

SHIPPER SEASON SEVEN

“Divided We Stand I”

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Logline

As Eve prepares to take her place among the Amazons and Xena and Ares spend some time alone, a surprise attack on Corinth brings pits old adversaries against each other and tests loyalties on all sides.

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TEASER

FADE IN

A small clearing surrounded by a densely wooded forest. Gabrielle and Eve are having a practice bout with staffs. They parry, but Eve is only halfheartedly deflecting Gabrielle's blows. The less enthusiastic Eve becomes, the harder Gabrielle presses her, becoming more and more frustrated at Eve's lack of interest. Gabrielle is about to deliver a hard, winning strike when Eve tiredly lowers her staff.

EVE:

I can't do this.

GABRIELLE:

Yes, you can! You have to! Now come on. Focus. (takes a defensive posture)

EVE:

Gabrielle--

GABRIELLE:

Eve, someday you'll rule over the Amazons. You need to be able to protect yourself.

EVE:

I'm not afraid to die.

GABRIELLE (lowers her staff):

Eve, this isn't about you. It's about the people who will follow you. As queen, it's up to you where you lead them.

CUT TO

A shot of the lower half of a body charging forward on a battlefield, all that is visible are legs and the blade of a sword. A cry of "forward!" is heard.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Eve in the clearing.

EVE:

You're saying I have a choice about whether I fight or not?

GABRIELLE:

I'm saying you have a choice about *how* you fight. You think a leader has to be cold blooded to lead soldiers into a battle.

EVE:

There's a side of me that should never be unleashed, Gabrielle. You should know that better than anyone.

GABRIELLE:

You *can* temper strength with mercy, Eve.

CUT TO

The same shot of the lower half of a body and the blade of a sword halting its advance. A bloodied soldier falls into frame on his knees, holding up his hands and looking up at his attacker.

SOLDIER:

Mercy!

The hilt of the attacker's sword flashes across the screen, hitting the soldier across the side of his head. He falls out of the shot, unconscious.

CUT TO

GABRIELLE:

Your mother has learned that lesson.

EVE:

I'm not my mother!

GABRIELLE (smiling knowingly):

You're not all that different, you know. I see the same good--

EVE:

--and the bad too. Don't forget the bad.

GABRIELLE (frowning):

If that's the way you see it. But you can learn to balance--

Eve's head jerks up as if she's heard something. She suddenly flips over Gabrielle and into the trees. It takes Gabrielle a moment to react. Just as she's about to charge into the trees, someone stumbles out and falls to the ground. Eve emerges and quickly levels her staff at the prostrate figure.

EVE:

If you even breathe wrong, I swear you're going to regret it!

GABRIELLE (mutters to herself):

Well, that's not quite what I had in mind, but it's a start.

The camera pans over to the person on the ground. We see that it is Haimon.

HAIMON:

I surrender! I surrender!

GABRIELLE:

Haimon?

Haimon casts an anxious glance up at Eve who has her staff positioned against his chest, then looks towards Gabrielle.

HAIMON:

Gabrielle? Thank the gods!

GABRIELLE (walks over to Eve and moves her staff from Haimon's chest):

It's all right, Eve. He's a friend.

Eve steps back, clearly disturbed by her use of violence. Gabrielle pulls Haimon to his feet. They clasp hands, staring at one another a moment, then Gabrielle throws her arms around his neck.

GABRIELLE:

It's so good to see you! What are you doing here?

HAIMON:

I was in Tegea when I learned that you and Xena were fighting together with the Amazons. When I heard a rumor that an Amazon Queen had been killed I was afraid that you--

GABRIELLE (glances at Eve):

No. That was...I was wounded but I'm healing.

HAIMON (reaches out and touches her shoulder gently):

Thank the gods for that.

Haimon and Gabrielle exchange a deep look that becomes more and more awkward until Haimon looks away.

HAIMON:

Anyway, I was headed north towards Amazon land when I came across hundreds of war refugees fleeing Megara.

GABRIELLE:

Megara has been invaded? By who?

HAIMON:

Take a guess.

GABRIELLE:

Sabina? (Haimon nods) How is that possible? Her army isn't nearly big enough to hit a city that size.

HAIMON:

That's what I thought. Turns out Sabina has been hitting smaller sized Macedonian cities along the Ionian Coast and building up her army.

EVE:

If her army is large enough to take Megara, Corinth will be next.

HAIMON:

What makes you so sure?

EVE:

Because it's what I would do.

GABRIELLE (turns to look at Eve, as if just remembering she is there):

I'm sorry. Haimon--this is Eve...Xena's daughter.

Haimon and Eve grasp arms in greeting.

HAIMON:

I'm a...very old friend of your mother's. I owe her my life. (Haimon looks around) Speaking of which, where is Xena? She needs to know that Sabina is on the loose again.

Gabrielle and Eve exchange uncomfortable looks.

GABRIELLE:

Umm...well...I'm not really sure. But I think I know how to find her.

CUT TO

Xena crouched in a defensive stance, sword in hand, amidst a severe rocky landscape with only sparse trees. She is obviously listening intently for signs of a possible attack. The camera pans to a warrior in a dark crimson and silver outfit leaping down from a rock. With a fierce cry of "Yah!", Xena swings her sword upward, knocking him out with a broadside blow. Three more warriors in similar outfits, two men and a woman, jump down at once, seemingly coming out of nowhere, and the

woman manages to knock the sword from Xena's hand. Two of the warriors swing at Xena but she dives down and rolls on the rocky ground, evading their blows.

With her battle cry, "A-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi!" she leaps high in the air, does a spectacular flip, and knocks out the woman and one of the men with kicks to the head. The other man remains facing her. Xena picks up her sword and charges. She and the man fight in a dazzling dance of flips, kicks, steps forward and steps back, their swords weaving and clashing in the air and making sparks fly.

As Xena begins to prevail, the camera pans over to yet another figure rising from behind a rock, behind Xena's back. The new attacker creeps up toward her and raises his sword but just then Xena swings around and kicks him in the midsection, sending him flying, even as she parries a blow from her opponent.

After some more sparring, she holds the tip of her blade to his neck as he lowers his sword. Suddenly, there is a smile on his face, and in the next moment he morphs into Ares, in his usual leathers. The unconscious bodies of Xena's other defeated opponents vanish without a trace. Xena chuckles.

ARES:

Told you I'd provide all the entertainment you need.

XENA:

That? That was just a light workout.

ARES:

Oh yeah. Barely enough to get your pulse racing. (he pulls her closer and kisses her. She responds passionately as they both drop their swords and draw their arms around each other. Then, Ares breaks the kiss and grins mischievously) I think it's speeding up.

XENA (seductively):

Hmm... You know what I could use right now?

ARES:

Let me guess. (he reaches to kiss her again)

XENA (pulls back teasingly a moment after their lips touch):

A swim. You know any nice beaches?

ARES:

A beach. (thoughtfully) Aren't you worried it's going to look too much like a honeymoon?

XENA:

No. Are you?

Ares stares at her, then smiles tenderly and shakes his head.

CUT TO

The calm sea glittering in the sun. Xena comes up for air with a gasp. Ares surfaces a few moments later, his hair dry. Smiling at Xena, he gathers her in his arms and kisses her. The camera pulls back to reveal a green island not very far away.

XENA (closes her eyes, then pulls back):

Hm-mmm... It's not exactly a fair contest--you can hold your breath underwater forever.

ARES:

That can come in handy sometimes.

XENA:

Oh yeah? Meaning what?

ARES:

Meaning I have a surprise for you.

XENA (looks at him slyly):

A surprise. (smirks) All right--I'm waiting.

ARES:

Race you back to shore.

XENA (gives him a mildly surprised look):

All right.

They swim toward the island, splashing at the water.

CUT TO

The island, overgrown with lush tropical vegetation. Xena is sitting in the grass naked, facing the water, her arms wrapped around her knees. Ares' hand comes up behind her and begins to emanate a red glow, drying her wet hair. Then the camera pans over to Ares who is sitting next to Xena, also naked.

XENA:

You're finally putting those god powers to a good use.

ARES:

And you're finally admitting that my god powers can be of some use to you. (pauses) So...your surprise.

He holds out a clenched fist and opens it. There is a large, luminous pearl lying on his palm.

XENA (with an incredulous, pleased laugh):

Ares! (after a pause) It's good to see that you think I can appreciate a present, which doesn't...kill anything.

ARES:

Don't push it. I just think it goes well with--the chakram.

He closes his fist around the pearl; currents of light can be seen dancing inside his hand. When he opens it, the pearl is hanging from a thin silver chain, which he fastens around Xena's neck. There is a dreamy smile on her face.

XENA:

Thank you.

Ares puts an arm around her shoulder and closes his eyes. They sit in silence for a few moments as Xena strokes his hand.

XENA:

It's amazing...

ARES:

What?

XENA:

That things can be so peaceful with you around.

ARES (chuckles):

Do you mean that as a good thing?

XENA:

Yeah. At least for a while. (after a pause) But you know what's going to happen eventually.

ARES (looks up a little warily):

What?

Xena turns around and throws her arms around his neck, staring into his eyes. The smile on her face is loving and a little wistful.

XENA:

Sooner or later, we'll both have to get back to work.

Their lips meet in a tender, passionate kiss as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Gabrielle, obviously agitated, paces back and forth across the clearing.

GABRIELLE:

Ares? Come on! I need to see Xena!

A flash of blue light and Ares materializes, a tired look on his face.

ARES:

Well, it just so happens, Little Miss Killjoy, that Xena is unavailable at the moment. She's in bed.

GABRIELLE (glances up at the sun):
Xena is asleep this late in the morning?

ARES (arches his eyebrows meaningfully at Gabrielle):
Who said anything about sleeping?

Gabrielle reddens and glances at Eve who is staring down at her feet.

ARES:
So--if you'll excuse me--I've got my own matters to attend to. I'll be sure to let Xena know you send your regards.

GABRIELLE (growls impatiently):
I mean it, Ares. This is important!

ARES:
My, my. You're awfully testy for someone that's found a new friend to play with. (he glances at Haimon) Whoops! I forgot the pair of goody two shoes I'm talking about.

GABRIELLE:
I'm warning you, Ares!

HAIMON:
In all my years, I have never--

ARES:
And that's your problem. You know, you really should try it. Maybe then the two of you wouldn't be so uptight all the time.

GABRIELLE (sighs, her patience exhausted):
Ares, what do you think Xena is going to do if she finds out that I wanted to see her and you wouldn't let me?

ARES (thinks about that a moment and flinches):
Point taken. (He raises his hand to summon Xena)

GABRIELLE:
Wait a minute! Is she--uh--is she decent?

ARES (purses his lips and smirks):
Oh, I hope not.

He waves his hand. A slightly dazed-looking Xena appears in the clearing. She is wearing a black silk robe and has a bunch of grapes in her hand. Gabrielle stares incredulously at Xena while Eve and Haimon look away, intensely embarrassed.

XENA (blinks and shakes her head, then growls):
Ares?

ARES (raises his hands in a "don't blame me" gesture):
Sorry. It seems you have an urgent call. (points to Gabrielle)

GABRIELLE (blushing furiously):

Xena...uh...sorry to interrupt your...whatever. We've got trouble.

ARES (sarcastic):

Let me guess. A cat got stuck in a tree.

XENA (curtly but with a touch of sadness in her voice):

Looks like that getting-back-to-work bit is going to happen sooner rather than later.

ARES (rolls his eyes):

Well, if it's all the same to you, I'd rather not listen to the details of your new humanitarian mission, so I'll say good-bye for now. Unless, of course (he presses his hand to his heart in mock sincerity) you want my help.

XENA (frowns):

Hmph. I'll be fine. But you'd better get me into... (looks herself over critically) ...something less comfortable.

ARES (smirks):

Done.

He takes her in his arms and kisses her while Gabrielle, Haimon and Eve look away. In the middle of the kiss, Xena's silk robe is replaced by her warrior outfit, complete with boots, sword and chakram.

XENA (smiles tenderly at Ares):

Thanks. I'll see you later.

ARES:

You bet. (he disappears)

XENA (coughs slightly, smoothing over her outfit, then nonchalantly pops a grape in her mouth and turns to her companions):

Well. What's the trouble?

HAIMON:

It's our old friend Sabina. She's back--and we think she's gearing up to attack Corinth.

A close-up of the shocked look on Xena's face.

CUT TO

An overhead shot of a vast army on the move through a valley: ranks of foot soldiers and cavalry. The camera slowly pans down to the warrior riding at the head of the army. It's Sabina, with her lieutenant Peneios at her side. A scout rides up to them.

SCOUT (slightly intimidated):

Sabina.

SABINA (without turning her head):

What news? Have the regiments regrouped?

SCOUT:

No, my lady. Your victory is complete. The soldiers are scattered and fleeing for their lives.

SABINA (smiles coldly):

Good. You see, Peneios? My victory is complete. And you told me I was being overconfident.

PENEIOS (reluctantly):

May I speak freely?

SABINA (laughs):

Come now, Peneios; you're far too valuable a warrior to waste for nothing more than a little backtalk. What's on your mind?

PENEIOS:

I still think it would have been better to wait before taking on Corinth.

SABINA:

Wait for what?

PENEIOS:

Wait until we have a stronger army. With the treasure you've taken at Megara, you could have recruited thousands more warriors to fight with us, and--

SABINA:

And my enemies would have plenty of time to find out exactly what my plans are and to get in my way. Maybe even to wipe out the army I already have. No, we move on Corinth now. We should be there in no more than two days and encircle the city. Then, our backup will arrive with the catapults, and I promise you they won't hold out for long. (she pauses, a dreamy look coming over her face) Who would have thought, when we were fleeing Xena and her militia, that a few months later we would take as juicy a prize as Megara?

PENEIOS (gives her a probing look):

Xena... Isn't it true that she tried to take Corinth once, and failed?

SABINA:

Yes, it's true. You know your history. (smiles) But you see, Xena made mistakes. One of them was having a partner who had his own ideas about how to do things. (glances meaningfully at Peneios) I lead alone. (pauses again, her eyes flickering) Except, of course, for...a little divine intervention.

CUT TO

Xena brings Argo to a halt beside a wide, well traveled road and dismounts. Gabrielle and Haimon reign in their horses behind her, with Eve bringing up the rear a few moments later.

XENA:

We'll stop here for a rest. Gabrielle?

The camera pans over to Gabrielle and Haimon, their heads bent close together. Haimon grins and speaks close to Gabrielle's ear. She laughs and looks up at him, lightly batting his shoulder.

CUT TO

Xena--her mouth is hanging open in mild shock.

XENA:

Uh...Gabrielle?

Gabrielle looks towards Xena as if jolted out of a daydream. After a moment her smile tightens as she realizes it's back to business.

XENA:

Let's go check things out and make sure Sabina doesn't have any scouts in the area that might give us a nasty surprise.

Gabrielle nods and squeezes Haimon's arm before walking away.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle in the forest. They walk side-by-side, silent. Gabrielle looks over at Xena and opens her mouth to speak and Xena turns to look at her. Gabrielle stops herself and looks away--masking her unease by focusing on the underbrush just off to their left--as if she has sensed a potential threat. Xena stares at Gabrielle, eyeing her with an odd look of anxiety. After a moment, Gabrielle senses Xena watching her and turns. They stare at one another a tense moment.

GABRIELLE (laughs nervously and makes an awkward gesture towards the underbrush):

False alarm.

XENA (nods and presses her lips tightly together):

Right. Can't be too careful.

They resume walking, the air thick with the awkward silence between them. Finally both start speaking at the same time.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, I--

XENA:

Gabrielle--

They both let out a nervous laugh.

GABRIELLE:

You first.

XENA:

You're the bard.

GABRIELLE (glances away and thinks a moment):

Do you think Eve is right? Would Sabina try to take Corinth?

XENA:

Hard to believe that after only a few months, she'd have an army large enough to be a threat to a

city that size. Then again--it wouldn't surprise me if she was ambitious enough to want to succeed where... (she trails off)

GABRIELLE (softly):
Where you failed?

XENA (nods grimly):
I guess we can never really break the chains of our past, can we?

GABRIELLE:
Maybe we're not supposed to. Our past makes us who we are and who we will be. It doesn't have to be a bad thing.

XENA (muttering under her breath):
I wish I could share your optimism.

GABRIELLE (sighs in annoyance):
Okay, obviously something is bothering you. Why don't you stop with the cryptic talk and save us both a lot of time and just *tell* me what it is.

XENA (looks down at Gabrielle, a hint of anger in her eyes):
You shouldn't have let Eve come with us.

GABRIELLE:
Take a good look at your daughter, Xena, she's grown up. Eve can make her own decisions.

XENA:
You're also her queen. Couldn't you have ordered her to stay behind?

GABRIELLE (nods curtly):
I suppose I could have. But if I made her do that, then Eve would never be able to make peace with this-- (she draws the sword from the scabbard on her back and holds it up)

XENA:
I don't want her to make peace with the sword! I just want her to make peace... (she turns away)
Eve has been down this road before, Gabrielle. It's not for her.

GABRIELLE (sheathes her sword):
That's not for you to say. It's up to Eve to decide. An Amazon Princess can't be afraid to lead her people into battle-- (Xena starts to protest but Gabrielle holds up a hand, cutting her off) Or to lead them away from it. Your daughter needs to learn the wisdom between the two. Give Eve the freedom to choose her own path. (she smiles teasingly, in an effort to lessen the tension between them)
You've got a lot of strengths, Xena, but allowing people to make up their own minds isn't one of them.

Gabrielle turns and starts back towards the horses. Xena runs to catch up to her.

XENA:
That's not true! I haven't said a word about you and Haimon.

GABRIELLE:
No--but you're dying to. And besides--there's nothing to really say. We're friends.

XENA (breathing hard in attempt to keep up with Gabrielle--who is walking at a fast pace):

You mean friends like you and me? (she rolls her eyes) Gabrielle--you've got to face it sooner or later.

GABRIELLE (stops and spins towards Xena):

Face *what*?

XENA:

Letting Haimon down easy. Come on, Gabrielle. Do you really think you could ever--?

GABRIELLE (throws up her hands):

Okay, here we go! I knew if I waited long enough, sooner or later you'd start rattling off all the reasons why he's wrong for me! So let me have it. He's too short? Too tall? Or maybe you think I should spend my life waiting around for you to get tired of playing with Ares? Why don't we start a list comparing the faults of both our boyfriends, Xena? Believe me, I don't think you *or* Ares would appreciate that.

XENA (lets that sink in and slowly a smirk breaks out on her face):

So you're saying that Haimon *is* a boyfriend?

GABRIELLE (momentarily taken aback that Xena has verbally bested her):

I'm just...well let's say that...oh, never mind! (she turns and starts walking again)

Pan over to Xena. She grins as she watches Gabrielle stalk off, then shakes her head and laughs as she follows.

CUT TO

Gabrielle returns to Haimon and Eve, who have just finished feeding the horses. Noting the expression on her face, Eve eyes her warily.

EVE:

All clear?

Gabrielle nods and goes over to her horse, angrily rummaging through her saddlebags. Haimon watches her a moment then takes a tentative step towards her.

HAIMON:

Is everything--?

XENA (racing back into camp, breathing heavily):

Gabrielle, I didn't mean--

GABRIELLE:

Just leave it, Xena. Please. For right now, just leave it alone.

Xena's expression turns to one of a chastened child. She stares sullenly at Gabrielle a moment. Her head suddenly whips around to the sound of shouting men in a panic, racing down the road in the direction Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon and Eve have just come from. She grabs one retreating soldier by the back of his neck.

SOLDIER:

Are you mad, woman?

XENA:

What are you running from?

SOLDIER:

Valeria Sabina! Three regiments were sent out to stop her halfway between Corinth and Megara and she cut right through us. She'll be inside the gates of Corinth in five days time! We can't stop her. No one can! There's nothing to do but save ourselves.

He takes off running down the road.

XENA (calls out to him):

What kind of soldier runs away from a battle?

SOLDIER (calling back over his shoulder):

The kind that's seen what Sabina can do!

Xena watches the soldiers retreat, a bitter, disgusted expression on her face. Gabrielle steps up beside her.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head in bafflement):

I don't get it. Where would Sabina have gotten a force large enough to rout three entire regiments? Do you think she had help?

Xena stares at her in shock, as if struck and appalled by a sudden thought.

XENA (after a pause, very quietly):

Maybe she did.

She turns and stalks off towards Argo.

CUT TO

Night. Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon and Eve stand on a hill overlooking Corinth. Below is a vast army camp that encircles the city walls, the torches and bonfires of the camp lighting the night.

HAIMON:

She's got the city completely surrounded.

XENA:

We're going to get in.

EVE:

How? Even if we get past Sabina's troops, I don't think the Corinthians will be in a mood to open the gates to any visitors right now.

XENA:

I know where to find an entrance to a tunnel that will take us inside the city walls. If it hasn't been sealed, we should be able to get in. There's only one problem.

GABRIELLE:

What?

XENA:

The entrance is in a patch of woods that cuts through the camp. Looks like we'll have to go through some of Sabina's soldiers.

CUT TO

The edge of a grove. Four sentries sit by a small fire, facing the grove. Small rocks whiz through the air, hitting three of the men in the back of the head and knocking them out. The fourth sentry is only grazed by the rock; he jumps to his feet, turns around, and sees Xena, Gabrielle, Eve and Haimon. He is about to strike his shield with his sword to raise the alarm but Gabrielle throws one of her sais at him blunt end first, the hilt of the sai striking the man in the forehead. He falls to the ground, unconscious. Gabrielle beckons to her companions, and the four go into the woods, leading their horses with them.

CUT TO

A street in Corinth. In the dim, reddish light of a torch, we see a large stone on the ground moving, shaking, and finally lifting off the ground. Xena and Gabrielle look cautiously out of the opening--only to find themselves staring at crossbows and spears pointed straight at them.

XENA:

Take it easy. We're here to help.

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Early morning. Sabina's camp. The soldiers are milling about in an obvious state of agitation and anxiety as they discuss something, gesticulating excitedly, a discontented buzz in the air. The camera slowly pans to a large, lavishly decorated tent and then takes us inside.

Sabina is sitting at a table, studying maps. The buzz of voices from outside reaches her ear and she looks up sharply.

The flap of the tent is lifted and Peneios comes in.

PENEIOS:

Sabina. I'm afraid there's a problem.

SABINA (stares at him intently):

What kind of problem?

PENEIOS:

A tall dark one--blue eyes, big sword, black leather...

A close-up on Sabina's face, her eyes wide open.

SABINA:

Xena's here? (she quickly regains her composure) Where?

PENEIOS:

Inside Corinth, it seems. She has just been spotted on the city walls.

SABINA (almost mesmerized):

Xena... How did she manage to sneak into the city? (chuckles) Silly question. How does Xena do anything? She just does.

PENEIOS:

Maybe she was already in Corinth when we got here...

SABINA:

No. (shakes her head) Too much of a coincidence. (looks up at Peneios) Have any of the sentries reported anything suspicious?

PENEIOS:

No, Sabina.

SABINA (brusquely):

Have them questioned. If you find anyone who seems to know more than he's telling, bring him to me.

PENEIOS (bows his head slightly):

I will.

The rumbling outside grows louder. Shouts and raucous voices are heard.

SABINA (frowns):

What's going on?

PENEIOS:

I wasn't the only one to recognize Xena. Word spreads quickly around the camp, they're starting to panic out there.

SABINA (scoffs):

Cowards. I'll speak to them. (pauses) Bring my horse.

CUT TO

Outside the tent as Sabina steps out. The agitated murmur among the soldiers dies down immediately as they turn to stare at her. At that moment, Peneios comes up leading Sabina's horse, and she leaps gracefully in the saddle.

SABINA (in a loud, clear voice):

So. I understand that all of you fine warriors are scared of Xena.

SOLDIER #1:

Show me one warrior who isn't!

SABINA (contemptuously):

You're looking at her. (pauses for effect) Listen to me. Yes, Xena may be the greatest warrior who has ever lived...so far. But she's still only one warrior. Hector was a great warrior, and Troy still fell to the Greeks. What is it about Xena that scares you so much?

SOLDIER #2:

They say she once defeated an entire Persian army single-handed! (a loud murmur goes up again) The woman must be invincible!

SABINA:

The Romans would tell you a different story. They captured her and crucified her.

SOLDIER #3:

And then she came back! They say she's come back from the dead eight times!

SABINA (smiles coldly):

Even a cat only has nine lives. Xena's luck is bound to run out some time.

SOLDIER #4:

She's got a god on her side!

SABINA:

Has she, now. And what god would that be?

SOLDIER #4 (bewildered):

Ares, God of War, of course. Everyone knows *that!*

SABINA:

Really. Well, sometimes "everyone" is wrong.

A close-up of her face, smiling triumphantly.

CUT TO

Morning. Xena and Gabrielle approach the portico of a temple which has been turned into a makeshift hospital for wounded soldiers, who are lying on thin mats and blankets spread out on the stone floor, some of them moaning in pain. Three women, two in white and one in dark green, are pouring soup into bowls and handing it out to the wounded, along with pieces of bread. As the camera draws closer, we see that the woman in the dark green dress is Eve. Xena and Gabrielle stop and watch her as a small smile appears on Xena's lips.

GABRIELLE (puts her hand on Xena's arm):

You see, I told you she'd find her own way. Even if she becomes a fighter again, Eve will never lose the compassion she's gained.

XENA (gives her a quick look, then changes the subject):

Sabina has every main route into Corinth blocked. How much longer do you think the food in Corinth will last?

MAN (behind her, off-camera):

My question exactly!

Xena whips around to see a burly man followed by three other men and two women. The six of them push their way past Xena and Gabrielle and walk toward the portico.

MAN #1 (to Eve and the two other women):

What do you think you're doing?

EVE (looks up):

Feeding wounded soldiers who fought to protect your city.

WOMAN #1 (sneering):

And did a mighty good job of it, too.

Close-up of the pained look on Eve's face.

MAN #1:

We have no use for them now. But we do for that food. Unless the siege is broken, the city barely has provisions to last us a week. So I suggest that (growls) you give it up.

He steps menacingly toward Eve as the other two women, and the wounded soldiers, eye her nervously.

Xena moves to intercede but Gabrielle grabs her arm to restrain her. Xena turns to look at Gabrielle, shocked.

GABRIELLE:

Let Eve handle this.

EVE (softly):

Your city is fighting against a ruthless conqueror. If you become as ruthless as she, don't you think you're letting her win? Take the food away from these helpless men, and you may save your bodies but you'll kill your souls.

MAN #1 (applauds sarcastically):

Beautifully said. Too bad we can't feed on fancy words. (moves closer) Now, are you going to hand it over peacefully or are we going to do it the hard way?

Eve puts the large pot of soup and the breadbasket on the floor, then straightens up.

EVE (lowers her voice to a menacing tone):

Come and get it.

The man comes up but as he moves to take the food, Eve knocks him down with a swift move and he sprawls on the floor, crying out as he lands on the hard marble surface. His face red and distorted with fury, he scrambles to his feet.

MAN #1 (draws a knife from his belt):

Now you'll be sorry. Are you prepared to die over this?

He charges Eve. She adeptly sidesteps his lunge, grabs his wrist with her right hand and brings her left arm down in a hard blow to his elbow, breaking the man's arm. He drops the knife and falls to his knees, bellowing in pain. Eve quickly snatches up his fallen knife, holding the flat end of the blade against his throat as he looks up at her, his face full of agony and terror. His companions watch, frozen in fear.

EVE:

Actually, I am. Are you?

MAN #1 (moaning):

N-no.

EVE (holds the blade against his throat for a long moment, then, as if having to make a conscious effort, takes it away):

Get out of here.

Cradling his broken arm with his good one, the man scrambles to his feet and backs away toward his companions.

EVE:

Anyone else?

The rest of the small band stares nervously at Eve. Then, Man #1 turns around, still cradling his arm and trying to suppress his groans, and walks away. The others follow. Eve stands for a moment with a strange, slightly dazed expression on her face. Then picks up the pot of soup and the bread basket, walks to the wounded soldier closest to her, and ladles the soup into a bowl by his side. The man is too weak to move. She kneels beside him and lifts him so that he is cradled across her lap and tilts the bowl so that he can drink from it.

Pan back to Xena and Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

You see? I told you she could handle it.

Xena frowns and sighs, then turns and begins to walk away.

HAIMON (running through the crowd):

Xena! Xena!

Xena stops and turns back. Haimon catches up to her and Gabrielle.

HAIMON:

I did some asking around. A general by the name of Kodros is in command.

GABRIELLE (looks up at Xena):

Kodros? He's an administrator, isn't he? He hasn't seen a battle in thirty years.

XENA (nods grimly):

What about Gylippus? I thought he commanded the army in Corinth.

HAIMON:

He was killed three days ago fighting alongside his three regiments.

XENA:

And Linos, his second in command?

HAIMON:

Him too. Kodros was next in the chain of command.

XENA:

Well that chain is about to be broken. (she turns and stalks off)

GABRIELLE (grabbing Haimon's arm):

Stick close by. This could get ugly.

CUT TO

A large hall serving as a headquarters. Several Corinthian officers gathered around a long, heavy table, studying a map spread out upon it. All of the men are relatively young save for Kodros, a man in his early to mid-sixties and Jason--Kodros' second in command--who is in his late forties. Their conversation is heated, though low and indistinct until Kodros brings his fist down upon the table.

KODROS:

I'd sooner see Corinth razed to the ground than surrender it to Valeria Sabina!

Xena walks into the room as Kodros is speaking. Haimon and Gabrielle come in behind her.

XENA:

Big words. I wonder how the people out there would feel about you gambling with their lives. (pauses) Hello, Kodros.

KODROS (gaping at her):

Xena...there had been talk that you had entered the city. (he nervously rakes a hand through his hair) I trust this isn't to be a--repeat performance?

Xena presses her lips together in a mixture of anger and guilt as she struggles to form a reply.

GABRIELLE:

We came to help.

JASON:

Help? (sneers bitterly) No offense to the legendary Warrior Princess, but how can even *you* defeat that out there? Sabina has got the city completely surrounded. She's cut right through every regiment we've sent out to stop her. In two days, she'll have her catapults in place and the siege will begin.

XENA:

Corinth won't be able to hold out against a siege. Sabina has cut off your supply lines. With all these people in the city, the food and water won't hold a week.

KODROS:

I--I've already made preparations to ration the food--

XENA:

You mean even more than you already are? And then what? People are already starting to panic over the shortages, Kodros. It's only a matter of time before the riots begin. Sabina won't have to lift a blade. Corinth is about to tear *itself* apart.

JASON (haughtily studies Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon):

Perhaps that's true for farmhands in whatever backwater villages *you* come from--but this is Corinth. Our citizens have culture and breeding.

GABRIELLE:

Will good manners and breeding fill a hungry stomach? You can't reason with someone that's starving.

KODROS (sighs tiredly):

They're right, Jason. I'm honest enough to know that I'm no warrior. I can't defeat Sabina, but I'm smart enough to take the advice of someone that can. (looks at Xena) Tell us what we should do.

XENA:

You need to evacuate the women and children now. With that many less mouths to feed, Corinth might be able to hold out against a siege until reinforcements can arrive.

JASON:

And how, pray tell, do you propose we do that? Sabina has the city surrounded. I don't think we'll be able to just slip hundreds of people through her lines.

XENA (steps up to the table to study the map):

There's a tunnel (she points) here. We can get them out through there.

KODROS:

A tunnel? I wasn't aware of any tunnel into Corinth.

XENA (grimaces):

My army dug it out years ago.

KODROS:

After all this time, is it sound?

GABRIELLE (nods):

That's how we entered the city.

JASON (studying the map):

This tunnel lets out right into the middle of Sabina's camp. That's supposed to be an improvement on slowly starving to death in here?

XENA:

We can create a diversion here (indicates a spot on the map) at the south wall. Sabina's men will be looking the other way. If we distract them long enough, we can get everyone to safety through the forest.

JASON:

Distract them with *what?* Our reserves are gone.

XENA (gaping in disbelief):

All of them?

JASON (glances uncomfortably at Kodros):

An attack was ordered this morning. One last effort to break through Sabina's lines.

XENA:

And?

JASON:

It failed.

XENA (shakes her head):

Well, we'll have to think of something else then.

GABRIELLE (stepping up beside Xena):

What if the civilians of Corinth were placed under the protection of someone that Sabina doesn't consider an enemy? Maybe then they could negotiate a treaty for the safe passage of these people out of the city.

JASON (laughs):

Name me anyone between Delphi and Damascus that Sabina *doesn't* consider an enemy.

GABRIELLE:

So far, Sabina has left the Amazons in peace.

Xena darts an anxious glance at Gabrielle.

KODROS:

I'm open to the idea but no one here has the authority to speak for the Amazon nation.

GABRIELLE:

As their Queen, I do.

XENA:

Gabrielle, this isn't--

Gabrielle cuts Xena off with a wave of her hand.

JASON (rubs his chin reflectively):

It just might work, Kodros. I can't imagine that Sabina wouldn't be at least somewhat flattered to entertain treaty negotiations with a queen--even a barbarian queen.

XENA (glares at him, sarcastically):

So much for culture and breeding.

Gabrielle puts a hand on her arm, stopping her.

JASON (looks at Gabrielle):

You can't go yourself, you know. You'll undermine your position if you go to her. You'll need an emissary.

HAIMON (steps forward):

I'll go for Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

No, Haimon. It doesn't work like that. There's a code of conduct (glances bitterly at Jason) that even barbarians have to follow. Only someone with the rite of caste can speak for an Amazon Queen.

CUT TO

A close up of Xena's face. Her eyes go wide as she understands the full implication of Gabrielle's words.

CUT TO

Eve mounts her horse and takes a deep breath. She looks down at Xena and Gabrielle--who are seeing her off.

EVE:

How do I look?

GABRIELLE (reaches out to pat the neck of Eve's horse):

Like an Amazon Princess.

EVE (gazes steadily at Gabrielle):

I'm worried, Gabrielle. All these lives are depending on me. I don't want to let them down. (a sheepish look) Or you.

GABRIELLE (smiles warmly):

You could never disappoint me, Eve.

Xena clears her throat uncomfortably--almost as if to remind Gabrielle and Eve that she is still there.

XENA:

Eve, don't hang around Sabina's camp any longer than you have to. Once you have her answer, you clear out fast.

GABRIELLE:

But don't let her think you're running away in fear. Sabina is smart. She's a master at exploiting any hint of weakness.

XENA (glances at Gabrielle out of the corner of her eye and her mouth tightens.):

Just get back here as soon as possible.

EVE (nods dutifully):

Yes, Mother.

GABRIELLE (reaches up and pats Eve's hand in reassurance):

Don't worry. You'll be fine.

Eve nods breathlessly and Xena raises her hand in a signal. Half a dozen heavily armed soldiers take their place behind Eve. She looks over her shoulder at them, then down at Gabrielle, her eyes widening in question.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--what is this?

XENA:

Her escort.

GABRIELLE:

They're supposed to be unarmed! I'm sending Eve to Sabina under a banner of truce. How is it going to look if these men are armed to the teeth?

XENA:

What makes you so sure Sabina will respect your banner of truce?

GABRIELLE:

I don't see where we have much of a choice. Besides--as twisted as it may be--Sabina *does* operate under a certain code of honor. As long as the Amazon Nation poses no threat to her--

XENA:

Are you willing to gamble Eve's life on Sabina's principles?

Xena and Gabrielle glare at one another in a test of resolve. Finally, it is Eve who breaks the stand off.

EVE:

Gabrielle is right, Mother. Either they accompany me unarmed or I go alone.

Xena realizes this is an argument she is not going to win. She nods resentfully.

XENA:

All right.

Eve turns in the saddle to look at the soldiers.

EVE:

Leave your weapons behind.

The soldiers are clearly hesitant to do so, but something in Eve's look forces them to throw their swords down. Gabrielle ducks her head slightly to disguise the smile on her face and Eve turns back, gathering the reins in her hands. She looks down at Gabrielle.

EVE:

I'll see you soon. (she looks over at Xena.) Both of you.

She leads the men out of the gates at a medium gallop. Xena doesn't take her eyes off of Eve's retreating figure as she speaks to Gabrielle.

XENA (in an almost menacing tone):
If anything happens to her--

GABRIELLE (also not looking at Xena):
I wouldn't have sent her if I didn't think she could handle it, Xena. It's going to be fine. (Gabrielle pauses a minute, then reaches out and tentatively touches Xena's arm) Trust me.

Xena glances down at Gabrielle's hand on her arm, then up at Gabrielle, forcing a small, though tense smile.

XENA:
I always have.

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Eve inside Sabina's command tent. Two of her soldiers wait silently behind her. She stands before a table that is laden with fruits, bread and wine. She glances down at the food--it's clear that the rationing in Corinth has taken its toll on her as well. Eve looks away quickly, as if to avoid temptation. After a long pause, she fidgets nervously and quickly catches herself. Taking a deep breath, Eve mentally steels herself and slowly postures herself with the bearing she believes an Amazon Princess should have. After another moment, Sabina enters, followed by Peneios--who takes his place behind her. She takes a seat at the head of the table, casually leaning back. She studies Eve a moment with an almost mocking stare and Eve stares back. Neither woman blinks until Sabina finally chuckles and reaches out for the bread. She tears off a piece and pops it in her mouth, chewing slowly and thoughtfully. Finally she swallows and speaks.

SABINA:
So--Xena's sanctimonious little sidekick wants to negotiate a treaty with me, does she? I've never been one for negotiating, but the idea of Xena's brat sent to crawl before me amuses me so much that I've agreed to this meeting.

EVE (fixes a cold stare on Sabina):
Amazons don't crawl before anyone.

SABINA (laughs and throws her leg over the arm of her chair):
Oh, I know they would never lower themselves before a mere *man*. (she pops another piece of bread into her mouth) It's true what they say, you know. Sometimes the best man for a job is a woman. Not too long ago, the Athenians and Spartans formed an alliance and sent the Persians scurrying from the battlefield like a bunch of Hestian virgins running from a mob of drunken warlords. What the Greeks didn't count on was me heading the Persians off in their retreat and recruiting them

into my army. After that, running over Macedonia was easy. Corinth is where all my hard work pays off.

EVE:

I'm not here to listen to your war stories, Sabina. The only interest the Amazon nation has in Corinth is protecting the women and children inside.

SABINA:

Well, that would be a whole lot more believable if the Queen of the Amazons wasn't also Xena's Little Helper--standing against me inside the city right now.

EVE:

Queen Gabrielle has no intention of leading the Amazon Nation against you. She only wishes to negotiate the safe passage of the women and children out of Corinth and onto Amazon land.

SABINA (smiles coldly):

And why would I want to allow that? What good is conquering a city if there's no one left inside to rule? I wouldn't expect your idealistic, goody-goody Queen to understand that--but I gave Livia more credit.

EVE:

Livia is dead. I'm Eve.

SABINA:

Ah, that's right. I almost forgot about your miraculous conversion to good. Tell me, how does Livia, Bitch of Rome and scourge of the Amazon Nation transform herself into meek and mild little Evie, Messenger of Peace and Amazon Princess? Did you go soft in the head just like Mommy?

EVE (refusing to be baited):

I started listening to my conscience.

SABINA:

Conscience? That's just an idea the weak made up to hobble the strong. Well, I'm not about to let a fiction stop me. If it takes a few starving women and children to get the Corinthians to surrender that much sooner, then so be it.

EVE:

I can't believe even you could be so callous about the lives of innocent--

SABINA:

Innocent? Who's innocent here, Eve? Let's be honest. The only reason you want the women and children out of Corinth is to conserve the dwindling supplies in the city. The less mouths to feed inside, the longer the army can hold out against me. The siege could drag on for months before Corinth accepts the inevitable and surrenders. You could say I'm *saving* lives, instead of condemning them to a certain death.

EVE:

You're awfully sure of yourself, aren't you?

SABINA:

I already told you. I don't have a conscience to get in my way. That gives me an edge over you and Xena--and gains me the favor of Ares where you both lost it.

EVE (flinches upon hearing Ares' name):

We didn't lose his favor, we refused it.

SABINA:

Well, maybe Xena did. From what I've heard, Ares tossed *you* aside like an old boot when Mommy showed up again. Now it's her turn to be thrown into the scrap heap to make way for the new Warrior Queen.

EVE (shakes her head):

Your arrogance is going to be your downfall, Sabina. My mother will never allow you another victory.

SABINA (cocks her head and smiles):

No? (she smiles coldly.) Well maybe she hasn't been given the proper incentive.

CUT TO

Sabina exiting the tent, Peneios is close on her heels.

SABINA:

Make sure our guest is made comfortable, Peneios. She might be with us a long time.

PENEIOS (nods):

Yes, Sabina.

SABINA:

And once you're done, make sure the men are prepared. It's time we sent our calling card into Corinth.

CUT TO

Night. The palace in Corinth. Xena is pacing silently around a room dimly lit with two torches and a few oil lamps. Gabrielle comes in. Lost in thought, Xena doesn't notice, and flinches slightly when Gabrielle puts a hand on her arm.

GABRIELLE (softly):

Worried about Eve?

XENA (gives Gabrielle a somewhat harsh look):

She should have been back by now.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, she'll be all right.

Xena walks away toward the window and stands looking out on the city.

GABRIELLE:

It's not just Eve, is it?

XENA (sighs):

It's...too many things at the same time. Being back in Corinth...

GABRIELLE:

Leading an army?

XENA:

What remains of an army. (bitterly) And no matter what, some people will think I took over the command for my own ambition.

GABRIELLE:

You know you're doing the right thing.

XENA:

Yeah. I just wish I didn't have to work so hard to prove it to everyone. (lowers her head)

GABRIELLE (tilts her head to look Xena in the eye):

That's not all, is it? There's something else bothering you. (in a near-whisper) Ares?

XENA (looks up at her defensively):

What about Ares?

GABRIELLE:

You think he's backing Sabina.

XENA (abruptly):

What makes you say that?

Before Gabrielle can answer, there is the distant sound of a boom, followed by shouts.

GABRIELLE:

What was that?

The thunderous sound is repeated as the two women stare at each other.

XENA (quietly):

Sabina.

GABRIELLE:

You think she's attacking?

XENA (her eyes widen slightly):

She's got Eve!

The two women stare at each other. Close-up on Xena's face, rigid but her eyes betraying her alarm, and then on Gabrielle's face--she has a slightly guilty look.

XENA:

Let's go.

CUT TO

Inside the Corinth city walls. People are running around in a panic; several fires are blazing by the walls, and the night sky is unnaturally bright from the reflections of fire. Haimon is trying to direct

several people who are carrying buckets of water. From outside, a flaming projectile flies over the top of the walls; it flies further than the others and lands on top of a roof, which starts to burn. An old man and a woman with a small child and another child clinging to her skirt run out of the house, screaming. At the same time, loud thuds are heard as projectiles slam into city gates.

HAIMON:

More water! Come on, hurry up! (looks around) Somebody get Xena and Gabrielle!

MAN:

Here they are!

Xena and Gabrielle run up.

XENA (businesslike):

Sabina's attacking.

GABRIELLE:

She can't be hoping to break down the gates...

XENA (grimly):

No, but she wants to demoralize the city...

Another flaming projectile comes flying right at Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon. They barely have time to dive out of its way as it lands next to them. A man with a bucket runs up and pours water on it. The next projectile hits another house and it goes up in flames. The screams grow louder.

XENA (a look of intense focus on her face as she tries to shout over the screaming):

Or maybe it's a distraction!

CUT TO

The other side of the walls. Sabina's warriors are using catapults to launch flaming missiles over the top of the walls and heavy rocks at the city gates, which are shaking and groaning under the onslaught. Sabina, atop her horse, is proudly and calmly surveying the scene with Peneios at her side. Close-up on Sabina's face, smiling slightly.

SABINA:

I think we're ready for phase two. Let's give them another little scare.

Several high towers constructed from wooden beams are rolled up to the walls, pulled by horses and pushed along by soldiers. At the top of each tower is a platform with several warriors on it. As the towers are pushed up to the walls, the warriors throw down ropes and start sliding down into the city. As they descend, other warriors climb up the towers, scrambling to the top.

CUT TO

Inside the walls. A group of soldiers has assembled for the defense of the city, mostly men but also some women; most of them have no armor, and while some have swords or spears, some are armed only with sticks. The barrage of fiery projectiles has stopped but the fires are still being put out.

VOICE (off-camera):

They're scaling the walls!

XENA:

Come on--let's ward them off before they try to open the gates!

CUT TO

Sabina's soldiers streaming over the walls. The defenders of Corinth, led by Xena, Gabrielle, and Haimon, charge at them and start beating them back. From the top of the wall, about a dozen of Sabina's archers fire flaming arrows at the Corinthians. With a shout of rage, Xena flings her chakram at the archers. A few are hit, others lose their balance and fall down screaming, still others have their bows knocked from their hands. More attackers are coming over the walls, but the Corinthians are doing an effective job of repelling them. Some of the assailants are killed or wounded; others scramble up the ropes to safety.

XENA (stops):

This is too easy.

HAIMON (breathing hard, a bleeding cut on his arm):

I wouldn't say that.

XENA (shakes her head):

Sabina can't expect to take the city this way. There's something else going on.

CUT TO

Another part of the city walls. In near-complete darkness, Sabina's warriors are pulling up long ladders to the walls.

CUT TO

Gabrielle fending off two of Sabina's warriors. She spins and knocks out one of them with a powerful kick.

XENA (a flash of realization on her face):

I'm going out to alert the patrols. (looks around for Gabrielle and sees her striking down her other opponent with her sword) Gabrielle!

HAIMON:

What's going on?

GABRIELLE (comes up):

What is it?

XENA:

She'll attack the walls somewhere else while we're distracted here. Smart girl, but I know that trick. Come on, Gabrielle. Haimon, you stay here and help defend the gates. (to Gabrielle, who is looking somewhat hesitantly back and forth from her to Haimon) Well, come on!

GABRIELLE (softly, to Haimon):
Be careful, okay?

HAIMON (touches her hand):
You too.

Xena shakes her head slightly, lifting her eyebrows. She and Gabrielle walk off briskly while Haimon returns to directing the defense.

CUT TO

Sabina's warriors climbing over the walls in the other part of the city. About two dozen of them are already on the ground. Suddenly, the darkness is illuminated by torchlight, and before the invaders can recover from the surprise, they are attacked by a small group of Corinthians led by Xena and Gabrielle. Fierce fighting ensues, with Xena displaying her dazzling sword moves and Gabrielle fighting with her sword. Sabina's men are falling to the ground, dead, wounded, or knocked out; a few climb up the ropes to flee over the walls. Their comrades who are coming over the walls are quickly beaten back.

CUT TO

The other side of the walls, where the attackers are backing off and climbing down the ladders.

OFFICER (yells):
Retreat!

Sabina's men start retreating.

CUT TO

Inside the walls. As the last of the attackers disappear over the top of the walls, a loud cheer goes up among the Corinthians. A close-up on Xena's face in the torchlight. She looks puzzled and rather grim.

CUT TO

The city gates, where the fighting is now over. One of the houses struck by the burning projectiles from the catapults is still burning; most of it has collapsed, but the orange flames are still lighting up the night with their sinister glow.

Several Corinthian defenders, supervised by Haimon, are binding the hands of several warriors from Sabina's army who have been taken prisoner.

Xena and Gabrielle come up with the patrol, leading two bound prisoners. A close-up of Gabrielle's face as she sees Haimon; she smiles a little and breathes a sigh of relief. Haimon turns and sees them, greeting Gabrielle with a barely noticeable nod and smile before turning to Xena.

HAIMON (with a touch of awe):
You were right--they did try to storm another part of the walls! How did you know--

GABRIELLE (smiles proudly):

It's what she does.

XENA (gives her a quick, doubtful look, then turns to Haimon):

You've stopped the attack.

HAIMON (shrugs):

It's more like they stopped attacking.

Off screen, there is a commotion. Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon turn in the direction of the noise and see several Corinthian soldiers running toward them, out of breath.

GABRIELLE:

What now?

SOLDIER #1:

There's been an attack on the southwest part of the city!

XENA:

What happened?

SOLDIER #2:

Flaming missiles catapulted over the walls--more than a dozen houses have been set on fire!

HAIMON (puzzled):

What's she trying to do?

XENA (sighs):

Show us that she can wear us down if she wants.

The defenders of Corinth look dejected.

MAN #1 (throws down his sword):

What's the use of this? We can't win.

GABRIELLE (turns to him, impassioned):

That's exactly what Sabina wants us to think! Well, we're not going to give her that. There's always a way, even when things look hopeless. (glances at Xena) Xena has taught me that. Remember one thing: You're fighting for your freedom. They're fighting to take your freedom away. Who do you think has the greater will to win?

Embarrassed, the man picks up his sword.

HAIMON:

All right--now let's go and help put out those fires! (he takes Gabrielle's arm) Come on, Gabrielle.

They move away with some of the defenders of Corinth. Xena starts after them, then looks at Gabrielle and Haimon walking away together and stops, gazing pensively after them.

VOICE (off-camera):

Nice speech, but the man was right.

Xena turns abruptly as the camera pans over to one of Sabina's captured men.

SABINA'S WARRIOR:

You *can't* win.

XENA (scornfully):

And why is that?

WARRIOR:

With Sabina leading us into battle, we are unstoppable.

XENA (sneers):

Really. Last time I went up against Sabina, she wasn't that difficult to stop.

WARRIOR:

That was before Sabina had the favor of the God of War.

Close-up on Xena's face. She looks shocked and anguished for a moment, then grimly purses her lips, as if steeling herself for the inevitable, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Xena is strolling briskly through the palace garden in Corinth. She stops and her eyes widen, a tense, bitter look on her face.

XENA (quietly):

Ares.

Ares materializes, a guarded, somewhat grim look on his face.

ARES:

I thought I'd save you the trouble of calling me.

XENA (narrows her eyes):

I'm flattered that you found the time. You must be pretty busy with your new pet.

ARES (sighs):

Sabina. You think I'm helping her.

XENA:

She obviously thinks you are.

ARES:

Or she wants her troops to think so.

XENA (pauses and looks at him probingly):

Then tell me you've never spoken to Sabina. (Ares stares at her silently) Tell me you didn't come to see her after I fought her. (off his silent stare, bitterly) I thought so.

CUT TO

Gabrielle paces in a colonnade on an upper floor of the Corinthian palace. It's dark, only the moonlight illuminates her. She stops to lean over the side, peering down expectantly. After a moment, her face falls in disappointment and her head drops a little lower. Sensing someone approaching her from behind, she turns her head slightly, listening for the footsteps.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon.

Haimon steps into the moonlight and smiles at her.

HAIMON:

I thought I'd keep you company.

GABRIELLE (she turns to face him, leaning against the wall):

You mean you thought you'd try to keep my mind off worrying about Eve.

HAIMON:

Sabina. (he shakes his head) Do you really think she would do anything to hurt Eve?

GABRIELLE (smiles bitterly):

After that last attack, I don't have a lot of confidence left in Sabina's humanity.

HAIMON:

You encouraged all those people down there not to give up hope. (he shakes his head sadly) I believed in what you said. (he reaches up to stroke her cheek with his fingertips) I believed it and I admired you for having the faith to say it. Don't let Sabina take that from you too.

GABRIELLE (wrenches away from his touch):

Fine! Then tell me that Eve is all right and that she'll be riding back through those gates any minute.

Haimon stares at her, then lowers his eyes. Gabrielle nods bitterly.

GABRIELLE:

I didn't think so.

Haimon sighs and grasps her by the shoulders lightly.

HAIMON:

You sent Eve to Sabina--

GABRIELLE (shoving him away angrily):

I don't have to listen to this! I know that!

Gabrielle rushes past Haimon.

CUT TO

Xena walks on in a purposeful stride, but Ares transports himself so that he stands in her path.

ARES:

Xena.

XENA (stops, her eyes flashing):

Sabina is everything you could possibly want in a Warrior Queen, isn't she? Smart, ruthless, fearless--great combat skills...

ARES:

You're making a pretty good sales pitch.

XENA (bitingly):

Not nearly as good as the one she made for herself, I bet. (looks at him regretfully) Oh, I know you would have rather given the job to me, but you knew I'd never take it. (pauses) I should have known. Just because we're together--it doesn't mean that you weren't going to look for someone who could give you--more. (sarcastically) You're the God of War and it's what you do.

ARES (takes her shoulders and speaks, a steely edge underneath his suave tone):

I'm not going to make excuses for my job, Xena. Don't forget--you gave it back to me.

XENA (shoves him away, disgusted):

Fine. Go on and do your job, then. Let me go and do mine.

ARES (exasperated):

Let me finish. I can't promise you that I'll never back someone you don't approve of. But I can promise I'll never lie to you about it, or do it behind your back. It's the best I can do.

XENA (warily):

What are you saying?

ARES:

That if I was helping Sabina, you'd be the first to know. (off her doubtful look) You don't believe me.

XENA (after a long pause, her face reflecting a struggle):

I don't know.

ARES (takes her hands):

Come on, Xena, don't you think you can trust me now?

A long pause. There is a pained look on Xena's face.

ARES (grimly):

I see.

He disappears. Xena lowers her eyes and stands still, her face rigid.

CUT TO

Haimon catches up to Gabrielle and takes her by the arm, turning her back towards him.

HAIMON:

Hold on and let me finish. You sent Eve to Sabina because you were trying to protect the lives of the people in here. There wasn't any other choice. You knew that and so did Eve. Whatever else happens, Eve rode out of these gates a hero, willing to risk her life a thousand times over for hundreds of people she didn't even know. You didn't have to order her to do that, Gabrielle. It's just who Eve is.

Gabrielle stares up at Haimon a moment, resentment burning in her eyes. Finally, her expression crumbles and she dissolves into tears, burying her head against Haimon's chest. He draws his arms tightly around her, stroking her hair soothingly.

HAIMON:

It's going to be all right. I promise. (he raises her chin with his index finger to look down into her eyes) You believe me, don't you?

Gabrielle stares up at him, an odd expression on her face. Finally, she nods.

GABRIELLE:

I believe you.

A long and intense gaze is exchanged between Haimon and Gabrielle. Haimon grasps her shoulders a little tighter. At the same time, Gabrielle leans up towards Haimon as he is bending down to her. They kiss.

XENA (off camera):

Gabrielle? (she comes bounding up the steps) Gabrielle?

She stops short, stunned, when she sees Haimon and Gabrielle kissing. They break apart, quickly moving away from one another.

XENA:

Sorry. I--uh--I thought...

GABRIELLE (rakes a shaky hand through her hair and turns to Haimon):

Haimon--would you excuse us a minute?

HAIMON (nods, glancing at Xena nervously):

Sure. Sure--I'll just be... (he gives Xena a wide berth as he heads for the steps)

Gabrielle watches him descend, then turns back to Xena.

GABRIELLE:

What is it? Is there news about Eve?

XENA (frowns and nods):

Sabina sent back a message with the soldiers that accompanied Eve to the camp.

GABRIELLE (swallows hard):

Eve is--?

XENA:

She's fine. Or so Sabina says. She's holding Eve as some kind of bargaining chip against me. She wants to meet me just outside the walls of Corinth tomorrow at sunrise.

GABRIELLE:

I guess she's not coming to discuss the terms of her surrender.

XENA:

I think there's about as much chance of that as there is of Aphrodite becoming a Hestian virgin. (Xena pauses and looks away sadly. Her eyes mist up a little) Gabrielle--Ares is working with Sabina.

GABRIELLE:

You've suspected that all along. What makes you so sure?

XENA:

One of the prisoners told me. (she sighs) Ares came to see me just now.

GABRIELLE (raises an eyebrow in skepticism):

And Ares admitted to you that he was helping Sabina?

XENA:

He didn't do a very good job of denying it.

GABRIELLE (shaking her head, almost in disbelief):

Xena, I never thought I'd be defending Ares. But I can't believe that he--

XENA:

Can't believe he could be a lying, manipulative bastard?

GABRIELLE (pauses, thinking carefully about her response):

All right, he could. (holds up her hand as Xena opens her mouth to speak) Xena--you know that Ares and I don't have the greatest history. And I don't think we have much of a future. He can be arrogant, manipulative, cruel--but I can still see that underneath all that, he really does... (she flinches slightly) ...care about you.

XENA (thoughtfully):

Maybe I was right all along... Ares only cares about himself.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, he gave up everything for you--twice. He wouldn't put his ambitions for some second-rate warrior queen ahead of you.

XENA:

Since when did you become Ares' champion?

GABRIELLE:

Maybe since he gave up his godhood to save Eve and me. Do you really think that after all that, he would allow Sabina to harm your daughter?

XENA:

You mean the way he almost let Varia kill Eve?

GABRIELLE (thinks for a moment):

The way he let you free Eve and wreck his plans for a big war. (she pauses as Xena looks down) Xena, he's been chasing after you for so many years. Now that he finally has you--does it make any sense that he would do something to mess it up?

XENA (raises her eyes, an anguished, bitter look on her face):

Maybe that's it. The hunt is over, the thrill is gone. He's moved on to bigger game.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, you don't believe that!

XENA (shakes her head bitterly):

Ares hasn't changed, Gabrielle. I wanted to believe that he could--that he had. Yes, he has some compassion in him, and... (her voice drops as she looks away slightly) ...love. And sometimes, he can act on it and do something completely selfless. But eventually, it's back to normal. Ares can never be good. Not really.

GABRIELLE:

Can't teach an old dog new tricks, is that it, Xena?

XENA:

Exactly.

GABRIELLE:

Well, if what you say is true--then I suppose I've been fooling myself all these years about you too. Sooner or later you'll go back to being a killer with no compassion or conscience.

XENA (her jaw clenches and unclenches several times):

Just you watch, Gabrielle--if Sabina does anything to hurt Eve, it could happen sooner than you think.

GABRIELLE (her mouth forms into a sneer):

I'm sure Eve would be honored that her mother is willing to avenge her with a bloodbath.

Xena turns away angrily.

GABRIELLE (takes a deep breath and continues in a gentler tone):

Xena, do you think I could ever forgive myself if anything happens to Eve? It was my decision to send her to Sabina. But if you're willing to become a monster to avenge her...

XENA (whips around):

Yes?

GABRIELLE (takes a deep breath):

Don't count on me to stand beside you--me or the Amazon nation.

XENA (looks at Gabrielle with something close to disgust):

Thanks. At least now I know.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--

XENA:

I can trust you about as much as I can trust Ares.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, don't--

Xena turns and storms off. Close up of Gabrielle's anguished face as she watches Xena walk away.

CUT TO

The sun is beginning to rise as Sabina waits on horseback a few hundred yards from the city's gates. Just behind her, Peneios waits on horseback as well. Accompanying her is a contingent of fifty of her best soldiers. They wait patiently. It is so quiet that the sound of the bolt being removed from Corinth's gate can be heard. Peneios picks his head up expectantly.

PENEIOS (his voice shrill with excitement):

They're coming out!

SABINA:

Peneios?

PENEIOS:

Yes?

SABINA:

If you can't keep your emotions under control, keep your mouth shut until this is over.

Peneios frowns and drops his gaze. The city's gate opens slowly with an audible creak. Xena rides out on horseback, keeping the gait of the horse slow and relaxed. Gabrielle and Haimon follow at the head of a column of Corinth's soldiers. They all appear to be exhausted and dirty--a striking contrast to the neat and polished appearance of Sabina's men. Sabina waits to speak until her horse and Xena's are practically nose to nose.

SABINA:

My compliments to you and your men, Xena. You fought well last night. You exceeded even my expectations.

XENA (arches her eyebrows derisively):

Sorry to have disappointed you.

SABINA (smiles with chilly amusement):

Actually, I enjoyed the challenge--however small. (pauses a moment to gauge Xena's reaction)
Let's be honest, Xena. We both know I was toying with you last night.

XENA (sneers):

Oh, really? Then what are you doing here? Why not just take the city if you're so sure of yourself?

SABINA:

I was hoping you'd listen to reason. You're out of soldiers, you're out of food and you're out of options. It's time to end this before any more lives are lost needlessly.

XENA:

You'll forgive me if I'm a little suspicious of your regard for human life.

SABINA (laughs):

You're right. If anyone is foolish enough to stand against me, I don't care if they live or die. But you do. (she pauses as her eyes meet Xena's) You can surrender or you can fight, Xena. Either way, the city will be mine. The only question is whether these people will live to see it or not.

XENA:

And what's to stop you from slaughtering every man, woman and child inside Corinth if we do surrender?

SABINA (frowns almost in disappointment):

You know me, Xena. I'm cold, I'm ruthless and I'm practical. But I don't kill just for the sport of it. I'm not a monster. And as a show of good faith--

Sabina raises her hand in signal. The column of soldiers splits down the middle and we see Eve and a semi-circle of six men guarding her.

SABINA:

Bring her.

The soldiers march Eve down the center of the column toward Xena.

XENA:

Eve!

Xena leaps down off of her mount and pulls Eve into her arms.

XENA:

Eve--thank the... I was so worried about you. (she pulls back to touch her daughter's cheek)

SABINA:

I'm giving her back to you.

XENA (ignoring Sabina, she strokes Eve's hair):

You're all right? She didn't hurt you?

EVE (shakes her head):

No. I'm fine, Mother.

SABINA:

You see? This should prove to you that I don't kill for the sake of killing. Don't let your pride be the death warrant of these people, Xena. You can't win.

XENA (steps around Eve and moves menacingly towards Sabina):

Don't be too sure, Sabina. Even Achilles had a weakness.

SABINA (smiles coldly):

And maybe yours is underestimating me. You think I'm just another Mavican.

Xena gives her a slightly puzzled look and frowns, as if Sabina's words have reminded her of something but she's not sure what it is.

XENA:

Give me time to think about this. I can't make this decision on my own.

SABINA:

Very well. You have until sundown to surrender the city. I think I'm being generous enough.

She raises her hand and motions to her troops. Her soldiers turn around and, led by Peneios, pull back from the gates. Sabina stays still, steadily holding Xena's gaze. Then she smiles, betraying just a hint of glee, and turns around and rides away. Xena grimly purses her lips and signals to the watchman at the top of the gates. Slowly, with a groan, the gates open and Corinth's defenders, led by Xena, retreat back into the city.

CUT TO

The hall that serves as headquarters. Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon and Eve are there, along with some of the Corinthian officers we saw before, including Kodros.

GABRIELLE:

Where's Jason?

KODROS:

He was killed in the fighting last night. (Gabrielle lowers her eyes sadly) Along with fifteen other Corinthians. Such losses mean nothing to Sabina, but three more such attacks--and between the dead and the wounded, we'll have no defense left.

XENA:

Then there's no choice but to surrender the city.

KODROS (appalled):

It's the end of Corinth.

GABRIELLE:

No, it's not. It will buy us some time. We can always come back with reinforcements--there has to be an army somewhere that can stand up to Sabina.

EVE:

Sometimes you have to lose a few battles to win the war.

XENA (darts a quick glance at her):

Sounds like an excuse for losers.

EVE:

It was Eli who said that--don't you remember? I read it in Gabrielle's scrolls.

XENA (suddenly thoughtful):

Scrolls... (she turns abruptly to Gabrielle, looking as if she's been trying to think of something and has finally remembered what it was.) Gabrielle--in your scrolls, did you ever write about Mavican?

GABRIELLE (glances at her, surprised):
Why?

XENA (brusquely):
Just tell me, Gabrielle. I have my reasons.

GABRIELLE:
No, I didn't. She wanted to make a name for herself by going after you--and I decided I wasn't going to give her that.

For just a moment, Xena's face crumbles, her eyes filled with pain and regret before she regains her composure.

XENA (quietly):
I see...

Gabrielle takes her arm; Xena flinches and looks at her.

GABRIELLE:
Xena, maybe we don't have to give up the city. I know you don't like asking Ares for help, and I know you think he's working with Sabina--but--

XENA (harshly):
No, Gabrielle. I know he is.

CUT TO

Outside the gates of Corinth. The sun, on its way toward sunset, is blazing in the cloudless sky. The gates creak and groan, and start opening slowly until they are thrown wide open.

CUT TO

The inside of Sabina's tent. Peneios sticks his head inside the tent; Sabina, who is seated on a fur-covered chair reading a scroll, looks up at him sharply.

PENEIOS (trying to suppress his excitement):
They've just opened the gates!

Sabina rises abruptly, a look of triumph on her face.

SABINA:
Now, it's over.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, Eve and Haimon riding out of the city gates. They look tired and gloomy. Behind them, the gates stay open.

A wide overhead shot of the city walls and Sabina's camp. As Xena, Gabrielle, Eve and Haimon ride toward the camp, Sabina rides out toward them. The camera slowly pans down until it closes in on

Sabina and Xena, who stop just a few paces from each other and stare at each other silently for a few moments. Gabrielle, Eve and Haimon look away.

XENA:

The city is yours.

Sabina smiles coldly and nods. Xena and her companions ride on.

CUT TO

Sabina entering the city gates at the head of her army.

CUT TO

Kodros standing on the palace colonnade where we saw Gabrielle and Haimon before. A grim look on his face, he leans on the ledge and looks down. An overhead shot of Sabina's soldiers moving through the streets of Corinth.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon and Eve riding silently through a grove at a slow pace.

GABRIELLE (reaches out to touch Xena's arm):

Xena... (Xena flinches slightly) It's not the end of--

XENA (abruptly):

Don't. There's nothing you or anyone else can say that-- (she trails off, shaking her head)

EVE (tentatively):

Mother...

XENA (harshly):

I'd like some time to myself, if you don't mind. (prods Argo) Yah!

She takes off at a gallop. Gabrielle, Eve and Haimon exchange worried looks.

CUT TO

A deserted stretch of the road lined with trees on both sides. The trees and the road are bathed in the glow of the setting sun, which glows crimson above the horizon. Xena is riding alone at a trot.

Ahead of her, there is a flash of blue light. Ares appears in the road and stands still, his arms folded on his chest. A close-up of his face, closed and expressionless.

Xena, facing the camera, slows Argo down to a walk. Not a muscle flinches in her face as she gets closer to Ares, but one can see the bitter disappointment and sadness in her eyes.

When Xena is only a couple of paces away from Ares, his eyes flicker and his lips twitch slightly; he swallows convulsively. Xena rides on, looking straight ahead, her face unchanged. Ares remains silent. Xena rides past him.

The camera pans to face Xena again, so that we see Ares standing immobile behind her. Xena reaches into her breastplate, takes something out and drops it on the ground without slowing down. The camera pans down to the objects she has dropped. It's the medallion from "What Dreams May Come" and the pearl pendant Ares gave her in the teaser.

A close-up of Ares as he watches Xena sadly. Then, the camera pulls back for a long shot to show Ares standing in the road with his back to the viewer, and Xena ahead of him, riding slowly away in the dusk as we:

FADE OUT

TO BE CONTINUED...

[Xena and Ares could have used relationship counseling during the production of this motion picture.]