

~ Small Talk ~

by Red Hope

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Subtext: Yes, but it's the main topic of story here.

Violence: None planned

Feedback: Any comments or questions can be sent to me at redhope@redhope.net and i'll will replay as soon as I can.

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Note: This fanfiction is for a friend of mine. She has a thing for Angelina Jolie and the Tomb Raider thing along with X&G. She also challenged me to write a short fanfiction because I can't seem to do it. Well, I think this'll prove her wrong and make her regret teasing me about that. ;) enjoy, Koty! And let me know if you really wanted this story this short....?

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There was a sudden silence of Argo's hoof beats.

Gabrielle stopped too and looked behind herself, wondering why her partner stopped. "Something wrong?" Her shoulders tensed and she lifted her staff in a defense position.

Xena jumped off her mare's saddle and her boots shot up a small cloud of dust on the road. "No." She looked around the surrounding woods as if a band of enemies would suddenly attack them. "Why?"

"You stopped."

The warrior felt a grin tug at her lips. "Is that okay?"

The bard sighed and her shoulders finally relaxed. "Yeah... yeah." She brushed it off and continued walking down the road.

Xena dropped her head to one side and then lifted it so she could shake it. She started to walk fast and with her long strides, she easily caught up to Gabrielle. She threw her

left arm around Gabrielle's shoulders. "I think we need a break."

"A what?" Gabrielle was grinning but her expression was worn and her eyes rather dark.

The Warrior Princess shook her head again. She pulled her arm away but not without using her hand to ruffling Gabrielle's hair. "Come on, partner. Let's get into this town."

"No, no... no soft beds. We have to rrrrrrough it, Xena," protested the smirking bard.

"Oh, drop it," retorted the Warrior Princess. "Fine...." She hurried her pace and went ahead of Gabrielle. "You can sleep with Argo and I'll have the queen size bed all to myself."

Gabrielle stopped and her jaw went slack. "Sleep with that horse, never!"

Argo whined and threw a glare back at Gabrielle.

The Amazon Queen snickered but broke into a jog to catch up. "I guess I can put up with a soft, queen size bed tonight." She then held up a finger. "But just this once, Xena."

The Warrior Princess flashed a huge grin. "I knew you wouldn't refuse."

It was a little while after sunset that the pair had made it into an inn. They quickly got a room and disappeared into it with all of their belongings.

Gabrielle was the first one to fly into the bed, face first. "Oh gods!"

Xena stood there at the foot of the bed, her hands on her hips, and a huge grin plastered to her face. "I thought this was suppose to be bad."

"Gods yes!" Gabrielle rolled onto her back, the happiest smile on her face, and she yelled, "This is just Tartarus!"

The Warrior Princess sighed despite her grin, which slowly shifted into a smile. "Anything for the Amazon Queen." She walked back over to where they'd put the saddlebags. She took a minute to remove her sword and chakram.

"Gee I wish," taunted the bard.

Xena sighed yet again then went around to the empty side of the bed and slowly lay down. "Not bad," she agreed.

The Amazon Queen chuckled and rolled onto her left side to face Xena. She lifted her head up and positioned her hand under her head to prop herself up. "So when is dinner?"

"Actually it won't be for another candlemark or so." Xena crossed one leg over the other and rested her hands onto her stomach.

Gabrielle lowered her eyes and watched her partner's hands lace together. She lifted her eyes back up to Xena. "Sssso... what are we going to do until then?"

"Relax," quietly replied the warrior. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Take a nap, Gabrielle."

The Amazon Queen grunted and said, "Too late for that."

Xena cracked open one eye and whispered, "What do you suggest then?" She closed her eye again and waited for a response.

Gabrielle seriously considered it and then suddenly it dawned on her, her expression as bright as a sunrise. "I got it."

"What is it? A bath?"

"Even better."

"Oh gods... count me out then," spoke up Xena.

Gabrielle reached over and swatted her partner's arm.

A small grin pulled at Xena's lips. "What is it?" Her tone was more sincere this time.

"How about we... talk."

Xena's eyes flew open and she looked like she was about to scream. "Oh gods," she moaned.

"Xena, let's talk!" gushed the bard.

For a response, the warrior rolled to her right and went off the bed.

Gabrielle jumped up when she heard Xena land on the floor. She peered over the edge of the bed to see Xena's face pressed into the floor.

"Anything but talking," moaned the Warrior Princess.

"Oh come on, it'll be fun." Gabrielle reached down with her right hand and grabbed onto Xena's leathers. She started to lift Xena up.

"Wooooo!" The warrior was surprised by her friend's strength and decided to just get up.

Gabrielle scooted away when her partner got back in the bed with her. "Seriously, we outta just relax and... talk." For a response, all she got was a very long, dramatic sigh. "Ooooh Xena, be fair. We hardly ever talk anymore."

"Yes we do," protested the warrior, "Gabrielle, stoke the fire... Gabrielle cook the dinner, Gabrielle there's a bad guy behind you... Gabrielle don't do a back flip and sprang your ankle. Gabrielle, you need to take a ba-"

"Okay, okay," cut in the Amazon Queen. "But I mean real talk." She was back lying on her side to face Xena. She reached over and touched Xena's side. "Please. I mean, we've been traveling together for how long now?"

"Two years, two months, six days, eighteen hours, and thirty-six minutes."

"Really?" whispered the warrior-bard.

Xena turned her head and looked down at her companion. "Yeah, really."

Gabrielle blinked and tilted her head back so she could peer into soft blue eyes. "Wow."

"Why wow?" Xena waited for a response and started to seriously wonder if she was going to get an answer.

"Oh sorry," apologized the smaller woman. She chuckled and said, "Just can't believe its been two years now."

"Mmmm," agreed Xena.

"But then again," started the bard, "it seems much longer than that."

"Mmmm," agreed Xena again.

Gabrielle partially glared at her partner. "Can you say anymore than that?"

"Mmmm uh huh," replied the warrior.

The bard groaned, rolled her eyes and said, "Started to worry me there." She grunted and rolled away so that her back faced Xena now.

The Warrior Princess felt a few laughs bubble up inside of her. "I'm just not a babbling bard," she taunted.

"Ooooh that's real rich, Xena." Gabrielle rolled back over and faced Xena again. "Well somebody has to do the talking. I mean gee, I can get a better conversation from your horse than you."

Xena shook her head as a grin spread across her lips. "I'm better," she countered.

"You are," agreed the bard. She watched as Xena's eyes slipped closed.

"I use to talk a bit when I was younger," started Xena.

"Yeah?" urged the bard, an amused grin on her face.

"Not as bad as you though, Gabrielle."

"Thanks," deadpanned the younger woman.

"No problem." Xena got a light push at her side for the response. She laughed quietly but her smile slowly disappeared. "We're not that different, Gabrielle."

"Oh right, how you figure that, Xena?" The Amazon Queen propped herself back up again with her arm and hand. "I mean, we're opposites in every way possible."

"Not completely." There was a long pause as Xena went a little serious but she continued speaking. "Like I said, when I was young I talked plenty then." She shrugged then added, "I believed that love conquered all. I dreamed too about settling down one day with a husband and having a child or two."

"Woooo, are you serious?"

Xena cracked open one eye and saw the taunting look on Gabrielle's face. She grinned back but when her eye shut again, she was also serious. "Yes, I did."

"I did too," agreed Gabrielle, "Shoot I even tried."

Xena reached over and grasped Gabrielle's left hand, she gave it a brief squeeze. "Sometimes change is good."

"And sometimes its not," reminded the bard. She sensed Xena's grip tightening briefly then she released her hand. Gabrielle faintly clenched her hand to try and shake the intense heat she'd felt. "It was meant to be, I'm convinced of that now. Perdicus was meant to pass away."

"Why do you say that?" quietly asked the warrior.

"I don't know... its just something I'm sure of, yah know. I mean..." Gabrielle trailed off as she peered up at Xena and studied her face. "Have you ever imagined your life if you weren't the Warrior Princess. If your village was never attacked, Ly was never killed, and you remained a villager. Eventually you'd probably settle down and have a husband and kids." She took a deep breath. "Can you imagine that life? And if you can, does it suit your taste?" Gabrielle could tell her best friend was imagining that life in her head. She then decided to speak what Xena was probably thinking. "Its just not you, Xena. This is who you're meant to be... one way or another."

"Hmmm." Xena took a long and deep breath, her chest filling with air until it couldn't hold anymore then slowly reseeding out. "You and Perdicus married... a boy and girl. Tilling a farm together and taking your children to their grandparents and Aunt Lila." She stopped and listened to Gabrielle chuckle at her. "Only thing is, you can't tell your stories because its looked down on in your town and maybe even Perdicus."

"I think Perdicus would have let me tell stories but only in the home."

"Yes but that was then and I'm talking about a what if." Xena opened her eyes and

looked at her partner. "Perdicus would let you tell stories now because you've been a bard. But if you'd married before being a bard, I believe you'd hide it a little more."

"I'm really not sure... that's kind of a maybe." Gabrielle had her lips pressed tightly together. "Around my kids I would tell them stories but in public, probably never."

"And you wouldn't write them," added Xena.

The bard sighed at those thoughts. "Besides... I wouldn't have anything worth writing about." She reached over and let her fingertips touch Xena's forearm. "That's one of the things you give me, great stories to write and tell about."

"We," corrected Xena. She now sensed Gabrielle's fingertips trailing down her arm and stop at her wrist. She held back her grin as she moved her hand up and captured her friend's hand in her own.

"Hmmm." Gabrielle couldn't control her smile and she laced her fingers through Xena's. "Know one thing we're opposites about?"

"What's that?" whispered the warrior.

"Well... I'm more you know... touchy feely than you."

Xena rubbed her thumb over the top of Gabrielle's hand. "Not... exactly."

"Oh come on," protested the bard, "Xena, you glare at me if I touch you too long. You know how I am, if you're somebody I love, I touch you a lot. Physical contact is another way I talk."

"Yes I know." The warrior turned her head to the left and grinned at her best friend.

"What?" The bard tried to raise her eyebrow like Xena always does.

"I glare at you huh?"

"Yes," grumbled the bard. "You're not big into... physical contact like me. You hate it." She then heard Xena starting to laugh and she felt a bit of anger boil up in her.

"What's so funny?"

Xena held back the rest of her laughter knowing it would only upset her partner. She then lifted up her left hand that was locked with Gabrielle's. "Oh yeah, I hate physical contact."

Gabrielle glimpsed down at their locked hands then looked up at Xena again only to blush. "Okay... maybe hate is a strong word."

"Gabrielle," drew at the Warrior Princess, "just because I glare at you doesn't mean I dislike it." She lowered their hands back down onto the bed.

"What you saying?" Gabrielle narrowed her eyes in suspicion.

"I glare at you and let you think what you want to think." Xena watched as a confused look came over her partner. "Gabrielle, have you ever seen how I react when somebody else touches me?"

"Yeah, sure... you glare at them, remove their hand, or just flat out punch them. So?"

The warrior didn't reply and simply arched an eyebrow at her. She waited for Gabrielle to add things up and she knew she had when Gabrielle's confused expression grew with understanding.

"Wait one Hades of a moment." Gabrielle suddenly sat up, breaking their hand contact, and she now used the hand to point a finger at Xena. "Are you telling me all along I could have been touching you without it being... a problem? You... you...." Gabrielle growled and hastily said the rest. "You glare at me to make me think you don't like it but if you hadn't you'd told me so."

Xena nodded her head in confirmation.

"Xena," growled the bard. "All this time, I've been feeling so gods be damned guilty and here all along you didn't mind one single bit."

The warrior knew she was in deep trouble now. But at the same time, the frustrated and angry look on her friend's face was starting to make her laugh.

"Xena, this isn't funny!"

"Gabrielle," hastily replied the warrior, "it's not my fault. All you had to do was ask. You didn't ask so I let you assume what you wanted to." She saw Gabrielle's expression growing angrier and her green eyes burning. She held up her right hand with her index finger up. "Remember don't assume because it makes an ass out of u and me." She knew she just did herself in that point because Gabrielle's eyes went from burning to pure wild. "Gabrielle, come on... its not that-"

"Xena," growled the bard, "don't even try to work your way out of this one." She was breathing heavily, her chest rising and falling in great lengths.

"Oh boy," whispered the warrior. She pushed herself up with her hands and sat up now. "I'll make it up to you," she persisted.

"You're damn right you will," declared the angry bard.

This could be fun, thought Xena to herself. "Will this help too?" Xena pushed herself forward and picked up Gabrielle's hands into her own. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you, Gabrielle. Will you forgive me?" She kept her serious face but a grin was just lying underneath her lips. "I didn't mean to upset you." She watched as Gabrielle's temper slowly defused because she knew if it was one thing Gabrielle couldn't ignore it was an apology.

"Its okay," whispered the Amazon Queen. "Just don't... glare at me anymore."

Now Xena couldn't hold back her grin anymore. "I won't."

"You promise?" persisted Gabrielle. "Even in front of others?"

"I promise and not in front of others."

The bard pretended to sniff as if it upset her, which it had but came to a dead stop when Xena apologized. "I feel better now."

"Oh good," tormented the warrior yet she had a warm smile on her face. "Lay back down." She tugged on Gabrielle's hands.

The two friends carefully laid back down into the bed next to each other. Gabrielle curled up along side of Xena while Xena stayed on her back but this time brought her arm around so that her hand touched Gabrielle's back. The bard had her forehead pressed against Xena's side and her feet were even with Xena's.

"I'm getting hungry."

"Mmmm." Xena looked off to her right out of the window. "About half a candlemark before dinner."

The hungry bard sighed but closed her eyes. "So you really don't mind?"

The warrior turned her head back and let her eyes drift shut. "No, Gabrielle."

"Oh good." Gabrielle suddenly flung her left arm over her partner's stomach. "That's better."

Xena laughed some and shook her head. "Just don't get too carried away."

"Yeah right," teased the bard. "You just opened up a whole nother door."

"I know," groaned at the Warrior Princess.

Gabrielle chuckled but when she settled down, she asked, "You know though, I'd never been happy being Perdicus wife."

"Yeah I know." Xena idly ran her nails gently up and down Gabrielle's back. "You were meant for this just like I am."

"Xena?"

"Hmmm?"

"By the time we stop fighting for good-"

"You mean when we're dead?" joked the warrior.

"Basically," agreed the younger woman. "But seriously, you said we're going to grow old together... I believe you on that. And when the day comes that we both run out of... energy, I think you'll have finished atoning for your past."

"How can you be so sure, Gabrielle?" Xena let out a long sigh.

"I admit, I don't know everything about your past and I don't need to just to know how to add the numbers up. But what does make a difference is the fact you're a good person, Xena." Gabrielle lifted her head up now and she slightly turned so that she could rest her chin on Xena's chest. "The difference is that you killed out of your past while others out there kill purely because they're evil. You take responsibility for your actions and your past then try to amend for it, you see where you went wrong. The people we fight against are the ones that will not stop and will not see anything evil about it."

Xena had been staring into her partner's soft green eyes. Her words seem to sooth some kind of fear deep inside of her. "And how can you be sure I will atone, Gabrielle?"

"Only you can know, Xena," whispered the bard. "But I know you will simply because you're a good person."

"How will I know when I have?"

The bard could tell Xena was being serious and she looked to Gabrielle for the answers. She gently squeezed Xena's stomach with her arm and quietly answered the question. "You'll know when you finally put your sword away and no longer feel an urge to hold it. The day you run out of energy will be it. That energy, that drive in you is the part of you that wishes to seek out that atonement and soon as its been satisfied then you'll stop. And soon as you stop the struggle that's been in you since the day Cortese attacked your home."

Xena closed her eyes, her breathing was steady but she tried to grasp Gabrielle's words. Her words repeated in her head in quick flashes. "There are times where I feel like there will never be an end, Gabrielle." She gradually opened her eyes.

Gabrielle's lips formed into a frown and she felt so many emotions touch her at the way Xena felt. "There will be," she promised.

"How can you be so sure?" urged the warrior.

A sad smile now took away the frown and Gabrielle whispered, "Because I am here... and I will always be by your side."

"I know," whispered Xena. She could see how emotional her partner was and it was growing in her too. She suddenly reached down and pulled Gabrielle up.

The bard quickly followed and rested on top of her best friend. She buried her face into Xena's neck.

Xena tightly wrapped her arms around the bard. She sensed Gabrielle's hands gripping her shoulders and holding onto her.

"There will be an end," promised Gabrielle. "There'll be peace."

"I know," whispered back Xena. She turned her head and pressed her lips against Gabrielle's temple. She pulled away some and quietly added, "As long as you're here."

"Always," promised the bard. Gabrielle then lifted her head and smiled at Xena. "One day, you won't need me to find something that's already in you."

Xena grinned and freed one hand. She poked her companion's nose and replied, "Until then, you're stuck with me."

The Amazon Queen giggled softly but a suddenly concerned look took over. "Wait... I take that back, don't find any peace in yourself. I'll be out of a job if you do that."

The warrior laughed and said, "We'll find you a new one."

"Oh gee, thanks," teased the bard.

"Don't worry, Gabrielle you have plenty of... jobs."

"Yeah... I got best friend, partner-"

"Side-kick you mean," teased the warrior.

Gabrielle's eyes widened and she gently smacked Xena's side. She then pointed her finger at her best friend. "You're the side-kick."

"And where does side-kick fit any where in Xena, the Warrior Princess, hmmm? Gabrielle, the Side-Kick." Xena then rolled with laughter as Gabrielle just stared at her in shock and a slack jaw.

"You... you..." The offended bard rolled to her left, off the bed and landed on her feet. "I have you know, I am Gabrielle the Amazon Queen." She stood tall, proud, and hands on her hips, her chin up.

That only made Xena laugh even harder.

"Gabrielle, Bard Extraordinar."

Xena rolled onto her side, her arms over her stomach, and she kept laughing.

Gabrielle groaned and dropped her hands from her hips. She stared down at Xena's back. "Ha, ha laugh it up, funny girl. I have you know, I am a staff master too."

Xena wiped the tears away from her eyes and just muttered out, "Ooooh... I'm scared now."

The bard glowered at her partner. She sighed as Xena kept laughing at her. She then decided to extract revenge and a nasty one at that. "That's it, I'm pissed." She reached forward.

Xena suddenly yelped and rolled onto her back. Her right butt cheek still pounded in pain from the hard pinch. "Gabrielle!" she roared.

Gabrielle laughed evilly and hastily moved to the other side of the room.

The warrior flew off the bed and spun around to face her prey. "You're toast, bard," she growled.

"Can't toast me if you can't get me." Gabrielle bent her knees into fighting stance, mirroring her partner's movement.

"Gabrielle," drew out the smirking warrior, "you're not as fast as me."

"I'll agree to that." Gabrielle moved to her left, closer to the door. "But that doesn't mean I won't try." She grabbed the handle.

"Gabrielle!" yelled the Warrior Princess.

Gabrielle screamed and threw open the door. She went flying out of the door and she felt her body full of shocks from the sensation of Xena chasing after her. "Oh Hades!" She heard Xena's boots slamming behind and the room's door bang.

"Get back here!" yelled the warrior.

"Oh gods!" Gabrielle went down the hallway then made a quick left and went barreling down the tavern stairs.

Xena growled in frustration and went chasing down the steps. "Look out below."

Gabrielle suddenly knew what the warrior was about to do. She stopped on the second to last step and suddenly saw a large body fly overhead and land neatly at the bottom of the steps.

"Gotcha," growled the warrior.

The Amazon Queen stood on the step, her eyes pinned on the warrior, and her right hand gripping the railing of the steps. She was breathing as hard as Xena. She wanted to look at all of the tavern patrons in the room but knew if for an instant she took her eyes off Xena, she would lose. Suddenly an idea for escape came to mind and a huge grin crept along her face. "I don't think so, Xena," she whispered and laughed.

Xena watched with amazement as her partner grabbed the railing with both hands and went flying over it. She tilted her head to the left more and watched Gabrielle land on a table that was luckily empty.

"Woooo!" yelped the bard as she swayed back and forth on the shaky table.

The warrior's first instinct was to rush over and catch her if she fell but she saw Gabrielle recovering. She then finally stole a glance at all of the tavern customers and saw how everybody was staring at them.

Gabrielle had finally gained control of the wobbly table. She looked at Xena and threw a triumphant smile at her. "See yah later, slow poke." She jumped off the table.

"Get back here," hissed the warrior.

Gabrielle weaved between the tables, trying to make it to the front door. She saw Xena was still after her and coming quickly after her. I got to think of something, growled the bard to herself. "Somebody stop her!" she yelled.

Two men jumped from their seats right after Gabrielle flew past them.

Xena came to a sudden stop as the two men blocked her path to her friend.

The Amazon Queen sighed when she made it to the door. She looked back and saw the two men were trying to stop Xena. "Don't let her near me," she called and an evil laugh came from her.

"Now miss, you should leave the young lass alone," stated one man. He held up his hands in defense. "Whatever she did, I'm sure it's not that bad."

"Yeah right, my ass says otherwise," growled the Warrior Princess. "Get out of my way."

Gabrielle snickered and called, "I only did that in self defense because you hurt me."

Xena groaned and rolled her eyes.

"Its okay, lass," reassured the man. He then looked back at Xena. "I'm sure this can be settled."

Gabrielle was giggling so much now. She got a nasty look from her partner.

"You need to get out of my way," snarled the warrior, "or I'll throw you out of my way."

"We're not trying to get anybody hurt here, miss." The second man now spoke up. "We can all settle this if we sit down and just... talk."

"Argh." Xena mentally counted to ten. "I hate talking," she growled through gritted teeth. "That's it." She took a step closer to them and lifted her hands up.

Gabrielle opened the door some, knowing the pursuit was about to continue. She then decided it was best to save those two men. "Please don't let Xena, the Warrior Princess get me," she begged but her eyes were twinkling.

"Warrior Princess?" spoke the first man.

"Xena?" repeated the second man. He turned his head from Gabrielle to the angry warrior. "By the gods." He grabbed his friend's sleeve and tugged on it. "I think we better get out of the way."

"You gods be damned better," hissed the warrior. She came closer. "Because I've killed people for less than this."

The two men yelled and made a hasty retreat.

The warrior's dark blue eyes flickered from the two retreating men over to Gabrielle. Suddenly a cat grin appeared in her expression.

"Oh gods," whispered the now fearful bard. "I'm out of here." She threw open the door and went racing outside.

Xena growled and ran through the tavern and out the open door. "Gabrielle!"

The Amazon Queen stole a quick glance behind herself. She quickly disappeared into the tavern's small stable. She quickly realized just how bad of an idea that was but she tried to think of a plan. She went to Argo's stall and jumped over the low door then slid down it.

"Gabrielle, come out, come out." Xena stood in the entrance of the doorway, her hands grabbing either side of the doorway. "Let's not be silly about this," she called. "I just want a little... compensation for my sore butt that I have now." Her eyes were scanning the stable. She saw how Argo was staring down at the bottom of the stable. "Nothing major just a small compensation." She let go of the doorway and started for Argo's stall. "Just let me have... my way and this'll be all over." She closed in on the stall. "Then we can go back into the tavern and get dinner." Her grin grew more and more as she went to the stall door. "I know you must be hungry by now." She stopped and stood right in front of the door. "Doesn't some warm chicken, with a cold salad, and rice sound really good?" She went quiet and then she got her response.

Gabrielle tried to cover her stomach but she couldn't stop it as it growled very loudly.

"Gotcha." Xena looked down at her partner.

Gabrielle dropped her head against the door and peered up. "Hi."

"Come here," growled the Warrior Princess. She started to reach over the door.

Gabrielle yelped and sprung up to her feet and closer to Argo.

"Stop making this hard on yourself," urged the warrior. She bent her knees and jumped over the door. "Just give me what I want."

"Never," protested the stubborn bard. She quickly shifted to Argo's side. Xena lunged for her and she expected it so she went underneath Argo and popped up on the other side. "Stay back," she warned. "I had every right to pinch you."

"No you didn't." Xena had a nasty grin on her face.

"You laughed at me!" roared the bard. Her eyes flashed with anger.

The warrior only laughed some more at the memories. "I know."

Gabrielle glared and suddenly saw Xena coming around Argo's back. She shifted and went to the front of Argo. "Stay back," she warned again. She then looked up at Argo. "Girl, stop her. Don't let her treat me like this."

Argo whined.

"Argo, no!" yelled the mare's master. "Don't listen to that... side-kick."

Gabrielle's jaw dropped again. "You hear that, girl? She calls me a side-kick and all I do for her huh?"

Argo threw her head up and whined, she stomped her front hoof.

"Listen girl, if she calls me her side-kick. What you think she calls you? I've heard her call you her lap-horse." Gabrielle sympathetically patted Argo's neck.

Argo threw her head around and glared at her master. She huffed very loudly and her eyes were slits.

"Don't listen to that centaur crap, girl," argued the warrior. "Who you gonna listen too huh? That silly side-kick or me, who's your partner that feeds you and cares for you huh?"

The bard growled when she heard herself called the silly side-kick now and that Argo was her partner instead. "Argo, how can you listen to her? She's called you her slave. You hear that girl, she thinks you're no better than a slave. No wonder she leads you by a rein instead of trusting you to follow along her side. Yeah sure you're her partner."

Xena's jaw was now hanging down. "Gabrielle!" she yelled hotly.

"Look girl, she's getting angry because I'm telling you the truth."

Argo whined hotly and glared at her master.

"Don't let her get away with this, Argo. Show her who's the real slave."

Argo threw up her head and suddenly backed up until she pinned Xena between her rump and the wall.

"Argo!" yelled the warrior. "Stop this!"

Gabrielle laughed happily and pointed a finger at her partner. "Don't assume you're gonna win, Xena because it'll make an ass..." She direct at Argo's ass. "out of u." She did a little dance in her spot and then pushed open the stall door. "Saaaa yah, Xena!" She wiggled her ass at the Warrior Princess and happily strolled off. "Gods, its great being the winner and it works up an appetite too. See yah, Argo. And don't let her loose until she deserves it."

Argo whine out her agreement. She threw another glare at her master then turned her

head away.

"Gabrielle!" screamed the Warrior Princess. She growled and tried to push Argo off her but Argo just leaned back and pressed more weight onto her master. Xena stopped pushing and knew she could only talk her way out of this one. "Argo, come on... you know I don't think you're a slave."

Argo ignored her and held her head up high.

"Oh come on, girl. You really don't believe that silly side-kick?"

Argo hastily looked back and glared. She huffed.

"What?"

The mare stomped at the ground.

"What? Side-kick?"

Argo threw her head up and then looked away.

Xena groaned when she realized her horse was also defending Gabrielle's honour.

"Since when did you care about Gabrielle?"

The mare looked back again and her tongue was hanging out.

"Oh gods," moaned Xena. She dropped her head against the wall. "Okay, okay... she's not a side-kick. She's my partner."

Argo narrowed her eyes at her master. Her bottom lip stuck out in consideration.

"And Argo." Xena lifted her hand and started to rub her mare's left leg. "You're my partner too. We're a team, girl. You know I couldn't make it without you." She noted Argo's lower lip starting to go normal. "We've been partners since day one. We work together and you've learned to be the best warhorse. I've always been so proud of you." She almost groaned out how she was sucking up to her own horse. "Come on, girl. You know you're so important to me. This is really silly." She patted her mare's leg. "Just let me go huh?"

Argo was starting to seriously consider the idea now.

"Come on, Argo. I promise to make it up to you for all of this." The warrior considered then said, "I'll give you an apple every night for the rest of the week." She couldn't believe she was now bribing her horse just so she could get out of this. "Including tonight."

Argo suddenly showed all of her teeth in a smile and she stepped forward a few.

"Thanks, girl." Xena came up to her mare and threw her arms around her neck. "You're the best." She kissed Argo's cheek and let go of her. "See yah later tonight." She then jumped over the stall door and came outside of the stable into the torch lit

street. She knew for a fact Gabrielle hadn't gone back to the tavern since it'd trap her again. She scanned the area hastily and tried to figure out where she may have gone. She then tilted her head to the right when her heartbeat seemed to pick up for no reason. She turned a little to her left as her senses went up a notch and picked up something. "Gabrielle," she drew out, "I know you're near by."

The bard held her hands out. She'd tried this before and it didn't work so she had no clue why it would now. She bent her knees and aimed herself at her partner. I'll get you yet... partner, thought the grinning bard.

Xena lifted her hands. "Show yourself, Gabrielle."

You've got it! screamed Gabrielle in her head. She suddenly jumped and went soaring in the air and down towards Xena.

The warrior thought she'd heard something from behind herself but higher up. She disregarded it but still wondered where her companion was hiding. Suddenly though two hands touched her back and then an entire body slammed into her. She fell onto the ground with Gabrielle on top of her. She lifted her head. "Gabrielle!"

The Amazon Queen squealed when she felt Xena lifting them both up. She jumped up and took off running again.

"That... that... side-kick," hissed the warrior. She continued the chase after her best friend.

The bard sprinted down the road and towards the market place area. She found that there was still a small crowd in the market since some shops remained open at night. She started to weave through the people.

Xena became frustrated as she pushed her way through the people. She knew she could easily lose track of her prey with these people especially with how much smaller she was too.

Gabrielle pushed past the people and hastily took a turn down an alley. She came to the side of a building in the alleyway and pressed her body against it. She looked around the corner and saw Xena almost through the people. She quickly looked away and pressed her body against the building, hoping Xena wouldn't find her. She breathed hard from all of the running and surge of excitement she was getting from this.

The bard then heard somebody moving down in the alley. She looked off her left shoulder and saw three rather dirty men appear from the dark area of the alley. "Oh great," she muttered.

"Hello there, girl."

Gabrielle narrowed her eyes at the man. "I'm telling you know, just back off." She shivered though when the three men looked over her body.

"I doubt we'll do that," spoke up another man.

The Amazon Queen knew she wasn't going to get out of this peacefully. She also knew it wasn't going to be easy considering she didn't have her staff and she didn't exactly know much hand to hand combat like Xena. Instead of showing any doubts or fear, she stepped towards them and bent her knees.

"Ooooh this is a fighter," teased one man.

"She shouldn't be much of a problem," persisted another man.

"Let's get her."

Gabrielle licked her lips and prepared for their attack. She almost felt a spark of fear when all three of them jumped at her at once. She threw a punch at the closest man, sending him stumbling back. She shook the pain out of her hand but had to deal with the other two men. She kicked another one in the stomach. However she was too late for the third man. He managed to take her to the ground.

The man stayed on top of Gabrielle and used his weight to pin her. He quickly tried to grab at her wrists.

The Amazon Queen wouldn't let him and she punched him in the face.

The man hissed at the pain and his head rolled with the blow. He quickly recovered though and grabbed her wrists. "I got her," he called.

"That's what you think." Gabrielle slipped her right leg free and rammed it between his legs.

The man cried out in pain and let go of her wrists.

The bard quickly took the opening and rolled them both and she was now on top. But before she could do any more damage, she was pulled up by a set of arms around her waist. She struggled against her attack that held her down.

"Quit struggling and make it easier on yourself," hissed the man. His grip went stronger.

The man on the ground now got up but very slowly since he was still in pain. "I'll kill that bitch when we're through with her."

Gabrielle at that point decided it was definitely time for the cavalry. "Xena!" she screamed as loud as she could.

"Shut her up," growled one man.

The guy covered his hand over Gabrielle's mouth and whispered hotly, "Shut up or we'll kill you now." He waited for her to agree.

Gabrielle closed her eyes and tried to remain calm. She knew a cool head was better than freaking out. She slowly nodded.

Xena had heard the scream. She'd felt her heart racing earlier and now it was pounding. She'd returned back the crowd of people, thinking Gabrielle was hiding there. But now she knew she was wrong and she started to shove her way through them. She broke through the people and stood there for a second just getting her bearings from the scream. She immediately looked to her left when she heard a squeal. She went charging down into the dark alley but came to a sudden stop when she saw what was happening.

The bard's eyes widened and she instantly clawed at her captor.

"Stop it, bitch." He saw he was having no affect and that the woman was staring at something. He looked up and realized just what or rather who at she stared. "Oh gods," he rasped.

Xena's eyes grew as dark as the night and she slowly approached them. "You do not touch what is mine," she whispered hotly.

Gabrielle felt her heart skip a beat at what her partner just said to them.

The three men though were exchanging fearful looks.

The warrior let out her war cry and charged at them. She almost seemed to disappear into the darkness and only appeared in flashes.

Gabrielle heard one man scream and disappear out of sight. She narrowed her eyes and decided she was sick of playing hostage. She growled and lifted her foot then slammed the heel of the boot into his foot.

The man yelped but only halfway because an elbow knocked the wind out of him.

Gabrielle spun around and kicked the man into the darkness. She went after him.

The third and remaining guy stood there, scared and unsure what to do. "Arkis? Lu?" he whispered but he only heard a few grunts, slams, and then moans. "Guys?" He then jumped when the tall, dark warrior formed in front of him. He stepped back but a large hand grabbed him and jerked him to her body. He found himself lifted up off the ground.

Xena lowered her face into his face. "Get a life better than this," she whispered but in a threatening voice. "Got me?"

The man could barely breathe but he did nod.

"Get out of here." Xena threw the man onto the ground and watched him run out of the alleyway. She then turned and looked for her partner but couldn't see a thing. She focused on her hearing and pinpointed where Gabrielle was now. She closed in on the bard, who was still fighting her enemy. She stood in the darkness but close enough to watch Gabrielle finish him.

The Amazon Queen landed on last punch to his face and it slammed his head against

the wall of the building.

The man groaned and went unconscious, he slid down the wall.

Gabrielle turned around and tried to figure out where Xena had gone. "Xena?" she called.

The Warrior Princess grinned evilly and stepped back silently.

"Xena?" called the bard again. She took a few steps and tried to be careful not to trip over anything. She started for the light at the opening of the alleyway. "Gods, where is she?" she whispered in worry.

Xena chewed on her lower lip but she followed several steps behind her partner.

Gabrielle stopped at the end of the alleyway. She peered out and didn't see her partner out in the street. She shook her head. "Where..." She felt rather worried at this point. She started to turn around but a pair of hands fell onto her shoulders. She yelped but stopped when the warm hands massaged her shoulders. "Oh gods, Xena... don't do that!"

Xena's grin broadened when Gabrielle turned to face her.

"Hi," whispered the bard. She looked down and fidgeted with her skirt before looking back up.

"Hi," replied back the warrior.

The bard sensed Xena's massaging stopping and now her grip went stronger. She then found Xena was pushing her off to the right but backwards. "Um... Xena, we're suppose to go that way." She pointed with her right hand to the lit up street.

"In a minute." Xena kept backing up her partner.

Gabrielle came to a stop when her back hit the side of the building. "Xena?" she whispered in worry.

The Warrior Princess's grin grew larger and her eyes lit up into a vibrant, wild blue. "We have a score to settle."

Gabrielle gulped and she slightly slumped down the wall when Xena's hands left her shoulders. She watched Xena press her hands against the building on either side of her head. She shyly smiled up at Xena. "You can't be serious, Xena."

"I'm very serious." The warrior leaned forward but her locked arms kept her from falling forward. She lowered her head closer to Gabrielle's. "You gave me a good run, Gabrielle."

"Yeah well... uh it was all in good fun." The Amazon Queen tried to play it up with a sweet smile.

"Yeah, good fun," repeated the smirking warrior.

Gabrielle knew Xena had something in mind and she really did not want to find out. "Xena, I didn't mean anything. I can make it up to you." She reached forward with her right hand and pressed it against her partner's stomach. The cool brass armour brought some relief to her hot, sweating hand.

"There's nothing you could say or do to stop me," uttered the warrior. She brought her head down even closer.

"Not even a sorry?" whispered Gabrielle. She couldn't look at Xena but instead stared at the integrated brass armour. She then started to run two fingers through the design, following the swirls.

"Definitely not a sorry." Xena peered down and briefly watched her friend trace the swirling armour. She lifted her head back up and saw how Gabrielle hung her head. She decided to break Gabrielle's trance so she moved her body closer, which forced Gabrielle to drop her hand. She noted how Gabrielle still wasn't looking up at her. "Gabrielle, look at me." Her tone was firm.

Gabrielle couldn't resist and she wasn't sure why. Maybe it was how Xena spoke her name or she felt she had no control of herself anymore. She was too intoxicated by Xena's strength to resist her. When her eyes finally met with Xena's, she felt her knees actually go weak and she slid a little more down the wall. Her breathing was even more irregular than before, and she suddenly grabbed onto Xena.

"What's wrong?" whispered the warrior.

"Gods... Xena," rasped the bard. She closed her eyes and covered her burning face with her right hand.

Xena lowered her head again to make up for Gabrielle's slouching. She moved her head to the side of Gabrielle's face and brushed her lips across Gabrielle's cheek that instantly flushed on contact. Xena held in her breath for a second but then whispered, "I thought you loved physical contact."

Gabrielle groaned and dropped her head forward. Her forehead pressed into Xena's chest. "Xena... gods... this isn't fair."

"It's very fair," teased the warrior.

"Please... there's has to be something I can say to... make it up to you."

"Mmmm." Xena kissed the side of Gabrielle's temple then uttered, "There's nothing."

Gabrielle lifted her head up as an idea came to her.

Xena immediately knew Gabrielle had come up with something to say.

The bard reached up with her right hand and pressed her palm against Xena's cheek. "I better there's one thing."

The warrior grinned at the glowing sparkle in Gabrielle's eyes. "What's that?"

"I love you," whispered the bard in a very gentle voice.

Xena closed her eyes and a very faint growl vibrated her chest. She took a step back and straightened up.

"Gods," groaned the bard then she fell onto the ground in a heap.

The Warrior Princess tilted her head to one side and folded her arms over her chest. She may not have gotten her full compensation but she was still pretty satisfied at what she had accomplished. She shifted her right foot and tapped her boot against Gabrielle's boot.

The bard lifted her head up. "What?" she grumbled.

Xena chuckled and asked, "Hungry?"

Gabrielle only groaned again and dropped her head back until it hit the building.

"Come on," urged the warrior. She then said, "I'll help you up." She started to bend forward but stopped suddenly when she found Gabrielle's hand held up to her in refusal.

"No... no... that's okay," insisted the bard. "I can... get myself up." She placed both palms on the ground and lifted herself up to her feet. She stumbled a bit but was caught by her partner.

"Watch your step," whispered the grinning warrior.

Gabrielle peered up and felt a little relieved Xena had caught her. "I'm fine." She pulled away and started walking for the street.

Xena watched her and noticed how she was shaking some. She felt bad at that point and didn't realize just how much she'd affected Gabrielle but then she knew how she could affect people easily. She took three long strides and caught up to her partner. She decided to help Gabrielle but played it off as a friendly moment. She brought her right arm around the back of Gabrielle's shoulders.

The Amazon Queen gave a faint smile and slipped her left arm around Xena's waist. She was grateful for the extra support as she regained control over her body. "You know," she started, "I can see now why... well why a lot of people could fall under your... power."

Xena really couldn't hold back her grin but more so at Gabrielle's memory than at past memories. "It's not that bad."

"Yeah right." The bard sighed and shook her head. "It's only like drinking."

"Drinking?" repeated Xena.

"Yeah sure. Somebody starts drinking... they become addicted and even obsessed." Gabrielle went quiet as she noticed Xena was leading them a back way to the tavern instead of through the market. She was rather grateful for it.

"I'll admit... it was easy to control somebody by using my body."

"Mmmm, I can see why," whispered the bard.

Xena slowly lifted an eyebrow at her friend. "Gabrielle, I would never do that to you for any other reason than to tease you."

"I know," reassured the younger woman. "Not that I was complaining." She then realized they'd stopped walking and because of Xena. She soon found Xena turning her around to face her.

"Gabrielle, I controlled a lot of people by doing stupid stuff like that."

"And I know." Gabrielle lifted an eyebrow, folded her arms over her chest, and bent one knee forward.

Xena was grasping her friend's shoulders and slightly bent forward. "It's not a good thing."

"There's pro's and con's about everything, Xena. It depends on how you use it. Like I said, not like I was complaining about it."

Xena now raised her own eyebrow. "What you saying, Gabrielle?"

The bard opened her mouth but her words didn't escape her. She closed her mouth and reconsidered what she was about to say. She shook her head and finally said, "I'm not going to even say it. I'm going to leave that one alone." She broke away from Xena's grasp and just walked away.

Xena straightened up and watched Gabrielle walk about five steps but stop.

The Amazon Queen turned around and her serious expression was broken by a soft smile. "Come on, let's get back. I'm starving." She held up her hand.

The warrior sighed but approached her partner. She took the offered hand and walked along side her partner back to the tavern. The street they traveled was rather quiet, well lit, but quiet however occasionally a person or two would pass by them.

Gabrielle would notice they would give her and Xena an odd sort of look but quickly look away in fear. She quickly recalled they were still holding hands, and she wasn't about to let go. She watched as a man walked past and gave them a disgusted look. Quickly, she peered up and saw the very nasty look Xena gave him. She quietly giggled to herself.

The warrior looked down at her partner. "What's the giggles for?"

The bard shook her head and peered up, a warm smile on her face. "I like that."

"Like what?"

The Amazon Queen's smile transformed into a grin, and she replied, "You glare at everybody else instead of me for once."

Xena simply winked without a word. She returned her attention ahead and saw the tavern.

Gabrielle released Xena's hand but not without a quick squeeze. She hurried up the steps and opened the door for Xena.

The Warrior Princess silently came up behind and held the door open. She let Gabrielle slip in and then she entered next. Soon as she stepped in, everybody in the tavern turned their heads to the pair.

Gabrielle stood there and faintly blushed from all of the various looks.

Xena chuckled and suddenly grabbed Gabrielle's shoulders. "We kissed and made up," she joked.

The smaller woman groaned and went two shades redder.

Hastily everybody looked away and continued about their business.

"Over here," uttered the warrior. She led her companion across the tavern, through some tables and to a table in the corner. She pulled out her seat and sat down.

Gabrielle had pulled out her chair a little but hesitated and looked at Xena. "What you want to drink?"

"Just some water, Gabrielle."

"Alright... I'll be back."

Xena curiously watched as the younger woman went up to the bar and partially sat on a stool. The bartender approached her smaller friend and nodded at a few things she said. Xena sighed and stretched out in her chair, she knew Gabrielle was going to be a little while. She could tell Gabrielle was talking to the bartender about something or another. For a moment, Xena just studied the grain in the wood table but it quickly became boring and she looked up.

Gabrielle gave Xena a brilliant smile as she twisted around the tables with a mug in either hand.

Xena couldn't help but return the smile. She studied how Gabrielle bent forward in front of her and carefully placed the mug down. "My they have quite a good lookin' barmaid here."

Gabrielle released the mug's handle but she remained bent forward. She lifted her eyes

up and locked them with Xena.

The warrior just gave a huge smirk.

The bard shook her head and straightened up and went to her chair. She sat down and got comfortable in her chair with her mug still in her hands. She lifted the mug and took a small sip of it.

"So what were you talking to the owner about?"

Gabrielle lowered her mug into her lap. She pushed her chair around some so that she could look at the tavern as well as Xena. She lifted her right leg and pressed her ankle against her left knee. "I apologized to him about earlier and offered to tell a story to make up for it."

"That's nice of you."

The Amazon Queen shot a quick look at Xena. "Xena, we came bursting through here scaring the Hades out of his customers."

Xena couldn't control her evil grin. "I know... it was fun too."

Gabrielle snickered in her mug before she took another sip of her water.

The warrior rolled her mug along its bottom for a moment then lifted it for a long drink. "Mmmm, you order dinner?"

"Yup." The smaller woman sighed and decided to put her mug up on the table. She stretched her legs and arms out a little. "Gods, I'm exhausted."

"Yeah I know you are."

"Aren't you?" countered the bard. She shook her head and had a worn look when she looked at Xena. "Oh right." She grinned suddenly. "You ride the horse, I almost forgot."

The Warrior Princess mock glared at her partner for the remark. "You know you're allowed to."

"Nooooo thank you."

"My point exactly," stated Xena.

Gabrielle yawned some but covered her mouth.

"Stop thinking about that bed and you won't yawn," teased the warrior.

Gabrielle chuckled but the tired look on her face didn't leave. "I can't help it." She peered over at Xena. "How long has it been since we stayed at an inn?"

Xena crossed her arms and really considered the question. "When we were in

Thessely, I think."

"Geez that was fifteen days ago."

"Mmmm," agreed the warrior. "Not that bad."

Gabrielle shook her head and then a curious expression came over her. "What's the longest length you've gone without staying a night in a bed?"

Xena raised an eyebrow but her face went distant as she tried to recall. "I think when I was a warlord...."

"Which time?" joked the bard.

The warrior came out of her daze at the smartass question. "Here in Greece. I went eighty-seven days without a bed."

Gabrielle groaned and shook her head. "I couldn't do it."

Xena only grinned and she took a brief drink from her mug. When she settled it back down and looked at Gabrielle, she could tell her friend was thinking about something. "What you thinking about?"

"Just trying to... think of how many things you've been."

"How many things I've been?" asked the confused warrior.

"Yeah, sure." Gabrielle lifted up her mug, peered into it then finally took a drink. After she put it back on the table, she looked at Xena. "You said you started out as a pirate right?"

"Mmmm," agreed the warrior.

"Then a warlord."

"Mainly a warlord," stated Xena.

The bard shrugged. "I guess technically you're just a warrior."

"Just?" teased the warrior.

Gabrielle grinned and shook her head. "You know what I mean."

"Raider too," added in Xena. "That fits in with pirate and warlord."

"That's true," agreed the bard. "Destroyer of Nations." She chuckled and shook her head. "Whoever gave you that title?"

"I don't know," grumbled Xena. "I hated it. I preferred Conqueror over that."

"Gods yeah, I agree... Destroyer of Nations is just too... wordy."

"Mmmm gets too complicated for some pea brains out there."

Gabrielle giggled and shook her head. "Conqueror would have suited better." She took a deep breath then looked over at Xena. "What you think would have happened if Hercules never stopped you?"

Xena huffed at that and peered up with a very big grin. "I would be the Conqueror now."

The bard's eyes widened. "You really think you'd have Greece taken by now?"

"Of course... Rome, Egypt, and be on my way to Chin by now."

Gabrielle became fascinated now with the idea. She grabbed her seat and turned it back to face Xena.

The Warrior Princess chuckled quietly at her friend's interest.

"You think you could get Rome... even with Caesar? I mean, I don't know how much of a challenge he is but from what you've told me..."

Xena shook her head and said, "There would be only one true challenge for me."

"What's that?" asked the curious bard.

"Not a what... a who."

Gabrielle lifted an eyebrow at that, she was a little confused. "Who then?"

"You," softly replied the warrior.

Gabrielle stared at her for a second and she opened her mouth to ask something but she was cut short when the barmaid arrived with their meals.

"Thank you." Xena gave a faint smile at the barmaid and waited until she left to look back at her friend.

"Xena..."

"Hmmm?" The warrior was studying her food but stopped and looked up. "Yessss?"

"How could I be a problem for you?"

Xena shrugged and picked up the fork that the barmaid had brought with the platters. "You just would be, Gabrielle." She poked her fork into the warm chicken but didn't tear it apart yet. "You'd show up out of nowhere and ruin my system... you'd be the person to stop my rampage."

"How can you be sure?"

The Warrior Princess sighed and replied, "Its like what you said, we're destined for some things. We are destined to meet and you're meant to show me another way. In this world or another, you will be there to help me past my darkness." She paused and thought about starting on her meal but decided to add, "I don't doubt it for a second."

"Huh." Gabrielle considered what her friend just told her. Her stomach growled though and brought her out of her musing. She picked up her knife and fork and started on her chicken. She brought up a piece of chicken to her lips. She was about to eat it yet she lowered it some and asked, "So you'd be the ruler of Greece, right?"

Xena lifted her eyes from her meal and rested them on her companion. She grinned and answered, "Yes."

"And I could be your partner...." Gabrielle started to add things up. "So that means I'd be a ruler too."

Xena felt her grin broaden. "Yes."

"Hades," growled the bard. She lowered her knife and fork down onto the plate. "Can you be a warlord again?"

The Warrior Princess laughed and shook her head repeatedly. "I think it's a little late for that, Gabrielle."

"Oh come on. We can pretend like we never met, you can get angry again and take on the world. I'll show up in what, two years? You need two years?"

Xena rolled her eyes and just ignored her friend's rambling.

"Xena," whined the bard.

The warrior pointed her fork at her partner. "Eat... you can rule your food far as I'm concerned." She saw Gabrielle pouting and she tried to ignore it. "I will do anything for you, Gabrielle but conqueror the known-world."

"What?" The bard pretended to be hurt. She gasped some and said, "You won't conqueror this little known-world just to make me happy?"

Xena looked up quickly again and growled, "Eat."

The Amazon Queen snickered and muttered, "Guess a bunch of feather headed women will have to do." She started eating her food finally and remained silent but she did keep thinking about the idea of her and Xena ruling the world.

Xena then heard her best friend snickering evilly and a fat grin on her lips. "Ggggabrielle," she drew out, "its not gonna happen."

"I'm just fantasizing, alright? What's wrong with that?" complained the smaller woman.

The Warrior Princess just sighed and decided it was best to remain quiet. Gabrielle

was finally eating but she knew her friend was still mulling over the idea of being a ruler, especially without breaking a sweat over it too. She chuckled inwardly at the idea. She could only imagine what a world like that would be like with her and Gabrielle at the head of it. Despite at how sweet the idea tasted, she would never wish for it.

The pair remained rather quiet for the rest of the meal. After they finished, they both pushed their plates away and just tried to let their food settle down.

Xena could tell just how tired her friend was and she was starting become concerned about her. "Are you sure you want to do a story tonight?"

"I promised I would," replied Gabrielle. "I'll be fine once I get into it." She fell silent again but it wasn't long before she looked up and asked, "Are you sure you have no interest to still conqueror the world?"

"Gabrielle," growled the warrior. "Forget it."

"Okay... okay... it was just a question." Gabrielle looked away and grumbled quietly to herself as she slumped down some. "Not my fault that you let Hercules get to you," she muttered.

Xena raised an eyebrow at her partner. "Next time, I'll be sure to pass your complaint to Hercules."

"Oh no, I'll do it myself," stated the bard. "He cost me a kingdom that darn demi-god."

Xena laughed some and sighed after that. "You know though, its pretty enticing."

"Ruling the world together?" The bard folded her arms on the top of the table just on the edge.

"Mmmm." Xena licked her lips and quietly spoke. "We would control every part of the known-world. There would be nobody higher than us."

"And a queen size bed every night," whispered the bard in awe.

The Warrior Princess laughed at that. "King size even."

"Gods... that's the Elysian Fields right there." Gabrielle had a happy smile just at the thought. Although her smile slowly disappeared and she was serious. "You know though, as nice as it sounds... I just wouldn't want to go through all of that fighting... bloodshed."

"Mmmm, exactly." Xena gave a drawn out sigh. "There'd be a lot and even afterwards, there'd be so much stress and pressure from running a kingdom of that magnitude."

"But it would mean we could stop suffering," cut in the bard, "abolish slavery and distribute food equally so that nobody goes hungry."

"You'd have to deal with laws and carrying them out. Deciding who goes free and

who doesn't."

"But they could be done in a more peaceful manor than what they are now."

"What about rebellions?" countered Xena. "Somebody will always disagree, you cannot please everybody."

Gabrielle sighed and shook her head. "So many problems."

"It is," agreed Xena. "That's why if I did rule, I'd have an iron fist."

The small woman looked up from the table and asked, "Why?"

"To keep control... you have to be ruthless but merciful at times." Xena shrugged. "Sometimes, fear can be the only way to control people."

"Sometimes," agreed the bard.

"Yes, sometimes." Xena could tell her friend was really thinking about it and she didn't want her to. "You going to do that story before it gets any later huh?"

"Yeah, yeah." Gabrielle stood up and stretched a little.

"Here, take this up to the bartender." Xena had pulled out a couple of dinars and handed them over.

"Thanks." Gabrielle took a step away but said, "I'll be back in a minute."

"Or two," teased the warrior.

The Amazon Queen grinned and went up to the bar. She paid for the meals then said she would tell her story now.

The tavern owner directed Gabrielle where she could go to tell her story. He thanked her and let her go ahead.

The bard shifted through the people and went to the front of the tavern. She cleared her throat and got people's attention and called everybody to silence. She then asked everybody what kind of story they were in the mood for tonight. Many requested a comedy and Gabrielle instantly came up with one. It was only a second before Gabrielle started to tell a story about her younger self, a grumpy warrior, and a very annoyed god of dreamscapes.

At the end of the story, Gabrielle took in a large applause and she was also given money from her audience, which she kept. Once the patrons all returned to their meals and drinking, Gabrielle came over to her table with Xena.

The warrior grinned at her friend. "What made you pick that one?"

"I'm not sure," replied the bard, "just... came." She grinned back while sitting down.

"Now, are you ready for bed?"

Gabrielle considered but instead of nodding, she shook her head. "I feel like a walk. I'm really full from dinner... almost uncomfortable."

Xena had her legs crossed and she undid them with her boot banging hard on the floor. "Wait here... let me grab our stuff."

The Amazon Queen knew what Xena meant by stuff. When Xena got up, she reached over and grasped her partner's arm. "Leave my staff."

The warrior lifted a worry eyebrow.

"You'll be with me," reminded the bard.

Xena flashed a brief grin then went to their bedroom.

While Gabrielle waited, she took a few more drinks of her water since she still felt rather dry-mouth from the story telling. When Xena returned, she got up and left the tavern with Xena. At first, neither were sure about where to go but eventually their wondering walk led them out of the town and down the road.

Gabrielle glanced up to the west and briefly took in the full moon. She smiled sadly at it then lowered her head.

"Doing okay?" whispered the warrior.

"Yeah... yeah," reassured the bard. "Just some times, I feel so worn out that I'm really not." She looked up with a silly expression. "If that makes sense."

"It does."

Gabrielle smiled and looked away again. She studied the dark road ahead. "Can I ask you something, Xena?"

"What's that?"

The bard just bit back her grin as she asked, "Are you sure you don't want to conqueror the known-world?"

"Gabrielle," growled the Warrior Princess. "I'll do anything for you but that."

Gabrielle gave a dramatic sigh but she mirrored the same grin that Xena had on her face. "Okay... okay." She then tilted her head up and gave a devilish grin now. "Anything else though huh?"

Xena raised an eyebrow. "That depends." She folded her arms and had a very serious look. "Don't even try asking for Greece."

"Hades," grumbled the smaller woman. "I knew that wouldn't work. Spartan Providence at least?"

"How about the Amazon Nation?"

"I already have that," complained the bard. "It just isn't enough."

Xena chuckled. "Then why don't you ask your regent to make a queen size bed for you."

Gabrielle huffed and said, "What's the point of that when we share separate beds in the Nation?"

The warrior had to do a double take but she kept her amused smile on her face instead of a surprised look.

"So seriously, you'll do anything for me huh?" teased the bard yet she held a bit of seriousness in her tone.

"Yesssss," drew out the warrior.

Gabrielle chewed on her lower lip. She lowered her head some and stared at her feet passing over the stones and grass on the road. "How about a relationship, Xena?" She didn't realize right away that Xena had stopped walking until she took two steps further. She stopped too and turned around. She tried to read Xena's expression but it was so hard to do. And Gabrielle was already feeling too weak as it was from getting the nerve to ask her friend out.

"Gabrielle... ummm...." Xena reached up to grab the back of her neck. She felt so nervous at that point and for once in her life, she felt shy. She dropped her hand back to her side. "Um." She laughed and lowered her head.

The bard tilted her head to one side then tried to look at Xena's face. "Xena... are you blushing?" she whispered in awe. She giggled a little but quickly stopped, too worried it'd hurt her friend's feelings. She came closer to Xena and grasped her shoulder. "Xena, I'm just...." She felt shy now too yet she pushed herself on since she'd come this far. "I'm just asking you out." She then decided to lighten it up a little more. "Come on, you must have had a hundred guys ask you out in Amphipolis when you were a kid."

"Not... exactly." The warrior lifted her head finally and her eyes met Gabrielle's. She laughed nervously and said, "Gabrielle, I don't exactly lead a normal life."

The Amazon Queen suddenly grinned and said, "Neither do I but once in awhile I try to act like its normal. So I thought I'd just try hooking up with you like it's a normal thing."

A charmed grin came over Xena's lips. "Not exactly normal for us."

"True," agreed the bard. "I mean, what was I suppose to do? Get in a tickling fight with you and hope you'd kiss me?" She suddenly had a big grin. "Oh right, I'm suppose to hide my feelings from you because you can't read me at all." She rolled her eyes and laughed. "Hades you know, you've known."

"I have," agreed Xena. She then nodded to her right. "Can we sit down?" Her eyes flickered away from Gabrielle as if she was caught in a lie but she looked back at Gabrielle. "I really need to sit down."

Gabrielle giggled and let go of her partner's arm. "Me too," she admitted. With Xena at her side, she went off the road and found a nice fallen tree to take as a seat. "Xena, if you knew... why haven't you said anything?"

The warrior leaned forward and started to pull at the grass between her boots. "Well I'm sure you've known about me."

Gabrielle pressed her lips together tightly and loosened them. "Yeah, I did... just never brought it up because I wasn't ready."

Xena nodded and looked back down at the grass. "That's the way I felt." She pulled a few more pieces then straightened up. "I know I've been ready for a the longest time. You, on the other hand, I wanted you to figure out for yourself. You weren't ready or even sure. There's a difference between love and obsession."

"Yeah," agreed the bard, "and I've had two plus years to figure out its definitely not obsession." She thought about what she just said and slowly her nose crinkled up. "Well then again... its like love obsession." Xena laughed at her words. "I'm serious."

"I know," whispered the older woman.

Gabrielle sighed and noted how Xena was quiet now. She knew she was going to have to pick up the conversation again. She also knew that the silence meant Xena was thinking about some kind of problem or worry. She reached over and grasped her partner's knee. "So..." She waited until blue eyes locked onto her. "So, do you want to date me?"

Xena smiled and brought her left hand to rest on top of Gabrielle's hand that was already on her left knee. "Gabrielle, I want to, I'm dying to its just..." She dropped her head and shook it. She stared down at their hands locked together.

The small bard reached over with her left hand and tilted her friend's head back up. She made sure Xena's crystal blue eyes were focused only on her. "What's the problem, huh?" She traveled her fingertips from Xena's chin to the side of her face.

Xena sighed and closed her eyes. "I'm just worried about you, for your sake." Slowly her eyes drifted open again. "I know it's your decision, your life but... I'm always worried about you."

"And I know you are, I've appreciated it since day one." Gabrielle lightly ran her thumb across Xena's cheek. "But honestly, over half of Greece already thinks we're together... the Amazons are wondering what's our problem and personally... I could use some sex, Xena."

Xena laughed and looked down for a second. She lifted her head back up, her eyes seemed to glow at that point when Gabrielle brushed her hair back. "Just not too many

of my more... serious relationships turn out so well."

Gabrielle shrugged. "And so far, our friendship has done pretty well. It's all in a chance." She grinned now but her eyes still held a promise in them. "And I won't end up dead like the rest."

The warrior huffed. "Not if I have anything to say about it." She fell silent after those words. She knew Gabrielle was waiting for her answer and as she stared down at their locked hands. She seemed to feel like something calmed inside of her finally. She slowly raised her eyes back up and quietly said, "If we're together, it won't mean you'll get Greece or even the known-world."

"Oh Hades," grumbled the bard. "Well never mind, I don't want to date you now." She and Xena chuckled together but fell silent again.

"Are you sure?"

Gabrielle slightly grinned but nodded and answered, "I wouldn't be asking. I'm ready, Xena."

"You think so, huh?" teased the warrior.

"Wellllll... just don't do what you did in the ally any time soon. I need to...build up for that."

Xena shook her head but her amused expression started to fade. She reached up with her left hand and took Gabrielle's hand away from her face. She seemed to study Gabrielle's eyes for a long time, just reading into so many pieces of Gabrielle. She knew Gabrielle was ready and she knew she was ready too.

Xena leaned in closer but stopped.

Gabrielle had taken a deep breath but was now holding it. She didn't move away or even more forward. Part of her was frozen in place by shyness and excitement and another part was purely being holding her by Xena's closeness.

After a moment, Xena finished the distance and let her lips graze over Gabrielle's soft lips. She'd seen Gabrielle's forest eyes drift shut and she sensed just how nervous Gabrielle was by how hard Gabrielle gripped her right hand, which still rested on her knee. Again though, she brushed her lips over Gabrielle's and let the shocks tear between both her and Gabrielle. At that point, she heard Gabrielle faintly whimper.

Xena tilted her head a little and then pressed her lips firmly against Gabrielle's. Her tongue slipped out of her open mouth and she let the tip of her tongue run along Gabrielle's bottom lip.

Gabrielle had a heat shock start from her lips and burst through her body, she felt on fire. She whimpered yet again and felt greatest urge to feel Xena's tongue against her own. She opened her mouth and instantly moaned when their tongues met between their locked lips. She ran her tongue along Xena's several times but then Xena pushed her back and entered her mouth.

Xena pressed the kiss on stronger, letting her passion control her. She was on fire and her desire to take Gabrielle was growing. She pulled her tongue out but not without briefly sucking on Gabrielle's tongue. She then backed off from the kiss but gave a gentle kiss before completely pulling away.

Gabrielle slowly opened her eyes and saw how dark Xena's eyes were. She'd seen them dark in the past but for totally different reasons other than this. She couldn't help but grin. "You can't say no after just kissing me like that."

"Well," whispered Xena, "it certainly wasn't a friendly kiss."

"Mmmmm... it was nice."

The warrior raised an eyebrow and said, "Nice?"

"Really nice," uttered the smaller woman. She leaned in closer. "So is that a yes?"

Xena's wild blue eyes were settling some but her breathing and hot body remained at the same intense levels. "Yes, Gabrielle."

"Good." Gabrielle grinned but her face was as bright as her eyes.

"Gabrielle," whispered Xena in a deep tone, "we need to move before I do something to you."

The Amazon Queen's grin went lopsided and her expression taunting. "And that's a bad thing?" But she released her partner's hot and sweating hand. She stood up and took a step back.

Xena took a shaky breath as she gained control of herself. She stood up and clenched and unclenched her right hand, it was a little sore from Gabrielle's grip earlier. "I think its been a long day."

"I second that... but you kind of woke me up now, Xena."

The warrior gave a dramatic sigh and retorted, "Tell me about it." She walked around one side of the log while her girlfriend went around the other side. They walked back to the road together.

"So what are we going to do for the rest of the night?" inquired the curious bard.

Xena glanced at her in amusement then looked away. "How about sleep?"

"Argh... you can't be serious?"

The warrior sighed but yet she was smiling. "Once you get into that bed, you'll be out like a candle."

"You're probably right," agreed the Amazon Queen. She licked her lips and she could still feel Xena's pressed against hers from earlier. She still hungered to kiss Xena

again. Suddenly a very sly grin creased her lips and she stopped in the middle of the road.

Xena also stopped and wondered what was wrong but before she could say a word, her mouth was covered by Gabrielle's. She pulled away from the kiss some and growled, "Gabrielle."

"Don't fight it," growled the bard. She quickly pushed Xena backwards and off the road again.

The warrior soon came to a stop when her back hit a tree. Gabrielle's hand went behind her head and pulled her head down so that her lips were perfectly locked with Gabrielle's. She moaned in the middle of the kiss and slipped her arms around Gabrielle's waist.

Gabrielle reached up with her right hand and grabbed a tree branch. She pulled down on it in pure frustration.

Xena heard the branch above her head snap. She knew exactly why too. She freed her left hand in the middle of the embrace. She pulled Gabrielle's hand away from the branch and urged her to slip her arm around her own waist.

The bard went with it and wrapped her arm around Xena's waist. She then was able to push her body firmly against Xena's.

Xena moaned from the contact but she pulled back from the intense kiss because she couldn't breathe. She still had her eyes closed and she was rasping like Gabrielle. "We can't do this here," she whispered.

"Mmmmm, I know." Gabrielle tangled her fingers a little more in Xena's hair. "But we can at least make out here." Not waiting for a response, she pulled Xena's head back down.

The warrior couldn't fight back as Gabrielle's tongue entered her mouth again.

Gabrielle pulled her tongue out and broke their lips apart. She took a deep breath and after Xena breathed, she pulled Xena's head back in for another kiss.

This time, Xena entered her girlfriend's mouth and ran tongue along Gabrielle's own. She growled some and started to fight for control of the kiss. Her left hand slipped from Gabrielle's waist and pressed against Gabrielle's muscular stomach.

The bard let go of the fight and let Xena take control again. She moaned deeply between her own growl. She felt Xena's hot hand travel up her stomach and stop just under her top.

Xena broke the kiss and lifted her head up higher than last time. "Gabrielle," she rasped and opened her eyes. "Slow down."

The bard was grinning and had come up with a retort but she was too out of breath to say it. After a second, she finally said, "You're the one to talk." She indicated where

Xena's left hand was resting at the moment.

The warrior quickly slid her hand back down. "Bad habit."

"Who said it was bad?" joked the bard. She then took a step back and pulled her hands away, breaking all physical contact.

The older woman took one last deep breath then pushed herself off the tree. "Come on."

Gabrielle gave a light chuckle but followed along side back to the town. "I'm glad we went for this walk."

"Mmmm," simply said the warrior.

The Amazon Queen came closer to her warrior and grabbed onto Xena's arms with both of her hands. She was actually starting to feel worn out between everything. "I think everything is catching up now."

Xena peered down and it almost seemed like the dark circles reappeared around her friend's eyes. "Going to make it?"

"Oh yeah," promised the smaller woman. "I can make it for that queen size bed."

The Warrior Princess laughed deeply but bent her head down and kissed the top of Gabrielle's head.

"So what you think?" asked the bard.

"About?" Xena moved her left arm and brought it around her partner's shoulders.

"Being together?"

"Too early to tell," teased the warrior.

Gabrielle shook her head but then finally rested it against Xena's side. "What I meant was, you think we should have done it sooner?"

"Honestly, no," replied the warrior, "I think now is a perfect time."

"Yeah me too." The small bard closed her eyes when a yawn came over her. "This is bad."

"Being tired?" asked Xena.

"Partially." Gabrielle shrugged then added, "More like the fact I'm so turned out its made me extra tired."

Xena laughed in response.

The smaller woman simply yawned again but not without covering her mouth. "I want

a soft bed and my girlfriend to snuggle up to."

"I think we can do that." Xena smiled and her smile grew more at now taking the title as girlfriend.

Gabrielle remained silent and enjoyed it between them both. She saw the town just ahead and she knew the tavern wouldn't be far off nor the comfortable queen size bed. "So you think we should stop by my home and tell my folks about us?"

"Very funny, Gabrielle."

"I wasn't being funny," sternly stated the bard.

Xena stopped and looked down at her partner. "You're serious?" She waited but her answer soon came when Gabrielle started to giggle at her. She just shook her head and started to walk again.

"Hey, wait up." The young woman took three running steps and caught up. She grabbed onto Xena's arm and held onto her. "Honestly, I think we should get use to it first."

"Mmmm," agreed the Warrior Princess. "I think I can tell my mother, that's about it."

"Really?" Gabrielle peered up but looked away just as quickly. "You think Cyrene will be fine with it?"

"Considering how much she's already accepted about me, I think this'll be the easiest for her."

Gabrielle giggled and squeezed Xena's arm. "I guess so. I wish my family would look at it like that."

"Me too. I think we'll leave that one alone for awhile."

"I second that idea." The bard was relieved when they came to the steps of the tavern. When they came in, they found very few to almost no patrons. They easily made it to the room upstairs and she opened the door first.

The pair separated and quietly prepared to go to bed. Once they were ready, Gabrielle curled up into the bed and watched her girlfriend blow out the candles around the room then join her. Xena slipped under the covers and felt Gabrielle scoot over closer to her.

"Xena?"

"Hmmm?" The warrior was on her back and letting Gabrielle lay on top of her.

But Gabrielle only rested half on Xena and half off of her. She was grateful she liked to sleep on her stomach and Xena on her back. "Thanks for today," she finally responded.

"What you mean?"

"Just... you know." Gabrielle shifted a little and became incredibly comfortable and content. "For all the talking and understanding."

"Oh... thought it was for the chase."

The bard giggled and settled her head on Xena's chest. "That too."

Xena lifted her head and kissed Gabrielle's head. "Anytime. Not the best at talking... but I'll try for you."

"I know," whispered the bard. "And I appreciate it."

"Go to sleep, huh?" Xena had her arms around her friend and she gave her a tight squeeze. "You need to sleep."

"Are we going to sleep in?"

"Yes," promised the warrior. She closed her eyes and felt Gabrielle's breathing starting to slow down. She then started to let go as well.

"Xena?" muttered a sleepy bard.

"Mmmm?"

"You...." Gabrielle lost her words like she'd almost fallen sleep but she hadn't quite. "You really wouldn't... wouldn't conquer the world... for me?"

Xena couldn't help but laugh some however she went still and quietly replied, "I would do anything for you, Gabrielle... even conquer the world." She couldn't see the smile on Gabrielle's face but she knew it was there. "Now go to sleep."

"I can now," muttered the tired bard. "Love you, Xena."

Xena sighed contently and her smile didn't break as she turned her head to the left to rest against Gabrielle's. She then whispered back, "I love you too."

The End