

~ Let's Give Them More to Talk About ~

by Red Hope

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Sex/Subtext ~ No doubt, nothing but the best. Sex never know with me... although I have a LGTSTTA feeling coming on. ;-)

Note ~ This story is just for fun of course. Basically I am just using the characters Xena and Gabrielle for fun with some song lyrics I just love. Xena and Gabrielle are not being portrayed as their normal selves shall we say. Just to make it simple, I am using sixth season Gabrielle and second season Xena. But I just wanted to play off the lyrics of this song and if anybody knows this song's name, please tell me! I wish I knew! *laugh*

Questions? Comments? or Advice? Send it away to me at redhope@redhope.net

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Section 1

~*Part 1*~

Xena leaned down to gently capture her partner's lips, the kiss was long and loving. Never had these kisses shown demand or a need in them, up forward. However they both in their soul shared a great demand and shattering need.

The warrior lifted her head back up and smiled to her friend. "Be careful huh?"

Gabrielle nodded and let a smile slip into place. "Don't worry, I'll be with the Amazons for just a week." She leaned against her staff. "Make sure you stay out of trouble."

Xena laughed and lowered her head close to Gabrielle's. "That's my line."

"Hardly warrior." Gabrielle turned around and walked out of the tavern to come up beside Ephiny. She turned back around. "Take care of yourself Xena."

The warrior moved her head in agreement and leaned against the inn's doorway. "In a week I'll be in the village."

"Better be!" Gabrielle turned to Ephiny to see the regent hopping onto her horse. She was soon on the horse as well thanks to the regent's help.

"Watch after her for me Eph."

The Amazon gazed over to Xena and winked. "No problem."

"Right!" Xena gave a grin.

"Hey!" Gabrielle squeezed her arms around Ephiny. "I'm not that difficult."

The Warrior Princess arched an eyebrow. "Just be careful Gabrielle."

"I will be." The bard gave a sad sigh. "You be careful too Xena."

"Definitely." The warrior gave a warm smile. "I'll only be at mother's."

The Amazon Queen quietly laughed and turned back forward in the saddle.

Ephiny turned her stallion around. "See you Xena!"

"Bye Eph." The warrior kept her eyes on her partner.

Gabrielle turned her head around and gave a warm smile to Xena. She mouthed out, 'I love you.'

The older woman's smile only became more wonderful while she mouthed the same words back. She watched her best friend disappear out of the village and out of sight. She sighed sadly and turned to go back into the inn to gather her own things.

Ephiny grinned and talked to her Queen. "I didn't know about you and Xena."

"Ephiny." Gabrielle shook her head with a grin.

"Sso... what is she like in-"

"Ephiny." The Queen took a deep breath. "We haven't been together... like that... yet."

"You're kidding me!" The regent laughed lightly. "You've gotta be kidding me. Why not?"

"Because we're taking things slow." Gabrielle gave a sigh in this explanation she'd have to do.

"There's something I am missing here." Ephiny turned her head sidelong. "Xena nor you are slow pace people."

"I know." The bard went serious. "But Xena and I have been through a lot lately and we wanted to take it slow. For each of our own safety."

"Mmm, understandable." However a grin took control of Ephiny's lips. "So how long have you two been... going out?"

Gabrielle laughed and shook her head. "Nine days, eleven candlemarks, and thirty-five minutes."

That did it, the regent fell forward laughing, which made the horse stop walking. "Oh gods, that's the cutest thing."

Gabrielle let go of her regent and glared at the Amazon's back. "Look, move it regent." She gave a small grin. "Or I won't tell you anymore."

"Oh there's more?" Ephiny straightened up. "I'm serious now." She kicked her horse

into a fast walk again. "Sso..."

"Well..." Gabrielle's face brightened up to go into bard mode about her new relationship with Xena. She became completely immersed in her past days with the warrior.

It had all began on the night Xena and Gabrielle destroyed Hope and her son in longing to never deal with Dahak again. After the pair finished staring at the lifeless bodies of Hope and the Destroyer they buried them and went into the bard's home. And well, since that night in Gabrielle's home things had changed between the warrior and bard. They'd slept in Gabrielle and Lila's room in the separate beds.

Lila had decided to sleep in the guestroom for the night. She didn't know exactly what happened between Gabrielle and Xena but she knew enough that they should be alone.

Gabrielle flopped down on her bed and heard Xena close the door behind. Her head fell into her hands as she moaned lightly. "Oh gods, that was crazy." She ran her hands through her hair and looked up with tiredness.

The warrior moved in the small room to sit on Lila's bed. "It was," she agreed with a deep breath. "Thank you Gabrielle."

The bard furrowed her eyebrows. "For what?"

"Coming back, fighting to come back."

The smaller woman took a long breath and slowly released it. "I don't feel like I did anything Xena." She shook her head. "I owe so much to you."

"You listen to me." Xena leaned forward closer to her friend. "You don't owe anything to me. Do you understand me?"

Gabrielle faintly nodded with sadness. Then she whispered, "Then why do I feel like I do?" Her eyes lifted to Xena. "I took so much from you... from us."

The warrior shook her head. "That's crap." She looked away then back to Gabrielle. "We've been through a lot... the both of us Gabrielle. We both learned so many lessons these past months. We paid a lot for what we went through. It is over and we both need to let it go."

The younger woman nodded. "You're right." She smiled sadly. "There is one thing I've come to learn that I would like to tell you."

Xena smiled warmly. "What's that?"

Gabrielle smiled lovingly and reached out with both her hands. She carefully took Xena's larger hands and studied them for a moment. Her eyes lifted up to the warrior's soft eyes. "I am trusting you with my soul for now on Xena." She shook her head as her throat tightened. "I can not... I can not make it in this world without you. So wherever you go Xena I will be going with you. I don't care where we go. I just know I need to go with you."

Xena studied her partner while repeating the small speech in her head over again. Her thumb now began to rub against Gabrielle's hands. If she tried now to push Gabrielle

away she would never win. Gabrielle would never back away, that she knew. "Be careful with that Gabrielle. I could lead you to darkness."

"I don't care." The bard squeezed her partner's hand. "I don't care as long as it's with you." She smiled sadly. "Don't ask me not to go with you Xena. I can't make it in this world without you." She faintly grinned. "I signed up to be your partner for eternity."

The warrior smiled warmly. "Gabrielle?" Her smile went sad and she lifted her right hand to her friend's cheek. "Don't ask me to lead you to your possible death."

The bard let her head rest into her best friend's touch. "I want to be with you Xena." Her eyes shut while her right hand came up to rest against Xena's. "Don't leave me after everything."

The older woman took Gabrielle's hand again along with her other. Xena moved to stand then kneel down in front of Gabrielle, she was eye level with Gabrielle. "Gabrielle?"

The small woman opened her eyes to study directly into her partner's sky eyes. "Xena, I love you."

Xena smiled lovingly. "I know, I know." She moved her hands with Gabrielle's into her partner's small lap. Carefully she leaned in to kiss her partner on the lips carefully. Then she pulled back with her smile never losing its depth. "I love you too."

Gabrielle felt herself blush a little, that version of love coming from Xena's lips were different. It meant more and held more depth. However it made a warm smile ease across her lips then she slowly leaned in to gently kiss Xena. Her kiss was timid because it was something new to her. And timid because she was still hurting inside and she knew her partner was as well. However she felt a fire come to life deep in her soul, a fire soon she wouldn't be able to ignore. Pulling back she leaned her head against Xena's. "Xena?" It was low whisper of need.

"Sshh." Xena stood up with her best friend. Reaching behind she unhook her sword and chakram throwing them on the bed behind Gabrielle. Carefully the warrior pulled the other woman in with protection.

The bard buried her head into Xena's neck and closed her eyes. She felt safe. Next thing she found was herself being lifted off the floor and laying on top of Xena's body. Gabrielle wrapped her arms around Xena and held tight.

Xena wrapped her legs with Gabrielle's while keeping one arm around her friend's waist the other hand was behind Gabrielle's head. Leaning up she placed a kiss to the small female's head. Resting her head back down on the pillow, she shut her eyes.

Soon the two women went to sleep from the long day. They slept hard and long in each other's arms and warmth. By that morning they were up late. And when they awoke they didn't leave the room right away. Instead they spent the rest of the remaining time together alone, talking about their relationship.

Xena sat back up against the headboard. Her boots were off and her legs propped up in front of her body.

Gabrielle on the other hand was at the foot of the bed with her own boots off and

sitting cross-legged. "Slow, definitely."

The warrior nodded with a smile. "That's what I figured."

The bard quickly glanced up. "Is that okay with you?"

"Definitely." Xena let a smile take her lips. "We don't need to rush this Gabrielle." She took a deep breath. "Still have to get use to the idea."

Gabrielle nodded with a small smile. "That's what I was thinking." She quietly laughed. "Gods, the last time I got involved in a love relationship the person ended up dead." She lost her smile. "You sure you want to do this now Xena?"

The Warrior Princess raised an eyebrow. "Sure? I was positive the first time I met you Gabrielle." She grinned a little. "I think I can fend people off."

The younger woman snickered. "To say the least." She then went serious. "First time you met me?"

"Yeah." Xena smiled warmly. "In the grove."

Gabrielle's lips shaped into a grin. "The same for me."

"Ohh?" The taller gave a cat grin. "Wish I'd known." She immediately saw her friend blush deeply and the warrior chuckled lightly. "Hey come here."

The bard was hesitant for a moment but moved to crawl into her best friend's arms. She leaned her back into Xena's warm body and felt strong arms come around her stomach.

The older woman took Gabrielle's hands and rested them on the bard's stomach. Xena propped her legs back up. "Comfortable?"

"Oh yeah." The small female sighed happily and rested her head against Xena's right shoulder. "Thanks Xena."

"Mmm?"

"For finding me." Gabrielle shook her head. "I was worried you really thought I was dead." She took a long breath. "I just can't believe you tried to search me out."

The warrior thought before replying to that. "I always will. You would have done the same for me."

The young woman chuckled quietly. "I don't quite know about that. You went through some rough things to try and find me."

"I did." Xena smiled. "And I'd do it again... for you."

"Thank you." Gabrielle turned her head up to capture Xena's lips in a light kiss.

"Here we are... finally." Ephiny hopped off her horse and turned around to her Queen.

Gabrielle easily climbed off the horse and recovered her staff from the saddlebag.

"So that's the whole story?" The regent had her hands on her hips.

"Yes." The bard grinned and leaned against her staff. "Nothing... sexual."

Ephiny sighed and shook her head with her hands dropping. "You know, I was expecting you to tell me some wild tale." She ambled over to the horse to take the reins. Her feet carried her through the Amazon forest towards the village. "That was... boring." She smirked over to her friend.

"Right." Gabrielle shot back a grin. "I know you find it interesting Eph."

"Actually I do." The Amazon let out a sigh. "Xena can be surprising."

"How you figure?"

"I don't know." Ephiny shrugged her shoulders. "I just never thought of her as the... slow pace kind of woman. More like jump into the sack at the first chance."

"Ephiny?"

The Amazon turned her head to the Queen.

"She isn't a warlord."

"I know... I know." The regent quietly laughed. "It's just still... she's a warrior and well..."

"She's changed Eph." Gabrielle shook her head with a smug look. "You can't back yourself up."

"I guess not." The regent laughed and shifted her attention to her walking again. "Still I would have thought... ah centaur butt hair... I give up." She gave a dragged out sigh with a shake of her head.

~*~*~*~

Xena pulled her mare to a slow walk as she entered into the familiar village.

Argo walked up close to the tavern and stopped there with a whine.

The warrior patted her war-horse's neck and dismounted. "Stay here girl." She walked into the tavern and gazed around. "Mother?"

The kitchen door opened with a creak and a short black and white haired woman came ambling out. "Xena?"

The Warrior Princess gave a warm smile. "Mother, it's good to see you."

"How have you been?" The older woman pulled her daughter in for a tight embrace.

"Well," responded Xena with a hug. "You?"

Cyrene pulled back with a warm smile. "Better... now."

The warrior's lips spread into a warm smile. "Thank you."

"It's good to see you." The innkeeper however suddenly had a confused look. "Where's Gabrielle?"

"Gabrielle actually went to the Amazon Nation to take care of some affairs."

~*~*~*~

"Been good Solari?"

The second in command evilly grinned. "In what fashion my Queen?"

Gabrielle quietly laughed. "Both."

"Oh... I have been... but only in one fashion."

The regent glanced over and lightly glared to her second in command.

Solari snickered and smiled back to Gabrielle.

The bard nodded and glanced back to her food. "No further details... please."

Solari laughed and sat back while continuing to eat her dinner.

Ephiny gave a long drawn out sigh as she finished her dinner in the food hut.

That evening had been rather quiet. Both the regent and Queen tired from the travels of the day. Yet, Ephiny had huge plans to make sure that there was a celebration for the Queen's returns. But that wouldn't be till tomorrow night, ample time to prepare for a good Amazon bash.

Soon the night came and Gabrielle was in her hut sleeping deeply. During that deep sleep her dreams came to her in riddles. Riddles that spoke to the bard of a beautiful woman of northern lands.

This woman was not of Greece and held a deep Celtic accent that could be traced to possible Britannia or maybe Gaul. Gabrielle could not be quite sure about that detail for she was not good with dialects. However she did remember that in the dream this Celt was a warrior with long majestic red hair and deep green eyes. Different scenes would flash to Gabrielle of this woman repeatedly saving her life in one fashion or another. By the morning when the Queen awoke she was left in mystery of this woman for this Celtic warrior seemed so real to her. Hence this left Gabrielle through the next day trying to understand the curious dream.

~*Part 2*~

Xena stood on the porch of the tavern in the early morning, she felt the light breeze kiss her cheeks. She slowly lifted her mug of tea up and carefully drank. The mug lowered but the warrior's sky teemed eyes stayed pinned on the village around.

The village itself was quiet on this early dawn. The only thing rising with the sun was the small thin patches of fog. Quietly the floorboards creaked as they held another form that exited the tavern.

"Morning."

A smile tugged on Xena's lips. "Morning mother." Her voice held hints of sadness.

Cyrene peered up to her daughter and studied her profile. She'd taken into

consideration about Xena's lack of attempt to talk about Gabrielle. For fear if Xena talked of Gabrielle it would say something and it bothered the innkeeper. Although at the same time she was concerned about the fact the warrior neglected to speak her thoughts on Gabrielle. So being the mother that she is, she acted as that mother. "You miss her."

The tall woman took a long deep breath and let her fingers curl more around the warm mug. "Yes."

The tavern owner turned her sights away. "You haven't spoke of Gabrielle since I asked about her."

"True." Xena lifted the mug to drink from it.

Cyrene lifted her arms against her chest. "I can understand that." A sigh freed from her as she added more. "It's hard without your... other half."

Very gradually sapphire eyes lowered to the innkeeper with hidden surprise.

The mother smiled up to her daughter. "I just know Xena... I'm a mother."

A fine smile creased Xena's lips.

Cyrene mirrored the smile and turned her eyes forward. "How long?"

The warrior lifted her mug to her lips but spoke before drinking. "Nine days, eighteen candlemarks, and fifty-seven minutes... and thirty-two seconds as of... now."

The mother quietly laughed with an amused smile playing on her lips. "That serious huh?"

"Very." The Warrior Princess swallowed the warm tea and peeked into it to see most of it gone.

The innkeeper had a serious look on her face as she stared over the town. "Slow or fast?"

"Slow... and we both agreed to the pace." Xena took a long drink and lowered the mug.

Cyrene moved her head in approval. "Good." She drew out a sigh. "You both were made for each other."

Xena's eyes flickered over to her mother.

The tavern owner smiled but didn't look up. "Trust me dear, I know these things."

The warrior quietly laughed and lifted her tea to finish it off. "A mother knows best."

"Yes she does." The older woman's expression was serious all over again. "How is Gabrielle feeling about all of this?"

"Very excited." The warrior crossed her arms over her chest while holding the dry mug. "She almost refused to go to the Amazons."

"And you convinced her otherwise?"

"Yess." Xena took a deep breath. "Be good time for her to completely consider the relationship."

"Xena..." Cyrene glanced up to her child. "If you're trying to get her to reconsider it won't work." A grin took over her lips. "The longer you're away from her the closer she'll come to death... as will you." She winked. "Distance makes the heart grow fonder." With that Cyrene strolled away and back into the tavern.

The warrior out of the corner of her eyes saw her mother disappear. Slowly her attention went to Amphipolis again. And so gradually a satisfied and happy smile crept along Xena's lips.

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After Gabrielle risen from bed and left her hut then Ephiny instantly hunted her down for talking.

The regent questioned her friend about how to go about the affairs with the Amazons.

These affairs dealing with treaties with surrounding villages and the centaurs. Nothing to lose sleep over but non-the-less were quite serious. All these treaties were coming to their expiration dates and need renewal and possible new terms.

As of now, Ephiny and the Queen stood in the center of the village. Ephiny to the bard's right talking in her ear. Gabrielle however was staring across in the village with half her attention on the regent and the other half on her thoughts of Xena.

"Gabrielle?"

"Yeah?" The bard turned her head to Ephiny.

"Did you hear anything I said?" The regent crossed her arms against her chest.

"Sort... of." Gabrielle gave a sheepish grin.

With a sigh the Amazon asked, "Want me to repeat myself?"

"You better." The Queen went serious and faced her friend, as she tried to focus.

"Okay, first we should speak with the centaurs...." Ephiny started chatting away with her ideas but stopped as she noticed Gabrielle not paying attention. "Now what?"

The small bard shook her head. "Ephiny... who is that?" Her face held a mix of surprise and fear.

The regent turned and gazed in Gabrielle's direction. "Who?" She pointed at a passing female. "Her?"

"Yes," was Gabrielle's whispered response. "Who is she?"

"That's Joan." Ephiny glanced at Gabrielle. "Why?"

"She... she..." The bard shook her head. "She looks exactly like the woman from my

dreams."

The Amazon's face lit with an evil grin. "She's in everybody's dreams since she's arrived here."

Gabrielle carked an eyebrow at her friend. "I don't wanna know." She sighed. "Since she's arrived? She isn't an Amazon?"

"No... no." Ephiny shook her head and turned her attention to the woman, Joan, watching her shift through the village. "Joan... is from Gaul. She quite literally stumbled into our territory."

"Gaul?"

"Yesss." Ephiny put her hands to her hips. "She has a beautiful dialect... Celtic. The weird thing is the accent sounds more Britannian than Gaelic."

The Queen stared at the fairly tall woman that had long flowing bright red hair and forest green leathers on. "She is pretty."

"Very... and her accent only makes her more deadly with beauty."

Gabrielle quietly laughed but went stern while turning her eyes to Ephiny. "How'd she come into our territory?"

"She came in stumbling... drunk off ale."

The bard's head bobbed while she watched Joan amble through the village and out of the gates. "I'll have to talk to her."

~*~*~*~

"Wahoo!" Eponin laughed and fell to a seat beside her Queen. "How's it going Gab?"

Gabrielle sighed knowing her Amazon was heavily drunk tonight. "Fine Ep, how are you?"

"Just wonderful." The weapons master leaned against her Queen. "How you feeling Gabrielle?"

"Almost perfect Ep." The bard turned her head and grinned.

"Really?" The weapons master carked an eyebrow. "Anything I can help with?"

Gabrielle bit her lower lip. "No... no." She patted her Amazon's knee. "I'll live."

Ephiny strolled up to the group by the fire with a mug of wine. "You causing trouble Ep?"

"Me? Nah!" The weapons master smiled. "Just trying to figure out who to sleep with tonight."

The regent choked on her wine, she coughed, and hit her chest. "Well... if you're hoping for your Queen, she's taken."

"Since when? And by who?" Eponin looked between Ephiny and the Queen. "You

Eph?"

"Oh no... no." Ephiny shook her head and sat down on the ground in front of her friends. "I have Solari."

Eponin chuckled. "How could I forget?" Now she glanced between Gabrielle and the regent. "You know what I never could understand?" She sighed and mumbled out, "I couldn't... couldn't understand how the two most beautiful women can travel with each other but not... not be sleeping with each other."

Ephiny grinned. "You talking about Xena and Gabrielle?"

"Of course I am!" Eponin faced Gabrielle. "Why is that? Is Xena blind or something?"

The bard bit her lower lip again. "I don't know what it is Ep. Strange huh?"

"It's messed up!" The weapons master gave a drawn out sigh. "Why don't you just jump her Gabrielle?"

Gabrielle's eyes widen. "Oh god, that's the worst image."

"Oh come on, I would." Eponin grinned and drank some more of her port. "What's the risk?"

The regent grinned up to the weapons master. "Ep?"

"Yeah?" Eponin turned her head to her friend.

Ephiny evilly grinned. "Ep, do you like your sword? Do you like your mask?" She paused. "Do you like your face?"

The weapons master sheepishly grinned. "That's true... Xena would do that."

"My point exactly." Ephiny drank more of her wine.

Eponin drank more of her port and furrowed her eyebrows to Gabrielle. "Not drinking?"

Gabrielle shook her head. "Trying to quit... thanks though."

The weapons master chuckled. "Never the true Amazon." She smiled warmly. "Gotta love it."

"What's happening over here?" Solari stood with a small sway in her stance.

"Just talking about how Gabrielle should jump Xena." Ephiny patted the ground beside her.

"Really?" The second in command sat down beside her regent. "I gotta hear this." She lifted her mug of wine to take a long drink. "So what's the tactic on how to jump Xena?" She glanced up between Eponin and Gabrielle.

"There is non." Gabrielle laughed and shook her head. *I'm surrounded by three drunk Amazons... this is not good. Where are you when I need you Xena?*

"You know..." Eponin's lips slipped into a grin. "I bet I could jump Xena."

Gabrielle arched an eyebrow very high. "Right."

"No really." The weapons master turned her head to the Queen. "I could."

"I guess she doesn't like her face," mumbled Ephiny.

Solari laughed. "I'd love to see that!" She took a deep breath. "And in which way would you jump her? Sexually or just... hop off a building to knock her to the ground?"

"Either." Eponin shrugged her shoulders. "Jumping is... jumping."

"I'd love to see you try Ep." Ephiny shook her head. "There's no way."

The weapons master narrowed her eyes. "I bet I can." She turned her head to her Queen. "When's Xena coming?"

Gabrielle shrugged her shoulders. "In six days or so." She reached out with her right hand to the weapons master's shoulder. "I suggest you don't jump her... as Eph said, you won't have a face."

Eponin rolled her eyes. "I can handle Xena."

The bard groaned and dropped her hand. "Alright."

Solari laughed and shook her head. "And nobody can tell Xena about this. I wanna make sure Ep does this all on her own."

Eponin glared at the second in command. "Don't worry, I don't cheat."

"Oh that's not what I am worried about." Solari turned her head to the Queen. "I'm worried about Xena's little partner there saying something."

Gabrielle batted her eyes. "Me? Never!"

"Right." Ephiny quietly laughed. "I'll keep tabs on our Queen."

The bard huffed. "Now I'm getting a babysitter."

The regent quietly laughed.

Eponin took a long deep drink. "So it's a bet. If I jump Xena... I don't have patrol duty for a week."

"And if you don't?" Solari's expression went smug. "You get patrol duty for a week straight."

"Sounds good to me." The weapons master grinned. "It's a deal." She stood up and almost fell back down. "I'm gonna go find somebody to sleep with... excuse me." She stumbled away.

"Try Joan!" Solari called off.

"I like my face Solari!" Eponin answered back.

Gabrielle sighed and stretched her legs out. "She's not going to have one once Xena

gets her."

Ephiny glanced up and had a sad look. "Maybe you better tell Xena."

"I might actually." The Queen sighed. "Gods only knows what Xena will do if somebody jumps her from behind."

Solari chuckled and asked, "What would she do Ep?"

"Nothing on purpose Solari." The bard turned her head to the second in command. "Xena's... reactions and self defense are... high strung."

"True." The second in command chuckled. "Well... it's all Ep's problem."

~*Part 3*~

Gabrielle dropped her head back over the chair. "This is sssso boring."

Ephiny quietly laughed and patted her Queen's arm. "Sorry, Gabrielle... has to be done and only the Queen can sign."

"I know." The bard sighed. "I hate treaties I've decided."

"Well... maybe you can take a break." The regent's face teased with a grin.

"I think I will." The Queen stood up. "Not like I need my regent's approval."

A laugh escaped from Ephiny. "True. Don't be to long."

"Nah." Gabrielle took a deep breath and grabbed her staff from the wall. "I think I'll talk to Joan... go for a walk."

"Good idea." Ephiny stood up. "I think I'll get some early lunch."

"How's the head?" Gabrielle opened the door to the hut.

"Still throbbing."

"But worth every moment of it huh?"

The regent had an evil grin. "Oh definitely."

The pair left the hut and went in separate directions.

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"Dear why don't you come in and get some lunch?" Cyrene stood on the porch wiping her hands. "You've been on that project since sunrise."

"And I'm determined to get it mother." Xena grinned down at her mother.

The innkeeper chuckled and kept her eyes pinned on her daughter on top of the roof of the stable. "The roof can stand a lack of attention for a candlemark."

The warrior grinned. "Alright." She came to the roof's edge and leaped off to do a backflip and land on her feet. "You said lunch?"

Cyrene shook her head. "Yup, come on dear." She walked into the inn.

Xena only wore her leathers and boots but now climbed the steps to go inside of the tavern.

Cyrene sat with her daughter at a table eating a quiet lunch. She took a deep breath. "When are you going to get Gabrielle?"

The Warrior Princess peered up. "In six days."

The innkeeper nodded and asked, "What is she doing with the Amazons?"

"Renewing some treaties with local tribes and villages."

"Ah... sounds like a bore."

Xena quietly laughed. "That's why I'm not there." She grinned. "That's Gabrielle sort of thing."

"I hope that's the only thing she's doing dear."

The warrior nodded. "Me too." She sighed a bit sadly. "She can get herself into trouble."

~*~*~*~

"So you're from Gaul?"

"Not originally Queen Gabrielle."

The bard glanced up. "Where you originally from Joan?"

The warrior took a deep breath. "Northern Britannia." She sadly smiled to the Queen. "I was born in Britannia but me parents were killed when I was rather young. So I left Britannia and went to northern Gaul and joined a Celtic clan."

Gabrielle nodded a few times and looked around in the forest as they walked. "I've heard of the Celtic clans there." She turned her head to the Celtic warrior. "Which one you belong too?"

"I *was* apart of Teufates clan... the god of war." Joan gave a sigh. "It was a guid clan but I was hattered to death."

"Hattered?"

Joan quietly laughed. "Hattered... uh bullied... persecuted. Sorry, I keep forgetting about me dialect."

The Queen chuckled. "It's alright. So your clan persecuted you?"

"The clan..." Joan shrugged her shoulders. "The Druids." Another sigh. "Me clan said I needed to seek revenge for me parents' deaths but I didn't want to do that. It's the way the clan works but it went against me own morals. So I left but the clans words plagued me."

"So is that why my Amazons found you drunk?"

"I'm afraid so." Joan stopped walking and ran her right hand through her red curly hair. "How about we take a seat?"

The bard arched an eyebrow. "A seat?"

"Yes." The Celt chuckled and walked over to a log to sit down.

Gabrielle shifted to sit beside her. "So you had no idea about where you were headed?"

"Not really lass." The Celt warrior sighed and continued. "When I left the clan I started drinking myself silly... I don't know if you've even drunk to excel. But you'll black out and I did and started just wondering through the countryside until I ended up here." She sighed. "I fainted on the edge of your territory and a few of your Amazons took me in." She paused. "When I finally came around I didn't remember how I got here but your regent, Ephiny, told me." She shrugged. "Been here since... Ephiny welcomed me here."

"I'm glad you..."

"Fainted in your territory?" Joan suggested.

The Queen quietly laughed. "Came to our lands." She smiled warmly. "You're welcome here as long as you want Joan." She went serious. "Do you know what your plans are?"

"Afraid not Queen Gabrielle."

Gabrielle placed her hand on the taller woman's knee. "Call me Gabrielle."

"Alright." Joan smiled warmly and took a deep breath. "They told me you only come here every now and again."

"Yup." The bard nodded. "I'm a... traveling bard." Her hand left the warrior's knee.

"Now that must be a real scary lifestyle lass."

"Not really." Gabrielle grinned. "I have a... guardian." A chuckle escaped her lips. "Actually a partner."

"Really?" Joan furrowed her eyebrows. "Who is that?"

"Xena, she's a warrior."

"Xena?" The Celt warrior furrowed her eyebrows. "You mean... the Warrior Princess?"

"The same." Gabrielle nodded.

"I've heard of her... the Destroyer of Nations or something."

"She retired from that job." The bard's lips spread into a grin.

Joan laughed and shook her head. "So what does she do now?"

"Well... we travel around and fight for the greater good."

"Hmmm, that must be a big switch for her ay?"

Gabrielle stood up with her staff. "It definitely is... she's good though."

"I can imagine... I've heard stories." The warrior stood up as well. "So what brought you back here?"

"Treaties." Gabrielle sighed and started walking. "A lot of them are up for renewal... Xena will be here in about six days." She grinned up to the other woman. "I'm just hoping to have the treaties done by then."

"I'm sure you will Gabrielle." Joan gave a warm smile.

The bard took a deep breath and listened to her own staff hitting the ground for a moment. "By the way..." Her head lifted up. "Did Eponin... bother you last night?"

"Eponin?" Joan's eyebrows creased together as she thought. "A very sid Amazon?"

Gabrielle grinned. "Sid... big?"

"Sort of... big built but small?" Joan thought for a moment. "The weapons master?"

"That's her."

Joan started to laugh. "Oh yes, Eponin did say... hello to me last night."

"I hope she didn't bother you too much."

The Celt sighed contently. "Nah, she just hung on me for a few minutes then left since I was ignoring her."

The Queen evilly smiled. "Good." She opened her mouth to say more but stopped as the wind suddenly picked up.

"My, freak weather around here lass."

Gabrielle stopped walking as her bangs blew back and her skin was crawling. "It's not freak weather Joan." She lifted her staff up.

Joan now tensed up feeling her own skin crawl. She went into fighting stance with her hands up. "I can tell this is bad news."

The Queen shook her head to get the bangs out of her face and then in front of her a whirlwind appeared. "Oh no."

The Celt warrior reached back to draw her sword. "Is this how your gods drop in on you?"

"The bad ones... yes."

The whirlwind stopped and a figure reappeared with burning eyes. "It's so good to see you again Gabrielle."

Gabrielle's eyes widen.

Joan narrowed her eyes and saw the newcomer raise her right hand and point her finger. She didn't need a soothsayer to tell her what was about to happen.

"Gabrielle!" She grabbed the Queen and threw her off into the woods. Joan shut her eyes as she felt herself go soaring through the air from a lightning bolt.

"Damn it." The newcomer sighed. "Always somebody getting in the way." She walked over to Gabrielle whom was slumped on the ground.

Gabrielle peered up into white eyes. "Been awhile Velasca."

"To long Gabrielle." Velasca bent down to one and gave a toothy smile. "Not going to even ask how I am?"

"Don't care." Gabrielle narrowed her eyes as she thought of things to say to keep her busy. "How'd you get out of the lava pit?"

The god laughed and shook her head. "Gabrielle... I am a god." She leaned closer. "Did you really think that lava pit would hold me forever?" She narrowed her eyes.

"I was hoping so." The bard's right hand curled around her staff.

"Sorry to disappoint." The ex-Amazon grinned and took a deep breath. "So where's Xena?" She smiled evilly. "I was hoping she'd be around with you but you have some Amazon with you instead."

"I traded Xena in." Gabrielle grinned.

"Don't blame you." Velasca gave her own grin. "She was always a sad story." She reached up between her gauntlet to extract her dagger. "This is actually boring, you were to easy Gabrielle." She sighed sadly. "Well... I'll have more fun killing your Amazons."

The Queen narrowed her eyes and swung her staff up with strength and a yell.

The god went rolling to Gabrielle's right to hit a tree.

Gabrielle bounced up to her feet and raced in the direction she saw Joan. "Joan?"

The Celt warrior lifted her head that had blood running down the side. "Gabrielle?"

"Get up!" The bard came up to her to grab Joan's offered hand. She helped haul the Celt to her feet.

"Not so fast Queen Gabrielle." Velasca stood up and raised her right hand. "I will have my revenge."

Joan stepped forward with her sword raised up ready to take on the lightning bolt.

"No Joan!" Gabrielle grabbed the Celt's arm and swung her away.

The bolt exploded near the two women causing them to go flying together.

Gabrielle screamed and landed hard into the grass with Joan beside her. She stood up

quickly.

Joan got up and whispered, "Moan." She started running with her sword.

The Queen didn't need a translator to know what the Celt said and she ran behind through the woods. With a fast pace, heavy breathing, and fear Gabrielle put distance between her and the god. On the run she could hear Velasca's laugh follow after her.

~*~*~*~

"Ephiny!" Solari busted through the door of the regent's hut.

"What now Solar?" Ephiny glanced up from her seat.

The second in command was breathing heavy and rasped out, "Velasca... she's back... she's after Gabrielle... and Joan."

"What?" bellowed Ephiny. She stood up with the scrapping of her seat. "How in Hades... Never mind!" She sprang out of the hut with Solari. "What happened?"

Solari took a deep breath. "We're not sure." She took a deep breath. "A few patrol Amazons heard the lightning bolts and investigated." She stopped to breathe. "When they got to the area they saw charred marks all over the place and they searched around to find Velasca walking... walking through the woods."

The regent shut her eyes. "Oh no." She opened her eyes. "Where was Velasca headed?"

"Due east... north-east."

Ephiny thought for a moment. "Back to the ruins." She shook her head. "Gabrielle's crazy... Velasca won't fall for that twice." She turned to her second in command. "Look, get a horse and find Xena."

The second in command nodded and felt her breathing finally relax. "Where is Xena?"

"She's in Amphipolis... with her mother." Ephiny grasped her second in command's shoulders. "Don't stop till you get her Solari. We can't let Gabrielle get killed and Xena will know what to do."

"What you going to do?"

Ephiny looked away to the village. "Slow Velasca down."

~*Part 4*~

Xena tore the thread apart and she finished repairing her gauntlet. She slipped it on next to find it fit better. She smiled at her handy work and she gave a sigh. Slowly standing up the warrior packed away her repair kit and stared out the window of her bedroom to the afternoon sun. She lowered her head to the saddlebag as she put the kit back in. Next, she heard a set of galloping horse hooves coming towards the tavern.

Quickly the warrior walked over to the window and gazed out of it to see an Amazon speeding through the village towards the tavern. "Gabrielle," she whispered with a skip of her heartbeat. She ran out of the room and down the stairs and out of the

tavern.

Cyrene came out of the kitchen and jogged out of the tavern behind her daughter.

"Solari?" Xena ran up to the horse to see the Amazon just holding onto the saddle.

"Xena?" The Amazon fell out of the saddle only to grab onto the warrior.

The warrior had franticness in her eyes and she held the Amazon tightly. "What happened?"

The second in command shook her head. "Velasca... escaped the lava pit." Solari straightened up with a groan and grabbed her horse's saddle horn. "She's after Gabrielle and a Celt named Joan." She took a deep breath and felt her body come back. "Gabrielle and this Celt, Joan, were on a walk in the forest and Velasca showed up. Right now Gabrielle and Joan are headed to the ruins with Velasca after them."

"That's not going to work." Xena turned to her mother. "Get me my stuff mother."

Cyrene nodded briskly and ran into the tavern and upstairs.

"Think you can ride back?" The warrior turned her head to Solari.

"Yeah, no problem." The Amazon straightened up.

"What's Ephiny doing?"

"She's trying to slow Velasca down till you can get there."

"Good, get on your horse and we'll leave." Xena patted Solari's arm and jogged into the stable.

Solari closed her eyes, groaned, and mumbled out, "How'd I get this job?" She turned to her horse and opened her eyes. She slowly mounted her horse and straightened up in the saddle.

Xena came out of the stable with an excited Argo. She patted the mare's neck. "Ready for a long run girl?"

The horse whined and gave a nod.

"Good."

"Xena." The innkeeper came up to her daughter and handed her the saddlebag.

The warrior took it and put it onto the mare's rump. She then turned back around to take her sword and chakram and placing them into their rightful spots.

"Be careful huh?"

"I'll try." The warrior turned to her horse and mounted.

"Make sure nothing happens to Gabrielle."

Xena winked. "Nothing will." She smiled warmly. "See you soon mother." She lifted her eyes to the Amazon while taking the reins. "Let's go." She hit Argo's sides.

Solari sighed. "You have one energetic daughter ma'am."

Cyrene laughed. "I know, good luck."

"Thanks." Solari kicked her horse and followed after Xena.

~*~*~*~

Velasca stopped in her tracks as Ephiny fell from the trees with raised arms in front of her. "Ephiny."

"How are you Velasca? Didn't like the lava pit?"

"No." The god smirked. "It was too warm for me."

"Pity." Ephiny reached behind to unsheathe her sword.

"Really Ephiny."

"Oh come on Velasca." The regent twirled her sword. "For old times sakes?" She smirked. "What's the worse I can do to you... hurt your pride?"

The god laughed and reached back to extract her sword. "Now that you put it that way. I wouldn't mind brushing up on my sword technique."

"Then shut up and attack me!"

Eponin heard the wild scream from Velasca, she turned her head to Teresa. "Let's move, Eph is giving us the time."

Teresa nodded and went through the trees.

The weapons master followed behind.

~*~*~*~

Joan stopped and slumped against a tree.

Gabrielle stopped and came up to her friend. "How you feel?"

"Not good." The Celt reached up.

"Don't." Gabrielle brushed the hand away and leaned forward to study the cut over the warrior's forehead. "Come on, I think you can clean that up."

Joan lifted herself off the tree and started walking beside the Queen. "So... who was that lovely lady?"

"That was Velasca." The bard searched around for a water source by looking and hearing.

"She was a pleasant chap." Joan glanced around feeling her head throb.

The bard chuckled and said sarcastically, "Right." Gabrielle stopped walking and closed her eyes to listen. She heard the small ripple of water and she pinpointed it.

"This way." She led the way through the forest. "She was an Amazon before I became

the Queen." She sighed sadly. "She wanted to become Queen but I took the caste from her... so she says." Gabrielle stepped past a hedgerow and found a small stream. "Here we go."

"So I take it she isn't too happy about that ay?"

"No at all." The Queen turned to the warrior. "She tried to stop me and only in the process ate ambrosia."

"Ambrosia?" The Celt leaned down next to the water's edge and placed her hands in the water.

"Yeah." Gabrielle sighed. "It's the food of the gods."

Joan splashed her face and felt the blood trickle of her face but she could feel fresh blood start to ooze out of the wound. "Great."

The bard chuckled. "Stay here." She got up with her staff and looked around in the forest. She walked up to the hedgerow and found what she was looking for. Very carefully she grabbed a small spider web. "Wash your face again."

Joan did just that and saw Gabrielle come up next to her. "What you going to do with that little thing lass?"

"Put it on the wound." The bard gingerly placed the spider web over the wound. "Leave it there for a few."

"What will that do?" Joan peered up at the web on her forehead with her green eyes. "Other than annoy me."

Gabrielle chuckled. "The webs will clog up the blood so that the scab will develop faster." She smiled warmly. "Trust me."

"If you say so lass." The warrior stood up with a groan. "Remind me never to stand in front of a lightning bolt."

The bard chuckled and leaned against her staff, thankful for a break finally.

"So what's the plan now?"

The smaller woman took a deep breath. "We're head to the ruins, a lava pit where Xena and I last trapped her."

"Lass." Joan grasped the Queen's shoulders. "That trick may have worked on this... Velasca last time. But what makes you think it will a second time?"

"I don't." Gabrielle stepped past the Celtic warrior and started walking. "Let's move."

The warrior sighed and jogged up to her friend's side. "We need a better plan than playing cat and mouse."

"That's all I can come up with right now Joan." The bard gazed up. "We have to till Xena finds us... she'll know what to do."

"Well let's hope we don't get killed while we're lollygaging." Joan sighed. "This is to

exciting for me."

Gabrielle chuckled. "You haven't seen the half of it."

~*~*~*~

Ephiny gritted her teeth as the sword nipped her throat.

"Ephiny, can you feel death coming?"

The regent laughed in the god's face. "Hardly." She pressed hard and gave a hard kick to Velasca's stomach.

The god went stumbling back with her sword. She shook her head. "Not fair."

The regent laughed. "And like your godhood is?" Out of the corner of her eyes she saw two Amazons hidden up in the trees with their daggers flashing to her.

"Oh, poor Ephiny can't handle a little challenge." Velasca smirked in her fighting stance.

Ephiny took that as a good excuse to charge the god. She went racing ahead with her sword and poured her strength into the attack.

The god was a little surprised and was stepping backwards. "Ephiny, you can't keep this up."

"Don't worry." The Amazon gave one hard slash and jumped back with her sword up. "I give up." She looked up to her two Amazons. "Now!"

Velasca's eyes widen and she looked up to the trees in time to see a tree trunk come soaring down at her from both sides.

Ephiny ducked, rolled away, and bounced up to her feet with a grin. She watched the god become smashed between the two flying tree trunks.

The tree trunks dwindled away and hung in mid-air with Velasca stumbling forward.

The regent looked up to the tree behind Velasca. "Now!"

There was a loud pang and a tree trunk came swooping from the treetops towards the god's back. It slammed hard into Velasca's back and sent her flying forward into a tree face first.

Velasca groaned, slumped down the tree, and went unconscious.

Ephiny walked over to the god to see her unconscious and she lifted her head to the trees. "Alright, bring the chains down and let's chain her for now."

The five Amazons fell from the trees with three sets of heavy chains.

~*~*~*~

"Okay... okay... Xena!" Solari slumped forward in her saddle and grasped the saddle horn.

The warrior pulled Argo back and trotted back to the Amazon. "Break?"

"Yeah." The Amazon took a deep breath and barely dismounted her horse. "How you do that?"

Xena turned towards Solari. "What?" She dismounted.

"Keep going like that?"

The Warrior Princess reached up to Argo's reins. "Because I know what's at stake." She turned her hard eyes to the Amazons.

Solari dropped her eyes. "Look..." She lifted her eyes back up. "Go ahead of me."

"No." The warrior shook her head. "The horses need to rest anyway." She patted her mare's shoulder and walked her off the road. "Not to long."

The second in command nodded and took her mare's rein to walk off the road. "Hey Xena?"

"What?" The warrior glanced sidelong.

"I heard Gabrielle was hooked up with somebody... is this true?" Solari came up to Xena's side. "I was wondering who."

The Warrior Princess shrugged her shoulders. "Beats me." She raised an eyebrow. "Who told you this?"

"Eponin... she heard from Eph the other night."

Xena led her mare to a stream and she turned to her saddle. "The other night?" She pulled out her water skin. "Was there a party then?"

"Oh yeah." Solari grinned and pulled out her own water skin. "Big one."

"And was Ep drunk when she told you this?"

"Eponin... gods yes. You should have heard her." Solari drank some of her water while watching her mare drink from the stream.

Xena nodded and finished drinking from the skin. She corked it. "So you believe Ep when she's drunk huh?"

The second in command blinked. "Well..." She corked her skin and put it away. "Now that you put it that way."

The warrior walked up to get her mare's reins. "Solari, as far as I know... Gabrielle hasn't... hooked up with anybody." She lifted the reins over the horse's head and mounted again.

Solari sighed and mounted her horse and glanced over to Xena. "Really? It would have made for some great gossip."

Xena grinned to her friend. "I know." She turned her mare around. "Next time, only believe what Ep says when she's not drunk."

"Good point." The Amazon trotted her mare onto the road behind Xena. "But Gabrielle really isn't hooked up with anybody?"

"Nope." Xena shrugged her shoulders. "She's a traveling bard... who could she... hook up with anyway?"

Solari evilly grinned to the warrior.

Xena leaned close to the Amazon. "Don't even breathe my name let alone think it."

The second in command chuckled. "I didn't... you said it."

The warrior narrowed her eyes. "She's not my type."

Solari nodded. "Exactly." She shrugged her shoulders. "No... need to get all... defensive Xena."

Xena lifted her right hand with her index finger close to her thumb. "You're this close to falling out of that saddle."

The second in command took a deep breath. "I didn't say anything." She shrugged her shoulders and had a mischief grin on her lips.

The Warrior Princess suddenly smiled evilly. "Good." She kicked Argo into a gallop.

Solari watched the warrior fly down the road. She laughed. "Gabrielle is going out with Xena." She laughed with glee and kicked her horse into a gallop. "This is so cute!"

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle walked through the woods with a sigh.

"How can you stay so calm?"

The bard lifted her head up to the Celt. "I'm anything but calm."

"You sure act calm Gabrielle." Joan rested her right hand on her sword on her hip.

"Well..." The Queen let the air around fill her chest. "After... almost three years of doing this sort of thing, you get use to it."

"Three years?" The Celtic warrior's head snapped towards the smaller woman. "That's a lot of adventures."

Gabrielle huffed. "Tell me about it." She stopped and looked around trying to remember the route to the ruins. "Let's go this way." She turned to the right.

"Sso... tell me a guid adventure."

"My tales are long." Gabrielle grinned up to Joan.

"Well maybe not the hael adventure... at least part of one."

The bard sighed. "I'll give you a... selection." She walked along thinking about her past with Xena. "Let's see there's the Titans..." She chuckled. "Um... Prometheus..."

dealing with a giant and army... when Xena had to do a beauty contest." She grinned up to Joan. "Or I can tell you how I first met the Amazons."

Joan's eyes widen. "Oh I gotta hear this story."

Gabrielle laughed. "It was the first time I met Eph."

"I bet that was a ming."

"A who?" The Queen arched an eyebrow at her friend.

Joan chuckled and looked away from the woods to the small woman. "A ming... how you say? Uh... stink."

Gabrielle started to laugh. "That's... that's one way to put it." She took a deep breath and began to tell her tale while leading them through the woods. "This was about two years ago and Xena and I had just finished dealing with freeing the titan Prometheus." She smiled at the memory. "So Xena and I were headed..."

~*~*~*~

Velasca felt a light sting to her cheek and she opened her eyes. The sting came again as a hand connected hard with her cheek. She tried to reach up but found her hands bounded behind her back. "Ephiny," she growled.

The regent smirked. "Morning sleepyhead." She stood in front of the sunset's rays. "Sleep well?"

The god struggled to get up. "This chains won't hold me for long."

"Oh I know." Ephiny straightened up and grinned. "But it's nice seeing you like that."

Eponin stepped up beside her regent.

Teresa stepped up on the other side with her arms against her chest.

Velasca's eyes flickered over to the weapons master. "Eponin... long time no see."

"I was hoping it would be longer Velasca." Eponin turned her attention to her commander. "Ephiny?"

"Get out of here." The regent turned her head sidelong to Teresa. "The both of you."

The two Amazons nodded and jumped to disappear into the trees. They joined up with the three other waiting Amazons.

Ephiny spun away on her heels to walk off.

"Ephiny, you're not going to leave a fellow Amazon tied up to a tree?"

The regent whirled around and stalked up to the god. "Screw you Velasca." She bent down to one knee in front of the god. "You don't even know what Amazon means so don't even breathe the title."

"You're breaking my heart regent." Velasca's eyes glowed white brightly. "I'll get out of these chains and kill all the Amazons one at a time."

Ephiny narrowed her eyes. "Don't count on it... you're plans are going to change real soon." She stood up and walked away but stopped. "Oh by the way." She turned back around. "This is for Melosa." Ephiny did a hard roundhouse kick to the god's head. She was breathing heavy with anger to see the god's head snap back hard against the tree and go unconscious again. "Bitch." She jumped to disappear in the trees.

~*~*~*~

A hard laugh came from Joan and she took deep breaths to calm. "That's a riot." She sighed and smiled to the bard. "Ephiny sounded like a character then."

"She was...she was." Gabrielle came around a few trees and saw the ruins ahead. "Here we are."

The Celtic warrior looked around to see the toppled over gray pillars and buildings. "Don't call it the ruins for nothing ay?"

"Nope." Gabrielle sighed and looked up to the sky.

"What now?"

"We make camp." The bard saw the setting sun. She turned her head to Joan. "Know how to start a fire?"

The warrior nodded. "Of course."

"Good... 'cause I don't." The Queen sheepishly smiled.

"Your friend never teach you?"

Gabrielle chuckled. "That's the interesting part... she's tried to teach me." She sighed sadly. "But I've never been able to pick the art up." She grinned.

"No worries lass." Joan crossed her arms against her chest. "How about you get some wood and I'll try to find us some dinner."

"Sounds like a plan." The small woman leaned against her staff. "Meet you here in a quarter of candlemark?"

Joan nodded and let her breath out slowly. "Sounds guid." She raised a red eyebrow at the smaller woman. "What you think happened to your friendly chap?"

"She's probably getting caught up in Ephiny's traps."

"Guid." The Celt's lips creased with a grin. "Be back." She disappeared into the woods.

Gabrielle sighed sadly and stared across the ruins and remembered the last time she was here. She dropped her head against her staff. "Where are you Xena?" She shook her head. "Gods, I miss you." Her eyes closed while she tried to calm her emotions. She straightened up with a long breath and strolled into the woods to collect firewood.

~*~*~*~

"She's really not hooked up with anybody?" Solari bounced up and down in the saddle

next to the warrior in the early night.

"Solari." The warrior turned her head to the Amazon. "No... what part don't you understand? The 'n' or the 'o'?"

"Sorry it's just..." The Amazon tightened the reins in her hands while she went at a trot beside the warrior. "Well... I can't believe both Ephiny, Ep, *and* Gabrielle would say she's going out with somebody and you don't even know."

"Remember who has an imagination?" Xena shrugged her shoulders. "Besides... you know how Amazons gossip."

"Don't I know." Solari chuckled. "So we're going to keep going at a trot?"

"Yeah." Xena gazed ahead down the pitch-black road. "I don't want to go at a gallop and stumble over something. Safer this way and gives the horses a breather."

"I agree." The second in command gave a stern nod.

"Glad I have your approval." The warrior smirked to the Amazon.

Solari carked an eyebrow. "You are... traveling with the Queen's second in command."

"And your point is?"

The second in command's mouth dropped. "My point is I have a lot of... prestige in the Nation."

Xena suddenly fell forward laughing.

Solari shook her head. "I don't find that funny."

The warrior took a deep breath and sat back up. "Sorry... but I am the Queen's Champion and I think I have higher rank."

"Actually you don't." The second in command smirked. "You're just the Queen's shadow."

Xena slowly raised an eyebrow. "If I remember right it's the Champion's duty to protect the Queen." She narrowed her eyes. "I think my position is a little important there Solari."

"Maybe you have a point there." Solari sheepishly grinned. "So... you're important, just not higher rank."

The warrior rolled her eyes to gaze ahead and spoke with a serious tone, "I don't follow rank."

"I know." The Amazon smirked but her smirk went to a grin. "She's really not hooked up with somebody?"

"Solari!"

~*~*~*~

Gabrielle straightened up with the sticks all in order to begin the fire.

"Looks guid lass." Joan reappeared with a skinned pheasant in hand. "I'll light it and you can get a skewer ready for the pheasant."

The Queen nodded and step forward in the late evening to take the pheasant. She went about skewing the pheasant on a green stick.

Joan on the other hand took her time lighting up the fire. By the time she was done, Gabrielle was cooking the pheasant over the fire. The warrior began glancing around noticing how close the camp was to the ruins. "So why did we put our buil here by the ruins?"

"Camp?" Gabrielle arched an eyebrow.

"Yeah... or resting place." The Celt grinned. "Protection?"

The bard nodded. "That's what I figured. If Velasca shows tonight we can jump behind these ruins to hide... or protect."

The Celt nodded. "Guid idea." She sighed and sat down crossed leg near the fire. "So how long will it take for your friend, Xena, to come?"

Gabrielle stepped back from the fire after putting the pheasant over it. "I'm hoping tomorrow." She shifted to sit beside the Celt. "Depends."

Joan nodded gave a small sigh. "This will be a long night." She faced the Queen. "You better get some rest tonight, I'll keep watch."

The Queen shook her head. "No, let me take watch Joan." She turned her head to the redhead woman. "You're injured, your wound will need the sleep."

"Gabrielle-

The bard's hand went to the Celt's knee. "It's okay... really." She grinned. "You need your sleep."

"Thanks." Joan gave a warm smile.

"It's the least I can do after you saved my life." The small woman stood up to kneel down in front of her friend. "Let me look at the wound too."

"You make it sound like nobody saves your life." Joan reached up to pull back her long curly hair out of the way.

Gabrielle chuckled and responded, "It's not that." She sighed and reached up to pull away the remains of the cobweb to find the webs tainted red. "It's just I'm use to Xena only saving my life." She smiled warmly. "It's... interesting when somebody else does it." She threw the spider's web to the ground and narrowed her eyes while studying the scab. "It'll be fine."

"Guid." The Celt watched her friend sit back down. She stretched her legs out in front of her body.

"We'll have to clean it up right when Xena comes."

"She has medicine?" Her red hair came back down.

"Definitely." Gabrielle smiled. "Nothing to worry about."

~*~*~*~

Velasca took a deep breath and shut her eyes. She swelled her muscles out with her anger and heard a small squeaking sound. The god's eyes tightened and she put more strength into her pull against the chains. A growl escaped her lips and the chains squealed loudly to break apart in defeat.

Velasca grinned and opened her white eyes. She brought her still bonded hands forward to push the chains around her body out of the way. Standing up, the god did the same process to break the chains around her hands.

The End