

~ Another Quest ~

by Red Hope

Disclaimers: Copyright ~ Copyright: Xena, Gabrielle, Hercules, Iolaus, and Argo are owned by Universal, not like nobody knew that. ;-) The story line on the other hand is mine. Just one of the many story lines of mine. ;-)

Subtext/Sex: t'll have subtext that becomes maintext. Sex... mmm could be... won't say no.

Violence: Yes there will be but nothing that will make you toss your cookies. But it is Xena *Warrior Princess* eh? None of that flowery stuff.

Comments or questions, things like that you can email to me at redhope@redhope.net

Started: August 19th 2000 on Saturday

Series Three: **Putting the Puzzle Together** Story: **Eleven**

Section 1

~*Part 1*~

Again, Gabrielle glanced up to the warrior on the mare. Her eyes staying fixed on the Warrior Princess as if trying to make sure she was real. Slowly the emerald eyes lowered to the road again.

Xena sighed inwardly. She'd felt the eyes on her back for the umpteen time. *She still can not believe it.* Her body shifted in the saddle again. *Why can't she?* A sarcastic chuckle came to her inside. *Because not everybody who dies comes back to life. Not exactly the most normal thing...*

The small bard glanced down at her boots then lifted her eyes back up. She'd been back on the road with her partner for three days now after saying goodbye to her Amazons. Her eyes came up to Xena again as she mused, *It still seems like I'm in a dream.* She became lost in that thought but quickly stop and snapped to when she saw her best friend's horse come to a stop.

Xena dismounted Argo and was reaching back to unsheathe her sword.

The Amazon Queen's eyes flickered ahead to see a group of men coming down the road. She sighed and ambled up to Xena's side. "A little practice."

The warrior turned her head to Gabrielle slowly. A grin crept along her lips. Her eyes went cold as they averted to the four men coming at them.

The four men were the normal thugs looking for the normal tussle with our heroes. With that in mind, we could simply predict what the leader thug's words were. Something such as, "Look at what we found boys?"

The answer from the 'boys' was laughs and then a few hoots.

Gabrielle sighed while dropping her head against her staff. "Like I've never done this

before," she mumbled.

Xena chuckled quietly beside her partner. She flickered her sword in a twirl. "We're really not in the mood boys."

"Not our problem." The leader reached to his side to unsheathe his sword.

"Alright, if you insist." The dark warrior's lips shaped into a cat grin while she took a step forward.

"Oh we do." The leader nodded to his 'boys' and they all went racing after the women.

The bard instantly was off to the side of the road with her staff up and fighting two men.

Xena though had two men as well.

Argo, she'd walked off the side of the road and was watching. She took a deep breath and sighed it out with a huff. She whined and lowered her head to eat some of the grass. She'd seen this one before.

One man went flying to land on his back. He lifted his head up with a blurred gaze to watch the female warrior fighting her last man. He coughed and slowly got up to rejoin in the fight.

Gabrielle sent her man to the ground. Her staff came up to knock the second man in the jaw to distract him. Her other end came back down to hit the thug on the ground on his head knocking him out. She jumped back preparing for her last enemy to attack her.

The warrior elbowed the one man in the neck hard leaving him dying to breathe. She then twirled her sword to stop her other enemy's sword. She punched with her left hand to send him stumbling back shaking his head. Turning to her first enemy she came up to him and kned him hard in the stomach. Stepping back she watch him fall to the ground. Her sword came up to stop the other man's sword. Coolly she turned her head to him and grinned to finish the man.

The Amazon Queen's eyes widen and tried to jerk her staff away. She hadn't been focused.

The thug laughed as she held the staff in both of his hands. He yanked it free from the small woman's hands and whirled around with the staff to hit her hard in the back.

Gabrielle went crashing forward, her face in the dust and breathing hard. Slowly she'd begun to lift herself up with her arms. However a hard strike came to her back again, which caused her to slam into the dirt again. A groan escaped her lips.

The thug grinned, dropped the staff and unsheathed his sword once more. He saw the bard starting to get up a third time so he jammed the heel of his boot into her back to hold her down. He raised his sword.

The bard gritted her teeth as her head swam. Without thinking much, she just jerked to roll onto her back. She saw the tip of the sword.

The man laughed while saying, "You're mine."

Gabrielle just grinned as she saw the blade coming. For she'd seen a second blade come into the picture and stop the one coming down.

A deep voice growled, "Sorry, she's mine."

The thug looked to his right as he kept trying to push the sword down. His eyes became locked with wild dark blue eyes. He smiled sheepishly.

Xena slowly let an evil smile come along her lips. "Funny huh?"

Gabrielle sighed while shifting her hands under her head to watch.

The enemy lost his smile. "Oh shit."

"Got that right." The warrior's right fist was pulled back and came slamming into the man's face.

The tall woman sighed while straightening up to walk over to the last thug. She twirled her sword. "Come on."

Gabrielle lifted her head a little to watch her partner fight the man. She sighed then dropped her head back down in her hands. She felt the strong sting on her back and it caused her to close her eyes. After a few moments she heard the fight end and a shadow fall over her.

"Comfortable?"

Emerald eyes opened to stare up at the grinning warrior. "Yeah."

Xena quietly laughed but went serious as she saw the four thugs all getting up. She dropped her sword's blade against her shoulder to watch the enemies all run off in defeat. She sighed contently and lowered her eyes to her best friend again. "What happened to you?"

The small woman shrugged her shoulders. "Just... wasn't focused."

"Not a good idea." The warrior sheathed her sword and bent down close to her friend. "How's your back?"

The bard shrugged again. "It stings."

"Let me see it."

Gabrielle decided not to argue and rolled into her stomach again then began to sit up on her knees.

The older woman reached forward to see two red marks that ran across her friend's back. "Sore?"

"A little."

Xena sighed faintly while placing her hands on her partner's back to massage it. "How's that?"

"Better." The small woman rolled her head to hear her neck crack. "That was good." She reached up to rub the back of her neck.

"Don't crack your neck." The warrior's lips spread into a small grin while she kept massaging the small back. "Your neck will hurt when you're an old lady."

The bard chuckled then dropped her hand to her lap. "I thought you said people in our line of work never get that old."

"Welll..." Xena finished the massage and just ran her palms over the red marks. "There's always a first."

"I hope so." Gabrielle sighed then began to stand. She reached up pulling her bangs and searched the ground for her staff.

"Here." The warrior stood up with the staff.

The young woman took the staff with a smile and replied, "Thanks... for everything."

The tall warrior smiled warmly. "Come on, let's go find a camp." She squeezed her friend's shoulder and walked over to Argo.

Gabrielle's eyes followed the warrior with remorse. A sigh filtered through her lips as she started walking along side Xena down the road in the late afternoon.

~*~*~*~

The bard dropped her head into her hands. She felt the quill press into her cheek. Her fingers went through her hair as she lifted her head and stare at the scroll in her lap. "Oh gods," she sighed out quietly. The frustration was coming back to her again tonight.

The warrior shifted her eyes over to Gabrielle seeing her stare at her scroll with a stiff back. Her whetstone stopped on the blade as she studied her partner.

The camp was silent but exploded with the crackle of the fire.

Gabrielle growled after a few seconds. She rolled up the scroll, dropped it to the ground and then the quill on top. "I'll be back." She stood up from the log and walked out of the camp with empty hands.

Xena watched the spot where her best friend disappeared into the surrounding woods. Her eyes moved to stare at the quill and scroll. She knew her partner had been trying to write for the past few nights with no success. And it all was due to the past week's history. The past week was haunting the small woman's days and she'd had yet to talk to Gabrielle about them. Her dark eyes then spotted the staff lying on the ground. She sighed at knowing her partner was hardly using her common sense right now. *But does she even have time to think straight with what's been going on?* Yet another sigh cascaded from her lips as she stood sheathing her sword. "Time for a talk."

Gabrielle closed her eyes while her arms went across her stomach. She let her body relax in the small breeze. Suddenly her memories filter back.

The tree trunk that came swooping down from the tree hit Xena. She went reeling

through the air to hit another tree and slid down it unconscious.

Gabrielle whirled around to stop the horde leader from killing her partner with the dagger. She knocked the man out but not before her leg received a dagger. She fell to her side next to her best friend reached up to Xena's face. "Xena?"

The warrior only groaned while rolling her head away.

The bard's hand covered in blood as she tried to wipe the blood away from her best friend's face.

The small bard shivered in the memory. That was the day Xena began to die on her before taking Xena to the mountain. After her friend's death, Gabrielle could still remember taking her body to the Amazons. Becoming Queen and committing treason because Autolycus showed up with Xena's soul in him. She had to bring her best friend back to life. She wouldn't have lived much longer if she hadn't.

Xena stared at her partner's back. She sighed sadly inside. And she began to slowly and silently come up to Gabrielle's side.

The Amazon Queen looked to her right to see Xena suddenly. "Oh my gods." She laughed letting the fear out as her right hand came over her chest. "You scared the Hades out of me Xena."

The warrior gazed at her friend with a small grin. "Sorry." Her eyes held the apology.

The young woman smiled warmly. "S'alright." She shifted her attention back to the woods again.

"How have you been feeling?"

Gabrielle had her arms folded over her stomach again. "Not very... safe lately." She sighed while her hand went through her hair at admitting this.

The dark warrior studied her friend now with worried eyes. She uncrossed her arms from her chest and walked behind the small woman. Hesitantly at first she was but her arms began to circle around Gabrielle's waist.

The bard's back stiffened however she slowly relaxed and leaned back into her partner. Her head slowly found its way resting back into the warrior's chest. "Thank you," she whispered.

Xena lowered her head close to Gabrielle's and asked quietly, "Does it help?"

"Yeah." Gabrielle relaxed back into her friend's warm body. She protection washed over her body and made her smile warmly.

That smile found its way onto the warrior's lips somehow and she lifted her head back up. She liked to feel her friend feel so safe and even more in her arms. "These past days have been rough huh?"

"Yeah." The young woman let her breath out sadly. "Been a real eye opened too."

"How's that?"

The small woman lowered her eyes to the forest floor. "Just... I've never imagine you dying you know?" She raised her arms up to let her hands resting over Xena's. "I always had the notion like, Xena can get us out of any jam. Nothing could stop her and nothing could ever kill her. But then it happens and I've had such a hard time taking that factor in."

Xena was silent at hearing this. She then asked, "How are those dreams?"

Slowly the Amazon Queen's eyes closed. "You know?"

"You talk in your sleep." The warrior shrugged. "Besides, I've... had nightmares as well."

"Really?" Gabrielle's open her eyes again. "About what?"

The tall woman grinned. "I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours."

"Alright." The small woman chuckled but went serious again. "What are yours?"

Xena took a deep breath. "They're about being back near that burned village. I'm stuck standing as I watch that tree trunk come out of the tree coming at me. I can't move or say anything and I just watch it come at me." She sighed a little. "Other ones have been about me not being able to get the ambrosia. Either my soul running out of energy when I get so close or of you and I being defeated by Velsaca on the ropes."

Gabrielle listened and rubbed her partner's hands. "Mine are always flashbacks of you dying and me taking you to Niklio's hut. Then right before I wake up I'm left with Ephiny's words echoing about how I needed to let you go." She dropped her eyes. "The worst part is once I wake up I'll look to my right to see you asleep beside me. I'll sit there and keep thinking I'm still dreaming as if you're not alive right now."

The warrior closed her eyes for a moment and opened her sad eyes again. She lowered her head and whispered, "I'm sorry." She paused. "It's my fault."

"What?" Gabrielle turned in her partner's arms to glance up at her. "How do you figure that?" Her hands moved to rest on her friend's arms. "None of it was your fault."

"Gabrielle... I put you through that." Xena looked away then back to Gabrielle. "I could have lived... I gave up." She was looking away again.

The Amazon Queen reached up with her right hand and turned the tall woman's head back. "You know what I miss?" Her hand lowered back to where it was before.

"What?" Xena's eyes held such regret.

"I miss that old feeling of feeling like your bard." A warm smile creased Gabrielle's lips. "It was always sort of a silent thing between us. I was your bard and you were my warrior." She shrugged her shoulders. "We never said anything about it but I felt it and I know you did."

The tall woman chuckled a little with a light smile. "Yeah, I did."

Gabrielle nodded a few times. "And I think that's what brought you back huh?" She

studied the warrior for a moment. "You wouldn't have came back otherwise."

The Warrior Princess slowly began to move her head in answer. "It was." She locked eyes with Gabrielle. "It has nothing to do with fighting for the greater good. I felt ready to stay in Tartarus and pay for my crimes. But when I heard your words that's what made me determined to come back."

"And I can't understand that Xena." The small woman shook her head with a confused look. "Why me? I know what I said to you after you died but... What's... what's so important about me to you? So much that you would fight death to come back to me."

Xena took a deep breath to prepare herself for this one. "We haven't talked about that kiss either huh?"

Gabrielle slowly corked an eyebrow. "As great as a kiss it was, no." She suddenly blushed at what she said. She chuckled and looked away with an embarrassed smile. "Wahoo... slip of the tongue, bad bard."

An amused smile found its way onto the warrior's lips. She whispered, "Wasn't good as it could have been."

The bard quickly glanced up with partially surprised look. Her eyebrows were shot up from the comment.

"Look," Xena went serious as she saw her partner go serious again. "I need you to understand something. I don't come back from the dead just for anybody." She grinned a little.

The small woman chuckled with a smile. "Indubitably."

The older female smiled for a moment but lost it. "You need to understand too, that I'm not here to fight for the greater good. It's not my purpose Gabrielle. Like I said, I was ready to sit in Tartarus for eternity and face my crimes."

"Then..." Gabrielle turned her head a little with her eyebrows pressed together. "What's your purpose?"

"You." Xena studied her partner for a moment then added, "I'm here, I'm here because of what you said and not the part about the world needing me. I am here because of the part of you saying you need me. My responsibility is not redemption, it's to protect you and be here for you."

The bard tilted her head down with her eyes peering up. "Wait... wait." She breathed heavily. "You're making it sound like you're mine."

"You said yourself you missed that." The warrior shrugged. "I'm your warrior." She smiled warmly.

"Th-that's what the kiss was about?" Gabrielle lifted her head a little more as she realized. "You're basically offering everything to me huh?"

The warrior chuckled a little. "Or I'm just trying to say I'm in-love with you." She grinned a little. "The pieces fit together perfectly now, don't they?"

The bard's right hand came up to pull her bangs back. She stared up at her partner as

she held her bangs back. "But... how could you... all this time... I can't believe... I must really be dreaming now." She laughed with surprise and dropped her hand to her friend's arm again.

Xena smile while watching the sunny strawberry blond bangs fall back down.

"Sso, wait let me get this aaallll right." Gabrielle took a deep breath and her eyes unfocused while saying, "I meet the Warrior Princess in a grove, follow her, became her sidekick-"

"Partner," interrupted the warrior.

The small woman chuckled. "Partner," she corrected but continued. "Do all the adventures, one happens to kill my best friend. She ends up in Tartarus but comes back because of a few words of mine and her love." Gabrielle slowly glanced up. "Warps me into an alternate world to kiss me, wins against death after stopping a crazed Amazon, and comes back to life to tell me she's mine and she did this for me."

"Basically."

The small woman crinkled her nose with a chuckle and smile. "Sounds romantic."

Xena groaned and looked away with rolled eyes. "Wasn't planned that way."

Gabrielle chuckled with a smile. "You're serious about this?" She lost the smile with such mystified eyes.

"Yes." Xena smile warmly as her eyes let the walls disappear and revealed everything of herself. "As emotional as this is for me." She chuckled. "Yes."

The bard took a long breath while trying to take it in. "Oh gods." She shook her head with wide eyes. "Xena, I... I never thought... I've had a crush... never thought... then I realized I was in-love... why couldn't I..." Her right hand came up as she kept seeming to talk to herself. "I'm such an idiot." She laughed and glanced up to her partner as her hand came back down.

"Not an idiot." The warrior smiled while reaching up to brush some of her partner's hair back. "I just try hiding it... kind of hard now."

Gabrielle shook her head with a baffled look. "I'd never imagine only in my dreams." She grinned. "Hold on, tell it to me again."

Xena chuckled while lowering her head closer. "I'll tell you in three words." She smiled warmly. "I love you."

The bard closed her eyes and leaned in to hug the older woman tightly. "Oh gods." She chuckled while asking, "Is this part where I'm suppose to faint?"

The warrior chuckled while keeping her head down against Gabrielle's. "Nah." She closed her eyes slowly as she asked, "So I take it this a good thing?"

The Amazon Queen lifted her head up with a smile. "Very good." She went serious again. "What made you decide to tell me?"

The older woman took a deep breath. "A few things." She shrugged. "Knew you'd

figure it for yourself once you sat down to think about it." She grinned while saying. "I thought it was about time because I couldn't be silent any longer." Her grin went a little more devilish. "Besides, I knew how you felt."

"I didn't tell you..." Gabrielle narrowed her eyes slowly. "When you were inside of me... oh Hades."

The Warrior Princess laughed with an evil grin. "You have some... interesting dreams Gabrielle."

"Oh gods." The bard looked away as she blushed again tonight. "It's... it's the imagination. Blame it on that."

"Uh huh." Xena cocked an eyebrow while she reached to carefully bring Gabrielle's head back to her. "Thought that crush would have faded away but never did."

"No, only got worse." The young woman grinned. "So you could tell then huh?"

"Oh yeah." A quiet laugh came from the dark warrior. "I certainly noticed the crush at the beginning."

The Amazon Queen laughed and sighed slowly. "Yeah, you know just me writing about you, you're a god, I followed you everywhere, I practically begged you to let me go with you, and I always kept saying I wanted to be you."

The tall woman sighed. "Yeah... just a little noticeable." She grinned. "But I can understand it, had one myself."

"Really?" The bard raised an eyebrow in interest. "Who was that?"

"I'm looking at her."

Gabrielle shook her head with a chuckle. "Come on, get off it Xena." She went serious. "There's nothing here to get a crush over."

"Mmm, that's not what I say." Xena smiled warmly. "You just don't see what I do." She lowered her head down again.

"Just name one thing to get a crush over." The small woman had a challenged look.

"You're mind." The warrior still had her smile. "I love it. You're perspectives and morals are interesting as they are powerful." She paused. "And they are what saved me."

"You saved yourself."

Xena shook her head. "No, I wouldn't have done it without you or your spirit."

Gabrielle released her breath slowly with smile. "So what now?"

The older female shrugged her shoulders as she grinned. "Anything you want."

"Nnno." The small woman put her hands to the other woman's hips. "This is going to be fifty-fifty." She quietly laughed and lowered her head against Xena's chest. "I'm not making all the decisions." She took a deep breath. "What you want?"

"You."

Gabrielle lifted her head and smiled. Her right hand came up bring Xena's head down. She took her friend's lips in a careful hesitant kiss.

Xena took her time and let her partner get use to the idea in the second. She had to let it be Gabrielle.

Slowly the bard's right hand moved to the other woman's cheek. Slowly she went into the warm kiss more finding it sensual. Her soft lips stayed faintly sucking on the other woman's warm lips. She let her tongue slip out and come towards Xena's mouth.

The warrior felt the velvet tongue come into her mouth and she let her own tongue go into Gabrielle's. She could feel her air starting to lack with her body warming.

The small bard slowly ended the kiss with a heavy breath. She leaned her head against Xena's while whispering, "I want you... need you Xena." She kissed her warrior lightly and kept her forehead against Xena's.

"Thank you." Xena laughed lightly with a grin. "I keep getting luckier." She moved her head to start kissing her partner again.

Gabrielle smiled into the collection of kisses while saying, "I love you."

The warrior pulled back and leaned her head against Gabrielle's with her eyes still closed. "We need to slow this down."

The Amazon Queen chuckled a little. "Oh?"

The Warrior Princess sighed and lifted her head however kept a tight hold of her partner. "Yeah, you can't talk me out of that one." She had a stern expression. "A lot has happened. We both need time to take it all in... especially you." She had a sad smile. "We kind of went from one to ten."

"Yeah really." The small woman shook her head and smile to her warrior. "Thank you." She brought in a deep breath. "I'm still trying to get use to you being alive."

"Let alone us being together... yeah I know." The older woman moved her head in understanding. "I've gotta get use to... well letting somebody control me a little more then normal."

Gabrielle quietly laughed but had a reassuringly smile. "Hey, it's good control because I only want what's best for you."

"Yeah." A smile crept along the warrior's lips. "We'll try out your dreams later."

"Right." The bard stepped back while lifting her hands to fold together. She felt herself go red and she lifted her laced hands together to point at Xena. "Sso, how about those thugs this afternoon?" She laughed shyly and dropped her hands to her stomach again. "Something else."

A huge amused expression was masked over the warrior's face. "Oh yeah." She grinned. "The normal run around."

"Yeah well..." The Amazon Queen unlocked her hands and put them on her hips.

"Just thought you know..." She shrugged her shoulders. "Change of topic then... my dreams."

Xena laughed and held out her right hand. "Come on."

Gabrielle blinked and reached up slowly to take the larger hand. She held tightly and started walking with her partner back to the camp. "You have to admit... between the thugs, traveling, and our talk... it's been a tiring date." Her eyes widen. "I mean day..." She laughed.

The warrior shook her head with an amused look. "A little flustered?"

"Yeah... a little." Gabrielle grinned up to her friend. "I'll be fine tomorrow."

"Uh huh." The tall woman glanced down with a grin and she said mischievously. "I think it was the talk that was the most tiring."

"Yeah really." The bard chuckled with a smile. "Ooooh gods... I can't believe this."

"You will soon."

The young woman peered up with a partially not convinced expression. "I don't know about that. I mean how many people get to say they get the Warrior Princess?"

The Warrior Princess laughed with a smile as she came into the camp. "Only you." She stopped as they came near the fire. "Let's get ready for bed." She turned her head and kissed her bard's temple. "I'm going to go check things out."

"Alright." Gabrielle felt herself calm down some. "I'll take care of the fire." She glanced up.

"Good, be back." The warrior disappeared into the forest.

The young woman sighed with a smile, her right hand went through her hair. "Fire, wood, stoke it... right." She chuckled and breathed calmly as she went to throw some fire into the wood. When she was done she was poking at the fire with a small twig. A content sigh escaped her and she tossed the stick in as she squatted in front of the fire.

Xena silently returned and kneeled down beside her partner. "Back."

"I was ready that time." An amused smile she turned to Xena. "I felt you."

"Oooh?" The warrior grinned but then smiled.

"Oh yeah." Gabrielle chuckled as she glimpsed to her warrior then back to the fire. "You know... I've been kinda angry about what Ephiny said regarding you."

"What you mean?" The older woman had a confused expression.

"That she told me to let go of you." The Amazon Queen turned her head to Xena again. "I mean, I know what she was saying but... she just made it sound like I had to forget you."

The tall woman sighed as she reached over to grasp her bard's knee. "She just didn't want you to get stuck in the past. She was telling you to move on." She shrugged.

"Ephiny didn't want you to get caught in the past and the pain."

"I know." Gabrielle dropped her head. "It just felt like I was suppose to forget you like we never happened... I guess." She stared at the fire again. "But yeah, Eph was right... a little." She smiled to herself. "But any memory dealing with you has always been a happy one..." Her head turned to her warrior again. "Not painful."

Xena smiled warmly. "Same here." She paused for a moment to soak things in. "Let's get some sleep."

"Yeah." The bard stood up and went to collect her satchel. She put her scroll in it with her quill. She set her satchel aside and searched out her staff. "I forgot this... good thinking Gabrielle." She laughed while dropping it near the bedrolls.

The warrior began working her armor off after placing her sword and chakram near the bedrolls. "That... was a tiny reason I came after you."

"Yeah, didn't need the boogie man jumping me." The Amazon Queen sighed while moving behind Xena to help her with the armor. "What did happen in Tartarus Xena?"

"I... bumped into an old friend." The tall woman slipped out of her armor and tossed it aside. She bent down to one knee and began to untie her boots. "M'Lila is her name." She sighed. "She'd saved me from the cross Caesar nailed me to."

Gabrielle cringed. "How'd she die?" She bent down to take her own boots off.

"Arrow." Xena stood up in her leathers. "She died trying to save me from Caesar's men."

"Oh gods." She stood up. "I'm sorry Xena."

The warrior shrugged her shoulders. "It happens." She sighed and said, "She actually taught me pressure points."

"Really?"

"Yeah." The tall woman shifted to lie down.

Gabrielle did the same. "So you saw her down in Tartarus?"

"Uh huh." Xena was resting on her side gazing down at her partner. "She came to convince me to go back to the land of the living." She grinned. "I didn't need much convincing."

The young woman smiled. "Good." She was lying on her back.

The warrior chuckled and leaned forward to gently kiss Gabrielle. "Let's get some sleep."

"Yeah." Gabrielle put her hands to her stomach as she let a shy smile creep along her lips.

The Warrior Princess chuckled with a smile. "Come here." She reached to pull her bard in.

The Amazon Queen tucked her head under her warrior's chin while wrapping her arms

and legs around the warrior.

Xena easily did the same thing and kissed her on her head. "Try to sleep well huh?"

"Yeah, you too Xena." She kissed the older woman's chest. "I love you."

"I love you too." The warrior closed her eyes.

The bard did the same and slowly let her breathing even out.

The older woman followed suit to go into her dreamscape.

~*Part 2*~

Xena began to carefully release her partner. She silently got up from the bedroll and was kneeling beside her partner's side. Her hands were slowly tucking the fur back over Gabrielle.

The bard reached out to take Xena's hand. With half open eyes she whispered, "Where you going?"

"I'm going to get us breakfast and get ready to go." The warrior smiled warmly. "Go back to sleep."

"No, no... I'll get up." Gabrielle started to shift.

"It's okay." The older woman held the bard down. "Get a little more sleep... I'll wake you." She leaned forward to kiss her friend lightly. "Okay?"

The Amazon Queen faintly nodded and released the warm hand to curl back up and go to sleep. She mumbled out, "Thanks Xen..." then slipped back into her dreams.

The tall woman sighed with a smile and brushed back blond bangs. She stood up to collect her things and put them on. Afterwards she found herself preparing to leave then making breakfast. Once that time passed she found herself at Gabrielle's side kneeling down. Her left hand came over to gently brush back her partner's bangs.

A small quiet moan escaped the bard's lips.

Xena smiled to herself and leaned down to kiss her bard with warm lips.

Slowly Gabrielle awoke and responded to the kiss. When Xena pulled back, she grinned. "That was better then the normal 'wake up sleepy head.'"

The warrior chuckled with her smile. "I figured." She took a deep breath. "You ready to get up?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Nope."

The Amazon Queen laughed. "I thought so, I'm getting up." She slowly sat up and pulled the fur away.

The older woman grasped her friend's sides and stood up with her. "How'd you sleep?"

"Really well." Gabrielle stretched a little and asked, "How about you?"

"Pretty good." Xena smiled. "Come on, let's get moving."

"Uh huh." The young woman snatched her staff up along with the bedrolls and furs.

Soon the pair had finished eating and packing up.

Xena was facing Argo while throwing the saddle on.

Gabrielle came strolling up. "So what's this mean?" She stood a little behind Xena while leaning against her staff. "That we're girlfriends?"

The warrior glimpsed back to her partner then back to Argo. She jerked a strap down. "I'm not calling it that." She huffed with a grin.

The small woman chuckled with a grin. "Yeah I guess that's to teenagerish huh?"

Now it was the dark warrior laughing quietly. "We're just together."

"Just?" Gabrielle came up to her warrior's side to put one hand on her hip. "You make it sound like it was nothing."

Slowly the Warrior Princess turned her stoic face to the other woman. "No." She smiled warmly. "It's everything." She leaned over to kiss Gabrielle warmly.

The small woman lifted her free hand to the back of Xena's head to deepen the kiss. The depth of the kiss was soon shooting heat through her body. When she ended the kiss a small smile played on her lips. "Is it always like this?"

"No." Xena walked up to gather Argo's reins. She started walking out of the clearing towards the road.

Gabrielle walked along side and waited for more of coming explanation.

The warrior glanced to Gabrielle then back ahead. "It's never this... intense."

"Even between women?" The small woman glimpsed up knowing her partner had been in relationships with other woman. Well maybe not relationships but at least been with women sexually.

"Yup." The dark woman grinned down. "It's just us."

"Must be."

The two women laughed together. They kept traveling beside each other as they hit the southwestern bound road. Right now they had plans to go to Amphipolis to see Cyrene, deciding it was best to let Cyrene know that Xena was still alive. They were positive that word of mouth had come knocking on Cyrene's door to tell her what the latest news was on the Warrior Princess.

"Hey Xena?"

"Mmm?" The warrior glanced to her partner.

Gabrielle glanced up with a huge grin. "What'd you and Autolycus do about..."

bathroom issues when you were inside of him?"

Xena laughed at the memory and question. "You don't wanna know."

"Yeah, you're probably right." The young woman snickered but went a little sad. "I really did like you inside."

"I noticed," teased the warrior.

The bard chuckled while a smile crossed her lips. "Hey, not everybody gets to say they had the Warrior Princess inside of themselves."

"Mmm." The tall woman placed her hand on her bard's shoulder. "We haven't gotten that far."

The small woman did a double take as she went bright red. She coughed and looked away. "Right." Another small cough to distract.

A laugh came from Xena and her hand went to the other shoulder from behind to pull her friend in. "But if you're talking about my soul... that's different."

"Uh huh." Gabrielle mocked glared. "Smartass."

The tall woman grinned. "Somebody's gotta do it."

The small woman shook her head. "But seriously... it was nice."

The warrior's head bobbed. "Nice... as in it was lovely?"

With furrowed eyebrows Gabrielle looked up rapidly. "Since when were you using the word lovely?"

"Hey." Xena narrowed her eyes as a grin creased her lips. "I do have an advance vocabulary."

"Pffft." The young woman shook her head. "You using lovely is like you loving pink. It doesn't happen."

The tall woman snickered. "Very true." She nodded. "So it was nice." She sighed while asking, "Wanna explain this niceness?" Her voice held a bit of confusion. "What's so nice about *my* soul inside of you?"

"I told you a few days back." Gabrielle smiled to herself. "I felt protected... loved."

"And I say it was a fight."

"So?" The bard peered up while walking along the road under her warrior's arm. "It felt right." She gazed ahead. "I don't know..." She sighed as her eyebrow knitted together. "I just never felt so... perfect." Her attention went to Xena again. "Like I do now."

Xena quickly locked eyes with her friend. "Now?"

"Yeah, right here and right now." Gabrielle's arm went around her warrior's waist. "You make me feel perfect."

The warrior turned her head to kiss her bard's temple. "I know what you mean." She squeezed Gabrielle's shoulder.

The pair kept walking together. Sometimes in silence, sometimes in funny talks, and sometimes in serious talks they walked. Xena eventually was telling her partner about her memory that came back to her when she was unconscious and Gabrielle was taking her to Niklio's hut. The bard the entire time listened carefully with few questions, she'd soaked into the story as she learned more of her warrior. Oh, now Gabrielle understood the how the darkness was only fueled in her warrior's body and mind. It also helped her understand how to help Xena fight the darkness. It left her smiling. Smiling over the new information on how to fight the darkness, how to heal the past, and how much she grew more in-love with Xena.

By the late afternoon the pair hit a clearing to begin a camp. Soon after they were in a near stream swimming.

Gabrielle popped up out of the water with the water streaming down her face.

The warrior grinned while she came up to her partner in the fairly deep water. She tenderly kissed her bard and pulled back with her right hand on the young woman's cheek.

"I'm glad the water is cool."

Xena chuckled with a grin her hand slid down the cheek to trace along the other woman's smooth neck. "True." Her hand disappeared into the water. "Come on." She swam past her partner to head down the stream a little ways.

Gabrielle followed to see the tiny step waterfall ahead with a few large rocks in the water.

The tall woman came up to a large rock and found it slopping out under the water. She sat on the edge coming out underwater and leaned back into the rock.

The young woman swam to her partner to be pulled into the large warm body. She nuzzled her warrior's neck as she sat in the other female's lap. She'd also noticed the fact that the rock raised them a little higher out of the water to reveal their breasts.

And the cool water came streaming past them in a soothing caress. It was a very intoxicating scene and feel.

Xena's hands were on Gabrielle's sides bit slid up to and her thumb pressed into Gabrielle's warm breasts at the bottom.

Gabrielle moaned faintly while leaning in to kiss Xena.

As she kept with the strong kiss, the warrior also pressed her palms into her bard's breasts. Her hands began their pleasing.

The young woman moaned and pulled back from the kiss. "Oh gods," she whispered. Her head stayed pressed into Xena's neck.

Xena grinned while she kissed Gabrielle's forehead. Her hands continued pushing, rolling, and massaging the warm breasts. She kept with it for a good minute or so then

slowly her hands came back down to Gabrielle's side. She listened to her friend's heavy breathing for a moment but whispered, "Try it yourself, I've gotcha."

The bard sucked in a deep breath while kissing her warrior's neck. Her left hand traveled up Xena's stomach to her the warrior's right breast. She began with that one hand with a cupping of the older woman's breast. Her thumb running across the hard nipple in learning. Slowly her hand covered over the large breast then hesitantly at first but she began to massage it. Her right hand quickly was moving to the other breast to knead that one.

The warrior moaned and dropped her head back. She was breathing a little coarsely.

The young woman continued with her hands' movements and touch. Then her left hand cupped the breast again as she moved her head down to carefully take the nipple between her lips.

The Warrior Princess glanced down with a grin. She closed her eyes slowly as she let the heat waver through her body.

Gabrielle first carefully sucked on the nipple but soon let her lips slide over the entire breast. Her right hand continued working the other breast. She was following pure instinct. And in the instinct it told her to use her tongue, which glided out to tease the nipple.

Xena's lips let out a groan and she lifted her right hand to the back of Gabrielle's head. She tried hard to resist her body's need to press into Gabrielle. She didn't need rushing this for this was pure fun and experience. But then again, what wasn't fun about sex?

The bard had finished with the one breast as her lips trailed over to the right breast. Her mouth quickly covering over the breast as much as she could. Her hand had returned to the other breast.

The dark warrior felt the warm smooth tongue glide over her breast that left her moaning in pleasure. Then she was sucking in a sharp breath as her bard carefully nipped her breast. That sent a too strong shock wave through her body and she whispered, "Gabrielle." It was a signal to stop.

Gabrielle quietly laughed and lowered her hand. She raised her head up with a small grin. "A little to much?"

"For a learning experience... yes." Xena chuckled as she took a calming breath. Her arms were circling around the small woman.

"And how can you be sure it was only... learning I wanted to do?" The young woman corked an eyebrow.

Both the warrior's eyebrows shot up.

Gabrielle laughed while leaning in to give her warrior a feather kiss. "Sorry, couldn't help it," she whispered while lowering her head onto her partner's chest.

"Oh... I'm not complaining." The tall woman kissed the top of her friend's head and lowered her head onto Gabrielle's. "Mmm... that was lovely."

The bard started to laugh.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle plucked off a small piece of salmon for the taste test. She chewed on the small cooked piece that was lightly touched with sage. A smile crept along her lips at the perfect taste. She was kneeling in front of the fire with the frying pan filled with four strips of salmon.

Xena quietly came up behind and snaked an arm around her bard's lower back as she knelt down. "How's it coming?" She was only in her leathers for the night.

"It's almost ready." The Amazon Queen reached back down to pluck another small piece. "It needs to cook a little longer." She lifted the small piece next to her partner.

The salmon bit slipped into the warrior's mouth. She slowly chewed on it taking in the flavor of the fish and the herb. "Hey, that's good."

The young woman chuckled with a satisfied smile. "I've got the Warrior Princess's stamp of approval?"

"Oh yeah." The warrior grinned.

The bard lightly laughed while placing the pan back over the fire for awhile. She turned her head to Xena again and leaned over to kiss her. She soon found out just how good that salmon tasted. When she pulled back a grin streaked across her lips. "I think the salmon tasted better there."

The dark woman laughed then smiled. "I know." She furrowed her eyebrows. "What herb is that? Sage?"

"Uh huh." Gabrielle glanced to the fire and the pan again. "One of the best." She took a deep breath. "That was a... nice swim this afternoon."

"Mmm, you mean lovely." Xena smirked at her partner.

The bard caught the smirk out of the corner of her eye. "Right, my mistake. It was a lovely swim."

The older woman grinned while shifting to sit down on the ground. Her arm slipped away.

Gabrielle did the same while propping her legs up. Her right arm came up to rest over her knees and her left hand lay resting on the ground. "We'll have to take that swim to... deeper waters next time."

Xena gave a small laugh then responded, "Maybe... we'll see." She reached over to take her bard's warm hand. "One thing at a time."

"Oh yeah?" The Amazon Queen grinned to her friend. "What's next on your list of experience?"

"Mmm..." The warrior lips stole into a warm smile. "I think cuddling."

"Oooh, a little snuggling experience." Gabrielle chuckled. "I think I can do that." Her

sights went back to the fire again.

"I know you can." Xena squeezed the small hand as she stood to walk over to the saddlebags.

The younger woman stood up to bend over the fire and pull the pan off with the cooked salmon.

The pair was soon eating together with their normal comfortable silence. But the dinner was slower as they kept watch over each other. Each watching the other's subtle moves and expressions and it was interesting to both as they learned more of each other.

After the dinner Gabrielle was near the fire working on her scroll from last night and getting better results.

Xena once more was sharpening her sword but this time she was pointing her blade towards the fire to gaze down it. She seemed to study her blade to make sure it was still in good shape. As she kept looking at her sword she kept noticing how unpolished the blade was. So she eventually stood to head to the saddlebags to pull out a rag. Pulling out some odd liquid she poured a little on the rag and cleaned her blade.

The bard pulled away from her story becoming better satisfied with it. She turned her head to the right to see her warrior. She watched Xena turning her sword left and right to reflect the firelight off the polished sword. And as she watched a warm smile crept along her lips. Her quill rested down on top of the parchment. Gabrielle lifted her hands to lace together, her elbows propped on her knees, and her chin on her hands. She kept her eyes pinned on Xena with a smile.

The warrior kept turning the blade every which way satisfied that the tarnish on the blade was gone now. She put the rag and cleansing liquid away. She bent her knees to do a few quick rapid moves with her sword to see the blade flashing the firelight. The fire's reflection wavering down the silver blade to leave it shimmering in the night. Xena straightened up with a happy smile. Slowly she turned her head to the left to see Gabrielle watching her.

Gabrielle's smile went from warm to loving and she now leaned her cheek against her raised hands.

Xena's eyes warmed and she turned to her partner. Slowly she walked over to where she left her sheath and she slipped her sword in it. Then she slowly came towards her partner.

The young woman lifted her head and lowered her hands to her lap on her scroll.

The tall woman kneeled down and reached out to circle her arms around Gabrielle with a smile.

The small woman leaned into her warrior with a smile. She chuckled happily.

The warrior kissed her bard's temple and whispered, "I want you with me." She nuzzled the younger woman's neck.

Gabrielle grinned. "Your bard?" she asked quietly.

Xena lifted her head with a smile. "Exactly... my bard." She kissed Gabrielle's cheek lightly. "Come on."

The scroll in the bard's lap was rolled up. And she turned with her scroll and quill to place them in her satchel. Slowly she stood up with her warrior.

The two women walked a little ways from the fire. Xena sat first with her knees propped up and wide so then Gabrielle sat down between and leaned back. The warrior leaned back into a log and drew Gabrielle more in with her arms around her waist.

The Amazon Queen contently sighed. "Snuggling experience." She chuckled while resting her head against Xena's chest.

"Uh huh." The older woman's hand came under her friend's chin. She tilted Gabrielle's head back and leaned down.

The bard moaned into the gentle kiss. When she pulled back a warm smile crossed her lips. "Thanks Xena."

The warrior's expression went into confusion. "For?"

Gabrielle silently laughed while she still peered up into warm blue eyes. "Well besides the past year plus but for the last day." Her hands came down to cover over Xena's hands. "You've been careful with me."

The older woman smiled warmly and nuzzled Gabrielle before leaning back. "I'll always try to be careful... you're the most precise thing to me."

The shorter woman's head bobbed a few times. "I know." She rested in the warrior's embrace. "The same goes with you, for me."

Xena smiled warmly.

The Amazon Queen filled her lungs heavily. "Sso, what else is there to the physical part of this relationship?"

Xena laughed then shook her head. "Do you need details?"

"Why not?" Gabrielle evilly grinned. "Let's see who can take it the longest."

"So..." The warrior leaned into her bard more. "You want to discuss such things as my hands traveling over her stomach, taking your breasts, then hold you down tight as my lips come over-"

"Okay." Gabrielle laughed as she felt herself need another swim. "Maybe I better not work myself up. I think you could take it a little bit longer."

The older woman had a chuckle and leaned back contently. "Uh huh. Any other topics?"

The small woman placed her left hand on Xena's calf. There she began to run her fingertips up and down. "Mmm, this is forever."

"I hope so." Xena had gone serious.

The bard nodded a few times. "I couldn't... couldn't make it without you."

"I know." The warrior took a deep breath so she could speak the rest without holding back. "I need you."

Gabrielle tilted her head back to peer up into warm blue eyes. Gradually a smile swept across the bard's lips. "I need you too Xena."

"Good."

Both the women quietly laughed together at that.

Xena afterwards went serious again. "Gabrielle, far as I am concerned I believe you should have better. But-" She saw her partner about to protest but she stopped her. "But I know you would say different... so I'm letting you decide."

"Thank you." Gabrielle smiled as she breathed deeply. "I want to be happy... you're what makes me happy. Just not that but safe, loved, and welllll looked after."

The warrior grinned as she tightened her arms. "I try... but it's never easy with how much trouble you get into."

"What?" The bard mocked glared. "Now that's a bunch of centaur crap right there. You bring on alllll the trouble in this partnership."

"Right." The older woman narrowed her eyes as a grin creased her lips. "You can believe it but I won't. Because you'll never be able to explain to me the titans, Morpheus, breast dagger, Amazon Princess, your five minute hang up on cute boys..." At that she saw Gabrielle laugh and bend forward but she continued on. "Henbane, pitchforking me, tomato fights, bacchae, losing control of your temper, and the toy fight on Solstice."

Gabrielle calmed down from her laughing and leaned into her warrior again. "Okay... okay maybe I do bring in a little trouble."

"As little as I am short." Xena huffed.

The young woman snickered. "Mmm which you think was worse? The titans or the henbane?"

"That's tough." The tall woman actually considered while she chuckled. "They were bother pretty funny."

"Yeah." The Amazon Queen sighed as she thought. "I can still remember that massive headache after the henbane. But I sure did feel goooood when I was high on it."

The warrior laughed then mumbled out, "And crazy."

"Yeah?" Gabrielle quietly laughed. "I can only imagine myself high on henbane. I had to be out of control."

"Understatement... there was no control."

The young woman laughed while sinking into Xena. "I feel tired... all we did was travel."

"Mmm yeah, surprising enough." The dark woman took a deep breath. "Normally we get a little entertainment."

"Yeah, a thug or two. One of them threatening to kill me." The bard shrugged. "The thugs are slacking today."

The Warrior Princess laughed then shook her head a little. "Guess so." She glanced down to see her partner's eyes slowly closing, which only led to a smile creasing her lips.

Gabrielle soon started shifting to press her side into the warrior. Her left arm went around Xena's waist while her other hand rested on the warm leather-clad stomach. "Xena?" Her voice was faint and holding tiredness.

"Yeah?" The warrior peered down with a bit of concern.

The young bard's eyes were closed and her breathing was starting to slow. "Why'd... why'd you let me travel with you at the beginning?"

Xena lowered her head down on the other woman's head as she whispered her answer. "Because I knew you could save me and I could save you."

"You knew that?" mumbled the short female.

"Well, I felt it at least. I know it now." The warrior kissed the top of Gabrielle's head. "Go to sleep huh?"

"Yeah." Gabrielle shivered for some reason. Out of fear? "You won't let go of me?"

Xena closed her eyes for a moment. "I won't... promise." Her arms also tightened with her oath.

"I love you Xen." The bard's breathing went very slow.

"And I love you." The tall woman sighed contently and lifted her head. She studied the small woman in her arms that slept soundly. Her right hand came up to brush back Gabrielle's bangs. Her arm came back down to wrap around the bard. For about a quarter of a candlemark she did not shift and only watched the young woman in her arms.

Soon after that time passed, Xena found her bard's arms tightening around her in pure fear. Her eyes filled with worry when she started to hear Gabrielle's mumbled words.

"Gods no... Xena don't leave me again." Gabrielle's head dug into the warrior's chest, her eyes tightly closed, and body shaking. Her words continued in broken whispers. "No... Niklio do something... I should have told her... Ephiny I can't let her go... she's my other half... Xena fight to come back to me, gods please." Her arms tightened on the warrior's body dramatically. "N-n-no don't die on me, gods please not again. Xena don't-"

"Gabrielle, I'm right here," whispered the warrior. "I'll never leave you." She felt

Gabrielle's hold loosen.

"You have to be my soulmate," ushered the bard. Her breathing began to pick up.

Xena didn't say anything at first. The word *soulmate* repeating in her mind without stopping. Then she slowly lowered her head close to Gabrielle's. "I am... and you're my soulmate." She saw her partner's head drop back and half-open sleepy eyes peered up, she smiled.

Gabrielle's lips crept along into a loving smile. Her head lifted a little to kiss Xena on her chest.

The older woman kissed her friend's temple and whispered, "Go back to sleep."

Without a word, the Amazon Queen curled back up to begin to sleep again.

Carefully, the warrior stood up with her bard in arms. She made her way to the bedrolls and settled down there with Gabrielle. Pulling a fur over them, she soon joined in with the sleeping.

The soulmates were left with the right dreams in each other's arms.

~*Part 3*~

Gabrielle twirled her staff and stabbed forward with it as a grin crossed her lips. She straightened up and leaned her head against her staff. Her eyes drifted to the right to see Xena coming over with Argo. "Ready?"

"Yup." The warrior came up to her partner and started walking down the dusty road with her.

At first the bard was silent then she walked a little closer to her warrior. "Xena?"

"Yeah?" Xena glanced down with concern.

"Were... you serious about last night?" The Amazon Queen lifted her eyes to the tall woman. "About us being soulmates?"

The older woman stopped walking and placed her freehand on Gabrielle's shoulder. "Yes." She locked eyes with Gabrielle. "I'd never go back on my word on that." She smiled warmly. "You're my soulmate."

Slowly a loving smile eased onto Gabrielle's lips. "And you're my soulmate."

Xena leaned forward to kiss her soulmate.

The bard chuckled once her partner pulled back. "Glad that's clear." She grinned.

"Me too." An amused smile played in the warrior's expression as she started walking again.

Gabrielle started walking with a new bounce to her stride. "Because I sure like to know what's mine."

~*~*~*~

Xena's pace began to become slow then eventually she stopped dead in the road.

"What is it?" Gabrielle raised her staff a little and peeked up to her warrior.

The warrior placed her right index finger over her lips. She turned her head to the right to where there was another road that meet their road to combine in one road down a ways.

A deep laugh came followed by a deep voice saying, "I'm not sure Iolaus."

"Oh come on Herc, I'm sure you know."

Gabrielle quickly looked up to her partner with a grin.

Xena's lips took on that grin as well. She chuckled and whispered, "Come on, we'll meet them up by the cross road."

The bard nodded and started walking again with her partner.

And within a minute the two women came crashing in on the two men. Iolaus and Hercules were left spinning around on their heels in surprise and laughs.

"How are you Xena?" Hercules took a step forward to pull the warrior in for a strong hug.

"Not bad."

The demi-god pulled back put kept his hands on Xena's arms. He nodded a few times while studying her body. "You look alive." He relinquished his grasp.

The Warrior Princess's lips shifted into an evil grin. "I'm not that easy to kill."

Iolaus smiled as he released the bard. "It's good to see you Gabrielle." He put his hands to his hips. "You look a lot better."

Gabrielle nodded her head to her partner's back. "That has a lot to do with it."

The small man chuckled. "I can imagine. I can't believe she's back."

"I am." Xena turned around on her heels to stand beside Hercules. "I had... unfinished business."

"Really?" Iolaus slowly raised an eyebrow. "And what was that?"

The warrior grinned as she folded her arms. "It's personal." Her eyes flickered to Gabrielle then back to the small man. "I heard you bumped into Gabrielle near the Amazon territory."

Iolaus nodded slowly. "Yeah." He glanced to the bard. "Wasn't the most pleasant scenario." He sighed.

Hercules turned his eyes to Gabrielle for the first time. "When was the last time I saw you, Gabrielle?"

The bard tilted her head up to the demi-god. "Since Prometheus."

The tall man's head bobbed. "You've changed a lot."

Gabrielle quietly laughed. "A lot has... happened since then."

"So I see." Hercules smiled and stepped forward to give the young woman a hug.

The Amazon Queen was a bit surprised but returned the hug. After the man released her she glanced to Xena with a raised eyebrow in surprise.

Xena just chuckled inwardly and winked. "So..." She glanced up to Hercules. "Where you two headed?"

"Delphi." The demi-god sighed dramatically while crossing his arms. "I've been told I need to go there to Apollo's oracle." Another dramatic sigh had come. "Supposedly Hera is up to something and I'm to find out from the oracle."

The warrior grimaced. "Glad that's not my adventure." She quietly laughed.

"Where you and Gabrielle headed?" Iolaus shifted his weight to his other leg.

"Amphipolis," was Gabrielle's quick answer.

Xena did the explanation. "I need to drop in on mother. Make sure she knows the rumors of my death are a little... off."

The two men chuckled together.

"Wellll..." The demi-god glanced to Xena mainly. "You can join up with Iolaus and I."

Xena peered up to the man. "I was going to tell you the same thing." She smirked.

Hercules chuckled.

"Sure we will... right Herc." The smaller man evilly grinned to the demi-god.

"Uh huh." Hercules turned his attention to Xena again. "If that ladies will allow us to grace them with our presence." His eyes flickered to Gabrielle.

The Warrior Princess looked to her partner. "Do we want them?"

Gabrielle laughed while her right arm wrapped over her stomach. "I think I can put up with a couple of men."

"Hey!" Iolaus counterfeit glared.

The bard chuckled while saying, "No offense."

Xena chuckled and made the final decision. "Alright boys, lets travel." She walked over to Argo to get the reins again.

The two women started walking beside each other.

Iolaus peered up to Hercules. "Boys?"

The tall man patted his friend's back. "I think she just meant you." He started power

walking to catch up.

The blond man's mouth dropped. "Now I'm really offended." He closed his mouth and jogged up from behind. "Wait up."

"So, care to explain how you came back from the dead?" Hercules glanced over to the Warrior Princess.

"Just one of my many skills." The warrior smirked at the tall man.

The demi-god laughed while shaking his head. "Right, what happened?"

Xena glanced down to her soulmate. "Ask the bard." She glanced up but she received playful hit to her stomach. She lowered her eyes to Gabrielle and she grinned.

Gabrielle shook her head at her warrior's words. "You're bad." She turned her head to the two men to her right. "Long story."

"Should be interesting then." Iolaus evilly grinned.

The bard groaned as she shook her head. "Alright... once upon a time..."

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle took a deep breath. "...and happily ever after."

"That's the last time I ever ask for a story." Iolaus sighed. "That was the most sarcastic story."

The bard corked an eyebrow. "Serves *you* right." She grinned then looked ahead again.

"So how was Autolycus?" Hercules's eyes went between the warrior and bard. "We haven't seen him in awhile."

The Warrior Princess shrugged and replied, "Other than getting his personal space invaded... he was pretty good."

The demi-god had an amused smile for a second but went serious. "He told me about that adventure with getting that chest back for your friends."

Xena's head bobbed. "Yeah, that was a while ago." She turned her head to the tall man. "I don't know where you dig your help up but..."

Hercules chuckled. "I know, but he's a good man."

"True."

"So, I hear you're the new Amazon Queen in the central nation Gabrielle." Hercules gaze went to the bard.

Gabrielle slowly nodded then lifted her eyes to the tall man. "Just recently."

"How'd that happen?" Iolaus furrowed his eyebrows at the Amazon Queen.

The bard corked an eyebrow. "Are you asking for a story?"

The blond haired man laughed and answered, "No... just a quick explanation."

The small woman nodded with a grin. "Queen Melosa was killed by Velasca, an Amazon. When I came through I was asked to take the rightful caste... I did." She smiled warmly.

"Wait... whose running the nation now?" Iolaus had a confused look.

"Gabrielle left a regent in charge." Xena glanced to the short man then back ahead.

"Ah, that would make sense."

And that's mainly where the conversation ended until the group left the road to go into a clearing. There they began to prepare for the night. Xena soon was walking down to a near lake with Hercules to gather up some fish. Gabrielle on the other hand was left in the clearing finishing up with preparing the camp and Iolaus was helping.

"So how have you and Gabrielle been getting along?"

Xena glanced up as she waded through the water. Her hands were behind her head pulling her hair up. "Good."

Hercules nodded and sat down on a rock near the water's edge. He placed his elbows on his knees. "I didn't think she'd stick it out this long."

"And why is that?" The warrior placed her fingertips in the water as she waited for an explanation.

"She's quite young." Hercules sighed as he saw his friend begin to feel around in the water. "Not that she couldn't handle it... its just concerning to have a young person to see what the world is really like at a young age."

The tall woman's head moved in understanding. "Maybe." She took a deep breath. "She's smart and isn't quite young as you may think."

The man chuckled a little. "You'd know better then I." He smiled warmly to the dark woman.

Xena returned the smile but her attention went back to the water as she felt a fish.

"Really?" Iolaus dropped the last branch into the fire. "But she's in the lava pit now?"

"Yeah." Gabrielle walked over to the fire to place her herbs near there. She straightened up as she glanced to her friend beside her. "I wanna thank you again for your help back a week ago."

Iolaus smiled warmly. "It was no problem." He took a deep breath. "I know that can be hard." His smile came back. "I'm just glad she came back."

"Me too." Gabrielle chuckled sadly with a sigh. "I still can't believe it." Her right hand went behind her neck.

"Yeah I'm sure." The man folded his arms. "I'm glad she came back to keep fighting for good."

The bard grinned inwardly. "Yeah," was her half-mocked response.

"I'm glad you made it back Xena." Hercules stood up from the rock.

Xena slowly walked out of the water with two fish in her hands, on the shore there were two others. "Had plans I had to finish." She grinned.

The man chuckled with a smile. "I'm sure."

The warrior had a smile but she felt her back start to stiff up over what she knew was about to happen. *Where are you when I need you my bard?*

Hercules put his hands on the warrior's arms and leaned in to let his lips touch Xena's.

Iolaus pulled back slowly from the warm kiss.

Gabrielle gave a shy smile and looked away. Her eyes shifted back to the small man. "Look Iolaus, I'm..."

"...taken." Xena shrugged while brushing past Hercules. She tossed her two fish on the other two. She went to put her boots on and collect her chakram.

The demi-god turned around slowly as he folded his arms against his chest. "I'm sorry for earlier." He sighed a little. "By whom?"

The warrior straightened up after tying her boots. "It's actually..."

"...personal." The Amazon Queen put her hands on her hips. "No offense or anything."

Iolaus chuckled with a smile. "As long as you're happy." He folded his arms over his chest. "And you are..."

"...happy?" Hercules bent down to lift up two fish.

"Yes." Xena gave a brief smile and reached behind to let her hair down.

The man bent one knee. "So, you're really not going to tell me who?"

The Warrior Princess's eyes narrowed a little. She bent down to lifted the last two fish. "Does it really matter?" She started walking towards the camp.

Hercules didn't move and answered with a serious tone. "Yes."

Xena glanced back as she stopped in mid-stride. "Why?"

"Because I'd like to know who is taking care of my friend." The tall man walked up to his friend. "I'd like to know you're safe."

The warrior knew what kind of safe Hercules was speaking of. "Gabrielle," was her strong statement.

Slowly a warm smile eased across the demi-god's lips. "That's wonderful." He sighed contently. "I should have known." He started walking along side the warrior. "For how long?"

Xena took a deep breath. "Forty-three candlemarks."

Hercules glanced up with a grin. "You hit it hard huh?"

"Gods yes," sighed the warrior. She then shook her head. "Never would have imagined."

The man quietly laughed with a smile. "I could." He breathed heavily. "And she is happy too?"

"Yes." The dark woman glanced up to the trees. "Gabrielle is still trying to take it in." Her eyes flickered to her friend.

Hercules's head bobbed. "I can understand." His lips curled into a grin. "Not everybody can to say they get the Warrior Princess."

Xena stopped walking.

The demi-god kept walking with a chuckle.

The tall woman sighed, shook her head, and started walking again.

Gabrielle glanced up to see her partner and Hercules come into the camp. "What'd you find?" Her arms crossed against her chest.

Xena lifted up one of the fish. "Trout sound alright?"

Slowly the bard smiled to her soulmate. "Perfect." She stood in front of the fire.

Iolaus was sitting over on a log with a content look. He glanced up to Hercules. "You catch any of them?" He corked an eyebrow.

The demi-god sighed very dramatically. "No."

"Oh come on big guy, you letting Xena do everything?"

"Yup." The warrior reached over to take the large man's two fish. "Be back."

"Hey Xen?"

The Warrior Princess stopped in mid-action and glanced over to her partner. She raised an eyebrow in question.

"Let me come with you." Gabrielle strolled over to the saddlebags. "The fish need to be chopped up into strips." She pulled out a pan and came up to her partner. "Lead the way."

"Be back boys." The warrior winked and headed into the forest in the early evening with her partner.

Iolaus peered over to his partner. "Xen?"

Hercules shrugged. "Nickname." He strolled over to his friend.

"Xen," whispered the small man. He shook his head. "Maybe I'll try calling her that."

"I wouldn't recommend it."

"What not?" The blond haired man glanced over to his friend.

Hercules sat down and patted his partner's knee. "This is the same woman we're talking about right? The one that was a warlord?"

Iolaus quietly laughed. "You may have a point."

The demi-god nodded and looked away as he ushered, "And I wouldn't want to know what Gabrielle would do."

~*~*~*~

"You told him?"

"Yeah." Xena sighed as she continued to scrap off the scales on the last fish. She stopped and peered up to her friend. "You... don't mind?"

Gabrielle chuckled. "No." She shrugged. "I mean I just had..." She saw her soulmate going back to scaling the fish. "Iolaus kiss me," she mumbled. Now she saw her warrior stop scaling the fish.

"He what?" The warrior asked in a calming but low voice.

The bard glimpsed over to her partner. "Kissed me."

"That's what I thought." The Warrior Princess continued her scaling. "I'll kill him," she ushered to nobody but herself.

A quiet laugh left the young woman. "No you won't." She brought in a long breath. "Because I'll kill Hercules then."

Xena laughed with a grin. "And you would with your temper."

"Yes," growled the small woman. She started to laugh a little.

The warrior snickered and finished scaling the fish. "So, this means we need to make a personal space zone between us and the boys."

Gabrielle laughed, stopped cutting the fish into strips, and glanced at her partner with an amused look. "You're talking such centaur shit Xena, it's not even funny."

The older woman laughed while taking her knife to cut the fish now. "I don't talk CS."

"Pffft... try BS then." The bard snickered and took the handed strips of trout to organize in the pan.

"Nor BS." The warrior smirked for a second. "We are getting space though." Her voice was stern.

"You're serious?" Gabrielle stopped in mid-action. Her head turned to the warrior.

Xena took a deep breath as her knife stopped running down the fish meat. "Yeah, I am." She locked eyes with her soulmate. "Call it my protectiveness."

Slowly a loving smile creased the bard's lips. "You know I've always loved that about you."

The tall woman smiled back. "Good." She winked and handed the last two strips of trout. She stood up after cleaning the knife and putting it away.

The bard finished organizing the strips of trout but left the pan on the rock. Her staff leaned against a tree beside her. "Xena?"

"Yeah?" The warrior put her hands on her hips with an arched eyebrow.

"I love you," whispered Gabrielle.

Xena moved instantly to pull her soulmate in tightly. She lowered her head down. "I love you too Gabrielle." She just ushered. Her lips pressed against her bard's forehead. "Don't... leave me huh?" A bit of a laugh escaped her but it faded out as she felt how serious this was to her.

"I won't ever Xena, I promise." Gabrielle slowly closed her eyes with her head resting on Xena's chest. "Don't leave me either, right?"

"Definitely not." The warrior squeezed her soulmate. "We've got plans."

The Amazon Queen chuckled and lifted her head. "Yeah we do." Her right hand came up behind her partner's head to pull her down.

Xena followed the physical command and let her lips seal over Gabrielle's.

The bard moaned lightly and pushed her left hand against her warrior's stomach to feel the strong muscles. She pulled back from the kiss and grinned. "You're not a bad kisser."

The tall woman laughed. "You're not bad yourself." Her eyes twinkled. She lowered her head again and whispered, "Wait till I kiss you a little lower on your body."

The young woman went bright red as her body warmed. "Right."

The dark female chuckled and rubbed her cheek against Gabrielle's. "You're cute when you blush."

"Gee thanks." The short woman sighed dramatically.

Xena chuckled and let her lips trail over her soulmate's cheek. "Do you know how beautiful you are?"

"Nothing compared to you," was the quiet answer.

The warrior smiled and brushed her lips over her bard's soft lips.

"Gods." Emerald eyes were closed. "I can't believe this."

"Neither can I." The tall woman slowly and gently took the warm lips.

Gabrielle responded gradually. "It'll only get... more incredible." Her mouth was spreading open a little more.

"You have no idea." The warrior put her right hand behind her soulmate's head. Her tongue slipped out to insert into a warm mouth.

The bard whimpered and pressed her body into her friend's. Her silk tongue was already invading the warrior's mouth.

The kiss lasted for a few seconds but the soulmates pulled back rapidly knowing where it would have gone if it kept going.

Gabrielle laughed a little sheepishly. "Okay, out of control." She turned to the pot and raised her chest high.

Xena folded her arms over her chest. "Almost."

The young woman chuckled and lifted the pan.

"Here, I'll get your staff." The Warrior Princess reached over to lift the staff easily.

"Thanks." The Amazon Queen walked along beside her partner.

"Anytime." The warrior glanced down with a smile.

Gabrielle smiled up.

~*~*~*~

The group had eaten all of the well-cooked trout. Soon after they talked about a little bit of everything. Xena and Gabrielle then decided to accompany Hercules and Iolaus to the outskirts of Amphipolis before going to see Cyrene. Following that everybody made headway for sleeping since there would be a lot of ground to cover tomorrow.

Xena lifted the bedroll with fur, she threw it at Hercules.

The demi-god huffed as the fur and bedroll hit him in the chest. "You sure?"

"Yeah." The warrior smirked. "Gabrielle and I don't... mind sleeping together."

Hercules just grinned a little. "Good glad it won't be... a strain for you both."

The warrior rolled her eyes. "And don't thank me." She turned around to walk to the opposite side of the fire.

"Thanks Xena," called the large man.

Iolaus reappeared out of the dark forest to come up beside Hercules. "Ready for bed?"

"Uh huh." Hercules turned to shove the bedroll and fur into his friend's arms. "That's yours."

"You sure?"

"Yes." The tall man smiled.

Gabrielle opened her eyes at hearing the boots coming towards her. She looked up to see her warrior smiled down at her. "Hey."

"Tired?" Xena knelt down and began to untie her boots.

The bard nodded a little. "Some." She was curled up under the fur on the bedroll. "You?"

The warrior shrugged for a moment. "Always tired."

The young woman snickered. "You're getting old."

The dark woman huffed and responded in a tease. "Gee, I love you too."

Gabrielle chuckled and reached out to grasp Xena's hand. "Mmm, I do love you."

The Warrior Princess smiled warmly as she studied warm green eyes. "I know." She stood up and took her boots off. After that her armor came off.

"How long are we going to stay in Amphipolis?"

Xena shrugged as she picked up her chakram and sword. "Maybe two days or three. We'll see huh?"

"Yeah." The bard lifted up the top of her fur in invite.

The older woman smiled placed the sword and chakram down on the ground near the bedroll and crawled into her partner's arms. Her lips claimed Gabrielle's in a gentle kiss. "Sleep well Gabrielle."

"You too Xen." Gabrielle kissed her warrior's forehead then tightened her arms around Xena. "I love you," she whispered in her soulmate's ear.

"I love you Gabrielle." Xena tangled her legs with Gabrielle's.

All three forms shifted into their dreamscapes with in a quarter of a candlemark. Tomorrow would come with it's plans.

Section 2

~*Part 4*~

Gabrielle slowly came up behind her partner. Her free left hand came up to rest on her soulmate's mid back. "Xena, you're not riding Argo alone."

The warrior jerked down a strap on the saddle then slowly turned her head to Gabrielle. "Don't want to stay on the ground with the boys?" She cocked an eyebrow with her stoic expression.

"No," growled the bard, smiling innocently.

Xena chuckled as a smile broke out. "Alright." She lifted her eyes to glance back at where the camp use to be. "You ready boys?"

Both Hercules and Iolaus came strolling up in the morning sun.

"Yup," Iolaus replied.

Xena nodded, turned to Argo, and mounted. After her boots slipped into the stirrups, she held her hand down to her bard.

The Amazon Queen handed over the staff first and watched her soulmate place it back with the saddlebags. Then she was offered another hand and she easily took it. Gabrielle then found herself hauled up and sitting in front of Xena. She glimpsed back at her friend and asked, "The front?"

The tall woman just grinned. She slipped one arm around her soulmate's waist and in the other hand she took the reins. "Let's go."

Iolaus shook his head as he watched the mare head down the road. He peered up to the demi-god. "Why does she always act like the leader?"

"Maybe 'cause she ran an army." Hercules looked down as an evil smirk came across his lips.

The small man huffed. "Thanks." He jogged ahead.

The large man chuckled a little and went jogging ahead to catch up.

~*~*~*~

Xena dismounted Argo then helped her bard down. She strolled up to her mare's head and grabbed the reins.

"Argo doesn't like bridges?"

The warrior glanced over to Hercules. "She's not fond of narrow ones... especially over deep gorges like this."

The demi-god nodded. "She'll be fine?"

"Yup." Xena started walking towards the bridge with her soulmate.

The boys followed behind.

The air was filled with the roar of the large river far, far below them.

Gabrielle suddenly felt the urge to walk over to Argo's bags and get her staff. She then came back up to her friend's sides. "I hate this."

Quickly the warrior glanced down and knew what she meant. "You'll be okay?"

"Yeah," replied the bard quietly. "Just as long as I'm not hanging over this gorge by a rope."

The older woman stepped closer to her partner and gave Gabrielle's shoulder a tight squeeze.

The bard peeked up with a smile. "Thanks."

Xena smiled warmly then gazed ahead. Within a few seconds they passed over the bridge and were on the opposite side of the gorge.

The Amazon Queen breathed a sigh of relief.

The group soon began to enter into the woods again by way of the road but soon found themselves slowing down and coming to a stop.

The warrior narrowed her eyes and walked back to her mare's saddlebags. Reaching in she pulled out her whip to tie on her side.

Hercules came up to his friend's side. "Do you know what that is?"

The tall woman shook her head as she listened to the low sound of scraping that echoed through the forest. "No, I was hoping you did."

"Nope." The demi-god was tense. "It's coming towards us."

"Uh huh." Xena patted her mare's rump. "Go on girl."

Argo whined a little and trotted off into the woods far from the approaching sound.

Gabrielle took a few steps back as the scraping came closer. "Xena... what is that?" She raised her staff.

"I don't know." The warrior reached behind to unsheathe her sword.

Iolaus followed suit and unsheathed the sword at his side.

Slowly the group turned their heads to the right towards the forest. Once they did a huge ugly head popped out of the forest. The monster opened its mouth and screeched at the group.

"Great," mumbled the warrior, "a hydra." She glared up at the demi-god.

Hercules shrugged. "A little entertainment."

Suddenly the hydra snapped its head forward, sending the small group scattering. Xena and Gabrielle jumped one way and the boys the other.

Xena glanced over to the men. "We can use that gorge."

Hercules nodded. "Let's go." He turned to the hydra and waved his hand. "Come on you ugly sucker. Come and get me." He started to run back to the gorge.

The hydra roared and slithered down the road following after the demi-god.

The warrior, Iolaus, and Amazon Queen followed behind. As soon as they came up from behind they found Hercules fighting the hydra bare handed. So they joined in with the fight.

Xena came up to Hercules's side. "So, you wanna throw it in the gorge?" She smirked.

The large man sighed, ducked from a hydra attack, then bounced up again. "Yup."

"Good."

"So what's the plan?" Iolaus asked, ducking an attack beside them.

"Herc is going..." Xena slashed forward with her sword to stop the hydra from attacking them. "To throw him in the gorge."

The small man chuckled. "Good luck big guy."

"Thanks." Hercules sighed, punched forward hitting the hydra hard in the face.

The hydra's head snapped up causing it to become angry. It whipped its head towards the bard. Its mouth slowly opened in a sneer.

"Xena!" Gabrielle raised her staff as she saw the hydra start an attack.

"Gabrielle!" The warrior went running ahead, but she was too late. For the first time her running wasn't fast enough and she watched her bard get hit by the hydra's head. She stopped dead in her tracks and went frantic when Gabrielle went flying over the ledge into the gorge. "No, Gabrielle!" She went running towards the ledge and leaped off.

"Xena!" Iolaus turned towards the ledge to see both the warrior and bard gone. "No," he whispered.

"Iolaus, I need your help," Hercules yelled, punching forward to strike the hydra. "Iolaus!" He jumped away as the hydra lunged. "They'll be fine, I need your help."

The small man shook his head out a daze and turned to help fight the hydra.

"Xena!"

The warrior grabbed her whip as she went diving down the cliff side and snapped it towards her soulmate.

Gabrielle frantically reached up to clench the end of the whip.

When she saw her partner's hands closed over the end, Xena reached out with her free hand to swipe frantically at the cliff side.

They fell faster and faster towards the roaring river. Their heads pounded and their bodies screamed at the nearing death. The air whipped by leaving them gasping for air.

The Warrior Princess's hand suddenly became entangled in a handful of vines. She came to a jerking stop and swayed back and forth on the vines.

The bard held tightly to the end of the whip. She glanced down at the river, it was a lot larger than what it had been earlier. She shut her eyes tightly and dug her head into her arms as she dangled in the air.

Xena rammed her heels into the side of the cliff and glanced down to her partner. She breathed heavily. "Gabrielle?"

The young woman didn't look up. Her memories of the lava pit were flashing through her mind leaving her shaking and scared.

The warrior had wide eyes as she tried to figure out what to do. "Come on Gabrielle, I need you." She held tightly to the whip. "Gabrielle, I'm going to sway you towards the

cliff so you can grab it. Alright?"

Gabrielle shook her head and closed her eyes tighter. "Xena," she whispered in fear.

Xena closed her eyes. "You can do this Gabrielle. I am not leaving you like this; we're not going to fall." Her eyes locked with emerald ones. "You'll be fine," she whispered.

The small woman took a deep breath as she forced the memories away. "Alright," she finally said.

The warrior smiled reassuringly. "Here we go." She carefully began to swing the whip back and forth. She watched her partner while listening to the roar of the river below.

Gabrielle reached out and easily found herself holding onto the cliff side and drove her boots into small crevasses.

"Now climb up a little and tie the whip around your waist. Got me?"

The small woman slowly nodded and silently climbed up the cliff until she reached a small ledge. She then stopped to tie the whip around her waist.

"Can you make it up to me?" Xena jerked her hand a little on the vines to get a better grasp.

The bard nodded faintly and slowly climbed up the cliff side with a quivering body.

"There you go, you got it Gabrielle," coached the warrior. "Take your time. We'll let the boys have fun with the hydra," she grinned.

Gabrielle peered up with a small smile at the joke. She took a deep breath and continued up the cliff.

"You're almost here." The warrior watched tensely, ready to spring into action if her soulmate fell.

The young woman made it up beside Xena only cling to the cliff side in fear. "That was not fun," she whispered.

"I know." Xena moved to face the cliff instead of overlooking the gorge. "How you feel?"

The bard shook her head and closed her eyes.

"It's alright." The warrior leaned over and placed a gentle kiss on her bard's temple. Xena tied the end of her whip around her waist. "At least we didn't hit the water huh?" Another grin took her lips.

"Yeah." Gabrielle chuckled a little and glanced at her partner. "Would have been one mean belly flop."

The tall woman laughed quietly then shifted closer to her friend. "Alright, climb onto me, and wrap your legs and arms around me."

"Xena, I can-"

"No you can't." The warrior sighed. "Your body is shook up." She sadly smiled. "Let

me at least get us half way up the cliff."

Slowly the bard nodded and moved to grasp her soulmate. Her arms went around Xena's breasts while her legs tangled around the warrior's waist.

"Here we go." Xena took a deep breath, shifted away from the vines, and began to climb.

Gabrielle lowered her head towards the river.

"Whatever you do don't look..." The tall woman sighed as she felt Gabrielle's head dig into her neck. "Look down." Another dramatic sigh came from her.

Gabrielle chuckled a little while holding tightly. "Sorry," she whispered.

"It's... alright." The warrior gritted her teeth while climbing up the cliff side. She could feel her muscles straining.

The bard breathed deeply then released the breath in a sigh. "Heights... I hate heights." She lifted her eyes up to see how far up they had to go. "First it's Argo, then the lava pit, and now this gorge." A small laugh escaped her lips. "I think somebody is trying to get me over my fear of heights."

"You're probably right," Xena chuckled.

The Amazon Queen's expression dropped. "Xena, where's my staff? If it's floating down that river Ephiny will kill me."

The tall woman took a deep breath while fumbling to find another handhold. "It's up on the ledge, don't worry."

Gabrielle nodded slowly. She then leaned her head into her soulmate's neck. "Once we get to the top we'll still have the hydra to deal with."

"That's not in my schedule." Xena sucked in a breath and pulled herself up. Her body soon became coated with a layer of sweat. "Hercules and Iolaus better take care of it."

"Yeah," the young woman laughed quietly. "Fighting hydras isn't in our job description."

The warrior laughed and stopped climbing for a second. "But bacchae, dryads, and crazed gods are?"

"Yup." The small woman snickered.

Xena shook her head with a grin and continued with the climb. "I'm still trying to understand why I always carry you up things. First it was the well, next the lava pit, and now it's a cliff side."

"Are you really complaining?"

The Warrior Princess corked an eyebrow and glanced up to see the top coming closer. "Complaining about your body against mine... never."

A small laugh came from the small woman. "Good." She took a deep breath and said,

"I think I can climb now."

"You sure?" Xena stopped, pressing her body against the cliff.

"Yeah, I know you can handle it but I don't want to-"

"Hey." The warrior's voice was quiet. "I love carrying you up."

"I know," Gabrielle chuckled and began to shift. She soon found herself clinging to the cliff side instead of her warrior.

"Okay?" The older woman glanced at her partner.

The short female simply nodded and started climbing up the cliff.

The warrior followed along side. "Watch your footing."

"Yes ma'am." Gabrielle smirked at her partner.

"Ha ha." The warrior rolled her eyes and hauled herself up the cliff side.

The roar of the river below wasn't quite as loud now. Soon the sound of the hydra's screaming filtered to them.

Xena lifted herself up and growled, "They better throw that hydra over."

The bard chuckled briefly but stopped as she scaled the cliff side. "You know we'll have to do it." She smirked to her partner. "Men can never do anything right."

The tall woman laughed. "Uh huh, then explain to me why we're climbing a cliff side?"

The Amazon Queen laughed and stopped climbing. "Good point."

"I know." Xena stopped for a breather. "How you doing?"

Gabrielle breathed deeply. "I'm fine." She looked up to see how far they had to go. "I might make it." She sighed dramatically at the distance.

"Well... let's make it before nightfall." The Warrior Princess continued climbing. "Next time you need to find a smaller gorge to be thrown into."

"Oh that's so funny." The young woman mock glared and started climbing again. "I'll remember that for the future."

"Good." The older woman smirked momentarily. "At least it was a river instead of a lava pit."

Gabrielle partially huffed. "Glad my dire straights are a little more satisfactory." She saw the ledge coming into better view.

"Uh huh." Xena grinned for a moment and stopped while waiting for Gabrielle to catch up.

The short woman came up beside her partner.

Suddenly the pair heard a, "Look out below!" A loud screeching scream followed.

"Xena!" Gabrielle's eyes widened as she saw the hydra on the ledge above them.

The warrior lifted her right hand to press Gabrielle hard against the cliff. "Kiss the cliff." She pressed her body hard against the rocks herself.

The hydra's head flew back from the force of a blow, and it tumbled over the side of the cliff with an ear-piercing cry.

Gabrielle was hit by the hydra on her side. She lost her hold with one hand and slipped. "Xena!"

The warrior's right arm instantly wrapped around her soulmate's waist to hold her. "Grab the cliff."

"This is just not... my day," grumbled the small woman as she clamped her hands on the handholds. She came up beside Xena.

Xena sighed. "You okay?"

"Uh huh." Gabrielle shivered. "I think I felt its slobber on my back."

The dark woman laughed but glanced up to the ledge. "Come on, let's go."

"Yeah," groaned the Amazon Queen.

Together they started to climb again.

"How's the weather down there ladies?" Hercules smirked while waving.

"Why don't you come down here and find out?" Xena yelled with a glare.

The demi-god put his hands to his hips. "No that's alright."

Iolaus came up beside his friend and peered down at the two women climbing the cliff side. "You guys want a rope?"

"No... no." Xena lifted herself up and yelled, "We're good."

Hercules shrugged. "Suit yourself. We'll wait for you."

"How considerate gentlemen." The warrior smirked up to the men.

The large man chuckled while crossing his arms against his chest. "We did offer a rope." He shrugged. "Call if you need help." He strolled off.

Iolaus smirked.

The Warrior Princess narrowed her eyes at the small man. "I can't wait to wipe that smile off your face Iolaus."

The small man laughed and responded, "You have to get up here first."

"Oh we will Iolaus." The bard shot a smug look. "We promise that."

"Herc and I will be waiting." Iolaus strutted off to join Hercules.

The Amazon Queen sighed dramatically. "Men." She concentrated on her climbing.

"Yup." Xena tilted her head while hauling herself up. "Gotta love them."

"Yeah if you want kids." Gabrielle laughed with her partner.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle fell to the ground and propped up her knees while breathing heavily. "That was fun."

Xena reached to her side to untie the whip. "Good exercise."

"Right." The bard untied the end of the whip then glanced to her right to see Hercules and Iolaus sitting on the ground talking. "This is the last time we travel with them." She peered up to her partner. "They don't even greet us."

The warrior laughed quietly while coiling up the whip. "That's alright." She lowered her eyes to her bard. "You okay?"

"Yeah." The small woman nodded a little and glimpsed up to her partner. "How 'bout you?"

"Wonderful." The older woman grinned. "Think you can travel?"

"On Argo?" Gabrielle grinned. "Sure."

Xena laughed and held her hand out. "Come on."

The young woman took the hand and was helped to her feet. She then searched out her staff and joined the group.

Soon the four friends were back on the road with Argo. The boys told their story to the girls about how they stopped the hydra. Gabrielle was rolling her eyes thinking how much better she and Xena could have done. Xena had that mutual feeling with her soulmate even though they'd been on the cliff side. Eventually they all came to a fork in the road, one went south the other branched east.

"Well boys, this is where we split." Xena put her hands to her hips.

Hercules nodded slowly. "Was great seeing you both."

"I wish the feeling was mutual." The warrior smirked.

The demi-god laughed for a moment. "You'll never forgive me for the hydra huh?"

"Nope." The tall woman shifted to hug the large man.

Gabrielle was soon exchanging hugs with Iolaus and Hercules.

Oddly enough, the Warrior Princess gave a hug to Iolaus as well. She was glad that she could finally give one to the small man after their past history.

Afterwards they split, the soulmates headed east while the boys went south to Delphi.

"That was nice." Gabrielle gazed down the road.

The warrior slowly nodded. "Was a surprise."

"Yeah." The Amazon Queen chuckled. "Well, we can put hydras in our book of creatures we've fought."

"Try cliffs," the tall woman smirked. "We never really fought that hydra."

The young woman laughed then slowly nodded. "True." She became serious. "Thank you for saving me."

Xena smiled briefly then grinned. "In my job description."

"No doubt," mumbled the bard. "One of your many skills."

"Really." The warrior sighed dramatically. "It is a skill to save you." She received a playful slap to her stomach.

"That was so funny I forgot to laugh," Gabrielle glared but grinned.

The older woman snickered but sighed contently. "Well, we should be in Amphipolis in about half of a candlemark."

"Good." Gabrielle's free hand cover her stomach. "Right in time for dinner."

Xena laughed and wrapped an arm around her soulmate's shoulders. She kissed her bard's temple and whispered, "I love you."

The young woman smiled warmly and responded, "I love you too."

~*~*~*~

The warm exchange of greetings, hugs, and stories had been done by the late night. Cyrene was more than happy to see her daughter and best friend. She loved company and outside news along with the bard's stories. So the entire evening Gabrielle was in bard mode while her partner listened carefully. Cyrene for her part had been worried for Gabrielle after hearing the rumors of her daughter's death. She wasn't even sure if her daughter had truly been killed. Part of her said no and now as she sat there listening to the story of what happened, it left her smiling. Smiling because she knew the real reason why her daughter fought to come back to life. She could even see it in the bard's eyes.

Later that evening the soulmates finally made their way to Xena's old bedroom.

Gabrielle sat on the bed with a scroll and quill.

Xena came out of the washroom and wearing only her leathers. She crawled into the opposite side of the bed and slowly stalked over to her soulmate.

The bard pretended not to notice and kept trying to write.

The warrior came right up to her partner and nuzzled her neck. She glanced over her bard's shoulder to peer down at the familiar handwriting. She grinned and then slid her arms around Gabrielle's waist.

"Hey, I'm trying to write here," the young woman complained, grinning evilly at her friend.

"Oh?" The dark woman pressed her lips into her bard's neck. "I didn't notice."

"Then what did you notice?" whispered the Amazon Queen.

The tall woman grinned while kissing her soulmate's neck. "Just an incredibly beautiful woman."

"Mmm, good answer."

Xena grinned while leaning down to kiss the young woman gently. She lifted her head with a smile and circled her legs around Gabrielle. "How long are you going to write?"

"How long do you want me to write?" Gabrielle grinned.

"However long you want to." The warrior brought her arms up onto her soulmate's shoulders and reached down to the scroll. She completely unrolled it to see how long it was. "Mmm, how stocked is your scroll supply?"

"Not bad." The young woman sighed and relaxed back into Xena. She then reached forward to take the scroll and began to roll it up. "I'll write later."

"Oh?"

"Uh huh." Gabrielle placed her stuff on the floor. She turned in her soulmate's arms to snuggle into Xena's warm body. "Gods, I love you Xena."

"And I love you my bard." Xena kissed her partner's forehead and lay back on the bed, taking her partner with her.

The young woman smiled as she lay on top of her soulmate. She pushed back her lover's bangs with a smile. Her fingertips then traveled down to brush over smooth lips. Slowly her fingers went over her warrior's neck and then to the top of her chest.

The warrior watched intently as her hands carefully held Gabrielle at the sides.

Gabrielle was immersed in what she was doing. Soon her small hands came up to the leather straps and she began to carefully pull them off. Her eyes flickered to Xena's eyes for authority.

Xena smiled warmly in response while bringing her hands up to clasp her partner's. Slowly she helped her soulmate pull the straps down.

The bard had slid down her warrior's body a little and saw as the rim of the leathers peeled back to reveal large breasts. "What happened to the breast dagger?"

The older woman quietly laughed. "It's with the other weapons," she grinned.

The Amazon Queen grinned but lost it as she went serious. She was a bit unsure about things now.

"Just do what feels right," whispered the warrior.

Gabrielle considered that and kissed her soulmate warmly before her lips came closer to her warrior's right breast.

Xena could feel the warm breath touching her breasts and then felt the warm lips take her breast. She moaned softly while keeping her arms around her bard.

Gabrielle started with a gentle sucking and then tried licking. After a few moments her right hand came up to knead the other breasts.

The warrior tried to remain still as the bard learned of her breasts. She felt the instinct to arch her back into Gabrielle, but she stopped herself. One thing at a time. But she kept with the low moans and whimpers. When she felt teeth close over her nipple her eyes shut and a strong desire shot through her. "Be careful," she whispered.

The bard understood the warning. She left the breast and went to the other one. She switched it up. She mainly repeated the process and when she finally ended her learning she found her soulmate breathing heavy.

The warrior kept her eyes closed while trying to even her breathing.

"You okay?" The bard asked with concern.

The older woman grinned while her eyes drifted open. "Perfect." She took a deep breath and felt more in control. "You?"

Gabrielle quietly laughed. "Real good." She leaned down to kiss her partner. When she lifted her head she began to pull the straps back up.

Xena still was grinning.

"What's the grin?" The bard cocked an eyebrow, crossed her arms over her friend's chest, and settled her chin on her arms.

"Would you like to try something... different?"

Ever so slowly the young woman lifted an eyebrow. "It... depends." A small grin creased her lips.

"Let's try sleeping in the nude."

Gabrielle's eyes widen. "What, so we can see who can take it the longest?"

The Warrior Princess shrugged. "Not exactly but if you can't handle it... that's alright." She patted her partner's shoulder.

The short woman narrowed her eyes. "Alright, you got me."

"I knew that."

The bard huffed with a grin. She rolled off her warrior and stood up.

Xena did the same and saw Gabrielle starting to unlace her top. She grinned.

The young woman raised an eyebrow and began to take the top off after unlacing it.

The taller female slipped off her leather straps and started to slide out of her leathers.

She watched Gabrielle's newly formed muscles intently. After her leathers were off, they joined Gabrielle's clothes on the chair.

The Amazon Queen took a shaky breath and peered up at her partner.

The warrior smiled warmly and took a step closer. "We don't have to."

The small woman quietly laughed with a sigh. "It's just different huh?"

"Yeah." Xena lowered her head. "Just remember you're gorgeous, so there's nothing to worry about."

Gabrielle nodded a little as she took a step to hug her partner. She felt all of her body press into Xena's warm and smooth body. She chuckled a little. "Skin on skin."

"Uh huh."

The bard smiled after she pulled away. She started to grin evilly and took a step back to act like she was examining her partner's body for quality.

The Warrior Princess sighed dramatically with a grin. She held out her arms and began to turn in a circle. "How's this look?" She came back to face her partner.

Gabrielle shrugged and nodded a little. "Not too bad for an old warrior."

Xena narrowed her eyes and quickly moved to lift her soulmate. "Right." She carried her partner into the bed and settled into the middle. She pulled Gabrielle on top of her body. "Old warrior?"

A small laugh escaped the small woman. "Okay, the young and sexy warrior. How's that?"

"You're helping my confidence now." The warrior kissed the top of her bard's forehead.

The blond grinned, then went serious. "Really though, you're perfect Xena." She smiled warmly. "You're beautiful, powerful, gentle, perfect blue eyes, amazing smile..."

Xena chuckled with a contented look.

Gabrielle grinned. "And just unbelievably sexy." She lowered her head close to Xena's. "And I get you."

"Everything." The warrior smiled warmly.

The bard closed the distance and kissed her warrior. When she pulled back she had a huge smile. "Hades, I'm lucky."

The Warrior Princess grinned while pushing her partner's head down on her chest. "Go to sleep."

"Try you mean." Gabrielle tucked her head under her soulmate's chin. She closed her eyes.

"Sleep well." The warrior kissed her partner's forehead and closed her eyes.

"Night Xen." The bard quickly found sleep like her soulmate.

~*Part 5*~

Gabrielle stepped out onto the porch of the tavern. She lifted her hands over her head and stretched. As she did this, her eyes scanned the empty village in the early morning. Her eyes slipped shut while she stretched a little more with her stomach arching out.

Xena came up from behind and slipped her arms around her bard's stomach.
"Morning."

The Amazon Queen smiled while lowering her arms. "Good morning." She reached behind to pull her soulmate's head down.

The warrior responded with a gentle kiss. Once the kiss finished, she straightened, with her arms still around her bard.

"So, what's the plan?"

The Warrior Princess shrugged. "I think I may do some sparring. A little rusty."

"Right," was the sardonic response. Gabrielle tilted her head as she studied the village.
"I think I may take a walk. It's nice out."

"Won't be for long."

"I know." The bard leaned into her partner. "Not with the winter coming."

"Uh-huh."

Gabrielle peered up at Xena. "Let me know if you want a sparring buddy later."

Xena's lips tweaked with a grin. "Of course."

"Okay." The bard chuckled while turning her attention to Amphipolis. "I think I'm going to go for that walk... wake myself up."

"Let's hope so."

"Hey." The small woman jabbed her partner's stomach lightly. "I was up before you."

"Physically."

Gabrielle rolled her eyes. "Never get any credit around here."

Xena chuckled while lowering her head. "But you're right, you were up before me."

"Maybe because I was sleeping on top of you." She grinned, straightening up. "You're going to spar?" She turned around in Xena's arms.

"Yeah a little later. When you get back, come find me."

"Definitely." Gabrielle got up on her tiptoes to kiss her soulmate. She smiled warmly

and shifted out of Xena's arms.

"Don't forget your staff."

"Oh Hades." The bard laughed while walking into the tavern to get her staff.

Xena watched as her partner came back out with her staff. She grinned. "Be careful."

"Xena, I'll be right in the area. You'd be able to hear me scream."

"I know but you always manage to find trouble."

Gabrielle walked down the steps and glanced back up. "No, trouble finds me." She smirked and started walking off.

The older woman quietly laughed with a contented smile. "I love you," she called.

The Amazon Queen spun around and smiled. "Love you too Xen." She winked and turned forward again to head through the village.

The dark warrior grinned to herself and watched her soulmate disappear, heading out of the village. She sighed heavily and she went into her mother's tavern.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle came up along side the stream. She stopped and peered down into the water. She watched the water trickle by and through the small rocks. She glanced up to stare across the stream. She looked harder because she noticed hoof prints on the other side. She tilted her head a little. "That's a lot of hoof prints." She narrowed her eyes, looking for a way to cross the stream. Soon she spotted some small stepping stones.

The Amazon Queen knelt down beside the horse hoof prints and touched them with her free hand. She noticed how considerably deep they were. She looked down at the stream's edge and began to realize just how many hoof prints there were in the ground. Her eyes widened as the realization dawned. "An army," she whispered.

"Brilliant deduction," growled a woman.

Gabrielle looked up in a flash only to have her forehead slammed by the butt end of a sword. She went crashing to the ground, the image of tall redheaded warrior locked in her mind.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle lifted her right hand to her forehead. She heard a rattle that resulted from the movement of her hand. She also sensed the heavy weight on her arms. She touched her forehead and pulled her hand back as warm liquid coated her fingertips. Slowly she opened her eyes. Blood. She then gazed over her body to see her wrists and ankles shackled to a post in a tent. "Oh great," she grumbled.

"Isn't it?"

Gabrielle peered up to see the woman who had knocked her out. Tall, dark expression, leathers, large built, and with flaming straight red hair. "Who are you?" the bard asked.

"The more important question here, is who are you?" The warrior knelt down in front of Gabrielle.

The bard raised an eyebrow. "Gabrielle."

Slowly an evil grin creased the woman's lips.

Gabrielle instantly regretted in telling this woman her name. Sometimes she forgot how much her name was attached to Xena's. It could cost her dearly.

"Perfect." The redhead warrior reached forward with her free hand to cup Gabrielle's chin. "Then you have Xena's body. Do you not?"

If only she knew, thought the young woman. "Xena?"

The woman stuck Gabrielle's head, ramming it back against the wood pole.

"Don't play games, Gabrielle," she said, narrowing her hazel eyes. "We both know who we're talking about. She was recently killed, and her body is worth a lot of money to some people." She tilted her head a little. "Then again I think you know that."

"Why do you want her body?" Gabrielle asked, opening her eyes once more.

"For the money of course. You can't run an army without money. Can you?" she sneered. Her expression suddenly brightened. "I am Semele... warlord of this grand army." She grinned now. "And you are Gabrielle the newly Amazon Queen and partner to the once Warrior Princess." She leaned towards Gabrielle. "I know you have her body and I know you brought her here to be buried." She narrowed her eyes as her temper rose. "You will live longer if you tell me where her body is."

"And if I don't?"

"Then you and Amphipolis will be destroyed," she shrugged. "And I will find Xena's body anyway." She rose up to her great height. "You have four candlemarks to decide your fate and the town's." She turned on her heels and left the tent.

The bard dropped her head against the post. "Wonderful." She sighed deeply. "Why didn't I take Xena with me on the walk?"

~*~*~*~

"Why didn't I go with her on that walk?" Xena twirled her sword while jumping back to do a few sword drills. As she did this she continued to mumble under her breath. "I know I hate walks but..." she lunged forward. "I love being with Gabrielle." She stopped practicing when she noticed her mothering coming around the corner.

"A little practice dear?"

Xena nodded, sheathing her sword. "A little rusty."

Cyrene raised an eyebrow. "Depends on your definition of rusty I believe."

The daughter laughed. "True."

The mother smiled for a moment but lost it as her hands went to her hips. "Where's

Gabrielle?"

"She went for a walk."

"And you didn't go with her?"

The warrior shook her head with a sigh. "Probably should have." She folded her arms.

Cyrene nodded in agreement. "Probably." A grin creased her lips.

The tall woman sighed very dramatically. "Is this a guilt trip mother?"

"Mmm." The innkeeper turned around. "It's whatever you want it to be dear." She walked back towards the tavern.

The Warrior Princess quietly laughed. She started walking off in the direction Gabrielle had left the village. Once outside of the village she found her soulmate's tracks with the staff marks. She easily followed them at a jog and they led to a stream with stepping-stones. She took the steps across. On the other side, she spotted all the hoof tracks. Her eyes narrowed instantly as her defenses came to life. "What'd you get yourself into now, Gabrielle?" she whispered quietly while kneeling. She studied the ground and saw her partner had been kneeling. She then noticed impressions on the ground as if a struggle or fall had happened. "Hades," she growled and stood in a flash.

~*~*~*~

Xena slowly knelt down and leaned back against the tree's trunk. She had a perfect view of the army's camp from high up in the treetops. She memorized the layout of the camp. And she realized just how big of an army this was. Gazing over to her right she noticed a tent with two guards.

"Stay alert!" the order was yelled across the camp.

The two guards at the camp straightened up into attention.

Slowly the warrior sought out the owner's voice. Her eyes rested on a tall redhead woman. She studied the warlord with interest as a plan came into mind. Carefully she reached up between her breasts to extract a small tube. She popped the top off and covered the top with her index finger. She turned the vile upside down as a thick red liquid cover her finger.

Xena then brought the tube up right. Her right finger came up to smear across her lips to leave her lips tainted a deep red. She placed the cap over the tube again and slipped it into a small slit in her leathers at the waist. She straightened up and jumped from the tree, landing on the ground neatly. Her eyes filtered into a crystal blue at knowing what she was about to do to get Gabrielle back.

The Warrior Princess strolled right into the camp with a huge grin. "Nice day huh?" She smiled to the man walking by.

The man watched her walk by and stopped as his mouth dropped.

Xena wanted to laugh but kept walking through the camp towards the warlord.

Every last man in the army stopped to watch Xena walk through, mouths gaping.

"Semele, look."

The warlord sighed dramatically and slowly turned around. Her eyes widened at seeing the tall dark warrior coming towards her. But as Xena neared she began to grin. "Back from Tartarus, are we?"

The Warrior Princess smirked while stepping up to the warlord. "Hades couldn't control me. So he sent me back." She shifted her weight to her right foot. "I do believe you have something that is mine." She narrowed her eyes. "I'd like her back with no scratches."

"I'm afraid I can't deliver on the no scratches." The warlord glanced up and down Xena's length. "She was a little... uncooperative."

"Well, let's hope you're a little more cooperative than she was." The warrior took a menacing step. "I get angry when the things that belong to me are harmed."

"She's fine." Semele folded her arms.

Xena lowered her head and began to circle the warlord.

Semele pivoted in place to stay facing Xena.

"I want her back." The warrior narrowed her eyes. "So, what do you want?"

"I want you." Semele tilted her head with a grin. "However, trying to kill you would be asking for my own death."

"Very good." Xena continued circling the tall woman. "What is your price?" She raised an eyebrow. "Nothing is ever free."

The warlord chuckled. "Very true Xena." Her hands went to her hips. "I still want you." She smirked to the other tall woman. "I want something out of this," she said deeply then took a step closer to the warrior. "That would be you," she said quietly and let her fingers travel over Xena's lips.

"I figured as much." Xena stepped back. "Let's make... arrangements then."

"Agreed." Semele spun around on her heels to start walking through the camp. "Follow me."

The Warrior Princess's eyes went dark as she followed behind. She ducked into the tent that was located in almost the center of the camp. "And your ideal arrangement is?"

"You want the bard." Semele slowly turned back around with glistening eyes. "And I want you." She shrugged. "It's simple as that. You'll have your bard after I have you."

"Then it's agreed?" Xena raised her hand with a coked eyebrow.

"Agreed." Semele took the large hand with a strong grip.

The two women shook harshly.

The warrior suddenly stopped shaking but didn't let go. She gave a hard jerk to Semele's arm.

The warlord was smashed into the other woman's body. She narrowed her eyes with a grin.

A cat grin creased along Xena's expression. She leaned forward to capture the other woman's lips roughly. She let go of the warlord's hand and snaked it around her waist.

The redhead pulled away from the rough kiss. She brought her right hand behind Xena's head and pulled her head in to kiss with her own strength.

Xena moaned faintly and ended the kiss. Her head dropped back a little as warm lips pressed into her neck and started for her breasts. Large hands began working her armor's clasps. Her eyes slipped closed as the dark passion came to life after so many years.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle looked up when the tall woman entered. Her eyes went forest green. "I still have time."

"On the contrary, you do not." Semele shifted to the right with her arms against her chest.

The bard narrowed her eyes wondering what was happening. Her eyes flickered and saw a tall dark woman enter in. She straightened up when she realized it was her soulmate. "Xena?" she whispered.

Xena smiled faintly and glanced over to Semele. "Our arrangement?"

"Of course." Semele snapped her fingers.

Two guards entered into the tent. One of them stepped forward with a key and unlocked Gabrielle's manacles.

The Amazon Queen stood, rubbing her wrists. "Arrangement?" She glanced between the two tall women with a menacing look. She knew this was an "arrangement" she was not going to be happy about.

"We'll discuss it later." The Warrior Princess turned her attention to Semele. "We leave unharmed."

"Of course." The warlord bowed her head. "It is part of the agreement." She watched her two guards leave the tent.

"And her staff?" Xena narrowed her eyes.

Semele turned to her right to pluck the staff from the wall. She tossed it to the Amazon Queen.

Gabrielle easily caught it.

Semele walked out of the tent, Xena behind, and Gabrielle following.

The redhead turned to Xena as she exited the tent. "Remember my offer Xena, if you ever get bored of this lifestyle." She stepped closer to the warrior.

The tall dark woman's blue eyes went to slits. "Forget it, Semele."

"I won't forget you, however." The warlord leaned forward to kiss Xena warmly on the lips.

The Warrior Princess froze in place, not wanting to show anything in front of her soulmate. Besides that, the agreement was finished.

Gabrielle's eyes narrowed, her breathing quickened, and she raised her staff.

Semele pulled back a little but whispered, "I've never had better in bed."

It was loud enough for Gabrielle. "You bitch," Gabrielle growled and lunged suddenly forward with her staff.

Xena moved instantly to grab her soulmate's staff and held her back. "Don't Gabrielle."

The warlord chuckled deeply with a smug look. She turned her head towards Gabrielle. "She's very good, Gabrielle."

"Semele, I'll kill you," yelled the bard. She pushed against Xena.

"Gabrielle, stop."

The Amazon Queen jerked her staff free while still breathing heavily.

Semele just watched intently with her hands on her hips. Her grin never left her lips.

Xena held her hands up. "Just walk away Gabrielle." She shook her head. "We're walking out of here, it's done with."

Gabrielle's upper lip twitched. Her teeth were clamped tightly as she tried to calm her anger. Slowly she began to gain control. She took a shaky breath, lowered her staff, and turned away. She walked off.

The Warrior Princess lowered her hands.

"Goodbye Xena."

The warrior peered over to Semele. "Enjoy the rest of your life." *Because it'll be short lived*, added the warrior mentally. She walked off to catch up with her partner.

Semele watched the tall dark woman power walk out of the camp and out of her life. A sad sigh left her lips as she dropped her head forward.

Gabrielle kept walking briskly, filled with rage. Her breathing was still fast.

Xena left the camp and headed into the forest. She broke into a jog to catch up to her partner. "Gabrielle?"

The bard ignored her and kept walking ahead. Her head was down. She didn't know

whether to cry at this point or scream.

The Warrior Princess caught up and grasped her soulmate's shoulder to stop her. "Gabrielle?"

The Amazon Queen spun around with ice green eyes. "Don't... touch me," she threatened.

"I didn't have a choice." Xena dropped her hand. "You need to understand-"

"You need to understand something yourself, Xena!" Gabrielle took a menacing step. "Never feed me promises and go back on them. Everything you have said to me in the past few days has been a crock of shit." She paused to calm down. "Don't play games with me." She turned to walk away.

The tall woman stood stunned. She pushed her bangs back with her right hand. "I did it to save you."

"I know there were a number of other ways to go about saving me." Gabrielle stopped and turned back around. She threw up her free hand. "What..." She shook her head. "What happen to your promise that you are mine?" She held up her hand waiting for an answer as she let tears roll. "That was such shit." A shaking of her head. "You're mine, what a load of shit, Xena." Her right hand went through her bangs as she tried to control her emotions. "Just... just leave me alone." She turned away and walked off with her emotions surging and tears running down her face.

Xena stood still in the silent forest. She watched her soulmate keep walking and walking and walking till she disappeared.

~*~*~*~

Cyrene lifted her eyes after wiping the table. She saw her daughter stumbling into the tavern. "Xena?" She briskly walked up to her daughter, frantic with concern. She saw Xena's red eyes and damp cheeks. "What's going on?" She grasped her daughter's hand.

The warrior closed her eyes against the pain.

"What happened, Xena?" The innkeeper guided the warrior to a seat. She bent down with her hands in Xena's lap. "Honey, you're going to be worse off if you don't tell your mother what happened."

The Warrior Princess chuckled slightly. She raised her right elbow to the table and leaned into her hand. "Just a bad day."

"I can tell." Cyrene collected the other woman's large hand. "What's going on?"

"I'm trying to figure that out myself." The tall woman shook her head then rested back in her seat. "Oooh gods," she sighed. She stared up at the wood ceiling, trying to gain control over her emotions.

"Xena."

The warrior peered down with a sad smile. "I know, it's good to tell mothers stuff.

They give good motherly advice."

"Exactly." Cyrene grinned for a second but went stern. "This has to do with you and Gabrielle, correct?"

The dark woman nodded faintly.

The innkeeper straightened up and pulled a chair forward to sit. "Something went wrong in the relationship?" Cyrene patted her daughter's knee. "I'm good at love relationships."

Xena instantly looked up.

The tavern owner quietly laughed. "Nobody comes back from the dead to fight for good. Not even Hercules himself." She raised an eyebrow in suggestion.

The warrior chuckled, then sighed. Taking a deep breath she began to tell her tale of the past week.

Cyrene silently and carefully listened to everything. When Xena was finished, she to one suggestion, "Go find her."

The daughter shook her head. "No, she wants me to leave her alone."

"That's the last thing you should do," Cyrene said sternly. "Do not be stubborn. Go find her." She had a pleading look. "Xena, she does need you right now." She patted Xena's hand on the table. "Anger never out wins love." She stood and strolled off towards the kitchen going in.

The Warrior Princess sighed, dropping her head back against the chair. Finally, she stood up and made her way out of the tavern.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle was back beside the stream again. Her staff was already tossed to the ground. She sat on a rock with her arms propped on her elbows. Her head was buried her arms. She took a shaky breath and lifted her head to rest her chin on her arms. Tears continued their mission.

The only thing her mind could do was torment her with images of Xena and Semele sleeping together. In turn only pain arose in Gabrielle. She lifted her legs a little to better hug herself. She felt alone.

The bard buried her head in her arms again. Her body rocked with more emotions. She lost the fury and was now in such pain that she only needed the right comfort from it. But she wasn't finding it. With ragged breaths she tried to calm down. Within a minute she heard somebody coming towards her. She waited a moment and slowly lifted her head to stare at the newcomer with blurred vision.

Xena stood emotionless. Her right knee bent forward with her weight on her left leg. Her arms hung at her sides as she stared at her soulmate. She showed no emotion in her expression. However, her red eyes told another story.

Gabrielle stared at her warrior, her vision clearing a little.

The warrior didn't flinch and stood as a statue would.

The small woman locked eyes with her soulmate. She started to cry again when her right hand pulled her bangs back. Slowly she stood up with her arms over her stomach and she faced Xena.

The older woman bit her lower lip to keep from saying anything.

The Amazon Queen lowered her head and took steps closer to her partner. She lifted her head up once more as the droplets came down her cheeks again. "Xena?" she whispered in fear.

"I'm right here for you," uttered the warrior.

Gabrielle quickly moved to wrap her arms around her soulmate. She buried her head into Xena's breasts and cried extremely hard.

Xena pulled her bard in tightly while shaking. Her head lowered onto Gabrielle's while she started to cry herself.

The young woman rested the side of her head against her partner's chest. She stared across the stream as the last few tears came.

The tall woman held her soulmate tightly. She kissed her bard's.

Slowly the soulmate's bodies began to sway back and forth where they stood. Each of them collected their thoughts and emotions. They only had one more thing to do.

After a little time passed, the Amazon Queen pressed her lips against her soulmate's chest. She lifted her head with a sad smile. "I'm sorry, Xena." Her right hand came up to brush back dark bangs. "I shouldn't be angry about it. You were trying to save me." She shook her head a little. "I guess I'm a little possessive."

The warrior grinned briefly but instantly lost the grin. "I probably could have found a better way to get you out."

"Xena, it was an army. Gods only know how many men were there." The bard shook her head. "It would have been suicidal."

The Warrior Princess sighed deeply. "There's always another way."

"You chose the best."

"Gabrielle, I could have simply snuck you out."

"Xena-" The Amazon Queen was cut off by the two fingers over her lips.

"We could be at this all day." The warrior raised an eyebrow in suggestion. "Agreed?" Her fingers slipped away.

Gabrielle nodded a little. "We both agree about disagreeing, huh?"

"Just stubborn." The tall woman smirked.

The small woman shrugged. "Nothing wrong with that." Her right hand came up

behind her soulmate's head.

"Not at all." The warrior grinned while lowering her head.

"Nope." The bard finished the distance to kiss her partner in apology.

The older woman pulled back with a bit of a smile. She gazed around the area. "Let's get out of here."

"Yeah," whispered the small woman. She shifted out of Xena's arms to get her staff. She came back up beside her partner. "I'm never going on another walk again."

Xena laughed while walking along side her companion. "Not even if I come?"

"Welll, that's different." Gabrielle reached over with her right hand to clasp her warrior's hand.

The dark woman laughed deeply. "Good," she whispered.

~*~*~*~

Xena slowly knelt down in front of her soulmate.

Gabrielle peered down into warm blue eyes as she sat on the bed. She saw Xena's hands come into her lap. She reached forward to twine their fingers together.

The older woman looked away then back up to Gabrielle. "This isn't easy."

The bard squeezed her partner's hands. "It's over, Xena."

"Not yet." The warrior stopped talking for an instant. "Semele... she won't live much longer."

"What?" whispered the small woman with a confused look.

Xena waited a moment then explained. "I placed hemlock poison on my lips."

The bard tilted her head as she started to understand. "How long does she have?"

"Not much longer." The Warrior Princess took a heavy breath. "I didn't want to tell you, but I didn't want to hide anything." She narrowed her eyes. "Semele had a price to pay for taking you."

"Xena-

"Don't ask me to apologize for that." The warrior shook her head. "That's the last thing I will do. She had her own price to pay."

"But death?" quietly questioned the small woman.

The tall woman shrugged. "She may survive the hemlock or she may not. That's for the fates." She lowered her eyes.

Gabrielle sat mystified by her partner's actions. On one hand she thought to be angry again, but that wasn't what was being asked. No, she felt protected by her warrior's actions... her warrior's protection. Besides, it was too late for Semele, Semele a

warlord. Leaning forward now, Gabrielle gently kiss her soulmate. "Thank you," she whispered after finishing the kiss.

Xena instantly had a questioning look.

"For protecting me," Gabrielle smiled sadly. "You're good at that."

The older woman laughed quietly. "Job description as well."

"Gee, thanks." Gabrielle smirked. "But that's why you got the job."

A grin creased the dark woman's lips. But she sighed while dropping her head. She looked back up with a serious expression. "I am sorry for sleeping with Semele." Her eyes glossed over in thought. "I wanted to spill as little blood as possible." Her eyes focused back up on her partner. "I wasn't thinking about your reaction." She smiled sadly. "I'll be more careful from now on."

"Its okay." The Amazon Queen squeezed the large warm hands. "I wasn't thinking either." She smiled with truth. "You are mine. And when I say that, I want to see you come out at the end into my arms." She leaned forward to kiss her soulmate's forehead. "You've always been mine."

The Warrior Princess was smiling broadly. She stood up and grasped her partner's waist.

The small woman started scooting back into the center of the bed.

Xena came crawling after her with a grin.

The bard chuckled and stopped moving steal a kiss from her soulmate.

The older woman moaned deeply, leaning into her bard.

Gabrielle smiled with love, and her eyes sparkled at the end of the kiss. "Together in the end, that's all that matters."

The End