

~ The Most Dangerous Game Of All ~

by Aurelia

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SEX WARNING: Yes, it's a PWP.

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FEEDBACK: I'm always open to comments, preferably nice ones, so let me know what you think at: aurelia_fan@yahoo.com.au

"We're stopping here!" The deep voice echoed in the meadow, voice after voice issuing the order to her troops. "Maltus! Set up camp!" The huge black stallion began to move forward with a press of his mistress's thighs, his huge hooves stamping uneasily on the dusty road. On his back sat a tall woman. Proud. Confident. Deadly.

Xena urged the horse along the line of men following behind her. One by one they looked up at her in awe. She had the might of Hercules, the mind of Caesar and the charisma of a god. Her men would follow her to the underworld and back.

A young man, barely out of adolescence, ran up behind her, trying to keep up with the prancing stallion. "My Lord! Where are you going?"

Piercing blue eyes stared like a hawk at the asker. "I...I... mean, is there something I can do for you, My Lord?"

Calm down, Xena. She was on edge, she knew that. It had been a long, hard winter campaign in the north and she welcomed the warmer southern climate. "The camp, Maltus. Over there." She pointed to the grassy area.

But he was not satisfied. "But... but... my Lord."

Her voice tempered, "Everything is fine, Maltus. I'm going on ahead to reconnoiter."

"Alone, My Lord?"

"Well 'I' usually implies one, Maltus," she replied sarcastically. She needed some time alone and he wasn't going to give it to her. Her vision scanned the meadow, pleased with the location. In one corner was what could best be described as a pond, although it was nothing more than a

widening of the creek that ran through it.

"We'll camp here for the next day or so."

"Day?"

"Don't question it, Maltus. Just do it!" Xena was tired. Sick and tired of having to spell everything out in black and white to her men. On the other hand, they were terrified of getting her orders wrong, so she made sure to tell them, in minute detail, what she wanted. It was a vicious circle.

"I want these men cleaned up. You got me? They are to have a bath, a wash, I don't care. I want them clean, their clothes, their weapons and anything else that hasn't seen the light of day in a while. Any untreated injuries are to be seen to." She smiled devilishly. "If they're still energetic enough after that, they can drill."

"As you wish, My Lord."

My Lord, My Lord, My Lord. When did that all start? Alti had promised her the title of *The Destroyer of Nations*, an allure she found too hard to resist. And yet despite the shaman's prediction it never came to be. She knew who was to blame for that. She had begun to believe in her own invulnerability and right to rule the world. That was a foolish decision on her part. This time she would win what was hers by leadership and a superior army, not because some dangerously mad witch had promised it to her.

But what a life it had been, having experienced things that only the bravest of men could dream about. Considering all the mistakes she had made in her life, Xena was mildly surprised that she was where she was and not dead and buried in some unnamed grave somewhere. Caesar. Alti. Borias's death. Solan's life. Her own wicked ambition and lust for power. So many mistakes... so many lessons.

So, now she was back in Greece. Her home and her heart. Warriors flocked to her like bees to honey, and she was once again in the grip of ambition. Xena was taking her homeland piece by piece, one warlord, one army and one league at a time.

Maybe it was her own men's sense of purpose and power that drove them to start calling Xena Conqueror, but it was a title she hadn't earned yet. She had only defeated the armies, not the land or the people. She needed a much bigger army for that.

So here she was, leading her force from north to south, east to west, eliminating anyone who stood in her way but with no structure in place to control what she had taken. It was days like this that the burden of leadership weighed heavily on her shoulders.

As Maltus was about to leave, she growled, "And warn them that the water is for drinking and fishing only. They wash up away from the water source. Anyone caught pissing or bathing in that creek will have to deal with me... personally. Understood?"

"Perfectly, My Lord."

Maltus only had the rank of Lieutenant but she found him enthusiastic and reliable in the delivery of her orders. Her more senior officers were older and thought they knew better. Some days it was easier to converse with someone who wouldn't argue back... well, not much and not too often.

* * *

Wraith trotted at a slow pace, moving in concert with his mistress's mood. "Hey boy..." Xena murmured soothingly, patting the strong black neck of her mount. "Do you sense something?" In answer he shook his black mane. "No?" But she didn't agree with his opinion, her eyes flicking to either side of the path.

She was being watched. A sly smile touched her lips at the thought but she didn't react, allowing Wraith to gently walk along at his own pace. Those sharp eyes scanned the forest surrounding her, taking in everything.

Nothing but the faint stirrings of nature could be heard. A small owl sat on a nearby branch, its eyes closed for the moment until the sun disappeared. A lizard stirred the undergrowth. All this, and more, she absorbed greedily, trying to find that one noise that was out of place. And yet...

Xena continued down the dusty road a little farther, satisfied that there was no immediate danger to her army. Not that she was worried about that. No army had yet come close to defeating her. Still, she didn't win battles by taking chances. That was a hard lesson to learn, one that had cost her dearly.

Xena had taken enough time to look around, and reluctantly she turned her mount around back to camp. She wished she had the chance to be out on the road alone, where only she and her horse existed. No army, no responsibility and no ambition. The gentle sway of the horse's lazy walk lulled her into a mind-numbing state of lethargy. That was until Wraith stopped and stomped at the ground restlessly. He could feel it, just like she could.

Despite not being able to see anything, her senses were telling her there was something. Something she felt she couldn't ignore. She should have turned back, she knew that, but the thought that someone was watching intrigued her. It was a mystery for an otherwise dull day, raw and untamed, and sat on the wind enticing her with its heady aroma.

She dismounted, tying her horse to a nearby tree. Why was she doing this? Putting herself in danger for the hell of it? Her officers would be mortified, not that she was going to tell them anytime soon. It was nobody's business but her own. After all, she was the Conqueror and she was feeling in a particularly brash mood.

A wry smile touched her lips as she followed her gut, leading her deeper into the foliage ahead. Fear was something that Xena had left behind years ago, along with her wish to live to an old

age. Live for today, that was the motto that had sent her fearlessly into battle. Tomorrow would take care of itself.

Her instincts drifted around her like an aura, picking up sights, sounds, smells and vibrations that her normal senses could not detect. Someone was there, she knew it. Someone who was hiding, but wasn't. That made no sense to her, and yet it did. Someone was calling out to her but not in words or actions. It was a thought she would take to bed with her tonight.

Wraith whinnied and stomped at the ground a bit more, awaiting his mistress's return. Xena wanted more time to look but her mount reminded her of her responsibilities. She would have to return to camp before a search party came looking for her. As she walked back through the undergrowth, her head swiveled to take one last look at where she had been, feeling a set of eyes looking at, and into her. Those eyes touched her soul.

* * *

The camp had barely begun to come together.

"Maltus!"

"Yes, my Lord!" The young Lieutenant snapped to attention, his hand nervously combing through his shoulder-length hair.

"Why isn't this camp set up?" Xena knew very well that it would take some time to set up the tents with so many men, but she enjoyed teasing him. He was so jumpy around her, so it was only natural for her to make him nervous.

"But... my..."

"Never mind! Take those men over there and help the cooks." She looked to the sky. "There's not much left of the day and I want a hot meal tonight."

"Yes, my Lord."

She should really teach the lad to say more than 'Yes, my Lord.' It was wearing a bit thin.

"Tomorrow, send out a hunting party in that direction." Xena indicated the part of the forest on the far side of the pool, away from her recent wanderings. "If there are any fish in the pond collect them too. Check for herbs and roots." She glared at Maltus. "Why do I have to tell you this? We have been on the road long enough that scavenging parties should already be at work." Xena turned away before dismissing the young lieutenant. "Now, get out of here!"

* * *

The night sky was alive with stars. Xena sat on the ground with her mug of port, sipping its rather tart taste. She glared at the cup. The wine was like her life at the moment, a bit bitter. And

yet, in its depths was a shy sweetness waiting to be drunk. Now, why did she think that? What was this stirring in her soul?

* * *

Despite Maltus's protests, Xena left her army behind and resumed her quest to find her watcher the next morning. Picking up where she left off, she lost track of time as she followed the subtle trail, her instincts screaming at her that it was a trap. But she already knew that. It was a trap she wanted to trigger. She had to know.

While she contemplated her next move the air around her erupted. Instinctively, her hand swept up and palmed the flying projectile, opening her fist to find a dart. As she brought the weapon to her nose another flew through the air, piercing her neck and delivering its poison.

Xena felt the drug take hold of her body. She had underestimated her quarry. Of course he would send more than one dart. Would she not do the same if she were to attack in this fashion? But darting someone was not her style. She preferred to battle her enemy face to face, defeating him with sheer power and skill with the sword.

Her eyesight began to blur as the poison took effect, her assassin coming into view as her vision faded to black...

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The first thing Xena noted when she regained consciousness was that she was spread eagle on the ground, secured with strong rope and metal spikes. Her eyes swiveled looking for her opponent, finding him seated against a tree idly peeling an apple with a dagger. His face was shrouded with a hood so she was unable to establish the identity of who darted her.

Testing her bonds, she felt a little give but it would take a while to get herself free, and she doubted that her captor would oblige and walk away while she made her escape. Her movement attracted the hooded man to her state. He stood, gliding over to her with a certain amount of elegance and confidence. Xena watched her enemy move and was curious by the body language exuding from this creature. There was something... intriguing.

He was of middling height but slim, and yet there was also a steely strength there as well, the shifting muscle visible under the dark linen shirt he wore. "So, you caught me. Get it over with." The hood tipped to one side as darkened eyes studied her, slipping over her torso in more than a passing stare. "If you're going to kill me, at least let me see my executioner."

When it looked like her last request was going to be ignored, gloved hands rose to the hood, slipping off the soft material to reveal a mop of short blonde hair. Xena stifled the gasp trying to escape her lips. It was a woman, a short blonde woman with the face of an angel. If the situation weren't so serious she would have laughed at the irony. She'd always thought that no man could beat her, yet she hadn't considered a woman. But here she was at the mercy of this babe in the woods.

Xena's eyes locked with the blonde's green orbs and she felt a lurch in the pit of her stomach. She scanned the woman again, this time with fresh eyes, and couldn't help but smile at the enticing package standing over her. She looked up into that adolescent face and saw an amused grin.

"So, you gonna kill me or what?" The words that came from her mouth held no fear. Xena could not sense any malice from her captor. There was a cold, logical mind residing behind those pale green pools. If the woman wanted her dead she would already be standing on the shores of the river Styx.

"Why are you in such a hurry to die?" Xena was surprised by her own reaction. The blonde's soft melodious voice had woven an erotic tale that her own body was eager to discover. It was a voice to die for. "This is the famous Xena?"

"Yep."

"You seemed awfully easy to catch, *Conqueror*." The young woman seemed amused at the title and Xena couldn't help but smile back.

"I hate that title."

"And yet all of Greece calls you that. Why is that?"

"Why do I conquer or why do they have a need to call me a conqueror?"

"What drives you, *Conqueror*? Your reputation is a mighty one. A she-devil with a blood lust that is unrivalled."

"I think you exaggerate a little. My blood lust has thinned of late. It used to be my only vice."

"Your only vice?" There was a touch of seduction in that voice that drew Xena's attention.

"The only time I felt anything was in death and battle."

"And now?"

"Now? Well, that blood lust does occupy a lot of my time..." Despite her predicament, Xena couldn't help but smile.

"I see..."

"And you? Who are you?"

"The woman who caught you." Xena raised a well-defined eyebrow in mock surprise. "My name is Raven." Xena had heard that name, but had never suspected that the most famous assassin in the land was a woman. She knew that many a contract would have been fulfilled by that innocent

young face approaching her victim before he'd even realize that his enemy was standing next to him.

Once or twice she'd thought of hiring the assassin herself, but it was only a fleeting wish. She had no need for subterfuge. She was the Conqueror... well, nearly the Conqueror. Her enemies must have believed it also and were worried. "So, you're Raven. Interesting..."

Raven straddled Xena's waist, removing her gloves and slowly lowering herself to sit on Xena's hips. The conqueror lifted her head, her neck muscles standing out with the strain. "And you feel nothing?" The tall warrior could do nothing but shake her head, her body focusing its attention on the woman sitting on her.

Raven placed her hands on the ground, on either side of Xena's head, those verdant eyes looking deep into the sapphire pools below her. She knew she could not deny that question, but she was interested in where this was going to lead. Xena again shook her head.

The young body had slipped up Xena, now spread over her stomach, as the smaller woman leaned down to within inches of the warrior's lips. Raven stopped, suspended a hair's breath away from a kiss, and Xena quickly lifted her head to make the connection. Sparks flew as each fought for control of the kiss, like the thrust and parry of a well choreographed sword fight. The blonde pulled away, once again looking into those eyes. "Nothing?"

A sexy smile crossed Xena's lips as she looked up at the young woman, "HMMMMM."

"That's what I thought."

"So, are you going to kill me, or what?"

A small hand came up and caressed her cheek, and Xena couldn't help but feel a flutter in her chest. Raven was getting to her. "Here are the rules. Catch me if you can. If you catch me, then you can do with me what you will. If I catch you, it's my choice. Acceptable?"

Had she heard right? Had this assassin just offered her an assignation if she catches her? "Let me get this straight. If I catch you, I can have whatever sex I want with you and vice versa. Is that what you're saying?"

A blush traveled up Raven's cheeks. "I wouldn't have put it so bluntly, but yes."

"What's the catch?"

"There's no catch."

"Then why? You had a contract to kill me. Why this?"

"I had every intention of killing you. But..."

"But..." Xena knew what the young woman was going to say because she felt the same way but she wanted to be sure that this was mutual. Raven had reached inside her and grabbed her heart.

"I made the mistake of looking into your eyes." The warrior could feel some sympathy for Raven's predicament because she was in the same boat. Nothing like falling in love with the person trying to kill you.

The young assassin leaned in again, plundering Xena's mouth with her tongue, touching any part she could find in an effort to impress herself on the warrior. Little did she realize that she had already done that from the moment she removed her hood. Xena allowed the blonde control and accepted her touch, opening her heart to feel for the first time in a long time.

Raven withdrew from the prostrate body, stepping back to look over the conqueror's figure with lustful eyes. Xena could feel the heat from the young woman's stare gliding over her skin. Her libido finally got a kick in the pants and was eager to start the game. The young woman started to walk away. "Hey, what about me?"

"I can't make it too easy for you, *Conqueror*."

"Call me Xena."

"Very well, Xena. By the way, if I see any sign of your soldiers, I will carry out my commission. Is that understood?"

"You make this sound as if the game is one-sided. I want it as much as you do. There'll be no soldiers. You have my word."

"Very well then. The game starts tomorrow and will continue only during the day. At night, there'll be a truce. Your generals will grow suspicious if you are away for too long."

So true. They're probably wondering what's going on even now. "Agreed. Until then..." There was silence. "Your name... please."

Just when Xena gave up hope of a more intimate title, the young woman replied, "Gabrielle".

* * *

Xena returned to the camp stunned. She had expected to feel the gratification of battle and instead came away feeling... everything. Emotionally, she was lost. One small woman had totally disarmed her and now she was naked and vulnerable in a world seen through new eyes.

Tomorrow. She had to wait until tomorrow. Temptation gnawed at her. The thought that the small blonde was out in the forest, so close to her that she could nearly smell her, was eating away at her hard-fought control. Knowing what was being offered to her and unable to touch was going to be the end of her. She needed a distraction.

Xena wandered out to the training field, amused at the terror-filled eyes of those around her. Her very presence suggested someone was in deep, deep trouble. Little did they know she was only using the training to burn off some sexual tension, not necessarily to punish someone. Her opponents were hard pressed to fend off her manic energy as she tirelessly fought one after another in an effort to exhaust herself.

As a last resort, Xena ordered a bath, the confused looks of her men sending her into peals of laughter after their departure. She had gone nuts, and everyone around her was of the same opinion. She was almost giddy with joy and anticipation at the thought of the game tomorrow. Gabrielle...

* * *

The warm water dissolved a lot of her edgy tension, sinking Xena into a gentle drowsiness which allowed her mind to wander. But her mind only headed in one direction - Gabrielle, and what would happen tomorrow. She would willingly surrender at first sight if it meant she could spend the whole day with the young woman. Somehow she suspected that her total capitulation would not be appreciated.

Idle hands moved as her mind fantasized about what was to come, disappearing into the murky depths of the tub. Exotically beautiful eyes floated in her mind's eye, their green depths hypnotizing her, and Gabrielle's melodious voice calling to her like a siren's song. She was totally captivated, a willing slave to this slip of a woman.

Xena felt her fingers slide over her skin, sensitized with thoughts of the mysterious Gabrielle, a woman of her own heart. A killer, like herself, and yet there was an innocence about her that was not so much in her words, but in her eyes. Experienced, and yet not. A wet tongue licked dry lips at the thought of uncovering the heart of this enigma, revealing the bare truth of her soul.

The warrior could feel herself slowly climbing as her thoughts turned erotic. Slowly soft pale skin would be revealed to her, her lips following her hands in discovering her treasure. As much as she wanted to ravish Gabrielle the moment she saw her, her heart begged her to be gentle, to woo her like a virgin on her wedding night. Despite the circumstances, Xena didn't want the relationship to end with the completion of the game.

Maybe this was who she had been waiting for all her life, and if so, she wasn't about to throw the chance for happiness away. She needed to make the young woman yearn for her as much as she already did for Gabrielle.

A slow smile crossed curvaceous lips, her hand grabbing the sponge and dripping warm water over her cooling body. She idly watched as the water ran in fine rivulets down her chest, dripping off her nipples before returning to the pool below. Nimble fingers slowly caressed, stimulating nerve endings that lay dormant for quite a while. Now... now, she would know love and passion again, to feel the ultimate expression of love.

A whimper escaped full lips as her fingers found the heart of her, visions of the young assassin

dancing in front of her eyes in gentle seduction. Throwing her head back in sweet agony, Xena prolonged her pleasure, her senses all combining to bring alive the young woman who had so captured her heart.

Xena had never felt anything so strong, so powerful, so all-consuming. Gabrielle had swept into her life and turned it upside down, giving her back the will to live and love again. *So, she wants to play. Alright then, Gabrielle, you will be mine...*

* * *

Gabrielle sat in front of her campfire, watching the flames flicker, fiery tendrils rising into the darkness to reach the night sky. An energetic sizzle broke the silence, her kill roasting over the fire. In her hand she held a wineskin, already open and half empty. *Damn, damn, damn...*

Green eyes reflected the dancing flame, turning the orbs a deep hazel in the semi-darkness. This was not supposed to happen. She had broken the cardinal rule - she had fallen for her target, a woman who had a more terrifying reputation than her own. Years of self-denial and detachment had built up a layer of ice around her heart. One look from Xena's lapis eyes had melted her frozen wall, opening her up to something she thought she would never do again... feel.

What had been going on in her head with this stupid game? Her hormones had overridden her cold, logical mind, screaming for her to not pass the opportunity up. She could see that Xena had felt something too... something ancient. Despite her better judgment, she was bound to this course of action and its ultimate end.

She brought the wineskin to her mouth, allowing its fiery contents to blaze a path down her throat to settle in a cauldron of fire in her stomach. The burn from the alcohol gave her mind something to focus on besides the dark haired woman haunting her. She had a job to do. Why couldn't she carry it out? Ridding the world of someone like Xena would be a good thing. Right?

Gabrielle looked up into the night sky, watching gathering clouds obliterate the curtain of stars overhead. She shifted her pile of dry wood under her waterproof hide, which was large enough to act as a tent. Tomorrow could bring rain. *Just great...*

* * *

Xena awoke, exhausted from a stormy night's sleep. *Sleep?* There was no sleep, only torment. She was cranky, tired and horny. *To hell with the game.*

With purpose, Xena dressed, settling her armor and sword, but one way or the other she was not going to need them today. She was going to wrestle her little assassin into submission and then make love to her until neither of them could stand. Her 'go slow' plan had been abandoned, along with her sleep, and her libido was raging.

She stepped out into the drizzle, looking up to the sky in anger. *Never mind*, her mind whispered, *in the rain, on the ground, up against a tree, in a warm bed, you will have her.* "You got that

right."

Light had barely broken when she moved silently into the forest, munching on some dried fruit as her mind tried to formulate a plan to catch her prey. The problem was that her normally razor-sharp intellect was blunted by visions of the small blonde, leaving her feeling very impotent indeed. She was glad that this wasn't a deadly game because Gabrielle had her at a very serious disadvantage. A leader without planning and intellect intact usually ended up a dead leader.

The cloud cover had made the early morning a lot warmer than it had been the day before, and she was grateful. She had left her cloak behind because of the game, knowing it would be an impediment. The rain, however, was really pissing her off.

Xena restlessly swiped at the undergrowth with her sword. She was probably giving her position away to Gabrielle, but at this point she didn't care. If she were within arm's distance of the woman, nothing was going to stop her from grabbing her and kissing her into surrender. She wanted the game over so that they could get down to the part she was really interested in.

"Now, *Conqueror*, I don't think you're trying nearly hard enough."

Xena looked up from her introspection to see her wood nymph standing there in a soft chamois hunting outfit, the gentle rain molding the material to Gabrielle's body and outlining her in sensuous detail. Xena's stomach clenched at the sight of her, every luscious piece shown to the warrior's gaze. Sliding her sword back into its sheath, she slowly stalked towards Gabrielle, intent branded into every step she took.

"Xena. Now, you're not playing by the rules."

"These are **my** rules." The warrior's voice had dropped to a low rumble, pinning Gabrielle in place. The voice was so primal she could do nothing but answer its call. Once within range, Xena pulled her prize in, wrapping her in long arms and lowering her mouth to meet her tormenter.

Xena pulled away. "I haven't been able to get you out of my mind since yesterday." Leaning in again, her tongue painted the assassin's lips. "I've caught you, now you're mine."

What could she say? Xena had caught her. By unscrupulous means, but caught nevertheless, and she had acquiesced without so much as a whimper. Gabrielle's mind fought it momentarily before a wash of hormones flowed through her, obliterating all rational thought. Why was she fighting this? She knew why, but she was still unable to stop herself.

The tall warrior shifted, guiding her companion to a nearby tree to get some leverage. A small hand came up and pushed against her chest.

"No, not here." That same hand trailed down her arm and grabbed her large hand, pulling her further into the forest. Xena's heart beat frantically, anticipation careening wildly through her system as her little blonde led her through the damp foliage.

Her patience was about at an end when the bushes opened up into a small glade, a tiny camp hidden away in the corner. A waterproof hide was stretched taut between two trees, acting as a roof for her companion's belongings. *Very nice*. She looked over to Gabrielle, then again taking in the campsite. This woman was very knowledgeable and smart. No wonder she was very successful in her chosen profession.

She had been like that once, but over time her penchant for order slowly eroded away with the acquisition of power and a larger army. Sometimes... sometimes she wished things were simpler, like back at the beginning, when her army started with a handful of men and nights were shared with joy and competition. Before she slid into darkness. This woman had given her a glimmer of the old days, and her world now had a little light instead of the complete blackness.

"So..." Gabrielle stood next to the tent, unsure what to say. She suddenly felt like a virgin on her wedding night, standing before the marital bed in confusion and terror.

"Do... are you having second thoughts?" Xena could sense her hesitation and approached slowly.

Gabrielle's mind was screaming 'yes' but her heart jumped into the conversation before she could stop it. "No!" Her answer came out a little too quickly, giving the warrior an indication of her eagerness. *Stupid, stupid, stupid...*

The tall warrior closed the distance, her hands pulling Gabrielle in the last few inches until there was no space between them. Lips touched, slowly igniting the embers of passion, bursting into fresh flames with the touch of skin against skin.

Gabrielle's mind gave up in defeat after that. Like a tidal wave, her senses were flooded with this woman - her smell, her touch, her taste... the very essence of her. Xena was becoming a dangerous obsession, and seriously undermining her resolve to do what she must.

Long fingers sought out soft skin, quickly stripping off dampened cloth to find its goal. Gabrielle stood quietly while Xena undressed her, goose bumps pebbling her skin with the removal of her outfit. Her physical reaction to this emotional unmasking of her had a profound effect on her mind. No-one had ever discovered the real woman behind the mask, and she felt decidedly naked in more ways than one.

She reached for Xena's armor, deftly undoing the clips holding the heavy plates in place. The soft battle dress beckoned her, and she couldn't help but run her hands over the pliant leather, subtly feeling the strong body beneath it. As one body was mapping another, Gabrielle didn't realize that Xena was amusedly watching her. She looked up into sapphire eyes darkening with intent, and she knew Xena was about to make her move.

"Now, Conqueror, hold on..."

"I caught you. It's my rules." The young assassin felt a shiver at the intonation in that deep voice. She was about to be ravished.

"At least, lose the leather." Xena looked down, having thought she was already naked. The blonde had thrown her very being into disarray, unable to distinguish fantasy from reality. In a flurry of activity she quickly stripped, moving in to feel her skin against Gabrielle's. A deep sigh escaped her lips at the contact, two bodies finally finding one another in a harsh world, able to take comfort in each other for a short while.

The gentle patter of rain slid over their cooling bodies, forcing Xena to push the blonde under the hide covering onto the scattered furs. Emerald eyes looked up patiently awaiting her next move, allowing the dark-haired woman a moment to take in the supple muscular body on display beneath her. Well defined muscle covered the little assassin, yet softened with a fine layer of velvet skin. A steely strength lent to the small frame while, at the same time, still being soft and feminine. It was a heady combination of strength and softness, a bit like Raven, she thought. Underneath the cold-hearted killer lay Gabrielle, whom Xena suspected was a young woman with a sad past.

Idle hands began to move, touching, stimulating, tormenting Gabrielle into a higher level of arousal. Gabrielle lifted her own hands. "Ah, ah, no!" The young woman looked up in question at the conqueror.

"This is my reward. You stay put." *So, torture is it?* She placed her hands above her head in surrender, knowing that her active participation for the moment was not needed.

Xena straddled the firm, sinuous body, allowing herself to feel the blonde's abdominal muscles shift between her legs. Without conscious thought, Gabrielle was stimulating her just by breathing. *Oh, Gods!* The conqueror couldn't help but lower herself a bit more, allowing more contact, and therefore more stimulation, muscular legs quivering with excitement as the woman beneath her shifted.

Gabrielle looked up at the sweet smile of the woman above her, her eyes closed in reaction, and wondered what had caused this turn of events. Her eyes scanned down Xena's body, taking in the muscled sleekness of the infamous warrior sitting on her. How could someone so beautiful be so evil?

A faint whimper escaped those curvaceous lips, curling up in a seductive smile, her eyes darkened to a midnight blue as she watched the blonde studying her. Blue met green, emotion-laden eyes conversing without a sound. Gabrielle felt the subtle movement along her skin and looked down to see the warrior's body sliding along her, her stomach slick with arousal. The tall woman's head flicked with each twinge of a hidden nerve. Her hands rested on Xena's hips, helping to guide her in her search for pleasure. Muscular arms planted themselves on either side of the blonde's head, shifting Xena's angle forward and increasing the stimulation. Gabrielle tightened her abdominal muscles, sending the warrior over the edge into a series of contractions.

This had not been what she had planned, but Xena couldn't stop herself. Her little assassin had barely touched her and she responded, leaping off into the abyss without a second thought. Floating freely with arms outspread, the warrior felt herself supported by very capable hands.

She had never given any one this much trust, but Gabrielle's soul reached for her and captured her effortlessly.

Panting, Xena looked down at her companion, taking in the shy smile crossing those soft lips. She reached down, planting her lips on velvet skin, claiming her mouth. Small hands slid up her sweat-slicked body to her face, pulling her in tighter to make more contact.

Gabrielle watched silently as Xena contracted against her, her head thrown back in release while her mouth silently cried out in response to her excitement. Was it this easy? Could they draw this response from one another so readily and so soon? They barely knew one another, and yet they loved like they had lived as one throughout the ages.

Vibrant blue pools focused on her, promising pleasure to come, and she abandoned her thoughts for a time. The kiss grew more demanding, eliciting a growing response from her. Fingers found the brunette's back, pulling her closer to Gabrielle as she sought more contact. She wanted to feel what Xena had moments before, that all-encompassing passion that would sweep her away.

Xena grabbed Gabrielle's hands and returned them to above her head, silently telling her to keep them there. Those wonderful lips shifted to her neck, lavishing the damp skin, nipping the pliant flesh until she was squirming beneath her. A moist tongue trailed down to her pulse point, concentrating her ministrations there until she felt Gabrielle's breathing increase.

"Wha... what are you doing?"

"You have to ask?" Wet lips brushed the skin underneath it. Xena smiled. She had the woman where she wanted her, helpless and quivering.

"Not really. I..." Gabrielle sighed. She never sighed, but Xena had accomplished that with a mere touch. What'll she do if the woman drives her out of her mind? Her breath caught at the gentle nip on her throat. "Didn't you eat this morning?"

"Nah. I thought I'd wait until now." The nips continued down the skin until Xena had reached a particularly tasty nipple. "Ah, a delicacy..."

"Ohhhhh..." Gabrielle moaned. *Damn it!* "You don't play fair."

"Nope. My enemies could have told you that, especially if I want something bad enough."

"Bad... oh Gods... enough?" Xena was tormenting her like no other. She had known torment but this was on a whole nother level. It was pleasure to the point of pain, or was it pain to the point of pleasure? She had never understood that before but Xena was teaching her now.

"And I want you real... **real** bad." It was a truth that resounded in Xena's heart. Her tongue flicked the piece of flesh in front of her, eliciting a twitch from the blonde. Smiling, she continued to torment, setting no rhythm or strength to her ministrations. She was just content to touch then wait for Gabrielle to respond.

"Just kill me now..." The young assassin had had enough. One more lick would drive her insane.

"Oh, no, no, no... Why would I do that?"

Breathy sighs interrupted the conversation. At that moment, a hand joined in, tweaking the other breast. "Oh Gods..."

"You seem to be calling them a lot. You think they're gonna help you?"

It was probably not a good time to point out that she knew Ares personally. Xena wanted only the two of them in this glade. Ares could find his own girl. Well, he had but she wasn't for sale. He had her right arm in battle but that was it.

Xena took a long swipe of the erect nipple. "Oh Gods..." Gabrielle lost all coherent thought after that as Xena applied herself to the task at hand. Gabrielle could see how she had been so successful at conquering half of Greece, if her attention to detail in battle was as precise as it was in her attention to making love. The brunette was everywhere, touching off sparks of pleasure wherever she made contact. Xena was very, very good at this and she was worried that she could easily become obsessed with her.

The warrior reveled in the essence that was Gabrielle. Swamped with a host of sensory input, she easily slipped into a sensual limbo. Her head rested on the washboard abdomen as her hands explored. A pair of hands buried themselves into her dark locks, the gentle massage jerked from time to time when she found a particularly sensitive spot.

But she had to know all of her, to know the beating heart of the woman she had become infatuated with. Slowly and with confidence Xena made love to her little assassin, enjoying the sighs and whimpers she elicited. It was not the sex she had been promised earlier, but something deeper. There was a gentleness and reverence to the love making, something she had not experienced since... well, ever.

Sex was sex. It was a tool to her and she wielded it without prejudice, just as those whom she came in contact with did. Her chosen profession did not allow for emotional attachments, but somewhere deep down inside her she wanted just that. Something she knew she couldn't have because it came at a price.

Enough daydreaming, Xena. Luscious lips traveled down the rest of the way to where she wanted to be... where Gabrielle wanted her to be. Before long the hands buried in her hair were grasping, tangling in her long hair and pulling forcefully. She tasted, she teased, she stopped and waited and she aggressively gave pleasure, driving the smaller woman to distraction.

Gabrielle didn't know what to think, so she thought nothing. Her body spoke eloquently enough without words, encouraging the woman lying between her legs to continue what she was doing. It was... exquisite. Who knew that someone so brutal in battle could be so tender in love? Just as that random thought crossed her mind the tempo changed, sending her quickly over a cliff she

had only stood on the edge of. Oh, she had experienced orgasms before but never so... so... complete... so... overpowering... so... final.

Gabrielle tried to stifle her cries for fear of their discovery. Despite what she had Xena promise, she would've been a fool to expect her generals to just let Xena walk away. This was a moment in time, nothing more. A moment that she could keep as her own in the dark days to come.

There they lay, Xena draped over Gabrielle's lower torso like a blanket, and there they fell asleep.

Xena was unaware of how long she had been lying there, but it had been longer than five minutes. That was all she had allowed herself before beginning all over again. But something was missing. To be more precise, someone was missing. Gabrielle was gone. All that was left, Xena's clothes and the fur she was lying on. Gone.

She sighed deeply. Was that it? Her mind grasped to remember every second of what had happened, cataloguing every nuance and sensation in an effort to re-capture the moment. It was not enough, and she knew that it would never be enough.

Dressing quickly, she'd already begun to formulate a plan to find her. Faint voices echoed from the trees, signaling the end of her thoughts. Not feeling in a very forgiving mood, she sat on the fur to wait for her men. They had spoiled her day so she would spoil theirs.

Xena's hand brushed against the fur she was seated on. Here was where she found love and lost it again. Would the hide carry their scent... Gabrielle's scent? Somehow she knew it would. A bittersweet reminder of their secret love. Her eyes dropped to the tanned hide to watch her hand caress the skin... her skin. Tucked under the edge of the fur was a piece of parchment. Xena's heart soared. A message... from her?

*Another day, another time, Conqueror.
The game continues...
Catch me if you can.*

Xena smiled. The game continues...

THE END

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