

~ Exclusive ~

by Ambrosia

Disclaimers: I must admit that some of these fine folks don't belong to me. I just asked them to participate in this story and they were sweet enough to say yes ;-) BTW, this is a post FIN story. Yeah, I know it took two years after the preposterous ending of the show for me to write it. Better late than never though. Unless you end up not liking this. In that case, never would be better for you for I suppose...(sad lil' shrug)

Subtext: Yep, I threw some of that in there.

Language: Nah, not too much. On a scale of 1-10, a 2 1/2.

Violence: Nah.

Feedback: If you'd be so kind as to send me some o' that stuff I just adore, please do so at SumrBrezze@aol.com

Sitting in a corner of the room at a small table, the warrior took a sip from the mug in her hand containing an amber colored liquid before her eyes swept around the room. Immediately, after she stepped through the doors of the tavern, she felt eyes on her but couldn't for the life of her figure out whom they belonged to. It was driving her crazy and making her just a tad bit paranoid too, because she had felt similar eyes on her during her journey here to Athens. Someone was following her and once she discovered whom, she intended to kick some serious booty.

Suddenly looking at a small round black jar sitting on the table, she pulled it toward her, beginning to caress it in an almost loving fashion. Blinking several times, her eyes teared up causing minuscule wet drops to start sliding down her tanned cheeks. Picking up the mug, she drained its contents before signaling the barkeep for another one.

Her eyes riveted on the jar, moments later someone placed a fresh mug in front of her. Without so much as a glance in their direction, she relayed her thanks while wrapping a hand around the mug. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed that the deliverer of the drink wasn't budging. Were they waiting for a tip or something?

Looking at the person, she was about to say something when her voice box failed her. A small gasp fell from her lips as she observed the tall woman standing next to her table. She bore a striking resemblance to Xena and if the warrior didn't know any better, she would have sworn that this woman was indeed Xena. The only differences were that her hair was a chestnut color, she might have been an inch or so shorter and she wore these peculiar looking golden oval things with two pieces of glass stuck in them. There were also two skinny golden arms, the ends of which curved around her ears.

The next thing she noticed was that the Xena lookalike (how many had there been already?) was strangely dressed in blue pants the material of which she couldn't fathom along with a long red shirt that had tiny plastic round things stitched down the length of it. On her feet was a pair of odd looking red shoes with the word 'skechers' printed on the sides of them. What in the known world were skechers?

Green eyes trailing back to the woman's smiling face, she looked at her curiously. "Who are you?"

Extending a hand to be shaken, the woman answered in a voice similar to Xena's, "Hello Gabrielle. My name is Logan Davenport."

Slipping her hand into the stranger's Gabrielle gave it a brief shake. "Davenport? Is that where you hail from?"

Logan shook her head. "No, I'm from Miami. Davenport is my last name."

Twin brows quirked in interest. "You have two names?" And where was Miami? She'd never heard of it.

"I actually have three names. My middle name is Amelia, but please don't tell anyone that!" She laughed.

Gabrielle slowly shook her head, intrigued and confused by this lookalike with the strange clothes and three names. "So, what can I do for you Logan? Are you the one who has been following and watching me?" She asked the question, but she already had a strong feeling that the answer was yes. That was confirmed when Logan nodded as she invited herself to sit down at the small blonde's table.

"Yes and I apologize for that. I was just trying to study you before approaching," pausing, blue eyes closely observed Gabrielle's face. "Gabrielle, I'm going to tell you something and it's going to sound bizarre but it's the truth."

The other woman lightly chuckled. "Logan, I've seen and experienced a lot over the years so I doubt there's much more that could truly sound bizarre to me. What did you want to tell me?"

"I'm from the future."

Gabrielle didn't so much as blink an eyelash. "Uh huh. Well now your clothing makes sense." She indicated the brunette's outfit with a nod of her head. "I assume that is the style where you're from? Miami?"

Logan was obviously surprised. She hadn't expected Gabrielle to believe her that easily. "That's it? You take me at my word?"

The warrior nonchalantly shrugged. "Of course. I've dealt with the future before. In fact, I've

seen and temporarily experienced a future life of mine. However, something tells me that the future you speak of is even farther away than that one." Reaching out, she stroked a finger along Logan's pants covered thigh. "What material is this?"

"Aah...it's called jean." Logan attempted to ignore the not so unpleasant effect Gabrielle's small innocent touch was having on her.

"Jean." Gabrielle nodded, removing her wandering digit much to the other woman's relief. "I wish we had jean. I think I like those." Remembering her drink, she took a sip before asking, "Is that it then? Do you want my help in getting back to the future?"

Images of Marty McFly entered Logan's mind before she pushed them away. "No, I know how to return. Actually, I traveled back in time on purpose to see you."

Green eyes widened slightly. "Whatever for?"

"Well, I'd like to do you Gabrielle."

"WHAT?!?" The warrior thought about thumping the woman's head with her mug, but didn't want to waste her drink, which had cost her a few precious dinars. The price was ten dinars for just a single mug of the beverage she drank. What was the Grecian economy coming to? She remembered when it used to cost half that before she and Xena's twenty-five year freeze.

"Um..." Logan quickly shook her head, wanting to kick herself for the faux pas. *Yank your mind out of the gutter, Davenport!* "No, I'm sorry. I mean that I'd like to interview you."

Gabrielle's eyes narrowed in suspicion as she glanced around the tavern. "Is Nigel with you? Because if he is, tell him I'm not interested in giving anymore interviews. I just want to sit here and peacefully finish my drink before going home."

"Nigel?" Logan appeared thoughtful while trying to determine why the name sounded so familiar. Within seconds, it struck her. Blue eyes lit up as she focused on Gabrielle. "Ah ha! **You Are There!**"

The blonde gazed back in puzzlement. "I'm where? What are you talking about?" *Perhaps someone has had a little bit too much to drink!* Gabrielle wondered, starting to question if the woman sitting before her was all there.

"**You Are There** is the title of the scroll you wrote with Nigel the reporter from the future in it. As you know, it's the scroll where Xena restored Aphrodite and Ares to their godly status."

Gabrielle nodded in agreement. "Right. With Odin's golden apples. However, I haven't written that scroll yet. I have returned to writing though and have been slowly but surely documenting Xena's and my past adventures."

Logan started to look thoroughly excited, her body nearly vibrating in the chair she occupied.

"Yes, but you will because in the future I am the proud owner of all of your scrolls--well I believe most of the them anyway--that document yours and Xena's major adventures. You wouldn't believe how much money they cost me, but they were worth every cent I spent-and put on my MasterCard."

Though it was on the tip of her tongue to inquire about what a MasterCard was, she didn't ask. Gabrielle smiled in return. "Good for you but Logan I must say that you don't want to interview me. Unlike that time with Nigel, there is nothing worth interviewing me for now. No major adventures happening. I'm just in Athens drinking some ale. Quite boring actually."

"So you say. Gabrielle, I don't need some big adventure. I only wish to talk with you about your life. Mainly as it is now. So, please may I? I promise I won't take up much of your time. I came all this way just to see you." When she looked as though she was about to protest, Logan added, "And I'll pay you 5,000 dinars." The reporter wasn't against resorting to monetary compensation.

Sitting back in her chair, Gabrielle's expression mirrored surprise. "You must really want this interview."

"I do. I mean, I traveled back to ancient Greece just to get it, which let me tell you wasn't an easy feat. But getting to talk with you was worth it."

The warrior looked genuinely flattered as her cheeks reddened with the beginnings of a blush. Well, what would it hurt to give the reporter a small interview? Gabrielle nodded in acquiescence. "All right Logan. I'll give you an interview, but it's not necessary for you to pay me 5,000 dinars." She indicated the two mugs sitting on her table. "However, you can get the drinks." She smiled, as did Logan.

"Excellent!" Reaching into the pocket of her pants, she pulled out a few coins, placing them on the table before looking over her shoulder and waving at a young man seated at a table across the room. Getting up, he headed in their direction carrying a big black object. Gabrielle instantly recognized it.

When she had Logan's attention, she pointed toward the device. "Isn't that one of those things that record a person's image? Nigel had one too." She briefly smiled while remembering how irritated Xena had been by the object whenever it was aimed in her direction.

The brunette nodded while smiling. "Yes, though it can record anything you point it at. You don't mind my taping this do you?"

"Um...no. Do you really think people are going to believe that you traveled back to...ancient Greece as you call it and interviewed the author of those scrolls?"

As the young cameraman arrived at their table, quietly taking a seat, Logan's head quickly moved back and forth in answer to Gabrielle's question. "Of course! This all looks much too real to be a fake set." She chuckled. "My budget is not that big."

The cameraman decided to put his two cents in after emitting a soft snort. "What budget? Last I checked, we didn't have a budget Logan." He thoughtfully paused, his green eyes, which were a shade darker than Gabrielle's on the woman he had been paired with for the last two and a half years. "I bet *she* has a rather generous one."

Blue eyes narrowed as Logan listened to this before she slowly nodded. "I swear that woman has interviewed everyone except God." Wagging a finger in his direction she added, "I'm telling you Ricky this interview is destined to make me bigger than Barbara!"

Gabrielle glanced between the two curiously. She was having a difficult time understanding their conversation. "Who is Barbara and why would this interview cause you to gain more weight than her? More importantly, why would you want to?"

She looked so perplexed that neither Ricky nor Logan had the heart to laugh. "No, I don't mean it literally Gabrielle. What I mean is that interviewing you just might take me to the top where my reporting rival Barbara Walters is comfortably perched. I aim to be better than her, which is a rather strenuous goal, but I won't rest until I achieve it." She paused. "Hell, I won't even rest then!"

Grinning, Ricky good-naturedly clapped her on the shoulder. He couldn't agree more! "We'll never rest Boss," the young man replied, using his favorite nickname for the reporter.

Logan returned the grin exuberantly. "You got that right Ricky. Never."

Taking a deep breath, Gabrielle folded her arms over her chest as she sat back in the chair. She waited until two sets of eyes filled with determination were focused on her and then proceeded to smile. "What are we waiting for then? Let's make you two bigger than Barbara."

Having decided to perform the interview elsewhere, the trio left the tavern in search of the perfect place. When Gabrielle suggested a nearby lake, Logan excitedly agreed. When they arrived at the picturesque lake, she along with Gabrielle and Ricky looked around in appreciation. The small body of water was partially surrounded by tall mighty trees, a multitude of brightly colored flowers and verdant tufts of grass that two deer were currently feasting upon, seemingly not in the least bit bothered by the arrival of the trio. In the distance rested a snow-capped mountain, easily visible due to an unpolluted clear blue sky where birds called to each other as they soared through the air.

"This is awesome!" Logan grinned toward her companions. "Are you guys ready to get started?" Both mutely nodded, waiting for her next directions. And directions she did proceed to give by indicating for Gabrielle to take a seat on a patch of grass that was about four feet from the lake's edge. As she and Ricky followed the woman, she asked him to get his camera ready.

Sitting in front of the blonde, Logan removed a pen and a small notepad from her jeans while Ricky kneeling before them, set up his video camera. Clicking the ink pen once so that the metal tip showed, she opened the pad before jotting something down. Watching in fascination,

Gabrielle inquired about the writing utensil. It appeared much easier to use than a quill. Smiling toward her, Logan handed the slim silvery object to her for inspection.

"It's called a pen. Sort of like a quill, but you don't need to continuously dip it in ink because there is already enough inside it that you can use for quite a bit of writing before it runs out." The reporter nodded toward the pen, which was being twirled between Gabrielle's fingers. "You may keep that one if you like."

The blonde head quickly shook back and forth. "Oh, no I couldn't take your pen, Logan." Though the expression on her face clearly read, 'but I really want to'. Almost sadly, she held the object out for the reporter to take back, but she made no move to take it.

"No, please keep it Gab. I have plenty more at home. Plus, I always travel with two." Sure enough, she pulled another pen identical to the one the warrior/bard held from her pocket. "See?"

"Okay, thank you so much Logan. I love this." A broad smile on her face, Gabrielle safely tucked her new gift away in the caramel colored backpack resting at her side. She couldn't wait to try it out on a scroll later.

"You're welcome." Logan couldn't explain just how delighted she was to have put that smile on the other woman's face.

"I'm ready Boss." Perching the camera on his shoulder, Ricky waited for her to give him the signal to switch it on.

Logan nodded followed by a deep breath. It was show time. Raising her right hand, she extended her thumb. Moments later, a small red light in the camera indicated that it was on. The reporter flashed the lens a brilliant smile, her teeth gleaming in the sunlight.

LOGAN: Hello, I'm Logan Davenport here in Ancient Greece-yes, I said Ancient Greece with Gabrielle, highly acclaimed bard *and* warrior hailing from Poteidia. This... (Dramatic pause) is **The Real Newz**. (Turns toward Gabrielle and smiles) Welcome Gabrielle. It's good to have you on the show.

GABRIELLE: (Smiling in return, although she looks a bit nervous) Thank you Logan. It's good to be on the...show.

LOGAN: Gabrielle, my first question to you is where do you reside now? Have you settled somewhere or are you still traveling?

GABRIELLE: (Shaking her head) No, I stopped traveling a few months after...well after the events in Japa. It just wasn't the same alone. I still help others but I have a specific place to call home now.

LOGAN: And just where is this place?

GABRIELLE: (Slight hesitation before answering) I moved back to Poteidia where my remaining family lives. My younger sister Lila and my niece Sarah.

LOGAN: (Small smile on her lips) So you ended up returning to the place that you were so desperate to get away from some thirty odd years ago.

GABRIELLE: (Nodding) That would be correct, Logan.

LOGAN: And what is it that you do in Poteidia? You mentioned earlier that you'd started writing again.

GABRIELLE: Yes, I did. I am in the midst of recording the adventures Xena and I had. I also run a farm.

LOGAN: A farm?

GABRIELLE: (Quick nod) Yes. You know, chickens, cows, pigs...

LOGAN: Of course, of course. (Starting to smile) I can't quite picture you as a farmer.

GABRIELLE: Well that's what I am, Logan.

LOGAN: (Shaking her head as though in amazement. Turns toward the camera) Amazing, isn't she ladies and gentlemen? A bard, an Amazon queen, a warrior, a heroine, and now a farmer as well. Is there anything that the woman sitting before me right now can't do? I sincerely have my doubts. (Turns back to Gabrielle who is now blushing) So Gabrielle, would I be correct in assuming that your journey led you from Poteidia to Athens and directly to the tavern we just left and after this interview you are headed back to Poteidia?

GABRIELLE: (Slowly nodding while remaining silent)

LOGAN: Is the ale in Athens just that delicious or do they not have it in Poteidia? (She grins while reaching up to adjust her glasses) A shame the automobile has yet to be invented. You could have been here in about forty-five minutes.

GABRIELLE: (Though her expression clearly relays the questions roaming through her mind, she decides not to even bother commenting on the automobile, whatever that was) Neither of those is the reason I came here. (Small sigh) Today is the second anniversary of Xena's...passing. I journeyed to Athens as I did last year to celebrate her life. The drinking of the ale was my toast to her.

LOGAN: (Looking sympathetic) I understand that and Gabrielle I am truly so sorry for your loss. It hurt me to my very core when I read the last couple of scrolls documenting your adventures together. **Friend In Need** was the title. I couldn't stop the tears from falling for a good solid twenty minutes. (Reaching out, briefly presses her hand to the back of Gabrielle's) If it did that to

me, I can only imagine how deeply her death affected you. After all, she was your best friend and soulmate.

GABRIELLE: (A shuddering breath) She was everything to me.

LOGAN: (Solemnly) I know Gabrielle. I know. (Pausing so that the blonde can get her emotions under control. As she wipes a tear from her cheek, Logan quietly indicates for Ricky to zoom in on it)

LOGAN (CONT'D): Gabrielle? (Green eyes lift to meet gentle blue ones) If it's alright with you, I'd like to talk about the events in Japa two years ago.

GABRIELLE: (Looks toward the lake, her eyes closing briefly before she looks back to the reporter) (Near whisper) Okay. Go ahead, Logan.

LOGAN: A question that's been in my mind since I first read **Friend In Need** almost five years ago. How did you feel when Xena informed you of her plan to stay dead? It's obvious from what you wrote in the final scroll that you disagreed and were upset over her decision, but you never really go into much detail about *your* feelings. Now I'm interested in knowing what was going through your head. Were you at all angry or just sad? Both? Something else entirely? (Blue eyes imploring) Tell me how *you* felt, Gabrielle. Tell the world.

The camera focuses on the contemplative warrior/bard.

GABRIELLE: (After a few silent heartbeats) Honestly? I was pissed.

Both Logan and Ricky's eyes widen in surprise. Neither would have ever thought they'd hear sweet little Gabrielle say the "P" word. Luckily, **The Real Newz** was liberal enough that the expletive wouldn't have to be bleeped.

LOGAN: What exactly were you pissed about?

GABRIELLE: Xena sacrificing herself by choosing death over us of course. I realize that it might have been selfish on my part, but I couldn't help the fact that I wanted her here with me. That just wasn't right.

LOGAN: And what about those souls? (Glancing toward her notepad, reads something) There were 40,000 of them. If she didn't die then-

GABRIELLE: (Interrupting) Yes, I know all about it. If Xena didn't avenge them by remaining dead then they would be lost for an eternity instead of elevating to a state of grace. Blah, blah and more freaking blah!

Two pairs of eyes widen again. Logan and Ricky watch as the interviewee begins to heat up. Logan attempts to hide her growing excitement.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D): (Pointing and looking toward the camera as though the entire world is visible through its lens) Let me tell you something. That is a bunch of complete horse manure if I've ever heard any! Why should Xena have been persecuted for something that was an accident, huh? (Glances back to the reporter) It doesn't make any sense.

LOGAN: (Playing the devil's advocate, although she's in agreement) She burned down (glances toward notepad again) Higuchi, killing those people in the process.

GABRIELLE: First off, doesn't that sound a little strange to you? How in Tartarus did 40,000 people allow themselves to be burned to a crisp, hmm? I could understand if maybe a thousand or even fifteen-hundred people died in that fire, but how was it possible for Xena to burn everyone or nearly everyone in the entire town? No one had the sense the gods gave a tick to run away or gather and put the fire out before it spread that much? (Shaking her head in bewilderment) Even all those years later when Xena and I traveled to Higuchi, it was ablaze and there was a vast commotion, as though none of them had any idea of what to do. So, the way I figure it that town is a fire hazard with a bunch of not so bright people living there. Terrifying thought really.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D): Second, (tapping one index finger to the other) I cannot stress this enough. It was an ac-ci-dent. She was minding her own business; merely trying to fulfill a dying friend's last request and that hateful mob decided to harass her. She ignored them at first, but you can only ignore someone so much when their throwing snowballs at you and trying to beat you with hoes and sticks! Xena was within her rights. She was only defending herself. What was the alternative? Stand there and allow them to kill her? (Swift shake of the head) I don't think so! The way I see it, it was just as much their faults as it was Xena's. Perhaps more so because she was attempting to fulfill an admirable selfless act. What was their purpose and why? To defend the death of that ass#@!# (bleep!) Yodoshi? Were these people on henbane?

LOGAN: I sense a lot of anger in you, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE: (An expression that clearly reads 'duh') I *am* angry. I'm angry with those people, with Akemi, with Xena, at this entire situation! (Pauses, touching her chest) (Quieter) I'm angry with myself.

LOGAN: (Just as quiet) Why are you angry with yourself?

GABRIELLE: Because...(soft sigh) I shouldn't have listened to Xena when we were on Mt. Fujisan. I should have just sprinkled her ashes into the fountain despite her trying to tell me that remaining dead was for the best. Perhaps she would have been upset at first, but over time I believe she would have forgiven me.

LOGAN: Gabrielle, if the situations were reversed do you think Xena would have allowed you to become a martyr? I recall the scroll **One Against an Army** when you had to convince her several times that you two had to defend Athens against the onslaught of the Persians instead of searching for the antidote to expunge the poison within you. She was willing to risk the welfare of the Grecian nation in order to save you. That's more than 40,000 people.

Not giving an immediate reply, Gabrielle imagines the scene.

Xena was about to pour Gabrielle's ashes into the fountain when the bard hurried over and gently took the jar out of her grasp. Blue eyes filled with confusion glanced at her and then the setting sun. The small blonde looked at her sadly.

"No, Xena."

The warrior grew even more confused. "Gabrielle..." She watched as the other woman resolutely shook her head. "Gabrielle, the sun is setting. I have to bring you back to life."

"No-not if means condemning the souls of the 40,000 who burned at Higuchi." She placed the small black jar on the ground. Within seconds, Xena had it within her hands again.

"The souls are free..."

"They're free from Yodoshi's grasp. Akemi didn't wanna tell me this in case I wouldn't come back to help, but for those souls to be released into a state of grace, they must be avenged. I must stay dead."

The warrior appeared stupefied as she fiddled with the top on the jar containing her beloved friend's ashes. "But if I bring you back to life..."

Emerald eyes glistened with tears. "Then those souls will be lost forever," Gabrielle whispered.

In the blink of an eye, Xena's expression changed from one of stupefaction to anger and determination. "Gabrielle, that's not right!" She began to pry the top off. "I don't care. You're all that matters to me."

Pressing her hand on the back of Xena's, Gabrielle prevented her from fully removing the lid. Twin tears slid down her cheeks as she gazed into the pained face before her. "Don't you know how much I wanna let you do this? But if there is a reason for our travels together, it's because I had to learn from you-- enough to know the final, the good, the right thing to do. I can't come back." Her voice started to break on the last two words, "I can't."

The warrior princess's lower lip quivered as she attempted to hold back the tears. "I love you, Gabrielle. How am I supposed to go on without you?"

Raising her hand, Gabrielle tenderly stroked her partner's cheek. "I love you too, Xena and I'll always be with you. Always."

Realizing that they only had mere moments left together, the pair gazed toward the setting sun. As she quietly sat there, Xena reasoned that they had about ten seconds left. Ten. She glanced toward Gabrielle and gave a slight shake of her head. No way in Tartarus was she allowing this to happen. Eight. Blue eyes trailed back to the pot in her hand. Seven. Stealthily, Xena lifted the

top and set it aside. Five. She glanced toward Gabrielle again; who was seemingly paying her no attention. She stared toward the sun, readying herself to remain dead. Four. With a quick flick of her wrist, the ashes descended into the fountain, swirling around in the water, which began to faintly glow. Three. Hiding a triumphant grin, Xena replaced the top. One. She watched in total innocence as the sun slipped out of view.

Closing her eyes, Gabrielle reopened them seconds later to find that she was still there. Questioningly, she turned to regard Xena. Though the warrior tried to conceal it, Gabrielle could tell that she wanted to smile. Suspicious green eyes narrowed.

"Xenaaaa..." She waited until the woman looked at her, cerulean eyes round with false innocence. "What did you just do?"

"What makes you think I did anything?"

Gabrielle smirked. "I'm still here."

She could no longer help it. Xena beamed. "Yeah, you're still here. It's a miracle!"

The blonde extended a hand, fingers wiggling like small, short snakes. "Give me the pot."

"No." Xena shoved the empty vessel behind her.

"No?" One eyebrow slowly lifted. "It's mine. I have every right to see it."

"I bought the jar. And if you ask me, I think you're body belongs to me too." She wiggled her brows in a way that could only be thought of as suggestive.

Gabrielle smirked again, though her cheeks turned suspiciously rosy. "You...I...am..." Her head swiveled back and forth. When her name was softly called, she looked at Xena.

"I couldn't let you die-or remain dead as was the case. If that makes me a horrible person, then so be it. I couldn't do that. You can do more good alive than dead." The tears found their escape. "And mainly, I love you too much to let you sacrifice yourself for something that you never should have been solely blamed for in the first place."

"Oh, Xena." Slipping into each other's arms, they held on tight.

LOGAN: (Waiting an appropriate amount of time) So?

GABRIELLE: (Coming out of her reverie with a blink) Oh! Your question. (Quick pause) It's possible that Xena would not have done the same as I. She might have poured my ashes into the fountain. I'll never know for sure.

LOGAN: (Nodding) You mentioned that you were angry with Akemi. Could you tell me why?

GABRIELLE: (Eyes suddenly blazing with ire) That lying, sneaky, deceiving witch.

LOGAN: (Vaguely smirking) I take it that you're not a fan.

GABRIELLE: You take right. Years ago she tricked Xena into showing her the pinch so that she could assassinate her father and then two years ago she tricks her again. This time into giving up her own life! I don't understand how Xena could have any positive feelings toward Akemi. That was low.

LOGAN: (Nod of agreement) If anyone is to blame for all of this...(trailing off, hoping her interviewee will take the bait)

GABRIELLE: (Hook, line, & sinker) ...it's Akemi. She set all of these events in motion. She killed her father, who happened to be *so* evil that not even the underworld would take him. (Pause, rolling her eyes) Which sounds so inane to me, because though Yodoshi was evil, I've seen others who were just as evil if not more so. (Slapping a hand to her knee) Take Alti or Julius Caesar for instance. Or Callisto before she got her goodness and purity back. Even my own spawn Hope! You didn't see or hear about any of them running around sucking up people's souls did you?

GABRIELLE (CONT'D): During their journey, she charmed the pants off of Xena, so when she committed suicide my gir-my friend was more than ready to do what she wanted with her ashes. To (showing the quote sign with her fingers) restore her honor. Honor my ass! She played Xena like a lyre! She killed Yodoshi; Yodoshi began to capture souls, including the 40,000 from Higuchi where Akemi wanted her ashes laid to rest. Years later, she wants Xena to fix it by eternally forfeiting her life. That fails to make any sense to me. If anyone should have had to avenge the deaths of those souls, that person should have been Akemi. After all, she's the reason her father obtained that much power in the first place. She inadvertently made him more powerful in death. *She* did this.

LOGAN: You don't think she had any true feelings for Xena?

GABRIELLE: (Grudgingly) I do, even if they might have been slightly twisted. I honestly think that the main reason she wanted Xena to give up her life was so that she could have her with her. She probably figured Xena could obliterate Yodoshi and then they could be together for eternity. (Eyes narrowing) It just makes my blood boil to think how manipulative she was.

LOGAN: And in the end, she got exactly what she wanted.

GABRIELLE: (Hands balling into fists) Yes.

LOGAN: (Waiting approximately 10 seconds) (Barely audible) And Xena?

GABRIELLE: (Loud sigh) It hurts...it hurts so much that she purposefully left. A few years ago-minus the 25 frozen-I could have sworn that Xena said she was done paying for her past misdeeds. Yet, every time someone accosts her, blaming her for something she feels that she

must be redeemed-set things right. It's as though she didn't understand how to say enough is enough. I truly am done. I've paid in full for my mistakes and that is it. No, she was always quick to walk along the path of guilt whenever it presented itself. This time was obviously no different. She surrendered her life to save these souls, a lot of which meant her harm. Xena was redeemed a long time ago. She has saved so many lives and she has risked her life time and again doing so. (Tears in her eyes) I just wish she could have figured that out.

LOGAN: (Looking toward Gabrielle compassionately) This doesn't lessen your love for her though, does it? (More a statement than question)

GABRIELLE: Of course not. I'll always love her. She means more to me than anything. (Swiping at a tear)

LOGAN: Could I ask you a personal question?

GABRIELLE: (Faint smile) You mean nothing about this interview has been personal thus far?

LOGAN: (Soft chuckle) Well, this is more personal.

GABRIELLE: Go ahead.

LOGAN: All of the scrolls I've read by you have been terrific-I'm not being biased. (Smile) Occasionally, they caused me to wonder just how involved yours and Xena's relationship was. The words you used to describe it were so subtle and often I asked myself were you two more than friends. I wished that you would tell your readers for sure and you never did. At least not in any of the scrolls that are in my possession. So Gabrielle, were you?

GABRIELLE: (A grin flashing across her lips) Are you asking if we were more than friends? Nigel asked that same question right before that (she pointed toward the camera) ceased to work.

LOGAN: Well, now *I'm* asking it. Yes. (Holding her breath as she awaits the answer)

GABRIELLE: Yes.

LOGAN: (Arched brow that reminds Gabrielle so much of Xena) Yes, you were more than friends?

GABRIELLE: Yup. (Almost laughing at the hopeful look on the reporter's face) She and I were lovers.

LOGAN: (Sitting forward on the grass) You mean that you two were in love with each other? You shared a deep soulful romantic type of love? Like 'ooh, baby I wanna marry you and have your children' type of love?

GABRIELLE: (Not being able to contain the laugh any longer) Yes, that's correct, Logan.

LOGAN: (Bolting to her feet and pumping a hand in the air as Ricky quickly angles the camera upward to capture the ecstatic expression on her face) YES! Yes, yes, yes! Whoooo-hooooo! (Pointing down at a chuckling warrior/bard) I knew it! I knew that you two had to be more than friends. (Remembering that she's a professional, Logan retakes her seat on the ground. Brightly smiling) That is awesome, Gabrielle. Truly awesome. (Suddenly glancing toward her cameraman) You got that, didn't you?

RICKY: (Off camera) Oh, yeah Boss. (Sounding just as excited) I got it!

GABRIELLE: (Laughing) Wow, glad that news could make you two so happy.

LOGAN: A lot of people will be overjoyed to hear it.

GABRIELLE: If you have most of the scrolls how do others know about them?

LOGAN: (A tad sheepish) Actually, technically I don't have the actual scrolls. Those are on display at a prestigious museum in New York. What I have are replicas. They're scrolls that a now very wealthy corporation called **GabTales** produced. They look quite similar to your originals, except they're written in English, but there are other languages you can purchase them in as well. Also, the paper is a bit different.

GABRIELLE: (Quizzical expression) I have no idea what you just said.

LOGAN: Yes, I know. Sorry. Let's start with a museum.

RICKY: Boss, do you want me to keep recording?

LOGAN: (Glances toward him and nods) We can perform any editing we made need later. (Turns to Gabrielle again) Now a museum is a place where important artifacts and works of art are kept. Those that work there guard these objects from theft or damage.

GABRIELLE: People attempt to steal them?

LOGAN: Yes, because they're valuable. Take your scrolls for instance. A lot of people would love to get their hands on those originals because they are worth so much. We're probably talking half a million dinars for one scroll and that could even be one like **Key to the Kingdom**.

GABRIELLE: (Smirk) Didn't like that story, eh Logan?

(Logan looks sheepish and the warrior/bard laughs)

LOGAN: It's not what you wrote. That was eloquent as usual. Also, I'm impressed that you were able to write it so well considering that you didn't seem to participate in the adventure at all-you were no where around. And I'm all for a story with the Xena lookalike Meg in it-she's a hoot--but well...

GABRIELLE: (Chuckle) I wasn't a witness of any of the events in that scroll, but Joxer, Autolycus, and Meg filled me in. I know it wasn't the greatest adventure either. You're off the hook so relax. (Reassuring smile)

LOGAN: Whew! (Wiping imaginary sweat from her forehead and Gabrielle chuckles again) Okay, so as I was saying, your scrolls are quite popular and **GabTales** is the reason it happened. The founders of the company are the actual people to have found the scrolls in Greece. Wanting to share with the world, they had the scrolls translated into English or a select few other languages and then made numerous copies for people to buy. The original scrolls were put into a museum located in the city of New York. I've even heard talk of a television show--which is a form of a play-- but now that I see you, I don't think there is a woman alive who could play you as well. You're an original yourself, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE: (Blush) Thank you, Logan. And I'm honored that so many people have read and enjoyed my scrolls. It's wonderful to know that (looking at the reporter questioningly) hundreds of years?

LOGAN: Try two thousand.

GABRIELLE: (Eyes wide) You *did* travel far! Well, it's wonderful to know that two thousand years from now people will read and learn about all the good that Xena accomplished. (Tender smile) She was a true heroine.

LOGAN: (Looking at the lens, a smile on her lips) And there you have it ladies and gentlemen. Xena was a true heroine and I'd like to add so is Gabrielle. Together they were a dynamic duo that can never be replicated because I don't believe there is anyone that could possibly measure up to them and all that they achieved. Friends, soulmates, partners in fighting crime and partners in building a strong everlasting love. Have you ever encountered such a wonderful pair? (Two second pause) Again, this has been Logan Davenport with **The Real Newz**. Thank you for tuning in. (Giving the camera her signature salute) Goodnight one and all.

"So you've gotten everything you wanted?" Gabrielle inquired as she and the reporter stood by the lake while Ricky packed up his equipment.

Blue eyes raked over her petite form. *Well, I wouldn't mind having you.* Not wanting to damage the rapport between them as well as get the stuffing kicked out of her, Logan smiled with a nod. That gleaming, sharp-edged chakram (she'd even been allowed to touch it earlier!) hooked to the waistband of the warrior/bard's cream-colored leather pants appeared mighty dangerous. "Yep, I think that'll do it. I could actually sit here until the sun rose tomorrow asking you questions, but time doesn't permit that. Plus, I know that you must have more important things to do."

"Do you have to leave?"

Did she detect a hint of sadness in Gabrielle's voice or was that just her imagination? Regardless, Logan nodded. "Yes, Ricky and I entered by way of a portal and it only remains open until

sundown. If we miss it, then we'll be stuck here for the next five years, which means that we won't get back to our time until 2008."

"So the portal only opens once every five years?"

"That's right. From the rising of the moon until the following sunset. Very few people know of its existence." The reporter smiled. "I'm gonna miss you. That must sound silly since I haven't known you long, but I truly will. And actually in a way, I do feel that I know you through your writing. Gabrielle, you can't imagine what a great impact you've had on my life and I thank you." Glancing toward Ricky to make sure that he couldn't overhear their conversation, Logan softly added, "Sometimes I've felt as though you're my best friend in the entire world. Isn't that pathetic? You barely know me and I'm claiming that you're my best friend." Though she bid them not to come, the tears paid her no mind.

Tears springing to her own eyes, Gabrielle pulled the taller woman into a tender embrace while quietly assuring her that there was nothing pathetic about it. Wanting to give them some privacy, Ricky walked further away from the hugging and crying pair while wondering what could have caused them to become so emotional. Women were awesome yet complex creatures.

"I'm gonna miss you too, Logan," Gabrielle whispered into the woman's ear just before placing a butterfly kiss there. Leaning back, she wiped at the reporter's tear streaked face. "You should come and visit me sometime." She smiled. "Around 2008 maybe."

Softly chuckling, Logan nodded. "I might just take you up on that offer."

Groaning, Logan held on tighter as they flew over the path, which was empty except for her, Gabrielle, and the black Percheron named Princess carrying them. Though she and Ricky had followed the small woman on a horse they'd rented for the day, (the man they had rented him from had never heard of such a thing, but he was loath to pass up 500 dinars) Ricky had decided to go on ahead of them. He would meet Logan at the inn they'd dined at in Sanctum, a small village near Poteidia where the portal back to Miami was located. There was a good two candelmarks left before the portal closed. Therefore, Logan wasn't worried about not making it there in time.

However, she was worried that if Gabrielle didn't slow the movements of the horse, she would be in danger of losing the scrumptious meal that she had scarfed down at the Sanctum inn that morning. When she groaned again in warning, the warrior/bard gently tugged on the reins. Immediately, Princess obeyed. She still moved quickly yet gentler now and Logan's queasy stomach silently thanked her for it.

"Are you alright, Logan?" Gabrielle asked, glancing over her shoulder. Logan's usually tan countenance was paler at the moment. "Was I going too fast? You should have said something earlier. We're almost there now."

Logan looked relieved if nothing else by the last statement. "Oh, good. I'll...um, I'll be fine. Just

ask Princess to take it easy." Closing her eyes, she rested her forehead against Gabrielle's shoulder. A bit of time passed in silence before she broke it. "Hey Gabrielle?"

"Yes sweetie?"

Though the other woman didn't realize it, Logan beamed at the endearment. "I was just wondering...when precisely did you and Xena become...more than friends? I mean, there's always been a man here or there getting in the way--such as Marcus, Perdicus, Ulysses, Antony, and even...actually *especially* Ares. So, it's difficult to pinpoint when you two became an exclusive item."

The reporter missed the mischievous grin that flashed across Gabrielle's lips. "It's like this, Logan. Technically..."

When they arrived in Sanctum, Logan was more than happy to jump off the tall horse. Standing still, she waited for her weakened legs to become stronger before moving again. She then offered to help Gabrielle jump from Princess, but the smaller woman was able to do so on her own. Smiling, she patted Logan on the back.

"You feeling better now?"

The reporter nodded, smiling back at her. "Oh yeah, much better now. I love being lower to the ground." She paused. "So, you heading on home?" A great part of her wanted to ask the warrior/bard to return with her and Ricky, but there was no telling how a move such as that would affect the earth's timeline.

The golden head shook. "Yep. I'd like to get there before the sun completes its descent." Gabrielle looked down the road, an unreadable expression on her face. Abruptly, she then wrapped her arms around Logan again. "You take care, okay?"

Quickly wiping at her eyes, Logan then nodded as they separated. "You do the same, Gab."

Green eyes observed her features in astonishment. "I don't think I've mentioned how much you look like Xena. You could almost be twins. Her hair *is-was* darker and she was just slightly taller than you are. The resemblance is amazing."

"Really?" Gabrielle confirmed with a quick shake of her head and Logan broadly smiled, thrilled with the idea that she resembled the renowned Warrior Princess. "Cool."

"Cool? I take it that you don't mean that as in frigid?"

The reporter grinned. "You take right. When I say cool I mean that it's nice."

"Oh." After a pause, Gabrielle grinned at her. "In that case, I think you're cool too."

Logan blushed, though she continued grinning. "You catch on fast."

Before Gabrielle could offer a response, both women turned toward their right as they heard the unmistakable sound of horse hoofs pounding on the road. Soon a golden mare with a dark-haired woman straddling the top of it rode into view. Noticing them, she stopped the horse a few feet from the pair. Concerned azure eyes fell on Gabrielle before they flitted to Logan, turning a mixture of suspicion and puzzlement. Not too politely, she asked the reporter who she was.

Logan slowly arched a brow, wondering if she had gotten out of the wrong side of the bed that morning. "Who wants to know?"

Expertly landing on her feet, the young woman walked up to Logan, their foreheads nearly touching. "I do."

The reporter refused to be intimidated by piercing blue eyes that were a near match to her own. "And who exactly is I do?"

"Eve," Gabrielle swiftly answered, thinking that if she didn't get involved they might continue in this loop for the next candlemark. "Her name is Eve." She pointed toward the taller woman. "And Eve this is my new friend Logan. She's a reporter from the future like Nigel." Gabrielle announced that as easily as she would say that it was a sunny afternoon.

"Eve?" Logan's expression changed from annoyance to surprised delight. "I'm face to face with Xena's daughter. That is so awesome! It's great to meet you. From what I've read, I think you're a beautiful soul. The way you've turned your life around is miraculous."

"Um, thanks." Dismissing the smiling reporter for the time being, Eve looked at Gabrielle. "So that's where you've been? Giving an interview?"

The warrior/bard nodded. "Yes, I was just on my way home after dropping off Logan here in Sanctum. Where you were headed?"

"Um..." Eli's messenger glanced in Logan's direction, her expression now guarded. "Poteidia."

"You're headed to the place you just passed?"

It was Eve's turn to look annoyed as she gazed toward Logan. "What?"

"You said you were headed to Poteidia. I haven't been here long but I do know that you just traveled from the direction of it. So, you were really heading *away* from Poteidia, not to."

"So?"

Both of the reporter's eyebrows trailed upward. Something was going on here. She just couldn't put her finger on what it was. "So, why lie about it? Where were you really going?"

Eve exhaled much too sharply. "I didn't lie. I was on my way to Poteidia. Gabrielle wasn't there so I went looking for her and here she is not far from home. Besides, it's none of your business anyway. Why don't you people just stay in your own time period and leave us alone?"

"Eve! There is no reason for you to treat Logan with such blatant disrespect. She hasn't done anything to you." Gabrielle's scolding look seemed to calm the younger woman down some. Eve actually looked properly reprimanded. Giving the reporter an apology, which sounded at least ninety-five percent genuine, she then slipped an arm around Gabrielle's waist, asking if she was ready to head home. Curious blue eyes observed the action, but Logan kept her mouth shut about it.

Patting the arm secured around her, the warrior/bard nodded. "Yes, just give us a moment, okay?"

Though Eve appeared as though she was on the verge of arguing, she succinctly shook her head. "Okay. We'll be waiting." Muttering something akin to a goodbye to Logan, she walked toward the horses, obtaining their reins and gently led them a few feet away from the pair. Reaching into her saddlebag, she proceeded to split the slices of an apple between the two animals.

Glancing toward Eve, Logan emitted a low whisper. "I tell you Gab, I had that girl eating out of the palm of my hand." She grinned. "Did you notice the way she fell all over me?"

Gabrielle chuckled. "I'm sorry, Logan. You'll have to excuse her. She's just...very protective of me."

The reporter nodded in understanding. "Yes. She's already lost one parent. I get how she'd be apt to wanna keep tabs on you. It's sweet, but you should let fill her in to the fact that you're a big girl." Logan grinned again, this time broader. "And a very pretty looking big girl you are." Her comment had the desired effect when a certain warrior/bard's cheeks suffused with color.

"Well, I could say the same about you." After glancing in Eve's direction to make sure that she wasn't looking, Gabrielle stood on her tiptoes, placing a chaste but tender kiss on Logan's unsuspecting lips. "See you in 2008 buddy?"

Logan grinned like a teenager who just completed their first date and it was stupendous. She nodded, eagerly replying, "See you then, Gab. I...like you."

The blonde softly chuckled. "I like you back, Logan."

Logan continued to watch until Gabrielle, Eve and their horses were completely out of sight before she walked in the direction of the inn where she was to meet Ricky. Already, she felt a deep ache settling within. She missed her best friend.

Having instructed Ricky to leave without her if she didn't make it back to Sanctum in time so that they could travel through the portal, Logan arrived in Poteidia. Not trusting herself alone on

a horse, she had hitched a ride on a farmer's carriage. The man had been so kind that he refused to accept the dinars she wanted to give him in exchange for the lift.

It only took her a few minutes of detective work to discover where Gabrielle lived and soon the reporter was standing in front of a quaint yet lovely home. Taking a deep breath, she raised a fist and knocked. When the warrior/bard failed to answer it after a bit of time had passed, Logan knocked again, this time with more insistence. Almost immediately, she heard a muffled 'be right there'.

The door opening a crack, quizzical blue eyes fell on surprised green ones. "Logan!" While further opening the door with one hand, Gabrielle attempted to keep the blanket she wore from falling open with the other. "What are you doing here?" She tried to smile, but it looked more nervous than pleasant.

It didn't take a brain surgeon to figure out what she had just been doing. Question was, with whom? Her expression a combination of melancholy and embarrassment, Logan slowly shook her head from right to left. "I am terribly sorry, Gabrielle. I didn't...I didn't mean to intrude on your..." A thought suddenly occurred to her. A very disturbing thought. The kind you desperately wanted to get out of your head, but it refused to leave. "Oh, dear. Tell me it isn't Eve?" The reporter failed to keep a disappointed look from showing. "It *is* Eve. You're sleeping with your late lover's daughter?!?" The younger woman's odd overprotective behavior made sense now. She had to have been jealous!

Someone suddenly appeared behind Gabrielle. "Just what kind of a reporter are you? She's sleeping with me," the person stated in a calm and slightly amused husky voice. "Perhaps, someone needs more training."

Looking behind the small blonde, Logan gasped.

And then she fainted.

Trying to suppress a chuckle, Gabrielle glanced over her shoulder. "How come women always fall for you?"

Her partner didn't even attempt to hold in the burst of laughter.

Coming to, Logan felt a warm palm gently caressing her cheek. Her eyes still closed, she whispered, "Gabrielle?"

"I'm here," the now fully dressed warrior/bard replied just as quietly. "Are you okay?"

Slowly lifting the coverings on her pupils, Logan looked at the concerned woman sitting next to her and then nodded. "Yeah. Hey, how long was I out? I can't miss that portal."

"Long enough to complete frying an egg."

"You assume I know how to cook one."

Gabrielle chuckled. "In other words, not long at all. We just finished carrying you into the house and laying you here on the bed."

"We." Blue eyes grew wide as Logan quickly sat up. She glanced around the bedroom until startled eyes fell on the smirking figure sitting in a chair only a few feet away. "Oh my God. You're alive."

"First, I'm hardly a god and second yeah I'm alive."

Bolting from the bed, Logan hurried toward the woman and without any reservations poked her arm-not once but twice. Her finger made solid contact with warm smooth flesh. This was so unreal. "You really are alive."

The smirk remained in place. "Yep, and if you wanna remain that way too, you'd best keep your fingers to yourself."

"Love, don't threaten the reporter please. It's not very nice." Her words were admonishing but her lips were faintly smiling.

Xena's eyes trailed to Gabrielle and she arched a signature eyebrow. "Since when was I nice?"

"You have a point there," Gabrielle teased, earning herself a grin from Xena and a chuckle from Logan.

Filled with questions, Logan glanced between the two women. "So, what happened? I thought you didn't spread Xena's ashes into the fountain. How could she be alive?" Not giving Gabrielle a chance to answer, the reporter kept talking. "I know you two have escaped death before, but I figured for sure this time Xena was gone for good. Though, I'm extremely happy to discover that I was wrong. Never been more happy to be wrong in my entire life!"

The blonde patted the recently occupied space on the bed beside her. "Sit right down here and I'll tell you a tale." After Logan did so, she began.

The note simply said, 'Go to the place where earthbound war was stored'.

When she returned to her table after having used Nature's restroom, the small torn piece of scroll lay there. She looked around but she didn't have a clue who had given it to her. Reading the one sentence note several times, Gabrielle started to ignore it but curiosity got the best of her.

Go to the place where earthbound war was stored.

What did that mean? Where did they want her to go? And why? Knowing that it could have been

a trap, the warrior/bard decided to listen to the short instruction anyway. After all, she could take care of herself if this led to trouble. Now all she had to do was figure out where earthbound war was stored. Her brow furrowed in concentration.

Earthbound...war...

*Green eyes lit up with an idea. Ares? Could earthbound war be referring to him?
Earthbound...perhaps when he lost his immortality.*

That was it! It must have been it. She had to return to the place where she and Xena kept Ares until eating from the golden apples put him back on Olympus.

Xena's grandmother's house.

Or...shack. Opinions varied on the little home.

It took her nearly two full days to get there, and once she did, Gabrielle stood in front of the house, observing it. It was still dilapidated and didn't look fit enough for a family of rabbits to live in. Inhaling deeply, the small blonde headed up the few steps to the porch, which she hoped wouldn't collapse beneath her weight. She knocked but no one answered. After glancing around and seeing no other signs of life, Gabrielle opened the door and walked inside.

The first thing she noticed was that the home looked much better from the inside. Though there wasn't much furniture, it was clean and neat, letting her know that someone was taking care of grandma's house—at least the interior of it. The second thing she noticed was the cinnamon sweet odor heavy in the air, as though someone was busy cooking in the kitchen. Hungry, it made her stomach grumble. The third thing she noticed was that there was a roaring fire in the hearth. A bit cold, the warrior/bard put her backpack on the floor and walked over to kneel in front of the fire. Briskly rubbing her hands together, she basked in the heat emanating from the fireplace.

She nearly jumped out of her skin when a hand touched her shoulder.

"AAAAGGGGHHH!!!" Hurrying to her feet, Gabrielle pulled the sword from the scabbard on her back. Whipping around, she instinctively and swiftly located the area beneath the person's chin with the tip of her sharpened blade. Her eyes connecting with startled blue, the sword uselessly fell from her hand, landing on the hard wooden floor with a loud clang. She opened and closed her mouth several times before being able to speak. "Xena?"

Slowly, the warrior princess started grinning. "Yeah. You're not gonna kill me are ya?"

"Kill you? How can I kill you if you're dead?" Quickly closing the distance between them, she lifted a hand, gingerly touching Xena's cheek. "You don't look dead...you don't feel dead." Xena had appeared to her a few times right after her death, but it had never felt this real. Something told Gabrielle that she wasn't looking at a ghost as hard as that was to believe.

Placing her hand over Gabrielle's, Xena brought it to her lips and placed a kiss on the center of the smaller woman's palm, her eyes keeping contact with her soulmate's all the while. "No, I'm not dead. Not anymore." She tenderly smiled. "I'm back baby."

"How? Oh gods, I need to sit down." Gabrielle felt as though her legs were about to give out.

"Let's sit in front of the fireplace and I'll tell you all about it." Leading them over, both she and Gabrielle took a seat on the oval-shaped rug placed in front of the hearth. Taking her lover's hands between hers, Xena smiled at her. "As you know, I'm not one to mince words, so I'll give you the basic short version. A couple of weeks into being dead I found out that Akemi had lied." The blonde was about to say something when Xena hurriedly covered her mouth with two fingertips. "No, no. Let me get finished before you comment." After the other woman nodded, she continued. "Since she killed Yodoshi incidentally turning him into an even bigger asshole, she had to be the one to avenge the souls trapped within him. She told me that I had to, but she knew all along that that wasn't true. She just wanted me with her. Anyway, the higher powers that be immediately gave me my life back and here I am."

Not giving a ready reply, Gabrielle absorbed this information. There was something that just didn't make sen... "Wait, you said two weeks after your death you found out the truth?"

Xena slowly nodded, having vainly hoped that Gabrielle wouldn't pick that particular tidbit out of there. No suck luck.

"And these higher powers immediately returned you to life?"

Again, she nodded. Winced too.

Removing her hands from Xena's, the warrior/bard folded her arms over her chest. "Care to tell me what happened with the last five and a half months? Were you looking for me all that time?"

She really wanted to lie, but her conscious just wouldn't let her do it. "Um, no I wasn't. I've known where you were most of the time I've been back. In fact, finding you was the very first thing I did after being restored." She'd hoped that saying that would help her to get back in Gabrielle's good graces, but if the expression she wore was any indication, it failed to work.

"Okay, so why did it take you so long to contact me?" Emerald eyes narrowed and Xena could have sworn she saw the younger woman glance toward the sword still lying on the floor.

"Um, well see Gabrielle...do you want some nutbread?" Xena attempted to sound jovial. "I made some especially for you."

Gabrielle's expression didn't alter. "What I want is an explanation. From you. Now."

The warrior princess visibly gulped. "Remember right before the monk came to tell us about what was happening in Japa we were talking about getting away?" After gaining an affirmative nod, she continued. "Well, that's sort of what I was thinking about upon my return. I decided that

I wanted to retire. I had a nice vision of you and I buying a small home of our own somewhere and settling down. You can write and I...well I'll find something to occupy myself. But that's what I want. I'm tired of us constantly running around putting our lives at stake. I think we've earned this."

"That sounds fine, but it still doesn't explain why you didn't tell me that you were alive."

"I decided that I don't want people knowing that I'm alive. I figured if they knew then it would make it that much harder for you and I to rest. So, I stayed away from you for nearly six months so that people would really know that I was 'dead'. You travel alone and they'll get the message that I'm gone for good."

"I'm still not certain that you answered my question. Xena, I mourned your loss for six months and you tell me now that you've been hiding out for the majority of that time? All of the sudden you decide to send me a little cryptic note? I've cried so many tears that I'm surprised my entire body hasn't shriveled up!" Abruptly standing, Gabrielle proceeded to pace back and forth while Xena watched her helplessly. "I've suffered...your daughter has suffered and you've been where? Hiding out here at your grandmother's?"

Standing, Xena nodded. "Gabrielle, I'm so sorry but it seemed like a good plan at the time. I just didn't want people to realize that I was alive."

The smaller stopped before her. "Xena this is what you do. Someone comes to you asking for help. You politely let them know that you have retired and that they'll have to find assistance elsewhere. It is not your obligation to solve everyone's problems. That's how you ended up in this predicament in the first place!" Placing her hands on Xena's broad shoulders, she gazed into her eyes. "You are not responsible for the world. You're right. You have every right to settle down and retire. With all the good you've done over the years, you deserve that. You've earned it. So, Xena let the world take care of itself and concentrate on what you want. On what would make you happy. You've earned it."

"We both have," the brunette softly added. "Gabrielle I just wanna be with you. I know this sounds strange coming from me, but I truly do want us to settle down. I always said that I wanted to die with my sword in my hand, well I've accomplished that now." Xena briefly smiled. "This is my second--or third or fourth depending on how you look at it--chance and this time I don't wanna leave this earth until you and I are old, wrinkled and gray." Pausing, she brushed a hand across the other woman's cheek, watching as golden eyelashes briefly fluttered closed. "I love you, Gabrielle and I swear that I will never leave your side again. It's where I belong. Where I wanna be."

Tears streaming down her cheeks, Gabrielle wrapped her arms around her beloved and felt as a pair of strong arms settled around her. A whispered 'I love you' was deposited into her ear and she quickly returned it. Neither woman knew how long they stood there before pulling apart. They shared a tender smile.

"Xena?"

"Yes love?"

"You mentioned something about nutbread."

A grin tugged at Xena's lips. "I recall saying something about that."

"You baked?" Gabrielle looked pleasantly surprised.

"Yep. This is my fourth loaf and I finally got it right. It's all nice, hot, sweet and soft." Her eyebrows wiggled up and down in a comical fashion. "Just like you."

Wearing a full-fledged grin, Gabrielle re-wrapped her arms around her lover. With every second that passed, she liked this new domestic side of Xena more and more. "Have I mentioned that I love you?"

Lips connected with her own. "Yep, but feel free to tell me again as often as you like."

And so Gabrielle told and showed her.

That is after consuming half the loaf of nutbread.

"...and so within a few weeks we decided to move to Poteidia and here we are a year and a half later," Gabrielle finished.

"Wow." Logan shook her head, thoroughly amazed. "And you're keeping the fact that Xena is alive a secret? Who knows? Only you, Lila, Sarah, and Eve?"

The blonde nodded. "Along with a few select others that we can trust not to spill the beans. However," pausing, she glanced toward Xena smirking, "if it does get out that she's alive it isn't the end of the world. The warrior princess here thinks that the only way she can truly get some R&R is to keep her resurrection a secret. Apparently, people are going to be banging at our door if word spreads."

Showing that she could very much behave like a five-year-old, Xena stuck her tongue out at Gabrielle. "Call me overly cautious. I just rather not take any chances. I like the way our life is now. I love living on and running this farm, being with you and getting to know your relatives and our neighbors." She smiled and walked over toward Gabrielle, kneeling next to her. "I love that," a large hand found its way to the other woman's stomach, "we're having a baby of our own. This is all so...perfect and I'm loving every moment of it."

A smile gracing her lips, Gabrielle leaned down and captured her soulmate's lips in a gentle heartfelt kiss while Logan stared between the two temporarily speechless. However, by the time they broke contact, her vocal cords were working again.

"What?!? You're having a baby?" The pair confirmed with a nod. "B-b--b...but Gabrielle you...the ale? You were drinking ale and you're pregnant!"

The warrior/bard smiled while shaking her head. "No, I wasn't. You just thought I was. I actually can't stand the taste of it, but other than that like you said I'm pregnant. I only told you that I was drinking it. If you'd smelled or tasted it, you would have realized that there was cider in that mug."

"Twenty dinars for two mugs of fancy apple juice?"

Gabrielle nodded. "A shame isn't it?"

"Highway robbery!" Logan shook her head. "But hey, you guys are really having a baby together!" Her eyes falling to Gabrielle's stomach, which appeared flat through her shirt, the reporter smiled happy for them. "That's awesome. How far along are you?"

"About two months," Xena answered for her partner. "I think Eve is more excited than we are about having a little baby brother or sister. She even made some adorable little booties in a variety of colors. Especially pink and red because she's rooting for a girl." She chuckled as did the other two.

"Well congratulations guys. I wish you all the best." Glancing toward her watch, Logan sighed. "I better get out of here if I'm going to make it back to Sanctum by sundown." She stood along with Gabrielle and Xena. As they headed toward the front door, Gabrielle asked her how she'd gotten to Poteidia so quickly. "I hitched a ride on a carriage. Of course, I'm not sure how I'm going to return. Ah, maybe a jog will do me some good. Oh!" Remembering why she had traveled to Poteidia in the first place, Logan pulled a slim plastic bag from her back pocket and handed it to Gabrielle. "Those are why I came. I wanted to give them to you."

A grin splitting her lips, Gabrielle fingered the pack of what she now knew were pens. She quickly counted. There were ten of them in all. "Cool," she smiled after having used her newly acquired word. "Thanks Logan! I already tried out the other one and I love it." Throwing her arms around her friend, she squeezed tight. "You take good care of yourself, alright?"

Smiling, Logan blinked back sudden tears. "I will." She glanced between Gabrielle and Xena. "You two take care of yourselves as well as that precious little bundle on the way. See you later." Turning, she ran smack dab into Eve. She muttered an apology, as did the other woman.

"Hey Logan, Eve can give you a lift back to Sanctum," Xena offered, ignoring her daughter's expression, which plainly read, 'Oh, I can, can I?'

The reporter glanced between mother and daughter. She could use the ride but she wasn't about to make Eve feel obligated. "No, that's alright. I'll be fine-"

Turning, Eve headed out again, "Let's go."

For a few moments, Logan merely watched her retreating back. "Okaaaay. Guess I'll get going then." Sharing one last hug with Gabrielle and even a brief one with Xena, she hurried after the young woman going in the direction of the stables.

Closing the door, Xena turned to her blonde bard, a smile on her lips. "Alone at last." Her eyebrows dancing up and down caused Gabrielle to burst out laughing. "Now where were we?"

Getting out of her clothes in record time, Gabrielle wrapped her body around Xena's before nibbling at her bottom lip. "I think we were playing Warlord and the Not So Innocent Captured Victim."

"Oh, yeah." The warrior princess roguishly grinned as she securely wrapped her arms around her soulmate and headed toward their bedroom. "However, this time can I be the warlord? I used to be a pretty good one ya know."

Gabrielle dramatically rolled her eyes. "Alright, but just this once."

The ride, (luckily, Eve had been kind enough to tether two horses to one of Xena and Gabrielle's carriages) back to Sanctum was so quiet that Logan nearly squirmed in her seat. The silence was driving her mad.

"Are you okay?"

She curiously glanced at the woman who'd asked the question. "Do you really care or are you just being polite?"

Eve gave the question considerable thought before offering her reply. "I'm sorry about the way I've been behaving toward you. It was uncalled for and I should know better."

"Why *did* you treat me like I was gum stuck to the bottom of your shoe anyway?"

The other woman's brow furrowed. "I have no idea what gum is, but I was being overprotective of Gabrielle. I don't know if she and my mother told you, but she's pregnant. I ride up and see you, a stranger dressed in strange clothing who strangely looks a lot like my mother. Instantly, I was on guard and suspicious of who you were and what you wanted. For judging you before even talking with you I am truly sorry, Logan. I only wanted to protect Gabrielle. She and Mom are my family and I don't want anyone ever hurting them again."

Placing her hand on Eve's shoulder, the reporter lightly squeezed. "I totally understand. If our situations were reversed, I might have acted in the same manner."

Eve briefly smiled. "You're not so bad."

Logan grinned playfully as she stretched her long body out in the carriage seat. "So countless women have said."

Eve laughed.

"Okay, so maybe only two."

They both enjoyed a laugh.

"Aw geez, you're trying to give me a heart attack and I'm only twenty-six! Boss, I was beginning to think that you wouldn't make it!" Ricky breathed a sigh of relief while wiping away the sweat on his brow. The sun was about to set at any moment, but the young man had been determined to wait until the very last second for his boss so that they could walk through the portal together. "Where were you?"

Exiting the carriage, Logan waited until her feet fully touched the ground before answering. "I went to Poteidia to give Gabrielle some pens." Blue eyes danced in merriment. "I have a lot to tell ya Ricky!" Looking toward the person still perched inside the carriage, she smiled to have it quickly returned. "Some quick introductions before we jet. Eve meet my best cameraman Ricky. Ricky meet Eve. See you later Eve!" Logan lifted two fingers high in the air, giving her the peace sign. "Peace, love, and happiness!"

Ricky's eyes grew wide as he stared toward the young beauty in the carriage. "What? You've got to be...aaaaaggggh!" He wasn't able to finish his sentence since Logan pushed him along with his equipment into the portal. She hated to be rude, but if they didn't jump right then the portal would disappear for half a decade. Flashing Eve a smile, the reporter sailed into the portal.

Eve watched in amazement as the portal vanished at the precise moment the sun fell from view. She then raised her first and index finger while repeating Logan's last words.

"Peace, love, and happiness." The messenger smiled beatifically. "I like that."

"Hey wait a sec!" Hearing a harried voice, Logan knew that someone was on their way to the elevator. Quickly locating the 'doors open' button, she pressed it. Instantly, the heavy elevator doors pulled back so that a slight figure dressed in a long yellow wet slicker could slip inside.

"Whew, thanks! It takes forever for these things to return."

"No problem," Logan replied, considering since the woman didn't select an option, she must have been going to the same floor, #18 where the reporter's apartment (#1810) was located.

"Can you believe this weather we're having and it's almost July? Oh, well I guess we could always use a few sprinkles from above." Chuckling good-naturedly, the woman pulled back the hood, which had previously concealed her features. After shaking out short, thick blonde hair, she gazed toward an open-mouthed Logan. Bright green eyes narrowed in thought. "Have I seen you before?" She chuckled again. "I know that sounds like a very bad pickup line, but I'm

serious. Have I?"

Managing to get passed the majority of her shock, Logan grinned. "Maybe in another lifetime."

"Yeah, maybe." The smaller woman returned the grin, showing a deep set of dimples, which looked so cute. The reporter found herself wanting to poke them with her fingertips. "Say, aren't you a reporter for **The Real Newz**? Though, I swear I've seen you elsewhere. Like face to face before."

"I do work on that show. I'm Logan-"

"Davenport." The blonde gave her a terrific smile. "Yes, I do love your segments. In fact, I think you're better than Barbara."

Logan beamed so brightly that a pair of sunshades was almost necessary. "Will you marry me?"

Both women laughed as the elevator stopped on floor 18 and they exited. "Why don't you allow me to make you dinner first? Then you can propose again next week." She winked as they headed down a long hall.

Logan chuckled. "Okay, deal. Are you new to the complex?"

"Yep. I just finished moving in to apartment #1811 on Monday. I love it here already."

"Hey, we're neighbors. I'm in 10, right across from you."

"Cool."

Logan chuckled, causing the other woman to questioningly raise an eyebrow. "What's funny?"

Logan offered her a smile just as they stopped in front of their respective doors. "Nothing. I just think that this could be the start of something...awesome."

"You think so?"

A nod. "Oh, yeah."

The blonde grinned. "Well, if this going to be something awesome then you should know my name first. Dontcha think?"

Walking up to the woman, Logan gazed into her beautiful green eyes. "What's your name?"

"Kellie with an I and a E."

"Well, Kellie with an I and a E what time should I be here for dinner?"

Not responding right away, the blonde turned and unlocked her door before looking toward Logan again. "Come on inside now and you can help me cook."

"Okay, but I must warn you that I don't know how." A petite hand tugged her inside the apartment.

"No worries." Kellie brilliantly smiled. "I'll show you how."

The End

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