

~ A Strange Interlude: I Had a Strange Dream ~

by Red Hope

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Violence: There is violence.

Subtext: Yes, always here in my fanfiction.

Summary: A brief interlude between [A Stranger in my Family](#) and [The Stranger of my Heart](#). Gabrielle spends some quality time with her two favorite nieces. Melpomene plays with Sarah, who goes into meltdown very quickly. Melpomene becomes desperate to calm the baby, and she finds a new toy that Sarah really likes. The Conqueror and Gabrielle though don't find the new toy too fun when they're sent spiraling into another time period.

Feedback: redhope@redhope.net

Homepage: <http://www.redhope.net>

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Series 8: **I, Stranger** - Story #3

Chapter 1 - My Nieces

Auntie Gabby giggled when her niece, Sarah, grabbed at the toy and put it in her mouth. The bard couldn't shake her smile if she tried because she was so happy to have her niece here. She leaned forward slightly and poked Sarah's button nose.

Sarah pulled the soft, wet lamb from her mouth and frantically waved it.

Gabrielle cooed at her five month old niece and asked, "Who's your favorite aunt?" She leaned in closer and tried, "Gabby, Gabby, Gabby." She waited to see if her niece would repeat it but no luck.

Sarah was on her back on the lion fur; she proceeded to kick her feet and drool happily.

"Gabby, Gabby, Gabby," the aunt tried again. Gabrielle paused and thoughtfully mentioned, "If Xena ever heard me doing this I'd never live it down." She chuckled at the thought of her lover, the Conqueror, finding out she was teaching her niece to speak her dreaded nickname.

Gabrielle lost her train of thought when there was a soft knock at the door. She twisted to her left from her seated position on the lion fur. "Come in."

The left door creaked opened and in popped a young head. "Auntie Gabby?"

The bard smirked at new claimed nickname lately. "Hi, Melpomene."

Melpomene, a young girl of about ten Helical Risings, snuck into the room and closed the heavy door behind her.

"What you doing here so late? Is Grandma with you?" Gabrielle couldn't imagine how Melpomene ended up here at the fortress without Cyrene. She was slightly concerned.

"Grandma walked me here," Melpomene promised. "I wanted to see you and Xena."

The Amazon Queen slightly melted at the warm sentiment from her adopted niece. "I know we've been very busy. I'm sorry." She patted the open space on the fur next to her.

Melpomene bounded over to her aunt and sat down so that she faced Little Sarah. "Hi, Sarah." She gently tickled the baby's sides and received several giggles. She chuckled and peered up at her adopted aunt. "Where is Xena?"

"She had to run to the office and get dinner for us."

"Oooh." Melpomene slightly frowned and mentioned, "I haven't seen her in so long."

Gabrielle sighed and patted the girl's covered knee. "She's been fairly busy with the Isthmian Games."

"I know," Melpomene murmured, "She's only taken me riding once since you've come back from Egypt."

The aunt could tell the child felt quite neglected lately, and it melted the bard's heart. "I'm sorry, Mel." She leaned to her left and wrapped her arm over the girl's shoulder. "There's just been so much going on, and we haven't meant to ignore you."

Melpomene lowered her head and quietly studied the cooing baby. She peered up at her adopted aunt and softly questioned, "You love Sarah more than me, right? She's your real niece."

Gabrielle's heart broke at the confession that obviously bothered the girl. She squeezed Melpomene's shoulder and honestly stated, "Not at all. I love you both

equally."

"But Sarah is your blood," the girl argued, and she gently played with Sarah.

"That is true," the Amazon Queen relented, "but that doesn't change how much I love you. You and Sarah are both my nieces and something like blood will never affect my love." She leaned in closer to Melpomene and whispered, "I promise."

Melpomene peered up into sincere, green eyes, and she felt her fears die away.

Gabrielle could tell she was winning so she inquired, "You believe me, right?"

Melpomene bumped her shoulder against her aunt's. "Right." She smiled brightly and showed her girlish qualities. "Thanks, Auntie Gabby."

"Anytime, sweetie." The bard kissed her adopted niece's forehead, then she turned to Little Sarah, who just kicked her in the shin. "Owww." Gabrielle rubbed her shin from the direct hit.

Melpomene laughed and mentioned, "She's good at that... I have a huge bruise from her kick three days ago."

Gabrielle still rubbed her sore spot, and she shook her head. "I can see why." She moved back when her niece started another kicking session. "Kick, kick, kick."

"You and Aunt Lila both do that," Melpomene proclaimed. "You say things in threes."

"Repetition is good," the Amazon Queen informed, "it drills things into a person's head."

"Then I shall quote you during staff drills," rumbled a husky voice from the door.

Gabrielle almost jumped from her skin when she heard her lover's voice. She patted her heavily beating chest and glared at Xena by the door. "Thank you," she snapped.

The Conqueror was highly amused, but she came over to the group.

Melpomene hopped up and came over to the ruler.

Xena raised an eyebrow at the young girl, but she lost the battle before she even had a chance to fight. She was suddenly engulfed by small arms. She grinned and hugged the girl back warmly.

Gabrielle smirked at the scene despite her partner gave her a glare. She briefly

checked on Sarah, who was busy rolling from side to side. Then something occurred to her so she questioned, "I thought you were bringing dinner...?"

The Conqueror was extracted from her hug, and she furrowed her eyebrows at the bard's question. "Dinner?"

The bard pulled away from playing with Sarah. She peered up at her lover. "Yes, you know... the meal you eat at sundown."

Xena put her hands on her black leather hips and shot a dark look.

Gabrielle sighed and reminded, "You said you were going to the office and then getting dinner for us."

"We already ate, Gabrielle," the ruler argued.

The bard oddly stared at her lover then agitatedly asked, "When?" She caught Melpomene's giggles, but she pursued the topic. "Please refresh my memory."

"At the coliseum," the ruler stated.

Gabrielle's expression became dimmer. "I would not touch that food... it's all sweets."

"I don't recall you having that problem yesterday," Xena chided.

Melpomene broke into a fit of laughter and promptly covered her mouth when her adopted aunt shot a glare at her. Her muffled giggles could still be clearly heard though.

The bard turned her full attention to Melpomene and kindly asked, "Can you watch Sarah for a beat?"

Melpomene knew this was serious so she quickly nodded. She came over and sat down at Sarah's side. She briefly peered up at the Conqueror and gave an encouraging look.

Xena faintly shrugged at Melpomene's look, and she soon found her partner in front of her. She smiled sweetly at Gabrielle.

The bard grabbed her lover's wrist and hauled her away to the double doors. She turned to Xena once she was mostly out of earshot from Melpomene. "Am I going crazy?"

"Well," Xena started, but she stopped when Gabrielle's face dimmed excessively. She held back her laughter.

The bard stepped closer and pointed a finger at the Conqueror. "Is this another one of your games like the fried scarabs?" She saw Xena prepared to reply, but she stepped closer and warned, "Because if it is then I swear to gods I'll be at Cyrene's tonight."

The Conqueror's eyebrows hiked up at the threat. She held up her hands and argued, "I never said anything about dinner."

"Xena," the bard dangerously began, "I know what I heard, and you said..."

Melpomene snickered a few times because she could easily hear the couple's spat. She knew how temperamental the bard could be when she got hungry. She focused on Sarah, who was getting bored and about to meltdown, as Aunt Gabby always called it.

Melpomene scooped up the nearby lamb and tried that to calm Sarah. She sighed when Sarah played with the lamb, but then Sarah threw it aside.

Sarah frowned and her eyes darkened. She fisted her hands and prepared to go into meltdown.

"Sssh, sssh," Melpomene cooed. She grabbed the lamb again and held it over Sarah's face. She could tell it somewhat helped, but it wouldn't last long. She muttered, "Only blonds must meltdown."

Sarah's faced darkened as if she understood the smart remark. She fisted her hands again and started a weak cry.

"Oh gods," Melpomene muttered in fear. "Sssh, sssh." She waved the lamb more, but it did nothing to stop Sarah's rising cries. Melpomene glimpsed at the arguing couple.

"Why are we having this fight?" Xena questioned.

Melpomene smirked, but she quickly turned back to Sarah, who fussed louder than last time. "Sssh, sssh. Come on, Sarah." She waved the lamb, which seemed to upset the baby more. "Oh please." She set the lamb down then gazed about her surroundings for something to help her stop Sarah. Then something on Xena's dresser caught her eye so she jumped up to her feet. Melpomene spotted something bright green on the ruler's dresser, which she figured Sarah would love to play with since it was colorful. She realized it was some green and silver ring attached to a silver chain.

Melpomene rushed back to the baby and fell to her knees. "Sarah," she softly called and swung the ring over the baby's face.

Sarah instantly stopped fussing and was intrigued by the green glowing ring. She reached up and tried to swat it, but she missed.

Melpomene giggled and kept lowering the ring, then she'd lift it just as Sarah tried to grab it. She smirked at the fact that she had something that kept the baby's full interest. She glanced over at Xena and Gabrielle.

"I'll just go get you something," Xena offered.

"That's not the point," the steamed bard fought. "You told me you were getting us dinner. You show up with nothing and tell me I already ate when in fact I know I did not." She had fiery green eyes as she kept ranting. "Now either I'm crazy or you're playing another one of your games. I'm betting on the latter myself."

The Conqueror folded her arms and smirked. "Well, I'm betting you're cr-"

"Xena," Gabrielle snapped. She watched those baby blue eyes roll around, which annoyed her even more. "You better," she insisted and poked at the ruler's bare chest, "tell me now," she growled and poked more, "you were joking."

The Conqueror had no clue what her partner was babbling about, but she figure if she didn't feed the bard soon then this ridiculous argument would heighten. She pretended to be serious and replied, "Alright. I was just joking." She goggled when the bard suddenly smiled and became innocent looking.

"Thank you." Gabrielle's voice was cheery and pleased. "See? It wasn't that hard to admit to, was it?"

Xena almost rolled her eyes again, but she just stopped. "Now, can I get you something, my queen?"

The Amazon Queen glowered at the jab.

The ruler sighed and hastily corrected, "Can I please get you something, Gabrielle?"

Gabrielle's sweet smile returned instantly again, and she patted the ruler's crossed arm. "That would be wonderful. Thank you."

"Oh no," Xena chided, "thank you." She side stepped her lover and grabbed the door's bronze ring.

The bard partially turned and focused on her two nieces, who were nicely playing together. Then ever so slowly Gabrielle's eyebrows knitted together when something

strange occurred to her. "Xena?" She hastily halted the ruler by the wrist.

The Conqueror was halfway out of the door, but she stopped and asked, "What now?"

Gabrielle opened her mouth, tilted her head, and couldn't come up with any words. She kept staring at the object that Melpomene was lowering closer and closer to Sarah's hand.

Xena followed her lover's stare and focused on the green ring that dangled from the silver necklace. She instantly realized the children were playing with the Cronos Ring. "By the gods." She released the door and yelled, "Melpomene, no!"

Gabrielle followed Xena's actions and started at a run for the children. "Put it down," she hollered at Melpomene.

Melpomene became confused and scared at the same time. She stopped paying attention to the Cronos Ring.

Sarah slowly lifted her right hand and stuck out her index finger. She giggled because she knew she would touch it this time.

The Conqueror and Gabrielle screamed together then took two more running steps before they simultaneously made a leap for the swinging Cronos Ring above the child's finger.

Melpomene squealed when she saw the two women flying towards her. She dropped the necklace.

The Cronos Ring fell freely and closed in on Sarah's tiny index finger; it spun in midair.

Xena and Gabrielle stretched out their hands together, and they held their breath as the ring lowered. Xena barely caught the chain with her long fingers. Gabrielle neatly hooked the large ring with her right pinkie finger. Then they both hit the lion fur on their stomachs next to Sarah.

Gabrielle gasped for air after it was all knocked out from the landing. She tossed up her head and stared at the ring in awe. "That was... too... close," she rasped.

Xena released a sigh of relief.

Sarah giggled then stretched out her arm the rest of the way. She neatly touched the Cronos Ring with her tip of her finger for a quick beat.

The Cronos Ring flared brighter than normal then suddenly the bedchambers flashed green.

"No!" echoed Gabrielle's cry, which faded away.

Melpomene had her face covered with her hands ever since Xena and Gabrielle made the dive. She uncovered her face and became wide eyed. She saw the flash of green between her fingers but now Xena and Gabrielle were completely gone. She gazed about the bedchambers and saw nobody else but her and Sarah. She softly called, "Xena? Auntie Gabby?"

There was no response but the baby's cooing.

Slowly, Melpomene lowered her shocked features to the baby.

Sarah smiled broadly, clapped her hands, and giggled before she started to kick her feet again.

Chapter 2 - O Conqueror, Where Art Thou?

The deer bowed his head and slowly drank from the water. Then beside him, several other deer slowly emerged from the woodland. They too took drinks from the river, but one did not and instead kept alert for any danger.

The day was fairly warm, and the sun was at its highest point. There were puffy clouds that rode on the gentle breezes. The sky itself was a sharp blue that came with any pleasant summer day. Suddenly the beautiful day was shattered by a young woman's piercing scream. The deer briefly peered up at the sky then suddenly became frantic and disappeared into the woods.

Gabrielle continued her fearful cry while she fell through the air. Just above her was Xena, who slightly rolled in the middle of her airborne fall. Gabrielle heard the sounds of a river, and she soon collided hard with it.

The Conqueror hit the water next, and she sunk down to the bottom thanks to her leather, armor, and weapons. She fought desperately against the river's increasing tow. She used her powerful arms to surge towards the top. Her lungs started to burn, but she broke through the surface just in time.

Gabrielle gasped for air and wiped her bangs from her face. She looked behind and spotted her lover a hundred pous away. "Xena?" she called.

The Conqueror focused on her new surroundings. Then her strong hearing picked out a low rumble in the background.

The bard was able to keep her head above the water, but she noticed the river's tow was becoming strong. She started to swim against it with little success.

Xena's focus on the low rumble became quite apparent when she gazed past her lover. She became wide eye and yelled, "Waterfall!"

Gabrielle glanced over her shoulder and noticed the few rocks and the edge of the river. "Oh gods," she rasped then desperately fought against the water's pull.

"Gabrielle!" the ruler hollered.

"Xeeena!" Gabrielle tried to swim for her lover, but it was useless.

The Conqueror dove under water and swam after her partner. She popped up just a few paces from Gabrielle. "Take my hand." She tried to get close enough without getting pulled too fast, but her cape made it harder.

Gabrielle forced her body to swim faster, and she reached for Xena's outstretched hand. Her and Xena's hands scraped over each other briefly. "Xena!"

The Conqueror saw the future so she swam after her lover. She caught Gabrielle just as they came to the edge. "Hold on to me!"

Gabrielle made every agreement and desperately clung to her lover. She gazed over her shoulder just as they came over the waterfall. "Oh... my..." She inhaled deeply when they went into the watery air, and then she screamed, "Gods!"

The Conqueror gave a brief warcry, but it drowned out when they disappeared into the mist at the bottom of the waterfall. Then her world blacked out completely.

The bard was ripped from Xena's arms when they hit the water. She briefly felt her side hit by something hard, then she was taken to the surface. She gulped for air, but she couldn't see that well. "Xena?" she called but there was no response.

Gabrielle tried to visually search for her partner, but she had no luck. She struggled against the current, but it was fruitless. She felt the ache in her side begin to hamper her when she swam, and she could only follow the flow.

An unknown time passed then finally the river's power slowed down enough. Gabrielle pushed against the soft current and made her way to the shore. She hit the sandy shore and crawled up until she was on the grass. She urged her legs to lift her,

but her body was too weak. Gabrielle fell to the ground in a heap.

Gradually the blackness sought out the bard. The bard's labored breathing eased, then she was unconscious. Her world jumbled and made little sense to her for another unknown time. Gabrielle swore she heard voices, yet they made no sense. She then felt small, warm hands that checked over her body carefully.

Finally her body started to awaken from the pain, which dulled out. Gabrielle released a soft groan, and she tried to open her eyes. The bright light over her head didn't help so she turned her head away. Another gentle groan left her, and she tried her eyes again.

Gabrielle realized from her side view, she was staring out of a window that was a few pous away. She reached up and pushed back her hair. Then she rolled her head back and realized that something up on the white ceiling above her head was giving off the bright, white light. She squinted and turned her gaze away from the strange light. Carefully the bard assessed her new surroundings.

The room was small but comfortable and very white. There was a small table to the right and two chairs that matched it. Then closer to the bard's bed were so strange, foreign looking objects that Gabrielle had never seen in her life. She noticed tube like things were hooked to it and snaked down to the bed.

Gabrielle raised her right arm up and realized those odd tubes were actually connected to her arm. She squealed and decided to get them off before they did anything weird to her. She found it quite painful when she fussed with them.

Suddenly a woman in all-white rushed into the room and ordered, "Now stop there, ma'am." She grabbed the patient's fast hands and managed to halt her. "Everything is just fine. Please calm down."

Gabrielle pulled her left hand away and became calm. She stared at the woman in the funny looking clothes. "Where am I?" She shook her head and added, "And who are you?" Then her memories flooded her, and she demanded, "Where's Xena?"

The lady briefly stared at Gabrielle, but she warmly answered each question. "You're in a hospital, I'm your nurse, and I'm not sure who Xena is but we can contact her. Is she a family member?"

The bard looked intently at the women as if she were Medusa. She then snapped, "Hospital? What in Hades is a hospital? Nurse?" She grew worried and repeated, "Where am I?"

"Now calm down," the nurse insisted. "You're just fine... safe and fine." She pressed

the petite blond to lay back.

"Where's Xena?"

The confused nurse held the woman down by her shoulders. "I'm sure we can call her and have her here."

Gabrielle felt her headache from the nurse's nonsense. She opened her mouth to refute the woman, but she stopped when a man entered the room.

The nurse glanced at the door and looked relieved to see him. "Dr. Wells, our patient is giving us some trouble."

Doctor Rudy Wells approached the pair, and he warmly smiled at his patient. "Good morning."

Gabrielle blinked and settled down; she was relieved when the nurse back away.

"I'm Doctor Rudy Wells," he politely introduced once the nurse moved out of the way. He held out his hand.

The bard hesitated, but she took the man's arm into hers. "I'm Gabrielle."

Dr. Wells was quite confused when he shook arms instead of hands. "Gabrielle...?" He waited for a last name.

Gabrielle smiled and nodded her agreement.

Dr. Wells released the young woman's arm then glanced at the nurse.

The nurse shrugged and decided to leave the room. She had plenty of other stubborn patients to attend to right now.

Dr. Wells focused back on his patient. "Um... what do you recall last?"

Gabrielle opened her mouth, but she stopped when she realized her current predicament. She decided on something safer and answered, "I fell in a river... went over a waterfall and made it ashore after awhile." She shook her head.

"Do you know where you are?" the doctor carefully tried.

Gabrielle inwardly cringed because she figured wherever or whenever she was it was no longer Ancient Greece. She tried a safer route. "I'm a little fuzzy on that part."

"You're in California," Dr. Wells tried to help.

Gabrielle was completely lost now, but she nodded once. "That's right." She mentally grumbled and silently cursed the Cronos Ring. Where in Hades did that ring go anyway? Gabrielle prayed her lover had the ring, but she suspected that wasn't the case now.

Dr. Rudy Wells wasn't convinced by the woman's answer. "Where are you from, Gabrielle?"

The bard smiled very sweetly and simply replied, "Greece."

The doctor bit his lower lip then kindly smiled. "I'll be back in a minute." He patted the woman's arm and added, "Just stay here and rest." Once he was convinced his patient wouldn't move, he quietly left the room.

Gabrielle loudly groaned when the doctor left. She scanned the room then stared down at her strange, white clothes. "What am I wearing?" She glanced about for her clothes and spotted her green halter top, brown skirt, and boots off to her left on a chair. She gazed back down at her right arm and the funny tubes.

Dr. Rudy Wells was busy chatting with another doctor, yet he stopped when a familiar face came into view. "Good morning, Jaime. You're here early."

Jaime Sommers smiled at her doctor and friend. "How are you, Rudy?" She warmly received a kiss on the cheek from him.

"I'm well." Rudy slipped his hands into the pockets of his white jacket. "How has work been?"

"My students are diligent as always," Jaime thoroughly teased.

Rudy Wells chuckled and nodded. "Well I'm glad to hear that." He then went more serious and offered, "I won't be too long. I'm just checking on my new patient."

Jaime Sommers grew curious and questioned, "The woman from the river, right? Oscar mentioned something about her."

"It's very strange," Rudy agreed. "Her name is Gabrielle... she says she's from Greece."

"Greece?" Jaime was stunned. "She's awake?"

The doctor's head bobbed some. "Awake and confused."

"You don't mind if I say 'hi' do you?" Jaime received a nod of agreement so she wandered down the hallway. She softly knocked on the door but there was no response. She waited a few seconds then knocked again.

Jaime glanced down the hall back at Rudy and the other doctor. She decided not to bother him so she opened the door and poked her head into the patient's room. "Hello?" She scanned the empty room, upturned bed sheets, and finally the open window. "Uh oh," she muttered and entered the room.

Jaime didn't find the strange woman so she went to the open window. She found that the screen had been pushed out, which told her plenty. She rushed back to the door and called, "Rudy?" She went back to the window held onto the windowsill.

Dr. Wells hurried into the room and noticed that his patient was gone. He rushed to Jaime's side.

"I would say your patient is impatient."

Rudy Wells quickly thought of what to do. "I better call Oscar."

Jaime gripped the windowsill tighter and mentioned, "I'll track her down."

"Be careful," Rudy urged. He caught Jaime's indignant look, and he smiled. "Good luck." He quickly turned and rushed out of the room.

Jaime easily hopped out of the window and landed on the screen. She brushed back her sandy blond hair then started in a run. She had no idea where this Gabrielle could have gone, but she figured it'd be easy to track her down.

The surrounding land around the hospital was nothing but forest and open land. There was a single, paved road that led to and fro the hospital, but the hospital was not typical. In fact, it was a secret hospital funded just for the Office of Scientific Intelligence by the government. Jaime Sommers often came here to have her checkups with Doctor Rudy Wells.

Jaime moved quickly through the woods and dodged around trees. She went for a ways then stopped. She tilted her head carefully and waited for her bionic ear to detect any unnatural noises to the forest. After a moment, Jaime picked out jogging steps ahead of her that led deeper into the woods.

"Cat and mouse," Jaime muttered, "well... bionic cat and mouse." She slightly grinned and suddenly surged into a forty mile an hour run.

Gabrielle sensed somebody or something tailing her. She still felt weak, however, not as bad when she was in the river. She worried though that somebody would try to stop her, and she didn't have time for this. She needed to find Xena and get home.

The bard stopped by a tree and quickly recalled Ephiny's lessons. She hooked her right foot against the tree and quickly started her climb up into the tree. When she was high enough, she hid herself into the foliage yet parted some leaves. Gabrielle surveyed the woods for what had triggered her internal alarm. She didn't see the danger first, but she heard it instead.

Gabrielle felt her jaw loosen then finally it hung open. She gawked at the human blur coming towards her. She closed her mouth and hunkered down so she wouldn't be spotted.

Jaime Sommers came to a quick stop and scanned about the silent woods. She didn't see anything, and she was almost sure she was on the right trail. She decided to double-check so she tilted her head again like earlier.

There were no sounds of human movement in the woods. Jaime listened more carefully with a deeper tilt of her head. She slightly narrowed her eyes when she picked out a human heartbeat above her head. She resisted from gazing up, but she moved around until she was in the right spot.

Jaime called on her bionic legs, which suddenly lifted her into the air and landed her squarely on a branch.

Gabrielle jumped back when the woman surprisingly landed on the same branch. "Oh my gods!" She lost her balance and started a tumble for the ground.

Jaime moved quickly and caught the young woman by the wrist. She then settled Gabrielle by holding her left hip. "Wooo, steady." She grinned at Gabrielle's shocked face.

Gabrielle tried to break free from her pursuer.

"It's okay, it's okay," Jaime insisted and tried to hold the smaller woman in place. "I'm not here to hurt you."

The Amazon Queen stopped struggling because she found it far too hard. "Who are you?"

Jaime felt more at ease now that the stranger was calming down. "I'm Jamie Sommers. You're Gabrielle right?" After the stranger's nod, Jaime asked, "How about we get down?"

Gabrielle glanced at the ground far below. She hated to admit it, but she wasn't very fond of climbing into the trees. She felt slightly queasy when she saw the drop.

Jaime caught the look so she decided to make quick work of the predicament. She scooped up the petite blond then hopped off the branch.

Gabrielle was shocked and could only slide out of the woman's arms once she was on the ground. She took one step back, but she didn't plan to run because it was obviously useless.

Jaime could tell she had to take up the conversation. "You're from Greece?"

The bard was nervously, but she replied, "Yes."

Jaime offered a warm smile that she hoped would ease the stranger's nerves. "Whereabouts?"

"Corinth," the bard merely replied.

Jaime sensed she was on a down sloping battle. "Why did you run?"

Gabrielle debated what to do and how to answer. She knew for a fact she was sometime ahead of her own time. Jaime's clothes and style were certainly not customary to Gabrielle's time. She sighed when she realized she needed to start trusting somebody. "It's really complicated... and crazy." She mentally groaned at the laugh she could imagine from her partner at her use of crazy.

Jaime folded her arms over her chest and grinned. "Try me."

Chapter 3 - Cronos Ring

The Conqueror released a low moan and slowly opened her eyes. She scanned about her dark surroundings and tried to guess where she could be, but there were no clues. She rested on her back so she slowly sat up from the cold, smooth floor.

Xena sensed something around her ankles, which she discovered were very nice chains. She tested them, but they were too sturdy. She sighed and looked over the small room that had a few high stacked boxes off to the right. They were too far for her to reach.

Suddenly noise from outside came to the ruler's ears. She patiently waited and raised

an eyebrow when two women entered the room. Xena scanned over their strange attire, but she focused on the woman closest to her.

"How did you sleep?"

The Conqueror didn't reply. She just stared coldly at the small woman, who had dark curly hair and amber eyes.

The other woman stood still and silent, and her hollow eyes fixated on the ruler.

"My name is Sandi Franklin." Sandi held out her hand to the ruler.

Xena glanced at the woman's small hand then back at her. "The name's Xena."

Sandi dropped her hand "Xena?" she repeated and scanned over the strange woman. She'd been first impressed by the woman when she'd found her on the riverbank. She was purely surprised to find this woman, Xena, equipped with such archaic armor and weapons. "Where are you from, Xena?"

"Greece," Xena simply answered. "Where am I?"

Sandi smiled at this question. "You're in my humble abode." She stepped closer, but she was far enough where Xena couldn't harm her. "Several miles from where I found you in the river."

The Conqueror faintly slotted her eyes. "And what do you want?" She indicated the shackles on her ankles.

Sandi chuckled and slipped her hands into her pant pockets. "They're just a precaution." She walked away to the side of the room. "It's a bit... strange to find somebody wearing the type of clothes that you were." She turned around and further mentioned, "And the weapons?" She rocked on her feet and inquired, "What exactly do you call that round weapon?"

Xena wondered where her armor and weapons were since she was stripped of them. She was only in her black leathers, boots with greaves, and amazingly she hadn't lost her Gaelic necklace. She focused on the woman's question, and she replied, "A circle weapon."

Sandi knew it was a smart remark, yet she truly didn't care. She chuckled and pulled out her right hand from her pocket. "And what is this?" She held up the small item.

The Conqueror remained passive despite the Cronos Ring dangled only a few pous away from her. She recalled tucking the ring away in her bodice when she was falling

towards the river. She'd thought she'd lost it, but somehow her cleavage saved the day... mostly.

Sandi walked the arc line that kept her safe distance from the tall, dark woman. "I'm quite interested."

"I'm sure," the ruler chided.

Sandi narrowed her eyes and mentioned, "I don't know who you are... or what you are."

The Conqueror felt her skin crawl and an old fire return at Sandi's words.

"But I will know what this ring does," Sandi hotly insisted. She turned to the silent woman next to her, and she simply nodded. She moved to the door, stopped, and informed, "When you're ready to tell me... she'll stop." Sandi opened the door and slipped out.

Xena turned her cold eyes to the silent woman. She clenched her hands into a fist.

The woman was dressed in black, skin tight pants. She wore a matching top that had no sleeves and a v-cut over the chest. She slowly moved closer to the prisoner.

The Conqueror slightly bent her knees. She wasn't sure what this woman planned to do to her, but she had every intention to stop her.

The woman suddenly moved quickly, and she grabbed the prisoner by her shoulders. She pushed Xena backwards then lifted up.

The Conqueror surprisingly found herself lifted off the ground and slammed against the wall behind her. The back of her head snapped against the hard wall. Xena finally had a closer view of the woman's eyes, which were steel grey and lifeless; it sent a chill through the ruler.

Xena quickly tried the pinch on the woman, but she was stunned to find it didn't work. She suddenly realized this woman had no pressure points. The Conqueror recalculated her next move, and she gave a powerful kick.

The woman released the Conqueror and stumbled back a few steps. She lifted her face, which was unchanging.

Xena raised her hands and prepared for the next attack.

The woman fisted her hands then suddenly whirled a punch at the prisoner.

Xena neatly dodged the blow. She was then stunned to find that the woman's fist went through the stone-like wall.

The woman kept her fist in the hole. She then slowly pulled her hand out, and the pieces of concrete fell from her knuckles.

The ruler hastily acted and gave a direct hit to the woman's face. The punch normally wouldn't bother Xena, but this time she felt as if she punched a stone wall.

The woman's head snapped to the right slightly, then her face gave off an odd noise.

The Conqueror stared in shock at the woman's changed face. She glanced at the floor and found the woman's face on the floor. She raised her head up and stared at the metal features of the woman's real face. "My gods," she muttered.

The electronical woman didn't waste anymore time. She came at the Conqueror.

Chapter 4 - Holy Maximillion!

Gabrielle entered the farmhouse after her host. She jumped slightly when a large, dark dog came near her. She covered her rapidly beating heart and smiled at the dog.

"Sorry," Jaime apologized. "This is my dog... Max."

The bard knelt and reached for the German Shepherd. Quickly her hands were filled by heavy fur, and Gabrielle warmly received the dog. "He's beautiful."

Jaime smiled and petted her long-time friend. "He's been a great dog." She waited a beat and let Gabrielle become accustomed to the dog. Once Gabrielle stood up, Jaime patted her jean covered leg and called, "How about dinner, boy?"

Max was quite inclined to have an early dinner. He bounced on his toes and followed Jaime to the kitchen.

Gabrielle quietly followed while she scanned the house. She couldn't understand what some things were and other items were quite obvious. She truly couldn't guess what the wood box with glass in it was for, but she shrugged it off.

Jaime poured some dog food into a metal bowl. She easily held up the large bag with her right arm. She set the bag down just as the phone rang. Jaime started for the phone on the kitchen counter, but she offered, "You can sit down, Gabrielle." She pointed at

the kitchen table.

The bard silently agreed, and she wandered over to the table and took a seat.

Jaime picked up the phone and began to talk to it.

The Amazon Queen stared at Jaime Sommers and became baffled. Why in Gods' names was she talking to that strange white thing? Gabrielle shook her head and glanced over at the dog.

"Really?" Jaime leaned against the counter. "Whereabouts?" She glanced at Gabrielle then at Max. "I think Max can track her down."

Max had mostly finished his meal. He peered back at Jaime but went back to his dinner.

Jaime sighed and replied, "I promise, Oscar. If I find anything suspicious I will contact you." She turned around and faced the counter. "Alright. Bye." She hung up the phone and turned around. "That was my boss... he seems to think he may have a lead on where your friend is."

Gabrielle popped out of the seat. "Where?"

"He sent out a team to find her," Jaime explained. "They discovered where she came ashore on the riverbank. They're not sure what happened to her afterwards... it's a bit strange."

The bard huffed and decided to hold back her slue of comments about how strange everything else was right now. "Can we go look for her?"

"I told Oscar we were." Jaime glanced at the dog and asked, "You ready, Max?"

Max finished a last drink then went to Jaime. He received a nice pat on his side.

"We'll take my car again. It's a bit of a ways." Jaime hurried out of the kitchen with Gabrielle and Max on her heels. She left her quiet farmhouse and opened the back door for Max. She then climbed into the driver's side and waited until Gabrielle was settled into the seat.

The bard recalled the entire seatbelt lesson from earlier. She gingerly hooked it into place and chuckled at Jaime's grin. "I'm sorry... we have nothing like this."

"I would suspect not," Jaime agreed. She smirked and started the car.

Gabrielle tried to remain calm while Jaime drove. She was apprehensive about Xena's whereabouts and safety. She couldn't imagine how her niece, Sarah, could send them here to this time and place. That child had to have an imagination that rivaled her aunt's.

The bard gazed out the window and enjoyed the peaceful scenery. She had to admit that this motorized horse was a lot nicer than a living horse. She briefly considered whether she could take one back home.

Jaime eventually turned right onto a dirt road. She followed it a ways until she came upon a few other cars. She parked the car off to the side then hopped out. She let out Max too.

Gabrielle straightened out her skirt and scanned about the familiar area. She knew her partner had to be near here.

"This way," Jaime offered. She led Gabrielle down to the riverbank where there was a group of OSI agents.

"Good afternoon, Jaime," an agent greeted.

Jaime smiled at the young man. "How are you, Charles?"

"I'm good." Charles glanced at Gabrielle, who was certainly not dressed for the times. He held back any comments and instead mentioned, "We haven't found anything yet... except for this." He guided them down to the riverbank.

Gabrielle became wide eye when she recognized her lover's black and purple cape. "That's Xena's."

"That's what we suspected." Charles looked to Jaime. "And that's why we hoped you'd bring Max."

Jaime grinned. "Well Max, you think you're up for some detective work?" She walked down to the edge and knelt beside the cape.

Gabrielle neared the pair and waited.

Jaime Sommers lifted the cape and let the German Shepherd sniff over the cape. She could tell Max was carefully assessing Xena's scent.

Max lifted his head slightly then walked around the cape. He kept his head down and started into the woods off to the right.

Jaime scooped up the cape. She and Gabrielle then followed the dog into the woods.

Charles called, "We'll follow you, Jaime." He received a holler of agreement back from Jaime. He turned around to his comrades and told them to pack up.

Max's nose quickly followed the distinct scent of the woman. His head made a sweeping motion, then he gave a low bark. He suddenly started into a trot.

Jaime glanced back at Gabrielle. "Try to keep up." She sped up the pace too.

Gabrielle easily stayed with the pair, but she noticed that Max's trot turned into a run, and it was quite a fast run. She quickly found herself out of breath, and she fell slightly behind the pair. She couldn't imagine how Jaime kept up with the dog.

Jaime called Max to stop, and she came up to the dog's side. She patiently waited for the bard to catch up. She grinned and teased, "It's a healthy run huh?"

Gabrielle bent over and gulped for air. She almost felt like falling on her butt. She also noticed that Jaime hardly worked up a sweat. She straightened up and asked, "You think we're far? I can't imagine Xena traveling this deep into the woods."

"I can't either," Jaime softly agreed. She did notice that they mostly travelled parallel to the river.

Max put his head down and climbed up a small embankment. He huffed and stopped.

Jaime and Gabrielle followed up to the dog's side and stared at what he'd found. Jaime touched her forehead and muttered, "I've never seen that here."

Gabrielle studied what seemed to be a building next to the river. She peered up at Jaime and questioned, "You don't know who is there?"

"No," Jaime whispered, "but let's knock and find out." She started down the embankment.

Gabrielle quickly followed, and she sensed Max beside her.

Max kept his head down and sniffed the ground. He noticed that the trail was taking him to the strange building down the river.

Jaime started into a jog as her fears grew higher. She only slowed down when she was close enough.

The bard came to Jaime's side and surveyed the building. "It seems quiet."

"Not exactly." Jaime Sommers pointed at the turret guns on each corner of the building. Then there were cameras beside the guns.

"What are those?"

Jaime tried to figure out the best way to explain it. "The long, black things are a type of weapon... very dangerous."

The Amazon mentally groaned but questioned, "And the white tubes?"

"They're cameras," Jaime explained, "somebody can watch from those."

Gabrielle didn't completely understand, but she knew it wasn't a good thing. She knelt down and tried to assess the best way to get into the building. It didn't help that there was a fence around it too.

Jaime watched the cameras and noticed the full range of motion they had, and they didn't completely cover everything. She turned to Gabrielle and said, "I can dodge those weapons on the roof, but I know you can't. I think it's best that you-"

"You're not going in there without me," the bard argued.

Jaime was fearful for the young woman's life. Gabrielle had no concept of guns and bullets.

Gabrielle could see that Jaime was struggling with what to do. She quickly ended it. "I'll only follow you in there."

Jaime sighed and nodded. "Alright. Let me try to disarm the guns first." She peered down at Max and ordered, "Stay." She watched Max sit then she grinned at the bard. "You stay too." She quickly got up.

Gabrielle glared at Jaime's back, but she called, "Be careful."

Jaime heard the last words, yet she went into an impressive run. She picked up speed as she neared the fence.

The roaming cameras started their cycle back towards the fence. The right camera first spotted Jaime Sommers and signaled the guns to open fire.

Jaime moved even faster thanks to her bionics. She easily dodged around all the bullets, and when she approached the wired fence, she simply took a few wide steps then launched her body.

Gabrielle watched in amazement from her hidden spot. She'd seen her partner perform several dazzling moves but this was humanly impossible. She watched Jaime land safely on the other side of the fence then head for the building.

Jaime went out of the guns' range. She stopped at the side of the building and dropped her head back. She noticed the cameras were looking directly at her so she smiled and waved. She bent her knees then inhaled deeply. Suddenly she jumped straight up, past the wall, and she landed on the roof.

The cameras had followed her every move. Now the guns quickly turned and took aim at Jaime.

Jaime bent her knees some and tilted her head. Her bionic ear picked out the low click of the guns, and she jumped into the air as high as she could go.

Gabrielle dropped her head back and watched Jaime go up higher and higher. She smirked when the two guns destroyed each other and the cameras as well. Gabrielle climbed to her feet and glanced down at the dog.

Max also stood up and took a few steps forward.

Jaime landed back on the roof in a kneeling position. She slammed so hard into the roof that she crumbled some of the roof's ledge. She neatly hopped off the roof and casually approached the fence. "It's safe now," she hollered.

The bard started for the fence, but she wondered how she was going to get over the fence.

Jaime met Gabrielle at the fence. She grabbed the fence with her right hand and instructed, "Step back a little." Once the blond was far enough, she gripped the fence's links and pulled. She watched in satisfaction as the fence gave out and ripped apart under her strength.

Gabrielle was impressed, and she stepped sideways through the fence. She turned to Jaime and asked, "Is everybody this strong in the future?"

Jaime softly laughed and replied, "No. Just me and Max." She didn't bother to get into Steve Austin's position.

The Amazon Queen prepared to ask something else, but she faltered when she heard a door open. She spotted some woman coming out of the side door and made a run for them. "Jaime-

"I see her." Jaime stepped in front of Gabrielle.

Max bared his teeth when he sensed something wrong. He inched in front of Gabrielle.

"You are trespassing, you are to be terminated," the woman stated in a monotone.

Jaime felt her skin crawl at the oddly familiar monotone. She moved ahead of Gabrielle and Max then raised her right arm when the woman came at her. She heard her bionic arm collide hard with metal. "Oh no," she muttered just as she ducked when the woman swung at her head.

Max growled and came at the woman too.

Jaime was relieved for the extra help. She gave a swift kick at the woman's hard stomach and sent her back several feet.

Max growled and snarled, then he came after the woman. He jumped for her face and latched on for only a few seconds. He fell but in his mouth was the woman's face.

Gabrielle gasped and covered her mouth. She'd never seen anything this strange before in her life. "What..."

Jaime felt her greatest fear come true. She thought she'd never seen another Fembot again, but she was wrong. She glanced back at the stricken bard and explained, "It's a machine." She turned back to the Fembot, who was trying to stop Max. "It's not human."

Gabrielle lowered her hand and tried to understand what Jaime meant. She'd heard of humans that were made of metal and moved around like normal. In the stories, they were always called automatons.

Jaime tensed up when she spotted two more Fembots coming out of the building. "Oh hell." She quickly approached the Fembots and tried to stop them both. One of them made it around her and came after Gabrielle. "Watch out, Gabrielle."

The bard back peddled towards the fence and kept her hands up. She had no weapon, and she was fearful about what the automaton would do or could do. She noticed how inhuman the Fembot acted and looked like once she observed long enough.

The Fembot lunged for Gabrielle, but she missed. She hit the fence and bent it some. The Fembot recovered and turned to the bard.

The Amazon Queen was fast on her feet and much more so than the robot. She easily

dodged each of the Fembot's attacks, but her luck would only be short lived if she couldn't protect herself.

Jaime Sommers grabbed her opponent by the arm. She held tightly to the Fembot and began to swing the robot in a circle. She gave a brief cry then released the Fembot towards Gabrielle's.

The two Fembots crashed into each other then stumbled into the fence.

Jaime quickly came to Gabrielle's side and asked, "Do you know how to fight?"

"If I had my staff," the bard argued in annoyance.

Jaime turned to the fence and grabbed a metal pole. She easily ripped it from the ground with her bionic arm. She then tossed it at Gabrielle just as the Fembots came at them.

Max was having more luck with his opponent. He'd managed his Fembot to the ground, and he jumped on top of it. He ripped its mask off then he clawed away at its exposed machinery.

Gabrielle and Jaime traded Fembots. The bard fought against the Fembot that was faceless, and she used her makeshift staff to fend off the Fembot. She then was taken by surprise when the Fembot grabbed her metal staff.

The Fembot displayed her strength by bending the metal tube at a right angle.

Gabrielle broke from her shock and hastily recovered. She ripped the staff from the automaton's hand then brought the other end around. She gave a surge of strength and rammed the end into the Fembot's face.

The Fembot went still briefly then raised its hands to the tube stuck in its face. It held onto the tube but stopped and started to shut down.

The bard could do nothing but let the Fembot fall. She was relieved that her idea worked, and she extracted the tube from the robot's face once it was down. She then noticed that Jaime was having some trouble with her Fembot so she yelled, "Jaime, catch."

The Bionic Woman slightly turned, caught the makeshift weapon, and spun around to face her opponent. She raised the tube's end and put all her strength into her drive. Her bionic thrust sent the tube through the Fembot's chest and instantly shut the machine off.

Jaime sighed in relief and backed away from the fallen robot. She glanced at Max, who finished ripping apart his Fembot's mechanical face. She sensed Gabrielle at her side, and she joked, "Welcome to the future."

The Amazon sighed and mock glared at her friend. "Thanks," she deadpanned.

"Come on, we should hurry." Jaime led the way to the open door. "Be very careful."

Gabrielle, Jaime, and Max carefully entered the dimly lit building, and they went down a long corridor. Max picked out a movement noise so he wedged ahead of Jaime and the bard. He sniffed carefully and picked out a familiar scent like earlier. He picked up his head and hurried down the hallway.

Gabrielle quickly followed the dog and Jaime followed her. She slowed down when Max rounded a corner and gave a low whine. Carefully Gabrielle came around and instantly she was taken into a locking hold, her back pressed against a warm body.

"Are you suicidal?" growled a deep voice.

The bard grinned and dropped her head back when her partner's hold loosened. "It's good to see you too."

The Conqueror sighed and released her lover. She then took in the stranger, who was with her partner.

"Hi," Jaime greeted. "You must be Xena." She was quite impressed by the tall woman's muscular built and striking, dark looks.

"I am," the ruler agreed.

Gabrielle glanced between the pair and said to Xena, "This is Jaime Sommers. She's came to help." She then pointed at the dog. "And this is Max."

The Conqueror raised an eyebrow then mentioned, "Maybe introductions can be saved for later?"

Gabrielle sighed because she knew her lover always wanted to get down to business. She quickly asked, "Tell me you have the Cronos Ring?"

Xena frowned, which was answer enough. "No, it was taken along with my armor and weapons." She glanced at Jaime and added, "The woman in charge is named Sandi Franklin." She waited to see if the name meant anything to Jaime.

"Franklin?" Jaime repeated in worry. She touched her forehead. "It can't be..." She

shook her head and lowered her hand. "He couldn't have a daughter." She sighed at the only explanation. "Do you know where this... ring is?"

"She has it," the ruler replied, "I was on my way to find it... and her." She signaled the broken shackles on her ankles.

Gabrielle glanced at them and darkened. She lifted her head and finally took in the wounds on her lover's body. "What happened?"

Xena shook her head. "It's not important right now." She touched the bard's shoulder. "We need to find the ring." She sidestepped Gabrielle and headed down the hallway. "I haven't been this way."

Jaime nodded and followed.

Gabrielle petted Max and whispered, "Come on, boy." She hurried after the pair with the dog at her side.

Xena came to a stop by a door and tried to listen for any voices. The door was too thick for her though.

Jaime tapped the ruler's shoulder and shook her head. She scooted closer to the door and tilted her head carefully. She listened with her bionic ear and heard a woman's voice behind the door. She then tensed and suddenly grabbed Xena's arm. She jerked Xena away from the door when it flew open.

The Conqueror recovered and took in another one of those automaton like creatures that wore no face mask. She shielded Gabrielle behind her.

Jaime quickly stopped the Fembot's attack and kicked the Fembot back into the room. She entered the room and blocked the Fembot's swinging fist.

Xena and Gabrielle entered the room and found it to be loaded with strange metal machinery. Xena then spotted her capturer, Sandi, who sat at a desk.

Sandi jumped to her feet and spun around. She was dumbfounded that the women had made it into her office. She glanced to her right and ordered a Fembot to activate to her voice command.

The Fembot awoke and moved robotically at first before it adjusted and stalked towards the enemy. She raised her hands and ran towards the women.

Max took several bounds then he jumped for the Fembot before she could make it to the ruler and Amazon. He grabbed at her face mask and tore it off.

Xena focused on Sandi, and she spotted the Cronos Ring around the woman's neck. She smirked and stalked after her prey.

Sandi became fearful. She grabbed up Xena's sword that she'd left on a nearby table. She held it with both hands because of the superior weight.

The Conqueror's grin widened at seeing her weapon. She carefully approached her enemy and prepared to take the sword back. She dodged the blade when it swept over her head. She recovered and caught the blade between her hands. She then gave a calculated kick to the handle and popped it out of Sandi's hand.

Sandi backed away when the tall, dark woman now had the sword. She held up her hands and grew fearful at how dark Xena became. She then briefly glanced at her Fembot that was breaking away from Jaime.

The Conqueror followed Sandi's glance and saw that the Fembot was headed for her partner. She cursed and broke away from her pursuit. "Duck, Gabrielle." She lunged for the Fembot.

The Amazon knew she didn't have enough time, yet she was hit by another body. She was lifted off the floor and carried away in a blur.

Xena ran her sword through the stomach of the Fembot. She quickly extracted it and brought it back around in a wide slash. She cut off the head from the robot's body with ease.

Sandi was horrified that her Fembots were so easily destroyed by Xena's primitive weapon. She backed away and glanced at her last Fembot, who battled the dog. She knew her Fembot would lose so she pulled off the necklace with the strange ring.

The Conqueror was relieved that Jaime had saved her lover. She turned around and faced Sandi with a new vengeance. "I want the ring." She hefted her sword and stalked after her prey.

Sandi held the ring up and warned, "Come any closer and I'll destroy it."

The Conqueror arched an eyebrow and kept coming at her.

Sandi held the chain in her palm and started to crush it together. "I'm not kidding." She opened her palm and revealed the ruined necklace that was a heap of silver.

Jaime recalled how Dr. Franklin's son, Carl, was a Fembot himself. She explained, "She's a robot too."

Sandi glared at the Bionic Woman. She turned back to Xena and held the ring in her palm. "Tell me what it does or I will destroy it."

Jaime moved to Max's aid and destroyed the Fembot with a solid punch to her mechanical face. She watched the Fembot stagger, yet it fell to the floor and shut down.

"You destroy it," the Conqueror warned, "and I'll tear you limb from limb." She stalked closer.

Gabrielle felt the tension rise, and she feared they'd be stuck in this time period. She held her breath when Sandi closed her hand around the ring. "Xena, don't..."

The Conqueror stepped closer and spun the sword.

Jaime glanced between the Conqueror and Sandi. She clenched her hands at her sides and prepared to act if something went wrong.

"Last step," Sandi hotly warned, and her hand tightened around the ring. "Tell me now."

Xena narrowed her eyes and growled, "Never."

"Fine!" Sandi declared, and she began to crush the ring in her palm.

"Nooo!" Gabrielle yelled.

The Conqueror came at Sandi with her sword raised.

Sandi opened her hand and revealed the green glowing powder in her palm. She opened her hand and let it fall to the floor. The green dust slowly sprinkled the floor and there was nothing left of the former ring.

Gabrielle felt her world spin out of control. She heard Xena's powerful battle cry, then Gabrielle couldn't breathe. She fell to her knees and tried to yell, but her voice was eerily silent. Suddenly she had a rush of cold air in her lungs, and she opened her eyes to a dark room.

The Conqueror quickly awoke and sat up in the warm bed. "Gabrielle?"

The stricken bard turned her head to her lover and calmed. It'd only been a bad dream; she was safe and at home.

"Are you okay?" Xena touched her lover's sweaty brow.

"Yeah... yeah." The bard took the ruler's hand into hers. "I had a strange dream."

The Conqueror visibly relaxed and softly ordered, "Lay down." She had Gabrielle back under the silk sheets and safely in her arms again. "Mine haven't been much better."

The bard grunted and asked, "Is Sarah asleep?"

"Yes," the ruler murmured. "Go back to sleep."

Gabrielle settled into her favorite spot. "You too," she muttered. She was quiet for a beat then asked, "Xena?"

"Mmmm?"

"Where's the Cronos Ring?"

The Conqueror dragged herself out of her half sleepy state and softly replied, "Safely locked away."

"Good," the Amazon mumbled.

Xena only had fleeting thoughts about why Gabrielle had asked, but she drifted back into her dreamscape. She briefly swore she heard a few giggles from Sarah, yet she was never sure. She faded back to her dreams about Japa and India.

The End.