

~ Dream A Little Dream ~

by Greek Warrior

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Warning #1: This story contains love and sexual acts between two consenting adult women. If this offends you don't read this. But I would suggest that you seek professional help. So, if you're under 18, or whatever the legal age is in your area, do not read any further, just covering my backside.

Warning #2: This story contains no violence. However it does contain an injury to a main character.

Note #1: This story takes place following the Xena episode 'A Necessary Evil' and the Hercules episode 'Judgement Day'. Pretend that the queen's mask hasn't been given to Ephiny yet.

Note #2: This is my first attempt at writing fanfic. Feedback is most welcome as long as it's constructive criticism or unadulterated praise, I can wish can't I? I finished this story sometime ago, but never had the guts to post it until now. I can be contacted at XWPScribe@aol.com.

The two women were returning to the village where they had stabled Argo, Xena's war-horse, and left most of their supplies. The stoic warrior, tall and muscular with long raven hair and sapphire eyes, Gabrielle an Amazon queen and bard, shorter with lighter muscle tone, below the shoulder blond hair with a tinge of red and emerald eyes.

The bard could tell that there was something wrong with the warrior. She had not said one word in the two hours since they had left Hercules and Iolaus, not that she normally said much in the two years they had been traveling together, but this was going some even for Xena. "Are you ok?" The bard asked. When she didn't respond Gabrielle touched her arm. "Xena?" Concern in her voice.

'How do I explain to her about the kiss? Maybe she won't ask. Oh yeah, like Gabrielle's not going to question it. I can see it now, well it was like this, just in case the ambrosia didn't work and I stayed dead I had to feel my lips against yours, just once. You see Gabrielle I'm in love with you! Oh yeah, she would high tail it back home so fast Argo wouldn't be able to catch her. Stupid Xena, really stupid!' She jumped when the bard touched her arm.

"Xena, I asked if you were ok?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, I was just thinking."

"About what?" The bard knew what she hoped the warrior was thinking about, that warm exhilarating kiss. They hadn't had time to talk about it. After depositing the two 'gods' into the lava pit, they had heard about Hercules and Serena and had gone to try to help. This was the first time since the kiss that they had been alone and not running from, or to, something.

"Just hoping Hercules is going to be alright. He's going to blame himself for Serena's death." Xena hoped Gabrielle would believe that was all she was thinking about. She also hoped the bard was not too angry with her for using Callisto to help fight Velasca. She knew it would hurt Gabrielle to be around the woman that murdered the bard's husband, but she would have used Ares himself if it would've kept Gabrielle safe.

They had entered the village and headed toward the stables. "Xena, it's getting late and there's not much daylight left, do you think we should stay here tonight and get a fresh start in the morning?"

The warrior did want to stay at the inn; it would be much harder for the bard to question her with strangers around. But she knew they needed to return as quickly as possible. "We need to start back now. Ephiny will have half the village out looking for their queen if we're gone much longer."

"You're probably right, we don't need to worry them." Xena saddled Argo and Gabrielle repacked their belongings. "I'm assuming I'm riding since we're in a hurry?" She didn't really like being that far off the ground, but riding behind the warrior wasn't without its perks.

Xena stiffened, she hadn't thought about the bard riding. 'Of Gabrielle being close, very close. Of Gabrielle's arms wrapped around my waist, holding me tight. Oh gods! I was able to handle it before. But after I kissed her I can't seem to control my emotions. Every time I look at her I want to hold her in my arms and make love to her all night long. By the gods Xena, get a grip. You're going to drive yourself insane'. "Uh yeah, riding." The warrior led Argo out of the stables, paid and thanked the blacksmith.

She mounted and helped the bard up behind her. Gabrielle wrapped her arms around Xena's waist and felt the warrior tense at her touch. 'What in Hades is wrong?' All thoughts of asking were replaced with 'I won't fall' repeated over and over again as Xena urged Argo into a fast gallop.

Xena was determined to get back to the Amazon village as quickly as possible. Having Gabrielle's body next to hers was not doing the little control she had left any good. After several hours they reached the outskirts of Amazon territory and Xena slowed Argo, it didn't pay to ride into their lands at a full gallop no matter who you were. Gabrielle gave the appropriate signal to announce their arrival and several Amazons descended from the trees.

They bowed as one. "My queen, Xena, we were beginning to worry." The leader of the patrol said, then asked, "Is Velasca," she paused not sure if dead was the correct word.

Xena replied, "She's been taken care of."

"Has everyone returned? Did anyone get hurt slowing Velasca down?" Gabrielle was concerned for Ephiny; she had been high on the goddess' list of revenge also.

"Yes, everyone has returned and no one else was injured." The Amazon reassured them.

They entered the village and both women were stunned at the amount of damage. The fires that had been left burning as a hasty retreat was made to the caves when Velasca attacked had burned at least half the village to the ground.

As they were dismounting, Ephiny, Eponin and Solari dashed towards them. "I was getting ready to send out a scouting party to find you two!" Ephiny stated, the worry clear in her voice.

"What happened?" Solari and Eponin both asked.

The bard gave them a brief rundown, promising that she would tell them the entire story later.

"Both of you look tired and hungry. The dining hall survived and there's food prepared. Go get something to eat and I'll have someone ready a room."

"Thanks Ephiny." The bard smiled gratefully at her friend. "You coming Xena?"

"In a minute, I need to take care of Argo first." She watched the bard walk away. She turned to Ephiny and motioned for her to follow. "I'm worried about her Ephiny. She hasn't had time to deal with her feeling about, how did she put it... 'the one being hunted'." Xena knew that she should not be the one to comfort the bard when or if her emotions surfaced. She was afraid that she might not be able to control her feeling and do something that could not be undone.

Ephiny looked puzzled. "We'll all be here for her, Xena. But you're the one she'll turn to. You're the one she trusts."

She wasn't about to explain her biggest fear to the Amazon, her second biggest was good enough. "I'm not so sure, Ephiny, I had to free Callisto to help fight Velasca.

Ephiny cringed at the mention of the mad warlord, but knew the bard wouldn't hold that against the warrior. Gabrielle had talked to Ephiny about Xena in detail before the warrior had returned from the dead. And Ephiny knew Gabrielle was in love with Xena whether either of the two parties concerned knew it or not. She didn't know what was wrong with the warrior but she would grant her request. "I'll talk to Gabrielle and try to get her to open up about her feelings." 'Her feelings about this and about you too, Xena.'

"Thanks Ephiny." They joined Gabrielle and the others that were eating a late meal.

Solari showed them to the room they had been given. They both stated that they were too tired to bathe tonight and would just wash up. Xena turned her back to Gabrielle as the bard started to undress. She removed her weapons and armor slowly giving Gabrielle time to wash and don her nightshirt. Then she took her turn at the basin. By the time she had finished and crawled into bed,

Gabrielle was fast asleep. She propped on one elbow and watched the bard sleep by the light from the fire. 'By the gods you are so beautiful. I wish I could tell you what's in my heart but I'm afraid of scaring you, of chasing you away. I love you so much my little bard.' She turned to lay on her back and stared at the ceiling for a long time before sleep claimed her.

Aphrodite was pacing back and forth. Every once in a while she would stop to look through the window she had created to view the two women. "Well it's about time." She had been waiting for Xena to go to sleep. She had started planting the seed of a dream in Xena's unconscious mind when Artemis popped in.

"Aphrodite, what do you think you're doing?" The patron goddess of the Amazons crossed her arms over her chest and glared at the goddess of love.

"Helping along the inevitable." She glared back at her interfering sister.

"I'll thank you to quit planting ideas in their heads and leave my chosen alone."

"I'm not giving them any ideas that they haven't already had. I'm just making them more vivid. Besides they're in love and this is my arena, not yours. Don't you want your queen to be happy?"

"I want Gabrielle to be safe and she's not as long as she's with Xena." Artemis replied.

"She's been with Xena two years and she's still alive and well." Aphrodite countered.

"I'll remind you Xena took her into the middle of a war and Gabrielle did die."

"And I'll remind you that Xena's love for her brought her back. And Gabrielle's love for Xena brought her back. You can't fight love dear sister. Besides neither of them would be any good to anybody much less themselves without the other one. Their hearts and souls belong to each other, they might as well share their bodies too." Aphrodite challenged Artemis to dispute those facts.

Artemis glared at the goddess of love and vanished. 'Good, now where was I'. Aphrodite finished her task. She rubbed her hands together and grinned, this should get the ball rolling. We'll see how much of this the Warrior Princess can take. She watched as Xena became restless, the dream that she planted in her head had started.

Xena turned to see Gabrielle walk towards her, dressed only in a nightshirt. The warrior watched fascinated as the woman she loved slowly raise the garment over her head and toss it to one side, she now stood in front of the warrior, naked. Xena swallowed, hard. "Gabrielle what..." The bard closed the small space between them and placed her fingers over the warrior's mouth. Xena was staring into eyes that were filled with passion, desire and love. Gabrielle removed her hand from the warrior's mouth and placed both arms around her soon-to-be-lover's neck. She pulled Xena towards her and covered the warrior's mouth this time with her own.

Xena jerked awake and sat up in bed breathing hard. She stared at the bard sleeping beside her. 'It was just a dream. But it felt so real.' She touched her mouth with her fingertips. She could still feel her lips tingling from the contact with the bard's mouth. 'Oh gods! This is not good, not good at all.'

Aphrodite laughed, "Just wait Xena, I'm just getting warmed up." She smiled, pleased with herself. "Until tonight Xena, until tonight." Aphrodite waved her hand and the window disappeared.

Xena dressed quickly and quietly and left the sleeping bard. It would soon be dawn and she needed to calm herself down. She nodded to the sentries she passed on her way to the stream just outside the village. She washed her face in freezing water and waited for her breathing to settle.

The bard woke to find the bed empty and Xena nowhere in sight. She sighed deeply and laid her head back down. 'I've got to talk to her, find out what's wrong. When she kissed me I thought she was trying to let me know she loved me. Then when she first started breathing again, still in the sarcophagus she wanted to say something and I stopped her.' Gabrielle sat up quickly. 'What if she was going to tell me that the kiss was a mistake? I was so emotional when she appeared through Autolycus, maybe she kissed me to calm me down or felt sorry for me. I'm an idiot. Why would Xena fall in love with me when she could have anybody she wanted? That's why she tensed when I put my arms around her, she doesn't want me but she can't tell me without hurting me. Oh gods! What I'm I going to do?' Gabrielle dressed and made her way to the dining hall. She let out a breath that she had been holding when she saw no sign of the warrior. She wasn't sure she could face her right now. She grabbed a plate and joined Ephiny for breakfast.

Ephiny noticed that the amount of food the bard had on her plate was nothing compared to what she usually consumed. "Morning. Where's Xena?"

"Morning." Gabrielle was pushing the food around on her plate. "Don't know, she was gone when I woke up."

They sat in silence both lost in thought. Ephiny knew something was wrong between the warrior and bard, but she had no idea what could have gone so wrong in such a short time. 'If I can get her to start talking, maybe something will slip.' "Gabrielle, are you alright?"

"Yeah, Ephiny, I'm fine."

"You said back in the caves something about being the one hunted. Have you worked through that? I know you were scared, Hades I was scared. I wasn't thrilled with the idea of a god after me."

"Neither was I. But I knew Xena wouldn't let her kill me. I mean, she put herself at risk when she used Callisto."

"Have you talked to Xena about that?"

"About Callisto? Why?" Gabrielle asked puzzled.

"Did you stop to consider the fact that Xena might think you're just a little upset with her for freeing the woman that killed Perdicas?"

The bard opened her mouth to speak then shut it. She thought for a moment. "She knows I wouldn't hold it against her. She was doing what she thought was right at the time."

"How does she know if you don't tell her how you feel?" Ephiny wasn't sure if Gabrielle would understand the double meaning. But she felt it would be a start if she could get the two of them talking.

"I guess you're right. I don't want her thinking that I'm mad at her."

Xena had skipped breakfast and started helping the work crews with the rebuilding process. She had planned on working herself so hard each day that she would collapse at night and be asleep by the time Gabrielle came to bed, therefore not giving the bard a chance to question her.

The work crew had ropes attached to the supports of the last burned out building. They were going to pull them down and let the building collapse. Xena was holding one of the ropes waiting for the rest of the women to ready themselves when she felt eyes boring into her back. She didn't need to turn around to know it was Gabrielle.

The bard had located the warrior with one of the work crews. She stood out of the way and stared intently at the warrior. Xena was wearing her leather tunic and boots, all weapons and armor had been removed. She had also pulled her hair back into a ponytail. This gave the bard an unobstructed view of the muscles rippling below the skin as she worked. Her back, shoulders and arms had Gabrielle mesmerized. When the building came crashing down, it broke the trance the bard was in. She didn't want Xena to catch her staring and blushing so she looked at the ground and quickly walked away.

After the building collapsed Xena dropped the rope and turned to see Gabrielle bow her head and quickly walk away. As the warrior watched the retreating back she thought, 'You really are a fool warrior. How could you have thought for one minute that when she said she loved you, she meant in love. Someone as sweet and good as Gabrielle couldn't possibly fall in love with someone whose soul is as hard and dark as yours is.' She turned back to the pile of rubble to begin clearing it away and thought of it as a symbolic representation of what her life had suddenly become.

The bard entered Ephiny's hut. The council was meeting there to discuss the rebuilding of the village. "Did you talk to Xena?" Ephiny asked her.

"No, she's helping one of the work crews. I'll speak with her tonight."

"We thought about making a few changes in the layout of the village." Demetria said. "Take a look and see what you think."

Despite how she was feeling, Gabrielle became engrossed in the drawing. "I see what you're doing." She said as her eyes lit up. "With the huts and buildings arranged in this manner, the village becomes a maze. It would be difficult for anyone unfamiliar with the pattern to navigate through them."

The group of Amazons spent the entire day in Ephiny's hut. Lunch had been brought to them. Candles supplied the light when the sun started to set. Dinner came and went. They had been so caught up in the plans that none of them realized how the time had passed until Helice stood and walked to the door. "Sweet Artemis! We've been at this all day." She rubbed the back of her neck to relieve the ache.

The work crew had stopped at sunset. Xena found Solari and asked if she knew where Gabrielle was. "Yeah, she and the council are in Ephiny's hut. Been there all day talking about plans or something." Xena wanted to see if Gabrielle would eat with her. She missed the bard. She knew Gabrielle wouldn't question her in the dining hall with that many people around. And surely they could share a meal without it becoming awkward. She decided that she would bathe first then ask Gabrielle.

She retrieved a clean shift and headed for the pools. The bathhouse was made up of several rooms, each containing a bathing area. When she entered she saw several younger Amazons in one of the larger pool areas. When they noticed who it was that had entered they collectively fell silent.

Xena wondered if they were scared of her, it wouldn't be the first time she had intimidated young women. She continued to one of the smaller more private rooms in the back. She had no way of knowing that most of the Amazon village was in awe of her. They all knew the story of her death, the ambrosia and her coming back to life. And by now the story of her not only fighting but also defeating not one but two gods had made its way around. It had also been blown way out of proportion and now half the people thought she must be a goddess.

Xena had fallen asleep for a short time while soaking in the warm water. She opened her eyes and sat up quickly. She had wanted to exhaust herself today but she was also concerned about repeating the dream from last night. She would gladly take one of her nightmares over another dream about the bard. The nightmares weren't as painful. She washed her hair and bathed. She walked out into the cool night air and took a deep breath, she felt more relaxed than she had all day. She was about to round the corner of the building but froze when she heard a group of laughing women coming toward her. She could hear Gabrielle's laugh among them.

The women turned the corner and Gabrielle almost ran into her. "Xena!" The bard slipped and stumbled backwards trying to avoid contact. The others continued inside.

"I was about to go looking for you. I wondered if you wanted to have dinner?" The warrior stilled her reaction to reach out and steady the bard.

"I uh, I've already eaten." Gabrielle had to look away from the warrior's eyes, even in the dark she could see those blue orbs burning into her soul. "They brought food to us while we were in the meeting."

'She won't even look me in the eye and she's shuffling her feet nervously. Not to mention she almost fell trying to keep from touching me.' It took all the warrior's control not to turn and flee. "Ok." She was calm on the outside as she walked away, but her insides were in turmoil.

Gabrielle leaned against the building for support. 'Gods I wasn't ready for that. I almost threw myself at her feet and begged her to love me. I've got to be more prepared next time, I won't embarrass her like that.' The bard swore to herself.

Xena skipped dinner and went to their room. She sat down heavily in a chair by the fire and stared into the flames. 'She seems to be at ease with the Amazons, it's just me she's uncomfortable with. I don't know how much longer I can stay here. I owe them for helping me and for all they've done for Gabrielle and I should stay long enough to help them rebuild. On the other hand, I ought to get on Argo and get as far away from her as I can. But I can't take the thought of never seeing her again. Gods, I've screwed up this time.' She got to her feet and changed into her nightshirt. After extinguishing all the candles, she knew the light from the fire would be enough for the bard to see by, she climbed into bed. Even if she wasn't asleep when Gabrielle returned, she would be able to pretend she was.

The bard entered a short time later. She undressed and got into bed. She turned on her side and faced the warrior's back. 'She must really be tired if she didn't wake when I came in.' She reached out to touch Xena but pulled her hand back before she made contact. 'Goodnight Xena, I love you.' She thought as she turned away from the warrior. Xena couldn't hear the bard's thoughts and Gabrielle couldn't see the lone tear that made it's way from the warrior's eye to the pillow.

Aphrodite was again waiting for the warrior to go to sleep. This time she was standing in front of the window viewing the woman with her arms folded across her chest and tapping her foot. "Xena, when this is over, I think I'll have a talk with you about your sleeping habits or lack of them."

As exhausted as she was it took several hours for Xena to fall asleep and when she did the dream started again. Only this time it went on a little longer.

Xena turned to see Gabrielle walk towards her, dressed only in a nightshirt. The warrior watched fascinated as the woman she loved slowly raise the garment over her head and toss it to one side, she now stood in front of the warrior, naked. Xena swallowed, hard. "Gabrielle what..." The bard closed the small space between them and placed her fingers over the warrior's mouth. Xena was staring into eyes that were filled with passion, desire and love. Gabrielle removed her hand from the warrior's mouth and placed both arms around her soon-to-be-lover's neck. She pulled Xena towards her and covered the warrior's mouth this time with her own. She broke from the kiss and backed Xena towards the bed, stopping her just before her legs made contact. With her eyes never leaving the warrior's, she reached down and grasped the bottom of Xena's nightshirt and began to lift, slowly revealing the body underneath. The warrior's

nightshirt joined the bard's on the floor. Gabrielle placed her hands on Xena's shoulders pushed the warrior backwards until she was lying on the bed. The bard covered Xena's body with her own.

Xena sat up in bed; she was breathing hard and had broken out in a sweat. She noticed that not only were her lips tingling, this time her entire body had joined in. She ran outside and took in breath after breath of cool air trying to calm the fire that was raging in her body.

Xena again dressed and left before Gabrielle woke. She went to find Eponin to find out what they would be working on today. She found her in the almost empty dining hall. The warrior fixed herself some tea and joined the Amazon.

"I thought you might sleep in after all that work yesterday." Eponin noticed the dark circles under the warrior's eyes. "You just started living again a few days ago, you should relax some and let your strength return."

"I'm ok, I'm just not sleeping very well. What's on the agenda for today?" Xena asked, brushing off the concern of the Amazon.

"There's still two groups working on the sleeping huts. Our all-knowing and wise council wants not only an outside ceremonial platform but an inside one as well. We've got enough stored lumber to construct the outside platform now so I guess we can start on that today. That will give the crews cutting the trees some extra time to restock the lumber supply."

Xena noticed a young Amazon standing several tables away staring at them, she recognized her as one of the girls from the bathhouse the night before. "Do you want something Lissa?" Eponin asked.

"The council wanted to see you before you started working this morning." The young woman answered as she moved closer to the two older women, trying not to openly stare at the Warrior Princess.

Eponin groaned. "I bet they've made more changes. Xena, why don't you come with me, maybe between the two of us we can change their minds?"

"Eponin, I don't do councils." The warrior replied.

"Don't tell me that I know you've had war councils before."

"War councils are different. If someone plans something you don't like you just run 'em through. You can't do that here." The warrior said grinning.

Eponin stood to go. "I might!" She winked and guided the wide-eyed Lissa out with her.

Xena decided to spend time brushing and talking to Argo while she waited on Eponin. She wasn't going anywhere near the council since Gabrielle would most likely be with them, the dream was still too fresh in her mind.

The bard had not headed to Ephiny's hut; she instead was looking for Xena. She saw her heading toward the stables and followed. The warrior was brushing the horse when she entered. "Xena." She noticed the warrior stop in mid stroke and take a deep breath. "I wanted to talk to you." She said as she walked over to her. 'She seems to be tense and uneasy when we're alone. What is it going to be like when we leave here? We're alone most of the time on the road.'

'Here it comes. Where's a crowd when you need one?' "Sure," was all she could manage to say.

"I just wanted to let you know that I'm, uh, not mad at you for what you did. I mean...I understand why you did it and its ok." Gabrielle uncharacteristically stumbled over her words.

'She's not mad at me. She understands why I kissed her. Maybe I haven't totally screwed up after all.' Hope was starting to flow though the warrior.

The bard continued. "After all you were using Callisto to save me."

'She talking about Callisto, not the kiss.' The warrior kept the pain she was feeling in her heart out of the expression on her face. "I'm glad you understand about Callisto." She forced the words out in a steady voice but didn't try to say anything else as she felt her throat constricting and quickly turned her back towards Gabrielle.

In her heart the bard knew that Callisto was not the problem. But she had hoped it was because they could fix that easily. She now knew beyond all doubt that they could never resolve the barrier that had come between them. "I just wanted you to know that." She started to leave but changed her mind. She made a decision at that moment. "Xena, I'm going to stay with the Amazons. I want to try to be a good queen for them."

The warrior felt like Gabrielle had ripped her chest open and pulled her heart out. "I'm sure you'll make a very good queen, I hope they know how lucky they are." They both managed to stay calm until they were out of each other's sights.

Gabrielle ran back to their room. She leaned against the closed door and sank to the floor sobbing. 'She didn't even say she would miss me.'

Xena sat down in the straw, tears running down her face. "Well Argo I guess it's just you and me again. Its going to get real lonely out there on the road without her, isn't it girl?" The horse nosed her master.

Gabrielle went through the day in a haze. The bard made no suggestions and very few comments to the council. Ephiny was determined to talk to Gabrielle and called a recess at lunchtime. She asked the bard to stay as the others left. "What's going on Gabrielle?"

"I've decided to stay with the Amazons."

Ephiny looked stunned. "What about Xena?"

"I told her this morning."

"What did she say?"

Gabrielle told her about their conversation but not about the bard's feelings or her reaction. "Ephiny, this subject is closed to discussion. I've made up my mind." She glared at her friend, closing the discussion. "Now I'm going to get lunch, you coming?"

"Be along in a bit. I need to speak with Eponin." She wasn't lying to Gabrielle, she intended to talk with the Amazon. But right now she really needed to speak with a certain warrior.

Ephiny headed toward Xena, who was still working on the ceremonial platform, and Eponin standing off to the side staring at her. "She won't take a lunch break." Eponin said to Ephiny when she joined her. "She's done the work of ten people this morning. I can't decide if she's trying to make the rest of us look bad or if she's trying to kill herself."

"Xena." Ephiny called to the warrior as she walked towards her. "We need to talk." She maneuvered the reluctant warrior to a less congested area. "What is going on between you and Gabrielle?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Xena, she told you she's staying behind and I want to know why."

"You need to ask her that. But she made that decision many days ago when she took the queen's mask."

"That was when you were dead. Now that you're alive, why does she want to stay?"

"Like I said Ephiny, you'll have to ask her that, I'm not a mind reader. But just because I'm living again doesn't mean she changed her mind about staying." Xena gave her friend one of her best warlord stares signaling that the conversation was over.

Ephiny had her hands on her hips staring at her friend when Eponin jogged up to them. "The scouts just reported that there's a group of soldiers off the northeast corner of our border."

"How many and headed which way?" Ephiny asked.

"Looks like 50 to 75 and right now headed south, parallel with our lands." Eponin relayed the scout's report.

"Choose two people, I want them watched until they're away from our territory."

Xena spoke up. "I'll go Ephiny." She didn't know if she could face Gabrielle without doing something that would really make their friendship irreparable.

"Eponin, find Lissa and tell her to saddle a horse and get a couple of day's worth of supplies. She's going with Xena."

"I don't need anybody to go with me." Xena needlessly pointed out.

"I know that but no one goes out alone. It's the way we've always done it and I'm not going to change polices now, so you can stay here or take Lissa with you." Ephiny explained.

"Ok, ok." Xena said as she went to retrieve her gear and saddle Argo.

Lissa was waiting as Xena lead Argo out of the stable. "If you want to start out I'll catch up." Xena said to the Amazon as Ephiny headed towards her.

"Xena, if it looks like they're going to attack you can send a message back with Lissa. But please don't take any chances, we just got you back and don't want to lose you again!"

"Who me, take chances?" The warrior raised an eyebrow at her friend.

"Yes you. Be careful." Ephiny grasped Xena's arm in a warrior's grip. Xena mounted and followed the path Lissa had taken out of the village.

Gabrielle had finished eating and returned to Ephiny's hut to find out why she had never joined her for lunch. When she found the hut empty she decided to wait outside for her to return. She spotted Xena leading Argo. She also saw that she had her weapons, armor and supplies. All of the sudden the lunch she ate wasn't settling too well.

Ephiny entered her hut followed closely by a distraught bard. "She's gone isn't she?"

Ephiny didn't like what she was about to do to her friend but if it worked, in the long run it would be worth it. "Gabrielle, you knew after you told her that you were going to stay that she would be leaving at some point. What difference does it make if it's today, tomorrow or the next day? You made it perfectly clear that you would rather stay with us than stay with her."

The bard had a stricken look on her face. "Which way is she headed."

"Why?"

"I can't let her go with out saying goodbye, Ephiny!"

"Is that all you want to tell her?"

'What if I told her the truth? If she stayed then it would be out of pity?' Gabrielle almost broke down and told the Amazon everything, but stopped herself. "Yes." Was what she said to Ephiny.

'For the love of Artemis! I thought I almost had her.' Ephiny explained to the bard that Xena would be back in the next day or two.

"Why? Why did you say those things to me?" Relief and puzzlement showing on her face.

"Because she will leave for good at some point. You know she can't or won't stay here. And to be perfectly honest I have no idea why you want to. Don't get me wrong, you're more than welcome to stay. It would make my life a lot easier if you were here; you could be queen full time and make all the decisions. But if you're staying here to hide from something, you're not doing the Amazons, yourself or Xena any favors." She paused to let her words sink in. "Now, I'm going to get something to eat. Oh, the council isn't meeting anymore today so you have the afternoon free." She left the hut shaking her head in bewilderment.

Gabrielle decided to spend the rest of the day with the children of the village. She thought that she could tell them some stories and that would keep her mind off Xena. The only problem was that the only stories they wanted to hear were the ones about the warrior and their queen. So her entire afternoon was filled with memories of her and Xena together.

After several hours of riding, the two women stood on a ridge overlooking the valley below. "This is a good spot to observe their movements. We should be able to watch them all day tomorrow without moving. Let's make camp, it'll be dark soon." Xena moved back down the ridge to tend to Argo. Lissa followed and gave the same attention to her horse.

The moon was almost full and with a clear sky they could see clearly for a short distance around their camp. Both knew that a fire was out of the question, they didn't want to take a chance of it being seen by the soldiers. The warrior had settled back with one of her favorite pastimes, cleaning and sharpening her weapons. Lissa had taken out a small amount of dried meat and bread and begun to eat.

Without taking her eyes off her sword Xena asked the girl, "You've been staring at me since we made camp, is there a problem?"

Lissa almost choked on the piece of bread in her mouth. 'How did she know I was watching her, she never even looked my way?' She recovered and swallowed. "I uh, I'm sorry. I was, uh, just wondering something."

Xena put down her sword and crossed her arms waiting for the girl to continue. When nothing else was forthcoming she prompted her, "Wondering what?"

"Well, the whole village knows the story of your death and the ambrosia. And even those of us that were removed from the village know the story of what you did to Valasca and Callisto. And well, most kind'a think that, well, that you're a god." Lissa looked like she was waiting to be struck down for her impertinence.

The warrior just looked at the girl. 'So that's what the problem in the bathhouse last night was.' "No Lissa I'm not a god. I'm mortal just like you are."

"But the ambrosia?"

"It allowed my soul to reunite with my body." Xena tried to explain to the still wide-eyed girl.

"But you fought and won against two gods!"

"Won isn't exactly right, we tricked them." Lissa was still looking at her with wide-eyed awe. 'She's not going to let this go.' "Lissa if I was a god, why would I be out here now waiting to see what that group of soldiers was going to do?"

"Maybe Artemis ask you to help or maybe you just wanted to."

'Ok she's a stubborn one that has an answer for everything. Who does that remind me of.' "Did you see me working today or yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Then you saw that I was dirty and sweating. Would a god get dirty or sweat?" The warrior tried to reason with the girl.

"I have no idea."

'Great, I guess we'll do this the hard way.' Xena got up walked to Lissa and knelt in front of her. The girl almost jumped out of her skin with the warrior looming over her. "Get your knife."

"Why? What are you going to do?" Lissa could feel her heart pounding in her chest. She wondered if she had pushed Xena too far with her questions.

Xena remembered that she was dealing with a young woman and not a warrior. She gave the girl the warmest smile she could muster. "Lissa, I'm not going to hurt you. Now please get your knife."

Lissa gazed up into warm sparkling amazing blue eyes. Her heart was still pounding but not from fear. She slowly withdrew her knife and held it in front of her. "Do gods bleed?" When Lissa continued to stare, Xena waved her hand in front of the girl's eyes. 'Oops, maybe that smile was a little too warm.'

Lissa shook her head. "No, no they don't." Xena held her arm out. "I can't cut you!" She responded when she realized what the warrior had in mind.

"Yes you can. You'll be doing me a favor. People are scared of me enough already, if they think I'm a god it'll just get worse." She explained.

Lissa held the warrior's arm, at least it was a chance to touch her she thought, and made a small nick in the skin. She watched as a trickle of blood made it's way from the cut down Xena's arm. "I guess you're not a god after all. I'll clean and bandage that for you."

"Lissa, it's just a scratch. It's already stopped bleeding. Now get some sleep, it's going to be a long and hopefully boring day tomorrow." She moved back to where her saddle was and propped against it.

The young woman looked a little disappointed that the warrior had retreated but laid back and covered herself with her blanket. "Goodnight Xena."

"Oh Lissa, if you need to wake me do it from a distance, say twice the length of my arm and sword."

"Uh, ok."

"Also," Xena really didn't want to tell the girl this but she didn't want to end up hurting her either. "If it seems like I'm having a nightmare. Don't try to wake me and don't come near me."

She turned over to stare at the warrior, she couldn't believe Xena would have nightmares, she didn't seem to be scared of anything. The look on the warrior's face said 'Don't ask, just do as I say'. "Alright Xena. And I won't tell anybody about them."

"Thank you Lissa. Goodnight." Xena leaned back and stared at the sky. 'Oh gods, Gabrielle I miss you already. Is this how it's going to be from now on? Staring at the stars at night and wondering if you've found someone else to watch them with. Found someone else to sleep by your side and keep you warm on cold nights? Found someone else to hold you and comfort you when you're scared or upset? Of course she'll find someone else, she's a beautiful warm loving person, half the Amazon village would line up to get a chance with her. Great Xena, you can stay awake and think about her or you can go to sleep and dream about her, some choice! Gods I've gotten soft.' She berated herself.

"And I thought the Warrior Princess was going to be the stubborn one. I think it's about time the Amazon Queen had a dream of her own."

"Aphrodite, your sister said that you were meddling with her Amazons!" Zeus said as he appeared beside his daughter.

"It's only one Amazon and I'm not meddling. They actually should have been together before now but Xena had to go and die. That kind'a put a crimp in my style."

"Crimp in my style, what language is that?" Zeus asked. 'No wonder I can't control them, I can't even understand them.'

"Get with the times pop." Aphrodite rolled her eyes. "Go ask the Fates if you don't believe they're supposed to be together and while you're at it tell Artemis to leave me alone. Now shoo, I've got work to do." Zeus shook his head and disappeared as fast as he could. "Well at least she goes to sleep faster than Xena." Aphrodite said as she watched the bard.

Gabrielle stayed in her room most of the night thinking about what Ephiny had said. 'She was right, I'll have to get used to the thought that Xena will be leaving. When I told her I was staying here I was hoping she would try and talk me out of it. I don't want to stay here without her. Why did I have to say it? Why didn't I keep my mouth shut?' The bard silently cried herself to sleep.

The bard walked into their room and saw the warrior stoking the fire. She removed the robe she had worn back from her bath. She surveyed the room looking for her nightshirt and hadn't noticed the warrior moving up behind her. "Xena have you seen..." the words died in her throat as she felt Xena's mouth against her ear. "You're not going to need it." Between the arms that now encircled her waist and the warm breath in her ear she couldn't remember what she had been looking for. Her naked body melted against the warrior's as she felt Xena's mouth and tongue doing wonderful things to her neck and shoulders. Her knees almost gave way as she felt the warrior's fingertips lightly caressing her mid-section. When Xena turned her around, Gabrielle gazed into eyes that filled the bard with erotic desire. With lips slightly parted the warrior slowly leaned down towards Gabrielle.

The bard woke with a start. 'By the gods!' She was sitting up and breathing hard. She could feel the sensation Xena's fingers left on her stomach. She walked to the basin and splashed water on her face. She had had dreams of Xena before but nothing so real and so specific.

With the bard dreaming away Aphrodite turn her attention to the warrior. "I really should be nice and give you a break tonight Xena. But I'm a goddess and nice isn't in the job description."

Xena had fallen asleep quickly, between the hard work, lack of sleep and not eating, her body had started to protest.

Xena turned to see Gabrielle walk towards her, dressed only in a nightshirt. The warrior watched fascinated as the woman she loved slowly raise the garment over her head and toss it to one side, she now stood in front of the warrior, naked. Xena swallowed, hard. "Gabrielle what..." The bard closed the small space between them and placed her fingers over the warrior's mouth. Xena was staring into eyes that were filled with passion, desire and love. Gabrielle removed her hand from the warrior's mouth and placed both arms around her soon-to-be-lover's neck. She pulled Xena towards her and covered the warrior's mouth this time with her own. She broke from the kiss and backed Xena towards the bed, stopping her just before her legs made contact. With her eyes never leaving the warrior's, she reached down and grasped the bottom of Xena's nightshirt and began to lift, slowly revealing the body underneath. The warrior's nightshirt joined the bard's on the floor. Gabrielle placed her hands on Xena's shoulders pushed the warrior backwards until she was lying on the bed. The bard covered Xena's body with her own. With the backs of her fingers, Gabrielle traced a line, leaving a trail of sensation, down the warrior's body stopping just below the navel and then followed the same path up again. Xena watch as the bard slowly bent her head and captured the warrior's nipple in her mouth.

Lissa woke when she heard Xena thrashing around but did not start toward her until the warrior sat up gasping for air. Xena held out her hand to halt the Amazon from coming any closer. "I'm alright, go back to sleep." She watched as Xena disappeared from camp. Xena collapsed with her

back against a tree and her knees pulled into her chest. She folded her arms across her knees and laid her head on them. 'Oh gods, I can't take anymore of this.'

Gabrielle grabbed her staff and headed for the practice grounds, she needed to work off nervous energy. Eponin was teaching a class to the younger Amazons and noticed the bard watching. "Are they just starting out?" Gabrielle asked when the teacher joined her.

"Yeah, just the basics right now. Letting them get comfortable with holding and moving their staffs. The next class is more advanced, they're sparring a little. We could go a round or two if you want before the next class." The bard nodded her head. "Great."

The two women stepped out to the center of the practice field. The youngsters hung around to watch and the girls in the next class quickened their pace when they saw the sparring match about to take place. "I should warn you that I've gotten a lot better since the last time you saw me." Gabrielle explained.

"I should hope so my queen!" Eponin grinned. "Ready?"

Instead of verbally answering, the bard attacked with a barrage of different moves. Eponin was on the defensive. She gave up ground, then went down on one knee and tried a swing move that would knock Gabrielle's legs out from under her. The bard jumped the staff and the two women circled each other. "You have greatly improved. But then I need to remember who your sparring partner is." The match continued for several more minutes with each alternating between going on the attack and going on the defensive.

Gabrielle thought of the first lesson that Xena had taught her, always look your opponents in the eye. 'Their eyes will always tell you where their next strike will be'. She used this to her advantage as she led with her eyes and gave Eponin the impression that she would attack low and to the teacher's right. As Eponin brought her staff down to block the blow she thought was coming, the bard pivoted, braced the staff with her body and connected with the back of the teacher's knees. The hit was enough to put Eponin on the ground but not hard enough to hurt.

She sat up shaking her head. "I can't believe I fell for that." Gabrielle helped her to her feet. "You've learned well. When you first started out if someone would have asked me where you would be in a year or two, I never would have said this good."

"Xena never went easy on me, she said my life depended on how well I handled my staff." Gabrielle smiled as she remembered the first months of lessons the warrior made her endure. At the time she thought the only thing that she was learning was how to get knocked down and how to live with multiple bruises.

Eponin broke into her memories. "Why don't you stick around and help me with the other classes this morning?"

Xena and Lissa were comfortably sitting on the ridge watching the soldiers. They had come into view just after sunrise. "Can you make out their numbers?" Lissa asked.

"About 40. I don't believe the Amazons have to worry about them either."

"What makes you say that?"

"They have the look of a defeated group. The only supplies they have are on their backs and some aren't carrying weapons. Either their leader has lost his or her horse or they've lost their leader. And some are wounded and are being helped by others."

"You've got good eyes. I didn't see the missing weapons until you pointed it out. Are we staying another night or heading back now?"

"You're going to head back now and tell Ephiny what we've discovered. I'm going to watch for the rest of the day. If I'm right, they'll turn east in about an hour or so."

"Why east?"

"The closest city of any size is about ten days walk due east of here. That would be the only place they might find another outfit to sign up with since most warlords and mercenaries stay clear of Amazon lands. That's where I would head if I were them."

"Oh!" She paused, not certain if she should question the warrior. "Xena, why don't I stay here and we can return together? Ephiny said no one was to go out alone."

"I know Lissa, but these soldiers are no threat and Ephiny should be informed of that. Besides, I can take care of myself. Tell her I'll be back by lunchtime tomorrow." She listened as the young Amazon rode away. She could have left also, she didn't need to watch the soldiers but she did need time to think. She had found some of the bard's blank scrolls in her saddlebags along with ink and a quill. She was going to try to write Gabrielle a letter explaining everything and let Ephiny give it to her after the warrior had left for good.

She checked on Argo and retrieved the supplies. She returned to the ridge and found a comfortable position, she had a feeling that she would be at this for a while. 'Where do I start? When I first knew that I was in love with you? With the kiss? You said I taught you so many things, I wish you had taught me how to express my thoughts and my feelings.' She rested her forehead in the palm of her hand.

Gabrielle had worked up an appetite helping Eponin, especially since she had skipped breakfast. She had washed up and was heading to eat when Lissa rode in and Ephiny ran to meet her. As Ephiny walked back toward her the bard asked, "Isn't she the one that went with Xena?" Ephiny filled her in on Lissa's report.

The crew had dug the foundation for the large ceremonial building that morning and that afternoon Gabrielle helped construct the frame. By sundown the building stood in skeletal form.

The bard had exhausted herself and she was asleep before her head hit the pillow. She didn't even have time to worry about dreaming.

The bard walked into their room and saw the warrior stoking the fire. She removed the robe she had worn back from her bath. She surveyed the room looking for her nightshirt and hadn't noticed the warrior moving up behind her. "Xena have you seen..." the words died in her throat as she felt Xena's mouth against her ear. "You're not going to need it." Between the arms that now encircled her waist and the warm breath in her ear she couldn't remember what she had been looking for. Her naked body melted against the warrior's as she felt Xena's mouth and tongue doing wonderful things to her neck and shoulders. Her knees almost gave way as she felt the warrior's fingertips lightly caressing her mid-section. When Xena turned her around, Gabrielle gazed into eyes that filled the bard with erotic desire. With lips slightly parted the warrior slowly leaned down towards Gabrielle. The bard wrapped her arms around Xena's neck as the warrior's tongue explored every inch of her mouth. Without breaking from the kiss Xena picked Gabrielle up and carried her to the bed. She gently placed her bundle on the bed and lay down beside her. The warrior ran her hand down the outside of the bard's thigh circled the knee and continued back up the inside. Gabrielle's legs parted giving Xena complete access to her body. The bard's body convulsed as the warrior's fingers made contact with Gabrielle's center.

Gabrielle's eyes opened wide. She could almost feel Xena beside her still. She could feel her body wanting the release and the love that she knew only the warrior could give her. She curled up on her side wondering if Xena was as lonely as she was.

Aphrodite smiled as she watched the Amazon queen. "One down one to go."

Xena paced around the small campfire. She had finished the letter around sunset and was pleased with the way it had turned out. She was also pleased with herself that she had found a cure for the dreams, 'No sleep no dreaming.' She would pace all night if she had to.

Aphrodite on the other hand was not pleased with the warrior. "Xena, you're really starting to piss me off."

Eponin had joined Ephiny for lunch. "I heard that Gabrielle has been helping with the staff training classes."

"Yeah. She's been doing a good job. She's great with the younger kids. When's Xena due back?" Eponin asked.

"She should be back by now." Ephiny looked a little worried.

"Ephiny, what's going on with those two? They've both been acting strange since they got here and Xena looks like she hasn't slept in at least that long. And now this morning Gabrielle had dark circles under her eyes and looked like she spent the night crying."

"Did you ask her about it?" Ephiny hadn't seen the bard this morning.

"Yeah, she said she thought she might be coming down with a cold. I didn't believe her, but I didn't question her either."

"I don't know Eponin, something is definitely wrong but trying to get either one of them to talk about it is like trying to reason with a Cyclops." The conversation ended as the bard joined them.

Xena arrived back at the village just before mid-day; she brushed and fed Argo before heading for the dining hall. She hesitated for a second when she saw Gabrielle sitting with the two Amazons, but then continued towards the table and sat down. "The soldiers continued to head east." She announced to the group.

"Good. We certainly don't need anymore complications right now." Ephiny said with double meaning as she stared at the bard and warrior.

There was a twinge of panic in the bard's mind. 'I should say something to her, but I don't dare. That dream is still so fresh in my mind.' She jumped a little when Xena said her name. "Gabrielle, you look sick, are you ok?"

"Uh, yeah. Just a little cold I think. Maybe I'll go lay down for a bit." She explained as she quickly left.

"She's not the only one who looks bad Xena, are you alright?" Eponin inquired.

"I'm fine." She lied. "Still not sleeping very well. I noticed the work on the ceremonial building. Is that the current project?"

"Yes. Which reminds me that I need to get back to work. Xena if you're tired, why don't you try to get some rest. I think we can manage this afternoon without you." Eponin said as she stood to go.

"No, I want to help." She definitely didn't need to be closed in the same hut as Gabrielle. "I'll join you in a few minutes." She waited until Eponin left. "Ephiny, I need a favor."

"Does it have to do with a certain bard we both know?"

"Yes. Can we talk in your hut?"

'Talk, Xena wants to talk. Well Zeus strike me down, there might be hope yet.' "Sure," was all she said.

As the two women entered the hut, Xena withdrew a scroll from her gauntlet. "Will you hold this for two days and then give it to Gabrielle?"

Ephiny looked at the warrior. "You're leaving." It was a statement not a question.

Xena answered her anyway. "Yes, in the morning. I think it's for the best."

"Look, I know something happened between the two of you. I don't know what because neither of you will say. Have you at least talked to each other?"

"No. I've tried to explain things as best as I can in the letter. I just hope she can forgive me at some point in the future."

"Xena, if you've already decided to leave and you're leaving her an explanation why not just sit down and talk to her before you go? What have you got to lose?" She was pleading with the warrior.

"Believe me I want to, Ephiny, but I don't think I can face her and explain."

"What happened that was so terrible?" Ephiny asked, becoming almost frantic at this point. She knew that two people that belonged together more than anyone else she knew were about to leave each other and she had no clue as to how to stop it.

"You can read the letter after Gabrielle if it's alright with her."

"I'll do as you ask with the letter. But I won't be the one to tell her you're leaving. You'll have to do that yourself."

"I planned on telling her in the morning." Xena said as she left the hut to help with the building.

The outside of the north wall and half of the roof had been enclosed with lumber and she found Eponin working inside the structure. "This is going up fast."

"I pulled the crews working on the individual huts to work on this. Everyone that still doesn't have a place to sleep can use this building instead of the dining hall."

"Let me get out of this armor and I'll be back to help." She had cleaned her armor, weapons and leathers during the night, which is what kept her awake, and she didn't see any reason to dirty them again so soon. She had left all her gear in the stables since she planned on sleeping in them. She knew she wouldn't be able to stay awake again tonight and there was no way she was going to try to sleep with Gabrielle.

About a dozen or so women were working on the roof but most of the crew was taking a break when she returned. She was helping Eponin finish the north wall inside the building. "I need to get more pegs. Take a break. I'll be back in a minute." Eponin said.

Xena stood with her back against the wall trying not to think about tomorrow morning. Suddenly her feet started sliding along the floor and she realized that the top of the wall was tilting forward. It was collapsing inward and she knew that if the roof fell the women on it would be hurt or killed. She braced her feet against a support column and pushed her back harder against the wall. She heard several of the women yelling at once, "Get off it's coming down!" She knew she couldn't hold it much longer. She also knew she was trapped. As soon as she moved away from the wall it would fall and there was no way she could get out before it did.

The entire village came running with the sound. Ephiny and Gabrielle got to the scene at the same time and began helping the women that had jumped from the roof. "Looks like a couple of sprained ankles are the only injuries." The bard said.

"What happened?" Ephiny asked the women.

"I was working on the edge when the wall just started to cave in. Then it stopped for a few minutes; it was like Artemis herself was looking out for us. Those of us that saw what was happening yelled for the others to jump. And after we did, it collapsed."

Eponin had run up in time to hear the explanation. She looked around frantically. "Where's Xena?"

"I thought she was working with you." Ephiny noticed the anguished expression on the Amazon's face.

Eponin looked at the pile of rubble. "It wasn't Artemis that held the wall, it was Xena. She was still in the building."

Ephiny had to grab Gabrielle to stop her from running into the heap of lumber. Eponin stopped the others from doing the same thing. "We have to do this carefully otherwise we could hurt her more than she already is."

As Xena watched the wall and ceiling coming towards her, she had one thought. 'At least now I don't have to worry about telling Gabrielle I'm leaving.' It seemed to be happening in slow motion but in reality it hit her so quickly that she didn't even have time to raise her arms above her head. The blackness hit her just as fast.

"Eponin, we have to help her!" The bard had tears running down her face.

"We will, Gabrielle." She gave instructions to the women waiting to dig Xena out. "Start at the edges and remove one piece at a time and only if it doesn't have another piece on top of it. If there's something that's too heavy for you to lift, don't try without help, you might be dropping it back down on top of her."

The women had been working all afternoon and it was beginning to get dark. Torches and fires were started so they could continue. Solari went to sit by the bard after her turn at the pile had ended. "We'll get her out." She said trying to reassure her queen.

"I know. But will she still be alive?" Gabrielle had not moved from the spot where Ephiny had made her sit when they had started to dig the warrior out.

Xena had regained consciousness a few times and tried to move, but had blacked out each time from the pain. When she came to this time she stayed still. She traced the pain in her body to the worst injuries. The first thing that got her attention was her head, it was pounding and she could feel blood running down her face. Her right leg was hurting but she didn't think it was broken.

The injury that concerned her the most was her right side. She knew several ribs were broken and probably her lung was punctured since she could hear the gurgling in her chest when she breathed. She had no way of knowing how long she had been laying there; it might have been minutes or hours. She could hear movement all around her and then people calling her name. She took a breath to answer but as she did a horrendous pain went through her chest. As unconsciousness claimed her again, the only thing she managed to do was whisper, "Gabrielle."

Solari was again working her turn at the rubble. She moved a board and froze. "I found her."

Gabrielle jumped up running. Ephiny had to physically restrain her. The healer leaned down and took hold of the warrior's wrist. "She's alive." It only took minutes to remove the rest of the lumber from Xena since they now knew where she was. The only piece that remained was the support beam across her ribs. It took several strong Amazons to lift and hold it while others pulled the warrior out from underneath. When they had her clear, Alcestis took inventory of Xena's injuries. She had cut open the warrior's shirt on the right side where it was soaked in blood.

Ephiny let the bard go. Gabrielle ran to the warrior and knelt down by her side, "Oh gods!" She exclaimed as she saw what had caused the blood. A rib bone was protruding from the torn skin.

"It's not as bad as it looks Gabrielle." Alcestis explained. "Put her on one of these boards and take her to the queens room." She pointed to a few of the women.

The healer didn't allow anyone in the room but her assistant while she was working on the warrior. Alcestis had finished repairing the tear in her lung and Cynara had sewn the gash on her forehead. "Alcestis, she's got a bad bump and cut on her head. Do you think she'll regain consciousness?"

"Oh, I believe she will, the Warrior Princess has a very hard head." She went back to working on the broken ribs when Xena moaned and opened her eyes. "Cynara, get some water for her. Xena, you're going to be ok. Do you remember what happened?"

"Building...collapsed...did they all...get off...the roof?" Xena's breaths were very shallow as she forced the question out past a parched throat and painful ribs.

Cynara lifted her head and gave her a swallow of water. "Yes. Two sprained ankles were the worst injuries. Not counting you that is." The healer could see the pain in the warrior's face and eyes. "I can't give you anything for the pain because of your head injury, but I still have to tend to your broken ribs. I'm sorry to have to hurt you."

Xena told the healer that she understood and nodded for her to continue. It didn't take long before the pain overwhelmed the warrior and she mercifully passed out.

Alcestis left Cynara in the room and went outside to give Ephiny and Gabrielle an update. She was surprised to see that it was sunrise. She wasn't surprised when she saw the entire village

waiting. She reported on the warrior's injuries, told the crowd that she should be fine and that she had regained consciousness briefly and asked about the women that had been on the roof.

The crowd dispersed after hearing the good news. Gabrielle told Alcestis that she would stay with the warrior and headed that way. Ephiny stopped her. "Gabrielle, we need to talk before you go in there."

"It can wait Ephiny, I want to be with her."

"No it can't wait." She led the bard back to her hut. "Gabrielle, you don't need to be there when she wakes up. The only thing it will do is give her false hope."

"False hope? What are you talking about?" Gabrielle was becoming agitated with her friend. All she wanted to do right now was to see Xena with her own eyes to make sure she was all right.

The Amazon knew that she was taking a very big risk. But things couldn't get any more mixed up than they already were. 'I suppose they could hate me or Xena could kill me.' She had not read the letter the warrior had left in her care, but she would stake her life on the fact that these two people were very much in love and for some reason wouldn't admit it to each other. "Gabrielle, I'm going to ask you one question and before you say anything I want you to realize that two people's happiness and future depend on a honest answer."

"Well?" Gabrielle prodded when the silence stretched out.

"Are you **in love** with Xena?" Ephiny prayed to Artemis for an honest answer from the bard.

Gabrielle took a deep breath. "Yes, Ephiny. With all my heart." She watched as Ephiny sighed with relief. "But she doesn't love me." She added and tears came to her eyes.

Ephiny retrieved the scroll left in her care. She explained to the bard the instructions that Xena had left. She also prayed again, this time, to any and all gods that would listen that she was right and that the scroll told Gabrielle of Xena's love for her. She handed it to the bard and left the hut.

Gabrielle stared at the scroll. It was sealed with Xena's signet ring that she had used in her days as a warlord. She thought of how people must have felt in the past when they were handed a document with that emblem on it. It was probably the same way she was feeling at this moment, terrified at what was written inside. She broke the seal and started to read.

"I'll sit with her Cynara, why don't you get some rest." Ephiny pulled a chair closer to the bed.

"She's got a slight fever and has been calling out for Gabrielle. Do you want me to send her in?"

"No she's...I'm sure she'll be here before too much longer. Thank you." Cynara nodded her head and left the room.

Lissa had been hanging around waiting for someone to leave Xena's room. When she saw the assistant healer, she intercepted her. "How is she? Can I see her?"

"She's still asleep and Ephiny is with her." Cynara glanced at the young woman and recognized the look of a major crush. 'She's got it bad.' "She's going to be fine Lissa, she just needs time to heal."

Gabrielle had to stop reading several times to wipe her eyes. She couldn't believe she had been so blind. 'Xena realized that she had loved me a year ago, when she almost lost me. How could I have missed it? I'm a bard for Zeus' sake, I'm supposed to observe things and I saw no signs whatsoever.'

She found Xena still asleep. Ephiny saw the red eyed bard and began to wonder if she had made a mistake. "You were right and we've been so incredibly stupid." The Amazon sighed with relief. The bard sat on the bed next to the warrior's uninjured left side. She wanted to wake Xena and tell her she was sorry and that she loved her too, but she would be contented just to hold her hand right now.

Ephiny left the room around mid-day, looking for Eponin. "Did you find the reason for the accident?"

"Yeah, there's a layer of sand underneath the ground here and nobody knew it. When we dug the foundation for the building we got too close to the sand and the weight of the wall caused it to shift."

The warrior opened her eyes. "Water." She croaked through a dry mouth.

"Is that enough?" The bard asked her after a couple of swallows.

"Yes, thank you."

"How do you feel?"

"Like a building fell on me." Xena managed a weak joke.

"It's good to know that you haven't lost your sense of humor."

"Gabrielle, you don't have to stay with me. I understand if it makes you, I mean, if you have other things to do." The warrior couldn't look her in the eye.

"There's no where else I want to be. Xena, please look at me." She placed her hand on the warrior's cheek. "Xena, I love you."

The warrior looked into the bard's eyes. "Gabrielle?" She hesitated. "Are you saying what I hope you're saying?"

"Yes, Xena, I am." She brushed the bangs off the warrior's forehead, careful to avoid the cut. "There's so many things I need to tell you, to explain to you, Xena."

"Later, right now I just want to hold you." She gazed into the loveliest green eyes that she had ever seen. "I love you, too."

The bard stretched out on her side next to the warrior and laid her head on Xena's shoulder. "You promise we'll discuss this later?"

"I promise. And we'll never keep our feelings from each other again. Ok?"

"Definitely ok." She snuggled as close as she could get without hurting the warrior.

Aphrodite watched as the two women fell asleep in each other's arms. "Well if I had known all it took was dropping a building on you, tall dark and gorgeous, I would have done it a few days ago." The goddess felt her sister appear behind her. "No, Artemis, I didn't cause the thing to collapse and endanger your precious Amazons."

"Just checking. I just hope those two being together isn't a mistake." She stared over her sister's shoulder at her queen cuddled into the warrior's side.

"It's only been two days since the accident, but I think you're ready to get up and move around. You heal at an incredible rate Xena." Alcestis said shaking her head in disbelief. "Has this always been the case or might it have something to do with the ambrosia?"

"I've always recovered from injury and sickness quickly, even when I was a kid."

"Absolutely amazing." The healer stated.

"Yes she is." The bard commented when she entered the room in time to hear the healer's last words.

"I was talking about Xena's powers of recovery." Alcestis said grinning. "Although I'm quite sure you meant something entirely different." She returned her attention to the warrior. "Don't try to do too much and if you feel tired rest. Understand?"

"I understand." The warrior replied as the healer left.

Gabrielle sat on the bed facing Xena. They had talked and gotten everything out in the open last night. "I told Ephiny that you weren't angry with her for giving me your letter, but I think she's still avoiding you."

"I'll talk to her later. Right now you can help me dress, I've been cooped up in here for days and I want out." Restless and Warrior Princess was not a good combination.

"There's someone else you need to talk to." The bard informed her as she helped the warrior dress.

"Who?"

"Lissa, she's fallen for you. She stopped me again this morning asking about you."

"I should make you talk to her, it's your fault." She informed the bard.

"And just how is it my fault?"

"Smile at people, Xena, be nice to them, show them that you're not an ogre'." The warrior said mimicking the bard.

"I never called you an ogre. Uh, Xena? You didn't give her your best smile, you know, the one where your eyes light up and it kind'a mesmerizes people?"

"I don't know what you mean Gabrielle." She said as she gave the bard the same smile.

Gabrielle stared at the warrior, her heart pounding. "That's the one I mean. Xena, that would melt Ares' heart. No wonder she's hanging around here all the time." The bard wiped her sweaty palms on her skirt and tried to get her pounding heart under control.

They didn't get 20 feet from the door before Lissa appeared. "They wouldn't let me come see you, Xena. How are you feeling?" She asked as she gazed up adoringly at the warrior.

"Fine Lissa." The warrior was poked in the side by the bard. "Uh Lissa, why don't you stop by later and we'll talk." The young Amazon jumped at the chance then made herself scarce after a glare from her queen.

The bard watched the girl and shook her head in wonder. "She's skipping, actually skipping. Xena, from now on that smile is reserved for me and me alone. Are we clear on this?"

"Yes, my love." The warrior said taking Gabrielle's hand in hers.

"My love. Mmm, I like that. Yep, definitely could get use to that. Yes, indeedy." The bard had a warm feeling flowing through her entire being. "So, where do you want to go?"

"To find Ephiny. I fell like being a little mischievous."

"Xena, what are you going to do?" The bard noticed the glint in the warrior's eyes.

"Gabrielle, she ought to know by now that the only time she would have anything to fear from me is if she did anything to hurt you. And we both know she would never do that, so I'm just going to teach her a lesson. When we find her, stay out of sight."

They found her in her hut. The bard hid by the window as the warrior opened the door.
"Ephiny!"

The Amazon's back was to the door and her arms filled with scrolls. When the warrior called her name, in a none too pleasant voice, she jumped sending the scrolls flying. She spun around, "Xena!" The warrior slowly walked towards her without cracking a smile. Outside the bard had her hands over her mouth trying not to laugh. The Amazon's eyes were wide as she backpedaled. "I've uh, been meaning to come see you. Are you, uh, sure you should be up?" She stopped backing up when she ran out of room. "Now Xena, I can explain." She was waving her hands in front of her, trying to ward off the warrior.

Xena was now standing directly in front of her. She grabbed Ephiny around the waist, picked her up in a fierce hug and planted a kiss firmly on the startled Amazon's lips. "Thank you, Ephiny." The warrior let her down and the Amazon found that her legs wouldn't hold her. She sat down on the floor, hard. The bard entered the hut laughing so hard that tears were running down her cheeks.

When Ephiny finally found her voice she glared at the pair who had joined her on the floor.
"That was not funny."

"I thought it was. Didn't you think it was funny?" The warrior asked the bard.

"Oh Ephiny, if you could have seen the expression on your face." Gabrielle started laughing all over again. The bard's laughter became contagious and soon all three women were in hysterics.

Eponin, Solari and a few others heard the commotion and ran in to see what was going on. They stood there, confusion showing on their faces until Xena got herself under enough control to explain. "I was just showing your regent what happens to people that avoid me." She turned back and looked at the two women that had begun to regain some composure. When the three of them made eye contact the fits of laughter started again. The group standing in the doorway looked at each other shrugged and walked away.

That afternoon when Gabrielle saw Lissa leaving after the warrior's talk with her, she returned to their hut. "Well, how did it go? She didn't seem upset."

"She's actually very happy. After I explained that you were head over heels in love with her." The bard's eyes got very big. "She decided that a queen beat a princess any day."

"YOU DID WHAT?" She started talking to herself, out loud. "Calm down Gabrielle, you can deal with this." She stopped pacing when she saw the grin on the warrior's face and she knew she had been had. "Xena, remind me never to let you get this bored again."

Several days later, Alcestis gave Xena a clean bill of health. "Except for the little bit of tenderness in your ribs you're fully recovered." As she was leaving the healers hut the warrior heard Alcestis talking to Cynara. "I still can't believe she healed this quickly. It's not good for my health."

That night Xena was waiting on Gabrielle in their room. When the bard entered, the warrior was kneeling down putting more wood on the fire. Her dream immediately entered her mind. She shook her head until the vision cleared. She knelt down beside her love and stared at the flames reflecting in the warrior's eyes. "By the gods, you are beautiful." Gabrielle said in a voice filled with reverence and wonderment.

Love and desire began to churn inside Xena. She took the bard's hands and led her to a chair. Xena sat on a stool facing the woman she had come to love and respect more than anyone she had ever known. "We promised that we wouldn't hide our feelings from each other." She paused.

"You're talking about the dreams we had." Gabrielle said quietly.

"Yes, we talked about loving each other in the dreams. But not about the physical love we can share, about the desire. Gabrielle you know I would never let anything happen to you that you didn't want." She took a deep breath. "I want to make love to you. But if it's not something you're not ready for now or in the future, I'll deal with it. I never want to lose you."

"Oh Xena, I want to love you completely. To show you how much in love with you I am. But..." She looked down at her hands being held by the warrior.

Xena waited for the bard to continue. When she didn't, she prompted her. "Gabrielle, honesty, remember."

The bard gathered the courage to continue. "But I don't know how to make love to another woman." The warrior let out the breath she had been holding. Gabrielle lifted her gaze from her hands back to the woman she loved. "Will you teach me?"

The warrior gave the bard the smile that was now reserved for her lover. 'Well, lover after tonight.' Her body warmed at the thought. "I can't think of anything I'd rather do." She stood up bringing Gabrielle with her. She let go of the bard's hands and placed her hands on Gabrielle cheeks. She slowly leaned down and covered the bard's mouth with her own. It started as a gentle kiss like the ones they had shared over the past several days. When Gabrielle threw her arms around Xena's neck and parted her lips the kiss quickly turned passionate. As their tongues danced together in erotic bliss, the warrior reached down and untied the sash that held the bard's robe closed. Before she removed the robe completely, Xena broke from the kiss. "You're positive this is what you want?"

Instead of replying in words, the bard wasn't sure she could, she pushed the robe from her own shoulders and stood naked before the warrior. "I'll take that as a yes." Xena said as she swept Gabrielle up and carried her to the bed. She laid her gently down and kissed the bard's palm. "You are exquisite, my love." The warrior exclaimed as her eyes took in the vision that was before her. She removed her nightshirt and stretched out on her side next to the bard. She propped on her elbow and lightly ran the back of her fingers across the bard's cheek. "I want you to tell me if I do something you're not comfortable with, ok?"

At this moment she wasn't sure her body would ever be comfortable again. It wasn't that she felt uncomfortable, no uncomfortable was definitely not the way that she was feeling. The only way she could describe it was that her body ached to have Xena touch her. "Ok." She finally managed to say.

Xena had to keep a tight hold on her own building passion. She wanted to go slow with Gabrielle since she had no idea what Perdicas had shown the bard or even how much he knew to show her. She leaned down and reclaimed Gabrielle's mouth. As she broke from the kiss, she traced her fingers down the bard's neck and between her breasts. She wanted Gabrielle's desire to overcome the nervousness that she felt emanating from the bard.

When the warrior had pulled back from the kiss, she had captured Gabrielle's eyes with her own and the bard found herself lost in a sea of blue. She felt her skin tingle wherever Xena's fingers touched her and when the warrior's hand cupped and gently massaged her breast she arched her back, "More, please, Xena."

When Gabrielle had arched her back and asked for more, Xena had to rein in her craving to ravage the bard. The warrior took the erect nipple between her thumb and forefinger and lowered her mouth to its twin. She ran her tongue around the savory tidbit. When the bard buried her fingers in the warrior's raven hair and let out a long pleasurable moan Xena took the nipple into her mouth. She alternated between lightly biting and flicking her tongue across the nipple and drawing it deep into her mouth. The bard was breathing hard and her heart was pounding in her chest. When the warrior released the delicious morsel, the bard's eyes flew open. "Don't stop!"

"Oh, I have no intention of stopping. I take it you like this?" Gabrielle nodded her head vigorously. "No complaints so far?"

The bard shook her head, "No,...no complaints."

Xena leaned in and kiss the bard passionately. As she broke from the kiss she moved her right hand down Gabrielle's left side to her hip. Watching intently for Gabrielle's reaction she placed the palm of her hand on the bard's mound and let her finger's lightly touch Gabrielle's folds.

"By the gods...Xena...yes." The bard's hips shot up wanting more. She wasn't sure what she was begging for, but she felt like she would die without it.

The warrior saw the unbridled passion burning in her lover's eyes and let go of some of the control she had been holding on to. She ran her fingers up and down through the warm wetness. "Gods Gabrielle, you're so wet!" Xena felt a shudder go through her own body. When the bard threw her head back exposing her neck, Xena took the offered flesh with her mouth. Gabrielle's hips moved in time with the warrior's tempo. When Xena moved one finger inside the bard, her hips became suspended in mid air.

"Oh yes...Xena...please." As the warrior pulled back she placed a second finger at the bard's opening and plunged in again. She detached her mouth from the bard's neck and leaned back, she wanted to see Gabrielle's face when she released. She moved in and out, letting Gabrielle set the

pace. As the movement of the bard's hips increased, so did the warrior's ministrations. When the bard reached back and grabbed fistfuls of the pillow that her head was now buried in, Xena knew Gabrielle wouldn't last much longer. She used her thumb to rub the bard's swollen center. The warrior felt the bard tighten around her finger's and plunged in deep one last time. "Xeennaaa!" The bard screamed as the orgasm over took her. The warrior continued to massage the bard's center, drawing shudder after shudder from her lover's body.

As she collapsed back on the bed still gasping for air Xena cradled the bard in her arms. "I've got you, Gabrielle." The bard put her arms around the warrior and pulled her closer. "I'm here, love." She held the bard tight until her breathing slowed down. "Gabrielle, are you alright? I didn't hurt you did I?"

She opened her mouth to answer but nothing came out. She cleared her throat and tried again. "No, you didn't hurt me. I just...I've never felt...anything like that before."

Realization suddenly hit the warrior. "You mean you never had an orgasm before? But you were with Perdicas."

"Well, he told me that he had never been with a...a virgin before. And it was a little painful for me and when he saw the blood, well he thought he had done something wrong so he stopped. And I didn't know at the time that it was normal either."

"Gabrielle, I'm sorry. I could have...should have explained it to you before you got married." She tilted the bard's head back to look into her eyes. "I'm so sorry."

"Xena, I'm glad my first time was with you. I love you so much." She pulled the warrior's mouth to hers. She had thought her body was entirely spent, but as the kiss grew more passionate, her desire started building again.

When their lips parted, the warrior grinned at her lover. "And I thought I had worn you out. I guess I'll have to try again."

"But Xena, I want to make you feel the way you've made me feel."

"You'll get your turn later. I'm not quite done with you yet." The bard missed the predatory look in the warrior's eyes.

"What else could you possibly do to me?" The warrior started sucking on the bard's earlobe. "Mmmm, that's nice!"

Xena whispered in Gabrielle's ear. "Believe me, my lovely bard, I have a very long list of other things that I can do to you."

The bard looked at the lustful expression on the warrior's face. 'Uh oh.'

The warrior placed her body on top of her lover's and ran her tongue down the bard's neck and hovered over her left nipple. The bard arched her back trying to make contact with her lover. "What is it you want Gabrielle? Tell me."

All coherent thought left the bard's mind as the sensation of having the weight of the warrior's body on top of her and nestled between her legs was driving her to new emotional heights. "Xena, please. I need to feel you...to feel you love me." The warrior drew her tongue across the offered treat. A long moan erupted from Gabrielle's throat.

When no more contact was forthcoming from the warrior, the bard opened her eyes. "Xena, are you...trying to drive...me crazy?" The warrior grinned as she inched down the bard's body. Gabrielle was propped on her elbows intently watching the warrior; her body shivering as Xena ran her tongue in slow circles around her lover's navel. The warrior inch down farther. The bard was breathing hard. "Xena...where...what?" She opened her eyes wide when she saw where the warrior's mouth was positioned.

"Tell me Gabrielle, do you want this?"

Every exhale of the warrior's breath sent a wave of desire coursing through her body. She had an overwhelming craving, she wanted to be consumed and possessed by this woman. "Yes...I do." As Xena's mouth made contact, Gabrielle collapsed back onto the bed. Her hips jerking uncontrollably each time the warrior's tongue touched her swollen center. Her fists clenching the sheet covering the bed.

Xena ran her tongue repeatedly through the length of the bard's folds. 'Mmmm, tasty.' She positioned the bard's legs over her shoulders and plunged her tongue deep inside her lover. The only sounds emitting from the bard were guttural cries of pleasure. As the bard neared climax the warrior replaced her tongue with two fingers, settling her mouth on her lover's nub. Xena felt Gabrielle's impending release and as the bard's body convulsed she continued her attack on her lover to draw out the orgasm to the fullest.

When Gabrielle felt her lover's mouth redirect its assault, her body could take no more and exploded from within. She screamed her lover's name, which was the only intelligible word that had escaped the bard's mouth in quite some time. She could feel her body still pulsing and was gasping for air.

Xena moved back up the bard's body and propped on her elbows. She stared down at her lover until she opened her eyes. "You ok?"

Gabrielle nodded. Speechless again. She reached up and pulled the warrior down until she relented and placed her full weight on top of the bard. She kissed the warrior, tasting herself on Xena's mouth and tongue. They held each other for a few minutes until the bard's breathing returned to normal. The warrior slid off her lover and onto her side bringing the bard with her. Gabrielle grinned. "You seem to have a little something on your chin." She grabbed Xena's wrist as it moved upward. She leaned toward her lover and proceeded to thoroughly cleanse the area

with her tongue. She was rewarded with a moan from Xena. 'I wonder if Xena tastes the same? I guess I'll just have to find out.' She moved her attention and mouth to the warrior's neck.

"Uh Gabrielle, are you sure you're not too tired to continue this tonight?" She thought that the bard would be exhausted after her intense releases.

She had to let go of Xena's neck to answer. "No, not at all, I feel great, never better." She saw an earlobe and redirected her mouth there. "I could do this all night." She mumbled.

"Oh gods, I've created a sex maniac." The warrior said smiling. She turned onto her back. She was curious at what the bard would do with unrestricted access to her body.

"Are you complaining?" She asked as she released the earlobe and covered Xena's mouth with her own. She traced her hand down the warrior's chest and rested it on her lover's breast. She was rewarded with a moan that sent a quiver through her mouth. She guessed that was enough of an answer to her question. She decided that there were new lands to conquer and broke from the kiss. She ran her tongue over the warrior's already hard nipple and took it into her mouth.

Xena placed her hand on the back of her lover's head. "Harder...Gabrielle."

The bard didn't need to be told twice and sucked with more force. She moved her left hand to the warrior's other breast and massaged the nipple between her fingers.

Xena arched her back. "Gods...Gabrielle...yes." The warrior was glad the bard was a quick study.

The bard let go of the warrior's right breast and moved her hand down her stomach feeling her lover's muscles tense beneath her touch. She became a little self-conscious when she realized that she wasn't quite sure what to do. When the roles had been reversed and Xena got to this point in making love to her, her mind had kind of gone away and her body had taken over. She decided to let the warrior's reactions tell her if she was doing this right. She relinquished the breast that she had been consuming and watched her lover's face, as she continued moving her hand downward.

Xena had never let anyone take control away from her, not even Marcus, when making love or at any other time. And now giving total control to Gabrielle was driving her passion to previously undiscovered levels. She released the bard's head and gave the sheet the same attention that Gabrielle had previously. It was quickly becoming a sacrifice to their lovemaking.

The bard moved her fingers through the hot and incredibly moist warrior. The silky softness sent a shiver through her body. Remembering her curiosity of how her lover tasted, she brought her fingers to her mouth. "Mmmm, you taste different. Why?"

"Gabrielle. I know...it's your nature to...analyze things...but...you're killing me!"

"Oops." She took note of the effect she was having on her lover and returned her hand to its previous task. She moved her body down the warrior's for a better position and tentatively

inserted a finger. Xena's hips bucked up and down. The bard raised up on her knees to keep her thrusts in tempo with the warrior.

"Gabrielle...please...another." The bard placed another finger inside the warrior, hoping that was what she meant. "Yes...oh gods...yes." Xena couldn't take the assault on her body any longer. Her desire demanded release. With words being beyond her at this point, she reached down and placed the bard's other hand on her sensitive nub. The bard seemed to get the idea and massaged it between her fingers. That sent the warrior over the top. "Gabrielle!" She cried out as the orgasm rocked her body.

The bard stayed inside her lover until the pulsing sensations that she felt with her fingers subsided. She then brought them to her mouth, moaning at the newly discovered taste of her lover. She propped on her elbow beside the warrior. She waited for Xena to open her eyes before she spoke. "I take it that I did ok?"

"Oh yeah, you did good." She replied with her breathing slowed down.

"Only good huh. I guess I'll have to practice. And I think I'm going to need a lot of practice. Don't you?"

The warrior groaned and pulled her lover down on top of her. "Get some sleep." The bard rested her head on Xena's shoulder. "I love you, Gabrielle."

"I love you too, Xena."

The next morning Ephiny happened to be walking by their hut when the two lovers emerged. "Good morning." The bard said as she fell into step beside the Amazon.

She glanced at the warrior and bard wondering why they looked so refreshed. "Morning." The Amazon grumbled.

"Ephiny, you don't look like you slept very much last night. Are you feeling ok?" The bard asked.

The Amazon looked at her queen in amazement. "At least half the village didn't sleep very well last night."

Xena put her arm around her lover's shoulders. "Uh Gabrielle, we didn't exactly whisper last night."

The bard's face turned bright red. "Are you telling me that half the village knew what we were doing?" Ephiny nodded her head. "Oh gods."

The Amazon grinned. "Yeah, I believe that was one of the expressions I heard several times."

The bard buried her head under the warrior's chin. "Gabrielle, it's not like they haven't heard two women making love before. This is an Amazon village you know."

"I know, it's just that I didn't think about us being overheard."

Thea walked up to Ephiny and kissed her lover. "Night, love." She said as she headed for their hut.

Xena grinned. "That's why you're irritable this morning, Thea was on night patrol." Gabrielle looked at the warrior questioningly. Xena explained. "She hasn't been getting any."

"Xena!" The bard slapped her in the stomach.

"Well she isn't on patrol tonight so the two of you can have at each other all night. We'll just see who drowns who out." Ephiny challenged, then thought. 'If she's not on patrol tonight, she doesn't need to sleep now. Why wait until tonight?' She reversed her direction.

"Ephiny I thought you were headed to eat?" The bard asked.

"Oh I'm going to have breakfast, just not in the dining hall." She winked at the two women.

They spent their days continuing to help in the rebuilding process without anymore accidents. And spent their nights discovering each other's bodies. The days turned into weeks before the village was completely repaired.

At dinner that night Gabrielle informed Ephiny that they would be leaving in the morning. "You've got to stay at least one more night. We planned a celebration." Ephiny explained.

"I'd love to stay but I finally convinced Xena that she needs to go home to see her mother. If Cyrene heard of Xena's death she needs to know that she's alive again."

"You're right, I hadn't thought about that. She's got a brother also, doesn't she?"

"Yeah, but she doesn't know where Toris is."

"I hate to see you two go. But I'm surprised Xena stayed in one place this long."

The next morning found most of the Amazons waiting to say their good-byes. It seemed to take forever and it was almost mid-morning before the pair got underway and Gabrielle knew Xena hated to wait. When she was ready to go she wanted to go, not wait around. "You were more patient than usual." The bard commented to the warrior's back since she was mounted on Argo behind the warrior.

"Yeah, you must be rubbing off on me." As they cleared Amazon territory the warrior turned her head toward the bard. "Hang on!" She said as she urged Argo into a gallop.

Gabrielle squeezed her lover around the waist. "Oh, I will." 'I most certainly will, my love. In fact I don't ever plan on letting you go.'

THE END

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