

Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 7



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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. RUTTED PATH - DAY

XENA and GABRIELLE are traveling along a lightly forested path. Xena sits atop ARGO, her expression alert. Gabrielle walks ahead, eyes scanning the thick growth of trees lining either side of the path.



Her gaze sets upon a flash of red high in the canopy overhead, and she smiles, triumphant.

GABRIELLE

Apple.

Xena rolls her eyes and shakes her head, but doesn't comment on Gabrielle's find.

Perturbed, Gabrielle turns and begins to walk confidently backward, a look of frustration on her face.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

All right, so it's not the best game in the world.
I don't hear you offering up any suggestions.



XENA

(deadpan)

Branch.

GABRIELLE

Branch?

Her hands gesture wildly.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

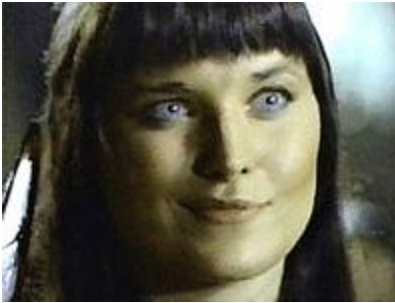
All of this beauty around us, and branch is
the best thing you can come... oof!

Gabrielle stumbles forward, rebounding lightly away from a thick, fruit-laden bough hanging low over the trail. She catches herself just short of falling and fixes Xena with a look hot enough to fry ice.

Xena returns her look with a raised eyebrow and a smirk as she steers Argo deftly around the hanging branch. As she passes Gabrielle she leans forward and her smirk broadens.

XENA

Warned ya.



Xena passes blithely on, leaving Gabrielle to clench her fists and jaw, and turn, teeth bared.

GABRIELLE

(to Xena's back)

I'll get you for this, Warrior Princess.
Just see if I don't.



XENA

(wickedly grinning)

Promises, promises.

Gabrielle's mock frustration passes away like a summer shower, and she grins, throws up her arms, and trots off after her unrepentant partner.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SAME PATH - DAY

Xena and Gabrielle continue their travels, with Gabrielle once again in the lead. Argo stumbles, and Xena utters a fluid curse as she brings the mare back under control.

GABRIELLE

Well, that works, I suppose, but I don't think it's anatomically possible, Xena.



XENA

It's all right, girl. It's all right.

Gabrielle turns to see Xena jump off of Argo's back and lift the mare's front leg, peering at the hoof in disgust.

GABRIELLE

What's wrong?

XENA

She threw a shoe.

GABRIELLE

(concernedly)

That's the second one this month.

XENA

I know. Remind me to thank our 'friend' Pellos if we're ever in the area again.

Gabrielle winces.

XENA

(Cont'd)

There's a town not far from here.
C'mon. I know a shortcut.



DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

An old, abandoned, and crumbling TEMPLE stands off the narrow path Xena and Gabrielle are following. It is surrounded by a ring of very old trees, most of whom have shed their leaves, even in this, the height of summer. The bone white of their naked branches resemble human skeletons bleached by the sun.

The temperature seems as if it's dropped twenty degrees, and Gabrielle shivers as an almost autumnal breeze brushes across her bared flesh.

XENA

Not exactly welcoming, is it?

GABRIELLE

Tell me about it.

(beat)

I wonder whose it used to be?

Xena peers closely at the structure, but most of the identifying markers have crumbled away.

XENA

Hard to tell. Might be something inside, though.

GABRIELLE

If it's all the same to you, I think I can live with not knowing.

Argo snorts in agreement, and Gabrielle grins a 'thank you' at her.

Xena hesitates for a moment, then nods, taking a tighter grip on Argo's reins.

XENA

All right. It'll still be here when we come back this way.

GABRIELLE

(sotto voce)

Joy.



XENA

Say something?

GABRIELLE

(falsely smiling)

Oh no. Nothing at all.

Xena narrows her eyes, but refrains from commenting, and the two start down the path again, leaving the abandoned temple behind.

As they retreat, a pair of eyes follows their movements until they are out of sight.

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The bright, warm sun is a welcome guest as Xena and Gabrielle step out of the dark wood and into a mid-sized, thriving TOWN. TOWNSPEOPLE greet their sudden appearance with smiles and nods of welcome.

GABRIELLE

(pleased)

Now, this is more like it!



Xena surveys the town with a professional air, finds it acceptable, and lays a hand on Gabrielle's shoulder. She guides her lover in the direction of the BLACKSMITH.

The smith is a large, beefy man with huge arms, a barrel chest, and a large, sloping belly that rounds out the leather of his long, stained apron. The anvil and tongs he holds look tiny in his blackened hands, but his smile is warm and welcoming as he notices the two women approach.

He lays down his tools and steps outside his forge to greet them, wiping his massive hands on his apron.



BLACKSMITH

Welcome! Welcome! How can I help you?

XENA

I need shoes for my horse.

BLACKSMITH

You've come to the right place, then.
Let's just see what we have here.

He approaches Argo, then backs off a step as she snorts and dances out of his way.

BLACKSMITH

(Cont'd)

Feisty one, isn't she?

XENA

She's a warhorse.

BLACKSMITH

That would explain it, yes.

(beat)

May I?

Xena gently urges Argo's face toward hers.

XENA

Play nice.



Argo's expression is almost human in its annoyed resignation, and she nods once and blows air from her nostrils into Xena's face.

Gabrielle covers a grin behind her hand. Xena sighs.

XENA

(Cont'd)

(to blacksmith)

Go ahead.

The smith steps in and gently examines Argo's hooves, then steps back, wiping his hands again.

BLACKSMITH

It's your nails. Crumbling away
to dust, the lot of 'em.

(beat)

Two dinars and I'll fix her up right.

Best nails this side of Thrace.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, but how are the shoes?

BLACKSMITH

(grinning)

Best anywhere.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a glance.

XENA
You're on.

BLACKSMITH
Wonderful!

He walks back to his forge, then turns, smiling.

BLACKSMITH
(Cont'd)

This is gonna take awhile. If you haven't eaten yet, give Spiros' Inn a try. He serves a great lamb stew, and his ale is the nectar of the gods.

Xena looks to Gabrielle, who grins.

GABRIELLE
A meal I don't have to cook?
I'm already there.

CUT TO:

INT. SPIROS' INN - DAY

The INN is clean, well kept, and almost full. Spirited chatter between the diners comes to an abrupt halt as the door opens and Xena and Gabrielle enter. It then resumes, a touch more softly than before.

Xena spies an empty table in the far corner, and heads for it, Gabrielle slightly behind.

As they sit, the door to the kitchen area opens and a short, stocky MAN appears. He is middle-aged, with a weathered, expressive face, and a withered arm ensconced in a sling resting against his chest. He is SPIROS, the owner of the Inn.

His dark eyes scan the interior of the inn, then widen as he spots his two newest guests. His jaw drops.



SPIROS
(softly)

By all the gods on Mount Olympus.

Xena hears this and looks up. Their eyes meet, and a stupefied grin crosses Spiros' face.

SPIROS
Xena?

Xena nods, and smiles slightly.



XENA
Spiros.

Spiros crosses the room to stand beside the table, shaking his head in amazement.

SPIROS
It's really you. I can't believe it.
They... they said you were dead!

Xena stands and grasps Spiros' proffered arm.

XENA
It's a long story.

SPIROS
And an exciting one, I'd wager.

Releasing Xena's hand, he steps back and appraises her from head to toe and back again, his smile growing.

SPIROS
(Cont'd)
By the gods, look at you! You're even more
beautiful now than when I last saw you!

Sensing Xena's discomfort with the adoration in his voice, he looks away, and sees Gabrielle sitting patiently, a slightly bewildered expression on her face. His smile reappears.

SPIROS
(Cont'd)
And you...you must be Gabrielle.

Gabrielle returns his smile and stands, taking his hand.

GABRIELLE
I am. It's very nice to meet you.



SPIROS

And an honor to meet you. Your tales
have kept me company on many a night.

Gabrielle blushes faintly.

GABRIELLE

Thank you.

SPIROS

You're very welcome.
Very welcome indeed.

He pauses as he turns back to Xena.

SPIROS

(Cont'd)

What brings you here?

XENA

My horse is getting shod.

SPIROS

Ah. You'll be here awhile, then.
Our smith is a master at his craft, but
slower than a frozen river at Solstice.

(beat)

And look at me, prattling on as if I have
nothing better to do with my time. Please,
sit and be comfortable. I've made lamb
stew today, and if I remember right, it
used to be a favorite of yours.

XENA

(smiling)

It still is.

SPIROS

Perfect! I'll be right back with your food,
then, and some ale to wash it down.

Xena and Gabrielle watch as he bustles away. Gabrielle turns to Xena.

GABRIELLE

Old friend?



XENA

He was a cook in my army. A long time ago.
The only one I ever trusted not to poison me.

Her eyes grow distant as she remembers.

XENA

(Cont'd)

He was just a kid when he came to me.
He'd run away from home.
"Looking for adventure", he said.

GABRIELLE

You seem to collect those.

XENA

(smirking)

Can't seem to get rid of 'em either.



Gabrielle laughs.

Further conversation is halted as Spiros returns, balancing a tray laden with food and drink in his one good arm. He sets the tray down and serves each woman deftly, then smiling, bows and leaves them to their meal.

The food and drink, both as good as promised, are consumed without much conversation. Finishing the last of her ale, Xena rises with her mug and cocks her eyebrow at Gabrielle. Gabrielle smiles and holds up her mug.

GABRIELLE

Please.

Xena nods and retreats to the large bar against the far wall, slipping among the throng of thirsty customers.

Spiros enters from the kitchen and approaches Gabrielle, intending to clear the table. He smiles as he watches Gabrielle watch Xena, easily seeing the look of adoration in her eyes.

SPIROS

She saved my life, you know.

Caught unaware, Gabrielle starts, and turns to face Spiros.

GABRIELLE

Excuse me?

SPIROS

Xena. She saved my life. It was a long time ago, but I've never forgotten.

GABRIELLE

(interestedly)

How did she save your life?



SPIROS

I suppose she told you I was a cook in her army?

GABRIELLE

Yes, and that you were very young and out for adventure.

Spiros laughs.

SPIROS

Very young and very foolish.
Full of big talk and bigger dreams.
Gods...I can't believe I was ever that naïve.

GABRIELLE

(chagrined)

Join the club.

SPIROS

That's right. You followed the Warrior Princess as well, didn't you?

GABRIELLE

Best thing I ever did.



SPIROS

I thought so too, at the time. My father was a tavernkeeper, much like I am now, in a tiny town. I was bored, so I left. I blundered into Xena's winter camp and almost got myself killed. Lucky for me, however, Xena had just dispatched her last cook. She caught him trying to slip hemlock into her ale.

GABRIELLE

(wincing)
Ooh.

SPIROS

Exactly. Well, I'd been cooking since I was old enough to walk, so I volunteered my services, and she took me up on it.

(smiling, remembering)

It was hard work, cooking for that army, but it was also exhilarating, somehow. Xena was so....

Spiros blushes and clears his throat.

SPIROS

(Cont'd)

At any rate, spring came, and that's when she saved my life.

GABRIELLE

What did she do?

SPIROS

She sent me home.

Gabrielle and Spiros look up to find Xena approaching, a small frown on her face. Gabrielle recognizes the look as one of annoyance, and she smiles sheepishly, knowing she's been caught out.

Spiros clears his throat again, quickly gathers up the dirty dishes, and retreats back into the kitchen, not wanting to be on the wrong end of Xena's temper.

Xena sits and slides Gabrielle's mug across the table.

XENA

Talking about me again, were you?



GABRIELLE

My favorite subject.

XENA

Mm.

They drink in companionable silence for a moment before Xena notices Gabrielle watching her. The frown reappears on her face.

XENA

What?



GABRIELLE

(smiling)

Spiros was telling me how you saved his life by sending him home.

(beat)

No matter how bad you think you were back then, Xena, you always did have a good heart underneath it all.

XENA

(very softly, warningly)

Gabrielle....

GABRIELLE

It's true, Xena.

You saw the look in Spiros' eyes. He adores you... the you he knew back then.



Xena's frown grows more pronounced, and her eyes grow cool.

XENA

I was far worse than you could ever imagine, Gabrielle.
Don't mistake my actions for kindness.

GABRIELLE

But....

Xena puts her mug down on the table and braces her hands against the tabletop.

XENA

Spiros was of no use to me beyond his cooking skills.
He was a boy with a withered arm. Believe me, if I
thought he had any chance at all of being useful to me
in a fight, I'd have kept him with me and he'd be so
many moldering bones on a battlefield somewhere.

She stands, slowly, hands still braced against the table.



XENA

(Cont'd)

There was nothing at all good about me then, Gabrielle.
Don't try and pretend there was.
You're not fooling either of us.

Without another word, she turns and stalks from the tavern, leaving a bewildered Gabrielle still seated at the table, mug of ale in hand.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - AFTERNOON

Xena strides through the center of town, her expression stormy and foreboding. Her fists are clenched at her sides, her jaw tense and set. People glance at her, then look quickly away. The blacksmith waves from his place at the forge, pounding out Argo's shoes with expert hands.

The inn door opens, and Gabrielle steps outside. She spots Xena immediately, and walks quickly to catch up to her.

GABRIELLE

Xena!



Xena gives no appearance of hearing Gabrielle's hail, and continues to head for the edge of town.

Cursing under her breath, Gabrielle increases her pace, catching up to Xena just past the MERCHANT STALLS.

GABRIELLE

Xena, please.

Xena stops, but doesn't turn, obviously trying to bring her anger under control.



GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I'm sorry for upsetting you. I didn't mean....

Xena's expression softens, and she turns her head to meet Gabrielle's gaze.

XENA

It's all right.

I shouldn't have snapped at you like that.

GABRIELLE

And I should know better than to
tease you about your past.

(beat)

Let's take a walk.

I need to work that delicious lunch off.

Xena looks around at the thriving merchant area.

XENA

You could burn it off bargain hunting.



Gabrielle grins.

GABRIELLE

I could, but I'd rather be with you.

(beat)

How about exploring that
old temple we passed?

Xena looks surprised.

GABRIELLE

I know. I know.

But we never could resist a good mystery.

C'mon.



CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED TEMPLE - AFTERNOON

Xena and Gabrielle explore the denuded area surrounding the abandoned temple. They find very little aside from the obvious, and Xena moves to explore the interior as Gabrielle makes her way around the back of the crumbling structure.

GABRIELLE

Be careful.

XENA

(preoccupied)

Yes, dear.



Gabrielle shakes her head and continues to the rear of the temple.

A sense of something she can't define comes over her, lifting the hairs at the back of her neck. Her head comes up just as a flash of brilliant red light illuminates the temple's interior. A loud, thunder-like boom accompanies the appearance of the light, and the ground around the temple begins to shake so strongly that Gabrielle is driven to her knees. The shaking seems to go on for an eternity, but then it and the light disappear as quickly as they appeared, and absolute silence falls over the area.

Gabrielle struggles to her feet, face white with shock.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

(silence reigns)

XENA!!!

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. TEMPLE - AFTERNOON

Gabrielle runs into the temple, looking desperately around for any sign of Xena.

GABRIELLE

Xena!!

She quickly scans the floor, which is littered with fallen debris. It is as musty and silent as a tomb. She runs forward toward the half-fallen altar, hopping over crumbled bits of marble and masonry without really registering her actions. She moans softly as she spies her fallen lover, her legs pinned beneath the remains of the heavy altar, unmoving.



GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

No. No, not again.
Please not again.



Dropping to her knees, she reaches out a trembling hand, tears already trebling her vision. Her fingers unerringly find the pulsepoint at Xena's neck, and her eyes squeeze shut tight in relief as she feels the strong, steady beat under her questing fingertips.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Oh, gods, thank you.

(beat)

Xena? Xena, can you hear me?

There's no answer, and Gabrielle leans back, assessing the situation. The marble of the altar-top is cold to the touch, almost unnaturally so, and very heavy, but it shows some give when she applies gentle pressure.

Jumping back to her feet, she uses all of her strength to lever the heavy object off of Xena's legs. To her relief, Xena's heavy leg armor seems to have protected her legs from any lasting damage.

Xena stirs as the sound of the slab hitting the ground echoes through the once silent chamber, and she moans softly as her eyes flutter open and try to focus.

Seeing this, Gabrielle drops back to her knees, her smile brilliant.



GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Welcome back.

Xena doesn't reply immediately. Her normally clear eyes are glazed and foggy.

Gabrielle frowns. Reaching down, she takes her partner's hand and squeezes gently.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Xena?

Xena blinks, and produces a slow smile.

XENA

Never could...resist a... good mystery.

Laughing softly, Gabrielle helps Xena to sit up, then supports her as Xena leans against her for a brief moment, rubbing the area above her brow and frowning.



GABRIELLE

What's wrong? Are you in pain?

XENA

No. Just a little dizzy. I'm all right now.

Xena pulls away and rises to her feet. She looks around at the destroyed interior, down at the marble slab once covering her legs, then over to Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

Do you remember what happened?

XENA

Bits and pieces.

(beat)

I remember walking in here, the altar,
and a flash of red light. The rest....

(beat)

How long was I out?

GABRIELLE

Not long. Are you sure you're all right?
You took a pretty bad fall.



Instead of the irritation Gabrielle half expects, Xena smiles and reaches out to gently touch Gabrielle's face.

XENA

I'm fine. Really.

Gabrielle returns the smile, though a kernel of unease remains within her.

GABRIELLE

Well, if you're sure, maybe we should
think about getting out of here. These
columns don't look all that stable.

Xena looks around, then nods in agreement.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Let's go then.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TOWN - EVENING

Dusk has fallen by the time Xena and Gabrielle make their way back into the town. The merchants have closed their stalls for the night, and the streets are filled with people making their way home for dinner. Blazing torches on high posts light the way.

The blacksmith approaches as Xena and Gabrielle head for the main thoroughfare.

BLACKSMITH

She's shod, brushed down, and back
in the stables having some dinner.

GABRIELLE

(embarrassed)

Gods... I completely forgot....



BLACKSMITH

That's all right, Miss. I figured you were out exploring
the wonders of our town here. And I have a lot of
extra room in my stables, so it wasn't a problem.

(beat)

I was just about to head to Spiros' Inn for
some dinner of my own. Would you join me?

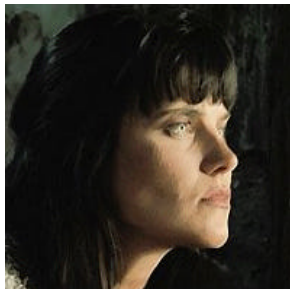
Both women nod, and the trio continue into town.

CUT TO:

INT. SLEEPING ROOM - NIGHT

Night has fallen by the time the meal is finished, and Xena and Gabrielle have agreed to accept Spiros' hospitality and his offer of a room for the evening. The room is small, but very clean. A good-sized bed rests against one wall. A small table, topped by a burning oil lamp stands next to the bed, and an unlit fireplace covers most of the opposite wall.

Xena stands before the open window, looking out into the darkness as the light breeze flutters her hair.



Gabrielle putters around with their gear, stashed in one corner next to the fireplace. Gabrielle straightens and walks over to the window. She places her hand atop Xena's, which is resting lightly on the open window's sill. Xena turns her head slowly and looks down at Gabrielle. She smiles softly.

GABRIELLE

You ok?

XENA

Fine. Just enjoying the quiet.

GABRIELLE

(laughing)

It was getting kinda noisy down there, wasn't it?

XENA

A little, yeah.

Xena turns back to the window, and her expression goes distant and slack once again.

Gabrielle's brow furrows.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

XENA

Mm?

GABRIELLE

Where are you?



Xena looks back at Gabrielle, eyebrow raised.

XENA

Excuse me?

GABRIELLE

Where are you?

(beat)

Ever since this afternoon, when that temple collapsed, you've been...somewhere far away.

(beat)

It's worrying me. Are you sure nothing happened to you that you're not telling me?

Xena turns fully to Gabrielle and rests her hands on her shoulders.

XENA

You know everything I know, Gabrielle.
I promise.



Xena tightens her grip on Gabrielle's shoulders, and pulls her into her embrace. The two hug tightly for a long moment before Xena pulls away slightly and trails a thumb against Gabrielle's cheek, just beneath her eye.

XENA

(Cont'd)

(murmuring)

I love you, Gabrielle.

Lowering her head, Xena brushes her lips against Gabrielle's in an impossibly tender kiss. When the kiss ends, Gabrielle looks up into Xena's eyes and sees nothing but love and a bone deep adoration reflected back at her. Her worries quiet, for the moment, and she can't help the smile that breaks across her face.

GABRIELLE

Come on. Let's go to bed.

Xena grins.

XENA

Best idea you've had all day.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SLEEPING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Gabrielle wakes up alone, and by the coolness of the furs at her side, she's been that way for quite awhile. Unconcerned, she yawns and stretches luxuriously, then sits up and runs a hand through her hair to order it.

As her gaze sets upon their neatly stored gear, she freezes, hand in hair. Though her armor and leathers are gone, Xena's weapons remain behind, gleaming in the light cast through the open window.

Face set, Gabrielle slips from the bed and dresses quickly, slipping her sais into her boots and straightening her skirt.

GABRIELLE

Time to get some answers.

CUT TO:

INT. INN - MORNING

Gabrielle walks down the stairs and into the dining room of the Inn, where she deftly avoids a collision with Spiros. He is backing out of the kitchen bearing a laden tray.

Spiros turns and smiles in welcome.

SPIROS

Good morning to you, Gabrielle! I've saved a table for you in the corner there. If you'll just....

GABRIELLE

Thanks, Spiros, but I need to find Xena first.
Did you see her this morning?



SPIROS

Yes. Maybe an hour ago, I think.
She was headed toward the stables.

GABRIELLE

Thanks!

Gabrielle leaves the Inn.

CUT TO:

INT. STABLES - MORNING

The blacksmith exits the stables just as Gabrielle is about to enter. He greets her with a beaming smile as he wipes his large hands on his already filthy leather apron.

BLACKSMITH

Good morning, Miss.
Your horse is out in the corral if you want her.

GABRIELLE

Thank you. Is Xena there with her?

BLACKSMITH

No. I saw her, just a little while ago, but she headed off into the woods. She said she would be back soon.

GABRIELLE

Thank you.
I need to talk to her.
We'll be back with the money we owe you.

BLACKSMITH

No hurry, Miss. Take your time.

GABRIELLE

(gratefully)
Thanks.

CUT TO:

EXT. TEMPLE - DAY

Xena sits on the temple steps, staring out into the woods beyond. The tense planes of her face soften as she watches Gabrielle step into the clearing and approach.



GABRIELLE

Thought I'd find you here.

XENA

Ya did, huh?

GABRIELLE

Yep.

Gabrielle closes the final distance between them and squats down on her haunches.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

And now that I'm here, you're going to
tell me what's going on with you.

(beat, off Xena's look)

I'm serious, Xena. I'm not leaving
this spot until you talk to me.

She takes Xena's hands.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Please.



Xena scans the area before returning her gaze to Gabrielle.

XENA

(hesitantly)

There's something about this place that...draws me to it.
As if I'm being pulled here for some reason.

(beat)

And I don't know what that reason is.

Gabrielle nods, understanding how hard it is for Xena to admit to anything less than complete confidence, even to her.

GABRIELLE

When did this start?

XENA

I felt it a little when we passed by here the first time.
But since this temple collapsed, the feeling
has been stronger than ever. I just don't....



Her voice trails off as her fists clench in frustration.

GABRIELLE

It's all right. Whatever it is, we'll figure it out.

Xena shakes her head.

XENA

I don't think that's possible. There's nothing
here but a ruined temple and some dead trees.

GABRIELLE

There **has** to be something. Whatever made that light flash and the ground shake like that....

XENA

... Is long gone now.

GABRIELLE

(heatedly)

You went back inside?



XENA

I had to.

Gabrielle nods, reluctantly. Xena looks around once more, sighs in frustration, and resolutely squares her shoulders.

XENA

(Cont'd)

All right, there's nothing more we can do here.

Standing, she reaches down a hand, and pulls Gabrielle to her feet.

GABRIELLE

We could ask Spiros about this place.
I mean, he's got to know **something** about it, right?
Even if it's just who it used to belong to?

XENA

That's a good idea.

GABRIELLE

(smirking)

I'm known to come up with them on occasion.



Xena grins and shakes her head, and together the two make their way back to the town.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TOWN - MORNING

Xena and Gabrielle walk into a mob scene. Townspeople, armed with clubs and other crude weapons, swarm the square, shouting incomprehensibly.

Xena and Gabrielle are spotted, and the mob turns on them.

MAN #1

There she is!

MAN #2

Get her!

MAN #3

Kill the murdering bitch!

Gabrielle unsheathes her sais and crouches in a defensive stance. Beside her, Xena stares into the crowd, but makes no move.



The crowd rushes in, but stops short of the pair, wary of Gabrielle's armed determination.

GABRIELLE

What's going on here? Why are you attacking us?

MAN #1

That monster murdered Belerron!

GABRIELLE

Mur-- Wait! Who's Belerron?

MAN#1

Don't play daft, woman! He's the blacksmith!

GABRIELLE

What?? When?!?



MAN #2

Enough with your games!
We saw it with our own eyes!
That harpy killed him in cold blood!

GABRIELLE

That's impossible!
Xena didn't kill anyone!
We weren't even here!
(beat, as she looks at her partner)
Xena?

MAN #1

You're lying!

MAN #4

Kill her!!

The crowd presses in, but Gabrielle pushes the leaders back, making the rest hesitate again. Gabrielle looks over her shoulder at Xena, who is still as a statue.

GABRIELLE

Xena, do something!
At least defend yourself!



It's as if she's talking to air. Xena doesn't respond. Her face has paled to an unnatural white, and her eyes appear empty and lifeless.

Gabrielle turns back to the crowd.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I'm telling you she harmed no one!

A stone sails over the crowd and hits Xena in the belly. She doesn't react. Her face is set as granite, emotions unreadable.



Gabrielle turns as the crowd encircles them, weapons at the ready. It's obvious to all that she'll use them to defend herself and her partner.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Please, please stop this, all of you!
I don't want to hurt you! Please!

MAN #5

Enough talk! Get her!

The crowd presses fully in, and Gabrielle goes into action, using her sais like battering rams against the chests and jaws of the onrushing men. All around the circle, men fall in tangled heaps, only to be replaced by their compatriots, who step into the fray with clumsy, but powerful thrusts of their weapons.

Three sets of hands reach into the melee, grab onto Xena, and begin to pull her from the rioting crowd.

GABRIELLE

Xena!! NO!

A right, left combination to the head with the butts of her sais takes care of the first man.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Keep....

A kidney punch followed by a leg sweep tumbles the second man to the ground.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Your... hands....

The third, larger by far than the other two, goes down slowly, under a vicious assault of expertly placed punches and kicks. A tree being felled a little at a time.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

OFF!!!



Gabrielle pulls Xena away, grabbing her tightly above the elbow, when she feels a blow coming from behind. Just managing to deflect it with her sai, she releases Xena and spins, meeting the

next thrust with both weapons, and easily twisting the makeshift staff from the man's hands. She hears the sound of air being driven from a set of lungs, and, distracted, glances toward her hunched over partner just in time to be taken down by a terrific blow to the backs of her knees.



She drops and rolls, but by the time she regains her feet, the crowd has closed completely around Xena and is dragging her away.

She tries to part the mob, but it is impossible.

Suddenly, she spies Spiros standing just outside of his Inn, watching the proceedings with a pained expression on his face. Gabrielle immediately races toward him.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

You have to stop this! Please!

SPIROS

I can't, Gabrielle. I can't.

GABRIELLE

You have to!

The person who did this wasn't Xena!

You have to believe me!

SPIROS

I wish I could, Gabrielle, but I saw her with my own eyes. She blew in here like a typhoon out of the depths of Tartarus, grabbed her weapons, and ran back out. She hurt two of my customers who got in her way.

(beat)

Then I watched her as she beat the Hades out of the blacksmith. He managed to get a good lick in with his poker, burned her bad I think, but then she took it from him and....

(beat)

It was horrible.

He's lucky to be alive.

GABRIELLE

He's alive?!? But they said....

SPIROS

He's alive. Just.

GABRIELLE

Spiros, I can prove that it wasn't Xena.
You said she was burned, right?
Well, go after them and look at her!
You'll see there's no burn mark on her!

Spiros looks uncomfortable, but shakes his head sadly.

SPIROS

I can't be positive she got burned,
Gabrielle. Maybe she didn't.
It wouldn't prove anything. I'm sorry.

Spiros starts to turn away when Gabrielle grabs his arm and spins him back to face her.



GABRIELLE

Damn you, you listen to me!
Xena did not do this! I swear it to you!
(beat)
Spiros, I need your help.
Xena saved your life once. And she's
never asked for anything in return.
(beat)
Well, I'm asking. Help her.
Please. She's innocent.

Spiros stares at her. Gabrielle can tell he's beginning to weaken.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Please. Just go to her. Look at her.
You'll know. She didn't do this.

After a long moment, Spiros finally nods.

SPIROS

All right. But if see one piece of evidence,
just one, I'll string that rope over the
nearest tree and hang her myself.

GABRIELLE

I understand. Please, let's go.

SPIROS

No. You stay here, Gabrielle.
They're already half convinced that
you're her accomplice in this.
Let me deal with this alone.

It's Gabrielle's turn to reluctantly nod, and she stays behind as Spiros crosses the square toward the mob, and Xena.

Left alone, Gabrielle stares after Xena's only hope. The hair on the back of her neck suddenly lifts as she feels eyes on her.



She turns around, searching, but the square is deserted. The feeling is still there, however, and growing stronger. She looks back, over her shoulder, toward the woods, suddenly certain that whoever is studying her is hiding in the thick growth beyond the town's boundaries.

Her eyes narrow with the realization that whoever caused this mob scene is watching from the safety of the woods. Her hands curl into fists and her jaw sets.

SPIROS

(Cont'd)
(shouting)
Gabrielle!

Gabrielle turns to see Spiros lifting his good arm in a half wave. Xena stands next to him, looking incredibly pale and tired, but otherwise uninjured. She runs to them.



SPIROS

(Cont'd)
They've placed her in my custody, for now.
But they want proof that you're telling
the truth, Gabrielle. Absolute proof.
If you can't find it...

Gabrielle looks up at her partner. There are tears in Xena's eyes, but she doesn't speak. Reaching up, Gabrielle wipes a tear away, then turns to Spiros.



GABRIELLE

I'll find that proof, Spiros.

SPIROS

The Fates be with you, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

Thanks, but I think I'll manage on my own.

(beat)

Take care of her.

With one last long look at Xena, Gabrielle turns and heads for the woods at a run.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TEMPLE - DAY

Sais drawn and ready, Gabrielle steps into the clearing around the temple. Her eyes scan the area, missing nothing.

A flash of sunlight on metal, and a figure steps casually out of the temple, smirking.

Gabrielle's jaw drops and her eyes widen in horrified recognition.

XENA

Hello, Gabrielle.



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. TEMPLE – DAY

Gabrielle reacts, clutching her sais tighter and unconsciously readying herself for a fight.

GABRIELLE

(strongly)

Who are you?

XENA

(smirking)

Come now, Gabrielle.

Is that any way to greet your soulmate?

Radiating dark, sensual energy, Xena takes another casual step forward. Gabrielle tenses, but stands her ground.

GABRIELLE

You're not my soulmate.

Xena's eyebrow quirks, and her smirk turns into a leer.

XENA

Sure I am.

(beat)

And I can prove it to you.



Xena takes another step, clearly stalking her intended prey.

GABRIELLE

Stay back!

XENA

(seductively)

You don't wanna hurt me, Gabrielle.

You can't...hurt me.

GABRIELLE

I will if you don't stay where you are.

Xena produces a mock frown, and slows to a stop.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Thank you.

XENA

Always the courteous one, aren't you, Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE

I'll ask you again. Who are you?



After a moment, Xena brazenly gazes at Gabrielle, from head to toe and back again. She licks her lips.

XENA

Your body speaks a truth your tongue denies, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle refuses to be baited.

XENA

(Cont'd)

(darkly)

All right, I can see it's gonna take a little convincing for you to see things my way.

(beat, as she considers)

Who else would know about that delicious little birthmark on the inside of your left thigh, or how you purr when I....

GABRIELLE

ENOUGH!

Xena laughs.

XENA

Enough? Oh no, I don't think so.

She resumes her forward motion; long, easy, confident strides.

XENA

(Cont'd)

I don't think...

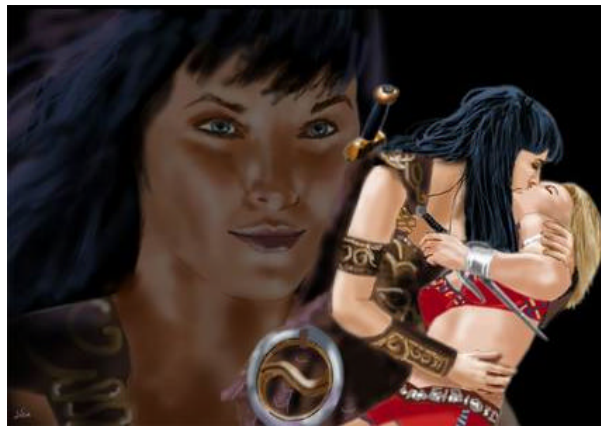
Another step closer.

XENA
(Cont'd)
... it will ever...

The distance between them is closed. Xena places a fingertip on the point of each sai, and easily moves them out of the way of her advance.

XENA
(Cont'd)
... be enough.

Supremely confident, Xena releases her light grip on the sais and reaches for Gabrielle's waist, pulling the smaller woman tight against her and covering her lips in an primal, lustful kiss.



Stunned, Gabrielle's body responds before her mind can catch up, pulled in by the overbearing sexuality of this woman she realizes is, in fact, her soulmate. The kiss goes on for a long, passionate moment, before Xena finally pulls away, her eyes half-lidded and as dark as the smile she sports.

XENA
(Cont'd)
(purring)
Proof enough?
Or should we take this dance a little further?

Gabrielle blinks, and swallows hard, trying to regain control of her rebellious body.

GABRIELLE
(hoarsely)
How?

XENA
The brainless dishrag you share the furs with had it right.
There's a power here. I can smell it on the wind.
(beat)
Like blood on a battlefield.

GABRIELLE
What kind of power?

Xena grins.

XENA
Destiny.



GABRIELLE
I'm afraid I don't understand.

XENA
Oh, but I think you do, Gabrielle.
(beat)
That so-called "good side" of me that
you so cherish has been burned away,
leaving me free to fulfill my destiny.

GABRIELLE
And that destiny is?

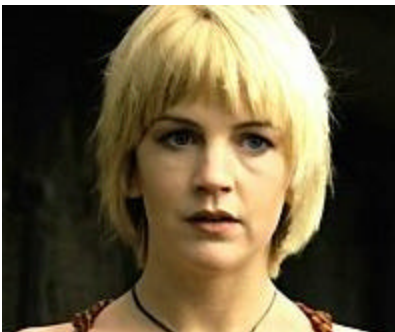
Xena's eyes darken.

XENA
False innocence doesn't become you.

Gabrielle remains silent, standing her ground.

XENA
(Cont'd)
I'll need an army, of course. Your Amazons should
fill the bill nicely, at least for now. They're decent
fighters, and they know how to work together
as a group, which is more than I can say for
most start-up armies I've commanded.

Gabrielle is stunned.



GABRIELLE

There is no way in Tartarus that the Amazons
are going to follow you on some quest
for world domination, Xena.

XENA

(grinning)

Oh, they won't be following me, Gabrielle.
You're their Queen, after all.

GABRIELLE

(whispering)

You're crazy.

Xena cups Gabrielle's cheek and brushes her thumb against Gabrielle's lips.

XENA

Am I really?

GABRIELLE

Don't do this, Xena.

XENA

Admit it, Gabrielle. Power intoxicates you.
And why shouldn't it?

(beat)

It's glorious.



GABRIELLE

You're wrong.

XENA

You might be able to fool yourself, Gabrielle.
But you could never fool me.

(beat)

You didn't even wait for my corpse
to cool before accepting the
Queen's mask, did you?

GABRIELLE

(heatedly)

That's not true!

XENA

Isn't it? You ignored my dying wish
to have my body taken to Amphipolis.

GABRIELLE

The Amazons needed me.
You know that.



XENA

So you've said, yes. But given the
choice, you snapped up that mask
with barely a second thought.

(beat)

Admit it, Gabrielle. You love power.
I can feel it burning within you.

Xena's hand tightens on Gabrielle's jaw.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Admit it.



Gabrielle grasps Xena's wrist and squeezes tightly.

GABRIELLE

No.

Smirking, Xena loosens her grip, and takes a short step away.

XENA

You have fire, Gabrielle. It's one
of the things I enjoy most about you.

Xena pauses, as she takes another lingering look up and down Gabrielle's body.

XENA

(Cont'd)

Among...other assets.

(beat)

I'm offering you the chance to rule
the world with me, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

Over my dead body.

XENA

It just might come to that.

GABRIELLE

Then do it now, or I'll spend every single
waking moment trying to stop you.



Xena laughs.

XENA

You can try.

(beat)

But we both know who'd win.

(beat)

Join me, Gabrielle. I'll give you
riches you've never dreamed of.

GABRIELLE

I don't want riches, Xena.

I want you. All of you.

Darkness **and** light.

XENA

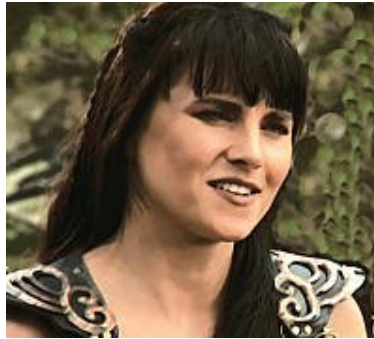
I'm sorry, Gabrielle.

That's one wish I'll never grant.

GABRIELLE

It's the only wish I want granted.

Xena smiles and Gabrielle wonders if there's a bit of sadness in it.



XENA

Go back to your simpering little do-gooder, Gabrielle.
I'll be back with your Amazons.
I think you'll have changed your mind by then.

GABRIELLE

The Amazons won't follow you, Xena.

XENA

Oh, I think they will.

(beat)

Because if they don't...

(beat)

... I'll just kill 'em all.

Putting her fingers up to her lips, Xena gives a piercing whistle, and Argo prances forward. Xena leaps on her back, and, with a final smile, is gone into the woods.

GABRIELLE

XENA!!!!

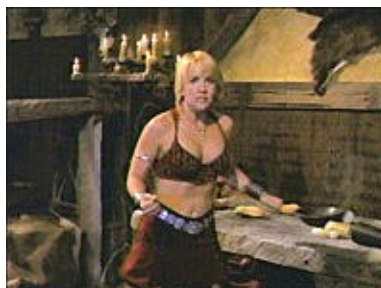
CUT TO:

INT. INN - DAY

Gabrielle bursts through the doors and into the tavern. The diners all look up, staring at the disheveled wild woman who has just entered.

GABRIELLE

Spiros!!



Spiros comes out from the kitchen.

SPIROS

What in Tartarus is going...Gabrielle!
What's wrong? Are you all right?
You look as if you've seen a ghost!

GABRIELLE

Spiros, I need Xena.
Right now.
Where is she?

SPIROS

She's in your room, Gabrielle.
What....

His voice trails off as Gabrielle pushes past him and runs up the stairs. Spiros quickly follows.

CUT TO:

INT. SLEEPING ROOM - DAY

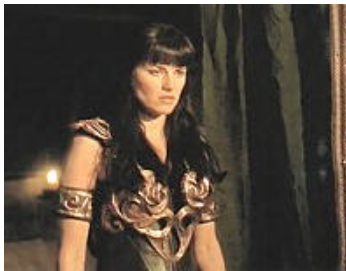
Xena stands as the door opens and Gabrielle enters. Seeing the shattered look in Xena's eyes, she comes to a stop less than a foot away.

GABRIELLE

(with certainty)
You know.

XENA

Yes. It all came together
when the mob attacked.
(beat)
Did you find her?



GABRIELLE

Yes, and we have to do
something about it. Right now.
(beat)
Xena, she's going to try to force the
Amazons to join her. We need to stop her.

XENA

And we will. But first we need to
find out how this happened in the
first place, and how to reverse it.

GABRIELLE

Xena, we don't have time! She's on her way to the Amazons right now! She said if they don't join up with her, she'll....

XENA

... Kill them all. I know.

Standing behind the two, Spiros politely clears his throat.

SPIROS

Perhaps I might be of some help?
If you'd care to tell me what's going on, that is.

Gabrielle rounds on Spiros in frustration, then forces herself to relax, realizing that he is just trying to help them. She puts a hand up to her head for a moment to calm her emotions, then releases a pent-up breath.

GABRIELLE

Do you know anything about the temple in the woods north of here?

Spiros frowns as he considers.

SPIROS

It was a temple to Athena, at one time.
She fell out of favor here maybe ten or so years back.
Other cults have worshipped there every now and then.
None of them ever last for very long. Why do you ask?

GABRIELLE

We were there yesterday, looking around.
Xena went inside, and the temple collapsed.



SPIROS

Good gods! Are you all right?

XENA

In a manner of speaking.

SPIROS

I'm afraid I don't understand.

GABRIELLE

That makes three of us.
(*beat*)
Something happened when the
temple collapsed, and we didn't
know what it was until today.

Spiros looks at Gabrielle expectantly.

GABRIELLE

(*Cont'd*)
Somehow, Xena was... split...
into two separate people.
One, all good. The other, all evil.

Spiros looks at Xena and takes an involuntary step back.

XENA

(*dryly*)
I'm the good one.



SPIROS

(*sheepishly*)
Of course. Of course.
(*beat*)
How did this happen?

XENA

That's what we're trying to find out.

GABRIELLE

Please, Spiros, can you tell us anything
else about that temple? Anything at all?

SPIROS

(*pondering*)
Well...I've heard rumors about a group of men,
townsfolk mostly, who go out there a couple
times a month. Pretty secretive bunch, though.
No one really talks about what they do there.

GABRIELLE

Do you know any of them? Could you bring
one back here so we could talk to them?

SPIROS

(doubtfully)

I don't know, Gabrielle. As I said,
they're a pretty secretive bunch.

GABRIELLE

We need any help you can give, Spiros.
Xena's good half is here, but her evil half....

Spiros pales to the color of fresh cream.

SPIROS

I'll be right back.

He departs quickly, leaving Xena and Gabrielle alone.

Turning away from the door, Gabrielle sees Xena standing in the middle of the room, the shattered look back in her eyes.

GABRIELLE

Xena? What's wrong?



Xena drops her gaze to the ground for a moment, before meeting Gabrielle's eyes again.

XENA

Did she....

(beat)

Did I hurt you?



Her own heart breaking, Gabrielle grasps Xena's hand and holds it up to her cheek, nuzzling against it.

GABRIELLE

Oh, Xena, no.
She didn't hurt me.
Not at all.

Xena looks down at Gabrielle for a long moment. Gabrielle gives Xena her most convincing smile.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)
(whispering)
I'm fine. Promise.

Both women stiffen as they catch the sound of two pairs of heavy boots tramping up the stairs. They turn as one to face the door just as it opens, admitting Spiros and a tall, hawk-faced stranger trailing slightly behind.

SPIROS

Xena, Gabrielle, this is Leanthos.

Gabrielle smiles. Xena nods.

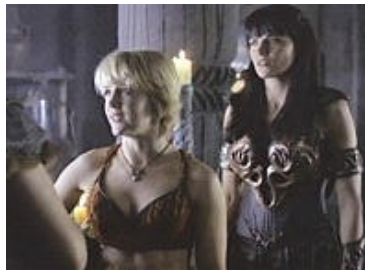
LEANTHOS

Why did you bring me here, Spiros?
I have nothing to say to that
butcher, or her protector.

Xena's face hardens. Gabrielle steps unconsciously in front of the stranger, partially blocking his view of Xena.

GABRIELLE

Leanthos, we need your help.



LEANTHOS

Forget it. I saw what that monster did.
The only help I'll give is a good hanging rope.

GABRIELLE

Tell us about the temple.

Leanthos freezes, and stares down at Gabrielle.

LEANTHOS

I don't know what you're talking about.

Gabrielle looks to Spiros, who nods. She takes a step forward.

GABRIELLE

I know about that temple in the woods, Leanthos.
And I know you're a part of the worship there.
I need to know what goes on there.

Drawing himself up to his considerable, full height, Leanthos sneers.

LEANTHOS

And I need to get back to my lunch.
It's getting cold.

He can no more begin to turn before he finds himself falling to his knees, paralyzed.

GABRIELLE

I don't have time to argue with you.
You have thirty seconds to tell us
what you know about that temple.

Leanthos struggles against the effects of the pinch, to no avail. Finally, he calms.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Your time is running out.



LEANTHOS

(straining)

A-alchemy!

GABRIELLE

Excuse me?

XENA

Alchemy. It's a charlatan's science
of turning metal into gold.

GABRIELLE

What does that have to do with....?

LEANTHOS

Turn... bad... into good. Strip away...
base... instinct... Purity... peace....

SPIROS

By the gods.

GABRIELLE

(angrily)

How many people have
you tried this on, Leanthos?

LEANTHOS

None! Never! ...please....

XENA

(softly)

Gabrielle....



Gabrielle turns on Xena, but Xena's expression softens her anger. She turns back, releasing the pinch on Leanthos. He collapses to the floor, gasping for breath.

Gabrielle gives him a moment, then crouches down and pulls him partway up with a firm grip to his upper arm.

GABRIELLE

Why?

Leanthos is clearly shaken, but his experience with the pinch has loosened his tongue somewhat.

LEANTHOS

To achieve a higher state of being.
To cast off our animal instincts so that
we can live in peace and harmony.

GABRIELLE

There's a problem with your logic, Leanthos.

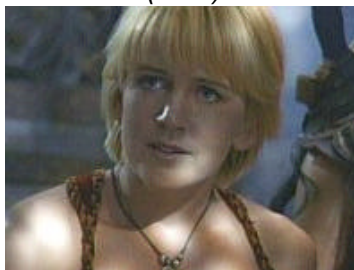
Leanthos looks at her, eyebrows raised.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Those "animal instincts" you want
to cast off don't just go away.

(beat)



GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

They stick around.

(beat)

And without a person's goodness to hold those instincts in check, the potential for destruction is enormous!

LEANTHOS

(crestfallenly)

I know. We've tried it on animals.

(beat)

It was horrible.

Gabrielle tightens her grip on Leanthos' arm. He squirms uncomfortably, but doesn't attempt to break her hold.

GABRIELLE

Do you have any **idea** what you've done?

Leanthos looks away from Gabrielle's burning gaze, acutely uncomfortable.

XENA

Have you ever tried to reverse the process?

Leanthos eyes Xena with some relief.

LEANTHOS

Yes.

(beat)

None survived. The shock of rejoining drove them all mad.

Gabrielle goes white.

Xena approaches from behind and lays a hand on Gabrielle's shoulder. Gabrielle turns her head, and the two women share a long look.



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - LATE AFTERNOON

Xena and Gabrielle, riding borrowed horses, move swiftly down a narrow trail deep in the woods. After passing yet another broken branch, Gabrielle pulls her horse to a stop. Xena follows, patiently awaiting an explanation.

GABRIELLE

Are we following the right trail?



Xena raises an eyebrow.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

(gesturing)

That's the third sign we've passed in the last ten minutes.

XENA

And?

GABRIELLE

C'mon, Xena. This is **you** we're talking about here. The person the gods couldn't track unless she wanted them to? A blind man could follow this trail with both legs tied behind his head.

XENA

Interesting image.



Gabrielle rolls her eyes.

GABRIELLE

I'm serious.

XENA

I know you are.

(beat)

Listen, she's already told you where she's headed,
and she knows you're going to follow her eventually,
so covering her tracks wouldn't be a priority.

GABRIELLE

(doubtfully)

Maybe you're right.

Xena gives her a look.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Ok, you're probably right.

(beat)

I just don't like it. These tracks seem too fresh.
Someone on a mission to conquer the known world
wouldn't be stopping to smell the roses like this.

(beat)

Face it, Xena. You don't even do that when
you're not looking to take over the world.

The look of guilt in Xena's eyes freezes Gabrielle where she stands. Her heart plummets into the depths of her belly.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

By the gods. I'm so sorry.

I didn't mean....



XENA

You were right, though.
That's something I've never done.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

Xena....

XENA

(sadly smiling)

It's all right.

(beat)

Let's keep moving.

It'll be dark soon.



DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

The fire has burned down to a few hot coals. Beneath a heavy fur, Xena lies spooned tightly against Gabrielle's back. Both are awake, though Xena's eyes are closed.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

XENA

Mm?

GABRIELLE

Do you think Spiros and Leanthos will be able to convince the rest of them to help put you back the way you were?

XENA

Don't see why not.

You were pretty convincing.



GABRIELLE

(flushing)

I don't know what came over me.

XENA
Frustration.

GABRIELLE
I suppose.

The camp falls silent for several moments.

GABRIELLE
(Cont'd)
Are you nervous?

XENA
(half-asleep)
'bout what?

GABRIELLE
About what Leanthos said.
About how the act of reintegrating
two halves results in insanity.

Xena opens her eyes and pulls Gabrielle more tightly against her.

XENA
That won't happen with me.

GABRIELLE
How can you be so sure?

XENA
I'm not an animal, Gabrielle.
I'll know what's happening.
I'll understand it.

GABRIELLE
But still....

XENA
I'll be fine.
(beat)
It's not as if this hasn't
happened before, you know.



GABRIELLE
But that was different.

XENA

The principle is the same.

(beat)

I'll be fine.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

There was a time, not so long ago,
that this... the way you are now...
is all I could have wished for you.

XENA

(slowly)

And there was a time when it would
have been an answer to a prayer.

(beat)

But the demons I battle... the evil I've done...
doesn't go away with the darkness within me.

(beat)

And it shouldn't.

I don't deserve that sort of peace.

GABRIELLE

Xena....

XENA

Gabrielle, when I think about the things
I've done to people... done to you....

Gabrielle turns within Xena's embrace. Reaching up, she clasps her face between her hands.

GABRIELLE

Xena, listen to me.

I know it's easy to get into a place
where thinking about the things
you've done overwhelms you.

XENA

Gabrielle....

GABRIELLE

Because I've been there.

Xena falls silent.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

You have to put your trust in love, and the
ability of those you love to forgive you.

Xena grasps Gabrielle's hands, removing them from her face, and clasping them tight against her chest.

XENA

Trusting in love--in **your** love--was one of
the hardest lessons I've ever had to learn.

(beat)

That trust takes a strength that I
just don't have in me right now.

There's a moment of silence as Xena takes in a deep breath, then releases it.

XENA

(Cont'd)

And if I don't get it back, I'm not sure
how I'm gonna live with who I was.

(beat, softer)

Or who I am.

Unable to speak for the lump in her throat, Gabrielle releases her hands from Xena's grip, and enfolds her partner into an all-encompassing embrace, resting the dark head on her shoulder and stroking the soft hair beneath her fingers.



DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WOODED TRAIL - DAY

Xena and Gabrielle sit atop their restive mounts, just before what they know to be a sizable clearing. Gabrielle's body is tense as she stands up in the saddle, head turning back and forth, searching.

GABRIELLE

She's close. I can feel her.

XENA

Very close.



GABRIELLE

Why is she doing this?
It doesn't make any sense. She should have
already entered Amazon territory by now.

Hearing no response, Gabrielle looks over to Xena, catching a very familiar expression on her partner's face.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

You know something.

(beat)

Of course you do. She's you.
Or you're her. Or something.

(beat)

Share?

Xena turns to her, expression somber and deadly serious.

XENA

(softly)

Whenever you've been in trouble, Gabrielle...
hurt, or captured, or worse... it wasn't just this part
of me that tried to move heaven and earth to help.

Understanding dawns on Gabrielle's face, together with a flush that displays her chagrin.

GABRIELLE

I... think I always knew that, somehow.

(beat)

But maybe I was a little afraid to admit that.
Even to myself.



Xena nods gravely in response, then softly urges her horse down the narrow trail. Gabrielle stares after her for a moment, her expression deeply thoughtful, before she too continues on.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Gabrielle remains deep in thought as she slowly crosses the clearing. She is jerked from her reverie when her horse suddenly stops very close to the rear of Xena's horse, which is likewise standing still near the very edge of the clearing.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

There is a rustle in the thick bushes just beyond the clearing's boundary, and DARK XENA emerges, a cold smile curving her lips.



DARK XENA

Speak of a satyr and she shall appear.

Dark Xena's gaze flicks briefly to her doppelganger sitting motionless atop the brown gelding, then flicks dismissively away, to settle once again on Gabrielle.

Her smile grows.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

I knew you couldn't stay away for long.

GABRIELLE

You left me, remember?

Dark Xena's hand waves in a dismissive gesture.

DARK XENA

A minor detail.

GABRIELLE

I'm surprised to find you here.

I thought you'd be halfway to the Amazons by now.



Dark Xena shrugs, unconcerned. She begins a slow, stalking approach toward Gabrielle.

DARK XENA

You always did tell me to slow down....

Another step and she is eye to eye with Gabrielle's horse, who snorts and shies away nervously. She laughs, then looks up, her eyes roaming possessively over Gabrielle.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

...and appreciate the beauty around me.

(beat)

Why don't you come down
from there, so we can...talk?

Gabrielle looks over to where the woman she's come to think of as "Good" Xena still sits atop her horse. Xena nods once, and they both slip from their mounts.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

Much better.

(stepping closer)

If you've changed your mind about joining
me, I should warn you that I don't share.

She looks over her shoulder, glancing at her double meaningfully.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

Not even with myself.

GABRIELLE

Actually, I was wondering if
you had changed your mind.

Dark Xena throws her head back and laughs, delighted.

DARK XENA

Oh, Gabrielle, you are a treasure.



GABRIELLE

I'm serious.

DARK XENA

I can see that, yes. Now let me explain to you why
this little fantasy of yours can never come to pass.

Circling Gabrielle slowly, she comes in close behind Gabrielle and places her hands on Gabrielle's shoulders, squeezing slightly.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

My foot is on the neck of the world,
Gabrielle, just waiting to bend it to my will.

GABRIELLE

(murmuring)

Bend it? Or break it?

DARK XENA

(lips to Gabrielle's ear)

Does it matter?

Smirking at Gabrielle's shivering reaction, she straightens, but doesn't remove her hands.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

It's my destiny, Gabrielle. And it will happen
because I now have the strength, the drive,
and the focus to make it happen.

Lifting a hand, dark Xena points across the clearing to her double, who stands motionless.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

That was my weakness.

My shame. My guilt.

(beat)

It's all that stands between who I am...
and who I am meant to be.

GABRIELLE

You're wrong.

DARK XENA

Am I?

Pulling away, Gabrielle spins, facing her head on.

GABRIELLE

Yes. Who you are meant to be, Xena, is who you were.
A full and complete person, who is capable of loving,
and being loved. Not feared and despised.
Someone who leads by example, not by force.

DARK XENA

And that's where you're wrong, Gabrielle.
Love is a mindless quest sought by spineless fools.
It's an illusion, nothing more.



GABRIELLE

It's not an illusion!
It's as real as you are... as I am.
And it's as strong as you and I, together.

Smirking, Xena draws her sword. Gabrielle immediately draws her sais, but Xena ignores them, stepping around her as if she wasn't there.



DARK XENA

I'll show you how strong love is, Gabrielle.

Unarmed, Good Xena watches her double's approach, steeling herself. She ducks back as her opponent slashes across her chest, then moves forward to counter a follow-up kick to the belly, grabbing her double's boot and flipping her backward.

With a chilling laugh, Dark Xena flips through the air and lands lightly on her feet.

Gabrielle watches intently, but doesn't interfere.

Dark Xena rushes forward and begins a rapid attack with sword, fists and feet. Good Xena blocks and evades every move, but doesn't counter-attack. Dark Xena's frustration mounts.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

Fight me, damn you!

GOOD XENA

No.

DARK XENA

Then DIE!

Dark Xena doubles the speed of her attack, her strokes coming too fast to be easily seen. Her counterpart is tiring quickly.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

Can you smell her fear, Gabrielle?

Can you hear her heart beating
like a rabbit facing a wolf?

I can.

(beat)

Here's your love, Gabrielle.

She steps in, flips her sword, and deals her double a crushing blow to the side of the head. Good Xena drops like a stone.



Dark Xena turns to Gabrielle, smirking.

DARK XENA

Fear is the ruler of all men.
Love is weak, and means nothing.

GABRIELLE

You don't mean that.

DARK XENA

Oh, but I do. I just proved it to you.

GABRIELLE

That wasn't proof, Xena.
That was you fighting an unarmed woman.
Someone who has more courage in her
smallest finger than you do in your entire body.

Dark Xena looks at her unconscious counterpart, then at Gabrielle. She grins.



DARK XENA

I won. That's all that matters.

She looks at Gabrielle's drawn weapons.

DARK XENA

(Cont'd)

Are you going to prove your
courage to me as well?

GABRIELLE

No. I'm going to prove my point.

Gabrielle deliberately sheathes her sais, straightens, and crosses the clearing, slowly, deliberately.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I love you, Xena.
Your mistake is in thinking that when
I say that, I mean that I only love her.

Stopping, Gabrielle points to the woman lying unconscious near her feet.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I love all of you. The part that loves,
and nurtures, and cherishes. And the part
that hates, and schemes, and destroys.



DARK XENA

(sneering)

I seem to recall you telling me that
my so-called “dark” side scared you.

GABRIELLE

You're right. It did.

But we've come a long way since then, Xena.
And during the journey, I've had to come to terms
with my own dark side. It makes me who I am,
just as yours makes you who you are.

She steps within Xena's space.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I've accepted that.
And I don't fear it any longer.

Raising on her toes, Gabrielle leans in and kisses Xena, who responds almost helplessly.
Gabrielle can feel Xena tremble against the close press of their bodies, and she deepens the kiss
before pulling slightly away.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Don't be afraid to feel, Xena. Don't be afraid to love.
It's a part of who you are, in the darkness and the light.

(beat)

It's your destiny.

After a moment, dark Xena gathers herself and savagely pushes Gabrielle away. As Gabrielle stumbles back across the clearing, Xena draws her sword, her face a twisted mask of rage.

Before she can take one step forward, her double rises from the ground, fists clenched, jaw set, and blood running down from a gash above her left eye.

GOOD XENA

Not this time.



She unleashes an uppercut that drives her dark half off of her feet. Dark Xena sails across the clearing and crumples against the trunk of a large tree, unconscious.

Xena looks over at Gabrielle, who stares back at her, open-mouthed.

GOOD XENA

(Cont'd)

Let's go. We don't have much time.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED TEMPLE - NIGHT

Outside of the temple, two dozen robed and hooded MEN stand in a semicircle. Each bears a blazing TORCH held high above their heads. A low chanting fills the clearing, interspersed with howls of rage and grunts of effort.

Gabrielle stands in the firm grip of Spiros and two other men, struggling desperately as she stares down at the scene before her with something close to horror.

A hastily built altar stands in the center of the circle of men. Two figures lie atop the altar. One, Good Xena, seems very weak, and drawn. Her movements are feeble, and her eyes are open, unblinking and glazed.

In direct contrast, Dark Xena fights like a trapped and feral animal. She is struggling, growling, and spitting at the five men who are desperately trying to hold her down.

A sixth man, dressed in the garish robes and hood of a high priest, chants in a loud, off-key voice as he circles the altar, dribbling oil from an ornate cask onto the two figures.

As Gabrielle watches, three men are suddenly flung away from the altar, and Dark Xena, howling in triumph, sits up, shrugging off the other men as if they were dolls.

Five more men jump in and somehow manage to pin her back to the altar with the weight of their bodies.

GABRIELLE

Let me go! I need to go to her!



SPIROS

I'm sorry, Gabrielle, but you can't.
The ritual's already begun.

Another man screams in pain and turns away, his white hood painted red with the blood of his broken nose.

Taking advantage of the distraction, Gabrielle jerks loose from those holding her and runs to the altar.

Sensing her presence, Good Xena blinks, and turns her head in Gabrielle's direction.

GOOD XENA

(brokenly whispering)
Help... her.

Gabrielle grasps her partner's hand and squeezes it tight.

GABRIELLE

I will. You just hang
in there, and fight.

Xena nods once, then turns away to stare back up at the sky.

Gabrielle circles the altar, pushing in between the tight press of bodies, until she is at Dark Xena's side. Dark Xena laughs with glee as another man screams out, holding an arm which now sports an extra joint.

DARK XENA

I'll kill you all!!!

GABRIELLE

Xena....

Hearing Gabrielle's voice, Dark Xena's face becomes frozen, her eyes cold as the grave.

DARK XENA
(very softly)
Et tu, Gabrielle?



GABRIELLE
Please, Xena. Don't fight this.
I need ALL of you.

DARK XENA
This was your plan all along, wasn't it?
To distract me and make me weak with your
talk of love. Long enough to bring me here.
(beat)
Congratulations, Gabrielle.
You proved your point well indeed.
(beat, smiling)
And now, I'll prove mine.



Sensing Xena's intentions, Gabrielle throws her weight against her, knowing it's fruitless, but needing to try.

GABRIELLE
You're wrong, Xena.
That wasn't my plan, or my point.
It's what my heart knows.

DARK XENA
Liar!!

GABRIELLE
No. The truth. And I know you heard me, Xena.
I know you've been hearing me since the beginning.
(beat)
You didn't answer my question before.
Maybe you'll answer it now. You should have
been halfway to the Amazons when we
caught up to you. Why weren't you?

Some of the rage leeches from Xena's eyes, and she looks confused, if only for a split second.

Gabrielle presses on.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

You could have killed the other half of you in the clearing today. You said she was all that stood between you and your destiny. Why didn't you?



Xena growls, deep in her throat. Her muscles tense, warning of an impending explosion.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Do you want me to tell you?

(beat)

It's because this part of you loves,
deeply and passionately.

(beat)

And you know it. Even if you can't admit it.

(beat)

And I'll prove it to you, Xena. Right now.

Releasing her grip on Xena, Gabrielle pushes the other men holding her partner away. They look at her as if she's gone crazy, but the look in her eyes convinces them to stand back.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

You're free, Xena. Free to pursue
any destiny you think awaits you.

Xena looks around the circle, eyes filled with distrust.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

I'm giving you the chance you wouldn't take before.

She unsheathes one of her sais and puts it in Xena's hand.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Kill her. Kill us both, if you want.
We won't try to stop you.

Xena sits up slowly, weapon in hand.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Go on. If love is an illusion,
destroy that illusion. Claim your destiny.



Slowly, with the wariness of a wild animal, Xena comes to her feet and looks down at Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Do it. I won't stop you.

With a rumbling growl, Xena draws back the weapon and stares into Gabrielle's calm, trusting eyes. She is motionless for a long, silent moment. Then, screaming, she plunges the weapon downward in a vicious, blinding arc. To shatter against the rock base that supports the altar. She crumples against Gabrielle, who catches her in steady arms and is driven to her knees by the weight of her partner.

The men rush in to help, and soon Xena is once again lain out on the altar, unresisting. Gabrielle, still on her knees, reaches out to grasp Xena's hand, smiling slightly when the grasp is returned. Xena's head turns, and she meets Gabrielle's gaze.

DARK XENA

(hoarsely)

How did you know?

Gabrielle's smile grows.

GABRIELLE

I believe in you. And I always have.
Even when you don't believe in yourself.

(beat)

I love you, Xena.

Xena lies silent for a very long moment, then her lips move with effort.

DARK XENA

(almost silently whispering)

Love... you too.



Smiling through tears suddenly sprung into her eyes, Gabrielle nuzzles the hand in hers, then kisses it before laying it across Xena's chest and releasing it.

The circle closes, and the worshippers take up their chanting again. Suddenly, a rumble is heard which shakes the clearing. The crack of thunder is followed by a brilliant flash of blood-red light. The tremors cease. The light disappears.

Gabrielle opens her eyes to see Xena, fully whole, lying before her, still as death.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

Xena's eyes open, and she looks at her soulmate. A smile forms.

XENA

(whispering)

Thank you.

(swallowing)

From both of us.



With a half-choked sob, Gabrielle stands, then lowers herself against Xena, holding her as if she'll never let go.

Around the circle, Spiros and the rest of the men smile and turn quietly away, leaving the two women to their reunion.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. CART TRAIL - AFTERNOON

Xena and Gabrielle walk side by side down a well used, rutted cart trail. Argo trails amiably behind, freshly shod and groomed.

Gabrielle is twirling a new set of customized SAIS around on her fingers, shadowboxing. Her grin is bright and sunny.

GABRIELLE

I can't believe Belleron made these for me.
Aren't they wonderful?

XENA

Mm.

Gabrielle stops, and turns to her partner.

GABRIELLE

You're still upset because he wouldn't
take payment for Argo, aren't you?

XENA

Gabrielle, I almost killed him.

GABRIELLE

But you didn't.

(beat)

And he forgave you. That's what people do
when they realize what happened was
beyond anyone's control. They forgive.

Xena makes a sound very much like a grunt, and resumes walking.

Sighing, Gabrielle catches up to her, and stops Xena with a hand to her wrist.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

(softly)

I know it's hard, Xena.
It's hard to forgive myself too.

(beat)

I think, though, that one day
we'll both be able to do it.

XENA

Ya think so, huh?

GABRIELLE

Yep.

(beat)

So... where to from here?

Xena smiles.

XENA

Blossom.

GABRIELLE

(puzzling)

Blossom. Where's...

(beat, realizing)

Ohh, blossom, as in the game we were playing.

Well, it fits, Xena, but I don't see any....

Still smiling, Xena presents Gabrielle with a beautiful rose.

GABRIELLE

(Cont'd)

Oh, Xena. It's beautiful!

XENA

I know a place in Gaul, where these
grow wild, as far as the eye can see.

(beat)

Maybe it's time we both took
some time to appreciate them.

With a happy shout, Gabrielle embraces Xena and they hold tight to one another.



FADE OUT.

DISCLAIMER

Gabrielle's sai gave up its life in the production of this motion picture,
but Xena's "enemy within" felt alot better for the sacrifice.