

~ First Adventure ~

by Red Hope

Disclaimers: Violence ~ Lacking the violence... non-plot driven story.

Sex/Subtext ~ Four women in-love. There is subtext sex though.

Copyright ~ Universal and MCA owns Xena, Gabrielle, Argo, Eve, Eponin, and Hope as we know. However I claim the story line with the Hope and Eve relationship so don't touch them.

Time Frame ~ In the sixth season around "Who's Gurkan?"

Started: October 29th 2000, Sunday

Mini Series One: **Thick as Blood** Story: **Four**

If anybody has comments about my story please let me know at:

redhope@redhope.net

Section 1

~*Part 1*~

Xena entered in first, followed by Eve, then Gabrielle, and lastly was Hope.

Every last man in the tavern turned their heads to the group of women. They kept their eyes locked on the women coming in.

The Warrior Princess scanned the dark inn. Her attention focused on the innkeeper behind the bar. She strolled over to the innkeeper. "We need two rooms."

The innkeeper glanced up from his mug he was cleaning. "For the night?"

"Yes," answered the warrior.

Eve turned around and studied the tavern. She noticed how there were mainly men inside.

Gabrielle shifted to stand beside her soulmate. "How much is it?"

The innkeeper corked an eyebrow. "Six dinars."

The warrior-bard nodded and extracted the money. She handed it over and waited for directions to the rooms.

Hope stood beside her soulmate. "Too many men," she whispered.

Eve nodded slowly. "I've noticed." She grinned down at her partner. "But I think we'll be fine."

The small woman chuckled deeply, dropped her head against her staff, and said, "I'd think so, between us four." She peeked up with a grin. "Definitely considering you're back in warrior mode."

Eve winked and looked away. She shifted a little in her stance still getting use to wearing armor and a sword once more. She was a warrior. She wore golden armor in certain spots of her body, a sword strapped to her back, a dark red cape, and a whip at her side. Her hair was completely pulled back out of the way. And since this transformation, she had fallen back into her emotionless frame of mind. Except when Hope came near or anybody she loved for that matter.

"Eve, Virgil is meeting us at Potidaea later, right?"

Eve nodded. "Yes, he had something to do."

Hope sighed and stared through the tavern. She was still thinking about yesterday when the group had been in Amphipolis. She had seen the side of her soulmate that was God's messenger. She'd seen Eve's power as the messenger. And it left Hope in a bit of awe.

"Okay, great." Gabrielle tapped her fist on the bar and walked off towards a set of stairs.

"Where's she going?" asked Hope.

"To the rooms," answered Xena. "Follow her."

The young soulmates nodded then followed behind Gabrielle.

Xena took up the rear and saw her partner stop at one door.

"Your room, Hope and Eve." Gabrielle grinned at the young soulmates. "Don't make too much noise tonight." She walked down the hall with Xena following her.

Hope shook her head and called down, "Yeah well its not our fault we're loud."

Gabrielle came next to door and opened it. She peered down at her daughter. "Then whose fault is it?"

Eve smirked. "Our mothers." She pushed Hope into the bedroom.

The Amazon Queen ran her tongue along her molars. "It's a conspiracy, Xen."

The Warrior Princess laughed quietly and pushed her soulmate into the room. "Let's go."

~*~*~*~

Xena pushed her seat back and leaned against the wall. She folded her hands in her lap. Slowly, her eyes scanned the dark tavern.

Gabrielle patted her lover's leg. "You never relax."

"In a tavern full of men, no," whispered the warrior. She grinned at Gabrielle.

The small woman chuckled and looked at the younger soulmates across the table. "We should make it to Potidaea by tomorrow evening."

Hope didn't make any notification of understanding.

Eve, however, asked, "How long are we staying?"

"I don't know," answered Gabrielle. She glanced at Xena then back to the other couple. "Depends on what we find."

Eve nodded faintly and glanced through the tavern, scanning it.

Hope studied her soulmate then studied Xena. She chuckled and grinned towards her mother. "Mother like daughter," she whispered.

Gabrielle snickered. "And look who that's coming from."

"Hey, I just look like you," teased Hope. "That's all."

"Uh huh," said Xena. "And carrying a scroll satchel has nothing to do with it?" Her eyes never locked with Hope.

Gabrielle's daughter chuckled. "Just a fluke thing."

"Rrrright," teased the Warrior Princess. Her eyes lowered and locked on Hope.

Hope stared at the warrior then she looked away.

"Are you just jealous of bards?" asked Gabrielle with a serious face.

Xena rotated her head slowly. She cocked an eyebrow at Gabrielle. "Me and bards mix quite well." She grinned. "I have a deep... weakness for them."

"Better be just for one," muttered the warrior-bard.

"You know it is," whispered the warrior.

Eve and Hope just chuckled.

There was a small boom of a mug on a table.

Eve and Hope turned their heads towards the sound. They saw two men at a table talking about something with laughs and mockery.

Xena and Gabrielle now glanced that way.

Hope tilted her head and listened carefully as did the other three women at the table.

"She was Octavius's wife."

The other man shook his head. "She was the commander of his legions in Rome."

"She did that too." The man with the mug leaned towards his friend. "She killed thousands of people and didn't care how she did it."

The other man shook his head again. "What was her name?"

"Livia or something." The man slammed his mug down. "She disappeared or something." He narrowed his eyes and said his next words low and in anger. "She was a bitch, a harlot. A ruthless commander that should be run through. The damn bitch is from Hades himself."

Hope was out of her seat instantly without even thinking twice. She forgot her staff and just walked over to the men.

Eve's eyes widened. "Hope?"

Hope came near the table and glared at the one man with the mug. "Excuse me, were you talking about Livia?"

The man peered up with cold eyes. "Yes, why?"

Hope smiled with anger and flashing eyes. "Well... I just happen to have a big fondness for her." Without warning, she punched the man hard.

The other man sat in his seat, stunned.

The man, who took the punch, moved rapidly and pulled a dagger out. He stood with it pointed at Hope.

Three chairs in the tavern loudly scraped against the floor followed by weapons unsheathing.

The man with the dagger froze.

Hope smirked and folded her arms.

The man with the dagger was stuck in place as two sword points were pressing into his neck. He breathed heavily as two sets of blue eyes stayed locked on him.

Eve poked her sword tip into the man's neck. "Don't touch her," she growled.

Gabrielle spun her sais out and straightened up. She reached out with one sai and pressed it against the man's opposite cheek. She turned the man's head towards her. "I recommend not talking about people when they're here." She grinned. "Is this clear?"

The man had a confused look but nodded faintly.

The warrior-bard pulled her sai back while saying, "Just don't talk about people," she said angrily.

The man moved his head in understanding and slipped his dagger away.

Xena and Eve lowered their swords.

"Go on, Hope," ordered the Amazon Queen.

Gabrielle's daughter nodded and sat back down at their table.

Gabrielle followed then Xena came over.

Eve examined the man one last time. She was still angry and it had nothing to do with what he said but with what he was going to do. She narrowed her eyes and walked off.

The man sighed and fell back in his seat then grabbed his mug with a shaky hand.

"Be more careful," whispered Gabrielle hotly.

Hope glanced at her mother. "And you can't tell me if they said the something about Xena, you wouldn't do the same as I just did?" she asked with anger.

The Amazon Queen narrowed her eyes. "That's different."

"How is that different?" Hope looked eyes with her mother.

Gabrielle opened her mouth.

"Hope," Eve cut in. "It was dangerous." She started backing Gabrielle up. "And besides, he had right to say what he did."

"No he didn't," growled Hope. "That was such-"

"Truth," finished Eve. She studied her soulmate.

"Hope?"

Gabrielle's daughter turned her head towards Xena.

The Warrior Princess stared at Hope for a moment before speaking. "Then you will be slugging over a hundred people."

Hope dropped her eyes.

"Honey," said Gabrielle soothingly, "You can't fight it... you can only prove them wrong." Her eyes flickered to Eve.

Both the young soulmates nodded sadly. They knew their mothers were right considering they've dealt with this for years.

The rest of the evening was a little quieter, the women tired mainly from the day. After their dinner, they retired to their rooms.

Eve slowly took her armor off as she stood in the middle of the room.

Hope was sitting on the bed taking her boots off. "Eve," she whispered.

The taller woman glanced over. "Yeah?" she asked after finishing with her armor.

The blond untied one boot and worked on the other. She didn't look at Eve. "Sorry about earlier." She laughed in anger. "He just really..."

"I know," responded Eve solemnly. She unhooked her cape and placed it on the chair with her sword and armor. She came over and bent down in front of her partner. "But what they say is true."

"Was," corrected Hope.

The older woman sighed deeply. "It's not going to stop there. You'll hear it again."

Gabrielle's daughter growled lowly and stood up. She walked over near the door and took her boots off there. "I don't have the patience to prove these people wrong. I know the truth about you."

"Then you know what I've done," stated Eve. She came closer. "So they don't speak

lies."

Hope leaned back against the door. "Eve..." She ran her fingers through her hair.

"Trust me, love... I know." Eve grasped her soulmate's shoulders. "It's not forever."

The small woman nodded and searched her soulmate's eyes. She reached up and took Eve's hands, she laced their hands together. "Eve, I'm going to make sure your reputation is fixed." She smiled sadly. "You're not Livia anymore."

Eve sighed deeply. "She's a part of who I am, I can't get away from that."

"Yeah," whispered Hope. "We have that in common."

"So it seems," said Eve quietly. "Let's see if we can rewrite these stories, huh?"

Hope grinned. "You're on."

Eve leaned down and kissed her soulmate warmly.

The small woman moaned softly and wrapped her arms around Eve. She pulled back slowly for air. "I'm glad we're taking us slow."

"Me too," agreed Eve. She encircled her partner's waist. "We need to do some... exploring," she whispered deeply.

Hope raised an eyebrow. "Nothing to explore."

The older woman grinned with twinkling blue eyes. "Right," she teased. She shifted before lifting Hope up into her arms.

"Woooo," Hope laughed. "Didn't know you could do this."

"I can do a many of things." The warrior carried her soulmate towards the bed and settled her down in the middle of it. Then she crawled onto the bed and rested on her side, she peered down at Hope.

Hope reached and took her partner's hand. "Eve, we haven't talked about this one." She paused and took a confident breath. "But have you... slept with anybody?" She glimpsed up.

"Yes," replied Eve quietly. "Too many." She rubbed her thumb against her soulmate's hand. "Men and women for whatever reasons to gain power in the army or take over things."

Hope nodded. "I kind of thought so." She smiled softly. "And no, it doesn't bother me." She paused while trying to build her confidence. "I've gotta be honest, Eve." She studied her soulmate's serious face. "I've only slept with one person." She paused then took a shaky breath. "Not proud of it but it was... Ares," she whispered.

Eve's breathing picked up and her eyes went dark. "Ares?" she asked lowly.

"Yes," uttered Hope. She squeezed Eve's hand. "I'm sorry, Eve."

Eve said nothing and just tried relaxing. She closed her eyes slowly. "Why did he have

to touch you?" she whispered in anger. "I'll kill him when I find him."

"It's over, Eve." She sighed. "It was my decision at the time, I'll regret it... forever."

"I know," said Eve as she opened her eyes. "I've regretted sleeping with him too." She shook her head. "He certainly gets a good laugh out of this I'm sure."

Hope grinned slowly. "I wouldn't say that..." She brought up her free hand then let her fingertips graze over her warrior's lips. "We do since we're the ones together." Her grin went into a warm smile.

Eve leaned down while Hope's hand slid down her neck. She captured her soulmate's lips in a strong kiss. She pulled her head back up a little. "Hope, I'm sorry about Ares." She paused. "I know what sleeping with him can do to a person."

"So do I," replied Hope. "We'll fix that about both of us," she stated truthfully.

"Definitely," agreed the warrior. She grinned and kissed her soulmate while whispering, "Now about that exploring," Her lips traveled down Hope's neck.

Hope sucked in a breath with a soft moan. "Broaden horizons? Especially mine."

"You'll like the... view."

Hope chuckled for a second but asked in concern, "Still slow."

Eve trailed her lips back up. "Yes," she promised. She smiled warmly at Hope. "No pushing you into anything you don't want to do." She lost her smile. "You trust me?"

The small woman smiled with love. "With my soul." She kissed Eve after saying, "I'm yours."

~*Part 2*~

Gabrielle turned her head on her soulmate's chest and studied the sun out the window. She sighed deeply. "We probably should get up and go."

"Probably," agreed the Warrior Princess.

"But we won't," finished the warrior-bard. "Considering it's already noon."

"Mmm and after the... noise a few rooms down."

The Amazon Queen laughed quietly. "Not like we were quiet or anything." She kissed her lover's bare chest. "Besides, I think they were just... experimenting." She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. "They're taking things slow."

"Yeah," uttered the warrior. "We never did."

Gabrielle chuckled and grinned. "We had good reason not too."

"A year and a half of being friends before hand, I think you're right."

The small woman grinned and pushed herself up. She kissed her partner warmly. When she pulled back, a rich smile was on her lips. "I love you, Xena."

"I love you too." Xena smiled warmly but slowly lost the smile.

"What?" asked Gabrielle with worry.

The older woman ran her fingertips up and down her lover's bare back. "Going back might not be easy."

The warrior-bard studied her partner. "Home?"

"Yes." The dark woman brushed back some of Gabrielle's hair. "Your parents could be dead."

"And they might not be."

"I know, love." Xena lifted her head. She pressed her lips against Gabrielle's forehead. When her head settled back down on the pillow, she said, "Just hope for the best and expect the worst, that's all you can do."

Gabrielle felt a bit of a lump in her throat. "Yeah." She took a shaky breath. "Can we get going?"

The warrior nodded slowly. "We'll have to sleep a night on the road."

"Okay." The short warrior rolled off her partner's nude body.

The taller woman stayed on the bed and watched her soulmate walk away. She got out of the bed instantly. Coming up behind Gabrielle, she wrapped her arms around Gabrielle's bare waist. She pulled her partner in. "I'm here for you, Gabrielle," she whispered reassuringly.

The younger woman turned around and hugged her lover. She dug her head under Xena's chin and closed her eyes.

Xena lowered her head onto her soulmate's. She swayed their bodies together in relaxing motion. Part of her already knew the truth, knew that Gabrielle's parents were dead. And that Gabrielle wouldn't have the chance to make amends.

~*~*~*~

She propped her legs up, lifted her quill, and chewed on the tip. Her green eyes stayed focused on the scroll in her lap. She sighed and shook her head. Lowering her quill, she wrote but soon felt a warm body press into her back.

"How's the writing going?"

She dropped her head back and smiled warmly. "It's coming... I think I should asked mom for tips."

Eve chuckled deeply. "I don't think you need too." She slid her hands down Hope's arms. "Give it time."

"So I've been told." Hope grinned and rolled up the scroll. "Are we ready to go?"

"Yup," answered Eve. "The horses are ready to go."

"I'm still not riding," declared Gabrielle's daughter with a wave of her scroll. She

stood and turned. She carked an eyebrow at her soulmate. "I don't mess with anything that's bigger than me."

Eve said nothing and folded her arms. She raised an eyebrow slowly in suggestion.

"Well..." Hope whispered while brushing past her warrior. "Maybe one thing I do."

Xena's daughter spun around and watched Hope head back towards the road. "Fine by me," she uttered with a grin then walked ahead.

~*~*~*~

"We'll make it to Potidaea tomorrow?"

Gabrielle nodded in answer.

"So, we're stopping for the night?"

Gabrielle nodded in answer.

"Where about's?"

Gabrielle's eyes widened and she looked up. "Xena, *did I* talk this much?"

The Warrior Princess peered down and grinned. "Yup," she said simply.

Hope dropped her shoulders. "Great, I'm the butt end of a joke."

The warrior-bard grinned at her daughter. "No, just teasing you." She patted Hope's back and continued walking down the road. "Don't know where."

"Oh great," whispered Eve. She stopped walking and turned to her horse.

Xena sighed, drew her sword, and placed the reins on the saddle. "Here we go."

Gabrielle did the same with her reins then stepped ahead.

Hope glanced between the other women, a smidge confused. "I'm missing something."

"Right there." Eve pointed down the road.

Hope glanced that way and saw nothing. "Don't see anything."

"You will," replied Eve as she drew her sword. "A little entertainment." She gazed over to her mother. "Six?"

"That's what I have too."

Gabrielle nodded in agreement. "Six." She folded her arms.

Hope moved near her mother. "Oh great," she repeated Eve's words when she saw the six male warriors come strolling down the road laughing. She leaned against her staff and smiled warmly. "Sweet and innocent."

Gabrielle huffed. "That's the last thing you are," she chided.

The younger blond grinned evilly.

Xena came up beside her soulmate. She smiled evilly towards the men coming. "Hey boys."

The six men smiled devilishly back and came closer. "Lovely afternoon, ladies."

"Isn't it," joked back Eve. She shifted her weight to her other foot.

The Amazon Queen peeked up at her warrior. "Six against four... pretty bad odds huh?"

"Yeah," uttered the warrior.

The six men laughed together.

"For them," added Xena.

The men glared now and drew weapons. "Alright, enough jokes."

The warrior-bard smirked. "Come on then, we're only women."

And that's when the fight began and it was a sad sight. By the end, the six men were on the ground, out cold, and the women strolling off like nothing ever happened.

~*~*~*~

Xena studied the two younger soulmates sleeping near the fire.

The group had finished dinner about a candlemark ago. And now they were settling into bed.

Gabrielle came up from behind. Her arms encircled her lover's waist. "They make a good couple," she whispered.

"They do," agreed the warrior. "They need a little more alone time though," she whispered.

"Yeah." The small warrior dropped her head against Xena's back. "They'll get it."

The Warrior Princess laughed quietly. "True." Her hands came down to rest on top of Gabrielle's hands. "How're you doing?"

The Amazon Queen kissed her lover's back softly. "Well, you?"

Xena grinned. "Real good." She sighed deeply and rubbed her thumb against her lover's hands. "Tired?"

"From the traveling, yeah." The short warrior lowered her head onto Xena's back again. "Getting old."

The tall woman chuckled deeply. "Right," she whispered.

Gabrielle sighed. "Alright, I'll get the bedroll and furs."

"I'll take care of the fire." The older woman patted her soulmate's hands before they released her. She strolled over to the fire and placed a little wood in it for the night. Afterwards she peered over at the daughters and her lips creased slowly into a smile. Standing up, she walked over to them and bent down. Xena studied the young pair

with Hope enveloped tightly in Eve's arms. She reached forward, took the fur, and pulled it over the younger soulmates.

Eve's eyes flew open instantly with coldness. She noticed it was her mother and smiled warmly.

"Sorry," Xena whispered. "Good instincts."

The daughter grinned. "Got them from my mother," she ushered.

The Warrior Princess grinned back and leaned forward. She kissed her daughter's forehead. "Go back to sleep."

"Goodnight, mother."

"Night, dear," whispered the warrior as she stood up. She strolled over to Gabrielle, whom was settling into bed.

Eve watched her mother briefly then closed her eyes. She drew Hope in a little closer against her body and let sleep take over again.

~*Part 3*~

Hope stood up from the log and stretched. "I'm ready."

Eve cocked an eyebrow before glancing at her mother. "Are we ready?"

"Yeah," Xena peered up from her boots. "Just need to put the fire out." She nodded at the almost dead fire. It was the following morning and the group planned to make it to Potidaea by the afternoon.

"Got that covered," declared Gabrielle. She stood and glanced at her lover. "You get the horses?"

"Yup," answered the warrior while standing.

The warrior-bard went about putting the fire out.

Hope studied the sky and looked west and noticed things a little gray. She crinkled her nose. "Probably going to rain later."

Eve glanced that way and nodded. "Yup," she mumbled. "Lovely."

Hope scanned, with her eyes, around the camp in search of her staff. "Where'd my staff go?"

"Right there." Eve pointed at the tree rather near Hope.

The young blond laughed quietly. "Forgot." She lifted her right hand and narrowed her eyes.

The staff lifted from the tree and glided through the air towards Hope.

Eve's expression dropped and she stood amazed faintly. After she saw her soulmate take the staff from midair, she strolled over. Bending down, she whispered to Hope, "You failed to mention *that* to me."

Hope grinned evilly at her partner. "And you failed to mention *your powers* to me." She sauntered off towards the horses.

Gabrielle came up behind Eve and patted her back. "Next time, ask her." She smirked at the taller woman before walking briskly to her soulmate and daughter.

"I just naturally assumed she'd tell me," called Eve. She huffed and joined the group.

Hope smirked at her soulmate. "Assume makes an ass out of you and me." She chuckled and began trekking down the road for Potidaea.

Xena laughed quietly and took Argo's reins. "What comes around-"

"Goes around, I've noticed," declared Eve with a huff. She took her horse's reins and started off.

Gabrielle smiled at her soulmate. "One big happy family."

Xena laughed and stepped closer. She kissed Gabrielle warmly before walking down the road.

The warrior-bard smiled to herself, took her horse's reins, and joined the entourage.

~*~*~*~

"Xena, Gabrielle!"

The group stopped and looked back.

Gabrielle smiled. "Hey Virgil!"

The young man went running down the road and caught up. "Hello, ladies." He laughed quietly and glanced around. "Good to see you four again." He smiled warmly.

"We were wondering if we'd see you." Hope shrugged and leaned against her staff.

Virgil sighed and shifted his weight to his left foot. "I know, got caught up in a few things. But things are fine now." His hands came up and he grasped his belt. "So, we ready to hit Potidaea?"

"Yup," answered Gabrielle a little dryly. She began walking again with her horse in tow.

The others followed and saw the outskirts of Potidaea coming into view. Once in Potidaea, they stabled their horses and made their way towards Gabrielle's home.

Gabrielle felt the excitement as she walked briskly towards home. "Xena ... it's thriving. I'm gonna see if the old house is still standing." She spotted her old home as everybody followed. "It looks so run down."

Virgil shrugged. "Nothing some paint couldn't cure."

Hope mock glared at the young man.

Eve smiled warmly before saying, "All that matters is that the people inside are alright."

The Warrior Princess grasped her lover's shoulder. "Go on."

The warrior-bard took a deep breath and said, "Here goes..." She jogged towards her home.

Everybody else brought up the rear slowly and with high hopes.

Gabrielle knocked on the door with a smile. She watched the door open quickly and there stood a short, brown haired, middle aged woman. "Lila," she whispered.

Lila beamed. "Gabrielle!" She pulled her sister in for a powerful hug.

Hope glanced towards the sky briefly and caught sight of the dark clouds. "Not good," she muttered.

Eve peered up and sighed at knowing her soulmate was right.

~*~*~*~

"A merchant told us that she was in his harem. Father sold most of the farm and he and Mother and my husband went to try and buy her back."

"What happened?" asked Gabrielle.

Lila took a deep breath and looked away while replying. "He beheaded all three of them. I don't know what happened to Sarah," she whispered painfully.

Gabrielle closed her eyes briefly, her anger rose, and she stood up. She stormed out of the house and out into the black night.

Hope, Eve, and Lila were moving but Xena was out the door.

"Gabrielle! Gabrielle, wait! I'm sorry, Gabrielle."

The warrior-bard stopped and fisted up her hands. "Xena, my niece may still be in that harem."

The Warrior Princess came closer. "We'll go after her first thing in the morning. If she's there, we'll get her out."

Hope and Eve came out of the house and stood on the porch, they listened.

"Xena, this is not just a rescue mission."

The dark warrior shook her head and asked, "What do you mean?"

"I want vengeance!" yelled Gabrielle.

Hope moved but was stopped by Eve's hand.

"No," whispered Eve. "It's between them... right now."

Gabrielle's daughter sighed and stayed beside her soulmate.

Xena was breathing heavy in fear. "It will have blood, Gabrielle. Blood will have blood."

The Amazon Queen narrowed her eyes. "Don't talk to me about consequences, Xena! That man murdered my mother and father!" she yelled as the rain came pouring down. "Now I kill him!" she declared in rage before walking off.

The Warrior Princess brushed back her wet bangs and stood in the rain. She watched her soulmate stalk off in anger.

"That's it, my turn," pronounced Hope. She jumped down the stairs and went running in the rain after her mother.

Eve sighed, walked down the steps, and joined her mother. "She won't be able to do it, mother."

"I know," whispered Xena. She watched Hope disappear in the distance. "But she'll get herself killed trying."

"Mom!"

Gabrielle stopped and turned around. She said nothing and stood there fuming in the rain.

Hope came up breathing heavily. "Don't do this." She pushed back her wet bangs. "It's suicidal to go after Gurkhan."

The mother narrowed her eyes and turned away.

Hope reached out and grabbed her mother's shoulder. "Don't," she stated coldly. "I am not going to lose my mother."

The older woman sighed and faced her daughter again. "He has a price to pay, Hope. He killed my parents."

"And must he add you to his list?"

"I won't get killed," growled the small warrior.

"Like Hades you won't because you're not going."

Gabrielle took a calming breath. "Hope, either way I am getting Sarah out of there." She shook her head. "Remember... she is your cousin as much as my niece."

"I know," agreed Hope. "We'll get Sarah out but leave Gurkhan alone. Please, mom you can't go after him. Don't risk your life for vengeance." She shook her head. "He'll win then."

Gabrielle's jaw clenched and unclenched in the rain. "Prices to pay." She turned away and walked on in the dark rainy night.

Hope closed her eyes tightly. She then quietly whispered, "Mom, please... I love you."

The mother stopped in her tracks, her eyes closed and she opened them while turning around.

The younger woman had a look of desperation. "Don't risk your life, mom. I love you

and can't lose you."

Gabrielle started crying suddenly and took steps closer. She pulled her daughter in tightly and held. "I love you too, Hope."

Hope dug her head into her mother's neck and cried as well.

~*~*~*~

Hope took a shaky breath, she left the house quietly.

Eve saw her soulmate leave, she narrowed her eyes in suspicion.

Gabrielle left the kitchen and came into the living room. She knelt down beside Eve. "She's going to face her past, help her," she whispered softly.

Xena's daughter stared at the warrior-bard then nodded. "I will," she ushered and stood. She left the house.

The small warrior watched Eve leave as Lila came up beside.

"I can't believe..." she trailed off.

The Amazon Queen breathed deeply and nodded without glancing to her sister. "Yeah, me too." She smiled faintly at Lila. "I have her back."

Lila smiled warmly. "Seems odd." She lost her smile. "She looks like you when you left here so long ago."

"Innocent," whispered Gabrielle.

Hope folded her arms against her chest as she neared the barn. The lightening, from the prior storm, flashed brightly. She sighed and opened the barn doors then refolded her arms. She stared at the inside of the rigid barn. She heard the grounding sound of the mill's stones inside. Lightening flashed and she saw the inside of the barn, it hadn't changed. The wind blew slightly as the lightening flashed again and lit up the world. Hope's eyes widened, for she thought she saw a figure inside of the barn.

"Hope," whispered Eve. She neared.

The small woman sighed in relief and glanced back to her soulmate. "Hey."

The warrior stood beside her partner. "Old barn huh?"

"Yeah," whispered Hope. She stared once more inside of the barn. "Just a barn," she ushered.

"Just a barn with a few memories," added Eve. She peered down at her partner. "What are the memories?"

The younger woman dropped her head and stared at the ground. "They're in the past, where they should be."

"But that doesn't mean they don't still attack you."

Gabrielle's daughter shook her head and turned away.

The warrior shifted instantly and grabbed her soulmate's hands. "But that doesn't mean you can't fight them back."

Hope locked eyes with her partner. "This was where I realized the truth about who I was." She glanced sidelong at the barn. "When I laid dying in my son's arms."

Eve sighed and knelt down and locked eyes. "Those days are over, Hope." She squeezed her soulmate's small hands. "You're not the same."

"I know," whispered Hope. "I've been told." She shook her head. "But Dahak is still in me, Eve." She narrowed her eyes. "And so is a portion of loyalty to him." She dropped her eyes. "Not even loyalty... more like attachment." She laughed bitterly.

"And it is the same for me with darkness, Hope." Eve paused. "We both can fight our inner enemies. And together." She took a deep breath. "What is it exactly about this barn?"

The small woman looked away. "Just my epiphany I had... I wanted to change but it was too late since I was dying." Her eyes focused on Eve. "And I didn't have the chance to tell Gabrielle... not even apologize for who I was."

"But look at where you are now." Eve smiled warmly. "You're here, a second chance, and Gabrielle as your mother. Gabrielle doesn't look at you the same way."

"Thank god," whispered Hope.

"Thank yourself," corrected Eve. She paused momentarily. "You got yourself away from Dahak, Gabrielle just gave you a good shove."

Hope laughed quietly. "Thank mom then." She smiled faintly. "I never imagined being here, being this person."

"It's no dream," whispered Eve.

The small woman nodded and lost her smile. "I was happy my son died too... the Destroyer." She huffed. "He was too loyal to Dahak." She rubbed her thumb against Eve's hands. "Despite I've always loved him." She chuckled. "Only a face a mother could love."

Eve rose up. She studied her soulmate then said seriously, "You're beautiful."

Hope grinned. "In what context?"

"In every context." The warrior lowered her head with a loving smile. "Mind, body, and soul." She kissed Hope softly.

The younger woman opened her eyes slowly when Eve pulled away. "One thing I do know is... I'm not going back to him."

Eve grinned. "No because you're mine."

~*Part 4*~

Hope walked silently along side her mother down the dock. "Don't do this," she whispered when they came near the ship.

"Sorry, Hope." Gabrielle faced her daughter with hard eyes. "I have to do this."

The younger woman sighed deeply and dropped her head. "Do this... get yourself killed?" She peered up with concern. "This... this..."

The mother grasped her daughter's shoulder. "This is right."

"Have you really questioned yourself if it is right?" asked Hope. Her eyes bore into the Amazon Queen's.

The small warrior was hesitant about replying but finally said, "No," honestly.

"Then just get Sarah out," demanded Hope. "And come back here... he'll pay for his crimes."

Gabrielle squeezed her daughter's shoulder then pulled her in for a hug. "I'll be back," she ushered.

Hope held tight.

Eve sighed at seeing her soulmate hugging her mother. She peered up to her own mother. "What you planning?"

Xena stopped walking down the dock. "I don't know... yet." She stared at her soulmate. "I'm just glad you and Hope are not coming." She glimpsed at her daughter. "You two don't need to get caught up in this."

Eve nodded briefly and held her hands behind her back. "I think Hope and I need to... fly from the nest."

The Warrior Princess chuckled deeply. "Yes well, the mother birds need a little alone time too." She folded her arms. "Just wish it was under better circumstances."

The daughter nodded in agreement. "I'm glad at least Virgil is going."

"Yeah," agreed the older warrior. "He'll be useful."

Eve chuckled and started walking down the dock more. "Be careful, mother. I don't like this."

"That makes two of us." Xena came to the gangplank and turned to her daughter. "We'll see you in a few weeks."

Eve corked an eyebrow. "A few weeks?" She grinned. "So a month huh?"

The Warrior Princess laughed deeply. "Could be... depends on how much trouble finds us."

"That won't be hard," muttered the daughter.

"We'll probably have the same problem, Eve," teased Hope, whom shifted and stood beside Eve.

Gabrielle reappeared next to Xena. She folded her arms. "Be careful you two." Her eyes flickered between the younger women. "You two will be targets."

"We know," mumbled Hope. She sighed. "We're big girls."

The Amazon Queen nodded and glimpsed up. "Ready?"

Xena nodded. "Yup," she said quietly.

Hope furrowed her eyebrows. "Where's Virgil?"

"He's on already," answered Gabrielle. "We'll see you both soon." She stepped forward and pulled Eve in for a long hug.

Hope studied Xena for a second then moved closer. "Xena?"

The Warrior Princess corked an eyebrow.

"Don't let her do it," whispered Hope. "Don't let her cross that line."

Xena smiled warmly. "She can't." She watched Gabrielle and Eve pull away. "Don't worry."

Hope nodded and smiled. "Thank you," she uttered.

The warrior nodded then found herself enveloped by a hug from Eve.

The Amazon Queen gave another long hug to Hope and whispered, "I love you, Hope."

Hope squeezed back tightly. "I love you too, mom."

Gabrielle pulled away slowly and kissed her daughter's forehead. "Take care, see you when we get back."

"I better," said Hope sternly.

The short warrior nodded and grasped her soulmate's arm. "Let's go."

Xena nodded and led the way up the gangplank. When on board, she noticed the ship already preparing to sail. She went to the rail with her partner.

Hope leaned against her staff as she stood beside Eve. She smiled up at the older soulmates.

The merchant ship dropped her sails, brought aboard her lines, and hauled her gangplank on board.

"Bye mom!" called Hope.

"Good luck, mother!" yelled Eve with a grin.

Xena shook her head and just waved.

Gabrielle folded her arms and smiled. "Behave you two!"

"Right!" replied Hope. "You know us."

"That's what your mom is saying," teased Xena. She laughed quietly. "Be careful you

both."

"Do you feel like five?" asked Eve quietly.

Hope snickered and nodded. "Yup," she replied. "And considering I missed that stage in my life, I like it."

Eve chuckled and nodded. "Agreed." She saw the ship leave the slip and head out into the mouth of the cove. "Bye Gabrielle and mother!"

The older soulmates waved with warm smile.

"See you soon mom and Xena!" Hope waved and watched the ship disappear out the cove. She sighed deeply while watching the stern of the ship head out into the sea.

"Well... we're on our own."

"Yup," replied Eve stoically. "Know how to cook?"

Hope's eyes widened. "Oh Hades!"

~*~*~*~

"I just forgot!" yelled Hope as she glanced over her shoulder to her partner. She turned her attention back to the fire.

"How could you forget to ask your mother how to cook?" growled Eve. "This rabbit is going to be a little bloody."

The smaller woman sighed as she tried to relax. "Hey, I just assumed you knew how to cook since you were apart of an army."

The pair in the late morning had left the port after seeing their parents leave. So they had traveled for most of the day and now made camp. The only battle they fought now was cooking a rabbit.

The warrior stalked close to her soulmate. She knelt down and held up rabbit by the legs. It dangled in mid air in Hope's face. "I can but it'll be one crispy critter," said Eve lowly.

Hope's eyes widened as she tried not to laugh. "Well, we can not cook it. The meat will be a little... raw."

"A little raw," mocked Eve. She moved the rabbit out of the way and locked eyes.

"Try very raw."

The smaller woman corked an eyebrow slowly. She wanted her soulmate to relax. "Maybe it won't taste so bad."

Eve narrowed her eyes.

"Hey," Hope said defensively, "How was I suppose to know I was the cook?"

"Because I assumed it," growled Eve.

The blond leaned towards Eve so that their noses touched. "Guess what?"

"What?" said Eve deeply.

"Assume just made an ass out of you and me."

The warrior's expression didn't shift and she said nothing.

Hope grinned evilly.

Eve closed her eyes and started laughing hard. She fell back on her butt and she propped her legs up.

The small woman sighed in victory and moved forward. She kissed her soulmate softly. "Sorry I didn't ask," she uttered at the end of the kiss.

The warrior smiled warmly. "Not your fault." Her free hand came up and brushed back Hope's hair. "We'll figure something out."

"Okay." Hope paused and took a deep breath trying to think. "How about... you..." Her eyes flickered to the rabbit off to the left. "Skin the rabbit." Her attention came back on Eve. "And I'll try to cook it. Alright?"

The dark woman corked an eyebrow.

"I know," sighed Gabrielle's daughter. "Key words... I'll try." She grinned.

"I'm sure it'll come out better than me doing it," joked the older woman.

"You're probably right," teased Hope but she smiled warmly. "Come on, my stomach is growling." She kissed her warrior warmly again.

Eve pulled back from the kiss slowly. "So is mine but for..." she stopped and stood up.

Hope narrowed her eyes at her partner. "Uh huh." She stood and strutted over to the horse.

The taller woman laughed deeply and disappeared into the forest to clean the rabbit.

"Hey Eve?" yelled Hope from the horse's side. She was sifting through the supplies in the saddlebags.

"Yeah?" called Eve from the woods.

"Have you named the horse?"

The warrior furrowed her eyebrows while continuing to skin the rabbit. "No," she answered.

"You need too," replied the smaller woman as she pulled out some herbs. "You just can't go around calling him... the horse." She chuckled.

The bay glanced at Hope and huffed.

"Yeah I agree," whispered Hope.

"What's wrong with... the horse?" teased Eve. She bent down to clean her dagger.

The small woman turned away from *the horse* with the spices in hand. "Well, can I call you the warrior for now on?"

Eve reappeared from the woods with the skinned rabbit in one hand and a green tree limb for skewering in the other hand. "You may have a point there." She grinned.

Hope chuckled and shook her head. "Call him something like... Jester." She shrugged while walking over to the fire.

"Jester?" The tall woman shook her head. "Jester... like a court jester of jokes?" She walked near her partner.

The blond glared at her soulmate. "No, Jester like in Jester."

"Love, Jester is not a horse name," stated the warrior.

"Whatever," mumbled the younger woman. "I don't care," grumbled the smaller woman. "You could just call him Dipstick for all I care."

Eve laughed while skewering the rabbit. "I'm going to go saddle up Dipstick," she teased in mockery.

Hope glared at her soulmate. "Give me the damn rabbit."

The warrior chuckled and handed over the rabbit.

The small woman took it and dabbed the spices on carefully.

"Mmm I could name him after you... Optimism."

Hope wagged the skewered, spiced, and skinned rabbit at her partner. "Hardy har har." She smirked. "Just call him Adam."

Eve didn't respond as she thought about the name. "Adam huh?"

Gabrielle's daughter laughed quietly. She bent down and placed the rabbit over the fire.

The warrior glimpsed over towards *the horse*. "Hey Adam?"

The horse's ears perked up and he whined.

Hope rose up slowly.

Eve turned her head quickly to her partner. "No, Adam doesn't sound right."

The horse pouted and dropped his ears. He just wanted an apple from Eve.

The young woman shrugged. "Then call him Dipstick." Hope smirked and strolled off to get her scroll satchel.

"Maybe we should just call him *the horse*." Eve shrugged.

"You ride him, not me." Hope put the spices away and removed her scroll satchel. "The horse with no name." She chuckled. Turning around, she strolled back towards the fire. "How about Shamrock?" She shrugged. "Then you can call him Shamy too."

The warrior considered the name as she studied the brown horse. "Shamrock?" she asked *the horse*.

The horse whined and bobbed his head up and down. He stamped his right hoof on the ground.

"Huh, he likes it," said Eve softly.

"So call him Shamrock," declared Hope when she came beside her partner.

Eve smiled and leaned down. She kissed her soulmate strongly.

The smaller woman moaned softly while grasping the warrior's hips. She pulled back reluctantly. "Alright, I don't feel like burning the food."

The older woman grinned and kissed her soulmate's forehead. "Later," she whispered and walked over to Shamrock.

~*~*~*~

The soulmates had eaten dinner and were soon resting in each other's arms in front of the fire. They gradually let sleep come after them as they relaxed together.

"So, we don't even know where we're going?" asked Hope.

Eve chuckled deeply while tightening her arms around her soulmate. "We're headed northeast right now."

"Then where?"

"Wherever."

The small woman shook her head. "This must be what our mothers did."

"Uh huh." Eve propped her legs up. She'd take her armor off and weapons. She only wore her leather top and skirt that stayed hidden under the bronze gold like armor.

"Tell me about your telekinesis."

Hope shrugged and rested back into her partner's body. "Nothing to tell." She paused. "I can just lift things mentally."

"And why didn't you say anything sooner?"

"Don't know," muttered the small woman.

Xena's daughter sighed deeply. "Maybe because you were worried about my... reaction?"

"Something like that," muttered Hope again.

"Wanna know my reaction?" asked Eve seriously.

"Yes," whispered Hope

The warrior tilted her soulmate's head back, she leaned down, and sealed her lips over Hope's in a loving kiss.

Hope smiled warmly at the end of the kiss. "Thank you," she said quietly. "I love you."

"I love you too, Hope." Eve finished her words with another kiss.

The small woman pulled away from the kiss slowly. "You know, I am still awed by your powers."

The dark female laughed deeply. "Nothing special here."

"Mmmm, my eyes see differently," said Hope seriously.

Eve grinned devilishly. "And things are getting a little hot around here."

"The fire," guessed Hope.

"I don't think so." The warrior went serious and stood up with her partner in her arms.

"I do have legs that let me walk."

The taller woman laughed. "Alright, I don't have to carry you in my arms... close to my body."

"Not that I don't like it or anything," retorted Hope hastily.

"Thought so," Xena's daughter teased. She carried Hope near the bedrolls and lowered her down on the bedroll carefully. She strolled back to the fire to get the weapons.

Hope rolled onto her side to watch her partner. "I love the fact we sleep with each other... and our weapons," she said dryly.

The tall woman grinned and came over. "Sorry, but it'll save our lives." She knelt down putting the staff on the opposite side and her sword with whip down on her side.

"I know," huffed the small woman. She reached down to pull the fur over and held it up as Eve lay down. She tugged the fur over top of their bodies.

"Come here," said Eve softly. She pulled her soulmate on top of her body so that Hope's back pressed into her body. She adjusted the fur and wrapped her arms around Hope's stomach. "Look up."

Slowly green eyes focused straight up to the dark sky. Then the sparkles and twinkles of the stars began to reappear to Hope. "They're beautiful."

"Uh huh." The warrior's fingertips trailed up and down Hope's warm stomach under the blanket. "I tried often to sleep under the stars when I was leading the Roman legions."

"I can see why," whispered Hope. Her head stayed resting on Eve's chest while she studied the stars. "There are so many of them." She turned her head a little. "Huh, I wonder if they represent everybody's dreams in the world... considering how many there are."

Eve chuckled deeply and smiled to herself. "Maybe." She brought one hand out from under the furs. She pointed up. "See those stars?"

"Yeah."

"Looks like a dipper huh?" The tall woman slipped her hand back under the furs.

Hope furrowed her eyebrows and looked harder. "No... looks like a bear."

"What?" Eve quietly laughed. "How do you get a bear out of a dipper?"

The small woman sighed and now slipped her hand out from the furs. She pointed at the various stars. "See, it looks like a bear."

"No, it's a dipper."

"Bear."

"Dipper."

"Bear."

"Dipper."

"It's a damn bear," growled Hope.

Eve closed her eyes and rolled into laughter.

Gabrielle's daughter sighed deeply and her lips played an amused smile. Her hand snaked back under the fur. "Some imagination you have if you're seeing dippers," she teased.

The older woman calmed down from her laughing. "Not very big huh?"

"Nah," whispered the small woman. She turned over onto her stomach. "I wouldn't have thought of a dipper."

"So you do see it then?" The warrior grinned evilly.

Hope groaned. "Yes," she mumbled when she dropped her head into Eve's neck.

"Good," said Eve confidently. "Glad we agree on something."

The small woman chuckled and lifted her head. "You see the bear?"

"No," deadpanned Eve.

Hope narrowed her eyes. "Fine we're not having star discussion... sharing time anymore."

The dark woman laughed quietly but smiled warmly. "I see the bear too."

"I'd hope so," whispered the blond. She lowered her head and kissed Eve lovingly.

When Hope pulled back, Eve grinned. "So, this means we still have star sharing time?"

"I guess so." Hope grinned back.

The older woman laughed and pressed her lips against her soulmate's forehead. "Let's

get some sleep huh? Been a long day."

"Yeah." The small woman sighed and lowered the side of her head on Eve's chest. "You know, I already miss them."

"Me too," whispered Eve. "But I'm sure they're fine."

"I hope so." Hope closed her eyes. "I'm worried about mom."

"I know." The warrior tightened her arms around her soulmate. "I'm sure mother will keep her from getting hurt."

"Yeah, that's your mother."

Eve chuckled and closed her eyes. "Go to sleep huh?"

"Yes ma'am," teased Hope. "Sleep well, love."

"I love you," whispered Eve.

Hope felt her control on staying awake slipping so she just mumbled out, "I love you forever," before falling asleep.

Eve fell asleep with a warm smile.

~*Part 5*~

"Are you ready, yet?" asked Eve stoically.

Hope cocked an eyebrow while pulling the scroll satchel strap across her head. She adjusted the strap accordingly and leaned against her staff. She stared at her soulmate standing in the sunrise light. "Why'd you wake me up so early?"

"Because we need to get going," drew out the warrior. She turned around and took Shamrock's reins. "Let's go."

The small woman grinned. "Hold your horses... horse." She chuckled and straightened up.

Eve sighed and glanced back at her partner. "What?" She put her hands on her hips. "I'd really like to get going."

"Just a second." The younger woman strolled up with a grin. "There's something I still need to do."

The tall woman raised an eyebrow.

Hope chuckled, came close, dropped her staff against Shamrock, and reached up. Slowly, she pulled Eve's head down. Sealing their lips, she kissed Eve slowly and warmly.

The warrior moaned quietly, dropped the reins, and encircled Hope's waist.

Hope ended the kiss carefully and smiled at her partner. "Now, that's how I like to start my day," she whispered affectionately. Her hands stayed behind Eve's neck.

"Me too," agreed the warrior. She grinned. "You're just trying to get me to drop my act."

"Sssh, you're not suppose to figure that part out," uttered the small woman. She was still smiling warmly. "I love you."

"And I love you," Eve whispered as she finished the distance. She kissed Hope sensually.

"Mmmm," moaned Hope when she ended the kiss. "We better start moving now."

"Afraid of what I might do to you?" teased the warrior.

The younger woman smirked and shifted out of Eve's embrace. She grabbed her staff and began walking while saying, "No, more afraid of what I'll do to you."

Xena's daughter laughed deeply and took the reins. She walked briskly and caught up with her soulmate. "Nothing I wouldn't enjoy."

"That makes two of us," muttered Hope with a grin.

~*~*~*~

"What's this stuff again?" asked Hope, who was poking the foreign object with her fork. She sat in a seat in the corner of a small tavern.

Eve lifted her eyes. "Its Roman."

The small woman dropped her shoulders and peered up. "What is it, Eve?" She studied the object on her plate again, the supposed food. "It looks alive still." She squinted.

The warrior grinned. "It's a rare delicacy in Rome." She studied the 'food' on Hope's plate then looked at her soulmate again. "Try it." She was just holding back her wild grin.

"Not till I know what it is," stated the small woman.

"It is a glis," told Eve. She tilted her head. "Won't kill you."

"A glis?" Gabrielle's daughter peered up. "Define."

"More like translate."

"Alright," drew out Hope as she poked at the glis more. "Translate."

"Glis is Latin for..." Eve studied the glis with a grin. "Dormouse."

Hope's eyes widen and she jumped up from her seat. She dropped her fork in mid-motion. "Oh gods!" she yelled and stared at the glis on her plate. "A mouse?" She shivered.

The older woman laughed hard and shook her head. "Basically."

The small woman shook her head, staring at the dormouse, and shivering. "No never again, I am not letting you recommend my meals."

The warrior snickered and relaxed back in her seat. "Try it, it's quite popular among the aristocracy of Rome."

"That's... that's okay." Hope grabbed her seat and carried it near Eve. She sat down beside her soulmate. "I'll get you for this." She glared at her warrior.

Eve grinned back. "You're not going to eat it now?"

"No," growled Hope. "Why don't you?"

"I have," revealed the dark woman.

The blond's eyes widened.

The warrior chuckled and folded her hands in her lap. "But I spit it back out once I knew what it was."

"Good," whispered Hope. She glanced over at the glis and actually could see that it once was a mouse. "That is ssso sick." She shivered again.

Xena's daughter laughed quietly and studied the tavern. "It wouldn't have killed you."

"Yeah right." Hope shook her head. "Think about where that things been?" She leaned back in her chair. "Couldn't even pay me."

Eve grinned and caught sight of their barmaid when she came near. She smiled. "Can we get... a different platter here for this young... miss." She smirked at her partner.

Hope glared. Quickly she looked up to the barmaid. "Not that I don't like... dormice but I'm trying to quit." She smiled forcefully.

The barmaid laughed and took the plate. "What would you like?"

"Something... normal... chicken."

The barmaid nodded and disappeared.

The small woman shook her head, stretched out her legs, and dropped her laced hands in her lap. "I still can't believe you did that."

Eve sighed and patted her soulmate's leg. "You'll live." She grinned evilly. "Was a great joke."

"Wait till I get you back."

"That will be... interesting." She scanned around in the tavern. "Are you going to go sit back on your side?"

"Why?" Hope teased, "Don't want me here?"

The older woman grinned and stretched her legs out momentarily. "The closer the better."

"Yeah?" Gabrielle's daughter shifted her face into a smug look. "So, can I sit in your lap?"

"I don't think so." The warrior had a stoic expression.

"Uh huh." The small woman leaned towards her partner. "I know you'd just love me in your lap with my hands-"

"Hope," growled Eve. She gave a stern look. She lifted her eyes to the tavern.

Hope stood up, grasped her chair but leaned over. She whispered, "Cut back on the warrior attitude." She paused with a serious look and demanding eyes. "Trust me, two can do that game." She straightened up and walked back on her side with the chair.

And that had been the better part of their lunch that midday.

~*~*~*~

Hope leaned against her staff, waiting outside of the stable. She studied the people going by in the small town. Lunch had just ended and she and her partner were getting ready to travel on the road again. She sighed and dropped her head against the staff. It was time for her to be a hard ass. "Eve, are you ready?" she asked deeply. Her ears filled with the clip clop of the Shamrock coming out of the stables.

Eve towed her horse out and came along side her soulmate. "Yeah, let's move."

"Good," stated Hope. She straightened up and led the way through the village.

The warrior narrowed her eyes and sighed. She followed behind.

The small woman studied the people around. Then she exited out of the village on the main road.

Eve was still following with an emotionless attitude. But she heard a sword unsheathing. "Hope?" she whispered in warning.

"What?" growled the small woman.

"Hope!" yelled Eve as she dropped her reins at seeing a man jump out of the trees after her partner. She sprung forward, pushed Hope out of the way, and was sent on the ground by the attacker.

Shamrock whined and jumped up followed by stamping backwards out of the way.

Hope whirled around with her staff raised.

The warrior growled at the man on top of her.

The thug grinned as he held his blade across the woman's throat. "You damn bitch."

Eve laughed. "I love it when I'm called that." She narrowed her eyes suddenly and rolled. She came on top of the man with her hands on his sword blade. She started pressing his sword down towards his neck.

Hope's eyes were wide and she stepped back. She never knew, for a man came up behind her and grabbed her staff. Before she could react, there was an arm across her stomach and sword against her neck.

"Alright woman, get off him or she'll be breathing out of her neck soon," ordered

Hope's attacker.

Eve stayed on top of the man, staring into his eyes. She narrowed her eyes and stood up. She stepped back with her hands up. "Alright boys, no harm done." She smiled with anger. "Let her go."

The first thug stood up with his sword pointed at Eve. "I doubt that."

Hope's tongue ran along her molars. *I hate being the captive*, she thought. *I'm just not a nice person either*, she added with an inward grin. She raised her right arm just a little and her eyes locked with Eve.

Eve tilted her head in question at Hope. "What you want?"

The first thug grinned. "Her and your life... and any money."

Hope grinned to her soulmate as her elbow came up just a little more. Without notice, she rammed her right elbow into her captor's stomach.

The captor yelped and found small hands pushing his sword away.

The first thug was surprised.

The warrior drew her sword, punched the first thug, and punched Hope's captor.

By that time, Hope was free and stumbling back. She went after her staff and found her captor after her again.

Eve saw her partner starting to fight the second thug. So she returned her attention to the first thug. He was coming around and she took him on.

By the end of it, the two thugs were stumbling towards each other almost beat. That's when they decided it was better to flee today and fight tomorrow. So they went sprinting off in retreat but one stopped before disappearing. He reached to his belt and extracted a dagger. He growled and threw it towards Eve.

Eve lifted her hands.

"I don't think so." Hope narrowed her eyes and focused her mind on the flying dagger.

The dagger stopped in midair, spun around, and went reeling back towards its owner.

The thug ducked as the dagger slammed into a tree. He looked at Hope with fear then ran away.

The small woman chuckled. "I should have done that sooner."

Eve sheathed her sword. "Are you alright?"

The young woman nodded. "Yeah, you?"

"Fine." The warrior went near Shamrock and took his reins. "You ready?"

"Um... yeah," whispered Hope. She began traveling again along side her partner like nothing ever happened.

~*~*~*~

Hope sighed deeply. She lifted her eyes from the scroll and stared across the small river. She sat on a large rock along the shore and behind her not too far was the camp. It was late in the day with the sun preparing to set soon. Her eyes lowered back to the parchment and she reread her work...

I was so lost,

Before you stepped,

Into my life,

I was so lost.

Since the day,

My eyes locked with yours,

I haven't returned,

From this world of love,

And I never will.

So won't you join,

Me here?

In this blessed,

World of love's perfection,

Where we can become,

One,

So won't you join,

Me here?

Hope sighed again and looked up. *Will you join me, Eve?* She asked herself while staring at the sun's setting rays reflect off the river. *Because you're busy being a warrior again.* Now she felt her body warming up and she knew why. Warm hands grasped her shoulders.

Eve stared at the sunset on the river. "Beautiful," she whispered.

The small woman nodded simply. "What we doing about dinner?"

"Same partnership on the idea. I catch, you cook?"

"Sure," answered the young woman. She rolled up her scroll but kept it in her lap with the quill. "Why don't you go get it now?" she asked a little coldly.

The warrior even flinched. She squeezed her soulmate's shoulders. "If that's what you want." She released her partner's shoulders and walked off.

Hope closed her eyes tightly. "Eve?" she whispered.

The tall woman stood near the edge of the forest. "Yes?" she replied without looking back.

"That's... not what I want."

Her head turned sidelong. "Then what is it that you desire, Hope?"

Hope turned her head towards Eve. Her eyes were filled with a mix of love and pain. "You."

Eve faced her soulmate. She studied Hope then walked towards her without breaking eye contact.

Gabrielle's daughter could feel her stomach turning in fear.

The warrior grasped her partner's sides and peered down into warm but worried green eyes. She smiled tenderly and leaned down. Her lips carefully pressed against Hope's then she deepened the kiss slowly.

Hope moaned softly and held onto her warrior's arms.

Eve pulled back but kept her eyes locked. "You have me," she promised with her heart. She smiled with love.

Hope shook her head a little. "But you're falling into your warrior side so much. And I know its going to get stronger."

The warrior chuckled faintly. "Don't worry, love." She brushed back some stray blond bangs. "Just give me one of your smiles and I'll fall to my knees." She went serious. "I'll be more careful." She leaned in and kissed her soulmate's forehead.

The small woman smiled happily. "Thank you," she said sincerely. "I love warriors but not all the time."

Eve grinned devilishly. "You like a little emotions now and again?"

Hope corked an eyebrow. "Yes," she responded.

The tall woman laughed deeply. "I'll try... no promises for now... and no sensitive chats."

The young woman grinned. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Right," Eve answer with sarcasm. "You're the queen of sensitive chats."

"Ha!" Hope shook her head. "Mom is."

"Alright, you're the princess," the warrior teased.

"That... I can't go against." Hope lost her smile.

The older woman picked up her partner's scroll and quill. She placed them on the ground then returned her attention to Hope. "Come here."

Hope moved into her soulmate's arms.

Eve pulled her other half in close and held.

The small woman buried her head into Eve's chest and closed her eyes. "I love you, Eve," she whispered.

"I love you," replied back Eve.

~*~*~*~

"You couldn't have caught that!" yelled Hope. She shook her head and stared at the fire. She checked the quail again.

"Yes I could have," stated Eve for the fifth time. She turned around and stared at her partner's back in the dark camp.

"Well... I have to exercise my telekinesis."

"Uh huh," responded the warrior. She strolled over. "You just wanted to show off."

"Me?" said Hope hotly. She jumped up and spun around. She pointed a finger at her soulmate. "And you wanted to catch it? That's not showing off?"

Eve smirked and folded her arms while leaning on one foot. "Nope, Hope."

The small woman glared. "Alright... weavie Evie."

The warrior's jaw clenched and unclenched. "Look Hope, just cope."

"No," declared the young woman with a smirk. "Because I wanna peeve Eve."

"You're doing a damn good job of it."

Hope snickered and rested her hands on her soulmate's waist. "Gee Eve, can't you handle a joke?"

The tall woman sighed and rolled her eyes. "Alright... alright you win."

The young woman went on tiptoes then kissed her soulmate apologetically. She fell back on her heels at the end of the kiss. "Sorry, couldn't help it."

"I deserved it considering I started it." Eve unfolded her arms and encircled the other woman's waist. "I could have caught it."

"No you couldn't have."

"Yes I could have," growled the warrior.

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Yesss."

"Nooo."

"Yes, damn it," growled Eve again.

Hope sighed. "Alright, let's make a bet?"

"Oh, this'll be good."

The small woman laughed quietly and thought. "If you catch three daggers I'll... tack up Shamrock for three days straight."

"If I miss one dagger, you win, and I'll let you sleep in for three days straight." The warrior raised an eyebrow. "Deal?"

"Deal," declared Hope and she sealed the pack with a kiss. "Let's do it now," she said at the end of the kiss.

"In the dark!?" yelled Eve.

~*~*~*~

Lifting the dagger, Hope raised an eyebrow. "Are you ready?"

Eve rolled her eyes. "Yes." She stood next to the fire in the night. "Just throw it."

The small woman pulled her arm back but never threw. "Eve, you sure about this?"

"Yes," growled the warrior.

"But what if you miss?"

"I won't," stated Xena's daughter. "I'll catch it."

Hope tilted her head. "You promise?"

"Yes," responded Eve with frustration. "Just throw it."

"Okay," whispered Hope. She breathed calmly and threw the dagger hard.

Eve narrowed her eyes and let all her senses come to life.

The dagger flew towards Eve, closing in, then it stopped in midair suddenly.

"Hope!" roared the warrior.

The dagger hovered in the air scant inches from Eve.

"I can't do it," revealed the younger woman. Hope kept her mind focused on the dagger. "What if you miss? You'll have a dagger sticking out of your side." She mentally backed up the dagger and plucked it out of the air.

"Hope, look at me?"

The small woman locked eyes across the camp.

"I won't miss, I swear." Eve smiled warmly. "You do trust me, right?"

Hope sighed. "Yes of course just..."

"Don't worry, just think of how you'll get to mother me if I get a dagger in me." She chuckled.

The younger woman narrowed her eyes. "That's not funny."

Eve sighed. "Come on, just throw it. I'll catch it." She grinned with evil. "I am not about to let you sleep in during the mornings."

Hope narrowed her eyes. "We'll see..."

"We won't if you don't throw it," jibed the warrior. "So throw it!"

Hope growled and threw the dagger hard.

Eve grinned, leaned to her right, and her left hand swooped up to pluck the dagger out of midair. She smirked and waved the dagger at her soulmate.

Hope huffed. "Lucky."

"Right," teased Eve with a deep voice. "It's called skill." She tossed the dagger towards her partner.

The small woman narrowed her eyes as the dagger came at her. She mentally stopped the dagger and slowly lowered it. She grabbed it out of the air by the blade. "Alright, let's try the other side."

"Bring it on," challenged the warrior.

The young woman pulled back her hand and threw the dagger.

Eve repeated the process but the opposite way. She leaned to her left as her right hand shot up and grabbed the dagger by the handle. She had a smug look while tossing the dagger in the air and catching it again. "Yup yup... two caught and one left." She grinned and threw the dagger at Hope again.

Hope stopped it in midair and snatched it out of the air. "Ready for this?" She grinned.

The warrior nodded and closed her eyes. "Go."

"Eve-"

"Go," growled the older woman.

The small woman shook her head and threw the dagger hard.

Eve heightened all her senses and waited for the dagger to enter her zone.

Hope raised her right hand and did a circle in midair with her index finger.

The dagger flipped around and closed in by the handle first.

The warrior felt the dagger close and in fluent motion she raised her right hand quickly. Her hand wrapped around the end of the handle. She opened her eyes and smirked. "Three in a row." She glanced over at her bay. "Shamrock, Hope will tack up

tomorrow and the next two days."

The horse whined and stamped his foot in laughter.

Hope put her hands on her hips, stared at her soulmate, and ran her tongue along her molars. She bit back her huge grin at knowing what she had done. "Well..."

Eve grinned and strolled to her soulmate. "Need I prove myself further?"

"Nope." The young woman folded her arms. "You won the bet."

"Hmmm." The warrior grinned while lifting the dagger. She pressed it against her lips as her eyes twinkled.

Hope laughed deeply and shook her head. "Alright alright..." She shrugged and walked off. "Sorry I was looking after your well being earlier today."

Eve chuckled and came up behind her partner. "Its okay, my pride was hurt... I'll admit."

"I'm sure its fine now," teased Hope.

"Definitely, it's normal again." Xena's daughter chuckled and neared her bay. She sheathed the dagger inside of the saddlebag. "But I'll wager..." she spun around and faced her partner. "That your pride has been pricked."

Hope said nothing and just corked an eyebrow. "Maybe."

"Maybe," repeated Eve. She smiled and closed in the distance. "I think so." She grasped her soulmate's hips. "Sorry," she whispered in a sincere tone.

"It's not a big deal," replied the younger woman. Her right hand came forward then pressed against Eve's stomach. "I'm rather glad to know you can catch daggers... if I couldn't stop them with a thought." She grinned.

The warrior lowered her head with a soft smile. She felt the tiny heat spot at her stomach where Hope's hand pressed. "Thank you for stopping the dagger earlier today."

"Yeah well..." Hope shrugged with her own smile. "Did it because I love you. Have to protect what's mine." Her hands moved to hold Eve around the waist.

"I know what you mean," uttered Eve. She lowered her head more and pressed her lips against warmer lush lips.

Hope, in an instant, deepened the kiss and poured her passion into the kiss. For her body was tingling like she'd been hit by thousands of love's needles. She pulled away breathing heavily and dark eyes. "Eve," she whispered sensual.

"Bedrolls, that way," teased Eve a little.

"Oh, this is a slow paced relationship... so we'll take a slow pace making it to the bedroll," teased back the small woman with passion swirled eyes. "Because this'll be a wild ride."

"Is that a challenge?" questioned the warrior when her eyes went dark. "I love a good

challenge."

"Good," whispered Hope. "Let's see who will win." She pulled her soulmate's head down and kissed her roughly.

The warrior pulled back slowly but didn't grin only smiled softly. "We said slow." She kissed her partner gently this time while murmuring, "And loving... passion later... please."

Hope melted into the warm words. "Gentle it is then... for now," she teased.

Eve chuckled and lowered her lips down. She kissed Hope's neck softly.

"Besides," Hope whispered between her moan. "I wouldn't know... what to do."

"Anything natural," replied the warrior as her soft lips trailed across the hot skin.

The small woman moan louder, brought her hands threw thick black hair.

Eve's hands slid up Hope's warm stomach to the bottom of the green halter-top. Then her lips trailed down Hope's chest towards the top of her chest. Then her head came back instantly and captured Hope's lips in a strong kiss. Her hands came up and began unlacing the halter-top.

The younger woman's hands came up and helped Eve unlace the top.

Within a couple or so seconds the halter-top was being removed.

Hope brought her arms back, taking the top green top off, and this made her breasts come out.

The warrior leaned back in for a long sensual kiss and her hands moved to massage perfectly round breasts.

The smaller woman groaned into the kiss and she held tight onto Eve's hips.

Eve ended the kiss by releasing slowly Hope's lower lip from sucking. She knelt down a little and leaned in with her mouth covering an erect nipple. She sucked carefully to start while her other hand took care of the other breast.

Hope moaned deeply and grasped Eve's shoulders. "Eve," she whispered in a plea.

The warrior grinned into her teasing of the breast. She gave bite to the nipple and heard Hope suck in a breath. Her tongue snaked out and swirled around the nipple then around the breast. She gave more sucking and teeth grazing over the heated skin before switching breasts.

Hope arched her back, which in turn pressed her breasts more into her soulmate's touch.

Eve grasped her partner's skirt by the belt with one hand. Her fingertips slid under the belt.

The small woman let go of her warrior's shoulder and brought that hand to her belt. She was soon pushing her skirt down with her soulmate's help.

Eve lowered herself to her knees, and glided her hot lips over Hope's warm stomach. Her tongue came out slightly and left a wet trail down the sweaty stomach. Both her hands grasped the sides of her soulmate's skirt. She pulled the skirt down.

Hope helped some but grasped Eve's shoulders again. But stepped out of the skirt. She looked down and watched her warrior's lush lips covered her mound. The fire exploded inside on contact. Her eyes drifted shut but she felt Eve's hand signal for her to spread. Hope widen her legs open and brought her right hand down to spread open her folds.

Eve ran her tongue along the wet clit and through the folds. Her left hand held onto Hope's waist while her right pressed against Hope's lower abdomen.

"Oh gods," Hope uttered and dug her nails into her soulmate's shoulder.

The warrior continued to roll her tongue through folds and graze the clit. She let her two forefingers of her right hand tease the tips of the folds.

The fire swept through Hope and the beads of sweat rolled down her body. She pushed her hips into her soulmate's mouth.

Eve nipped at Hope's clit and ran tongue through the soft flesh, letting the increasing sweet juice slid into her mouth. Then her tongue began moving faster. She gave another bite, then slipped her forefingers between the folds and rubbed hard and quickly.

The small woman's breathing was matching the pace of her soulmate's fingers. Her right hand was back on Eve's shoulder with nails digging more into Eve's shoulder.

The warrior sped up her pace so the small orgasm would follow soon.

Hope felt her body wash over with passion and the heat screamed. So she dropped her head back and yelled, "Eve!" After the passion passed through her lips, she fell forward against Eve.

Eve wrapped her arms around her soulmate and rose up. She drew her partner in closely and held tightly.

Hope's eyes were closed, her head dug into hot breasts as she tried to breathe normally again. She had her hands holding onto Eve's hips. "That was... nice."

Eve grinned and lowered her lips close to Hope's ear. "It's just started."

"Oh god..." whispered Hope. "What else is there?"

"A lot more," purred the warrior. She picked up her soulmate and carried her to the bedrolls.

~*Part 6*~

"Hope, wake up," whispered Eve. She brushed back blond bangs while kneeling beside the bedroll.

"Not... yyyet," mumbled the small woman.

Eve shook her head with a grin. "Shamrock needs to be tacked up," she teased.

"You tack... him up," uttered Hope as she rolled away.

The warrior grinned. "But remember, I won the bet."

"Ooooh Hell," growled the small woman sleepily. "What time is it?"

"Late." Eve bent down and whispered to Hope, "We both won the bet... since you flipped the last dagger in midair last night." She paused and let it sink in with Hope. "You sleep in and tack up Shamrock." She patted her lover's shoulder and rose up.

"Damn," murmured the blond and opened her eyes. She rolled onto her back. "How'd you know?"

The dark woman strolled over to the fire. "Because I anticipated catching it by the tip of the handle but I caught it by the end of the handle."

"Double damn," huffed the small woman. She sighed and brushed back her bangs. "I just couldn't..."

"I know," answered Eve. "That's why I'll let you sleep in for the next three days... but you have to tack up Shamrock."

"Alright." Hope grinned and stood up in the nude. "Where'd my clothes get to last night?"

"Over there." Eve pointed.

"Right," murmured the small woman. She collected her skirt, put it on and followed it with her green halter-top.

The warrior put the fire out and came up behind her lover. Her arms snaked around the warm stomach. "So, how you feel after last night?"

Hope chuckled and continued lacing her top up. "As good as you do." She smiled softly.

"Good," whispered the taller woman. She kissed Hope's neck. "No regrets?"

"Definitely not," whispered Hope. She finished lacing her top and she leaned back into Eve. "You?"

"No." The warrior held onto her soulmate for a few moments. She then said, "Don't forget to tack up-"

"Yeah, yeah... you know how to ruin a moment."

Eve chuckled and kissed Hope's shoulder. "You'll live." She released the smaller woman.

Hope sighed before strolling over to Shamrock. "Alright." She grabbed the face tack off the tree's branch. She stared at it with furrowed eyebrows. She glanced over to her lover. "Eve?"

"Yeah?"

"How you tack a horse up?"

~*~*~*~

Hope gazed around the area. She continued traveling along side her soulmate, whom rode Shamrock. She studied the surrounding forest and noticed the road came out of the forest now. The rolling hills came into view and it made Hope shiver. "Eve," she whispered.

Eve glanced down and noticed her partner was walking closer to her horse. "What's wrong?" She stopped Shamrock.

"Can... I ride with you?" asked the small woman with tinted fear.

The warrior held her hand down. "Come on." She felt her breathing pick up faintly at seeing this fear. She lifted Hope up into the front of the saddle. She wrapped one arm around Hope's waist and pulled her in. "What is it?"

The small woman breathed calmly, trying to relax. "We're near Dahak's temple." She held tight to her staff in her right hand. "I can just feel him from here," she uttered.

"Where's the temple?"

Hope pointed northwest. "In that direction... probably three candlemarks walk." She lowered her hand then grasped the saddle horn. "Eve, I don't like this."

"Alright, we're going the other way." Eve tugged on Shamrock's reins and kicked him. She headed southeast. She held tight to her soulmate. Her back was ridged and her senses at their peak. Why was she so worried? Dahak was gone and couldn't enter this world without Hope. So, what's there to worry about? That's what had Eve worried, those questions. And the small prickles she felt on her back.

Section 2

The pair came into a small town. They both walked side by side and rather close.

Hope studied the small village before peering up to her partner. "Are we staying for the night?"

The warrior nodded. "If you would like to."

The small woman considered the idea. "Yeah, let's stay."

Eve grinned and chuckled. "Alright." She directed herself and Hope through the town. She found a stable and went in. "Can you open the door?"

Hope nodded and walked ahead. She opened a stall door and watched her soulmate go in with her horse. "Want me to go get a room?"

Eve glanced back. "No, not without me."

The younger woman corked an eyebrow. "Worried I can't do it on my own?"

The warrior shot a small glare. "You know that's not it." She was untacking her bay. "I don't like you being by yourself," she said quietly.

"Oh gods, come on. I can handle myself," stated the small woman proudly. "How many people can say they have telekinesis?"

"Exactly my point." Eve turned her head and had a stern expression. "Eli only knows, what people would do if they found out you did."

Hope sighed before dropping her arms and chin onto the stall door. "Worry wart," she muttered with a smirk.

The warrior sighed with a grin. She grabbed the saddlebag and came over to the door. "You know you love it."

The small woman chuckled, straightened up, and opened the door for her lover. "Do we have enough money for a room?"

Eve shrugged. "We'll be okay."

"We'll be okay?" Hope closed the stall door after Eve came out. "What's that mean? We're short?"

"Just come on," replied Eve. She headed for the inn.

The smaller woman sighed and followed behind with her staff. *We're low on money*, thought Hope, *that means we need to find a means of getting more*. Slowly ideas came into Hope's mind about how to get more money. She eased a grin across her lips as the perfect idea came.

"Can we get a room for tonight?" inquired Eve with the innkeeper.

The man glanced up and down Hope and Eve's forms. "Allright," he drew out. "It'll be five dinars."

Eve reached into saddlebag and pulled out a pouch, she handed it to her lover.

Hope opened it and pulled out the amount. *Oh yeah, we're getting dry*. After handing the money over, she asked, "Is there anyway I can do some performing for you?"

The innkeeper put his hands on the bar. "What do you perform, young lady?"

Eve narrowed her eyes at what her soulmate was up to.

"I'm... a poet," stated Hope. She smiled. "I can also do stories too." *I think*, she mentally added.

The innkeeper considered. "Alright, if you bring in a good crowd, I'll pay you at the end. Deal?" He held his large hand out.

Hope kept smiling as she shook the hand. "Thank you."

The man nodded and released the small hand. He looked up to Eve. "Up the stairs, turn right, third door on the left."

"Thank you," replied Eve. She nodded at Hope.

The small woman followed the signal and went upstairs; her lover was right behind with heavy boot steps. She went into the room and faced Eve. "You're not mad?"

Eve walked silently to the chair in the room. She placed the saddlebags down. "I don't know," she answered honestly.

Hope came over and grabbed her lover's hands carefully. She laced their fingers together. "I'm sorry... but we do need some money, Eve." She shrugged. "It's the easiest thing." She grinned. "Think about it, I get paid for doing something I love."

The warrior laughed quietly and nodded. "Very true." She lowered her head. "And I get to listen to you."

"Is that a good thing?"

"Very good." Eve closed in the distance and kissed her lover tenderly.

The small woman whispered, "I love you," at the end of the kiss. She pulled Eve's head back down for a longer, passionate kiss.

Eve felt a warm tongue slip into her mouth. She moaned and encircled her lover's waist. Her own tongue glided into Hope's mouth as they tasted each other.

The fires arose inside of both soulmates.

Hope backed up and brought Eve along with her. She still kept the kissing going.

The warrior gently pushed her soulmate onto the bed and crawled onto her as Hope pushed back onto the bed.

While kissing Hope, Eve ran her hands along a muscular stomach of her lover.

Hope pulled back from the kiss and grinned. "Now this time it'll be wild."

Eve laughed quietly but stopped instantly when her lover flipped her onto her back.

The small woman grinned down at her warrior. She lowered her head for a passionate kiss.

Eve kept up with the demand of the kiss but groaned right when a knee went up between her legs. Passionate was what Hope wanted then Eve was going to give it.

~*~*~*~

"For once a normal meal," stated Hope with a mocking tone.

The warrior glanced back at her lover across the table. "Are you still upset about the dormouse?"

"Hades yes," growled Hope. She sat back in her seat. "I'll get you for that."

"Uh huh." Eve smirked. "I'd lllove to see that."

Hope nodded a few times. She grabbed her mug. "And you'll just never apologize for

it, will ya?"

The taller woman snickered and looked away. "Nope."

The younger woman narrowed her eyes. "Hmmm, I'll get you to apologize."

"You couldn't," challenged the warrior with a smug look.

Hope arched an eyebrow. "I bet I can."

"No, because you couldn't."

The small woman leaned towards her soulmate. "Yes I could."

Eve leaned towards her lover. "No you couldn't." She narrowed her eyes. "Don't even waste your time."

Now Hope narrowed her eyes. She sat back in her seat without another word. Oh, she knew how to win this game.

The warrior actually became a little concerned when Hope didn't give a retort. *She does have something up her sleeve.*

The innkeeper came over to the table. "You can start anytime you're ready," he stated to Hope.

The small woman looked up. "Alright, thank you."

The innkeeper walked off after nodding.

Hope looked back at her lover. "Wish me luck." She stood up.

"Just relax up there," coached the warrior. "It is your first time."

The younger woman nodded and glanced around the tavern. "Its not too packed, I'll be fine."

"You'll be okay?" asked Eve.

Gabrielle's daughter nodded. "Don't worry." She winked and walked to the front of the tavern. She stood in front of all the people. *This is for a good cause, Hope... money for feeding your stomach.* She chuckled inwardly but went serious. *I can do this, its now or never.* "Excuse me everybody," she yelled with a warm voice. *I'm gonna die.*

Eve glanced over and locked eyes with her soulmate. She gave the courage to Hope through their connection. She nodded.

Hope smiled and gazed back at the people going silent. "Evening everybody." She paused. "I am a poet partially a bard." She crossed her arms. "I would love to recite a few poems to get warmed up then I can try a story or two if everybody is interested."

The people in the tavern all mumbled and whispered before starting to nod.

"Go on, tell a few poems!" called a man.

"Give it a shot," yelled another person.

Another voice rang clear, saying, "Go poet!"

Hope chuckled as everybody settled down. She thought for a moment, staring at the floor, she looked; preparing to recite one of her poems by memory. "Okay, this is a love poem." She took a deep breath. "This is titled the *Reality of the Story*." After one more deep breath, she began reciting with pauses at the end of each line.

" How I wrote about such things,
Then you came along,
And showed me it wasn't just a,
Story."

She paused and glanced over to Eve then back to the people. Her hands lifted now as she continued reciting.

"Reality hit me ten fold,
And I am still trying,
To catch up,
But I am loving,
This race to catch up,
Because you're right here,
With me."

A smile now creased her lips at the end of the second stanza. Her hands moving in motion of the poem.

"So we take hands,
Because I know I have,
Made your story,
Come true too,
So we run together,
Back to reality.

Yet you stop without warning,
And I look to you in alarm,
You shake your head with a smile,
And lean in,
To kiss me with such love,
Once pulling away you tell me,
That we should stay here,
Away from reality,
Where people will try to,
Tear apart what we only have."

Hope paused and locked eyes with Eve. Her smile went into pure love.

"I couldn't refuse such an offer,
To stay in love's kingdom,
In your embrace,
And glowing love,
So since then we have,
Stayed in this story of,
Passionate Love,

That we will live in for,
Eternal Time."

Hope went silent at the end of the poem.

Nobody spoke; just absorbing the poem. Then one by one claps started up.

The small woman sighed deeply and felt the tension recede like a tide. She smiled brightly at hearing the applause.

"Do another!" yelled somebody. Everybody said the something within seconds.

"Okay... okay." The poet held up her hand and grabbed a chair. "My next poem is... *Those Years*." She lifted up the chair.

"Without you I have gone,
into my future
I found out after all
that I did not need you
to help me fight this life.
Does that hurt you?"

Hope looked up while taking steps backwards to a table, carrying the chair.

"Since the day I walked off,
I have found others
whom have lifted me higher
than you ever could.
What you think of that?"

The poet continued reciting but she pulled herself up onto the table behind herself.

"This new life without you,
is very refreshing
since the rains have fallen upon me
and swept away those years
in my memory
because you, I no longer think of.
Does that hurt you?"

Hope was on the table and propped her boots on the chair in front of her. She lifted her hands while finishing the poem.

"You were merely some dream of mine,
to good to be true
but you went sour one day
and I had to save myself
like you told me too so long ago.
What you think of that?"

I don't remember when I last thought of you,
nor the last time my heart beat for you
in all of that turmoil you brought
down on me in those final hours

so I have stopped loving you
since then.
Does that kill you?"

She finished the poem and waited for the reaction. Once more, she received a collection of applause and cheers. Hope smiled and asked, "How about a story anybody?" Her response was certainly a cheer of yes's.

~*~*~*~

Hope smirked and patted the pouch of money. "Yup yup, my brilliant idea worked." She grinned at her partner across the room.

Eve laughed. "Toss it."

The small woman threw the pouch of dinars to her lover.

The warrior caught it and slipped it into the saddlebags. "Good idea." She came near Hope.

The poet grinned. "I know."

Xena's daughter laughed again.

"I'm just glad it worked out," whispered Hope. She leaned against her staff. "We almost hit the bottom of the money pouch."

The older woman chuckled quietly and grasped her lover's hips. "We're fine now, for a long while."

Hope stepped out of her lover's touch.

Eve corked an eyebrow. "What's this about?"

The smaller woman slipped a grin onto her lips. "Payback for the dormouse." She wagged a finger. "Don't touch me till you apologize."

The warrior narrowed her eyes. "Oh don't even, Hope."

"Don't get peeved, Eve." The poet snickered and headed for the bathroom. She shot a smug look back. "Self inflicted."

"I can cope with that, Hope," retorted the warrior.

"Right," taunted Hope from the bathroom. "You coping is like you trying to leave me, Eve."

Eve growled at all the rhyming. She chuckled though. "Well I *hope*... this won't last long."

The small woman rolled her eyes while in the bathroom. She came out after washing and drying her face. "Well on this *eve*, you're not allowed to touch me," she deadpanned.

The warrior narrowed her eyes. "You couldn't last."

Hope smirked. "I could." She walked over to the bed and sat down. She began taking her boots off. "I don't know about you, but I'm going to sleep."

The older woman huffed and walked over to a chair. She took her sword off, settled it onto the table, then began taking her armor off.

The poet was in bed while her lover was still taking her attire off.

Eve finished and only remained in her black leather top and leather skirt. She walked over to the table and blew out the candles. Afterwards, she crawled into the bed and lay down beside her soulmate.

The only thing that could have possibly touched between them were their elbows since they both had their hands under their heads.

"Goodnight, Hope," taunted the warrior.

"Mmm," Hope closed her eyes and turned to her left; her back to Eve. "Sleep well," she taunted back.

Eve grumbled under her breath. She stared up at the ceiling. "You're serious about this, aren't you?" she asked.

The younger woman didn't say anything right away. She actually considered the question. "In a sense, yes."

"It was a joke," stated the older woman.

"Yeah," Hope's tone was sarcastic. "So funny I forgot to laugh." Her hands shifted under her head.

The warrior sighed. "You know I was teasing you."

"Uh huh." The poet took a deep breath. "But even after a joke, most apologize."

Eve knew her lover was right and could understand now what she was saying. Hope was hurt by the lack of care and it made Eve feel guilty. Yeah, she'd be a little angry if Hope did the same to her and didn't apologize for the joke. She rolled to her left and brought her right arm over her lover's waist. Cautiously, she drew her partner in close and whispered, "I'm sorry, you're right." She kissed Hope's shoulder.

Hope turned in the stronger arms, kissed Eve tenderly, and tucked her head under Eve's chin. "Thank you," she whispered.

The darker woman smiled and closed her eyes. She pressed her lips against Hope's forehead then draped her right leg over Hope's legs. "Get some sleep," she suggested.

The poet tightened her arms around Eve. "I love you, Eve."

"I love you too, Hope." Eve was still smiling when she went to sleep.

~*Part 7*~

"Hope!" yelled Eve, "get up!"

Hope bolted up in the bed and her heart dropped. "Oh gods!"

The warrior ran to the door, grabbed her partner's staff. "Move, move!"

The small woman jumped out of the bed. She ducked as a piece of burning wood fell. She coughed as the smoke rose up. Her eyes watered up from the smoke. "Eve?" she hollered.

Eve had her soulmate's staff, boots, and their saddlebag. They were caught in the middle of a fire, their room ready to go up in flames any second. "I'm coming!" She jumped over the burning board and came to her partner. "Get your boots on."

Hope put them on hastily and yelled, "What we going to do?"

"We have to go out the window!" Eve grabbed her lover's hand and took her to the window. She threw Hope's staff out the window then the saddlebag, far from the building. She turned to her partner and picked her up.

The poet glanced out the window and noticed the drop. "Oooh gods!" She looked back and saw the room begin engulfed in flames. "Eve!"

"Hold tight." The warrior backed up a few steps, then sprinted, and jumped. She slipped through the window, soared through the air, spun in midair, and came ground bound. She landed solidly on her feet.

Hope glanced up to the inn and noticed it was about to fall. "Eve, its going to come down!"

The warrior growled and sprinted for her life with Hope still in her arms.

The inn creaked in protest and the burning wall had begun its decent to the ground. It aimed for the young women but missed and slammed into the ground with a huge boom. The wood continued burning.

Eve slipped her partner out of her arms. She glimpsed back at the half-standing inn. "Well, that was fun."

The younger woman groaned and walked over to their stuff. She bent down and quickly tied her boots. "What's going on?"

The warrior glanced around and noticed raiders on horseback taking the village. "It's a raid."

The poet looked up and noted it was and she'd been sleeping through it. "Oooh no."

Eve drew her sword. "Ready?"

Hope took her staff, rose up, and took the saddlebag. She hid it behind a tree then came beside her partner. "Let's go."

The older woman grinned and broke off sprinting towards a raider.

The poet shook her head with a grin and followed after her soulmate. She came to a halt as a sword swiped over her head. She raised her staff and fought back.

Eve had just knocked two raiders off horseback and now was fighting them.

Hope on the other hand used her staff to fight against an easy raider. She swiped his feet out from under him then smacked him across the face- she knocked him unconscious.

The warrior killed her two enemies then jumped to her partner's side. "We need to find the leader."

"And that'll do what?" asked the poet.

"Then I can kill him," responded Eve lowly. She nodded to the center of town.

Hope sighed but nodded back. She jogged into town with her lover.

Before even getting into the middle of town, Eve spotted the leader on horseback, watching.

The smaller woman came in from behind. The leader made her stop running, he sent a shot up and down her spine. She wasn't even sure why but she felt like she knew the leader.

The leader was a fair height, sandy-blond curly hair, and brown eyes with an evil glint. He didn't look at all muscular but aired a hubris attitude. He noticed Eve coming and dismounted his horse while having unsheathed his sword.

Eve stopped in front of him and held her sword out. "If you want this village you'll have to kill me." She grinned. "Which will be hard to do."

The leader laughed and spun his sword. "You'll be surprised." He circled Eve. "And if you want this village saved, kill me, and my men will leave."

"Sounds good." The warrior smirked and kept circling.

The leader's cold eyes flickered to Hope and he looked on her as if he known her.

The poet narrowed her eyes.

"Keep her busy," ordered the leader.

Eve growled and slashed out at her opponent.

Three raiders went after Hope.

Hope jumped back, went into battle stance, and prepared to fight the raiders.

The warrior and the leader kept fighting. Eve was losing ground, which surprised her, the scrawny man was stronger than he looked. She focused her mind on the things at stake and she reached down into her days as a Roman commander. It fueled her body and rage, she broke out in the passion of fighting for death.

The poet, however, was just keeping her enemies back; not quite yet having mastered her staff. She smacked on raider across the face then the other two in the stomach.

One of them dropped their swords.

Hope took that opening and used her telekinesis. She grinned, stepped back as the sword hovered towards the raiders.

The raiders were frozen in place of fear and awe.

The small woman smirked and hurled the sword towards its owner.

The raider caught the sword in his stomach and fell down, dead.

The other two raiders dropped their swords, and sprinted for their lives.

Hope chuckled and glimpsed at her lover and the leader. She smirked because Eve was winning against the leader.

Eve gave a swipe to his head, she hoped he'd duck.

He did but soon found himself on his back from his opponent taking his feet from under him.

The warrior growled, lifted her sword, and slammed it down into his stomach.

The leader's eyes widened and he grabbed the blade in his stomach. His head slipped down the blade then he dropped his head. His eyes rolled up into the back of his head.

The other raiders saw what happened and frantically yelling words of retreat.

Eve stared at what she'd done. She bit back her regret because it was for the greater good. She removed her sword and stepped backwards.

Hope came up from behind and touched her lover's arm.

The raiders were running out of the village. Two of them had stopped and grabbed their leader's body. They threw the leader onto a horse's back and rode him out.

Eve knitted her eyebrows together at that. *Why would they take his body...?* It baffled her for she'd never seen that done before.

The poet smiled once the enemy was gone. "We did it," she whispered, "but it seemed too simple."

The warrior nodded in agreement. "Let's not complain too much huh?" She drained the darkness out of her system.

"Yeah," whispered the small woman. She studied the village and all the hurt or dead villagers. "We still have a lot of work to do."

The warrior examined things too. "Yes... this is the hardest part," she uttered. She sheathed her sword at her side. She glanced down at her soulmate. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." Hope leaned against her staff. "You?"

Eve grinned. "Perfect." She dropped the grin and said, "Let's see what we can do huh?"

The younger woman nodded. "I hope Shamrock is okay."

"I'm sure he is, we'll worry about him later." Eve nodded. "Come on." She walked off to a healer's house.

Hope followed along side her partner.

~*~*~*~

The raider rode the horse to the top of the hill, which overlooked the village they'd just attacked. He stopped and dismounted his horse. After he went to the horse's rump, he lifted their dead leader off the horse. He settled the leader on the ground then bent down.

Two other raiders came up the hill in a jog. They peered down at the dead leader.

"Is he...?" asked one raider.

"I don't think so," whispered another raider. He touched the leader's neck and felt a pulse.

Suddenly, a growl rumbled up from the leader's throat. His eyes flew open. "Move," he ordered.

The three raiders stepped back.

The leader got up to his feet, and brushed back his sandy-blond hair. He examined his wound in his stomach and watched it healed over then the armor become repaired, as if it never happened. He grinned and peered up at the awe struck raiders. "Did you not believe in his power?"

The raiders looked up.

"We do know," whispered one.

The leader laughed deeply and turned to the village below. "How many were killed?"

"Several," reported a raider. "Not that, that matters."

The leader smirked. "Very good." He folded his arms against his chest. "What is the report on Xena and Gabrielle?"

One raider gulped but said, "They are returning."

"What?" roared the leader, "They are suppose to remain in Africa."

"I'm afraid they killed Gurkhan." The raider paused. "They will arrive back here in three days."

The leader closed his eyes and growled, "I want them stopped." He turned his head to the raider while having opened his eyes. "I want twenty men sent to the port, kill them, drown them, I do not care!" He narrowed his eyes. "Xena purposes a threat to our plans, she is not to interfere."

"What of Gabrielle?"

"Bring her to me." The leader grinned. "We could use her again."

"But she's killed since then."

"No matter, she will still be of use." The leader chuckled and whispered, "We need more Hope."

The raiders exchanged glances.

"You have your orders. Kill Xena and bring me Gabrielle." The leader turned. "The rest of us will follow Eve and Hope."

The raiders nodded briskly.

The leader peered down the valley, his back to the village, and he studied the thousands of warriors at the bottom of the valley. "Love will not save them."

~*~*~*~

"You ready?" whispered Eve.

Hope nodded faintly. "Can we get out of here?"

"Yeah." The warrior went in the stable and found Shamrock waiting for them. She tacked up the horse in the stall.

"I think things will be fine here?" asked Hope.

"The village will be fine," answered Eve. She glanced up and noted how tired her lover was. "We won't travel far today."

"Just get some distance huh?" asked the poet.

The older woman nodded and continued tacking her horse.

It was late afternoon now. The soulmates had finished helping the village and did as much as they could. Now, they wanted to head off and be alone after the insane day.

Eve came out of the stall and walked out of the stable, Shamrock was in tow.

Hope came out and watched her soulmate mount the bay.

The warrior held her hand down to her lover. "I want you to ride."

The small woman didn't feel like arguing so she took her friend's hand. She was lifted into the front of the saddle.

Eve wrapped an arm around her lover's waist. "Just relax, huh?"

Hope nodded and dropped her head back into Eve's shoulder.

The warrior kicked her horse's side lightly.

Shamrock made his way out of the village and to the road.

~*Part 8*~

Gabrielle came up on deck, she went near the railing and leaned against it. She spotted

the port ahead.

Xena came up from behind, happy to be coming home.

The small warrior studied the port and noted something odd. "Xena... were you expecting a welcoming party?"

"Nnnno." The Warrior Princess narrowed her eyes.

There on the dock were twenty or so warriors.

"I hope they're not waiting for us," whispered Gabrielle.

Xena's dark side had begun peaking inside. "They are," she uttered lowly. "Get ready."

"Hell," grumbled Gabrielle. "Remind me why I am your partner?"

The warrior chuckled deeply and answered, "Because you love it."

"That's right." The warrior-bard knelt down and extracted her sais. "When is retirement?"

Xena laughed. "Not today... tomorrow isn't looking good either."

Gabrielle groaned. "Wonderful." She grinned and noticed they were pulling into the slip. "Here we go."

The warriors on the docks all unsheathed swords.

Xena drew her sword. "Let's go off the bow," she whispered.

The Amazon Queen glanced up at the bow. She noticed how at that end of the dock there were no warriors. She also saw how big the jump was to the dock. "You sure?"

"Well, once this gangplank is down, we're going to be dead. Your choice."

"The bow." Gabrielle sprinted to the bow.

Xena laughed and ran up to the bow. She sheathed her sword, jumped up to the upper level of the deck. She picked up her lover. "Here we go."

Gabrielle held tight and closed her eyes.

The enemy saw what was going on and tried going after the soulmates but couldn't make it around the ship's ropes being thrown all over.

The Warrior Princess leapt off the ship, spun in midair, and landed on the dock with a loud boom. She put Gabrielle down and spotted the twenty warriors screaming and coming after them. "Move!"

Gabrielle broke off running and her partner was beside her.

Xena ran through the port and led her lover. Ahead she spotted a tavern and jumped into the door. She grabbed her partner's wrist and swung her in.

The warrior-bard dropped her head against Xena's chest and held onto her warrior.

The Warrior Princess breathed heavily and leaned against the doorway and watched the twenty warriors run by, hunting for them. She dropped her head against the frame once they were gone. "We're okay."

Gabrielle sighed and lifted her head. "What on earth do you think that was about?"

"I don't know," whispered the warrior. "But I know we'll find out... and soon."

"Was one heck of a greeting party."

Xena chuckled but stopped and peered down at her lover. "We need to be careful."

"What we going to do?"

The older woman considered their options. "Let's... follow them... see what they do." She looked up and studied the tavern. "Let's get some cloaks first."

The small warrior nodded. "Let's go."

The Warrior Princess ducked out of the tavern and glanced outside. She saw no one and went into the streets. "The market is this way."

The Amazon Queen nodded and let her partner lead the way. "I hope Eve and Hope are okay," she whispered.

Xena didn't respond for it was her fear too.

~*Part 9*~

Eve knelt down in front of her soulmate. "Hey, how are you doing?"

Hope peered up from her scroll. "Alright." She sighed faintly and lowered her quill onto her scroll.

The warrior sat down next to her lover. She glanced at the fire next to them, which lit the entire dark camp, she gently touched Hope's leg. "What is it?"

"What you mean?" The poet wasn't looking at her partner.

Eve sighed deeply and whispered, "Don't beat around the bush, something is up."

"Curtness is the key to understanding," whispered the small woman.

"Yes," agreed the older woman. "So, tell me what's eating at you?" She shifted her hand and grasped her lover's hand.

"I don't know... just yet," uttered Hope, "something just isn't... isn't right."

"You're not sure what it is?" inquired Xena's daughter.

The poet shook her head. "No." She lifted her eyes to her soulmate. "But we'll both know soon."

Eve searched the other woman's eyes- she too knew something, something was going to happen. She moved closer and wrapped her left arm around her lover's waist. She drew Hope in.

Hope rested her head on her soulmate's shoulder. "I hope our parents are okay," she murmured.

The warrior sighed deeply and lowered her head onto her poet's. "They can take care of themselves."

"I hope we can take care of ourselves too," joked the small woman.

Eve chuckled faintly but she really had to wonder herself.

~*~*~*~

Xena pulled the hood closer around her face. She caught sight of Gabrielle kneeling down beside her behind the brush in the dark.

The warrior-bard spread opened the brush faintly and peeked through.

The Warrior Princess narrowed her eyes at the twenty men in the camp. "We've been traveling a ways," she whispered.

Gabrielle nodded. "Headed west... north-west."

The older woman turned her head a little while she watched the camp. "Sssh." She reached up and pulled her hood down. She turned her head towards her partner but her focus wasn't on Gabrielle. She tried listening carefully to the men talking in the camp.

The Amazon Queen kept silent and let her lover concentrate.

Very gradually Xena's eyes went darker and darker as she listened more. "Shit," she growled lowly.

The younger warrior gave a worried look.

Xena came out of concentration and grabbed her lover's hand. "Let's go."

The pair quietly snuck off in the night back to their horses.

"What is it?" asked the warrior-bard hastily.

"They're apart of a massive army." Xena tightened Argo's straps then mounted her. "They're after Hope and Eve."

"What?" Gabrielle had almost yelled but didn't. She mounted her own horse. "Why?"

"I don't know, they didn't say." The Warrior Princess tapped her mare in the sides. "Doesn't matter right now, we need to get to them."

The Amazon Queen followed along on her horse. "Why are they after us?"

"To kill," stated Xena. She didn't reveal that they had intent to capture Gabrielle, her partner didn't need to know that. Only because it would mean more questions, more questions needed answers that she didn't have. "Let's go."

Gabrielle kicked her horse into a gallop. She headed west, to the only place they could think of where Eve and Hope were.

~*Part 10*~

Hope rose up out of the bedroll. Eve wasn't sleeping with her; it had her worried. "Eve?" She looked around the empty camp. She narrowed her eyes when the sound of swords clashing filtered to her. "Oh no." She jumped to her feet and grabbed her staff.

Eve bursted into the camp, her body was bruised and bloody, her sword out. "Hope!" She rushed beside her partner. "Get out of here."

"What is it?" The poet was becoming frantic over the chaos.

"Just get out of here!" yelled the warrior.

"No! I am not leaving you," growled Hope.

"Stop them!" ordered the leader of the army of the village raid.

"Shit," growled Eve. She twirled her sword and stood between Hope and the leader closing in.

The leader glanced around and watched all his men surround the campsite. He gazed back at the pair.

"How is he still alive?" whispered the poet. Her eyes went to slits because she knew that there was more going on then being said. "And why am I asleep when everything happens?" she growled.

"We will take out," stated the leader. "You're out numbered and surrounded." He pointed his sword at the women. "It'd be simpler if you come with us."

"Who the Hades are you?" yelled the poet.

The leader grinned at the small woman. "Your saviors." His eyes narrowed and he ordered, "Take them!"

The numerous men rushed in and captured the fighting women. It took them a few minutes bet eventually they had the women knocked unconscious and chained.

"Let's head back to the camp."

The men nodded at the command and dragged the women off.

~*Part 11*~

Xena spotted the brown horse outside of the clearing. "Its their horse," she yelled back to her partner.

Gabrielle kept her stallion at a gallop after her lover. "Are they there?" she hollered back.

The warrior stopped her horse and hopped off.

The warrior-bard halted her stallion beside Xena. She dismounted and looked towards the camp. That sinking feeling entered her and she sprinted towards the camp.

The older woman knelt down and touched the red liquid on the grass. She lifted her

fingers and smeared the red blood. "Damn," she mumbled.

"Xena!"

The tall woman stood and jogged into the abandoned camp.

The warrior-bard held a half-written scroll in her hand. She knew it had to be Hope's. She faced her soulmate. "They've been captured," she whispered.

The Warrior Princess's jaw tightened and she ran her finger through her hair. She turned in complete circle, she tried finding some sort of clues to work with.

Gabrielle peered down at the incomplete poem on the scroll. She read it.

Its that nearing feeling,

Of the darkness's hand

That leaves us shaking

Here in this black evening

We fear; what we know not of

But soon we'll know

Soon will be the moment its

Too late

What crime will she and I

Pay for, tomorrow

We will be told tomorrow

And I fear we will not

Gabrielle swallowed and rolled the scroll up. She glanced over at her lover by the fire.

Xena knelt down and touched the ashes. Her fingers dipped under the ashes, she calculated the warmth- none. She lifted up her hand with a few ashes in it, she smell it carefully and there was a small scent left to it.

"How long?" whispered the warrior-bard.

"Three days... at the most," replied Xena. She brushed the ash off and got to her feet.

Gabrielle signaled the scroll. "They both knew." She glanced around the camp again.

"Get their stuff together and I am going to find some tracks."

The Amazon Queen nodded and walked over to Shamrock where there was a saddlebag and a scroll bag. She slipped her daughter's scroll in. She tacked up the bay in front of her and led him to the other horses. "How are you, boy?"

Shamrock whined sadly.

"Did you see what happened?"

The bay nodded briskly and stomped at the ground. He stopped walking once he neared the other horses.

"Yeah I bet." Gabrielle gave him a scratch behind the ear.

Xena reappeared from the direction of the camp. "Found the tracks." She got up onto Argo. "I'll take care of the other horse."

The short warrior mounted her stallion and nodded. "Alright." She handed her soulmate the reins.

The Warrior Princess led the way to the tracks.

Gabrielle saw them way ahead, her eyes widened. "Oh god," she whispered.

There were numerous tracks of men and two things or people had been dragged behind.

"Xena, I will kill them if they hurt..." she trailed off, her voice in a low deathly tone. Her eyes flashed.

"I know," uttered the warrior because she felt the exact same way. For there was no wrath like that of a mother's. "Let's go," she said hotly.

"Ya!" Gabrielle kicked her horse into a gallop.

The Warrior Princess signaled her mare to follow and Shamrock galloped in tow.

~*~*~*~

Hope's eyes opened and the world swirled around her. She groaned and closed her eyes once more. She felt herself on some stone table, she knew she was inside a building after seeing the stone ceiling spin around.

"Welcome back, little one," came the soothing voice.

The poet groaned before she sensed a warm cloth touched her forehead. She opened her eyes. "Who are you?" she whispered.

"The flames from which you will be reborn from," the voice whispered gently.

Hope couldn't focus her eyes on the being. She started slipping again. "Where am I?"

"Home, Hope," said the soothing voice, "Rest, reviving it in you will drain you."

"Revive what?" muttered Hope but she never got her answer because she slipped unconscious.

"Your destiny," whispered the voice.

~*~*~*~

Eve lifted her head while she opened her dark, blue eyes. She stared, for a moment, at the bars of the cell. She knew her wrists were chained since they were hanging above

her. With lowered eyes, she noted her ankles shackled too. Her sword and daggers gone but her armor still on.

A guard reappeared at the cell. "Good evening, messenger."

The warrior narrowed her eyes at the title. *He could only be referencing to God... the way of love*, decided Eve. "Where am I?" she growled.

"Being hostile will not help," stated the guard. "You do not need to know something of little importance." He grinned then he left the dungeon.

The warrior jerked at the chains even though she knew it was no use. "Son of the devil," she grumbled and tried relaxing.

Footsteps echoed down the dungeon- they were a light footfall, however.

Eve narrowed her eyes when the man in the black, red striped robe came to her cell.

"Ah, you've awoken, messenger," he said in a soothing tone. He slipped each hand into the open, large sleeves of his robe. "I'm so glad to finally see one of His own."

"Who the Hell are you?" Eve asked hotly.

"That is of little importance."

"Actually, it's a lot of importance, to me," corrected the warrior. "So who are you?"

"Another time, maybe." The robed man started down the dungeon.

Eve grinned and called, "You know my destiny is not to stay in this cell." Her grin went more evil. "I am the messenger," she taunted.

The robed man stopped, turned on his heels and studied the woman in the cell. "Your destiny will be soon." He reached up and pulled his hood over. "And so will your friend's be soon." He continued down the dungeon and left.

"Stupid clergy," grumbled the warrior, "think they know everything." She jerked at the chains. "They know a lot of nothing."

~*~*~*~

"Wake up, little one," whispered the soothing voice.

Hope opened her eyes gently and stared up at the non-spinning world. She sat up, looking for the owner of the soothing voice.

Instantly, a fire roared up around the stone table that looked more like an altar. The fire shot up to the ceiling creating a wall and enclosing the poet.

The poet's eyes widened as she realized whose fire this was.

Then slowly, a flame stretched out of the wall towards Hope, over the altar table.

Hope felt the fear rush her. "No!" she screamed but her scream went dead as the flame flew into her mouth. She closed her eyes as the fire started pouring inside her and she could only lay back down on the table.

The fire continued spilling inside of the small woman until her entire body was filled with the flame. Once Hope's body was full of the flame, the firewall just disappeared in a poof.

Hope opened her red-yellow eyes for a second and they rolled up in the back of her head. She arched her back and groaned before she went unconscious. She slept and she slept and she slept for three solid days. Her body twitched this way, her eyes rolled under her lids, and small moans escaped her lips during the three days.

"Its time," uttered that same soothing voice at the dawn of the fourth morning.

Hope moaned deeply, her red-yellow eyes opened slowly. She stared at the ceiling as her eyes focused on them. She sat up on the table and studied her legs, lower body, upper chest, and then her hands. She turned her hands over and stared at her palms.

"Its time, Hope," whispered the soothing voice.

The poet's lips creased with an evil smile. "I'm home," she said quietly.

"Welcome home, Hope," greeted the soothing voice, "And its time you bring me."

Hope chuckled and slid off the altar. "Naturally." She strolled to the door of the altar room- she opened it.

The leader of the army turned around with the two guards beside him. He noted the change in the small woman- he bowed his head. "Welcome home, Hope. Its good to see you once more"

"I cannot say the samething about you, Deliverer," muttered Hope.

The leader chuckled as he lifted his head. "We didn't quite leave off on the same foot last time." He tilted his head. "Did we?"

Hope smirked. "No because I can't stand you." She brushed past the human form of the Deliverer. "What has happened since I've been gone?" she asked in her cold voice.

"Nothing really," reported the Deliverer. He followed behind with the guards.

The poet trekked down the hall with her boots pounding. "What of His messenger? I assume we still have her...?"

"Of course we do," stated the Deliverer. "She is one of the key components."

"She is," stated Hope as she stopped and whirled around. "I need to see her."

The Deliverer folded his arms. "I cannot, Hope... not until we're sure you've completely returned."

The small woman smiled falsely and neared the man. "Deliverer, let me put this way. He has ordered me to see her." She rapidly reached out and grabbed the man by his armor. She jerked his face down to hers. "I will see her," she growled.

The Deliverer narrowed his eyes, about to reply with harsh words.

"Let her see the messenger," uttered the soothing voice in the hall, "A test."

"Very well." The Deliverer jerked himself free. "You're free to see the messenger but we will join you." He escorted the small woman down to the dungeon cell through the large, stone building. The small group came to Eve's prison cell.

Eve raised her head up, a faint smile creased her lips at seeing her soulmate. But the smile turned upside down as Hope entered the cell with those red-yellow eyes. "Hope?" she whispered.

The small woman neared her lover and the closer she got the larger her evil smile grew. "How are you, Eve?"

"What's happen to you?" uttered the warrior.

"I've been reborn from the flames," whispered back Hope in a silky, deep voice.

"No." Eve shook her head. "No." She jerked at her manacles and growled, "No."

Hope chuckled with her glint in her eyes increasing. She pressed her body into the warrior's, she grasped Eve's shoulders. "You... you thought you could protect me." She grinned while she studied rich, blue eyes. "From my destiny."

"This is not your destiny," countered Eve.

The small woman shook her head. "Yes it is, Eve." She leaned her head more in. "You know what you never realized?" She tilted her head. "Is we're from two different worlds." She caressed her lover's cheek and gently touched the soft lips. "You are His chosen and I am the flame's chosen." Her focus went back to Eve's eyes. "We're enemies."

"We're the same," whispered Eve, she was becoming desperate.

The poet chuckled as her eyes went two shades redder. "No, we're counterparts." She licked her lips while she pressed her body hard into Eve's. "We're enemies." She leaned in more, her lips just touching Eve's.

The warrior tensed up and gritted her teeth as a hiss escape her lips.

Hope laughed while she continued bringing her nails down the other woman's left arm. She stepped back and ripped her nails down and deep on Eve's arm. "Until later, messenger." In a fluent motion, she reached forward and pushed Eve's forehead roughly.

The warrior's head smacked back into the hard wall.

Hope strolled out of the cell with a sway in her hips.

Eve clamped her jaw down and watched her soulmate leave with the other men. She sensed the blood rolling down her arm and the stinging in her arm pinned at her. She felt the rage, from her soul, enter into her body. "Hope!" she screamed at the top of her lungs.

Hope's next step was hesitant once she heard the cry outside of the dungeon.

"Problem, Hope?" inquired the Deliverer.

"No," growled the small woman. "Let's continue our plans." She closed her eyes as emotions flickered across her face, as fast as lightening. Her eyes reopened and were the deep yellow-red once more.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle's horse galloped around the bend and begun to slow down at a slow pace. Gabrielle's heart sunk as she went farther ahead.

Xena caught up and stopped her horse next to Gabrielle's on the road. They were on the forest's edge and ahead were rolling hills while the tracks led on.

"No, no," whispered the warrior-bard frantically. She half dismounted and half fell off her horse. "No!" she almost screamed.

The Warrior Princess frantically got off her mare. "Gabrielle! Don't!"

The small warrior started running down the road as rage filled her.

"Gabrielle!" The warrior sprinted and caught her lover. She grabbed Gabrielle's arm and stopped her. "No, Gabrielle, that's suicide!"

The short warrior tore out of her soulmates grasp. "Xena, they..." She pointed towards the hills. "They have my daughter!" she hollered.

"And do you think you can get her back by running into that army?" yelled the warrior. "You won't be of any help to Hope." She grabbed her partner's shoulders and tried to calm down. "They have both Hope and Eve, we're gonna get them back."

The Amazon Queen was shaking her head, tears running down her cheeks. "Xena, we have to stop them." She grasped her lover's arms. "They have Hope and Eve," she whispered in agony. "He'll take her away from me," she rasped while she clung to her soulmate. Her tears become stronger. "He has my Hope." The pure desperation that comes when one tries to fight death filled her.

"Sssh." The warrior pulled her lover in and held her. She felt the intense anger fume up inside of herself. She would do whatever it took to save her daughter and her soulmate's daughter. The wrath drove her into the darkness. "We'll get them back," she promised with fury seeping in her words, "and kill him... end this forever." Her eyes continued darkening as she studied the large army, which surrounded Dahak's temple.

~*Part 10*~

"Stay awake!" snarled Hope.

The two guards snapped into attention and straightened up on either side of the door.

"Tense?" taunted the Deliverer.

The small woman whirled around and narrowed her eyes at the man. "Are you that dense?" she whispered hotly. "Xena and Gabrielle are near, stupid." Her upper lip twitched. "They wouldn't dare let Dahak back into the world."

The leader of the army folded his arms. "How near is near?"

Hope strolled over to the window and gazed out over the view of the forest. "Very near."

The Deliverer unfolded his arms. "I'll send some men out to check." He started to head to the door.

"No," ordered Hope harshly. "That won't do a damn thing." She spun around on the heels of her boots as a huge smirk took her lips. "I have a much better idea."

The Deliverer lifted his eyebrow and waited for the idea.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle heard the sound of leaves crunching then a twig snapping. She rose up from her seat by the almost dead fire. She extracted her sais and twirled them. She bent her knees and prayed her lover would be back soon from the river.

The brush ahead rustled from something moving through it quickly.

"Oh gods!" yelled a voice like Gabrielle's own.

"Hope?" called the warrior-bard. She raced ahead in desperation. "Hope!" She bursted through the bushes and spotted her daughter.

"Mother!" yelled Hope before she fell onto the ground rasping.

"Oh gods." Gabrielle ran to her daughter's side. She noted how Hope's body was bruised and battered. "Hope?" she whispered in agony, she touched her daughter's cheek gently.

"Mom, you have..." Hope closed her eyes and lay on her back. Her chest raised and fell at a fast pace. "You have-"

"Sssh," cut off the mother.

The poet shook her head. "They're coming... Dahak's men," she whispered. "Run," she uttered, "please."

"Not without you." Gabrielle slipped her arms under her daughter's body and lifted her up. She stood up and briskly walked towards camp. "How many, Hope?"

"Ten were... after me," rasped the younger woman.

The short warrior narrowed her eyes. "What's happened to Eve?"

"They... they have her." Hope shook her head and buried her face into her mother's chest. "We couldn't stop them." She opened her eyes as tears rolled down her cheeks. "They've beat her too," she whispered. "Their planning to use her."

"For what?" whispered the bard as she entered the camp.

"To bring back Dahak," uttered the daughter as she felt her body settled down on a bedroll.

"Xena!" screamed Gabrielle at the top of her lungs.

The Warrior Princess heard her name and sprinted back to camp. She saw the scene ahead and rushed up to her lover's side. "What happened?"

"Hope escaped and is being chased by ten men," informed the bard hastily as she knelt back down beside her daughter with a medical kit.

"Damn it," growled the warrior. "Which way?"

"In that direction." Gabrielle pointed.

"Alright, take care of Hope. I'm gonna go take care of these men." Xena unsheathed her sword and headed to the clearing's edge.

"Be careful," called the bard.

The Warrior Princess nodded before she disappeared.

"Try and rest," ordered Gabrielle.

The younger woman nodded as she sensed gentle hands clean her wounds. "What are we going to do?" she whispered and closed her eyes.

"We're going to stop him," stated the warrior-bard darkly. "We'll end this... forever."

Hope hissed when a few wounds were cleaned. "But you can't save Eve," she whispered sadly.

Gabrielle hesitated in the cleaning. She studied her daughter for a moment while she repeated the words in her head, and she licked her lips. "Just be quiet now," she ushered and continued cleaning. She blinked back tears as her anger rose up inside. She finished cleaning, pulled out an herb from the medical kit, and a tiny cup. She walked over to the mare and plucked off a waterskin. *Damn you Dahak*, she cursed mentally.

The short warrior knelt back down beside her daughter and filled the tiny cup up. She then put in a lot of her herb and stirred it in with her fingers. "Hope?" she whispered, "You need to sit up and drink this."

The poet sat up some with her mother's help. She drank the herbed water then settled back down on the bedroll. She sighed and closed her eyes yet her body was very tense, for the moment.

"Go to sleep," said Gabrielle soothingly. She wiped the tears away from her cheeks and put the medical supplies away. She then leaned towards her child and kissed her on the cheek. She whispered, "I love you, my Hope." She stood up onto her feet while extracting her sais.

Xena back flipped away from the ring of enemies. She dropped to the ground and did a roundhouse swipe kick. She took out five men, killed two, and had only three standing. She bounced up to her feet, charged one enemy, and stabbed him in the

stomach.

Another man attacked her at the side.

The Warrior Princess kicked him away then faced him. She kicked behind and sent an opponent flying. She sliced her sword through the man in front of her.

Within a few more minutes, she had finished off all ten men. She stood there studying them for a moment. Then she considered the entire situation since Hope came back this morning. *Hope escaped and is being chased by ten men*, rang Gabrielle's words in her head.

"Hope escaped," uttered the warrior in confusion. She peered down the road at the mass army that fully surrounded the temple. "How could she have...?" Her eyes widened. "Gabrielle, no." She broke off running towards the camp.

Gabrielle ducked and rolled away as the sword breezed past her head. "Come on!" she challenged her enemy.

"Surrender!" urged the enemy. "This camp is surrounded by twenty-five men." He slashed forward with his sword.

"Take her!" commanded a deep voice with anger.

Ten men suddenly jumped Gabrielle and took her. They were soon chaining her up.

"No," snarled Gabrielle lowly. She glanced over at the leader; she quickly recognized the familiar face.

The leader lifted his sword and pointed it towards the clearing's edge. "Come join us, Xena."

The Warrior Princess strolled towards the man. "Well, didn't think I'd see you again... Khrafstar."

"Miss me, Xena?" asked the Deliverer.

"Immensely," replied the warrior dryly. Her eyes flickered over to her chained soulmate. "Well..." She turned her focus back on the Deliverer. "Where too?"

The Deliverer laughed and smirked. "Take her weapons and chain her too," he ordered.

Several men came over with chains and shackles. They stripped the warrior of her weapons then shackled her arms behind her back.

"Somebody get Hope," commanded the Deliverer.

"I'm trying," called one man. He kept shaking the small woman's shoulders. "She's not waking up, Deliverer."

"What?" roared the man and he stomped over. He bent down and touched her lips. Lifting his fingertips, he smelled them and picked up on the scent of herbs. "She's been drugged," he growled. He stood up and faced the two warriors with fuming anger.

"What did you give her?" he snarled and stalked towards the women.

Xena sighed in relief inwardly at the fact her soulmate had figured things out ahead of time. *Good thinking, Gabrielle*, she commended her lover mentally.

"What did she take?" growled the Deliverer.

Gabrielle straightened her back out. "Three strong pinches of Opium Poppy. She'll be out for at least three days... if not more," she stated coolly.

The Deliverer suddenly lashed out and smacked Gabrielle hard across the face. "You bitch," he whispered with flashing eyes.

Xena quickly moved but was kicked in the stomach by a man. The wind was knocked out of her as she curled up.

The warrior-bard lifted her cold eyes. "You got that right, Deliverer. Nobody fucks with my child." She jerked forward but was stopped by the men. "She isn't Dahak's," she whispered hotly.

The Deliverer just gave a smug look back. "She's already Dahak's."

"That's what he thinks," snarled the warrior-bard. "He may control her body but he does not control her heart or soul."

The Deliverer laughed. "She has neither. She is just a vessel for Dahak's power." He turned and signaled a few men to pick up Hope.

"Hardly," whispered Gabrielle with a glint in her eyes.

The Deliverer was annoyed by the short warrior's words. He suddenly whipped around and slammed his fist into her face.

The Amazon Queen fell the ground; unconscious.

"Gabrielle!" yelled the Warrior Princess, and she broke away from the men.

"Stop her!" ordered the Deliverer.

Ten men all jumped on the warrior at once and beat her down hard, leaving her unconscious as well.

~*~*~*~

"Mother... Gabrielle?" whispered Eve; she was still chained in her cell.

There was a soft moan from the bard, and she opened her eyes. Her eyes slowly focused and realized she was in a cell.

"Gabrielle." Eve gave a warm smile to the small warrior in the neighboring cell.

The warrior-bard shook her head and peered up at Xena's daughter in the other cell. "Eve?" she uttered and rubbed her forehead.

"Welcome back." God's messenger gave a wry grin.

"Thanks," deadpanned Gabrielle. She gazed down and noted her arms and legs shackled.

Xena, however, was laying on the floor, out cold and chained to the wall.

The bard crawled over to her soul mate and lifted her head. "Xena?" she whispered in concern. She started inspecting her partner's body for any serious injuries.

"How is she?" asked Eve.

"She's okay, just unconscious." Gabrielle's attention flickered up to Eve then back to Xena. "How are you doing?"

"Hanging in there," replied the young warrior.

"More ways than one huh?"

Eve huffed in answer. "Have you seen Hope?"

Gabrielle sighed sadly. "Yes, what's left of her." She kept check the shackles on Xena's wrists, finding them rather strong. "How'd it happen?"

Eve shook her head and stared at the floor below. "They jumped us in the woods. I should have been more careful," she whispered.

"Don't start blaming yourself, Eve. We'll get out of this."

Eve lifted her head and stared across the cell. "I'm praying so."

"We will," stated Gabrielle deeply, "and with Hope." She lowered her head close to Xena's. "Come on, love. I need you." She closed in the distance and gently kissed her partner.

The Warrior Princess moaned softly and responded to the kiss. She pulled back and opened her eyes. "Earlier I was being beaten, now I am being kissed," she joked.

The warrior-bard smirked and said, "That's for putting up with it."

Xena chuckled and sat up with her lover's help. She glanced up at her daughter in the other cell. "I see you and Hope found yourselves a fine mess."

Eve smiled and a bit sheepishly at that. "Sorry, mother."

The warrior cracked her neck and dropped her head against the wall. "This isn't so bad."

Gabrielle shook her head. "If you say so, Xena." She patted her partner's thigh and sat down beside her.

"Okay, what's happened to Hope?" The Warrior Princess's question going to Eve.

Eve shook her head. "I'm not sure exactly." She paused before saying, "I did hear a few of the men talking. They said something about her being locked up in a room for three days. And during the time she was cleansed by the flames."

Gabrielle sighed; she propped up her legs while she thought. "That means she's being

control by Dahak."

"No," cut in Xena. "As you said Gabrielle, only her body is."

"Hope's will is far stronger than Dahak's," stated Eve. "She can beat him if she wants to."

"Well, she's not going to be doing anything for a few days," muttered the warrior-bard.

Eve furrowed her eyebrows at Gabrielle's words. "You drugged her?" she whispered.

The Amazon Queen nodded. "Opium Poppy, she keep her asleep for a few."

"How did you figure it out?" questioned Xena.

Gabrielle sighed and explained, "I told Hope that we were going to end this forever." She licked her lips and breathed calmly. "But you can't save Eve was her response. That's how I knew Dahak had taken her."

"She would have said, we have to save Eve," uttered the Warrior Princess.

The bard nodded at that. "Our Hope wouldn't have said we couldn't."

"Either way," started Eve, "she's still inside. Dahak didn't destroy her. There has to be away to get her to gain control of her body again."

Gabrielle lowered her eyes from Xena's daughter and looked at her lover.

The Warrior Princess locked eyes with Gabrielle.

The warrior-bard sighed and dropped her gaze.

~*Part 11*~

Slowly, boot steps echoed down the prison cells.

The three women, in the cells, lifted their heads in the early morning as the person neared.

"Hope," whispered Gabrielle in surprise.

Hope grinned evilly at her mother. "Did you think that Opium Poppy would keep me asleep for three days?" She reached forward with a key. "Dahak burned the medicine out of my body and healed my wounds." She inserted the key.

Gabrielle rose up to her feet with an ache in her body.

Xena stood up as well while she fisted up her hands.

Dahak's child opened the gate and quickly moved. She wrapped her hands around Gabrielle's throat and slammed her up against the prison cell bars.

"Hope!" yelled Eve.

The Warrior Princess was struggling against the chains that held her in place.

"It's all right, Eve," rasped the warrior-bard. "I can handle my own child."

Dahak's chosen smirked at the words. "Very funny you put it that way." She jammed her knee up into the bard's stomach.

Gabrielle closed her eyes and coughed hard. "We're going to get out of here, Hope." She opened her eyes slowly and whispered, "And with you."

"What makes you so sure?" countered Hope. "We just can't seem to escape that pit, can we... mother?"

"Dahak may be in control here but we have the upper hand." Gabrielle revealed an evil grin. "Our upper hand is our Hope... you." She suddenly found her head slammed against the bars then dropped onto the floor.

Hope glared down at the older woman before she walked out of the cell and started relocking it.

Gabrielle moaned softly but managed to whisper, "I love you, Hope."

Dahak's chosen was hesitant when she started pulling the key out. She narrowed her eyes, spun around on her boots, and strolled off.

Xena just controlled her anger. She peered up at Eve. "Do it, Eve."

"Mother-"

"Do it, now," growled the Warrior Princess.

Eve closed her eyes, took a deep breath and yelled, "Hope!" She paused then called, "Hope," again.

"Gabrielle?" whispered the warrior softly.

The warrior-bard climbed up to her feet and neared her lover slowly.

The older warrior pulled her partner in closely. "Do you trust me?" she whispered.

"You know I do, Xena," replied Gabrielle.

Xena reached up between her breasts and extracted her dagger. "Then play along. Understand?"

Gabrielle nodded and she heard the nearing of her daughter.

The Warrior Princess quickly inserted the breast dagger in between her soulmate's breasts. "Be careful," she whispered and kissed her lover quickly.

The warrior-bard stepped out of her friend's arms as Hope came back.

Hope ignored the two warriors in the cell and came up to Eve's cell. She grasped the bars, her red-yellow eyes locked on Eve. She just waited.

Xena's daughter took a shaky breath but narrowed her eyes. "I, as His messenger, will welcome Dahak into this world with my own blood. But only under the condition that

you release Gabrielle and Xena."

"No," screamed Gabrielle, and she moved forward.

"Gabrielle," growled the warrior. She wrapped her arms around her partner and pulled her in. "Don't, it has to be done."

Dahak's daughter laughed deeply as an amused smile creased her lips. "And it will be done." She folded her arms. "At nightfall, it will begin."

"It will," stated Eve and she stared down her lover.

Hope gritted her teeth before she headed down the prison again.

"It will begin," repeated Eve in a soft whisper.

Section 3

Fragment 1

~*~*~*~

Hope watched the sun kissing the horizon in the west. As the sun sunk lower and lower a grin spread further across her lips.

"Its time," whispered the Deliverer.

"It is." Dahak's daughter reached back and pulled the silk hood over her head. "Bring in His messenger along with His soul mates."

"Yes." The Deliverer marched out of the room, down winding steps, and picked up a few soldiers to go to the cells with him.

Hope rested her hands on the stone sill of the window. Then suddenly she was hit by a memory...

Eve's arms slipped around her soul mate's waist. She pulled her lover in closely and lowered her chin down on Hope's shoulder. She gazed across the calm lake.

The poet sighed happily and rested back in her partner's arms. "Beautiful isn't it?" she whispered.

"Yes." The warrior gave a soft smile, she continued staring at the sunset before her.

"Sunsets use to always mean evil." Hope dropped her head to one side, thinking about her random statement. "Meant to me the coming of Dahak."

The warrior automatically pulled her lover in closer, she gently started rubbing Hope's soft stomach. "Use to though?"

"Yes, use to." The poet covered her hands over Eve's hands. "Now it means..."

salvation." She was rubbing her hands over Eve's in a soothing motion. "It's a sunset, the darkness will come but I know there will be a sunrise... a new day. Another chance, don't you think?"

The older woman had a warm smile on her lips. "Yes, I do... I do."

Hope tilted her head back and gazed up into her soul mate's eyes. "One we share, together."

"Only together," uttered the warrior, and she lowered her head.

Hope's lips softly connected with Eve's in a long, loving kiss.

Hope blinked as the memory faded out, and she saw the sun gone despite the last rays of light filtered in the air. She turned away and almost seemed to float down the steps. Once down the steps, she walked into a large room that contained an out stretched altar table, and Dahak's fire pit behind it.

She walked up to the altar and stood on the top step, she turned and faced the huge door she came in by. She then held her hands together, waiting.

Eve entered the large temple room and lifted her head up, her eyes locking on Hope. Behind her were three guards that ordered her to go off to the right side. She stood in front of the Hope with the guards surrounding her.

Next came in Xena, who was taken to the opposite side of the altar from Eve, she too was surrounded by guards.

Finally came in Gabrielle, and she was escorted by the Deliverer. The warrior-bard came right up to Hope and stared into her eyes.

Hope grinned and ordered, "On the altar, mother."

The bard knew not to fight it and climbed onto the table, the exact same table she'd been on so many years ago.

Hope stood on one side and the Deliverer on the other. The two Dahak followers began shackling Gabrielle down by her wrists and ankles. When they finished, around twenty guards had entered into the temple room, blocking all the exits and stationed near the altar but not too close.

Dahak's daughter walked around to the foot of the altar and held out her right hand.

The Deliverer came over and slipped a long, thin dagger into Hope's held out hand. He then descended down the three steps and stood behind Dahak's daughter.

Hope slowly turned her eyes to Eve, and she walked over to God's messenger. She held out the dagger to Eve. "They live if you draw blood."

Eve faintly nodded and took the dagger from her soul mate.

"Eve!" yelled Gabrielle; she was struggling against the chains. "Do not bringing him to this world!"

Eve glanced across to her mother.

The Warrior Princess gave a very faint nod of her approval.

Eve took a shaky breath and faced the huge fire pit. She held her head up high and walked towards the fire pit. *Please be with us now, God.*

Hope's grin spread wider across her face as Eve took steps closer and closer.

"Hope, don't let this happened," demanded Gabrielle.

Dahak's daughter glanced down at the bard.

"Hope," whispered the warrior-bard, "you can fight him. Don't let him control you, please."

Hope blinked and continued staring at her mother.

"You're my Hope," uttered Gabrielle lovingly.

Dahak's daughter raised her head up to Eve. *I love you, always Hope*, rang Eve's words in her head.

Eve held out the dagger, lifted her left hand, palm up, and called, "Dahak, I, the messenger of God, welcome you to this world!" She slowly lowered the dagger towards her left hand and her hand curled around the blade. She held her left hand out, over the fire pit.

"No!" screamed Hope suddenly, she broke off running towards her soul mate.

"Stop her!" yelled the Deliverer.

The three guards that were Eve's went racing after Hope and grabbed her by the arms. They quickly apprehended her and held onto her tightly.

Hope struggled against the guards, trying the break free while screaming, "No, Eve! Don't!"

Eve gritted her teeth and pulled the dagger through her left hand.

Gradually, blood trickled from between Eve's fingers and dropped into the pit. The more blood that went into the pit, the higher the flame of Dahak flared up. Then the flames exploded and came sweeping up from the pit, sending Eve flying, and she landed on the ground on her face, out cold.

"Eve!" yelled Hope; she still struggled against her captures.

Xena narrowed her eyes at her daughter on the ground. She then looked up instantly as a tall, dark form appeared at the edge of the pit. Slowly, her evil grin creased along her lips as she whispered, "Dahak."

Dahak, the gigantic monster, opened his red eyes and scanned the room. His fires behind him still roared up. Then his eyes finally rested on Gabrielle. He descended down the stone steps at a gradually pace and came to the head of the altar.

Gabrielle opened her eyes, they bore right into Dahak with anger and rage.

Dahak grinned back at the bard.

"Don't you dare," growled Hope lowly, her eyes pinned on the God of Evil.

Dahak turned his head towards his daughter then walked to her. He revealed an evil smile, he ran the claw of his index finger along Hope's jaw line. "Just think, you've brought me here finally... daughter."

Hope laughed darkly and replied, "You'll be sent back too."

"Always the optimist like your mother."

Hope smirked back and stated, "Mother didn't name me Hope for nothing, father."

The God of Evil chuckled deeply and pulled back his hand. "Always amusing." Then he went serious. "First you will see your mother be taken again then your soul mate killed before you join her."

Hope narrowed her eyes and watched Dahak walk back to Gabrielle.

Dahak raised up his hands and the fire spewed over the rim of the pit. The fire crawled down the steps, towards the altar.

Gabrielle's daughter glanced over at her lover, she spotted the dagger from earlier and mentally lifted it up.

The dagger hovered in the air very close to the ground, turning in the direction of Dahak's back.

Gabrielle saw the fire coming closer and closer, creeping towards the altar.

Dahak was raising his hands higher and higher. "Time for a better daughter."

Hope narrowed her eyes as the floating dagger soared through the air.

The warrior-bard growled loudly and her right hand flew up, unchain and with Xena's breast dagger. She landed the dagger square into Dahak's chest.

Dahak cried out then his howl went double louder when the other dagger sunk into his back with the blood of God's messenger.

Gabrielle gritted her teeth. "Hope is the best daughter," she whispered and jerked the dagger hard to the left.

The God of Evil closed his eyes, fell to his knees, and started swaying back and forth. His fire screamed back into the pit as if it were in fear.

There was one second of silence and no movement before Xena attacked her three guards.

Gabrielle quickly started working on the other manacle on her left wrist.

Hope lashed out and fought the three guards watching over her.

The other guards around the entrances had joined in on the fighting.

The warrior-bard finally picked the lock on her left wrist then sat up to do the lock on her ankles. She lifted her eyes when she saw one of Dahak's soldiers about to bring his sword down on her and she still was fighting with the locks. She sucked in her breath, preparing to be sliced in half. But then she saw an arm wrap around his neck and his head wrenched to the right. There was a snap and the man fell to the floor, dead.

Gabrielle looked up and smiled back at Eve. "Thanks."

"No problem." Eve winked and bent down to take the man's sword. Soon as she rose back up, she put the sword behind her back to stop a sword from hitting her back. She spun around and met her opponent.

The Amazon Queen flipped up onto her feet on the altar table, she kicked behind herself right as an enemy leapt onto the altar. She then spun around with her hands up as another opponent jumped onto the altar to take her on. She grinned and spun out the breast dagger. She waved her freehand some and urged, "Come on."

Xena punched her enemy in the face then ducked as the man behind her tried to slash her with his sword. She quickly sprung back up and grabbed both men by the back of their necks and slammed them together.

The two enemies smashed their heads together and went falling to the ground.

The Warrior Princess then took a glance over towards where Dahak had fallen. Her eyes widened when she realized he was gone. "Damn," she growled lowly. She bent down and picked up one of Dahak's men's sword and gave it a good spin. "How could a huge monster just disappear?" she whispered hotly.

"Mother?" Eve moved quickly over to her mother while fighting one man. "He had to go outside."

Xena grinned as an enemy attacked her. She went into fighting stance. "Now we just need to get out."

Eve nodded over to the main part of the temple room. "Not many left."

"Mmmm," agreed the mother, she kept fighting her man. "Eve, I want you to get Gabrielle and Hope out of here." She kicked her opponent hard in the chest before adding, "I'll take care of Dahak."

"Mother, let me help."

"No," warned Xena, "you need to stay alive or this won't work."

God's messenger ran her sword through her enemy's stomach and kicked him to ground. "Mother--"

"No," growled the Warrior Princess, she whirled around simultaneously to when Eve did. "Get them out of here. Do you understand me?"

Eve held her breath but nodded back.

"Go, now!" Xena twirled her sword and plunged it forward past her daughter and

killed another man. "Be careful, Eve."

"You too, mother."

The Warrior Princess nodded and watched her daughter jog over to the other side of the temple. She sighed before turned her eyes toward the doors. She sheathed the sword and jogged out of the temple room.

"Its time to go," ordered Eve to Gabrielle and Hope.

Gabrielle kicked her enemy in the chest and sent him on his back. "Where's Xena?"

"She's gone to help Dahak." Eve lowered the sword to her side. "We need to go, Gabrielle."

"No, I'm helping Xena," stated the warrior-bard.

Eve's hand shot out and grabbed Gabrielle's wrist. "Gabrielle, I can't... mother wants me to get you and Hope out of here safely."

"No." The Amazon Queen took a step closer. "You will get Hope out safely and I will take care of my soul mate."

"Gabrielle, I promised mo-"

"No, Eve." The warrior-bard sighed and whispered, "I can't let your mother fight Dahak alone." Her eyes flickered over to Hope then back to Eve. "Besides, I owe Dahak... for Hope's sake."

"Mom, please don't do-"

"Hope, I'll be fine," cut off Gabrielle to her daughter. "You both just get out of here." She paused and whispered, "Dahak has not seen a wrath until he's seen a mother's wrath."

Hope held her hand out to her soul mate. "Eve," she whispered.

Eve took her partner's hand from behind and nodded to Gabrielle. "Be careful, Gabrielle."

The warrior-bard grinned and replied, "Always am... now go."

"Wait." Hope took a step closer. "Mom, your sais and Xena's weapons are upstairs." She turned and pointed up the stair case she'd descended awhile back ago.

Gabrielle nodded and smiled. "Thank you."

His messenger nodded and turned, she headed towards the large doors that she'd first came through when she was taken by the Deliverer. She never released Hope's hand as they left the altar room together.

Gabrielle watched them go, then her eyes flickered over to the other door she'd seen her soulmate go out of seconds ago. She narrowed her eyes before she suddenly kicked back behind her and sent a man flying onto his back. She then quickly jogged off to the stairs that lead up to where Hope told her their weapons rested.

Xena continued walking down the hallway, her sword up and ready. She scanned the entire hall, watching each of the corners, and making sure she wouldn't be attacked by Dahak. Glancing down the corridor, she noted the door that led outside and it was slightly ajar.

The warrior took a deep breath and crinkled up her nose. "Where are you?" she whispered, "I can smell you." She then stopped moving in the hall when she felt her body warm up and she faintly heard footfall coming towards her.

The Warrior Princess lowered her sword and a dark eyebrow etched up into place. "Gabrielle?" she uttered sternly.

The warrior-bard materialized out of the dark hallway with a grin. "Yes, partner?" She held up Xena's sword in one hand and the chakram in the other. "Forget these?"

Xena shook her head as a tiny grin crept along her lips. "Thanks." She rid herself of the sword she had and took hers before taking her chakram and hooking it into place. "I told Eve to take you with her and Hope."

"Yeah well." The Amazon Queen shrugged. "I told them I had to stick with my partner."

The older woman huffed and gazed back down the corridor. "Stubborn as always."

"Not about ready to separate now," whispered Gabrielle, who took a step closer to her soulmate. "So what's the deal?"

The Warrior Princess held a finger over her lips for silence. She pointed her sword down at the slightly opened door at the other end. She then pulled her chakram off her side and raised it up.

Gabrielle narrowed her eyes when she realized there were shadows underneath the door moving about. She knelt down and pulled her sais out. Then she saw her friend throw the chakram silently down the hallway.

The chakram slammed into the door and shut it tight while hitting a board at the same time. That board then fell down in front of the door and barred it closed tight.

Then a loud amount of pounding came from behind the door along with yelling.

The Amazon Queen chuckled and whispered, "Guards huh?"

"Yup," replied the Warrior Princess. "Come on," she ordered and raced down the hall.

"Right beside you," called the bard, and she raced after her partner.

Hope and Eve bursted through the door and came outside, the opposite side of the temple that the army was camped.

Eve gazed around first then went down the large steps. "We need to get back to the camp."

"The horses?" inquired the poet.

"Yes." The warrior waited for Hope to come down the steps. "We need to have them ready for our mothers if something goes wrong."

Hope nodded, came down off the steps, and stopped to take off the robe she wore. She had it off in seconds and chucked it onto the steps and now only wore her green halter-top and brown skirt with boots. "Let's go," she said seriously.

Eve grinned before she started running towards the direction of the camp.

Hope quickly followed after her partner at a quick sprint to try and keep up with Eve. "Eve, what happens if this doesn't work?"

The warrior closed her eyes briefly before opening them again, she called back, "It has to."

The poet shook her head, sprinting as hard as she could. "Hope so," she whispered.

~*~*~*~

Hope and her soul mate frantically saddled two of the three horses in the camp. All the while, Eve kept a sharp ear out for the Dahok's army, hoping that they would never see them.

"I've got Torque done," whispered Hope to her partner.

Eve glanced over seeing Gabrielle's horse saddled up; she'd just finished tacking up her own horse and went to Argo. "Go to the edge of the forest and watch the army, I'll be there in a minute."

The poet nodded and quickly, as she was quietly, raced to the edge of the forest, she ducked down behind some shrubbery. Her heart pounded with each second, her focused on the army that never stirred... yet. She could only wonder what would happen if the army realized what was going on within the castle. Then she noted a door of the castle opening, her eyes began to widen at seeing the Deliverer coming out of the castle. "Hades." She hastily tried to figure out what to do but nothing came to mind as she watched the Deliverer round the corner towards the army. Suddenly, she surged out of the bush at a sprint towards the army.

Eve had just come to the edge of the woods when she saw her soul mate running back to the castle. She followed where her partner was going and saw the Deliverer and army. "No," she uttered, fear springing to life within her.

The Deliverer rushed to the army, once in ear-shot he called out, "Get your weapons!"

The main leader of the army came out of his tent. "What is going on?"

The Deliverer came straight to the leader. "Dahak has arrived but-"

"Stop him!" screamed out Hope as she charged into the army towards the Deliverer and Dahak. "He's a trader!"

The Captain unsheathed his sword like lightening strike, pointed at the Deliverer.

"What?" roared the Deliverer.

Rapidly, several warriors with their swords drawn circled around the Deliverer, their leader, and Hope.

"Hope," snarled the Deliverer but he looked back to the leader. "She is the trader."

Hope took a deep breath and tried playing her previous role as Dahak's daughter. "How dare you." Her eyes narrowed, and she took a threatening step towards the Deliverer. "I will make sure father makes a living hell out of your life." Her eyes flared with her anger.

"Kill him," ordered Hope darkly.

The Captain narrowed his eyes at the Deliverer.

"He has betrayed Dahak... him and his men must be killed." The poet took a few steps back.

The Deliverer growled and leapt for Hope but was stopped when he was stabbed in his side by the Captain. He then decided to ignore Hope and fought the leader.

Hope backed up more until she came to the circle of warriors. She looked at three of them and ordered them to help kill the Deliverer; they didn't hesitate against her

order.

Eve watched the scene from afar, a very evil grin spreading across her lips. “Nice one.” A faint chuckle escaped between her lips. She turned to the horses and doubled checked them of their tack. She then turned them around to face the direction they were headed for as soon as it was time. She patted Shamrock on the butt before turning back towards the castle.

Hope stared down at the Deliverer, she took one step closer to him and kicked his side.

The Deliverer groaned, blood trickling out of the corner of his mouth as he lay on his back in the dirt. “Damn you,” he whispered hotly.

The poet peered up at the leader. “Finish him.”

The Captain grinned and raised his sword, within a breath he’d plunged his sword into the Deliverer’s heart.

Hope took in a shaky breath. “Gather twenty of your men, Captain.”

The leader nodded and called for his best men.

“Follow me,” Gabrielle’s daughter commanded, and she led the group of men into the castle.

Xena flicker her sword in a circle in the air as she came around the corner, her sword pointed directly in front of her. She saw nobody down this corridor so she signaled her partner to move closer.

Gabrielle silently came near her partner; she noted two doors a bit down the dark corridor. She glimpsed up at her warrior in question.

The Warrior Princess nodded in answer then she walked down the corridor with Gabrielle at her side. Xena took the door to her right while Gabrielle took the left one.

The warrior-bard grabbed the handle of the door; she began opening it slowly with her back pressed against the cold wall and sai in front of her. Before she could open the door anymore, she sensed something wrapping around her ankle and she looked down to see fire around her leg. "Xena!" The next thing she knew, she was flat on her back and being drug along the floor into the room.

The warrior swiftly left the room she was investigating and raced after Gabrielle.

"Xena!" yelled the warrior-bard again as she hung in the air by the fire around her ankle. Below her, she spotted Dahak near another pit of fire.

Dahak smiled toothily at the Warrior Princess, a bit of yellow slobber hanging from his teeth.

Xena reached to her chakram, held it up aimed at Dahak.

Dahak narrowed his eyes at the warrior.

Xena's own eyes went to slits then she laughed amusingly as she threw her chakram.

Dahak instinctively ducked when the chakram whisked by his head.

The warrior had already started moving, doing several backflips towards her soulmate.

The chakram bounced off the wall behind the god, lifted up in angle and came towards Gabrielle. It easily sliced through the fire causing the warrior-bard to come falling down.

Xena landed on her legs in during the rapid backflips and she pushed up harder this time sending herself up into the air. She met Gabrielle in mid-air, catching her, and coming back down; she neatly landed on her feet with her partner in her arms.

“Show-off,” whispered the warrior-bard.

For a response, Xena just smirked and put her lover down and put out her hand when her chakram returned. She hooked her weapon to her side then started coming towards Dahak again.

Dahak stood still, his eyes pinned on the warrior.

The Warrior Princess was grinning from ear to ear while being slightly hunched over and stalking towards her enemy.

Gabrielle didn't near the on coming fight between her soulmate and Dahak. Instead, she was looking around in the large room with the lava pit centered in it. Then she dropped her head back and gazed upwards. She grinned at the huge, round hanging portion of the ceiling above the pit. “Now if I can find some way to get...” Her grin went even larger now when she saw the huge crack that tore through the ceiling. “Perfect.”

The Warrior Princess caught sight of her soulmate climbing up the jagged rocks of the side of the wall. She then noted the huge overhang ledge far above Gabrielle and knew that's where Gabrielle was headed. They both knew that Dahak could be revived and healed by his own fire from the pits in the castle and destroying them was the key to destroying Dahak.

Dahak snarled right when he attacked the Warrior Princess.

The warrior jumped to the side and gave a kick with her left foot, striking Dahak in his back.

Dahak stumbled a bit but spun around, his hands out and he attacked Xena again.

Xena shielded Dahak's right hand away with her sword when he swung at her with his sharp claws. She kept in mind how his entire body was covered in spikes much like the Destroyer.

The god now began fighting at a faster rate, using his claws as daggers, his hands moving in every direction but only being reflected by Xena's fast movement. He growled lowly to himself, which broke his concentration.

The warrior struck him on the inside of his right arm with the tip of her sword.

Dahak jumped back as a pain shot up and down his arm, his eyes were wide.

"Hurts doesn't it?" joked the warrior, she knew he was surprised that a mortal could inflict pain on him especially when the wound didn't heal. "Confused huh?" she further taunted the god.

Dahak narrowed his eyes, his teeth beginning to show again.

"Well..." Xena gave a spin of her sword. "I just happen to be able to kill gods now since the last time we met."

The god stared, not sure whether to believe her but when she attacked him again and slicing a few spikes off his chest he knew to believe her. He quickly counter attacked his opponent.

The warrior-bard grabbed the rock sticking out above her but her right foot slipped but she regained her balance and pulled out a sai. She rammed her sai in between the stones above her. She hung onto that sai and grabbed her other one from her boot and jammed that one between stones as well. Above her was the ledge and she estimated it would take another good minute or so to reach it.

Xena suddenly found herself being caught off guard when Dahak gave his first kick. She'd jumped out of the way but only stumbled into a circle of Dahak's fire.

Dahak laughed deeply as he commanded the fire to rise up higher than the warrior

stood.

The Warrior Princess quickly thought and stabbed her sword at the fire and saw how the fire built up in that spot more than anywhere else. She scratched off the idea of trying to jump through it then she looked above herself through the opening of the ring of fire.

The god saw what she was planning and he quickly waved his hand and the ring of fire capped off the top, fully enclosing the Warrior Princess inside.

“Oh great,” muttered Xena, then the ring began to shrink, closing in on her. “Even better.”

The Amazon Queen gazed over at the battle and saw her partner’s predicament. She studied the ring of fire and how it had a tail leading directly into the fire pit, she knew that it was its source. She gritted her teeth and began climbing faster up the wall side, the ledge just above her.

Xena looked to where her lover was and then at the ledge. *She wont make it in time*, she instantly realize when she saw the ring closing in tighter. “Gabrielle, we have to do it now!”

Gabrielle heard her soulmate’s words but ignored them as she slammed one sai after the other into the wall then her fingertips brushed the ledge. With her right hand, she began to pull herself up and her sai laying on the ledge.

The Warrior Princess saw the ring about to touch the tip of her boot, she removed her chakram and turned towards the over hang of the ceiling.

The warrior-bard hefted herself onto the ledge- she grabbed her sais and gazed at her partner.

Xena nodded briskly and pulled back her arm with the chakram.

Gabrielle grounded her teeth and held her sais by the middle blade. She pulled back her arms and threw them with all of her strength, and anger.

The sais went sailing through the air towards the open crack of the ceiling.

Xena threw her chakram as her arm stretched out and it went into the fire making her close her eyes in pain.

Together, the pair of sais and the chakram sped for the opening in the ceiling.

Gabrielle held her breath and her body was tense.

Slowly, the fire began touching Xena's body and the pain screamed threw her. She closed her eyes in wait as she became cocooned in the fire.

Then there was a loud boom and the ceiling began to fall.

The warrior-bard finally breathed and watched the round ceiling portion come tumbling down over top of the pit. It capped it over and ended the tail of fire to the ring that surrounded the Warrior Princess.

The ring of fire fell to the ground and disappeared and Dahak screamed when he saw the fire pit covered. Without delay, he came after Xena with teeth bearing.

Xena did a spinning kick once he was near enough.

Dahak went reeling into the air and landed hard on his back but he jumped back up to his feet.

The Warrior Princess narrowed her eyes and stalked after him, her anger growing in each step she took.

Gabrielle watched them briefly but then heard the sound of Xena's chakram and it was coming right at her. She tensed up and prepared to catch the weapon.

The chakram narrowed in to the warrior-bard, lowering towards her mid-waist.

The Amazon Queen swiftly flung her hand out and caught the chakram with ease.

Xena dropped down to the ground, and did a fast roundhouse and she swept Dahak's feet from under him.

The god dropped to his back yet again but he kicked at the warrior.

The Warrior Princess jumped out of the way in time and spun her sword.

Dahak was up on his feet again and this time he held up his right arm, his hand in a fist. He suddenly grinned as a dozen of tiny spikes grew out of his knuckles.

Xena's eyes widened as she realized what was about to happen. She leapt up into the air doing a spinning summersault as the spikes flew around her, barely missing her. But before she landed back on the ground, she was hit by a spike in her right shoulder. Once on the ground, she tore the spike out of her shoulder.

Dahak now raised his other hand the same way as he did with his left.

This time, Xena was ready and she dashed forward with her sword coming down.

The god screamed out when the blade sliced through and cut off his arm.

Xena smirked at his reaction and went into attack- a seeming dance of death.

Gabrielle stood on the ledge from far above, carefully watching over her partner and the chakram at her ready.

Dahak tried hard keeping up with the warrior, deflecting each strike she gave him. Yet she kept coming at him and his energy was wearing out especially now that his fire was gone from his command.

The Warrior Princess suddenly gave out her war cry, and she jumped up, giving a hard kick that sent the god stumbling back. She then brought her sword against him and cut him against across the chest then kicked him directly in the knee, sending him down.

Dahak looked up, his eyes flashing in anger.

Xena sneered back at him and rammed her sword down into his back. She then gave it a hard twist making Dahak scream in pain.

The god reached out and grabbed the warrior's leg, his claws digging into her skin.

The Warrior Princess kneed him in the face and managed to get free from his hand while drawing her sword out of his back.

Dahak tried standing up but blood was seeping out of his back.

The warrior removed her breast dagger and hurled it at him and it punctured his throat.

The god didn't move, just rested on his knees but then his eyes rolled up into the back of his head and he fell onto his side.

Xena huffed and turned to face her partner up on the ledge, she walked towards her. "How's the view up there?"

"Not bad," replied the warrior-bard. She was about to relax her hand that held the chakram but then saw Dahak moving again. "Xena!"

Xena whirled around with her sword back up.

Gabrielle was faster and she flung the chakram towards Dahak.

Dahak was just barely up on his feet when the chakram drove into his chest and into his heart.

The warrior realized her partner didn't have the power to kill the gods so she acted quickly. She grabbed the portion of the chakram that stuck out and gave a hard push, which caused the god to fall onto his back. And for certainty, she twisted the chakram in his chest before pulling it out. For a moment, she stared down at the dead god, relieved that finally he'd be gone and never would haunt Gabrielle or Hope. Xena then

moved towards the ledge again saying, “He’s dead.”

The warrior-bard sighed in relief and felt herself shake a bit from all the tension of the day. “Okay, I’m coming down.”

“Hold on a sec.” Xena glanced around and spotted some cloth on an altar by the now cover fire pit. She cleaned her sword and chakram of the blood then put them in their proper places. Coming back to the ledge, she called, “Go ahead.”

Gabrielle took a deep breath then jumped her arms out in front of her and legs together, she aimed for her partner.

Xena braced herself and held her arms out when her lover came into her. To make it easier, she spun to her right to gave way to the force then she lower her warrior-bard to the ground.

“Thanks.” Gabrielle smiled at her warrior.

Xena returned the warm smiled. “No problem.”

The Amazon Queen then scanned the room and spotted her sais by the pit. She hurried to them and swiped them off the floor but she noticed the pit rumbling with anger. “Xena... I think we better get out of here.”

“What’s wrong?”

“This pit is going to turn into a volcano any minute.”

“Hades,” grumbled the warrior, “come on!”

The pair raced to the door but it flung open when they were about to leave.

“Hope?” Gabrielle had a surprised look, staring at her daughter with a staff.

“Mother?” Hope smiled but lost it when she saw Dahak behind the pair of soulmates.

“Gods...”

Xena then saw the warriors behind Hope and instinctively drew her sword.

“What happened?” barked the Captain.

Hope looked at Xena and gave her a warning look, which made the Warrior Princess lower her sword.

“Dahak is dead,” commented the poet to the Captain.

The Captain pushed through Hope and saw the god dead on the floor. “But hh...” He didn’t finish his sentence as his head drop down and he groaned deeply. “What?” he whispered.

Hope noted that all the other warriors were going through the same change as the Captain. “His power must be wearing off.”

The Captain lifted his head and gazed about with confusion written in his expression. “Where are we?”

“In western Greece,” explained Gabrielle to the Captain.

“How’d we get here?” inquired a warrior from behind Hope.

“Look,” Xena sheathed her sword while saying, “Let’s play catch-up later before this place explodes from the pit with us in it.”

“Let’s go,” ordered Gabrielle.

The warriors hastily backed up into the corridor with Hope, Gabrielle, and Xena behind. As soon as the group was out, the ground started shaking lightly.

“Let’s move!” yelled Xena.

The group started running down the maze of corridors, trying to find their way out of the castle. They then found the steps that led upstairs and as they sprinted up the steps, a large opening tore between the steps and the floor. Both Xena and Gabrielle had to jump the growing crack onto the steps.

Eve's head fell a bit to one side as she saw all of the men in the army walking about in utter confusion. She bit her lower lip and then realized something must have happened to Dahak. She looked to the horses and said, "Stay..." She then grinned at Argo. "Keep those boys in line, girl."

Argo whined with her head going up and down.

The warrior made her way to the army of Dahak but as she ran, she felt the ground shake under her. She became even more worried than she was before about Hope. Coming up to the army, she heard several men asking where they were. "You're in western Greece," called Eve.

The men all turned to her and stared at her.

"It's the Roman Commander Olivia."

"Look everybody, you were brought here by a god called Dahak," cut in the warrior. "Right now, we need to get away from this castle."

"Why?" called out one man.

"Because its about to blow!" yelled the Captain of the army as he bust from the side door of the castle. Following him out were the twenty warriors and Hope, Gabrielle, and Xena directly behind.

"Move it!" screamed Xena and Gabrielle right when the ground shook dramatically.

The top of the castle started falling apart and coming down on everybody.

In a panic, the army of men ran for their lives from the castle followed by the two pairs of soul mates. As the entire army and soul mates made it near the forest, the castle collapsed into itself with the ground taking one last large quake.

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle dropped down and rolled out of the way. "Oh good one but not good enough," she teased her daughter.

Hope glared at her mother and spun her staff with grace. "Just admit it."

"What's that?" challenged Gabrielle.

"I'm a faster learner of the staff than you were." The poet smirked and bent her knees, her staff in front of her.

The warrior-bard gave a deep laugh. "Sure," she mocked back.

Hope growled lightly and attacked her mother.

Xena gave a huge grin to her daughter as her sword stopped Eve's blade. "You're getting rusty, Eve."

"Its been awhile," countered the younger warrior.

The Warrior Princess laughed lightly and shook her head and continued sparring with her daughter. She then peered over at her soulmate from across the clearing.

Gabrielle caught Xena's gaze and gave a look briefly.

Xena nodded in agreement to Gabrielle's look. She then focused back on Eve and without warning, she dropped and did a roundhouse swipe.

Eve yelped as she went falling onto her butt.

Gabrielle, herself, had locked her daughter's staff into her sais and ripped it from her hands. She then tossed the staff far out of reach from Hope.

Hope was shocked and stared at her mother in awe.

The warrior-bard snickered and walked over to her soulmate. "Let's go."

Together, the two mothers strolled off from the clearing towards a lake that wasn't too far away.

"What was that?" mentioned Hope to her partner.

Eve shrugged while she sat on the ground. "I take it as a hint."

"Such as?" The poet picked up her staff from the ground and strolled over to her lover. She sat down beside Eve.

"Such as they want to be alone," she urged with an evil grin.

"Well... they could have just said something, yah know."

The warrior released a small laugh and crossed her legs. "Well..." She sheathed her sword behind her back and looked to Hope. "How you feel after yesterday?"

"Better," replied the poet, she settled her staff in front of her. She was quiet for many seconds before finally saying, "Eve, I'm sorry about what happened."

"Its okay." Eve lifted herself up a bit with her hands and turned her body to face her partner. "Dahak controlled you."

"I know but..."

“You still feel guilty,” finished the warrior, “I know.”

Hope fell silent, and she stared at the grass in front of her. “I’m happy Xena killed him.” Slowly, she lifted her eyes to Eve. “He won’t be lurking in the shadows anymore. I’ve always feared him coming back and I knew he would sometime.”

“He’s dead,” stated Eve simply. “Its time to move on now, Hope.”

“It is... finally,” agreed the poet as a smile etched along her lips. “For once, I can live my life... I never liked who I was.”

Eve had a half smile. “I can relate.”

Hope peered up into soft green eyes. “I know... and I’m still waiting on that story.”

“You’ll hear it...” Eve grasped her lover’s knee. “In time.”

“I know,” uttered the poet. She then leaned over and softly kissed Eve, pulling back a bit after the kiss, she whispered, “Thank you.”

“For?”

“Helping me and sticking by me.” A loving smile was covering the poet’s lips.

“Anytime,” replied the warrior quietly.

“Mmmm, I love you,” added Hope.

Eve formed her own warm smile and tenderly kissed her poet.

Hope sighed happily when she sat back, she then said, “I think I’m going to go talk to your mother.”

“Yeah?” Eve rested her elbows on her knees.

“Yeah... I want to thank her.” The small woman got to her feet and held her hand out.

Eve grabbed her lover’s staff while taking Hope’s hand, and she got hauled up onto her feet.

Hope took her staff from her partner. “Thanks, I’ll see yah in a bit.”

Eve nodded and watched her soul mate walk in the direction that Gabrielle and her mother went earlier.

The warrior sighed and glanced at the setting sun. “Time for dinner soon.” She disappeared into the forest to get that dinner.

Hope came up behind her mother and Xena.

“Hey,” greeted Gabrielle with a smile.

“Hi,” replied the poet, the same smile on her lips. “Um...” She peered up at Xena. “Can I talk to you for a moment?”

“Sure,” answered the Warrior Princess.

Gabrielle immediately stood up, knowing this would be a sensitive chat that wasn’t meant for her. “And I’ll go get dinner ready.”

“Need help later, mom?”

“No, I’ll be okay, sweetie, thanks though.”

Hope nodded and watched her mother go then she heard Xena.

“Sit,” offered the warrior, her hand signaling the vacated spot that Gabrielle had been

in earlier.

“Thanks.” Hope sat quietly and made no conversation so she placed her staff on the ground. She took a heavy breath and looked at Xena. “Honestly... I’m not sure what to say... other than thank you.”

The warrior wasn’t looking at the poet instead she gazed at the lake. After numerous seconds, she finally looked at Hope and said, “You’re welcome.”

Hope finally felt her stomach stop turning especially when Xena gave her a smile. She quickly returned the smile and whispered, “I’m sorry for everything that’s happened in the past.”

“I know you are.” Xena took a long breath and let it drift back out as she looked back over the lake.

The poet licked her lips and stared at the beach. “I know I can never take back what I did to Solan... but I’ll never stop trying.”

Slowly, the warrior turned her focus back on Hope, her eyes locked on her. “Solan was very dear to me,” she whispered in a sincere tone, “there’s nobody that can take his place. I know what weight you have on your shoulders from it. But I also know that a lot of things happen during that time. You, Gabrielle, and I all went through Hades. The one thing I’ve come to realize from all of it is that it was nobody’s fault... I don’t hold anything against you.”

Hope reached up, her fingers brushing her bangs back and her eyes stung. Gradually, tears began rolling down her cheeks

Xena sighed deeply and moved her left hand to rest on Hope’s back. “We all have something to pay for, Hope... some of us more than others. What’s important is you learned from your mistakes and that the people that were angry towards you have forgiven you.”

The poet closed her eyes, still warm tears trickled down her cheeks as her mind became consumed with thoughts.

The warrior rubbed Hope’s back. “And Hope, I do forgive you.”

Hope started to calm after those words, she wiped her tears away and looked up at Xena. "Thank you," she whispered.

"I'm sorry for what I've put you through." Xena started to smile. "Call Dahak's death a repayment."

"It definitely is," confirmed the poet. "I'm relieved he's finally gone."

"Me too," agreed the warrior.

Hope had a small grin playing on her lips. "He was a pretty bad father."

Xena broke out with a smile. "I think I have to agree with you on that one." She then lost her smile a bit, her eyes slightly glistening and throat hurting. "Come here."

The poet came in closer, not sure what was about to happen but she found herself in a tight hug with the one person she'd called enemy. Without another thought, she hugged Xena back just as strong.

The Warrior Princess pulled back with a smile and said, "You've got a lot of Gabrielle in you."

Hope gave a small laugh while standing up with her staff. "I think you have more Gabrielle than me, you're better at the sensitive chats."

Xena let out a laugh and countered, "Hang around your mother long enough and it'll rub off on you."

"True," agreed the smaller woman. "You coming into the camp?"

"I'll be there in a minute."

Hope nodded- her smile from earlier never fading as she left Xena by herself. She came into the camp and saw her mother cooking some birds over the fire, she also saw her soul mate sitting down on a log.

Gabrielle quickly noticed her daughter's red eyes and came over to her. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah," replied the poet quietly, "it was a good talk."

"Good." The Amazon Queen took a deep breath of relief. "Is Xena still down there?"

"Yeah, she said she'd be up here in a minute or so."

Gabrielle nodded but then with surprise, Hope hugged her with one arm.

The warrior-bard chuckled a little but whispered, "What's this for?"

"Because I love you, mom," answered the poet as she squeezed her mother tighter.

"Love you too, sweetie," uttered Gabrielle, her grip never loosening. "We need some time to catch up one day soon here."

The poet released her mother and nodded. "We do."

"Go on, sit with Eve."

The daughter smiled before going to sit with her soul mate.

Gabrielle returned to the quail on the spit, checking on them. She carefully studied the two young soul mates from the corner of her eye. She could see how they had that same glow as she and Xena do, it made her smile. Looking to her right, she noted her own soulmate returning from the lake. The most loving smile crossed her lips and her eyes warmed to her lover.

Xena mirrored back the smile, her eyes soft as the sky. "So, what's for dinner?" she asked with her usual tone of tease.

Both Hope and Eve gazed at their mothers and chuckled together while Gabrielle was

shaking her head.

“Some things just never change,” commented the warrior-bard, “and those are the best things.”

The End