

~ A Royal Proposal ~

by Carole Giorgio

Standard Disclaimer: Okay, here goes . . . All the characters in this story belong to MCA/Universal, Ren Pic and whoever else is actually on the payroll of Xena: Warrior Princess. I'm only borrowing the characters to fulfil a desire to set things right in my own little mind (and on monitor or paper for those of you with like minds). No copyright infringement is intended. This story is gratis for all who wish to read it.

Violence Warning/Disclaimer: Nope -- This is a party story! Rest, relaxation, dancing, singing Amazons and the reinstatement of a Queen.

Love/Sex Warning/Disclaimer: This story is about love, healing, and an explicit sexual relationship between two consenting adult women. If you are under 18 years of age, if lesbian relationships offend you or if this type of story is illegal in the state, province or country in which you live, please do not go any further. Go back to making cookies, go play with your toys or go visit the Disney site but do not read this story.

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.)

Carole Giorgio aka WomynBard@aol.com

All Xena wanted to do was pick Gabrielle up and carry her to the banquet hall, but she knew it would have embarrassed the reinstated Queen to do so and make her look weak in front of her tribe. Instead, the warrior watched as the other half of her soul hobbled painfully, using her staff for support, down the center of the village, on the way to the breakfast celebration being prepared in her honor. Today would be one continuous feast with dancing and music progressing into the wee hours of the morning. There was nothing Amazons liked better than a reason to party, and her mate had certainly given them that.

Knowing it would be nearly impossible to tear Gabrielle away from the festivities, Xena sent Eve off to the hut to retrieve some salve for the cut knuckles and split lip. The healing process needed to be started immediately for quickest resolution. After all lips and hands were not injuries to be taken lightly. The raven-haired beauty smiled inwardly as she chided herself for her twofold reasoning.

Gabrielle interrupted her warrior's train of thought. "I should probably get cleaned up and changed before we eat; what do you think, Xena?"

"It's according to how hungry you are." The champion smiled down at her mate, knowing that the woman was more than likely famished. "But, it will probably be a while before everything is

prepared; after all, it's not like anyone stayed in the kitchen cooking while the challenge was going on. Why don't you let me get something for you to ride in to the lake and . . ."

"Xena, I couldn't do that!"

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not an invalid, I'm just a little bumped up."

"Honestly, Gabrielle, no one will see you; we can use one of the vegetable carts and call it a Queenly carriage." Gabrielle's warrior smiled over at her with so much pride that the smaller woman had to smile back at the thought of being pulled through the village in a cart.

It was at this point that the duo began passing occupied huts and excited Amazons came up with congratulations and accolades to the Bard Queen. Gabrielle did her best to smile and started to shake a sister's hand, only to have her arm withdrawn by a strong grip. Xena firmly shook her head and told the Amazon that her Queen needed medical attention on her hands and that any unnecessary use would deter healing.

"Those need to be treated before you go around continuing to abuse them, Gabrielle."

"But Xena," Gabrielle protested, "these women expect to be acknowledged."

Then acknowledge them with as much of a Royal grin as you can muster out of that split lip of yours. Say thank you, and give them a regal wave." The warrior looked silly as she demonstrated a slight hand in the air movement. Seeing the look of humor on Gabrielle's face she took advantage of the mood and continued, "Of course you could give them the old two handed wave." Putting both hands into the air she moved them from side-to-side, her body going in the opposite direction from her hands. "Check it out."

She had her lover laughing and holding her side, trying to keep from disturbing the bruises she had received in the challenge.

Looking down, the warrior's face took on a solemn expression as she seriously informed Gabrielle that fooling with open cuts was no laughing matter. "Treating those hands really is a necessity, Gabrielle. We can't have those open wounds becoming infected."

"Okay, Shamaness, you've made your point." The small blonde leaned a little heavier on her lover and they continued to walk toward home.

"You know, Xena, I think you might have a hidden reason for getting these cuts and scratches healed," Gabrielle's eyes twinkled as she looked up into a face bearing an arched eyebrow.

"Don't act innocent, my warrior - hands **and** lips - what a combination to be out of commission at the same time," Gabrielle tittered. "Thank the Gods we've been fairly affectionate these past few days, it may be a day or two before I'm able to . . ."

"I wasn't even thinking about that," Xena objected.

"Oh, I think you might protest too much," the bard countered.

"Of course it doesn't stop Me from fulfilling my promise of last evening, now does it?" Xena gave her lover a sensual look.

"I think not!" The response came quickly.

They continued walking and Gabrielle's limp became more apparent with every step, and her pressure on her warrior stronger. Xena reinstated their former conversation. "Listen, Gabrielle, our hut is so far out from the village no one will ever know if I pull you in a cart. Beside, if you don't let me pull you in something with wheels, we will never get to the lake and back before your hungry subjects consume the entire meal."

Having run out of objections, and feeling the consequences of the early morning conflict with Tecmessia, the Queen agreed to be carted to the lake and back. She giggled when conceding to the transportation. "Oh, okay -- we'll just call it my Royal coach."

"And that would make me?"

"My Royal Footwoman," she laughed.

They were coming within sight of their hut by now and Xena had a second idea. "Better yet, why don't you just ride behind me on Argo? It would be even quicker and you wouldn't look so pitiful."

"Much better suggestion, Champion. I knew there was a good reason I kept you around." With her arm around Xena's waist she was afforded the added stability of leaning into the taller woman.

It lightened Xena's heart to see her bard smiling after such an exhausting display of prowess. She was extremely proud of her Bard/Queen/Warrior, although she didn't like thinking of Gabrielle as the latter of the three titles. In actuality her favorite title for the small blonde was Lover and soon to be Wife. Yes, if she were to put the four facets of her versatile soulmate in order it would be Wife/Bard/Queen/Warrior. She tightened her hold on Gabrielle's shoulders and whispered softly in her ear. "Do you know how proud I am of you?"

Verdant eyes looked up into sparkling sapphire eyes. "I'm glad, Xena, but a challenge for the title of Queen is not something I want to make a practice of competing in. I hope the village will be content with their Queen for a long time to come."

"I'm sure they will be, my love."

As they neared the hut, Eve met up with them, carrying the jar of salve.

"What took you so long?" her mother asked as she took the medicine from the outstretched hand.

"Oh, and you're very welcome, Mother." Eve responded sarcastically. "If you had bothered to give me the right place to look, I might have been here sooner," she grumbled to her mother.

"I did," Xena argued. I left it on the table the other night after taking it out of Argo's saddlebag.

"And I put it away . . ." Gabrielle countered with a smile, " . . . As usual."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You didn't ask. Besides if I told you every time I went around picking up after you, we'd never be able to discuss anything more than my tidying up." She smiled sweetly at her warrior and then thanked her for being so considerate and sending Eve for the medicine.

"How are you feeling, Mom? You don't look very comfortable." There was a look of concern on Eve's face as she examined the cuts on Gabrielle's hands and face.

"I've had worse, believe me." The blonde tried to act nonchalant, but she was most assuredly beginning to experience the reality of the morning's activities, as her body began to stiffen and new areas of pain emerged with each new candlemark. Come nightfall, she had a feeling that the consequences of the day's actions would be totally realized.

"At least Tecmessa's not feeling any better," Eve smiled. The younger woman stood in front of her mom, wishing there were something she could do to help ease the pain.

Xena opened up the jar and started to dip her finger in when Gabrielle asked if it would be wiser to wait until after she had bathed. "No, we have plenty of this salve; let's get a little on now and I'll reapply it when you're cleaned and changed."

Gabrielle flinched as the cream was applied. It stung as it made contact with the open areas, but within seconds the pain was ebbing from the wounds and the bard was wishing there were a salve that could take care of bruising that easily. "That feels marvelous, Xena. Thanks."

"I'll check you out a little better when we have that outfit off; you might have a few bruised ribs, and wrapping could relieve some of your pain."

"I'd love to stand here and chat with the two of you, but I promised Toxaris I'd help with the preparations." Eve looked at her mother fawning over Gabrielle. "I know you're in excellent hands, Mom."

"Yes, your mother is always around to pick up the pieces and help put them back together. You go ahead and have fun with your friends. I'm glad you're getting along so well with the sisters."

"I feel safe here; this was a great idea. Thanks to both of you." She kissed Gabrielle on the cheek and then turned and did the same to Xena before running off in the direction of the village.

"I guess this was a good idea, huh?" Xena asked.

"This will be a very healing place for our daughter," Gabrielle muttered as she watched Eve leave.

A long sharp whistle brought the beautiful palomino into view. "Come on, let's get you up on Argo." Xena gently assisted Gabrielle onto the horse then told her she would be right back with a change of clothes, soap, and some cloths to dry with.

Within minutes she was back out of the hut. "We don't want to take too long; I know you don't want to miss the meal."

"You're right on that account, Xena. Even with this sore lip, I'll manage to get the food down. All that exercise gives the appetite a real boost."

"As if you ever need a reason to have your appetite boosted." Xena chuckled as she got behind Gabrielle on the young horse that was quickly learning all of her new master's idiosyncrasies.

The trip to the lake was a quick one via horseback, and within minutes Gabrielle was soaking her sore muscles in the cooling water of the lake. Xena didn't need the bath but she didn't want Gabrielle to split her knuckles any more than they already were by overusing her hands. She stripped down and walked into the water next to her lover.

"Here, give me that," the warrior shook her head as she retrieved the soap from the blonde.

"I can wash myself," Gabrielle objected.

"Of course you can and if you're really clever you can start those hands to bleeding again." Sapphire eyes twinkled merrily as she lathered up one of the sponges they had purchased from a seaman the last time they were in Potidaea.

"This may sting a little Gabrielle, but I need to get the wounds cleansed." Xena flinched when Gabrielle did, as she patted the knuckles with the soft sponge. "Sorry."

"It's not your fault. Luckily I'm a fast healer; not being able to do things with my hands is going to be the pits!" The statement was peppered with a slight grin in the direction of her Champion.

Pretending she hadn't heard the comment Xena made a suggestion. "Maybe you'll be forced to sit and do some writing again for a while."

Pleased with the idea from her mate, the small blonde smiled. "That's true, once I get my hand into the writing position, I won't have to be changing it. I guess I should get the story of Livia/Eve written while it's still fresh in my mind."

"And the story of the Bard Queen's return and victory over the Regent Queen." The warrior's face was one of a proud partner when she spoke of Gabrielle's victory.

"You know, Xena, it was strange being out there on that field totally alone this morning." Gabrielle put a bruised hand on each of her champion's shoulders. "You've always been around to back me up. Xena if I hadn't . . . "

"IF is the operative word here, my love; you did fine all by yourself."

"Yes, but if I hadn't, you wouldn't have been able to interfere."

Intent sapphire orbs focused on just as intent green ones - "You don't honestly think that I would have let any major harm come to you out there today, do you, Gabrielle?"

"But, Xena, the rules."

"To Tartarus with the rules, you are more important to me than the rules of an Amazon village. You and Eve are the most important people in my world. We could always find somewhere else to put down roots. I would never settle for being a widow before becoming your consort. No! Losing you was never a viable option."

The blue eyes softened as they searched the face of her beloved for a sign that Gabrielle didn't agree with her, but she found none.

Holding her head down and almost whispering the small bard mumbled, "I'm ashamed to say that I'm glad to hear you say that Xena. As much as it would have been a death with honor, I wouldn't have wanted to leave you and Eve. Maybe I'm not as true an Amazon as I'm trying to portray. You mean more to me than the tribe. Not that I wouldn't give my life to save any one of them in a battle, but I wouldn't want to have died this morning. We have so much left of life to explore together, we have . . . "

Gentle fingers barely touched the wounded lips and Gabrielle looked up into glistening eyes that belied the warrior's hard exterior, and her heart went out to her lover. "This is just between the two of us, my soul," Xena whispered. "No one of this world need be privy to what transpires between us. Just so we know that I would never let you die without coming to your side and that you would do the same for me. I think we've talked this conversation out, my bard."

The raven-haired beauty drew her lover close and tenderly kissed her neck and face, carefully avoiding the bruised lips. "You're my life, Gabrielle, what would I be doing settling in a village if you weren't?"

As is true for many bodily functions, Gabrielle's stomach took that particular time to make an unqueenly rumbling sound that could be heard even through the water. The lovers laughed and Xena commenced rinsing the remaining suds off the smaller woman.

As they emerged from the lake, Gabrielle was just beginning to realize how much she actually ached. Xena not only helped her dry off, but assisted her in getting dressed.

"Well, this should be a fun week." The newly re-appointed Queen remarked with apparent disgust.

"Take advantage of the newness of your position, my love. I'm sure there will be many young women who will be grateful and eager to be of help to you around the hut until your hands heal." Xena finished helping Gabrielle on with her top and helped her back onto Argo.

Jumping up behind her mate, the warrior put her arms around Gabrielle. It was easier for her to hold the small blonde, than vice versa. This way Gabrielle didn't have to use her arms or her sore hands. "We had best get going before all the food is devoured by those same young women I was just speaking about."

"Xena it's funny, you commenting on the women that are Eve's age. You keep calling them young women when, if you don't count the frozen years, they aren't much younger than we are. Sometimes I still feel as though we walked into a wonderland. Everyone who was our age is now old enough to be a parent to us, and those who were infants, like Eve, are now seemingly our age."

The rest of the way to the village the two were quiet as they both pondered on the anomaly that was now their life.

Upon entering the middle of the village, Argo was soon surrounded by Amazons of all ages. They had been anxiously awaiting their Queen and her Champion, so the mid-morning festivities could begin. Xena jumped down, then turned and reached up to help Gabrielle dismount.

Even though Gabrielle had given her a bit of an argument in the beginning, the warrior finally convinced the aching bard that wrapping the ribs would alleviate some of the pain. She was glad her lover had surrendered to the procedure, as getting her down off the horse would now be slightly less painful, with the tightly wrapped bandages protecting the small blonde's bruised ribs.

Gabrielle's thoughts were traveling in a similar direction, while being helped off the horse. She was exceedingly grateful that Xena had been so observant and insisted on wrapping her ribs. Had the warrior not securely bandaged the area, she was sure the jogging she would have received from riding astride Argo would have left her in excruciating pain, instead of her having only moderate irritation.

Thoughts of pain were washed away as wonderful smells drifted through the air, titillating the nostrils of the Bard Queen and her soon-to-be Amazon Consort. They walked into the communal dining hall to find that no one had eaten yet; they were all awaiting the arrival of Queen Gabrielle. A place of honor was set for three at the head of the largest table with Xena on one side of the Queen and Eve already seated to the left of her. The elders of the village also had seats at the Royal table. Everyone was anxiously awaiting the arrival of the tardy duo.

The tables were already laden with fruits and breads. Pitchers of juice and water were strategically placed, and as soon as Gabrielle sat down, platters of hot foods were brought in from the cooking area; the breakfast feast officially began.

"This is so much better than hard bread, jerky, and berries." Gabrielle commented as she filled her plate and thanked the young woman who was doing the serving.

"Yes, but the past few days you also had fresh fish to go along with the stale bread," Eve reminded her mom.

"So I did, Eve, and believe me I was grateful for that, also." She couldn't help but notice that Toxaris was seated next to Eve. She didn't want to form an opinion too quickly, but she noticed the far away look in her daughter's friend's face when she looked at Eve. *I hope our Eve doesn't break your heart, little Amazon*, Gabrielle silently mused while beginning to partake of the breakfast feast.

By the time the meal was completed it was well into the afternoon and Xena suggested that they return to the hut so that Gabrielle could take a nap before the evening festivities began. When the smaller woman began to argue, Xena gave her 'the look' that meant she would not take no for an answer.

"If you are going to heal properly, Gabrielle, you need rest. There's nothing you can do here, anyway. Everyone has their own chores and you have none." She smiled at her bard and slowly walked with her out of the main hall. On the way out they stopped to talk with Eris and Rhea who were extremely excited that the challenge had gone in favor of the bard. Rhea looked a bit tired and pallid. Xena promised to make a poultice for the woman and bring it with her when they returned for the evening feast. She explained to the women that Gabrielle needed to rest for a while and, once again, Xena helped her mate to mount the palomino. There was no sense in Gabrielle walking anywhere she didn't have to - at least for the next few days.

"I'm really not that tired, Xena," Gabrielle had objected when they were exiting the hall."

"Humor me," had been the response from the dark warrior.

After the short jog back, they entered the hut and Gabrielle insisted Xena lay down with her until she went to sleep. Strong arms encircled the smaller aching body, willing comfort and healing to each area the strong yet gentle fingers touched. The warrior hummed as she trailed her hands lightly down the Bard's back, lulling her soulmate to a place where pain could be forgotten, if only for a few hours.

As soon as the warrior was positive her lover was in Morpheus' realm, she cautiously unwound the blonde's arms from around her body and slipped quietly from the bed.

Now, standing looking down at the sleeping bard, Xena knew it had been a good idea to have the newly reinstated Queen get some needed rest before the evening's festivities began. She blew her a kiss and went about making the promised poultice for Rhea.

Xena busied herself around the outside of the hut, gathering the ingredients she didn't already have for the poultice, grooming the horses and cutting down some of the brush that the Amazon sisters had neglected around the porch. When she was quite finished playing Shamaness and blacksmith, she sat and sharpened her sword, a luxury she hadn't the time the last few days to engage in. The sun was beginning to recede toward the horizon before the raven-haired beauty decided it was time to awaken her Bard. If they were going to attend the festivities, they had best get ready. It was a wonder Gabrielle had been able to sleep throughout the entire day, with all the drumming that had been keeping pace with the excited Amazons, but that further acknowledged that the warrior had been right and that her partner was in obvious need of the rest.

"Good evening, Starshine, you've just about slept the day away." Xena whispered, as she reclined next to her lover. She studied the peaceful face, before running her long fingers through the silky locks.

"Oh, Xena, is it really that late? I can see the shadows on the walls."

"Actually it seems as though you've slept from breakfast directly through to dinner." The warrior smiled tenderly down on the face of her angel, as she watched the sea-green eyes blink away the sleep. "Did you dream?"

"Of course, I don't think I ever sleep without dreaming. It must be the curse of the bard, or perhaps the gift; I'm not sure which. At least I didn't relieve the entire challenge as I thought I might. Morpheus was kind to me today; he allowed me to dream of our joining. Did you say I slept through dinner?" There was panic in the bard's voice.

"I was only kidding; you know I wouldn't allow that. You'd never let me live it down. So did you plan the entire wedding in your sleep, my soul?" Xena raised an eyebrow as she awaited the response.

"No. I wouldn't do that . . . I wouldn't plan everything without including you."

With a sarcastic smile the warrior kissed her mate on the cheek. "Oh, but we all know that, Gabrielle. You wouldn't think of starting anything without first discussing it with me, right?"

"I don't know about not starting, Xena." Gabrielle confessed. "But I certainly would include you as things went along."

"You had best include me in Everything, my little bard. I want no surprises on my wedding day. Do you understand? We need to sit down, you and I, and talk about the ceremony, until we both agree on how it is to be played out."

"Are you getting cold feet, my warrior?" Gabrielle smiled, sitting up and now fully awake.

"No, not cold feet, but I don't want any surprises. I want to know just what it is we will be promising. I never thought I would be settling down like this Gabrielle. I want to feel comfortable with the vows."

"I understand, Xena. I was just kidding with you. We do need to sit and talk about how we want to handle the vows and who we want standing up for us." A slight melancholy looked cross the bard's soft eyes, and they veiled over for an instant.

"A dinar for your thoughts, Gabrielle."

The bard shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. "It's nothing, really."

The dark-haired woman tilted the small face before her until their eyes were locked in a lover's stare. Through the piercing green eyes, the warrior searched the other half of her soul, and her heart found the question that was patiently awaiting her response.

"You want to go home before the wedding, don't you Gabrielle?"

The tears in her lover's eyes spoke the answer long before the slightly pouting lips were able to reply. "I always thought Lila would be my maid of honor if we ever took the vows," the bard sighed.

"And you think that's too difficult a request to have granted?" Xena placed a hand under her soul mate's chin and lifted the face of her angel to meet her gaze. "Gabrielle, if you want to go get Lila we can start as soon as your ribs heal. We can talk about the plans along the way."

"What if she's . . . not alive?"

"Since when did you become the pessimist? I thought that was my job? I'm sure Lila is alive and as ornery as ever. She probably even has a cottage full of kids." Xena chuckled at the thought of the feisty young girl having grown into motherhood.

"It's going to be weird seeing my baby sister looking like my elder." Gabrielle didn't know whether to smile or cry when she thought about the years of memories that had been denied her.

"Xena, Lila isn't the only one I want at the wedding."

Now it was the warrior's turn to become serious. "Gabrielle you don't think your parents will want to attend?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"Xena, I'm not even sure if my parents are alive - they were not that young when we went into hibernation. But, no . . . I wasn't thinking of My parents . . . I want Cyrene there."

It was now also the warrior's turn to have doubts about going home. She had been comfortable enough with taking Gabrielle home to Potidaea, but returning to Amphipolis was a different story. She tried not to think of the fact that Cyrene could very well be dead. And Toris . . . she didn't know if he had stayed in the city or not. "Don't you think we should talk about this a little more?"

"No. Xena this is perhaps the most important step in either of our lives," she chuckled and shook her head. "Well, maybe coming back from the dead might have been a little more important or fighting Gods and Goddesses for our lives, that might have taken second place, but you know what I mean!"

"Yes, Gabrielle, I know what you mean."

"It's important for us now, and I don't think I want to wait until after the wedding to see if our families have survived the past 25 years. The wedding will be at least a moon in the preparations. Xena help me. I'm rambling." The blonde looked pathetically up into almost sorrowful sapphire eyes that knew the same ache to find out who was still alive in their immediate families.

Xena simply nodded affirmatively, giving Gabrielle the acknowledgment she desired. "We'll leave just as soon as you can ride your own horse without pain."

"Thank you, Xena." The small blonde put her head on her champion's chest and hugged her close. "I think we should ask Eve if she would like to come along and meet her aunt and grandmother and maybe even her uncle and cousins."

"Yes, Eve should have that option. We can talk about it more in the morning, right now you need to get dressed; I can smell the food and that means it's almost time to eat."

After re-wrapping Gabrielle's ribs and putting more salve on the bard's hands and lips, Xena helped her lover finish dressing. When they were ready to walk out the door she reminded Gabrielle that both the ceremonial staff and mask should be taken, for the ceremony that was certain to ensue this evening. Xena had shined up her chakram as well as her sword, while Gabrielle was sleeping and they were both in their respective holders.

"We might as well ride Argo into the village, arriving like a Queen will add a nice touch." The dark-haired beauty lifted her soul mate up onto the horse, as she had before and before getting on herself, raced back into the hut and retrieved a small bulging bag she almost forgot. When she came out again, Xena situated herself behind her mate and took Argo's reins.

Within minutes they were gathering attention as they neared the great hall where the banquet was being held. Gabrielle could tell that it was going to be a long evening and she leaned back and thanked Xena for allowing her to sleep and to rest up for the festivities.

The warrior simply kissed her bard on the golden crown and then leaned over and whispered into the small ear. "That's what Royal Consorts are for, My Queen, to make sure you are taken care of properly." Her tongue played a round of ring around the ear, causing Gabrielle to shiver and smile as she leaned back into her lover's body.

"If you don't stop, we will find ourselves leaving and heading back from whence we just came, my warrior!" Gabrielle giggled.

"I think not, my bard - your body is in no condition to undergo what I would expect from you, if we left these festivities and went home." She walked Argo over to the large building and dismounted. She then held out her arms to Gabrielle, lifting the smaller woman down from the horse.

The Amazons lined up on either side of their Queen and her Champion as they walked toward the banquet hall. Inside, the room had been gaily decorated and there was a small group of musicians over in one corner performing on drums, reed, and string instruments.

Gabrielle smiled at the musicians as she caught each of their glances in her direction. The couple then continued on to their place of honor at the end of the table. The throne-like chairs had been pulled away from the table in anticipation of the short ceremony that was planned to take place before the dining would begin.

Tecmessa met them at the head of the table, her own mask firmly in place, as were the masks of the Amazons surrounding her. This would be an extremely unusual ceremony with the defeated queen regent being the officiating sister.

"Bard Queen Gabrielle," Tecmessa began as Gabrielle stood facing the village of Amazons that were still filling the large room. "We are here to honor and welcome you back as Queen of your tribe." She reached out and took Gabrielle's mask while at the same time another of the sisters took her staff. The two Amazons stood in front of Gabrielle and Xena, patiently waiting until a third masked Amazon joined them.

It was at this point that they all turned and faced the crowd.

Tecmessa spoke to a now hushed gathering. "Sister Amazons, we are here to reinstate our Bard Queen Gabrielle who has for too long been absent, through no fault of her own, from this tribe." She motioned the woman to the left of her to step forward.

"Phillippis has for the last season been the faithful keeper of the Bard Queen's staff, our Queen's symbol of warriorhood."

Phillippis held the staff high above her head for all to see and the crowd was silent.

Tecmessa continued. "This Amazon has protected and cherished the staff in our Queen's absence, and tonight gratefully places the weapon back into the hands of its rightful owner."

Phillippis turned and faced Gabrielle. She relinquished the staff to the Queen, placed her right fist to her heart and bowed as she stepped back two paces to stand again beside the new leader of the Royal Guard.

Tecmessa now motioned to the woman on her right to step forward.

"Aello has for the last season been the faithful keeper of the Bard Queen's quill, our Queen's symbol of her ability to weave the spoken word into that of the written word so that all Amazons may be able to know the stories."

The proud Amazon turned and faced Gabrielle. She relinquished the quill to the Queen, placed her right fist to her heart and bowed as she stepped back two paces to stand again beside the new leader of the Royal Guard.

Finally, Tecmessa held high the Queen's Mask. "By the authority granted to me by the council this afternoon, I now reinstate the Bard Queen Gabrielle to her rightful station as Queen of the Amazons. A title she not only deserves by cast but by deed as a warrior. Never before has the tribe been lead by such a versatile woman, one who is as easily at home with a pot, a quill or a staff in tow. She will lead the tribe with strength, honor and compassion."

The former regent turned and faced Gabrielle. She relinquished the mask to her Queen, placed her right fist to her heart and bowed as she stepped back two paces to stand again between the other two Royal Guard Amazons.

Gabrielle stood with Xena by her side. She handed her Champion her staff and quill, allowing her to hold her Queen's mask high above her head with one hand on either side of it. Then slowly and with conviction she placed the mask of Queen upon her face.

The crowd went wild and a thundering cheer rolled through the room, shaking the timbers of the large hall . . . "Queen Gabrielle! Queen Gabrielle! Long Live Queen Gabrielle."

Xena stood by watching, pride lighting up her face. The small blonde allowed the excitement to flow for a few minutes and then, motioning with her hands, dulled the sound to a whisper and then to silence. She took off the mask and placed it on the throne behind her then turned to address her subjects.

"Amazons - we are gathered here in celebration, but this is more than just a ceremony of my reinstatement as your Queen. We are gathered here as a once divided nation, now reunited. My dream is to see all the Amazons joined into a strong sisterhood. There should never be a village anywhere in the known world that each and every one of you is not welcomed in. We will take our stand for justice and it will be our duty to watch out for and support any woman, Amazon or not, who asks for our help. When all women are safe in their homes and free from tyranny, only then will we all be Free! Hail to the Amazons - defenders of women!"

"Hail to the Amazons - defenders of women," became the cry from the sisters.

Now it was Xena's turn to raise her hands and ask for silence. While the congregation was calming down she turned and retrieved one golden and one silver goblet from the bag she had carried from the hut. Picking up a pitcher of wine from the table she filled each of the goblets, placed them on the table and faced the now silent throng.

"Amazons - I have been among you for many years, longer than some of you are old and even longer than your reigning Queen. For all these seasons I have denied, not my association with your nation, but becoming a member of the Amazons. Today there are two subjects close to my heart that I would like to acknowledge. The first of the two matters has to do with the re-coronation of Gabrielle as your Queen. I would like to commend the tribe, as I feel you could have made no finer a choice for a leader, especially when looking for attributes of both courage and mercy. Secondly I would like to officially join the ranks of the Amazons in the most auspicious way possible."

Gabrielle stood staring at the statuesque beauty before her, mesmerized by her style and grace, as were the rest of the women sitting and standing in the huge room. All of them were trying to calculate in what direction Xena was going with her speech.

The raven-haired warrior stepped back and took her lover's hand as she knelt on one strong knee. She reached behind her and unsheathing her sword held it, palms up in front of Gabrielle to take. I offer you my sword, and my life. Placing her right hand over her heart she beseeched . . .

"Gabrielle . . . my lover . . . my lifemate . . . the completion of my soul . . . will you join with me in a Royal Ceremony . . . be my wife and make me your Royal Amazon Consort?"

Gabrielle, her brilliant green eyes filled to overflowing with tears of joy, took the sword and lightly touched each of Xena's shoulders, commanding her to rise. Handing the sword back to the warrior who quickly replaced it into its sheath, the small blonde stepped closer and took her Champion's hand.

"My answer, of course, is yes, my love."

A deafening cheer spread throughout the hall until the small Queen silenced the Amazons with her hands. "Looks like there will be preparations for a Royal Joining," she smiled at her sisters as the cheering began anew.

With joined hands the newly betrothed couple approached the table. Xena picked up the two goblets and handed one to Gabrielle. Without need of encouragement, a hush fell over the hall.

"These are ceremonial goblets stolen long ago from the cities of Amphipolis and Potidaea - the Silver belonged to my home of birth and the gold to that of your Queen's. Warlords, who have long since died, pilfered them. I took them back from the thieves, and until a day ago they had remained entombed. Tonight, as we drink from the goblets of bride-to-be our ancestors, we shall look to a bright future among the Amazons." She toasted her and the couple drank in celebration of their announcement. The clamor of the sisters was almost deafening.

Gabrielle put her goblet down and stepped closer to her warrior. "By the Gods Xena that was beautiful - thank you my love!"

"Never say there is no romance in my blood, my soul," the champion whispered back.

Without trying to subdue the crowd this time, Gabrielle faced the front of the table and stated simply, in as loud a voice as she could muster - "Let's Eat . . . Let the Celebration begin!"

No sooner were the words spoken than the women chosen to serve, raced to the cooking area and started filling trays with all the delicacies that had been prepared throughout the course of the day. One of the entrees that had been simmering for candlemarks was a delightful rabbit stew, chock full of vegetables from gardens of some of the older Amazons, who no longer went on the hunting expeditions. There were plates piled high with deer steaks and potatoes as well as loaves of fresh bread. Sitting in the kitchen as a special surprise were round little dumpling-like pastries filled with sweet red stuff and made exactly like Gabrielle had taught some of the women to make the last time she and her warrior had been here, 25 full seasons ago when Eve was a baby. The recipe had now been handed down to a new generation, and the small treats were still enjoyed at all the celebrations.

Throughout the feeding frenzy people kept coming up and congratulating the lucky couple. Xena sat there wondering if she had done the right thing proposing in front of the entire Amazon community, but when she looked over at Gabrielle and saw how she radiated happiness the silent warrior vowed that she would do it all over again if need be. Smiling inwardly she reminded herself that they still had the actual ceremony to go through and what a 'gladiator day in Rome' that was going to be.

Throughout the evening one or the other of her mothers would occasionally receive an approving look from Eve. She even made sure to talk to each of them, both separately and together, but they steered clear of discussing the forthcoming trip Amphipolis and Potidaea.

After a while the entire party began shifting to the open air, as the musicians took their melodies out where there was room for dancing.

Again there was a special place reserved for the Queen and her Champion. It was obvious to anyone who watched Gabrielle walk from the dining hall to the outside area that the Queen would definitely be only a spectator during the evening's festivities. There may have been a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eyes, but there was definitely pain in her movement.

"I'll be right there," Gabrielle told Xena as they left the hall. "I have something I want to do first."

"Want me to come with?" Xena asked, unsure of where her bard was going.

"No, I'll only be a few minutes," Gabrielle assured her dark hero. "You go on ahead."

While Xena made her way through the crowd of Amazons to their seats of honor, Gabrielle meandered in the opposite direction over to where Tecmessa was standing with some of her friends. After catching the woman's eye, Gabrielle motioned that she wanted to speak with her privately.

"Tecmessa, I just want to thank you for the lovely way you headed the ceremony tonight. I would think that to be a difficult chore after such a recent loss."

The taller woman nodded to her Queen and smiled. "If you were to stop and really think about it Queen Gabrielle, had I lost that challenge to any other of my sisters, I would not have been alive tonight to hand them their mask. Not only did you spare my life, but you, also, gave me a place of honor in your guard. You have a friend for life in me, my Queen." Tecmessa patted her heart with her right hand and bowed her head slightly in reverence.

"Enough of that when we talking privately, Tecmessa." The blonde blushed slightly at the compliment she had just been paid. It had come from the heart she was sure, and she was glad that the two of them would be friends. "I'll let you rejoin your friends; I just wanted to thank you."

Gabrielle began walking back toward her seat of honor. She glanced around at the bonfire and over at the dancers and musicians, but Xena was nowhere to be seen. She figured her dark warrior had wanted a few private minutes alone. After all, large parties still made her champion nervous, even when they were in her bard's honor.

Xena decided that a little quiet time might be just what she needed. She felt if she could steal away into the woods for a few minutes while Gabrielle was off talking to whomever, that maybe her nerves would calm a little after opening her heart in front of the entire Amazon Nation - or at least a good hunk of it. She needed a break from all the congratulations being given by nearly every Amazon in the village.

Just beyond the light of the fire the drums took on a duller tone. The tall warrior stood in the light of the silver moon, gazing up into the stars and feeling quite content with herself. It pleased her to know how happy she had made her soul this evening, both the one that resided in her body and the other half that resided in the body of her bard.

There was a slight crackling sound emanating from the left of her. Out of instinct she reached for her chakram, then heard a giggle. "Way to go Warrior Babe."

"Aphrodite?! What are you doing here?"

"I told the Little Bard that I was watching out for Artemis' chosen, now that she no longer can. And since my favorite mortal happens to be one of them, what better place for me to pop in occasionally." She closed the gap between herself and the warrior and continued. "Xena that was quite a romantic interlude there amidst all those Amazons. A bit out of character for you, but lovely nonetheless."

"I only did it for Gabrielle. I figured she would appreciate it."

"Well let me tell you - I appreciated it also. Anything that laced with love makes me tingle all over, and for doing that I will grant you one wish gratis anytime you want to make it."

"Thanks Aphrodite, I'd like to think on it for a while. Wouldn't want to waste such a precious commodity. "

"No hurry, Xena. I plan on being around for quite some time. Will I get an invitation to the joining?"

"Of course, if you want."

"Sure I want; I love weddings! I'll even give the two of you an instant trip to your grotto as a wedding present for your honeymoon . . . or wherever you want to go for that matter."

"Thanks again, Aphrodite."

Realizing that Gabrielle might start worrying about where she was she asked the Goddess if she would like to come back to the celebration with her.

"No, thanks. I just wanted to compliment you on your lovely proposal. After all you only do something like that once in a lifetime, might as well make it spectacular. And no one could say that you ever did anything that wasn't spectacular, now could they Xena?"

"Guess not." The warrior agreed with the Goddess of Love.

"Listen, Warrior Babe, give my little friend a big hello from me, and tell her I'll be keeping an occasional eye on the two of you."

"Just be careful when you decide to pop in Goddess of Love," the warrior teased. "There are times when being alone is exactly how we want to remain."

"I get the picture, Xena. Now, I have an appointment for a facial so I'll catch ya later."

With that the Goddess of Love was off in a blink of an eye, leaving only the sprinkling of gold and pink dust behind as she disappeared as quickly as she had arrived.

Xena took a deep breath and slowly made her way back into the midst of the festivities. It didn't take long to spot Gabrielle sitting above the crowd, watching the women dance. Going back into the hall, the warrior retrieved the goblets and filled them with wine before joining her lover.

"Where did you disappear to?" Gabrielle wanted to know as she reached out and took the offered goblet.

"Just went for a minute of quiet thought out in the woods."

"Alone?" Gabrielle wanted to know.

"It wouldn't have been quiet if I took someone with me, now would it have been?" She shook her head and smiled sweetly over at her lover. "But, I did meet up with a friend of yours while I was out there."

"Really? Who?" Now she really had Gabrielle's attention.

"The Goddess of Love."

"Aphrodite was in the woods? Whatever for?" Questioning green eyes focused on her lover's face.

"She came to congratulate me on proposing to you in front of the entire village. She thought it was extremely romantic."

The look of pride on her warrior's face was so sincere; it warmed the bard's heart.

"And so it was Xena. I was shocked. Thrilled, but shocked." The bard tried to smile but her cracked lips prevented a full grin.

Catching the grimace on the fair face in front of her, Xena reached into the small bag she had attached to her leathers and brought out the salve she had been putting on Gabrielle's cuts.

"Xena, that's not necessary."

"Really? Then why don't you just give me a great big grin, my Queen? Come on, an ear-to-ear smile."

Knowing that her champion was right, Gabrielle yielded to letting Xena cover her lips with the soothing cream.

"When do you think we should ask Eve if she wants to go with us to Amphipolis and Potidaea?" Gabrielle asked, while Xena was putting the salve away.

"As soon as we get the chance. Give her a few days to make up her mind and then she can help us get everything ready to travel."

"On the trip there we won't have to take much. The grotto is less than a full day's ride. But we do need to get a horse for Eve if she decides on coming with us. I hope she does."

"I do, too, Gabrielle, just in case Mother isn't in good enough health to make the trip back here to the village. At least she'd get to spend a little time with her granddaughter and Eve with her grandmother." Remembering a portion of her conversation with the Goddess of Love, Xena thought she had better fill Gabrielle in while she was thinking about it. "By the way, Aphrodite wants to be invited to the joining."

"She wants to be . . ." Gabrielle plopped into her seat.

"I think the Goddess of Love has adopted you, Queen of the Amazons." Xena smiled as she sat down next to her lover.

Gabrielle took a drink of her wine and then proceeded to examine the goblet she held in her hand. "Is this really from Potidaea?"

"Sure is. Look around on the other side you'll notice the mascot of your little city. I collected these treasures quite a while ago my love, before we met. When we were rummaging around in the treasure trove the other day I spotted them and was happy I had left them at that particular spot."

"No coincidences, remember Xena? There's a reason for everything." Gabrielle lifted her glass to toast her warrior. "To the love of my life. I know you are just as thrilled about all the preparations that will now have to be made for the Royal Wedding as I am."

"Thrilled is an understatement, my love, an absolute understatement," the warrior acknowledged as she took a large gulp of her wine.

The moon had risen high in the night sky and was now beginning to make its descent when the bard and her warrior decided they had stayed long enough to be sociable and could easily slip away and retire to their hut.

After gently placing Gabrielle on Argo, Xena joined her and they trotted off toward their home with little attention from the partying Amazons.

"You know, my love," Xena began after they had dismounted and began walking up to the porch steps. "I promised to make last night up to you, after you were reinstated as Queen, but I really think we ought to conserve your energy for a few days." Still standing on the ground she placed the staff, quill, and mask on the deck of the porch, then started to ascend the stairs.

"As much as I hate to agree with you on that count, Xena, I do." The bard turned around at the top of the stairs and put her hands on her lover's shoulders. Only in positions such as this did she get the chance to look down into the beautiful face that could start her blood to heating and send chills up and down her spine. The angle of the moon was such that its glow lit up and softened the angular features of her beautiful warrior. Dazzling sapphire eyes shone brightly as they gazed up into the fair face of a golden angel.

"If you stand looking at me with those emeralds of yours much longer, my soul, I will find it almost impossible to keep my body from doing what my mind knows it shouldn't tonight."

The corners of Gabrielle's mouth slightly curled into a tiny smile, and her eyes took on an iridescent glow as she slowly lowered her face toward that of her lover. It mattered not that the kiss would be as painful as it was sweet, she could not let this moment slip by without taking advantage of the full lips as they reached up to meet her own.

Xena cautiously ran her tongue over the outside of Gabrielle's lips, wishing silently that the mere touch of her tongue would be able to heal the wounded skin. "I love you, my soul," the dark hero whispered before allowing her tongue entrance between the damaged lips.

"I love you more," came the answer from the other half of her heart, as Gabrielle opened her mouth to allow the soft, warm tongue of her lover inside.

With their lips still joined, the tall warrior carefully encircled her arms around the bard as she climbed to the next step. Then, picking the smaller woman up, she placed one foot and then the other on the deck of the porch. Without missing a step she carried her beloved to and beyond the threshold of their home, then closed the door behind them.

Xena placed Gabrielle on the bed and began undoing the bard's clothing, not stopping until her lover was lying naked on the bed in front of her. Quickly she stood and stepped out of her own clothes, then crawled back onto the bed to envelop the warm body awaiting her. "I'll be gentle, Gabrielle, I promise. Please don't tell me I can't take you tonight."

The plea that was evident in the soft contralto voice caused a lump to form in the throat of the bard as she searched for a reply.

"All the tea in Chin couldn't stop me from allowing you to continue, my love. My body silently screams for your touch." She sat up slightly to allow the warrior to gently remove the bandage she had wrapped around her ribs earlier in the evening. The few glasses of wine Gabrielle imbibed during the feast anesthetized her to the throbbing pain that had followed her throughout the day. All her mind could focus on at this minute was the tall, muscular body leaning over her, smelling of musk mixed already with the sweet odor of desire.

As accustomed as she was to lying on top of her bard, the warrior tonight lay beside her instead. Fingers that had a propensity to occasionally be rough were, in this early morning rendezvous, slow and gentle as they stroked the slightly bruised body of her bard. Her lips tenderly caressed the abused areas and then traveled on to where the outcome of the challenge showed no signs.

Slipping easily between her lover's thighs, Xena parted the golden rimmed nether lips with her tongue, only to find what her heart had known all along would be there to greet her. A pool of the nectar of love awaited, and the warrior's appetite increased as she sucked the delicate nub, smiling as it hardened under her expertise.

Soft moans came from the vicinity far above her head and the warrior took pride in knowing that both parts of her soul would be totally satisfied before the need for sleep would overtake the two. Restraint was the order of the early morning ritual and the warrior stopped herself more than once from proceeding too vigorously as she concentrated on keeping her movements to a minimum and her pace slow.

"Xena . . . oooh . . . y-e-s . . . please . . . " Half phrases, sighs, and moans punctuated the utterances that were merely spoken fragments of the small blonde's thoughts and feelings.

"I know, my soul," the warrior whispered. "There . . . is that what you want?"

"Y-e-s . . . oh . . . Xena . . . Gods . . . ah!" A small hand extended searching fingers to touch the tip of the black curly mound, situated almost out of reach. "I want to touch you Xena . . . please," the blonde pleaded, and her mate responded by inching closer and allowing the eager digits to find their way to the yearning deep inside the champion, as they slid ever so easily within, to play among the walls of passion. A solitary thumb engaged itself on the swollen bud outside the walls, helping to raise the intensity of the dark warrior's intoxication.

Finally, kneeling and continuing to allow her lover access to her own longing, Xena advanced the orchestration of an undulating dance of love, maintaining a slow and steady rhythm . . . slow and steady . . . slow and steady.

"Come for me Gabrielle. Let me feel the pulsating inside your body match that of my heart."

With a unhurried and deliberate pace, combined with the perfect amount of pressure, the warrior not only succeeded in bringing her soulmate to an exquisite climax, but she managed to achieve her own satisfaction as well, as she watched her lover's body move in a cadence that matched her own. Instead of speeding up the act of love as she normally did when the anticipation of orgasm was evident, she filled the recesses of her lover more fully than ever before and added pressure on the sensitive areas, causing her bard to come both inside and out simultaneously.

"By the . . . Xena . . ." The last of the words were cut off when a warm mouth, as tenderly as possible in the height of ecstasy, covered the small bard's mouth. Xena's tongue was allowed entrance and there was not one cell in the blonde's body that did not experience the rapture of Heaven on Earth.

Lying spent beside the love of her life, the raven-haired beauty, her dark locks drenched in sweat, rolled onto her back and coaxed the small blonde into her most common sleeping position. The warmth of Gabrielle's skin touching hers sent shivers of devotion through her body.

"Will sleep be a difficult venture this morning, my love," Xena questioned in a teasing tone.

"I believe you already know the answer to that, as I will be in Morpheus' realm probably before you start snoring," Gabrielle teased back. "We have so much to talk about Xena . . ."

"Hush, Gabrielle. Don't even start. Let your mind remained fixed on what just transpired. We'll allow the world back in when the sun greets us after a few candlemarks of sleep. Goodnight, my soul, sleep tight."

"Goodnight Xena, I love you."

"I love you, too, Gabrielle." Those were the last words spoken, before the lovers surrendered their bodies and their minds to the realm of the God of Dreams.

The End

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive