

~ Amazons, Speed and Weed ~

by Aurelia

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Thanks to GreenMoon, as always.

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The young lad approached the sprawling house with some trepidation. The infamous number 32 was on his paper route. He wished to God it was on someone else's. Today he brought a slingshot. One of those nice big ones you get at the sporting goods store. He hoped he could just rocket the paper to the front door from the sidewalk. The crazy old lady had tested his ingenuity to the limit and he was fast running out of ideas. His bike screeched to a halt, the paper in hand, ready to load...

"Ah ha! I see you, you centaur runt! Amazons! Intruder at the far outpost!"

The young lad forgot his slingshot, hastily throwing the paper into the front yard and trying to make his escape but he couldn't budge. He looked down to find his front tire stuck in a wad of chewing gum. His eyes widened as the wiry little old lady rushed him, her cane waving in the air. "I have you now..." In a last ditch effort he frantically tugged on the bike handles, the gum clutching at the hot tire rubber like cheese on a pizza. *Oh Christ, she's gonna get me...* Using what strength remained, he dragged the bike down the street, a string of soggy gum stretching for yards.

"Warn the other warlords! You cannot trespass on Amazon territory!" Agnes quite proud of herself waddled back to the house victorious. "How do ya like those apples, huh?! He, he, he."

"Gabrielle!" An ancient voice echoed down the corridor to reach the ears of a young woman in the kitchen.

A sweet green-eyed blonde-haired woman of middling height and a gentle demeanor looked up, dragging herself with resignation towards the sound of the ragged voice. It meant work, it always did. Drury O'Hara was the owner of this establishment loosely named the Shady Oakes Retirement Home but it was more a boarding house for old women. And despite the fact that

they were little old ladies, she had never met a more cantankerous, ill-tempered group. Real 'Ella Diablos'. She-devils in wheelchairs.

'The Ancient Amazons of Juniper Avenue', as they had been nicknamed, were a fiercely loyal bunch, living in said street as a small community quite content to forego the manacles of marriage. To them, men were only good for one thing, and living with them meddling in their lives wasn't it. As Agnes would put it, the monastery position was just another example of the predatory rights of the male on her poor hapless Amazons. Agnes confused everyone on a regular basis.

Drury considered her 'inmates' with some affection. She knew that her home was their last resort, having been thrown out from just about every nursing home in the city for a variety of offences ranging from drinking beer and booby-trapping a garden gnome to the *pièce de résistance* of starting a riot when one of them claimed to have leprosy. News spread quickly of the antics of 'The Ancient Amazons of Juniper Avenue'. They had all effectively, one by one, been rejected, denied, discarded, blackballed, blacked out, and... blacklisted... from every single establishment in the city.

Philomena Ozmond had been a cop at one time after a stint in the Army. She ran her private life like a military operation. She also had command of this troublesome entourage. Phil's second in command was Daisy, in her mid-seventies, fractionally younger but a lot heavier. She looked like a World Wrestling Federation retiree and certainly acted like one too. Her solution to any problem was to dive in swinging then let Phil ask questions later. Ethel was their gadgets lady, being the only one who knew what a computer was. The most amenable of the group was Josie. The youngest and the most effusive, she was just enthusiastic about being a part of the group, whether it was to start a donnybrook, join in, or go for ice cream afterwards. And finally... there was Agnes Doherty.

Drury followed the constant thumping, and the call to arms, made by the old woman's cane on the floor. Agnes had dementia. She lived in this fantasy world where everyone was a living character out of the old Xena show. Hence, she had been christened 'Gabrielle'. She really didn't mind. It was all innocent enough. Well, except for the poor old mailman who kept getting ambushed by her because she thought he was a warlord intent on tarnishing the virtues of her amazons. Agnes wasn't a pest as such, it was just that she was a nimble little old lady and was often out the door and down the street before she had even put on her shoes.

"Hey Agnes! What's wrong?"

"You keep calling me Agnes, Gabrielle. Who is this woman? Queen Melosa, if you please."

"Alright, Melosa. What's the problem now?"

"Solari is not well. I think she needs a healer."

"Is that right Josie? You sick?"

"Sorry. It's that old problem again. Can you see if the doc can give me something?"

"Sure. Rest easy." Drury patted the reclining woman on the shoulder. Thank God for the volunteer medical service in her local community. Times were tough. She could barely make ends meet, even with the input of the ladies' social security checks, and with the fast approach of Christmas she was wondering what to do about a turkey. Would they notice if it was a spam turkey?

* * *

Bennet Riley pulled up out front of the old sprawling turn-of-the-century house. She hadn't seen one of these structures in a long time and had to smile at its quaint old-world charm. The wooden house sat smack in the middle of no-man's land, surrounded by villas, townhouses and two-storey dwellings, standing in a virtual brick garden like a noxious weed.

She chuckled at the name of the establishment. She knew very well what the name of the home was but someone had painted over some of the letters and it now read 'Dykes' Retirement Home. Nothing like advertising...

Alighting from her car, Bennet walked tentatively towards the front door. It was her first day on the roster for volunteer work and her second call for the day. She looked for a doorbell but found only an old door knocker. The metal struck the door with a hollow bang. As she waited for the owner of the establishment to arrive she studied the effigy of... of... who was that? She bent closer to inspect it.

"It's supposed to be Ares, the God of War." A soft, melodious voice interrupted her introspection.

Bennet looked up to see a blonde woman standing in the doorway. "Really? Ares? And you, ah... worship him?"

"One of the residents thinks she's...living...on the old Xena show." Drury nearly laughed at the flabbergasted look on the woman's face. "Hey, it keeps her occupied so I don't mind. Can I help you?" She looked down at the hunched woman. *Damn she was... how did the old broads put it? A bodacious honey?* Long dark hair framed a beautiful face, highlighted by high cheekbones and curvaceous lips. As Bennet stood up Drury took in the long luscious legs encased in soft brushed cotton. Yep, the woman was yummy, like strawberry jelly.

"Dr. Bennet Riley. I'm from Community Health. You have a patient?"

"Oh yeah, come on in." Drury turned to show the woman the way, unaware that she herself was getting the once over. "Where's Cornelius? Ahhh... Dr. Wilson?"

"He's on vacation over the Christmas break. I'm taking his place for now." Bennet studied the inside of the house. For a structure so old it was in remarkably good condition. "Interesting place you have here."

"Thank you. Just to let you know, one of the ladies in this particular room, Agnes, has dementia. She's the one living in Xena land. I find it easier just to play along."

Bennet entered the large bedroom. "Which one is the patient?"

"Josie. The one lying in the right-hand bed."

"Xena? Welcome back to the Amazon Village. Your presence has been sorely missed." Bennet's dark eyebrows rose and she looked at the smaller woman in inquiry.

"Ahhh... yeah. It's good to be back....ahhh..."

"Surely you have not forgotten so soon? It's me, Melosa."

"Of course, it is. Good to see you again." Bennet's eyes shifted to the other woman in the opposite bed. "Now, what is wrong with you Josie."

"Solari. Why does everyone forget her name?"

"Okayyy... Solari. What seems to be the problem?" Bennet directed her remarks to both Josie and Drury.

But it was Agnes who answered her question. "She's got asteroids!"

"Asteroids?"

"Asteroids! She has been struck down by the Gods!"

"Hemorrhoids," Drury mumbled.

"Ahhh. Is this the first time you had... errr... asteroids?"

"No, Doctor, I've had them for a number of years. I just need some cream to fix them."

"Well, let me examine you quickly to make sure everything else is working fine." If nothing else, Bennet was thorough.

Josie took umbrage at being asked to strip down a bit to be examined, but relaxed as warm, strong hands gently pushed and prodded examining, amongst other things, the appendectomy scar sitting below and right of her navel. All the while, the doctor talked to her in soothing tones, asking questions about her medical history and life in general.

"Well, you are in remarkably good health... Solari." The doctor winked at her patient conspirationally. "I'll give... ahhh..."

"Gabrielle..."

"Really? Gabrielle, huh?" Bright blue eyes looked at the woman standing at the door. "You know what that means..." Okay, she would admit it. She had been a closet Xena fan. She knew what was going on between those two. Hmmm, what an interesting happenstance.

"Oh, stop it! Don't encourage her!" Drury blushed.

Bennet grinned at the hapless woman. "Just kidding," she added with a wink.

"If that got around here, there'd be a revolution! Believe me these ladies love nothing more than rattling my cage."

"Okay, okay. I'll stop!" Bennet chuckled at the pouting woman. "Now... Josie...errr, Solari... I'll give Gabrielle here the prescription. I'm sure I don't need to tell you to use the cream liberally. If it doesn't help in the next day or so, tell Miss Uptight here to give me a call." Bennet's lips tipped to one side, her lop-sided grin adding to the intonation.

"Me? Uptight?" That was one word she would have never associated with herself.

"Druryyyyyy!" Daisy broke into the conversation.

"Gabrielle!" Agnes was getting angry now. "You're all doing this to drive me crazy, aren't you?"

"Come quick! We have a... situation." Daisy was excited but not panicked.

"Oh Good Lord, what now?" Drury followed the gray-haired woman down the hall to the end room, looking in at the invective woman seated in her wheelchair in front of the mirror.

"Oh Ethel! For the love of God! I asked you to do one simple ass thing and would you look at this!"

"But... but...I..." Ethel was nearly in tears.

But there wasn't going to be any stopping Phil as she vented her anger. "How many times, Ethel? Take your glasses with you when you go shopping, Ethel! Did you remember this one little time? Noooooooooooooo."

"What happened...?" Drury was beginning to feel queasy as the beginning of a migraine was making itself known as yet another calamity unfurled, in front of company no less.

"Miss I-Know-All-About-Computers here bought the wrong hair dye. Hell, it ain't even hair dye at all!" Phil was trying very hard to stay calm. "Look what she did to my hair!"

"I can see that." She had never seen such a sight before. She felt the presence of the taller doctor behind her.

"Anything I can do...? Whoa! That is a doozy of a hairdo!"

"A hair-don't! Tell me about it!" Phil harrumphed and slouched in her chair. She sighed. "I could use a brandy right about now."

"If you had a Jamaican accent and a joint hanging out of your mouth you could pass for a slightly bizarre looking Rastafarian." Bennet had to laugh. Somehow life around these aged Amazons would never be dull. She only hoped when she was their age that she had half their energy.

"Bloody hell, Phil. You look like a sheep caught in barbed wire. Strewth!" Daisy replied, her accent slipping a more than notch with the excitement.

"What did you just say?"

"Oops?"

"Where did that come from?"

"Ahhh... Australia?"

"I thought you were from England." Here was another piece of juicy information that Phil was not privy to. She wondered if the quartet knew about this. "You were Aussie all this time and you didn't tell me?" Phil was so close to causing grievous bodily harm to her friend.

"And spoil the image you have of me as a trapeze artist? No bloody way!" Daisy hadn't used her long-hidden accent for a long, long time and it was almost foreign in her mouth.

Bennet made her excuses. "I can see that I'm not needed here. Not my area of expertise. I better be on my way."

"Would you like a cup of coffee before you go?" Now why did she say that?

"Errrr. Sure."

Neither woman noticed the exchanged looks between the elderly ladies. Maybe it was just as well they didn't see the sparkle in Phil's eyes because they would have rushed to the nearest airport and hopped the first airplane out. This was not going to be subtle because that was just not Phil's style.

"So why are you doing volunteer work?" Drury carried over two mugs filled with steaming coffee.

"I thought it would be a lot easier than going to Africa."

"And does that appease you?"

"Pardon me?"

"You know, does it gratify you that you help others less fortunate?"

"I don't know yet, it's my first day." Bennet was annoyed that the woman thought so little of her. "You don't have to be snarky about it. Not all of us do it to feed our ego."

"Oh, come on. I'm sure you just didn't join up to help because it was the right thing to do."

"Why not?"

"Because I have yet to meet a doctor who did volunteer work as a community service not for the self-gratification she would obtain from adding it to their resumes."

"Well, you just met her."

Drury looked at the enigma sitting in front of her. Did she believe a woman she so desperately wanted to believe or did she go with the fact that she had yet to meet a doctor who didn't expect at least something out of working for nothing? There was the conundrum. She should have had the jurisprudence to leave things well enough alone, but Drury was a risk-taker and something inside her was telling her to take this particular risk.

* * *

Phil was sulking, she knew that. Her wheelchair sat immobile between the front fence and the road as she contemplated her friend, or at least the friend she thought she knew. An Aussie? The land of kangaroos, koalas and wombats. Why did Daisy feel the need to hide this fact? Was there some underlying reason? Did the woman think so little of her to deliberately lie? But was that really what was pissing her off? Maybe it was the ridiculous hair she now had to live with. Phil was in a reflective mood and did not notice a truck speeding along the road, a length of rope hanging off the back where it had been hastily thrown on board.

Phil's indigo eyes widened as the rope latched onto her wheelchair, sending her off speeding down the street after the truck. "Help!" Phil didn't think she was a screamer but right then she let out the most girlish scream she had ever heard come out of anyone's mouth as her chair kangaroo-hopped after the truck, bucking and jumping over potholes and bumps in the road.

"Did you hear something?" Out of habit, Drury's hearing picked up at the sound. Another yell sent her into action and out the front door. Bennet was close on her heels, nearly slamming into the woman who had stopped at the front gate. "There!" Her finger pointed to the rapidly disappearing wheelchair speeding up the street.

"Jump in the car!" Bennet was already moving rapidly to the driver's side, unlocking the doors in one smooth motion. Gunning the engine, Bennet threw the gear into reverse and out onto the

road, not even looking to see if a passing car was going to cause a wipeout.

The wheelchair had disappeared around a corner and the physician pressed her foot down on the accelerator, afraid of losing sight of the willful septuagenarian vainly hanging on for dear life.

Phil's initial terror gave way to exhilaration and the memories flooded back to the days of her old motorcycle. She closed her eyes, feeling the wind on her face the feel of speed under her legs. "Woo hoo!" she hollered, the adrenaline rushing through her making her feel young again. Those eyes opened a moment before she saw it. She was traveling towards an enormous pothole, opening up in front of her like an abyss as her wheelchair rattled along at breakneck speed. "Awww shit..." she muttered as she hit it, bringing the chair to an abrupt halt and sending her flying through the air.

The last thing Drury wanted to see was one of her girls injured, but her eyes tunneled to the airborne figure sailing over the curb and onto someone's front lawn. "Oh dear God!" Bennet moved to climb out the car, grabbing her medical bag as she went. Both of them ran to the prone woman on the ground, breathing a sigh of relief to find she had landed in a pile of leaves.

"Phil? Phil, honey?" There was a moment's silence. "Oh God, Phil, answer meeeee!!"

Those dark eyes opened and a smile crossed the wrinkled face. "Can I do that again?"

* * *

The house was abuzz with excitement. The other residents fussed over their kick-ass hero of the fantastical tale. It was the most excitement they'd had in a decade. The driver of the truck offered restitution for the damaged wheelchair and Drury was more than happy to take his money. Her budget didn't allow for replacement wheelchairs.

Bennet phoned her service, informing them that she had been delayed until later in the afternoon. Despite the fact that Phil seemed to have walked away unscathed from this fiasco, she was going to keep an eye on her for a little while just to make sure. Besides, it wouldn't hurt anything to get to know the owner a little better...

While Drury began preparations for dinner, Bennet went in search of her patient, finally locating her and her cohorts outside in the backyard sitting under a large oak tree. "There you are, Phil. How are you feeling now?"

"Phil? How soon you forget, Xena. This is my viceroy, Ephiny." Agnes just had to put her two cents' worth into the conversation.

So... Ephiny. The heart not racing so much now?"

"Well, Doc.... Errr Xena...." Phil corrected herself after a stern look from Agnes. "It was... it

was.... "

"Exhilarating." Ethel supplied, her mousy voice barely heard over the gentle breeze.

"Yeah... exhale... exhire... yeah, what she said." Phil knew damn well what the word was, but trying to get it out was just impossible.

"I bet. It scared the life out of us seeing you tearing down the street in your wheelchair. We might need to get you a harness for that thing. What a sight!" It had taken some time, and a quick shot of the brandy, to calm Drury down. Despite her assurances, Drury felt personally responsible for the accident. It was just one of those incidents where a number of unrelated events came together to create a catastrophe.... well, near catastrophe.

Bennet cast her eyes around the yard, taking in a large vegetable patch near the back fence. Vines trained up a trestle were laden with beans, while other vines on the ground held gourds and cantaloupes. Green tops of carrots poked their heads out of the rich soil. Her keen eyes picked up the tops of some suspicious looking plants tucked away behind the bean vines. Bennet narrowed her eyes to look closer then widened them when she realized what they were.

She turned to stare at Phil who at least had the decency to look away under the hardened look. "So..." What could she say? That was when she noticed a sweet smell as a wisp of smoke floated up from behind Daisy's back. "Does she know?"

"I don't know. Look, it's nothing, okay? We don't have much to enjoy these days, so don't tell her."

"I suspect she already knows, Phil. She putters around that garden and you don't think she's gonna notice weed growing in her rhubarb patch? I'm sure she's already discovered the plants. They're kind of unique so it would be hard for her to miss them." Bennet looked at the forlorn faces and found she just couldn't scold them.

"We're old. What else do we have to look forward to?"

"You girls just don't know how lucky you are. The freedom you have here would be a Godsend to other women in swankier places."

"Yeah..." Phil sighed, looking at the faces of her fellow residents. "We know. Drury..."

"Hey!" Agnes huffed.

"Gabrielle is our guardian angel. She took us in when we had nowhere else to go. And she gets paid jack-shit for it to boot."

"Nothing?" Maybe that explained the woman's suspiciousness.

"Nope. There is no profit in looking after us. Our pensions go to her for food and bills, but she

does give us some back to spend as we want and whatever is left over goes into an emergency fund in case one of us needs something. You can't ask for more than that."

"Are you going to break out the tambourines now? She sounds like a veritable one woman Salvation Army."

"Hey! Don't you talk about her like that!" Daisy stood up ready to defend their caregiver with her fists.

"Alright!" Bennet held her hand up in surrender. "You just make her sound like she's too good to be true. I assure you no insult was intended, errrr....."

"Eponin." Daisy mumbled. God, she hated that name but Agnes's constant bickering over using the right names had worn away any resistance she had.

"Eponin." Bennet smiled. *Hey, hey, the gang's all here....*

"It ain't paradise but it's comfortable. We get by, and I suppose that's all we can expect. At least we can do what we want, which is probably more than those poor suckers in other places." Daisy tried not to sound disappointed. In fact, if she was honest with herself, things were pretty good around here.

"But we worry that she's missing out on life. Her granny owned this house and did pretty much what Gabrielle is doing now. She grew up with that and probably doesn't know anything else. A young girl shouldn't throw away her life like that."

"I'm sure she knows..."

"I'm not so sure. It's a lifestyle that doesn't leave much room for anything else. Who else can she fall back on to look after us while she goes out on a date? Go to the movies? We all go with her when she goes shopping cause she's worried about leaving us alone at home."

"Why doesn't she just hire someone, even if it's part time?"

"She can't afford it." What a truism that was. "She doesn't think we notice things like that. We know the money barely covers the bills but she's a trooper."

"It's got to be hard. Why does she do it?"

Ethel piped up for the first time. "Because she has a giving heart." The sentiment was rather corny but the doctor understood perfectly. Bennet's mind was already in motion. *This woman needs help...*

"Ahh, there you are. I was wondering where everyone was." Drury stepped off the porch and joined the assembled group. "What did I miss?"

"Nothing much. That's a gorgeous garden you have there." Bennet was quick to divert her attention while Daisy got rid of the offending weed.

"It's been a lifesaver, let me tell you, and it's due for a serious *weeding*. Maybe later."

Bennet's watched the old women's faces, chuckling internally at the looks of apprehension being passed between them. "Nahhh, it's too beautiful a day for that... Gabrielle. Maybe I should take 'my girl' for a walk."

"My girl? My... your... *your* girl?? When did that happen?"

"Well, I *am* Xena and you *are* Gabrielle. So, therefore, you are *my* girl. Right, ladies?"

"Ohhhhhh yeah!" "Absolutely!" "No doubt about it!" The chorus of enthusiastic voices were nearly too eager in their encouragement, mischievous smiles lending credence to their words.

"You're supposed to be on call, remember?"

"I am? Hmmm, fancy that." She looked at the shocked look on the blonde's face. "No, I called in and told them I would be here a little monitoring my 'patient'." Bennet's eyes shifted to Phil's and made contact, noticing for the first time the twinkle in them. "I can spare a quarter of an hour for a short walk." She turned to face the gaggle of women grinning at her in unison. "Now you... Amazons..." That brought a smile to her lips. "...will behave yourselves while we're gone, won't you?"

"Hey, we're not kids here. We're older than you by a long shot!"

"Older but no wiser, from what I have seen. Can you be trusted?"

"We're Amazons! Our word is our bond!" Finally Agnes said something right.

"Does the Hippocratic Oath cover this sort of thing?"

"Sure, it's in the fine print." Bennet smiled benevolently. *Damn, the woman was cute.* "I can feel five sets of eyes burning a hole in my back." The physician grabbed her girl's hand, and grinned wickedly over her shoulder at the group. "Let's go for that walk."

Drury was no debutante at this courting stuff, despite what her cheerleading squad thought, and she was hard pressed to stop all those licentious thoughts running through her head. She knew if she got a love life the old ladies would give her a 21 gun naval salute. But... but what about them? Her sense of integrity kept stepping in the way of her happiness. It had happened before, so what was so different about now?

She looked up into pale blue eyes, not cold like icicles but warm and friendly like a blazing fire in winter, warming the empty spaces in her heart. But the smile held much more, a promise of

everlasting friendship and what? Respect? Dare she say love?

"What are you thinking about?"

"Snow-white unicorns and knights in armor rescuing damsels in distress from fire-breathing dragons? No? Won't believe that one, huh?" Drury couldn't even come up with a good lie. But Bennet was not going to be put off. "What we're having for dinner? Would you believe knockwurst and tater tots? Actually, not knockwurst, it's too expensive. How about corned beef and cabbage?"

"No tater tots? Awww, I like them..."

"You can stay if you want..." Drury looked shyly at the woman.

"Well...ahh..." Bennet hesitated, leaving the conversation hanging in limbo.

"No? Oh..."

"I have another house call or two before I'm finished, so how about a raincheck on that? I could stop by for dessert."

"You swear?"

"Grab me a bible and I'll swear on it." Bennet's face lit up with a 100-watt smile. "But, for now, I better get back to work." She grabbed Drury's hand. "So, my girl Gabrielle, let's get this show over with."

"They certainly are pushy, aren't they?"

"Give them a little freedom and they're running your life. It's like a Montessori school for geriatrics, but don't tell them that."

"I don't need to, they already know it. They seem to think it's just a matter of saying supercalifragilisticexpialidocious and *viola* it happens."

"Somehow none of them even remotely resemble Mary Poppins."

They strolled through the gate hand-in-hand watching the knowing grins on the randy old residents. "You got that right."

Drury watched Bennet leave and turned to face the group of wily old Amazons. "What!?" She tried walking away but they would have none of it.

"So, tell us what happened." "Did she ask you out?" "Did she lay one on ya?"

"Did she l...? What? Get outta here you bunch of parasites!" Her smile took the sting out of the

words. "I've gotta go fix dinner."

"Awww, come on Dru... Gabrielle! We don't have any lives, remember?"

"Oh yeah, I remember, *Ephiny*. No lives, huh? Today alone we've had asteroids, a funky Jamaican hairdo, wheelchair surfing and...*and*... don't think I didn't notice that marijuana you think you're trying to hide!"

"Yeah, the doc said you would."

"She's a smart woman." *And absolutely gorgeous*. Drury's mind couldn't help but add that one.

"So you're keeping tabs. You are a regular elephant... you never forget...all knowing....all seeing." Thinking of all those plants growing behind the house she declared the contest a whitewash, so they didn't win or lose. Losing to her was not an option.

"Damn straight!" She laughed out loud as she walked away from the group. "If you're looking for something to do, there's always cleaning up your rooms!" There was a sudden scuffle as the room vacated in a hurry. Drury smiled. There was nothing like the mention of work to clear a room.

Over the next few days the Amazons kept Bennet busy. The only plus to these constant calls was that she saw Drury, which she suspected was the aim of the aged Cupids all along.

As the car pulled up in the driveway she thought she could feel the ruts in the cement where she had parked before. Warily she knocked on the door. "Now what?"

"Hello to you too." Drury could see the lines of fatigue around those beautiful eyes, deciding that she was going to have to have a word with her social committee. "Not again..." she muttered.

"Yep. Maybe I should change my number." Bennet smiled at the woman, finally getting a glimpse of her life. These women were more than a handful and yet Drury battled on alone. "Who is it this time?"

"Don't ask me. This one they arranged on their own. Come on in. I'm sure I don't have to show you the way..."

"You can say that again."

The two women found four of them in a suspicious huddle in Josie's bedroom. "Alright! Who called the doctor?" Four fingers pointed to four different people. "Where's Ethel?" The four fingers then all pointed in one direction... towards the bathroom. "Ethel honey?" Drury moved to the closed door. Knocking, her hand shifted to the doorknob. "Ethel? You okay?"

"Ahhh...."

The door opened to find the tiny woman hunched over the toilet. Bennet pushed past Drury to examine her, immediately moving into her professional demeanor. "So, what's happening Ethel?"

"Hey Doc. I'm not feeling too good." She tried to expectorate in an effort to validate her illness, but it came out as nothing more than a mild cough.

"Uh huh." Bennet could see that Ethel wasn't that sick and suspected it was just another feeble attempt to get the two of them together, but a patient was a patient until she could prove otherwise. "Okay, stand up and let me take a look."

"Ewww, that is soooo gross!" Drury grimaced.

"Hang on... trust me." Bennet winked at the blonde. "Come on, Ethel. Up you go."

The old woman wanted to comply but she was too embarrassed to move. At least, sitting down she had some modicum of modesty. "Do I have to?"

"Yep. I gotta examine the evidence, don't I?" But the woman wasn't convinced. "Look, we'll even turn around while you get yourself together." Bennet nudged Drury to turn around. Her ears picked up the rustle of material and shuffle of slippers. "Good girl."

"Girl? Honey, I haven't been called that for sixty years."

"Ethel, it's gotta be better than granny."

"You got that right! I ain't no granny!"

Bennet slipped past Ethel and looked into the bowl. Her dark eyebrows knitted together in confusion. Warily she eyed Ethel. "And this is yours?"

"Yep."

Bennet sniffed the air, and she had to smile at Drury's answering shudder at the action. "In that case, you better cut down on the Kibbles and Bits."

"Hey! We're not that poor!"

"Drury, its dog crap. They're trying to pull one over on us." Bennet turned her attention to the blushing woman. "And you, young lady, nice try but it's not gonna work." She waved a finger at them. "Come on." Bennet led them back into Josie's room, allowing Ethel time to find a seat while Drury leaned against the doorframe.

"Listen up ladies, this has gotta stop. All this running back and forth has got me functioning at less than optimum performance."

"Huh?"

"Okay. I'm draggin' ass here because of you gals. They're lookin' at me funny over at the medical center like I'm some dope dealer runnin' out every time a call comes in. Don't make me send old Doc Leadbetter. He is one nasty ol' geezer and could give ya all a run for your money. You got me?"

"A man? Are you trying to torture us?"

"I seem to recall that you had Dr. Wilson before me."

"He was a little sweet, if you catch our drift, and we were used to him. I'm not having some crotchety old goat feeling me up." Phil shuddered at the thought.

"Jesus, Phil, he's still a doctor. He has standards. Believe me he won't touch anything unless he has to."

"I think that was an insult!" But Daisy wasn't sure. She'd check that one with Phil later.

"My point being, you gotta stop calling just to get me out here. You remember the Boy Who Cried Wolf? That also works for wily old Amazons."

"Well damn, we're just trying to help..." The irascible old woman jumped up shooting the wheelchair backwards.

"Phil, we don't require your assistance, okay? Dru...ah...Gabby here and I are doing just fiffffaarrggffffuuu...!" The handle of the wheelchair hit Bennet in the lower stomach, catching her just above the bikini line.

"Shit, now what?" Drury was quickly at Bennet's side. "Easy, easy. Sit down."

"No... no, it's okay. Just caught me off guard." She eyed the ring leader of the matchmaking circle. "I'll just take my bruised ovary home. Ladies." She slowly made her way out of the room slightly hunched over, waiting for the pain to subside. "That's gonna bruise..." she muttered.

Drury managed to convince the physician to sit down and have a coffee in the kitchen, allowing a little time to recover. "I am soooo sorry, Doc."

"Please... Bennet. Let's drop all this doc and patient stuff." The pain was cutting through her professional demeanor.

"Bennet. I don't know what's got into these women. I apologize."

"Oh, I know what's going on. They're not gonna be happy until we are together."

"Oh." The doctor's reply was laced with a bit of annoyance. Didn't she want anything to happen? Drury thought things had been going along fine. Had she changed her mind? "Well, that's not gonna happen, is it?"

What brought that on? "Not if you don't want it to." Bennet looked shyly at the woman. "Do you?"

"Do *you*?" Drury was confused.

"Ahhh... yeah. But I could do without all this pretense. I feel like my parents are watching us."

"I think they are." Drury smiled. "When they have their minds set on something it's like a killer instinct. Come hell or high water it *will* happen."

"Well, tell 'em to get off this boat or it's gonna sink." Bennet's faced wrinkled up in sympathy at Drury's forlorn look. "Don't worry, that's not gonna happen."

"No?"

"No." Bennet's finger came under the blonde's chin, tipping it up gently. "They've got good taste."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really." The brunette picked up her mug took a sip of her coffee, allowing the warmth to flow through her. "But it'll have to wait until after Christmas. It's been real busy besides these extra calls and I'm exhausted."

"Speaking of Christmas, what are you doing on the 25th?"

"Nothing much. I'm on call but I'll probably just collapse at home."

"Would you like to come for an early dinner? It's not going to be much but you're welcome to join us."

"I would love to. Anything you want me to bring?"

"Nope. Just yourself." But Bennet knew she wasn't coming empty handed.

* * *

It was the day before Christmas and Drury was busy in the kitchen, leaving the old ladies to their own devices. She knew it was a bad idea but she had no choice. It was quiet. Too quiet.

"Phil? Ethel?" There was no response. "Daisy?"

"Gabrielle? Is that you?"

The blonde wandered into her room. "Agn... Melosa, where are the other Amazons?"

"They have gone hunting."

"Hunting?"

"Yes. They took the horse and went hunting."

Oh God... Drury ran out of the house to find the station wagon gone. "Damn it to hell! Why can't they just stay put?"

"Dr. Riley." Bennet had a funny feeling that this phone call was not going to be good.

"Bennet?"

"Drury?" She sighed. "What have they done now?"

"I'm really sorry but I've got no one else to turn to."

"You kind of caught me at a bad time. I'm just about to go out on a call."

"Oh. Sorry then..."

"No. Come on, tell me what's wrong."

"It's our Amazons." *Our* Amazons? "They've taken the car and are missing."

"Oh crap. I think you need an electrified fence, or maybe bars."

"The thought has crossed my mind. You're busy right now so I'll manage."

"Have you already looked?"

"No. I've got Agnes at home. I can't leave her alone."

"Alright, leave it to me. I have a patient to see first but I'll cruise the streets for them after that. In the meantime, if they get back home give me a call."

"Oh, thank you, God. Thank you."

"Calm down, Dru. I'm sure they're fine."

"Dru?"

"Ahhh... yeah. I hope you don't mind."

"No," Drury's voice dropped to a seductive whisper, "Not at all." She thought she could hear an answering swallow down the line.

"Talk to you soon." Bennet hung up from the conversation, a bead of sweat forming on her upper lip. "Oh Jesus..." She was in trouble.

* * *

A couple of hours later Bennet found the troublemakers at the local mall, wandering around lost within the maze of stores. "Just what do you think you are doing?"

"Christ, don't do that." Daisy's hand rested on her pounding chest. "Give me a heart attack, why don't ya."

"Well, you're giving Drury one, so turn about is fair play." Bennet was angry. "You are one seriously selfish bunch! You take advantage of that woman's good natured ways and just do whatever the hell you want. Did you ever think about what she is going through right now?"

"But... but..." Ethel replied timidly.

"No buts. You don't deserve her." Bennet turned around in disgust and walked away. "Get moving... back to jail for you four."

"Hey!" Daisy placed her meaty hand on the tall woman's shoulder. "Who the hell do you think you are, huh? The naughty Amazon police?"

"A friend who sees this poor woman trying her best to make sure you women are taken care of and all you do is give her grief!" Blazing blue eyes held the geriatrics one by one.

"If you must know..." Phil said imperiously, "... we're shopping for a Christmas present for her. We can't do it with her up our butts now, can we?"

"You would rather have her be sick with worry while you steal the car to go shopping."

"That's how it boils down."

"Daisy! Shut up!"

"What did I say now?"

"Nothing. You just opened your mouth and stuck in your size 10 orthopedic." Phil sighed.

"Look, we didn't mean to get her upset but we wanted to get her something nice, you know? A surprise. She doesn't get many of those."

"She sure as hell got a surprise when she found you had disappeared and the car gone."

"Okay! We get it! We're naughty Amazons!"

"That's just it, I don't think you do." Bennet was getting frustrated. They were dismissing it and she didn't like it. "I think there should be some changes made."

"Well, it's not up to you, is it?" Phil moved closer to her antagonist. "What gives you the right to tell us what to do, huh?"

"As Drury's physician I do. You are running her ragged. If she gets sick then you will have to fend for yourselves. Did you ever think of that?"

"Oh... no."

"Well, maybe you should." She had said her piece now it was time to go home. "Come on. Let's find this car of yours." But that feat wasn't so easy. Fading memories and a lot of cussing and fussing took place before they even found the correct entrance to the parking lot, let alone the vehicle.

It took half an hour... half... an... hour. Damn. Bennet was hot, tired and cranky, dragging along four equally hot, tired and cranky Amazons to their car. "Straight home, okay? No more side trips."

"You don't have to tell us twice."

"If someone had told you once, you wouldn't be in this position."

"Now look here you quack...!"

"Stop it! Everyone just stop!" Ethel piped in, her reedy voice barely heard over the din. "I just want to go home, alright?"

"Fine." It took a minute or two for the old ladies to lower themselves into the seats, the creaking of old bones covered by the sound of gunning engines. "You gonna escort us home like naughty children?" Phil was straining at the leash.

"Nope. I think you can find your own way home."

"Can... " Phil hated this, she really did. "Are we seeing you tomorrow?"

"Well, Drury invited me, yes."

"Can you take care of her present for us?"

Bennet smiled for the first time since finding the wayward Amazons. "Sure. I can do that." She took possession of the gaily wrapped present, her curiosity interested in what was inside. Phil relaxed. Maybe the woman actually felt something for young woman. She studied their rescuer, seeing the lines of exhaustion and worry.

As if reading her mind, the physician commented. "By the way, you can stop worrying about her love life." With those words, she walked away towards the mall, leaving the hunting party to return home to an anxious and frustrated Amazon princess.

* * *

Bennet sat in her car Christmas morning, her head leaning against the steering wheel. God, she was tired, both mentally and physically. Her mind felt like a snowball slowly melting away to become slush. Yeah... slush. Random thoughts, like slush, were just gonna drip out of her ears. How did Drury keep her sanity around these women?

After leaving them at their car the day before to make their own way home, she made her way back through the maze of shops towards her own car. Something caught her eye and she stopped and looked. It was a pretty little thing and she hadn't bought the woman a present yet. She wasted no time with her shopping as she had lots to do before the big day.

It had been a long afternoon. She returned to the office to collect her list. A few phone calls earlier in the week had people readily donating to her cause to help Drury. People whose enthusiasm for her simple request had amazed her. The Christmas spirit was alive and well, at least in her little corner of the world.

So here she was. The moment of truth. Bennet knew the old battleaxes would be delighted but would Drury see it as charity? Would she be too proud to accept these people's generosity? It was too late. It was done.

"Showtime," she mumbled as she got out of the car carrying the two small offerings. Bennet looked at the blue sky. Another nice day. It also determined when she would bring in the rest of the presents. It was going to be a warm day. With some familiarity she knocked on the door, pleased to see the beaming face of the owner. "Hey... Merry Christmas"

"Merry Christmas to you too. Glad you could come." Drury stepped aside to let her guest in. "You look tired."

"Yeah." What more could she say to that? "So where are the troublemakers?"

"We're having dinner in the dining room. They're having a drink or two to unwind...or so they say."

"Sounds good." Bennet felt decidedly naked without her medical bag as she entered the room.

"Hey Doc! Merry Christmas." Phil was in a jovial mood. On her second scotch she was nice and mellow.

"Here you go." The doc handed over the present she had been babysitting.

"Errr... Drury..."

"May Zeus strike you down Ephiny!" The alcohol flowing through her veins made Agnes even more feisty than usual, cursing her inmates in what they only assumed was supposed to be ancient Greek. Daisy suspected it was Agnes's version of ancient Greek since everything else was a product of her confused imagination. "The next person to disobey me will have to fight me in single combat!" She rose from her chair to her hunched 5 foot 2 inches, gnarled hands clenched in fists.

"Gabrielle, this is a little something from all your... Amazons." Phil's eyes flickered over to the bristling Agnes, glad to see her bowed body lose its rigidity.

"Awww... you didn't have to do that... errrr.... My warriors." That sounded just plain stupid. Drury tore away the paper and opened the box. "Wow!" she murmured "Thank you. How did you know?"

"I think it was the holes in the toes that gave it away, Gabs..." Daisy looked over to Agnes to see a warning eyebrow rise. "Ahhh... Gabrielle." The woman was certainly snippy this morning. "Try them on."

Drury slipped off her old slippers to try on the new ones. "They're lovely, thank you... Eponin." She was touched by their thoughtfulness, knowing very well that their allowance was not much. "But..."

"No buts, Gabrielle. A **big** fairy pointed out to us that you are our guardian angel and we have been neglectful of that fact of late. We're sorry and we'll endeavor to behave ourselves....more, you know, than usual."

"You? Behave? You are Amazon warriors and you are what you are." Drury smiled benevolently. "I gotta admit life is never dull around you."

"While you're all sappy, I've got something... *two* somethings for you too." Bennet handed over the first present.

"But... but why?"

"You have to ask?"

"Aww that is soooo... corny." "What did she get you?" "Open it." "Gabrielle..."

The paper with Santas plastered over it fell away to uncover a flat box. "What...?"

"Just open it." Bennet just knew she would get slapped for this one but with some luck she may wear it. Even if it was only once....

"It's... it's..." ...*the most ghastly thing I have ever seen*. Drury tried so hard not to utter those words.

"It's your trusty sidekick uniform!" Sparkling blue eyes skittered around the gathered group.

"I don't believe it." Drury held up the ghastly green top and the rust colored skirt. "The only thing that has any promise is the belt."

"Ahh, but it's a magical costume."

"Magical. Uh huh." Why did Drury suspect there was a catch to this?

"It shrinks every time you wash it. I want to be here when it disappears all together."

"You ain't the only one!" "Woo hoo, a buck naked Dru..." "Don't make me hurt you, Eponin!" The ladies were excited.

"Right... In your dreams, Doc."

"Yeah, in my dreams..." Bennet's voice drifted off, the dream playing in her head repeatedly. "Hmmm....."

"So does this work both ways?"

"Huh?"

"Where's the leather, oh tall one? No leather, no sidekick!"

"Oooh, kinky!" Phil was enjoying this immensely.

"You said two presents?" Drury so desperately wanted to end this conversation.

"Awww, don't leave at that just as it was getting interesting." Daisy had so little chance to eavesdrop on sexual banter, that's if she didn't count Phil's noisy dreams at night.

"Here you go..." Bennet had teased the young woman enough, "...my Gabrielle."

"I think I'm gonna puke..."

"Shut up Agn... Melosa!"

The small woman could feel her eyes water with unshed tears. The paper came away to reveal a

small jewelry box. She was nearly afraid to open it but she overcame her reticence and did so. Inside lay a small pendant, a tiny emerald lay nestled in a delicate filigree setting. "Here, let's try it on." Bennet gently took the box out of the woman's hands and removed the necklace from the cushioned cardboard.

The room was so quiet you could hear a pin drop, the old ladies letting the scene unfold. Phil smiled gently as she watched Drury's face. It was... beautiful. As the necklace brushed her skin, Drury's hand automatically rose to rest on it. Her eyes lifted to the woman standing behind her, touching the bright blue gaze watching her response. "Thank you," she whispered.

"Well, before this gets all mushy, I could use a hand unpacking the car."

"Unpacking? There's more?"

"Sure is." The brunette plastered a huge smile on her face as she delivered the news. "Ho, ho, ho..." she murmured, earning a glare from Agnes. "Ay yi yi yi?!?!?"

As they moved towards the front door, Bennet stopped in the doorway. She pointed overhead and smiled at Drury. A chorus of hollers met them as they hesitated, bursting into cheers as Bennet's lips touched Drury's. "Who put up the mistletoe?"

"I think it was a group effort. They are incorrigible."

"Come on. I need help." Bennet looked over her shoulder at the old ladies, giving them a friendly 'thumbs up'. A round of raucous laughter met her ears as she walked out the door into the sunshine.

"What's all this?" There were boxes sitting in the doctor's back seat, one announcing it was a television and the other... the glare and the smeared glass made it opaque and she couldn't make out what it was. "Where did all this come from?" She looked accusingly to the tall woman. "Did you buy all this stuff?"

"No. Not that the thought didn't cross my mind. I made a few phone calls..." Bennet held her breath waiting for a response.

"So this is charity?"

"Don't look at it that way, okay? I had a few friends who wanted to help you out."

"It's not so easy to accept this."

"Well, accept it for them. It's just a few creature comforts, nothing more." Before Drury had time to answer, Bennet had the back door open and was lifting out the box. "God, this is awkward. Can you..."

The blonde moved around and grabbed the other end of the box, the two of them waddling into

the house with the large box. As the old women 'ooo'ed and 'ahhh'ed over the new computer, they returned to the car to get the next box. It took a little time to unpack everything from the car as the trunk was full as well.

Drury and Bennet stood back as the ladies laughed and chatted about the new things. "Are you going to deny them?" The doc knew she had the woman over a barrel, knowing very well that she would be hard-pressed to say 'no'.

"You play dirty, Doctor."

"I'll take my victories anyway I can, Dru."

"Can we get the internet?" Ethel piped up.

"What are you going to use the internet for?"

"Porn!" Phil grinned.

"You... whaaaa???!?"

"Porn! Is there anything else?"

"Ephiny, you are 76 years old. What on earth do you want porn for?"

"Have you seen my fantasy woman? It's not pretty. She's wrinkled, has false teeth and her boobs are down to her waist. I gotta get some fresh material."

Bennet looked at Drury. "Don't look at me. They're your problem."

While Bennet fought off the enthusiastic helping hands trying to unpack the boxes, Drury brought out the food. "Food's on the table!"

"Woo hoo! Tater tots!" Bennet grinned.

"Since you missed 'em the last time I couldn't help myself."

"Very thoughtful." The brunette looked around the table and felt a warming glow. Here was Christmas in its purest form. One filled with friendship, joy, peace and hope.

"It seems I was wrong." The thought was out of place with the conversation but it was something that Bennet wanted to say.

"Wrong about what?"

"Remember when you said we all do this work to get something in return?"

"I seem to recall you saying something about you were the exception."

"I got something out of it."

"Yeah? What did you get?"

"You."

THE END.

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