

# ~ A Royal Amazon Wedding ~

by Carole Giorgio

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Positive feedback always welcomed and tends to keep the fingers typing. (If you don't like lesbians - I don't need to know -- Feel free to go somewhere else for entertainment.)

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Almost a fortnight had passed since the four women had returned to the Village and the day of the big event was quickly approaching. The actual date was now hinging on Toxaris and her friends returning with the guests of honor, Xena and Gabrielle's nieces, Xe and Gabby.

If Xena's calculations were correct, and they usually were, and if the small troop had run into no delays, their arrival was anticipated sometime today. With that in mind, the wedding was tentatively scheduled for tomorrow when the sun was at its fullest.

Excitement was so thick it could almost be cut with a sword. The sisters, both young and old, scurried through the Village, attending to last minute details. Tecmessa's Honor Guard had been diligently working on a routine to honor the couple before the joining, and some of them were still busy polishing swords and preparing their uniforms. The bards of the Village had composed poems, praising the Royal couple, and were now busy memorizing their lines. The communal lodge was crowded with cooks who were frantically preparing the favorite delicacies of the Queen and her Consort.

There was not an idle hand in the entire village, as preparations were being brought to a close and the anticipated day was finally about to dawn.

Xena had retrieved the rings and goblets from their hiding place and was on her way to Eve's hut to ask that she hold them until morning.

"Not that I think Gabrielle might find them, but . . . "

"Sure, Mother. You know full well that Mom has an insatiable curiosity. I know I'd be afraid of her finding them if I were you. Does she have any idea that you made rings?"

"None. I can't wait to see the expression on her face. You will hold the rings for the ceremony, won't you?"

"You just try and keep me from participating," the younger woman smiled at her mother.

The warrior was glowing with pride as she thought about placing the ring upon her bride's finger. Eve, on the other hand, was looking at the change she had seen in the champion since they had arrived in the village those many moons ago. Eve was slowly coming to know her mother as someone people from the past would never have imagined. As the hero of legend slowly disappeared, a woman that history would definitely miss out on was emerging in this isolated village far from the eyes of Greek civilization.

"What?" the warrior questioned her daughter.

"Oh, nothing," Eve lied. "I was just thinking what a beautiful day tomorrow was going to be and hoping that Toxaris arrives before the sun sets this evening."

"I think their arrival is on the top of quite a few lists this day; Gabrielle's a nervous wreck, and I don't think I could last through another evening of her tossing and turning. I got more sleep out on the road when we were being pursued by the gods than I have the last few evenings with the Amazon Queen."

The complaint was sincere, but there was levity in her mother's voice that let Eve know that she was tickled that Gabrielle was nervous about the ceremony.

"So, mother, do you have your vows?"

"As a matter of fact, I do. I just hope they don't sound ridiculous when I say them in front of the entire tribe. They sound good in my head and they come from my heart, but . . ."

"Those are the two most important points, Mother. Just try to imagine that it's just you and Mom standing there."

"Right!" Sapphire eyes sparkled as she gave Eve a gentle tap on the shoulder. "It will be the middle of the day, and I will be flanked by my daughter, her lover, and two nieces. We will be standing under an arbor of flowers and surrounded by every Amazon in the known world. And you want me to pretend it's just Gabrielle standing there before me? I may have gotten a little soft over the years while traveling with the bard, but it hasn't affected my mind."

The younger woman laughed at the sight of her mother, who was usually in total control of her emotions, on the verge of a nervous fit. She was just about to answer Xena when there was a commotion outside that seemed to be getting louder by the second.

Racing for the door, the women were greeted with the sight of a huge crowd surrounding a small party of Amazons and two visitors.

"I knew she wouldn't let you down," Eve mumbled, more to herself than to her mother, as they both exited the hut and joined the growing assembly.

Looking none the worst for wear, Toxaris smiled at the two women she had been searching for in the midst of the chaos surrounding her. "Eve, Xena-over here," she waved her arms above her head.

The crowd parted, allowing the warrior and her daughter through to the middle of the assemblage where Xe and Gabby stood in awe of the entire tribe that was surrounding them.

"Give them some room to breathe," the warrior commanded as she neared the center of the group. "I know you want to welcome them, but do you want to scare them in the process?" She smiled at the Amazons as they separated and let her through.

"Welcome to the Amazon village girls; I hope your adventure was not too hard on you."

Twinkling azure and verdant eyes met those of the older woman and both visitors answered in unison, "Oh, no Aunt Xena . . . "

A giggle flitted through the crowd that was quickly squelched at the site of ice blue daggers searching the group for the original culprit.

"What's so damned funny?" the warrior asked one of the closer Amazons.

"Excuse me, Xena, but no one has ever heard you called Aunt before."

"Yeah, well . . . warriors have families, too, you know?"

"Of course they do. Many of us are warriors here, but you're Xena the Warrior Princess, the Consort to the Amazon Queen, a living legend, hearing you called 'aunt' just makes you seem so . . . "

"Human?" the warrior questioned.

"We're sorry, Xena. We really meant no disrespect. I think everyone is just keyed up and anxious for the wedding to be held."

The ice in the sapphire eyes melted as the warrior looked out among the young sisters surrounding her nieces. These were to be her extended family, and she could tell that even though she lived among them, she still held a place in their hearts and minds that kept her and Gabrielle beyond reproach. She missed the days of Ephiny, Solari, Eponin and Melosa, Amazons who accepted them as equals. She realized she had some work to do to be accepted here on the

same footing as with her friends of old. A tug of sadness hit her heart when she thought about the friends who would not be here to see her united under Amazon law with her soulmate.

Brought out of her reverie by a tap on the elbow, Xena turned to again face her nieces. "So, you ready to go find your Aunt Gabrielle?" she asked, recovering quickly from her reverie.

She looked around the crowd to make sure there was no repeat of laughter when the Queen's name was mentioned. Amazons are fast learners and the faux pas that had occurred earlier was definitely not repeated.

Toxaris had pulled Eve aside and was talking to her when Xena interrupted to thank the younger woman for taking such good care of her nieces. "No one seems any the worse for wear after such a long journey," the warrior noted. "I'm assuming there were no problems?"

"No problems at all, Xena. Even the weather was on our side, and your nieces were eager travelers." The younger woman smiled up at the warrior. "But I could use a goblet of Amazon wine and a nice warm bath before the feast that I know will be prepared in honor of these two guests."

"Don't let me keep you from it, Toxaris. You and your friends deserve a break after making such a long trip in both directions in the amount of time you did. I'm just glad you didn't run into any road bandits along the way. I'll leave you in Eve's hands, that should make you happy."

Not wanting the warrior to change her mind, Toxaris grabbed Eve's arm and the two hurried toward their hut.

Xena turned back to Xe and Gabby and suggested they go look for Gabrielle, but before they had time to travel more than a few huts, Gabby spotted her aunt running down the path toward them.

"I thought I heard a rumor that the guests of honor had arrived." Gabrielle threw her arms around Gabby and then around Xe. "I am so happy to see the two of you. I hope you had a good trip up." Concerned verdant eyes searched the faces of the two younger women.

"We had an exciting adventure, Aunt Gabrielle," Gabby responded.

"Well, we have a guest hut all prepared for the two of you. Everyone has been excited about meeting you and of course, we were all concerned whether or not you would arrive today as expected. Now the wedding can proceed as planned."

The crowd dispersed around the four relatives, leaving them some semblance of privacy in the midst of all the excitement. Xena and Gabrielle decided to get the girls settled into the hut before showing them around the rest of the village. After the tour, they had a standing appointment with the village seamstress. Ainia had been working diligently the past week and crossing her fingers that the Queen had a good memory as to the sizes of her nieces.

In the meantime, Toxaris and Eve had started home. On the way, Toxaris told Eve she had a surprise waiting for her back at the hut.

"You have a surprise waiting for me? How in Tartarus did you manage that? I was in the hut when you arrived and . . . "

"Take my word for it; you **will** be surprised when we get home."

She refused to give any further details, which caused Eve to hasten their arrival by beginning to run. "If you won't even give me a hint, then I'll simply have to get there faster."

Eve took the stairs leading to the hut two at a time and Toxaris grabbed her by the back of her shirt just as she was about to reach the entrance. There were sounds coming from within, and Eve looked back at her lover with questioning eyes. "What in Tarnation?"

"Go ahead, open the door," Toxaris was grinning from ear to ear.

Slowly opening the door, Eve was almost afraid of what she was going to find but was pleasantly surprised to see her grandmother and Aunt Lila sitting at the table talking like they were old friends to the Goddess of Love.

Toxaris pushed Eve inside and shut the door behind them.

"W-h-a-t . . . "

"Hi Evie. Do you think the Warrior Babe and Little Bard will be happy with my wedding gift to them?"

"Happy? They'll be ecstatic! How? When?"

"Slow down, Eve." Cyrene opened her arms for a hug from her grandchild, as she walked across the room to greet the dumbstruck young woman. "It seems Aphrodite here popped in on your friends when they were just outside the village. She saved them traveling all the distance to Amphipolis and Potidaea. She dropped them off at my place for a few days to visit and sight see, and then we all traveled to Gabrielle's little town where I got to meet everyone in Lila's family before the Goddess whisked the lot of us here."

"We were going to wait until morning to surprise Gabrielle and Xena," Lila interjected, "but thought that since we only have a few days before I need to get home that it might be best to surprise them at dinner this evening. What do you think, Eve?"

Eve's heart was beating wildly; she still found it difficult to believe that the Goddess of Love cared so deeply for her parents. But, it certainly was a plus to have a Goddess on your side.

"No wonder you all look so rested; that was the easiest long distance trip you'll ever make. I think surprising them at the feast in honor of Xe and Gabby tonight will be great. I can't wait to see the looks on their faces."

She turned to Aphrodite. "This is going to make a special occasion a miraculous one as well. I know Mother wanted Grandmother at the ceremony, and I also know that Mom was extremely disappointed when Aunt Lila told her she wouldn't be able to attend. Thank you, Aphrodite."

"You're welcome Evie. I can't stay for the reunion tonight, but I wouldn't miss the ceremony tomorrow for all the baubles in my temples. Have fun, kiddos, see ya later." With a wave of her hand she was off, leaving a trail of pink and gold iridescent dust in her wake.

Cyrene shook her head smiling, "That Goddess certainly knows how to make an exit."

Eve turned to Toxaris. "No wonder you look so rested after being gone for such a long stretch of time. You've been off on a vacation!"

The other woman smiled and drew Eve close. "I had a great time, but if it's any consolation, I missed you." She kissed her gently on the cheek.

"Yeah, yeah," Eve giggled as she felt her body react to the delicate touch of her lover's lips. "Behave yourself. Can't you see we have company?"

"They're not company, Eve, they're family."

"Speaking of family," Lila turned to Eve and opened her arms. "Don't I get a hug?"

"Gods yes," the younger woman answered, as she walked over to her aunt for an embrace. "We can take the back route to the dining hall. I don't want anyone asking who you two are until we get you in there and seated."

"I do hope Xena doesn't take all night arriving," Cyrene proclaimed. "I'm anxious to see the two of them and spend some quality time, especially since we only have until the day after the wedding to visit."

"There'll be plenty of time for visiting this evening, Grandmother. Mom was going to have to spend the evening alone in her hut, but now she'll have company. She and Mother are not allowed to sleep together tonight. It's one of the few Amazonian customs that have survived the twilight."

"But we can all be together until bedtime, right?" Cyrene wanted to make sure.

"Absolutely! There's just no consummating of the marriage the evening before the nuptials." Toxaris added.

"From what I heard from Mother, there's been no consummating for the past week anyway, what with Mom being so excited about everything that's going on and anticipating the arrival of Xe and Gabby," Eve informed everyone in the room.

"But doesn't that seem kind of silly? After all, they've been together for years," Lila commented. "What's one more evening?"

It was Toxaris' turn to answer the question. "Actually, for this tribe it's been generations since we've had a Queen joined, after she was made Queen. To compound the unique circumstances of this occasion, the Queen is Gabrielle. It's because of her and Xena that all the tribes are now united. We have sisters coming from distant lands to witness this joining. There will be representatives from Melosa and Ephiny's tribe, as well as those coming from regions where they have only heard of the Bardic Queen and her Warrior from legends. I think the elders wanted to make this even more special by abiding by at least a few of the ancient rules."

"Who's going to be officiating?" Cyrene asked. "The temple of Artemis is of no use to anyone anymore."

"We're going back to the ancient ways there, also. Thraso, the village healer and Shamaness will be presiding over the ceremony. But enough talk about tomorrow; we should all be getting down to the dining area. I want to make sure we arrive well before Xena and Gabrielle show up with Xe and Gabby."

The other three women agreed and the four of them headed toward the communal hut where the evening feast was being prepared.

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After showing Gabby and Xe around the village and being stopped on more occasions than they would have liked, they finally headed toward the seamstress' hut.

"You are going to let me beg off here, aren't you Gabrielle?" Xena pleaded. "I can't help with anything in there, and you'll just be oohing and ahing over colors and material and whatever else it is that gets you all excited when you try on clothes. I could be off helping with some of the . . ."

"You don't need to be off helping with anything or making excuses to do so. The sisters all have their own committee they belong to, and I think they're extremely organized."

The warrior began to display a pout and the bard shook her head, grinning.

"You didn't let me finish, Xena. I'm not going to drag you into the dress hut kicking and screaming. I know quite a few of the Amazons have arrived from the southern regions today; why don't you track them down and help make them feel at home? I'm sure some of them are relatives of sisters we used to know."

"I could do that. I'll get them a cup of mead and we'll talk over old times."

"Easy on the mead, warrior; you've a long night ahead of you."

"Uh, huh." Xena smiled, leaned down, and kissed Gabrielle on the cheek. "Want me to meet you back here in about a candlemark? "

"That sounds good and then we can all go to dinner."

The warrior breathed a sigh of relief as she bade farewell to the three women entering the seamstress' abode.

"Have fun, girls,"

Once again Ainia and her apprentices had worked wonders. After having put the finishing touches on the Queen and her Consort's outfits, they set about tie-dying lightweight material to match the colors on the inside of the yin/yang symbols. The effect of the sky blue and emerald green gave a complimentary accent to the solid colors being worn by the two being joined. Eve's short attire was similar to her Mother's in design, minus the couple's wedding symbol. Not knowing what would make the other two participants comfortable, the seamstress decided on matching apparel that was a cross between the two styles. She wanted to make sure that no one looked like the Queen and went to great lengths to make sure there were differences in the outfits, deciding to keep the length to about the knee.

"Your aunt had an excellent memory when it came to the size you two were," Ainia informed the two nieces as she sized them up with her expert eyes.

"Not really that good a memory, Ainia. Gabby is practically the same size I am, and as you can see, Xe is almost a perfect match for Xena."

"When you put it like that, my Queen, I guess it wasn't just memory," the older woman smiled in Gabrielle's direction and then motioned to her assistants to retrieve the dresses for the two younger women to try on.

Within the candlemark, the garments had been fitted to perfection and the young women were handed the outfits to take with them to wear in the morning. Eve and Xena had already been given their clothing, but the Queen's gown and accessories were to remain with Ainia until tomorrow when the woman and her apprentices would meet with Gabrielle in her hut to help ready her for the ceremony.

Xena was sitting out on the steps waiting for the three women, sharpening her sword when they opened the door and stepped out.

"Ready to go eat?" Gabrielle asked. "Personally, I'm starving. It's been quite a full day and I think we missed the midday meal."



"Remember you have to get into your gown in the morning," Xena kidded and quickly received a playful jab in the side.

Jovial chatter accompanied the four women as they made their way to the communal dining area. The little village was brimming over with Amazons from the far reaches of the known world. It was amazing to see how far the news had traveled that the Bardic Queen and the Warrior Princess were to be wed. Luckily the weather was conducive to sleeping out under the stars, once the guest huts and communal sleeping huts were filled to capacity. Some of the visitors who had come on horseback established an area near the entrance to the village where they were able to pitch tents.

"This village is bustling with more excitement than I've ever seen in Potidaea," Gabby announced as they continued walking toward the dining hall.

"I would venture to say that this is more excitement than **this** village has seen in a long while," Xena added.

"I would guess," Xe commented. "After all it's the joining of two famous women."

Bard and warrior looked at each other and smiled without venturing forth any comments.

"By the looks of the crowd outside the hall, I would say we've gotten here just in time. I wouldn't want them running out of food before we had a chance to eat." Xena nodded for the two younger women to enter ahead of them, while she put her arm around Gabrielle and kissed her gingerly on the crown. "This is the beginning of your celebration, my soul; are you ready? "

"As ready as I'll ever be," the smaller woman confided. "Seeing all these Amazons in one place makes me nervous. I hope no one is disappointed that they made such long journeys to be here."

"Amazons love a good party, Gabrielle. The more the merrier." As people parted to allow the Queen and her entourage entrance, they noticed that the hall was already fairly full and were thankful that the reserved table would be awaiting their arrival.

Xena was the first to sense that something special was happening as they walked through the outer doors and into the crowded room. She could see Gabby and Xe in front of them whispering, but the hubbub of the room was too distracting to hear above. The Amazons they passed smiled broadly at the little group, but the warrior had originally assumed it was just in greeting to the Queen and her company. Looking over the heads of most of the Amazons, Xena's sapphire orbs received a most welcomed surprise and her quick intake of breath warned Gabrielle that something was not as the warrior had expected when they first arrived at the building.

"What is it, Xena," the blonde tugged at her partner's arm. "Is something wrong?"

"No, my soul," the warrior answered with a quiver in her voice. "Something is most definitely right, as right as it could possibly be!" She grabbed her bride's hand and whisked her through the rest of the crowd toward their reserved table.

Tears of joy began streaming down the bard's face before they reached their final destination when she saw her sister and mother-in-law-to-be sitting at the table with Eve and Toxaris, chatting as if they had been in the village forever.

"Lila, Cyrene!" the Queen exclaimed. "By the gods!"

"By one god in particular," her sister corrected as she arose and ran to meet Gabrielle half way. "Must be nice to be on good terms with the Goddess of Love."

"Aphrodite did this for us?" Gabrielle was overjoyed.

"I do believe her exact words were, "a wedding gift for my Little Bard and the Warrior Babe."

The sisters laughed and cried tears of happiness as they embraced, oblivious to anything that was going on around them. Then Gabrielle turned to see Xena hugging her mother, tears also gathered in the beautiful sapphire eyes of her lover. There could have been no greater gift given to the two to be joined than the bringing of their family together for this momentous occasion.

"Wow," Gabrielle exclaimed after welcoming Cyrene to her village. "I'm almost speechless."

"Well, that's a rarity," Xena laughed.

"Seriously, I can't believe you are **all** here. How long can you stay?" the Queen asked.

"Gabrielle, we can stay the full day and evening after the joining and but I have to leave the next day; I'm in the middle of preparations for Jason's wedding."

"Still that gives us time to visit. Looks like you have already been taken care of in the food and drink department," Gabrielle acknowledged. "Come on girls, let's get some of this banquet before the Amazons eat it all." She smiled impishly as she took the arms of her two nieces and walked toward the serving area. "You know we could be waited on, but it's so much more fun to see everything they have prepared." Turning back to the table, she winked at Xena. "Do you want me to fill you a plate or are you going to join us?"

"A plate would be nice," the warrior admitted as she sat down next to Cyrene. "You know what I like." She smiled broadly at her soul and then continued her conversation with her mother.

The remainder of the evening was filled with gossip from Amphipolis and Potidaea, as well as filling the visitors in on all that happens in a village. New friends were made from neighboring tribes and from tribes that had traveled great distances to see the joining of the Warrior Princess with the Bardic Queen.

Amazon wine flowed freely and the food continued to fill the stomachs of all who were hungry. Sometime before the moon reached her highest point, Tecmessa made the announcement that the Royal Guards and Bards were not to be among those who saw the sun come up in the morning. They had a ceremony to perform in and she wanted them all in excellent shape. There was a slight murmur of displeasure throughout the crowd, but those who knew the honor they were being given to participate in the bonding ceremony didn't need to be reminded twice.

Xena could see that her mother was beginning to tire and suggested that they withdraw to the Queen's quarters where Lila and Cyrene were to spend the remainder of the evening with Gabrielle.

Xena had decided to sleep in the hut with Xe and Gabby rather than with the single warriors as she had originally planned. "I have a feeling that hut is not going to be the most conducive to sleeping this evening," she announced as she made her decision.

"Did you tell your mother of the party the warriors threw for you a few days ago, Xena?" Gabrielle received a mock look of indignation and giggled as she promised to fill Cyrene in on the festivities that had been happening throughout the village all week long.

Finally everyone was in their prospective quarters and bedded down, or at least in a situation where they could go to sleep if the mood hit them. Cyrene was the first to lose the fight of the drooping eyelids. Lila and Gabrielle lowered their voices but continued to talk for a few candlemarks longer before Lila was also overtaken by the excitement of the day and the anticipation of the ceremony to come.

Gabrielle reached over and brushed a wisp of hair from her sister's face; she shook her head as she examined with her eyes the wrinkles on the woman's face, showing signs of age that should have also been covering her own. Not quite ready for sleep, the blonde walked over to the window and looked out at the stars as they shone brightly down through the trees. The air smelled fresh through the pines and peace filled Gabrielle's heart as she thought about the vows that would be exchanged in front of the Amazon nation and their blood families when the sun was high in the afternoon sky. It had been a beautiful evening, which was slowly turning into the anticipated perfect day for the joining.

The bard sent a prayer of thanks off to the Goddess of Love for bringing Cyrene and Lila here to share in the bonding ceremony, making the rite complete. She slowly returned to the bed she normally shared with Xena, resigned to will herself to get at least a few candlemarks of sleep before the heralding of the new day. Her heart was beating wildly and she tried to imagine if Xena was feeling the same involuntary excitement.

Later today her dream would be realized and she would be ceremonially joined with the woman she loved. She thought of all the horrible things that had happened to them and all the trials and tribulations they had suffered through. She knew that everything that had gone before had brought them to this place, this finality of purpose. She was grateful that they now had the opportunity to live a somewhat normal life among friends and family. With the thoughts of all

the blessings that were presently being bestowed upon her, the bard finally closed her eyes and joined her roommates in slumber.

On the other side of the complex a warrior stood by a window, looking out into the same early morning sky as her lover so many huts away. *I never imagined I would find the kind of love I have with Gabrielle. After all we've been through together-all I've put her through-she deserves this day of joy. I love you Gabrielle; today is for you!* With that final thought Xena walked back to the single cot that rested in the corner of the hut. She curled her long frame up to fit the bed and waited for sleep to engulf her. Later tonight she would consummate her marriage to the woman she loved more than life itself, but she needed to get a few candlemarks sleep before the dawning of the big day.

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Even before the cock had crowed, the warrior and her Queen had both opened sleep-filled eyes and welcomed the new day with joyous expectation. They would not be allowed to see each other until the hour of the ceremony, so each set out to fill in the morning hours before the blessed event.

Out of respect, the tribe had opted to serve both the consort and the Queen the morning meal in their huts. Xena ate breakfast with Xe and Gabby and then the three of them walked to the lake to bathe.

As unusual as it was, Gabrielle's appetite had deserted her this morning, so she watched as her guests enjoyed the delicacies the Amazons graciously lavished upon them, having only a goblet of juice for herself. When Cyrene and Lila were finished, Gabrielle asked if they wanted to accompany her to the lake for bathing. Escorted by the Royal Guards, who had been stationed outside the Queen's hut for the evening because the Queen's champion was not there to protect her, the three women made their way through the woods to the lake area set aside for the Amazon Queen.

Amidst giggles, like those of a teenager and solemn moments, when they all spoke of who would not be able to attend the wedding, the three women finally finished with the chore at hand. Dripping with the cool water and smelling sweetly of lavender soap, they dried quickly and exited the area, ready to start the formal preparations for the afternoon.

By the time they reached the hut, Ainia and her crew were standing on the porch. They had come to prepare Gabrielle and to assist Lila and Cyrene in getting ready for the ceremonial event.

Two candlemarks later, the Queen was standing in front of Cyrene and Lila, a smile frozen on her radiant face. "I can't stop smiling," she admitted coyly.

"No reason you should," the older woman commented. "Today should be the happiest day in your life. I am so blessed to be able to be here to see my daughter united with the only person in the world I could ever see her settling down with. A few candlemarks from now, you will be

officially added to the family you have been a part of since you first stepped away from Potidaea those many years ago."

After Cyrene finished talking and walked away from the bride-to-be, Lila stepped over to stand in front of Gabrielle.

"Gabby, I have something for you that I never expected to be able to give you." Tears began to well in Lila's eyes and her voice cracked as she stepped behind her sister and prepared to put a necklace around her neck. "Years ago, Mother had mentioned that she would have liked to have given this to you on your wedding day. She wanted you to know how proud she was of you and to acknowledge that she approved of your relationship with Xena. Because she felt that day would never arrive, she gave it to me, but I now give it to the person who was meant to receive it."

Gabrielle lifted the necklace from her skin and fingered the small gold band that was strung on the thin piece of leather. "By the gods, Lila, it's Mother's wedding ring," the blonde whispered, her verdant eyes filling with tears. "But . . . she gave it to you."

"You're the one it was meant for, Gabrielle. You were," and her sister giggled through her tears, "the older of the two of us."

"I don't know what to say . . . "

"Don't say anything, just know that Mother will be there with us today as you take your vows with Xena."

"Thank you, Lila." She hugged her sister closely, tears streaming down both their faces.

"Now, now, girls. No more of this! All the fussing your friends just did making you look beautiful and look at what you're doing to your lovely faces." Cyrene grinned through her own glistening eyes and gave both of the younger women a hug as she tried to tease them back to smiles.

The older woman took out a handkerchief and wiped Gabrielle's face. "Hold onto this, it might come in handy later on in the day."

A shuffling sound from the porch announced the arrival of the Honor Guard. Cyrene opened the door and told them the Queen would be out in a heartbeat. "So, are you ready, Gabrielle?"

The blonde readjusted the flowered headpiece and smoothed her gown; she picked up a rolled parchment that was tied with a double ribbon of green and blue and turned toward the front door. "I'm the luckiest woman in the world." Looking over at Cyrene, she nodded her head and announced, "I guess the day I've been dreaming about for years has finally arrived. Let's go face the music."

Flanked by the Honor Guard and musicians, the Queen, her sister, and the mother of the Consort slowly made their way through a deserted village on the way to the wedding altar. Even though she knew better, it seemed to Gabrielle like they were traveling in slow motion toward the cathedral of love.

Not usually one to get nervous, the bard found herself trembling slightly as the outer reaches of the assemblage came into sight. There were more Amazons gathered than she had ever seen before and it did her heart good to know that she and Xena were the reason for the reuniting of the Amazon tribes.

Just before they reached the first of the visitors, there was a momentary spark of color as the Goddess of Love made her appearance known to the Queen of the Amazons.

"Hi there Little One. I do have to admit that you give me competition today," the Goddess smiled in Gabrielle's direction. "I've decided it might be best if only you, Xena, and the family are able to see me. It's your day and we don't want anyone distracting your guests." A momentary pale drained the Goddess' face. "It's a shame things turned out the way they did for Artemis; Xena was always one of her favorites, and she would have been proud to have officiated at such a monumental affair. Imagine, the Royal Wedding of the Queen of the Amazons and the famed Warrior Princess, with all the tribes joined in peace; you two have accomplished quite a feat, my little friend."

"I know Aphrodite, but we had no choice in the way fate played itself out with the gods. I'm just glad that certain individuals were not affected by the unavoidable clash. Thank you so much for the fantastic gift of bringing our family members to the wedding; there is nothing else I could have desired."

"You are surely welcome, Gabrielle. But, I think we had best stop all this chit chatting and get to walking you down the aisle." The Goddess leaned over and kissed her friend on the cheek and then with a wave of her hand, she disappeared, causing flecks of glistening gold to float through the air. Some of the particles landed on Gabrielle, adding celestial highlights to the golden locks of the already beautiful bride.

The musicians began to play the beginning chords of the music the couple had chosen as soon as the entourage reached the first of the visitors. All heads turned to get a glimpse of the bride and none were disappointed at the beauty she displayed with such grace on this magnificent day.

Lila and Cyrene stepped back and allowed the Guards to fill in and flank their Queen as they walked her down the long aisle leading to the flowered arbor and to Xena.

Her first glimpse of her Champion standing there in her blue attire looking so regal and somber weakened the knees of the Amazon Queen and she faltered slightly in her steps. A quick hand on her elbow, unseen by any but the chosen, helped to steady her. Emerald green eyes sparkled and her smile broadened as she looked into the face of the Goddess of Love. "I'm glad you're here with us today," Gabrielle whispered.

"I wouldn't have it any other way, Little Bard; love belongs where it is valued the most and today this is definitely the place to be.

The arbor was covered with meadow flowers and flanked on either side by two tall pillars, draped in ivy. A labrys was affixed in the middle of the archway and slightly in front of and between the pillars, one on either side, were the traditional bronze bowls of fire, resting atop a tri-tusk stand. The fires were present to signify the sanctity of union of the two people coming to stand before the high Shamaness.

Gabrielle continued walking toward Xena and the Guards fell into position to the left and right of the couple. Xe and Gabby were already standing one step from the altar, Xe on Xena's side and Gabby close to where her aunt would be standing. Cyrene walked up and stood next to her granddaughter and Lila took her place beside her daughter. Xena reached out a hand and took Gabrielle's as the Queen stepped up to stand beside her lover and in front of Thraso.

"You look beautiful, my soul," Xena whispered in her soulmate's ear as she bent forward and kissed Gabrielle gently on the cheek. "It was definitely worth the wait to see you in that gown."

Thraso cleared her throat, and the warrior straightened up. With a small grin on her face, Xena winked at the Goddess of Love and mouthed a 'hello.'

Before the actual joining was to begin, Tecmessa and her Honor Guard, joined by the drummers of the village, gave a display of precision marching, some performing with staves, while others wielded polished swords, in honor of the auspicious occasion.

Finally, it was time for the ceremony to begin. Thraso stepped up to her place between the two women to be married. Fixing her gaze on Xena, she questioned the champion. "Xena, do you realize that this is not just a marriage of love but one of commitment to your Queen?"

"I do," replied the warrior.

"Do you realize that upon taking the oath of marriage you are also committing yourself to a lifetime of service to your Queen and her subjects as you become a full fledged Amazon and military leader of the Queen's people, answering only to the Queen herself?"

"I do," Xena replied solemnly.

"Then let the uniting of these two people begin. Let the love they share and the commitment they are about to make be indelibly written in the scroll's of time-never to be extinguished.

"Xena of Amphipolis, Warrior Princess, do you have vows to present to Gabrielle, the Bard of Potidaea and Queen of the Amazons?"

"I do."

"Proceed with your vows." The Shamaness instructed.

Facing her bride the warrior began:

*"Gabrielle, before we met, my world was a place of destruction and turmoil. I tried facing myself, but the reflection was almost unbearable. I can remember the day you first won my heart, my soul, but I would have never revealed that to you at the time. I would have never admitted it to anyone.*

*You were the breath of innocence that melted the ice around my heart and allowed me to believe there was still some good in my soul. I often tried to look at myself through your eyes, Gabrielle, and just as often, I failed to see what it was that attracted you, but I am ever grateful that it did.*

*In finding you, I have been able to recapture the good part of my being, the part that I hid for so many years that it almost disappeared completely.*

*I love you, Gabrielle, more than life itself, and although I know you know all these things, I also know that sometimes you need to hear the words that are so difficult for me to vocalize.*

*You are my love, my soulmate, and my destiny."*

It was at this point that Xena turned to Xe and accepted the ring that the younger woman offered.

Gabrielle gasped as Xena took her hand and began to place the ring on her finger.

*"Take this ring that I offer you, as I pledge, in front of our relatives and all your Amazon sisters and subjects.*

*I will cherish you for now and always. You will forever be my lover, my wife, and my Queen. There will never be anyone before you, Gabrielle, not even I."*

Xena sighed and released Gabrielle's hand. Tears of joy streamed down the bride's face and her champion reached over and took the handkerchief that was sticking out from under the bride's cuff. As Xena wiped away a tear of joy from her lover's face, Thraso spoke again, this time to the Queen.

"Queen Gabrielle, do you realize that upon taking the oath of marriage with Xena that she becomes an Amazon for life?"

"I do."

"Do you also acknowledge that as your Consort, you endow her with the right to lead the Amazons into battle and give her authority over your subjects that can only be thwarted by a direct command from you?"

"I do," Gabrielle answered.



"Gabrielle, Bard of Potidaea and Queen of the Amazons, do you have vows to present to your Champion, Xena of Amphipolis, Warrior Princess?"

"I do," Gabrielle again replied.

"Let the ceremony continue with the Queen's vows." Thraso announced.

*"Xena, before I met you, my world was a one-dimensional landscape with a dismal future.*

*I thank the Gods you came along and slipped not only into my life but also into my heart, where you instantly filled a hole in my existence.*

*I knew the first time I set eyes on you that beside you was where I wanted to spend the rest of eternity.*

*I know now that you are my soulmate and the inexplicable magic that was missing in my life.*

*Now that you are here and our souls are joined once more, neither of us need ever feel alone again. Like the symbol of balance, although we each possess our separateness, our own uniqueness ~ together we become complete and unconquerable. Our immortal souls are so intricately intertwined that I know now I will never be without you, and that fact alone gives me more joy than you can imagine.*

*I love you more than life, Xena, and I now pledge my devotion to you in front of this congregation of friends and relatives."*

It was at this point that Gabby stepped closer and handed her aunt a ring, slightly larger, but in every other way identical to the one Xena had put upon her finger just moments ago.

"By the Gods, Xena." Gabrielle's eyes filled immediately with tears as she looked up at her lover.

"Take the ring, my soul; if we're going to be married, we should both have a symbol to wear, don't you think?"

The blonde started to say something but was stopped by two long fingers that gently touched her lips. "Your audience is waiting, my love," Xena whispered.

Gabrielle took a deep breath and then allowed the bard in her to take over, as she had to quickly revise her vows.

*"As I place this ring upon your finger, may it serve to remind us both that so intricately are the threads of our existence woven together, that we are each but one half of the same soul. We'll be together forever, my love, and with you by my side, there is no earthly obstacle that I can not and will not surmount and conquer."*

Thraso clasped Gabrielle's left and Xena's right hand, holding them high as she began the finalization of the ceremony. "You will be bound together by the vows and the rings you have exchanged until your time on this earth is through and until you meet again in the spirit world. By the power vested in me as the Shamaness of this Village, I pronounce you married in the eyes of the Amazon nation."

A cry of exaltation arose from the crowd where seconds before not a breath could be heard.

Thraso raised her hands to hush the assembly as she turned and retrieved the two goblets sitting on the small table behind her. She raised the first of the goblets high and announced:

"A toast to the Queen and her Consort."

She took a sip from the goblet and handed it to Gabrielle before raising the second in the same respect adding the exclamation:

"A toast to Xena and her bride Gabrielle."

Taking a sip from the second goblet, she handed it to the warrior and nodded for the two of them to entwine their arms and offer each other a drink.

Once again, the crowd went wild as they threw flower petals towards the altar.

Thraso retrieved the goblets and placed them back on the table. Turning to the newly joined couple she smiled broadly.

"Well, go on, Xena-kiss your wife."

There was no telling the warrior twice. She bent down as Gabrielle's arms came up around her neck and the two kissed for the first time as a joined couple, in front of the entire Amazon nation.

As the kiss ended, Gabrielle looked at Lila who stepped up and handed her a rolled parchment tied with a double ribbon of blue and green. The blonde looked into the eyes of her beloved and started to speak.

"Xena, it was for me that you came out of your area of comfort and proclaimed your feelings for all to hear. I can expect no less from myself. My gift is not tangible like the beautiful rings we now wear, but it is from the heart. I am a bard and what I do best is write."

The blonde smiled then lowered her head and confessed that she was not the most talented of singers. The bard acknowledged that she had given Lila and Cyrene the words to memorize the evening before and a handful of Amazons stepped up to the altar to backup the family. "I hope the emotions I felt when I wrote this come through in the singing."

Gabrielle looked up into her mate's eyes and then cued the musicians who began to play as the bride began to sing:

## *YOU COMPLETE MY LIFE*

*(Sung to the tune of You Light Up My Life)*

*All through my youth, I knew there was someone  
Searching the known world, looking for me.  
Waiting for you, I closed off emotions.  
I knew you would come, and you'd set my heart free.*

### *CHORUS*

*You complete my soul.  
You are my world; you are my life.  
You're all that I need to see me through any strife.  
We've seen the worst the world has to offer  
Fighting for others to make right the wrong.  
Now here at last is our New Beginning.  
I give you my heart, as I sing you this song.*

### *CHORUS*

*You complete my soul.  
You are my world; you are my life.  
You're all that I need to see me through any strife.  
I love you so.  
And you're mine tonight.  
My Xe . . . you complete my life.*

Gabrielle watched as Xena stood there trying not to let the tears flow from her sapphire eyes. The blonde reached up and brushed one away as it escaped and began to trickle down the warrior's face.

"You don't have to be a warrior today, my love; tears of joy are no disgrace in this crowd of women who care for you."

"That was beautiful, Gabrielle. Thank you."

"Thank you, Xena, for giving me the inspiration."

"If you two can stop your mutual admiration conversation long enough, I believe the ceremony is over and the party is about to begin." Thraso smiled at the newlyweds as she encouraged them to leave the altar area. In a loud voice, trying to be heard above the increasing hum of the crowd, she announced-"Under Amazon Law I present to you the newly joined couple, Queen Gabrielle and her Champion, Xena. Let the festivities begin!"

With the last words of the Shamaness' statement, streamer-laced arrows filled the air and the crowd began to disperse. Music and laughter filtered around the happy couple and the rest of the wedding party, while being escorted by the Guard toward the center of the village. They headed toward the banquet hall where the celebration was already in full swing by the time the bridal party reached the area.

Women were sitting around in small groups, chatting, eating, and getting to know new friends as the party progressed.

The bridal party had a place of honor outside the hall where a table had been brought out and placed so they could observe the various performances throughout the day.

The children of the village were allowed to perform first and they did several songs based on stories they had been told of the bard and the warrior. They were followed by a poetry reading, during which Xena's hand occasionally found its way to Gabrielle's thigh for a squeeze to she let her Queen know just how much she was suffering through all the attention. Gabrielle would smile at the performers and then place her hand upon Xena's, giving it a squeeze back and letting her lover know she appreciated the anguish she was suffering. At one point the bard leaned over and placed a kiss on her warrior's cheek. "It will all be over in a few candlemarks, my love. Thank you for being so patient."

The answer was a simple, "I expect you to remember this," as sapphire eyes sparkled and a crooked grin appeared on the champion's face.

Aphrodite popped in occasionally to remark on a particular poem, the way someone was dressed, or to sample some of the Amazon delicacies. She congratulated her friends on their union and told them she hadn't seen such a production since she threw the reception for Cupid and Psyche. At one point in the afternoon, she took the warrior aside and asked if she had decided on the wish she wanted granted. She received an affirmative and beamed at the request before exiting again in a flutter of pink and gold dust.

Throughout the day, the members of the bridal party switched chairs to better enable them to visit with one another. Xe and Gabby were taken off by Eve and Toxaris to meet new friends, dance, and learn more about Amazon customs.

Cyrene was content to sit and watch the young people as they danced and performed. She was definitely the epitome of the proud mother. A few of the elders of the village came by to pay their respects to her. They ended up sitting and talking and being mesmerized by the stories of Xena's childhood, as well as about the early years of the bard and her warrior, topics the older woman never ceased to enjoy telling about.

Afternoon drifted into evening, and as the hour grew later the warrior whispered in the bard's ear that perhaps they had stayed the designated amount of time and could slowly slip away to be alone.

It warmed Gabrielle's heart to think that after all these years, Xena was still anxious to leave the crowd and be alone. Of course, today was rather special for the entire Village, and neither one of them wanted to be rude. Gabrielle had made up her mind to try to make tonight seem like the first night all over again but without the awkwardness. She squeezed her lover's hand and agreed that she thought they had stayed the appropriate amount of time and no one would miss them if they disappeared.

It had been decided earlier that Lila and Cyrene would bunk with Xe and Gabby tonight and they would all meet again in the morning for breakfast. As inconspicuously as possible, the bride and her consort said good night to Lila and Cyrene and left the table.

Arm in arm they walked back toward their hut, away from the festivities that were still going strong. They would make love to the beat of Amazon drums tonight, but Gabrielle knew that all extraneous sounds would be lost when she was in the world of her lover's arms.

"It was a beautiful ceremony, Xena. Thank you for going through with it."

"It was certainly a day to be remembered, and you're very welcome."

"I'm glad Aphrodite made an appearance. It was good to see her again."

The warrior smiled and tightened her grip around the smaller woman's shoulders. "It certainly has been a pleasant experience for us lately when we've come in contact with the Goddess of Love. Her bringing Mother and Lila to the wedding was exceedingly thoughtful."

Before long, they were walking up the stairs to their home and the sound of the drums were but background music when they entered their hut. They were met with quite a surprise upon opening the front door. It seemed some of the Amazons had decided to decorate the hut for the occasion and there were flower petals scattered on the floor and bed. Someone had made a plate of treats that was placed on the bedside table along with the goblets from the wedding and a skin of Amazon wine.

"What thoughtfulness," Gabrielle exclaimed.

Xena nodded her head and then turned her bride around to face her. "Let me look at you one more time before you take off your gown, my soul. I want to remember the joy on your face for the rest of our lives."

The couple stood for a few minutes just absorbing the wonder of each other and replaying in their minds the ritual that had been performed earlier.

Simultaneously, the two women had glanced down at the rings on their fingers. When Gabrielle looked up, the moonlight shining through the window caught the glistening of the bride's tears.

"Are those tears?" Xena queried.

"Tears of happiness, my love. This ring," she looked down at her finger. "Your ring, and the goblets . . . Xena what a wonderful surprise. All I had to offer was a song."

"But it was from the heart, you said so yourself. We both gave the gifts we were best able to give. I loved the song, Gabrielle."

"Did you really?"

"Really," she walked closer to her bride and kissed her on the forehead. "I think it's time to get out of these outfits and say goodnight to the wedding day."

Experienced hands adeptly helped the blonde to remove her dress, allowing her fingers to trace circles where the material had been but seconds before. She smiled when she felt her mate's skin react to her slightest touch and could not help but lean forward and kiss the bared shoulders as the gown fell to the floor.

"Xena," Gabrielle squealed, and the warrior knew she was thrilled at the attention. "How about getting out of your clothes."

"I'll be finished before you can gather up all your accessories and beat you to the bed," Xena smirked, as she deftly removed her boots and clothing.

"I guess you will, after all you have less to remove," the blonde countered as she continued to pick up the gown and then rid herself of her undergarments. After putting the gown away she started to turn back toward the bed. "I'm sorry. Did you say something, Xena?"

"No, my soul, I guess I was just thinking out loud."

"Uh, huh," Gabrielle nodded as she climbed into the bed next to the brunette. "So, how does it feel to be a married woman?"

"Actually, it doesn't feel much different," Xena smiled. "I believe this ring has been around my finger for quite some time; today it was simply made visible." She pulled her lover closer and kissed her gently. "I meant every word I said today, Gabrielle."

"Me, too," the smaller woman answered.

Words were no longer needed as lips and fingers said everything that was necessary. While Xena nibbled delicately on Gabrielle's ear, she allowed her hands to investigate known territory, gently taking the erect nipples one-by-one between her fingers, smiling at the reaction she received, then lowering her body to allow her tongue to further titillate the bard's body.

With her hand on her warrior's shoulders Gabrielle moaned softly, "You make me feel beautiful, Xena."

The answer to which was, "You are beautiful, Gabrielle."

Xena slowly made her way to the golden crop of curls that hid the treasure she desired even more tonight than she could remember having wanted before. It was only a joining and she knew in her heart that they had been bonded lives ago, but tonight would be special. She would join with Gabrielle tonight like she would never again join with her in this lifetime.

Her tongue, completely familiar with what pleased her mate, took the time to tease, slowly licking the inside of the bard's thighs and relishing in the way the smaller woman's body moved, as Gabrielle tried to coax Xena into the area of desire. Again the taller woman smiled and finally gave in, tasting the elixir of love as she opened Gabrielle's nether lips wide with her fingers and felt the swollen bud with her warm wet tongue. A moan from her mate brought further satisfaction to the warrior as she continued to pleasure her lover as only she knew how, until Gabrielle could stand no more and begged her to retreat from the pulsating nub.

Xena then positioned herself between the smaller woman's legs and slowly dragged her body up and over the one beneath her. First, her breasts grazed the golden locks as she leisurely continued her ascent, and finally, the lovers were chest-to-chest.

"Xena, I need you inside me," Gabrielle whispered when her lover's face was parallel to her own.

"I know, my love, but I have a gift for you tonight," Xena kissed her fully, inserting her tongue and playfully exploring the inner sanctum of Gabrielle's mouth.

"Not now, Xena," Gabrielle pleaded.

"Oh, but this gift is only for right now." The warrior moved her body ever so slowly further up the smaller woman's body until she heard Gabrielle gasp.

"Xena?" Gabrielle voice was trembling as she reached for her champion's hands and found them on either side of body.

"My soul?"

"Do you have some kind of toy you're planning on playing with tonight?"

"No, my love, this is not a toy," the warrior's voice was solemn. "Remember I told you that Aphrodite promised me a wish?"

"Yes."

Xena repositioned herself, constantly playing Gabrielle's body with her fingers like a finely tuned instrument, never letting the bard get out of the mood.

"Well, we've talked many times about having a child, but I wanted it to be part of each of us. I thought of asking Toris to impregnate you, but the more I mulled it over the more dead set against the idea I became. I get crazy when I think about someone else touching you, even if it is to satisfy my own desire. Aphrodite gave me a way out. She offered me a wish, anything I wanted. This night was my wish."

"Xena are you saying what I think your saying?"

"Yes, my soul. We have this one night to make a child of our own. Aphrodite offered to do it for us, but then I wouldn't have any part in the baby's making. I wanted to be the one to make the baby with you and this was the only way I could think of to accomplish that."

Gabrielle threw her arms around her lover's neck. "Oh, Xena," were the only words she could manage.

Then she felt the hardness of her lover as Xena slowly positioned herself between her thighs again and slowly entered Gabrielle as she never had before, or ever would again.

The warrior's true blue eyes were transfixed on her soulmate's emerald green as they rocked to a steady beat in an extraordinary dance of love for the two women. "For you my love, for us and for the child we will create together as a testament of our love for each other."

As they reached a climax, Gabrielle could feel the essence of her lover as it found its way to her inner reaches, searching for the point of culmination where destiny would transpire and creation would be achieved. Gabrielle swore she could feel the combining of the necessary elements, and in that instant, she realized that they had miraculously created a child out of the deepest emotions imaginable. They had just performed the impossible and she had conceived a new human, one who would have the characteristics of each of them, truly a child of magic and love.

"I love you, Gabrielle," Xena whispered softly into her lover's ear as she held her tightly.

"I love you, too, Xena," Gabrielle responded. "Thank you, my love."



The taller woman lifted her body into a position where she could gaze into the face of her beloved. Tears were trickling down the pale face, glistening in the glow of the early morning moon.

"I should be the one thanking you, Gabrielle. You are the one who is going to be carrying our child inside you for the next nine full moons.

"And happily so, my love. At least I will get to experience the awe of a full pregnancy and the anticipation of birthing a child that will be the ultimate affirmation of our love for each other. What an extraordinary feat we have accomplished." She giggled at the aspect of trying to explain to everyone how she became pregnant on the night of their joining.

"You're the Queen. You answer to no one, my soul," the warrior replied as if she had heard her mate's thoughts.

"I guess we will deal with the questions as they arise. But nothing could ever diminish the exhilaration I'm feeling this very minute."

Wrapped around each other in their usual sleeping posture with Gabrielle's head resting on Xena's chest, the two were just about to fall asleep when Gabrielle could not keep from vocalizing her thoughts. "I guess now we have done just about everything this lifetime, Xena."

The warrior lightly kissed the golden crown and smiled. "Well, just have to wait and see what happens."

A lyrical voice penetrated the silence of the room. "Nope, no waiting. I'm sorry but I'm terrible at secrets. You're going to be the proud parents of a baby girl."

"Aphrodite!" The surprised women spoke in unison, looking around the room for the Goddess who chose to remain disembodied.

"I just wanted to be the first to congratulate you Little Bard. Nice going Warrior Babe! Now I know you ladies have a baby to plan for, think of a good name! I'll leave you mortals to your sleep; Morpheus has promised that you will have fantastic dreams. TaTa for now!"

**The End of New Beginnings!**

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