

SHIPPER SEASON NINE

“Take Two”

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Logline

When Sabina and Siran are asked to transport a valuable object with unusual powers, Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon volunteer to help. With would-be robbers on their trail, Xena and Gabrielle realize that the talisman may help them sort out their problems--if it doesn't drive them crazy first.

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TEASER

FADE IN

An Elijan temple in Rome. A young priest is deep in prayer at the altar. Siran enters and waits quietly at the rear of the temple. Once he finishes, she clears her throat.

SIRAN:

Carminus?

He turns and smiles, hurrying down from the altar to meet her.

CARMINUS:

Siran! Thank you for coming. (He takes her hands in his) You're looking well. (He glances around.) Your friend--is she also here?

SIRAN:

Sabina accompanied me to the city but you know she wouldn't come into the temple. She went to get something to eat.

CARMINUS:

Well, at any rate it's good to see you. Though I wish the circumstances were more pleasant.

SIRAN (frowns):

It's Peter, isn't it? He's gone?

Carminus frowns and nods sadly.

CARMINUS:

Just this morning.

CUT TO

Outside the Elijan Temple. Two men trudge along the road. It's obvious they are dressed in garb too heavy for the Mediterranean climate--heavy furs and wools. They are Vikings. Sven, the leader, is of average height and build. Ragnar, his companion, is short and portly. He trudges along behind Sven, exhausted and dragging his sword in the dirt.

RAGNAR:

This doesn't look like Britannia to me, Sven.

SVEN:

This is Britannia! I'm sure of it!

RAGNAR:

We're lost. (plaintively) We'll *never* make it home now.

SVEN:

We'll get home--don't you worry about that. They don't call me Sven the Invincible for nothing.

RAGNAR:

But someone stole our boat.

SVEN:

Ragnar, by the time we're done *here* we'll be able to buy a thousand boats!

RAGNAR:

You know, *I've been thinking* about your plan, Sven. I don't think it's right for us to just take things that don't belong to us.

SVEN:

We are *Vikings*! We plunder and pillage and take what we want.

RAGNAR:

But stealing is wrong!

Sven sighs tiredly.

SVEN:

Well, if you insist on looking at this from an ethnical point of view--

RAGNAR:

Yes! That's what I'm saying!

SVEN:

But we have no money and no boat. How else are we supposed to get home?

Ragnar frowns and looks around, searching for an answer.

RAGNAR:

Look! A temple! We could *pray* for a boat.

SVEN (shocked):

A Viking does *not* prostrate himself before lesser gods. What would Odin think?

Ragnar frowns, momentarily stymied by Sven's argument. Suddenly his expression brightens and he points

RAGNAR:

There's a fish painted on the door! Perhaps this god is a patron god of the sea. He might give us a boat.

SVEN:

You've got a point. After all, what god of the sea wouldn't be honored to have a Viking bring him glory?

CUT TO

Inside the Elijan Temple. Ragnar kneels, clasps his hands and is praying fervently to the fish symbol upon the altar. Sven kneels beside him and looks around, noticing Siran and Carminus standing off to the side. Carminus hands Siran a metallic orb that appears to be made of pure silver. Sven's eyes widen and he inclines his head discreetly to listen in on their conversation.

CARMINUS:

...you must make it to Ostia in five days. The ceremony can't take place without the orb and this decree from Peter naming the new Head Priest.

Carminus hands over a large, ornate scroll. Siran takes it reverently and nods.

Sven grabs Ragnar by the shoulder and drags him to his feet.

SVEN:

We're leaving!

RAGNAR:

But I haven't finished my prayer to the sea god--

SVEN:

Our prayers have been answered, Ragnar!

Outside the temple. Sven leans casually against a pillar while Ragnar paces. Siran appears at the top of the steps.

SVEN:

Here she comes!

RAGNAR:

But she looks like such a nice girl!

Sven bats Ragnar in the chest to shut him up. He leans casually against a pillar and smiles at Siran as she descends the steps of the temple.

SVEN:

A fine evening for praying, isn't it, little lady?

SIRAN (smiles):

Just fine, thank you.

SVEN:

My friend Ragnar and I are both religious men. Isn't that right, Ragnar?

RAGNAR (sighs):

/ certainly am!

Sven hits Ragnar in the chest again.

SVEN:

And we'd like to learn more about your sea god. Perhaps you could tell us about him over herring and a cup of glogg?

Siran smiles, friendly but wary.

SIRAN:

Carminus is the priest of this temple. I'm sure he'd be happy to tell you anything you'd like to know.

Siran walks past them but Sven follows.

SVEN:

We're Vikings, you know. We plunder and pillage and lay waste to the land. That turn you on? Plundering and pillaging?

Siran spins on him, shocked. She opens her mouth to speak but is cut off. Sabina steps up to her side. Her manner is calm and cool and with a sword at her side she cuts an imposing figure.

SABINA:

Well, well. What have we here? Friends of yours, Siran?

SIRAN:

They were in the temple.

RAGNAR:

Praying to the sea god.

SABINA:

Really. Well far be it from me to come between you and your god. (she puts a hand on Siran's shoulder.) Let's go.

SVEN:

What's your rush? (he leans close to Sabina and winks) Two ladies, two Vikings...do the math.

He grins lewdly and pats her backside. Sabina takes a step back, reaching for her sword.

SABINA:

Two dead Vikings.

Siran grabs for Sabina's hand on the hilt of her sword.

SIRAN:

Sabina!

Sabina frowns and looks down at Siran who shakes her head. She thinks a minute then let's out a deep breath.

SABINA:

Well, this is your lucky day. If it wasn't for my friend, they'd be picking up pieces of Viking all over Rome.

SVEN (shocked):

Rome?

RAGNAR:

See? I *told* you this wasn't Britannia! You never should have taken that left turn at Gaul!

Sabina and Siran walk off while Sven and Ragnar can be heard arguing in the background.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon standing roadside. Xena holds Argo's reigns and rolls her eyes, shaking her head in annoyance.

HAIMON:

...I can't believe you took Xena to the Sappho reading instead of me.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon, I explained this to you. Sappho was only appearing the one night and you were called away to Clonia.

HAIMON:

That's not the point. We had planned on seeing her together.

XENA:

You didn't miss much, Haimon. I thought it was pretty boring, myself. What sort of poetry doesn't even rhyme?

HAIMON:

Why can't you--

He is cut off when Darion runs out of the bushes, straightening his pants.

DARION:

All done!

Haimon and Gabrielle glare at one another in silence.

XENA:

Darion--come ride up here with me.

Xena lifts Darion onto Argo and they resume walking down the road.

Haimon continues on in a whisper that comes out in a hiss.

HAIMON:

See? Xena doesn't even *like* poetry.

GABRIELLE:

Well, I do plenty of things with Xena that I don't like either.

Xena overhears this and stops and turns to Gabrielle.

HAIMON:

Like what?

Gabrielle fidgets uncomfortably and gives both Haimon and Xena a nervous glance.

GABRIELLE:

Well...you know...Xena sometimes likes to...

She trails off into silence.

Haimon glares and Xena crosses her arms and taps her foot impatiently.

XENA:

Well?

Gabrielle pauses, trying to choose her words carefully. Finally she throws up her hands and resumes walking.

GABRIELLE:

I can't believe we're having this conversation! It's absurd.

Behind them, Sabina steps out from the underbrush.

SABINA:

For once I agree with you, Gabrielle. Xena, Warrior Princess at a poetry reading? What next? You running the snack table at a gladiator contest?

They all stop and turn towards Sabina, regarding her silently for a long moment. Sabina stares at them expectantly.

SABINA:

What? No clever retort? My wit and charm must have grown on you. (She notices Darion.) Hello. Who have we here?

GABRIELLE (reluctantly):

This is Darion.

SABINA:

Well hello, Darion. This is your Auntie Sabina. I'm sure Xena and Gabrielle have told you *all* about me.

Darion approaches Sabina, inspecting her warily.

DARION:

You don't *really* have fangs, do you?

He looks back at Haimon, who puts his hand to his forehead and looks away.

GABRIELLE (clears her throat and looks down):

Darion...

Pan to Xena, who can barely suppress a smile, and then to Darion, who looks confused, realizing that he has said something he shouldn't.

SABINA (chuckles):

Don't believe everything you hear.

DARION:

Gabrielle says lying is wrong.

SABINA:

Well, Gabrielle is right. (she winks) But sometimes it's fun.

XENA (in a faintly menacing tone):

Look, we could just walk away right now.

Sabina smiles sweetly.

SABINA:

You could...but *would* you? (she glances at Gabrielle and Haimon) No, you and your goody-goody friends would never do that. (she turns to Darion) You see, Darion--little boys like you can learn from people like Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon. They *always* do the right thing.

GABRIELLE (edgy):

And what about you?

SABINA (shrugs):

Me? Oh--I know what the right thing is. And sometimes I'll even do it. But I'm not like *some* people who'll do the right thing even if it kills them. You just can't help it, can you?

XENA (sighs impatiently):

Sabina, why did you send for us?

Sabina laughs admiringly.

SABINA:

Now *that's* the Xena I've always admired. No time to waste on pleasantries with an old friend--right down to business. (pauses; off Xena's expectant stare) Why did I send for you? Let's just say I heard you were in the neighborhood and I thought you might lend me a hand.

XENA (suspiciously):

A hand with *what*?

SABINA (smiles sweetly):

Would it make you feel better to know that this is Siran's mission and I'm just tagging along for...moral support?

Xena smiles coolly at Sabina.

XENA:

Yes, as a matter of fact it would.

GABRIELLE:

Siran is here?

SABINA:

She's back at the camp. (She pauses and glances up at the sun) We should hurry--there isn't a lot of time.

Sabina starts walking briskly. Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon and Darion follow behind her; Xena picks up her pace to catch up with her. Darion tries to keep pace with Xena to walk with Sabina but Gabrielle pulls him back.

XENA:

So what exactly is this mission of Siran's?

SABINA:

Ever heard of the Orb of Mimir?

XENA (frowns):

The Elijan talisman? Eve mentioned it once. She thought it was a myth.

CUT TO

Xena, Sabina and the others arrive at the campsite where Siran is stoking the campfire. The orb rests beside her. Sabina gestures towards it.

SABINA:

Seeing is believing.

Siran jumps up and smiles.

SIRAN:

Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon! I'm so glad you've come!

SABINA:

And not a moment too soon. (she glances up at the sky) The sun is setting. It's time you passed the orb to me, Siran.

XENA (suspiciously):

Really. And why is that so important?

Sabina waves in an uncharacteristically agitated way.

SABINA:

Xena, we don't have time to explain and wait for you and Gabrielle to weigh the pros and cons of giving me the orb.

Siran picks up the orb and holds it out to Sabina to take. Xena steps forward and snatches the orb from Siran's hands. Siran and Sabina both stare at Xena in shock.

XENA:

Well, if it's all the same to you, I'll feel a whole lot better hanging onto this until you *do* explain.

The last rays of sunlight fade.

SIRAN (whispers):

Sunset.

XENA:

So why don't we sit down and have a nice chat while Gabrielle goes and kills something for dinner and Haimon takes care of the horses.

A bell rings. "Reset."

A bell rings. "Reset."

The sunlight fades.

SIRAN (whispers):

Sunset.

Xena stares at her, bewildered.

XENA:

What in Tartarus--? (looks around; then, to Sabina) Well, like I said--Gabrielle can go kill us something for dinner, Haimon can take care of the horses and you and I can have a chat about the orb.

A bell rings. "Reset."

The sunlight fades.

SIRAN (whispers):
Sunset.

Xena gapes at her in confusion as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

On the same scene. Xena stares in confusion at Sabina and Siran.

XENA:
All right--what's going on?

SABINA (smirks):
I don't think it likes what you said.

XENA (narrows her eyes at Sabina):
Huh?

SABINA:
I'd try something different if I were you.

XENA (nonplussed):
Different? (thinks) Why don't you tell Gabrielle and me all about the orb, and Haimon can go hunt us up some dinner and take care of the horses.

The bell rings. "Reset."

The sunlight fades.

SIRAN (whispers):
Sunset.

XENA (starting to get really impatient):
All right. Why don't you tell us all about the orb and then I'll go hunt us up some dinner and Haimon can take care of the horses.

She pauses, waiting to see what happens. Pan over the faces of Gabrielle, Haimon, Darion and Siran, also expectant. Sabina smirks.

Xena gives a sigh of relief, then looks at Sabina and Siran.

XENA (slowly, narrowing her eyes):
All right, start talking.

SIRAN (nervously):
It's--it's the orb.

XENA (holds up the orb and looks at it mistrustfully):
I figured as much. What does it do?

SIRAN:
Well--let me tell you the whole story...

XENA (snarls):
Make it snappy.

The bell rings again.

SIRAN:
Let me tell you the whole story--

Xena clenches her fists, about to explode.

SABINA (coolly):
Temper, temper, Xena. At this rate, we'll be stuck here all night. Better let her tell the story.

As Xena stews silently, Siran continues.

SIRAN:
The orb was created by a powerful master of magic who converted to Eli's teachings--and came to believe that the only true magic was love. He gave the orb--

She glances at Xena and sees her tense up, as if listening to something.

SIRAN:
Xena?

Xena turns to her and nods, still alert.

XENA:
Go on.

SIRAN:
He gave the orb a great power. It's all explained right here in this sacred scroll--

She takes out a scroll tucked away under her belt and begins to unroll it.

MALE VOICE (off-camera):
Great powers. Just the thing we want to hear.

Pan over to Sven and Ragnar, who stand on the edge of the clearing. Sven is swaggering while Ragnar looks visibly uncomfortable and nervous.

SVEN (to Xena):

You. In the leather. Hand that over.

XENA (incredulous):

Are you talking to *me*?

SVEN:

Who else?

He draws his sword and charges at Xena with a furious yell. Xena slips the orb inside her breastplate and then stands still, looking exasperated and bored. Then, as he is almost upon her, she whips around, kicks the sword out of his hand, knees him in the gut, and then kicks him, making him fly back with a yell and slam into a tree, promptly passing out.

XENA (turning to a terrified Ragnar):

You want some of this?

Before Ragnar can say anything, the bell rings.

The scene is "reset" to Ragnar standing on his feet, sword in hand. He looks around incredulously.

SVEN (to Ragnar):

Invincible! What did I tell you?

The camera pans slowly over the utterly stunned faces of Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon, and Darion, who gapes open-mouthed at Sven. Even the imperturbable Sabina looks shocked. Finally pan to Xena, who looks bewildered and disgusted.

SVEN:

Give it up!

With a furious yell, he charges at Xena again.

Mindful of what happened before, Xena now fights him cautiously, parrying his blows without hurting him. The camera pulls back to show them fighting as the others look on curiously. Their fight looks particularly amusing since Sven is about a head shorter than Xena.

SVEN (slightly out of breath):

I see you're afraid of me. (grins triumphantly) You should be, little lady.

XENA (growls):

You're *really* asking for it...

With a snarl, she knocks the sword from Sven's hand. With surprisingly agility, he manages to pick it up before she steps on it, and charges her again. Xena is growing increasingly frustrated.

Taking advantage of her frustration, Sven advances and manages to nick her arm with a thrust of his sword. With a look of shock and anger, Xena parries his blow but doesn't strike back.

Pan to Gabrielle and Haimon, who look puzzled and concerned. Meanwhile, Darion swings his arms, trying to imitate Xena's battle moves.

SABINA (amused):

Xena, if our Viking friend is too much for you to handle, I could always step in and help.

Just as she speaks, an emboldened Sven lets out a loud, hoarse battle cry that sounds like the roar of a sick sea lion, and strikes out at Xena with his sword while attempting to kick her at the same time. Having had enough of this, Xena finally stops holding back. She whips around with a fierce yell of her own and strikes out at Sven. Her sword plunges into his gut.

Sven's battle cry is cut short as the camera pans to his face, full of shock and pain.

Pan to Siran, who gasps in horror, then to Gabrielle, who looks shocked, and to Darion, who clutches fearfully at her skirt.

Pan to Sabina, who arches an eyebrow sarcastically.

SABINA:

Uh-oh.

The bell rings, with a sound that seems louder than before and almost angry.

Sven is standing in front of Xena again, alive and still holding his sword. He pats himself down in amazement.

SVEN (his face spreading into an incredulous grin):

I'm *immortal!*

With a yell of frustration, Xena plunges her sword into the ground.

SABINA (laughs):

Foiled by the bell.

Finally recovering the gift of speech, Ragnar runs up to Sven.

RAGNAR:

Sven...I don't think I like this.

SVEN (swaggering):

Oh yeah? Well, I do! Sven the Invincible lives to fight another day. (thumps his fist on his chest, then turns to Xena) Bring it on, woman!

Xena yanks her sword out of the ground and opens her mouth, about to yell in fury, then forcibly composes herself, forcing her right hand down with her left.

RAGNAR:

Sven, she knocked you out the first time and then killed you. Maybe the third time's the charm. We should get out of here.

SABINA (still laughing at Xena's predicament, to Sven):

I'd follow his advice if I were you. It would take too long to explain, but let me put it this way: I wouldn't have any problem killing you.

Pan to Siran, who looks alarmed but says nothing, then to Sven, who looks hesitant.

SABINA:

So beat it. (turns to Xena) Well, Xena, maybe you'll learn a lesson from this.

XENA (glares):

Like what?

SABINA:

Like--occasionally, you should trust me?

While she's speaking, Sven looks around and then obviously makes a decision on the spot. He charges toward Siran, yanks the scroll out of her hand, roughly pushing her away so that she stumbles and falls with a yelp, and grabs the bridle of Sabina's horse. A confused Ragnar runs toward him.

SABINA (whips around and sees Siran lying on the ground):

Siran!

While she rushes toward Siran, Sven climbs into the saddle, pulling up Ragnar behind him, and rides away into the darkening woods.

SVEN:

Ha! Sven the Invincible rides again!

Siran stirs and sits up.

SABINA:

Are you all right?

SIRAN:

I'm fine, just.... (She scrambles to her feet and brushes dirt off her dress, then gasps suddenly)
They stole the scroll!

SABINA:

And my horse.

GABRIELLE:

I'll go after them.

HAIMON:

We'll go after them.

GABRIELLE:

Haimon, I can handle this.

HAIMON (sourly):

Fine. Handle it.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

All right. *We'll* go after them together.

HAIMON (a little shamefaced):

No, you were right. You don't need to wait for me.

DARION:

You know, the bad guys are getting away.

HAIMON:

Exactly. Listen to Darion.

GABRIELLE:

Are you sure you're okay with this? (off his impatient look) All right--all right. I'm going.

She goes to get her horse and rides away.

XENA (suppressing her irritation):

Well. Now that the interruption's over, maybe someone can tell me what this is all about.

SIRAN:

The orb--well, it's hard to explain--

XENA:

Try me.

SIRAN:

It makes you do the right thing.

XENA (narrows her eyes):

What are you talking about? I don't need this to tell me to do the right thing.

SIRAN:

As long as you're in possession of the orb, if you do something.... (she pauses, searching for a word that won't offend Xena) something that isn't right--the orb will undo it, just as you saw. Time will turn back--to give you a chance to do it right.

XENA (irritably):

Right according to whom?

SABINA:

You ask too many questions, Xena. You've seen what the orb does. What more do you need?

XENA:

I'll tell you what I *don't* need. (takes out the orb) This. (hands the orb over to Sabina) Take it. You need it more than I do.

SABINA (shakes her head):

It won't do you any good.

XENA:

Don't play games with me, Sabina. Just take it.

SABINA (shrugs):
Suit yourself.

She takes the orb.

The bell rings. The scene is reset to Xena holding the orb.

XENA (glances at the orb with a crooked grin):
So it doesn't like you. Fine. (She strides over to Haimon and gives the orb to him) You take it.

SIRAN:
Xena, it won't--

Haimon takes the orb. The bell rings. Xena is holding the orb again.

XENA (yells):
Aaaaaaargh!

She throws the orb down on the ground.

Bell.

Xena is holding the orb again.

SIRAN:
You can't give it away, Xena. Not until one full day has passed.

XENA:
What?

SIRAN:
Well--that was Mimir's idea. The orb would make its holder be good for a full day.

XENA:
Great.

SIRAN:
Peter--the Head Priest of the Elijans after Eli died--decided that it was not good for the orb to be out there, passing from one person to another.

HAIMON:
Why not?

DARION:
Because it would drive them crazy?

SIRAN:
Peter thought that goodness should be chosen freely--not forced on you by a magical spell. Robbing them of that freedom--is not what Eli would have wanted. But Peter was a holy man who already lived a good life. He thought it would be safe for him to keep the orb--and pass it on to the

next leader of the faith. When Peter died, I was entrusted with the mission of taking it to Ostia--to Peter's chosen successor.

XENA:

So I have to hold on to this until sunset tomorrow.

SABINA:

You haven't heard the best part yet.

XENA (looks at her suspiciously):

What's that?

Siran hesitates for a moment, then looks at Xena.

SIRAN:

If you don't give the orb away at sunset, you have to hold on to it for the rest of your life.

Close-up on Xena's shocked face.

Sven and Ragnar in a small clearing, sitting on a fallen log. Sabina's horse grazes nearby. Night has fallen completely. Sven is squinting at the scroll.

RAGNAR (nervously):

Well?

SVEN (gives him a haughty look):

Well, I'm not very good at reading--by moonlight. (shoves the scroll at Ragnar) *You* try it.

Ragnar cautiously takes the scroll and examines it, turns it upside down, then looks up at Sven, who reaches into his coat.

RAGNAR:

I can't make this out. (nervously) Sven, what if--

SVEN (pulls out a piece of beef jerky and pops it in his mouth):

Never mind. We know it's valuable--what more do we need to know?

RAGNAR:

Sven, what if this thing--(pokes a finger at the scroll)

SVEN (grabs the scroll from him):

Hey! Careful with that. (puts the scroll inside his coat) It's not worth anything to us if you ruin it. That'll teach me to let a person of your silk manhandle the goods.

RAGNAR:

What if it's got some horrible curse written on it? Like, you know--it could say--

SVEN (irritably):

Maybe it brings luck! (bites off another piece of jerky) Maybe that's what brought me back from the dead.

RAGNAR (thinks a moment):

You came back from the dead *before* you had the scroll.

SVEN (deflated for a moment):

Oh. (suddenly perks up) Maybe I'm a god!

RAGNAR (looks at him dubiously and shakes his head):

I still say we shouldn't have taken it.

SVEN:

Shut up. What we have to do now is figure out a way to get that other thing.

CUT TO

Xena is pacing impatiently around the clearing. Gabrielle, Haimon, Darion, Sabina and Siran are sitting round the campfire. Sabina is polishing her sword, casting occasional sarcastic glances at Xena. Siran is staring pensively into the campfire, and occasionally lifting her eyes to look at Xena as well with obvious anxiety. Darion is eating an apple.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, look, I'm sorry I didn't find them--

XENA (stops and glares):

Gabrielle, that's *not* our biggest problem right now.

She starts pacing again.

SABINA (gives her a sarcastic look):

Siran might disagree with that.

SIRAN (looks up hastily from her mending):

Oh! I'm sure Gabrielle did the best she could.

SABINA (wryly):

Hmm--yes, I'm sure she did.

GABRIELLE (snaps):

At least I didn't let them get away with *my* horse.

A burning stick falls out of the fire; Gabrielle kicks it back in.

XENA (stops again and raises her hands in a "time-out" gesture):

All right! Enough with the bickering. First light tomorrow, we're going after those two and we're going to kick some Viking butt.

The bell rings.

"Reset": A burning stick falls out of the fire; irritably, Gabrielle kicks it back in.

XENA (throws up her hands):

That does it! I can't work under these conditions!

She looks around suddenly, as if she's just thought of something.

XENA (mutters):
I'll be back.

She runs off into the woods.

DARION:
Where's *she* going?

SABINA (continues, imperturbably, to polish her sword):
To talk to the boyfriend, I imagine.

Gabrielle gives her an alarmed look, then leaps to her feet.

GABRIELLE (yells):
Xena--? (She takes a few steps in the direction where Xena went)

HAIMON:
Gabrielle--where are you going?

SABINA (holds up the gleaming blade and looks at her own reflection in it):
Maybe she wants to watch.

GABRIELLE (flustered):
Look--she's upset and--

DARION (looks curiously at Sabina):
Watch what?

Haimon and Gabrielle exchange anxious looks. Sabina smirks.

CUT TO

Another part of the woods. Xena, holding up the orb, stands facing Ares, who looks amused but also slightly nervous.

ARES:
So you want me to take some Elijan amulet?

XENA (smirks):
What are you, scared of this little thing?

ARES:
Well, it seems that so far, this little thing has just about defeated *your* many skills--

XENA (snarls):
Just shut up and take it!

The bell rings.

ARES:

--this little thing has just about defeated *your* many skills--

Xena is about to explode but then forces herself to calm down, holding out her hands in a steady gesture.

XENA (making an effort):

Would you *please* just take it?

Ares shakes his head, his amusement overcoming his misgivings, and takes the orb from Xena.

The bell rings. "Reset" to Xena holding the orb.

XENA (exasperated):

So much for any help from you.

The bell rings. Ares gives Xena an amused look.

XENA (through clenched teeth):

Thank you for trying to help.

CUT TO

The clearing lit by the campfire. The camera pans over Darion sleeping in a bedroll, Sabina, Siran, Haimon, and Gabrielle, finally pausing on Xena who sits by the dying campfire, staring into it, a grim expression on her face.

CUT TO

Morning. Xena is sitting on the ground staring ahead of her, with the same grim expression on her face.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, look, it's only until sundown. Then you can give it to me and everything will be fine.

XENA (mockingly):

Oh you think so? (thinks a moment) No, I should give it to Ares. He's a god--chances are, it won't have any power over him. And if it does-- (she looks at Gabrielle with a crooked grin) maybe it wouldn't be so bad, huh?

SIRAN (quietly but firmly):

Xena, I don't think this is right. The God of War--

XENA (grins at her):

Well, think about it this way, Siran. The Orb of Mimir could make the God of War follow the way of peace--even if it is only for one day.

SABINA (smirks):

That's going to be one long day. Well, are we going to sit here or are we going to get moving? The orb needs to be in Ostia in four days.

DARION (jumps to his feet):

Let's go! (to Gabrielle) Can I ride with Sabina?

Xena and Gabrielle exchange worried looks.

GABRIELLE:

I think we have *another* problem.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle are walking along a narrow path in the woods, leading their horses. Haimon (with his horse) is walking behind them, a rather sour look on his face. Sabina and Siran can be seen in the background.

XENA (glances at Gabrielle):

Well, if Darion comes back and starts asking why Aphrodite has so many *swimming instructors*, you can explain it--not me.

GABRIELLE (testy):

Look. I know Aphrodite isn't the world's greatest babysitter, but where are we going to get someone else to watch him on short notice?

CUT TO

A montage:

* Xena, Gabrielle, Sabina, Siran and Haimon travel through the woods.

* Xena glares at Sabina and says something (we don't hear the words). The bell rings. Xena stares grimly ahead.

* The sun is now high in the sky

* A clearing. Xena, Gabrielle, Sabina and the others find Sabina's horse (neighing is heard over the soundtrack music). Sabina pats her horse on the neck.

* Xena, Gabrielle and Sabina in the village tavern talking to people. Looking pissed off, Xena says something to one of the patrons just as the serving girl trips and drops a tray. The bell rings. Reset to the serving girl tripping and dropping the tray. Close-up on Xena as she rolls her eyes.

* Xena and the others are walking through the woods again. The sun is starting to set.

CUT TO

A blazing sunset. Pan down to Ares and Xena sitting on a riverbank, staring rather tensely into the distance.

The camera then pulls back to show Gabrielle and Haimon watching them. Gabrielle is working on a scroll but has stopped writing. Haimon is sitting next to her. Sabina and Siran are further in the distance; Sabina is arranging some firewood and pointedly not watching, while Siran has been mending a rip in her skirt but has paused to look at Xena and Ares.

The sun has almost set.

XENA (with pretend nonchalance):
It's time.

ARES (likewise):
All right--hand it over.

Xena takes the orb out of her breastplate and gives it to Ares, who hesitates for a moment before taking it. Close-up on their hands as the orb passes from her hand to his.

A wide shot of the river. The sun sets, its final rays going out.

Pan back to show Ares and Xena looking at each other uncertainly, then further back to show Gabrielle, Haimon, Sabina and Siran look at them in anticipation.

Trying to act casual, Ares bounces the orb in his hand a couple of times, whistling, then slips it in his pocket. Then he lifts his hand and looks at it, obviously worried but trying not to show it.

Ares balls his fist and shakes it, then raises his hand, aiming at a tree on the riverbank. Medium close-up of the tree. A crow sitting on a large branch cocks its head and looks evilly at Ares, then squawks loudly.

With a yell, Ares releases a fireball, hitting the tree. The large branch where the crow was sitting catches fire, breaks off and plops down into the river with a loud splash. The charred body of the crow falls into the water as well.

ARES (grins):
I still got it.

Siran winces while Sabina smiles in amusement.

GABRIELLE (indignantly):
Now why did you--

Before she can finish, the bell rings.

"Reset": the tree is whole again. The crow is sitting on the branch. It cocks its head and gives Ares the evil eye. This time, its squawk sounds almost mocking.

Close-up on Ares' dismayed face as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

On the same scene: Xena, Ares, Gabrielle, Haimon, Sabina and Siran on the riverbank. The sun has set and it's starting to turn dark. Sabina chuckles and goes back to making the fire.

ARES:

I think I've had enough. (takes the orb out of his pocket, thinks a moment and hands it to Gabrielle) There. A goody-two-shoes like you should be able to get through the day carrying this thing around.

The bell rings. "Reset": the orb is back in Ares' pocket. He looks at his empty hand, then scowls at Gabrielle.

XENA (amused):

I'm afraid you'll have to do better than that.

Ares forcefully jabs a finger in the air and looks like he's about to utter a string of curses; then, composing himself, he turns to Gabrielle and takes the orb out of his pocket again.

ARES:

Gabrielle--you're--(though clenched teeth) *a nice person*. So--I think the *sensible* thing to do would be for you to take the orb.

Off-camera, a clapping sound is heard. Ares and Xena whip around to see Sabina clapping sarcastically. The fire she has just lit flares up, lighting her face.

SABINA:

Bravo, Xena. (stops clapping) Always remember to spay and neuter your Gods of War. I knew you'd do it someday.

ARES (about to explode):

Why, you--

SABINA (holds her finger to her lips):

Tsk-tsk-tsk. We don't want any more bells ringing, do we?

With a supreme effort, Ares composes himself and turns to Gabrielle.

ARES:

All right. Just take the d-- (catches himself) the orb. (He hands the orb to Gabrielle and thinks for a moment, then grins a little) *Please*.

Hesitantly, Gabrielle takes the orb.

Bell rings. "Reset." Ares is holding the orb again. He stares at it silently, then gives Xena a pained look. Xena gives his shoulder a sympathetic squeeze.

XENA:

Believe me, Ares, I know exactly how you feel. (sighs)

ARES (indignant):

Oh, do you. I seem to remember *someone* telling me I'd be safe from this because I'm a god.

XENA:

I said *maybe*.

Pan to Sabina, who is stirring the fire with a stick.

SABINA:

Well. Now it's tested on gods.

Pan back to Ares, who scowls and clenches his jaw angrily.

ARES:

Oh yeah? Test this!

He throws the orb up in the air and zaps it with a blue bolt of energy, shattering it.

SIRAN:

No!

Everyone stands around waiting for the inevitable bell.

As the seconds pass, close-up on Ares tapping his fingers on the hilt of his sword.

Pan to Siran. She turns pale, a look of pure horror on her face.

SIRAN (whispers):

What have you--

The bell rings, loudly and angrily. "Reset."

SABINA:

Well. *Now*, it's tested on gods.

Siran clasps her hands to her mouth, almost sobbing with relief.

Ares looks dejectedly at the orb in his palm, then sighs, admitting defeat, and slips it back into his pocket.

SABINA:

Oops.

ARES (turns to her):

One more word out of *you*, and I--

SABINA (walks toward him with a mocking smile):

You'll do what? Zap me? (laughs) We both know the orb will just undo it and I'll be right as rain.

XENA (gives Ares a sympathetic look, then turns to Sabina):

Give it a rest, Sabina.

SABINA:

What a waste of a perfectly good fire--

Before she can finish, a blue fire bolt hits her in the chest and she falls to the ground.

Pan back to Ares, blowing on his fingers as if on the barrel of a smoking gun, grinning with satisfaction.

Siran whimpers in horror. Pan to Gabrielle and Haimon, who are in shock, and then to Xena just as a slow grin starts to spread across her face.

The bell rings. "Reset." Sabina is back standing on her feet. She pats herself down, checking that she's all right.

SABINA (not amused):

That *hurt!*

ARES (grins):

Good.

The bell rings. "Reset" to Sabina patting herself down.

SABINA:

That *hurt!*

Ares opens his mouth; Xena quickly presses her finger to his lips, then turns to Sabina.

XENA:

Good.

Sabina snorts and goes back to the fire. She and Siran can be seen in the background while the camera stays on Xena and Ares.

Xena turns to Ares and gives him a small smile, warm and mischievous.

SIRAN (in the background):

Are you okay?

SABINA (curtly):

Fine.

Ares smiles back at Xena as she lowers her hand.

GABRIELLE (reproachfully):

Xena...

Xena glances back at Gabrielle and her smile fades quickly.

ARES (to Xena):

Now...remind me again why I let you drag me into your oh-so-clever schemes?

XENA:

Because I told you so.

ARES:

Right. Thanks.

HAIMON (to Xena):

You know, you could at least say thank you--

Xena glares at him and he trails off.

GABRIELLE (smiles cheerfully):

Come on, Ares. So you're stuck like this until next sundown. Look, it could always be worse--

ARES (glares at her):

Yeah--I could be traveling around with an annoying blond sidekick.

The bell rings. "Reset."

GABRIELLE (smiles cheerfully):

Come on, Ares. So you're stuck like this until next sundown. Look, it could always be worse--

ARES:

This thing is *killing* all my best lines!

The bell rings.

GABRIELLE:

Come on, Ares--

ARES (takes a deep breath):

Yeah, yeah. I know. It could always be worse.

XENA (pats him on the arm, smiling rather tensely):

She's right, you know.

Gabrielle nods with a self-satisfied smile. Pan to Haimon, who is looking sympathetically at Ares.

ARES (shakes his head):

Women. Can't live with them-- (trails off)

HAIMON (grins crookedly):

--can't zap them with a fireball.

Ares turns and gapes at him in amazement. Pan to Gabrielle, who purses her lips in annoyance, and to Xena, who looks like she's not sure whether to grin or frown.

ARES (looks at Haimon almost warmly):

You know, you're not as boring as I thought. (turns to Xena.) Well. Guess I'll just, uh--go back to the Halls of War and--count my blessings. See you tomorrow.

XENA (nods):

See ya.

Ares vanishes in a burst of blue light. Xena looks at the spot where he vanished, her face inscrutable.

CUT TO

Morning. Sven and Ragnar trudging through the woods.

SVEN:

I can't believe you just let that horse go.

RAGNAR (sheepishly):

But it didn't belong to us--

SVEN:

What kind of Viking are you? Whatever we conquer belongs to us!

RAGNAR (sighs):

We didn't *conquer* it. We stole it.

SVEN (snarls):

Argh--what's the difference! You say Val-kyrie, I say Wall-kyrie.

RAGNAR (gives him a dubious look):

Can you say "Wall-kyrie"?

SVEN (irritated):

Whatever!

They walk on in silence.

RAGNAR:

...and they could have found us if they followed the hoof prints.

SVEN (reluctantly):

I suppose you've got a point there. (pauses) Wait a minute. *We're* supposed to find *them*. We were going to get that thing from them.

RAGNAR:

So we find them. Then what?

SVEN (punches the air):

We attack! And this time, we get it!

RAGNAR (sighs):

But--they're taller than us.

Sven turns to him irritably and slaps him hard upside the helmet.

SVEN:

We are Vikings!

CUT TO

A temple of Ares. A warlord is kneeling before the altar, a beautiful jewel-covered sword in his hands.

WARLORD:

My lord Ares! Your humble servant requests your presence!

A few moments pass; nothing happens.

WARLORD:

My lord?

There is a flare of blue light and Ares appears, sprawled in the throne. He slowly gets up and approaches the warlord.

ARES:

Yes, Mellor?

WARLORD (bows his head reverently):

My lord--as you commanded, my army is massed outside Argyron's stronghold, Baria. The men are ready to go to battle--for the glory of Ares.

ARES:

Right.

WARLORD:

I await only your final blessing--to launch the attack. (lays down the sword on the floor before the altar) Great Ares, God of War, accept this sacrifice as a token of our respect--and a token of your favor.

ARES:

Launch the attack.

The bell rings.

"Reset": The warlord lays down the sword on the floor.

WARLORD:

Great Ares, God of War, accept this sacrifice as a token of our respect--and a token of your favor.

Bewildered, the warlord glances around, then stares questioningly at Ares.

ARES (momentarily stumped):

All right--you...you have my blessing.

The warlord nods, satisfied but slightly surprised.

The bell rings.

"Reset": The warlord lays down the sword on the floor.

WARLORD:

Great Ares, God of War, accept this sacrifice as a token of our respect--and a token of your favor.

He looks up, even more bewildered.

Pan to an increasingly frustrated Ares.

ARES (irritated):

Just--do whatever you need to do. (off the warlord's shocked look) What, can't you make a step without orders from me?

The warlord looks at him questioningly, then rises and nods slowly.

WARLORD:

Yes, my lord. I'll go start the attack.

The bell rings. "Reset": The warlord lays down the sword on the floor.

WARLORD:

Great Ares--

ARES (bellows):

Get out of here!

CUT TO

A river, with a rickety boat bobbing by some reeds. The camera pulls back for a wide shot of the riverbank. Sven and Ragnar are walking along the bank.

RAGNAR (sheepishly):

My feet are killing me.

SVEN:

You're the one who let the horse go. (pauses and points at the boat) Hey, look!

Ragnar looks at the boat, then, dubiously, at Sven.

RAGNAR:

We can't get to Britannia in *this*.

SVEN:

No, but we can use it to get to the nearest town, sell the scroll, *and* make enough money to get us a real boat. (Off Ragnar's obvious hesitation) Come on.

RAGNAR:

I don't think we should sell the scroll, Sven. I mean, it belongs to some sea god...what if it's bad luck?

XENA'S VOICE (off-camera):

Oh, boys.

Pan to Xena and Gabrielle, who stands behind them. Xena taps her hand on her chakram. Sven and Ragnar turn around.

XENA:

Your bad luck is right here.

Sabina and Haimon can be seen coming up behind them, with Siran hanging back.

SVEN (nervous but trying not to show it):

Hah! You and I both know you can't kill me!

XENA:

You are--so wrong about that.

There is a flash of blue light. Ares appears, looking very pissed off.

ARES:

What have you *done* to me?

XENA (barely turning her head toward him):

Can't you see I'm busy?

Close-up on Sven and Ragnar, who stare in consternation at the new arrival.

RAGNAR (whispers loudly):

I think that's the sea god! Let's just give the scroll back and maybe he'll grant us his favor!

Pan to Xena.

XENA:

So. The scroll. Are you going to give it up the easy way or the hard way? (Grins dangerously) Because trust me--after yesterday, I'm *all* for the hard way.

SVEN (starting to sweat):

You're bluffing!

Sven takes a deep breath, then lets out his hoarse battle cry (the one that sounds like the roar of a sick sea lion) and charges at Xena. Taken by surprise, Xena stumbles and falls backwards, with Sven landing on top of her.

Looking furious, Xena leaps to her feet, shoving Sven so hard he staggers away.

ARES (frustrated):

You know--I have *got to* kill *something* before the day is over. I don't care who or what--but I'm going to find a way.

The bell rings. "Reset".

Sven slams into Xena; she stumbles and falls backwards, with Sven landing on top of her.

Xena leaps to her feet, shoving Sven so hard he staggers away.

ARES:

Just kill the little weasel.

The bell rings. "Reset".

Sven slams into Xena; she stumbles and falls backwards, with Sven landing on top of her.

This time, Xena "loses it": shoving Sven away, she screams, staying on her back, yelling incoherent curses as she pounds and kicks the ground in frustration (reminiscent of her frustrated yell in *Been There Done That*).

Gabrielle and Ares rush toward her at the same time.

ARES (bends over her):

Xena--

XENA (still having a fit):

Get away from me, you-- (screams incoherently) This is all *your* fault!

Pan to Sabina and Siran. Sabina is smirking while Siran looks concerned.

SABINA:

Hmm--this mission is turning out to be more fun than I thought.

Pan to Haimon, who suddenly points ahead.

HAIMON:

Hey--they're getting away!

Pan to Sven and Ragnar, who are scrambling into the small boat.

Haimon and Sabina rush toward the riverbank, but Sven and Ragnar are already paddling away with surprising agility.

SVEN (yells triumphantly):

Sven the Invincible sails again!

In a moment they disappear around the riverbend. Sabina and Haimon stop and look after them, then turn to the others. Xena, now over her fit, is scrambling to her feet.

GABRIELLE:

I can't believe we let them get away--*again*. (sighs) Look, all we have to do is catch up with two not very smart guys and get one scroll back from them. That's not so tough, is it?

XENA (to Ares):

This is all *your* fault.

ARES (sighs):

Want me to follow them and--do something about it?

Xena stares at him thoughtfully.

DISSOLVE TO

An imaginary scene in Xena's mind's eye:

A field. Ares stares down the two Vikings who cower in fear. Ares throws a fireball at them, killing them on the spot.

A bell rings.

Sven and Ragnar stand before Ares, alive again.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena facing Ares.

XENA (shakes her head with resignation):

No.

DISSOLVE TO

The setting sun.

Pan down to another part of the riverbank. The camera pans over Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon, Sabina and Siran, who are sitting on the grass finishing a snack of some kind. Having made a full circle, the camera pauses on Ares. He is sitting on the ground leaning against the trunk of a tree, looking tired and defeated.

Xena finishes eating, gets up and walks toward Ares, squatting down next to him.

XENA:

Rough day, huh? It's almost over.

ARES:

You owe me for this one, Xena.

XENA (indignant):

I owe you! I wanted you to get the orb out of the way so I could do my job. Instead, you show up at the *worst* possible moment and--

ARES:

Oh, shut up and kiss me.

They both look up, obviously expecting the bell to ring. It doesn't.

Ares grins, then reaches out to put his arm around Xena's shoulder. Xena tenses slightly, then smiles and leans in toward him. They melt into a long kiss, then finally break apart.

XENA:

Well, it's time. (off his mischievous look) I mean, time to pass the orb over to the next lucky contestant.

ARES:

With pleasure.

He gets up and holds up the orb. Gabrielle looks up at him.

GABRIELLE:

All right.

She starts to get up, but Haimon rises abruptly and walks toward Ares.

HAIMON:

I'll take it.

Before Gabrielle can react, Haimon takes the orb from Ares.

GABRIELLE:

What are you doing? I thought we agreed that I was going to take the orb next.

HAIMON:

"We"? You mean, you and Xena. I don't recall anyone asking me.

Gabrielle opens her mouth, obviously about to make a sharp retort. She is cut off by Ares.

ARES:

Well, it's about time you let her know who's boss.

GABRIELLE (growls):

Watch it, Ares. Or--

Ares stands and is toe to toe with Gabrielle.

ARES:

Or else what? I can say whatever I please. No more bells--I don't have anything to worry about.

Ares turns and grins smugly at Haimon, not seeing Gabrielle draw her fist back.

GABRIELLE:

Yes, you do.

Ares turns back to Gabrielle and is caught on the jaw by her punch. He falls backward, landing hard on his back as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Ares sits atop a large boulder, slightly dazed as Xena checks him over.

ARES:

Ares, God of War, getting sucker-punched by the short preachy sidekick. It's all downhill from here.

XENA (smiling in bemusement):

You'll live.

ARES:

Reputation is everything, Xena. You should know that better than anyone. The moment your pesky little bard puts this in one of her scrolls--it's all over for me.

SABINA:

Today, God of War--tomorrow, Elijans are beating you up for your lunch money.

ARES (gives her a venomous look and gets up):

There's got to be a war going on somewhere that needs my help.

Blue light starts to flare up around him but Xena reaches out to touch his hand, and the light fades as he looks at her expectantly.

XENA (warmly):

Thank you.

Ares cocks an eyebrow at her, as if surprised, then suddenly clicks his fingers.

ARES:

Almost forgot. Want to know where to find your Vikings? (off Xena's expectant look) They've set up camp about ten leagues northwest of here--by a marble tablet in (clears his throat somewhat self-consciously) my honor.

SABINA (wryly, as if talking to herself):

They still have those around?

Ares zaps out without another word. Sabina shakes her head and snorts.

Haimon cradles the orb in his hands.

HAIMON:

I don't blame him for leaving.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, so now you're sticking up for him? (snorts) Suddenly, Ares is Mr. Sensitive!

HAIMON:

Well, have you ever stopped to consider what he might be feeling?

GABRIELLE (snorts):

I try not to.

XENA:

All right. Let's all calm down.

Xena takes a step forward and trips over an exposed tree root. Haimon and Gabrielle are glaring at one another. Haimon speaks before he notices Xena has fallen hard on her hands and knees.

HAIMON:

I mean, what makes Ares such a bad guy?

The bell rings. "Reset."

XENA:

All right. Let's all calm down.

Xena takes a step forward and again trips over the exposed tree root. Haimon and Gabrielle are glaring at one another and once again Haimon speaks before he notices Xena has fallen hard on her hands and knees.

HAIMON:

So Ares starts all those wars. It's just his job. He probably doesn't even enjoy it--

The bell rings. "Reset."

XENA:

All right. Let's all calm down.

For the third time Xena takes a step forward and trips, landing hard on her hands and knees. Haimon and Gabrielle are still glaring at one another.

HAIMON:

What I mean is that--

Xena glares menacingly at him. Gabrielle and Sabina watch Haimon nervously as he falters, searching for the right thing to say.

HAIMON (lame):

Ares and I understand each other...

Everyone but Siran pauses, waiting for the bell. Siran rushes over to Xena, helping her up.

SIRAN:

Xena, are you all right?

Xena waves Siran away, brushing off her hands and knees.

XENA:

I'll live.

SABINA (smirks):

Not if *he* can't learn to keep his mouth shut.

HAIMON (angrily):

Why don't you--

Xena glares at Haimon and takes a menacing step towards him. Gabrielle and Siran glance nervously at Haimon. Sabina purses her lips in humorous anticipation. Haimon thinks a moment and good sense finally prevails.

HAIMON:

Never mind.

The tense moment passes.

XENA:

Okay--so. We've got to find the Vikings, get the scroll back and get the orb to Ostia before the ceremony. And before someone gets stuck with that thing forever. We need a plan.

SABINA (casually):

By the way, I know where that marble tablet is. Siran and I passed it on our way here.

XENA (gives her an icy look):

Nice of you to tell us. (pauses) All right--Gabrielle, Haimon and Siran--you head for Ostia. Sabina and I will go after Sven and Ragnar.

GABRIELLE:

Are you sure? I think I should come with you.

XENA:

No. With that orb Haimon is defenseless. He needs someone to look after him in case you run into trouble between here and Ostia.

GABRIELLE:

But why can't Sabina--

Quick pan to Haimon, who shoots her an irritated look.

SABINA:

Because Sabina doesn't babysit goody-two-shoes sidekicks--or their boyfriends.

XENA:

Sabina knows where the Vikings are camping. That settles it.

CUT TO

Xena and Sabina walking down a road in the moonlight.

SABINA:

Isn't this liberating, Xena? No bell, no right and wrong or fear of repercussions. (she stretches dramatically) Your little sidekick is a preachy, sanctimonious little goody-goody with an overactive conscience. And I bet she's not even a real blonde. Now you can even say it. (she does a gleeful little twirl) Ah...Freedom!

Xena stops and looks at Sabina curiously.

SABINA:

What?

XENA (smirks knowingly):

You *have* changed.

SABINA:

And I thought Gabrielle was the unwitting dupe in your partnership.

XENA:

You can quit the act. If you were the old Sabina, it wouldn't even occur to you that it was wrong to say what you just said about Gabrielle.

SABINA (shakes her head tragically):

I *knew* hanging around those Elijans would bring me to a bad end.

XENA (curiously):

Why *are* you hanging around with that girl?

SABINA (gives her an amused look):

Are you still trying to figure me out?

XENA:

You don't make it easy.

SABINA:

Good.

XENA (thoughtful):

You could have been the Empress of Rome and you walked away. I still don't get it.

SABINA (laughs):

I told you the job came with a low life expectancy. And I was right, wasn't I? For a while there, they were changing emperors more often than their society women change husbands.

XENA:

That can't be the only thing. I could call you many things, but coward isn't one of them.

SABINA (after a moment's silence):

Xena--after all your years of conquering and leading armies, you never even got close to the kind of power I had within my grasp. All I had to do was reach out and take it. (sarcastic) Once you've left your role model in the dust, you know it's time to look for another line of work. Otherwise, things tend to get boring.

XENA (looks at her inquisitively):
Is that really the answer?

SABINA (gives her a wry look):
That's for you to figure out.

As they continue to walk side by side, Xena looks at Sabina and shakes her head with an imperceptible smile.

CUT TO

Gabrielle, Haimon and Siran at a crossroads.

SIRAN:
Which is the road to Ostia?

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):
I don't know.

HAIMON:
You should have gotten directions from Xena before she took off with Sabina.

GABRIELLE (affronted):
Well, you were there. Why didn't *you* ask her?

HAIMON:
I thought Xena put you in charge of this operation. Getting directions should have been a part of *your* job description.

The bell rings. "Reset."

GABRIELLE:
Well, *you* were *there*. Why didn't you ask her?

Haimon throws up his hands in a "hands off" gesture.

HAIMON:
Far be it from me to come between old friends.

The bell rings. "Reset." Gabrielle rolls her eyes, sighs and mutters her line automatically--quickly and without emotion.

GABRIELLE:
Well-you-were-there-why-didn't-you-ask-her?

Haimon reddens and ducks his head..

HAIMON:
I forgot...

SIRAN:

So which way do we go?

Haimon and Gabrielle glance at one another, both unsure. Finally, Haimon takes the orb out of his pocket and studies it a moment. His look turns to resolve and he starts down the closest road.

HAIMON (pointing):

This way.

The bell rings. "Reset" to Haimon standing back at the crossroads, holding the orb. Without batting an eye, he starts down the second road.

HAIMON:

Make that *this* way.

They continue to walk and Gabrielle looks over her shoulder. Haimon notices and frowns.

HAIMON:

Looking for Xena?

GABRIELLE:

No...I... (she sighs) It's just that she's been so crabby over this orb thing. And she *is* with Sabina...

HAIMON:

So that's why you wanted to go with her. You're afraid that when she catches up to Sven and Ragnar she might do something she'll regret.

Quick pan to Siran who is considering what Gabrielle has said and is obviously troubled.

GABRIELLE:

Well-- (she falters)...

HAIMON:

So Xena has no idea about right and wrong and it's your job to tell her?

Gabrielle turns to face him.

HAIMON:

I'm sure after all these years she can figure it out for herself.

GABRIELLE:

Are you saying she doesn't need me?

HAIMON:

You're twisting my words. I just mean that maybe you've got an inflated sense of your own importance--.

The bell rings. "Reset" to Gabrielle facing off with Haimon.

GABRIELLE:

Are you saying she doesn't need me?

HAIMON (curiously):

Is that what this is *really* all about?

The bell rings. "Reset" to Gabrielle facing off with Haimon.

GABRIELLE:

Are you saying she doesn't need me?

Haimon opens his mouth to speak but clamps his mouth shut. He thinks a moment and takes a deep breath, speaking slowly as if exerting great patience.

HAIMON:

I'm just saying that I have faith in Xena.

Gabrielle studies him a moment, deciding whether or not to continue the argument. Finally she nods.

GABRIELLE (unconvinced):

Great...then we both agree... (she turns) Now let's get moving. We've got to make it to Ostia by tomorrow evening.

Gabrielle starts walking down the road.

HAIMON:

Wait a minute.

She stops and turns back.

HAIMON (looking around):

Where's Siran?

CUT TO

Xena and Sabina crouching behind a rock, observing Sven and Ragnar seated before a camp fire. A large marble tablet is visible behind them.

RAGNAR:

Sigmund or herring?

SVEN:

Herring, of course!

RAGNAR (thinks a moment):

Thor's hammer or a troll?

SVEN (rolls his eyes):

Too easy. A troll.

SABINA:

What are they talking about?

XENA:

I have *no* idea. And for once--ignorance is bliss.

SABINA:

Well, they were able to get a fire started. I would have bet against that. (she glances at Xena) So what's the plan?

Xena stands, draws her sword and marches straight into Sven and Ragnar's camp. Her lip is curled in an angry snarl.

XENA:

We don't need one.

Sabina leaps up and follows after Xena who strides into Sven and Ragnar's camp to stand between the two men.

XENA:

Hand over the scroll.

Ragnar stares, wide eyed. Sven clutches the scroll tighter.

SVEN:

Or else *what?*

SABINA:

I don't think there *is* an 'or else.'

CUT TO

Close up of Sven. He has a black eye and groans groggily.

RAGNAR:

I told you you weren't a god.

SVEN:

You let them get away.

Ragnar sighs. Both are silent a moment until his expression suddenly brightens.

RAGNAR:

Odin or reindeer?

SVEN:

Not now!

Ragnar's expression falls. He sits in dejected silence. Sven hears something and picks his head up, listening. Ragnar watches him curiously.

RAGNAR (whispers):

What is it? A wolf? The tall lady?

SVEN:

Warriors. (he cocks his head to listen) At least twenty. They've heard the tales of Vikings marooning the countryside and they've come to apprehend us. Well, they'll never take Sven the Invincible alive!

He leaps to his feet, fumbling to pull his sword. Before he is able to, Siran steps out into the light of the campfire.

SVEN:

The girl! (Sven's face lights up and he turns to Ragnar) Ragnar, are you thinking what I'm thinking?

RAGNAR:

I think so, Sven. But where are we going to find wooden shoes at this time of night?

CUT TO

A clearing in the woods. Dawn. Sabina is pacing impatiently around. Gabrielle and Haimon are sitting by a tree, looking glum and rather guilty. Xena is sharpening her sword.

SABINA (agitated):

How in the world could you just *lose* her and not notice?

GABRIELLE (wearily):

Sabina, we've been through this before.

SABINA:

Oh--and that makes it all right?

XENA (to Gabrielle):

Why are you so sure she wandered off? She could have been kidnapped.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

Xena--I...just know. (She pauses and then suddenly looks up at Xena, obviously struck by a thought) I think she went to find the Vikings--to follow you.

SABINA (baffled):

Why?

GABRIELLE (sighs):

It's--hard to explain.

Haimon raises his head and gives her a curious look.

HAIMON:

Well, then maybe those Vikings have her. All we have to do is track them down and--

Footsteps are heard. Sabina whips around, her sword at the ready. Standing behind them is a nervous-looking young villager.

SABINA:

What do you want?

VILLAGER (stammering a bit):

Sorry, ma'am--do you good folk have a missing friend named Siran?

SABINA (harshly):

What about her?

VILLAGER:

She's safe. I saw her with two...(pauses, looking for words) strangely dressed warriors.

SABINA (her anger rising):

Did you. (her hand on the hilt of her sword, she turns to Xena) Our Viking friends.

VILLAGER:

They sent you a message. If you give them the scroll and the other thing, the girl will be released.

SABINA:

Oh, really. Well, you take a message to *them*--

Xena holds out a hand, stopping her.

XENA:

Fine. Tell them we'll meet them at sundown--

Gabrielle and Haimon look up in shock. Sabina whips around.

HAIMON:

What?

SABINA:

Have you lost your mind?

GABRIELLE:

Wait. I'm sure Xena knows what she's doing.

XENA (resumes):

We'll meet them at sundown--in the same place where (she smiles crookedly) we met them last night.

VILLAGER:

Oh, one more thing. They said for only one person to come with the scroll and--the thing... (sheepishly) ...and it can't be the tall lady.

XENA (amused):

All right. It'll be him. (points to Haimon) Just tell them one thing: they *have* to be there before sundown.

VILLAGER (nods, relieved):

I sure will. Thank you, ma'am.

The villager walks away.

SABINA:

All right. So you know what you're doing. Would you mind enlightening the rest of us?

XENA (with a wicked grin):

They want the orb? They got it.

The camera pans over Haimon, Gabrielle and Sabina as their shocked look changed to one of dawning understanding, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Gabrielle sits alone on a riverbank, staring pensively into the water. Haimon approaches from behind with two apples.

HAIMON:

Hungry?

Gabrielle shakes her head and Haimon comes over to sit beside her.

HAIMON:

Are you all right?

GABRIELLE:

I'm sorry about letting Siran wander off.

HAIMON (snorts in disbelief):

So now you're listening to *Sabina*?

GABRIELLE:

Why shouldn't I? She happens to be right. Siran is the best person I know. And while I was busy trying to prove to everyone what a good person I was, I made her doubt Sabina so much that she ran off.

HAIMON:

Gabrielle, I don't think that's--

GABRIELLE:

You know, I look at Siran and I see myself all those years ago. Maybe that's why I've been acting so--smug lately. Maybe I've been trying to convince myself that I haven't changed.

Haimon reaches out and takes Gabrielle's hand.

HAIMON:

You *are* a good person, Gabrielle.

She smiles weakly.

HAIMON:

...and if anyone is to blame for Siran running off it's me.

Gabrielle opens her mouth to protest but Haimon holds up a hand.

HAIMON:

No, it's true. We've been fighting so much lately. And instead of protecting Siran we let her just walk off. That was my fault. You and Xena... (He looks away from her) I've been so threatened by your relationship with Xena that I... (at a loss, he trails off)

Gabrielle looks down at her hand held in Haimon's, saying nothing. After a long moment, he sighs.

HAIMON:

Anyway, I'm sorry.

Haimon stands and turns to walk away.

GABRIELLE:

I love you, Haimon.

She is still looking down and doesn't see him stop and spin back towards her, a look of shock on his face which he quickly masks. When Gabrielle finally gathers the courage to look up she sees Haimon smiling gently. He offers her an apple.

HAIMON:

Are you hungry?

She takes the apple and bites into it. Haimon looks out across the river.

HAIMON:

I love you too, you know.

GABRIELLE (nodding shyly):

I know...

Haimon leans down to kiss her. His lips barely brush hers and she pulls back.

GABRIELLE:

The bell--

HAIMON:

Would you just shut up and kiss me?

They kiss, slowly and tenderly.

DISSOLVE TO

The sun, which is now high in the sky.

A montage of images showing the sun advancing further toward evening.

DISSOLVE TO

The clearing with the tablet honoring Ares. It's late afternoon; the sun is about to set. Sven cautiously peers out from behind the tablet and then walks out into the clearing, sword at the ready. He looks around.

Haimon emerges from the trees, conspicuously carrying the orb and the scroll.

Sven's face lights up in triumph and he walks up to Haimon.

SVEN:

Well, that's better! (reaches out) Hand them over!

HAIMON:

Not until I know Siran is okay.

SVEN:

Don't you worry, the girl is safe. (trying to be menacing) For the time being. I don't know how much longer I can hold my friend back. He is a fierce one--a true Viking.

HAIMON (rolls his eyes):

Riiight. I'm going to see Siran now.

Sven tries glaring at him, but Haimon wins the staring contest, and Sven sighs and gives in.

SVEN:

All right.

He turns and walks toward the trees, Haimon following him.

After they are gone, Gabrielle emerges cautiously from the trees on the other side of the clearing. She is followed by Xena and Sabina.

SABINA (sighs):

I would *love* to make some chopped Viking tonight.

GABRIELLE (gives her an anxious look):

Sabina...

SABINA (shakes her head):

Don't worry. Siran wouldn't like it.

CUT TO

Another part of the woods. Siran sits on a tree stump, with Ragnar sitting at her feet.

RAGNAR:

...you don't say!

SIRAN (nods):

Every word is true.

RAGNAR:

So He isn't a sea god after all!

SIRAN:

We worship the God of Love as revealed to us through Eli's teachings.

RAGNAR (miserably):

I bet Eli didn't think stealing was right.

SIRAN:

No. But he taught that a contrite heart paved the way to forgiveness.

Ragnar's face brightens.

RAGNAR:

You mean if I said I was sorry--.

SIRAN:

...and promised to never again take anything that didn't belong to you.

RAGNAR:

I do! I do!

Sven appears with Haimon behind him.

RAGNAR:

Sven! Siran has been telling me the most wonderful story about her fish god--

SIRAN:

The God of Love.

RAGNAR:

Yes! The God of Love. He's not from the sea after all. And he thinks stealing is wrong.

SVEN:

Wrong? Wrong for some lily-livered God of Love perhaps--but not wrong for Odin and his Vikings! I deny anyone to challenge us and our right to take what we please!

RAGNAR:

I don't know, Sven. The way she was telling me about this fish-- (catches himself) about this love god, it sounded *really* nice.

Sven throws up his hands in exasperation.

SVEN:

Odin help me, this whole operation has been on my shoulders since the beginning. Steal the scroll, kidnap the girl, write the ransom note, get the orb. All *you* had to do was watch the girl.

He scowls at Ragnar, who turns away sheepishly, and turns to Haimon.

SVEN:

All right, you wanted to see the girl? Here's the girl. Now, hand over the scroll. Because I am running out of patience, and... (he strikes a pose) I am a Viking.

Haimon holds up his hands in an appeasing gesture. He glances at the sky, just as the last rays of sunlight fade.

HAIMON:

Okay, okay. (he offers the orb and the scroll to Sven) You know, not for nothing, but you're a little over the top with this whole Viking thing.

SVEN:

Hey! You're talking to Sven the Invincible.

In the background, Siran gets up and walks toward Haimon. With his back to her, Sven doesn't see her--he is too busy admiring the orb.

HAIMON (to Siran):

Are you all right?

SIRAN:

Yes, of course. (She smiles)

Sven walks triumphantly toward Ragnar and brandishes the orb.

SVEN:

With this, Sven the Invincible will *crush* his enemies!

The bell rings. "Reset": Sven now stands in the same spot where he stood before.

Sven looks around in consternation as Ragnar stares at him uncomprehendingly.

Finally, Sven takes a deep breath, then raises the orb again and walks toward Ragnar.

SVEN:

With this, Sven the Invincible will *crush* his enemies!

The bell rings. "Reset": Sven now stands in the same spot where he stood before.

With increasing bewilderment, Sven looks around. He looks suspiciously at Haimon, at Siran, and at Ragnar. Then he raises his finger ("I've got an idea!") and charges menacingly toward Haimon, brandishing the orb.

SVEN:

With this, Sven the Invincible will *crush* his enemies!

The bell rings. "Reset": Sven now stands in the same spot where he stood before.

HAIMON (raises an eyebrow at him):
Aren't you getting tired of this?

SVEN (affronted):
No! The night is still young.

HAIMON (shrugs):
Suit yourself.

Sven looks at him suspiciously, pondering his next move.

Just then, Sabina emerges from the trees. A look of relief is evident on her face as she sees Siran.

SABINA (with barely suppressed emotion):
Siran...are you all right?

Siran runs to hug her.

Xena and Gabrielle come out, following Sabina.

GABRIELLE:
Haimon! There you are. (smiles) Everything going all right?

HAIMON:
Exactly as planned.

Sven glowers at Xena.

SVEN:
Back for more, woman? Well, Sven the Invincible strikes again!

He charges at Xena.

HAIMON:
Uh--bad idea.

He stands in Sven's way and Sven slams into him.

The bell rings. "Reset." Sven is back in his place.

SVEN (to Haimon):
You dare to incite Sven the Invincible?

Clenching his fists, he advances on Haimon.

The bell rings. "Reset." Sven is back in his place.

SVEN (growing increasingly agitated):
You dare to indict Sven the Invincible?

Clenching his fists, he advances on Haimon.

The bell rings. "Reset." Sven is back in his place.

SVEN (bellows):

You *dare* to--

SABINA:

Somebody gag him or we'll be here for hours.

Sven stops and looks around, breathing heavily, very confused. He turns to Ragnar, as if looking for help. Ragnar shrugs helplessly and spreads his arms, as if to say, "What can I do?"

SVEN:

What--what in Odin's name is happening here? (understanding dawns on him) It's--it's this *thing*, isn't it? (He holds up the orb) It's cursed!

RAGNAR:

What did I tell you?

SVEN (to Xena):

Take it back!

XENA (shakes her head):

I'm afraid it's not that simple. There's only one way out of this for you--

CUT TO

A long shot of the Elijan temple in Ostia. The sun is low over the horizon.

A close-up of the front of the temple.

Sven comes into view. Breathing heavily, he runs up the temple steps, his face drenched in sweat. Behind him, Xena comes up. Sven stops and turns.

SVEN (panting):

Well? Hurry up, woman! We have to make it by sunset!

XENA (amused):

Don't worry, we have plenty of time.

SVEN:

You're not the one cursed with this thing for the rest of your life if we don't make it!

CUT TO

Inside the temple. A group of people in white robes are standing in a circle. Other people in ordinary garb crowd the temple as well.

The sound of chanting fills the temple.

The camera pans slowly over the crowd, toward the altar over which hangs a banner with a fish symbol on it. By the altar stands a medium-height, slender, white-robed woman who looks to be in her early forties, her brown graying hair pinned at the back of her head, her bearing simple but dignified. She is reading aloud from the scroll brought by Siran (her words cannot be heard over the chanting). Siran stands by her side. Among the people in the crowd we see Felix and Petronia, the Elijans from *Ashes to Ashes*.

Pan to Xena, Gabrielle, and Haimon standing at the front of the crowd, slightly apart from the Elijans in white robes. Next to them stands Sven, holding the orb in his right hand and his horned hat in the other. Sweat is rolling down his face; he is fidgeting and looking about nervously.

Zoom in on Sven as he leans toward Xena.

SVEN (in a loud whisper):

Are you sure the sun hasn't set yet?

As the chanting continues, the camera pulls back to show a white-robed girl of about fourteen walking down the aisle toward the altar, carrying a ceremonial chalice.

Zoom in on Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon and Sven.

The bell rings. "Reset":

The camera pulls back to show a white-robed girl walking down the aisle toward the altar, carrying a ceremonial chalice.

A slightly alarmed murmur goes through the crowd but is drowned out by the chanting.

Zoom in on Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon, who turn to give Sven a puzzled look.

Sven spreads his arms slightly and shrugs, as if to say, "I have no idea what I did!"

The girl reaches the altar and hands the chalice to the older woman, who takes a few sips and puts the chalice down on the altar. Then, she turns to Sven and holds out her hand, smiling graciously.

XENA (whispers):

You're on.

Sven gives a start, then walks toward the woman. The chanting stops.

Sven hands the woman the orb and she takes it. Breathing a huge sigh of relief, Sven backs away. He bumps into Xena and almost jumps.

FELIX:

My fellow Elijans, the new leader of our faith--Calpurnia!

The people assembled in the temple bow their heads in prayer. The chanting resumes.

Close-up on Sven as he breathes a huge sigh of relief and wipes his forehead.

Medium close-up of Xena, Gabrielle and Haimon as they exchange smiles.

DISSOLVE TO

Outside the temple. Sven comes out the door, putting the horned hat back on his head with a satisfied smile. He stops and looks around.

SVEN (raising his voice):
Ragnar? Where are you?

A stocky man in a white robe comes out of the temple. As the camera zooms in on him, we see that it's Ragnar.

RAGNAR (timidly):
Sven?

Sven turns and freezes, staring incredulously at Ragnar.

SVEN:
What in Hella's name happened to you, man? Why are you dressed like one of those sissies in there? (gestures toward the temple) *You* are a Viking!

RAGNAR (sighs):
Sven...I want to stay here. I really liked what that girl told me about their God. I want to be nice, like her.

SVEN:
Wimp!

He takes a swing and is about to slap Ragnar on the head; then he pauses and looks nervous, as if waiting to be interrupted by the bell. A moment later, obviously realizing that he's not under the bell's effect anymore, he brings his hand down and sighs.

SVEN:
Well, then--I guess I'll just have to go home by myself. If I ever get enough money for a boat.

RAGNAR (sighs):
I'll miss you, Sven.

SVEN (looks at him thoughtfully):
You know? Maybe I'll hang around here for a while. I bet there isn't one tavern in this whole town that serves real Viking food. Herring! Glogg! It'll be a big hit!

RAGNAR (eyes lighting up):
Now you're talking! Hey, I could help you out with that. (He pauses, suddenly looking dubious, and looks back at the temple.) If--if it's okay with their God, of course.

In the background, Xena, Gabrielle, Haimon and Siran can be seen coming outside the temple.

SVEN (growls irritably):
Are you a man or a sheep?

Ragnar looks at him and his face brightens.

RAGNAR:

Sheep! (Obviously thinking that he and Sven are back to playing their game, he pauses a moment) A Valkyrie or a goat?

Sven growls and slaps Ragnar upside the head.

In the background, we see Sabina approach. Siran runs toward her.

DISSOLVE TO

Dusk. A campfire in a clearing. Xena and Ares are sitting by the fire. His arm is around her shoulder.

XENA:

So what do you think? Is there a lesson in this story?

ARES:

Yeah. Beware Elijans bearing talismans.

Xena chuckles and squeezes his hand.

Pan to Gabrielle, Darion and Haimon coming out of a grove and toward the campfire. Gabrielle and Haimon are walking hand in hand, smiling.

XENA (thoughtfully):

Looks like Gabrielle and Haimon have learned a few things about getting along.

ARES:

Pity. I was just starting to like him.

Xena chuckles indulgently.

Gabrielle, Haimon and Darion approach.

XENA (looks up):

So. Everything all right?

GABRIELLE:

No problem at all.

DARION:

Gabrielle-- (zoom in on his face) why does Aphrodite have so many swimming instructors?

The camera pulls back as Gabrielle, Xena, Haimon, and even Ares exchange shocked looks, as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Ares' godly powers were not damaged during the production of this motion picture. Sadly, the same cannot be said of the Vikings' reputation.]