

Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 9



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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMP - BEFORE DAWN

It is a well-laid camp. A fire, banked to smoldering coals, glows mellowly in the darkness. Off to one side, a gold-colored mare twitches in her sleep, stamps one hoof, and swishes her tail before settling.

Closer to the fire, a large, rumped bedroll is laid out, and beneath the fur cover two figures lay cocooned tightly against one another. The smaller of the two figures shifts, then shifts again, pulling slightly away from the comfortable grasp of her partner.

Another groan and she flips onto her side. Green eyes pop open and scowl.

XENA

(fuzzily)

Wha...? What is it?



GABRIELLE

(grumpily)

Rock.

One hand darts from beneath the warm blanket and searches around the ground under the bedroll until the offending rock is plucked up and tossed away.

XENA

Better?

Gabrielle squirms around, feeling for more rocks with the length of her body. Finding none, she smiles, satisfied.

GABRIELLE

Much.

XENA

Good. C'mere.

Her smile broadening and her eyes closing, Gabrielle willingly snuggles back into Xena's warm embrace.

All is silent for a moment. Then....

Gabrielle's face twitches. She scrunches her nose, then brushes a hand against her cheek. Suddenly a sharp smack is heard, and Gabrielle once again opens her eyes, scowling.

GABRIELLE

Ouch.

XENA

You all right?

GABRIELLE

Tartarus blasted mosquitoes. Why don't they ever pick on you?!



XENA

(still sleepy)

'Cause you're a lot sweeter than I am.

GABRIELLE

You know, Xena? Any other night, that might work. But tonight?

She growls.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

It's almost dawn, and I've had an hour's sleep, if that.

Xena opens one eye.

XENA

We'll sleep in, then. Don't have anywhere we particularly need to be.



GABRIELLE

Easy for you to say. You
don't have mosquitoes
using you for target practice.

Xena grins.

XENA

C'mere.

As Gabrielle rolls back to her, Xena tugs the fur blanket up so that it is covering all but the very top of Gabrielle's head.

XENA

(cont'd)

Can you breathe all
right down there?

Gabrielle takes in a deep breath through her nose, smiling as she inhales the scent of leather and Xena.

GABRIELLE

(purring)

Oh yeah.

XENA

Good. Try and get
some sleep. I'll keep
mosquito watch.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP - A LITTLE AFTER DAWN

Gabrielle awakens abruptly yet again. Keeping her eyes closed, she attempts to determine what has disturbed her slumber this time. No rocks. No mosquitoes. A searching hand makes its way to Xena's side of the bedroll, only to find it empty. Not that this is surprising.

Finally, with a heartfelt sigh, she opens her eyes.

To find a rotten-toothed, ill dressed, unshaven, and stinking mass of humanity ogling her from above.

Grabbing her sais from the ground next to her, Gabrielle uses the butt of the left one to take the man's knee out, then quickly hops to her feet as he collapses onto the bedrolls.

XENA
(cackling)
Told ya!



The fallen man simply holds his knee and groans.

Gabrielle looks to her right to see Xena fighting four similarly disgusting bandits. Two more see her and head her way. She easily downs the first one with a right-left combination to the chest and a spinning kick to the head.

The second one, more cautious than his fellows, takes a little more time. After finally egging him into attacking with his sword, she catches the clumsy swipe with both of her sais, rips the weapon from his hands, drops the sais, and jabs two sets of fingers into his neck.

The man drops to his knees, breathless.

GABRIELLE

I was in a bad mood already, buddy,
and you just made it worse. So if
you don't want the last thirty seconds
of your life to be spent like this, I'd
suggest you tell me what I want to know.

Having finished off with her own set of scumbags, Xena looks on, arms crossed over her chest, clearly impressed.

BANDIT

Wh-what??

GABRIELLE

What in Tartarus are you doing here?
Saw two women sleeping alone in
the woods and what? Wanted
to invite us over for tea??



BANDIT

M-m-money! J-jewels!

Leaning back, Gabrielle laughs. It's not a very genuine laugh, but it's a laugh nonetheless.

GABRIELLE

Oh, buddy, did you ever pick the wrong camp! Do you see any jewels lying around here? Any money, for that matter?

BANDIT

(seriously short of breath)

P-please!

Gabrielle pretends to think about his plea.

GABRIELLE

I dunno. Xena....

BANDIT

XENA?!?



GABRIELLE

(grinning)

Didn't realize that either, didja?

(beat)

As I was saying, Xena, do you think I should take the pinch off, or should I keep the "stupid" genes from polluting the pool?

Xena smirks.

XENA

Your call.

Gabrielle pretends to think a second longer, then with lightning speed, undoes the pinch. The man falls forward, gasping for breath. Gabrielle grabs his shoulder and pushes so they are again face to face. She leans in close.

GABRIELLE

You might wanna leave now.
Before I change my mind.



With wide eyes, the man jumps to his feet and runs out of the camp. The rest of his buddies are all the worse for wear and limp after him, holding tight to various wounds.

Still smirking, Xena crosses the clearing until she is by Gabrielle's side.

XENA

Well, that was a refreshing
pick-me-up, don't you think?

Gabrielle growls.

Laughing, Xena pulls Gabrielle in close and kisses the top of her head.

XENA

(cont'd)

Sorry 'bout that. I keep warning
them to just stick with me,
but they don't wanna listen.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, well, could
you do me a favor?

XENA

Name it.

GABRIELLE

There's a coastal town not far
from here. Can we go there and
sleep in an honest-to-gods inn
tonight? I'm sick of rocks. I'm
sick of bugs. And I'm sick of
drooling, smelly bandits
interrupting my sleep. Please?

XENA

Sure.

Gabrielle pulls away slowly, disbelief evident on her face.

GABRIELLE

Sure? That easy?
No arm twisting?
No cajoling? No pleading?

Xena grins.

XENA

What Gabrielle wants,
Gabrielle gets.



FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. COASTAL TOWN - AFTERNOON

As coastal towns go, this one is pretty representative of its breed. The commingled scents of saltwater and gently rotting fish permeate the place. The wooden buildings are worn and warped and dull from the continuous wind and salt spray, but they seem in good repair for all the stress.

Coming by way of the main costal road, Xena and Gabrielle pass through large groups of sailors loading their heavy catches onto the docks, and past the long line of merchant ships unloading bright wares onto those same docks. The mood is loud and roughly-good-natured, but because they are women, they get their fair share of cat-calls and whistles from sex-starved sailors. They roundly ignore all of them as they push past the teeming tide of unwashed humanity looking for an inn.

The first one they come to is a seedy little dive with the charming name of The Third Leg. As they approach, the levered doors swing open and an obviously drunken sailor is tossed out into the mud.

From his ground level view, he spies two pairs of boots directly ahead, and allows his gaze to travel up two pairs of shapely legs, one set quite a bit longer than the other, then over two fabulous bodies. Completely missing twin icy stares directed his way, he jumps to his feet and brushes his hands off on his filthy gray pants, trying his best smile out for size. The fact that the two remaining teeth in his mouth have been reduced to blackened stumps makes the effect a less than attractive one.

SAILOR

Hello, la <hic> la <hic> ladies!
You look like a coupla fun <hic>
gals! Howsabout a drink?

Xena and Gabrielle bend back at the waist, fanning the air in front of their faces free of the toxic fumes of his breath.

GABRIELLE

Thanks, but... We'll pass on
that offer. Tempting as it sounds.



SAILOR

Awww, c'mon! Jes one?

Reaching out, the sailor clamps a hand around Xena's bracer. Xena freezes. Looks down at his hand. Looks up at him.

The sailor's grin widens.

Xena bares her teeth. She's not smiling.

The sailor's smile fades. He releases Xena's arm and takes a careful, wobbly, step back.

Then he notices Gabrielle again, and his smile reappears.

SAILOR

(cont'd)

How 'bout you, ho <hic>
honey? We could have a
good <hic> time, you an' me.

GABRIELLE

Not for all the dinars in Greece.

SAILOR

Oh, come on baby! Jes one.
Then you an' me can get better
ac <hic> ac <hic> familiar.

Stepping away from the man's reach, Gabrielle grabs him by the front of his dirty jersey and jerks him forward.

GABRIELLE

I am not your gal, I am not your
honey, and I am certainly not your
baby. Now buy a clue from the
merchant train and go away.

He tries another grab, which Gabrielle adroitly slips, and he winds up off balance and face to chest with the Warrior Princess.

Xena plucks him away from her breastplate by the back of his shirt and stares down into his beady brown eyes.

XENA

Leave.
(beat)
Now.



She emphasizes her command with a slight push, and the sailor stumbles away.

XENA

(cont'd)

Guess we can cross this
inn off our list, huh?



Gabrielle just gives her a look.

CUT TO:

EXT. COASTAL TOWN - AFTERNOON

Xena and Gabrielle move further into the town. The pickings are pretty slim. The inns that aren't seedy are full, and the ones that aren't full are little better than rat-traps filled with drunken, sometimes violent sailors fresh from the sea.

Xena can tell by the slight slump to Gabrielle's shoulders that she is becoming more and more dejected. Just as she is about to suggest giving up and trying another town further up the coast, they cross into a section of town that is clean and clearly affluent.

GABRIELLE

Xena, look!

Xena looks. Before her is a large, clean, well-made inn bearing the name The Headman's Inn. Looking like a temple to the Olympian gods, it is made almost entirely of marble. Large Corinthian columns stretch from ground to roof. Large balconies dot the façade on all sides.

To the right of the large, blue front door, a rather rotund man stands dressed in a costume strange to Xena's eyes. Deep navy pants are topped by some sort of matching coat that sports thick gold threadwork and matching tassels than hang from his shoulders. On his head is perched a blue, billed cap of a type Xena has never seen.

He smiles at her and touches white-gloved fingers to the shining bill of his cap, then turns away to speak to a young, well-dressed couple who approaches him.

Shifting her attention away from the strangely dressed man, Xena looks to the right of the large structure where a patio made from crushed stones of every hue holds a dozen or so small tables, each covered with fine linen. Each table is occupied by elegantly attired men and women who eat and drink of food that, by its very scent, must be second only to ambrosia in taste and quality.

Off to one side of the patio, a young, blonde woman clad in a flowing white gown plays a harp softly and with expert skill.

As Xena looks on, she knows that even one night in this fine establishment is well beyond their means. Gabrielle hadn't been joking with the bandit earlier, when she had told him that he had chosen the wrong camp to loot. Living a mostly vagabond existence gives them little in the way of funds for necessities, let alone the luxury this Inn represents.

With a soft sigh, she shifts her gaze to Argo's saddlebag, where the very tip of an exquisite bone-handled knife protrudes. It has taken her several months to carve the intricate details of a mermaid into the hilt to her satisfaction, and she had hoped, at the very least, to trade the weapon for new tack for Argo, and perhaps new boots for them both. Such a move she knows would be eminently practical.

One look at Gabrielle's shining face as she watches the diners, however, and practicality goes out the proverbial window. To see and keep that look on Gabrielle's face, Xena would gladly sell everything she owned. Reaching into the saddle, she pulls out the knife and wraps it in a soft, black cloth. She then lays a gentle hand on Gabrielle's shoulder, distracting her from her reverie.

Gabrielle turns, smiling.

GABRIELLE

Hey.

XENA

You ready to go inside?
Get a place for the night?

The smile fades.

GABRIELLE

(sadly)

Oh, Xena, I don't think we
could ever afford to stay in
a place like this. It sure
is pretty to look at, though.



XENA

You never know.
Let's give it a try, hmm?

After a moment, Gabrielle nods, and the two walk hand in hand toward the door. The strangely attired man gives them a smile, a short bow, and a tip of the cap before reaching for the door's heavy brass knob and opening it for them.

GABRIELLE

Thank you.

DOORMAN

My pleasure, my lady. Have
a wonderful stay with us.

CUT TO:

INT. HEADMAN'S INN - AFTERNOON

The Inn's interior décor is one of understated elegance. Subdued tapestries line the walls. The marble floors are covered here and there with exotic rugs from the East. Flowering plants and tall, leafy trees give a sense of the outdoors indoors.

From behind a long, dark-wood desk, a nattily dressed man looks up at their entrance and smiles.

CONCIERGE

Good afternoon, ladies.
How may I help you?

XENA

We'd like a room.



CONCIERGE

(brightly)

Well you've certainly come to the right place then! We have several rooms available. Each comes with a large, down bed, a balcony, a Roman bath, and all the amenities. Morning and evening meals are, of course, included.

XENA

How much?

The man's smile broadens.

CONCIERGE

Only thirty dinars.

GABRIELLE

Thirty...!

XENA

It's all right, Gabrielle.

Lifting the covered knife, Xena is only stopped by a voice that sounds behind her.

VOICE

(O.S.)

On the house, Milenteus.
These women are our guests.

Xena turns slowly, pinning the speaker with her eyes. He is a handsome, middle-aged man dressed with the same understated elegance that is present in the hotel. He smiles. It is a warm expression that reaches his eyes, chasing something darker, sadder, away. Standing, he bows to them both.

MAN

Welcome to The Headman's
Inn, Xena and Gabrielle.

Xena's eyes narrow.

XENA

We don't take charity
from strangers.

The man spreads his hands wide.

MAN

No charity intended, Xena. This
world of ours has far too few
true heroes. Those there
are should be honored.

Xena continues to stare at him, her disbelief and suspicion plain.

XENA

Who are you and
what do you want?



His smile still firmly in place, the man approaches slowly. There is nothing but warmth emanating from him.

MAN

I am Andros, the Headman of this town. And this is my Inn, aptly if unimaginatively named. And what I would like is for the two of you to stay here, as my guests.

(beat)

Please. Stay the night at least.

Xena still looks suspicious, but Gabrielle decides to take the man at his word. Smiling, she steps forward and clasps his hand.

GABRIELLE

Thank you, Andros. I think we'll take you up on your generous offer.

Andros shakes her hand warmly, smiling broadly.

ANDROS

Thank you, Gabrielle, for honoring us with your presence here. If you'll allow me, I will show you to your rooms.

Gabrielle looks to Xena who finally, reluctantly nods.



ANDROS

(cont'd)

Good! If you'll follow me?

CUT TO:

INT. INN ROOM - AFTERNOON

The door closes quietly behind Andros' retreating form, leaving Xena and Gabrielle alone in the large, well-appointed room. Gabrielle turns in a slow circle, her face bright with wonder and contentment.

GABRIELLE

Would you look at this place,
Xena? It's got everything!

Walking over to the bed, she runs a hand along the silken sheets, grinning like a madwoman.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Oh yeah. I'm gonna
loooooove this.



XENA

(preoccupied)

Mm.

Gabrielle straightens.

GABRIELLE

We're in a room most kings
would kill to have, and the best
you can say about it is 'Mm'?

Xena gives her a look, which she returns. Doubled.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Fine. You can grump around
all you want. I've got a
Roman tub calling my name.

Walking to the tub, she goes to her knees and places the marble plug into the drain. Then, shifting the lever that covers the spout, she moves slightly away as steaming water enters into the deep, tiled bath. Several jars of bath salts sit along the rim, and she opens each one, taking an appreciative sniff, until she finds the one she likes, and adds it to the water. The steam becomes fragrant with the scent of jasmine, and she inhales deeply, then sighs in pleasure.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Now this is living.

Coming back to her feet, she quickly divests herself of her clothing, then steps slowly into the deep tub, groaning in appreciation as the warm water soothes her tired muscles. Lowering herself onto a bench on the far side of the bath, she looks across the water at her partner, who is looking out the balcony door, her spine stiff, shoulders tense. She sighs.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Xena, can you just leave whatever's worrying you at the door for a few minutes and enjoy the bath with me?

I don't think we're in any immediate danger, do you?

Xena turns to look at her, then shrugs and walks to the bath. As Gabrielle looks on in appreciation, Xena strips off her armor and clothing, and steps down into the water.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

C'mere.

As Xena approaches, Gabrielle puts her hands on her partner's hips, turns her so she is facing away, then urges her to sit between her legs. Then reaching up, she begins to knead the tense muscles in Xena's shoulders.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Now, do you want to tell me why you're one big knot?



Silent for a moment, and truly enjoying the massage, Xena finally speaks.

XENA

It's Andros.

GABRIELLE

(surprisedly)

Andros? Xena, he's one of the nicest people we've met in a long time.

XENA

That's what's bothering me.

Gabrielle laughs.

GABRIELLE

Xena, that doesn't make sense... even for you.

Xena gives her a look over her shoulder, then turns back away.

XENA

I don't trust him. There's something he's not telling us. I can see it in his eyes.

GABRIELLE

Well, that's easy to fix. When we go down for dinner, you just use a little "Warrior Princess" persuasion, and bam! No more secrets.

That gets a reluctant chuckle from the Warrior Princess in question.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

That's better.
Now c'mon. Relax.



XENA

Can't.

Grinning, Gabrielle moves her head until her lips are right next to Xena's ear. Her hands disappear beneath the water.

GABRIELLE

(purring)

Are you sure?

XENA
Well....



Gabrielle laughs softly.

GABRIELLE
That's what I thought.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. INN PATIO - EVENING

The diners have changed, but the ambience remains the same. Soft strains of harp music float sweetly on the air to mingle with the sounds of muted conversation and cutlery striking against fragile bone china.

Xena and Gabrielle, freshly washed and looking much more relaxed, sit at a table in a quiet corner, beneath a flickering sconce that washes their faces with dancing light. An immaculately dressed man approaches their table and lays out their food and drink with professional aplomb.

His tasks complete, the waiter smiles, gives a small bow, and leaves them to their peace.

Gabrielle immediately digs in, then rolls her eyes back in pure pleasure.

GABRIELLE

(groaning)

Oh, Xena, this is
the Elysian Fields.

Xena tastes a bit of what's on her plate.

XENA

It's all right.



Gabrielle looks at her.

Xena smirks.

They settle into companionable silence and enjoy the feast laid out before them.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. INN PATIO - LATE EVENING

Chewing the last morsel of an awe-inspiring dessert, Gabrielle pushes herself slightly away from the table and leans back, contentedly patting her straining belly. Xena looks over at her, quirking a smile.

XENA

You ok?



GABRIELLE

If I were anymore all right, you'd be picking me up off the ground with a spoon. Xena, this has got to be the best meal I've ever eaten. And I've eaten a lot of meals!



XENA

(dryly)

Ya don't say.

GABRIELLE

(grinning)

I definitely do say.

Gabrielle allows her eyes to slip closed. Sleepy, sated, and content, she finds herself drifting on the currents of the music and soft conversation that surrounds her. In an often frenetic life, she welcomes the peaceful interludes when they come.

Xena gazes at her from across the table, a gentle, loving smile on her face.

After a moment, a movement catches the corner of her eye, and she turns in its direction to see Andros standing on the western edge of the Inn's elaborate portico, looking at the rising moon, his face haggard and seemingly ten years older than it was when she first saw him.

Her face thoughtful, Xena pushes herself up from the table and rounds it, coming to stand beside Gabrielle. Gabrielle's eyes open. She smiles.

GABRIELLE

Hi.

XENA

Hi yourself. I'm gonna go
check up on something.
Be right back.

Gabrielle's eyes follow the tilt of Xena's head to where Andros stands, still staring into the sky. She makes as if to rise.

GABRIELLE

I'll....

XENA

No. I can talk to him. You just
stay here and relax. Ok?

Xena squeezes Gabrielle's shoulder. Gabrielle covers Xena's hand with her own and smiles. Captivated by the smile, Xena leans over and presses a soft kiss to her cheek.

GABRIELLE

Ok.

XENA

Be right back.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORTICO - NIGHT

Andros stands in a shadowed corner, watching the moon as it rises over the low hills. He suddenly feels a presence beside him and nearly jumps out of his sandals as he turns to come face to face with the Warrior Princess herself.

ANDROS

Oh...!

You startled me.

(beat)

Is everything all right? Something
not to your satisfaction?

XENA

No complaints.

ANDROS

Oh. Well, good. I'm glad to
hear that. Is...there anything
I can help you with?

XENA

You might want to start with telling me what it is you're trying to hide.



Andros' eyes widen.

ANDROS

Hide? Xena, I assure you, I'm not hiding anything.

Xena slowly crosses her arms. One eyebrow goes up.

ANDROS

(cont'd)

I swear it to you.

He hesitates at Xena's continuing stare.

ANDROS

(cont'd)

P-private thoughts only, as we all do. Please, I only wish for you to enjoy your stay here.

XENA

Well see, that's where I have the problem, Andros. You're hiding something, and that's making my gut twitch. And when my gut twitches, I can't relax. And if I can't relax

A charged silence falls between them until finally, Andros' shoulders sag.

ANDROS

You know of Ikos.

XENA

It's an island near Crete. A haven for warlords, pirates and other scum.

ANDROS

My family is there.

XENA

Mm.

ANDROS

My wife and our two young daughters. They were captured by pirates and taken there against their will.

XENA

What happened?

Suddenly drained of his energy, Andros leans against one of the Corinthian pillars with his head touching the cold, unforgiving marble.

ANDROS

Two months ago, we began having trouble with pirates in this town. Especially the one who calls himself Igor the Black. Normally, even the worst pirates confine themselves to the outskirts, but these were moving inland, threatening citizens and causing a lot of problems.

(beat)

We have a militia here, and they're very good at what they do, but even they were overwhelmed.

XENA

Go on.



ANDROS

It was then that my wife received a message that her mother had taken ill and wasn't expected to live. I thought it best to send her and our daughters to see her. I thought it would keep them safe.

XENA

And it didn't.

ANDROS

No. I had sent five of my most trusted men to serve as their protectors. Only one returned. Near death. He'd been beaten, and stabbed, and ordered to deliver this message to me.

Reaching into the folds of his shirt, Andros pulls out a dirty, bloody, and much-handled scroll, which he hands over to Xena.

Unfurling the scroll, Xena reads the poorly worded message contained within. Her eyes widen slightly at the amount of ransom demanded. After a moment, she looks up, meeting Andros' steady gaze.

XENA

You can't afford what they're asking?

ANDROS

(very seriously)

Xena, my family is the most dear thing in all the world to me. I would pay those pirate scum their blood money if it meant I had to sell everything I owned and steal the rest. There's nothing I wouldn't do to ensure their return. Nothing.

XENA

Then where's the problem?

ANDROS

Delivering it. There isn't a ship's captain worth his salt who would go anywhere near that island, no matter how much money I offered. And the ones who would go, well, I'd never see the money or my family again.

XENA

I see your point.

ANDROS

I've been given three days to deliver the ransom. I bought a small pleasure craft that I plan to sail to Ikos myself. At least I'll be close to them, even if my plan doesn't work. It's all I can think of to do.

XENA
(thoughtfully)
Maybe not.

Andros looks at her, confused.

ANDROS
Have I missed something?

Xena smiles just slightly, more a quick twitch of her lips than anything else.

XENA
Not really. Gabrielle and I
might be able to help you.



ANDROS
What? No, Xena. No.
I could never ask....

XENA
You're not asking.
I'm offering.

ANDROS
No. No. Thank you.
But no. I couldn't possibly....

XENA
As I said, I'm offering.

She smiles. It is the smile of a predator; immaculate white teeth and flashing eyes. Seeing it, Andros is hard-pressed to keep a shiver from going down his spine.

XENA
(cont'd)
Let me talk to Gabrielle. We'll
let you know more in the morning.

ANDROS
But....

XENA
Goodnight, Andros.

And with that, she is gone, leaving him to stare after her in a mass of confusion and for the first time hopeful.

CUT TO:

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT

Gabrielle watches as Xena approaches, knowing from the set lines of her face that something interesting has just transpired. She gives Xena a smile as Xena approaches the table to stand beside her.

GABRIELLE

That took longer than I thought.



XENA

(distractedly)

Are you ready to go up?

GABRIELLE

Are you gonna tell me
what you guys talked about?

XENA

Yup.

GABRIELLE

Then I'm ready.

XENA

Let's go, then.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clad in a silken robe supplied by the Inn, Gabrielle sits on the comfortable bed. The down comforter is pooled in her lap as she watches Xena ritualistically divest herself of her weapons and armor.

When she is down to her leathers, Gabrielle pats the bed and Xena readily accepts the invitation. She climbs into the gigantic bed and slides over, settling down next to Gabrielle. Their bodies touch companionably along their lengths from shoulder to hip to ankle.

GABRIELLE

So. Tell me. What were you guys
in such deep conversation about?



Smiling slightly, Xena leans her head back against the wall.

XENA

Andros' family was kidnapped
by a band of pirates.

Shocked, Gabrielle sits up, turning to look directly at Xena.

GABRIELLE

Xena, that's horrible!
Are... are they still alive?

XENA

I don't know. They're being
held on Ikos. There's
been a ransom demand.

GABRIELLE

Dear gods. That's a horrible place!
My father used to threaten to ship
Lila and me there when we were bad.

Now it's Xena's turn to look shocked.

XENA

Nice father.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, well....



She shrugs.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Can't he afford the ransom?
He certainly seems rich enough.

XENA

He can afford it.
That's not the problem.

GABRIELLE

Than what is?

XENA

There's nobody around who's willing
to deliver it. Not who can be trusted,
anyway. He's planning on going
on his own tomorrow.

GABRIELLE

Xena, we can't let him do that!
He's a merchant, not a warrior!
They'll kill him and take the ransom
and his family will die anyway!

XENA

I know.

GABRIELLE

Well, I assume you told
him we'd help him out.

XENA

I did.

Gabrielle grins.

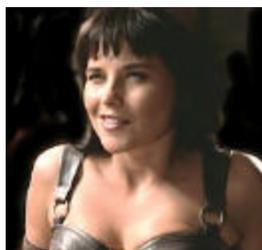
GABRIELLE

And the plan?

XENA

(smirking)

What makes you think
I'm gonna tell you?



Rolling her eyes, Gabrielle pokes Xena's chest with the tip of one strong finger.

GABRIELLE

You just better tell me.

XENA

Or?

GABRIELLE

Xena....

Holding up her hands, Xena gives in rather easily.

XENA

There's a cove to the north of here. Pirate ships often set in to offload their loot. There's a system of caves back there where they can stash their stuff until the coast is clear.

GABRIELLE

And you know this because...?

An eyebrow wings upward.

XENA

I was a pirate once, remember?



GABRIELLE

(drolly)

Oh, yes. How could I have forgotten? And the plan?

XENA

(casually)

Well, I figure we head up there tomorrow morning, scout the area, and when the time is right, hijack us a pirate ship and its crew and set sail for Ikos.

Gabrielle looks at her as if she's taken one two many sword blows to the head.

GABRIELLE

We're going to hijack...
a pirate ship.

XENA

Mm. Hm.

GABRIELLE

Pirates. Like hooks for arms, pegs
for legs, black patches where
their eyes used to be pirates?

XENA

Yup.

GABRIELLE

Knives between the teeth,
swords out the wazoo, walk
the plank kind of pirates?

XENA

Mm. Hm.

GABRIELLE

You and me. Against an
entire shipload of pirates.



XENA

Yup.

Gabrielle breaks out in a wide grin.

GABRIELLE

Good plan!

Xena can't help but let out the laugh she's been holding in, and gathers Gabrielle into her arms as she does so.

XENA

Have I mentioned lately
how much I love you?

Gabrielle pretends to think for a moment.

GABRIELLE

I dunno. You might have
to refresh my memory.

Turning Gabrielle's head just slightly, Xena lowers her own until their lips meet in a kiss that rapidly deepens into heady passion. When at last they break away, both are breathing heavily.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Whoo! That much, huh?

Xena grins.

XENA

Oh no. Much more.



They grin at one another like sappy fools for a long moment. Then....

GABRIELLE

Xena?

XENA

Yes?

GABRIELLE

If this is gonna be our last
night on land for awhile....

XENA

Yes?

GABRIELLE

Let's make it count.

Grinning even more broadly, Xena pulls Gabrielle against her.

XENA

(very softly)

Yo. Ho. Ho.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Gabrielle walks into the room, her arms piled high with clothing and stops, eyes wide in amazement and admiration.

There standing before her is Xena. Dressed in a flowing white shirt that comes in tight against her forearms and torso, a bright red sash wrapped around her waist, and tight black leather pants, she is a vision to Gabrielle. A fancy-hilted saber hangs from a belt at her waist, knives are tucked into the high tops of her shiny, black boots, and her hair flows wild and free over her shoulders.



GABRIELLE

Whoa.

Grinning, Xena spreads her hands.

XENA

You like?



GABRIELLE

I think you should keep it after this is all over.

XENA

Think so, huh?

GABRIELLE

Oh yeah.

Chuckling softly, Xena walks to where Gabrielle is standing.

XENA

So, what do you have here?

GABRIELLE

Makings of my pirate costume... I think.

XENA

Let's see.

Plucking the silken fabrics from the stack in Gabrielle's arms, she grins.

XENA

(cont'd)

Oh yeah, I think these
will work just fine.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - ONE CANDLEMARK LATER

Gabrielle stands open-mouthed in front of a mirror propped up in one corner of the massive room. Her upper body is draped in several lengths of colorful silk that look as if they're only being held up by a wing and a prayer to the gods. They're actually much more secure than that, and will allow her to fight without worry of overexposing herself, but the whole effect is somewhat... different to her eyes. Her lower half is sensibly covered, and her weapons are near to hand, but still....



After several false starts, she finally manages to find her voice.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

XENA

Mm?

GABRIELLE

You're a pirate, right?

XENA

(drawling)

Yes....

GABRIELLE

And I'm supposed to be... what, exactly?



Coming up behind Gabrielle, Xena puts an arm around her waist and pulls her tightly against her.

XENA

You are the pirate's most valuable treasure.

GABRIELLE

You mean I'm booty.

Xena pulls back just enough to examine the silk-clad body part in question.

XENA

You might say that, yes.

GABRIELLE

This is payback for Rome, isn't it?

Xena contrives to look shocked.

XENA

Would I do that to you?

Gabrielle's eyes answer that question better than her lips ever could.

Grinning, Xena hugs Gabrielle, then releases her. Her face sobers.

XENA

(cont'd)

The truth is, the sea still gets to you. And if you should get sick, your absence from my side would be difficult to explain if you were an experienced pirate.

Thinking on Xena's words a moment, Gabrielle finally nods.

GABRIELLE

You're right. Not that I'm thrilled about it, but you're right.

XENA

(seriously)

Well, is there some other way you can think of to work this?



Gabrielle thinks again, then shakes her head.

GABRIELLE

No, you're right. A seasick pirate isn't exactly the look we're going for.

XENA

Not really, no.

GABRIELLE

Well... do I at least get to fight, if it's needed?

Xena grins and gently pokes an area of exposed skin.

XENA

Do I look like the type who enjoys having wimpy little body slaves hanging around?

GABRIELLE

Hm. There might be some perks to this job after all.

XENA

I figured you'd see it my way eventually.

GABRIELLE

(warningly)

Just remember....

XENA

I know. I know. Paybacks.

GABRIELLE

Heh.

CUT TO:

INT. INN RECEPTION AREA - MORNING

The reception area is empty save for the Concierge, who gives Xena and Gabrielle a polite smile as they enter.

Andros then enters through a side door, half carrying/half dragging a heavy golden chest behind him. He gives them both a broad smile.

ANDROS

Xena! Gabrielle! You're both looking... um....

Gabrielle laughs.

GABRIELLE

That's ok, Andros. We're pretty much used to that reaction no matter what we're wearing.

Returning the laugh, Andros drops the chest with a grunt of relief.

XENA

We won't be needing that.

ANDROS

Excuse me?

Xena points to the chest.

XENA

I assume that's the ransom.



ANDROS

Yes, it is, but....

XENA

We won't be needing it.

ANDROS

But how...?

Gabrielle approaches Andros and lays a hand on his wrist. She smiles.

GABRIELLE

Andros, these men stole your family. Do you really think they deserve a reward for that?

ANDROS

No, but....

GABRIELLE

Keep the money. Give it to someone who deserves it.

ANDROS

You deserve it. For all you're doing for my family.

XENA

No.

ANDROS

But....

GABRIELLE

Andros, give it to someone who needs it. Surely there are poor people in this town who could use this money. We've seen them when we were walking through.

ANDROS

Well, I suppose I could....

GABRIELLE

Good.



Giving his wrist a final pat, she steps away.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

We'll see you soon, all right?
Spend the time getting ready to
give your family the best welcome
home this town has ever seen.

With a final grin, Gabrielle collects Xena, and they both leave the Inn.

Andros just stands there. Staring.

CUT TO:

EXT. COVE - LATE AFTERNOON

The quiet inlet directly abuts the sea. High cliff walls tower above the surf, and deep caves dot those cliffs. The area is inaccessible to all but the heartiest of seamen and one determined Warrior Princess.

Safely hidden behind a rocky outcropping, Xena and Gabrielle look on as a small group of pirates unload wooden chests of treasure from a boat they've rowed to shore. A large PIRATE SHIP waits out at sea, bobbing in the violent surf that rams itself again and again against the towering cliffs, sending up milky curds of white foam.

The pirates carry the heavy treasure chests to a cave a short distance away from the rocky shore.

XENA

Looks like that's
the last of it.

Gabrielle watches as the men, five in all, emerge from the cave and wipe the sand from their bodies. The largest pirate is a heavy man dressed in colorful silks and sporting an eye patch. He grabs something from his belt, then holds his fist out. The others gather around nervously.

GABRIELLE

What are they doing?

XENA

Drawing lots.

GABRIELLE

For what?

XENA

(grimly)

You'll see.



On cue, all the men open their hands. One of them, a tall, skinny fellow, turns white behind his heavy beard. He makes a desperate run for the waiting boat, only to be hauled back by his mates. Eye patch draws his sword and with the others holding the unfortunate struggling pirate by the arms, plunges it into his unprotected belly.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

By the gods... Why?

XENA

The pirates around here are a superstitious lot. They know that any gang with a ship brave enough to withstand the tide can come along and steal their treasure. So they kill one of their own and leave his ghost to guard the loot. No one will come as long as they see the body.

Looking a little green, Gabrielle turns away as the dead man is dragged back to the caves.

GABRIELLE

That's... Gods.

Xena gently rubs Gabrielle's back as the young woman takes in deep breaths of the misty salt air. After a moment, Gabrielle turns back, her color somewhat restored.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Now what?



XENA

They'll go back out to the ship
with the tide. And when they
do...we'll be waitin' for 'em.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. INLET - NIGHT

The four remaining pirates jump into their boat. Two man the long oars as the other two take seats in the bow and stern. Gradually, the boat pulls away from the shore toward the darkened hulk of the pirate ship awaiting them.

They get perhaps five boat lengths out when a hand comes up out of the water and pulls the pirate sitting on the bow backwards. The splash isn't heard over the roar of the crashing waves, and his presence isn't immediately missed.

A second later, the pirate at the stern disappears in a similar fashion.

This time the oarsmen react, stopping their rowing and straightening on the planks that serve as their seats. Simultaneously, their oars are ripped from their hands and they find themselves becoming one with the ocean as the butts of those oars clout them across the head, toppling them over the side.

Silently, Xena and Gabrielle hoist themselves into the boat and grab the oars to prevent them from floating away on the tide. They look at one another grinning, and settle down to row.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIRATE SHIP - NIGHT

Xena privately thanks the darkness as two hooks come barreling down from the pirate ship. Torches set into the ship's rails are too far away to pick out their features. In concert, Xena and Gabrielle grab the hooks and attach them to the carved loops at the bow and stern. Xena gives a long wave over her head, and the boat is slowly raised from the water.

XENA
(softly)
You ready?



GABRIELLE
As I'll ever be.

Xena grins.

XENA

Let's go, then.

As soon as the boat comes even with the ship's rail, Xena stands and draws her sword. The waiting pirate blinks stupidly as the face revealed by the flickering torchlight isn't the one he's expecting. He goes down like a sack of turnips as Xena drives the pommel of her sword into his jaw. Shouting her battle cry, she vaults over the railing, sword flashing.

Gabrielle enters more sedately, simply stepping onto the deck before loosening her sais. She straightens in time to see two huge pirates lumbering toward her, wickedly curved swords drawn and ready for action. Standing perfectly still, she gives them her best smile, and a rather flirtatious wave for good measure.

GABRIELLE

Hello, boys.

Both men come to a skidding stop and ogle her not-quite-clad body. Leers spread over their unshaven faces, and they begin to approach, more slowly this time.

PIRATE #1

Come to papa, you
comely wench. I'll... oof!

The first man goes down quickly from a sai butt to his massive belly. The second quickly follows from a spinning kick to the jaw.

GABRIELLE

Sorry, boys. There's
only one person who
can call me 'wench'
and you're not it.

With a little waggle of her fingers to the woozy pirates, Gabrielle darts off in search of more trouble.

CUT TO:

EXT. DECK PIRATE SHIP - XENA'S POV - NIGHT

Xena steps her way over downed and bleeding pirates until she is standing on the steps to the forecandle deck. A large, well-built, and expansively dressed man, obviously the PIRATE CAPTAIN, mans the wheel.

XENA

This is my ship now,
Captain. Turn over
the wheel, or die.

The Captain throws back his head in laughter and draws his sword from the bright sash around his middle. He steps away from the wheel as Xena darts up the steps, and the two clash in the middle. The Captain is strong, fast, and an expert swordsman. Sparks fly as swords strike one another again and again, their echoing clang heard over the crashing of the waves.

Xena laughs, delighted at having such a worthy opponent, and spins away as he attempts to cut into her side with a wide sweep of his cutlass. He turns with her, but is a step too late as the edge of her sword bites deep into the meat of his thigh.

PIRATE CAPTAIN

(growling in pain)

You die now, wench!

XENA

(laughing)

Guess again, 'Captain'.

Again, Xena darts out of range, laughing as his desperate, enraged lunge misses. Swords clash again, then lock. The Captain uses his greater weight to bear down on Xena. She lets him think he's winning, then pushes him away and clouts him across the jaw with the pommel of her sword. He drops to his knees, gasping. Xena grabs his hair and yanks his head back, staring deep into his dark eyes.

XENA

You've lost. Swear
fealty to me or
swim with the fish.

PIRATE CAPTAIN

Never!

With a grunt, Xena grabs his heavy bulk and tosses him over the side. He screams until he hits the water. Then nothing is heard but the pounding surf.

Gabrielle runs up onto the forecastle deck. Xena grabs her around the waist and pulls her in tight, eyes sparkling wickedly, grin as feral as any predator's. She turns and her gaze out over the deck and the injured pirates who are just now picking themselves off of the hard wooden planks, groaning and holding tight various injuries.

XENA

Seems there's been a
management change boys.
Play nice, and we'll
get along just fine.

Silence. Then...

CABIN BOY

Who... who are you?

XENA
(grinning wickedly)
Me? I'm Xena.



CUT TO:

INT. PIRATE SHIP - MAIN DECK - NIGHT

Torches blaze as Xena walks along the line of thirty pirates all standing at attention. Her gaze is as cold as the ocean below as she stares down each man, straightening a sash here, checking the sharpness of a sword there.

Several of the men scowl after she passes by, but none of them have a chance to do any more than that as they are reminded of their place by a smiling blonde with an affinity for sais and a definite ability to use them.

Finished with her inspection, Xena moves to stand before the men, Gabrielle at her side. She smiles.

XENA
Instead of cursing me, you
should be thanking me. I
am soon going to make
all of you very rich men.

There is a long moment of silence, broken only by the shuffling of feet on the deck. Finally, one pirate, a giant with a flowing blonde beard, gathers up enough courage to speak.

BLONDEBEARD
How you gonna do that?

Xena's smile cranks up a notch. All of the men notice that it doesn't reach her eyes.

XENA
We're sailing for Ikos.



The men shout out their disbelief and displeasure in colorful language, each louder and more vehement than the last until it appears that they're on the verge of an all-out mutiny.

Gabrielle calmly reaches over, detaches the chakram from Xena's hip, and tosses it. It sails just over the heads of the men, caroms off the mainmast, clangs against the torch brackets one at a time, hits the mainmast again, and sails back into Gabrielle's hand. She smiles and replaces the weapon as the ship becomes deathly silent.

Xena tips Gabrielle a wink then turns her attention back to the pirates.

XENA

(cont'd)

As I was saying, we set sail for Ikos.
I think it's time Igor the Black got a
taste of his own medicine. And I think
you're just the crew to give it to him.

The pirates shuffle their feet again, none quite daring to speak up. Several cast furtive looks in Gabrielle's direction. She grins at them, wagging her fingers.

BLONDEBEARD

What's in it for us?

XENA

Once Igor is out of the
way, all the loot you
can carry is yours.

The men stare at her, open-mouthed. What she's just proposed is unheard of among pirates. Captains always get a cut of the booty.

GABRIELLE

(helpfully)

Every last dinar.



A pirate with a hideously scarred face and missing fingers on his left hand steps forward.

SCARFACE

All the dinars in the world won't
be no good if we're dead. Nobody
gets on that island without the
Black's permission. Everyone
who ever tried it is dead.

Xena smirks.

XENA

There's a first time
for everything.

SCARFACE

Not for me, there ain't.
You're crazy.

He turns to face his fellows.

SCARFACE

(cont'd)

C'mon, ya lillylivers! There's thirty
of us against two of them! Let's
take 'em and be done with it!

Xena holds up a hand. The men freeze in place.

XENA

Never let it be said that Xena of
Amphipolis is an unfair woman.
You all have a choice. You can
either come with me and make
yourselves rich beyond your
wildest dreams. Or...you can
join your former Captain
and feed the sharks.

With a growl, Scarface turns to her and draws his sword. Laughing, Xena draws her own and with two quick moves, his sword is fluttering overboard and hers is at his throat.

Xena looks casually into the glittering, hate filled eyes of Scarface, then past him to the rest of the crew.

XENA

(cont'd)

So, what's it gonna
be, boys? Yes...

She pushes the tip of her sword into his neck just hard enough to draw a droplet of blood.

XENA

(cont'd)

Or no?

The men look at one another and shrug.

BLONDEBEARD

XE-NA!

CREW
XE-NA! XE-NA! XE-NA!

CUT TO:

INT. PIRATE SHIP - MAIN DECK - DAY

The main deck of the ship is dotted with groups of men who diligently go about their appointed tasks. One man stands high in the crow's nest, on the lookout for other ships. Others man the sails, turning the wenches that wind the thick ropes onto the spools. Still others mend sailcloth, make ropes and repair nets.

Blonde Beard, First Mate, walks among the men, shouting out orders left and right.

BLONDEBEARD

Avast ye landlubbers! Stop swingin'
the lead or by the sake of the
gods, I'll keelhaul ya myself!

A group of six men ignore the warning, standing near the stern and talking among themselves while making it look as if they are repairing netting. So intent on their conversation are they that they don't see a slight, blonde shadow that eases its way closer to their position.

Others notice, however, and pay the price. One pirate, so captivated by the way that the wind plasters the gauzy material of Gabrielle's top to her body, walks into the rail and almost flips into the drink. He's saved at the last moment by a rough hand to the back of his vest, to the general laughter of his fellows.

Another pirate, enjoying the same view, gives himself a concussion by walking directly into the giant timber that makes up the mizzenmast. More coarse laughter follows this.

SCARFACE

(to his fellows)

Bilge rats, the lot of 'em, bendin'
over for a woman. Give me
the wheel, and I'd clap em all
in irons and tie her to the
mizzenmast and flay her alive.

The men around him grumble, mostly in agreement.

SCARFACE

(cont'd)

I'm not goin' down without a fight,
I'll say that. All the gold in the world's
not worth my skin. We're pirates.
We can get all the loot we want
anywhere. I say we take our ship
back and knock some sense into
those yellowbellied scallywags.

PIRATE

But how? She's already
beaten us once!

Scarface smiles, showing all three of his remaining teeth.

SCARFACE

I'll tell ya how.

The men's heads bend closer together. The blonde shadow listens for another moment, a smile growing on her face before she silently glides away, leaving the men none the wiser.



CUT TO:

INT. PIRATE SHIP - MAIN DECK - EVENING

The evening wind has picked up a pace, and the ship bounds and rolls over the increasing waves. The pirates, well used to rough seas, tend to their tasks with one eye as the other watches the unfolding drama taking place by the wheel.

Xena stands at the wheel, expression stoic, eyes staring straight ahead. Gabrielle stands facing her, face curd-white with a definite greenish tinge. Her hands underscore whatever point she is trying to make, though Xena's expression doesn't change.

The ship rolls and yaws wildly courtesy of a gigantic wave. Gabrielle falls into Xena and clings tightly to her as the ship finally, slowly, rolls back to an upright position. Xena's eyes soften just slightly as she looks down at Gabrielle, then harden once again as she shrugs off her soulmate's grip.

Gabrielle steps back, and as the ship rocks under the force of another wave, she puts a hasty hand over her mouth and runs for the rail.

Hidden in the shadows, Scarface grins nastily and nods to his compatriots.

CUT TO:

INT. JUST OUTSIDE SHIP'S CABIN - NIGHT

Scarface and two of his cohorts stand just outside the door to Xena's cabin. All are armed and one bears a torch which crackles in the humid silence of the enclosed space.

SCARFACE

(whispering)

Stay right here and guard
the door. I'll call you
when I'm done.

The men nervously look around.

PIRATE #1

(whispering)

What about the captain?

Scarface sneers.

SCARFACE

She's no Captain and you'd do
best to stop calling her one or
I'll send ya over the side myself.

PIRATE #1

Fine. Xena, then. If she
comes down here....

SCARFACE

She's not coming down here, ya
yellowbellied bilge rat! She's
manning the wheel. Besides,
did it look like she cared about
the little wench's wellbeing to you?

The men consider for a moment, then shake their heads 'no'.

SCARFACE

(cont'd)

Right... so just mind my orders
and man the door. And if you
even think of leavin' your post....

PIRATE #2

Just remember you promised us
a piece when you were through.

Scarface draws a dagger from his sash and presses it against Pirate #2's neck.

SCARFACE

Don't you be remindin' me
about keepin' my word, Talbat.

TALBAT

N... no, sir. I mean yes,
sir. I mean....

SCARFACE

Shut up. You just do as
I say, and I might even
let ya have seconds.

The men laugh lecherously.

Scarface nods to them both, silently opens the door, and slips inside. The men strain to peer into the room, then back off when the door is closed in their faces.

CUT TO:

INT. SHIP'S CABIN - NIGHT

The interior of the small cabin is dim with one small, guttering torch casting a shadowy light over the boxes and scattered possessions of the two women who share the room. It is dominated by a large hammock that bisects the cabin down the middle; a hammock which is currently occupied by a deeply slumbering Gabrielle. The top of her head is the only thing visible over the thick fur covering the rest of her body.

Scarface fancies he can smell sickness in the room despite the small porthole that is open admitting the fresh, ocean-scented breeze. He smiles. It's a supremely nasty expression.

Hefting his dagger, he slips forward while loosening the tie that keeps his trousers up.

Just as he is about to reach the hammock, he hears a rich, almost friendly voice directly behind him that stands the hackles behind his neck on end.

XENA

Didn't anyone ever teach
you that it's rude to enter
a lady's room uninvited?



Growling, Scarface turns, dagger at the ready. The movement causes his pants to puddle down around his ankles.

Unarmed, Xena stands with her arms crossed. Her eyebrow rises as she flicks her gaze down, and then back up again. She smirks.

XENA

(cont'd)

Seems that we have a ...
tiny ... problem here.

Scarface growls and draws the dagger back, only to be stopped once again; this time by the very sharp tip of a very pointy sai pressed between his shoulder blades.

GABRIELLE

I wouldn't.

He spins back toward the hammock, scowling as he finds a very hale, very hearty and very wide awake Gabrielle smirking at him.

SCARFACE

YOU!!

GABRIELLE

You were expecting
someone else?

SCARFACE

GRAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!!

He thrusts the dagger forward in a strong lunge. Gabrielle easily counters it with the side of her hand to his wrist, but he stumbles from the force of her counterattack, tangling his feet in his pants. He goes down hard, landing on top of Gabrielle.

The hammock swings wildly, and tips them both out. Gabrielle lands hard on her back, her wind temporarily lost. Scarface seizes the advantage, hitting her with a solid blow to the jaw and preparing to finish her with his dagger.

He never gets the chance as he finds himself hauled bodily upwards by the back of his jerkin and tossed hard against the rear wall of the cabin. Before he can even blink, Xena is standing above him, eyes glittering murder.

Gabrielle gets to her feet, rubs at her jaw, and touches Xena's back to let her know she's all right.

XENA

I think we need to learn a little
lesson on the dangers of touching
other people's property without
their permission, don't you?

Scarface lets out a breathless little scream as he's once again hauled up and carried from the cabin. He looks down in time to see his cohorts slumbering peacefully on either side of the door, courtesy of Xena's fists.

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN DECK - NIGHT

Torches blaze as the last strap lands on Scarface's naked back. Groaning softly, he sags against his bonds, his legs barely strong enough to hold him upright.

Handing the flogger to Blonde Beard, Xena nods to one of Scarface's accomplices, who has regained consciousness just in time to see his leader receive his punishment. Shaking his head nervously, he tries to back away, only to be caught up by several pirates who stand behind him.

XENA

Do it, or you'll
be joining him.

Rather unsteadily, the pirate walks over and grabs hold of the rope handle of the seawater-filled bucket, hefting it. His nervousness causes some of the water to slosh over the bucket's sides, earning him a fierce glare from Xena.

XENA

(cont'd)
Do it.



Taking a deep breath, the pirate grabs the bottom of the bucket, tilts it, and tosses the cold water onto the striped and reddened back of Scarface who lets out one breathless scream before sagging in his bonds again, blessedly unconscious.

With a nod of satisfaction, Xena steps away from the beaten man and turns to face the remainder of her crew, eyes pinning each one of them to the deck.

XENA

(cont'd)

You have all learned a much
needed lesson in the
respect for property. This...

She holds out an imperious hand. Gabrielle closes quickly, sliding her hand along Xena's outstretched arm until she is caught and whirled in tight against Xena's body.

XENA

(cont'd)

Is mine. This....

She indicates the rest of the ship with her free hand.

XENA

(cont'd)

Is mine.

She indicates each man standing before her with a sweeping glare.

XENA

(cont'd)

You... Are mine. You live because I allow it. You breathe because it pleases me to let you. And if it pleases me to halt your breathing....

She smiles.

XENA

(cont'd)

I'll do that too. Am I perfectly understood?



ALL PIRATES

YES, CAPTAIN!

XENA

(cont'd)

Good. Now, I suggest that those of you who are off watch return to your bunks and get as much rest as you can. We'll arrive at our destination soon, and there is a great deal to do to prepare for our visit.

PIRATES

AYE, CAPTAIN!

BLONDEBEARD

Captain! About the prisoner?

XENA

Leave him there. He'll serve as a reminder to the rest about what it means to cross me.

BLONDEBEARD

Aye, Captain.

XENA

You have the wheel. Wake
me at dawn. We have a
full day ahead of us.

BLONDEBEARD

Aye, Captain.

Xena pulls slightly away from Gabrielle and takes her hand. The others studiously ignore the couple as they make their way along the deck and into the cabins beneath.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. MAIN DECK - MORNING

Several scenes of Gabrielle helping pirates measure out and cut lengths of dried reed they use in their daily tasks.

INTERCUT TO:

INT. MAIN DECK - MORNING

Xena sitting with another group of pirates, making rope.

INTERCUT TO:

INT. MAIN DECK - EARLY AFTERNOON

Gabrielle helping the men haul up bales of hay from a secure hold and tossing them onto the deck.

INTERCUT TO:

INT. MAIN DECK - AFTERNOON

Xena holding a sewing class. The men laugh as one of their fellows holds up a pair of breeches with the waist sewn shut and one of the legs sewn to his sleeve. Xena rolls her eyes and uses her breast dagger to cut the man free from his breeches.

INTERCUT TO:

INT. MAIN DECK - LATE AFTERNOON

Gabrielle helps haul out large pots of renderings and fish oils that the pirates use to waterproof the wood. All the pirates lean forward and crane their necks as Gabrielle bends over the pot. They all snap to pale-faced and sweating attention as Xena shoots them a look hot enough to sear their boots to the decking.

INTERCUT TO:

INT. CAPTAIN'S CABIN - EARLY EVENING

Xena and Gabrielle pull away from a deep kiss. Gabrielle lifts the bottle Xena's given her and waggles it. She tips her head back and mock-sips the clear liquid, smirking at the look Xena gives her.

With a kiss to the cheek and another waggle of the bottle, Gabrielle is gone, leaving Xena to stare after her with her hands on hips, shaking her head.

INTERCUT TO:

INT. MAIN DECK - EARLY EVENING

Gabrielle pours the liquid from the vial into a dipper of fresh water. Walking over to the groggily conscious Scarface, she tips his head back and holds the dipper to his lips. For a long moment, it looks as if he's going to refuse, but then his thirst gets the better of him and he drinks deeply from the dipper, then from a second that Gabrielle offers him. Even though he tried to assault her, her touch is gentle and her eyes compassionate.

Scarface snarls at her and strains against his bonds with what little strength he's managed to regain.

After making sure that he is unable to injure himself further, Gabrielle sighs and steps away.



INTERCUT TO:

EXT. CROW'S NEST - DUSK

PIRATE #5
LAND HO!!

CUT TO:

EXT. IKOS - DUSK

A lone man stands atop a high watchtower, bent forward at the waist and peering through squinting eyes out to sea.

LOOKOUT
Ship ahoy!!

Four men, grouped around the bottom of the tower strain forward, but are unable to see anything in the rapidly encroaching twilight.

HEAD GUARD
From where? Can you
get a make on it?

LOOKOUT
From the west!

There's a short pause as he holds a very primitive "seeing glass" to his eye.

LOOKOUT

(cont'd)

She bears the marks
of the Buzzard's Wing!

The head guard sneers.

HEAD GUARD

That'll be Poxo Pete, that mangy cur.
I warned him not to set one hair of
his louse-ridden skull near this island
again or I'd string him up to the nearest
yardarm and skin him alive. Double
check, now. Best be sure it's him.

LOOKOUT

Flyin' his colors, sir! His men
are at the rails, all armed!

HEAD GUARD

Fall out, then, ya scurvy dogs! Man
the long boats and take no prisoners!!
A hundred dinars to the man
who brings me Poxo Pete's head!!

With a loud cheer, fifty men bolt from their hiding places on the narrow strip of shoreline on the north side of the island. They drag ten longboats into the water and quickly fill them, then set out toward the slowly approaching ship.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEA, JUST OUTSIDE THE BUZZARD'S WING - NIGHT

The longboats bump up against the Buzzard's Wing's hull as the men aboard them ready themselves for action.

INVADER

Avast, ye white livered squids!
Yer trespassin' on Igor the
Black's property. Lay anchor
and prepare to be boarded!

There's a long moment of silence.

INVADER

(cont'd)

Last warnin', ya belly crawlin' wharf
rats! Drop anchor and prepare ta
be boarded!! All right then, you
lot! Over the side! Send
em all ta Davy Jones!

Hooting and hollering, several men jump onto the netting and scramble up the ship's sides. Others produce grappling hooks and board by climbing the ropes attached to them.

CUT TO:

INT. BUZZARD'S WING MAIN DECK - NIGHT

The invaders stream onto the deck, swords and daggers at the ready. With a shout, the first man plunges his sword through the belly of a pirate, then pulls it out and stares, slack jawed.

Another man neatly beheads a pirate with a clean stroke, then watches, wide eyed, as the head bounces and rolls to the mizzenmast, then stops.

Soon, all of the invaders are simply standing still, their weapons limp at their sides, eyes round in confusion and disbelief.

The leader makes his way through the "carnage", eyes as wide as any of his men.

LEADER

Damnation seize my soul!
What is all this?!?

INVADER

We been crimped, sir! These
are naught but straw dummies
someone made up fer fun.

LEADER

Crimped my arse! No bunch a
cowardly whelps hornswaggles me!
Poxy Pete is aboard this ship and
not one man will rest until we
find him! On your toes, men!

INVADERS

AYE SIR!!

CUT TO:

EXT. SHALLOWS - NIGHT

In the shallows, several reeds disappear into the water to be replaced by the heads of Xena, Gabrielle, and the crew of the Buzzard's Wing. Their faces are almost impossible to see, blackened as they are from generous applications of grease and fish oils.

BLONDEBEARD

(whispered amazement)
By thunder! If I wasn't seein'
it with me own eyes, I
wouldn't be believin' it.

He turns stunned eyes to Xena and Gabrielle.

BLONDEBEARD

(cont'd)
How...?

Gabrielle smirks.

GABRIELLE

(offhandedly)
Oh, just a little something
we picked up in Troy.



Xena rolls her eyes.

BLONDEBEARD

It's a thing o' beauty all right.
But what about Scarface?
He's sure to rat us out, the
henhearted numbskull.

GABRIELLE

(wider smirk)
I wouldn't worry about that.
It's nothing that a little
linseed root won't cure.

XENA

Let's get moving.

CUT TO:

INT. BUZZARD'S WING - NIGHT

INVADER

Sir! Over here!

The leader strides up the steps to the wheelhouse and looks down in the direction that his compatriot is pointing. There, bound and gagged and tied to the wheel, lies Scarface.

LEADER

Poseidon's Trident! Scarface?
What in Tartarus' bloody
deep are ye doin' aboard
this bilge-laden scow??

SCARFACE

Mmph! Mmmph!!

Reaching down with the tip of his sword, the leader cuts the gag from Scarface's mouth.

LEADER

Talk, ya scallywag! Ye
part of this tomfoolery?

SCARFACE

Theena! Theena! Theena
'id dis, neddlin' nitch!

LEADER

What? Speak like ya got a
tongue in yer head, ya damn
fool! I'm not understandin' ya!

Scarface struggles against his bonds, redfaced with anger.

SCARFACE

THEENA!!! The thole
goat and thwim to thore!
Height da Glack!

The leader looks at his fellow.

LEADER

Ye ken what he's
tryin ta say?

INVADER

Somethin' about
stealin' a goat?

SCARFACE

Goat! Goat!! GOAT!!

He swings his head in wild arcs, ostensibly trying to point to what he's talking about.

INVADER

(contemplating)

I think he's gone off his
nut. Lookit 'im foamin
at the mouth like that.

INVADER #2

Cursed by the gods, me
thinks. Bad one too, from
the looks of it, poor sop.

SCARFACE

THEEEEEENNAAAAA!!!!!!

The men step back in disgust as copious amounts of spittle fly from his lips, coating their boots, pantlegs, and the deck liberally.

INVADER

Best ta put him out
of his misery, no?

LEADER

Nay. The Black's been knowin
him since he was knee high to
a tadpole. Best leave him here
for now. Get on with the search!
I want Poxy Pete's head!

SCARFACE

(enraged)

THEEENAAAAAAA!!!!

CUT TO:

EXT. IKOS SHORE - NIGHT

Ikos is a rather barren piece of dirt and rock. A few wilted trees struggle valiantly against the prevailing winds, their roots sunk shallow in the gritty sand of the narrow strip of beach that surrounds the island. It is dominated by a tall, flat-topped cliff with sheer sides. At the top of the cliff, a huge walled fortress stands like a conquering hero surveying his newly acquired territories. A long, steep row of steps have been carved into the unforgiving, sun-bleached rock, and guards stand at every third step, torches blazing and weapons at the ready. It is the only entrance to the fortress.

Xena's group of thirty-one is surprisingly unseen as they make their way in small groups silently ashore, far away from the main fortress' main gate and its attendant guards.

Xena and Blonde Beard step off to one side as the others stand quietly in place, awaiting the next phase of the evening's festivities.

XENA

You know what to do.

BLONDEBEARD

Aye, Cap'n, I'm sure. Been
doin' stuff like this since I
was a wee guppy. We'll be
ready, no worries on that.

Xena nods.

XENA

All right, then. Good luck.

BLONDEBEARD

Fair winds to ya, Cap'n.
See ya soon.

The two shake hands, then Blonde Beard beckons his group, fifteen in all and they disappear into the darkness, silent as wraiths.

XENA

The rest of you, follow me.



CUT TO:

EXT. REAR OF CLIFF - NIGHT

Thirteen men and one woman line flat against the sheer wall of the cliff as Xena, a step away, stares along the top of the wall timing the guards who walk steady patterns around the perimeter.

Unlike the guards who man the posts in front of the fortress, these guards seem rather lax in their duties, though by the sound of raucous laughter and music heard just above the thunder of the surf, Xena can guess why.

After another moment, she nods to herself, then looks at several men who are awaiting her signal, coils of rope in their arms.

XENA

Now.

Five grappling hooks, their clawed arms padded, land silently over the lip of the fortress' wall. The pirates pull on them, insuring a snug fit, and nod to their Captain.

XENA

(cont'd)

Now.

In groups of five, the pirates scramble up the cliff face and the wall, leaping over and squatting flush against it. Xena and Gabrielle go up next. The maneuver is accomplished quickly, silently, and with no detection.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORTRESS WALL - NIGHT

A lone guard steps around the corner and feels the strength drain from his body as two fingers jab into his neck.

Gabrielle steps forward and catches the torch as the man drops it. As his knees hit the ground, Xena is there, tilting his face to meet hers. The pirates look on in awe.

XENA

I've cut off the flow of blood to your brain. You have thirty seconds to tell me what I want to know or you die. Understand?



The guard nods frantically.

XENA

(cont'd)

Good. I'm looking for a woman and her two daughters. They were kidnapped half a moon ago for ransom. They are the family of Andros, an innkeeper from Perkotis.

GUARD

I... don't...the Black ransoms a lot of women and girls!

XENA

Ah, but see, these are special. And I'd be very upset if I found out that something had happened to them. I don't think you'd like to see me upset, would you?

The guard shakes his 'no' even more frantically.

XENA

(cont'd)

Didn't think so.

She holds out a hand, and Gabrielle slips a waterproofed pouch into it. Opening the pouch, she shakes out a small painting, no larger than her hand. On it is an excellent rendering of Andros and his family. She shows it to the paralyzed guard.

XENA

(cont'd)

Recognize them?

The man squints, and Gabrielle helpfully lowers the torch for him.

GUARD

I... I think so! They're... being kept... on the third floor, in the east wing! Please! Can't....

XENA

How sure are you?

GUARD

Sure! Sure! Please!

XENA

Is there another way into the fortress besides the front door?

GUARD

Guard's entrance! Please!
To... to the east!

XENA

Good.



His neck is jabbed again, and a right cross sends him into slumberland.

Xena hands the pouch back to Gabrielle, takes the torch, and eyes her men.

XENA

(cont'd)

Let's go.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUARD ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Two guards man the entrance. Both look to their left as a humming noise comes from the darkness beyond. Before they can make a move, Xena's chakram takes them out of the picture and they slump to the ground on either side of the door. A pirate named Two Shakes presses his ear against the door, listening. Taking a deep breath, he grasps the handle and pulls. The interior is deserted. He beckons them forward.

Seven pirates enter through the now opened door. Xena touches Gabrielle's arm just as she's about to follow.

XENA

Fifteen minutes. If you're not back by then....

Gabrielle smiles and pat's Xena's belly.

GABRIELLE

We'll be fine. Now go raise some Tartarus.

Standing on her tiptoes, she steals a kiss from Xena's lips.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

For luck.



She then disappears through the doorway and closes it softly behind her. Xena looks at the closed portal for another moment, then over at the remaining crew.

XENA

Let's do it.

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDORS - NIGHT

Gabrielle pushes to the front and leads the men through the empty corridors of an unused section of the fortress judging from the dust on the floor and walls.

GABRIELLE

(muttering)

Stairs have gotta be
around here somewhere.

TWO SHAKES

Here they be, Ma'am.

GABRIELLE

(smiling)

Thanks!

The pirate tips his kerchief to her to the guffaws of his fellows. He swats a few and they move on.

At the top of the steps stand four heavily armed guards. They hear the tread of bodies coming toward them, and one steps forward, torch raised.

GUARD

Who goes there?

Gabrielle holds up a finger to her compatriots, gesturing for them to wait and follow her lead.

Pulling the flimsy top off of her shoulders and displaying her assets to their best advantage, she slinks up the remaining steps, her most seductive smile gracing her face.

GABRIELLE

(throatily)

Hello, boys. The Black
thought you might be lonely
up here all by yourselves,
so he sent me over to....

(broader smile)

...keep you company.

The men peer down at Gabrielle's lovely face and form and leer. The leader steps back, arms wide in invitation.

With a coy smile, Gabrielle picks her way up the stairs, then nails the leader in the gut with a hard right, and straightens him back up with a knee to the nose. He flies back, knocking the two down in back of him, and she attacks the forth with a low kick to the shin, and a sweeping kick to the shoulder. He topples into an unconscious heap on top of the rest.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

C'mon up, guys!
The coast is clear.

The pirates look at one another with disbelieving grins, and thunder up the remaining steps.

One lone door stands at the top of the stairs, and Gabrielle opens it with the skeleton key she's appropriated from one of the unconscious guards.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

An attractive young woman huddles in the furthest corner, her two young daughters wrapped firmly in her desperate embrace. Her green eyes are huge with fright, but though her clothes are a bit worn and dirty, neither she nor her family look much the worse for wear.

Gabrielle enters slowly, a gentle smile on her face.

GABRIELLE

It's all right. We're here to help. Are you the wife of Andros of Perkotis?

Still frightened, the woman nods.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Good. My name is Gabrielle. I'm a friend of your husband's.

WIFE

Is... is he here?
Is Andros here?

GABRIELLE

No. He's on the mainland.
I'm here to take you home to him, all of you.

WIFE

I... don't....

Gabrielle steps forward, empty hands raised.

GABRIELLE

It's okay. I'm here to help, honest.

WIFE

B... but my husband...

GABRIELLE

... will be fine as soon as he sees you again. He misses you terribly.

DAUGHTER

Can we go with the pretty
lady, Momma? I wanna
see Daddy. Please?

After a very long moment, the woman finally nods.

Smiling, Gabrielle squats down and looks the young girls in the eyes.

GABRIELLE

Now, I need you to help me, okay?
You need to be very quiet and do
exactly what I say. There are a
lot of bad men here, but if you do
just as I say, we'll be on a boat
back to your Daddy so fast, you
won't believe it. Can you
both do that for me?

Both girls nod shyly.

Gabrielle grins.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Good. Your Daddy is
going to be so happy
when he sees you again.

DAUGHTER #2

I miss him.

GABRIELLE

Oh, honey, he misses you
too. More than anything. So,
let's get back to him, okay?

DAUGHTER #2

Ok.

As Gabrielle stands, she feels a tiny palm press itself against hers. Smiling, she tenderly grasps the trusting hand and walks back to the open door, the mother and her other daughter following quickly behind.

CUT TO:

INT. FORTRESS, MAIN - NIGHT

In contrast to the heavily guarded steps, the main entrance to the fortress is unguarded. The massive doors are chocked open to admit the ocean breeze, and men and a few women wander drunkenly in and out of the massive structure, laughing and singing.

It's therefore no surprise that Xena and her men fit right in, passing into the main room unnoticed by those around them. At Xena's nod, the men split up, each going in a different direction through the milling knots of pirates and other unsavories.

In contrast to the men populating it, the room itself is massive and ornate, with items of value wherever one looks. Food and drink flow in abundance, and the music, though loud, is passably fair.

By this time, the party has been going on for hours, and Xena's crew has no problem slicing off money belts and picking up other valuable trinkets strewn carelessly on the tables and the floor. Each of the pirates-turned-rescuers keeps a careful eye on his Captain, and when Xena gets close to the horribly garish throne that houses the overly corpulent form of Igor the Black, they spring into action.

One pirate throws a punch, another a kick, another a well-placed push, and soon the entire party has turned into a drunken brawl.

Xena uses the distraction to close the remaining distance to the throne, which sits upon a stone platform. She bounds upon the platform with ease, slipping behind the obscenely large man and slipping the edge of her dagger against the rolls of his exposed throat.

XENA

Evening, Igor. I wish I'd have known you were having a party. I'd have brought a suitable gift.



Igor's sunken eyes widen as he looks around desperately for help that suddenly isn't there anymore.

IGOR

Who... who are you?

XENA

Someone who's gonna give you some much needed advice

Igor grunts around the pressure of the knife tight against his throat.

XENA

(cont'd)

This is just a taste of what life's gonna be like for you from now on, Igor. In fact, if I were you, I'd get out of the kidnapping business altogether. I have a feeling it's gonna take a big turn for the worse.

IGOR

(haughtily)

How dare you....?!?

Xena laughs.

XENA

You listen to me, little man. You're very lucky you're not armed, or you'd be a stain on the floor right now. If I hear that you've kidnapped one more of my friends, I'll come back here and see how many cuts it takes before a pig like you dies.

She reinforces her point by pressing the sharp blade hard enough against his throat to draw blood.

Igor's terrified scream goes unheard in the melee below.

She cocks her head, sensing Gabrielle's presence somewhere nearby. Her eyes gleam.

XENA

(cont'd)

Remember what I said, Igor. I'll be watching.



Just like that, she disappears as if she'd never been. Her battle cry sounds loud over the din, and her crew instantly heeds, slipping away from the fights they've started and heading for the door as the brawl continues behind them unhindered.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORTRESS - NIGHT

Just as the crew makes it outside of the fortress, a battered guard shuffles his way toward the door.

GUARD

The prisoners!
They're escaping!!

PIRATE

In there, man! Hurry!
We'll try and catch up to 'em!

The guard nods gratefully and heads inside.

Xena's crew laughs.

PIRATE

(cont'd)

What about the guards?

XENA

You let me worry
about that.

Unhooking her chakram, she gives it a perfect toss. It cuts down the row of torches on the left side of the stairs, then reverses itself and does the same to the right. The stairs are plunged into sudden blackness.

XENA

(cont'd)

Now! Move!

Xena's crew flies down the stairs, past the confused guards who are wondering where their torches went. They make it to the shore in time to meet up with Gabrielle and her party.

Gabrielle grins.

GABRIELLE

Perfect timing!



Xena returns the smile as she looks over the rescued woman and her daughters.

XENA
(to Gabrielle)
You did good.

GABRIELLE
Of course. Now what?

VOICE
(off camera)
GET THEM!!

XENA
We run.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCK - NIGHT

The land gradually slopes upward to as the group moves east, and it is there that Igor has built a large dock for his ships. The dock is usually heavily guarded, but Xena can see that Blonde Beard has done his job well. The path is littered with bodies, alive and dead.

The dock currently harbors five ships, and all appear to be deserted except for the one on the very end; the grandest ship of them all, Igor's personal vessel. From the bow, a large torch is swung back and forth in an arcing signal.

BLONDEBEARD
(shouting)
Ahoy, mateys! Quit swingin'
the lead and get your arses
aboard! Ye be attractin' rats!

From behind the fleeing group can be heard the thunder of many booted feet and the angry shouts of robbed men.

Xena, carrying one of the little girls, and Gabrielle carrying the other, double their speed, and the rest of the group follows suit. Up the stairs they run, then over the sturdy, weather-beaten planking of the dock. They can almost feel the drunken breath of the enraged mob on their shoulders.

PIRATE
ARRRGGGHHH!!

The pirate goes down as a spear penetrates his calf. Several others stumble over him.

XENA
Keep going!!!
(to another pirate)
Here, take her and
get to the ship! Move!!

GABRIELLE

Xena!

XENA

Move! I'll be right
behind you! Go! GO!

Before she gets the chance to argue further, Gabrielle is pushed ahead by the tide of fleeing pirates heeding their Captain's word. She gives in for the moment and picks up speed, cradling the young girl in her arms.

Standing guard over her fallen comrade, Xena unhooks her chakram and again lets fly. It takes down the first row of attackers and returns to her hand just as a second spear heads her way. Plucking it out of the air, she throws it back, grunting in satisfaction as it pierces the belly of an onrushing man.

She senses something to her right and turns to see three pirates flanking her and grinning.

XENA

(cont'd)

I told you to GO!



PIRATE #1

Not without you, Cap'n!

PIRATE #2

I be deaf in me
right ear, Cap'n.

XENA

I'll make you deaf in
both if you don't move!

The pirate grins and shrugs, weapon drawn and at the ready.

Then, the mob is upon them and she has no time for further argument.

With sword, chakram, fists and feet, she battles against the mob. The bodies of the dead and injured pile at her feet as she uses her chakram to slit the throat of one while using her sword to disarm another. A lucky kick sends her to her knees, where she whirls her sword and thrusts behind her and up. The man about to skewer her drops his sword and falls on top of her, bearing her to the ground.

Punching and kicking, she frees herself from the pile and rises to her feet, only to be pushed forward as one of her own men collapses into her, a slashing cut blooming red across his chest.

A lucky swipe across her arm almost causes her to lose her sword, and she spins just in time to see a huge, ugly-faced man grinning fiercely and thrusting his own sword directly at her unprotected midsection.

Before she can raise her weapon to defend, the man's eyes widen in shock, and he stumbles forward, to his knees, and then to his belly. A lone sai sticks out of his back. Xena looks up to see Gabrielle smirking at her.

XENA

(growling, but inwardly pleased)
Dammit! Doesn't anybody
listen to me anymore?!?

GABRIELLE

'Fraid not... Cap'n!



Back to back, Xena and Gabrielle fight off the remainder of the mob, but they can easily see a second, even larger group heading their way. Xena pulls one of the uninjured pirates to her by his shirtfront.

XENA

Get back to the ship and
tell Blondebeard to cast off!

PIRATE #3

Not without you, Cap'n!

XENA

(teeth bared)
You do as I say!
Now MOVE!!

Aided by a helpful shove that almost sends him into the ocean, the pirate runs toward the ship, shouting Xena's orders as he moves.

XENA

(cont'd)

You two, get these men
and yourselves back to
the ship. Do it, now.

Shaken and white-faced, the men do as they're told, bearing off their comrades with as much speed as they're able.

XENA

(cont'd)

Gabrielle....

GABRIELLE

Not a chance. Where
you go, I go. Period.

Xena hands Gabrielle her sai.

XENA

I was just going
to give you this.

Gabrielle's look tells Xena exactly how much she believes that little statement.

Xena sighs and turns back toward the onrushing mob. The vanguard, a group of ten men, is twenty yards away. The rest are fifty yards beyond it, almost consumed by the darkness.

XENA

(cont'd)

Let's take these out, and
when I tell you to, run back
to the ship as fast as you
can. Don't stop, don't look
back, just run. Got me?

After a moment, Gabrielle nods, trusting Xena's instincts.



The vanguard is upon them, and together Xena and Gabrielle make short work of the mostly drunken men. A few kicks, punches, and sword blows later, the group is piled unconscious at their feet.

XENA
(cont'd)
Now. Run.

Without hesitation, Gabrielle turns and takes off toward the ship. It has already left its slip and is slowly sailing parallel to the dock. She can see the concerned faces of the pirates as they stand at the rail shouting for her and their Captain.

The wooden planks fly by as she puts on a burst of speed. The skin at the back of her neck tingles suddenly, and she grins.

XENA
(cont'd)
GABRIELLE! Get
ready to JUMP!

Sticking out her left hand like a runner on an Olympiad relay team, Gabrielle catches Xena's grip and holds on tight, allowing her longer-legged partner to help pull her along those last few feet to the dock's edge.

GABRIELLE
Ready!

XENA
NOW!

In perfect tandem, the pair hits the end of the dock and jumps high into the air. Flipping once without losing contact with one another, they land together on the deck of the ship to the raucous cheers of their crew.

Pumping her fist into the air in triumph, Gabrielle then turns and grabs Xena in a tight embrace as the men surround them, pounding on their backs and shoulders. She turns her head to watch in amusement as the remaining members of the mob come to a skidding stop at the edge of the dock and shout at them in rage.

Chuckling, she gazes up at Xena, eyes sparkling.

GABRIELLE
Ya know, this pirate
stuff isn't too bad.

Xena leans forward and gives Gabrielle a kiss that makes even the pirates blush. Pulling away, she grins.

XENA
Yo Ho Ho.

FADE OUT.

END ACT FOUR

TAG

FADE IN:

INT. THE HEADMAN'S INN MAIN RECEPTION ROOM - NIGHT

The Headman's Inn is jammed to the rafters, though fully thirty of these jolly souls look quite out of place among the eloquent décor and moneyed clientele. No one, however, seems to mind. The night's orchestral musings have been replaced by thirty odd pirates and their admirers singing a bawdy tunes while working their way into stupefied drunkenness.

PIRATES

Fifteen men on a dead man's chest...

CROWD

Yo Ho Ho and a bottle of rum!

PIRATES

Drink and the devil had
done for the rest...

CROWD

Yo Ho Ho and a bottle of rum!

PIRATES

The mate was fixed by the bosun's pike
The bosun brained with a marlinspike
And cookey's throat was marked belike
It had been gripped by fingers ten;
And there they lay, all good dead men
Like break o'day in a boozing ken...

CROWD

Yo Ho Ho and a bottle of rum!

CUT TO:

INT. HEADMAN'S INN - ANTEROOM - NIGHT

Andros peers into the crowded and raucous reception hall, his family gathered close about him. All bear smiles which wreath their faces and appear to have become permanent fixtures. Tears of happiness slowly dry on Andros' cheeks.

Xena and Gabrielle, dressed in their traditional clothes, stand beside them, drinks in hand.

ANDROS

I still can't believe it. I never hoped...
never dreamed.... And I have you to
thank. Both of you. I could never
repay what you've done for me,
Xena and Gabrielle. Never.

XENA

It's not necessary.

GABRIELLE

Seeing you all together again
is more than enough for us.

ANDROS

But, surely....

GABRIELLE

Love them well. That's all we ask.



ANDROS

(beaming)

An easier request was never
granted. Please say you'll
stay the night, at least.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange looks. Both grin.

GABRIELLE

That is something we
can accept with thanks.

ANDROS

Wonderful! Let me
show you to your room.

XENA

Oh...I think we can
find it ourselves.

Andros looks at them both, easily seeing the love between.

ANDROS

You know? I think
you're right.

CUT TO:

INT. HEADMAN'S INN - STAIRS - NIGHT

About to head toward their room, Xena and Gabrielle narrowly miss running into Blonde Beard, staggeringly drunk and a mug in each hand.

BLONDEBEARD

Ahoy, mateys! Ye can't be turnin' in already! The party's just startin! C'mon and join me in a mug o'grog. It's just stu...stu...stu...really good!

XENA

(smirking)

I can see that. I think you've had enough for the three of us.

Blonde Beard polishes off both mugs in two gulps, then stands swaying.

BLONDEBEARD

Ye be tellin' the truth at that!

Gabrielle pats his arm, laughing.

GABRIELLE

So, where to from here?
Back to the high seas?

BLONDEBEARD

Not sure yet. The Cap'n here made us rich lads. I might want ta savor it for awhile. Or maybe not. Bein' a pirate's what I know, and I'll never stay too long away from my lady, the sea.

He sobers.

BLONDEBEARD

(cont'd)

I wanna thank ye both, Xena and Gabrielle. T'was the first honest work I've done fer...gods, forever, it seems. Felt pretty good. Mebbe there's somethin' ta this rescuin' the innocent business after all.
I'll have ta think on it.

XENA
You do that.



Reaching out, she clasps his arm.

XENA
(cont'd)
Thank you for your help.
We couldn't have
done it without you.

Blonde Beard blushes to the roots of his hair and looks down at his feet. Then he looks up, smiling.

BLONDEBEARD
Aww, twern't nothin', Cap'n.
If ya ever need a hand, on
the high seas or off, you
just call out for Blondebeard
the Pirate, all right?

GABRIELLE
We promise.

He nods.

BLONDEBEARD
All righty, then. Be off with ya,
landlubbers. I've got me
some more celebratin' ta do.

Xena and Gabrielle watch as he toddles drunkenly off to join his fellows as we....

FADE OUT.

DISCLAIMER
The secret language of the pirates was severely
mutilated during the making of this motion picture.