

~ A World Away ~

by Red Hope

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Violence: Definitely a violent story. So, hang tight with that.

Subtext: Nnnot yet... watch out though!

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Time Frame: Sixth Season Gabrielle and Xena the Conqueror from the Hercules episodes.

Feedback: Any feedback can be sent to me at: redhope@redhope.net

Note: This is the **Final Copy!** Means there isn't suppose to be grammar and mechanics issue but there may be still some.

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Mini-Series One: **The Reflection of the Mirror** Story: **One**

A World Away By **Red Hope**

Section One

~*Part 1*~

Gabrielle's eyes drifted open. She stared up at the leaves high above while she lay on her back. Her eyebrows knitted together. "Oookay, I fell asleep in a cave beside Xena, and now I am outside." Suddenly, she was struck with fear. "Xena?" She sat up and didn't see her partner nor any signs of her.

The warrior-bard's heart stopped. "What the Hell is going on?" she whispered, gazing around. She couldn't find any of her bags, Argo, Xena... nothing. She looked at her boots and noticed her sais still in place. She hopped to her feet.

Gabrielle didn't recognize the surrounding forest. She continued to spin in a circle where she stood, her breathing picking up. Then her expression dropped as it dawned on her. "I'm in Amazon territory," she mumbled.

As if on cue, three Amazons landed on the ground in front of her, drawing their swords. The small warrior put her arms over her head in the Amazon peace signal. She said nothing and stared at the three women with masks.

One Amazon stepped forward, lowered her sword, and pulled her mask back. "Gabrielle?" She had a confused look.

Gabrielle's eyes widened and her heart stopped yet again. "Ephiny?" she whispered in a mixture of surprise, fear, and love. "You're dead," she uttered. "How..." She'd woken up in Amazon territory with a ghost. She wasn't sure how much more she could

handle.

Ephiny tilted her head as her confusion grew more.

The other two Amazons stepped forward and removed their masks while lowering swords. They had baffled looks as well.

She stared at the other two Amazons, Eponin and Solari, and fell to her knees, overwhelmed. She ran her hand through her short blonde hair. "I must be in the Elysian fields..." She shook her head frantically as a powerful fear and sorrow washed over her.

Gabrielle stared at the three Amazons in utter disbelief. She could either be dead or having a really bad nightmare. But there were two things that struck her as being especially odd. First, why would the Elysian fields look like Amazon territory? And second, how could Eponin be dead?

Ephiny stepped towards Gabrielle carefully. "Gabrielle, may I ask what... what's going on?" She sheathed her sword. "Why is your hair short, you have sais, you're more... butch, and the clothes?" The Amazon's voice was going fast. "And most of all! How can you walk?" yelled the Amazon.

"What?" The short warrior was loosing more pieces to the puzzle as things kept going.
"What?" she repeated.

The Amazon stepped forward, knelt down, and locked eyes with the young woman. "You are Gabrielle, right? The same woman who stood up against the conqueror and had her legs smashed on a cross?"

The warrior-bard said nothing then finally whispered, "The conqueror?"

"Yesss." Ephiny paused. "The Warrior Princess that has conquered the known-world... Xena." She narrowed her eyes. "Who are you?"

Gabrielle's hands came up to pull back her blond bangs. "Oh my god," she whispered. "Where am I?"

"In Amazon territory, small as it is." The Amazon studied the small warrior. "The rebels against the conqueror."

"Rebels?" Gabrielle shook her head with her hands still on top of her head. "Wh... who... where... I am past confused."

Ephiny said nothing and stared at Gabrielle. She tried reading this woman before her, who she called Gabrielle, but seemed to be another person too. "You are Gabrielle?"

Both Solari and the weapons master neared with only Eponin sheathing her sword. However, Solari wasn't convinced and kept her sword out. They were quite intrigued about this new comer that they somewhat knew.

The short warrior dropped her hands to her legs. "Okay... who is Gabrielle to you?"

"A young blond, talkative, a rebel, possible bard, beautiful... with a dark past," replied Ephiny in a quiet and sad tone

"Dark past..." Gabrielle's eyes dropped, and her voice faded out. Her eyes came back up. "From Potidaea?"

"Yes, originally."

The young warrior nodded and rose up. "Can you take me to her?"

Ephiny stood and folded her arms. "Then you are not her?"

"Yes and no...I'm not sure... yet." Gabrielle laughed and shook her head. "It's hard to explain... I can't even explain it to myself."

"You're confused as we are," stated Solari. She stepped up. "If not more."

"I am, Solari," agreed Gabrielle. Her eyes flickered back to Ephiny. "Let me ask you this... do I look like Gabrielle just... older?"

Ephiny examined the woman and nodded slowly. "Yyes now that you say that... and with short hair."

I wonder if I'm in the past, mused Gabrielle, *but why would Xena be the conqueror of the known world?* She snapped out of her thoughts. "Ephiny, this is hard to explain, this is a guess. But I am Gabrielle just... a different form of her." She laughed at her own reasoning. "I know how strange that must sound." She held her hands up. "Just take me to the Nation." She paused then lowered her hands. "Can you?"

Solari looked at Ephiny. "You sure about that?" she whispered. "She seems like Gabrielle but-"

"What difference does it make?" cut in Eponin. She moved closer. "Even if she isn't Gabrielle, she'll be in the middle of our Nation. There's nothing she can do." The weapons master shrugged. "I say we take her."

Ephiny considered her options. She stared straight into warm green eyes. Something inside of her whispered that this was somebody she'd known for years. And the only thing she saw in those green eyes were trust, respect, and love. "Alright... we'll take you to the Nation."

~*Part 2*~

Gabrielle gazed around the Amazon village as she entered. Ephiny, Solari, and Eponin walked beside her, watching her curiously. She only smiled, and that left the three Amazons more confused. Gabrielle sighed contently because she was in a familiar place.

Ephiny shook her head faintly and gazed ahead. She neared a hut and an Amazon came out with an empty tray. "Logos, is Gabrielle in the hut?"

The cook nodded. "Of course she is, she is suppose to rest and get healthy." She lowered the tray and glanced at the rest of the group. She dropped the tray and gaped.

Ephiny glanced at the smaller warrior then back to Logos. "Don't ask." She bent down, picked up the tray, and handed it back. "Just go, Logos."

Logos nodded with an awed expression and walked off, surprise still registering on her face.

Ephiny grasped the door's handle. She took a shaky breath and thought, *I'm not ready for this*. But she opened the door and stepped in with the others following. Her heart skipped a beat when she saw the longhaired blond sitting in a seat with a scroll in her lap, writing vigorously.

Gabrielle came in last and stood near Ephiny. She stopped breathing and stared at her duplicate sitting in the chair. She looked exactly like herself numerous years ago. She also noticed the splints on the young girl's legs and bruises spotting on her legs. "Gabrielle?" whispered Ephiny carefully.

The young girl in the seat shook her head, never looking up, continuing her writing. "Hold on, Eph. I need to finish this line."

Ephiny sighed.

Solari chuckled quietly with an amused smile. She folded her arms; she couldn't wait for this confrontation.

"Please, Gabrielle... this is serious," growled Ephiny.

Gabrielle studied the young girl and was so amazed by the perfect looks and voice that she was about to assume her to be Hope.

"Almost have it...." mumbled the young girl. She finished writing and settled her quill on the scroll. "What's up, Eph?" she asked with a hollow voice as her eyes lifted.

The three Amazons were silent as two sets of emerald eyes locked together, and two heartbeats skipped. They waited for something, anything, to happen between these two women named Gabrielle.

The young girl in the chair just stared; her scroll and quill slid unnoticed off her lap and hit the floor.

The warrior-bard moved quickly and knelt down to pick them up. "Can't drop these," she smiled shyly, holding the scroll and quill out.

The young woman took them back with shaky hands. "Thank you," she whispered. "Who are you?"

"My name is Gabrielle," replied the warrior.

The young woman tilted her head as her eyes widened. "You can't be... I'm Gabrielle."

"That's the interesting part." The small warrior grinned and patted the other woman's lower arm. "And I haven't quite figured that bit out yet."

Ephiny stepped up. "The part we must figure out is who's the real Gabrielle."

The warrior-bard glanced at Ephiny. "That's just it Ephiny, we're both Gabrielle."

"What?" whispered the Amazon. "You both can't be-"

"Hold on," cut in the short warrior. She sighed and glanced back at the younger blond woman. "Who is Xena?"

Green eyes went into a forest green. "The harlot... the Warrior Princess and conqueror of the known-world."

The small warrior sighed at hearing this description again. "Alright... tell me... is she tall, dark, blue eyes, bad temper, and hard ass attitude?"

"Yes," answered Ephiny.

The young warrior's eyes dropped to the floor and she considered this. "There's got to be an answer," she mumbled.

"How'd you know this about Xena? Few know she has blue eyes unless they've been confronted by her in person." asked the young woman.

The warrior came back and smiled faintly. "The Xena I know is the opposite of what I think she may be here." She paused and added, "I know her as a hero."

The room went silent.

"That's it... oh god," uttered Gabrielle. "I'm in another world... that's the only explanation."

"Another world?" questioned Solari. "How can that be?"

"I don't know." The warrior-bard looked at Solari. "But it makes sense." She shook her head. "Where I am from, Xena and I are partners, and we fight for the greater good."

"I doubt that," mumbled the young woman. "She's ruthless with a heart of stone."

"I wouldn't hold your breath on that," answered the warrior. "The Xena I know, she's caring."

"This is crazy," said Solari. "You're saying you're from some other universe where Xena is hero?" She shook her head. "You couldn't pay me to believe that."

"I believe it," spoke up Eponin. "It does make sense in a funny sort of way." She

shrugged. "You're both Gabrielle but of two different worlds, and so is Xena."

"Exactly," responded the warrior-bard. "And all of you," she said, glancing at the Amazons, "are Amazons in my world; my closest friends... or at least you were..." she trailed off.

Ephiny stood with her head bobbing. "Alright, so now what?"

"I'm not sure," confessed the short warrior. "There's some reason why I am here." She shook her head and glanced at the young blond that looked like her so many years ago. She looked back at Ephiny. "Can...I talk to Gabrielle... alone?"

Ephiny glanced at the young woman. "Gabrielle?"

The young woman nodded. "Its fine, Eph."

Ephiny nodded and motioned for Eponin and Solari to leave.

The three Amazons left the hut, and the two women glanced at each after they heard the door closed.

The small warrior sighed and sat down on the floor at the younger woman's feet.

"You're really... Gabrielle too?" questioned the young woman. "Hmmm, who was your sister?"

The short warrior peered up. "Its Lila." She grinned.

The younger Gabrielle lowered her eyes. "My Lila was killed, several years back," she uttered.

"I'm sorry." The warrior-bard studied the broken legs of the other woman. "How about this, can I look at your legs while you tell me about the Conqueror?"

"Alright," agreed the younger woman. She went silent momentarily as small hands grasped her legs. "What do you wanna know about the Conqueror?"

"Who she is," replied the warrior. "Anything and everything." She began checking over the splints as a frown developed on her lips.

"She's the ruler of Greece, the Roman Empire, Egypt, Chin, and some smaller lands," went on the longhaired blond. "She's ruthless and cold."

"She is Xena?" asked the warrior with a glance.

"Yes, among other things."

The warrior sighed deeply. "Does she know you?"

The young blond nodded. "Yeah, I tried rebelling against her." She gestured at her splinted legs. "This is what I got in return."

"I'm sorry," whispered the older Gabrielle. "I know she can be... dark."

The longhaired blond huffed. "So, what's... *your* Xena like?"

"Quite the opposite." The warrior-bard smiled softly. "She's very loving." She glanced up. "You'd have a hard time believing."

"I would," whispered the young woman with hard tone. "I tried speaking against her."

"It wouldn't have worked," mumbled the warrior. "Politics isn't her crack in the wall."

"Then what is?"

The older Gabrielle lost her smile and went serious. Her eyes hazed over in seeming memory. "Love."

The younger woman huffed. "Love... you've gotta be kidding me?" She shook her head. "That's the last thing that would... change her."

"No." The warrior crossed her legs while still sitting on the floor. "Its the first thing that would change her... the only thing. It's the only emotion she desires."

The longhaired blond said nothing.

The warrior-bard sighed and grasped one of the other woman's knees carefully. "Your legs will heal fine." She paused. "They weren't broken too badly. When did it happen?"

"About two weeks ago," answered the younger Gabrielle. "I can almost stand on them."

"Take your time," whispered the warrior. "They'll heal in good time." She stood up. "Maybe in three days try standing on them and moving a little."

"Yeah," agreed the young woman.

"So, what are we going to do about the names?" The warrior corked an eyebrow with a grin.

The girl in the chair chuckled. "Don't know... we're both Gabrielle."

"Yup," answered the warrior. She reached down and took the scroll and quill. She placed them on the table and folded her arms. "Brie?"

The younger Gabrielle chuckled. "Haven't been called that in ages." She peered up with soft eyes.

"I figured." The warrior bent forward and picked up the small woman into her arms. "Or I can take the nickname."

The younger woman wrapped an arm around and felt herself being carried across the hut. "No, I don't mind." She grinned. "Make me feel young again."

The warrior-bard laughed quietly. "You're making me feel older than I am." She neared the bed. "Who's the Queen?" She bent over the bed.

"It *was* Melosa." The young woman slipped into the bed and peered up at the warrior. "Thanks."

The short warrior flashed a smile then folded her arms while going serious. "She was... who is now?"

"It's complicated." The longhaired blond sighed. "Technically I am... I am the princess. But Ephiny is the regent." She paused. "I was suppose to be made Queen but I decided to rebel against Xena and held back from taking the position. So I nominated Ephiny as regent in case I was killed by Xena."

The warrior nodded in understanding. "But now-"

"I am the Queen," finished the younger Gabrielle. "And Xena presents a threat to my nation."

"She plans to take the territory, doesn't she?"

The young woman nodded. "Yes, she knows the Amazons are behind the rebels. She's just toying with us now, leading us to believe we have a chance."

"You do," stated the warrior sternly. "Xena hasn't won, and this has just started." Her lips curled into a mischievous grin.

The princess furrowed her eyebrows. "You're not planning on..."

"Look Gabrielle," the small warrior started and sat on the bed. "I know Xena, I can take care of her. Save the Amazons... save everybody." She gave a warm smile. "I just need to reach her."

"This isn't the same Xena we're talking about, Gabrielle." The young woman grasped the other woman's hand. "She's ruthless, cold, dark, and out for blood. You can't save us."

"No, I'm going to save her." The warrior squeezed the small hand. "Somewhere in that Conqueror lies *my* Xena, that's who I am after." She stood up. "You stay here and heal. Take the throne and prepare for the future."

"Yes, to either live or die."

The warrior-bard walked towards the door. "Hope for the best and expect the worst." She turned around. "I'm here for a reason Gabrielle, and this is the only answer. I know what's inside of that dark conqueror." She shrugged. "It's just a matter of tapping into it."

"If she doesn't kill you first."

"I won't know unless I try," stated the older Gabrielle.

The princess sighed deeply. "Go to Ephiny, she'll help take you to Athens. My guess is, Athens is quite different than yours."

"Why is that?"

"Xena made it her... capital and demolished the original Athens. You'll be lost without guides." The Amazon Princess smiled faintly. "Good luck and don't risk your life."

The warrior nodded. "Heal your legs, Gabrielle. Be ready." She smiled confidently and left the hut with fears and hopes.

~*~*~*~

Ephiny lifted her head when she heard her door open. She said nothing.

Gabrielle closed the door behind, neared Ephiny, and folded her arms. "Ephiny, can you take me to Athens?"

Instantly, the regent stood up with wide eyes. "What?!" she yelled in half anger. "Athens?" she hissed.

"Yes, Athens... the capital." The small warrior coked an eyebrow. "You do know what I am talking about... right?"

The Amazon narrowed her eyes and stepped closer. "Yes I do," she growled. "And I won't take you."

"Fine." Gabrielle shrugged, turned around, and opened the door. "I can handle this on my own."

The regent rushed over and put her hand against the door, stopping it from opening. "Before you go, I have to ask... are you crazy?"

"No, I'm as sane as the rest of you," answered the short warrior.

Ephiny shook her head. "You're crazy," she whispered and went serious. "Gabrielle... our Gabrielle just returned from Athens and look how she came back. Broken, beaten, battered, and no hope. What do you think you can do that she couldn't?"

"Beat Xena at her own game." The warrior grasped the Amazon's shoulders. "Ephiny, listen to me... I know Xena, maybe not this conqueror but I know Xena." She stopped. "I can do this... I have too." She shook her head. "There's got to be some reason as to why I am here and this is the only sensible explanation."

"Sensible... sensible?" roared the regent. "Going into Tartarus's center, trying to unchain the Conqueror's heart, only to get burned... even killed. That's sensible?"

"No," agreed the warrior-bard. "What is sensible is not giving up hope, finding a way, and saving this world." She dropped her eyes then looked back up. "I know my Xena, and if I can find her inside of this dark ruler then everybody here will be saved." She now spoke with conviction. "My Xena could save this world... you'd be amazed."

"Yes, I would be," whispered the regent. "And are you so sure that your Xena lies in this... this evil?"

"Yes," uttered Gabrielle in pain. "She has to." She folded her arms over her stomach. "Nor can I stand around and not try and reach out. I have to do this, Ephiny. Try and succeed or try and die... as long as I tried." She lowered her eyes while murmuring, "for myself... and her."

The regent didn't speak, just breathed calmly, and tried to reason things out. Her common sense told her to chain this woman to the floor to keep her out of harm's way. But her heart said quite the opposite. So, she reached forward and pulled Gabrielle in for a long, warm hug. "Alright," she finally agreed quietly. "I'll take you to her." And that's when Ephiny knew she was as sane as this Gabrielle.

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Gabrielle tugged the hood of her cloak closer around her face. "So, this is it?"

Ephiny nodded, gazing around Athens's streets. "Yup," she answered dryly. "Nothing much... not like she was before the Conqueror destroyed the city."

The warrior-bard sighed deeply. "Why'd she destroy the original Athens?"

"Nobody is quite sure." The regent shrugged and nodded to the right. "This way." She turned down an alley.

Gabrielle followed along side Solari and Eponin. She gazed at her surroundings in the dark night. It was about a candlemark after sunset, and they'd just entered the capital.

Ephiny came around the corner of a house. She stopped and waited. She pointed ahead. "There's the... castle."

It was massive, with huge stone walls lit up by hundreds of torches and guarded by dozens of guards. "Oh boy..." Gabrielle uttered.

"You're in for it now," whispered Solari teasingly.

"You sure about this, Gabrielle?" questioned Eponin.

"No," answered Gabrielle. She took a shaky breath. "But... I've gotta do this." She glanced at Ephiny. "Where's the front door?" she asked smugly.

The regent chuckled and folded her arms. "On the other side, it's especially heavily guarded." She faced her friend. "Gabrielle, anybody that goes in there alive comes back out dead."

"Well, I'm about to be the first to come out alive and with a smile."

"I hope so, for your sake," whispered Ephiny. "Once you're inside, we can not help you. You're on your own." Her expression shifted into worry. "Be careful, please?"

"I'll try my best." Gabrielle flashed a warm smile. "I'll be fine, I know my enemy." She stepped forward and hugged the Amazon.

The regent hugged back tightly. "We've already lost one Gabrielle to her, we can not lose another."

The short warrior pulled back. "You won't... I promise." She smiled. "I'll be back." She started walking towards the castle.

"Good luck!" called the three Amazons.

Gabrielle waved and disappeared down the dark street.

"You think she'll make it?" asked Solari.

"No," answered Eponin. "She's crazy."

"She's perfectly sane," whispered Ephiny. She glimpsed at her friends. "She'll make it." She grinned.

Solari and Eponin stared at each other in wonderment.

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Gabrielle came around to the front of the gates. She spotted about seven guards. "Oh, wonderful, Xena," she mumbled under her breath. She kept walking towards the gates.

"Halt!" A guard stepped forward while the others unsheathed swords. "Who goes there?"

The short warrior said nothing. She kept coming.

"Are you deaf? Stop!" ordered the guard. He unsheathed his sword. "Stop him!" he commanded.

At once, the seven guards attacked Gabrielle.

The first one to come at Gabrielle, she simply kicked aside. She jumped back, bent down, and unsheathed her sais. "One way to make an entrance," she said and laughed. She straightened up, sais in hand and smiled as the guards came at her.

~*~*~*~

"My liege?" The man stepped forward and bowed before the throne.

"Rise, Draco."

Draco stood tall. "My liege, we had a small problem."

"Had? So it's been corrected?"

"Almost, my liege." Draco folded his arms. "We await your orders on finishing the problem." He paused. "We had an intruder attack the seven guards at the gates."

"And I assume you captured him?"

"Yes, we captured... her," answered Draco.

"A woman, really?" The ruler crossed one leg over the other as she sat on the throne. "Bring her in."

"Of course, my liege." Draco turned towards the large double doors of the throne room. "Escort the woman in!" he ordered loudly, his voice echoing in the room.

Three guards came in. Two were walking along side a hooded woman who had her hands tied behind her back. The third guard walked behind. The two guards brought her before the ruler. They kicked the back of her knees, and she fell forward.

"Remove the hood," ordered the ruler.

The guard behind pulled back the hood.

Gabrielle slowly lifted her head and locked eyes with the ruler. She stared at the tall, dark, beauty before her on the throne. It certainly was Xena in all of her glowing power and glory. It was the Conqueror.

"She had these on her, too, my liege." Draco held out a set of sais.

Xena glanced at the weapons. She stood with her red silk dress cascading down to touch the floor. She reached out and took the sais. "Interesting." She studied the well-crafted sais. Her eyes lowered to Gabrielle. "She attacked the guards at my gate?"

"Yes," replied Draco.

"What is the status of the guards?" asked the Conqueror while she studied the sais again.

"Two killed by her, three injured."

"And the other two?" asked Xena as she glanced at Draco.

"Killed themselves."

The Conqueror smiled, amused, and glimpsed down at Gabrielle. "You saved me a little trouble." She came down the three steps of the thrown. "Stand."

Gabrielle rose up to her full, but short, height.

Xena stared into green eyes. She placed the tips of the sais under the warrior-bard's chin and tilted her head up. "You must be an Amazon, huh?"

"You could say that," whispered Gabrielle.

"I could but you lack... feathers," stated the Conqueror as she narrowed her eyes. She lowered the sais. "Take her to the dungeon."

The two guards grasped Gabrielle's arms.

The Conqueror turned her head to Draco. "She is to be whipped for her actions. Five lashings per guard she killed, three lashes per guard she injured." She then grinned at Gabrielle. "But for the two guards whom killed each other, she is not to be left hanging by her feet. Leave her manacled to the floor."

Gabrielle felt her breathing pick up, her pulse racing in fear.

"Is that all, my liege?" asked Draco with a grin.

"Yes, take her away."

"No!" yelled Gabrielle as she tried jumping forward.

The two guards restrained her.

"Get her out of here," ordered Draco.

"No, Xena!" screamed the short warrior.

The Conqueror's eyes widened in anger. She whisked forward and punched Gabrielle in the face.

Gabrielle took the blow and dropped her head forward with blood trickling down her face. "No," she whispered in hopelessness.

Xena grabbed a handful of short blond hair. She jerked Gabrielle's head up.

The warrior stared into dark blue eyes full of anger. She was half-conscious.

"Ten extra lashings for calling me Xena," ordered the Conqueror. She grinned and let go of Gabrielle's hair.

The guards started to drag the warrior-bard off.

"Oh and Draco." Xena held up a hand halting them. Her eyes locked on blurry green ones. "Make sure she is fully awake when she is whipped. That's all." She grinned evilly and whirled around. She disappeared out of the throne room.

~*Part 3*~

"Open the cell," ordered the Conqueror the next morning. She stood in front of Gabrielle's cell and stared at the small woman huddled in a corner, bloody, bruised, chained, and whipped. The cell door swung open and Xena strolled in with the warrior-bard's sais in her right hand. She knelt down in front of Gabrielle and listened to the door close with a clang.

Gabrielle lifted her head and locked eyes.

The dark Warrior Princess narrowed her eyes when she saw only warmth in the green eyes. "You survived, how wonderful," she said smugly.

"I thought so myself," whispered Gabrielle.

"Hmmmm." The Conqueror held out the sais. "Where'd you steal these from?"

"I didn't steal them," told the smaller woman.

Xena smiled roughly and leaned towards Gabrielle. "Do not lie, nobody can find such well made weapons as these in my kingdom." She settled back with a grin. "So who gave them to you?"

"You did," answered Gabrielle. Her head snapped to the right from the hard slap she received.

"No lies," growled the Conqueror.

The small warrior dropped her head back against the walls and stared at Xena. "No lies... Conqueror."

"Last chance, who gave these to you?"

"A warrior," whispered Gabrielle. "A warrior," she repeated in agony.

The Conqueror narrowed her eyes. Instantly, her left hand shot forward and wrapped around Gabrielle's neck. She stood up and lifted up the younger woman. She rammed Gabrielle against the wall as her feet dangled in the air while the shackles jangled. "Are you asking to play my game?"

Gabrielle closed her eyes and felt the droplets of blood roll down her body. "Yes," she uttered. Her head smacked against the cold stone wall as Xena slammed her into it.

"Good," purred the Conqueror. "This should be a good match."

"It will be," whispered Gabrielle. She could barely breathe from the tight hold on her neck. "Be ready, Conqueror."

"And why is that?"

"Because I hold all the aces," said Gabrielle confidently with a smug look.

Xena laughed deeply and raised her right hand with the sais. She traced the tip of the sais' blade across the other woman's chest and down her stomach. "Don't be so sure." She let go of the warrior.

The small woman fell to the floor with a groan. She looked up with blurry eyes. "I hope you're not a sore loser," she murmured.

"I don't have to be because I never lose." The Conqueror whirled around and left the cell. She stood in front of the cell and watched the guard close the gate behind her. She faced the guard with the tips of the sais pressing against her lips. "Have her cleaned up for tonight's dinner." She lowered the sais. "Understood?"

"Of course, my liege." The guard bowed and watched the Warrior Princess brush past towards the stairs.

Xena chuckled to herself. "Thankfully I hold the jokers," she whispered with a grin and disappeared up the dark stairwell.

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Xena stared across Athens on the balcony. She watched the sun set in the west over her kingdom. She never watched the sunrises, only sunsets.

There was the sound of footfalls coming into the large dining room.

The Conqueror turned around. There, in front of the oak dinner table, stood Gabrielle. "Evening," she greeted and walked off the balcony.

Gabrielle tilted her head and said, "Evening," back. She was in better condition, her body checked over by a healer, wounds clean, her warrior attire mended, and now she wore a yellow-white silk dress. Her hair had been braided by the same maids who dressed her.

"Sit," ordered the ruler. She held out her hand to a seat at the end of the table.

The small warrior nodded and sat carefully, inwardly grimacing from the pain of her injuries.

The Warrior Princess sat at the other end. Three female servers came in carrying food, which they placed before both Xena and Gabrielle.

Gabrielle watched as everything was served, and then her napkin was placed into her lap. "Thank you," she whispered to the servant. The servant smiled shyly and quickly left with the other two.

"The healer and maids were kind?" asked Xena as she picked up her fork.

"Yes," answered Gabrielle.

The Conqueror narrowed her eyes suspiciously. She began to eat.

The warrior-bard followed the other woman's example and ate silently. But soon she questioned, "Why the nice dinner?" She peered up with deep green eyes.

"Thought I'd kill you with kindness," chided the Conqueror coldly.

"Quite a different approach than earlier," mumbled Gabrielle.

"All part of the game," returned the Warrior Princess.

The small warrior nodded and looked back up. "I figured."

Xena drank some of her wine and set the glass back down. "And why wouldn't I?" She grinned. "You paid the price for fighting the guards."

"Why... because I am your enemy," stated Gabrielle.

"True," agreed the Conqueror. She folded her hands in her lap. "But you're my friendly enemy." She grinned. "Correct?"

The small warrior stopped eating. She just wasn't quite up to it. "And why do you say that?"

Xena shifted her grin into a smug look. "Your eyes."

Gabrielle stared at the other woman, examining what the Conqueror said. Yes, she was the Conqueror's enemy and Xena's friend. "Yes... you're correct."

"Ahh, then I would say you have quite the predicament," concluded the Conqueror. She went back to eating.

"Yes I do," agreed the small warrior. "So do you."

The Warrior Princess swallowed her food and grinned. "And how is that?"

"Because you don't know what to do with me," stated Gabrielle.

"Continue with this idea." Xena's voice sounded amused, and her dark eyes twinkled.

Gabrielle folded her hands and leaned back in the seat. "I come out of no where, knocked out seven of your guards single handedly, made it through a whipping, and now here I am sitting down having dinner with you." She paused and grinned. "You tell me, do you know what you're going to do?"

"Destroy you," answered the Conqueror. She lifted her wineglass but didn't drink. "Just as you are planning to destroy me." She smirked. "It's just a race... a game... to see who has better skills and more stubbornness."

The smaller woman chuckled despite everything. Old memories filtered to her of when she was more stubborn than her partner. "Maybe... maybe." She reached forward and selected the glass of water. "Would be interesting to see who wins."

"Wouldn't it," agreed the dark Warrior Princess. She sat back in her seat with a stoic expression. "Care to explain the unconditional trust you have towards me?"

Gabrielle shrugged and lowered her glass of water. "Can't start any good relationship without trust."

Xena chuckled and shook her head. "You make us sound like friends."

"Oooh, sorry," mocked the warrior-bard. "And I thought we were friendly enemies." She stared at the glass of half empty water. "Even enemies have a certain amount of... trust." No, it was a glass of half full water. "Correct?" asked Gabrielle as her eyes raised.

The Conqueror folded her hands with her elbows on the table. Her chin settled onto her hands. She studied the young woman across the table. "Correct."

~*~*~*~

The two servants came up behind the Conqueror.

Xena stood in front of the large pool tub, which had just been filled, and took off her robe.

The servants took the black and sapphire silk robe and carried it off.

The tall dark beauty slowly walked down the steps and glided into the water. Her hair was up. She sighed in pleasure, relaxing as the warm water caressed her smooth skin. She turned around and faced the huge double doors. "Guards," she called.

Two guards came in and bowed.

"Bring me... our guest."

The guards nodded and left. They fetched Gabrielle from her cell and escorted her to the Conqueror.

Gabrielle still wore the evening dress she'd been given. She came into the large bathing room and stared at the Conqueror in the water. Even from there, she could see Xena's nude body beneath the surface. Her jaw tightened.

The Warrior Princess grinned and looked at the guards. "Leave us." Her eyes flickered to the servants. "All of you."

The guards nodded and left with the servants.

"Come up here, Gabrielle," ordered the ruler.

Gabrielle took a deep breath, climbed the three steps, and stood before the other woman. "Why have you requested me here?" She crossed her arms against her chest.

The Conqueror grinned. She leaned back against the bath's side, across from

Gabrielle, and she raised her arms up onto the ledge. "I have a few questions for you."

The small warrior corked an eyebrow. "So ask."

Xena examined the other woman briefly. "How is the trust between us?"

"The same," stated Gabrielle.

The Warrior Princess chuckled at that. "No lies?" she inquired.

The warrior-bard considered that question. She knew that her Xena's past had been filled with lies and deception... anger. With that knowledge, she figured this Xena had the same past and knew that to break the Conqueror's walls, she had to open up to Xena fully. There could be no lies, deception, distrust, disrespect, or anger. Yes, only the purest form of love. "No lies." Gabrielle shook her head. "I will not lie to you, Conqueror. Ask what you will."

Xena stared with cold eyes. She heard how sincere Gabrielle's words were and honesty read through warm forest green eyes. "Good idea." Her eyes lowered to the water. "Tell me," she grinned at Gabrielle, "why you look exactly like the girl I recently crucified?"

"Because I am her."

"Do not toy with me, Gabrielle." The Conqueror's eyes were narrowing. "Don't play me for a fool."

"I am not." Gabrielle sighed. "You did crucify... that girl."

"Don't tell me you're her twin." Xena sighed sadly with drama.

The small woman chuckled at the joke.

Xena quickly realized she'd dropped part of her defenses and quickly shot them back up. "Who the Hades are you?" she growled. "I know," she whispered darkly, "That you're not of this world."

"How you figure that, Conqueror?"

The Warrior Princess's lips eased into an evil smile. "Gabrielle, do you realize you're an open book before me?" She laughed deeply. "You look at me as if you've known me for years. You talk to me as if you know me. You listen to me as if you know what to expect me to say." She paused. "You know me, yet I do not know you. So in conclusion, you must know a me from somewhere else." She corked an eyebrow. "Unless you've been stalking me all my life, which I doubt."

Gabrielle grinned momentarily but went serious. "That girl is Gabrielle-"

"Is?" repeated the Conqueror. "She's alive?"

The warrior-bard closed her eyes at her mistake. "Yes," she whispered honestly.

"How lovely," murmured the empresses sarcastically. "Now continue." She gave a wave of her hand.

The small woman opened her eyes again. "She is Gabrielle, and I am Gabrielle. We're the same person." She sighed deeply, not believing she was telling this to her *enemy*. But this was her *friend*, too. "I am from an alternate world... at least, that's what I believe."

"You believe?" Xena raised an eyebrow. "What makes you believe this?"

"Because this world is backwards." The younger woman's eyes glossed over. "Everything is wrong compared to my world."

"Let me guess, I am a hero in your world," said the Warrior Princess dryly.

"Yes," uttered Gabrielle, and she locked eyes with Xena.

The dark Warrior Princess lowered her eyes to the water. "Fascinating." She chuckled evilly. "How refreshing to know I can be the hero as much as the villain." She smirked at Gabrielle. "Isn't it?"

"All in perspective," answered Gabrielle.

"Very true," agreed Xena. "My men would say I was the hero here... so would I." Her expression went smug. "Now then, how did you end up in... this world?"

"I don't know." The small woman sighed. "I'm still asking myself that." Her eyes dropped to the marble floor. "I was in a cave before I ended up here."

"Then that cave contains your answer." The Conqueror grinned. "I'd say you better pray that it zaps you back home... where its safe."

Gabrielle smirked. "I know where home is."

"You'd be so lucky," stated Xena harshly. She lowered her arms and treaded through the water towards Gabrielle.

The small woman looked away at seeing the powerful, beautiful, nude body move through the clear water.

The Conqueror grinned wryly and slowly climbed up the steps out of the water. The water cascaded down her muscular body. She came right up to Gabrielle.

Gabrielle's jaw clenched. Xena's right hand came up and turned her face.

The deadly Conqueror locked eyes with green ones. "Is there a problem?"

"Not at all," responded the younger woman.

Xena's head leaned down. "Did I hear a lie?" Her hand moved and her fingertips

traced over Gabrielle's lips.

"Yes," Gabrielle whispered. Her voice quaked.

"Do you... desire me, Gabrielle?" The Conqueror's voice was rich and silky.

The small woman closed her eyes and stepped back. "Yes," she answered quietly. Her dark eyes opened again.

The ruler grinned darkly, her eyes twinkling. She walked over and picked up her robe. She slipped into it and tied the sash while turning to face Gabrielle again. "That was your first and last free lie." Her upper lip twitch. "The next lie will hold a heavy price."

The short warrior simply nodded and tried to compose herself. "Thank you," she said sincerely.

"For what?" The tall woman neared.

"For giving me a free one."

Xena didn't respond to her and called, "Guards."

Gabrielle felt her heartbeat pick up. Had she said the wrong thing?

The two guards entered and stood below the bathing pool's steps.

The Conqueror stared at the young woman before her with hard cold blue eyes. "Gabrielle is to be taken... to her room for the evening."

The small warrior sighed to herself in relief. She turned and walked down the steps.

"And Gabrielle, sweet dreams." The Conqueror stood tall, and her eyes gleamed evilly.

The warrior-bard glanced back at Xena. "Conqueror, they will be." She joined the guards and left with them. She was escorted to a room a few doors down. She went inside and heard the door closed and bolted behind her. She smiled as she saw her regular red velvet attire and boots folded neatly on the bed.

~*Part 4*~

Gabrielle came out onto the training field, escorted by two guards. She spotted Xena fighting a warrior.

The Conqueror did a roundhouse kick and sent her opponent flying onto his back. She'd seen Gabrielle out of the corner of her eye. She grinned at the man on his back. "A little better."

The soldier stood up. "Thank you, my liege."

"Don't get your head in the sky," stated the Conqueror. She nodded briskly.

The man got up and jogged off.

Xena turned around, twirling her sword. She wore her old leathers with brass wire armor, cape, boots, and her chakram at her side. She smirked at Gabrielle. "I thought you might want some... practice."

The small warrior folded her arms. "That depends." She was in her normal red top, short skirt, and boots.

"On what?" The Conqueror signaled for the guards to leave, and they did.

"How uninjured I come out of it," answered Gabrielle. She strolled up to the ruler.

The tall woman laughed deeply. "How about this." She paused in momentary thought. "We spar, and I promise to not even nick you."

The small warrior corked an eyebrow. "Oh, so now we're testing my trust towards you in the game?"

Xena grinned evilly. "Yes, my way."

"Lovely," murmured the warrior-bard. "Alright, I'm... game."

The Conqueror's left hand went behind her cape then came back out. She held out Gabrielle's sais.

Gabrielle took a deep breath and accepted them. "And trusting me not to hurt you either, I believe."

"Should be interesting." Xena stepped back as her eyes darkened. Her sword raised, her left hand came up, and she bent her knees. "You have a very slim chance to... beat me."

"A chance I don't want," revealed the younger woman. She flipped the blades of the sais under her wrists and straightened up fully. "You're first move." She grinned.

The Conqueror laughed, took two running steps, and leaped over Gabrielle's head. She slashed at her opponent from behind.

Gabrielle dropped and rolled away. She bounced up to her feet. "Unsporting."

Xena grinned. "Then don't let me have first move." She held up her free hand. "Come on, Gabrielle."

The small woman shook her head and rushed forward while flipping out a sai. She slashed at Xena with her weapon.

The Warrior Princess leaned back as the weapon breezed past her chest. She saw the other blade coming and stopped it with her sword. She threw a punch at Gabrielle.

The warrior-bard ducked the punch and jumped back. She kept her sais' blades out and grinned. "Conqueror, you can't do anything I don't expect."

"Rrright," drew out the Warrior Princess. She brought her sword at Gabrielle.

Gabrielle parried the swipe with a sai.

That's when Xena kicked in the speed. She brought her sword around and began doing rapid thrusts, swipes, and slashes. Each time her attack was stopped by Gabrielle's strong defense.

The pair soon fell into a rhythmic fighting motion.

The Conqueror soon picked up the feeling that the other woman had fought her before. It left her skin crawling slightly under those tight leathers.

Gabrielle on the other hand had almost forgotten she was fighting the Conqueror. Before her, she thought she fought her Xena. She became so caught up in the feeling that her guard fell.

Xena swiped forward but stopped her sword instantly.

The blade touched Gabrielle's right side at the waist.

The small warrior stopped moving and glanced at the sword at her side. She peered up into ice eyes.

The Conqueror grinned. "Trust me?" She pressed her sword against her opponent's side. "You could have a nice wound right there now."

"Oh, I've trusted you," Gabrielle said with a tiny grin. Her eyes sparkled, and playfully she rushed forward with the distraction. Her right sai came up and the long blade pressed into the Conqueror's neck. "But do you still trust me?" Her face was close to Xena's.

The Warrior Princess slowly raised an eyebrow. "Quite," she answered in a hard tone. "I trust that warmth won't kill me with a sai." She grinned deeply.

The warrior-bard smiled evilly and laughed faintly. "Keep reading my book."

"Oooh?"

"Yeah." Gabrielle removed the sai. "It has an unbelievable ending." Without warning, she suddenly found herself on her back in the dust of the field, her legs swiped out from under her. She coughed and looked up at the smug Warrior Princess.

"Next time, back up then remove the sai." Xena sheathed her sword. She held out her right hand. "Sais," she ordered.

The small warrior sighed, flipped the sais, and held the handles up.

The Conqueror took the weapons then hooked them to her side. "Guards," she commanded.

The two guards came up beside Xena.

The Warrior Princess folded her arms. "Escort Gabrielle to her room."

The warrior-bard stood up and brushed herself off. She strolled off with the guards. Once in her room, she sat on the bed and thought for a time. She wanted to come up with a strategy to get the Conqueror in her control, but the more she considered it, the more she decided she didn't want one. She knew that's what Xena was expecting, a plan. So, she wasn't about to fall into the Conqueror's claws by having one. No, she had to play the Conqueror's game, flow with it, and come out on top. She had to win, and she had to make sure the Conqueror won. One thing she knew, no matter what universe, Xena was a sore loser.

~*~*~*~

The empresses sat high on the throne but a bit slumped in the seat. "Bring in the next." Her voice held boredom. To either side of her stood a guard.

The guard nodded and signaled for the next victim to come in. Three guards brought in a young man and kicked him to his knees before the Conqueror. One guard handed the other one a scroll.

That guard unrolled the scroll and began to read, "Sphaerus, son of the dead warlord Cycnus, was captured in a raid that his small army was conducting. Sphaerus and his small band were trying to sack one of your armories, my liege." The guard rolled up the scroll.

The Conqueror slowly nodded and stared at the young man before her. She narrowed her eyes and gazed at the guard with the scroll. "How many of my men were killed in this raid?"

The guard put his hands behind his back. "Twenty, my liege."

Xena ran her tongue along her molars. "Where?"

"Thessaly."

Xena shifted in her seat. "You're as stupid as your father," she told the young man.

Sphaerus jerked forward but couldn't escape the guards. His manacles jangled. "We won't rest," he spat.

The dark Warrior Princess laughed and smiled evilly. "These small rebellions are nothing, Sphaerus." She leaned forward in her throne. "They're like flies, just needing to be swatted." Sitting up straight again, she decided the man's verdict. "He is to be lashed fifty times, and if he lives, he is to be taken to Shark Island for ten years."

"As you command, my liege." The guard with the scroll turned to the other three.
"Take him to the dungeon."

Sphaerus didn't protest the sentence. He stood tall and let himself be led away.

Xena leaned to her left and ordered the guard, "Bring me Gabrielle."

The guard nodded, walked off, and exited the throne room with two other guards. They went to Gabrielle's room and opened it. "You are to follow us."

Gabrielle turned around from the window. She walked over and was led out of the room. She followed the three guards to the throne room. She was escorted in through a door behind Xena.

The marble-doors in front of her were opened and in came three guards escorting a young woman with red hair.

The warrior-bard's eyes widened as she was led along side the Conqueror's royal seat.

The redhead came near with her three guards.

"Amarice?" whispered Gabrielle.

The redhead looked at Gabrielle. She was confused. "How do you know me?"

"Restrain her," ordered the Conqueror, pointing to Gabrielle.

Two guards grabbed her arms. The third drew a sword in warning.

"Wait..." Gabrielle shook her head once she realized what was happening.

"On her knees," commanded the Conqueror, this time indicating Amarice.

Amarice's was hit in the back of her legs. She crashed to her knees before the Conqueror.

The ruler's eyes were flashing. "You're one of the rebels, are you not?"

Amarice narrowed her eyes. "I am."

"What was she caught doing?" asked the Warrior Princess.

The guard with the scroll spoke up. "She spoke out, my liege."

Xena smiled, amused. "I suppose you didn't hear about the last person that spoke out, did you Amarice?"

"Yes I did," growled the young Amazon. "She is our Queen!" She struggled against her guards briefly. "You'll be stopped, Conqueror. Just wait."

The Conqueror laughed and gave a vertical wave of the hand. "I doubt that..."

Amarice." She grinned. "How is your Queen? I heard she's still alive and well."

"She's preparing to stop you," snarled the Amazon.

Xena laughed only again. "That, I would like to see."

"Oh you'll see... that's a promise," declared Amarice with a growl.

The Conqueror sighed. "Such small hopes." She sat up straight in her throne. "You have spoken out against the realm, Amarice, and you are a rebel." She paused. "You will suffer the same fate as your Queen."

"No, wait, Conqueror?" yelled Gabrielle. "Don't do this, don't crucify her."

The dark Xena's head whipped to the right. Her eyes were wide, her breathing heavy in anger. "Silence her!" she ordered hotly.

The guard, who had drawn his sword earlier, raised it to Gabrielle's neck. "Be silent or pay the price."

The warrior-bard closed her eyes and felt the shattering pain at not being able to help Amarice. There had to be a way. An idea came and before she even considered it she whispered, "Conqueror, I'll tell you where the rebels are."

"No!" screamed Amarice. "You bitch!" She tried to break free from her guards. She tried to attack Gabrielle, but she was held back by her guards and pushed back down to her knees.

The Conqueror waited for the Amazon to be quiet then she glanced at Gabrielle. "Sheathe your sword."

The guard lowered his sword from Gabrielle's neck and sheathed it.

Xena grinned, and her eyes twinkled darkly. "Gabrielle, where do the rebels live?"

The warrior-bard's mouth opened slowly, and she didn't answer at first. "The Amazons, the rebels live... three candlemarks north of Thessaly... just east of the mountains there," she uttered.

"Thank you," responded the Conqueror, and she stared at the young woman with a smug look.

"No!" screamed Amarice again. Her right hand reached to her side. She extracted a hidden dagger and sprang forward, breaking free of the guards. She came after the Conqueror with her dagger raised.

Gabrielle's eyes widened. "Conqueror!" she yelled in warning. She broke free of her guards, took three running steps, and jumped.

Amarice bound up one step of the dais and leaped for Xena.

The Conqueror stood up instantly, prepared to meet her enemy.

But the small warrior was soaring through the air. She smashed into Amarice, wrapping her arms around Amarice's waist, and together they crashed onto the steps.

Both Amarice and Gabrielle rolled down the marble steps, one over the other.

Gabrielle was knocked partially unconscious. A sharp pain tore through her left side, but when she lifted her head, she saw Xena alive and Amarice knocked out. A sigh of relief escaped her lips, and her head dropped back to the floor as she lost consciousness. Red blood seeped out onto the white marble floor from around the dagger still imbedded in her side.

The Conqueror stood, stunned, then quickly snapped to. "Take Amarice to the dungeon!" She came down the steps quickly. Kneeling down, she examined the dagger in Gabrielle's side. "Hades," she growled.

Amarice was dragged off to the dungeon.

Gabrielle, on the other hand, was lifted up into the Conqueror's arms and cradled there.

Xena held the small woman in her arms. She glanced at two guards. "I want a healer in my room now!" She rushed out of the throne room carrying Gabrielle.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle groaned and coughed. Before she even dared open her eyes, she did a mental check of her body. She noticed a searing pain in her left side, but it wasn't as bad as earlier. Her entire left side was hot, and she knew she'd taken Amarice's dagger in the side. She felt light headed and weak. But she was still alive.

Now she did a check of her surroundings. A soft bed, salve lingering in the air, a cool breeze, bed sheets covering her body, and the faint snap of candles.

Opening her eyes slowly, she saw the red and orange rays of a sunset pouring in through a window. She looked around and realized this wasn't her room. Slowly and carefully, she sat up. She hissed at the pain in her side.

"Lay back down," said a dark and deep voice.

"Good idea," mumbled Gabrielle, complying.

The Conqueror stood on her balcony watching the remains of the sunset, her hands behind her back. She wore her leathers and armor, sword and chakram. "You've been out for three candlemarks." Her back was to Gabrielle.

The warrior-bard lifted the bed sheet and glanced at her wound. It was wrapped in clean cloth. Her boots were off but she still wore her clothes. Then, out of no where, she felt her world start to spin. "Oh gods," she whispered.

"I said, lay down," growled the Conqueror when she turned around and saw that the small woman was becoming dizzy.

Gabrielle relaxed and took a shaky breath.

Slowly, Xena walked into her room once more. Her hands were still behind her back when she came next to the bed. She peered down at the younger woman. "You've lost a fair amount of blood. So rest."

The short warrior just closed her eyes. "What about Amarice, Conqueror?" she whispered.

"She is not of your concern."

"No." The small woman felt the pain increasing, and she was becoming more light headed. "I gave you information for you to sp... spare her." Her breathing was becoming ragged. "You can't... can't go back... on it," she rasped.

"Fine, she will remain in the prison until later." The Conqueror tilted her head. She noted how pale the other woman was. "Go to sleep, you're going to faint anyway." And Xena was right, for Gabrielle passed out after her words.

The warrior-bard's breathing became shallow, and Xena knew she would sleep for at least a day.

The dark Warrior Princess stood there examining the younger woman. "More worried about others than yourself, Gabrielle." She folded her arms. "It'll get yourself killed and soon." She turned away and walked out of her chambers. She looked at the two guards by her door. "Stay here. Nobody is to enter but me. Is this clear?"

The two guards nodded sternly. "Yes, my liege," they said together.

Xena strolled down the hall, her eyes narrowing with every step she took, her anger rising as she went down the steps, and her jaw clenching when she came to the dungeon. She stood the bottom of the steps and balled her hands into fists. Emanating a deadly power, she headed down the prison corridor. She came to the last cell and faced it. "Guard," she growled.

The guard stepped up beside Xena. "Yes, my liege?"

"Open the cell and retrieve me a whip."

The guard gulped but obeyed the orders. He opened the cell, let the Conqueror in, then locked it behind her. He jogged off in search of a whip.

The Conqueror stared at Amarice on the floor. "Stupid girl."

The Amazon sprung up but was stopped by the manacles. She was scant inches from Xena, and she growled. "Damn you and that blond bitch."

Xena laughed. Her hands moved like lightening and her fingertips hit the pressure

points on Amarice's neck.

The young Amazon's breathing was cut off, and she fell to her knees. While gasping for breath, a trickle of blood ran down her upper lip.

The cell opened, and the guard handed Xena a whip. He quickly left and locked the cell again once out.

The Conqueror uncoiled the whip and the tip fell on the ground in front of Amarice. She knelt down and tilted Amarice's head up with the whip's handle. "You have a few prices to pay... Amarice." She grinned. "You should be happy, that blond bitch saved your damn feathers." She reached forward and undid the pressure points.

The Amazon gasped for breath and rubbed her neck. "Sweet Artemis," she rasped, coughing.

The dark Warrior Princess rose up slowly, and her eyes flashed. The whip lifted up, and Xena let her anger reign over her.

~*Part 5*~

The small warrior sighed before opening her eyes. The room was still dark, but it was warm. She was alone. Her body felt better than it had earlier. Deciding to test things out, she sat up very slowly. Her hands came down on the bed as she waited for the world to spin, yet it didn't happen. She sighed happily and carefully got out of bed. Her feet connected to the cold off-white marble floor. Gazing around in the room, she realized that she still wasn't in her room. Considering the size of the room and the elaborate furniture, she decided it must be Xena's room. "Oh boy."

Licking her lips, Gabrielle went over to the door and opened it. She poked her head out.

"Halt," said a guard.

The two guards at the door turned and blocked the door.

"You are not allowed to leave," said the same guard. "The Conqueror's orders."

"Wouldn't even think of it," teased Gabrielle. They didn't laugh, and she huffed. "Was so funny you two forgot to laugh huh?"

The guards looked at each other then back at Gabrielle.

The warrior-bard sighed. "Alright bright candles, how long have I been sleeping?"

"A day now," responded that same guard.

"Talk about sleeping the day away," mumbled the small woman. "Um, can either of you... get me food?" she asked sheepishly.

"No, we are not allowed to leave."

Gabrielle's head bobbed. "Rrrright." She put her hands on her hips. "Have I mentioned how angry I get when my stomach isn't fed?"

One guard bit back a grin. "We have to wait for the Conqueror's orders."

The short warrior groaned. "Oh come on, I am starving here." She ran a hand through her hair. "Have either of you ever had cramps? My hunger pains right now are like that but ten times worse."

"You'll have to stay hungry until the Conqueror says otherwise."

"Great." The young woman sighed and dropped her arms. "I was fed better down in the cell."

Suddenly there was a low involuntary growling.

Both guards looked down at the woman's stomach.

Gabrielle laughed shyly and covered her stomach with her arms. "I told you." She shrugged. "Anyway, I'll just go humor myself. Thanks for all the help." She stepped back and closed the door. Studying the balcony, Gabrielle decided to walk out on it on this early night. Her hands settled on the rail, and she took in the scene of Xena's kingdom. "That's... aaamazing," she whispered in awe.

~*~*~*~

The Conqueror came strolling down the hall. She came to her room with the two guards. She stopped. "Is she awake yet?"

"Yes, my liege," answered one guard. "Quite awake."

Xena narrowed her eyes. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, my liege, she came out."

"And?"

"And she asked how long she'd slept." The guard paused. "Then she asked for some food."

"So?"

"My liege, she is quite hungry." The guard held back his grin. "Her stomach roared like a lion."

The Conqueror suppressed the laughter that wanted to bubble up. "She's hungry?"

"Yes, my liege very hungry... you should have heard her stomach growl."

The Warrior Princess sighed, turned, and walked back down the hall.

The guards exchanged glances and noted that their liege soon returned with a tray of food. They both tried not to laugh at this.

Xena walked into the room, closed the door silently, and placed the tray of food on her glass table in the room.

Gabrielle still stood out on the balcony, captured by the scenery even in the dark.

Xena joined the other woman and came up from behind. "Amazing isn't it?"

The small warrior jumped and looked frantically at Xena. "Oh gods..." She calmed down then turned back to the scenery. "It is."

"It took every drop of my blood to conquer these lands."

"Your blood... or others?" whispered Gabrielle.

The dark woman laughed at that. "My blood, Gabrielle." She folded her arms. "I was bleeding when I rammed my flag into Athens's soil at the end of the last battle to take over Greece." She turned her head to Gabrielle. "Don't think I haven't suffered like others here."

"If you understand that... lived that then why are you letting your people continue to suffer?"

"Gabrielle, it will make my kingdom stronger as the hard times made me stronger." The Conqueror's eyes went darker. "I will not have a kingdom of happy fat people that can not defend themselves."

"So a kingdom of miserable dying people is better?"

Xena laughed deeply. "You certainly are Gabrielle. Just as naive as the other one."

"Oh no." The older Gabrielle faced Xena. "I am the wiser Gabrielle. I know death, life, hatred, and love unlike she does." She paused. "And I know what I see in your kingdom. I'm just telling you how it is."

"How nice of you to inform me," replied the Conqueror dryly.

"Somebody needed to." Gabrielle narrowed her eyes. "Since you can't inform yourself." She turned away, heading for the room.

The Conqueror moved quickly. She grabbed Gabrielle's arms and jerked her closer to her body. "Do you think I don't spare people? That I can't show mercy?"

"I don't know, honestly."

"Then let me clear things up for you," growled the Warrior Princess. "I have spared that Amazon; she is still in that cell alive." She lowered her head, and her voice came out menacingly. "I show mercy because you're still alive, and your blood isn't spilled

all over my nice expensive marble floor in the throne room." Raising her head back up, she added, "And third, in that room right now is food for you that I got myself." She narrowed her eyes. "You tell me now, Gabrielle, do I spare people and show mercy?"

"Yes," whispered Gabrielle. "Not much of it, but you do show it."

"Exactly," snarled the Conqueror. She pushed Gabrielle away. "Do not talk about something you have not fully understood... or lived."

The small woman looked away and swallowed the lump in her throat. "Alright." After nodding she looked up. "You tell me if I do or don't fully understand." She folded her arms. "I was born in simple village. One day my village was almost enslaved." She paused and tried to compose the next part right. "But a warrior stopped the warlord. After that, the warrior and I became friends, and we traveled together."

The Conqueror crossed her own arms and continued listening.

"The warrior told me never to fight or use a sword because I would become a target." She tilted her head. "But the warrior knew more than that, the warrior knew I would fall into darkness if I picked up a weapon." Her eyes fell but she continued, "None the less, I picked up a staff and used it for numerous years. One day I killed somebody." She peered up. "That's when I crossed the line like anybody else that has killed. I threw away my staff in hopes to save my innocence but it wouldn't happen. Days went on as I saw more and more death... darkness both the warrior and I. It almost destroyed my friendship with the warrior but we managed to bring it together before it was too late."

The Conqueror shifted her weight to the other foot.

"Since then, I've picked up the sais, killed people on purpose and by mistake." Gabrielle took a step closer. "I have been in countless battles, wars, and deadly adventures. I've traveled the world and seen the poverty, the hatred, the anger, and the hopelessness." She shook her head while staring into steel blue eyes. "You tell me, Conqueror, do I understand a hard life?"

"Yes," answered the ruler. "However, your... light still remains bright inside, Gabrielle." Her arms came down. "You haven't experienced full darkness." She walked into the room. "Come eat something, your body needs energy to heal properly."

Gabrielle went in slowly. "Did I mention too that I am a healer?" She grinned lopsidedly.

Xena glanced back and corked an eyebrow. "Next time, I'll let you take care of your own wound."

"But not when I have daggers in my side, I'm not a healer," added the small woman.

"I figured." The Warrior Princess sat down in a long sofa. Before her was the glass table with the food. "Eat something."

The warrior-bard sat on a sofa on the opposite side of Xena. She didn't eat right away. "What are you planning to do now that you know the location of the Amazons?"

"Absolutely..." The Conqueror leaned forward with an angry expression. "Nothing," she finished and grinned.

"W-what?" asked Gabrielle, who was completely baffled.

"Gabrielle, did you not realize that I already knew where they are located?"

"You... knew?"

"Yessss."

"Then why did you..." The small warrior shook her head.

The ruler laughed and sat back in her sofa fully amused. "Oh, I do plan to stick to my word and not crucify Amarice." She grinned. "And letting you tell me the location... call that a test."

"You were testing me to see if I would tell the truth. Whether I would stake the Amazons' whereabouts to save Amarice's life."

"Correct." Xena crossed one leg over the other. "You passed the test with flying colors." Relaxing with a sigh, a smug look crossed her face. "Be happy. If you had lied I'd have struck you down there on the spot." She waved a hand at the food. "Eat something before I-"

"I'm eating," cut off Gabrielle. She picked up the plate of food and began eating.

"Oh by the way, I do believe we are even."

The small woman glanced up confused. "How is that?" She stopped eating for a second.

"You saved my life, and I saved your life." She pointed at the wound.

Gabrielle raised an eyebrow. "You... took care of my wound personally?"

"Yes," answered the Conqueror. "I wanted to see that wound taken care of and taken care of right. A healer checked it later."

The warrior-bard nodded and went back to eating. "It'll take a good week to heal over."

"Maybe sooner if you keep salve on it." The Warrior Princess stood. "The stitches will fall out on their own." She walked around the sofa. "I will return." She left the room.

Gabrielle sighed, shook her head, but finished eating. After she was done, she stood up. Reaching to her side, she carefully removed the bandage and looked at the wound.

It was stitched, the opening not too large, and the skin around was bruised.

Carefully she replaced the bandage, and the warrior sat back down gingerly. She stretched out on the sofa and stared at the torches across the room. Emotions and notions soon filled her mind and she relaxed back in the sofa.

Here is a young *warrior*,

In an *alternate* world

That *beckoned* her here

And she has to

Prepare for what

Desires her

Since there *may be*

No turning *back* now.

Section Two

~*~*~*~

The Conqueror entered into her room and glanced at Gabrielle.

Gabrielle had fallen asleep on the sofa, and her breathing was slow. Her face glowed golden yellow from the torchlight reflecting off her face.

The Warrior Princess strolled over, her expression hard. "Gabrielle?"

"Not yet, Xena," mumbled the warrior-bard. "A few... a few more minutes."

The ruler cawked an eyebrow. She licked her lips. "You have to get up, Gabrielle." She made her voice more soothing this time.

"Go... saddle up Argo."

Xena's eyes widened slightly. She grinned. "Argo is saddled up." She folded her arms across her chest. "We need to start... traveling."

"Later," murmured the small woman. She turned on the sofa and put her back to the Conqueror.

The dark Warrior Princess dropped her arms and sat down on the sofa. She stared at

the younger woman's back. Gabrielle's words sifted through her mind. Lacing her hands together with her elbows on her knees, she lowered her chin onto her hands. "Keeps getting more and more intriguing." Deciding it was time for bed, she stood up and walked around the table. She reached down and picked up the small woman.

Gabrielle half opened her eyes and whispered, "Xena?"

The Conqueror's jaw tightened, but she warmly uttered, "Go back to sleep."

That's all the warrior-bard needed to hear in her confused state. She dropped her head against the other woman's shoulder. "Xena... thank you."

"For what?" asked the ruler, crossing the room to the bed.

"For being yourself... and always saving me," mumbled the young warrior before her eyes closed, and she went back to sleep.

The Conqueror's eyes narrowed, and she bent forward before lowering Gabrielle onto the bed. She then pulled the sheet over the woman and walked back to the sofa. She laid down and stretched out. Thoughts filled her mind about this younger woman. She couldn't stop thinking how Gabrielle must be here to change her. It was the last thing the Conqueror wanted but the first thing Xena needed.

~*Part 6*~

"Alright, time to get up, Gabrielle." The Conqueror stood tall over the woman in the bed. Morning had begun just a candlemark ago.

Gabrielle rolled onto her back and looked up. "How'd I get-"

"I put you in it last night." The ruler had hooded eyes, and she turned away.

"Where'd you sleep?"

"On a sofa."

The warrior-bard sat up in the bed. She combed her hair with her right hand. "You should have left me on the sofa."

The Conqueror disappeared into a huge washroom off the main bedroom. "Wouldn't have been good for your wound," she called. When she came back out, she was dressed in her leathers, armor, boots, and her weapons. "You have an Amazon's fate to decide today."

The small warrior knitted her eyebrows. "I can't decide her fate."

"Oh you won't completely, I have to decide if it's just." The ruler came over with the other woman's boots. "Hurry up."

Gabrielle took her boots and put them on the floor. Leaning forward, she hissed as the pain shot through her body.

"Try standing up."

The short warrior closed her eyes and stood up. When she opened them again, there was no pain reflected in them.

Xena tilted her head. "I think your body was giving you a reminder." She smirked.

"Yeah," muttered the small woman. She turned and slipped into her boots. After propping one foot at a time on the bed, she had them tied.

The Conqueror held open the door. "After you," she said coldly.

Gabrielle sighed and headed out. The Warrior Princess followed matching her stride for stride along the marble corridor.

The pair went down into the dungeon and passed the first few cells.

"Last one on the right," Xena said.

The warrior-bard nodded and came to the end of the prison. She looked into Amarice's cell. Her heart skipped a beat. "She's been whipped."

Amarice sat in the cell, huddled in a corner, her legs propped up, and her head buried between her legs and arms. The red lash marks were all up and down the young Amazon's back.

"Yes." Xena peered down into angry green eyes. "I, personally, whipped her for what she did."

"What?" asked Gabrielle hotly. "How could you do that?" She faced Xena. "You said—" Before she could say more, she was slammed against the dungeon wall.

The Warrior Princess lowered her head close to Gabrielle's. "Do not question me," she snarled. Her right arm pressed against Gabrielle's chest, and her left hand pressed against the wall. "I said I'd spare her from being crucified. I never said a damn word about being beaten." Her eyes narrowed. "She had a price to pay for attacking me. Do you understand me?"

Gabrielle said nothing.

The Conqueror growled, grabbed the small woman's shoulders, whirled her around and smashed her into a cell's bars. "Do you understand me, Gabrielle?" she yelled furiously.

The short warrior closed her eyes and whispered, "Yes... Conqueror."

"Good." Xena waited. "Look at me."

The small woman opened her eyes.

"Thank me, Gabrielle." Xena slammed Gabrielle back against the bars again by the shoulders. "Thank me, because she should be dead right now. I am showing her mercy," growled the ruler. "So do not get angry with me. Otherwise you may join Amarice. Do you want to join her?"

"No... Conqueror."

"Then suck it up and deal with it. There are prices to pay."

After a moment of silence, Gabrielle asked, "Let me clean her wounds?"

"No," snarled the ruler.

"Please, Conqueror, I was whipped, and then my wounds were cleaned."

Xena leaned in. "And you know why?"

"Why?"

"Because I was showing you mercy." Her right hand came up and pointed at the Amazon. "I have shown her mercy already. I will show no more for a person that tried to kill me."

Gabrielle closed her eyes and balled her hands into fists. "Conqueror," she whispered, "she's so young, she doesn't deserve this." Her eyes opened. "Please," she begged.

"And I never deserved to have my village sacked when I was young, but it happened. I never deserved to have my legs broken, but it happened. I never deserved my brother's death, but it happened." She grinned. "What doesn't kill her will only make her stronger."

"Conqueror-"

The dark Warrior Princess cut her off instantly. "No, Gabrielle." The ruler straightened up and released the small woman. "You will join her if you ask again, and I will whip you myself."

"Then... can I ask for something else?"

"What is that?"

"For you to show me mercy again."

The Conqueror folded her arms. "On what grounds?"

"On the grounds of... trust."

Xena said nothing at first and considered the idea. "Very well, on trust. What is the mercy?"

"That you have mercy on my guilt and let me clean Amarice's wounds. I feel guilty it

happened to her because I... I feel responsible for her, and I provoked her to attack you."

The Conqueror's face broke out with a grin. "Very well, you may clean her wounds." She lowered her arms. "Your love will get you killed." She looked down the dungeon and yelled, "Guard?"

A guard came down. "Yes, my liege?"

"Get me a medical kit."

The guard fetched a kit and returned. He gave it to Gabrielle then opened the cell.

Going in, she knelt down in front of Amarice. "Amarice?" Gabrielle whispered, settling the kit on the floor.

The Conqueror stepped in the cell. "Leave the cell open," she ordered.

After nodding, the guard stood waiting.

Amarice lifted her face revealing red eyes and puffy cheeks. "What the Hades do you want?"

"I'm going to clean your wounds."

"No," growled the Amazon. "I don't want my enemy to clean my wounds." She lifted her hands with the shackles making a noise. She was preparing to attack Gabrielle somehow.

In a fluent motion, Xena unsheathed her sword and pointed the tip at Amarice. "Do not touch her, Amarice." She narrowed her eyes. "She's been saving your life since minute one. Either accept her help or refuse it nicely."

Gabrielle sighed. "Amarice, please let me look over your wounds." She took a deep breath. "They'll get infected if they're not tended. Besides that, you'll feel better later, and I *will* clean your wounds."

The Amazon sighed deeply. "Fine."

"Thank you," uttered the warrior-bard. She opened the kit, sat down cross-legged, and started cleaning the wounds.

The Conqueror sheathed her sword.

Within a quarter of a candlemark, Gabrielle was done and put the medicine away. "There."

"Thank you," muttered the Amazon grudgingly.

"You're welcome," returned the warrior-bard, standing, kit tucked under her arm.

The ruler stood in front of the cell's door. "Before you go, Gabrielle, you must decide Amarice's sentence for speaking out. What will it be instead of crucifixion?" She paused. "And it must be suitable to my standards."

Licking her lips, the small woman faced Amarice then peered up at Xena. "Her sentence..." Ideas came to mind, and she tried to come up with a 'suitable' punishment to Xena, which would keep the young sassy Amazon out of trouble. "She is to be a indentured servant for two years."

"Done," declared the ruler. Stepping backwards, she left the cell.

Gabrielle glanced at Amarice. "Don't give-up, Amarice."

The Amazon stared at the woman until she and the Conqueror were out of sight.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle stood alone in her room. She'd peeled back the bandage over her injury. Deciding it would be fine, she kept the bandage off so the wound could breath. After grabbing the salve off the table, she carefully smeared some over her wound. She closed the jar and put it on the table again.

The warrior-bard walked over to the window in her room. It was late afternoon, and she stared at the view of Athens. "Xena, I wonder what you're doing right now back in our world." She sighed sadly. "I hope I can find you here in this world," she mumbled under her breath.

The door opened and in stepped a guard. "You are to come with me."

The short warrior turned around and followed the guard out of the room and to the dining room.

The guard left her at the doorway.

Gabrielle stood there, staring at the Conqueror sitting at the head of the table.

"Care to sit?" asked Xena.

The small woman sat down at the opposite end of the table. "Dinner this early?"

"Not quite that early," stated the Warrior Princess. "About half a candlemark before sunset."

Three servants came out, set food on the table, and filled the glasses with wine and water. After they left, the two women were silent momentarily.

"So, tell me more about your world, Gabrielle," inquired the ruler.

Green eyes peered up. "What do you want to know?" She picked up her fork.

"For starts, how do you know Amarice?"

The younger woman sighed deeply and stared at the food. "She's a friend of mine... was."

"Was?"

Gabrielle lifted her sad eyes. "She was killed."

The Conqueror began eating and speaking at the same time. "And that's why you feel responsible for her."

"For the most part," muttered the warrior-bard. She ate some of her food.

"What's the rest of it?"

The small warrior sighed deeply. "I am her... Queen in my world."

The Warrior Princess stopped eating. "Very interesting." She grinned. "Seems as if there are parallels between our worlds, huh?"

"Yes and no," answered Gabrielle. "There are differences too."

"I can imagine," responded the older woman smugly. "Myself for example."

"You... and I," stated the short warrior. "This world's Gabrielle is... darker."

"And I wonder why," drew out the ruler. "It must be this dark world... can even effect the light in people."

Gabrielle stopped eating. "But I didn't say she was of darkness... just darker than me." She raised an eyebrow, questioning. "Do you know Hercules?"

"Who?" asked the Conqueror.

"Hercules... the son of Zeus?" The warrior-bard's eyes widened as the implications dawned on her.

"No," answered Xena. "Who is he?"

No wonder Xena is the Conqueror... Hercules was never born, so he never changed her, mused Gabrielle. She came out of her thoughts. "He's just a hero in my world."

"Just a hero?" mocked the Conqueror. "He must be of importance, if you pick him out of all the heroes of your world."

"He... he is." Gabrielle nodded and ate more. "He's legendary in my world; he fights for the greater good."

"Ah." The ruler nodded in understanding. "I see."

The pair fell quiet and continued eating their dinner.

At the end of dinner, Xena stood up. "Come with me." Her eyes twinkled deeply.

The warrior-bard felt something inside drop. She rose up so slowly and waited for the Conqueror to join her. She left the room along side the Conqueror.

The two women went to the ruler's room, then out onto the balcony where sunset was beginning.

"Stay here," the Conqueror told Gabrielle, and she went back into her room. A moment later she came back out with her hands behind her back. She stood beside the small woman and watched the sunset. "Tell me about Argo."

Gabrielle's head whipped up. "A-argo?"

"Yesss, Argo." The Conqueror corked an eyebrow. "Is Argo a light gold?"

The warrior-bard opened her mouth and almost said no before catching herself. No lies. "Yes."

"Is Argo a warhorse?"

The small woman looked back at the sunset. "Yes," she whispered.

"Is Argo... my horse?"

Gabrielle closed her eyes. "Yes, I believe so, Conqueror," she uttered in seeming pain.

The Conqueror grinned and nodded a few times. "How long have you known me?"

"Over five years."

"Well, I should say the other Xena." The ruler smirked. "So, you believe you know quite a bit about me, too, huh?"

"Yes, Conqueror."

"Now, what do you believe... your Xena is doing right now?"

"I don't know," whispered Gabrielle. "I'm just hoping she's okay."

The Conqueror turned to the small woman as the last few rays of sunlight streamed through the sky. "From what I know, Xena will try to save you." Her hands were still behind her back.

"If she can, she will," revealed the warrior-bard. She now faced the dark woman.

The ruler tilted her head. "Now, did you help... this Xena fight her darkness? For she must have had it."

"Yes, I did," whispered Gabrielle.

"Does she need you?" asked the Conqueror.

"Yes, Conqueror."

The Conqueror stood tall, dark, and powerful before the young warrior. Her cold eyes stayed fixed on the small woman. She'd heard all the truth she needed. There was no escaping; there was no winning. She leaned down, and her right hand caressed Gabrielle's cheek, her thumb grazing over soft lips. "And do you still desire... me?"

The young woman's eyes closed, and she uttered, "Yes."

The Conqueror's eyes darkened. The sun had set, and there was no light. She leaned down and sealed her lips over Gabrielle's in a rough kiss. As the kiss continued, her left hand came forward and grasped Gabrielle's wrists tightly. When the kiss ended, she began another and pressed her body against Gabrielle's. Bringing the small woman's arms behind her back, she held the hands together.

Gabrielle ended the kiss, and fear washed over her when she realized the Conqueror was tying her hands behind her back. "What you—" She was cut off.

The Conqueror kissed the short warrior powerfully, keeping the warrior restrained while she tied her small wrists together.

The younger woman pulled away from the kiss. "Don't do this," she warned.

The ruler grinned evilly and let go of Gabrielle's bound wrists. "I am, and I will."

Gabrielle struggled against her restraints. "Please don't." She felt the fear taking over. "Not like this."

"Oh, certainly like this." The dark Conqueror grasped Gabrielle by her silver jeweled belt, pulling her in harshly and kissing her with strong demand.

~*Part 7*~

The Conqueror slowly opened her eye, she wore nothing as she climbed out of bed. She noticed it was already morning, probably late morning. She went to a chair, picked up her robe and slipped into it. Once around the bed, she studied the small nude woman still sleeping in her bed.

Gabrielle's breathing was shallow, her hands resting on her stomach, her wrists faintly swollen and red, but she was sleeping differently this time.

The Conqueror tilted her head, trying to figure out the change. Gabrielle seemed less at... peace. She growled as guilt welled up inside her, and she stormed into the bathroom to change.

Had she just raped that woman last night? Gabrielle had said she desired the Conqueror. Yet, she had bound the small warrior against her free will. Then Gabrielle had freely given herself over to the Conqueror's touch once things began. Gabrielle

showed trusted towards the Conqueror. Had she just raped that woman last night?

Xena came back out of the bathroom dressed in her leathers and armor. She came over to the bed and was about to wake Gabrielle but then decided not to and left the room instead.

About a candlemark after the Warrior Princess left, Gabrielle woke up. She sat up in the bed with a straight back, and she looked at her wound. Finding that it was fine, she sighed in relief. She then looked at her wrists and rubbed them a little. "Great," she mumbled. She studied the room, still rubbing her wrists, and noticed that the Conqueror had already left. She breathed deeply and felt how shaky she was from last night. She hadn't expected it to happen. She could handle it, but she certainly hadn't expected it.

No, she didn't expect Xena to force her, not Xena. But this was the Conqueror, the Conqueror, the Conqueror, the Conqueror... It continued repeating in Gabrielle's head.

Gabrielle brought her hands up to the side of her head and closed her eyes tightly. The Conqueror kept filling her head, and she tried to stop it. "God," she growled and closed her eyes when images of the Conqueror flashed in her mind. Scenes of last night flashed in her mind. "Why am I here?" she said hotly. Upon taking a deep breath, the control came back to her, and the images stopped, as did the word Conqueror.

She got up and found her skirt and top. She put them on quietly, then put on her boots. Heading out of the room, she found no guards so she decided to go to her room. Once inside, she leaned against the door and slid down to the floor. "I can't do this anymore," she muttered hopelessly.

~*~*~*~

The Warrior Princess went into her room and noticed Gabrielle had left. She narrowed her eyes and exited her room. Going to Gabrielle's room, she opened the door.

The warrior-bard stood in front of the window, her back to Xena. Her body was tense in seeming control of emotions.

"Gabrielle?"

"Yes?" asked the small woman without turning around.

The Conqueror didn't know what to say, nor was she sure why she came. "Do you want anything to eat?"

"No." Gabrielle's voice was emotionless.

"Very well." The Conqueror left and closed the door.

The small warrior sighed and leaned against the windowsill. Her thoughts took her far away to another world. *Gabrielle, anybody that has gone in there alive comes back*

out dead. Gabrielle closed her eyes, remembering Ephiny's words.

~*~*~*~

"Eat something," growled the Conqueror.

The young warrior lifted her eyes then looked back down. She said nothing and stayed resting in the chair at the dinner table.

Xena's jaw clamped tightly. Her breathing picked up, and she stood. She walked over to Gabrielle and grasped the chair's arms. She leaned down to get in Gabrielle's face. "You need to eat for that wound to heal." Her voice was angry.

Gabrielle peered up. "It is my body, therefor I can eat or not."

"Anything in my realm is mine," growled the Conqueror. "Do as I say."

The small warrior shook her head. "So I've come to notice. Do as you say not as you do, huh?" Her expression turned angry. "You demonstrated that last night, didn't you?"

The Warrior Princess's muscles flexed in control. She growled and spun around, stalking off. "You gave yourself over."

"Like I had much of choice," yelled Gabrielle. She rose up. "I can't play your game when you break your own damn rules."

"How is that?" The Conqueror whirled around.

The small warrior stomped her foot and shook her head. "I trusted you... I trusted you, and you broke that last night." She laughed sarcastically. "So I, I showed a little mercy last night and gave myself freely to you instead of struggling."

"Now you're lying."

"I have only lied once, once," stated Gabrielle.

Xena narrowed her eyes. "You showed me mercy last night, yet you said you desired me."

"Yes I do." The young warrior paused. "Did." She closed her eyes then opened them again. "You think if I desire you, and I am tied, I still won't struggle?" She pointed a finger. "I did not agree to sex." She turned away and walked off. "But I sure as Hell got it."

The Conqueror watched the woman head to the door. "Don't you dare walk out of here, Gabrielle," she warned in a loud voice.

"Watch me." Gabrielle opened the door and went out.

Xena waited two seconds and rushed to the door. She look down it and yelled,

"Guards, I want Gabrielle taken to the dungeon."

Three guards ran down the hall, unsheathing their swords.

The Conqueror let them pass, then watched as they approached Gabrielle.

The warrior-bard spun around and kicked the first guard. He crashed to the ground, and she took on the other two. She ducked as a sword breezed past her head. She punched him in the stomach and kicked at the other.

Xena's eyes darkened with every menacing step she took forward. Her eyes stayed pinned on Gabrielle. "Enough!" she yelled and moved in a flash. She disappeared in a breeze of motion between the guards and struck Gabrielle on either side of her neck with her fingertips.

Her blood flow stopped, Gabrielle fell to her knees. She struggled to breathe, and she leaned forward.

"Get up, men." The Conqueror knelt down in front of Gabrielle. She reached forward and tipped Gabrielle's head up. "Gabrielle, we can do this the easy way or the hard way." She grinned evilly. "I can release the pressure point, and you can go nicely to the dungeon, or I can pressure point your arms and legs then drag you." She paused and let the woman suffer a little more. "Which will it be?"

"The easy way," rasped Gabrielle.

"Done," declared the dark Warrior Princess. Her fingers flew forward and undid the pressure points.

The warrior-bard gasped and fell forward onto her hands. "Oh god." Her breathing was heavy, and she closed her eyes.

Xena stood up tall. "Get up," she commanded coldly.

Gradually, the small woman stood up, and she wiped the blood off her upper lip.

"Now then, to the dungeon," said the ruler with a cool tone.

Gabrielle didn't move immediately, but she did after seeing no emotional change in Xena. She turned and walked down the hall.

"I'll take care of this," the Conqueror told the guards.

The three guards sighed and went back on patrol in the castle.

Gabrielle and Xena marched to the dungeon below the castle. When they came to the bottom of the steps, Xena said, "Stop."

The warrior-bard did just that.

"Guard," hollered the empress.

A guard appeared. "Yes, my liege?"

"Key." After receiving a key, she ordered Gabrielle to go ahead of her.

They went down the row of cells.

"Stop here." The Conqueror turned to the cell on the right and opened the door. "Get in." Once Gabrielle was in, she locked the door behind. "Remember Gabrielle, you can not leave my castle alive." Her eyes narrowed, and she walked off. As she strolled down the rows of cells, she slipped the key down between her breasts. Her right foot settled onto the first step as a yell of anger exploded in the dungeon, echoing off the walls.

A smirk formed slowly on Xena's lips, then she continued up the dark stairwell.

~*~*~*~

The Conqueror spent the rest of the day in her office. She worked on plans to stop the rebels. The rebels had been in action for too long. Three years was one to many years for the ruler's liking. Awhile ago she'd found out where the Amazons lived, but she hadn't had the time to flush them out. There had been numerous small battles to fight on her borders.

After working those plans out, she sat back and thought about her plans to expand her empire. She wanted the world; she wanted the world in the palm of her hand. The only thing holding her back was a lack of power. She hoped to seek out some godly powers, whether it was ambrosia or the rhinegold. However, she wasn't yet sure where to find these things. Leaving that idea for later, her mind shifted to Gabrielle. Last night came back to her, bringing with it a wave of guilt.

She stood up quickly, pushing her seat back.. She walked out of her office and out onto the walkway high up along her castle walls that wrapped around the castle completely. She strolled down the rampart, thinking. Once she came around a corner, she spotted the sunset in full swing.

Xena settled her arms on the stone rail and watched the sun set on her realm. Thoughts of Gabrielle still filled her mind. "You were right, Gabrielle," she whispered. "I don't know what to do with you." She ran a hand through her hair. "What to do with somebody that appears on my doorstep freely handing over trust. I don't know what to do." She growled. "She knew that too."

Ah yes, the Conqueror realized, that was Gabrielle's intent the entire time. To break through the system she'd set up. To break through her walls. And had it happened yet?

Was Gabrielle finally the winner of Xena's game? Or would Gabrielle just remain in the cell, hopeless and alone?

~*~*~*~

The Conqueror faced the cell. "Gabrielle?"

The sun had already set, today.

Xena received no response. She sighed and tried again. "Gabrielle?"

Gabrielle simply sat on the cold floor, her back to the bars. She stared ahead and didn't look at the Warrior Princess.

"Gabrielle, we need to talk."

The small warrior only turned her head. She stared with cold eyes.

The dark ruler looked away from the death look she received. "We are done with this game," she stated. Licking her lips, she gazed back at the other woman.

Gabrielle shook her head, propped her legs up, and rested her chin on her knees. She closed her eyes and tried to forget she was here. Her mind raced back to her world, back to her Xena. The pain filled her heart at the thought of her Xena that she called her soul mate. "Just go," she whispered in agony.

The Conqueror snarled then rammed the palm of her hands against the bars. "As far as I am concerned, you can live in this damn cell." She stalked off, fuming.

The warrior-bard buried her head into her arms and legs. The pain and hopelessness washed over her and formed into bitter tears.

The ruler made it to the steps while the sobs filled her head. When she neared the stairs, she stopped and grasped the wall. She punched the stones before climbing up the stairs.

~*Part 8*~

Morning had already begun; the sun had peeked over the eastern horizon. The Conqueror had awakened and was changing into her battle attire. She went to eat and while doing so, her mind couldn't stop thoughts of Gabrielle. Gabrielle, Gabrielle, Gabrielle... thoughts wouldn't end, nor emotions die.

After the breakfast, she debated on whether to start her day with her own judgments in her own version of a court. Or to visit Gabrielle.

Her emotions took her down to the dungeon after breakfast. This was the last chance, she decided. Otherwise, she knew she and Gabrielle were certainly worlds apart.

Xena came to the warrior-bard's cell. She grasped the bars and peered through.

The small woman had her head back against the bars, and she seemed to be asleep.

"Gabrielle?"

The younger woman opened her eyes and glanced at Xena.

The Conqueror noticed how emotionless those green eyes were, making them a dull green. "Can we talk this time?"

Gabrielle looked away. She pulled her legs in closer against her body.

The Warrior Princess took a calming breath. "We need to talk." She waited for a response but got none. She pressed hard against the bars and pushed her legs back in frustration. Her head dropped against the bars. She snarled lowly as she pulled on the bars. Once she stopped, her head lay resting against the bars.

Xena closed her eyes and whispered, "I'm trying so hard to hate you, but I'm only... only loving you more and more."

The small warrior closed her eyes. "I'm trying so hard to love you, but I'm only... only hating you more and more."

"Hatred... or anger?" asked the ruler as she lifted her head. "Hate is a strong emotion while anger is temporary."

"That depends." Gabrielle lowered the side of her head onto her knees. "Anger is the seed of hatred." She breathed deeply. "You of all people should know that."

"I do," stated Xena. "I also know it can be corrected."

"What do you care after everything?" The small woman lifted her head and gazed at Xena. "Since I've been here I've been punched, jailed, whipped, stabbed, disrespected, tied, raped, and had my breathing cut off... not to mention slammed against a few walls and bars here and there." She shrugged. "Not like you did aaany of it." She laughed cynically.

"Then lets try again."

Gabrielle laughed and stared ahead, not at Xena. "Rrrright."

Xena ran a hand through her midnight hair. She closed her eyes and held her bangs back with her right hand. "Gabrielle... show me mercy."

The short warrior decided to turn tables on the Conqueror. "Show you... you mercy? I showed you my mercy last night. I will show no more for a person that has raped me."

Xena dropped her head against the bars. Her eyes stayed closed tightly. Rapidly, her emotions took her like a tidal wave, and she collapsed to her knees with her head still against the bars. "Show me mercy." Her breathing became rasped. "Show me mercy." Her voice quaked. "Please," she uttered in pure pain.

Gabrielle examined the broken Conqueror on the floor begging. She crawled across the floor and reached between the bars. She touched Xena's warm cheek, and Xena opened her sad blue eyes. "I will not show you mercy, not the Conqueror... she needs no mercy." She smiled. "I'll give you, you a second chance though."

Rich blue eyes stayed locked with rich green eyes.

Xena reached up and took Gabrielle's hand. She laced their hands together while saying, "No more games, we'll try this again."

Gabrielle nodded in agreement. "Clean slate. Wounds, but clean ones."

Xena nodded, too, and squeezed the small hand. She released the hand. "Let's get you out of here."

The Conqueror stood tall once more. Pulling the key out, she opened the cell. When Gabrielle stepped out, she kissed the small warrior warmly.

The warrior-bard smiled at the end of the kiss. She started turning red. She patted the Conqueror's chest. "Um." She stopped, not knowing what to say.

"I know," stated the ruler. "We'll take this slow."

"Yeah." The younger woman sighed in relief. "Thank you."

"Just consider that an apology." The dark Warrior Princess now walked down the dungeon.

The small warrior sighed, followed behind after a moment's hesitation.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle stood tall and silent beside the Conqueror's throne. She'd been here for a candlemark already, and it was late afternoon. Xena sat in her throne, passing sentences on people who had broken her laws. The small warrior said nothing against them; she just let Xena be the Conqueror.

Xena watched a man be escorted out. She sighed and mumbled, "This is getting boring."

The short warrior couldn't stop the grin. "I agree... my legs are killing me too."

The Conqueror looked at the guard, who held a scroll. "How many are left?"

"Ten, my liege."

"Save them for another day," declared the Warrior Princess. She stood up.

The guard nodded and went to the double doors.

The Conqueror faced Gabrielle. "To my room."

The younger woman nodded and walked down the steps.

Xena followed.

Together, they went down the halls. Going into Xena's room, they each sat down on a sofa.

"So... what's going to happen now?" inquired Gabrielle.

"I... don't know, yet." The older woman crossed ankles. "I imagine you'd like to go back to your world."

"If I knew how." The small warrior sighed.

"There has to be a way. If you can get here... you can get back." The ruler folded her arms. "It's just a matter of figuring out how."

"That's the missing piece," stated the small woman.

The Conqueror was silent but soon spoke up. "Why did you come here... to my castle?"

"To... change you."

"That you have done."

"Have I really?"

"Yesss." The dark woman paused. "I never saw you coming." She grinned. "So I could never prepare for the impact."

Gabrielle chuckled and sighed. "I thought I lost," she whispered.

"No, you won."

"Have I really? Or have we both won?"

There was a dead silence in the room.

"Well." Gabrielle stood up. "Stalemate none the less."

The Conqueror peered up. "Where you going?"

"I want to get the salve from my room." The small warrior inspected her wound.
"Could use some."

"Stay here." The ruler stood up. "I'll get it."

"Conq-"

"Stay here," cut off Xena. She exited the room.

Gabrielle shook her head and sat back down. "Damn stubborn as ever." She chuckled quietly. Within a minute the Warrior Princess returned with the salve, and she smiled.

The Conqueror smiled faintly.

Gabrielle locked the image in her head. "Thanks."

The older woman nodded and said, " Sit up with your wounded side to me; I'll put it on."

The warrior-bard moved on the sofa so that her left side faced Xena.

While opening the salve, the Conqueror knelt down. She dipped two fingers into the ointment and reached up to carefully rub it onto the wound. "It looks better."

"Yeah," agreed the young warrior. "It's healing nicely." She carefully watched Xena as she worked.

"Tell me this, are you and Xena..." The Conqueror looked up. "Lovers?"

The small woman huffed. "Not at all." She turned her gaze away. "It's gotten close to that, I think."

"You think?"

"I know she loves me; I just don't know the extent." Gabrielle combed her hair with her fingers. "You would think I would know after five years."

The ruler grinned. "You would think so, but I bet she's good at hiding emotions."

"Yes, not good as you, but she's good." The warrior-bard grinned down at the Conqueror.

The Warrior Princess grinned back. She rubbed her hands together to get rid of the salve. After sealing the jar again, she placed it on the table. "Give it a few more days, and it'll be healed pretty much."

"Think so?"

"I know so."

"Thank you," whispered Gabrielle.

The ruler nodded and studied warm green eyes. Emotions revived inside. Her left hand came up and touched Gabrielle's cheek.

Gabrielle couldn't stop it and lowered her head with her eyes closing.

Xena met her halfway.

Their lips met gently, then deepened with true passion. When the kiss finished, Xena started to stand, then leaned in for another long kiss.

The warrior moaned softly. After the second kiss, she pulled Xena's head in again for

a third kiss.

The Conqueror encircled the other woman's waist. She felt shock waves through her body as their tongues met and pleased.

Gabrielle pulled away from the kiss slowly and smiled. "Not bad."

The ruler arched an eyebrow. "Oh I see." Her eyes twinkled. "Let me try this." Lowering her head, she captured Gabrielle's lips in a stronger kiss.

The warrior-bard felt her insides turn and heat up. She was left breathless when the kiss ended. "That... that was real good," she rasped. She grinned at the Conqueror.

The dark Warrior Princess laughed, then turned serious. "How is the anger?"

"Lessening. The self hatred?"

"Lessening." The Conqueror released the small woman. "Let's get you something to eat."

Gabrielle's stomach agreed with a loud rumble.

"Looks like the guard was right." Xena went to the door and opened it.

"About what?"

The Conqueror smirked. "Your stomach does roar like a lion."

"Thanks," responded Gabrielle sarcastically. She left with Xena.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle stood tall, her arms folded, and she stared into the fireplace watching the flames dance and talk. The evening had become cold tonight. She was content. Her stomach was full, she was out of the cell, the Conqueror was partially changed, and her wound was healing fine. Maybe soon, real soon, she could go home. Just one problem, how to get home?

Xena came up from behind and slipped her hands over the other woman's shoulders. "What are you thinking about?"

"About how I am going to get back."

The Conqueror was quiet.

"There has to be a way," uttered Gabrielle with a shake of her head.

"And what if there isn't? What then?"

The warrior-bard sighed. "Then I am stuck here."

"That bad of an ordeal, huh?"

Gabrielle came out of her trance once she understood what the Conqueror was saying. She turned around. "No, not that bad of an ordeal. It's just... I don't belong here, Conqueror."

The ruler nodded. "Understandable." She shrugged. "That, and you want to return to Xena."

Gabrielle huffed at the way the Conqueror kept referring to the other world's Xena. It was as if her Xena was completely another person than the Conqueror. "I don't know, yet."

"Don't know what yet?"

"Whether... I truly want to go back."

The Warrior Princess arched an eyebrow. "Why wouldn't you want to go back?"

"I guess I'm getting a little... attached to this world." The warrior-bard grinned at the joke.

Xena chuckled then asked, "Why?"

"I'm not sure." Gabrielle's eyes dropped. "Just not sure."

The Conqueror's eyes narrowed, because she felt like Gabrielle knew why. Then she realized that Gabrielle might not have wanted to acknowledge why, preferring to deny the truth. She sighed inwardly.

"Either way, I don't belong here and need to head back," declared the small woman. "I have to go back."

"But not tonight or tomorrow," stated the Conqueror in a hard tone. "Not for awhile."

The young warrior gave her a confused look. "Why? What else can I do here? I've done what I came to do."

"Do you truly believe that you've finished your... mission?" The ruler lowered her head. "I am still the Conqueror."

"True," agreed Gabrielle. "You still plan to carry out your plans to crush the rebellions don't you?."

"Yes."

"Conqueror, don't. Help your people."

Xena grinned evilly. "Happy Conqueror, then happy people. Dark Conqueror then dark people. Simple as that."

The warrior-bard thought about that statement. *I have to make her happy... we have to love each other. And if I leave this world then everything is lost... everything.* Gabrielle closed her eyes at the thought. "Right here and right now." Her eyes opened again. "You'll start becoming the happy Conqueror."

The Conqueror leaned down and kissed the younger woman warmly.

Gabrielle strengthened the kiss with love. She held on to the Conqueror's waist.

The Conqueror pulled Gabrielle close. Her large hands pressed against a strong stomach.

Gabrielle made mental plans to hit the bed any second. She pulled back from the kiss, then started another. She would be the conqueror, this time, conquering Xena.

It was the first time in years that the Conqueror had missed the sunset.

~*Part 9*~

Gabrielle shivered slightly. She felt her body pulled into a warm one, and she snuggled close as the bed sheets were pulled back over her. "Thanks," she mumbled.

The Conqueror chuckled deeply and held tightly onto Gabrielle. "Go back to sleep."

"What time is it?" whispered the small woman.

"A few minutes before dawn."

The warrior-bard snuggled her head under Xena's chin. "Definitely too early."

"I know." Despite the hour, the dark Warrior Princess lifted her head and glanced out the balcony. She could see it was dark, but a few small rays of light were forming. She stared at it in wonderment, and her mind became lost. "I'll be right back," she whispered. Releasing Gabrielle, she rolled out of bed and slipped into her robe to cover her bare skin.

The small warrior rolled over and watched the Conqueror go onto the balcony and face the east. Now she was in wonderment, and she hopped out of bed. Quickly putting on her skirt and top, she walked out onto the balcony beside the Conqueror. The Conqueror ignored her.

Gabrielle took a calming breath and reached over.

The small hand laced perfectly with the larger hand.

The Conqueror still didn't look at Gabrielle but simply squeezed her hand.

Together the pair stayed silent and watched the sun's rays of light reappear as the sun peered over the eastern horizon.

Once the sun was over the horizon, the Conqueror glanced down at Gabrielle. "Stay

here with me." Her voice held a plea despite how low it came out.

The small warrior closed her eyes and opened them again. "I don't belong here."

Xena faced the warrior-bard. She held both hands now. "Gabrielle, don't go back." After encircling the small woman around the waist, she lowered her head. "Please." She sighed. "Stay with me... we can rule together, all the power." Her voice was becoming hypnotic to Gabrielle. "Just think of it. We'll have the world at our feet, you and I."

The warrior closed her eyes and let the words take her.

"Can't you just imagine it, Gabrielle?"

The feeling of power washed over Gabrielle. "God..."

The ruler lowered her head more. "Stay with me." She caressed Gabrielle's cheek. "If you return you won't have this with Xena like you do with me." She paused then whispered, "You have everything right here."

Gabrielle kissed Xena with warm love.

The Warrior Princess slowly pulled away from the kiss.

Gabrielle opened her eyes. "I'll stay with you... because I love you."

Xena grinned. "Thank you." She kissed the small woman tenderly on the lips with a promise of the future. At the end of the kiss she'd whispered, "I love you, Gabrielle."

~*~*~*~

Her teeth clenched together as the pain screamed through her body. It stopped suddenly, and she sighed in relief. Her breathing picked up, but she tried to relax her body. She was on her hands and knees with her head down.

She took a deep breath and slowly rose to her feet. She began to gaze around at everything. She stood in the middle of a huge forest that looked somewhat familiar. "Great, where am I?"

There was a bird whistling.

She narrowed her eyes. "Amazon forest, now I know."

Instantly three Amazons dropped to the forest floor with unsheathed swords. Their masks were pushed back so they could see.

Her eyes widened when she recognized two of them.

One Amazon pointed a sword at her. "Stop the Conqueror!" she yelled.

She shook her head at being completely confused. "Conqueror?" she mumbled under

her breath. Unfortunately, she had no time for questions, and she quickly unsheathed her sword. "Wait!" she yelled, but the Amazons still came. "What is going on around here?" she growled, bending her knees, lifting her sword, and preparing to protect herself from Eponin, Solari, and another Amazon.

Section Three

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle was on her stomach half her body on the bed and half on the Conqueror. Her right arm rested across Xena's chest and the side of her head on the ruler's shoulder. Her eyes were closed. "What are the plans?"

The Warrior Princess's fingertips ran up and down the other woman's bare back. "Not sure yet." She grinned. "I still have to adjust to having you here."

The small woman laughed deeply. "Am I quite that big of an upset in your life?"

"Wouldn't say upset, more like change."

"Good or bad?"

"Good." The Conqueror turned her head and kissed Gabrielle's forehead.

The small warrior took a deep breath and relaxed. "Can we talk about something?"

"I'm fighter not a talker." The ruler grinned. "But we can try."

The younger woman chuckled but went serious. "I'm sorry about the other night."

The Conqueror furrowed her eyebrows then recalled what she meant by the *other night* when Xena had taken Gabrielle. "You're sorry? I thought it was suppose to be the other way around," she said amusingly.

"I deceived you."

"As I said, I thought this was the other way around."

The short warrior sighed then propped herself up on her elbows. "I... I." She laughed in annoyance. "I wanted you to do that the other night." She shrugged. "And I knew you had the rope when you came out on the balcony." She paused. "Truthfully, I could have easily gotten free." She sighed deeply. "I needed you to do that."

"Part of your game?" asked the Conqueror.

"Exactly."

The dark Warrior Princess reached up and caressed Gabrielle's cheek. "And I knew

you wanted me to do that the other night."

The warrior-bard's eyes widened. "You knew?"

"Gabrielle, ever since you've arrived here. You've been trying to do the opposite of what I would expect most people would do." The Conqueror grinned. "I put the pieces together and figured out you wanted me to do that the other night." She lost her grin. "But, I still felt guilty."

"I know."

"And you were smart enough to use that against me," added the ruler.

Gabrielle nodded. "I was scared at first."

"I knew that as well, that's why the ropes were so loose then you could have freed yourself easily." The Conqueror smiled softly. "And I tried to be gentle."

The younger woman huffed before lying back down. "Careful but damn dominant."

"I am the Conqueror," stated the ruler.

"You are also Xena," stated the warrior.

"Quite true," agreed Xena.

Gabrielle thought about that, the difference between Xena and the Conqueror. She thought about the night Xena took her, the night the Conqueror took her. Then that's when she realized something. "That's when you gave up in the game, on that night."

"Yes," whispered the Conqueror.

"Why?" asked Gabrielle.

The Warrior Princess sighed deeply. "Remember I asked you whether Xena depends on you or not... needs you?"

"Yes." The small warrior tried fitting her pieces together.

"As you said Gabrielle, I am Xena too there is no escaping that."

Gabrielle fell silent after she understood. The Conqueror is Xena too, the Conqueror would need Gabrielle too. It was defeat.

~*~*~*

She twirled her sword and stayed in fighting stance.

The three Amazons wouldn't stay down and got up again to their feet. Bruised and hurt but they wouldn't give up on the fight.

"Stop this," she growled.

The Amazons came closer. They weren't listening.

Another Amazon dropped from the trees with her sword drawn. She pointed the sword at the other Amazons. "Stop you three," she ordered.

She looked over and became quite stunned. "Ephiny?" she whispered.

The three Amazons stopped walking but kept their swords out.

"Ephiny, it's the Conqueror," stated Solari.

"I have a sane feeling it isn't quite the Conqueror," retorted the regent. She joined the other women.

Solari shook her head and pointed her sword at the newcomer. "That is the Conqueror!" she yelled.

She sheathed her sword and watched the Amazons. She folded her arms and just listened.

Ephiny rolled her eyes. "Considering what's going on these days, I doubt it's the Conqueror. Look how she arrived here, no men, she popped up from nowhere, and not killing you three." She faced the newcomer. "If anything, she'll know who we are."

She grinned. "You're right... Ephiny." Her blue eyes flickered over to the other Amazons. "How are you Ep and Solari?"

The three Amazons gaped.

The regent grinned, strolled up with her sword, and stood in front of the newcomer. "You must be Xena the hero."

"I wouldn't say hero more like reformed warlord," stated Xena.

Ephiny chuckled but went serious. "Let me guess, you're here to find you're... partner."

"I am, happen to know her?" The warrior cawked an eyebrow.

"Quite a bit."

The other Amazons started exchanging looks but they neared. They couldn't believe this craziness.

"I'm going on pure instinct right now... Xena," Ephiny said the name cautiously and saw the taller woman didn't react to the name use. "I'm not surprised you're here. My instincts say I can trust you but my mind says no. Convince me."

The warrior nodded. "Alright." She tilted her head. "I'm looking for Gabrielle, she's a

warrior, short, strong, short blond hair, uses sais, green eyes, and a cute smile." She grinned. "Did I pass?"

"Yes," stated the regent.

"Wait just a centaur's heap dung," said Solari and she stepped up. "This could still be the Conqueror since she's seen Gabrielle by now."

Ephiny sighed and was about to say something but was cut off.

"Solari, you've been an Amazon since birth, you're the second in command, you love to fight with the sword however you enjoy using the bow and arrow, you love getting into a good drinking contest, and you get the biggest kick out of teasing Ephiny." The Warrior Princess paused. "Did I miss anything?"

"This is crazy," whispered the second in command.

"I agree," said Xena. "Now you know how I feel."

The regent nodded. "You're Gabrielle's Xena." She sheathed her sword. "Naturally, you would like to know what's going on."

"Please update me." Xena lowered her hands to her hips. "I think I am behind in this story."

Ephiny chuckled. "Just a little." She sighed. "Let's walk and talk." She faced her Amazons. "We're going back to the village."

"I'm not going to say a word, not a one," Solari said and sheathed her sword. She turned and headed for the village.

The other two Amazons kept their swords out and followed Solari.

"Tell me about the Conqueror." Xena looked at Ephiny.

The regent took a deep breath. "She is you but the ruler of the world."

"Of the world?"

"Not quite the entire world." Ephiny looked up. "But most of it."

The warrior nodded and gazed ahead. "So, I'm in an alternate world."

"You are, here you are the Conqueror and Gabrielle is our Queen."

"Mmm, so... my Gabrielle went to stop the Conqueror, didn't she?"

"Yes," whispered Ephiny.

"Wonderful," grumbled the Warrior Princess.

~*~*~*~

The warrior-bard jumped back and let the sword breeze past her stomach. "Close." She flipped her sais out and attacked the Conqueror.

The dark ruler laughed before stopping the sais. "You're quite good, Gabrielle."

"Trust me I know," chided the small warrior. "I was taught by the best."

The Conqueror corked an eyebrow as the parried Gabrielle's attacks. "The second best, you mean." She moved quickly and locked her opponent's weapons in her sword's blade. She lowered her head and grinned at Gabrielle. "The Conqueror is the best."

"Oooh?" Gabrielle grinned back. "Are you trying to say Xena is half rate?"

The ruler chuckled deeply. "Considering I've been fighting non-stop against various enemies, yes." She went serious. "It takes many skills to conquer large lands and keep them."

"Very true," agreed the smaller woman. "Maybe I'll pick up some things from you."

"Mmmaybe."

Gabrielle tried jerking her sais free but couldn't. "Great, can I have my sais back?"

The Conqueror laughed. "Do that on your own."

"Alright." The short warrior shifted onto her tiptoes and kissed Xena warmly. It seemed to work considering the Conqueror lowered her sword and grasped Gabrielle's hip with her free hand. But then it backfired because Gabrielle encircled her lover's waist and deepened the kiss.

Xena ended the kiss, rammed her sword into the ground, and brought that hand up to the side of Gabrielle's face. She leaned back in and began another kiss.

The small warrior pulled away from the kiss slowly. "Hmmm, staying with you might not be that bad after all."

"Glad you're starting to look on the bright side," teased back the Conqueror.

"Oh, was that a tease I heard from the Conqueror?"

"Very funny." The ruler mock glared. "Don't ruin it."

Gabrielle laughed quietly. "Oh no never." She grinned. "I'll have to write down all the jokes and teasing you do."

Xena smirked. "I'm always funny, but I'm the only one laughing normally."

"Figures." The small warrior released her lover and backed up. She bent down and

sheathed her sais.

The Conqueror twirled her sword then sheathed it. She folded her arms. "We need to get out of here for awhile," she mentioned.

The warrior-bard stood up. "What you suggest?"

"You do know how to ride?"

"Of course," answered Gabrielle. "Once I got over my fear of heights," she mumbled under her breath.

The ruler grinned. "We'll take Argo out for awhile." She nodded. "Come on."

The small warrior followed along side. "We can actually get out of this city?"

"Of course, it is my city."

~*~*~*~

"Good, hurry it up," the Queen commanded her Amazon. She sighed. "Where the Hades is Ephiny?" she mumbled. Gabrielle leaned against her staff in support of her still healing legs. She could walk on them now but she couldn't jog or run on them, simply walk. She turned around and became alarmed at what she saw. "Oh gods..."

The regent stopped. "Wait here," she ordered Xena and the Amazons. She neared her Queen. "Gabrielle-"

"Ephiny, what in Hades is she doing here?" growled the Queen.

"Wait... wait." Ephiny held up her hands. "It's not the Conqueror, Gabrielle."

Gabrielle gazed back at the tall, dark, leathered woman. "She's Gabrielle's Xena?" she whispered.

"Yes." The regent grabbed her friend's shoulder. "It's not the Conqueror."

"How can you be sure? It could be the Conqueror posing as... as Xena the hero."

The regent grinned. "Do you think the Conqueror knows there is a hero Xena?"

The Queen sighed deeply. "Alright." She took a deep breath and walked along side her regent towards Xena.

"Just look into her eyes, Gabrielle. You'll see," whispered Ephiny.

Gabrielle neared Xena and the other Amazons. She locked eyes with Xena and saw how warm they were and seemed to contain hints of love. "So, you're Xena the hero?"

"Why do I keep getting this description?" grumbled the warrior.

The Amazon Queen leaned against her staff. "Because that's what your partner said, you're a hero in her world."

Xena sighed. "Gabrielle would." She crossed her arms against her chest. "Ephiny said she was here."

"Yes," acknowledged Gabrielle. "About... seven days ago?" she gazed at her regent.

Ephiny nodded. "More than seven I believe."

"You haven't heard anything from her?"

Gabrielle shook her head. "Afraid not." She sighed. "Either way, she's still alive."

"How do you figure?"

"Because her dead body didn't come rolling out of the gates lately," stated Solari.

"Solari," warned the Amazon Queen.

"It's alright." Xena sighed before asking, "Do you know what she was planning to do?"

Gabrielle looked away.

Ephiny noticed and decided to answer the question. "Love the Conqueror."

The warrior licked her lips. "What else?"

"She told me to take the Amazon throne," answered Gabrielle. She glanced back at the Warrior Princess. "And that I should prepare for the future."

"That's it?"

"Yes." The Queen ran a hand through her bangs. "She may be dead inwardly and she may be alive."

Xena's jaw tightened. "Oh, she's alive, I know that. She has too much spirit and stubbornness to give up." She breathed calmly. "I'd just like to know what her plans were."

"Nobody is sure, she wasn't even sure," mentioned the regent.

The warrior nodded. "Where is the Conqueror?"

"Athens." Ephiny paused. "We'll take you." She glanced at Gabrielle for approval.

The Queen peered up at Ephiny with fear dulling her eyes but she nodded.

"First, we need a plan," stated Xena.

~*Part 11*~

Gabrielle dismounted her horse and walked beside the Conqueror into the castle's grounds.

"Go to the stables," told the dark Warrior Princess.

The warrior-bard nodded. "That was a nice ride."

"It was," agreed the older woman. She came to the stables and saw a young boy come out. She handed him her reins for Argo.

The boy took them then also Gabrielle's reins for her horse. He then towed them into the stables.

Xena held out her hand. "Hungry?"

"Definitely." The small woman took her lover's hand and they walked towards the castle's large marble doors.

"Must not be too hungry if your stomach hasn't... roared."

"Oooh, it'll voice its opinion soon."

The Conqueror chuckled and kept walking.

Once inside of the castle, they made their way for the dining room. And there they began eating but for once beside each other.

Gabrielle sat back in her seat and stretched her legs out under the table. "What happened to Amarice?" She peered up.

The ruler finished eating as well so she relaxed back in her seat. "She's gone."

"Do I dare ask where?"

"Back to the Amazons," stated Xena.

The small woman's eyes expanded in surprise. "Really?"

"Yesss." The Conqueror grinned. "Don't make a big deal out of it."

"Oh, I won't." Gabrielle smiled. "I'll just say, thank you."

"You're welcome," whispered the ruler. She leaned over and tenderly kissed her lover. She pulled back with a grin. "Mmm."

The younger woman reached out and pulled Xena's head back in. Her kiss was more seductive.

At the end of the kiss, the dark woman grinned as her blue eyes twinkled. "Let's take

dessert into our room."

"Sounds real good."

Xena leaned in and whispered lowly, "It feels even better." She stood.

Gabrielle laughed deeply and rose up.

The pair left the dining room and went directly to Xena's huge room. They'd barely made it to the bed in the heat of things. Both trying to dominate the other but Gabrielle gave in because she knew that in the end she held the dominance.

~*~*~*~

Xena narrowed her eyes at seeing the massive castle in the middle of Athens on this cool night.

"She's in there," whispered Ephiny.

The warrior nodded and pulled her hood more over her head. "Where's the front door?"

The regent shook her head, grinned, and answered, "On the other side."

"Good."

"Do you need help?" asked Ephiny.

The Warrior Princess glimpsed at the regent. "No, I'll just walk in."

"Can you really do that?" asked Gabrielle.

Xena grinned at the small blond. "Of course, I look like the Conqueror." She went serious. "Make sure you stay low you four, till the time is right." Her eyes locked on the Amazon Queen. "You're the key, don't forget."

Gabrielle nodded and grasped the warrior's forearm. "Be careful, please." She shook her head. "I'd like to see Gabrielle come out alive."

"She will, I promise." Xena smiled warmly. "If things go right, everybody will be saved."

"We've heard that before," huffed Solari.

Eponin poked the second in command with her elbow.

The Warrior Princess looked at Solari. "It will work if you have faith. I always deliver on my promises."

Solari sighed. "Sorry."

Gabrielle squeezed Xena's arm to get her attention. "The Conqueror is-

"Me," finished Xena. "Just in a real bad mood, I can handle this. Just worry about yourselves."

The Amazon Queen nodded and let go of the warrior's arm. "Good luck."

Ephiny held out her hand. "Watch yourself, Xena."

The Warrior Princess smiled sadly and took the Amazon's arm. She shook arms then walked off. "Be ready," she called.

"We will," responded Gabrielle. She sighed and watched the warrior disappear in the darkness. "Alright, let's get a place to stay."

The Amazons nodded and went in search of an inn.

Xena came around the bend of the castle. She saw the seven guards ahead, so she pulled back her hood. Her expression went stoic and her eyes ice cold.

The guards grasped their swords and waited for the person to come closer.

The Warrior Princess came right up. "At ease men."

The guards sighed in relief. "Evening, my liege," said one guard. "We didn't know you left."

"Yes, I had some business to attend to," said Xena dryly. "How is Gabrielle?"

"We do not know." The guard shrugged. "We hardly ever see her."

The warrior nodded. "She hasn't left though, correct?"

"Of course not, my liege." The guard stepped back and reached to the gate. "Going in, my liege?"

"Yes." The warrior began walking.

One guard noticed Xena's chakram. "My liege, what happen to your weapon?"

Xena stopped and faced the guard. She pulled out her chakram. "Something wrong with it?" She grinned.

"Uhhh no, my liege." The guard stepped back. "It just looks different that's all, my liege."

The Warrior Princess took a menacing step. "Trust me, it still can slice your head off, nothing different about it." She hooked it back on her side and walked into the castle's grounds.

The gates closed behind.

Xena studied the area then found the entrance into the castle. She began walking up the large steps and went through the open doors.

Two guards on either side of the doorway straightened up with attention. "Evening, my liege."

The warrior glanced at the guard. "Evening." She reached up to take her cloak off. "How are things?"

"Everything is in order, my liege."

"Good, keep it that way."

"Of course, my liege."

Xena grinned and tossed the guard her cloak. "Take care of that."

The guard held the cloak and bowed.

The warrior huffed and walked into the rest of the throne room. She stared at the huge throne on top of three steps. Her eyes went cold at the sight but she kept going.

~*~*~*~

Xena kissed Gabrielle's forehead. "I'll be back."

"Where you going?" asked the small warrior.

The Conqueror pulled on her leathers. "I need to check things, make sure the men are in order." She had her armor on and was hooking her sword and chakram on.

"Don't take long." Gabrielle grinned evilly.

The Conqueror laughed and leaned back down. Her licks locked in a powerful kiss. She straightened up and slipped her boots on. "Be back." She left the room.

The young warrior sighed and stared at the ceiling. She listened to the fire crackle in the fireplace. Sitting up in bed, she felt something inside give. She stared at the door for a moment. Then she decided to leave but put on her warrior attire first and took her sais.

The Conqueror walked briskly down the hall, her footfall echoing. Then she picked up on the sound of another set of footfall coming towards her, the exact same footfall as hers. Her eyes narrowed as the prickles raised on the back of her neck. She came around the corner of the hall and stopped. She growled at the person before her. "You must be Xena... the hero." She reached back and unsheathed her sword.

The warrior narrowed her eyes at seeing her mirror reflection before her. She extracted her sword and went into her fighting stance. "You must be Xena... the Conqueror," she said dryly.

"I take it, you're here for Gabrielle."

The warrior twirled her sword. "Yes, I've come for what's mine."

"Actually, she's not yours." The Conqueror grinned evilly and took small steps towards Xena while speaking. "You do realize, I am the person you couldn't be." Her voice was taunting. "The ruler of the world." Her sword tapped the warrior's and she laughed deeply. "And Gabrielle's lover."

"If you've touched her—" Xena's anger was coming to life towards this ruler.

"Trust me, I have," whispered the Conqueror lowly. "In places you can only dream of." She leaned towards her counterpart. "She is mine." Her eyes darkened. "And a beaten up ex-warlord will not stop me today or tomorrow."

Xena's body was trembling with rage. "You'll be so lucky to live within the next minute," she whispered with pure hatred.

The Conqueror laughed and stepped backwards. "You won't kill me. You know this world needs me otherwise this realm will be in utter chaos without me to reign."

"Right about now, I don't care." Xena twirled her sword. "I just want you."

"Here I am," provoked the dark ruler.

The warrior snarled and came forward with menacing steps.

The darker Warrior Princess narrowed her eyes, twirled her sword, and went on attack.

The warrior parried the blow and fought back.

Gabrielle came rushing around the corner after hearing the two same voices and sword clashing. Her heart raced and she had her sais in hand. She came around the corner and saw her partner fighting her lover. "No!" she yelled and ran forward. Without thinking, she went head long into the fight.

It all happened too quickly. Both Xenas tried to protect Gabrielle from getting hurt. But the warrior-bard smashed into them, trying to stop the swords yet couldn't. So both swords came down on her and cut her shoulder deeply then hit her in the forehead. Gabrielle fell to the floor unconscious with her head bleeding. Her sais slipped from her fingertips in midair and came crashing to the ground, which seemed to make the loudest boom ever.

The warrior instantly knelt down, forgetting about the Conqueror. "Gabrielle?" she yelled. She placed her sword on the floor and lifted her partner's head. "Gabrielle?"

The Conqueror sheathed her sword and knelt down. "Hades," she growled. Reaching forward, she lifted Gabrielle into her arms. "Follow me," she ordered the other Warrior Princess harshly. She walked briskly down the hall.

The warrior took her sword and her partner's sais then walked quickly down the hall. She kept glancing at Gabrielle in the other woman's arms. She had sheathed her sword and hooked the sais on her side.

They came to the ruler's room and the warrior opened the door.

The Conqueror carried Gabrielle over to the bed.

"Do you have a medical kit?"

The ruler was lowering Gabrielle into the bed while saying, "Yes, in the bathroom."

Xena sprinted into the bathroom. She came back out with clothes and the medical kit. She threw the clothes at the other Xena.

The Conqueror caught them and tried stopping the bleeding in warrior-bard's shoulder and head.

The warrior began pulling out medicines and came over. She knelt down and mixed some herbs. She noted the wound on her friend's side. "What happened to her earlier?"

"She was stabbed," whispered the Conqueror.

The warrior clamped her jaw down from saying anything and just put together the medicine.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle opened her eyes gradually and found her head pounding. "Great," she muttered.

"Try to relax," whispered the warrior. She came over and sat on the bed.

"Xena?"

The warrior smiled warmly. "Hey, how are you?" She grabbed her partner's hand and squeezed tightly.

"Been better."

The Conqueror reappeared behind the warrior. "Try being more careful next time."

"Personally, I hope there isn't a next time." Green eyes flickered between both the Warrior Princesses.

Xena sighed. "The... Conqueror and I agreed to be cordial." She grinned. "For your sake."

"Thanks," deadpanned Gabrielle. She sighed in relief. "How'd you get here?"

The warrior licked her lips. "The same way you did."

"By the cave?"

"Yes," answered Xena.

The ruler cut in now. "We should let Gabrielle rest, Xena." She folded her arms.

The warrior ran her tongue along her molars. "Yeah," she agreed. She focused her attention back on Gabrielle. "Get some sleep huh? The headache should be gone in the morning and the shoulder wound will be fine."

"Thank you," whispered the younger warrior.

Xena nodded and squeezed Gabrielle's hand. She bent forward and kissed her partner's forehead. She whispered, "We need to talk." She sat up. "Goodnight." Xena stood up.

"Goodnight, Xena."

The warrior flashed a sad smile and walked over to the door.

The Conqueror knelt down beside the bed. She smiled softly at Gabrielle. "I'll be back in a moment. I'm going to give Xena a room."

Gabrielle gave a suspicious look. "Don't-"

"I won't," cut off the ruler. "I'll be nice." She grinned.

"Good."

The Conqueror leaned forward and kissed Gabrielle soundly.

The warrior saw this and looked away with her eyes closing. Her right hand fisted up.

The small warrior smiled at the end of the kiss. "Thank you."

"No problem," whispered the older woman. "I will be back real soon." She rose up.

Gabrielle watched her join her partner at the door. She noticed the warrior didn't look at her and she didn't want to know what Xena thought of the Conqueror's kiss. But she knew she'd hear about it tomorrow. Right now, she wanted to sleep and get rid of her headache.

The Conqueror escorted the other Xena down the hall.

They both were silent and tense. They both wanted to tear the other apart but knew it would destroy Gabrielle. Neither would or wanted to hurt Gabrielle.

The ruler stopped at a door, and opened it. "Your room." She held out her right hand. "And your weapons."

The Warrior Princess narrowed her eyes at the empresses but reached back and unhooked her sword. She handed it over along with her chakram.

"Gabrielle's sais too," ordered the darker Xena.

The warrior handed over Gabrielle's weapons.

The Conqueror examined Xena's chakram and raised an eyebrow. "Yours is quite different."

"Why don't you play with it." The warrior started moving into the room. "Maybe it'll cut your head off."

The ruler's upper lip twitched. "You'll get these back when you leave."

Xena faced the ruler when she was in the room. "When I leave with Gabrielle," she added on.

The Conqueror laughed. "Don't count on it." She grinned. "She has everything she wants here."

"Don't count on it," mocked the warrior. "I know her, you don't." She grinned.

"Mmm, but you don't know her like I do," retort the Conqueror amusingly. "Sleep well."

"Till tomorrow... Conqueror."

The Conqueror kept her smug look and closed the door.

The warrior turned around and studied the room. She ran a hand through her bangs. "What'd you get us into now, Gabrielle?" She barely slept that night, her thoughts consumed by Gabrielle and the Conqueror. The image of her partner and the Conqueror kissing flashed and reflashed in her mind. It was pure torment for her heart and soul.

~*Part 12*~

The Conqueror glanced to her right at her lover. She was dressed in her leathers with weapons. With the warrior in the castle; it made the Conqueror quite unease.

Gabrielle was out of the bed, and stretching in the early morning. There was red line wound running down her shoulder blade and her forehead was scabbed over on the right side. She still wore her red velvet outfit.

Xena came over and pulled the small warrior in. "How you feel?"

"A lot better," answered Gabrielle. "You two took a good junk out of me last night."

The dark Warrior Princess didn't laugh at all. She peered into green eyes.

The warrior-bard sighed. "To early for jokes?"

"Not at this time," stated the Conqueror. Darkness was tinting her eyes today.

"The protection is kicking in," whispered Gabrielle in realization. "You're not planning to..."

"Gabrielle," drew out the ruler, "she poses a threat to us."

Gabrielle shook her head and furrowed her eyebrows. "That is my best friend," she said lowly.

"You think I do not realize this?" The tall woman released Gabrielle and walked to the other side of the room. "This won't be easy," she muttered under her breath.

"I'll simply will tell Xena to go back home without me," suggested Gabrielle.

The Conqueror whirled around. "Do you really believe she'll agree to that?"

"Well, what else will she do?" growled back Gabrielle. She sighed and dropped her head. "I can convince Xena to leave."

The ruler tilted her head, then folded her arms. "Can you convince... yourself?"

Gabrielle looked up instantly. "What?" She held her hands out. "I said I was staying with you." Her hands fell down in seeming defeat of disbelief. Did she even believe that statement?

"I won't hold you to it," whispered the Conqueror.

The small warrior ran a hand through her hair as the frustration kicked in. "Let met talk to her."

"If that doesn't help then I'll..." Xena trailed off and just walked to the door.

The warrior-bard moved and grabbed her lover's arm. "Don't hurt her, whatever you do."

The older woman sighed and glanced back. "I promise I won't," she whispered because she truly knew how much the warrior meant to Gabrielle.

"Thank you," uttered the short warrior.

The Conqueror just nodded and left the room.

"What did I get myself into now?" Gabrielle mumbled. Finding her boots, she slipped into them and tied them. After making an exit out of the room, she headed for Xena's room, not quite sure where that was but guessed it.

Xena looked up. "Come in." She was sitting on the bed, full dressed in her armor and

leathers.

"Hi," whispered Gabrielle. "Can I come in?"

"Sure." The warrior waved a hand at the bed. "Sit down."

The warrior-bard nodded, closed the door, and sat on the bed facing her partner. "How are you doing?"

Xena shrugged. "I'm... alive." She grinned but her eyes were sad.

Gabrielle nodded and lowered her eyes. "Xena, you really don't have to... be here." Her gaze came back up.

The warrior corked an eyebrow. "And why is that?" She crossed her arms.

"I want to be here."

"Hmmm." Xena slowly began to nod repeatedly. "I'm noticing."

The smaller warrior licked her lips and glanced out the window. "I want to stay here with the Conqueror." She sighed and looked at her friend again.

The Warrior Princess nodded but was peering down at her fingers. She pretended to clean her nails. "As I asked, why is that?"

"Xena, come on." The expression on Gabrielle's face was offensive. "You know why."

"Oh, I can assume." The warrior looked back up. "Probably because it's feeling pretty damn good right now to stay with her."

Gabrielle sat up and walked across the room while the anger grew in her. "Xena, I love her." She spun around. The anger was coming over her.

Xena stood up and came over. "Do you really, Gabrielle?" She grasped her friend's shoulders. "Or are you seeking something in the wrong place?"

"W-what?" The short warrior stared into blue eyes. "Xena, go back. I am staying here." She went towards the door.

"I will not leave without you." The Warrior Princess spun around with an arched eyebrow. "You do not belong here, Gabrielle."

"Then why am I here?"

Xena didn't have an answer, she just dropped her gaze.

"Exactly," stated the warrior-bard. "I am suppose to be with the Conqueror."

Xena looked back up and let her eyes fill with pain. "Gabrielle," she whispered, "you're going to stay with the person... with the person you didn't want me to be?"

She closed her eyes and shook her head. "Leave," she growled.

Gabrielle said nothing and left, making sure to slam the door. Her brisk walk took her to the Conqueror at the other end of the castle.

The Conqueror turned around and saw her lover. "Well?"

The short warrior shook her head and stared across at the sparring field. "She won't leave without me."

The ruler's eyes narrowed. "I figured as much." She was about to move but Gabrielle stopped her by stepping in front of her.

"Please don't confront her." Gabrielle paused and added, "Maybe if we leave her be, she'll just give up."

Xena grasped the other woman's upper arms. "I know her." She grinned at the irony. "She won't leave without you."

"Then how do you plan to get rid of her?" questioned the small woman. Maybe she didn't want to hear this after all.

"Torture her mentally." The Conqueror's gaze lifted up and she spotted Xena on an upper level ledge of the castle, staring down at them. "Like now." She grinned evilly and drew her lover in. She lowered her head gradually and captured Gabrielle's lips in a long sensual kiss.

The warrior watched the scene of her best friend and her counterpart kissing. She grabbed the rail and clutched it with white knuckles. "There has to be a god laughing at me now," she whispered. "I lost her before I had her." She shook her head. "This is what I get for waiting," she whispered in voice of bitter pain.

The Conqueror lifted her head slowly and smiled at Gabrielle.

"I love you," whispered Gabrielle.

"Mmm." The ruler lowered her head again. "I love you." She sealed her lips over Gabrielle's with passion pouring into the kiss.

The warrior straightened up and walked away back into the castle. This was going to be her hardest battle ever. The battle of love.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle walked out into the courtyard that was massive, it contained a large garden. She began walking through it. Thoughts raced through her mind and made her frustrated rather fast. She sat down on a bench and lifted her legs up. She crossed them and continued thinking.

At hearing another person coming, she glimpsed up and spotted the warrior. "Just don't-"

"I won't," cut off Xena. She sighed and tried to relax. "Can I sit with you?"

The warrior-bard calmed down and nodded.

The Warrior Princess sat down and stared ahead at a bed of flowers. She stared at the small patch of tiny rose bushes. "How long?"

The small woman said nothing at first but did answer. "For a few days now."

"Does she love you?"

"Yes," answered Gabrielle.

Xena nodded and fell silent. Slowly, she turned her head to Gabrielle. "I have your answer."

"To what?"

"Why you're here."

The warrior-bard raised an eyebrow in question.

"Hercules doesn't exist here, correct?"

Gabrielle nodded and waited for more.

Xena folded her arms. "Think about it, you did what Hercules was suppose to do." She tilted her head. "Unchain the Conqueror's heart." She sighed. "That's what Hercules did to me, the only thing that he had to do. That's exactly what you were suppose to do."

"What happens if I leave?" asked the warrior-bard. "I'll tell you Xena, she goes back to being the Conqueror and ruling her people with an iron fist."

"She is the Conqueror, Gabrielle." The Warrior Princess leaned towards her friend. "You cannot change that of her." Her hand shifted and rested on her partner's thigh. "And you cannot accept that of her, Gabrielle, because that's not who you want out of her."

"I can't leave her, Xena... I can't let her realm go to Hell because she lacks love."

Xena closed her eyes, breathed deeply, then opened them again. "Gabrielle," she drew out, "you were not made for the Conqueror."

"Then who is?" questioned Gabrielle hotly.

"This world's Gabrielle." Xena stood up. "It makes sense, just put the pieces together."

"Her heart is too darken."

The Warrior Princess grinned. "That's exactly why she's made for the Conqueror. She has the right amount of light to change the Conqueror and the right amount of darkness to understand the Conqueror." She lost her grin. "You don't belong with her nor here." She disappeared in the garden.

"God," growled Gabrielle. "What is happening?" She closed her eyes as gleaming crystals rolled down her cheeks.

~*~*~*~

Xena jabbed forward with her sword, twirled it, jumped back and gave a few swipes and thrusts.

The warrior-bard came down the steps from the castle. She spotted her partner out in the middle of the sparring field practicing with her sword. Sighing, she folded her arms and leaned against the castle's cold corner. She watched the warrior continuing to practice.

Thoughts and emotions haven't stopped slamming into Gabrielle's mind since the warrior had arrived last night. She had no idea what she wanted, why she was here, or why Xena was still here. To stop the Conqueror, sure, but there had to be more. It seemed like even the warrior was holding back from telling Gabrielle something. It seemed that even her own self was holding back from telling herself something.

That in turn made Gabrielle lift herself off the wall. She had a mission now. She reached down and unsheathed her sais. With a powerful walk, she made her way towards Xena.

The Warrior Princess felt her friend coming up from behind by the way her body warmed. She immediately spun around with her sword pointed at Gabrielle. She grinned.

Gabrielle corked an eyebrow, spun her sais out, then shifted into battle stance.

The pair began circling each other. What a great stress reliever between each other. That was one of the few reasons they sparred together.

The Conqueror came out of the castle and saw the two women preparing to fight. She folded her arms and stood in the shadows, just watching with intent.

Gabrielle attacked first. She gave a hard kick at Xena's chest.

The warrior took it but didn't lose any footing. She just smirked while spinning her sword. "Come on, Gabrielle. I know your kicks are hard than that," she teased. "Or are you even getting soft?"

The warrior-bard laughed and stepped backwards a little. "There's a difference between being soft and weak, your words."

"True," taunted the warrior. But she smiled softly to her friend.

The small warrior faltered for a moment by the smile. She composed herself and attacked her opponent.

The Conqueror saw the second of hesitation from her lover. "Guard," she called.

A guard came over to the ruler. "Yes, my liege?

"Find me Draco."

The guard nodded and disappeared off. He sought out Draco and told him to see the Conqueror.

Draco went to the Conqueror and bowed his head. "My liege?"

The dark Warrior Princess didn't look at him, she just stared at Gabrielle and Xena fighting. "Have the men that sent Amarice to the Amazon Nation... returned?"

"Yes of course."

Xena nodded; still studying the pair fighting. "Did they see the Amazon Queen there?"

"They said they requested to see the Amazon Queen, to give her your message."

"And?"

Draco folded his arms. "They talked to the head council member, the Amazon Queen was not there."

The ruler eased a grin onto her lips. "Interesting." She final looked at Draco. "Take ten or so men, sweep Athens for the Amazon Queen."

Draco had a confused look. "How will we know what she looks like?"

"Recall the rebel that spoke out a month ago?"

"Yes."

"That is the same person." Xena narrowed her eyes. "Find her."

Draco bowed his head. "It will be done, my liege." He strolled off.

The Conqueror sighed contently and lifted herself off the wall. She joined her lover and Xena. "May I interject?" she inquired amusingly.

The warrior went into rapid movement, which caught Gabrielle off guard. She moved her blade in a certain way and caught Gabrielle's sais in her blade and locked them. She grinned. "We're done."

Gabrielle narrowed her eyes. "Why does everybody do that to me?"

The Conqueror chuckled deeply. "Because it annoys you." She grasped her lover's

shoulder. "Hungry?"

The warrior released her partner's sais.

The ruler faced the Warrior Princess. She held out her left hand.

Xena smirked and handed back the sword. "Thanks," she said grudgingly.

The Conqueror nodded and sheathed the sword behind. "Let me know if you're ever interested in sparring together."

"Oh I will," retorted the warrior.

Gabrielle stepped between the two. "Alright, neither of you can spar without me being around."

The ruler grinned down at her lover. "Don't worry, we'll invite you."

"Gee thanks." Gabrielle shook her head and pushed her lover in signal to move.

The Conqueror stepped aside and walked beside Gabrielle into the castle.

The warrior sighed and followed behind. As she followed behind, she noticed her partner's back for the first time. *She was whipped.* The anger bubbled up inside.

The short warrior felt Xena's blue eyes on her back, so she glanced sidelong back at the warrior. She just caught the sight of darkness in the warrior's blue eyes. *What is that about?* Then she thought about it and figured it out. *Oh no, this won't be good.* With a sigh, she looked ahead again.

"What is it?" whispered the Conqueror.

Gabrielle gave a shake of her head; not wanting to answer.

The ruler walked closer and grasped her lover's hand. "What?"

The small warrior sighed and peered up. "I think Xena just noticed the whip marks on my back."

Even the dark Warrior Princess felt the guilt inside relight. "Sometimes, I have to wonder if you were better off heading back."

The warrior-bard squeezed the other woman's hand tightly. "No, I won't go."

"Like I said, I won't hold you to it." The Conqueror's voice was sincere. "Gods only knows what will happen within the passing hours."

Gabrielle couldn't deny that whatsoever, her grip on the ruler's hand just became tighter. *This is going to end badly,* she mused sadly.

~*~*~*~

Dinner had gone and passed. Gabrielle was heading to her room with the Conqueror. Ahead was the door to Xena's room and she stopped when she came to the door. She was tempted to knock and talk to her best friend but something was holding her back.

The Conqueror came down the hall and spotted her lover beside Xena's door with a look of bewilderment. She sighed, because she knew she wasn't going to win. She neared Gabrielle. "I am going to check the men."

The warrior-bard peered up and nodded. "Alright, I think I'm going to head to the room."

"No you're not," whispered the dark ruler. She searched Gabrielle's eyes. She grasped her lover's hand and signaled for her to follow.

Gabrielle did follow and was taken down the hall, away from the warrior's room.

Once the ruler decided she was far enough away, she faced her lover. She bent down and laced her hands with Gabrielle's. "I know you want to talk to her."

The small woman opened her mouth but she couldn't deny it.

Xena smiled softly and caressed the other's cheek. "Talk to her."

"Why?" whispered Gabrielle.

"Because you're confused and I know she'll help you." The ruler's eyes lowered. "I can't."

"What?" asked the smaller warrior completely baffled by this.

The older woman sighed deeply and tried to compose herself. "Gabrielle, I want you to stay and I know deep down it is not right." She grinned. "But I cannot convince you that you're not suppose to be with me because I want you to stay here with me."

Gabrielle shook her head. "Xena, I can't leave you."

Xena inwardly cringed because Gabrielle could call her Xena and get away with it now. Gabrielle had certainly broken her walls and this would leave her wounded. "You need to." She narrowed her eyes. "I want what's best for you, I am not it."

"Why are you judging what's right for me or not?"

"Because I know your fate if you stay here." The Conqueror rose up to her full height. "I am not Xena, remember that." She squeezed her lover's small hands then turned to head down the hall.

Gabrielle watched her go but asked, "You are giving up on me? Letting me go?"

The Conqueror stopped and turned back around. "No, I'm sending you home." She locked eyes with her lover in an intense gaze of love. "Go talk to her." She turned

away and headed back down the hall. The Conqueror was reborn inside of Xena.

Gabrielle closed her eyes and tried to think. "This is ridiculous," she muttered.

Xena came out of her room, she had heard the entire conversation between Gabrielle and the Conqueror. She knew the Conqueror knew this as well. She stood there, staring down the hall at Gabrielle. "Gabrielle," she whispered.

The voice that seems to always guide me in all the chaos, mused Gabrielle. She opened her eyes and smiled sadly at the warrior.

Xena smiled back but made the smile of love.

~*~*~*~

"We have her, my liege." Draco came in with seven guards escorting four women.

The Conqueror came into the throne room and stood in the middle. She folded her arms, her eyes once more were ice, and her cat grin back. "Welcome Queen Gabrielle."

The Amazon Queen held her hand up and her three Amazons stopped. "What do you want, Conqueror?"

"I have what I want, you." The ruler grinned then glanced at Draco. "Where did you find them?"

"In a tavern on the west side."

Xena nodded and brought her focus back on the Amazons. "Xena had you here for a reason. Did she not?"

"If you're referring to the hero Xena, yes," stated Gabrielle. She stood in front of her Amazons, arms crossed, and back straight. She stood tall and proud as she did the last time she met the Conqueror.

"I see your legs have healed fine," taunted the Conqueror.

"They have," responded Gabrielle. "So, what are you going to do with us now, Conqueror?"

The dark Warrior Princess grinned. "I have plenty of options."

"You do." The Amazon Queen paused. "I wouldn't mind giving you... one."

The Conqueror chuckled amusingly. But she couldn't laugh as much as she wanted to. This was Gabrielle before her, the same Gabrielle she was in-love with but there was an exception to this Gabrielle. An exception she just couldn't quite figure out yet. It was the only thing keeping the Amazon Queen alive right now. "Oh, please makes a suggestion."

Gabrielle grinned. "A treaty. My people are sick of all this fighting." She went serious. "And I know you are sick of the rebels." She tilted her head. "I propose an agreement that you leave my Amazons alone and in turn we will not lift a finger against your realm let alone whisper the word rebellion."

The ruler didn't respond immediately while she considered the idea. She knew there were more motives behind this than Gabrielle was caring to tell. The Conqueror would have thrown this treaty out the window in a heartbeat but she wasn't just the Conqueror anymore; she was Xena too. "I'll consider the idea." She stopped because she had to repeat the words in her own head to believe them. "Till then you may stay in the tavern. I will call you back to discuss your idea."

The Amazon Queen bowed her head. "Thank you, Conqueror." She almost stumbled over the words but managed to say them with half sincerity.

The Conqueror looked at Draco. "Escort them back."

Gabrielle didn't move because she held Xena's eyes. *Show the Conqueror forgiveness, Gabrielle. That's what will get you inside of her.* Xena's words repeated in Gabrielle's mind. *Forgive her then you'll forgive yourself,* continued Xena's words.

The Conqueror was caught by the Amazon Queen's strong gaze. She read the conveyed message in the small woman's warm green eyes.

Conqueror, you know you cannot escape this or me, thought Gabrielle. *Because I know I cannot.*

The ruler blinked and noticed everybody was waiting for somebody to speak in this deathly silence. She broke the contact and looked at Draco. "Escort them back now," she growled. "You have my orders."

Draco bowed his head. "Of course, my liege." He glanced back the guards and nodded.

The guards escorted the four Amazons out of the throne room.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle sat in the middle of the bed, her legs crossed, and her head down.

Xena sat on the side of the bed. She reached out and grasped her friend's knee. "I know, Gabrielle." She squeezed the small knee tightly. "I know what your trying to understand, what your trying to figure out what's right, and what the Hell is going on around here."

The smaller warrior peered up and a tiny grin formed on her lips at the joke.

"Gabrielle, listen to me huh?" The Warrior Princess voice was warm. "I want you to come out of this in one piece."

The younger woman nodded; still silent.

The warrior sighed. "We have two things between us that the Conqueror doesn't have with you."

"What is that?" asked Gabrielle. Her words held no anger just misunderstanding.

"We have five plus years of knowing each other under our belt and we have a connection." Xena paused. "You know that but I think you've forgotten since your time here."

Gabrielle closed her eyes and whispered, "I haven't forgotten... I just tried finding it all somewhere else."

"Gabrielle, do you really think you're here to change the Conqueror into me?"

"For the most part, yes." The small woman opened her eyes.

"You can't do it," stated Xena. "You cannot change the Conqueror into me." She shook her head. "There is no way possible. You are a world away from being able to change the Conqueror into me."

The warrior-bard looked out the window while thinking. "You're right, I hate having to admit... but you're right." She huffed and looked back at her partner. "She has to stay as the Conqueror anyway since this world was made for her."

Xena slowly nodded. "I will say, there will be pieces of 'me' in her that can be harnessed but not all." She sighed. "It has to be that way."

Gabrielle nodded in agreement, she finally understood. now.

"There's more to this than you just wanting to make the Conqueror me," stated the warrior. She waited to see if Gabrielle would pick up from here.

The warrior-bard sighed deeply then her right hand came up and rested on Xena's hand. "Yes," she whispered. "I've been looking for something... in the wrong place." She held Xena's gaze. "I think... I think I wanted to be with the Conqueror because it was second best to being with you." She stopped then added, "I think somewhere inside myself, I was hoping the Conqueror would be you so that..."

"So that you would have a love relationship with her as if it were me," Xena finished sadly.

The small woman nodded and dropped her eyes. She felt her anger at herself coming to life because she knew that truth would hurt her friend. The person she truly loved and held a connection with. "I'm such an idiot." She shook her head and closed her eyes.

"You're human, Gabrielle." The warrior squeezed her friend's knee. "I can understand why you did what you did. You had two intentions, both backfired on you, but that's okay because in the end things have worked out."

"How is that?"

"Because you have changed the Conqueror." Xena tilted her head. "If she wasn't different do you think I'd be here right now, do you think she would have encouraged you to talk to me, or have doubts about keeping you here?" She shook her head. "If she were the same Conqueror, she would have fought me and forced you to stay against your free will. But instead she is forcing you in the right direction despite the fact she knows she'll lose you." Xena smiled. "You changed her just like Hercules changed me." She paused. "Let this world's Gabrielle love the Conqueror."

Gabrielle nodded and looked at Xena.

The warrior still smiled warmly. She turned her right hand up and held Gabrielle's hand. "You did what you came to do." Her smile had left and her expression was sincere. "You are not her Gabrielle... you are my Gabrielle."

Gabrielle looked away and closed her eyes. She let a few tears escape down her cheeks. "Just explain one thing to me Xena?" She turned her eyes back on her partner.

Xena nodded.

"Why... why after all these years, and knowing what we know about each other, why are we only still friends physically?" The warrior-bard laughed bitterly. "It's got me so damn confused and frustrated." She huffed. "Five damn years and I'm still just your best friend even though we both know we are soul mates." She locked eyes with Xena. "I cannot figure that out to truly save my life."

Xena licked her lips and thought over her friend's words. She felt all her past fears come to life that have held her back for so long. "Because I can't hurt you," she uttered. "After five years I still can't believe that you're safe with me as friend let alone a lover." She rubbed her thumb against Gabrielle's hand. "Don't doubt the fact that I love you with my soul or that I want to be with you." She shook her head. "I have doubt about myself... I'm constantly worried I'll lead you down the wrong path. I have already."

"Would you for once stop holding me back?" growled Gabrielle. "Stop pushing me away, stop trying to walk away, stop walking behind me, and stop holding yourself back." Her hold on Xena's hand became very strong. "We are soul mates, we both have to accept it completely. I'm not going to fight it and I don't want to fight it. I want to embrace it and become complete because being alone like this is killing me more each day. But I cannot move on without you, Xena." She paused. "Because you are my soul mate."

Neither of them said anything because they didn't need too. All the words were heard and now were up for judging. So many notions and emotions flew through Xena, as well as Gabrielle. But Gabrielle knew what she wanted while Xena knew what she wanted but was too fearful to take what was hers. The warrior finally came to her decision and promised herself and Gabrielle to carry through with it for eternity.

Xena leaned towards her friend so that they were face to face. Her eyes still searching Gabrielle's.

The small warrior breathed heavily and squeezed the larger hand.

The warrior gave back reassurance with a squeeze back. Her free hand came up and caressed Gabrielle's cheek while she still studied the other woman.

Gabrielle swallowed and stayed still. She conveyed her soul shattering desire in her mint green eyes.

Xena tilted her head to the right some as her fingertips grazed under Gabrielle's chin and part of her neck. She brought her hand back up to the side of Gabrielle's cheek. No, she couldn't escape this, only embrace it with a rewarding smile.

Gabrielle waited because she saw the remains of the conflicted in Xena's eyes ending. She already knew the outcome because love has her ways. She sensed Xena's thumb tracing over her lips and it sent a shot through her body.

Xena let a hidden smile tug at the corner of her lips. She leaned towards Gabrielle with her lips slightly parting.

Gabrielle could barely breath and her heart pounded with anticipation.

Xena stopped moving in and watched her friend close her eyes tightly. She felt how tightly Gabrielle held onto her hand that their knuckles must be white. She herself was shaking from this. She heard how labored the smaller warrior's breathing had become. Xena closed her eyes and finished the distance between them.

Gabrielle slowly felt warm lips touch hers and she sucked in a breath with surprise.

The kiss was feather light and almost nothing. But the kiss grew like their love and mouths pressed more against each other. The soul mate's kiss gradually grew intensity.

Gabrielle opened her mouth and felt Xena's tongue enter. She moaned softly and let her own tongue slip into Xena's mouth.

The warrior's free hand slid behind the warrior-bard's head.

The younger warrior carefully grasped Xena's hip for support. She felt her tongue gliding over Xena's soft tongue while they consumed each other's air.

Xena pressed her lips more against the other warrior's and sucked on Gabrielle's tongue. She swirled her tongue over Gabrielle's before starting to carefully pull back. She lessened the kiss to something smaller and sucked on Gabrielle's lower lip.

Gabrielle pressed on for a moment and then agreed to end the kiss. She opened her eyes gradually and smiled. Her eyes sparkled deeply.

The warrior opened her eyes and saw the expression; it mirrored onto her. She laced their hands together before saying, "Thank you for pointing me in the right direction."

The warrior-bard chuckled faintly. "I showed you the door, you had to step through."

"You're always good at doing that with me," joked the warrior.

Gabrielle grinned. "I know."

Xena combed her fingers through her soul mate's hair. "I love you, Gabrielle."

Gabrielle's smile of love never fell. "I love you, Xena."

Section Four (Conclusion)

~*~*~*~

Xena kept Gabrielle close, against her body.

The warrior-bard opened her eyes and raised her head off the warrior's chest. "I better head back."

The Warrior Princess gazed down with a soft smile. "Yeah." She brushed back blond hair. "So, are we at an understanding?"

Gabrielle grinned but nodded. "Yes."

"Good." The older woman held her soul mate's sides. They stood in front of the door; Gabrielle getting ready to leave. "We'll leave here soon but first we have unfinished business."

The smaller woman sighed. "How are we going to work this?" She tilted her head. "I don't want to leave the Conqueror... heartbroken."

"She's a big girl," teased the warrior but she went serious. "The other Gabrielle is here in Athens with a few Amazons."

Gabrielle's look went into question.

Xena grinned. "She's going to try and setup a peace treaty with the Conqueror."

"And that'll do what?"

The Warrior Princess sighed. "If she did what I said, it'll get a treaty up and hopefully get the Conqueror to fall for her."

The younger warrior's eyebrows shot up. "You're serious?"

"Come on, she is you and the Conqueror is me." The warrior smirked. "They'll fall for each other."

Gabrielle chuckled deeply. "True, let's hope love beats the anger."

"It will, I promise." Xena paused. "The Conqueror has been changed enough to see better." She took a deep breath. "Just as long as Gabrielle showed her forgiveness, it'll work."

The warrior-bard did a double-take. "Showed?"

Xena grinned because her partner caught her this time. "The Conqueror sent out Draco to find her and the Amazons. I heard her order Draco while we were sparring."

The smaller warrior grinned. "So, you think the Conqueror has already talked to Gabrielle?"

"Probably." The warrior lowered her head and pressed her forehead against Gabrielle's. "We'll finish what you started, starting at sunrise."

Gabrielle chuckled. "I'll talk to the Conqueror tonight."

"Do that, because you can convince her to be with this world's Gabrielle."

"I hope I can."

"You can," insisted the warrior. "Stay with her tonight too, that'll be important."

The small woman nodded. "You don't mind?"

"No," whispered the Warrior Princess. "I'll be fine. You'll need to reassure her."

Gabrielle grinned evilly. "Yeah, she is a bit of baby like somebody else I know."

"Don't mention names," growled the warrior with a grin. She lifted her head up. "Be careful huh?"

"I will." Gabrielle reached down and took one of her soul mate's hands. "Thank you, Xena." She peered up. "You helped me so much and you understood everything."

Xena smiled tenderly and tilted Gabrielle's head up. "That's because I love you." She sighed. "I'm sorry about my fears holing me back... us."

The warrior-bard reached up and took the hand from under her chin. "And I understand them... I had them for awhile but I realized that they just don't matter. My way is you. I'm not going to waste my precious time on a sack of stupid fears. I rather spend that time on you."

"You're right," whispered Xena. She lowered her head again. "Thank you."

"My pleasure." Gabrielle grinned.

The warrior sealed her lips over Gabrielle's delicately. Then she broke the kiss and lifted her head. "I love you."

"I love you too." Gabrielle smiled and reluctantly stepped out of her warrior's arms.
"Sleep well huh?"

"I will, let's plan on heading back tomorrow."

The warrior-bard nodded and grasped the door's handle. "Wait, how are we going to get back?"

Xena shrugged. "I think if we go back to that same spot in the forest somehow we'll just be..."

"Zapped back," finished Gabrielle.

"Basically."

"Interesting."

"That too." The warrior laughed quietly.

Gabrielle opened the door and walked out.

Xena followed and stood in the doorway. "Sleep well tonight too."

"Yeah." The short warrior headed down the hall, she glanced back. "Don't cause any trouble without me."

The Warrior Princess smirked. "No, you just cause the trouble without me."

Gabrielle laughed, spun around, and walked backwards. "That's how it's suppose to work, so then you can come jumping in to save the day."

"Always." Xena grinned. "Goodnight."

"See you tomorrow, partner." The short warrior winked, spun back around, and disappeared around the corner.

"Huh." The warrior chuckled and went back inside her room.

~*~*~*~

The Conqueror looked at the door when it opened.

Gabrielle came in.

The Conqueror noticed the new glow to her lover and read what Gabrielle's eyes held. She voiced what Gabrielle couldn't. "You're leaving with her."

The small warrior sighed and dropped her head while coming up to the ruler. "Can we talk?" She looked up with sincere eyes.

Xena turned around and walked towards the balcony where the sunset was beginning.

Gabrielle's eyes widened. *Not that sunset.* She sprung forward and grasped the other woman's hand. "Conqueror, please don't watch the sunsets anymore."

The dark Warrior Princess slowly turned back.

"Stick to the sunrises, please."

The ruler coked an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"Yeah, they're better for your health."

The Conqueror let a tiny grin tweak her lips.

Gabrielle sighed. "Please, can we talk."

The ruler held her free hand out to the sofas.

The warrior-bard still held Xena's hand and she led her over to a sofa. She sat down and faced her past lover.

The Conqueror settled back and folded her arms. "What was resolved?"

"You were right."

"About which part?"

"Everything."

The older woman nodded and didn't voice anything.

Gabrielle reached out and took the other woman's hands. She held them tightly. "Is Gabrielle here?"

Xena nodded.

"What happened?"

The Conqueror sighed. "I may be setting a treaty up with the Amazons."

The smaller woman smiled at that. "Xena, you should."

The ruler huffed and stared at her hands being held by Gabrielle.

"You know I'm right." Gabrielle squeezed the larger hands. "Please do it, Xena."

"I don't know yet truly." The Conqueror looked up quickly with hard eyes.

Gabrielle closed her eyes and whispered, "Please... for me."

"Now that's interesting."

The small warrior opened her eyes with remorse. "Xena, I know I'm hurting you by this. I'm not going to go around acting like everything is jim-dandy." She shook her head. "But you must keep fighting some of the Conqueror in you. Are my efforts... my love that lost on you?" she whispered in pain. "That cheap that they haven't changed you whatsoever?"

Xena breathed deeply and sighed. "No."

"Thank you." Gabrielle relaxed. "Do a treaty and let her stay here with you."

The ruler was about to object but Gabrielle cut her off before she could.

"Don't say it." The warrior-bard narrowed her eyes. "You know, as I do, that this Gabrielle here is made for you. You won't be able to escape it, I can promise you that. It'll just turn you inside out." She squeezed the larger hands. "I just got through yelling at my Xena for this I don't feel like doing it again with you."

The Conqueror laughed quietly. "The stubbornness never fails."

"It doesn't seem to," mumbled the younger woman. "Please do this."

The ruler huffed. "I am honestly not sure."

Gabrielle licked her lips before saying, "Please try, for me and for yourself. If you love me then you'll promise me you'll try. I don't want to go back to my world knowing I screwed up and that you were left in deep anger."

Xena looked up at the ceiling and tried to calm down.

"Xena," whispered the small woman, "I promise it'll all come out right if you believe."

The Conqueror closed her eyes while trying to think.

"Please Conqueror, I love you."

The Conqueror opened her eyes and leaned forward. She kissed Gabrielle gently and released one of the small hands. She caressed the other woman's cheek carefully at the end of the kiss. She smiled warmly. "I'll try... I promise you."

"Thank you." Gabrielle smiled. "Thank you for everything."

Xena nodded. "Thank you for unchaining my heart."

The small warrior smiled even more. "It was real, it was fun but it wasn't real fun."

"Smartass," mumbled the Conqueror.

Gabrielle snickered and shifted. She pulled her past love in for a long hug. "Thank you for letting me unchain your heart," whispered Gabrielle. "It's very rewarding to

see you become a new person."

The Conqueror sighed and said, "Don't rub it in too much."

"Yes, my liege." The younger woman grinned as she pulled away. She reached up and brushed back black bangs. "Let's get some sleep."

The ruler narrowed her eyes. "And you're not staying with Xena?"

"I am." Gabrielle kept her eyes locked on Xena.

The Conqueror arched an eyebrow. "Remember my words."

"You may not be Xena but you have pieces of her in you." The short warrior stood up and held a hand out. "Come on."

The Conqueror sighed and accepted what Gabrielle said earlier. She took the small hand and stood up.

Together the pair removed their boots and weapons then crawled into bed.

The Conqueror, for once, slept in Gabrielle's arms. She was vulnerable tonight and she never had been like this before. She needed a place to feel safe and that was right in Gabrielle's arms where she could reshape herself. Tomorrow at the sunrise a new Conqueror would be born from the ashes of the old.

~*Part 13*~

"Draco, bring in the Amazon Queen." Xena stood tall in the throne room but on common, level ground and not on the divan. She glanced to her right when she saw Gabrielle and Xena come out together.

The soul mates listened to Draco yelling at the guards to escort Queen Gabrielle in.

The warrior-bard glanced at the Conqueror but the Conqueror wasn't looking at her.

The ruler of this realm folded her arms when the Amazon Queen came in with her Amazons.

Queen Gabrielle glanced at Xena and Gabrielle then back at the Conqueror. "And your decision is, Conqueror?"

The Conqueror stepped closer. "Upon your request on a treaty, after considering the idea, and... a little convincing from a third party. I have decided to grant your request."

The warrior-bard let her breath out in relief.

The warrior, however, just grinned. *That's Gabrielle's touch.*

The Amazon Queen nodded. "Thank you, Conqueror." She bowed her head in respect.

"Upon accepting this, Queen Gabrielle," added on the ruler, "you are invited to stay here in my castle till the treaty is setup. Your Amazons may stay as well."

"Queen Gabrielle-"

Queen Gabrielle held up her hand for Solari to stay silent. "Never insult, Solari." She glanced back at the Conqueror. "That is one thing I have learned with the Conqueror."

The Conqueror let a hint of grin tug at the corner of her lips. "Your answer?"

"We would be honored," replied Gabrielle. "It'll beat the tavern."

The ruler grinned faintly but dropped it when looking at Draco. "Have a few men sent to the tavern and pick up Queen Gabrielle's things."

Draco nodded and walked off.

"Now then." The Conqueror looked over at the soul mates. "We must settle everything."

The warrior-bard felt her soul mate's hand come up to her back and signal for her to move. She walked closer to the Conqueror with Xena. "What's left?" she asked.

"Sending you back," whispered the Amazon Queen.

Both Gabrielles smiled to each other.

The ruler quickly cut into the exchange. "Exactly." She followed her arms. "Today I will take you and Xena back."

The Amazon Queen looked up. "Threw Amazon territory?" She questioned with protection in her voice.

The Conqueror grinned at the Queen. "With your permission and help."

Queen Gabrielle glanced at her regent. "Who did we leave in charge?"

"The head council member."

The Queen sighed and said, "We'll need to send word that we're coming through. I know they'll automatically attack."

Ephiny nodded. "You're right."

Solari grumbled and spoke up, "I'll send word even though..." she trailed off and huffed.

Eponin chuckled and patted the second in command's back. "That's big of you."

"Zip it," growled Solari lowly.

The Amazon Queen sighed at her Amazons. "Alright, we'll send word." She glimpsed back at the Conqueror.

"Thank you." The ruler turned to the soul mates. "Are you both ready to get back?"

"Just as long as I know things here will be fine," stated the small warrior.

The Conqueror slipped a smile onto her lips. "They'll be perfectly fine," she whispered.

Everybody in the room fell silent; they had to hold tight to this rare moment in this world's history.

"Thank you," whispered the short warrior sincerely.

The Conqueror nodded and looked across the throne room to a guard. "Guard, bring me a scroll and quill."

The guard left in search of his liege's request.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle rode on horseback with her soul mate. She couldn't remember the last time she rode with her warrior, holding her. The warrior was given back her sword and chakram by the Conqueror.

The Conqueror rode beside them on Argo while the Amazons were on the opposite side escorting Queen Gabrielle. Behind were a few of the ruler's guards for protection. Solari had left numerous candlemarks earlier to deliver the message about their arrival in the territory and that Queen Gabrielle along with Ephiny and Eponin were staying with the Conqueror.

"We should be entering Amazon territory soon," stated Ephiny.

The ruler nodded and glanced back at her men. "Tighten up," she ordered.

The men followed orders and fell into a tiny formation.

The warrior glanced over at Ephiny. "The area is to the north?"

The regent thought for a moment. "Yes." She turned to her left a little and headed that way. Everybody else followed her lead. And within a half of candlemark she found the area. She came to a stop and faced the soul mates. "Do you think you can get back by just stepping into the same spot?"

The warrior dismounted and said, "Yes."

The shorter warrior hopped off and watched the Conqueror dismount.

The ruler turned to her men. "Stay here," she commanded. Walking over, she studied

the forest. "Over here?"

The small warrior nodded and neared the dark Warrior Princess. "Yes."

The warrior joined her Gabrielle, as did the Amazons with their Queen.

The warrior-bard turned to the Conqueror and lost her smile. "Thank you for everything, Xena. Thank you for understand and helping me."

The Conqueror smiled warmly. "One turn deserves another."

Gabrielle chuckled and stepped forward. She pulled the Conqueror in for a strong, long hug.

The warrior glanced over at Queen Gabrielle. She moved closer and whispered, "The best thing you can do to get your way with the Conqueror is to smile at her."

The Amazon Queen chuckled quietly. "I'll remember that." She smiled at Xena. "Thank you for your help, Xena." She grinned. "Gabrielle is right, you are the hero."

"Just don't tell anybody huh?"

Queen Gabrielle laughed and hugged the Warrior Princess.

The weapons master leaned towards the regent. "I can't believe this worked out," muttered Eponin.

Ephiny laughed and grinned. "I said it would." She shook her head. "Doubting your regent is bad for your health, Ep."

"I'm noticing."

"Eph, Ep," said the warrior as she came over to them.

"Oh no," grumbled Eponin. "Here comes the sappy stuff," she teased.

The warrior gave a stoic expression. "No sappy stuff here."

"I want sappy," stated Ephiny and she now gave Xena a hug.

The warrior-bard released the Conqueror but took her hands. "I'll always love you, Conqueror."

The Conqueror grinned and lowered her head. "You mean Xena." She received a chuckle. "Just don't forget me, Gabrielle."

"I couldn't," whispered the small warrior. "Don't forget me either huh? I'll always be with you."

"I know," uttered the ruler. "Say goodbye to everybody else." She nodded.

Gabrielle nodded back and released the Conqueror's hands. She walked over to Queen Gabrielle. She laughed a little. "Was something else huh?"

The younger Gabrielle grinned. "I know I wont be the last to agree to that." She smiled. "You made me believe... both you and Xena. I think things will work out."

"They will, just keep trying. Love will repair everything," promised the warrior.

Xena came to face the other darker Xena. She folded her arms and blue locked on blue. "Conqueror, don't forgot who you can be."

The Conqueror grinned. "Fortunately a short blond warrior showed me a door."

The warrior shot a grin back. "She tends to do that."

"She does," agreed the darker Warrior Princess.

"Glad you decided to step through the door," stated Xena.

The ruler tilted her head. "I heard you stepped through one just yesterday too."

Xena laughed deeply. "Funny how that works huh?"

"Very," stated the Conqueror.

Gabrielle pulled back from the hug with Ephiny. "I'll miss you, Ephiny."

"What happened to... your Ephiny?" asked the regent.

"She was killed several years ago," whispered Gabrielle. "She was dear to me."

"She is dear to you," corrected the regent. "She's still with you."

The warrior-bard nodded with a smile. "You're right. Thank you for your help, Eph. I knew I could count on you."

Ephiny chuckled. "I'm loyal to you, no matter what world or time."

"I know." Gabrielle leaned forward and kissed her friend's cheek. "Take care of yourself and keep Gabrielle and Xena in-line."

Ephiny grinned and shrugged. "I'll try my best."

"What was that I heard?" asked the Queen as she joined them. She glanced over at Gabrielle. "You better go."

"You're right."

"Besides." The Amazon Queen nodded at the two Warrior Princesses talking.

"Oh no," whispered Gabrielle. "They're probably trading secrets."

"Or telling stories," added the Queen.

"Something like that," joked the small warrior.

Both Gabrielles laughed together. The group walked over to the ruler and warrior.

The Conqueror held out her arm while saying, "Well I'm still up for that sparring match, Xena."

The warrior grinned and took the arm briskly. She held tightly and tried to make her hold strong. "I'll keep that in mind."

The ruler smirked and made her grasp very strong too. "Good."

"Alright you two." Gabrielle rested her right hand on top of the two locked arms. "Be nice."

They both chuckled and released arms.

The warrior turned to her soul mate and grasped her shoulder. "I'll be waiting." She strolled near the area.

Gabrielle faced the Conqueror. "This is it."

"For now," stated the ruler.

The small warrior corked an eyebrow. "And you're suggesting...?"

"That maybe you should try visiting," teased the Conqueror.

The warrior-bard grinned. "If I could, I would."

"That cave may work again."

The younger woman chuckled. "Maybe we'll find out." She took her friend's large hands. "Take care of yourself."

"I will, promise." The ruler sighed and whispered, "Where was that cave?"

Gabrielle titled her head in bewilderment at the question. "Just north of Stagira." She raised an eyebrow. "Why?"

"For reference."

Gabrielle's eyes widened. "Don't you even think about it."

The Conqueror smiled. "No, its incase I need you, I know how to get to you."

"You won't need me... because you already have me." She nodded at Queen Gabrielle.

The ruler sighed and lowered her head. "I know." She paused. "I love you, Gabrielle."

"I love you too, Conqueror." Gabrielle smiled. "And I mean Conqueror."

The Conqueror chuckled and closed in the distance. She gently kissed her friend and lifted her head back up. "Go."

The warrior-bard nodded, squeezed the large hands and released them. She walked backwards. "You're beautiful when you're the Conqueror." She grinned and turned around.

Xena stood waiting for her soul mate.

The Conqueror grinned at Gabrielle's words and she looked over at the warrior. "Take care of her," she called.

The warrior nodded and smiled. "You know I will." She looked at Gabrielle and held her hand up.

The ruler chuckled deeply.

The small warrior joined her partner and took her hand.

The Amazon Queen moved and stood beside the Conqueror.

Together, the soul mates walked into the same spot they had first arrive in this world. They faced each other and laced their hands together.

"Think I should click my heels while saying, 'there's no place like home' three times?"

The warrior laughed and squeezed her soul mate's hands. "No, I have a better idea." She moved in close, kept their hands together between their bodies, and leaned down. Her lips captured Gabrielle's lips in a passionate kiss.

Gabrielle moaned softly, released her soul mate's hands, and wrapped her arms around Xena.

The warrior did the same and encircled her Gabrielle's waist.

The Amazon Queen's eyes widened as she watched the soul mate's bodies beginning to light up like lightening.

The two Amazons gaped.

The Conqueror, however, stood stoically.

Suddenly the soul mates became too bright to see and the group shielded their eyes. When the light died out they all looked back and the soul mates were... gone.

"That's one way to make an exit," joked Eponin.

Ephiny chuckled. "They have many skills."

"So, back to Athens?" asked the Conqueror.

Gabrielle looked up at the Conqueror. "Yes, we have a number of things to settle... my liege."

The ruler arched an eyebrow slowly but grinned.

Gabrielle smiled.

~*~*~*~

The soul mates pulled back from the kiss and opened their eyes.

Gabrielle gazed around. "We're back?" she whispered.

Xena looked at her surroundings in the cave. "I think so."

Suddenly there was a horse's whine outside the cave.

The smaller woman laughed. "Yup, we're back."

The Warrior Princess sighed and noticed the dead campfire she had before leaving.
"That was something else."

"Tell me about it," stated the younger woman. "Thank you for saving me."

The warrior focused her attention back on her partner. "You know I'll do anything for you."

"Yeah." Gabrielle smiled. "I just didn't think it included coming to an alternate world."

"Let me tell you, there are so many finer details in this contract between us," joked the warrior.

The warrior-bard laughed and shook her head. "I didn't know I signed."

"No, I did." Xena drew her soul mate in close. "We have a lot ahead of us," she whispered.

"We do," agreed the small woman. "Like sex."

The Warrior Princess laughed. "Interesting how you pick that among things."

"Isn't it?"

Xena pulled back and went serious. "Give me a little time to get rid of the last of my fears."

"I know." Gabrielle nodded. "I'm here."

"I'll only need a couple of days." The warrior grinned.

The warrior-bard grinned back. "Good." She leaned in and kissed her partner.

Xena lost herself into Gabrielle's love. She had been through the battle and won.
Winning is sweet.

Gabrielle kept her eyes close and her lips brushing Xena's after the kiss. "I love you,
Xena."

"I love you, Gabrielle... forever." She promised that in her kiss to follow.

They had been a world away from each other but now the soul mates were locked in
an eternal kiss.

The End