

~ The Fever ~

by DS Bauden

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Love/Sex: This story depicts a relationship involving people of the same sex. If this bothers you or the idea of two women loving each other makes you a little queasy, then please turn back while you still have a closed mind, or keep reading to educate yourself on "those people". There is a bit of graphic sex. Nothing too extreme, but if you are a squeemish one, you may choose to read something else.

The waters were beautiful on this wondrous landscape that Xena and Gabrielle were traveling on. They had been wandering around and found this nice, small, secluded area. Gabrielle, after seeing the huge waterfall, insisted that they stop here to make camp. Xena, against her better judgment, agreed to stop there for the night.

"You know Xena, if you just open your mind to this beauty, you might even find some peace."

"Gabrielle, if it was that easy for me to find peace, I would have claimed every waterfall by now as my own!"

"Yeah, I am sure that you would have by now. Just look at it for a minute though. Can't you feel any peace with this staring back at you?"

"Yeah, I guess it is beautiful. Lets make camp, it'll be dark soon."

"I will get some firewood, OK?"

"Sure, I'll unpack the rest, be careful. I am not familiar with this area OK?"

"OK Xena, I will."

Xena went over to Argo's saddlebags and began to unpack the bedrolls and their food, or what they had of it. She started to walk towards the camp when she heard Gabrielle yelling.

"Gabrielle!!! What is it? Can you hear me? I'm coming!!!"

Xena ran to Gabrielle's rescue, when she found the bard looking down at a small turtle wading in the water.

"SSSSHHHHHHH!!! You'll scare him away!"

"Hera's tits Gabrielle! You nearly scared me half to death!! It's a turtle, for Zeus's sake."

"Yeah but look at him, how cute!! Can we keep him? Please??"

"Only if I can cook him."

Gabrielle looked at Xena in disgust and shooed her new friend back into the water for safety.

"I can't believe you sometimes Xena. He was adorable."

"Yeah well, when I look into our supply bag and find just enough dried meat for us for tonight only, I get a little concerned. He could have made a great stew!!"

"You are a sick one, but I knew that going in now didn't I?"

"Yep, and you followed me anyway. Against my orders too, I might add."

"You know, I saved your life because I followed you. You keep forgetting that."

Laughing, "No I don't, I just like to see your face get all red when you get frustrated with me!! It's very becoming."

"Ha ha. You are so funny. Hahaha. Keep it up, warrior... whatever you are now."

"Now look who is funny?" Raising her eyebrow and smirking at Gabrielle.

"Hey, um, do you mind if I take a swim down there? I could use a bath. Traveling like we have, has made me a little....unbearable."

"No, go on ahead, I may join you later. I'll get a fire started and then I'll come down."

"OK Xena, see ya!"

"Bye."

Xena continued to make camp as Gabrielle went down to the shore of the lake where the waterfall was raging. Gabrielle undressed and dove into the water.

"Ahh, by the gods this feels wonderful. I hope Xena comes in, the water is fantastic!"

She began to swim when all of a sudden she felt something grab her leg.

"Hey!!" Pausing "What in Tarturus was that?" Something pulled at her again. "Hey!! Stop!!! Xena!!!!!!!"

Xena came up for air laughing at the Bard's fear of the unknown.

"Xena!! How could you?? You scared me!! That wasn't funny."

"Oh, I beg to differ with you Gabrielle. I found it very amusing."

Xena couldn't help but stare into the green eyes of her best friend, who was genuinely frightened. She looked at her and suddenly began to feel guilty and started to apologize.

"Gabrielle, I am sorry. I only meant it as a joke, but I can tell that it really scared you. I'm sorry."

"Paybacks are a bitch, Xena." She spat as she choked down lake water and started to swim away with a half smile on her face. Xena couldn't help but notice the playfulness in her voice as she moved away.

"Are you threatening me, Gabrielle?"

"Oh no Xena, you can count on retaliation. I promise you, you won't even see it coming."

"Oh Gabrielle, I can hardly wait."

"You say that now. Hey, by the way, did you bring the soap with you?"

"Yes I did. Don't change the subject. What am I in for?"

"Nothing yet Xena, but when I know, you'll be the first I tell. Please give me the soap, so I can finish what I came in here to do."

Xena playfully threw the soap at her friend and watched her as she began to wash her body. Xena could feel her own body warm by just watching Gabrielle. She had been in love with her for a while now, but just couldn't tell her how she felt. At times she knew that Gabrielle felt the same way, but she just couldn't cross that line, yet. Gabrielle noticed Xena's stares and started to question her in her own mind.

"I wonder if I can get a reaction out of her. I know she feels for me. I just don't know how deep those feelings are. I have to do something soon, or I will just die!" She thought to herself.

Without thinking twice, Gabrielle swam in front of Xena and then behind her while brushing her breasts up against Xena's back. After seeing Xena shudder at the contact, she began to wash her back for her. Smiling and whistling, Gabrielle knew what she had to do.

'But I don't have the first clue on what to do! I don't want this to go wrong, it has to be perfect. Gabrielle look at yourself, she is at your mercy! Go for it, what are you afraid of? She loves you, she has told you that a thousand times. In what sense? In every sense!! Do it!!' Gabrielle's mind was working on overtime, so much so, her companion noticed the silence.

"Gabrielle, what is it?"

"Nothing Xena. I guess I am a little tired." Rolling her own eyes. 'Chicken!! I can't believe you, that was your shot!! You blew it!! Nice going bardy girl.'

"I think my back is clean now, thank you. Let's head up to camp. I'll see if I can catch any fish so we can eat a little more than what we have."

"Mmmm. Sounds good Xena. My stomach has started talking to me."

"Uh oh, I know what that means." Laughing they both headed for shore.

They walked up back to camp in total silence. Each could feel the incredible tension that was building between them. A tension that they just couldn't seem to understand or know how to deal with just yet. Xena broke the ice or so she thought.

"Thanks for washing my back, Gabrielle. It felt really nice. I love when you do that for me."

"Oh, uh, sure Xena, anytime. I'm glad that you liked it."

Gabrielle could feel her face begin to flush with longing and desire for her friend. Tonight needed to be the time that she finally told Xena her true feelings. Whether or not she or Xena was ready.

Xena caught dinner in the form of Trout, and the two practically inhaled their meals.

"I guess I didn't know how hungry I was."

Giggling, "Me either Xena."

The night sky had turned into a beautiful array of stars that even had Xena's attention for awhile. Gabrielle watched as Xena marveled at the constellations above them.

"You gotta wonder about all of those stars."

"How so Xena?"

"Well, for one thing, there are so many of them in one place, but yet they look so incredible. They have such a power among them to make people stop what they are doing, just to stare."

This was her chance, Xena practically walked into Gabrielle's plan. Gabrielle moved her bedroll next to Xena's and closely placed her body next to her. She tried to act like she was trying to see what Xena was looking at. Then she turned to look at Xena.

"I can think of something else with that power." Gabrielle said as Xena turned to face her friend.

"Oh, really? What's that? I think I'd like to see that."

"I see it all the time. Everyday in fact."

Gabrielle could feel her heartbeat begin to increase. It was now or never for the young bard. Xena raised her eyebrow at Gabrielle in genuine curiosity. She noticed Gabrielle's hands begin to shake, so she took one of them in her own.

Talking rather seductively, "Gabrielle, what is it? What's wrong? You seem kind of.....nervous. Did I do something?"

Thinking, 'Oh you have no idea do you.' Staring at Xena, "It's nothing you have done Xena, it's just...well.....oh nevermind"

"No Gabrielle, please tell me. What's on your mind? Maybe I can help."

"Xena.....I....." staring deep into Xena's eyes she felt it happen before she could stop it. The kiss was a soft, passionate one. Gabrielle placed her lips gently on Xena's as if not to scare her. Xena kissed her back with a yearning from such a deep part of her heart. Each of them was mesmerized by the other, unsure of the next move, knowing they didn't want to stop. The kiss became deeper and Gabrielle's tongue asked for entry and Xena willingly opened her mouth to feel and taste what she had been desiring for so long. Their tongues explored each other's mouths and tasted everything. Gabrielle pulled away only to catch her breath.

Panting, "Oh Xena, I have wanted to do that forever I think." Resting her forehead on Xena's.

"Me too Gabrielle. I just didn't know if you were ready or not. Or even wanted this for that matter." She began to stroke Gabrielle's head and face. "I have loved you for a long time, I just couldn't bring myself to tell you. I was afraid that if I told you, that you would leave me."

"Leave you, why? I would never leave you, Xena, you have to know that."

"I do now my love, I do now."

"Xena, never doubt my love for you, ever. I will love you until I die. That's a promise."

The two held each other in their arms and looked up into the night sky, not wanting the feeling to end.

"You never told me the power you were referring to Gabrielle."

"Do you really have to ask? You are my power Xena. Just one look from your beautiful eyes can tell me a thousand different things. You can make me stop and stare within moments of opening my eyes in the morning. I have felt that power ever since I first saw you in Potedeia."

"Gabrielle, you have changed so much from that little girl I saw with those slavers. You have grown into a beautiful young woman. I wait for the nights when you fall asleep close to me so I can just watch you. You are so peaceful, all the things that I am not when I sleep. Sometimes, I reach out to just touch a strand of your hair that has fallen into your face so it doesn't interrupt the beauty."

"Xena....that is the most beautiful thing anyone has ever said to me." Touching Xena's face. "You are such a romantic when you want to be."

"I am just happy that I can tell you the truth now. I have held so many things back, just because I wasn't sure of what your reaction would be."

"Well you know now. I love everything there is about you, I will always love you."

"I love you too, Gabrielle." Softly placing a kiss on Gabrielle's cheek.

"If this is a dream, please don't wake me, I think I would cry eternally. By the gods, I never want this to end."

"Shhh, it may have to. I think I heard someone in those bushes over there. Stay here."

Xena stood up and started to walk towards the rustling noise she had heard. She took a few more steps and looked up to see three people shooting down from the trees. She held her chakram and readied herself for a fight until she realized it was amazons. She quickly raised her arms over her head and Gabrielle did the same. As they landed Xena heard her name from one of the masked amazons.

"Xena, Queen Gabrielle, we finally found you." Epinon said lifting her mask, the other amazons did the same but said nothing.

"Epinon?" Xena questioned.

"Epinon!!" Gabrielle exclaimed and rushed over to hug her amazon sister.

"Queen Gabrielle I am happy to see you too!!" Epinon said in an exhausting voice.

"What's the matter Epinon? Is the nation in trouble?" Xena asked.

"Yes, Xena. I am afraid it is. We have been exposed to a horrible illness. A few of our sisters have died within the last week."

"By the gods, I am so sorry!! From what?" Gabrielle sympathetically inquired.

"That's the problem, we have no idea what is making them sick. It starts off with a horrible rash and then violent vomiting occurs, within a few hours, a high fever accosts their bodies and we are unable to break it. Before they know it, they slip into a coma.....and none have survived. We didn't know what else to do. Ephiny sent me to find you, thank the gods I did."

"I am glad you did. It will take us a second to pack up our gear and we will follow you home. We have to find out what is causing this, and stop it before it takes any more lives."

"We'll be just a minute Epinon." Gabrielle replied.

Gabrielle and Xena walked to pack up their gear. Xena couldn't help but wonder what kind of illness could take so many lives in such a short time. It had to be game of the gods, it just had to be. She knew of no other reason for any unnecessary death.

"Xena? You have that look. What is going on inside that head of yours?"

"The gods Gabrielle, it must be a play from the gods. How else could the lives of so many die from an unknown disease? There is no other explanation. There can't be. Someone up there is angry about something and is taking it out on us. I am gonna find out if it kills me."

"Hopefully it won't come to that. We have some unfinished business to take care of my dear." Smiling at Xena she reached out for her hand and squeezed it.

"Yes we do my little bard. I won't forget, I promise. We will have our time in Elysia, you will see."

"You sound confident of that."

"I have many skills." Xena purred as she brushed her lips on Gabrielle's earlobe.

The group started their journey on their way back to the amazon village. Epinon hoped that Xena would be able to find a cure for this unknown illness. She had seen 3 of her sisters die from it, and it was becoming all too painful to watch.

"Xena, I hope we can figure this thing out. I don't think I can stand watching anymore of my sisters die."

"Epinon, I promise you and all of the nation, I will do everything I can to find out what is making this happen."

"Xena, do you really think that we can help?" Gabrielle asked.

"That's what we are going to find out. C'Mon I think we are getting close."

"Yes we are actually. The ridge to the left has been altered so we have a better path from this direction. It should only be another few minutes or so before we see some of the guards." Epinon explained.

No sooner did she finish those words when down came guards from the trees to welcome their queen and her group.

"Hi girls! We are so glad you could make it. Queen Gabrielle, we are honored as usual." Teresa exclaimed.

"It's nice to be home! Where is Ephiny? I can't wait to see her."

"She is in her hut.. She is very despondent right now. When Solari got ill she closed herself in her hut and wont see anyone." Teresa explained.

"Solari?? Ill??? When did this happen?" Epinon questioned.

"She became ill shortly after sunrise this morning. She was hit with the rash and became violently ill. The fever isn't bad yet, but its only a matter of time before that kicks in too, unfortunately."

"Well, we will just have to make sure that it doesn't get any worse. C'Mon Gabrielle." Xena comforted.

Xena and Gabrielle walked away from the rest of the other amazons in hope to speak with Ephiny. They walked in silence, both engrossed in thought, hoping that it wouldn't be too late for Solari. Ephiny's guard outside of her hut stopped them as they approached.

"Our regent will see no one." She exclaimed.

"You are new around here, right?" Gabrielle mused as the guard nodded. "Do you know who I am?" She questioned authoritatively.

"No I'm sorry I don't. I am new to the amazons here."

"Well let me introduce myself. I am Queen Gabrielle, I think she will see me, don't you?"

"You.....um.....your highness.. I am so....sorry." Falling to her knees.

"It's quite alright. Just let me in. She will want to see me. It's been too long."

"As you wish my queen."

Xena rolled her eyes and smiled as the young guard fumbled with the door to open it for her queen.

"It's OK, you can breathe now." Xena whispered.

Gabrielle looked into the hut and found it dark and solemn. She looked hard and found Ephiny laying on her bed in the fetal position.

"Ephiny?" There was no response. "Ephiny?"

"GET OUT OF HERE!! I TOLD THEM I WANTED NO..... Gabrielle? Xena? By the gods I have never been more happy to see anyone in my life!!" Ephiny exclaimed as she began to wail into Gabrielle's embrace.

"Ssshhhhh. We are gonna try and get to the bottom of this, I swear. If anyone can do it , it's Xena, you know that." Gabrielle said as she comforted her friend.

"Ephiny, I will search out everything possible to find out what the cause is of this horrific illness. I give you my word as a warrior and as a friend." Xena stroked Ephiny's sobbing head as she spoke.

Xena left the two regents in the hut alone so she could begin her search for answers.

"Oh Gabrielle, if I lose Solari, I don't know what I will do. I love her so much. While you have been away, she and I have become bondmates. We grew very close and felt something more than friendship, and decided to try a relationship. It has been wonderful, until now. I can't lose her, I just can't. I will die myself, I swear I will."

"Oh no!! We will do everything to stop this before it comes to that. OK?" Ephiny nodded.
"Alright, this is gonna be painful, but I have to ask just for reference. How long is this whole process?"

"Well, the rash is the first thing to show on the body. That stays for the entire duration. Next comes a terrible bout of vomiting which lasts about a day or so. The last thing to set into the body is the fever. This is what terminates the life. They get such a high fever, that they slip into a coma and don't come back. That is usually on the second or third day."

"OK then. Solari just came down with the rash this morning, right? So that means that we still have a few days. Is this thing contagious?"

"I don't know for sure. It very well could be, since those that have been in the infirmary have been the ones to contract it the fastest."

"OK, so keep as many people out of there as possible. Only the ones treating them should stay, and even they should keep something over their mouths, so they don't breathe in too much of the

germs."

"OK, I will tell the healer. She will inform the rest."

"Alright then. So uh, who is the new guard you have posted outside of your door? I don't recognize her."

"No, you wouldn't. Her name is Charissa. She is from another nation. She came very highly recommended from her circle of sisters. We brought her on as a royal guard. She has only been with us for a couple weeks actually. She is doing a great job."

"Good, we need as much good help as we can find right now. We need to concentrate on this disease."

"Yes we do. We have lost too many of our guards as it is. We are up to 3 deaths already. Gabrielle thank you so much for being here. It is a great relief to know that Xena is on this mission. I know she will do what she can for us."

"Xena thinks of you as family, as do I Ephiny. Believe me when I tell you that she will figure this out.....I also have a bit of news that may cheer you up a bit."

"Good, I could really use it."

"Xena and I.....well, we finally admitted our feelings to each other."

"Gabrielle that is wonderful? So does that mean that you guys finally....."

"No, not yet. What do you mean finally?" Ephiny smiled and raised her eyebrow at her naive queen. "We could have done that easily, but we heard Ephinon first, so lets say that the timing was all wrong. I know now that she loves me though. That alone will be enough for me if I were to die today." Looking at her friend's saddened face. "Oh Ephiny, I am so sorry. I didn't mean that. Me and my big mouth!! C'Mere" Gabrielle continued to console Ephiny.

Xena was walking through the nation talking with everyone that would listen. She was trying to find any clue to this unknown phenomenon. She asked about the amazons diet, was there any change at all in the menus that the cooks prepared. She came up empty everytime. She was beginning to feel beaten when she went back to her original thought of the gods.

'If I know Ares, he has got something to do with this. I just need to find out what it is before its too late. Solari needs our help and fast.' She thought to herself as she walked back towards Ephiny's hut. Gabrielle was outside of the hut talking with Charissa.

"Hi Xena! Did you find anything?" Gabrielle asked.

"No, not yet. Trust me, I will get to the bottom of this. How is Ephiny doing?"

"Not well. Xena, she and Solari became bondmates a few months back, isn't that wonderful?"

"Yes it is. Now I hope for their sake that I can figure out what is going on here."

"Oh, I am sorry. Xena this is Charissa. She is new to the royal guard. Ephiny speaks very highly of her."

"Nice to meet you."

"Xena, it is an honor to meet you. My sisters have always spoken very highly of you. Your name is known in my family and my mother wanted me to grow into a woman like yourself. I hope I can do you justice."

"Well, I don't know what a great role model I have been in the past, but it seems that you are on your way to being a well respected amazon. That alone is a great accomplishment."

"There is nothing I wouldn't do for my leader."

"You mean Ephiny and Gabrielle?" Xena retorted.

"Oh yes, exactly." Charissa replied in a hurry.

Xena nodded at the girl and pulled Gabrielle away from her. Gabrielle gave Xena a quizzical look and Xena just kept walking.

"Gabrielle, what do you know about her? I am getting a very strange feeling about her."

"Oh, Xena. She is harmless. She has been doing a great job since she was brought on here. It's a good thing too. The three amazons that have died were on the royal guard. Talk about timing, she couldn't have come at a better time. We need her now more than ever. Just relax, she will grow on you. She seems really nice, and she seems to like you."

"Gabrielle, any woman that wants to grow up into the warrior princess has me a little concerned. I wasn't the best of people in my day, you know that."

"Well, look at you now. You are the best, most generous.....most gorgeous, most sensual, most incredible woman I know." Xena's facial features softened instantly when she heard all of the terms of endearment coming from Gabrielle.

"Yeah, well, you have a lot to do with the person I am today. You keep me in check. I would be lost without you Gabrielle, I love you." She tenderly embraced Gabrielle and kissed the top of her head. "I love you too Xena." Gabrielle replied as she kissed Xena's fingertips one by one.

"Let's find some food, Xena. I am starving."

"You go on ahead Gabrielle, I need to keep looking for clues. I'll come to the royal hut when I am finished. OK sweetheart?"

"OK Xena. I'll see you later. Be careful."

"You too, we have a score to settle."

"Oh yes we do. Paybacks Xena, just remember how sweet revenge is."

"You're not still sour about the lake thing are you? I said I was sorry."

"I know you did. I just can't let you get away with that unscathed though. You really scared me."

"My, I see I have created a monster."

"And a hungry one at that. I'll see you later. Bye for now!!"

'By the gods that woman is beautiful.' Xena said as she watched her love walk towards the mess hut. Gabrielle smirked and waved as she entered, leaving Xena with her thoughts. 'Should I be afraid? Nahhh!!'

Gabrielle seated herself in the mess hut. She was all alone until she looked up and saw Charissa staring at her.

"Do you mind if I join you my queen?" She politely asked.

"Not at all Charissa. It'll give us more time to get acquainted with each other."

"Yes it will. Thank you."

Charissa sat down across from Gabrielle and began to talk about her family and her other amazon tribe that she came from. Gabrielle tried to listen patiently, but was so hungry she only managed to hear every other word or so. Charissa stopped talking when she realized that she was only speaking to herself.

"Oh, I'm sorry Charissa. I haven't eaten in a while and I am so hungry. Do you know where the cook is?"

"Yes I will get her for you. I think they are just in the back, I don't think they heard us come in."

"Thank you, I appreciate that."

"Your welcome my queen." Charissa shot a smirk to Gabrielle and walked away to find the cook.

"By the gods, I am starving!! It seems like I haven't eaten in days!" Gabrielle moaned to herself. Her face beamed as she saw Charissa with a tray of food that would impress the gods themselves.

"I didn't know what you liked, so I got a little of everything they had left from lunch."

"Oh thank you, thank you." Inhaling the different aromas, Gabrielle began to dig in as her new guard sat and watched in disbelief.

"Where do you put it?"

"Mmpphhffhh?" Gabrielle mumbled through a mouthful of food.

"Nevermind, just go on and finish. I have to go back and check on Ephiny anyway. Enjoy my queen."

Gabrielle just waved as she devoured everything on the tray. Charissa just smiled and walked back to Ephiny's hut to stand guard once again.

Xena continued her search throughout the nation to find any clue that would lead her to a cure of the unknown disease. She went into the healer's hut to talk with the healer herself. Maybe then she could have a better understanding of this process. Myla the healer greeted her as she entered with a mask for her face.

"Regent Ephiny's orders, sorry."

"That's OK. How is Solari doing?"

"Not well I am sorry to report. She has become violently ill. This has been going on for about an hour or so. She is finally resting, probably from sheer exhaustion. This takes so much out of them, it's just awful."

"I can imagine. So how long until she gets the fever?"

"It could hit tonight, it could hit tomorrow we aren't quite sure. I know I have about three days once the fever kicks in, and then....well.... you know the rest."

Xena nodded and stayed with Solari for a bit and then walked back to Ephiny's hut to find Gabrielle. She noticed Charissa at the door and approached her.

"Has Gabrielle been back here yet?"

"Yes, she came in here after she had some food. She said she was feeling a little tired so she said to tell you she was in the royal hut."

"Thanks. Bye" Xena said as she walked to meet with Gabrielle .

"So long warrior princess, so long." Charissa taunted quietly.

Xena walked into the royal hut and found Gabrielle asleep on their bed. She walked up to her and began to stroke her hair back, then she noticed Gabrielle's face had broken out in a rash. Nervously, Xena tried to awaken Gabrielle from her sleep.

"Gabrielle, wake up now, I'm here." Gabrielle barely stirred. "Gabrielle, it's Xena, please wake up. C'Mon sweetheart, talk to me." Gabrielle opened her eyes and she noticed the fear in Xena's.

"Xena? What is it? What's wrong?" Gabrielle questioned.

"Your face Gabrielle. You have a rash on your face. Did you go into the healers hut at all?" Gabrielle shook her head. "Are you sure, not even to see Solari?" Gabrielle repeated her gesture, this time she had fear in her eyes.

"Xena, what kind of rash is it, can you tell? It is beginning to itch."

"Oh, Gabrielle I have no idea. Where have you been since I left you, exactly."

"I went into the mess hut and ate with Charissa, she left, and then I went back to Ephiny's hut. That's it I swear! Oh Xena I am so tired, what is happening?"

"I don't know for sure, but I think you have been hit with the illness. Let me check the rest of you."

"Xena if you wanted to see me naked, all you had to do was ask." Gabrielle smiled and allowed Xena to undress her. The rash had spread to her whole body. The expression on Xena's face left no mystery in Gabrielle's mind.

"That bad huh?"

"I'm sorry to say. Gabrielle I promise you, I will find out what is going on here. I am gonna

investigate for a little while, but I will be back I swear. Let Myla help as much as she can, OK. Be a good patient. I won't be long my love."

"Xena, please hurry. I am a little scared. I don't want my last moments to be without you."

"Gabrielle, you are not going to die. I won't let you. We have too much ahead of us. You just hang on for me.....for us." She clutched Gabrielle's hand. "For us. I love you." Xena kissed Gabrielle's lips and left the hut to get the healer.

Xena told Myla of Gabrielle's illness and went to Ephiny's hut. She walked inside after not seeing a guard and found Ephiny asleep on her bed.

"Ephiny? Are you asleep?" She moaned and rolled over to see Xena hovering over her.

"Xena? What is it? Where am I?"

"What? What do you mean where are you? You are in your bed. What happened Ephiny?"

"All I know is that someone came in here as my back was turned and hit me on the back of my head. They must have put me into bed to make it look like I was sleeping." Rubbing the back of her head. "Yeeesh, this lump is a good one. Ouch."

"Where is that guard that was supposed to watch out front? Charissa I guess her name is."

"You mean she wasn't out there when you arrived?"

"No she wasn't. Ephiny, what do you know about her? Did you do a thorough check on her before she came here? Which tribe did she come from?"

"She came here highly recommended. I put out word that we needed some assistance here with the illness, and then the northern tribe of amazons sent word that they were sending someone to help us. Why do you ask Xena?"

"Well, I just don't get a good feeling about her. I can feel that she is involved in this somehow. I just don't know how she ties into it, but I am going to find out. Where is this other tribe's location?"

"If you ask Eponon she will give you travel instruction on how to get there. She has friends there, maybe she can go with you."

"Good, because we don't have much time. Gabrielle has come down with this illness and we need to hurry."

"Oh no!!! Not her too. What is happening?" Ephiny's eyes began to well.

"Don't worry Ephiny, I will be back shortly. Solari and Gabrielle are as good as healed. I promise you."

"Please hurry Xena."

"I will, don't worry." She gave her friend a warrior handshake and left to find Eponon.

Xena found Eponon and explained her fears about Charissa privately. Eponon and Xena got on their horses and rode the northern route to the other amazon village. They rode their horses hard, but arrived in the village right after sundown. They were approached by two guards at the village gate.

"Stop, why do you want passage here?" One of the guards asked.

"I am Xena. I need to speak with your queen. It is a matter of life or death."

"I know of you Xena. Your name is very well known to our sisters. What is your problem?"

"Look, there is no time for this. I need to speak with your queen...."

"I am Eponon. My queen is very ill and we must speak with yours. I know Queen Malais, she will speak to me. Please, several of my sisters have died already."

"As you wish, I will escort you to our queen."

"Thank you." Xena replied and followed her into the village.

The three of them entered the village and the guard sent word for the queen to come and speak with Xena and Eponon. The queen after several moments, met with them on the practice field where she was training some of her amazons.

"I am Queen Malais. I have been told of your problem. What can we do to help? Eponon it is a pleasure to see you again."

"Yes, you too, thank you." Eponon replied.

"Queen Malais, what can you tell me about your sister Charissa?"

"Charissa? Why what has she done now? We haven't seen her for many moons."

"What? Do you mean to tell me that you didn't send her to the nation to help out Regent Ephiny?"

"No I am sorry I did not. She is not one that I would recommend sending anywhere. She was a very large problem in our tribe. We asked her to leave since she was causing so many issues among our sisters here."

"So you are sure you had nothing to do with her arrival in Themiscrya."

"No none at all."

"What kinds of things did she do here before she was asked to leave?"

"She helped in the healing hut. She worked very closely with our healer here, but the women didn't like the way she handled them. She was very cold and very heartless at times. We didn't think she would fit in well here. She had some strange nature about her as well. I think she had a lot of inner demons that she was fighting. She lost her family at a young age and we raised her here as one of us, but she never quite fit in."

"Was she ever involved in acts that were violent or harmful to the other amazons?"

"Yes, unfortunately she was. She was quite the troublemaker. When she was old enough, we asked her to leave. Like I said it has been awhile since I have seen her."

"Did she ever work with the herbs or potions with the healer?"

"Well I guess she would have been around them, since she did spend quite a large part of her day with her."

"I'm sure she has something to do with this. She must be poisoning the amazons herself, but why?"

"I don't know Xena. Maybe out of some sick revenge to get back at us."

"Hmm, it can't be, why wouldn't she have done this to your tribe then? I have to keep looking. I must find the solution and fast. Gabrielle's life depends on it."

"Solari's too." Epinon chimed in.

"We have to get back Epinon. Queen Malais, thank you for your time and information."

"You are welcome Xena. I hope that you can find the answers before it's too late."

"Me too. Thanks again!! C'Mon Epinon we have to hurry."

The two left the village and charged out of the village on their horses. They pushed their horses even harder this time. They needed to get back before it was too late.

Gabrielle's illness had progressed into a violent stage. She had begun to vomit uncontrollably. She kept calling out for Xena, even in her worst moments, her love was all she could think about. Even the healer couldn't prepare herself for what was in store for her queen. Gabrielle was the most loved of their queens, and she hated to see her suffer in this way. Solari's fever had increased to levels she couldn't consciously handle anymore. Her body shut down and she fell into a coma. Ephiny held her hand and refused to leave either of the amazon's bedsides. She waited patiently for Xena and Eponon's return.

Around midnight, Xena and Eponon galloped back into the village. They found Ephiny in the healer's hut and weren't prepared for what was waiting for them inside. Xena was instantly insane with worry once she saw Gabrielle.

"Gabrielle!! Can you hear me? Ephiny, how long has she been like this?"

"For a couple of hours. Solari is in a coma now. It's any guess how long it will be until she leaves me."

"Ephiny, she is not going to leave you. The problem is Charissa. We need to find her. Once we do that, we can find out what she gave them and find an antidote for the poison."

"That's all fine and good Xena, but where is she? I haven't seen her since this afternoon."

"She's not far. She will want to make sure that her plan has worked. My guess is she is hiding in the woods, just close enough to this hut to watch everything that we do. I am going to find her if I have to die trying....Oh Gabrielle, I promise you with every fiber of my being that I will save you. I love you, my little one." Xena's eyes began to tear as she kissed Gabrielle's forehead as she left the hut in search of Charissa.

Xena walked behind the hut to look for the girl responsible for the deaths of three amazon guards, poisoning her friend Solari, and bringing harm to her beloved Gabrielle. As far as she was concerned, Charissa would pay very dearly for her crimes. She heard some rustling and unsheathed her sword from its scabbard. She slowly looked through the trees looking for any kind of ambush awaiting her. She stopped dead in her tracks and taunted the night sky.

"Ares, I know you are here. The hair on the back of my neck is on end. Show yourself." Xena

looked around and saw a bright blue light, and Ares now stood before her.

"By the gods Xena, I hate that you can do that."

"What are you doing Ares? Having fun with the lives of others again?"

"Oh Xena, what is it this time that you think I have done?"

"Oh come on Ares. Only you would have something to gain from the deaths of others. What's in it for you?"

"You are my stakes as usual, my dear." Ares replied as Charissa came from behind a tree.

"This little girl needed my help. I scratch her back she scratches mine..."

"And plenty of people die in the process. What do you want now?" Xena's patience were gone now.

"You my dear. You will be what I want until I get..what I want."

"Never Ares, I will never follow your lead again. How many times do I need to remind you of that fact? Those days are over. My life has new meaning now."

"Because of your little friend? Your little dying friend?" Ares chuckled amusing himself once again.

"What did your little slave do to her?" Xena asked angrily.

"Oh nothing that can't be undone, just say the word Xena and all will be restored."

"What did he promise you Charissa? I can guarantee that it will never pan out."

"He told me if I killed off the amazon guard and their queen, I could rule in her place. Then I would be able to wage war on those bitches that threw me away like garbage!!! If your friend died, you would go back to him. It was a fair deal in my opinion."

"Only if Ares was in control of the amazons. Didn't he tell you that Gabrielle was the chosen one of his sister, the goddess Artemis? This will come as quite a surprise to her I am sure. Shall we deal her into this hand, Ares? I doubt you could bluff your way out of this."

"You lying bastard!! You knew I could never have what I wanted and still you used me!!!"

"Charissa, there is still time for you to redeem yourself. What kind of poison did you use? If we hurry we can make an elixir to help them before they die too!!!"

"I can't believe you used me like that!!!" Ares smiled at his accuser.

"Come on there isn't much time!! Don't think about Ares, he does that all the time. He uses people for his own gain, don't feel exceptional. Charissa, people will die if you don't help me now!" Xena screamed at her.

"Fine! I will help you." Turning to Ares. "You bastard!" She spat at Ares as he faded away into oblivion, laughing at her tauntingly.

"C'Mon we have to go, now!!"

Xena grabbed Charissa and took her to the healer's hut to make a cure for her friends. Charissa grabbed a few things and started to make the antidote.

"I will finish this, if you promise I won't be killed for my actions."

"I can only promise that I won't kill you unless you don't finish. Now do it!!"

Charissa finished her concoction and gave it to Xena. Xena gave a small amount to Ephiny to give to Solari. Xena took the rest and lifted Gabrielle's head to pour it in her mouth. Both of the amazons had ingested the treatment, and now it was just a matter of time to see if it worked.

Xena called in the guards to put Charissa into custody until justice could be served to her.

"Ephiny, this has got to work. I can't live without her. She is my absolute reason for living! I can't remember loving anything as much as I love her." She held Gabrielle in her arms waiting for her to wake so she could look into her beautiful eyes. "Please wake up Gabrielle, we have so much time to make up. This isn't fair!! I finally know what my destiny is, and it's taken from me. What do I have to do?" Xena sobbed into Gabrielle's lifeless body while she rocked her back and forth.

"Did Charissa say how long this would take?"

"No she didn't. I guess we just have to wait. I will kill her with my bare hands if she lied to me."

"Let's just wait and see. We have had enough death here to last us quite awhile." Ephiny wept while holding onto Solari.

The two waited anxiously for the awakening of their bondmates. A bright light penetrated the hut and Artemis soon appeared before Xena and Ephiny.

"I see that my brother has made a mess out of things again. He needs to control his greed. I can restore all that has happened if you can do one thing for me Xena." Artemis said to the two women sitting before her in awe.

"Anything, Artemis, I will do anything. Please, just don't let her die."

"Love her."

"That's all?"

"Yes, it is a simple task. You have proven your loyalty to me by searching out the cause of these deaths to my amazons. You have proven bravery against my brother and a will against his need for power. Gabrielle is my chosen queen. Just love her every day and all will be restored to what it was before."

"I promise you, I will never hurt her, lie to her, or harm a hair on her beautiful head. I will die protecting her, I love her, she is in my soul Artemis. Please know this to be the truth."

"I do." Artemis smiled at Xena and then turned to Ephiny. "As for Charissa, I will see that she is taken care of for her crimes. No one harms my amazons without punishment. Don't worry, I will take into account that she was steered by my brother, but her past is not a pretty one either. I am fair as she will see." Looking back at Xena, "Take care of her Xena.....all...is.....restored." Artemis' voice changed to a whisper as her figure vanished before their eyes.

Gabrielle and Solari began to stir and Xena and Ephiny cried out exuberantly.

"She did it! She really did it. You are okay!!" Ephiny cradled Solari as she regained her consciousness.

"Yeah, I think I am. Oh my head. It feels like a rock hit it." Solari said as she felt her lover cling to her while she whimpered.

Xena and Gabrielle did not speak. They could only cry in their joy of Gabrielle's convalescence. They just remained holding and rocking each other, sobbing into each other's arms.

"I love you Xena."

"I love you too, Gabrielle. Don't ever leave me. I don't think I could live without you."

"Hopefully, you will never have to. Artemis, thank you, if you can hear me, thank you for bringing me back to her."

The two couples stayed in the healer's hut until the morning light shined through the window. Each of the sickened amazons were stronger and were wanting to move out of the hut. Myla, the healer was overjoyed to see the progress of her queen and her guard.

"Thank the gods, they are well." Myla exclaimed as she escorted the newly revived women from her hut.

Ephiny and Xena walked Solari and Gabrielle out into the village so the nation could see them, alive and well. Much to their surprise they saw the three royal guards that had died waiting for them as well.

"Thank the gods!!! They are alright, Artemis thank you!!" Ephiny exclaimed as she hugged her royal guards.

Xena and Gabrielle just looked on in amazement of the power that Artemis held.

"She brought them back from the dead. That is a power that can't be trifled with." Xena whispered to Gabrielle.

"That is why mortals will never have it. They would just abuse it for their own use. No one would ever learn from their mistakes. It would be awful."

"You can say that again. How are you feeling? Can I get you anything?"

"I would love some breakfast. I am starving. I don't think I have ever thrown up so much in my life."

"Well, I hope not. There would be nothing left of you. I love you just the way you are."

"Kiss me Xena, please?"

"Here? In front of all.....?" Gabrielle stopped Xena's words with her mouth on hers. The kiss knocked Xena right out of reality. She and Gabrielle were the only people on this earth. The amazons looked on in awe. They had never seen such a display of true love in their lives. It made them happy to see their queen alive and in such good hands, so to speak.

Gabrielle's rumbling stomach broke apart the kiss.

"Let's go eat. I need to show you something later."

"Oh? I can hardly wait. Uh, how much later?"

"Patience is a virtue Xena. Let's have a nice breakfast....in my chambers. I will have them bring the food to us." Gabrielle motioned to one of the guards and told her of her new plans for breakfast. The guard agreed to have some food sent to her hut.

"Royalty does have it's perks." Xena mused to Gabrielle.

"Yes, and you will be a recipient of them all."

"Shall we go?"

"After you."

"Oh no, my queen after you."

The two laughed as they made their way to the royal chambers. Xena opened the door for her companion as they walked in.

"Oh, I don't think that I have ever felt this alive before."

"Gabrielle, you were barely alive for the last day or so. I can see why you would feel that way."

"I have so much energy, it feels incredible. Come here Xena." Xena sat next to Gabrielle on the bed.

"Hmm? What is it?" Xena asked.

"I need you, now. Breakfast can wait."

Xena, not thinking twice about the offer, grabbed Gabrielle close and began to kiss her passionately. Their tongues were elated with their reunion. The soft moans that were escaping Gabrielle's lips were driving Xena mad. Gabrielle began to suckle on Xena's earlobes and whispered words of passion into her ears. Gabrielle felt Xena's body begin to shift and tremble, as she pulled away from Xena's embrace.

"Xena, you must take off this armor before someone loses an eye, mainly me."

"OK Gabrielle" Laughing. "Can you give me a hand please?"

"I can give you two." Gabrielle purred as she held Xena's face in her hands while Xena struggled to remove her armor.

Gabrielle held her stare into Xena's eyes and saw nothing but raw desire in them. Xena's face had never looked so serious, that made Gabrielle began to worry.

"Xena, what is it."

"I don't think that I have ever made love to anyone before. Yeah, I have had sex with people, on many occasions."

"Xena, I don't need to hear how many."

"Sorry, I was just trying to say, that you are so special to me Gabrielle. I love you more than I have loved anything in my life before. That kind of love is very new to me and I guess it's a little scary."

"Wow, I never thought I would hear you say that word in reference to yourself before. It sounded too strange coming from you. I completely agree, though. I thought that I loved Perdicus, but I think that his love was more on the lines of a brotherly love, you know? We were from the same town, we were betrothed at one time, and I guess he is all I thought I would ever have. I never should have married him, knowing that there was something missing."

"Well, we all learn things differently. Some lessons are harder learned than others. I am just glad that I got you back. I will never again lose you, to anyone. That is a promise my love."

"I love you Xena."

"I love you too. Let me show you how much."

"Xena, I , don't know what to...do."

"Don't worry. Just follow my lead, you will do wonderfully. You are a quick study, I am sure it won't take you long to figure it out. I have faith in you." Gabrielle gave her a quick smile and then took her face in her hands and kissed her very delicately on her lips.

Xena took the remainder of her armor off and began to strip Gabrielle of her unnecessary clothing. The two women sat naked next to each other in total silence. They looked at each other with a new appreciation. Their bodies had never evoked such a passion before, but now they could indulge in the beauty illuminating from them. Xena was the first to break the trance. She stroked Gabrielle's face with the side of her hand as Gabrielle moved into the sensation. Sitting on the bed the two faced each other. Xena leaned in and kissed Gabrielle's neck and shoulder. Gabrielle reached out and held Xena closer. The contact was making Gabrielle very moist with desire. She needed to feel Xena's body on top of hers. She slowly leaned back and pulled Xena on top of her. Xena spread Gabrielle's legs with her thigh and positioned herself between them. Xena could feel Gabrielle's wetness on her stomach, which increased her desire as well.

Xena kissed Gabrielle fiercely and began to explore her body with her tongue. She moved down and took one of Gabrielle's nipples into her mouth. Slowly moving her tongue over it, Gabrielle began to moan. Her nipple stood very erect and Xena continued to stroke it with her tongue. Gabrielle's body began to thrust into Xena's and Xena met her lovers' pace with her own body. Xena slowly moved her hand down Gabrielle's well toned abs and found herself asking permission to move lower.

"Gabrielle, I need to feel you. Can I touch you?"

"Oh Xena.....please....I need to feel you touching me. I want you. I want you now!" Gabrielle's voice turned into desperate pleading, when she realized that her body was in need of release.

"Please, Xena, touch me."

"Oh yes, I can feel you. Oh Gabrielle, you are so wet." Xena's hand explored her lover's sex. She found Gabrielle's opening and slowly entered with one finger, never taking her eyes off of her. Slowly she pushed it in and pulled it out. Over and over she entered Gabrielle feeling her own body react with every movement of her lover's. Gabrielle started to moan much louder and was very close to climax when she felt Xena's tongue touch her swollen clitoris. Her tongue moved in slow even strokes. Gabrielle had never felt anything so incredible in her life. She was no longer in control of her body. Her hips began to buck wildly off the bed. Xena held onto her until she had given Gabrielle the largest orgasm she had ever known.

"OH...OH...BY THE GODS.....XENA!!!!" Gabrielle's voice echoed through the amazon village claiming the warrior princess over and over.

"Gabrielle you are so beautiful. I love you so much." Xena held Gabrielle's shaking body until her aftershocks subsided. Gabrielle rested her head on Xena's shoulder while Xena caressed her back.

"This feels so right. I can't believe it took us so long to reach each other. Are we that stupid that we couldn't see this coming?" Gabrielle asked.

"I had hoped for this, but was never quite sure it would happen. I am glad it has though more than you could ever know." Xena replied seductively.

"Xena, show me how to love you."

"Gabrielle, you don't have to if you aren't ready. I would be satisfied with just making love to you forever."

"Xena, I want to. Please, I want to give back at least a little of what you have given me these past few years."

Xena rolled onto her side and faced her lover. She took Gabrielle's hand and moved it down her body. She guided Gabrielle's hand to her breasts and showed her how she liked to be touched there. Gabrielle leaned in and took Xena's nipple into her mouth. Xena was taken off guard and let out a sigh of craving and want. Her arousal had almost peaked when Gabrielle wanted to see more of what Xena favored. She took her hand down to her sex and Gabrielle's face changed from intrigue to fervor. She needed to make Xena feel the way she had only moments ago. She stroked Xena's sex from top to bottom, leaving no area untouched. She loved the way she felt, soft, velvety folds of skin, in need of attention. She found Xena's clitoris and began to lightly stroke it. Xena pressed Gabrielle's fingers down hard on it. Gabrielle moved her fingers harder and harder in a circular motion, until she could feel Xena's body begin to shake and shudder. Xena's body was sweating profusely with a need for release. Gabrielle's hand moved faster and faster until she heard her name uttered in a guttural moan.

"YES....GABRIELLE.....YES....." Xena shouted over and over.

Her body shook from her climax. Gabrielle held her shaking lover and began to hum into her ear. Xena's body started to slowly relax in the arms of her lifemate. Gabrielle and Xena never quite ate breakfast but they were satiated just the same. The two stayed in each others arms until Morpheus claimed them for his own. Their sleep was peaceful and their dreams magical.

The two awoke in the late afternoon and neither had moved until they were sure the other was awake.

"How did you sleep my queen?"

"Like I have never slept before. I had the most wonderful dreams about you and I."

"Me too. I can honestly say that I have never felt so at ease in my life. I owe it all to you my bard."

"I can't take credit for it all Xena. You had to want this at one time before you could even try to accomplish it."

"That's true, but without you, I don't think I would have wanted peace as much as I do now. I probably would have tried it for awhile, but without you to keep me there, I would have gone back to my old ways. They are much more familiar to me than this kind of life."

"Yeah, but which do you find more satisfying?"

"You are the most satisfying, Gabrielle."

"Was I OK? I mean in comparison."

"You are the best sweetheart. I love you. You are my reason, my rhyme, my life. I will spend the rest of my days and nights with you at my side."

"I can't think of a place that I would rather be."

"Good."

"Xena?"

"Yeah?"

"Were you scared when you thought I was dying?"

"Gabrielle, I was terrified when I thought I was going to lose you."

"I told you paybacks were a bitch." She said laughing as Xena grabbed her, pinned her on the bed, and tickled and kissed her mercilessly.

The two got dressed and went out to find Ephiny and Solari. They approached Ephiny's hut, but stopped when they heard what was going on inside. They had made love all afternoon and continued on well into the evening hours. Solari was well on her way to a full recuperation, and Ephiny made sure that she would see to that personally. Xena and Gabrielle decided to stay on in the village until Gabrielle's strength had fully returned. With Xena's daily assault on Gabrielle's

body, their stay was surely going to be a long and wonderful road to recovery.

The End

AUTHORS NOTES:

Thank you once again for sitting in on my little fantasy trip. Please let me know how you liked it. I can't tell you how great it is to hear from you. Send all of your hate mail to someone else!! :-)

Feedback is the ruler of all Bards!!

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