

Prod. #76915

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"The Prodigal"

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Revised pages: FULL SCRIPT

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XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"The Prodigal"

CAST LIST

XENA
GABRIELLE

LILA
MELEAGER
PHARIS
DAMON
ATHOL
DERQ
HEAD HIGHWAYMAN
ELDERLY DRIVER
PEASANT
WOMAN VILLAGER
THUG
SENTRY

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

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SET LIST

INTERIORS:

TAVERN/GENERAL STORE
MELEAGER'S LEAN-TO
TENT

EXTERIORS:

MOUNTAIN PASS #1 - NARROW, DESCENDING
- AROUND A CURVE
MOUNTAIN PASS #2 - ASCENDING
- AROUND THE BEND
CROSSROADS
STONE ROAD
ROCKY ROAD
DUSTY ROAD
ANOTHER ROAD
FORK IN THE ROAD
DENSE FOREST
FAST-MOVING STREAM
ROCKY LOOKOUT
BURNT-OUT VILLAGE
POTEIDAIA - VILLAGE
- MELEAGER'S LEAN-TO
- STREET
- TAVERN/GENERAL STORE
- LOOKOUT POINT
- SQUARE
- MOUTH OF ALLEY OFF SQUARE
- ALLEY
- NEAR SOME TREES
- BUILDING
WOODED ROAD OUTSIDE POTEIDAIA
NEARBY WOODS
ANOTHER PART OF THE WOODS
DAMON'S CAMP
TENT

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

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CHRONOLOGY

DAY 1	SCENES # 1 - 2
DAY 2	SCENES # 3 - 14
NIGHT 2	SCENES #15 - 16
DAY 3	SCENES #17 - 29
NIGHT 3	SCENES #30 - 32
DAY 4	SCENE #33
NIGHT 4	SCENE #34
DAY 5	SCENES #35 - 46

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"The Prodigal"

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. A NARROW, DESCENDING MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY 1

In tune with the elemental surroundings, we hear the halting notes of a very simple MELODY piped by...

...Gabrielle as she walks beside Xena who is leading her horse, Argo, down the narrow pass. A SOUR NOTE makes Xena wince as she calms her agitated horse.

GABRIELLE
(sheepish)

Sorry.

(off Argo's SNORT)

I said sorry. Everybody's a critic.

Argo WHINNIES. Xena hides a smile. With a disdainful look at the horse, Gabrielle begins to PIPE some more as they disappear around a curve. Suddenly, the PIPING STOPS.

CUT TO:

2 EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - AROUND THE CURVE - DAY 2

Xena and Gabrielle regard an ENORMOUS BOULDER wedged in the pass, completely blocking their way.

GABRIELLE

Wow...

(then; idea dawning)

You know the Orpheus legend -- how he plays music so great it moves mountains? Well, I know it's a myth, but there's often a kernel of truth in even the wildest story. So...

(raising pipe)

What if I tried to --

XENA
No --!

ARGO
Neigh --!

GABRIELLE

(with a look to both)

It was just a thought.

HEAD HIGHWAYMAN (O.S.)
Here's another one.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED:

2

Whirling, Xena and Gabrielle react to see --

-- a group of armed HIGHWAYMEN led by a sardonic scoundrel who draws their attention to...

...a CART on the upgrade behind them. Numerous sharp wooden stakes protrude from the front of the cart where another HIGHWAYMAN stands poised to release the brake and send the deadly cart down the narrow pass straight at them.

HEAD HIGHWAYMAN

Think about being skewered against the stone "a la cart," or simply giving us everything we want...

(a pointed leer)

...and I do mean everything.

XENA

You're not only thieves, you're dreamers.

HEAD HIGHWAYMAN

And you, my dear, are stuck between a rock...

(indicates boulder)

...and a hard place.

(indicates himself)

So, what do you say? Shall we be civilized about this?

Xena looks from the Highwaymen to the lethal cart, then shrugs.

XENA

Why start now?

Slapping Argo's flank, she sends him bolting into the Highwaymen who scatter as:

Sword slashing, fists and feet flying, Xena becomes a whirling dervish of martial action while...

...Gabrielle deftly defends herself with her staff. Even so...

...the two are steadily being forced back toward the boulder.

Evading a Highwayman's lunge, Gabrielle trips him and conks him with her staff. But as she turns, she glances up to see:

The man at the cart is starting to release the brake!

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 2

2

Seeing Xena has her hands full, Gabrielle picks up a rock and throws it at --

*
*

-- the man at the cart who looks up in shock to see the rock sailing at him an instant before it knocks him cold.

*

But Gabrielle's triumphant grin is cut short as...

...the man at the cart collapses on the brake -- releasing it and sending the cart rolling down the pass straight at them!

GABRIELLE

(shouting; alarmed)

Xena! Look out!! The cart --!

IN THE MIDST OF THE FIGHT

Xena hears Gabrielle's shout and quickly glances up -- as do the few remaining Highwaymen -- all staring to see:

The cart is gathering momentum as it rolls toward them!

Reacting, the men rush to flatten themselves against the walls of the narrow pass. But as Xena starts to join them, a SHARP CRY makes her halt and, turning, she sees:

Gabrielle has tripped and fallen directly in the cart's path!

Instantly, Xena runs and pulls Gabrielle to her feet as --

-- the cart hurtles straight at them!

Trapped, they seem doomed, when inspiration strikes:

XENA

Lie down!

She throws herself on the ground. But Gabrielle looks at the oncoming cart... and freezes. Her staff drops from her limp grasp.

*
*

XENA

Gabrielle, now!

Gabrielle doesn't react, transfixed. Xena grabs the fallen staff and sweeps it under Gabrielle's ankles, knocking her on her butt and back as --

*
*
*

-- the cart, with its needle-sharp stakes, rolls directly over them, continuing on until --

-- it hits the rock and shatters with a SPLINTERING CRASH!

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 3

2

Demoralized, the rest of the Highwaymen flee as Xena and Gabrielle rise and dust themselves off, though Gabrielle is slower to recover.

XENA

Nothing like an ambush to liven things up, right?

(off Gabrielle's silence)

Hey, you okay?

GABRIELLE

(shaken)

Oh, sure, I'm great -- considering I was almost roadkill. You bet. I'm perfect.

Xena hears the upset in her voice, but dismisses it.

XENA

C'mon, we've been in tighter spots than this.

GABRIELLE

You're right. Since hooking up with you, I've nearly been eaten by a Cyclops, almost forced to marry Morpheus, practically squashed by a Titan...

(trails off; then, genuinely disturbed)

Why did I suddenly freeze up now?

XENA

You're just a little burned out, that's all. It happens.

GABRIELLE

It didn't "happen" to you.

XENA

No, but it has. That's why I always try to remember: act -- don't react. Go with your gut.

Turning, she whistles for Argo. But Gabrielle remains troubled as the horse joins them.

XENA

We'll double back and take the coast. It's longer, but it's safer, too.

GABRIELLE

I don't think so.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 4

2

XENA
(surprised)
Sure it is.

GABRIELLE
No, I mean...
(hesitates; then)
I'm not going with you.

Surprised, Xena stares, really taking in how shaken Gabrielle is. Then, gently but firmly, she tries to reason with her.

XENA
Gabrielle, it was a dangerous situation. You'd have been crazy not to be scared.

GABRIELLE
-- And I froze! If you hadn't been there...

XENA
But I was.

GABRIELLE
Today, yes! But what about tomorrow? And the next day? Can you promise me you'll always be there?

Knowing she can't, Xena is silent. Point made, Gabrielle begins collecting her things.

XENA
(after a beat)
Where will you go?

GABRIELLE
The only place I know: home. Things are simpler there.
(bundling her things)
But even more important, my sister Lila's there. She's just a kid. But when I think of how we used to share our plans and dreams...
(smiles; wistful)
Maybe it'll help, having someone to talk to about this.

XENA
(a little hurt)
You can't talk to me?

Gabrielle eyes her, warmly.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 5

2

GABRIELLE

I can't endanger you. Don't you see?
Until I sort this thing out, I'm a
liability.

*
*

XENA

That's a risk I can take.

GABRIELLE

The question is, can I?
(unhappily)
And right now, the answer is no.

Xena starts to protest. But Gabrielle preempts her with a hug.

GABRIELLE

Don't worry. I'll be fine. I've just
gotta find out what's going on with
me.

*

And pulling back, she hoists her bundle.

XENA

But you'll be back... right?

GABRIELLE

(hesitates; then)
Guess that depends on what I learn.

As Xena reacts, Gabrielle turns and hurries away so Xena
won't see her tears as she strikes off... alone.

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

3 EXT. A CROSSROADS - DAY 3

It's a new day for Gabrielle who strides into the crossroads, then stops, unsure which way to go. Reaching into her pocket, she consults a multi-folded piece of parchment -- first rightside up, then upside down -- until she finally fixes on her route, dismayed to find she still has:

GABRIELLE

Another twenty-two leagues to go...!

Resigned, she starts refolding the map -- first one way, then another, then a third, a fourth, until:

GABRIELLE

(imploring the gods)

How is it man can solve the riddle of the sphinx, but he still can't make a better road map?!

Wadding it up, she shoves it in her pocket and exits.

CUT TO:

4 EXT. A STONE ROAD - DAY 4

Gabrielle walks along the road when she hears a WAGON coming up behind her. She turns, sticking out her thumb and smiling big.

The wagon never even slows. Gabrielle resumes walking.

CUT TO:

5 EXT. A ROCKY ROAD - DAY 5

As Gabrielle trudges along, she hears ANOTHER WAGON overtaking her. She feigns a crippling limp, leaning heavily on her staff and giving a wan, imploring wave as the wagon moves past.

Her wave becomes a fist that she shakes, then she moves on.

CUT TO:

6 EXT. A DUSTY ROAD - DAY

6

Looking bedraggled, Gabrielle hears ANOTHER WAGON coming and stops to adjust her shoe, quickly striking a provocative pose.

The wagon kicks up a cloud of dust... which settles on Gabrielle as the wagon rolls past.

CUT TO:

7 EXT. ANOTHER ROAD - DAY

7

CLOSE ON GABRIELLE who hears another WAGON. She looks up to see:

LONG SHOT

another wagon coming over the hill.

BACK TO SCENE

She halts and we STAY CLOSE as she wearily leans on her staff, wipes her brow, and simply stares at the wagon which rolls past then... STOPS.

Gabrielle beams as, peering around his loaded wagon, an ELDERLY DRIVER motions her to join him.

CUT TO:

8 EXT. A FORK IN THE ROAD - DAY

8

The Elderly Driver halts his wagon, then turns to Gabrielle, half-hidden among some bolts of cloth.

ELDERLY DRIVER

'Fraid this is where our paths diverge. Sure you'll be alright? You're still a day's walk from Poteidaia, you know.

GABRIELLE

(getting her staff)

I'll be fine. Believe me, once I get to Antibia, I know a shortcut through the woods that'll get me home in no time.

ELDERLY DRIVER

The woods?! You think that's wise, the shape you're in?

Her back to us, Gabrielle clambers down from the wagon.

(CONTINUED)

8 CONTINUED:

8

GABRIELLE
Don't worry. The exercise'll do me
good.

Reaching the ground, she turns around, revealing...
Gabrielle looks ten months pregnant!

ELDERLY DRIVER
(shakes his head)
You modern young women... Well, suit
yourself.

He drives off as she waves. Then, releasing her belt, she
delivers herself of her bundle of clothes, and exits.

CUT TO:

9 EXT. A BURNT-OUT VILLAGE - DAY

9

Gabrielle looks appalled at the smoldering shells of
buildings she passes, when a NOISE draws her past a stone
fence to...

...a PEASANT slowly shoveling dirt on the smaller of two
fresh mounds of earth. Bewildered, Gabrielle approaches.

GABRIELLE
Excuse me...
(he keeps digging)
Uh -- beg pardon, but...
(still nothing)
Sir...?

Blinking, the Peasant seems to come to, though the hollow
look he gives Gabrielle makes her shiver.

GABRIELLE
I'm sorry, I don't mean to intrude
but... what happened?

PEASANT
(still in shock)
Damon, he's what happened. Him and
his gang of thieves came for their
tribute.
(eyeing larger mound of
earth)
Only this time, we held back some
food. You know, for our son?
(eyeing smaller mound)
Come winter, a little boy gets awful
hungry...

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED:

9

He trails off, then resumes shoveling earth on his son's grave.

GABRIELLE

I'm so sorry.

PEASANT

Don't be. We're well out of it. You want to pity someone, pity the folks in Poteidaia.

GABRIELLE

Poteidaia?! Why Poteidaia?

PEASANT

(turning back; grim)
'Cause that's where Damon said he's striking next.

*

Off Gabrielle's reaction --

CUT TO:

10 EXT. A DENSE FOREST - DAY

10

Gabrielle sprints through the trees like a wood nymph.

DISSOLVE TO:

11 EXT. A FAST-MOVING STREAM - DAY

11

Gabrielle crosses over a narrow log, and keeps running...

DISSOLVE TO:

12 EXT. A ROCKY LOOKOUT - DAY

12

Gasping, Gabrielle scales the rocks until she reaches the top. Then, steeling herself, she peers over the ledge to see...

...the village of Poteidaia, lying intact on the land below.

Relieved, Gabrielle hurries toward it.

CUT TO:

13 EXT. POTEIDAIA - DAY

13

Up close, the village seems strangely deserted as Gabrielle moves cautiously down the windswept streets of home...

jumping at every CREAKING gate and BANGING shutter until, glancing around, she heads for the town's largest building...

CUT TO:

14 INT. TAVERN/GENERAL STORE - DAY

14

Backlit by the sun, Gabrielle comes through the swinging front doors into the relative gloom which explodes with one big:

THE VILLAGERS
(shouting in unison)
HOORAY!!

The shock nearly blows Gabrielle back through the doors. But as she recovers, and the CROWD begins to BUZZ.

VOICES
It's not him! When is he going to get here? He'd better hurry.

LILA (O.S.)
(calling; stunned)
Gabrielle...? Is that you?

Turning, Gabrielle sees LILA, her younger sister, moving through the crowd, only to reach her and stop, strangely awkward.

LILA
I can't believe it. You're back.

Too distracted by her urgent news to notice Lila's oddly restrained welcome, Gabrielle scoops her into a hug, promising:

GABRIELLE
I'll explain later. Right now...
(pulls back; urgent)
There's something important I have to tell you --
(turning to crowd)
-- all of you!
(as crowd quiets; announcing)
A man named Damon and his gang are on their way here!

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

14

WOMAN VILLAGER

(calls out; bitter)

To sack and burn the village? Strip
it of everything valuable? Old news,
Gabrielle.

*
*
*

GABRIELLE

What? How did...?

*
*

LILA

Damon and his men have been hitting us
for food and supplies every few months
since you left. He uses us while his
men attack the other villages.

*
*
*

(then; slight edge)

Don't suppose you brought the "woman
wonder" with you...?

Surprised by her tone, Gabrielle starts to answer, when:

PHARIS (O.S.)

Who cares?

Turning, the sisters react as a pompous, self-appointed
village leader, PHARIS, joins them.

PHARIS

We don't need Xena to save us. We've
hired a warrior of our own.

("marqueeing" it)

"Meleager the Mighty." That's who
we're here to welcome.

GABRIELLE

(impressed)

Wow. Isn't he the guy who
single-handedly killed a hundred men
at the battle of Liguria?

*

LILA

Two hundred.

PHARIS

Two hundred and fifty.

MELEAGER (O.S.)

(slurring bravado)

Three hundred and seventeen!

Surprised, all turn to see...

...MELEAGER the Mighty, a warrior just beginning to go to
seed, swaying in the doorway.

Seeing all eyes on him, he grins.

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED: 2

14

MELEAGER

...But who's counting?

He keels over as Gabrielle and Lila rush to his aid.

LILA

Is he dead?

GABRIELLE

(sniffs and winces)

Yeah... dead drunk.

DISSOLVE TO:

15 EXT. A SMALL LEAN-TO - MELEAGER'S QUARTERS - EVENING

15

Gabrielle's VOICE rises from within:

GABRIELLE'S VOICE

On three; okay? One, two...

CUT TO:

16 INT. MELEAGER'S LEAN-TO - CONTINUOUS

16

Lila and Gabrielle each have hold of one of Meleager's boots as he lies passed out on a cot.

GABRIELLE

...three!

Bracing themselves, the girls pull off his boots, tumbling down in the process, and landing together on the floor.

GABRIELLE

Tell me again why we got stuck with him?

LILA

'Cause you're the only one who's ever worked with a warrior before.

GABRIELLE

(snorts; rising)

Oh, please! Xena would never act like this. It shows a total lack of respect -- not just for us -- but for himself.

(rueful)

And trust me, one thing a fighter can't afford to lose is self-respect. As a matter of fact...

She hesitates, preparing to unburden herself, when --

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED:

16

LILA

(rises; miffed)

Well, if Xena's so perfect, I'm surprised you can stand to be around simple people like us, you know... your family?

And turning, she exits... leaving Gabrielle at a total loss.

DISSOLVE TO:

17 INT. TAVERN/GENERAL STORE - NEXT DAY

17

Pharis addresses a crowd of VILLAGERS, among them Gabrielle and Lila, the strain still evident between them.

PHARIS

...And so, my friends and fellow citizens, without further delay, I give you Meleager the Mighty!

Hungover, but covering, Meleager winces at the APPLAUSE that greets him as he steps up to speak to the crowd.

MELEAGER

Greetings, good people of... of...
(clueless; off Pharis' whisper)
...Poteidaia! My apologies for yesterday's, uh, illness.

Gabrielle rolls her eyes, but Lila studiously ignores her.

MELEAGER

But I'm fit now and ready to take on...
uh... uh...

(name escapes him)

...whoever! Still, I'm gonna need a few things to do it. First off:

(to Pharis)

My money -- where is it?

PHARIS

(thrown)

Uh, well, it's here in the strongbox. If you recall, the deal was you got half up front, and the rest when you finished the job.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

17

MELEAGER

(a too-quick smile)

Right! Just checking.

(back to crowd)

Next thing I need's an arsenal. So, everybody go get your knives, spears, bows and arrows, whatever you got that's sharp enough or heavy enough to be a weapon, and bring 'em back here to me.

As the crowd exits, we find Gabrielle and Lila who starts off.

GABRIELLE

Lila, we need to talk...

*

LILA

Talk? We haven't talked for months. Why start now? I'm going to get our meat skewer. It's not much of a weapon, but at least I can rely on it.

*
*
*
*
*

And she's gone.

GABRIELLE

What's that supposed to mean?

*

CUT TO:

18 EXT. STREET - DAY

18

Gabrielle and Lila are talking as they approach a corner.

GABRIELLE

...C'mon, Lila. Would you please tell me what's wrong?

LILA

I already told you. Nothing's wrong.

GABRIELLE

Nothing? If that big freeze number was nothing, then I'd like to see your idea of something.

*
*
*

And rounding the corner, they freeze, as they see:

*

ATHOL and DERQ, two brawny but dim members of Damon's gang, swaggering into town like they owned the place, kicking doors in, laughing.

*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

18

GABRIELLE
That would be...

*
*

LILA
...my idea of something. Those men
work for Damon!

*
*
*

GABRIELLE
C'mon, we've got to warn Meleager!

CUT TO:

19 INT. TAVERN/GENERAL STORE - DAY

19

Gabrielle and Lila burst through the swinging doors.

GABRIELLE
Meleager, quick! Damon's scouts are
nearly here!!

*

ON MELEAGER

swaying as he turns from the bar, bottle in hand.

MELEAGER
Oh, yeah? Well, that's too bad for
them. See...?
(upends bottle)
...all gone.

GABRIELLE
You're drunk!

Reacting, Meleager opens his mouth to protest -- emitting an
unexpected BELCH that only confirms her accusation.

LILA
What'll we do?!

As Gabrielle eyes the soused warrior, HOLD on her dilemma.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

20 EXT. STREET - DAY

20

Men grab their wives and kids, and scurry for cover as Athol and Derq round a corner and start toward the tavern. The Scouts stop, reacting as they see:

Meleager poised menacingly in the tavern doorway and...

...Gabrielle standing on the steps before him.

GABRIELLE

(calling to Athol and Derq)
Smart move, stopping right where you are...

(deliberately casual)
...Unless, of course, you want to take on Meleager the Mighty...?

The Scouts exchange startled looks.

ATHOL

(low; to Derq)
Meleager?! I heard he killed four hundred men at Liguria.

DERQ

I heard five hundred!

Another look, as --

GABRIELLE

So, what'll it be, guys?

At that moment, Meleager "moves" forward onto Gabrielle. She "holds him back."

GABRIELLE

I can't hold this killing machine back forever.

Behind her, Meleager seems to GROWL. His hand comes up, pointing at the men.

Seeing this, Athol and Derq turn tail and run!

CUT TO:

21 EXT. TAVERN/GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

21

Relieved, Gabrielle shrugs off Meleager and turns to him.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

21

GABRIELLE

Great job! They're gone!

Meleager's hand lifts as if to modestly brush aside her praise, when suddenly --

-- Lila peeks from behind Meleager and we see she's been controlling Meleager's movements all along by a stick stuck in his leather wristband. We also reveal...

...Meleager, himself, is propped up on a target easel... passed out cold. Lila continues to hold the stick, waving Meleager's hand as she speaks.

LILA

What happens when they come back... with Damon?

GABRIELLE

Good question.

(re: Meleager)

It's a cinch he won't be much use.

LILA

But he has to be. He's all we've got!

GABRIELLE

What about asking the other villages in the area to band with you against Damon?

But Lila shakes her head and lets go of the stick. In the background, Meleager's hand drops and he slowly starts to list...

LILA

Without a warrior to lead us, no one's got the nerve. That's why he has to do it.

GABRIELLE

(dubious, but...)

Okay, let's get him sober and see what we've got.

On cue, Meleager falls OUT OF FRAME behind them with a CRASH. Off their looks, and a loud BELCH, we:

CUT TO:

22 EXT. DAMON'S CAMP - DAY

22*

Hell-for-leather, a rider approaches, pulls to a halt, and dismounts. As he strides to Athol and Derq, we sense from his powerful build and arrogant face that this is DAMON. *

DAMON *

Is it true? Was it Meleager? *

ATHOL

Sure as we're standing here.

DERQ

Y'know, they say he killed five hundred men at Liguria.

DAMON *

I heard it was six-twenty-five. But that's not the figure that interests me. No, the number I'm thinking of is fifty thousand, as in the fifty thousand dinars being offered for Meleager's capture.

As the men react, Athol gives a low whistle.

ATHOL

Who wants him that bad?

DAMON *

A warlord named Cassius. Turns out his sons were at Liguria. *

CUT TO: *

23 EXT. MELEAGER'S LEAN-TO - DAY

23.

CLOSE on the inert Meleager. A hand slaps him gently... then harder. Nothing. PULL BACK as Gabrielle hands an empty bucket to Lila. *

GABRIELLE *

Get some water. Cold water. *

Nodding, Lila exits as Gabrielle moves to Meleager. His eyes pop open. *

MELEAGER *

You don't need the water. I'm well aware of my surroundings... Where am I? *

(then) *

Wait! Wait! I remember. Pota... Puter... Potadohickie... something. *

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED:

23

GABRIELLE

(testy; eyeing a bottle)
Meleager the Mighty... Do you realize
there are people out there counting on
you? And this is what you show
them?

*
*
*
*

MELEAGER

(sullen; defensive)
What do you know anyway, a farm girl
like you. You couldn't begin to
understand how I work, or my kinda
life.

*
*

GABRIELLE

You might be surprised.

MELEAGER

I doubt it. The blood I've seen, the
gore and killing...

(trails off; then)

...It would turn your stomach just to
hear about it, never mind having to
live every day never knowing when the
next attack'll come -- who's an enemy
or friend -- what you're gonna have to
deal with -- how -- and when you
might freeze.

*
*

(stops; hefts bottle and
swigs it; then touches
his face)

Ow. You slapped me. It takes a
while, but the pain gets --

*
*
*
*

GABRIELLE

(softly; realization hitting
home)

You've lost your nerve. That's why
you drink.

*
*

MELEAGER

(bitter smile)

Can you think of a better reason?

GABRIELLE

No... But I can think of a reason
not to.

(off his confused look)

We hired you to get rid of Damon.

*

MELEAGER

(dismissing it)

Yeah, well, you'd be better off buying
some decent weapons.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED: 2

23

MELEAGER (cont'd)

Say, a rack of Spartan javelins -- the ones that can shoot through fifteen sheets of siege wood? And they make that awful whistle?

(imitates whistle)

Scares 'em every time. That's what you really need to buy.

GABRIELLE

(erupting angrily)

With what?! The village couldn't afford both you and weapons. So they chose you. After all, what good are special javelins if no one here can throw them?!

(stops; steadies herself; then)

The truth is, you're all we've got... and you're worthless to us drunk.

There is a beat. Then Meleager takes a breath and holds out the bottle. Lila enters with the bucket of water.

MELEAGER

Okay, no more wine 'til tonight.

Gabrielle grabs the bottle.

GABRIELLE

No more wine 'til it's done.

She pulls, he doesn't let go. Even he looks a little surprised. She tugs again.

MELEAGER

Wait! Let's not be unreasonable. What'll I drink?

Gabrielle looks to Lila and nods. Lila SPLASHES MELEAGER IN THE FACE with the water. Gabrielle yanks the bottle away. Off this, we:

DISSOLVE TO:

24 EXT. A WOODED ROAD OUTSIDE POTEIDAIA - DAY

24

Seasoned pros, Meleager and Gabrielle survey the area, flanked by Lila, a willing but inexperienced amateur.

MELEAGER

My guess is they'll come this way. It's the most direct route.

(CONTINUED)

24 CONTINUED:

24

GABRIELLE
Then I vote we use it, too. If we
don't stop him here, it's the village
or nothing.

*
*
*

LILA
What do you --

*

GABRIELLE
(oblivious; to Meleager)
What would you think of stringing a
garroting rope along here?

LILA
What's that?

MELEAGER
Good idea. But we'd need some
coverage trees.

*
*

LILA
Coverage trees? What --

*

GABRIELLE
Okay. You go left, we'll go right.
First one to find coverage shouts
out. Got it?

*
*

Meleager exits left. Gabrielle exits right. Lila, fuming
and at a loss, remains on the road. There is a beat. Then,
Gabrielle runs back, takes Lila's arm, and leads her off.

Another beat.

Then Athol and Derq emerge from the woods where they've been
following our trio. Turning, they silently motion A GROUP
OF DAMON'S MEN to follow them as they exit... left.

*

CUT TO:

25 EXT. NEARBY WOODS - DAY

25

As Gabrielle checks the trees, Lila stumbles after her.

LILA
I still don't understand what we're
doing.

GABRIELLE
We're looking for coverage trees.
Then we'll anchor a garrote for the
ambush. What part didn't you get?

*
*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED:

25

LILA

All of it.

*
*

GABRIELLE

Never mind. Xena taught me what to look for.

LILA

(with an edge)

No kidding. Tell me, Gab, is there anything that Xena can't do? Or should we build her a temple right now?

Surprised, Gabrielle stops and turns, exasperated.

*

GABRIELLE

Lila, are you jealous... of Xena?!

LILA

Jealous?! Don't be stupid. Just because you chose her over me?

GABRIELLE

I didn't choose her over you!

LILA

Sure you did. And I don't blame you. Next to the almighty Xena, I must seem pretty dull. I mean, I don't even know what a "coverage tree" is!

*
*

GABRIELLE

Lila! We talked before I left. I thought you were happy I was getting out to see the world.

*
*
*

LILA

I was happy... until I realized getting out meant... leaving me. Why'd you wait so long to come home? You never even sent word to me. It's like you forgot I even existed.

*
*
*
*

GABRIELLE

(hugging her)

Oh, Lila, I never forgot you -- ever. Xena's my friend, yes. But you're my sister. No one could ever replace you.

(pulls back; eying her levelly)

In fact, you're the reason I came home...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED: 2

25

GABRIELLE (cont'd)
(hesitates; then)
...for good.

Ecstatic, Lila returns her hug, oblivious to Gabrielle's wistful face. A MUFFLED SHOUT interrupts them.

GABRIELLE
Meleager must've found some good coverage trees.
(beat)
You see, we need a big tree for the rope and little trees to hide behind to --

*
*
*
*
*
*

LILA
(grins)
I don't have to know, Gabrielle. As long as you do.

*
*

Turning, she runs off. Dismissing her doubts about her decision, Gabrielle follows.

CUT TO:

26 EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST - DAY

26

The woods look deserted as we hear the girls calling:

GABRIELLE (O.S.)
Meleager --? Where are you?

LILA (O.S.)
Meleager --?

They move into view, scanning the forest, bewildered.

LILA
Where'd he go?

GABRIELLE
(checking the ground)
Wherever it was, it's a good bet he didn't go willingly.

*
*
*

Gabrielle starts moving around, recreating the battle by reading the ground.

GABRIELLE
One guy came out... he moved here... Meleager took him down... Two! Two of them... hit him from behind...
(then)
Look here.

*
*
*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

26 CONTINUED:

26

Lila joins her to see a set of parallel marks, scoring the ground as they trail deeper into the woods.

GABRIELLE

Those are fresh drag marks -- the kind a litter makes -- and they're deep. That means the litter was carrying something heavy.

LILA

Meleager?! You think somebody killed him and --

GABRIELLE

(thinking)

No, if they'd killed him they would've left his body. Minus the head, of course, as proof.

*
*
*

As Lila goes green, Gabrielle rises, resolved.

GABRIELLE

I'm going after him.

LILA

Me, too.

GABRIELLE.

No!

(forestalling her)

Look, the important thing is to safeguard our village, right? They'd panic if they knew Meleager was missing. That's why you've got to stay and make sure they don't find out.

*

(eyeing her levelly)

Now, will you do that?

Returning her big sister's gaze, Lila nods her promise.

CUT TO:

27 EXT. DAMON'S CAMP - DAY

27*

ON MELEAGER

who looks incredulous as he stands bound in chains before Damon and his men.

*

MELEAGER

Join up with you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

27

DAMON

Why not? You could be worth a lot more to me than the fifty thousand dinars Cassius is offering. Fifty thousand alive. But, if I have to, I'll take the twenty for your head.

(grins)

Zeus, your reputation alone's enough to make towns surrender to us without lifting a sword. So, what do you say?

MELEAGER

(steely-eyed)

Remove these chains, you'll get my answer.

Damon holds his glare a beat. Then:

DAMON

You make me sad. Take him away.

But as Meleager is about to be hauled off, a COMMOTION erupts as Athol and another THUG approach, holding a struggling young woman they throw face down at Damon's feet.

ATHOL

We caught her near the horses.

Turning, she tries to stand, but a spear keeps her prone as Meleager reacts to see the woman is... Gabrielle.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

28 EXT. DAMON'S CAMP - CONTINUOUS

28*

Meleager watches, helpless, as Damon waves his men off, allowing Gabrielle to rise. *

DAMON *

Who are you? What do you want?

GABRIELLE

(stalling as she seeks inspiration)

Wow. Two very good questions. And not to be answered lightly. I mean, after all...

(turning to Thugs)

...Do any of us really "know who we are"? And as for what we really want...

(back to Damon) *

Well, I think it was Sophocles who said --

DAMON *

(bored; summarily)

Kill her.

As Gabrielle reacts and they start to drag her off:

MELEAGER (O.S.)

Wait.

His voice stops everyone cold as they turn to him.

MELEAGER

(to Damon) *

You still want me to join you...?

(eyeing Gabrielle lustfully)

...A little added "incentive" might change my mind.

(a wink to Damon) *

Know what I mean?

Damon does, but hesitates. Then: *

DAMON *

(shrugs)

Why not? In fact, I'll even throw in a tent for some privacy...

(winks back at Meleager)

...the better to persuade you.

CUT TO:

29 INT. TENT - DAY

29

Gabrielle is thrust inside the tent, followed by Meleager who's been unchained. Alone, he whirls on her.

MELEAGER

What in the name of Zeus do you think you're doing here?

GABRIELLE

What does it look like? I'm rescuing you.

MELEAGER

(incredulous)

That's not what it looks like!

GABRIELLE

Okay, maybe not. But it will now that I'm on the inside.

MELEAGER

You mean you've got a plan?

GABRIELLE

(confidant)

Any minute now.

DISSOLVE TO:

30 EXT. TENT - NIGHT

30

Two GUARDS are posted at the tent flap door, when they hear:

GABRIELLE'S VOICE

(from inside tent; feigning passion)

Oh, Meleager... oh, the gods preserve me. Oh... oh... OH...!

Exchanging lascivious looks, the Guards lean closer to the cloth door, straining to hear as:

GABRIELLE'S VOICE

(practically purring)

Ooohhh, Meleager! No wonder they call you "the Mighty."

Another look, then both Guards start to peek around the tent door -- one on either side -- when, suddenly --

-- Meleager's strong hands thrust through the cloth and, grabbing a Guard's head in each one, he CLUNKS them together, knocking them cold. Then, reaching under the flap, he drags them inside, out of sight.

DISSOLVE TO:

31 EXT. TENT - MINUTES LATER 31

With Gabrielle in the lead, she and Meleager cautiously emerge from the tent and sneak away.

CUT TO:

32 EXT. DAMON'S CAMP - AT HORSES - NIGHT 32*

Gabrielle and Meleager search the horses. Gabrielle finds... *

GABRIELLE
This one's the lead! *

She unties it as Meleager unties the others. She scares it off, the others follow the lead. *

MELEAGER
That oughta slow Damon down. *

GABRIELLE
I hope so. We've got a lot to do.

MELEAGER
Then let's get to it.

CUT TO:

33 EXT. POTEIDAIA - DAY 33

A sense of urgency underlies everyone's efforts as Gabrielle helps the Villagers set traps for Damon and his men. But even in the rush, Gabrielle and Lila each find moments to watch the other unobserved -- revealing moments that show them to each other in different lights. *

SETTING TRAPS MONTAGE - SERIES OF SCENES (MOS)

1) A VILLAGE STREET where Gabrielle confers with Meleager over a trench that's being dug. Meleager listens while across the street, Lila pauses as she carries off a pail of earth to observe how competent and knowledgeable her sister is. *

2) A VILLAGE ALLEY where a slack rope, running in a small ditch, goes from one building, across the street, to another where Gabrielle secures it. But as she does, she sees Lila using a rake to cover the rope with dirt and blend the earth. Lila wipes her brow and continues, instructing the kids who are doing the same as she is. Gabrielle notices. *

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED:

33

3) A VILLAGE BUILDING whose awning is being loaded with logs at Gabrielle's direction while on the street, Lila looks up from toting hoes and pitchforks to note how naturally leadership suits Gabrielle. *

4) A VILLAGE STREET where Gabrielle advises some men on shoring up a ditch being filled with water. But as she glances around, Gabrielle sees Lila, carrying a bucket of water to the ditch. Spotting an elderly woman struggling with a bucket, Lila quickly moves to take it -- earning the old woman's gratitude and a look of quiet pride from Gabrielle who returns to work, oblivious to Meleager who scans the town's defenses with worried eyes. *

DISSOLVE TO: .

34 INT. TAVERN/GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

34

Gabrielle stands with Lila and Meleager as Pharis addresses the crowd of Villagers.

PHARIS

...So, if everyone's clear on when you stand watch, there's just one thing left to do, and that's to thank the man whose courage and skill we can rely on to protect us. A man whose very name strikes terror into the hearts of his foes. Fellow citizens, I give you: Meleager the Mighty!

As the CROWD ROARS its approval, Gabrielle and Lila grin and urge the reluctant warrior forward.

GABRIELLE

Go on, go on...
(forestalling his protest)
The town needs a warrior.

MELEAGER

(meaningfully)
They've already got one.

Touched by this tribute, Gabrielle smiles warmly. But before she can speak --

-- some eager Villagers propel Meleager over to Pharis who motions for quiet, then turns to Meleager.

PHARIS

This time tomorrow, you'll be taking the rest of the money from this strongbox...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED:

34

PHARIS (cont'd)
 (pats locked wooden box on
 bar beside him)
 ...and leaving, never to think of us
 again. But for the rest of our lives,
 we'll always be grateful for your
 strength and fearless bravery.
 (turning to crowd)
 Three cheers for Meleager the Mighty!
 Hip, hip --

VILLAGERS
 HOORAY!

As the CHEER CONTINUES, only Gabrielle sees the nervous
 doubts behind Meleager's strained smile.

DISSOLVE TO:

35 EXT. POTEIDAIA - LOOKOUT POINT - SUNRISE

35

As dawn lights the sky, we see Lila fast asleep at her post
 while, beside her, Gabrielle stands watch for them both. An
 anxious MOAN betrays Lila's troubled dreams and, concerned,
 Gabrielle gently wakes her.

GABRIELLE
 Lila...? Lila, wake up.
 (as she bolts awake)
 It's okay -- I'm here.

Getting her bearings, Lila blinks, mortified to realize:

LILA
 I fell asleep! On watch! Oh,
 Gabrielle, I'm sorry. I didn't mean
 to --

GABRIELLE
 Hey, it's okay. I was keeping an eye
 out. Besides, I'm not surprised. You
 earned it.

(overriding her)
 No -- I mean it. I watched you
 yesterday, and you know what I saw?
 (off Lila's puzzled face)
 I saw a competent, caring young
 woman -- not the little girl you were
 when I left here. It just hit me
 today... you're grown up.

*
*

*
*

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED:

35

LILA

Sometimes I think I'm just growing old. But you... Thinking up all those traps, getting them set, figuring out all the strategies...

(beat; then, with an effort)

Guess Xena really taught you a lot, huh?

Knowing how hard Lila's trying to move past her jealousy, Gabrielle smiles.

GABRIELLE

Yes, she did. She taught me when to fight, and when to talk... She taught me how to know a friend from an enemy... She taught me what having a real friend means.

LILA

Then why'd you come home?

Thrown, Gabrielle takes a beat. Then:

GABRIELLE

Because some things can't be taught. Some things you either have... or you don't. Like the connection you can only feel with your sister. Xena can't teach me that. I already have it.

Gabrielle can't help but smile as she gives her sister a quick hug. Lila wipes her eyes.

GABRIELLE

Okay, enough with the mushy stuff. We're supposed to be on watch, remember? I can only imagine what Xena would say if she saw us.

LILA

(looking off)

There they are!

GABRIELLE

(shrugs)

Well, sure, but I mean after she said that.

LILA

(crossing to her)

No! Damon and his gang --

(pointing O.S.)

There they are!

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED: 2

35

Looking where Lila points, Gabrielle reacts to see...
Damon and his men are on the move!

BACK TO SCENE

GABRIELLE

Alright, you run tell Pharis to sound
the alarm. I'll get Meleager.

CUT TO:

36 INT. MELEAGER'S LEAN-TO - DAY

36

There's a brief KNOCK, then Gabrielle bursts in, calling:

GABRIELLE

Meleager, hurry -- they're here!
(looks around)
Meleager? Meleager --?

The lean-to is empty. Reacting, she starts out when Lila
and Pharis rush in, all three nearly colliding! In his
hands, Pharis holds the tavern strongbox.

GABRIELLE

Lila! What are you two --

LILA

(breathless)
I ran into Pharis --

PHARIS

(winded)
Where's Meleager?

GABRIELLE

(surprised)
He's not with you?

PHARIS

No -- and look!
(displays strongbox,
broken and empty)
The money's gone!!

GABRIELLE

(heart sinking)
...And so's Meleager.

HOLD on her troubled face, as we:

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

37 EXT. POTEIDAIA SQUARE - DAY

37

Panicked Villagers rush to contribute their prize possessions (a loom, a lyre, a vase, a chicken, etc:) to a pile of tribute being collected by Pharis as Gabrielle and Lila protest.

GABRIELLE

Okay, Pharis, let's not panic.
Meleager was important to us, yes.
But --

*

PHARIS

Important?! We're farmers, not
fighters. We counted on him. And he
deserted us! He stole our money and
left us to die!

*
*
*

GABRIELLE

I can't explain why he left, but maybe
it's time we started counting on
ourselves. We've still got the traps.

*

PHARIS

Meleager's the key to our whole
defense. Without a warrior, we're
dead.

*

LILA

But we've got a warrior. Gabrielle
can lead us.

PHARIS

Gabrielle?!

Me?!

GABRIELLE

LILA

(staunchly)

Who better than a student of Xena's?

(turns to crowd)

Everyone, stop, please... Listen to
me.

(as they do)

I'm no hero, believe me. But the way I
see it, we've got two choices: either
we make a stand and maybe die... or we
surrender and die for sure. It's time
to stop talking and time to fight!

(turning to Gabrielle)

Isn't that right? Isn't that what
Xena taught you?

*
*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

37 CONTINUED:

37

For a moment, Gabrielle hesitates, assailed by self-doubts. Then, drawing strength from Lila's shining eyes, she takes a breath and turns to the crowd.

GABRIELLE

It's true. A man like Damon won't be satisfied 'til he's picked this place clean. So if we want to have a future, we have to stop him... now.

*

As the CROWD REACTS, Pharis frowns.

*

PHARIS

(dismissive)

Run along, Gabrielle. This is a decision for the whole village, not an outsider.

*

*

*

*

That stings. Gabrielle is stunned.

*

LILA

(mad)

Hold it!

(off Pharis' shock)

In case you haven't noticed, this is Gabrielle! My sister! This is her village. And if you people were smart, you'd see Xena's taught her a lot more about warrior arts than you'll ever know about anything.

*

*

*

*

*

Pharis glares. But before he can reply, a SENTRY runs up.

SENTRY

Damon's men have cleared the woods. They're making straight for us!

*

GABRIELLE

(urging the crowd)

Come on -- we've gone this far. Let's give these sons of gryphons a welcome they'll never forget! What do you say?!

SMASH CUT TO:

38 EXT. ALLEY - DAY

38

Some of Damon's men stride down the alley, when --

*

-- a couple of BOYS dash out ahead of them, SHOUTING taunts and throwing stones.

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED:

38

Glad for the excuse, the men charge after them, only to go sprawling as they reach a trip rope rigged to span the alley and fall over it, landing in a tangled heap.

CUT TO:

39 EXT. VILLAGE - NEAR SOME TREES - DAY

39

A couple of Damon's thugs are skulking by, when --

-- a RUSTLING sound halts them. Puzzled, they look around, when a LOUDER RUSTLE sounds directly above them and, looking up, the thugs react to see --

-- EGGS dropping directly onto their faces with a SPLAT!

Above them, a BOY grins, grabs a rope, and swings away to safety.

CUT TO:

40 EXT. STREET - DAY

40

More of Damon's Men are on the prowl, when...

...a bevy of GIRLS, Gabrielle and Lila among them, appear at the end of the street.

Exchanging lusty looks, the Men rush at them only to fall through a camouflage cover into a water-filled trench!

Immediately, Villagers swarm the bandits, walloping them with pots, pans, brooms, etc. Gabrielle wields her staff effectively.

CUT TO:

41 EXT. BUILDING - DAY

41

A handful of Villagers armed with farming tools stand beneath the building's awning as...

...a dozen outlaws, armed to the teeth, head toward them.

But as the outlaws get within striking distance, the Villagers seem to lose their nerve and, turning, run inside the building.

Roaring at their retreat, the outlaws start after them when --

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED:

41

-- a last Villager yanks a rope that releases the awning and --

-- a landslide of logs tumbles directly down onto the bandits who are completely bowled over!

Instantly, the Villagers are back, streaming out of the building to clobber the outlaws with everything they've got.

The outlaws begin to retreat!

*

CUT TO:

42 EXT. MOUTH OF ALLEY OFF SQUARE - DAY

42

The Villagers cheer. Pharis walks up to Gabrielle and Lila.

*

*

PHARIS

(amazed)

We've done it! We've beaten them!

*

*

*

GABRIELLE

No! They're just going to regroup. We surprised them, but they won't fall for it twice. This time, have the people...

*

*

*

*

*

PHARIS

(glaring)

Regroup? This is madness! We can't possibly win! I'm going to Damon and offer our surrender before we're slaughtered!

*

*

*

*

He turns and strides into:

43 EXT. SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

43

Gabrielle and Lila rush after Pharis.

LILA

No! You can't!

GABRIELLE

There's got to be another way!

Pharis suddenly stops -- and the girls plow into him. Recovering, they look to see...

Damon riding up to his troops who are already starting to regroup. He looks them over.

*

*

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED:

43

DAMON

You fools! You let women, children and old men kick your behinds? Now, take this village or die by my blade!

The men all start waving their swords in the air and screaming their battle cries.

DAMON

Front line, form and move!

The warriors line up and start a slow march down the street.

Three of the front line start to move forward toward Gabrielle and Lila. Gabrielle stands in front of Lila, holding her staff at the ready. Suddenly:

MELEAGER (O.S.)

(calls)

Hey, Hydra Heads!

Turning, the Thugs react to a HIGH-PITCHED WHISTLING sound carried straight at them by --

-- a gleaming Spartan javelin that impales all three Thugs like shish kebab on a skewer! As they fall over --

Gabrielle, Lila, and Pharis react and turn to see...

...Meleager, fully armored, standing beside a mobile rack of Spartan javelins!

Throwing a vindicated look at Pharis, Gabrielle runs to join Meleager, Lila at her heels.

GABRIELLE

Am I glad to see you! Pharis thought you stole the money and ditched us.

MELEAGER

I needed cash to buy the javelins.

LILA

But Gabrielle knew you'd be back.

MELEAGER

(to Gabrielle)

That's why I'm here.

As Gabrielle returns his gaze --

-- an arrow WHIZZES past, close as a shave!!!

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED: 2

43

MELEAGER

(taking charge)

Now beat it, and let me do my job.

Glad to obey, Gabrielle and Lila scurry for cover as:

Looking like a human Gatling gun, Meleager hurls the javelins -- filling the air with their frightening WHISTLES as he skewers two and three Thugs at a time until he picks up the last javelin.

The three Thugs in front of him have caught onto the tactic. Meleager hurls the javelin. They duck! The javelin passes over them and blasts through the trunk of a small tree. The three Thugs stand and swing their swords; emit their battle screams... and get pounded by the small tree as it falls on them.

MELEAGER

(amazed)

I did it!

DAMON (O.S.)

Guess again.

Whirling, Meleager reacts to see:

Damon standing behind him, holding Lila and Gabrielle (who has a knife at her throat) as human shields.

Instinctively, Meleager starts toward them, but --

Damon presses the knife harder against Gabrielle as he warns:

DAMON

Move, and I'll slit her like a sacrificial lamb, I swear it!

Meleager scowls, but stays put as...

...Gabrielle glances around, desperately seeking inspiration when, suddenly, she spies the rake lying on the ground.

DAMON

(jerking the girls)

All right, let's go.

But as they move off, Gabrielle deliberately stumbles.

GABRIELLE

Ow! My foot's asleep.

DAMON

Well, wake it up -- fast!

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED: 3

43

GABRIELLE

Maybe this'll help.

And raising her foot, she stomps down on the rake blade, sending its shaft shooting straight up between her and Lila to connect hard with --

-- Damon in a place that brings tears to his eyes, forcing him to release the girls and clutch himself in agony as --

Gabrielle seizes their chance and grabbing Lila, pushes her ahead, shouting:

GABRIELLE

Run, Lila!

Lila takes off. But as Gabrielle follows, Damon grabs her ankle and she drops to the ground.

Damon stands, his fury increased by his pain, when suddenly, a foot catches him in the face and knocks him back. Meleager stands there.

MELEAGER

You're real tough with girls. Now why don't you pick on someone your own size?

For a beat, Damon hesitates. Then he backs off.

DAMON

Hey, look, I'm sorry, okay?
(turning away)
Can't blame a man for trying...
(whirling back, sword in hand)
...right?

And Damon lunges! Dodging his thrust, Meleager parries and the fight is on! As Gabrielle retreats to safety with Lila:

Damon charges again, sword meeting sword as Meleager repels him, then takes the offense.

Fueled by years of frustration, Meleager is relentless as he slashes, thrusts, cuts, parries, and swipes at --

-- Damon who is forced to give ground until it seems he's nearly defeated. Then, in a last ditch effort, Damon musters all his strength and --

-- knocks Meleager to the ground, sending his sword flying from his hand!

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED: 4

43

Unarmed, Meleager turns to see Damon standing above him, sword in hand and, in that instant... Meleager freezes!

Seeing this, Gabrielle instinctively shouts to him:

GABRIELLE

Act -- don't react!

Meleager recovers just in time. Damon slices at Meleager. He does a back handspring to avoid it and, when he rights himself, he kicks the sword from Damon's hand. It sails up into the air...

Damon pulls a dagger from his vest and screams.

Meleager looks up at:

THE SWORD

as it completes its upward arc and starts heading down...

BACK TO SCENE

as Meleager makes his quick calculations. Damon charges. Meleager grabs Damon's wrists and rolls onto his back, pulling Damon up and over.

Damon slams to the ground, flat on his back. He has just a second to look up and appreciate Meleager's calculations as his own sword plunges down and through his chest.

Silence. Meleager stands and looks over to Gabrielle.

DISSOLVE TO:

44 INT. TAVERN/GENERAL STORE - DAY

44

A victory party is underway as we FIND and FOLLOW Gabrielle who threads her way through the crowd past:

PHARIS

...Oh, sure, there were a few tense moments. But I never had a doubt that we could do it...

Reacting, Gabrielle continues on until she reaches...

...an OUT-OF-THE-WAY NOOK whose relative quiet offers sanctuary among the store's merchandise. Looking pensive, Gabrielle seems a million miles away, as:

LILA (O.S.)

A dinar for your thoughts.

(CONTINUED)

44 CONTINUED:

44

Startled, Gabrielle turns to see...

...Lila appearing around the corner by some grain sacks, her hands casually clasped behind her as she joins Gabrielle who forces a brief smile.

GABRIELLE

Don't waste your money.

LILA

Okay, then I'll tell you. You love this village, love your family, your friends. But you want to leave... and you don't know how to tell us.

GABRIELLE

(impressed)

And I thought I was the only oracle in the family.

Lila smiles as she eyes her transparent older sister.

LILA

It doesn't take an oracle to see you belong out there in the world...

(an effort)

...with Xena... helping to change people's lives for the better, like you did here.

Producing Gabrielle's bundle of clothes from behind her back, Lila extends it. Still Gabrielle hesitates.

GABRIELLE

But Mother and Father --

LILA

-- have some oracle in them, too.

(as Gabrielle takes the bundle)

They know you, Gabrielle, and they love you...

(holding back tears)

...almost as much as I do.

Her own tears welling, Gabrielle embraces her sister.

CUT TO:

45 EXT. AN ASCENDING MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

45

Staff in hand, Gabrielle WHISTLES as she climbs the pass. But as she turns a bend OUT OF SIGHT... the WHISTLING STOPS.

CUT TO:

46 EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - AROUND THE BEND - DAY

46

ON GABRIELLE who looks stunned as she stands gaping at...

...the same HEAD HIGHWAYMEN we saw in the TEASER who gazes back at Gabrielle in ironic surprise.

HEAD HIGHWAYMAN

Well, well... We meet again.

Instantly wary, Gabrielle backs off, angling to escape the way she came when --

-- a HUGE THUD makes her whirl in time to see --

-- a large BOULDER being rolled into place by TWO more Highwaymen, completely blocking the pass behind her..

Alarmed, Gabrielle spins back to their leader who smiles thinly.

HEAD HIGHWAYMAN

Not so brave without your well-muscled friend, are you?

And stepping aside, he reveals...

...the same CART with the sharp wooden stakes protruding from its front, looking the worse for being jerry-rigged together, but still deadly... poised on the upgrade behind him, a THIRD Highwayman ready to release it.

As Gabrielle reacts, the Head Highwayman's grin grows lethal.

HEAD HIGHWAYMAN

Last time we did this, you and your friend chose to fight rather than submit.

(leering)

Care to rethink your decision?

He nods to the men at the boulder to grab her. But Gabrielle spins, takes her staff, and brings both men down with swift jabs to their stomachs.

Whirling back, she faces the Head Highwayman who simply shrugs.

HEAD HIGHWAYMAN

It's your funeral.

The lethal cart -- released by the Third Highwayman -- is gathering momentum as it rolls straight toward her...

...exactly like it did in the TEASER... when she froze!

(CONTINUED)

46 CONTINUED:

46

For a heartbeat, it seems history will repeat itself as Gabrielle stares -- caught between the BOULDER and the onrushing cart.

Then, instinct kicks in and, giving the cart a measuring look, Gabrielle starts to run... directly toward it!

Nearing the cart, she thrusts her staff into the ground, pushes off, and pole vaults completely over the cart as...

...the cart hits the BOULDER and SMASHES to bits!

BACK TO GABRIELLE

Landing safely, she grips her staff and whirls to see...

...the Head Highwayman and his three men coming at her, raising their weapons, when suddenly --

-- a CHAKRAM slices through the air in an arc that chops all the weapons before boomeranging back to...

...XENA who smiles as she catches the chakram. The Highwaymen react, then run!

Seeing Xena, Gabrielle beams and hurries toward her.

GABRIELLE

Xena! When'd you get here?

XENA

In time to see you vault that cart.
Gutsy move.

Xena pulls Argo into the clearing behind her.

GABRIELLE

It was gutsy, wasn't it? I didn't freeze.

XENA

No, you didn't.
(then)
Did you find the answers you were looking for?

GABRIELLE

(reflective)
Yeah. I think I did.

Gabrielle and Xena turn and start walking, just as they always do, as if nothing has interrupted their journey.
A BEAT.

(CONT)

46 CONTINUED: 2

46

GABRIELLE
Kind of funny, don't you think? That
we should just run into each other?
Out here?

XENA
Not really.
(then)
I was on my way to Poteidaia. Just to
see how things were going.

A long beat.

GABRIELLE
I missed you, too.

XENA
(difficult)
I... I...
(finally)
Argo missed you. A lot.

Xena pats Argo on the neck. Gabrielle and Xena look at each
other, then start laughing. Off this, we:

FADE OUT.

THE END