant splendor.

Xena sits cross-legged in the center of the meadow, her hands resting palms up loosely on her thighs. Her eyes are closed, and she appears not even to be breathing so deep is her meditative trance. By her side is a small bow and a quiver of expertly made arrows.

In various places around the large meadow... tied around the thick stalk of a tall flower, in the high branches of the meadow's lone tree, pinned under a rock... are fluttering scraps of brightly colored fabric.

Once the sun has fully cleared the horizon, Gabrielle smiles and turns, looking down at her statue-like partner. Her smile brightens and warms as she heads back down the tiny rise.

Hearing Gabrielle approach, Xena also smiles, though her eyes remain closed and her body still.

XENA

Ready?



GABRIELLE

When you are.

XENA

Close your eyes.

GABRIELLE

They're closed.

XENA

And... now.

Opening her eyes, Gabrielle spins to face the first piece of bright fabric. Before she can even fully focus on it, it is pierced by an arrow. Quickly, she turns her attention to the second. It, too is pierced barely a split-second after she's noticed it.

And so it goes as target after target is struck by Xena's arrows the moment Gabrielle gets it into her sight.

Finally, smirking slightly, Xena relaxes her stance. Her eyes are still closed. The meadow rings with Gabrielle's delighted laughter.

GABRIELLE

That's amazing!! It's like you really were looking through my eyes!

XENA

I was.

GABRIELLE

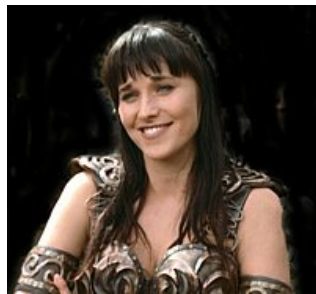
(awed)

Teach me how to do that. Please?

Xena opens her eyes and smiles fondly at the excited Gabrielle.

XENA

Well, since you asked so nicely....



Clapping her hands excitedly, Gabrielle closes the final distance between them, throws her arms around her taller partner and squeezes tightly.

GABRIELLE

Did I ever tell you you're the best?

XENA

(mischievously)

Well... I think it might have been last n—

GABRIELLE

(over Xena)

Ha. Ha.

(beat)

So, what do I have to do?

Xena takes Gabrielle's hands in her own.

XENA

Sit down here across from me.

Both women lower themselves to the ground. Xena goes back to her cross-legged position while Gabrielle assumes her more familiar Lotus position.

GABRIELLE

Ok, what next?

Xena lifts Gabrielle's hands toward her neck. Gabrielle stiffens.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

No, Xena, please. Not that.



Xena's eyes soften in understanding. Releasing Gabrielle's hands, she removes her gauntlets, then takes up her partner's hands again.

XENA

Place your fingers right here.

Right over my pulsepoint.

(beat)

Can you feel my heart beating?

GABRIELLE

(quietly)

Yes.

XENA

(softly, hypnotically)

Good. Now, close your eyes and focus on my heartbeat. Let it center you. Feel yourself relax. Focus on nothing else but the beat of my heart under your fingers....

You're not focusing, Gabrielle.

One green eye is revealed.

GABRIELLE

I know how to meditate, Xena. Besides, not that I'm not enjoying this because I am, but why are we doing it this way?

You didn't focus on my heartbeat.

Xena smiles and answers with great sincerity.



XENA

I've had the rhythm of your heart
memorized for years, my love.



A crooked, almost shy grin springs to Gabrielle's lips that is to Xena more beautiful than the sunrise.

XENA

(cont'd)

Ready to try again?

Gabrielle nods and closes her eyes.



XENA

(cont'd)

Just relax and breathe. Relax and breathe.
Focus on my heartbeat and nothing more.
Relax and breathe. Relax and breathe.

Xena's voice gradually falls off and the two sit in mutual meditative silence for several long moments.

Gabrielle finally opens her eyes. They widen. Gabrielle gasps.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

XENA

(eyes still closed)

Mm?

GABRIELLE

We... we seem to have a problem here.



FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. MEADOW - MORNING

Opening her eyes, Xena finds herself looking at...herself. This, in and of itself, isn't as shocking as it might be for another, since Xena has met several of her own doubles and is more or less used to looking at someone else and seeing her own face and form.

She then looks down, and realizes that she has become somewhat smaller and somewhat fairer than she had been previously.

She looks back up into her own eyes, which are staring at her with a mixture of perplexity and concern.

XENA

(in Gabrielle's Body)

Interesting development.



Gabrielle opens her mouth to yell, but a laugh comes out instead. She shakes her head.

GABRIELLE

(in Xena's body)

Only you, Xena.

XENA

Well, it's not as if I'm unfamiliar with this kinda thing, Gabrielle. I've been in other people's bodies before, remember. I've been in your body.

Gabrielle bites the inside of her cheek.

GABRIELLE

You know, I don't think I'm going to touch that.



Xena rolls her eyes.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

So, how do we fix this?

XENA

(thoughtfully)

Our ceremony with the Amazons must have caused this to happen. It helped to open and strengthen the bond between us. But...

GABRIELLE

You're not sure?

XENA

(vexed)

No.

GABRIELLE

All right then. What if we just try to reverse it? Do what we were doing before and see if that puts us back into our own bodies?

Xena tilts her head a little.

XENA

Might work.

GABRIELLE

(smiling)

Good. What are we waiting for?

(beat)

Wait a minute.

XENA

What?

GABRIELLE

What's that sound?

Xena looks around and finds nothing amiss.

XENA

What sound?



GABRIELLE

It's....

Reaching out, she grabs Xena's arm, which is really her own.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd, awed)

It's my heart! I can hear my heart
beating! Well, that certainly answers
a lot of questions about your hearing.

Xena merely gives a slight nod and lifts her brows in an 'I know' fashion.

XENA

All right, let's see if we
can fix this. Ready?

Gabrielle takes a deep breath, releasing it slowly as she closes her eyes and nods to Xena.

GABRIELLE

Ready.

XENA

Okay, same as before.
Relax and breathe.

Sitting together, they each begin to slip into a meditative trance.

Then Gabrielle's eyes pop back open.

GABRIELLE

Wait.

XENA

What?

GABRIELLE

(frustratedly)

That infernal buzzing sound.
Can't you hear it?



XENA

(dryly)

Since you're currently wearing my
ears, the answer would be no.

GABRIELLE

Well I can, and it's driving me nuts!
Gods, Xena, how do you stand this?

XENA

Just tune it out, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle rolls her eyes heavenward.

GABRIELLE

Tune it out she says. By the gods,
Xena, do you know what it's like
to have an entire swarm of....

With a triumphant grin, she lashes out and swipes something from mid-air.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)
Gotcha!

Opening her palm, she gazes down at a thoroughly annoyed fly that buzzes and flutters its wings at her before hightailing it out of the meadow for safer accommodations.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd, grinning)
Long arms and lightening fast
reflexes. I could get used to this.

Xena shoots her a look.

XENA

Watch it, bard. That's my
body you're wearing.



Gabrielle's grin broadens, her eyes twinkling.

GABRIELLE

I know.

Xena rolls her eyes.

XENA

Can we get back to trying to undo
this? I'm feeling a bit... cramped.

GABRIELLE

Veeeery funny.
(beat)
Ok, let's try again.

Xena nods and their eyes close once again. It is only a few seconds before Gabrielle's eyes snap open and she is on her feet. She stumbles a bit as the legs she's currently using are quite a bit longer than she's used to. Unthinking, she reaches for sais that aren't there, then straightens, frustrated.

XENA

What now?

GABRIELLE

Company, headed this way.

Xena also rises, though a bit more gracefully given that she's had experience in inhabiting Gabrielle's body. She can hear the sounds that first attracted her partner's attention, and turns to face them.

GABRIELLE

One carriage, one horse.
Not moving very fast.

XENA

Not the bad guys, then.



GABRIELLE

Right.

She shakes her head obviously trying to clear her thoughts, which are running rampant as her mind tries to sync with Xena's body.

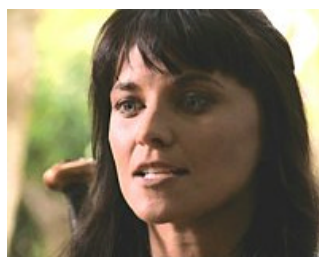
Xena places her hand on, well her own shoulder, in a calming gesture.

XENA

Don't fight it. Everything
will be all right.

GABRIELLE

I feel like every nerve is trying to
get through my... er... your skin.
How do you feel?



XENA

Remarkably relaxed, believe
it or not. But still cramped.

Xena gets an up close and personal gander at her own LOOK and finds herself suitably impressed.

Both look up as the carriage finally comes into view. It is a fine vehicle which is being pulled by a pure white horse. The driver is dressed in clean shiny leather and next to him is a guard holding a cross bow and looking very serious. It's unclear who is riding inside, but it is clear that whoever it is is quite important.

They watch as the carriage starts to pass, then comes to an abrupt stop at a call from its passenger. A tallish man wearing the distinguished cloak of middle-age steps from the carriage, his eyes round with disbelief.

Gabrielle finds herself looking back at the man. He is familiar in a way that she can't quite place.

MAN

G-G-G-Ga-Gabrielle?

The stutter places him, and Gabrielle breaks out in a beaming grin.

GABRIELLE

Twickenham?

Twickenham turns to look at the woman he thinks is Xena.

TWICKENHAM

I-I don't b-b-believe we've
e-e-ever met, X-X-Xena.

Gabrielle thinks quickly as Xena hides a smirk with her hand.

GABRIELLE

Well, no, we've never... formally... met, no.
But Gabrielle loves to tell stories about
her time at the Academy, and you
know what a wonderful bard she is.

Xena's smirk broadens.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

She described you so perfectly
that I recognized you right off.



Twickenham smiles proudly and straightens, narrow chest puffed out like a rooster's.

TWICKENHAM

She t-t-talks about me, huh?

GABRIELLE

Often, yes.

He turns his smile to who he thinks is Gabrielle.

TWICKENHAM

I'd heard the ru-ru-rumors that you hadn't a-a-aged. And I-I-I-can see they're all t-t-t-true. You're as b-b-b-beautiful as ever, Gabrielle.

He holds his arms open.

Gabrielle looks to Xena, gesturing with an eyebrow.

Xena shoots her a glare.



Gabrielle's smirk isn't hidden.

With a reluctance that is obvious to no one but Gabrielle, Xena crosses the distance separating herself from Twickenham and gingerly hugs him.

XENA

(through gritted teeth)

It's so good to see you again, old friend.

Twickenham embraces her tightly and his hands, quite of their own accord, begin to stray beyond the bounds of propriety. Xena resists the mighty urge to break those wandering hands, instead settling for shooting Gabrielle a look she hopes will be well read.

Gabrielle clears her throat and steps forward, catching Twickenham's eye with a look of her own.

The man pales, releases Xena, and steps back.

TWICKENHAM

I-I-I-I-I-I....

Secretly flattered, Gabrielle smiles and steps forward, which for some reason causes Twickenham to pale even further.

TWICKENHAM

I-I-I-I-I-I....

Reaching out, Xena pats the man comfortingly on one bony shoulder.

XENA

It's all right, Twickenham. Xena is just having some fun. Right, 'Xena'?

GABRIELLE

Oh...right! Yes! Just having fun, Twickenham. Honest.



TWICKENHAM

Th-th-th-th-th.... B-b-blast this st-st-st-stutter! I haven't b-b-been this bad in ye-ye-ye-forever!

XENA

I might be able to help with that.

Twickenham looks at 'Gabrielle', eyes wide.

TWICKENHAM

Re-re-re-really?

XENA

Yes. It's something Xena taught me. May I?

TWICKENHAM

P-p-p-p-sure!

Before Twickenham can blink, Xena uses her borrowed fingers to jab two spots to the left and right of his voice box.

TWICKENHAM

Ouch! That hurt! What did you....

(beat)

Hey! My stutter! It's gone!!

(to 'Gabrielle')

Thank you! Oh, thank you!!

XENA

My pleasure.

TWICKENHAM

There must be some way I
can repay you for your kindness.

XENA

That's really not nec—

TWICKENHAM

I know! You'll both travel with me to Athens
in style! My coach is large enough for both
of you and your belongings. And, of course,
I insist that you stay in my villa during the
induction ceremony! All the luxuries of home
and I can't think of two people who deserve it more.

XENA

Induction ceremony?

GABRIELLE

Athens??



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. MEADOW - MID MORNING

Twickenham looks at the two women staring back at him.

TWICKENHAM

Surely you've received
the invitation, Gabrielle?

He looks back and forth between them.

TWICKENHAM

(cont'd)

To the induction ceremony? All of the
Academy's most famous graduates
will be there to show support for the new
Chancellor. I know you were invited.
I sent the invitation out myself!

GABRIELLE

We... travel a lot. Your messenger
probably couldn't find us.

TWICKENHAM

Well, invitation or not, you have to be there.
The Academy, it's... worse, much worse,
than it was when we entered, Gabrielle.
It's nothing but a den of rich thieves who
accept bribes in plain sight for admittance.
Talent isn't counted. Wealth is. It's... horrible.
Even the library, home to scrolls from the
best bards around the world is only
open to those with enough money.

GABRIELLE

(horrificed)

That's absurd!



Twickenham looks at 'Xena'.

TWICKENHAM

I didn't realize you were such
an admirer of the Fine Arts, Xena.

XENA

Oh yeah, she admires 'em all right.

Twickenham returns his attention to 'Gabrielle'.

TWICKENHAM

And I'm sure you've heard about what happened to the last Chancellor.

Xena mightily resists making the comment she wants to make, and settles for a simple nod instead.

XENA

We heard.



TWICKENHAM

He was a bastard, if you'll pardon my language. But he was only part of the problem.

GABRIELLE

What was the rest?

TWICKENHAM

Well, as I've said, it's become nothing but a den of thieves. When the reigning Chancellor made his trip to Lesbos, the vipers were left to fight among themselves. They never expected him to come back, you see.

XENA

Mm.

TWICKENHAM

The students aren't all bad though. Not by a long shot. Somehow, even in the midst of their greed, they managed to admit some very talented, upstanding young men and women. While the vultures were arguing among themselves, the students formed a committee, asked for help from the distinguished alumni, and held a secret ballot to elect their own Chancellor.

XENA

(knowingly)

And the vultures didn't appreciate that.

TWICKENHAM

(outraged)

Th-th-they tried to k-k-kill him!

GABRIELLE

Who?

Twickenham looks over at 'Xena' as if she's gone a bit slow.

TWICKENHAM

The Chancellor, of course.

Gabrielle takes in a deep, calming breath.

GABRIELLE

And the Chancellor is....

The same look. Squared.

TWICKENHAM

The head of the Academy?

Xena laughs softly.

XENA

Uh, Twickey? I think she wants his name.



TWICKENHAM

Oh! Ohhhhh!

He smiles broadly.

TWICKENHAM

(cont'd)

It's Homer!

GABRIELLE

Homer!

TWICKENHAM

Homer, yes. I didn't realize you knew him as well, Xena. But then, I guess I shouldn't be surprised. I'm sure Gabrielle told you how close they were.

Xena looks at Gabrielle.

XENA

Close, huh?

TWICKENHAM

Why yes, Gabrielle. Don't you remember the two of you were going to be married?

XENA AND GABRIELLE

Married?!?!?



Twickenham looks at them both, shocked.

TWICKENHAM

It was all over the dorns.
We thought....

GABRIELLE

You thought wrong. She did come back to me, after all.



Twickenham scratches his chin in thought.

TWICKENHAM

I guess that's right... I suppose. Regardless, I know he's looking forward to seeing you again, Gabrielle. And we really do need your help. When their assassination attempt failed, the Regents elected their own Chancellor. Merikus. A more corrupt man you've never met. They insist he is the rightful Chancellor and will be inducted into the position the day after tomorrow. Unless we can stop them.

XENA

And how are you planning to do that?

TWICKENHAM

That was the reason for the invitations, Gabrielle. The induction ceremony is a very public affair. Half of Athens will be there. We need to show strong public support for our choice for Chancellor. We're all planning to stand with him, perhaps tell some of our longer epic stories to hold the stage, and give the public a taste of what the Academy once was and could be again. Please, will you stand with us?

Xena and Gabrielle look at one another for a long moment, communicating more in silence than most do with speech.

TWICKENHAM

We could also use your help, Xena. I don't think they've given up trying to take Homer's life. You are the perfect person to help prevent that from happening.

Another bit of silent communication before Xena turns to their guest.

XENA

We'll help.



Twickenham beams.

TWICKENHAM

Thank you! Thank you! Please, gather up your belongings. We'll place them on my carriage and we can be off to Athens.

Another look is exchanged.

XENA

Thanks for the offer, but we'll catch up with you in Athens.

TWICKENHAM

(shocked)
But why?

GABRIELLE

We...have things we need to take care of first. We weren't expecting to make this trip at all, remember?

Twickenham sighs.

TWICKENHAM

You're sure I can't talk you into coming with me?

GABRIELLE

No, but thank you for your offer. We won't be far behind you.

TWICKENHAM

Will you at least take up my offer of lodging at my villa? Please?

Gabrielle nods.

GABRIELLE

We'll do that. Thanks.

TWICKENHAM

Well... goodbye then.
See you in Athens.

XENA

See you there.

Twickenham turns, enters his carriage, and is soon gone from their sight.

Alone once again, Xena turns to Gabrielle, a smirk on her face.

XENA

Homer, huh?

Gabrielle shoots her a sideways look.

GABRIELLE

Please. He was just a friend.



Xena grins.

XENA

Using my definition of the word friend, are ya?

GABRIELLE

Ha. Ha.

XENA

Hey, don't look at me! You were the one getting married.

GABRIELLE

(primly)

I'm already married, thank you very much.

Xena's eyes soften as she smiles.

XENA

I know.



Gabrielle's eyes widen. She slowly lowers herself to a log at her feet. Her face is slightly pale.

GABRIELLE

Dear gods!

Xena looks down at herself to see if perhaps she's popped out of her top or something equally strange to engender such a reaction from her partner.

XENA

What?

GABRIELLE

Is that really how I look when I look at you that way?



Understanding dawns, and Xena can do nothing but grin.

GABRIELLE

No wonder they've been
talking about us for years!

Chuckling softly, Xena crosses the distance between them and stoops in front of Gabrielle, taking her hands.

XENA

Let 'em talk.

Leaning in, she gently brushes Gabrielle's lips with her own, then settles in for a longer kiss. After a moment, they pull away, both women distinctly flushed.



GABRIELLE

Wow! That was....

XENA

Different.

GABRIELLE

That it was. I think I liked it.

XENA

(faux shocked)
You think?!

Gabrielle grins.

GABRIELLE

Let's just say that your body has
some... interesting responses
and leave it at that, shall we?

XENA

Let's.

GABRIELLE

So, I guess we should
try to switch back now.



XENA

I suppose you're right.

Gabrielle slides off the log and to the ground, still holding Xena's hands. She smiles and looks around, taking in a deep, bracing breath of fresh air.

GABRIELLE

I want to remember this. The time I was
in the body of the best warrior in the world.
Should make for a great story sometime, huh?

Xena can only smile.

GABRIELLE

Ok, I'm ready.

Both women close their eyes and begin the process of meditation.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MEADOW - EARLY AFTERNOON

Sighing, Xena leans back, looks up at the sky, then up into similarly colored eyes.

XENA

It's obvious this isn't going to fix
things, Gabrielle. I think that if we're
gonna head for Athens, it's probably
best that we get ready to move.

GABRIELLE

Maybe we should give it
a little longer to work?

XENA

We've given it half a day, Gabrielle.
It's obvious I'm missing something,
and I don't think we're gonna
find it just sitting here.

Gabrielle comes to her feet more fluidly now that she's become accustomed to the body she's currently inhabiting.

GABRIELLE

(flexing a knee)

Do your joints always hurt this much?

Xena shrugs.

XENA

Occupational hazard.



Reaching down, Gabrielle gives Xena a hand up, then abruptly lets go at her partner's wince.

GABRIELLE

What is it? What's wrong?

Xena holds up a rather mangled looking hand.

XENA

You don't know my own strength.

GABRIELLE

(worriedly)

Is it broken?

Xena shakes the hand in question, then squeezes it into a fist a few times.

XENA

Nah. Just don't blame this one on me when you start wearing it again.

GABRIELLE

Speaking of which... I personally don't think I'll have a hard time catching an assassin, especially with these new... enhancements... but Xena, you're not exactly known as a bard.

XENA

(exaggerated dignity)

I'll have you know that I'm a perfectly adequate storyteller.



Gabrielle laughs.

GABRIELLE

Adequate for putting your audience to sleep maybe.

Xena gives her a look.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I'm serious! "We came, we saw, we kicked their asses" is hardly the height of bardic talent, Xena.

XENA

Hey! It has a beginning and an ending!

GABRIELLE

(laughing)

Just no middle. Ok, if you can teach me the sounds behind the sounds, I can teach you how to make those sounds sound more interesting. Sound good?

Xena clasps her hands together in a deliberately overdramatic pleading posture.

XENA

Take me with you. Teach me everything you know.



GABRIELLE

Oooh, that's very good! No wonder you couldn't resist my charm!



XENA

(sotto voce)

If that was the only reason,
you'd still be sitting in Poteidia.

GABRIELLE

What?

XENA

Nothing. Let's just get going.
The daylight's wasting.

Gabrielle follows Xena to Argo.

GABRIELLE

Nothing my eye. She
forgets about my hearing.



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. TRAIL - AFTERNOON

Xena and Gabrielle are both on Argo, in their normal positions. There is a very sour lemon look on Gabrielle's face.

XENA

Ok, how about this one? There was an old woman from Thebes with....



GABRIELLE

XENA!

XENA

... down to her knees.

GABRIELLE

Ok, that's enough. Dirty limericks might appeal to battlefield brawlers, Xena, but this is the Athens' elite we're talking about. They're expecting epics.

XENA

That was an epic!

Once again, Xena gets an up close and personal view of one of her myriad of looks. She can only groan as she tightens her arms around the body in front of her, which is, of course, also her own.

CUT TO:

EXT. ATHENS - EARLY EVENING

Xena and Gabrielle are walking through the streets, which are bustling as usual. Walking through the agora, the shouts of vendors selling their wares ring all around them. 'Xena' shakes her head to try and clear some of the noise. 'Gabrielle' takes her by the arm and they stop walking.

XENA

Are you okay?



GABRIELLE

Yeah, it just seems like I'm hearing every thing much louder than normal.

XENA

I know. I've learned to tune out what I don't want to hear. Close your eyes and take a deep breath and just focus on one sound and make it go away. Do that with all the sounds that you don't want to hear.

She does as she's told and a few second later she opens her eyes and smiles.

GABRIELLE

Thanks.

XENA

You're welcome. Let's find Twicky's villa. Maybe if we can get settled some place comfortable, we can fix this before we have to face Homer and the rest of your school chums.

GABRIELLE

The theater is on the other side of the Areopagus.

'Gabrielle' blanches at the mention of the hill that was dedicated to Ares.

XENA

You'd think they would have figured out none of them are coming back.

GABRIELLE

Old habits die hard, Xena.
Worshipping Gods is the only thing some of these people have.

XENA

I know. Come on. Let's get going.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLA - EARLY EVENING

A guard stands outside the gates of Twickenham's home. As Xena and Gabrielle approach, he holds up his hand to stop them.

GUARD

I'm afraid the gates are locked for security purposes.

XENA

I'm Gabrielle, an old friend of the owner. He invited us to be his guests.

GUARD

Ah, yes, I'm sorry. He told me to expect you, but he thought you would be arriving later.

XENA

Well we're here now. Could you open the gates?

GUARD

Of course.

He unlocks the gates and pushes them open as they walk past he stops 'Xena'.

GUARD

Any chance that you would be willing to spar with some of the estate guards?

'Gabrielle' snorts and 'Xena' grins.

GABRIELLE

Sure. I'd like a chance to have a good workout.

GUARD

Great!

They enter the grounds and 'Gabrielle' elbows 'Xena'.

XENA

Don't get my body hurt, I intend to get back into it and I don't want it all bruised and sore.

GABRIELLE

I don't intend to get you hurt, but I may as well take it out for a test drive while I've got it. I mean come on Xena, you don't buy a chariot until you kick the wheels and check the horse's teeth.



XENA

(teasingly)

Just don't get comfortable with all the extra room.

GABRIELLE

(teasingly)

I kinda like the height. I may
just decide to keep it.

XENA

Don't get cute. There are some
things that are not negotiable.

As they approach the door, it flies open and Twickenham meets them.

TWICKENHAM

I'm so glad you two are
here. Please come in.

GABRIELLE

Umm, we need to stable Argo.

TWICKENHAM

Don't concern yourself. I'll have
one of my groomsmen take her
to the stable and tend to her. But
do come in, there's someone
here who wants to see you.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - MID EVENING

The trio enters, and finds an older man there. He is very distinguished, tall with white hair and a neatly trimmed beard and mustache. He stands from his place at the long table and moves to **'Gabrielle'**. Without asking or waiting, he pulls her into a long hug.

HOMER

It is so good to see you again.

'Gabrielle' pulls away as quickly as possible.

XENA

(uncomfortably)

It is good to see you too.
It's been a long time.



HOMER

Too long. But I can see the years
have been good to you. You're
as beautiful as ever.

'Gabrielle' looks to 'Xena', then back to Homer.

XENA

Thank you. You've aged very well.

HOMER

I've gotten older and hopefully a little wiser, but you are still the radiant young woman I remember. The Gods have been kind.

'Xena' steps forward and moves a little closer to Homer, moving 'Gabrielle' back a bit.

GABRIELLE

The Gods were not kind...
that's how we ended up like this.

HOMER

Xena, I have heard stories of your and Gabrielle's struggles with the Olympian Gods. I am sorry for all that you endured, but I am pleased that you and my friend have come through it alive and well.

'Xena' smiles and nods.

GABRIELLE

Thank you. That's very kind of you.



XENA

But enough about us. What is going on here? With the Academy?

Homer smiles and leads 'Gabrielle' to the table where he offers her a seat and a cup of wine. 'Xena' takes a seat next to her.

HOMER

I know what transpired on Lesbos, Gabrielle. I was given a full briefing after Aubin's trial. I'm sorry you got caught in the middle of a conflict that actually started here.

XENA

What exactly happened that would prompt him to try and hurt Sappho?

Homer sighs and Twickenham takes a seat. It's clear that they've explained this situation several times.

HOMER

Aubin and some of the other elders of the school discovered that they could make a nice living from charging excessively high fees to attend the academy. They were afraid that if Sappho opened a school it would reduce the number of wealthy students who would study here.

GABRIELLE

So when he couldn't convince her to not open the school, he opted for other methods.

HOMER

Right, and after Aubin's treachery was revealed to some of the students, they decided to challenge the current administration. They got most of them thrown out of school, and I'm afraid that it may have gotten one or two of them killed. After that, the students decided they wanted a new chancellor. Since Twickenham and I have been teaching here for so long, they came to me with their concerns and asked me to take the position.

XENA

So the current administration installs their own lackey and nothing changes.

TWICKENHAM

We have to stop them, Gabrielle, Xena. The Academy is much too important an institution to come to ruin.

GABRIELLE

We'll do everything we can.

HOMER

I know you will. I don't think the Academy's safety could be in any better hands.

TWICKENHAM

There is a formal reception tonight. All the current administration will be there. Students and patrons will also be in attendance.

XENA

We'll be there too.

CUT TO:

INT. BED ROOM - EVENING

Xena and Gabrielle are alone, sitting facing each other, eyes closed. It's obvious that they are trying to reclaim their own bodies. Gabrielle's eyes open and she shakes her head in frustration.

GABRIELLE

We're in real trouble here.

XENA

It's definitely a problem, but we don't have time to worry about this right now. Someone is trying to kill your college sweetheart and take over the school.

GABRIELLE

You're just really enjoying this, aren't you?



XENA

Absolutely. How often do I get to tease you about an old flame? Real or imagined.

GABRIELLE

(groaning)
Gods.

XENA

Come on. We need to get down to this dinner they're holding and see exactly what's up.

CUT TO:

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

The huge room is filled with dozens of people, most of them wealthy and quite unwilling to associate with anyone they consider beneath them. In one corner of the room there is a small group of students who don't have the means that the other in the room do and they are doing their best to stay away from them.

GABRIELLE

I'm going to start over there.

She gestures to the small group.

XENA

Does that mean I get to go
make nice with the snobs?



GABRIELLE

Yup. Just remember. Be charming.
Be elegant. Be witty. Be...
(beat, grinning)
Gabrielle.

XENA

Yeah, well, don't schmooze too much
while you're making your rounds.
I have a reputation to maintain.

GABRIELLE

One stoic, stiff as a board,
take no prisoners Warrior
Princess coming right up!

As if turning on a switch, Gabrielle becomes ramrod straight, shoulders thrust out to their widest. Her eyes narrow and she looks down her nose at Xena with a combination of cold intent and regal elegance. Xena looks up in poorly disguised awe.

XENA

(muttering)

You know, Gabrielle, you're
really starting to scare me.

The "Warrior Princess" effect is ruined by a delighted, soft peal of laughter.

Then, after wishing another good look with only their eyes, they separate and begin to mingle.

CUT TO:

INT. BANQUET ROOM - EVENING

'Xena' makes her way to the group of students and a few instructors. They all seem to part right down the middle as The Warrior Princess joins the group.

GABRIELLE

Good evening everyone.
How's the party?

A young man smiles and nods to her. He takes a cup of wine from a tray near his hand and gives it to her.

APOLLODUS

It could be worse.
We could be in Rome.

She laughs and takes the cup.

GABRIELLE

I couldn't agree more. I'm....

APOLLODUS

Oh we know who you are. We've
read enough descriptions of you in
Gabrielle's scrolls to know Xena, the
Warrior Princess when we see her.

GABRIELLE

Of course.



The young man gestures to a few others around him.

APOLLODUS

This is Hesiod....

A young blonde man nods to her and raises his glass in welcome.

APOLLODUS

(cont'd)

And this is Pindar....

He continues to introduce people and we....

CUT TO:

INT. BANQUET HALL - EVENING

'Gabrielle' is walking through the crowd of people who are looking down their noses at the blonde woman in the common travel clothes.

Taking bits of food off various trays, the current inhabitant of the body is doing what she does best, listening. She is hearing whispered comments about 'her' and Xena.

XENA

(under her breath)

If they knew the truth,
they'd explode.

She's walking slowly through the group, rather enjoying making these people nervous. She stops as she hears two men specifically mention Gabrielle's name.

EURIPIDES

She's nothing but a peasant.

'Gabrielle' makes eye contact with him and he doesn't look away. Taking a deep breath she walks over to them.

XENA

Is there a problem?



EURIPIDES

Not unless you consider the fact that they're letting commoners like you back into the academy a problem.

'Gabrielle' stands and looks at him for a minute and then makes a grab for a rather sensitive spot, causing his eyes to squeeze shut and tears to form in the corner of closed lids.

XENA

Now you listen to me. I'll advise you only once to watch your mouth or they'll be calling you Euripides for an entirely different reason. Got me?

Not able to speak, he simply nods quickly. The man standing next to him is quite pale now but manages to stammer a bit.

SIMONIDES

I thought you were the nice one.

XENA

You thought wrong.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gabrielle is sprawled across the large bed in a most un-Warrior Princess-like fashion, while Xena paces the length and breadth of the room. Sighing heavily, Gabrielle throws an arm across her eyes.

XENA

Are you all right?

GABRIELLE

I have a headache. Do you know how hard it is to be you?
(beat, off Xena's look)
Never mind. Dumb question.

With another sigh, she sits up.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

So, were you able to
find out anything?

Stopping her pacing, Xena comes to stand beside the bed, looking down at her partner. She begins ticking points off on her fingers.

XENA

Your hair is too short, your manners are too
coarse, your muscles are too big, and....
These boots don't go with this skirt.



Gabrielle blinks at her for a moment, then sags back against the wall, laughing. Finally spent, she moves to sit back up, and winces as her head recommences its infernal pounding.

Gesturing her partner forward, Xena slips in behind and begins a firm massage, knowing exactly how to get rid of the headache.

Gabrielle's head lolls back in utter bliss.

GABRIELLE

By the gods, that feels good.

XENA

Mm. So, what were you
able to pick up?

GABRIELLE

Not much, unfortunately... a little to
the left, oh yes, that's perfect! If they
weren't fawning over 'The Warrior
Princess', they were looking at me
like I was a rat run over by a
chariot on the side of the road.

(beat)

Something is definitely going on,
though. You could cut through
the tension with a sword.
They're all smug as toads.

XENA

Agreed. The induction ceremony
is in the evening, right?

GABRIELLE

At sunset, yes.

XENA

Good. Then we should use the daylight hours tomorrow to investigate further.

Pick up whatever clues we can find before the ceremony.

GABRIELLE

Sounds good.

XENA

Guess we'd better get some sleep, then. How's the head?

GABRIELLE

(drawling)

Marvelous. I've got some pretty talented hands, don't I?



XENA

They're not bad.

Gabrielle turns on her.

GABRIELLE

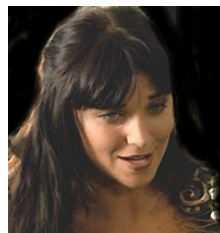
Not bad! Why you....

Reaching in, Gabrielle starts tickling the exposed flesh of her partner, her superior strength easily subduing the wriggling, and now very ticklish woman.

GABRIELLE

(large grin)

Ha! Finally my chance to get even! Paybacks are a bitch, Warrior Princess.



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. ACADEMY - MORNING

Xena and Gabrielle make their way unnoticed from Twickenham's villa and begin to make their way in toward the city center. In the distance, they can see and hear a stage being set up near the main fountain.

Gabrielle spots Homer standing tall among a group of his cronies, many of whom she recognizes from her own Academy days, including Twickenham, and one other. Her face lights up in a smile.

GABRIELLE

That's Euripides! By the gods, I
haven't thought about him in years!
He told the most awful stories!

XENA

(muttering)
They're not much better now.

'Gabrielle' turns wide eyes to her partner.

GABRIELLE

Wait. You know him?



XENA

Let's just say we had some words.
(beat)
And if his voice is higher
than you remember....

Stopping, 'Gabrielle' lays a hand on 'Xena's' wrist, halting her as well.

GABRIELLE

You didn't....

XENA

Oh, I most certainly did.

GABRIELLE

When? Where?? Why???

XENA

(succinctly)

Last night. At the reception. Because he had some less than complimentary things to say about you.

Gabrielle looks quite confused.

GABRIELLE

Are you sure we're talking about the same Euripides?

XENA

If we're talking about the man over there practically draped all over Homer, then yes, we're talking about the same Euripides.



GABRIELLE

But that's.... Why was he at the party? It doesn't make any sense.

Xena shrugs.

XENA

Maybe he couldn't cut it as a bard. Decided to ingratiate himself with the rich merchants instead.

GABRIELLE

No, Xena. He's not that way. He's....

XENA

It's been thirty years, Gabrielle. That kind of time changes people. Even people you thought you knew.

Shaking her head, '**Gabrielle**' looks over at the man in question who appears to be having a grand time with Homer and his compatriots.

GABRIELLE

No. Not Euripides. I can't believe that. There must have been some other reason he was at that party last night.

A slight smile breaks over her face.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I'll bet he was there for the same reason we were. To find out what was going on and how to stop it, if he could. He probably ingratiated himself with those men so he could spy on them for Homer.

The face itself might be Gabrielle's, but the look of doubt is all Xena. Seeing it, Gabrielle's smile fades.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

At least admit that it's a possibility.



Xena sighs, then nods. Gabrielle's smile returns.

XENA

We've got the next few hours to confirm or deny it, so I suggest we get going.

GABRIELLE

All right. Let's.... Uh oh.

Xena looks up in time to see Homer's entire group turn toward them, grinning and waving their arms in identical beckoning gestures.

HOMER

Gabrielle!

TWICKENHAM

Gabrielle! We're headed Stallonus' villa to prepare for this evening! Come with us!

GABRIELLE

(whispering)

What now?

Xena eyes the expectant men. It's obvious they're not going to take 'go to Tartarus' for an answer.

XENA

Go on as we planned. Head for the Academy and do some snooping. I'll keep an eye on the rest of them and see what I can find out.

GABRIELLE

Ok. I'll meet you behind
the stage later, alright?

Xena nods.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

And Xena? It's not that I mind my
reputation being tarnished, but....
I really don't think Athens is ready for
"There once was a man from Arenis...."



Giving her partner the most withering of looks, Xena lengthens her stride and is soon within the grasp of Gabrielle's old friends. As she watches her partner adroitly avoid the Roman hands and Russian fingers of the admiring men, Gabrielle sends up a quiet prayer that those same men will live to see the ceremony with most of their limbs intact.

CUT TO:

INT. ACADEMY - AFTERNOON

Gabrielle is walking toward the administration offices. She is watching the crowd already gathering for the ceremony and she knows by the time it actually begins; there will be very little room to maneuver through the crowd.

Slipping into the main section of the academy that holds all the administration offices, as well as the library, she is relieved to find it mostly deserted. There are a few students milling around, but they don't look like they're interested in much of anything, including her.

She takes a moment to read a sign on the wall, which directs her to the second floor and the Chancellor's office.

GABRIELLE

Like taking candy from a baby.

Looking around to make sure no one is around, Gabrielle heads up the steps. At the very top she finds the hallway is locked off by a large gate.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

A cranky baby.

Looking at the gate, which reaches from ceiling to floor, she contemplates her next move. She leans down and examines the lock, scratching her chin; a smile slowly breaks across her face.

Taking the dagger from her bodice, she places it between the lock and the gate. Efforts to pry the lock open are proving less than successful.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I should have listened to Autolycus
when he wanted to give me lessons.
Of course the lessons he was offering... well....

She tries again to pry the lock and is getting more frustrated when it doesn't show any sign of budging.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Son of a....



Pulling the knife away, she beats the side of her fist against the gate in frustration, then almost jumps out of her skin as the gate opens pretty as you please.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

... centaur's uncle. Heh. Watch
out, Xena, I just might decide
to keep this package.

Carefully, so she doesn't cut anything precious, she puts the dagger back and walks through the gate, making sure to close it behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. STALLONUS' VILLA - AFTERNOON

A large group of men are gathered in a tight crowd, red-faced, shouting, and pointing accusatory fingers at one another. Outside of this circle, Xena stands, arms crossed over her chest, eyes narrowed to dangerous slits, one boot tapping on the ground.

HOMER

What do you think, Gabrielle?

'Gabrielle' gives them all one long, sweeping look.

XENA

What I think is that if you don't start
acting like men instead of a bunch
of overgrown boys, I'm gonna start
busting heads and be done with it.

A loud murmuring, punctuated by a gasp or two, fills the overcrowded room as the men react to her comment.

YOUNG MAN

(to friend)

I thought she was supposed
to be the nice one.

XENA

I AM the nice one.



CUT TO:

INT. ACADEMY - AFTERNOON

Moving carefully down the long hall, Gabrielle is quick to look about just to make sure her presence still hasn't been detected. Treading lightly she continues down the hall, finding herself rather impressed with how easily it is to move so quietly in Xena's body.

All her years with Xena and under the tutelage of the amazons, she has learned how to move without being seen or heard, but she had a feeling that everything Xena did was natural to the body she currently occupies.

She stops quite suddenly, almost as though the body has stopped on its own. She hears movement at the end of the hall. Pressing herself against the wall, she carefully peers around the corner to find two guards standing at the other end.

GABRIELLE

Perfect. Just perfect.

Taking a deep breath and closing her eyes, she contemplates her next move.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

What are the odds they're guarding
a door I **don't** want to go through?

Looking around, she doesn't find anything that she thinks she can use to take their attention away from their post.

Moving to the window, she looks out and finds that there is a thin ledge along the side of the building that could get her closer to the room in question.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Nothing is ever easy.



Climbing out onto the ledge, she is very careful to make sure she has her footing before even attempting to take her first step. Sliding her feet, she moves across the ledge, inching closer to what she hopes is the window leading to the office. As she places her foot for the next precarious step, the ledge crumbles and she falls.

Having reflexes that are lightening fast pays off for her and she grabs at the ledge, stopping her fall, she hangs on the side of the building by her fingertips. Looking down briefly, she decides that falling to the ground below is not high on her list of objectives for the day.

With a groan and tremendous concentration, she pulls herself back up and finds her footing once again.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Now I know why she likes a good
massage at night. Controlling
this thing is a chore.

Now trying to make her way without slipping again, she can feel the muscles in her body tensing and un-tensing as she moves. Finally reaching the last window on the side of the building, she pushes the wooden shutters in, hoping that the cracking of wood doesn't arouse the attention of the guards on the other side of the door.

CUT TO:

INT. STALLONUS' VILLA - AFTERNOON

The men have finally settled into smaller groups, each vying for the honor of being the first to tell his tale to what promised to be a massive audience. Homer, already having decided that for himself, beckons '**Gabrielle**' to his side, along with Twickenham.

HOMER

When Merikus begins to speak, we'll
make our entrance. Twickenham and
I will lead a column on from the left,
and I would like you to lead the
column from the right.

XENA

Fine.

Homer lays a hand on '**Gabrielle's**' arm.

HOMER

I would also like you to tell
the first tale, Gabrielle.

Xena turns wide eyes toward Homer, her mind scrambling to come up with something suitably Gabrielle-like to say in response.

XENA

That... I.... Thank you, Homer.
For that honor, but....



HOMER

I insist, Gabrielle. You're the best
of us all, and it's only right that you
be given the honor of presenting our
case based on the strength of your skill.

Xena stares at Homer, truly between a rock and a hard place. She well knows that Gabrielle deserves the honor being bestowed upon her. But she also knows that she is not Gabrielle, and by her acceptance runs the risk of turning the honor into a farce. Still, her pride in her partner's skill and accomplishments leads her to answer in the only way she can.

XENA

I accept. Thank you.

Homer and Twickenham beam.

CUT TO:

INT. CHANCELLORS ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

The sound of footsteps comes through the door, nearing the chancellor's room.

Dropping inside, Gabrielle immediately goes into a crouch, eyes and ears alert to any possible danger or threat. Her eyes fall on shadows just outside the door.

GABRIELLE

Just stay out there, guys. You
don't want me to have to test
this thing out, do you?

The shadows stay beside the door as Gabrielle waits, then slowly they move away.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Good decision.

Standing, she moves around the room. A swinging candle holder comes dangerously close to smacking her in the head but at the last minute, Xena's reflexes keep her from hitting it.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Whoa.

She ducks under the lamp and heads for the large, ornate desk in the center of the room.

Looking at the surface of it, she finds it covered with papers and rifles through them.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Well, well. What do
we have here?

Gabrielle holds the parchment up to the light.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

A thousand dinars, huh?
Nice donation.

Gabrielle holds up another parchment, almost identical.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Two thousand. Didn't know
storytelling was that lucrative.
Maybe I should.... Nah.

Shaking her head in disgust she takes a seat in the large chair and continues to examine the desk. In the back, she finds a small panel. Pressing it, the small door pops open and she retrieves several scrolls. Unrolling them one at a time, she reads through each carefully until she finds what she thinks she is looking for. As her eyes scan the third scroll, she shakes her head, not believing what she's seeing as the lines of text form themselves into words that shock her to the core.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

(anguished whisper)
No. Euripides. Why?



Putting away the other scrolls, she takes the last one she read and tucks it away in her bracer.

Standing, she looks at the window reluctantly. She walks over and peers out, then with a decisive grunt backs away and heads for the door.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Let's try the other route.

Gabrielle pauses and looks at the desk. She shakes her head sadly.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I guess you were right after all,
damn it. All right, Euripides. You
and I are gonna have a little talk
right after I check in with Xena.

Going to the door she stops long enough to listen to the men talking on the other side. A strange expression comes over her face, and she lifts her hands, clenching and unclenching them.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Weird....

Her right hand curls into a loose fist, as though her fingers are closing around the hilt of a sword.

Gabrielle touches the pulse at her wrist, then slowly lets her hand fall. She looks at the door, and her eyes narrow, a slight smile appearing on her face.

Pulling the door open she is met by two VERY shocked guards.

GUARD 1

(completely surprised)

Hey!

GABRIELLE

Hiya fellas. Nice day
for a nap, isn't it?



Before either of them can react, she grabs them both by the neck and knocks their heads together. They go limp as they are dragged back the room. She drops their bodies and steps back, looking at them intently.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Wow. That was different.

Gabrielle flexes her hands again, then she rubs them together and gets to work tying the men up.

Closing the door she starts back down the hall, she leaves the building as quickly and quietly as she made it in.

CUT TO:

INT. STALLONIUS' VILLA - LATE AFTERNOON

Standing in one shadowed corner, Xena watches as Euripides, who has been rather quiet and evasive all day, begins to inch his way toward the door. After a last furtive look around, Euripides slips out of the villa through a side door.

Taking in a deep breath, Xena pushes herself away from the wall and moves after him.

CERAS

Gabrielle! There you are! Please,
you must help me with my delivery!

Xena looks up at the large, triple-chinned man in the garish red robes and, praising her newly diminished physical stature, easily ducks beneath the massive arm set to swing itself about her shoulders.

XENA

Sorry Ceras, but I need to
see a man about a donkey.
Catch up with you later.

Turning, she nearly collides with several more bards who all but surround her, begging for her help with one thing or another.

The stature she just blessed she now curses as the men block her view to the outside, allowing Euripides to slip further and further from her grasp. Resisting the urge to crack skulls and be done with it, she decides upon a tried and true Gabrielle method, one that has always worked on her.

She smiles and adds a nose-crinkle for effect.



The men smile back.

One or two even blush.

XENA

(cont'd)

(secretly impressed)

Sorry, guys, but I have to take care
of something. I'll be right back with
you as soon as I can, all right?

The men nod eagerly and, as if by magic, the way to the door is opened for her.

XENA

(cont'd)

Hm. That was different.

Darting through the seam, she almost makes it to the outside when a hand on her shoulder stops her. She whirls, then halts as Homer takes a step back at the look on her face. Carefully schooling her features, she looks at him expectantly.

HOMER

The sun has almost set.

It's time to go.

Xena looks at him for a moment, undecided.

XENA

I've been thinking about
this, Homer and....

HOMER

Gabrielle, you promised.
Please. We need your help.

Sighing, Xena finally gives him a nod.

XENA

Fine, then. Let's go.

CUT TO:

EXT. ACADEMY GROUNDS - ALMOST SUNSET

Gabrielle exits the main building and sees the crowd gathering for the induction ceremony not very far away. Men and women of all classes and ages swarm toward the stage like lemmings toward a cliff. The air is tense with excitement and expectation.

GABRIELLE

Wow. Last time I saw a crowd
this large, they were filing into
the Roman Coliseum.



She moves with the crowd, intent on getting to the stage, and Xena, with her findings.

Just then, she spies a vaguely familiar figure as it pushes its way through the crowd like a salmon swimming against the current. Her eyes narrow as the man looks up and she recognizes his face.

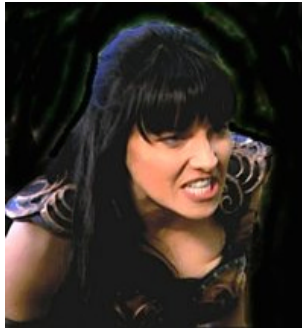
GABRIELLE
(*cont'd, whispering*)
Euripides.

She tracks him as he bulls his way to a stand of trees just to the left of the large stage, where he disappears from sight. After a longing look at the stage, she takes the bit in her teeth and begins to move against the crowd, angling for the stand of trees and Euripides.

The crowd, however, has other ideas and isn't about to let one woman, even a fully armed and fierce looking woman warrior, keep them from trying to get the best seats in the house. As hard as she pushes against them, they push back harder, forcing her to give two steps of ground for every one she gains.

Time is running out, and finally she can think of no other option but to use one of Xena's techniques. Reaching behind her, she unsheathes her sword and holds it before her.

GABRIELLE
(*cont'd*)
MOVE!



The first wave stops, wide-eyed.

GABRIELLE
(*cont'd*)
NOW!

The way parts clear to the trees and Gabrielle smirks, impressed.

Sheathing the sword, she strides through the now open path as if she owns it.

GABRIELLE
(*Cont'd, muttering*)
I could get used to this.

CUT TO:

EXT. STAGE – SUNSET

Xena stands off to one side of the stage, quite concerned. Gabrielle is nowhere to be found, and Euripides is still absent as well.

Mistaking her concern for anxiety, Homer approaches and smiles down at her.

HOMER

You'll do fine, Gabrielle. I have faith
that all will go as planned this evening.

Xena gives him a distracted smile and nod.

XENA

Oh yeah. I'm sure.



Twickenham steps behind Homer and smiles at them both.

TWICKENHAM

Merikus is taking the stage.
It's starting.

CUT TO:

EXT. TREES - SUNSET

Peeking through the foliage, Euripides raises his small crossbow as the students and alumni of the Academy led by Homer and 'Gabrielle' enter the stage and form several rows behind Merikus, who is still speaking in loud, grating monotone.

A hand touches his neck, along with a sharp blade.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

Drop it.

He freezes.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Drop it, Euripides. I'm not kidding.

Slowly, so as to not get cut, he turns his head, staring up into the fierce blue eyes of the Warrior Princess.

EURIPIDES

I....

GABRIELLE

I'm not interested in your excuses,
Euripides. Drop it. Now.

CUT TO:

EXT. STAGE - SUNDOWN

Receiving her cue from Homer, Xena takes a deep breath and steps forward so that she is directly next to the droning Merikus. She scans the crowd for Gabrielle, but after a moment, she raises her hand and rubs her eyes, shaking her head a little.

XENA

(mumbling)

Maybe that's her secret. She just doesn't see all the damn people watching her.



Merikus looks at her from the corner of his eye, scowling deeply but continuing his speech.

MERIKUS

And of course, all know of the great, wondrous bard of Potadeia, who honors us with her presence!

Xena looks out over the crowd. She looks down at her hands and realizes they are shaking. She licks her lips, realizing she has gotten in deeper than she thought. A thousand eyes are on her.

Xena takes a breath. Her eyes widen as she realizes Merikus is almost finished introducing her. She has no idea what she is going to say when he is done.

CUT TO:

EXT. TREES - SUNDOWN

Gabrielle spots Xena, seeing the look on her face as she realizes the predicament they are in.

GABRIELLE

Oh boy.

EURIPIDES

It's almost time. You have to listen to me.

Blinking, Gabrielle turns her attention back to the traitor. Her eyes narrow.

GABRIELLE

Listen to you? Why you would want to silence her voice, and voices like hers, is beyond me.

EURIPIDES

Silence...? Xena, I don't want to silence them. I want to give them the same opportunity that I had.

GABRIELLE

By assassinating Homer?

EURIPIDES

Homer?? I'm afraid you're mistaken, Xena. I'm not trying to kill Homer. I'm trying to save him.

Gabrielle looks from his face, to the crossbow he still holds in his hands, back to his face again.

GABRIELLE

You'll forgive me if I have a hard time believing that.

EURIPIDES

This isn't for Homer.

He gestures toward the stage.

EURIPIDES

(cont'd)

It's... ahh!

Gabrielle jerks and turns around just in time to meet a masked, cloaked figure leaping at her with sword extended, aiming for Euripides.

GABRIELLE

Hey!

Gabrielle shoves the attacker back and faces off against him. He turns from Euripides and goes after her, using his sword with skill and aggression.

EURIPIDES

Wait!

The man slugs Euripides and he goes down without a sound. Gabrielle tries to just let instinct take over. She steps forward and swings her sword, but it doesn't quite hit in the right place and the man deflects it easily, driving her back a step.

GABRIELLE

Why isn't this as easy as she makes it look?



CUT TO:

EXT. STAGE - SUNDOWN

Xena sees some confusion at the back of the crowd, but she cannot see over it to figure out what it is.

MERIKUS

And now, I give you the
great Gabrielle!

The crowd cheers and claps. Xena stares at them. After a second, the clapping fades, and it grows silent.

Xena takes a breath to speak, then as the last clap fades she hears the sound of crossing swords and suddenly claps her hand over her stomach.



XENA

(whispering)
Gabrielle.

The crowd murmurs, shrugging.

MERIKUS

Gabrielle? We await
your words of wonder.

Xena is searching the crowd again, but cannot find Gabrielle anywhere.

XENA

Ah... I've got... something
to tell you all.

Xena fall silent, and closes her eyes.



CUT TO:

EXT. TREES - SUNDOWN

Gabrielle stumbles, unable to gain control of Xena's body using her own instincts.

CLOAKED MAN

Ha! The great Xena is
not so great after all!

GABRIELLE

Damn it. I can't use this thing.

The man comes after her. Gabrielle stumbles backward, ducking under the man's sword but almost banging her head against the tree limb they are fighting under.

Euripides gets unsteadily to his feet and makes a grab for the man. The man turns and hits him, then as he falls, raises his sword to finish him off.

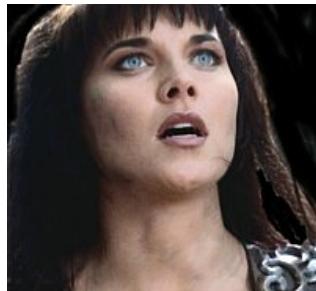
Gabrielle lunges forward and grabs Euripides in mid fall, throwing herself and him out of the man's reach. They hit the ground and Gabrielle rolls over to get up, but finds her sword trapped under Euripides body and looks up to find the attacker's blade coming right at her.

She closes her eyes.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd, whispering)

Xena, I need you.



CUT TO:

EXT. STAGE - SUNDOWN

Xena stands with her eyes closed, the crowd forgotten.

CUT TO:

INT. XENA'S MIND'S EYE VIEW

A thunder is heard. Two sets of pounding.

GABRIELLE

(V.O.)

Xena!

Xena is hunting, following the sound. A blast of light appears and she runs towards it. The pounding gets louder, almost overwhelming. As Xena runs, the thunder slowly changes, becoming a singular pounding as the sound becomes recognizable as a heartbeat.

Of two heartbeats becoming one.



CUT TO:

EXT. TREES - SUNDOWN

The attacker yells in triumph and raises his sword, swinging it down towards Xena's kneeling form.

CLOAKED MAN
I've got you!

As the sword comes within a whisper of her neck, the still figure stirs and evades it in a flickering motion.

The man swings around, but by the time he catches his balance Xena is up and facing him, her sword in her hand and a fierce grin on her face.

XENA
Oh yeah. You got me.



Xena twirls her sword. She goes after the man with glee, slicing his cape to ribbons.

The man stumbles back. Xena pounces on him, ripping off his hood in triumph. It is no one we've seen before.

XENA
(*cont'd*)
Bad plan.

Oddly, the man just smiles at her.

CUT TO:

EXT. STAGE - SUNDOWN

Merikus strides towards Gabrielle. Homer rushes after him.

MERIKUS

As I have long suspected! You
are an impostor! A fake! Guards!

HOMER

No, wait!

Gabrielle opens her eyes and looks at him. She spreads her arms and takes a deep breath.

GABRIELLE

I sing of an Amazon Queen, who in
the midst of her grief, fought bravely
against treachery and reached out
to a place beyond death to rescue
a fallen warrior from the grave.

Gabrielle's voice lifts up over the crowd, which quiets down to listen.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I sing today of grief, and of passion,
and of a love so great it has the
power to make two lives...

(smiling)

One.

Merikus stops in surprise. Homer gives him a shove.

HOMER

I told you!

Merikus turns and glares at Homer. Twickenham slips up to stand behind both of them, motioning to Gabrielle for her to continue.

TWICKENHAM

N-n... now b-b-b-boys. W... we're i...
in... interrupting... our g-g-g-g-guest.

Merikus and Homer subside, bowing towards Gabrielle. Twickenham and Merikus exchange looks.

Gabrielle turns and faces the crowd, then suddenly dives for the ground as Xena leaps onto the stage, hurling herself right over Gabrielle's head and into the three men.

The figures roll several times before stopping. A knife slides along the stage until it hits Gabrielle's boot. She bends over and picks it up, then continues to where Xena is just pulling away from the would-be assassin.

XENA

Here's your traitor, Homer.

Homer and his compatriots gasp as the assassin's flushed face is revealed.

HOMER

Twickenham?!?!?

Merikus gets to his feet his florid face flushed with anger. Several bewildered looking guards cluster around them.

MERIKUS

Now see here....

GABRIELLE

Guards! Arrest this man for conspiracy to assassinate the rightful Chancellor of the Academy.

GUARD

Twickenham?

Gabrielle points.

GABRIELLE

No, Merikus.



MERIKUS

Now wait just a moment! I....

GABRIELLE

(angrily)

How much did he pay you, Twickenham??

TWICKENHAM

I-I-I-I....

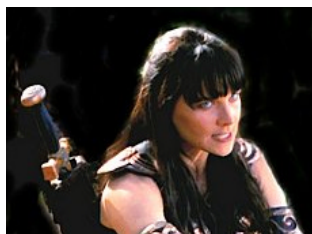
GABRIELLE

How much?!?

Xena pulls the terrified man up by his robes and shakes him.

XENA

I'd suggest you answer her.



TWICKENHAM

T-t-ten th-th-thousand d-d-d-dinars.
And the a-a-a-a-assistant
Ch-ch-ch-chancellorship.

MERIKUS

Lies! All lies!! They're setting me up!
Can't you see that?? They're all in
league with one another. They all
want to discredit me. They're
all lying!! All of them!!!

Euripides jumps onto the stage and strides over to the group, pulling a scroll from his robes.

EURIPIDES

They're not lying. Look.

A guard takes the scroll and unrolls it to reveal a contract between Twickenham and Merikus; a contract written in the same hand that wrote the documents condemning Euripides that Gabrielle had found earlier.

GUARD

This is your writing, Merikus.
I recognize it from a contract
you drew up for my wife
and me last harvest.

MERIKUS

Lies! You're all lying!!
All of you! All of you!!!

GUARD

Take him to the prison.
That one too.

Xena hands Twickenham over to the guards. He looks at his assembled friends, tears sparkling in his haunted eyes.

TWICKENHAM

I-I-I-I'm s-s-s-sor-sor-sor-sorry!

No one answers him as he is led away.

As the men disappear from view, Homer turns to Xena.

HOMER

Thank you, Xena. You saved my life.

XENA

(looking at Gabrielle)
I had a lot of help.

Gabrielle grins and rubs her nose.

HOMER

Of course. You are quite a team.

GABRIELLE

(dryly)

We have many, many skills.



Homer laughs softly, looking at each of them in turn.

HOMER

That I can well believe. Thank you both. You've done the Academy and Athens a great service.

Xena and Gabrielle nod in unison.

GABRIELLE

Any time. Right Xena?

XENA

Right.

Gabrielle indicates the crowd, which is pushing forward to goggle at the going's on.

GABRIELLE

I think you better distract them.
Know any good stories?

Homer grins, and starts towards the crowd followed by his friends.

HOMER

Just leave 'em to me.

Xena and Gabrielle move off to one side into the shadows where they stand to watch, hands clasped. After a moment, they exchange looks.

GABRIELLE

You okay?

Xena nods.

XENA

How about you? That was....

Xena's voice trails off. Gabrielle nods.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, it sure was.

XENA

Could have been worse.

Gabrielle thinks about it for a moment.

GABRIELLE

I think I need time to... think about all of it. But I'm glad to be home.

Xena grins and squeezes Gabrielle's hand warmly.

XENA

Me too. I was getting a crick in my neck from being so short.

Gabrielle puts her hand on her hip and gives Xena a look.

GABRIELLE

Don't get me started.



Xena grins.

XENA

I thought you liked my body.

GABRIELLE

Mm... Let's just say we need to discuss some of your urges.

Xena's eyebrows go right up and sticks there. It is Gabrielle's turn to grin.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. HOMER'S VILLA - DAY

Their belongings packed, Xena and Gabrielle, happily in their own bodies, are readying themselves for the road. Homer and Euripides join them as they make ready to leave.

HOMER

Are you sure you won't stay?

EURIPIDES

Yes, we're planning a huge celebration tonight.

GABRIELLE

Thanks, guys, but we need to be moving on.

EURIPIDES

(doubtfully)
Well, if you're sure.

XENA

We are.



HOMER

I'd like to thank you both again. If it wasn't for you, I might well have been dead, and the Academy would once again have been in the hands of the merchants. If there's ever anything I can do to repay you, please ask.

Gabrielle smiles.

GABRIELLE

No payment necessary. It's what we do. Just give everyone an equal chance to study and learn there. That's all we ask.

HOMER

You have my word.

Gabrielle sobers.

GABRIELLE

I still can't believe it.
Twickenham, of all people.

EURIPIDES

I didn't want to believe it either.
Even when the proof was there.
(beat)
He was my best friend.

GABRIELLE

I wish I understood why he did it.



EURIPIDES

It was his stutter. It kept him from
being the bard he wanted to be.
I think after a while he just... gave
up. It was easier to side with the
rich who were willing to offer him
anything, than to continue to struggle
along doing something he felt he
would never be very good at. He
always wanted respect, and felt
he'd never get it with his stutter.

XENA

Why involve us? That's what I don't get.

HOMER

(shaking head)
He figured your being here
would be a distraction?

EURIPIDES

(grimly)
He probably figured he'd have
someone to blame the death on.
(apologetically)
Sorry, Xena.
(beat, to Gabrielle)
Merikus always had an idea
that you weren't.... Um....

GABRIELLE

Telling the whole
truth in my scrolls?

HOMER

Something like that.

EURIPIDES

(sighing)

And I suppose Twickenham
just wanted to be somebody
else for awhile.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a significant glance.

GABRIELLE

That might be a good fantasy,
but in reality, it's not all it's
cracked up to be, believe me.

Homer and Euripides look at her strangely.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Just... take my word for it.

Xena nods to them both.

XENA

Homer. Euripides.

HOMER

Good journeys, Xena. Please bring Gabrielle
back to visit us again soon. I'd love to
hear the end of that story she was telling.

Gabrielle grins.

GABRIELLE

So would I.

Xena and Gabrielle leave, two puzzled men staring after them.

FADE OUT.

DISCLAIMER

Xena and Gabrielle's sense of self wasn't harmed during the making of this
motion picture. Argo, however, is requesting several weeks of intense therapy.