

# ~ From Plan A to Plan B ~

by Red Hope

---

**Disclaimers:** Violence ~ This series is violence happy.

Subtext ~ Maintext on the subtext and there might be sex.

Copyright ~ Universal and MCA own Xena, Gabrielle, Ephiny, Solari, Eponin, Amarice, and Argo. However I own Lux, Gelidus, Augeus, Seoirse, and Cacus. So don't take my characters or story line, I'm very protective of them.

Thank You ~ My huge thank you goes to Leslie for her endless grammar checking for me. From the looks of things earlier, this story was chaos but Leslie really brushed it up for me. Thank you so much Leslie!

Any feedback is welcomed at... [redhope@redhope.net](mailto:redhope@redhope.net)

Started: Started: October 13th 2000 Friday

Series Two-**Meeting in the Midst as One Story-Three**

---

## Section 1

~\*Part 1\*~

Xena's eyes lifted slowly. She stared up in the dark at the brown canvas of the top of the tent. She turned her head, on the pillow, to study her lover's back. Her right hand came forward and gently brushed over the almost healed scab. Again, her fingertips grazed over the scab on Gabrielle's right lower back. She sighed, lips twitching into a grin as she returned to her past memory.

"What is that?" roared the warlord as she touched her soulmate's lower right back.

"I just told you," snapped the Amazon Queen.

"I know what it is," growled Xena in response. "What I don't know is why you have it!"

Gabrielle whirled on her heels. She eyed Xena. "Because I'm yours."

"That's no reason!" yelled the tall woman. "Our men have that symbol for a different reason," she said hotly. She narrowed her eyes and brought her head close to Gabrielle's. "I'm removing it," she said coldly.

"No you're not," argued the Amazon Queen. "You can't."

"Watch me," barked the warlord. She rose up to her full height in the tent.

Gabrielle narrowed her eyes as her knuckles went white on the staff. "Don't you dare. I got it for a reason."

"You are no longer my slave!" yelled the Warrior Princess. "It does not belong on you."

"Yes it does." The young woman put her free hand on her hip. "I'm part of this army

and I'm yours. Its fine."

Xena stood tall, fuming with anger. Her teeth clenched.

Gabrielle was starting to think she could actually hear her lover's teeth grinding like two rocks. "I like it," she whispered.

The older woman leaned down towards her partner again. "That brand does not belong on you." She narrowed her eyes but still tried to hold a calm tone. "I will have Jacob remove it."

The small woman sighed deeply. "Xena... you can't get rid of a tattoo anyway."

"You can, and you're about to find that out."

"No," growled the smaller woman. She dropped her shoulders then grasped her lover's arm. "Please Xena... I like it, and, well... I like how it's your symbol on me." She smiled. "It shows you own me."

Yes, it was the symbol that Xena placed on everybody in her army except for Gabrielle... until now.

The warlord sighed dramatically and looked away.

"Please Xena," begged the small woman. She squeezed her soulmate's arm. "Think of it as... an incentive. Nobody will touch me knowing I belong to the Warrior Princess... it'll keep me safe."

"Or get you killed," added the warlord sadly.

Gabrielle dropped her eyes knowing her partner's words held truth. "Xena, it means a lot to me. It's symbolic... please." She gave a sad smile. "I love you."

The Warrior Princess closed her eyes. "Under one condition." Her eyes opened again.

"What's that?"

"I'll tell you later."

"Xena-"

"Agreed or not?" asked the dark woman as she turned her head to Gabrielle. "Yes or no... your choice."

"Alright, I'll agree." The Amazon Queen sealed the agreement with a tender kiss.

The tall woman smiled wryly.

"You'll warn me about *this* condition before you care it out... right?" Gabrielle corked an eyebrow.

"Considering you didn't ask me about this tattoo before hand... probably not," teased Xena. She strolled out of the tent.

The young woman closed her eyes and dropped her head against her staff. "Oh no, I've done it now."

The warlord receded from her memory and she came back to reality. She stared at her partner's back. She sighed deeply and grazed the scab again. The tattoo had her name in purple block letters with a jet-black panther stalking up between the 'X' in the background.

"Xena?" whispered a gentle voice.

"Hey..." The tall woman slid her hand over Gabrielle's side to her stomach. She shifted to press her body against her soulmate's back. "Did I wake you?"

"Maybe," chuckled Gabrielle. She snuggled into her partner's body and laced her hand through Xena's. "Just woke up." She moved her lower body a little and flinched. "It's really sore."

"Yeah," uttered the warlord. She kissed her lover's neck. "That scab will be there for a day or two. You shouldn't be sore tomorrow."

"Good." The Amazon Queen groaned, then felt a squeeze given to her hand. "I still haven't heard or seen... the condition for our agreement."

Xena chuckled and closed her eyes. "Soon." She grinned. "Go back to sleep."

Gabrielle felt herself already slipping. "Love... you."

The warlord smiled and kissed her soulmate's shoulder. "Go to sleep."

The small woman nodded faintly before drifting off.

The Warrior Princess soon made her way to a rare dreamscape of peace.

~\*Part 2\*~

"Jacob."

The small man raised his head quickly when he heard his commander's voice. He saw the evil expression on Xena's face when she entered his tent. "My liege." He stood up instantly and bowed his head.

"I've seen your... recent artwork." The warlord took a step closer and folded her arms. "May I ask why Gabrielle has my branding tattoo?"

Jacob gazed up with a worried look. "Because she requested it." He tilted his head. "She... she said you agreed to it!"

The dark woman took a menacing step. "I didn't agree."

"B-b-but-"

"Did I tell you I agreed?" snarled the warlord.

"N-n-no, my liege." Jacob took a step back and shook his head. "Queen Gabrielle-"

"Queen Gabrielle, got you to hear what she wanted you to hear." Xena's lips twitched with a grin as her eyes twinkled with amusement. "Now then... there still might be some hope for you." She raised an eyebrow in suggestion.

The man nodded and gained his composure. "Anything, my liege."

The warlord flashed a cat grin. "Sketch me an emblem for Gabrielle."

"You mean a branding tattoo like yours?"

"Yesss." The warlord narrowed her eyes and turned to sit. "Now," she commanded in a deep voice.

Jacob nodded and found his sketchpad with a piece of small charcoal. His head turned and tilted each way as he put together a design. Within ten minutes he was done and handed the pad over to the woman.

Xena took the sketchpad and glanced at the design. Gabrielle's name was done in block letters of the same style as Xena's and a feather floated above her name. "What color would her name be in?"

"I believe white would be appropriate, my liege."

The warlord waved her hand horizontal. "Fine... and touch it with black. Is that clear?"

"Yes of course." Jacob peered at his sketch. "The feather will be in brown."

"Fine." Xena nodded. "Make sure the feather can be taken as a quill also."

"Done." The man nodded and took back his sketchpad.

The warlord grinned as she sat back in her seat. "Everybody in this army is required to have this tattoo put next to my branding tattoo."

Jacob's expression went into hidden surprise. "Visible like yours?"

"Yes." The dark woman nodded and examined the design from a distance. "Start today." She grinned slowly. "I'll be your... test subject."

Jacob gaped with wide eyes. "My liege?"

"You heard me." Xena narrowed her eyes. "Get your supplies, and let's get this done."

The warrior nodded his head and stood. He collected his needles and colors. He came back over with a curious look. "Where would you like it?"

She turned around in her chair. "On the back. On my right shoulder." Reaching back, she pulled her hair out of the way to one side.

Jacob sighed and spread out the containers of colors and needles. "Do you want something for the pain?"

"No."

The man sighed, put the sketchpad in his lap, took a needle after dipping it, and began the tattooing process.

~\*~\*~\*~

"Yes, tomorrow, is that clear?"

"Oh, it's clear, but I don't like it," replied the short female.

Xena sighed deeply and sat in her chair near the desk. "Gabrielle, we've had these plans for a week now."

"And for a week I haven't liked them." Gabrielle started pacing back and forth in the tent. "Xena... I'm not a commander."

"Get ready to be one." The warlord folded her arms.

The small woman shook her head while still pacing. "I can't do it."

"Yes you can," reassured the older woman. "Just put on an angry mask and lead fifty men." She laced her hands together. "Your Amazons will be with you."

"I know," whispered Gabrielle. She stopped and turned to Xena. "What happens if I can't lead them?"

"They'll listen." The warlord narrowed her eyes. "They will." She stood up to her full height with her cape cascading down. "Just look inside, Gabrielle." She came up to her partner. "You'll find that side of you that is me." She grinned. "Then you'll know how to be a leader."

The small woman lifted her eyes to Xena. "You're sure?"

"I'm positive." She bent down and took Gabrielle's lips.

The young woman wrapped her arms around Xena. Her left hand came up to the back of Xena's shoulder. She pulled away from the kiss instantly. "What is that?"

The warlord arched an eyebrow. "What?"

"Turn around." Gabrielle narrowed her eyes.

The tall woman smirked. She turned around slowly and felt a small hand brush her hair to one side.

"Xena?" growled Gabrielle.

"The condition," stated the warlord. She turned back around.

"But..." the young woman couldn't come up with a reason why not. "Hold on, Jacob made that design?"

"Yes." Xena crossed her arms and stood tall.

"And... does he still have it?"

"Yes."

"And... what's he going to do with it?"

"Copy it."

"And... who's he tattooing it onto?"

"Our army."

"What?" Gabrielle yelled and grabbed her partner's arms. "Tell me, you're joking."

"No." The dark woman grinned. "That's the other half of the condition."

"Xena... Xena... Xena that's my name on a hundred men's bodies," she said in anger.

"Actually it's a hundred thirteen... excluding me."

The Amazon Queen's eyes widened. "By the gods... that's just great."

The warlord sighed and took her partner's hands. "This is your army as it is mine. It's only appropriate."

The small woman nodded slowly. What could she do? Only agree with her soulmate. "Yeah." She peered up. "At least it's a good design."

Xena chuckled deeply. "Uh huh."

"But, I'm still not liking this idea."

The warlord straightened up for her best intimidation.

"That's... not going to work." The Amazon Queen grinned and folded her arms.

Xena cocked an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"Yes." Gabrielle grinned. "You were scary." She brushed past her partner.

"I was?" The tall woman spun around on her heels and studied her lover's back. "I'm hurt."

The younger woman chuckled and came up to the desk. "I think your pride will be fine." She reached down then picked up a scroll. "The plans?" She peered over at Xena while holding the scroll up.

The warlord nodded. She came up behind her soulmate and encircled her waist. "They'll work."

"I hope."

"If you have the confidence, it will," whispered the older woman. She lowered her head. "Do you want Greece?"

"Yesss." The Amazon Queen grinned at her warlord.

Xena's lips twitched with an evil grin. She lowered her head more and whispered into Gabrielle's ear, "Then I will conquer her for you."

Gabrielle closed her eyes and turned her head. She kissed her warlord forcefully.

The warlord's hands crept up her soulmate's warm stomach. Her fingertips slipped under the green halter-top.

The small woman pulled back from the kiss with a grin. She pulled Xena's head back down for a long kiss.

The Warrior Princess lifted her soulmate's top off at the end of the kiss. She kissed Gabrielle roughly then brought her hands up and kneaded Gabrielle's breasts.

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle crossed her arms and settled them on her lover's chest. She dropped her chin onto her arms. She peered across into crystal blue eyes. "Alright, I'll try it."

The soulmates were laying in bed after an extensive... activity. Gabrielle was resting simply on top of her partner's still hot body.

Xena chuckled. "Oooh, now you will?" She grinned while running her fingertips up and down her lover's bare back.

The blond woman laughed quietly. "No, it wasn't the great sex that convinced me."

The warlord arched an eyebrow. "Then?"

"Looking into your eyes," whispered the Amazon Queen. She leaned forward and captured Xena's lips.

"I promise, you'll do fine as a commander." Xena smiled warmly, which she did on rare occasions and only for her soulmate.

Gabrielle didn't reply at first as she soaked in her partner's smile. "Okay," she uttered. "But I still don't like the idea of not having you with me."

"It'll be between a week to two weeks." The warlord went serious. "Things will be fine."

The small woman nodded. "Can we go over the plans again?"

"Yes." The Warrior Princess crossed her legs over her lover's. She was feeling a little intoxicated with Gabrielle's nude body pressing into her own, but she was willing to focus. "We split tomorrow morning, fifty-two men go with you and sixty-one with me." She paused. "Seoirse goes with you."

"No." The Amazon Queen shook her head. "I'd like for him to go with you. I'll have my Amazons with me to protect me, take Seoirse to protect you," she pleaded. When she saw her partner was not about to agree, she tried another tactic. "For me... please."

The tall woman took a deep breath and released it slowly. "Alright, Seoirse goes with me." She studied her lover before continuing. "You will head east to Mani. I will head northeast and we'll meet up a little north of Mani. Got it?"

Gabrielle nodded briskly. "How large will these towns be?"

"In eastern Greece, most of the towns are small with only a hand full of people. Mani is the largest... with probably thirty plus people."

"Okay." The small woman furrowed her eyebrows. "What about our men?"

"We'll need to recruit some... I'll take care of that." Xena paused as she thought. "By the time we head back towards the Amazons we'll need an army of two hundred... minimum."

"And you think we can get that those men?"

"Yes." The warlord grinned. "As soon as we take the small eastern portion of Greece, warriors will come." Her eyes narrowed with twinkles. "They know my reputation."

"Your past reputation," corrected the young woman.

Xena chuckled. "True." She grinned. "None the less, they will come."

"We'll need a large army... a real army as we head west," stated Gabrielle.

The warlord sighed before nodding. "Yes, our army now is to loose but it'll make do for now." She paused in thought. "Once we take over the Aeolians province then we'll focus on the army."

"Xena, we'll need actual forces... not just these basic warriors."

The Warrior Princess chuckled with an amused smile. "I know this. And after we take over the province then we'll organize a true army."

The Amazon Queen raised an eyebrow. "With hoplites, calvary, archers, foot soldiers... thousands of men?" she asked in excitement

"Everything," whispered the older woman with darkening eyes.

The small woman's eyes sparkled with darkness. "Perfect," she purred. She grinned evilly. "Mercenaries?"

"Yes," answer the warlord. "We'll have it all." She pulled Gabrielle up and kissed her soundly. When the kiss ended, she grinned but lost the grin. "I want to make something clear to you."

Gabrielle nodded. "Alright, I'm listening."

The warlord took a deep breath. "While we're apart, I want you to be extra careful." She arched an eyebrow. "Especially with that tattoo, people will know who you're with, and it could give you problems."

Gabrielle nodded slowly.

"If for any reason after two weeks, we do not meet up, I want you to return to the Amazons. Do you understand me?"

"Xena-

The Warrior Princess cut her off instantly. "Do you *understand* me?"

The small woman sighed. "Yes." She narrowed her eyes. "Why?"

"Because I know I will be attacked before you. If somehow I don't make it out of a battle, I want to know you're safe." She paused. "The Amazons are the safest place for



you." She shifted her head and brushed back her lover's hair. "If I live through a battle, I'll come find you. The Amazons will be the first place I'll look. Is that clear?"

"Yes." Gabrielle sighed and thought, *Its clear, but I won't follow through.* She studied her lover's eyes. *You're too important to me to wait around for.*

"Another thing." The warlord sighed. "Your Amazons."

"What about them?"

Xena took a deep breath before explaining herself. "Do not get too close to Eponin and Solari."

"What you worried about?"

The tall woman lifted her head and pressed her lips against her lover's forehead. "They want you." She lowered her head back to the pillow.

The Amazon Queen's eyes widened. "You mean..."

"Uh huh." The warlord chuckled at her lover's reaction. "I see how they look at you."

"Great," whispered the small woman. She shivered because her mind took her all the way back to Darphus.

Xena tightened her arms. "They won't do anything." She grinned. "They know the price they'd have to pay."

Gabrielle nodded. "What should I do about them?"

"Just maintain a certain distance... I think eventually they'll look to each other." The Warrior Princess sighed. "However, trust Solari's advice when it comes to battle tactics and Eponin's wisdom on weapons and fighting." She smiled. "Amarice, trust her friendship. She'll make a loyal and protective friend... even if she won't admit to it."

The young woman chuckled. "Thank you," she uttered.

"Just watching after my soulmate." Xena smiled. "Either way, your Amazons will protect you if need be."

"I know... they're prepared to die for me." The Amazon Queen sighed.

"Don't worry, that's one of the last things on our list." The warlord glanced over at the flap of the tent. There was still a little light left. "Let's go check on our men and confirm things with Seoirse."

"Sounds good." Gabrielle leaned forward and sealed her lips with Xena's in a loving kiss.

~\*Part 3\*~

"The men are split in half." The warlord glanced at her right side. She fingered her chakram and made sure it was secure. "Are you ready?"

Gabrielle nodded slowly. "It's now or never," she whispered.

Xena looked back at her soulmate. "I'll be with you." She smiled warmly.

"My liege?"

The Warrior Princess turned and saw Seoirse had brought Argo to her. "Thank you, hold her for a second."

"Of course." The second in command nodded.

"And the men are prepared to travel?"

"Yes," responded Seoirse. "Ready and itching to go." He grinned. "They want to conquer this country."

Xena grinned. "Good."

The grin caught on Gabrielle's lips. "Time to scratch our names in history," she said.

"Indeed." The warlord grinned at her partner. "Remember everything I told you."

Gabrielle nodded. "I will." She smiled and grasped her partner's arm. "Be careful, Xena."

The warlord wasn't about to leave their parting at this. She took a step closer and rested her hands on Gabrielle's hips. "You too, love," she whispered.

Seoirse was looking everywhere but at the soulmates. He turned to Argo. "How are you, girl?"

Gabrielle chuckled at her second in command's words. "You picked a good second in command."

"Smart one." Xena grinned and lowered her head. "If anything goes wrong, abandon the men and take your Amazons. Come find me," she whispered. "I will make sure your attackers pay a heavy price."

The small woman nodded faintly because she knew what that heavy price would be. Death. "Same goes for you." Gabrielle reached down and took her lover's hands. "I'll miss you."

"I know." The warlord lowered her head closer to Gabrielle's. "Please be careful, love."

"I will, promise." The Amazon Queen looked up with pleading eyes. "And you'll be careful too, right?"

"Yes." Xena smiled warmly. "I love you, Gabrielle."

"I love you too." Gabrielle moved in for a long sensual kiss.

Seoirse turned away and stared up at the sky. He wasn't about to interrupt a private moment such as this.

The soulmates pulled away slowly, pain in their eyes.

Xena winked at Gabrielle, turned, and took her horse. "Thank you, Seoirse." She began to mount her mare.

"Yes of course, my liege."

"Mount up, Seoirse."

The second in command nodded yet turned to Gabrielle. "Be safe, Queen Gabrielle."

Gabrielle smiled. "I will, you too." She walked over to Seoirse and peered up at him with a hidden plea in her eyes. "Protect her," she whispered.

"With my life," Seoirse promised. "Don't worry." He smiled easily and held out a hand.

The Amazon Queen shook it. "See you in two weeks."

"I will be counting the days, Queen Gabrielle." The man smiled, let go, and strolled off after his mount.

Three horses came up beside Gabrielle.

"My Queen?"

The small woman turned and smiled at Solari. She was handed her staff and she gratefully took it. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Solari nodded with a smile. "Are we ready?" she questioned seriously.

"Yes," replied the Queen. "Let's join the rest of the army." She walked over to her fifty-one-man army and saw that everybody was prepared to travel east.

The mounted Amazons kept close to their Queen. That was one thing they would do for the rest of the journey.

Gabrielle whirled around on the heels of her boots. She faced the other half of her army that would travel with her soulmate.

Xena examined her half of the army and decided they were ready to move out. "Seoirse?"

The second in command shifted his horse towards Xena's side. "My liege?"

"Time to split and head northeast." The warlord grinned as she faced her partner across what were the campgrounds. "Today, this army splits. Sixty-two are traveling with me while fifty-one are leaving with Queen Gabrielle." She shifted in her saddle as her eyes went cold. "The plans are to take eastern Greece!"

The army roared with excitement.

Gabrielle glanced around and started to grin when her eyes met Xena's.

The Warrior Princess grinned back.

"Silence!" yelled the Amazon Queen. She had to try this commanding thing. She took a deep breath. "Our mission is to take the northern and central sections of eastern Greece." She paused briefly before continuing. "The army will rejoin halfway and take the southern portion. Afterwards, we will head back west with an increasing army. Then the major part of our campaign will begin." She grinned evilly. "Prepare yourselves."

The hundred plus warriors all yelled at once in excitement.

Gabrielle was still grinning when she looked back to Xena.

The warlord nodded in approval. She took a heavy breath. "Alright." She paused for the silence. Her eyes rested on her soulmate. "In a maximum of two weeks, we will rejoin. Is this clear?"

The Queen nodded and took a step forward with her staff. "Between a week to two weeks we will meet. Any problems occur we are to send word to the other."

Xena nodded briskly. "Safe travels, Queen Gabrielle." She bowed her head. "Courage, bravery, and honor in battle." She lifted her head with her warlord expression but warm eyes.

The Amazon Queen lowered her head. "Safe passage, my liege." She took a deep breath. "Courage, bravery, and honor in battle."

The warlord nodded with her twinkling eyes. She turned her head sidelong to her half of the army. "Fall out!"

Gabrielle turned around. "Alright men, let's move!" She watched her warriors turn and begin traveling. However, her Amazons stayed beside her.

Xena kicked Argo in the sides and headed for the woods while Gabrielle took the road. Before entering the woods she stopped, and turned in the saddle. She smiled at her soulmate.

Xena's soulmate smiled back to her lover. *I love you*, she mouthed.

The Warrior Princess winked and nodded her authority to carry out this separation. Her eyes stayed locked with Gabrielle's for a few seconds.

Gabrielle saw the love coming from her warlord and knew that within only a candlemark she would miss her soulmate.

Xena turned away and kicked Argo. She disappeared into the woods.

"Gabrielle?"

The young woman looked up to her weapons master. "Let's go." she said coolly.

~\*~\*~\*~

"Gabrielle?"

The small woman looked up. "Hi, Lux." She smiled.

"How are you, little one?" He came into the commander's tent.

"Alright." She patted the bed. "Can sit down."

"Thank you." The cook walked over and sat on the edge of the bed. He peered at Gabrielle, who sat cross-legged in the middle. "What you writing?"

The Amazon Queen glanced down at the scroll in her lap. "Thought it'd be interesting to write about the conquering of Greece." She lifted her eyes. "About Xena," she added quietly with a tinted sadness.

Lux nodded slowly. "How you doing what that?" The cook studied his young friend.

"I'm okay." Gabrielle nodded and stared at the scroll in her lap. "It's only been the first day without her."

"That's all it takes," responded Lux. He patted Gabrielle's knee. "Let me know if I can help."

"Thanks." The young woman smiled warmly. "I'm glad you came with me."

"Wouldn't miss it." The cook chuckled and laced his large hands together in his lap. "Dinner should be ready soon."

The small woman chuckled and grinned. "Did you cook it or Cacus?"

"I did, little one." The older man winked. "And they're all your favorites." He grinned. "Cacus is just getting everything ready to serve." He stood up from the bed. "Actually, I better go check on things."

"Alright, thanks for coming by." Gabrielle smiled. "Can't wait for dinner."

Lux chuckled deeply. "Its almost ready." He walked towards the tent flap. "Bye, little one."

"Bye, Lux." The small woman watched the man leave and went back to writing her scroll.

Lux came out of the tent and soon as he did, an Amazon stepped up.

"Excuse me," said the Amazon coldly.

The cook peered up at the Amazon. "My apologies." He brushed past the woman and headed to the food tent.

The Amazon huffed and watched him disappear in the sunset-lit camp. She turned back to the tent flap and went inside.

Again the small woman looked up to see the newcomer. "Hey Solari."

"How are you, my Queen?" Solari smiled warmly and strolled over.

"Not bad." Gabrielle rolled up her scroll. "What brings you here?"

"Checking on you." The Amazon sat on the side of the bed. "And to find out the plans."

The Queen raised an eyebrow. "Tomorrow we finish the distance to Mani."

"Mmm." The second in command nodded and studied her own fingers. "And what about taking Mani over?" She lifted her head back up with an intent look.

"We will take over the town the following day."

"How are we doing this?" Solari laced her hands together. "I know we're not going to fight them."

"We won't."

The Amazon sighed deeply and grasped Gabrielle's hand. "I'm not trying to be bit-witchy." She grinned momentarily. "I'd just like to hear the plans on how you expect to take a town over with them happily agreeing." She let go. "It's not going to happen, Gabrielle. They're not going to slap on smiles, throw you the key to their town, and say take us."

The commander sighed deeply. "I wouldn't say that." She grinned evilly. "I'll talk to the town's leaders, and when I walk out that door, I'll have the town's key."

Solari sighed dramatically. "I can't wait to see this."

"Just watch and learn." The Queen winked. "See your Queen's magic."

"Well, I can say you're not going in alone." The second in command narrowed her eyes. "Incase those villagers decide sweet and innocent you isn't what they want and try to hang you."

Gabrielle chuckled. "I was hoping you, Ep, and Amarice would come with me."

"Definitely." Solari grinned. "Besides, I don't want your partner after me."

The small woman laughed at her friend's words. "True."

"Yeah, well, I like my feathers right where they are," mumbled the Amazon.

The commander chuckled and smiled. "Don't worry. She isn't here."

"That doesn't mean a darn thing." Solari laughed uneasily. "If I looked at you the wrong way right now and I went to leave this tent, she'd be right there waiting for me."

Gabrielle laughed and grinned. "You're probably right."

"I know I am," grumbled the Amazon. "Anyway." She stood up from the bed. "I'll see you at dinner. Let me know if you need anything."

"Sure." The Queen nodded. "Thanks, Solari."

"Anytime." The Amazon flashed a smile and left.

~\*~\*~\*~

"Explain to me why this army has better food than our Nation?" whispered Amarice to Eponin.

The weapons master laughed deeply. "Ask our Queen."

"What?"

The three Amazons looked up and saw Gabrielle at their table now. They all smiled sheepishly.

"Amarice..." The Queen sat down near the Amazon. "Like the food?"

"Um, yes."

"Which?" growled Gabrielle with an innocent smile.

"I don't know what you're talking about, my Queen." Amarice batted her eyes.

Gabrielle laughed and shook her head. "Lux is just a good cook."

"So I've tasted," replied the sassy Amazon. She sighed. "Can we switch Logos and Lux?"

"I don't think so." The commander grinned at her Amazon. "I like Lux with me." She chuckled. "Besides, he's a he."

"That's true." Amarice grinned and continued eating.

"Are we headed to Mani tomorrow, Gabrielle?"

The Queen looked across the table. "Yes, Ep." She stopped eating. "The following day we'll take Mani."

The weapons master corked an eyebrow. "And how do you purpose that?"

"I don't purpose it." Gabrielle grinned. "I'll do it."

Eponin chuckled deeply. "Yes of course, you're the commander." She grinned while going back to eating.

"Yeah... you are getting a little cocky, Gabrielle." Amarice peered over at her Queen.

"Somebody needs to be around here." The small woman grinned. "Especially since Xena is not here."

"Ah yes." Solari pulled the drumstick away from her lips. "The Warrior Princess, how we miss her." She smirked.

"Yeah I bet," Gabrielle teased. "Be glad she isn't here to hear that."

"Ha." Eponin turned her head to Solari. "With your luck Solar, Xena will hear about this."

"How you figure?" The second in command mumbled between her eating.

The weapons master nodded at her Queen.

Solari drew the chicken leg away from her mouth and wagged it at Eponin. "Now, you have a point there."

Gabrielle groaned and rolled her eyes. "Alright Amazons, let's not talk about people that aren't here."

"Is this a new rule?" Amarice asked with a grin.

"Yes." Gabrielle laughed quietly and then glanced around at her other Amazons with a serious look. "Has anybody else noticed how Eph needs to grow her hair out?"

The three Amazons bursted out laughing and choking on their food. All the male warriors turned their heads to the four women laughing together in the middle the food tent.

~\*Part 4\*~

"I want that village taken!" yelled the warlord. She twirled around while drawing her sword. "Do not kill anybody but take hostages if necessary." Xena paused as her eyes went to slits and she scanned her half army. "Attack," she whispered coldly.

The warriors all hollered and yelled as they drew their swords. They went running past Xena and towards the village ahead.

Xena turned around and faced the small village. She lifted her left hand.

Argo nickered and galloped up to her owner.

The Warrior Princess mounted her mare and sent Argo into a canter towards the village.

And within a half of a candlemark the village was taken and partially burning.

"I want that fire put out!" ordered the warlord. "We need this village," she growled lowly. She turned her head to the right and walked towards the group of huddled villagers.

"What do you want with us?" asked one young man from the villagers.

"Your town," Xena smiled coldly. "Seoirse?"

The second in command came up beside Xena. "Yes, my liege?"

"What's the report?"

"Five houses burned, the fire is almost out, none of our men hurt or killed, two villagers wounded, and one killed."

"Killed?" whispered Xena.

"Yes." The second in command studied Xena's profile. "What will you have me do, my liege?"



"Bring me the warrior," uttered the warlord with an angry voice.

"It will be done." Seoirse disappeared into the circle of Xena's warriors to find the killer.

The Warrior Princess rotated her head slowly to the villagers. "Now then, let's talk friendship."

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle came up the top of the valley and gazed down the valley and viewed Mani.

"Here she is, my Queen."

"So, I see." The commander leaned against her staff. "Amarice?"

"Yes?" The young Amazon came near her Queen's side.

"Bring me a messenger from my army."

"Yes of course." Amarice started to move.

"And Amarice?"

The Amazon stopped and turned back. "Yes?"

"Tell Francis to please join me. I will need his assistance."

Amarice nodded at the orders. She turned and jogged back to the camp.

"You've changed, Gabrielle." Solari turned to her Queen. "You've taken on a powerful mindset within two days."

The Amazon Queen didn't look at her second in command. "It is a demand of me, Solari." She took a deep breath. "I am an Amazon Queen and a commander of an army. How can I not?"

Solari sighed and glanced back to the town at the bottom of the valley.

Eponin stood on Gabrielle's other side. "What are the plans?"

Gabrielle tilted her head. "We'll give them half a day to decide."

"Decide what?" The weapons master studied the town.

"Whether they want to join us freely or have us make them join."

Eponin nodded in agreement. "I do believe that will... rattle their cages."

Gabrielle chuckled. "That is the effect I'm looking for."

Solari sighed. "Let's hope we don't have to attack."

"I'm praying," whispered the commander.

"You called, Queen Gabrielle?"

The commander glanced back and saw Francis, a messenger, and Amarice coming.  
"Yes, Francis."

The small young man came up beside Gabrielle. "What can I help you with?"

"Controlling the men." The small woman gazed at the messenger. "But first, let's get this message taken care of."

The messenger nodded and removed a quill and scroll from a satchel on his side.  
"Here."

Gabrielle took the items and unrolled the scroll. She wrote down a message that reached to the middle of the scroll. At the end, she signed *Queen Gabrielle*. She rolled up the message and handed it back.

The messenger received the scroll and quill and tucked them away.

"Deliver it now, we'll wait here," ordered the commander.

The messenger nodded and started power walking down the valley.

Gabrielle watched him go for a moment. "Francis, how is your respect in the army?"

Francis chuckled deeply. "Quite well."

"Perfect." The small woman smiled up at the man. "Here is what we'll do tomorrow. My Amazons and I will go down to the village to discuss terms. You will stay here and..." she continued telling the plans with an attentive audience, including a sunset.

~\*~\*~\*~

The warrior fell to his knees in the center of the circle of people. He closed his eyes and prayed the pain would end soon. He could taste the blood in his mouth. Suddenly his head was jerked back by his hair.

"Follow my orders next time," growled the warlord.

The warrior opened his eyes and gritted his teeth. "Yes, Xena." He received a blow to his back that sent him on his stomach.

"Try my liege." The warlord paced around the man. "Now, have I made myself clear to you?"

The man coughed and sat up. "Yes, my liege." His body was shaking uncontrollably.

Xena smiled evilly and knelt down in front of her warrior. "You will follow my orders accordingly." She lost her smile. "Or next time I will kill you for your mistake." She smiled coldly again. "Is that clear too?"

"Crystal, my liege."

The Warrior Princess nodded gradually. "Good." She narrowed her eyes. "Have a nice evening." She stood up and walked off while yelling, "Show is over boys. This is your time now."

All the warriors nodded and left the circle after seeing the killer, of the single villager-being punished.

Seoirse came near Xena's side. "The villagers request a meeting tomorrow morning."

"About what?" The warlord continued walking to her tent.

"About a treaty," said the second in command smugly.

The tall woman chuckled deeply. "If they waited any longer, I would have..." She cut herself short and stopped walking. "Tell them their request is granted." She put her hands on her hips. "And tell them to prepare the treaty by the morning." She paused in thought. "Also post outlooks. Make sure one person is watching the village... incase they try something."

"You think they will?"

"No," responded the warlord.

"It will be done, my liege," called Seoirse.

Xena glanced back to her second in command. "I will be expecting you too." Her lips twitched with a grin.

"Of course... my liege." Seoirse bowed momentarily then left to carry out his orders.

The dark woman grinned and continued her short journey to her tent. She went inside and removed her weapons. She sat at her desk with a sigh. She opened the one drawer of the small desk and corked an eyebrow. Reaching in, she extracted a scroll. A grin tweaked her lips. "Gabrielle," she whispered and unrolled the scroll slowly.

"Xen, how are you, love? I'm sure you're reading this after taking over a village or a day of grueling traveling." Xena paused. She chuckled because she could just hear her soulmate's voice. Her eyes lowered back to the scroll and she continued reading the scroll silently. "I'm still trying to figure out why I agreed to separate the army. I think it all has to do with that rotten apple I had the other day. You remember that?" The warlord chuckled deeply and shook her head. *Don't I, Gabrielle? I've never seen a disgusted face like yours when you ate that apple,* thought the warlord. She continued to read, "Well either way, here I am writing this letter a day ahead. You're asleep beside me with a peaceful look on your face. You probably don't believe that. Peaceful, loving, and sweet are the last words you'd want to hear in your description. But I can say it anyway." Xena chuckled again and smiled warmly.

"My liege?"

Xena broke away from the scroll and glanced over. "Seoirse?"

"The posts have been set and the village has agreed to the meeting."

The Warrior Princess nodded. "Perfect." She raised an eyebrow. "Make sure our patrol doesn't... sleep."

"Yes of course." The second in command folded his arms. "Are we discussing further plans this evening at dinner?"

"Yes, we will." The warlord rolled up the scroll. "That would be now, correct?"

"Yes, my liege." Seoirse held the tent flap open. "Duty calls."

"So it seems." Xena studied the scroll in her hand. She sighed sadly and placed it carefully on the desk. She stood up and strolled out of the tent. She was never able to finish Gabrielle's scroll that night, or following night, nor the next, and she wouldn't until one dark stormy night far into the future.

~\*Part 5\*~

"Right this way, please." The large man opened the door and held it open.

Gabrielle nodded briskly. "Thank you." She went up the steps with her Amazons directly behind. She entered into a small room that was darkly lit, there were no windows and it took a moment for her eyes to adjust, this made her narrow her eyes in concern. She then saw there was nobody in the room, just a long wooden table stretching before her.

The large man peered through the door. "The village leaders will be with you."

The Amazon Queen nodded and watched the man close the door. She glanced at her Amazons. "Stay by the door and pay attention."

The three Amazons nodded and shifted back against the wall in attention.

Xena's soulmate scanned the candle lit room. "You'd think it was night in here," she whispered.

Eponin chuckled. "Maybe they're trying to scare us."

"Hardly," mumbled Solari.

"Well, my feathers are shaking," cut in Amarice sarcastically.

"They would," jibed Solari.

Gabrielle held her hand up for silence. She looked sidelong at her Amazons. "Do not make me throw you two out the door on your feathers." She narrowed her eyes. "This is serious."

The second in command coughed and glared at Amarice.

The young Amazon's mouth dropped. "Solari, don't-"

"Be quiet," growled Gabrielle.

Eponin faced Amarice. "We're here to protect Gabrielle," she whispered hotly. "Let's start doing it." Her eyes flickered over to Solari.

Both Amarice and Solari nodded together.

"Thank you," uttered the weapons master sincerely. She moved back to her position against the wall.

The Amazon Queen's head whipped to the right as a door opened.

Five men came in together and sat down in chairs along the table.

The man in the center studied Gabrielle before saying, "You are Queen Gabrielle?"

"That would be me," answered the commander. She walked up close to the table and folded her arms. "I'm here to discuss your village's... relations."

The five men exchanged glances.

~\*~\*~\*~

The large man scanned the town. The villagers were working but a number of houses burnt to the ground. He narrowed his eyes and walked into the village.

One villager turned to the large man entering her village. "Hello."

The large man stopped and smiled to the woman. "Hi." He glanced back towards the burned houses. "Fire recently?"

"Sort of." The young woman nodded too. "They were burned by a warlord."

The man furrowed his eyebrows. "A warlord in these parts?" His eyes lowered to the woman.

"Yes." She nodded and folded her arms. "She left this morning."

"She?"

"Xena... the Warrior Princess." The woman was smiling partially.

The large man stood there stunned. Not because it was Xena's name but because the woman was smiling as she said the name. "Are we... talking about the same Xena?"

The woman folded her arms. "Tall, dark, gorgeous jet black hair, and beautiful blue eyes."

The man stared at the small woman. He heard a small squeaking sound begin in the center of the village. He looked that way and saw a flag rising up a wood pole. He squinted as the emblem came into view. It said *Xena* in block letters with a black panther stalking up from the background. "That would be her," he mumbled.

The woman shook her head and asked, "What do you have against Xena?"

"The fact that she is a murdering harlot," growled the man.

The young woman laughed quietly. "Hardly, she's given us protection."

The man's eyes widened as he glimpsed down at the woman. "In return for what?"

"Joining her and providing supplies." She put her hands on her hips. "And who are you?"

"Hercules."

~\*~\*~\*~

The five men laughed together.

Gabrielle folded her arms against her chest and waited.

The three Amazons glanced between each other with worry.

The man in the middle settled down and smiled with amusement at Gabrielle. "And you expect us to surrender our town to... you?"

"Naturally." The Amazon Queen arched an eyebrow with her stoic expression. "I want this town." She narrowed her eyes. "And I will take it... at any cost."

"You and what army?" a man joked and nodded to the three Amazons. "You and your three women?"

The commander glanced side long at her three Amazons, smiled coldly. "Myself, my three Amazons, and... my army."

The five men went dead silent.

Gabrielle strolled up to the table with an evil grin. "My army that is waiting at the top of this valley. My army that awaits my arrival in two candelmarks. My army that will attack this village if I do not return in two candelmarks." She put her hands on the table, bent forward, and locked eyes with the man in the center. "Me and that army." Her eyes flickered over to the two other men.

"And what are you the Queen of?" asked one man quietly.

The Queen straightened up. "I am Queen Gabrielle of the Central Amazon Nation." She smiled. "I am the commander of a hundred and thirteen warriors." She folded her arms against her chest. "And I am giving Mani the chance to join me willingly or I will make Mani join me." She held her hands out. "Your choice."

"We've never heard of you... as a warlord."

Gabrielle chuckled. "Yes, well I'm rather new." She shrugged. "But I know the rules." She glanced around. "So, what is your choice?"

"Considering we do not know your reputation," one man went on, "we hardly feel threatened." The man straightened up in his seat. "On the contrary, you're the one who should feel threatened. You obviously do not know conquering. We have the means to fight back, Queen Gabrielle."

The small woman ran her tongue along her molars. *Reputation-? I need a reputation? Mmm... maybe I can use a reputation that's not mine.* She smiled at the men "A reputation?" she asked, spinning around on her heels. She smiled at her Amazons. "Supposedly I need a reputation on how to kill." She stood still and let the candlelight reflect off her back.

The five men gaped.

"Xena," one whispered in fear.

*Jack pot... they saw the tattoo. I hope it was a good idea.* Gabrielle turned back around and smiled. "Did you mention my partner's name?"

~\*~\*~\*~

"Seoirse!"

The second in command turned around and saw his commander. "My liege?" He strolled over.

The warlord waited for him, her armor reflecting the midday sun. "Is the army ready to travel for the next battle against Kani?"

"Just about, my liege." The second in command glanced around then back at Xena. "You look... puzzled."

Xena was silent for a moment then whispered, "I want a scout."

"My liege?"

"I want one of my men scouting around these areas." Xena gazed upon the surrounding lands. "I can feel it, Seoirse."

"What is that?"

"I don't know... yet." The Warrior Princess crossed her arms. "My... intuition says something is after us." She raised an eyebrow at her second in command. "I want a scout out and about. Is that clear?"

"Yes." The warrior nodded his head. "Anything else?"

"No, that'll be all." The warlord ambled off.

Seoirse watched her go for a second before he broke off in a jog. He had to find a smart scout, who could easily track. That day's afternoon, Xena gained control of another small village. This second small village was also happy to join Xena's miniature country that would grow in time. So after agreeing upon a treaty with the village, the army settled down on the outskirts. Xena had retired to her tent for the evening when the scout, from earlier, returned.

"Xena?"

The Warrior Princess placed her chakram back in the hook after hearing her name being called. She turned around and spotted Seoirse coming into her tent. "What is it?"

The second in command stepped aside as another of Xena's warriors stepped in. "The scout, my liege."

The scout glanced from Seoirse to the warlord. "My liege, I've come across tracks."

Xena arched an eyebrow. "Go on."

"They're coming towards us but I lost them after the stream." The scout paused as he recalled everything. "But they're coming from the west... the village we took first."

"And the tracks themselves?"

The scout folded his arms. "They were of a large man, my liege. Alone, on foot."

"Mmm." The warlord turned away. "Continue scouting and see if you can find our stalker."

"Yes, my liege." The scout began to move.

"Oh, another thing." The warlord glanced sidelong at Seoirse and the other warrior. "If you find our stalker, don't attack. Return here and report to me."

"Why?" asked the warrior.

"I highly doubt you would return to this army in one piece," said Xena coldly. "Back to your post."

The scout nodded and left.

Seoirse, however, didn't depart.

"Yes, Seoirse?" Xena strolled towards her desk.

The second in command put his hands on his hips. "Who is it?"

"What makes you think I know?" The warlord turned around with a grin.

"Despite the grin." The man chuckled. "The way you talk."

The Warrior Princess smirked now and she removed her chakram. She lifted and studied it while saying, "My old friend." She stared through the center of the chakram. "I told him he hadn't heard the last of me," she whispered with twinkling blue eyes.

~\*~\*~\*~

Solari stood there shaking her head with an amused expression. "I'll be a son of a Bacchae." She chuckled and looked at Eponin. "Do you see this?"

The weapons master gave a smug look. "Uh huh... that's our Queen." She peered over.

Gabrielle smirked as the light breeze brushed her bangs back. "I did want this village." She stared down at Mani in the sunset from the top of the valley.

"What the Queen wants... the Queen gets," teased Amarice.

"Damn straight," growled Solari with a grin.

The four women all laughed together as they continued to watch Xena's flag being raised up on the pole in the center of town.

The second in command glanced at her friends. "And the best part was not even one single drop of blood was spilt."

"The magic of our Queen," uttered Eponin.



"Okay Amazons," cut in Gabrielle. "Let's not embellish this victory."

"How couldn't we?" asked Amarice. "You just convinced a town join you without even putting up a fight."

The Amazon Queen chuckled deeply. "You just have to know how to... thrill them."

"Understatement," huffed Solari.

"So, Solari?" the Queen asked her second in command, "How do you like the fact I walked out of Mani with their key and them smiling?"

Solari laughed, and her head bobbed. "Looks like you were right, my Queen."

"Thank the gods," whispered Gabrielle. "Even I was worried."

The other women chuckled.

"So, where to next?" asked the weapons master.

The Queen took a deep breath, thinking. "There's a village a little east of us on the border. They're our next stop."

The Amazons nodded simultaneously.

"What's the path we're taking to join with Xena?"

The commander didn't respond instantly, she just stared at the village below. "A zigzag, we'll hit a number of villages that way."

"And what of the Aeolians? The province will be furious once they found out their northern lands have been taken."

Gabrielle nodded at Solari's words. "Well, so far only Thessaly would disagree." She grinned. "If their northern villages submit to us, they lose power."

"True," agreed Eponin. "Maybe Thessaly won't even put up a fight once they've see all their villages have sided with you."

"I doubt it." Gabrielle sighed. "We all know Greek pride."

~\*Part 6\*~

"How much longer will we continue to travel, my liege?" asked Seoirse tiredly. He shifted in his saddle with an inward groan from the long day of endless traveling.

The warlord swayed in the saddle as her mare walked down the dirt road. The army marched wearily behind. "We'll stop here soon. I don't want the men to be too tired tomorrow."

"As you command." Seoirse nodded and glanced back at the army to make sure they were keeping up. Satisfied, he turned back in his saddle and stared down the empty road.

Xena herself became hypnotized from swaying in her saddle, the beat of the army walking, and the endless road ahead. She was into her fourth day since splitting up

with Gabrielle and she was ignoring the ache in her soul caused by her partner's absence. She knew if she dwelt on it, it would destroy her focus on the mission at hand. Thankfully, she let herself become lost in her warlord side. She didn't have time for love's games.

Within a candlemark Xena's army stopped their travels. They came to a large camp area and settled down for the evening. Xena retired to her tent so she could work on attack plans against Thessaly. She had to plan this just right.

"My liege?"

The warlord sighed at her second in commands. "Seoirse?" she asked without looking to him.

The second in command stepped into the tent. "My liege." He bowed his head. "The scout is returning from the west."

The Warrior Princess narrowed her eyes and strolled out of the tent.

Seoirse followed behind. "He should arrive momentarily."

"Fine." Xena power walked in the early evening towards the western part of the camp. Ahead she spotted the small scout dismounting his horse. She came directly up to him. "Report." She folded her arms.

The scout breathed deeply and said, "I found our stalker, my liege." He paused. "Its Hercules."

The warlord smiled with amusement. "Continue."

The scout was taken aback by the smile but proceeded his report. "He's about two candlemarks behind us... west, on foot, and nobody is with him." He paused. "Right now, he's camping for the night. He won't travel in the dark it seems."

Xena nodded gradually. "Alright, stay here. You've done your job."

The scout nodded. "Yes, my liege." He took his horse's reins and walked off.

The warlord didn't look at her second in command but said, "Seoirse, follow me."

The warrior nodded and trailed behind Xena back towards her tent.

The pair went in and faced each other.

"What are you considering?" Seoirse asked quietly. "He'll try to stop you."

"I know this," whispered the warlord coldly. She started pacing in the tent. "I think he should get what he wants."

"What?" The second in command widened his eyes. "You're not considering handing yourself over, are you?"

"Yesss," growled the Warrior Princess. She stopped pacing and faced her warrior. "I know him, Seoirse."

The man shook his head. "Suppose you do hand yourself over. What then?"

Xena grinned while folding her arms. "You stay here and run the army." She coked an eyebrow. "Hercules needs to be distracted, and I can do that." She paused. "Send a messenger to Gabrielle. Once she is here, the full army can take Hercules down."

"What are you going to do?"

The warlord grinned. "Play cat and mouse." She unfolded her arms.

"You're the commander." The second in command sighed. "When will you leave?"

"A few candlemarks before dawn." Xena raised an eyebrow. "And have a scout follow me, incase something goes... wrong." She went serious. "Get me a messenger."

Seoirse nodded briskly and left the tent.

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle stood tall at the edge of the camp in the night.

"What's taking Francis so long?" asked Amarice impatiently.

The Queen sighed. "Control your feathers, Amarice."

"I'll have to apologize for Amarice, Gabrielle." Solari began to grin. "Its way past her bedtime and she tends to get... grouchy if she stays up too late."

Amarice glared at the second in command. "Ha, I can stay up later than you... older woman!"

Solari opened her mouth but was cut off by a hand covering her mouth.

The weapons master narrowed her eyes at Solari. "Don't even reply." She lowered her hand.

The second in command chuckled.

Amarice smiled victoriously while looking towards the dark woods.

The Amazon Queen sighed deeply and listened carefully as she heard the sounds of hoof beats. "He's coming."

The three Amazons squinted towards the woods trying to find Francis.

Suddenly a horse emerged from the black woods and came up to the four women. "They refuse, Queen Gabrielle," Francis said, dismounting.

The commander swore under her breath before asking, "And you told them the consequences for not joining us?"

Francis nodded while taking his horse's reins. "Yes, they said they're prepared to fight."

"Very well," Gabrielle said coldly. "Tomorrow morning, we attack."

Francis nodded. "As you wish."

"I don't wish it," muttered the Amazon Queen. She leaned against her staff. "Alright, get some sleep Francis. Thank you for delivering the message."

"You're welcome." The warrior walked past the women and went into camp.

"Alright, Amazons." The Queen eye's flickered between them. "Get to your tent and get some sleep too."

The three Amazons nodded. Solari and Amarice strolled off.

The weapons master stayed and arched an eyebrow at her Queen.

The small woman gave an amused smile. "Yes, Ep?"

"Don't hide it, Gabrielle." Eponin paused. "It's not an easy choice... to attack a village."

"No its not," whispered the Queen. "But it has to be done." She dropped her head against the staff. "I wonder how Xena did it her first time."

Eponin didn't respond at first. "I'm sure it wasn't easy for her then either." *Because it was her first step towards darkness*, thought the Amazon. "Get some rest too, huh?"

"Yeah," replied the young woman. "You too, Ep."

"I will." The Amazons smiled warmly and hugged Gabrielle.

The commander wrapped one arm around her weapons master and hugged tightly back. When she pulled back she smiled. "Thank you."

"Anytime." Eponin winked and headed off.

Gabrielle turned around and faced the camp. She studied the tents and warriors milling about. "My army," she whispered, shook her head, and went to her tent.

~\*Part 7\*~

"No horse?" asked Seoirse.

"No," answered the warlord. She sheathed her sword and faced her second in command. "I sent the messenger out." She paused in thought. "Stay here, Seoirse, and keep the men under control. Is this clear?"

"Yes, my liege."

The pair was on the edge of the camp near the road. Xena was prepared to leave, and a scout was mounting his horse. It was three candlemarks before dawn.

"Good," Xena said and check to see if her scout was ready to go. "Once Gabrielle arrives, she'll be in command. Help her." She narrowed her eyes. "Either I'll return with plans to finish Hercules or I'll send the scout. Is this clear?"

"Yes, of course." Seoirse crossed his arms. "You're sure about this?"

"No." The warlord walked onto the road. "There are too many variables." She turned towards the scout. "Are you ready?"

The scout nodded and spurred his horse forward. He came up onto the road beside Xena.

"Keep things intact, Seoirse." The Warrior Princess took a deep breath. "I'll be back." She turned and walked down the road in the dark.

The second in command watched her go and uttered, "Be safe." He turned on his pivot foot then went into camp.

~\*~\*~\*~

"Alright, get the men up!" commanded Gabrielle.

Francis nodded as he went to various tents. He began the process of waking the army.

The small woman glanced towards the east. She noticed the sun had yet to rise over the horizon. She shivered though the morning air was warm. Her right arm went across her bare stomach and her shoulders dropped. She continued to stare at the dark eastern horizon. "Something is wrong," she whispered. Her head turned as she heard her Amazons coming, complaining of the early morning.

~\*~\*~\*~

Xena reached forward and spread open the leaves of the brush. There slept Hercules close by a dead fire of black ashes. She smirked. Then moved and left the area silently. Walking up to the road, she came towards her scout. "Alright, he's in there." She folded her arms. "I want you to stay near but do not get involved. Is this clear?"

The scout nodded. "What will you do?"

"I'll keep him busy." The Warrior Princess studied the sunrise peeking over the horizon. "Do not let him know you're here. If I am taken, wait around to hear Hercules's plans, then go back to Seoirse. Understood?"

"Yes, my liege." The scout shifted the reins in his hands. "Good luck."

The warlord nodded, unsheathed her sword, and went towards Hercules's camp.

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle studied the tiny village ahead. She took a shaky breath know what she was about to order her army to do.

The army came to a stop behind their commander. On their commander's signal, they unsheathed their swords simultaneously.

The Amazon Queen turned around to face them while her Amazons stood beside. "We take this village hard and fast," she ordered. "Nobody is to be killed however do what you must to control the village. Is this clear to you all?"

Every warrior nodded and grinned.

"Alright." The small woman lifted her staff. "I control of this village in half of a candlemark." She grinned slowly. "Attack!"

The warriors together yelled, "Queen Gabrielle." And raced down the road towards the small town. Some ran on foot others galloped on horseback.

The Amazons stood close to their Queen while watching the warriors roar past.

Gabrielle turned around and saw the flow of men rush into the small town. She walked near the town slowly with her Amazons.

~\*~\*~\*~

Xena strolled into the middle of the camp and stared down at Hercules. "Morning, Hercules."

"What took you so long?" rumbled the deep voice. Hercules opened his eyes slowly and smirked at the woman above him.

"Oooh, I was deciding how I wanted to enter your camp." She propped the blade of her sword against her shoulder. "Miss me?"

The demi-god narrowed his eyes then placed his hands palm down on the ground. "I've heard of your recent... conquering."

"Quite different isn't it?" The warlord shot a smug look before strolling off to the other side of the camp.

Hercules stood up and watched the woman. "Decided not to kill now? How sympathetic of you."

The Warrior Princess laughed and whirled around with her cape flowing behind. "Isn't it?" She grinned. "I've decided I'd need people if I desire to have a country." She lowered her sword.

"You're after Greece?"

"Very much," Xena answered. "With renewed strength," she whispered deeply. She came right up to Hercules. "Greece will be mine." She pressed her free hand against the demi-god's stomach. "You're welcomed to join."

Hercules raised an eyebrow. "And you know my answer to that."

"Mmmm." The warlord smiled seductively as she ran her hand up the man's chest. "Thought I could convince you otherwise," she purred. "You're the son of Zeus, you should show it." She ran her fingertips over his lips. "Don't you think so?" She leaned in and kissed him roughly.

He pulled back from the kiss with an angry expression. "I don't think so." He grabbed both of Xena's wrists and put them behind her back.

Xena laughed and tilted her head. "You won't win, I can promise that."

"Then I'll put that to the test." Hercules started to squeeze the warlord's right wrist to get her to drop the sword.

The Warrior Princess's upper lip twitched and she ignored the pain. Her eyes went cold, she smirked, and without warning rammed her right knee into Hercules's... groin.

The large man doubled over in agony, releasing her wrists.

The dark warlord chuckled and stepped back. "Always a man's downfall." She spun her sword.

Hercules rose up to his full height with gritted teeth. He held up his hands. "Let's dance."

"Would love too." The warlord made the transition into her fighting stance with dark and flashing eyes.

The demi-god grinned and prepared to fight.

The scout kept watch of his commander fighting the legendary Hercules. He hid deep in the brush. The display before him was of Xena and Hercules fighting equally. And that was what surprised the scout... equally. He knew his commander's potential as a warrior and the way she fought now was not her best. That led him to believe that Xena wanted to be defeated... in this battle.

Xena's sword went soaring from her hand. She turned her head to Hercules with a laugh. "Not bad."

"Thanks." Hercules grinned and with no warning punched.

The warlord let the blow connect, and she went spinning to the ground. She pretended to try and dodge the next punch but Hercules's fist rammed into her face. The Warrior Princess's head slump to the ground as she went out cold.

Hercules stood up and searched for some vines. He came back and tied the warlord's hands behind her back. He took her chakram and sword and placed them on his own body. By the time he was done, Xena was waking up.

The dark woman moaned softly and lifted herself up. She noticed immediately that her hands were tied and her weapons gone. She glanced over at Hercules near the dead fire. "Have me tied with no weapons." She grinned. "And what do you plan to do? I won't stay in these that long."

Hercules raised an eyebrow and walked over. He knelt down in front of the warlord. He had a serious expression. "You're going to pay for your crimes... you're going to prison in Thessaly."

## **Section 2**

~\*Part 8\*~

"Queen Gabrielle?"

The small woman turned around slowly at hearing her name. She stood in the middle of the second village they'd taken over. "Francis?"

Francis came jogging up with a worried look and a scroll in hand. He passed by three warriors and came up to Gabrielle. "A message has arrived for you." He handed the scroll over.

The three Amazons beside Gabrielle became worried and huddled close.

The Amazon Queen unrolled the scroll. "Xena's messenger?" she questioned while unrolling the scroll.

"Yes," answered Francis.

Gabrielle's breathing slowed as she began to read the familiar handwriting. "Hades," she growled and rolled up the scroll rapidly. "Hercules is after Xena."

"What's the plan?" asked Solari.

The commander stared through the village, she thought. "Alright..." She started walking towards the group of villagers they had captured.

Francis and the Amazons followed behind in a rush.

"We finish the business here with this village," Gabrielle went on, "Then we head to Xena's army."

"All of the army goes back?" questioned Francis.

"No," replied the commander. She stopped walking suddenly. "No actually, I lied." She faced Francis. "We will join back up with Xena, the entire half of this army." She shook her head. "We abandon this mission."

Francis's eyes widened. "What about the rest-"

"I do not care!" yelled Gabrielle. She pointed the scroll at Francis and narrowed her eyes. "Our objective now is to stop Hercules. He purposes a threat to our mission to conquer Greece." She paused. "And he threatens my partner's life." She lowered the scroll. "We will return to Seoirse and take care of Hercules. We'll continue this mission later. Is this clear?"

"Yes, Queen Gabrielle." Francis nodded briskly.

"Good." Gabrielle turned and walked on. "Now then, I want a treaty setup with this village by this afternoon." She studied the huddled villagers in the center of the tiny town. "After the treaty is done, we will travel." She stopped in her tracks since she was near the villagers. "How many days will it take to meet up with the other half of the army?"

"A day and a half," answer Solari. She peered up to Francis and saw him nod in agreement.

"Fine." The commander leaned against her staff. "Get me a messenger, Francis."

Francis nodded and disappeared.

~\*~\*~\*~



Xena growled lowly after having the rope jerked. "Can't you keep a set pace?" she asked coldly.

Hercules peered back at the woman. "With you as my shadow, no."

"You know Hercules, I won't be staying in the prison that long."

The demi-god laughed quietly and slowed his pace. He walked along side the warlord. "You will be, for life is my guess." He paused. "I highly doubt your army will... wait for you."

The warlord grinned knowingly. "No, they won't."

Hercules studied the woman in wonderment. "And why did you let me capture you?"

"I'm bored," replied the Warrior Princess. Her eyes twinkled at Hercules. "I need to play."

"Hmmm." The demi-god gazed ahead. "I'm sure I'll find out more, later."

"Promise," whispered the warlord.

~\*~\*~\*~

"Let's go, let's go!" yelled Francis. "Move it men!"

Gabrielle leaned towards Solari. "This is why I like Francis." She grinned. "He can do the yelling instead of me."

The second in command chuckled and watched the army preparing to travel in the early afternoon.

"You sure this is a good idea?" Eponin looked to her Queen. "Traveling this late after just taking a village?"

"Eponin," drew out the Queen, "We need to get to Xena." She faced her weapons master. "And that's what we're gonna do."

"Yes," responded Eponin. She sighed at knowing her opinion did not matter this time.

The commander turned around and examined her army. "Francis, are we ready?"

"Pretty much, Queen Gabrielle." Francis strolled up. "Are you?"

"Yes, let's move." The Amazon Queen stepped around Francis. She took a deep breath. "Alright men!" She watched the warriors settle down and she continued. "We're headed to join up with the other half of the army. Hercules is around and we need to... extinguish him so to say. It will take us a day and half to meet with Xena's army so we're getting started now. Let's fall out!" she ordered.

The warriors collected themselves and trekked onto the road headed northwest.

~\*Part 9\*~

"Perfect," mumbled Seoirse under his breath. "She's headed here now."

"Queen Gabrielle?" questioned the warrior.

"Yes," answered the second in command. He lifted his eyes to his chosen third in command. "Any signs of the scout that left with Xena?"

"None, Seoirse."

"Alright, keep an eye out." Seoirse rolled up the message he just received from Gabrielle. "You have your orders."

The third in command nodded and left.

Seoirse glanced around at the camp and walked back towards his tent. As soon as he entered the third in command came racing in breathing a little heavy.

"The scout is just coming in, Seoirse."

"Already?" The second in command tossed the scroll message to his bed and left the tent. "Lead the way."

The third in command nodded and guided Seoirse towards the western end of camp. He spotted the scouting coming in on horseback at gallop.

"What's your report?" asked Seoirse when the scout came in closer.

"She's taken," stated the scout as he stopped his horse. "Hercules has her," he added while dismounting. "And he's taking her to the Thessaly prison."

"Hades," growled Seoirse. "He actually took her?"

"Yes," answered the scout. "The odd thing is, she seemed to want to be captured."

"What?" Seoirse yelled suddenly. "How do you figure?"

The scout shook his head. "She wasn't fighting at her peak, sir." He put his hands on his hips. "I think she's trying to keep him busy."

The second in command grumbled, "Until Gabrielle returns." He sighed. "Damn, why'd she do that?" His attention went back to the scout. "Alright, follow Hercules and Xena... protect her if it looks like she needs it. Just keep her in your sights. Is this clear?"

"Yes, sir." The scout remounted. "Any message you want me to give to Xena if I can?"

Seoirse shook his head but held his hand up. "Actually, tell her... we're coming for her."

The scout grinned and nodded. He spurred his horse and disappeared into the woods.

~\*~\*~\*~

"The men need a break," snarled Francis.

Gabrielle looked up instantly at her second in command. She stepped closer to his horse. "Francis, this army will stop when I say we can." She narrowed her eyes. "We

can go another half of candlemark then we'll break for camp." She paused before growling, "Is that clear?"

Francis sighed and nodded. "As you order, Queen Gabrielle."

"Thank you," Gabrielle replied and strolled away from Francis's horse. She continued leading the army down the road with her Amazons at her side.

And the commander held true to her words when the army turned off the road and settled down for the night. Tomorrow, the Amazon Queen would push the army to finish the distance and meet up with Xena's half of the army.

~\*~\*~\*~

Xena watched Hercules tie her legs together. Her tongue ran along her molars. "Is this... necessary?"

"With you?" The demi-god jerked the vines tight and peered up. "Yes." He stood up and walked near the fire. "Interested in quail?"

"Only your death," whispered the warlord. "Quail sounds great," she said louder.

Hercules narrowed his eyes at the woman before returning his attention to the fire. He turned the quails and cooked them on the other side. "So... want to explain your change in... conquering?"

"I told you."

The man huffed and turned his head. "Just to have people in your... kingdom."

"Just to have people in my kingdom," mocked the warlord. "Exactly." She grinned. "Any other questions?"

"One." Hercules stood and knelt down in front of the woman. "What happened to Draco?"

~\*Part 10\*~

"Let's move!" order the commander. She watched her men begin the rest of the trek towards Xena's army. Gabrielle sighed and started walking. She went to the front of the army and led the way. Her Amazons, on horseback, came trotting up from behind.

The only thing she thought about during her traveling was her soulmate. Her soulmate and the plans to save her soulmate. And the only thing in her mind was just swamping Hercules with her army and breaking her partner out. She sighed at that thought. Breaking her partner out, now she was becoming a criminal. But this was her soulmate and that's how she justified it. She'd declared a while back that nothing would come between her and Xena. She couldn't let it happen in this reality... nor any others.

So here she was still walking down the seeming endless road, praying she could come up with a plan to saving her partner. In the end, she knew she would but she needed to figure it out and quick.

~\*~\*~\*~

Seoirse tilted his head and narrowed his eyes. He sat on his bed in his tent. He heard the sound again and he lifted his head. "She's here," he whispered to himself. Standing up instantly, Seoirse walked briskly out of the tent and into the late evening. He jogged to the eastern portion of the camp and spotted the glow in the distance. "They're coming!" he yelled.

The third in command came rushing up. "I saw her coming earlier." He looked east and saw the other half of the army nearing. "You think there's enough room in the camp for the rest of the army?"

"Make room," ordered Seoirse. He glimpsed down at the warrior. "What you waiting for, a hand written declaration? Go get the camp in order!"

The third in command laughed quietly and jogged off.

Seoirse watched him go then he glanced ahead. He recognized the three women on horse back along with the woman between the horses walking. He grinned. "Queen Gabrielle!" he called.

The Amazon Queen grinned while marching down the road. "You better have this camp in order, Seoirse!" yelled Gabrielle.

The second in command laughed deeply and walked towards the approaching half of the army. He met halfway with a smile.

Gabrielle stopped and peered back at her half of the army. "Alright men, settle down for the evening. Good job!"

The warriors sluggishly made their way into the camp for the night.

"Dismount," ordered the Queen. She turned her head back to Seoirse as her three Amazons dismounted. "Go on in Solari and Eponin."

The two Amazons nodded and walked their horses into camp.

Amarice shifted and stood near her Queen.

"How are things, Seoirse?"

"Well... here anyway."

"Word from Xena?"

The second in command sighed deeply. "Hercules captured her."

Gabrielle corked an eyebrow. "Unlike Xena."

"Quite," agreed the warrior. "I think she's planning to distract him till you can get to her."

"Your guess is good as mine, Seoirse." Gabrielle leaned against her staff. "And they're headed to Thessaly?"

"Yes, Hercules plans to take her to prison."

"Wonderful," grumbled the commander. "Alright, I'm going to go figure out the plans." She straightened up. "I'll catch up with you later."

Seoirse nodded. He turned and headed back towards camp beside the Queen. "How were the conquerings?"

"Sufficient," answered Gabrielle. "I'd would have like to seen one more town taken before this." She shrugged. "But two will do for now."

The second in command nodded while listening to the clip clop of Amarice's horse. "No problem with the men?"

"None." Gabrielle nodded and smiled faintly. "I was happy with that."

The warrior chuckled and peered across the camp. "Things here are quiet. I think the men are ready to stop Hercules after the last ordeal."

"I wasn't there for that." The commander studied the camp as she went in. "But this will be Hercules's last interference."

"Those are bold words," whispered Seoirse, "Considering who he is."

Gabrielle grinned at her second in command. "No, they're words of truth considering who I am." She lost her grin. "I'll catch up with you at dinner, Seoirse."

"As you wish." Seoirse strolled away but called off, "Good to see you back, Queen Gabrielle."

The commander smiled. "Thank you, Seoirse." She watched the warrior leave then she faced Amarice.

The young Amazon corked an eyebrow.

The Queen chuckled and leaned against her staff. "I may need you to do me a favor, Amarice."

"Oh boy, I don't like the way you say that."

Gabrielle grinned and brought her hand up to her Amazon's back. "Ever consider being a village girl?"

~\*Part 11\*~

"You can't be serious?"

"I am dead serious, Amarice." The commander folded her arms and averted her weight to her left foot. She studied Amarice. "You look perfect."

"I'm in rags!" yelled the Amazon.

"Part of the role of being incognito."

The Amazon shook her head. "Incog who?" She reached down to adjust her long brown skirt.

Gabrielle sighed and stepped forward. She adjusted Amarice's blue top and pushed

down the sleeves. "Please be nice to this outfit, Amarice. My mother made it for me."

The young Amazon huffed and dropped her shoulders. "Do I really have to do this?"

"No," answered Gabrielle. "But I am asking you too... as your friend." She stepped back, in the middle of the tent, and studied Amarice dressed in her old villager clothes. "So?"

Amarice groaned. "Alright, I'll do it."

"Thank you," whispered the commander. She looked up when Solari, Eponin, Francis, and Seoirse came in.

Francis moved and stood beside Amarice. "How do we look?" He grinned.

Amarice groaned.

Solari smirked while standing beside her Queen. "Like a married couple."

Amarice glared.

Francis chuckled.

Gabrielle was silent and studied Francis being dressed in regular villager garb. "Alright, you two do look like a married couple." She folded her arms. "Perfect." She went serious. "Now, you two understand what your mission is in Thessaly? Its not that complicated."

"Yes," replied Francis. "To keep track of Xena in Thessaly."

The Amazon Queen corked an eyebrow.

"And to protect her if need be," added Amarice. "Do you seriously think they might put her to death?"

"Its possible, Amarice." Gabrielle sighed. "And if that's the case then you two need to distract the town."

"How are we gonna distract a city from killing Xena?" asked Amarice a little to suddenly.

The Queen sighed and replied, "Using Hercules." She grinned. "I know Hercules enough to say that if you keep him in the city he'll protect Xena from the town." She paused. "If the city decides to be ruthless and kill Xena without a trial."

Francis nodded slowly. "Good plan."

"And you two have enough money?" asked Seoirse.

"Yes," answered Francis as he patted the side of his belt. "We're covered."

"Alright then." Gabrielle paused and took a deep breath. "You two head out now. Myself and around fifty men will leave here in a few candlemarks."

Amarice furrowed her eyebrows. "How are we going to get Xena back?"

"Attack Hercules," told Eponin. "And break Xena out."

"It's quite simple," added Solari with a grin.

"But it won't work out that way, I can guarantee that," said Gabrielle. "You two get going."

Francis and Amarice nodded and headed out of the tent with the group following behind.

"Hey Queen Gabrielle?"

"Yes Amarice?"

"I know I'm not riding side-saddle."

The Queen laughed deeply and shook her head. "I'll spare you that at least."

"Thanks," chided the young Amazon.

The group went through the camp and neared the two horses at the west end of camp.

Amarice and Francis mounted the horses immediately.

"Make it there in record time," ordered the commander. Gabrielle had a stern expression. "And watch over her."

Amarice saw the desperation in her Queen's eyes. "Don't worry," she said warmly and smiled reassuringly.

Francis turned back in his saddle to see his regular warrior attire and weapons. He shifted back in his saddle. "Don't take long, Queen Gabrielle."

"We won't." Gabrielle grinned. "Are you both set?"

"Yup," replied Amarice. She turned her horse and gave a small tap to her horse's sides. "We'll see you soon."

"Good luck," called the commander then watched the two horses break out into a gallop headed for Thessaly. "Okay, let's get everything else ready." She turned to face Seoirse and her two Amazons.

~\*~\*~\*~

Hercules scanned the area as he saw the sign ahead that said, "Welcome to Thessaly," in Greek of course. "Here we are."

"Wonderful," mumbled Xena. She narrowed her eyes when the outskirts of Thessaly came into view. And there were numerous people even milling around on the outskirts of the city. She sighed. "Good preplanning to conqueror this city later," she muttered under her breath.

The demi-god slowed his pace and came along side Xena.

"So, where to first?" asked the warlord.

"To prison."

"Oh." The Warrior Princess grinned. "I don't get a trial first?"

"You don't deserve one."

"Huh." Xena gave a mocking look. "And you say you fight for the greater good." Her head bobbed. "Fascinating how that changes when it comes to me."

Hercules's jaw clenched and unclenched in controlled anger. "You'll get your trial."

~\*~\*~\*~

"Keep up the pace, men!" yelled the commander. She walked backwards, inspecting her fifty warriors marching behind. "I know you're tired, so am I. But we have to cover this distance quickly."

The men nodded and continued the trek towards Thessaly.

Gabrielle sighed and turned back around. Beside her were Eponin and Solari on horseback. She'd left the rest of the army still in camp with Seoirse in command. She had plans to make camp half way to Thessaly tonight and reach the outskirts of Thessaly tomorrow-late afternoon. And it was already late afternoon. But she had her warlord to free and that's what drove her to keep traveling at such a fast pace.

~\*Part 12\*~

Amarice shook her head, trying to stay awake. She glanced eastward and saw the sun just peeking over the horizon. "I can't believe this," she mumbled and continued to sway in the saddle.

Francis chuckled and studied the Amazon. "Never ridden this hard huh?"

"No," whispered the Amazon. "I'm exhausted."

"And I thought you were full of spunk."

Amarice chuckled deeply and sat up straight in her saddle. She was extremely saddle sore from riding all yesterday, all night, and still riding. "I'm sassy not spunky."

The warrior laughed at the young woman. "So I'm noticing." He stood up in the stirrups to stretch. "It's been a good ride."

"You make it sound like we're almost in Thessaly."

"We are," stated Francis. He pointed ahead.

Amarice shook her head, squinted, and noticed the sign ahead. "Welcome... to Thessaly. Oh sweet mother of Artemis!" She sighed in relief. "We've made it."

Francis laughed deeply and sat back down in his saddle. "We'll go stable our horses then find Xena and Hercules."

"You know what's odd, Francis?"



"What's that?"

"We haven't seen that scout."

~\*~\*~\*~

The scout narrowed his eyes and strolled past the guards of the jailhouse.

The guards watched the scout warrior walked by and went behind the jailhouse. One guard look to the other, they both shrugged to each other.

The scout put his hand on his sword hilt and walked along side the jailhouse wall. Ahead he noticed the barred window and he grinned. He came up to the window and peeked through. "My liege?"

The warlord stood in the center of the cell, stripped of her armor, in only her dark leathers and jewelry, and manacled at the wrists and ankles. She lifted her head slowly and grinned. "Jake, good to see you."

"How are you, my liege?"

"In one piece." The warlord shrugged. "Why are you here? I've told you not to come near."

"I know, my liege." Jake glanced to his right at hearing a tussle. "Seoirse said we're coming for you. My liege, is there anything you need done?" He noticed the guards coming.

The Warrior Princess grinned. "Tell Queen Gabrielle to demolish this place in payment."

Jake glanced to see the guards coming. "My liege?" He was confused by the message.

"She'll understand, Jake. Go!" she ordered.

The scout nodded. "Protect yourself, my liege."

"Hey you!" yelled one of the guards and came running after the scout.

Jake laughed and broke off running and disappeared.

"Hades," growled a guard and stopped at the barred window. He looked through to Xena. "One of yours, I suspect."

The warlord grinned evilly.

The guard glared and grabbed his friend. "Let's tell the jailer."

The other guard nodded in agreement.

~\*~\*~\*~

Amarice walked out of the stable and slammed into a man. "Wooo." She stepped back and held her hands up.

Francis came out quickly. "Jake?"

The scout grinned and stepped back. "Sorry there." He furrowed his eyebrows. "Wait, you're that Amazon."

"I have a name." The Amazon folded her arms. "Amarice."

"Sorry Amarice." Jake glanced to Francis. "What are you two doing here?"

"To keep tabs on Xena," answered Francis.

Jake nodded and took a deep breath. "Then Queen Gabrielle must be on her way."

"Yes, she's coming with fifty warriors."

The scout grinned. "Even better." He lost his grin. "Xena is in the jailhouse for now. They're planning a trial for her... not that she'll be sentenced." He laughed bitterly. "And the trial starts tomorrow."

"Is anybody invited?"

Jake nodded at Francis's question. "Yes, its public." He folded his arms. "Nice disguises too." He grinned.

Amarice rolled her eyes. "Alright, anyway." She put her hands on her hips. "Where were you headed in such a rush?"

"To Gabrielle. Xena wants me to send a message."

"You saw Xena?" The Amazon's eyes widened.

"Yes."

"Then that means we can go see her, Francis," said Amarice hastily.

"Wait." Jake held his hands up at the woman. "I almost got caught by the guards. If she's caught talking to anybody I'm sure she'll be paying for it." He dropped his hands.

"She'll be beat?" asked the young woman with anger.

Suddenly, a scream rung through air with such pain and fury that the three people cringed at the familiar voice.

~\*~\*~\*~

Another scream erupted from Xena's lips and she dropped her head forward with her eyes tightly closed.

"Who was he?" asked her beater.

The warlord clenched her teeth and fumed with anger.

The man walked around with the whip in his hands. "Each time you don't tell me you get another three lashes." He grinned. "Just tell me who came and visited you."

The Warrior Princess lifted her head a little and smirked. "Kiss my-" She was cut off by the punch to her face.

Hercules cringed even, he stood outside of the cell next to the jailer. "Is this really necessary?" he asked quietly.

"Was it really necessary for her to kill all the people she has?" retorted the jailer hotly.

The demi-god nodded but replied, "Is it necessary to justify violence with violence?"

The jailer peered up to the large man, whom fought evil with fists. "You tell me."

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle held her hand up briefly once she neared the entrance for Thessaly. Her two Amazons stopped walking and stood beside her. "Here's Thessaly."

Solari nodded. "Yup," she stated. "We're here a little earlier than planned."

The commander chuckled and leaned against her staff. "That's one way at looking at it."

Eponin folded her arms. "Are you sure it's a good idea to have the men camp so near the outskirts of Thessaly?"

"No," whispered the small woman. "But it's the easiest thing right now."

Solari nodded. "True, besides where the camp is on the least populated side of Thessaly." She shrugged. "We'll be fine."

Down in city it could be seen all the hustling and bustling of the people with the crowd in the market and along the port. Then to the right was the jailhouse, which Gabrielle picked out. She was happy to see the jailhouse there, close to the edge of the city and out of the walls of the city. It actually made her grin considering it would make her plans much easier.

The weapons master brought her attention away from the town at hearing a horse come trotting up the road from the city. "Gabrielle, look."

The Queen glimpsed and noticed it was the scout. "Jake?"

The scout laughed happily, stopped his horse, dismounted and came up to the group. "You're already here?"

"Yes." Gabrielle straightened up. "What's going on?"

Jake held his horse's reins and sighed. "She's in the jailhouse right now. They're going to give her a trial starting tomorrow."

The commander nodded and wrapped her free arm over her stomach. "Have you seen Amarice and Francis?"

"Yes." Jake glanced to the city then back. "They've gotten a room and plan to attend the trial."

"Good," mumbled the Queen. "What does the jailhouse look like?"

"Pretty basic." The scout grinned. "And as you can see, outside of the city walls."

"I know, makes things easier." Gabrielle glanced at her Amazons. "We'll have to explore it tonight."

The two Amazons grinned in agreement.

"And Queen Gabrielle." Jake paused then said, "Xena said, demolish this place for payment."

Gabrielle opened her mouth, ready to reply but there was a scream that erupted. She glimpsed to the jailhouse knowing it came from there. "No... Xena?" She looked up to Jake quickly. "They're beating her?" she asked angrily.

"Yes," whispered the scout.

"No!" The commander broke off into a run towards the city.

"Gabrielle!" yelled Solari. She raced after Gabrielle. "No!"

Eponin and Jake broke off running to stop Gabrielle.

The second in command ran in front of her Queen held her hands up. "Don't do it, Gabrielle."

The small woman's eyes were flashing a dark angry green. "Get out of the way, Solari," she growled.

"No," growled back the Amazon. "I won't let you go bursting into that jailhouse to get yourself killed."

The Queen raised her staff. "Get out of my way."

Eponin came up from behind and grabbed the staff. "Don't do this."

Gabrielle screamed when tears came rolling down her cheeks. "Move, Solari." She lifted her fists.

Xena's scream exploded again from the jailhouse.

The Amazon Queen punched at her Amazon.

Solari ducked.

The weapons master threw the staff at Jake. She grabbed Gabrielle from behind and restrained her. "No, Gabrielle."

The commander yelled and struggled from her Amazon's grasp. "They're beating her!"

"Better beaten than dead," said Solari in desperation.

"No!" The Queen broke free from Eponin and kicked at Solari.

The second in command ducked again then slammed her body into Gabrielle's. She wrapped her arms tightly around the small woman and pinned Gabrielle's arms against her sides.

"Solari!" yelled the Queen. She struggled but soon her tears took stronger control. "Please," she pleaded desperately. "They're beating her," she whispered painfully.

"She can handle it," reassured Solari.

"No," Gabrielle whimpered and stopped struggling since she was crying to hard. "We've have to save her," she whispered. "Please." She cried even harder.

Solari moved her arms and hugged her Queen. She drew Gabrielle in close and held tightly. "We'll get her out, Gabrielle." She rocked her body with Gabrielle's "Promise." Her eyes lifted to Eponin. Her eyes flashed with anger for what has happened to the Queen.

Eponin folded her arms and nodded briskly. She didn't like seeing her Queen in pain either. There would be a heavy price to be paid for this.

~\*~\*~\*~

Hercules stood still and listened for the door to close and lock. He stared at Xena's back, her figure slumped faintly but still containing pride.

"What do you want, Hercules?" asked the warlord. She lifted her head and stared through the barred window. The sun was preparing to set soon.

The demi-god walked around and faced the woman. "And why didn't you tell who that was instead of being lashed numerous times?" He folded his arms.

"I enjoy pain," responded Xena sarcastically with a smirk.

The large man said nothing back and studied the warlord's beaten, bruised, cut, and bleeding body. "No, you enjoy inflicting pain," he whispered.

"None the less, I enjoy pain," declared the Warrior Princess. Her vision blurred momentarily then stilled once more. "So I get my trial tomorrow huh?"

"Yes."

"That should be interesting," joked Xena. She closed her eyes with a grin on her lips. She was in unbearable pain but she would still grin at knowing her soulmate wasn't to far. Despite this wasn't the diversion she'd had in mind.

Hercules watched the warlord's cold face and tried to read her. "What's happened in your past that's made you this way?"

"Rage," uttered the warlord.

The demi-god lowered his arms and walked around Xena's right side. He came around and glanced at her back. He counted twenty-five whip marks on her back. He furrowed his eyebrows, reached up, and brushed some of Xena's hair. "Gabrielle, Amazon Queen," he read the tattoo. He pulled his hand away. "Who is she?"

The warlord smirked and kept her eyes close. "My savior and your demise."

"The Warrior Princess talking in riddles, how unique."

Xena laughed half heartily. "It soon won't be a riddle." She sucked in a breath, for the pain in her ribs suddenly came to life from the earlier laugh.

Hercules narrowed his eyes, faced the jail door, the guard opened the door, and he left.

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle stared at the dagger in the candlelight.

It flashed back at her. It was Xena's special dagger that she'd told Gabrielle about for 'emergency' use. The dagger was silver with an ivy design down the blade. And the warlord mentioned it had been her brother's dagger numerous years back.

Now it was Gabrielle's dagger. So she knelt down while standing next to the bed. She sheathed it down in her right boot. Standing back up, she saw Lux come in.

"Hey, little one.... I heard." Lux came into the tent slowly. "How are you doing?"

The commander turned around and faced her friend. "I'm okay, Lux." She folded her arms. "Thank you for coming." She shook her head. "I know this fast pace stuff is hard on you."

The cook chuckled and shrugged. "A cook needs to go to feed the men." He went serious. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Gabrielle shook her head. "I'm fine, thank you though."

The older man sighed sadly. He came closer and without asking, pulled Gabrielle in for a strong hug.

The small woman smiled faintly and hugged her friend back tightly. "Thank you," she whispered.

Lux smiled warmly when he pulled back. "Anytime little one, figured you needed one."

"Yeah," whispered the commander. "Alright, I need to go talk with my Amazons."

The cook nodded and moved out of the way. He followed Gabrielle out of the tent.

The small woman flashed a forced smile to Lux then headed to her Amazon's tent. She went inside and found her two Amazons. "Come with me." The Queen ducked out of the tent with her Amazons following behind like two ducklings. She headed back to her hut and went inside.

Solari and Eponin folded arms and corked eyebrows at their Queen.

The Queen began pacing back and forth in her tent. "Any suggestions on getting Xena out?"

Solari and Eponin glanced at each in question.

The second in command cleared her throat and glimpsed back at the commander. "Um, Gabrielle?"

The Queen stopped pacing and faced her Amazons. "Go ahead."

"Well, Ep and I were thinking." She folded her arms. "We should go down to the prison tonight, check out the area."

Gabrielle nodded for the rest.

Solari placed her hands on her hips. "Then we'll have an idea of what the conditions are like down there. Then tomorrow night we should attack the prison and break Xena out. We can use the night as an element of surprise."

The small woman nodded as her eyes lowered. She considered the plan. "I like the idea of checking the area out." She sighed and lifted her eyes. "However, I don't like the idea of attacking at night."

"But Gabrielle-"

"No," cut off Gabrielle. "The night would hurt us more than help us. None of the men will know who the Hades they're fighting." She paused. "Besides, I think it would be better to our benefit to attack when they're taking Xena back to prison after the trial." She folded her arms. "That's a better element of surprise."

The two Amazons glimpsed at each other then returned their attention to the Queen.

"Alright then," declared Gabrielle, "Tonight we'll visit the prison and go from there."

~\*~\*~\*~

The commander tied her cloak on then grabbed her staff. She left her tent and came near her Amazons. "Are we ready?"

The two Amazons turned around after putting their cloaks on. "Yup," answered Solari.

"Let's go," ordered the Queen. She headed down the road, out of the camp, and towards the town.

Soon the three women were in Thessaly and scanning around. They noticed few people were up and about but still a fair amount.

"Let's find the court house," whispered Gabrielle.

Solari and Eponin nodded in agreement.

The commander looked to her right and wasn't watching where she was gone. Suddenly, she slammed into a large body. She stumbled back and looked up. "Sorry," she said without realizing whom it was at first.

"It's alright," replied the man.

Solari and Eponin's eyes widened as their hands were about to move to their swords. But they stopped knowing better.

Gabrielle peered up and her face dropped. "You're... Hercules?"

The large man folded his arms and nodded. "Yes." His eyes flickered back at the two Amazons then back at Gabrielle. "And you are?"

The commander smiled with hidden anger. "Ephiny."

"Nice to meet you, Ephiny." Hercules held his hand out.

The Queen was hesitant but took the man's large hand.

They shook.

The small woman pulled her hand back like it stung and she leaned against her staff. Her right hand was holding tight to the staff.

"So, who are your friends?"

Gabrielle glanced back. "Solari and Eponin." She shrugged. "We heard about the Warrior Princess being captured." She looked at Hercules. "We wanted to see the murderer's trial." She tilted her head. "Do you happen to know where the trial is being held?"

"Of course, I'll show you."

"Wonderful."

The demi-god smiled briefly then turned and began walking.

The Queen glanced sidelong at her Amazons. "Hide your feathers," she uttered in command. She walked briskly and caught up to Hercules.

The Amazons tugged their cloaks closer then followed behind.

"So, where are you three from?"

Gabrielle stared ahead while replying, "Potidaea." She furrowed her eyebrows. "Now, how'd Thessaly get a hold of Xena? We heard you brought her in."

"Yes," replied the demi-god. He nodded and added, "I captured Xena in eastern Greece."

The small woman nodded and glanced around the city. "And Thessaly isn't concerned that her army will come after her?"

"I doubt it," answered Hercules. He took a deep breath. "The last second in command she had almost slit her throat." He chuckled a little. "She can't seem to keep a handle on her men."

"Interesting," murmured the commander. "Well, I'd hope they'd still at least have the prison heavily guarded."

"They do, thankfully." The demi-god came to a stop in front of a building. "Better to be safe than sorry." He held his hand out. "This is where the trial will start tomorrow."

"And anybody is invited right?"



"Yes," answered the man. He lowered his hand. "After its over with, I'll be leaving."

Gabrielle leaned against her staff. "Thank you very much."

"Where is the prison?" asked Solari. She came next to her Queen. "I'm curious about that."

Eponin chuckled and neared. "I'd be more curious to see the harlot in her cell."

"Follow me." Hercules turned and led the way. He went outside of the city walls and into barren open area of the prison. He walked up the steps, past the guards, and into the prison.

The Amazon Queen was starting to breathe a little heavy but managed to control her anger.

The demi-gold led the women through the dark torch lit prison that was packed with guards. He came near the end of the prison and faced one of the last cells. "Here she is."

Xena had been moved from her position from earlier. Now she was sitting on the floor, her back against the wall, her hands shackled together, and her legs manacled to the floor. She lifted her head with dark eyes when she heard the new comers.

Gabrielle locked eyes with her soulmate. She almost broke in anger but Solari's soft hand on her shoulder just helped her control everything.

Eponin glanced up. "They've beaten her?"

"Sadly enough, yes." Hercules studied the bloody wounded warlord. "One of her men found her and the jailer tried to beat the information out of her." He sighed. "Although I think he was doing it out of pleasure more than anything else."

The weapons master nodded. "So, her army is near?"

Gabrielle was still staring at her soulmate in the cell. Her eyes held promise of freedom and of revenge.

The warlord nodded very faintly in approval.

"We don't know, honestly," revealed Hercules.

Eponin nodded. "Let's hope her army hasn't found her."

Hercules said nothing as he stared at the beaten Warrior Princess in the cell. Even his eyes were tainted with sorrow and he couldn't understand that.

"Well," whispered Gabrielle, "I'm sure there would be quite the price for this if her army found her."

The demi-god nodded. "There would be." He glanced at the three women. "Seen enough?"

"Yes," replied Gabrielle. "I've seen all I've needed." She peered up at the man. "Lead the way out."

"Of course." Hercules side stepped the women and headed back down the prison.

Gabrielle signaled her Amazons to go. She glanced back to her soulmate. "You'll be out of here tomorrow, Xena," she whispered. "I promise."

Xena smiled a little with evilness. "I know, be careful."

The commander nodded. "Hang in there, love." She gave a sad smile and jogged down the prison hall.

The warlord sucked in a breath from the pain in her ribs. She dropped her head against the cold stone wall.

Hercules came down the steps outside of the prison and turned around at the women. "Well ladies, I have to be off." He smiled. "Have a good night."

"We will," replied Gabrielle. "Thank you for your help."

The demi-god nodded. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight," replied the three women and they watched him head back into the city.

Gabrielle sighed in relief. "Let's go." She began walking back into the city. "Let's go find Amarice and Francis."

Solari and Eponin nodded together.

"I'd think they'd be in a tavern," said Eponin.

"They are," replied Gabrielle. "Jake told me they're staying at the Sea Side Tavern." She grinned. "Which means its near the port."

The Amazons chuckled and followed along side. They headed for the port in searched of the Sea Side Tavern of Thessaly.

Soon the group sought out the Sea Side Tavern and entered inside. They scanned the inside, looking for Amarice and Francis, but noticed at one table two people waving.

"That might be them." Solari pointed.

Gabrielle glanced that way. "Yup." She headed for the table. "Evening, can we join you?"

Amarice laughed deeply and nodded. "Definitely, my Queen."

The three women sat around the table with Francis and Amarice.

"So, how goes the village life?" asked the commander with a smirk.

"Ha, ha," replied Amarice. She sighed and shook her head. "I take it you heard about the trial?"

"Yes."

Francis cut in now. "Amarice and I are planning to go."

Gabrielle nodded. "Good idea." She rested back in her seat. "Xena has a snowball's chance in Tartarus of even getting a life sentence."

"What are the plans on setting her free?" asked Amarice quietly.

The Queen sighed and laced her hands together in her lap. "Tomorrow at the end of the trial, we'll attack and set her free." She paused. "I want to get a hold of Xena before they put her back in the cell. It'll be easier that way."

Francis nodded in agreement. "So, Amarice and I will follow behind at the end of the trial."

"Yes." Gabrielle thought for a moment. "Soon as we get Xena, we're racing out of here before the Thessaly militia doesn't have time to stop us." She grinned. "Thessaly will pay later when we come to conquer her."

The people around the table chuckled despite they knew they should not have.

"We are having more detailed plans then that, correct?" asked Francis.

"Yes, I'll take care of that tonight." The commander crossed her ankles. "Just be prepared to head out. And we do whatever it takes to get Xena back."

The others around the table nodded.

"Good." Gabrielle glanced at Solari and Eponin. "We should head back."

"Yeah," agreed the second in command. She stood up with Eponin. "Amarice, enjoy the village life."

The young sassy Amazon growled. "Wait till I get my feathers back on."

Solari snickered.

The commander stood up with her staff. "Alright kids." She grinned at Solari and Amarice. "Be ready for tomorrow, Francis and Amarice."

"We will, with feathers flying," replied Amarice.

"And leathers," added the warrior. He grinned and relaxed back in his seat. "Goodbye."

"Night you two." Gabrielle strolled off.

Solari and the weapons master gave a wave then headed off.

~\*Part 13\*~

Amarice stepped in followed by Francis. She scanned the inside of the courthouse and then walked down the rows of benches. She went down one row and began to sit while brushing her skirt forward.

Francis sat down next to her. He studied the front and noticed the guards around. He also noted the courthouse filling with numerous people. All of the people had cold deathly expressions.

Now the judge came out and took a seat at the head of the bench. Next followed out

the jury and who sat in front of the audience.

Next a side door opened and four guards came in, followed by a fifth guard holding chains, whom led in Xena. Four more guards followed in after Xena.

Xena was led up to sit at a booth in front of the people. Her chains were locked to the floor so she wouldn't get loose. Soon four guards were surrounding her while the others spread out in the courthouse.

The warlord scanned the people and her eyes came to rest on Amarice and Francis. "Gabrielle," she muttered in anger.

Amarice smiled shyly at the Warrior Princess.

Xena narrowed her eyes and looked away.

The Amazon leaned towards Francis. "I think we're gonna hear about this later."

"Uh huh." Francis grinned. "But be glad you're not apart of the army."

"You have a point there," whispered back Amarice. She studied Xena's body and took in all the marks of being beaten. "They really beat her hard."

"They did," said Francis sadly. "She doesn't even notice it though."

Amarice nodded and sat up straight.

~\*~\*~\*~

"Queen Gabrielle, they've taken Xena into the courthouse."

The Queen nodded at Jake. "Thank you, get back there and see when they take her back to the jailhouse."

Jake nodded and left the commander's tent. He headed back to his post that overlooked the city.

Gabrielle turned around. "Solari, Eponin, time to carry the plans out."

The Amazons grinned and left the tent with their Queen.

~\*~\*~\*~

Francis's eyes flickered to the right.

Hercules sat in the front row, watching the trial. He had a stoic expression and kept his eyes on Xena.

The warlord had a hidden grin in her expression. She knew her future while the rest of these villagers didn't. So that left her sitting in her seat with her back straight and pride in her stature.

The trial had been going on for a candlemark so far. Xena's defendant had been appointed, not that he was good but he was there. And naturally the trial was falling in favor of the city's verdict. The jury was not about to set Xena free nor leave her alive. The trial itself dragged on for three solid candlemarks before it was adjourned till

tomorrow. Tomorrow, the judged decided, would be the day the jury would give their sentence.

Now, Xena was being unchained from the floor as her guards came around.

Francis lowered his head and nudged Amarice.

The Amazon nodded and stood with the warrior. She left the courthouse with Francis.

They headed directly back to their room in the tavern. They had plans to change into normal clothes and prepare for the break out.

~\*~\*~\*~

Jake studied the courthouse from afar on the top of the ledge. He spotted Francis and Amarice leaving and he widened his eyes. "It's over." He stood up and broke off into a run. He came into the camp and found Gabrielle. "Queen Gabrielle!"

The commander whirled around. "Are they done?"

"Yes," replied Jake. He took a deep breath. "Amarice and Francis just left the courthouse at a jog."

"Alright, go get ready." Gabrielle faced her men. "Is everything ready?" she requested in a loud voice.

Eponin and Solari joined Gabrielle beside her. They drew swords.

The fifty warriors all came together in rows in compliment to Gabrielle's orders.

"Now, follow my orders preciously," yelled Gabrielle, "When I give the signal we are to rush the guards, free Xena, then burn the jailhouse to keep the city busy. Is this clear?"

The warriors nodded.

"Then light the torches." The Amazon Queen watched numerous torches come to life. "One other thing." She paused and narrowed her eyes. "Kill if you need to. I want Xena back here," she said in conviction. "Let's move!" She turned around and took Argo's reins from Solari. "Thanks Solari." She handed Eponin her staff

"No problem." The Amazon helped hoist the Queen up into the saddle.

Gabrielle settled into the saddle, grabbed the reins, and took her staff. She stayed high on the horse and watched her warriors march ahead. "Come on." She kicked her horse's sides into a trot.

The weapons master and Solari walked quickly behind the horse.

The warriors followed behind with the unsheathing of swords.

~\*~\*~\*~

Xena glanced around the city. She was led out of the city walls. The prison was just ahead. She scanned around the area, expecting. She was surrounded by fifteen guards

and knew there were twenty more in the jailhouse.

Her chain was jerked and it sent a shot of pain down her wrist from being so raw. She growled lowly but kept her pace up. She was in complete pain but was ignoring it for now. That and she hadn't eaten in a few days nor slept, her body's energy level was lowering by the candlemarks.

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle sat high up on Argo, gazing down at the jailhouse. Her eyes narrowed when she saw her soulmate appear and being led by all the guards. She held up her free hand momentarily then dropped it.

All the warriors broke out in a scream and went charging down the hill towards the jailhouse.

The commander let her men flood by. She peered down at her Amazons. "Ready?"

"Definitely," replied Solari. She broke into a run down the hill with Eponin.

The Queen kicked her horse into a gallop for the prison. She held tightly with her one hand, her adrenaline peaking from the excitement of everything, and her right hand grasped her staff tightly.

The fifty warriors crashed into the guards all fighting.

The guards from the jailhouse came rushing out with swords. They came after Xena.

The jailer came out and stood on the top of the steps. "Stop them! Get Xena in the jailhouse now!" he yelled.

The Amazon Queen was on the edge of the fighting, scanning the scene. She saw her soulmate on the other side and close to the prison. She knew the guards were going to get Xena into the jailhouse and hide in there. Since the army wouldn't be able to attack the prison with Xena in it. "Stop them before they get her in the jail!" she ordered. She quickly dismounted with her staff. "Go girl!"

The mare whined and trotted off out of the way.

"Solari, Eponin!"

The Amazons reappeared beside their Queen with swords.

"We need to stop them from taking Xena into the jailhouse."

Solari nodded and grabbed her Queen's wrists. "Follow me." She led the way.

Amarice and Francis came galloping, on horseback, out of the city walls with their weapons. They scanned the scene and saw what was happening.

Francis pointed his sword at the guards with Xena. "They're trying to get her in the jailhouse."

"Then let's stop them," declared Amarice as she charged into the mass of fighting.

Francis shook his head with a laugh. He kicked his horse and spun his sword in the air

with a war cry.

The warlord kicked one guard, taking him down. But before she could fight more, she was slammed over the head with a sword hilt. She groaned and fell to her knees.

A guard grabbed her under the arms and started dragging her up the steps of the jailhouse.

"Hurry up hurry up!" barked the jailer. "Get her in here, they won't attack then!"

The guards were being pressed back into the jailhouse as the fifty warriors pressed on.

"Stop them!" yelled Gabrielle as she fought off a guard.

Solari and Eponin pushed through the fight with their Queen behind. They came near the steps and saw them just dragging an unconscious Xena in. "No!" yelled Solari, whom was fighting off a guard.

"Get Xena!" screamed Gabrielle. "No!" She saw them getting ready to close the large metal door. "No!" she screamed with all her rage.

Francis came galloping through the fighting and jumped off his horse. He landed on the empty steps. He raced up them with his sword out while seeing the door closing. He put all his effort in and rammed his sword forward at the guard closing the door. His sword slipped between the door and cut through the guard's stomach. He grabbed the door and tore it open.

"Get her in the cell!" ordered the jailer. He ran down the hall of the jail with his guards dragging Xena down the hall.

One guard sprinted ahead and opened the cell.

The two guards dragging the warlord, threw her in.

"Lock it, lock it." The jailer looked down the corridor to see a warrior coming down. "Stop him!"

A guard ran past with his sword.

"What are we going to do?" asked a guard in fear.

"Get the door closed!" ordered the jailer.

The two guards raced down the hall to try and get the door closed.

Francis kicked a guard down the steps and turned to Gabrielle. "Queen Gabrielle, come on!"

The commander came up with Eponin and Solari. "We need to get Xena out."

"Don't worry, I have men going into the prison to kill off the guards inside."

"Good." Gabrielle turned around and studied her men. They were over throwing the guards and there were only a few remaining. "Take the last of the guards!" she ordered. "Then protect the jail if the militia come!" She faced Francis. "Lead the way."

Francis nodded and went into the jail. He raced down the hall with Gabrielle behind and the Amazons. He saw ahead fights going on between the guards and the warriors. He came right up and rammed his sword into the guard's sides taking them all out. "Follow me men!"

Gabrielle stepped past the dead bodies and came near Xena's cell. She saw her soulmate out cold on the floor still shackled. She grabbed the bars and shook them. "Where are the keys?" she yelled. "Get me the damn keys!" she growled loudly.

One of the warriors rushed off.

"The jailer has them!" told Francis. "Find him!"

"Xena... Xena?" called Gabrielle. She was gripping the bars tightly. "Come on, Xena." She looked down the hall. "Where the Hades are the keys!?"

Two warriors came racing down the hall with a rattling of keys. "We got them!" hollered a warrior. He threw them at Francis.

"Open it open it," said Gabrielle hotly.

Francis worked frantically to open the door. He kept switching around with the keys trying to find the right one. "Shit," he growled. He tried another and turned the key. He grabbed a bar and pushed the door open.

Gabrielle rushed in and knelt down in front of Xena. She grabbed her lover's face and lifted her head up. "Xena, come on. Wake up." She brushed back the bloody bangs. "Come on, I'm here now." She turned her head sidelong. "Ep and Solari, help me."

The Amazons came in and knelt down beside her Queen.

"Come on, Xena" whispered the small woman. "I need you," her eyes began to sting. She leaned in and kissed her warlord gently and tasted the blood. She pulled back in hopes that did something.

The warlord groaned and opened her unfocused eyes. "Gabrielle?"

The small woman smiled with sorrow. "Welcome back, love." She kissed her lover's forehead despite the blood. "Let's get you out of here." She glanced at her Amazons. "Help me get her up."

Solari and Eponin grasped Xena's arms and began to haul her up to her feet.

"Francis?" The commander turned around. "The keys."

Francis tossed the keys.

Gabrielle took them and knelt down. She tried them and finally succeeded in getting the shackles off Xena's legs. Standing back up, she grabbed the manacles and took them off. Taking them she threw them to the floor. Turning back around, she looked at Francis and the two warriors. "Find me Xena's weapons and armor then get out of here."

Francis and the warriors nodded. They disappeared down the hall on their mission.



"Alright." Gabrielle grabbed her lover's right arm and brought it around her shoulder. "Let's get out of here." She wrapped her right arm around her soulmate's waist. She glanced to Eponin. "You got her?"

The weapons master nodded. "Yup."

The Queen nodded and head out of the cell with Solari in the lead.

Outside, the army had taken control of the jailhouse. All the guards dead along with the jailer and they surrounded the prison. Amarice stood on the steps watching over things. She looked to the city wall and spotted the Thessaly militia coming. "Oh shit!" She looked through the door. "The militia is coming!" she screamed. "Hurry up, Gabrielle!" Turning back around. "The militia are coming, slow them down!" she ordered the men.

The warriors all faced the militia and prepared for the next fight.

The leader of the militia glanced at the men. "Stop them! Don't let them free the warlord! Attack!"

The militia broke up and charged the warriors.

Francis came rushing out, Xena's possessions in hand, with the two warriors. "Stop the militia!" He looked around for Xena's horse and spotted the mare. He ran over to the horse and put the entire armor and weapons on Argo's back. He took the reins and led the mare to the steps of the jailhouse.

Solari came out followed by Eponin and Gabrielle supporting a beaten hurt warlord.

"Gabrielle." Francis waved and stood beside Argo.

"Let's get her on Argo," said Gabrielle. She went down the steps carefully and neared Argo.

Francis, Eponin, Solari, and Gabrielle all helped Xena get on the horse.

Gabrielle then got on the mare in front of Xena. She took the reins and her staff from Solari. "Xena, hold on tight huh?"

The Warrior Princess leaned against her soulmate and encircled Gabrielle's waist. "Burn it, Gabrielle."

The commander nodded. "Men, burn the jailhouse!"

The warriors with torches started throwing their torches at the jailhouse. And instantly the jailhouse was ablaze.

"Retreat, retreat!" yelled Gabrielle. She raised her staff. "Retreat!"

The fifty warriors struck down their opponents then fled back down the road. Some of the militia raced after them but the leader of the militia screamed for them to return and stop the fire.

The Amazon Queen glanced down at her Amazons. "Get out of here."

Eponin and Solari nodded and ran off.

Gabrielle spurred Argo into a gallop for the road. She glanced back to see the militia busy trying to stop the fire. She grinned. "Argo, get us out of here."

The mare whined while galloping down the road. She came over the hill but came to a breaking halt at seeing the person in the middle of the road.

"Hercules," whispered the commander. She stared wide eyed and shaking her head.

The demi-god stepped forward. "You must be Gabrielle."

The Amazon Queen dismounted with her staff raised. "Yes," she said hotly. "Don't stop me."

"I figured as much considering those women were Amazons with you. Put two and two together last night with Xena's tattoo." He lifted his hands. "I can't let you escape with her."

"And I can't let you take her back," growled Gabrielle as she circled the much larger opponent.

Xena turned in her saddle, she grabbed her sword hilt, and unsheathed it. She slowly dismounted, sucked in a breath against the pain, and stepped up to Hercules. "Try me Hercules... you really want me."

"Xena you're-"

"Get back, Gabrielle," growled the warlord. She spun her sword and bent her knees, preparing to fight. "Get on the horse, Gabrielle." Her eyes locked on Hercules.

The small woman neared the mare but never mounted. She watched Hercules and Xena circle each other waiting for the other to make a move.

Hercules lunged forward first.

Xena jumped out of the way. And switched sides and she attacked this time.

The demi-god fought back and was easily taking the upper hand.

The warlord felt her strength fade fast from all the abuse her body had been taking the past days.

"Xena, you can't win."

The Warrior Princess growled and slammed her sword against the man's gauntlet. "But I can slow you down." The last thing she was about to let happen was have Gabrielle be taken.

Gabrielle saw the bad odds. She dropped her staff against Argo and knelt down. Her fingers curled around the dagger's handle and she stood back up with the pin of the dagger being extracted. Her eyes went cold and dark while she stared at the man's back. Hercules had brought all of this on her and Xena. There was a price to pay. Yes a price for toying with the soulmates, the soulmates of the greater good. The price must be paid in full.

Hercules grabbed Xena's sword and jerked it free. He jumped back giving it a good twirl. He pointed it at Xena with a grin. "Give up."

"That's not an option." The warlord kicked.

Hercules ducked then kicked back sending Xena on her back.

The Warrior Princess moved quickly but stopped in mid motion when her own sword tip pressed into her neck. Her broken ribs were screaming in pain and her body was almost drained.

"Don't make me do this," said Hercules.

"Gabrielle, get on Argo," yelled the warlord. Her eyes flickered back to Hercules. "Now or never, Hercules."

The demi-god shook his head faintly and raised the sword high up. He was giving the warlord a chance.

"No!" screamed Gabrielle. She raced forward with her dagger.

Hercules started bringing the sword down.

Gabrielle came up behind Hercules, jumping on his back, and she brought the dagger around.

The dagger sliced through Hercules's chest and into his heart.

The world stopped.

The world came back to life in the fastest rush ever.

Gabrielle jammed the dagger in tighter with her eyes tight for she even felt the pain. She jerked the dagger out and fell to her feet.

Hercules dropped the sword, crashed to his knees, then on his side. He closed his eyes and rolled onto his back as the blood oozed out of his chest and his yellow shirt soaked it.

Gabrielle stared at the bloody dagger in her hands. She started breathing heavily and her eyes shifted to Hercules to see his chest not rising. The panic set in.

Suddenly a cloud covered the sun and its shadow fell over Gabrielle and Xena but never touched Hercules's dead body.

Xena stared at the scene of her soulmate holding the bloody dagger. "Gabrielle?" she whispered with a cracked voice.

The small woman started crying and wiping the blood away. "We gotta get out of here, Xena." She frantically tried to wipe the blood off. "Get up, let's go," she said with fear and shaky voice. "We gotta get out of here... we gotta get out of here... have to run," she kept mumbling between her sobs.

The warlord stood and took the dagger. "Get on Argo." She led her partner to the horse and helped her up.

"We have to run," whispered the small woman as she started shaking in the saddle. She watched Xena strap her staff against the saddle.

The warlord hauled herself, with great pain, into the saddle. She took the reins and kicked Argo into a gallop.

The soulmates left the Legendary Hercules dead in the dirt of the road. He'd be mourned for by all even by Gabrielle.

Xena needed to make it to the army before she collapsed. Ahead she saw the signs of her warriors and she headed straight for them. Coming into the camp, she pulled Argo to a halt. "Men!" she hollered

Francis spun around and went rushing over with a few warriors. He could tell Xena was readying to fall.

Amarice, Eponin, and Solari raced over with worry.

The warlord tried to dismount but failed. Her body just shut down as she went crashing to the ground.

Gabrielle started to panic again. "Get her up, hurry." She dismounted and almost fell herself if it wasn't for her Amazons. "Hurry!" she yelled.

Francis and the warriors all carefully lifted Xena up and carried her towards Gabrielle's tent.

"Where's the healer?" demanded the commander. "I want the healer in my hut!" She followed the men carrying Xena into her tent. They laid her on Gabrielle's bed and stepped back. "Where the Hades is the healer?" screamed Gabrielle.

"He's coming," retorted Francis. He held up the tent flap when the healer ran in.

Amarice came up beside her Queen. She grasped Gabrielle's shoulders. "Calm down," she whispered.

The Queen was breathing hard and shaking as she watched the healer work on Xena. She folded her arms and only shook more. Her memories suddenly rushed in on her from the last battle.

"Xena you can't-" The Queen was cut off.

"Listen to me Gabrielle..." Xena's words were low but hard. "I can not look injured in front of our men." Xena and Gabrielle both ambled into the Queen's hut.

As soon as Gabrielle shut the door she turned to her soulmate. "Let's get that wound taken care of."

The warlord stepped up close to her partner but kept a certain distance. "Gabrielle, I need you to understand something." Her voice was hard and almost cold. "If either of us are ever injured no matter the extent we can not act it in front of our men. If we do, our men will kill us for it." She paused. "Any one of those men would die to be a leader in this army."

The Amazon Queen narrowed her eyes. "Maybe in our army but not in my Nation

Xena." She crossed her arms against her chest. "Our men fear us... fear you. My Amazons are loyal." She shook her head. "And right now I am going to the healers to get my leg taken care of." Turning around, she grasped the door handle.

Gabrielle slammed back to reality as the memory disappeared. She shook her head and took a calm breath. *I have to be strong*, she coached herself. She stopped her shaking and came near the healer. "Will she be okay?"

The healer shook his head while cleaning the wounds and stitching them. "She's badly hurt. I don't know... she may not live." He stopped for a moment, thinking it was useless to continue.

The commander grabbed the healer's arm. "Save her or I'll slit your throat myself," she whispered in rage. "This is a real bad time to tell me she might die."

"I'll do everything I can," responded the healer. He went back to work.

"Good, what can I do to help?" The Queen glanced at her Amazons. "Let's help the healer."

The Amazons nodded and came around the bed to help.

~\*~\*~\*~

The healer cleaned his hands with the rag. "That's all that can be done," he announced to all the people in the tent. He held the rag out to Gabrielle.

The Queen looked at her hands still soaked in blood, a mix of Xena and Hercules's. She took the rag and cleaned most of the blood off with shaky hands. She breathed calmly and returned the rag. "Thank you," she said sincerely.

The healer nodded and picked up his things. "I am not sure if she'll make it." He shook his head. "She's falling into a fever to fight all the sickness in her body." He paused. "If she beats the fever by tomorrow then she'll make it, otherwise..." he trailed off.

"Fine," whispered the commander she nodded. "Thank you again."

The healer nodded and left.

The small woman glanced at Francis and the warriors that carried Xena in. "Thank you all."

Francis nodded. "You're welcome."

Gabrielle sighed. "Tomorrow... we'll break camp and head back to Seoirse." She paused. "Get a wagon prepared for Xena."

"As you wish." Francis nodded his head at the warriors. He left with them.

The Amazons were silent.

The Queen said nothing and let the silence fill the tent. She bit her lower lip. "Can you three guard the tent for me?" she whispered. "Please."

Solari stepped up and hugged her Queen tightly.

Gabrielle hugged back.

"We'll protect you both with our lives," whispered the second in command. She smiled sadly and left the tent to stand outside.

Eponin gave a hug next followed by Amarice. They then left and joined Solari outside.

Gabrielle stared at the tent flap wavering then she turned to her soulmate. She neared with a shaky body and heavy breathing. Reaching out with red tinted hands, she grasped Xena's hand. She studied her lover's face and listened to the shallow breathing. "You were almost killed, I broke you out of jail, and killed Hercules," she whispered. "What has happened?" Her eyes stung.

Xena never shifted. Only small beads of sweat, tainted with red, rolled down her body.

Gabrielle closed her eyes and dropped her head back. She tried swallowing the lump down. Tears rolled down her cheeks and she squeezed Xena's hand tightly. "Please come back to me, Xena." She sobbed with muffled whimpers. "I need you more than ever." She broke and fell to her knees. Her head dropped against Xena's hand that she held. The pain, guilt, and shame took over. She cried with such excruciating pain for she just lost all her resolve, dignity and sanity.

### **Section 3 (Conclusion)**

~\*~\*~\*~

Xena heard the faint sobs of her soulmate. She tried to fight the faintness and broke through. She turned her head slowly while opening her eyes. "Gabrielle?" she whispered and squeezed the small hand in hers.

Gabrielle lifted her head off her lover's hand. Her eyes were red, her cheeks wet and puffy. "Xena," she uttered.

The warlord just smiled and said, "Come here." She pulled on her partner's hand.

The commander shook her head. "You're hurt." Her free hand wiped away the tears.

"Lay on me." The Warrior Princess's voice was quiet. "I need you and you need me."

The small woman moved onto her soulmate. She lowered her body gently onto the warlord's.

Xena held her breath as zaps of pain shot through her body. She sighed once her lover was on top of her body. "You'll be okay," she reassured.

Gabrielle rested her head on the older woman's chest and closed her eyes. "Xena-"

"Sssh, just rest." The warlord closed her eyes for she knew she'd faint any moment. "I love you, Gabrielle," she said before going under.

The commander closed her eyes tight while tears rolled down her cheeks. "I love you, Xena." Her voice crack but being in her soulmate's arms left her feeling safe.

~\*Part 14\*~

"Are we set?" asked Gabrielle.

"Yes," answered Francis. "Seoirse is waiting for us, Queen Gabrielle."

The small woman nodded. "Destiny awaits us." She sighed. "You lead the men today, Francis."

"I will do my best." Francis bowed his head.

"Thank you," whispered the Amazon Queen.

Francis nodded and watched the small woman head over to the wagon.

In the wagon laid Xena, she was asleep and covered in furs. The three Amazons on horseback surrounded the wagon.

Gabrielle got into the wagon. She placed her staff to one side, then shifted behind Xena. Carefully, she pulled Xena's head into her lap and rested her back against the wagon.

Solari peered down at her Queen then her eyes lifted and locked on Eponin.

The weapons master nodded and patted her sword.

Solari's eyes flickered over to Amarice.

Amarice wrapped her fingers around her sword's hilt and pulled it up slightly. She nodded.

The second in command nodded back then gazed ahead.

Francis sighed but walked in front of the men. "Let's fall out!" he ordered.

The fifty or so warriors began marching, heading back northeast.

Gabrielle lowered her head onto Xena's. She stared at the scenery while the wagon moved on. She swayed a little yet she didn't notice since her mind was leagues away.

~\*~\*~\*~

"How is she?"

The healer glanced at Gabrielle. "She'll make it fine." He smiled gently. "Thankfully, she has an amazing healing ability."

"She's just plain stubborn." The commander huffed then leaned against her staff. "Thank you."

The healer nodded and left the soulmates' hut.

Gabrielle reached out and touched her lover's forehead. Her hand caressed Xena's

cheek, then she leaned down and kissed her soulmate's forehead.

Xena moaned softly and opened her eyes. Her vision was blurry yet it came around slowly.

"Hi," said the small woman softly. "How do you feel?"

"A lot better," uttered the warlord. She moved with a groan.

"Your fever is almost gone," mentioned the commander.

The Warrior Princess closed her eyes and let her breath out slowly. "I know," she assured. "It'll be gone by the morning, thankfully."

Gabrielle grasped her lover's hand. "How do you seriously feel?"

"Been better," joked the warrior.

The small woman chuckled but hardly.

"How about yourself?" The warlord squeezed the small hand. "You've suffered the brunt of this escapade."

"I'm okay." Gabrielle nodded. "I wouldn't be if you weren't."

Xena nodded. "How are the men?"

"In order." The commander sighed. "Tomorrow by the evening we should be joining Seoirse again."

"Good." The older woman shifted again. "We need to return to our mission."

Gabrielle nodded. "First you need to get better."

"I'll be fine." The warlord blew it off. "I can't lay around in a sick bed much longer."

The younger woman sighed, knowing there was no stopping her lover. "Just be careful."

"I will," promised the warlord. She gave a smile and asked, "Go get something to eat, I think I'm going to sleep more. Get this fever out of my system."

"Do you want anything?"

"I'll be fine." Xena grinned. "Mmm, come here."

Gabrielle leaned down and kissed her soulmate gently on the lips. She then lifted her head a little. "You sure?"

"I'll be okay, get something to eat."

The commander nodded and pulled the bed sheet over her partner. "Sleep well, Xen."

"Be careful, love."

Gabrielle nodded and left the tent. She stepped into the sunset evening as her



Amazons came beside her.

~\*Part 15\*~

Xena slipped out of bed and took her leathers off. She tossed them aside and found her 'warrior' leathers. She put them on then put on the brass armor. Afterwards, she found her weapons and placed them in their homes. Going over to the bed, she caressed her lover's cheek. "Gabrielle?"

The commander moaned softly and opened her eyes. "Xena?" she became instantly worried.

"I'm okay," cut in the warlord. She grinned. "Get a little more rest and I'm going to get the men up."

"Wait." Gabrielle started sitting up. "You're not-"

"I'll be fine," she cut off. "I can't play sick anymore in front of the men, especially now that we're rejoining the rest of the army."

"Xena... please."

Xena sighed and leaned in. She kissed Gabrielle with care. "I'll be okay, I promise." She pushed her partner back down. "Go to sleep."

"Damn it, you're stubborn," she mumbled.

The warlord grinned. "Got that right. I'll see you soon." She left the tent and went in search of food. Proceeding that, she got her army moving about.

~\*~\*~\*~

Xena sat high on Argo. Her lover sat in front of the saddle, completely worn out from the... adventure. She kept a strong arm around Gabrielle's waist.

The army had been marching all day and was nearing the rest of the army.

Gabrielle had actually fallen asleep with the side of her head against her soulmate's chest.

The warlord would have objected to it but considering all that had happened, she was not about to object.

"I didn't mean to kill him," mumbled Gabrielle.

The warlord looked down at her partner. She just heard the words. She saw Gabrielle's eyes close tighter in seeming pain.

"He was going to... to kill Xena," muttered the small woman. She breathed heavily. "I had to stop him."

The Warrior Princess closed her eyes momentarily then opened them again.

"It was... was for the greater good," whispered Gabrielle in a tone of disbelief. "The greater good... the greater good, I swear."

Xena ran a hand through her bangs then reached down. She wearily shook her lover.  
"Gabrielle, come on, wake up."

Gabrielle jerked with a startle. She shook her head and let the blurring leave her eyes.  
"Gods... I had the worst nightmare." She shifted in the saddle and straightened up.

"Yeah?" The warlord drew her partner in close. "What was it about?"

"I don't quite remember... but I know I was being judged after my death."

The older woman stared ahead and swayed in the saddle. "Gabrielle, I am sorry."

The commander looked up; confused. "About what?"

"Hercules," she stated. "You shouldn't have killed him."

Gabrielle stared at the moving ground. "I couldn't let him kill you," she whispered.  
She looked up. "Nobody hurts you let alone kills you, as long as I am around."

The warlord smile but lost it instantly because of the cost. Gabrielle's blood  
innocence- the light. "It wasn't worth it."

"Yes it was, for you."

The Warrior Princess had no words. What could somebody say to something such as this? Say to a young woman, such as Gabrielle, that lost her blood innocence by killing a legendary hero of the greater good? What could a person say? "Thank you," was all she could mustard in none sincere tone. It sounded cheap.

The past has a tendency to haunt the future. But the death had been done- Hercules was no more. Only part of the price had been paid. Xena didn't want to know the rest of the price, despite she knew what it was. Oh gods, how she would pay her life to fix this. To save Gabrielle... to save her soulmate from the price.

~\*~\*~\*~

Seoirse looked up when he saw the warriors coming in. He smiled happily when he spotted Xena and Gabrielle on Argo riding it. But his smile slowly faded out. For he now noticed Xena was a shade darker and Gabrielle's glow was gone. This was not a joyous victory he would hear.

"Seoirse," called Xena.

The second in command jogged up and tried to smile. "Welcome back, my liege."

The warlord grinned. "Its nice to be back. How are things?" She pulled Argo to a halt beside the man.

"In order of course." He grinned and gazed at the quiet Gabrielle. "How are you, Queen Gabrielle?"

The commander nodded. "Okay, yourself Seoirse?"

"Quite well." Seoirse placed his hands behind his back and noted the men heading into the camp. "What are the plans, my liege?"

"Back to Plan A," stated the warlord. "Conquering eastern Greece."

Gabrielle stayed silent.

"Did things go well in Thessaly?" He dared not want to know in the end.

"Could have been better." Xena dismounted now. "But could have been worse." She turned to her soulmate.

Gabrielle dismounted with her lover's help. "Thanks."

Xena smiled before getting her commander's staff. "I take it the men are well rested?"

The second in command laughed. "Of course."

"Good." The warlord faced Seoirse once more. "Tomorrow we travel in the late afternoon."

"Back east?"

The Warrior Princes nodded. "Yes, we'll finish what we started."

Gabrielle peered up at her soulmate. "We are not splitting again, correct?"

"No splitting," agreed Xena. "We'll keep the army together and finish taking eastern Greece. Is that clear, Seoirse?"

"Crystal, my liege."

Xena nodded. "Good, make sure the men are settled in."

The second in command nodded back.

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle ducked and entered the Amazons' tent. "Hi."

The three Amazons peered up and saw their Queen.

"Hey Gabrielle." Solari stood up and smiled. "Dropping by?"

It was early evening and dinner had ended about a half of a candlemark ago.

"Yes." The Queen didn't have her staff, so she folded her arms across her stomach, and smiled. "I wanted to thank you three for all your help."

The Amazons smiled back.

"Anything for the Queen," stated Eponin.

Solari nodded in agreement. "Definitely."

Amarice grinned. "Yeah, I don't mind playing villager for the Queen."

Gabrielle chuckled but was still smiling. "Thank you again. I don't know what would have happened if I didn't have your help."

The three Amazons sprung up and together gave their Queen a group hug.

The commander laughed and let herself be engulfed by the massive hug. Afterwards, they let go of her and sat back down, except for Amarice.

"Okay, I think I'm heading to bed." The small woman smiled at her Amazons. "Sleep well."

"You too, Gabrielle," responded Solari.

Amarice gazed at Gabrielle. "Can I walk you back to your tent?"

"Sure," answered the commander. She strolled over to the tent flap. "Goodnight, Ep and Solari."

"Night," called the Amazons.

Gabrielle went out followed by Amarice. She stayed silent, as was Amarice.

They came to Gabrielle's tent and the young Amazon turned to her Queen. "I'm sorry about everything that happened." Her tone was apologetic.

"It wasn't your fault, Amarice."

"I know, its just... none of it should have happened." The young Amazon paused. "It shouldn't have happened to you... nor Xena." She shook her head. "I wish I could change it."

"I know what you mean," whispered the commander. "But what is done is done."

Amarice nodded. "We just have to be more careful." She smiled now. "Right?"

"Right," uttered the Queen. Gabrielle now realized her young friend had grown five years older in these past five days. "Thank you, Amarice. Its good to hear that."

Amarice chuckled a little then drew in her friend tightly.

They held each other for a long time.

The smaller woman pulled back slowly with a warm smile. "Thank you again," whispered the Queen. "Go get some sleep, Amarice."

"You too." Amarice flashed a smile then left. "Goodnight!" she yelled while waving.

"Goodnight," called back the commander. She went into her tent and saw her soulmate at her desk. She quietly came over and slipped her arms around Xena's chest.

"Hi," greeted the warlord. She tilted her head back and smiled.

Gabrielle lowered her head and kissed her lover softly on the lips. "How are you?" she asked after the kiss.

"Not bad, tired."

The younger woman nodded. "Yeah, me too." She rested her chin on her soulmate's head.

"I'm going to go check on the men." Xena stood up tall. She turned to her partner.  
"Get ready for bed, huh?"

The small woman nodded without a word.

The warlord knew something was up. So she reached forward and picked Gabrielle up.

The younger woman instantly wrapped her legs around her lover's waist and her arms held tight onto Xena.

The warlord sighed sadly and neared the bed. She sat down then propped her boots up on the edge of the bed.

Gabrielle dug her head down into her soulmate's chest.

Xena lowered her head against Gabrielle's and tried to protect her soulmate with her entire body from the world.

The Amazon Queen closed her eyes and relaxed in the protective arms. She felt a gentle kiss placed on her forehead and Xena's fingers running through her hair.

The pair stayed in that position for quite sometime. Neither spoke any words because it was too late for words. They could only reassure the other physically.

After awhile, Xena peered down at her lover. "Gabrielle?" she whispered.

Gabrielle lifted her head and gave a half smile. "Sorry."

"Its okay." The warlord smiled and brushed back blond hair. "Feel okay?"

"Yeah." The commander nodded before saying, "Go check on the men."

The Warrior Princess tipped Gabrielle's head up and leaned down. Her kiss was loving as it was long.

The smaller woman smiled at the end and then entangled her legs from Xena's waist. She stood up.

"I'll be right back." Xena kissed her lover's forehead before disappearing out of the tent.

Gabrielle sighed and considered on whether she wanted to go to bed yet. No, was her answer. This led her to leave the tent and then the camp somewhat. She came to the outskirts of the camp and turned.

The full moon stood low in the western horizon; it would set in minutes. All of its light poured over Gabrielle and made her glow brilliantly.

Xena had came back from checking on the men. She didn't find her partner in the tent and the deepest fear came to life in her that she'd ever known. Leaving the tent quickly, she went in search of her soulmate.

Gabrielle glanced to her right, away from the moon, and saw Xena coming with the darkness around her.

The warlord tilted her head while watching her soulmate bask in the moonlight. Her pace slowed down but she kept coming closer. Once she was next to Gabrielle, she just wrapped her arms around Gabrielle from the side. She said nothing.

Gabrielle took one last glimpse of the setting moon then she turned into her lover's arms.

Xena pulled her in close.

Gabrielle cried softly.

Xena dropped her head onto her soulmate's head. Emotions arose from her soul and caused two tears to run down either cheek. She closed her eyes tightly against the emotions.

The soulmates stood in the last rays of moonlight then slowly the bright moon disappeared with its light diminishing till it was... gone. The soulmates were left in the darkness.

The End