

SHIPPER SEASON SEVEN

“Two For One”

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Logline

Xena and Gabrielle return to Lycia to help lobatas once more. But their mission hits a snag when they both become obsessed with the same man: Ares.

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TEASER

FADE IN

A medium shot of Xena and Gabrielle on foot, leading their horses slowly through a lovely forest, obviously enjoying a gorgeous day.

CUT TO

A Merchant, dragging his cart, mumbling and swearing, trudging down the same road.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle. They hear him coming and stop. The merchant comes into view, approaches and passes them, still muttering and whining.

MERCHANT:

Damn lobatas, damn all kings, damn bloodsucking monster, damn, damn, damn, damn!

XENA:

He sounds upset.

GABRIELLE:

Ya think?

XENA:

Hmm... He looks familiar.

GABRIELLE:

Now that you mention it...

XENA:

I've got it! He was one of the survivors of the Chimaera's attack.

GABRIELLE:

You're right. But what's he doing here? Weren't they going to stay in Lycia? Iobatas promised to distribute money from the treasury to those who had suffered. Why isn't he doing that?

XENA:

Let's go find out.

They catch up to the merchant, who is still grumbling and muttering.

XENA:

Excuse me.

MERCHANT:

Bloodsucking creep, stupid ass--

XENA:

Excuse me!

MERCHANT:

What? Who? Oh it's you.

XENA:

What are you doing?

MERCHANT:

Leaving, what's it look like?

XENA:

I thought Iobatas was going to help--

MERCHANT (shrieking):

Help?! That blood suck--

GABRIELLE:

Hey, calm down.

MERCHANT (through his teeth):

I...am...calm.

XENA:

Okay. What's going on?

MERCHANT:

Iobatas has not given one dinar to anyone since you left. He's just moping around the palace and acting like a jerk. That's what's going on. Things are worse than ever and anyone with half a brain is getting out.

GABRIELLE:

But--

MERCHANT:

No buts. No ifs or ands, either. Just good-bye and don't let the door hit you in the--

XENA:

Okay, we've got the picture. (she turns away, turns back) Good luck to you.

MERCHANT:

Yeah, right. Damn bloodsucker, damn all kings...

He's still muttering and cursing as he disappears over a rise in the road.

GABRIELLE:

So...back to Lycia?

XENA:

Back to Lycia--and your friend.

Xena grins as Gabrielle blushes scarlet.

CUT TO

A dusty room crammed with trunks, odd pieces of furniture, books, bottles, and all kinds of junk. Sunlight streams through the window, glinting on the dust motes dancing in the air. Theias is hunting through the room. He comes upon an old trunk in a corner, opens it, and sees a bunch of scrolls. He smiles with pleasure and takes one out, sits down on the trunk and starts to read. Since he's not a good reader yet, he's reading aloud, sounding out some of the words and having a lot of trouble.

THEIAS:

Recee--receepee--receppeetee--what's a receepeetee? (he shrugs and continues his laborious task) For wa-wa-washing! Washing, that's it! (he's pleased with himself) One toga, one shi-shirt, one pair of--it's a bill from the laundry!

Disgusted, he drops the scroll on the floor, gets up and drags the trunk further forward into the puddle of sunlight. He hears a sharp crack as he moves it. Curious, he pulls the trunk completely away from the wall, revealing that a floorboard has popped up. He peers under it cautiously, obviously thinking of snakes or scorpions, then his face changes and he reaches in and pulls out another scroll. This one

is much older than the other, faded, dirty, and yet at one time it was heavily decorated with gold. He reseats himself on the trunk lid and starts on his new project.

THEIAS:

God-dess of De-dee-desire. Now *this* is more like it! Goddess of Desire, grant me--

POLYEIDUS (thundering from the doorway):

What do you think you're doing?

Theias jumps in fright and drops the scroll. Polyeidus holds out his hand.

POLYEIDUS:

Give it to me.

THEIAS:

But--

POLYEIDUS:

I said give it to me!

Theias picks up the scroll, hands it to his father, and dodges past him out of the room.

CUT TO

The same dusty room, only now it's dark. Theias creeps in and starts hunting for the scroll. He looks under the floorboard, on the shelves, in the trunk, but can't find it. He sits on the trunk lid as before, then gets an idea. He kneels down, opens the trunk, and starts to unroll all the scrolls. When he gets to the bottom, he finds the ornate scroll rolled up inside another. He unrolls it, and begins to sound it out again, this time reading by moonlight.

THEIAS:

Goddess of Desire, grant me this fa-vor...

CUT TO

A serene campsite. Xena and Gabrielle are asleep, the fire burning low. Suddenly they sit up simultaneously and stare at each other, wide-eyed. And just as suddenly they collapse into unconsciousness.

CUT TO

Polyeidus's bedroom. At the same moment that the others fall, the old man sits up with a gasp of horror.

POLYEIDUS:

You fool, what have you *done*?

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

We're back at the campsite. The sun's rising and birds are chirping. Gabrielle opens one eye.

GABRIELLE (groaning):

There are days when I could cheerfully murder every miserable feathered creature in Greece!

XENA:

Well, that would certainly take care of breakfast.

Gabrielle glares at her.

XENA:

Or not.

GABRIELLE (frowning as she thinks back):

Xena, did something happen last night?

XENA (carefully):

Er--how do you mean?

GABRIELLE:

I don't know. Something. We woke up.

XENA:

Oh, yeah--and then you looked at me funny.

GABRIELLE:

Hey, you looked at *me* first!

XENA:

Nah, you *always* look at me that way. Especially at night.

GABRIELLE:

No, this was different. I vaguely remember sitting up and looking at you, and you were staring back. Then I don't remember anything else.

XENA:

Now that you mention it... You went straight back to sleep after that. I suppose *that* was a bit odd.

GABRIELLE:

What woke us, do you think?

XENA (shrugs):

A nightmare?

GABRIELLE:

Both of us? At the same time? (she pauses) How do you feel?

XENA:

I'm fine...no, wait a minute. I do feel strange. A little jumpy.

GABRIELLE:

And that's supposed to be strange?

XENA:

I feel like...something's about to happen.

GABRIELLE:

Me too. Like I'm anticipating something but I have no idea what it is.

XENA:

Gabrielle, I'd love to sit here all morning getting in touch with our feelings, but we have to see lobatas. Let's go.

A silver-blue flash announces the arrival of Ares. Xena and Gabrielle turn in slow motion, and look up at him. Both seem to get a strange look in their eyes for a moment, then blink, as if coming out of a trance.

ARES:

Is this a bad time?

For a moment, the women stare at him in puzzlement. Then, Gabrielle's expression turns to slight annoyance and Xena's to desire.

GABRIELLE:

What do you want?

ARES:

Hello, Ares, how are you? I'm fine, thank you, Gabrielle, how nice of you to ask.

XENA (breathy):

Hellooo, Ares, how are you? You're fiiiine, thank you...

ARES and GABRIELLE:

Xena?!

XENA (sighs):

Yeah...

She gazes at Ares in rapt adoration.

ARES (flaps his hand in front of her nose):

Xena? Are you in there?

XENA (sighing deeply):

Oh, Ares...

ARES:

All right, Gabrielle, very funny. Hand over the nutbread.

GABRIELLE:

I don't have any. And Xena didn't have any, either. (turns to Xena) Hey...are you okay?

XENA (with a beautiful smile):

Oh, yes, I'm more than all right, I'm perfect. As long as you're here, Ares, everything is wonderful.

She steps close to the War God, putting her head on his shoulder and her arms around him.

ARES:

Er--

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

XENA:

Don't bother me.

She slides her hand up his arm to the back of his neck and tries to pull his mouth down to hers. He pushes her hands away and steps back. She comes after him and they begin a goofy race, with Ares walking backward around the campsite and Xena in pursuit.

ARES:

Now look--

XENA:

No, *you* look! You've wanted me for years and now you run away?

ARES:

Xena--

XENA (continues to advance):

All I want is to be with you. Cook your breakfast...darn your socks...

ARES (still retreating):

I don't wear socks. And I don't eat breakfast, either.

XENA:

Oh, you will. I want to be yours, Ares. I lo--

ARES:

Oh, that's great, Xena. Go ahead, have a good laugh. Just don't count on having me as your audience. (to Gabrielle) I don't know what the joke is, but I've had enough.

He turns, walking away, and vanishes.

XENA:

No, don't leave me! Come back! Ares!

In a frenzy, Xena saddles Argo and gallops off. Gabrielle stares after her, shaking her head in bewilderment. Before she can do anything else, Xena comes galloping past her in the opposite direction. Gabrielle just manages to saddle her own horse when Xena zooms past yet again.

Gabrielle, like a spectator at a tennis match, watches this for a few more laps, until she gets an idea. Xena is coming up again, Gabrielle cups her hands to her mouth and yells.

GABRIELLE:

Ares!

XENA (screeching to a halt):

Where, where?

GABRIELLE:

Xena, I hate to interrupt, but we *were* supposed to be going to the city.

Xena gives an exasperated sigh, and she and Gabrielle ride off together.

CUT TO

A road. Gabrielle and Xena are riding alongside each other. Xena seems far away.

XENA:

Where is *he*?

GABRIELLE:

Thrace, Britannia, Athens, Sparta, Olympus, another planet--who knows? (she looks at Xena)
Who cares?

XENA:

I do!

GABRIELLE:

Why?

XENA:

He's, he's, he's--

GABRIELLE:

Bless you.

XENA:

After all, he saved us. I mean he gave up everything for us. (dreamily) And besides, he's so tall, so gorgeous, so sexy, so charming, so funny...

GABRIELLE:

You forgot cunning, manipulative, murderous...

XENA (curtly):

Well, that's just part of his job!

GABRIELLE (genuinely bewildered):

Xena, I know you've always had a soft spot for Ares but this is... (she shakes her head) What's going on?

XENA (glares at her):

What do you mean, I've always had a soft spot for Ares? (her face and voice turn dreamy again) You know, I just love the way his eyes turn all soft and misty with desire when he leans down to kiss you...hell, I love it that he *has* to lean down! You have no idea what it's like to have that hard, strong body pressed against you...

GABRIELLE (mutters under her breath):

Thank the heavens I don't.

XENA:

...and he has such a beautiful mouth--and I *love* the way his voice drops down like that and sends shivers down your spine--

She stops dead, suddenly realizing that she's said way, waaaay too much. Gabrielle is looking at her like she's running a fever.

XENA (weakly):

Well, it's true.

GABRIELLE:

If you say so. You do, ah, know him better than I do. (under her breath) Obviously.

XENA (glares at her):

The city's just over this rise.

CUT TO

Long shot of the capital city of Lycia. It's desolate, in even worse shape than it was during the Chimaera's siege. The camera pans around to pick up the women as they urge their horses into a gallop down the slopes toward the town.

CUT TO

The city's main street. We ride with Xena and Gabrielle as they move toward the palace, examining the mess. Only a few shops are still open, no repairs have been made, women and children beg on the streets.

GABRIELLE:

This is bad. It wasn't this bad before.

XENA:

It looks like lobatas hasn't kept his promise. I was hoping that peddler was wrong.

They come to the palace and tie their horses, then climb the steps. There are guards who seem as though they're about to do or say something unfortunate, but Xena gives them her trademark steely glare and they let her through without a fuss. She and Gabrielle move quickly down a marble hall and into the throne room. The king is seated slumped on the throne, his head in his hand. He looks up warily when the two walk in. Then his face changes and he smiles as he recognizes his visitors.

IOBATAS:

Xena! And Gabrielle, Slayer of the Chimaera! Welcome back, it's good to see you.

XENA:

King lobatas.

GABRIELLE:

Your Majesty.

XENA:

I'll get straight to the point. When we left last time, you gave me your word you were going to distribute the city's treasury to those who had lost everything. Now Gabrielle and I have been looking real hard and we're not seeing anything of the sort. Are you going to tell us why that is, or do we have to--take matters into our own hands?

IOBATAS:

Just who do you think you are to talk to me--

GABRIELLE:

We're the people who saved your sorry butt and your sorry kingdom, remember? We're the ones who did it without charging anything for it, remember? And you said you'd help your people by making the money available to them that you saved on us--

XENA (pleasant threat):

Remember?

IOBATAS:

Ah, yes, yes.

XENA:

All coming back to you now, is it?

lobatas looks wretched and miserable, and Xena relents.

XENA:

What is it, lobatas? What's wrong?

IOBATAS:

You're right, I haven't given away the money. But I need it, Xena, the kingdom is in danger again.

XENA:

Go on.

IOBATAS:

No! There isn't anything you can do, not this time.

GABRIELLE:

We won't know until you tell us what the problem is, will we?

IOBATAS:

I...can't.

XENA (flatly):

You mean you won't.

IOBATAS:

Have it your way. But just trust me, Xena, I need that money to save the kingdom. And I have to be the one to do it. I must ask you to trust me.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a glance, plainly doubtful of anything this man says.

XENA:

I trusted you to help your people last time, and--what can I say--you've let me down. Not to mention your people. This time, we're going to make sure you get it right.

GABRIELLE:

We'll be here for a few days. You know you can count on us to help.

IOBATAS:

Yes. Thank you. Good morning.

It's a dismissal and he is a king. They leave, puzzled.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle are seated in an inn. It's packed but the patrons are quiet, sullen and resentful. There are mutterings about lobatas and his stinginess.

XENA:

This is worse than I thought. If these people realize how many of them feel the same way--

GABRIELLE (finishes Xena's sentence):

lobatas could have a revolt on his hands.

Xena nods. Suddenly her face lights up with a smile.

XENA:

Ares!

Gabrielle drops her face into her hands and groans.

GABRIELLE:

Not again!

XENA:

Don't be so negative. We need his help.

GABRIELLE (under her breath):

Well, *one* of us definitely needs help.

XENA:

Go with me here, Gabrielle. We have to find out why lobatas is hoarding the money.

GABRIELLE (slowly):

Yes...

XENA:

And we need to do it quickly, before a riot breaks out.

GABRIELLE ("where is this going"):

Yes...

XENA (perfectly logical conclusion):

And so, we need Ares!

Gabrielle drops her face into her hands and groans.

GABRIELLE:

Why?!

XENA:

Don't you see? Ares is a god! We can ask him to--

GABRIELLE:

Wait, wait, stop right there. You're not seriously thinking of asking Ares for help?! Xena, you'd owe a favor to the God of War!

XENA ("oh I *hope* so!"):

Yes. I would.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, I get it. This isn't about lobatas' problem, is it? No, it's about getting Ares here so you can see him again!

XENA:

You should know better than that!

GABRIELLE:

No, no, Xena. *You* should know better than that.

XENA (frowns):

Oh. Are you sure?

GABRIELLE (pleading):

Yes, I'm sure. Can we just...handle this without "tall, gorgeous and sexy"?

XENA:

You know, Gabrielle, you're not being very supportive...

Gabrielle is near to tears.

XENA (grudging):

But, okay.

Gabrielle breathes a sigh of relief and the two return to their food.

CUT TO

A room at the inn. It's dirty and run-down, making Xena's farm appear luxurious by comparison. The door opens and Xena and Gabrielle come in.

GABRIELLE:

This place has gotten a lot worse, hasn't it.

XENA:

Either that, or our eyesight has gotten much better.

They look around, turn in unison and walk out.

CUT TO

A campsite. Xena and Gabrielle have made another camp nearer the city, close to a stream. The sun is high.

GABRIELLE:

Looks like an excellent fishing spot.

XENA (distracted):

Mm-hmmm.... What?

GABRIELLE:

We could do some fishing. You like fishing, remember?

XENA:

Oh, you go right ahead.

She shivers and stretches luxuriously. Gabrielle stares at her, then rolls her eyes and shakes her head.

GABRIELLE:

All right, I'm going to go and gather some firewood. Don't go anywhere, okay?

Gabrielle walks away. Xena sighs and stretches again, then picks up a twig and starts tracing hearts on the ground.

Suddenly, she looks up, her eyes sparkling in anticipation, and licks her lips. A blissful smile lights up her face as the familiar silver-blue light flares up before her, and Ares appears.

ARES:

Xena...you know, I've been thinking about what happened this morning...

XENA:

Yes?

ARES:

I think perhaps I was a bit hasty.

XENA (moves to him and puts her arms around him):

Oh, you do?

ARES (cautiously):

I said "I *think*" I may have been a bit hasty.

XENA (runs one hand up his arm and rubs his back with the other):

What do you think now?

ARES (doesn't believe what's happening):

You're up to something.

XENA (huskily):

Let me show you just what I'm up to...

She slides her hand to the back of his head, pulls his mouth to hers, and kisses him passionately. He responds with equal fervor. Then he opens his eyes, and suddenly notices the little hearts Xena has traced on the ground.

ARES (stops and pulls away):

Wh-wh--wait a minute.

XENA (pouncing):

We've waited long enough!

Startled, Ares vanishes. Xena gasps with dismay and hurt. A second later he's back.

ARES (grinning widely):

What was I thinking?

He takes her in his arms and kisses her as if he'll never stop. He pulls her close, holding her tightly against him. She responds and wraps her arms around his waist. Oblivious to everything but their mutual hunger, they sink to the ground as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

The campsite. Trees rustle in the wind. We hear a long moan and the camera pans down to reveal Ares and Xena, still clinging together, kissing passionately. Ares breaks the kiss, moves and nibbles Xena's neck and she moans again.

The camera pans over to Gabrielle, who stands on the edge of the clearing carrying firewood, a horrified look on her face.

The sun beats down and a breeze ripples across the stream and the grass. The leaves glitter in the sun and a shadow moves across a branch, falling now on the other side. Suddenly, Gabrielle's look turns from dismay to desire, and she drops the firewood.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

Ares...

At the same time Xena gasps, pushes Ares off and sits up.

ARES:

Xena--

Xena rises hastily to her feet, with a dismayed and embarrassed look on her face. He stands as well and tries to hold her, but she steps back and adjusts her clothes.

XENA (clearing her throat):

Ahem--I think I--uh--got a little carried away. (she laughs nervously)

ARES (angrily):

I can't believe I fell for this *again!*

XENA (turns hastily toward Gabrielle):

Gabrielle! What do you say we--uh--go fishing? (pause) Gabrielle? *Gabrielle?*

Now it's the bard who's staring at Ares as if entranced. Her eyes growing even larger, she steps toward him. He recoils but she comes close and puts her arms around him, holding him as tightly as she can.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, Ares!

Ares, for once, is speechless. Gabrielle snuggles close and playfully runs one finger down his chest.

GABRIELLE (to Xena):

You were right. He *is* gorgeous...and sexy...and...

She slides her hand up to the back of his head and tries to pull his mouth to hers.

Ares looks at her, at Xena, at her, at Xena, and vanishes in a violent burst of light that somehow manages to look puzzled and angry at the same time.

GABRIELLE:

Ares! Wait, don't leave me!

In a frenzy, Gabrielle saddles her horse and gallops off. Xena stares after her, shaking her head in bewilderment. Before she can do anything else, Gabrielle comes galloping past her in the opposite direction. Xena whips about, and Gabrielle zooms past yet again. Like a spectator at a tennis match, Xena watches this for a few more laps, then jumps into Argo's saddle and stands in Gabrielle's path, just as she is coming up again.

XENA:

Hold it.

GABRIELLE (screeching to a halt):

It? It?! The only one I want to be holding right now is Ares! (wails) And he's gone, gone, go-o-o-o-ne!

XENA:

That's right, he's gone. Gabrielle, something very strange is going on here...

GABRIELLE:

Strange? It's *wonderful!*

XENA ("let's get you out of here"):

All right... Come on, then.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle ride back into the city, Xena holding the reins of Gabrielle's horse to stop her from riding off in search of Ares. Gabrielle's look is one of dreamy oblivion. Xena, on the other hand, is very much aware of the state of the city. Somehow it seems worse this second time, and the camera lingers on the dilapidated and destroyed buildings, the filth and squalor, the hollow faces of the beggars. They come to a halt.

XENA:

I think it's high time lobatas gave us some answers.

GABRIELLE (absently):

Oh, yeah. Answers. Uh--what were the questions again?

Xena shakes her head.

CUT TO

Xena, pacing back and forth in front of lobatas's throne. Gabrielle stands nearby, lost in reverie.

XENA:

I've been listening to you for nearly an hour, and you're still not making sense. Look--I'm a problem solver and you're a man with a problem. We were made for each other. Now tell me what's wrong and let's get it taken care of.

IOBATAS:

Okay, Okay, have it your way. Come with me.

CUT TO

A small ironclad door high in the castle tower. Xena, Gabrielle and lobatas appear from a winding staircase and lobatas gets out a huge set of keys. Xena looks from him to the door--there are at least ten locks there.

XENA:

Why the high security? (suspiciously) This isn't another monster, is it?

IOBATAS:

N-no. I'm just--uh--supporting the locksmiths' guild.

He begins to fuss with the locks, looking over at Xena and Gabrielle. His fingers keep slipping. Finally he manages to get the door unlocked.

IOBATAS:

Here it is.

He looks around cautiously as if "Here" were something that could overhear him, leap out and tear him to pieces. Then he opens the door and ushers Xena and Gabrielle into the room.

CUT TO

A small room piled high with every loopy exercise invention imaginable. There's the Spartan Stair Master, the Athenian Ab-Doer, the Thracian Thigh Master, the Scylla Sit-Up Machine, the Ulysses Untie-Bo Scrolls and so on. Iobatas looks at Xena sheepishly; she looks back in complete bewilderment. Gabrielle frowns.

GABRIELLE:

What is all this?

IOBATAS:

It's, they're, ah, the equipment is designed to help me, ah, get in shape.

GABRIELLE (looks skeptically over Iobatas's shape, rather similar to that of a round-shouldered pear):

I don't think it's helping much.

XENA:

And this is where the money's been going? This is the problem that's draining the treasury? *This* is the danger to the kingdom?

IOBATAS (stammers a little):

I--in a manner of speaking, yes.

XENA (between her teeth):

Well, I don't particularly care for your manner of speaking. (Pause) Let's have it. Now!

IOBATAS:

It's difficult to explain.

XENA:

Try real hard.

IOBATAS:

Well, it's really about Queenie.

XENA:

Who?

IOBATAS:

My queen.

GABRIELLE:

She doesn't mind being called Queenie? Isn't that a little...condescending?

IOBATAS:

Well, her parents didn't think so.

XENA:

Her parents call her Queenie, too?!

IOBATAS:

They were ambitious.

GABRIELLE:

But what is her *name*?

IOBATAS (exasperated):

Queenie!

At this, the queen comes into the room. She's wearing a caftan glittering with jewels; sandals; her finger and toenails have been stained and she's made up with the latest thing in ancient Greece. If this were the 1950's she'd be wearing cats-eye shaped glasses with rhinestone rims.

QUEENIE (coolly):

What is so important that you feel the need to yell like a common barkeep, lobatas? They can hear you in Sparta! (catching sight of Xena and Gabrielle) Oh, hello. I'm Queen Queenie. Funny, isn't it? That I should be named Queenie and turn out--

XENA:

To be a queen. Hilarious.

QUEENIE (looks around):

So the secret's out, hmm? I've told him and told him that this stuff is worthless unless he uses it, and probably even then. But nooooooo, he just keeps buying it, filling up the castle with junk! (Queenie glares at lobatas) It's pointless, stupid and useless, just like you!

She sweeps grandly out of the room as lobatas stares after her, and then turns to Xena with a miserable look on his face.

IOBATAS:

You see, we have no heir, and I've gotten so, so...well, look at me! She doesn't want anything to do with me and unless I can, er, ah, entice her back to my bed, we will never have an heir. And the kingdom needs the stability that a viable royal line brings. (he lowers his voice) You know, she was always stubborn and hard to please, but it's gotten much worse since our only son... (sniffles) ...left us.

XENA (moved):

I'm so sorry. There's nothing worse than losing a child... How did he die?

IOBATAS:

Oh, he didn't die. He just left us. Said he wanted to go away and find himself.

XENA:

I take it he's still looking.

IOBATAS:

Last thing we heard, he had joined the Praise Isis Society and was handing out flowers to people in seaports.

There is a noise in the doorway. Iobatas, Xena and Gabrielle turn to look. Two salesmen are standing there; one is carrying a jug labeled "Salamakan Slim Fast Potion" and the other is dragging a treadmill made out of wood with a belt of leather.

IOBATAS (trying to look like part of the furniture):

Oh, no.

SALESMAN #1 (brightly):

Hello, and welcome to our--your beautiful tower. I'm Potus--

SALESMAN #2 (even brighter):

And I'm Enocrates.

POTUS:

And boy, do we have a deal for you! For just seven hundred dinars, you can--

XENA:

Stick this thing up y--

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

XENA:

You're right. Actions speak louder than words.

In a blur of kicks, Xena knocks the jug out of Potus's hands and it smashes on the floor. Then she yells her war cry, spins in the air and lands on the treadmill, which she proceeds to hack to bits with her sword. The salesmen back away in horror, then turn and run as she comes after them.

XENA:

And stay out!

CUT TO

The campsite in mid-afternoon. Xena and Gabrielle are eating.

GABRIELLE:

So. Any ideas?

XENA:

Yeah. We'll move into the palace and chase away every traveling salesman who comes along. (she continues to eat, then suddenly perks up) Wait a minute. Ares!

GABRIELLE ("please please please"):

Ares? Ares is here?

XENA:

No, he's not. But we need his help.

A silver-blue flash and Ares appears though he remains insubstantial, ready to vanish again instantly. Xena looks at him coolly but Gabrielle's expression turns to a rapt, adoring gaze.

ARES:

What's the matter, Xena? Want to play some more games?

XENA:

Actually, this is very serious. Let me explain because I'm going to--well-- (forcing the words out) I'm going to need your help.

Xena starts pacing around the campsite. Meanwhile, Gabrielle sidles up to Ares, who is now fully present, and puts her hand on his arm. He jumps, shakes it off and moves a step away. She comes after him and puts her arm through his. He untangles himself and moves again. Gabrielle stops but stands staring at him adoringly. He tries to focus on Xena but his glance keeps coming back to the bard in a series of takes that show bewilderment, annoyance and disbelief flashing across his features.

ARES (uncomfortable):

Xena, will you get on with it?

Gabrielle puts her arm around him. He moves away.

XENA:

Okay, it's like this.

Gabrielle holds his hand. He disentangles his fingers from hers and turns his back on her.

XENA:

King lobatas needs an heir, and his queen is unwilling to--er--what are you doing?

Gabrielle has stepped behind Ares and put both arms around him.

ARES:

Stop it! (to Xena) Go on. (gasping for breath) No, not you!

This last is to Gabrielle who is hugging him as tightly as she can, still behind him. He vanishes and reappears on the other side of the campsite, slightly out of breath.

ARES (to Xena):

So lobatas needs an heir and his queen isn't in the mood. Well, that's not exactly my department, is it? Are you sure it's not my sis--stop right there!

He's yelling at the bard, who has begun to sidle towards him again. She stops but continues to stare at him, enraptured.

ARES (to Xena):

So...what does all this have to do with me?

Gabrielle takes a step towards him, unnoticed.

XENA:

It's not just that he wants an heir, it's the way he's trying to go about it. His only son has left and he's let himself get out of shape. Not only does the queen blame him for her son's departure, she has no desire for him at all. So he's buying every device known to man to build himself up so that she'll find him desirable again.

Ares starts to grin and even Gabrielle, who's still focused on the God of War, is now smiling.

XENA:

He can't say no to anyone, and so he buys devices, potions, diet parchments, anything and everything that anyone brings to the castle. *That's* where the money's going. He's a shopaholic and he can't say no! He's got rooms full of this stuff--and of course it doesn't help him because he never uses it!

Ares starts to laugh; Gabrielle giggles a little, all the while moving closer to Ares again and finally sitting down next to him on a log.

XENA:

Okay, so it's silly. But it's causing untold misery in the kingdom. We've got to get lobatas and Queenie together.

ARES (incredulously):

Queenie?

XENA:

Don't ask. We've got to get them together, and in order to do that, lobatas has to actually *use* the equipment. That's where you come in.

ARES:

I'm glad to hear that you have such a high opinion of my powers of persuasion, but--

XENA:

I wasn't suggesting you give him a pep talk. More like a demonstration.

ARES ("the hell you say"):

What?

XENA:

C'mon, Ares, you know what you look like. (Gabrielle purrs and leans closer, Ares finally notices her and stands up; Gabrielle falls over onto the log) If you posed as a teacher of gymnastics, told him that's why you look the way you do, and got him to actually use that stuff, our work here would be done.

GABRIELLE (dreamily):

Why do you look the way you do, Ares? You're the most gorgeous--

ARES:

Don't you know? We look the way you want us to. (to Xena) Look, Xena, I'm a god.

GABRIELLE (adoring smile):

You most certainly are!

ARES (gives her an exasperated look):

I'm not about to pose as some idiotic gymnastics teacher to help some cretin of a king who can't hang onto his own wife!

XENA (seductively):

Come on, Ares. The kingdom needs stability and order, and an heir will give them that. Once lobatas and the Queen are happy, he'll stop plundering the treasury to buy every silly invention that comes down the pike and distribute the money as he promised. The town will grow again, and the first thing I'll have him do is build a Temple of Ares.

ARES (starts to waver):

Well--

XENA (slyly):

Not only that, but I'm sure Gabrielle will be delighted to help find worshippers for you.

GABRIELLE (completely missing the sarcasm):

Oh, yes!

ARES (rolls his eyes):

All right. (pause) Why do I let you talk me into this stuff? This is just like the time you dragged me to that farm.

XENA (snaps her fingers, smiling):

Oh, that reminds me. You'll have to pretend to be mortal.

ARES (sighs):

Why am I not surprised?

XENA:

If lobatas knows who you are, he'll be much too intimidated. Besides, he'll think that he'll never be able to reach your level.

GABRIELLE (snorts):

Of course he won't!

XENA:

You know that and I know that but lobatas doesn't have to know it! Let's go.

ARES (glances at Gabrielle, who is starting to sidle up to him again, then to Xena):

I'd rather not walk this time, if it's all the same to you. I don't have to start pretending to be mortal just yet, do I?

XENA (smiles):

No, I think a shortcut to town would be nice. (suddenly thinks of something) Wait a minute, Ares. If you're going to pose as a gym teacher, you have to look the part. The leather's gotta go.

GABRIELLE (perks up):

All of it?

ARES (gives her a nervous glance):

Um....Xena, I don't spend a lot of time hanging out with gym teachers. You'll have to give me some tips here.

XENA:

Okay. Sandals...

At the same time that Ares snaps his fingers, Gabrielle pipes up again.

GABRIELLE:

And a loincloth!

In the next second, Ares is standing in the middle of the campsite wearing nothing but sandals and a black loincloth. Gabrielle whimpers a little.

XENA (stares at Ares a little longer than necessary):

Mmm--that's not what I had in mind, Ares.

ARES (irritably):

Well, it's what *somebody* had in mind. (to Gabrielle) Would you keep your fantasies to yourself while I'm trying to work?

XENA:

Just a pair of pants and a towel.

Ares snaps his fingers again and is instantly changed into tight black pants, with a black towel slung over his shoulder.

XENA:

That's great. Only I was thinking a white towel.

Ares snaps his fingers again, changing the towel to white.

GABRIELLE (dreamily):

You look--

ARES (cuts her off impatiently):

Yeah, yeah, let's get out of here.

They all disappear in a flash of light.

CUT TO

Ares, Xena and Gabrielle walking down the street, Ares attracting the stares of some female passersby. Gabrielle is still trying to cling to Ares. Just then, they see Theias walking toward them. Seeing Gabrielle, the young man smiles with delight.

THEIAS:

Gabrielle! It's wonderful to see you again. I had no idea you were here.

GABRIELLE (a princess to a common swine):

Hello.

THEIAS:

Gabrielle--

He stops, suddenly aware that Gabrielle is hanging on Ares' arm. He looks from Ares to the bard and back again, disappointment plain on his face.

THEIAS:

I see.

GABRIELLE (dryly):

I'm so glad. Then I don't have to explain it to you.

Theias looks crushed. He shakes his head silently and stalks off.

XENA:

Gabrielle! What was *that*? I thought you liked him!

GABRIELLE:

Oh come on! Who'd take Theias if she could have--

XENA:

Careful!

GABRIELLE (leans against Ares):

This.

ARES:

Hey! Hey! Who said you could have *this*? Can we just get on with it? People are staring.

GABRIELLE:

Of course they are! I bet they've never seen anyone so gorgeous...dreamy...so perfect.

ARES:

Ah-huh... You'd better stop that. I'm beginning to like it.

XENA (glares):

Well, you'd better not get too used to it. Come on, Gabrielle, that's enough.

The three of them head for the palace.

CUT TO

The throne room.

XENA:

Iobatas, I'd like you meet Bellus, my very dear friend. (Gabrielle gives her a look that would slay dragons) He's used such equipment for years, and you can see what it's done for him!

She looks meaningfully at Ares. He sighs and flexes his biceps.

IOBATAS:

Well, I don't know...

XENA:

Do you want to win Queenie back or not? Do you want an heir to the throne or not? You've got to work at it if you do!

Queenie comes in and stops dead. Her cheeks flush a little under the make-up. Gabrielle gives her a nasty look.

XENA (to Iobatas):

What have you got to lose?

IOBATAS (resigned):

All right, Bellus, show me how these things work.

ARES:

Come on then.

GABRIELLE:

Wait! I know you men, you'll be gone forever, I just know it. So before you go--

She runs to Ares and throws her arms around him, then raises her face to his.

GABRIELLE (femme fatale):

Kiss me, you fool!

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

The throne room. Gabrielle is in Ares' arms. Everyone else is frozen, staring at the two of them. Iobatas is frowning, Queenie looks disappointed, and Xena is furious. A guard dashes into the room.

GUARD:

Your majesty! Your majesty! The encyclopedia salesmen are coming!

IOBATAS (horrified):

Oh, no, they're the absolute *worst!*

Iobatas turns and runs.

Queenie and Xena exchange a worried glance and Gabrielle moves a tiny bit closer to Ares. At that moment, a shadow falls through the window as the lower limb of the sun touches the horizon: it's begun to set.

Gabrielle blinks, then gasps, backs up and pushes Ares away.

GABRIELLE:

Ares? What are you doing? (clutches her head) What am I doing?

Ares opens his mouth to say something and finds himself speechless once again. He looks from Xena to Gabrielle, shrugs, and goes after Iobatas, with a look that says, "might as well get this over with." Queenie trails along, leaving Xena and Gabrielle alone.

XENA:

Welcome back.

GABRIELLE:

What was that?

XENA:

I have no idea, but if we stay here long enough, someone will probably try to sell us a cure.

The noise outside gets louder. Xena and Gabrielle exchange a nervous look.

GABRIELLE (small voice):

I think they heard you.

Shouts of "cheap!" and "today only!" are heard.

XENA and GABRIELLE:

Let's get out of here!

CUT TO

The exercise room. Iobatas is panting and straining, a pained look on his face, as Ares leads him through the routines. Iobatas stops, and when the noise of the exercise machines ceases for a moment, he becomes aware of the noise outside.

IOBATAS (eagerly):

It sounds like there's real trouble there. I'd better go, uh, do my duty.

Despite being out of shape, he makes such a quick exit that Ares follows him with a surprised look. Ares shakes his head and rolls his eyes.

The camera pans over to Queenie, who is peering from around the pile of equipment.

QUEENIE:

Hey there.

ARES (an "oh swell" look crosses his face):

Uh, hi.

Queenie saunters over and circles around him, admiring him. He turns with her, keeping his eye on her as she preens for him.

QUEENIE:

So...do you really think you can get that tub of lard in shape? I mean, will he have muscles like this? (she caresses his bicep) Or this? (she touches his chest) Or...

Ares grabs her hand before she can touch anything else.

ARES:

If he works at it he can certainly improve his condition.

QUEENIE:

But it will take a while, won't it?

ARES (improvising wildly):

Everyone, ah, progresses at their own rate. Improvement isn't instantaneous, obviously, it takes time. But he'll, ah, feel better about himself from the beginning.

QUEENIE:

And will *you* be here to help him?

She threads the fingers of the hand he's holding through his, and bats her eyelashes at him. It's Greba squared and he nearly groans aloud.

QUEENIE:

I mean, if he did it wrong he could injure himself, couldn't he? (she moves closer, still holding his hand) And considering what this is all about (closer) the last thing we want (she's leaning against him now) is an injury. Of any kind.

Queenie kisses Ares square on the mouth just as Xena, Gabrielle and lobatas come running back into the room.

Queenie is hanging on Ares' neck like an ornament on a Christmas tree, but he's as wooden as the pine itself. His eyes are open and his hands are at his sides. When they come in, he holds out his arms in an "I'm innocent here" gesture.

XENA:

Look, ma, no hands.

IOBATAS:

Guards! Arrest that man!

ARES:

What?!

He gives Xena an exasperated and somewhat plaintive look, as if asking, "Do I have to keep pretending to be mortal?"

XENA:

Bellus! Leave this to me!

Ares glares at her but subsides and the guards lead him away.

IOBATAS (calls after them):

Chain him up!

QUEENIE:

Iobatas--

IOBATAS:

If you say one word I'll send you to the dungeon with him. (Queenie does not look at all averse to the idea) Now get to your room! (turning to a guard) You! Go with her and lock her in!

Queenie opens her mouth to protest, thinks better of it, and goes. Iobatas, Xena and Gabrielle walk back to the throne room. Iobatas stands puffing and blowing while Xena and Gabrielle look at him in alarm.

GABRIELLE:

Are you all right?

IOBATAS:

I will be, once I have him whipped within an inch of his life!

XENA (smirks):

Well, in that case, I'm afraid you're *not* going to be all right.

They are interrupted by a growing rumble that resolves itself into a babble of excited voices.

IOBATAS:

It's those wretched encyclopedia salesmen. Bar the doors!

But there's no one left to bar the doors. The guards are either taking "Bellus" to the dungeon or Queenie to her chambers. The salesmen burst into the room, waving scrolls and shouting. Xena and Gabrielle step between Iobatas and the mob.

XENA:

Quiet! Quiet! (takes her chakram from her belt and hurls it so that it zooms just over the heads of the salesmen, ricochets off the wall, around the room and back to her. The salesmen shut up immediately) That's better. Now, what do you want here?

FLACCUS:

Who are you?

XENA:

My name is Xena.

The salesmen murmur among themselves; this is not what they were counting on. They take a step backwards.

FLACCUS:

Stand still! (to Xena) We're not here to see you, we're here to see him. (gesturing at lobatas who's more or less cowering) We have an offer he can't refuse.

lobatas tries to back away--into a pillar.

FLACCUS (ignores both Xena and Gabrielle and concentrates on the weak link):

Your Majesty, I am here to offer you an extraordinary opportunity. You can rule wisely and well if you take advantage of this offer. Look! (he unrolls a scroll with a flourish and waves it under the king's nose) See? This is the Alpha Scroll, the first in a series of 24, one for each letter of the alphabet. In these scrolls you'll find all the wisdom of the ancients! Why, there is information in here you won't find anywhere else, including the Library at Alexandria! You can't be your best without this--

IOBATAS:

What do you call it?

FLACCUS (smarmy):

This is the Encyclopedia Aegea, Your Majesty, and it is crammed full--

VOLUMNUS:

Of crap! You don't want that inferior product, King lobatas, you want *this* instead. This is the Encyclopedia Romanus, and it is far superior to the Aegea, trust me on this. It's newer, handier to use--

DECUS:

And just as full of crap as the Aegea! What you really need, Sire, is *this!* (he displays a much larger scroll, full of small print--it's obviously crammed with information) This is the Encyclopedia Britannicus, and it's the very best in the world. And it's yours on an installment plan.

IOBATAS (weakly):

Installment plan?

DECUS:

Why yes. You don't need to buy all the scrolls at once, you can by Alpha now, Beta next month, Gamma the month after that, and so on, all the way to Omega. And if you sign up now, with me, I'll throw in--at no extra charge (he whips an object from his bag and holds it up) this brand new, easy to use, orange juicer!

lobatas's eyes begin to gleam with an unholy light. He stands and moves toward the salesmen, obviously entranced.

GABRIELLE:

No! No. Your Majesty, you can't do this!

XENA:

What are you going to do with the encyclopedias? Use them to cover the exercise equipment?

The salesmen begin to converge on lobatas, moving in until he's surrounded and chattering at him, waving their scrolls. An overhead shot makes him look like a piece of meat in the middle of a school of piranhas.

XENA (quiet and calm but her voice cuts through the bedlam like a knife):

Gentlemen. The king has no need of any of your materials. Leave quietly and do it now.

FLACCUS:

There are twenty of us.

XENA:

And your point is?

Gabrielle rolls her eyes and braces herself.

FLACCUS:

You think you're good enough to take us all?

XENA (smiling):

Shall we find out?

Instantly the room erupts in a fight. Xena does a back flip over Flaccus's head, lands behind him and yanks the strap of his bag down over his arms, pinning him. She kicks his legs out from under him and gives him a kick. He rolls across the floor, knocking down the other salesman as he goes. Some jump aside, two dash out the door, three more leap out of the window, but the others gather themselves together and make a counterattack. Xena meets the charge and Gabrielle wades into the fray, using her sais to block their blows and poking them in the sides. Sounds of 'oof' and 'ka-pow' are heard. lobatas is staring at the fracas without moving, then he suddenly yells for his guards.

The guards charge in and help Xena and Gabrielle mop up the last of the mob. They push them out of the room and bar the doors. Flaccus is lying under the window trying to wriggle out of the straps. He can't manage it, but he does get to his feet and stands there, swaying, his arms trapped at his sides. He flaps like a seal and yells.

FLACCUS:

You'll pay for this! I promise you will!

XENA:

How about an installment plan?

Xena knocks him over like one of those dolls with all the weight in the bottom and rolls him toward the doors. She signals to the guards; they unbar the doors and throw them open, and Xena rolls Flaccus through the doors and gives him a shove. He goes rolling down the corridor, yelling, "Damn!" with every revolution. The last time, however, it sounds less like 'I'll get you for this' and more like 'I feel sick'. Xena comes back into the room, sits down at a table, and brushes her hands together in a 'that's taken care of' gesture.

IOBATAS:

Thank you! You've saved me from a horrible mistake. I was, ah, weakening there for a moment.

GABRIELLE:

No, really?

IOBATAS (stung):

Watch your mouth! One more thing. (he turns to the guards) If any of those bums come back, spear to kill!

XENA (her feet on the table):

Peace, it's wonderful.

CUT TO

The defeated encyclopedia salesmen gather outside the palace.

FLACCUS (his voice a little wobbly, a greenish pallor on his face):

All right. Now, it's war!

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, Iobatas and the guards are still enjoying the glow from winning the fight. There's an additional glow from the torches, since it's now dark. Dinner is brought in.

XENA:

You know, Iobatas, considering that we bailed you out... (pauses for emphasis) ...*again*...the least you can do is release...my friend.

IOBATAS (stubbornly):

I'm not letting him go, Xena, and that's final. Not until I find out what's between him and Queenie.

GABRIELLE:

Why, nothing, of course! Queenie just got a little carried away. (she blushes furiously) I guess he can--uh--have that effect on women. (she shakes her head slightly, remembering her own obsession; the look on her face says, "What came over me?")

IOBATAS (grumbling):

Maybe, we'll see. Bring that, that...home wrecker here! And get Queenie as well. We'll have them confront one another and see what happens.

The guards leave.

IOBATAS (to Xena):

So I guess you're pretty fond of this...Bellus.

XENA (a bit too hastily):

He's an--old friend, that's all.

IOBATAS (hopefully):

Boyfriend?

XENA:

Of course not! (she catches Gabrielle's sly glance) Not a word out of you!

GABRIELLE (innocently):

Why, did you think I was going to say something?

A guard comes into the room, looking deeply puzzled.

IOBATAS:

Well? Where's Bellus?

GUARD (stammering):

Your M-majesty...he's, er, not there.

IOBATAS:

What do you mean, not there?

GUARD:

Sire...his cell was empty.

Xena and Gabrielle smirk at each other.

IOBATAS:

That can't be! No one has ever escaped from the palace dungeon. (looks suspiciously at Xena)

What do you know about this?

Xena's at a loss for words, but before either she or lobatas can say anything else, they are interrupted by a second guard who comes running into the room, a look of horror on his face and a piece of parchment in his hand.

GUARD #2:

Your Majesty! Your Majesty!

IOBATAS:

What is it *now*?

GUARD #2 (holds out the parchment):

It's the queen, Sire. She's gone! She's been taken hostage by the encyclopedia salesmen!

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

A street in Lycia, illuminated by torches. It is still dark, though the first glimmer of daylight is visible in the sky. Xena and Gabrielle are walking down the street.

GABRIELLE:

Where are we going to look for her?

XENA:

We're heading to the marketplace. Some of the vendors have to know where the encyclopedia gang hangs out.

CUT TO

The marketplace, where the few vendors still in business are opening their stalls. Xena and Gabrielle come up to the edge of the square just as the sun rises, and a dreamy look comes suddenly over Xena's face.

XENA:

I was thinking, Gabrielle...Ares could really help us out with this.

GABRIELLE (groans):

Not again!

XENA (in a seductive sing-song):

Aaa-res!

Ares flashes in, looking exasperated.

ARES:

Now what? Any more brilliant plans you want to get me involved in?

XENA (sighing happily):

Oh, Ares.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, Xena!

ARES:

Oh, *no!*

She puts her arms around him and kisses him hard.

ARES (pulls back):

What is this? Drive Ares Crazy Week?

He turns around, walks away and vanishes. Xena sprints after him, with Gabrielle in hot pursuit.

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

XENA:

Ares! Come back here!

GABRIELLE:

Xena, what are you doing? You can't chase after someone who's disappeared... He's probably back on Olympus by now!

XENA:

Well, he went in this direction!

CUT TO

A street corner. Theias is walking down the street, guiding Polyeidus. Turning a corner, Xena and Gabrielle run smack into them and they all wind up in a heap on the ground. After some scuffling, they disentangle themselves. Theias is the first to recover.

THEIAS (overjoyed):

Gabrielle! (then he remembers, and his attitude changes) Um--are you all right?

GABRIELLE:

I'm fine. I'm so glad to see you, Theias.

THEIAS (a little bitterly):

I'd never have known it from the way you acted yesterday. You were plastered all over some big tall guy...

XENA (dreamy):

Oh yes--big, tall, gorgeous...

THEIAS (puzzled):

So he's with Xena? Gabrielle, I thought you and he--

XENA (growls):

Don't even think about it!

GABRIELLE:

I'm *not* thinking about it!

THEIAS:

But...what about yesterday?

GABRIELLE:

Well...yesterday, I was...sort of...for part of the day, at least.

Polyeidus' face changes, as if he has just realized something.

POLYEIDUS:

Wait a minute. Gabrielle, are you saying that half the day, you're smitten with this man, and the other half Xena is?

XENA (squirms):

Well...yeah....that's what it looks like.

GABRIELLE (blushes furiously):

I guess so.

POLYEIDUS (sighs):

I love you, Theias, but sometimes you are *such* a dolt!

THEIAS:

What'd I do?

POLYEIDUS:

That scroll you found, you cast a spell with it, that's what!

XENA and GABRIELLE (simultaneously):

What kind of spell?

POLYEIDUS (suddenly realizing he'll have to spill the beans):

Ah, er--

THEIAS:

Come on, father, let's have it!

POLYEIDUS:

Once upon a time--

GABRIELLE:

Good beginning!

XENA:

Hush!

POLYEIDUS (hesitant):

Yes, well, once upon a time I, that is, a friend of mine was in love with two women. He couldn't make up his mind between the two, and so he, well, he cast a spell so that he could be with one of them in the morning and the other in the afternoon, and they would both absolutely adore me--I mean, him. (he smiles with fond recollection) It was like Olympus on earth--I mean, it must have been like Olympus on earth, for, ah, my friend.

XENA (unable to suppress a grin):

Sure. Go on.

POLYEIDUS:

Well, that's it. My son found the scroll with the spell. I took it from him, but he must have snuck up while I slept and taken it back--isn't that right, Theias? (he turns his unseeing eyes toward his son)

THEIAS (looks down, turning crimson):

Uh...well...yes.

GABRIELLE:

But, but--why us?

POLYEIDUS:

Well, Gabrielle, obviously Theias was thinking of you at the time. (Gabrielle looks fondly at Theias and he turns away, blushing even more if that's humanly possible) And Xena, I suppose, was in close proximity to Gabrielle when the spell was cast, so she was the other woman affected.

XENA:

But...why *him*?

POLYEIDUS:

The spell works so that both of the women fall in love with the first man they see in the morning after it was cast.

GABRIELLE (groans):

Why do all spells seem to do that? Is it some sort of law of nature?

POLYEIDUS (seizing the opportunity):

Well, actually, you see--when you're casting a long-distance spell--

XENA:

Never mind that! How do we reverse it?

POLYEIDUS:

Well...I have the reverse spell written down on a scroll. But it may take a while to find it.

XENA:

So in the meantime, I'll be wildly in love with Ar--with, uh, that man in the mornings--

GABRIELLE:

And I'll adore him in the afternoons?

THEIAS:

At least you get the nights off.

XENA and GABRIELLE (simultaneously):

Oh, great!

CUT TO

The marketplace, later the same morning. Xena, Gabrielle, Polyeidus and Theias are walking.

GABRIELLE:

What if you can't find the scroll with the reverse spell? Does that mean we're stuck like this forever?

POLYEIDUS:

What kind of man do you think I am, to permanently ensnare unsuspecting women--uh, what I mean is, my friend... (he realizes no one is buying that story and waves his hand in an "I give up" gesture) Oh, the spell will just "wear off"--eventually.

XENA (grits her teeth):

How long?

POLYEIDUS:

I don't know. Never got to that point, myself-- (apologetic) short attention span. Could be days, months, years--

Gabrielle groans.

THEIAS (sheepishly):

I'm really sorry, Gabrielle...um...and Xena.

XENA (brusquely):

All right, spells can wait. We need to find Queenie, remember?

THEIAS:

The queen is lost?

GABRIELLE:

No, kidnapped. And we have to find her.

XENA:

Yeah, yeah, but more to the point, we...no, *I* need to find Ares. *Really* need to find him. Right--
(she bites her lip and her eyes widen) --now.

She shakes herself, then starts off at a run, startling the others. Theias and Gabrielle look at each other then run after her--by now she is nowhere to be seen.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, wait! What's the point of looking for--

The camera pans over to the shadow of the giant sun dial in the market square just as it crosses the noon mark. Gabrielle stops in mid-stride.

GABRIELLE (dreamy):

Ares.

Theias rams into her.

THEIAS:

Who?!

Gabrielle steps away, frowns, looks left and right, completely ignores Theias and runs in the direction Xena went.

GABRIELLE:

Xena! Yell when you've found him!

THEIAS:

Gabrielle!

POYEIDUS (behind them):

Theias!

GABRIELLE:

Ares!

They round a corner, Gabrielle in the lead, Theias running after her and Polyeidus tapping along in their wake as best he can, grumbling to himself. Soon, a half-dozen townsfolk are running behind them as well, trying to see what's going on.

CUT TO

A littered courtyard in a run-down part of town. The buildings surrounding the court lean drunkenly against each other, and several have rooms that overhang the pavement. It's an altogether nasty place.

Xena is standing in the center of the courtyard, frowning.

There is an explosion of noise and Gabrielle appears in the mouth of the alley leading from the street, followed by Theias, the whole mob of people running after them.

THEIAS:

Wait!

GABRIELLE:

Ares!

XENA:

Gabrielle!

Gabrielle sees Xena and stops, Theias nearly runs into her but stops as well, and the mob trips over its collective feet and goes down. There's a good deal of thrashing and muttering, then the mob gets up sheepishly, looks around, sees nothing and goes away.

Gabrielle looks around the enclosed courtyard, her face falls. Theias looks at her, concerned.

GABRIELLE (wails):

He's gone, gone, go-o-o-one! (stamps her foot) He's not here.

XENA (distractedly):

No. But someone else is.

THEIAS:

Yeah. Me.

GABRIELLE:

I don't *want* someone else, I only want Ar--

She's cut off when Xena clamps a hand over her mouth.

XENA:

Shhhh!

She points over Gabrielle's shoulder, down the alley. The camera pans around to show the leader of the encyclopedia salesmen making his way stealthily toward them.

Xena pulls Gabrielle after her and Theias joins them as they duck into a doorway. Flaccus passes by without seeing them. There are a few strange sounds, then Xena peeks out cautiously to see where he's gone. The alley is empty. Flaccus has vanished.

XENA (mutters):

Strange. Men shouldn't just vanish.

GABRIELLE:

Tell me about it! Vanishing needs a touch of godly finesse... (blissfully) Ares has it down to an art form!

Theias' eyes widen in sudden comprehension.

THEIAS:

That man is Ares? As in Ares, God of War? (off Gabrielle's "duh" look) Oh. But hang on...so he's Ares...then how could Flaccus have vanished? (suspiciously) He's not a god, too, is he?

XENA:

Oh, he hasn't vanished. We just need to look harder.

She stands and looks carefully at the courtyard, checking out every possible exit. The doors to all the buildings are boarded up, the stairways closed off--there seems no way out. Then she points to a pile of crates heaped untidily in a corner.

She draws her sword. Gabrielle grabs her sais and Theias picks up a piece of wood. The three surround the pile and at Xena's silent signal, they snatch the crates away from the wall to reveal--nothing. The corner is completely paved, offering no hiding place or escape route.

Frustrated, the three turn to leave when Xena sees something sparkling in the dust. She walks over and picks it up: it's a jewel from Queenie's caftan.

Once again Xena looks around carefully, and as she does she notices something: one of the overhanging upper stories looks odd. She makes a square out of her fingers and peers through it (think of a director framing a shot). She checks again and then points it out to the others: the shape of the building is all wrong: there's a hidden room between the overhanging part and the main building.

XENA (loudly):

I don't know where Flaccus could have gotten to, but we've lost him. Come along, we might as well get some rest.

She leads the others down the alley away from the courtyard. Then they turn and tiptoe back. Quickly the three gather the crates together and place them under the overhang, then set them on fire. The wood is damp and there's a lot of smoke, which is exactly what Xena wants. As soon as the fire is blazing and smoke is billowing up towards the building, the three start to yell.

GABRIELLE:

Fire! Fire! Fire!

THEIAS:

Help! Get out, the building's on fire!

A cunningly hidden trapdoor opens in the floor of the overhang and the encyclopedia salesmen tumble out, helter-skelter, dragging Queenie with them. They stop dead when they see the burning crates, but it's too late: Xena, Gabrielle and Theias attack.

Xena is legendary, of course, and Gabrielle can hold her own, but Theias isn't much of a fighter. Besides, dozens of miscreants are pouring from the hideaway like cockroaches, and the odds aren't good.

Soon, however, it becomes apparent that someone is helping our heroes, because the salesmen are falling down a lot, tripping over their own feet, and dropping their weapons...almost as if some invisible entity were knocking their swords from their hands.

XENA (grins):

I don't really need your help, you know.

ARES (only she hears him):

You're welcome.

A few minutes later and the thugs are tied and on their way to the magistrate under guard and Queenie is on her way back to the palace, accompanied by her three rescuers.

CUT TO

The sun is setting behind lobatas' palace. lobatas and Queenie are standing on the porch, looking for all the world to see like newlyweds. Xena, Gabrielle and Theias are about to leave.

QUEENIE:

I can never thank you enough. When those-- (shudders) --salespeople carried me away, I thought I was going to die! And I realized... (wipes away a tear) ...just how shallow I have been. (looks fondly at lobatas who is gazing back adoringly) The truth is, I love my darling lobatas just as he is. (to the king) Don't ever change, you gorgeous thing, you!

The king and queen kiss.

Gabrielle, Xena and Theias exchange an amused look that swiftly turns to one of slightly embarrassed appreciation as the royal couple's embrace grows more and more passionate: Gabrielle's eyebrows rise, Theias blushes, then they look away.

XENA:

Looks like our work here is done.

GABRIELLE:

You can say *that* again!

All three turn to walk away from the palace. In the background, the image of the king and queen is now scrambled for the sake of propriety.

Theias stops and pulls something from his pocket--a small scroll. The camera focuses on it as he unrolls it.

THEIAS (apologetic):

The spell to remove the charm. (offering it to Gabrielle) You'd better read it. I don't want to mess it up.

GABRIELLE:

No, no--you should read it. (smiles a little at him) I trust you.

Xena opens her mouth to object, then thinks better of it.

THEIAS:

Okay... (starts reading) God-d-dess of des-desire...

A close up of Xena and Gabrielle--both squeeze their eyes shut, as though bracing themselves for a blow.

CUT TO

The campsite by the stream, after dark. Xena and Gabrielle are sitting by the fire with Ares, who is looking from one to the other and back again, finally settling on Xena.

ARES:

So it was all a spell.

XENA:

Right.

ARES:

And you don't really want to darn my socks. (off Xena's look) No, I guess not.

GABRIELLE:

Watch it, Ares, if you're not careful, she *will* cook you breakfast. (threatening) *Every* morning.

Ares gives Xena a horrified look; Xena scowls and elbows Gabrielle, who tries to look innocent and fails miserably. Ares reaches over and scoops Xena into an embrace, planting a kiss on the side of her head; Gabrielle yelps and gets out of the way. Xena beats him off, laughing.

ARES:

Don't worry-- (he pushes a strand of hair back from Xena's face) --I can cook well enough for both of us.

XENA:

You *can*?

ARES (smirks):

I have many skills.

Xena chuckles affectionately. There is a long pause as they look into each other's eyes.

ARES:

So it was just the spell...there's nothing else.

XENA (haughtily):

Of course not.

She shivers slightly as Ares brushes his hand against her face.

ARES:

Speaking of skills, you used to be a much better liar.

He disappears.

GABRIELLE (after the flash):

He does have that vanishing thing down to an art, doesn't he?

XENA:

Yeah...

GABRIELLE (suspiciously):

Are you *sure* that spell is gone?

XENA:

Oh, it's gone. (under her breath) Unfortunately.

GABRIELLE:

What?!

FADE OUT

THE END

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