

~ Time's Changes ~

by Red Hope

Disclaimers: Violence: This is a violent free store line...at least it's planned that way right now. Really non-plot driven story again. There is mostly emotional things going on, emotional windmill time.

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Subtext: Oh definitely, wouldn't be good otherwise, hehe. But not sex written between the soulmates...read another story if you want that.

Series Warning: If you haven't read any of my other stories ahead of this one. I can tell you, you'll be sort of screwed big time. This story is based around some of my older stories. Highly recommend you read them before this one.

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

redhope@redhope.net

Part 1

Section 1

~*Part 1*~

Janice Covington stepped out of the car door, she stretched her legs from feeling a little stiff. She slammed the driver's door and then she heard another door slam. The archeologist looked to the other side of the car, her hands touching the Airflow's roof.

Sapphire eyes met Janice's. "Are we gonna get dis radio inside or stand here all day?"

Janice grinned at her soulmate. "Come on."

The pair had just returned from being at a local maintainess store, or so it is called. There they had ordered a radio over a week ago. Today they just picked it up. It was a large radio meant to by place on the floor. Wood and one big speaker in the front with knobs and a dialer above the speaker.

Janice went to the back of the car to the trunk, Melinda Pappas joining her. The archeologist popped open the trunk and peered in, there lay the new radio.

Mel looked to her soulmate with an arched eyebrow. "So how are we gonna get dis thing out of here?"

Janice stared at the radio deep in the trunk then looked up to Mel. "Good question." The small woman looked back to the radio. "Let's just haul it out."

"Dis ain't gonna be good."

The archeologist looked up to her soulmate. "Are you saying we're going to break it?"

Melinda grinned and crossed her arms against her chest. "I ain't gonna say uh thing."

"Mel." Janice huffed and looked back up to her soulmate from the trunk. "Okay so do you have a plan then?"

Melinda grinned a little. "Yup." She uncrossed her arms. "You lift duh top part out and then I'll get duh bottom, jus' carry it on in."

"That's what I was planning."

"So lets try it out."

Janice nodded her head, she reached in grasping the top. Mel on the other hand reached for the bottom half. Carefully both women lifted the radio out of the trunk and began to carry it up the steps to the mansion's front door.

"Jesus this thing is heavy."

"I reckon it could be heavier."

Janice looked behind herself and just remembered the door. She looked back to Mel with a grin. "Mel?"

"Yes?"

"You have a plan for the door?"

"Lord, do I have tuh figure everything out around here?"

Janice chuckled a little despite herself. "Okay, you just put your end down, then I can open the door."

"Sounds good."

The soulmates climbed two more steps. Mel then carefully placed the base down then Janice turned around to the door. She pulled out her keys from her leather jacket. She opened the door and swung it open. She looked back to her partner. "Den?"

The belle nodded her head. "That's what I reckoned, there's uh plug there next tuh duh fireplace."

Janice nodded and they lifted the heavy radio again, they began to carry it into the den. Janice came near the fireplace. "Just drop your end Mel. Then I'll just push it up against the side of the fireplace."

The translator nodded her head and carefully placed the base of the radio down onto the rugged floor. The archeologist bent down and grabbed the black cord, she turned to her right and on the wall was a plug, and she plugged it in. Next Janice came

around to the front of the radio. She lifted it at the top on either side and pushed it against the brick fireplace. "There."

Both soulmates backed away from the radio and took a good gander at it from a distance.

Melinda smiled. "Looks good Janice."

"Yeah, bit odd but it works."

The southerner chuckled and stepped up beside Janice. "Try it out?"

Janice looked up to her soulmate with a grin. "Yeah." The archeologist then bent down to one knee and flipped the right knob, the radio came to life. Immediately the den filled with the sound of static from the radio. So Janice turned the volume down with the left knob.

"Janice, try station one hundred point seven or something. I heard it iz uh good station out of Spartanburg."

"Not sure we'll be able to get it in Mel." Janice turned the tuning knob to the right and watched as the meter went to the hundreds. She slowly turned the knob then a station came on, an announcer talking loudly.

"This is WSPA out of Spartanburg, been sending out radio waves since nineteen thirty. Now tuh come up is a little music from Frank Sinatra." The announcer's voice died out then a song came to life over the radio.

Janice grinned and stood up and looked to her soulmate. "There you go Mel, your favorite singer too."

The southerner grinned and looked to Janice. "Perfect." A large grin came on Mel's lips. "If I were uh teenager."

Janice laughed. "Oh come on Mel, its good to feel young." The archeologist then tossed off her hat throwing it to the sofa behind Melinda. Turning back around the small woman turned up the volume to fill the den. She turned back around to Mel then reached for the aristocrat's larger hands. Janice began to dance while grinning up to Melinda.

The southerner rolled her eyes then smiled. She looked down to her small partner and grinned. She quickly noticed Janice was lip singing to the music. Melinda blushed a little and Janice grinned. The translator chuckled and kicked off her high heels. The soulmates then started to glide across the room dancing to Frank Sinatra. Janice's voice then began to actually sing the lyrics along with Sinatra.

"Time and again I've longed for adventure

Something to make my heart beat much faster

What did I long for, I never really knew.

Finding your love, I found my adventure,

Touching your hand my heart beat much faster

All that I want in all of this world is you."

That's when the music just played and Mel was a little red. The lyrics came back and Melinda sung with her soulmate this time.

"You are the promised kiss of springtime
That makes the lonely winter seem long
You are the breathless hush of evening
That trembles on the brink of a lovely song.
You are the angel glow that lights the star,
The dearest things I know are what you are.
Someday my happy arms will hold you,
And someday I'll know that moment divine
When all the things you are, are mine."

Once the song was over the soulmates started laughing at themselves. Janice released her dancing partner and padded back over to the radio, she turned it off. Turning back to see her lover standing with her heels in her right hand.

"Thanks for duh dance Janice."

"Oh anytime Mel."

The taller woman chuckled and shook her head. "I knew dat radio would be nothing but trouble."

Janice grinned. "Oh I can think of more things to do with it."

Melinda's eyes narrowed but she grinned. "You'll have tuh show me later."

"Count on it."

The southern belle shook her head then exited out of the den, Janice went to get her hat.

The translator reached to the first step and turned back to look down at Janice as she came out of the den as well. "I'm gonna go get changed."

Janice nodded her head. "Alright, I think I'm going to go put the car away."

Melinda nodded back and went up the stairs, emerald eyes sparkled up at Melinda till she disappeared around a corner at the top of the steps. Janice sighed and went out the still open door. She closed it behind herself and went into the car.

~*~*~*~

Melinda Pappas straightened back up, reached behind to her hair that is in a bun. Her large fingers pulled out a small metal pin and her hair fell freely. Her bangs then fell down on her forehead. She placed the small metal pin down on the dresser in front of her. She then turned away from the bureau and bent down to one knee, she proceeded

to tie her shoes.

The southern now is dressed in a pair of loose khaki pants and a white blouse that she didn't tuck in and had the top two buttons undone. She was picking up to many habits from her soulmate. Melinda grinned to herself and stood back up from tying her low cut brown shoes.

After doing so she opened the bedroom door and went down stairs into the main lobby. Peeking into the den she didn't see her soulmate. She then padded into the kitchen and didn't find her soulmate. "Janice?"

A reply came back to her from a distance. "Hey Mel, I'm outside on the steps."

Mel smiled and went to her right through the kitchen where there was an old door that led outside to the back of the mansion. She opened the wood door and spotted her soulmate down on a step. The southern closed the door and went down a few steps then sat down beside her partner.

Janice pulled her cigar from out of her mouth. "Comfortable?"

Melinda grinned and looked to Janice. "Yeah, thanks for teaching dat one tuh me."

"No problem, don't need to always wear them skirts."

"Complaining?"

The archeologist grinned, placed the cigar into her mouth and smoked from it. She replied in between the cigar. "Nope, not a bit Mel."

"Good."

Janice looked to her soulmate and chuckled. The archeologist looked back to the backyard of the property. Pretty much the backyard was a... backyard. Just a bunch of grass and a few trees here and there, no garden or anything. Plain and simple. This had actually surprised the archeologist the first time she saw it considering the amount of money Melinda has.

Silence soon fell between the soulmates. Janice smoking her cigar staring off while Mel had her eyes fixed to the ground below.

"Janice?"

The archeologist looked to Melinda, the southern still had her eyes fixed to the ground. "Yeah Mel?"

The belle looked up to Janice. "You miss New York?"

Janice smiled a little and looked back to the... backyard. "Haven't been to New York in... I don't even remember Mel. Since I was a child though." The archeologist then took a drag from her cigar. The smoke left from her lips. "I guess I miss it a little."

The translator nodded her head. "I wuz considering on gotten uh apartment up there."

Janice looked to Melinda with slightly widen eyes. "Really? Since when?"

The belle looked to the archeologist with a grin. "For uh while. I wanted tuh ask you

first before I did it."

"God, I'd love to have a place up there Mel. New York City is great."

The southerner grinned. "Dat's what I reckon. So yo fancy duh idea?"

"Definitely."

Melinda grinned and Janice reached over with her left hand. Her hand went to the aristocrat's right leg. Mel smiled to herself and dropped her hand on top of Janice's.

"So you reckon dat Doctor Johnson iz still in uh hissy fit over the lecture?"

The archeologist laughed a little. "Oh well if he is Mel. I am not about to do that lecture when it's almost Christmas."

"Well I reckon we can't anyway considering since we haven't even translated any duh scrolls since we got back from Greece."

"True." Janice took a last drag on her cigar then smothered it out on the step and left it there. "We are going to have a lot of work to do after Christmas."

"My lord I reckon we'll need uh vacation after duh lecture." Melinda then grinned. "New York City then?"

The smaller woman looked to Melinda with a grin. "Sounds good to me Mel."

"Grand."

Janice chuckled at her partner's words. "Let's go back inside."

The translator nodded in agreement. The two females got up and went inside, Janice taking the butt end of her cigar with her. Once inside of the kitchen Janice went to the trashcan under the sink, dropping the cigar inside of the trashcan. She straightened back up and as she did both soulmates heard the doorbell sound.

The archeologist looked to Mel with furrowed brows.

Melinda shrugged her shoulders. "Emily maybe?"

"Don't know, let's go find out."

The pair went to the door in the lobby and opened it. Janice's mouth dropped then she smiled, along with Mel having the exact same reaction.

Janice stepped forward and enveloped the person before her. "Starling, damn good to see you."

The Amazon chuckled and hugged the other woman back just as hard. "It's good to see you too Doctor Covington."

Janice released the Amazon then Starling looked to the tall belle with a smile. A warm smile quickly took over Melinda's lips. "How are yo Starling?"

The Amazon went in for a hug while replying. "Real well Miss Pappas."

After releasing each other, Starling looked to both of the soulmates.

Janice looked beyond Starling and saw a familiar car, Doctor Emily Leukos. "Emily brought you eh?"

The Amazon grinned. "She did." Starling turned back around to see the good doctor stepping out of the driver's door. She smiled up to the three women and waved. Janice smiled to Emily Leukos. The doctor went to the back of her car opening the trunk.

The archeologist looked to Starling. "Why don't you go inside with Mel. I'll go help Emily with your stuff."

The Amazon smiled. "Thanks Janice."

"No problem." The archeologist then looked up to her soulmate and smiled, Mel nodded.

The translator went inside of the lobby with Starling following behind. The translator led the Amazon Queen into the den. "Sit down. Can I get yo anything tuh drink?"

Starling shook her head. "No I'm fine, thanks though Mel." The Amazon shifted to sit on the sofa in the middle and Mel went to sit in a large old leather chair to the right of Starling.

"So when did yo arrive?"

"Just now actually. I flew in at Charleston, Emily came and picked me up."

Melinda nodded her head. She spotted her soulmate and Emily going up stairs to the rooms with luggage in arms. She looked back to the other woman. "Charleston? Why didn't yo fly intuh Colombia?"

Starling grinned and rested back more into the seat. She is dressed in a dark forest green skirt reaching to her ankles. She had on black heels and a white blouse buttoned up with a green flower design along the sides to match the skirt. "Well Cliona and Ashley flew me in and they need some extra time to head up to Chicago, didn't have enough time."

"Chicago? Why were they headed tuh Chicago?"

"Well they're having a small Christmas vacation up there. Cliona is originally from Chicago."

Mel nodded her head and both women looked up to see Janice and Emily come in. The archeologist smiled to her soulmate and sat down on the sofa but closes to Mel. Emily on the other hand sat on Starling's left side.

"Now how did you get here to South Carolina Starling?"

The Amazon Queen grinned and looked to Janice to answer the question again. "Cliona and Ashley flew me here."

The archeologist grinned. "So Hellenes and Sylvia decided to let you go huh?"

Starling grinned back. "Yup, I was surprised."

Janice laughed. She reached up and removed her hat from her head, settling it into her lap. "How long are you here for?"

Starling smiled. "Well I only have time to stay here for a couple of days. Then I have to be off for some business."

Melinda's eyebrows furrowed together. "What business iz dat about Starling?"

The Amazon Queen sighed and looked to Melinda. "I need to head down to Miami Florida, supposedly there are rumors flying that Amazons do exist. Emily and I are heading down there to suppress them."

Janice and Melinda both nodded their heads. The archeologist looked to her soulmate with a certain look, Mel read the look and nodded.

Janice looked back to Starling. "Well if you need any help, Mel and I will be happy to go with you two."

The Amazon Queen smiled. "No that's alright, I think we can handle it. You two both need a vacation."

Melinda grinned, as did Janice. "Well if anything comes up, let us know Starling."

Starling nodded her head to Janice and replied back. "We will for sure."

The translator looked over to Doctor Leukos. "Emily, I apologize, iz there anything I can get for yo?"

"No thanks Mel, I'm fine."

Mel nodded and crossed her right leg over top of her left. "I reckon duh University gave yo some time off Emily?"

The doctor nodded her head. "They did, two weeks that's why I'm able to head down to Florida with Starling."

"So exactly what's going on with these rumors?" Janice looked up from her hat after asking her question, she looked to Starling.

The Amazon Queen took a deep breath and replied back. "We're not quite sure. We have a few Amazons down in Florida in the Miami area. Once we get there we'll find more out. There's just some leak in the system that we need to correct."

Janice nodded her head and Melinda looked to her soulmate. "Janice?" The archeologist looked to the southerner. "I reckon I'm gonna go start supper." Janice nodded her head and the translator looked to Emily Leukos. "Do yo care tuh join us Emily?"

The doctor smiled. "Love tuh, I'll help you Mel." Emily Leukos then stood up at the same time as Melinda. The southerner looked to her soulmate and grinned, then looked back to Emily. The pair walked out of the den and went straight to the kitchen leaving Starling and Janice alone in the den.

~*Part 2*~

The small woman took a deep breath, she sat up from the furs. The fire not too far in front of her crackled, as if to greet her when she sat up. Gabrielle's eyes became fixed on the fire for a moment she then looked to her right at her...friend.

The warrior lay on her back, soundlessly sleeping. But the bard could tell Xena was sleeping lightly, her defenses still up. And why shouldn't they be? After what happened today.

That thought made Gabrielle prop up her legs against her chest, she wrapped her arms around her legs. She lowered her chin down onto her arms and stared into the fire. Her memories from early this morning came flying back.

"You're not real. You're in my mind." The bard closed her eyes.

The goddess grinned and purred into the bard's ear. "What difference does it make? You came here for the truth, and the truth is that Xena made us both. She shaped our lives, changed our fates, killed our families."

Gabrielle opened her eyes again, her voice coming out harder now. "No, I killed hers. Solan died because of my daughter."

"Because of Xena you had a daughter. Her hatred for Caesar took you to Britannia..."

"Yes, but ..."

"Straight to Dahak where she deserted you. Isn't that right? Isn't that right?"

It began to make sense to Gabrielle, she replied back low but surer. "Yes."

Callisto began to grin. "And you hate her for it, don't you ... for betraying you ... for failing you ... don't you... don't you ... don't you?!"

The bard grits her teeth as she lays on the purification table, the answer a cross between a scream and a yell. "Yes!"

Gabrielle shuts off the memory, her eyes closing tightly. She trembled a little in the furs. Her eyes opened again and she looked to Xena beside her. She studied the warrior's perfect body. Gods, how she missed Xena, being her everything. But now, now she had failed Xena, failed herself as well.

No nothing around them could ever destroy their world. Nothing. But they could destroy their own world. Had they destroyed it? Or had they only cracked it?

The Amazon Queen's eyes close again, she tries to block out her musing. A few tears roll down her cheeks. Her memories begin to shift in her mind again. They take her back to Illusia, to an illusion.

Xena stared down at the body of her soulmate, the warrior's sword embedded in Gabrielle's chest. "I killed Gabrielle." The warrior's voice had cracked, she then looked up as a door creaked open.

Gabrielle took a step through the doorway and stared down at her own lifeless body, she looked to Xena. "You killed me. By the gods, Xena, you killed me. I knew you were trying before, Xena, but I ..."

The sword and the bard's body disappeared as Xena stood up. The warrior looked to Gabrielle, her mind quickly tried to find an explanation. "No ... no ... I didn't ... none of this is real ... Ares and Callisto... Joxer... I didn't kill you, I killed an illusion."

The bard quickly replied with an angry half-upset voice. "Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

Had it made her feel better? Not even for a second had it. In fact it made Gabrielle feel worse. The small woman's mind flashed back to the scene of Xena over her lifeless body, sword still in her chest.

More tears came down Gabrielle's cheeks, she looked to the fire again. As the tears rolled down her cheek they twinkled in the yellow firelight. They fell from her cheek and sparkled then crashed into the darkness of the furs. Her hands moved from her knees up to cover her mouth. She tried to stop the sobs that escaped her lips. That same image flashed over and over again, along with Xena's voice saying, *"I killed Gabrielle."*

"I killed Gabrielle."

Yes, Gabrielle was killed in every sense of the word. Gabrielle and Xena had been killed in Illusia. It is only a warrior and bard. No lovers, no partners, just friends. Two friends that's only connection between each other is a very fine piece of thread. It only need be broken once and they would separated forever.

The Amazon Queen freed her hands from over her mouth, because she needed to breathe through her mouth. So she buried her head down between her arms and legs, her body rocking her.

The bard's eyes filled with tears, she stared at the funeral pyre for her daughter. She then looked to Xena. "If I had just done what you said, when you told me to do it, then they would still be alive, Kaleipus and Solan."

The warrior shook her head. She didn't turned to Gabrielle, her eyes still pinned on her son's funeral pyre. "No." Xena looked to Gabrielle. "Don't you even speak his name."

Gabrielle replied low. "Xena ..."

Xena cut her off, her voice hard but starting to crack. "No. You lied to me. I trusted you and you lied to me. And now, Solan is dead." Xena looked back to the funeral pyre, tears escaping as her weak voice whispered. "My son is dead ...because of you."

Tears stream from Gabrielle's eyes, she wanted to kill herself. Anything to satisfy this darkness in her, pain. Anything to rid Xena from seeing her. But the bard gave one last desperate attempt, her voice a plea. "I love you Xena." The bard stared at Xena, the warrior never responding. Gabrielle dropped her head and walked away. There's always an end to everything.

The bard kept rocking, her eyes closed tightly. Her memories kept shifting even though she tried to stop them. But she couldn't, they were too much like a hurricane.

Gabrielle stepped into the hut she shared with Xena after leaving the funeral pyres. She looked to her left hand at the wedding rings. Her eyes were red as blood. The

bard carefully removed her rings and walked over to a table, there she placed both down carefully. Next to follow was her necklace. She stared at it in the palm of her hand. Tears still came rushing out. Lowering her lips she placed a soft kiss to the center of the charm and placed the necklace down with the two rings. She left the hut.

By the time she returned, Xena had gone. The warrior's things gone. Gabrielle's wedding rings gone with the necklace. In their place were Xena's own wedding band and her necklace. The bard bursted into tears as she stared at the table. Her back against the hut door. She slid down the door as she stared across the hut to Xena's ring and necklace.

Gabrielle took a deep breath. Her head lifted up again and she locked her eyes on the fire. The fire, the fire that engulfed her. It overwhelmed her and tried to burn her. But she pushed it down inside of herself. Gabrielle would make it through this, she had to. For now though, she had to deal with her memories that kept flooding into her mind over and over through the night. Then the emotions, the agony of them all.

~*~*~*~

Xena stared ahead as her body swayed a little back and forth as Argo walked along the road. Her back was ridged for no real reason. There was no danger around her. Or was there?

Her blue eyes shifted down to the form walking beside her. Walls quickly came to life in the warrior's eyes, in her soul.

Last night had been an extremely long night. Xena had lay in the furs listening to Gabrielle cry the night away. Here and there she'd open her eyes to see the bard rocking back and forth, her head embedded down between her body. Her small arms tightly wrapped around her body in protection. All the warrior could do was watch. All she wanted to do was take Gabrielle away from it all. But she couldn't because she knew she'd caused that pain for Gabrielle. Besides that, part of Xena was still angry at Gabrielle. Angry at herself.

The warrior sighed, her eyes shifting back ahead. Illusia had helped, but it didn't cure. No how could it? How could one little place of illusions bring back love? That had to be done between the two people.

"Everything's changed...everything."

Xena shook her head as Gabrielle's words and voice seeped into her mind. The warrior tried to ignore the voice, ignore the words. But the entire scene came to her.

"Xena?"

The warrior tried to look to her soulmate while they lay in the rubble of the temple, she rubbed the bard's back some. "I'm here, Gabrielle." Tightening her arms around the bard, Xena reassured her.

"It hurts inside." The bard then bent her head forward some, she started to cry.

Xena was motionless for a second. The fine scent of fire in the air. "What?"

"Everything's changed ... everything." Such a low whisper it was, but it held such great meaning.

The warrior's heart clenched at that. No! Xena then quickly went to rubbing the bard's body. Trying to wipe away the pain. "It's going to be okay, I promise."

Blue eyes shut at that. She'd promised that, but had she delivered? No. Xena broke her promise. Since Dahak's temple, nothing has been okay or even worth hanging in for.

"Everything's changed...everything."

The warrior opened her eyes again to the world around. The pair had been silent all morning. Once the warrior had risen from the furs she noticed the bard finally asleep. Her cheeks wet though as she breathed from her mouth. The bard's nose slightly red. Xena had left the camp for awhile to be alone. To torture herself.

As the pair traveled on, Xena began to remember Illusia, especially the end. The end where she finally tells Solan that she's his mother. The warrior sighed at that, she shifted the reins in her hands. Her gaze looked down to Gabrielle for moments then back up. Images in her mind began to swim and come to life.

The warrior rushed into the hut, her heart pounding. Once she entered she stopped dead in her tracks. Her eyes stared at the motionless body of her son on the ground. Gods no!

Xena quickly rushed to Solan and lifted his head up, his eyes closed. His head rested in the warrior's lap. Xena shook her head. "Solan? ... Solan? ... hey, Solan ..." No response.

Gabrielle took a few more steps into the hut. She couldn't believe this, it couldn't have happened. Her eyes stared at the lifeless Solan. Then slowly her emerald eyes lifted up to Xena. "Xena? ... No ..."

The warrior quickly cut her off in an angry voice. "Get out."

The bard whispered back. "Xena ..."

Xena looked up to her soulmate and cut her off again, hatred seeping into her single word. "Go!"

The Amazon Queen left and Xena looked back down to her son. She began to cradle and rock Solan, droplets slowly rolled down her cheeks. "Solan ... Solan, please. I'm here now. Your momma's here now, just like you always wanted." Such desperation and pleading. But Xena knew the truth. Her son is dead. Her head fell back and a scream flies from the warrior's lips, it could be heard from lands around. Then her head fell forward again into her son's body, she rocked. Her mind raced as fast as the pain took control.

Xena closed her eyes against the tears that tried so hard to break through. She took a deep breath, her heart rate calming back down. Sad eyes shifted open again and Xena went stoic once more. As if nothing ever happened.

Now, now they move on. Let the days roll on to see what happens. Xena had no idea if things would become better or worse. All she knew was that things were bad now. Gods forbid they get worse. She didn't know if she could take much more of this huge rift between her and Gabrielle. Let alone the rift getting bigger.

~*~*~*~

This couldn't be? No! It hadn't happen.

Xena closed her eyes. Her hands tightly gripped the edge. Cold sapphire eyes reopened and stared down into the yellow burning pit. She was on her knees.

Her mind had to be playing tricks on her. This had to be a bad dream. She'd wake up any second. Wake up and look to her left to see Gabrielle sleeping beside her. No, Gabrielle hadn't fallen into this pit. Gabrielle didn't throw herself and daughter into this pit. It's just a bad dream. A bad dream. Not real. She's alive.

Her ice eyes looked back behind herself to see Callisto dead on the floor, the dagger near the lifeless body. Joxer standing beside the dead goddess staring at Xena.

Xena dare not look at Joxer, for if looks could kill. So her eyes shifted back to the pit. The warrior's anger took over. Her breathing picked up, her knuckles tightly clenched the pit's edge. She threw her head back and a scream erupted.

That's when Joxer knew to exit stage left. He quickly left the temple and soon as he did another scream echoed. He closed his eyes and leaned against the temple. He only felt a minor amount of the pain Xena does.

By now hot tears were racing down Xena's cheeks. Her eyes still stared down into the pit. Desperate hope fiercely raked away at her heart. Hoping to find Gabrielle down there in the pit still alive. Hope. Xena's teeth clenched at that Tartarus of a word. Hope.

Another scream escaped Xena's throat. It echoed in the temple and sounded back into her ears. Her soul slowly withered into nothingness. She'd failed. She'd fail Gabrielle, failed herself. Nor did Xena try to fix her relationship with Gabrielle. She'd held back. There was so much she wanted to say to Gabrielle before they'd entered into the temple. But she hadn't, she'd recoil within. And Gabrielle had seen it in her blue eyes.

Xena closed her eyes yet again. She rocked back and forth as the heat of the pit washed up into her face. But it wasn't hot enough to dry her endless tears.

The warrior knew Gabrielle did what she wanted for once. Xena told her not to sacrifice herself, but Gabrielle had. The memories resurface to a time when Xena told her to do something. Gabrielle had done that something and the bard paid for it.

"I don't know what's happening to me, Xena. I did something that I never thought I would do. I played judge, jury and executioner."

The warrior shifted a little against the boat's railing. "You did what I told you to do."

Gabrielle sighed then replied. "You said that Crassus living or dying wasn't the point. I had a choice, I made it."

Xena took a deep breath. "Gabrielle, I put you in a situation I had no right to. I expected you to understand my logic and ignore your heart."

"But, I know you were right." The bard's hands then came out to cover over Xena's.

"But, it wasn't right for you. That's not who you are. If I had to do this all over

again..." She is cut off.

"I'd still do it."

The warrior nodded her thumb lightly caressing the bard's hand. "If I couldn't find another way, I would, but I wouldn't include you."

"Yeah, but I'd be hurt if you didn't."

Xena sighed, there's no way to win. "How many more times are you going to follow me into battle? How many more times am I going to hurt you? You are the most dear thing to me in all the world. Yet, instead of protecting you ..."

"I'm here because I want to be. I love you, Xena."

The warrior smiled just slightly, but it was a sad smile. She hadn't heard that in a long time. "I love you too, Gabrielle." The gold ring fell from Gabrielle's hand and into the murky dark water. It disappeared without a trace. It was gone, forever.

The warrior shook her head. How she'd wrong Gabrielle left and right. *"I'm here because I want to be."* It rung through Xena's mind again. *But look where it got you my bard?* Xena's heart tightened, a large lump in her throat. The final truth erupted like a thousands nails hitting into Xena's body as the truth was whispered between Xena's lips. Her eyes flying open from the amazing pain, the pain of the truth.

"But look at where I got you my bard?" Blue eyes closed. "Everything's changed...everything." As Xena's eyes opened again thousands of tears swept from her eyes. Darkness smiled at the warrior and took her over. Pain laughed at her as it chains her soul and heart. Death crossed its arms and grins with satisfactory. "I killed Gabrielle...again." It repeated without end in Xena's soul.

So in turn the warrior curled up within and outside. Her hands leaving the edge of the pit. She hugged her body with her arms, as she bent forward close to her knees. Tears rolled and rolled down. She rocked. Agony set in as her eyes closed to block everything out.

~*Part 3*~

Xena stared across the barn at the monster. It lay still on the ground, blood flowing from it death wound. She could see Hope's body mashed underneath.

The warrior took a deep breath. She felt the bard in her arms shudder. So she looked down at Gabrielle.

The bard pulled a little back in the embrace and turned around to face the warrior. She looked into her friend's eyes. "Glad that's over with." Low whispered words.

Xena sadly smiled, her arms still wrapped around Gabrielle. "Me too."

The Amazon Queen then turned back around in the warrior's embrace. She leaned against Xena. She desperately needed this. She was just considered "dead" then "reborn" and now she'd just killed her daughter and Hope's son. The bard needed to feel safe from all this chaos that happened. Her mind is confused, her body reacting to it. But in Xena's arms her body could at least calm while her mind slowly settled

down.

Xena though, she needed to feel Gabrielle in her arms again. It'd been too long. They may not be lovers like they were so long ago. But they both still felt love towards each other. Some where in there in that chaos. Besides that, the warrior thought she'd just lost Gabrielle forever. She needed that physical touch to know she had the bard here in her arms again.

By the time night came, the two partners were in bed. Cyrene had quickly sent them to bed after finding out what happened. But what she couldn't quite understand was why the two women kept so far away from each other physically. And she'd taken quick notice to the fact neither wore their wedding rings nor necklaces. It put a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Into that night Gabrielle had nightmares about the past days. About that pit. She was so confused. When she'd killed her daughter part of her was extremely happy, the other was angry at herself. She was so angry at herself for not trying. She felt as if she never tried hard enough. She never tried to find a good side to Hope and tap into it. But no, Hope had wronging Gabrielle to the extreme. That happy side was glad to take revenge on her daughter. Revenge for Hope killing Solon, part of Xena, and her relationship with the warrior. That was satisfaction. Gabrielle hates this side of herself.

~*Part 4*~

Janice nodded her head. "Yeah." She looked down to her hat in her lap then back to Starling. "Things are a little better... you know."

The Amazon also nodded her head, she looked to the floor then back to her friend. "That's better than nothing Janice. I know Mel went through a lot in Greece."

The archeologist huffed at that. "That's an understatement. Every goddamn time we go to Greece it seems Mel ends up getting physically and mentally hurt."

Silence.

"Janice, you do realize Mel can handle herself?"

Janice's eyes were still fixed on her fedora, she didn't know what to say. So she decided to say what first came to mind. "She shouldn't have too." The archeologist then looked up to the Amazon.

Starling crossed her arms against her chest. "I can understand why you say that. You think she's your responsibility huh?" A pause as the archeologist's eyes went back to her lap. "Let me tell you Janice, that'll get you into a lot of trouble. For the both of you."

Janice quickly looked up. "And if I don't take her as my responsibility Starling, who is?"

"Mel will."

The two women's eyes locked tightly. How did they even get into this discussion in the first place? Was Janice actually starting to trust this woman? Trust enough to tell

Starling her deepest fears? She couldn't quite understand where this trust came from. But it is quickly developing from somewhere.

"Maybe." Janice then looked away to stare at the fireplace. Why is she getting so...so defensive? She couldn't understand why.

Starling uncrossed her arms again. "Well Janice, let me phrase it this way. The tiger doesn't need to be protected when it has its own claws and fangs. I think the tiger would prefer another walking beside it in support rather than hiding it from the world around." Janice looked back to Starling, so the Amazon decided to add on. "I think Mel can handle herself Janice. We've all seen it, she's dangerous in her own way."

Again the smaller woman looked back to the fireplace as she took deep breaths. Her right hand was on the arm of the sofa. Her hand is gripping the arm rather tightly as if in means to kill it. Janice's left hand shifted in her lap to grasp her hat. She lifted and put it on and looked to Starling. "Excuse me."

The Amazon Queen nodded as she watched the archeologist get up. Starling watched the other woman leave the room then go out the main door of the house.

Janice looked up to the sky, it was getting late, almost sunset. There would definitely be some nice stars considering there were no clouds. The archeologist took a deep breath. She then walked down the steps of the mansion and walked over to the garage. There she leaned against it, staring across the lane of the mansion. The sun in her eyes beginning to fall below the buildings of Colombia.

"I think Mel can handle herself Janice."

Janice sighed. She reached into her inside pocket and pulled out a cigar and matches. Lightening it then she began to smoke the cigar after biting off the end. Sighing again she shifted against the front of the garage.

"Every goddamn time we go to Greece it seems Mel ends up getting physically and mentally hurt."

Her eyes closed tightly as her own voice rung through her head. Slowly emerald eyes opened again, she took a drag from her cigar. *No, it's not every time we go to Greece. It's every time I ignore my instincts. Being stupid.* She took a rough draw from the cigar, the smoke slowly escaping from her lips. *What do I think I am? An insurance liability to Mel?*

Janice dropped her head back against the garage, her hat protesting by shifting off her head. She closed her eyes as the hand with her cigar fell by her side. The ashes slowly falling off and onto the ground, the cigar becomes shorter and shorter with every passing moment.

Her ivy eyes slowly opened again, they stared up to the overhang of the garage. There she spotted a small nest of bees. She'd heard from her father how a bee's hive works. There was the queen then all the workers and drones. In the end all the workers and drones protected the queen, plain and simple. Black and white.

"I think Mel can handle herself Janice."

Lifting her head back up, Janice's eyes looked to the slowly disappearing half sun. She

brought up her left hand to adjust her hat. She then brought her slowly shortening cigar back up to smoke from. A little time passed, then the cigar was gone, smothered dead on the pavement.

The archeologist then is able to bring both arms up to cross against her chest. Her eyes staying fixed on the setting sun, it will be gone for a time. Now the sun sunk behind the buildings of Colombia.

The mansion door opened quietly and closed quietly. Janice felt her body tingle every where possible. A tall form came to stand beside her. Janice looked up and smiled sadly. "Hey."

The southerner smiled back. "Hey yourself." Melinda then shifted to lean against the garage as well. She stared in the same direction as Janice. "Supper will be ready soon."

The archeologist just faintly nodded. "Good."

Blue eyes looked to Janice, fixed on her for a moment. Then they looked back to the scenery. The belle took a deep breath. She knew something was going on. Ever since Janice got upset, she'd felt it too. She'd began to rush dinner then, Emily noticing. Then Starling came in taking her job. That left Mel to find out what was going on.

"Ain't much of uh sunset huh?"

Janice nodded her head. "Nope."

"Kinda need duh clouds."

The archeologist looked up to her soulmate for a moment. That's when the translator saw that turmoil in her soulmate's eyes.

Janice then looked away back to the declining sunset. "I guess."

The aristocrat nodded. Her left hand then reached over near Janice's right. She grasped Janice's right hand then squeezed.

That's when Janice held back everything from turning into Mel's arms on the spot. Her jaw clamping down in self-resistance.

Mel took a deep breath. "Yo know, I jus' had dis real bad upset feelen jus uh few minutes ago. Still actually have it tuh tell duh truth."

The smaller woman looked up to her partner. Melinda looking down to her. Their eyes quickly locked, something passed between the soulmates.

Janice was the one to break the contact, feeling to vulnerable right now. She then mumbled something low. "Sorry."

The belle looked away too. She squeezed Janice's hand in reassurance. "Well I reckon we better head in for supper."

Janice nodded and felt Melinda release her hand. The pair walked back inside of the mansion, single file.

~*~*~*~

The archeologist stared down at the fried chicken. She wasn't feeling like fried chicken tonight. She wasn't feeling much into eating to begin with. So she just ignored the food and began to drink her quantity of scotch. Great stuff too, does a lot to a person.

The small glass found the table again. Janice releasing the glass and looking up to everybody at the table. They all sat in the main dinning hall. The entire time the archeologist could feel a worried set of eyes on her. But she just ignored them right along with the food. She looked down to Starling.

"Starling, how many Amazons are in the nation exactly?"

The Amazon looked up from her plate of food. She smiled to Janice then replied. "Right now the count is at five hundred, plus or minus that."

Janice nodded her head. "That's pretty damn amazing." She took a deep breath. "So does everybody in the nation get together? Some huge ass meeting?"

Emily Leukos looked up from her plate of food as well. She arched an eyebrow at Janice.

"Sometimes Janice, depends on situations." The Amazon Queen then reached out to lift a glass of water in front of her. She drank from it then placed it back on the table.

"So when was the last time there was a meeting?"

Starling sighed. "It was about...a good thirty-seven maybe forty years ago."

Janice nodded her head. She rested back in her seat.

Melinda took a fork full of corn, eating it. After swallowing she looked to Janice. She noticed how her soulmate slouched in the seat. Not to mention the scotch glass almost empty. Scotch and an empty stomach. The belle sighed then looked to Starling.

"Starling, how does duh system work? I reckon you do have uh system on who becomes an Amazon right?"

The Amazon smiled. "Well normally the mother hands the right of caste as an Amazon down to her daughter. It's passed on from generation to generation."

The translator nodded her head. "What happens if yo family has two or more daughters in them?"

Starling grinned and she looked to the doctor.

Emily caught the look from her Queen, so she looked to Mel. "I had that myself Mel. I have two younger sisters. But I'm first born and I take the right of caste. If it is felt I can never handle the right of caste...being an Amazon then I pass it down to my next sister. Also if I am ever killed then my next sister would take the caste."

Janice crossed her arms against her chest. She looked to Starling. "And when the hell do you know when you're chosen as an Amazon?"

Melinda's hand tightened on the fork she held, she kept eating.

Starling sat back in her seat, her stomach filled. "It depends Janice. Some will receive their caste at a young age others when they're quite older."

Janice nodded then she reached out for her glass of scotch. The liquor burns its way down her throat and into her stomach. She sat back in the seat. Everybody at the dinner table fell silent. Things were too awkward for them all, out of order so to say.

The night continued on in relative silence. By the time Mel noticed everybody done, she stood up. She began to clear the table then Starling and Emily helped her clear. Janice though, she left the dining room and walked into the den with her empty glass of scotch. The belle's eyes narrowed at this. They kept spare liquor in the den.

Once all the dishes were cleared away, the three women were conjugated in the kitchen. Melinda turned from the sink to the two Amazons.

"Thanks Starling and Emily, y'all were uh grand help."

Starling nodded her head, as did the doctor. Emily then took a step closer to her host for the evening. "Thanks for dinner Mel. I need to get going." A pause as Emily locked eyes with Melinda. "Is Janice alright?"

The translator dropped her eyes to the floor for a moment then looked back to the doctor. "She'll be okay."

Emily Leukos nodded her head. She then pulled Mel into a hug. "Thanks again. Sleep well tonight Mel."

The belle nodded as she watches Emily begin to leave the kitchen. "You too Emily, drive safely." And with that, Emily disappeared out of the kitchen. Mel hearing the front door open and close. The belle then looked to Starling whom leaned against a chair at the wood table.

The Amazon had her eyes fixed to her feet. "Sorry Mel." She then looked up to her tall friend.

"For what Starling?"

Starling took a deep breath. "I got Janice riled up." Her hands left the top's of the chair heads. She crossed her arms against her chest. "We had a bit of a talk."

The southerner crossed her arms at hearing this new information. "'Bout what?"

"You."

The belle nodded. "I reckon I can take it from there on what happened." Melinda then bobbed her head up and down as her eyes stared to the floor. She then looked back to Starling. "Thank for tellen me Starling. Go get some sleep huh?"

The Amazon Queen nodded. "Yeah, long flight here. Take care Mel."

The translator smiled. "Thanks Starling. Third door after you take left. Goodnight."

Starling lifted herself from the chair, heading out of the kitchen. "Night Mel." The Amazon now gone.

The southerner dropped her head down to stare at the floor in the dimly lit kitchen. She listened to the sound of Starling's heels clicking up the stairs. Looking back up, Mel's eyes stared at the old clock hanging off the wall. It read fifteen minutes till eight. Not too late at all.

Melinda took a deep breath. She walked out of the kitchen, into the dining room, through the lobby. She came to the doorway of the den, she stopped and leaned against the doorway. Her eyes fixed on her soulmate. She listened to the radio as she watched Janice take a sip from her refilled scotch glass. Refill number? Mel had no idea how many. Her mind began to focus more on the music, it is Billie Holiday.

Oh clouds above me

Where are the birds that used to sing?

Everything's wrong

Oh where is their song of love?

Where is the one

Who said he loved me

Far, like those clouds he used to bring

Can it be true there's somebody new to love?

Listen my heart

Don't feel so bad

Think of the kisses we knew

You know my heart

The moments we had

Maybe he's missing them too

Where is the sun?

Oh clouds above me

Don't take the dreams to which I cling

Where is the sun?

Oh where is the one I love?

The song ended, so did Mel's mind being in a daze. She finally shifted and walked into the den, Janice noticing her for the first time. The southerner walked over to the radio, the archeologist watching the entire time. The translator turned the radio off then walked over to her soulmate. She bent down to own knee in front of Janice.

"Hey."

The archeologist looked up from the glass in her right hand. "Hi."

The aristocrat brought up her right hand to the archeologist's lap. "Come outside wid me." Janice didn't move nor did Mel. The belle's large hand squeezing Janice's knee for a moment then relaxing. "Please?"

The small woman's eyes slowly lifted to Mel's. Then dropped again. She took a deep breath. "Yeah." She began to stand up, Mel also standing back up.

The pair walked through the mansion to the kitchen, Janice still had her glass of scotch. Once Mel came to the sink, she stopped abruptly and turned back to Janice. She held out her large hand to Janice.

The archeologist looked up into her soulmate's eyes. They were all too serious. And she knew what Mel wanted. So Janice handed the glass to the southerner, her hand a little shaky.

Melinda took the glass and turned to the sink, pouring the remains of the scotch in the sink. She then placed the empty glass by the other dirty dishes next to the sink. She then looked to Janice and nodded. Turning back around she went out the door, Janice following behind.

The pair soon found themselves in the middle of the backyard, it was fairly warm out. Especially since they are in South Carolina.

Mel sat down on the ground and then lay out on the lawn. Janice still stood and stared down at her partner, she then took her hat off. The archeologist then sighed and sat down on the grass, her hat finding a spot on the grass relatively close. She then shifted to lie down beside her soulmate.

Silence came between them.

Mel took a deep breath. Janice thought this was where some sort of lecture was about to begin. She felt liked some kid right now. This has never happened between the soulmates. New ground to tread.

"Beautiful stars." A pause. "Duh stars seem tuh make up for duh shitty sunset huh?"

The archeologist blinked. Did Mel just cuss? No lecture started either? Janice looked to her left at Melinda. She watched as the belle brought up her arms, her large hands going under her head.

The archeologist then looked back to the stars. "Did you just cuss Mel or was it me?"

The translator grinned to herself. "Yeah, ain't you."

Janice hands came up to rest over her stomach. "I thought for a moment that scotch was really getting to me."

Melinda's grin went a little more, then it formed into a smile. "Naw." She then took a deep breath. "My daddy use tuh tell me when I wuz little. Dat duh stars are duh touchstones tuh dreams. Then dat duh dreams are touchstones tuh reality."

The archeologist didn't reply to that. She just kept staring at the stars. Her mind repeating what Mel just said. Is it true or not?

Silence again took control.

Janice sighed. She closed her eyes for a second, she felt warm from the scotch. But then why did she feel cold on the inside? That made her shiver for a second. She looked to Mel. She saw that the belle had her eyes fixed on the stars. Janice then looked back above, her eyes closing. "Mel?"

The taller woman's head turned to Janice. "Yeah?"

The archeologist's eyes opened again. "Sorry." That was so very low from the small woman's lips.

But Melinda had heard it for sure. She smiled at the sincerity of that one word.

And Janice turned her head to Mel to see that smile. She watched as Mel's lips shaped into a loving smile. The small woman smiling back a little in return.

That's when Janice didn't give a damn. She just let go of her reserves. Shifting quickly, Janice soon found herself snuggling up against her soulmate's side.

But Mel wouldn't have it. Not at least like that. She grasped the smaller female's side and lifted her over. Janice now lay on top of the southerner.

Janice took a deep breath and dug her head down underneath Mel's chin. Her small arms wrapping around Melinda as the belle's went around Janice's midsection.

They both closed their eyes. The archeologist listened to the rhythm of her soulmate's heartbeat. It's the same as hers, exact. Time passed on without them. The soulmates didn't want to shift or speak. Just take in each other's feel. To reassure the other. To be apart of the other.

Janice then opened her eyes again to the darkness around. "Mel?"

"Mmm?"

The archeologist took a shaky breath. "You remember how you said you liked that tough side of me?"

"Yes."

"At certain points too right?"

"Yes."

"Does... does that go the same for my protective side?"

Melinda took a deep breath as all the pieces fell together to create a picture. "Depends Janice, jus' like duh tough side."

The archeologist's eyes closed again. "Alright."

The belle opened her eyes now. "Janice, none of it happened 'cause yo screwed up. It jus' happened."

Janice opened her eyes once she heard that. She shifted against Mel's body in reaction.

So Melinda tightened her arms more in support. "I could have changed it though Mel."

The translator sighed. "Maybe yo could have, maybe yo couldn't have. Duh way I see it Janice. Iz you could have been there and gotten hurt too. Things would have probably been worse."

The archeologist then lifted her head quickly to peer down at Mel. Her hands leaving Mel's side and falling to the ground. "So you're telling me. That Hope... Hope... taking you... raping like she did was for the better? That's bullshit Mel."

"It could have happened tuh you Janice."

"I know Mel. I'd rather have it happen to me over you anytime."

"And I'd rather if it happen tuh me Janice then you."

The soulmate's eyes stayed locked for moments on end. Janice's closed then she got up from Mel's body. She walked a ways from Mel, her back to the belle. The archeologist crossed her arms against her chest. The aristocrat got up and walked up behind Janice.

Janice turned around to look up to her soulmate. "It's always going to be stalemate between us huh?"

Melinda nodded her head. "Yes, Janice."

The archeologist dropped her eyes to the ground.

"Janice, whatever happens, happens. We'll both try our best tuh stop anything bad from happening tuh duh other. But we're both only human and have tuh deal wid what's thrown at us."

The small woman looked up to her partner. "I'm beginning to realize that one."

The southerner's hands went up to each of Janice's shoulders. "Janice I'd rather deal wid what's thrown at us together." They searched each other's eyes.

The archeologist let a small smile slip into place. She then saw her soulmate let tears trickle. At first Janice couldn't quite figure out why. Then it hit her like a ton of bricks. She wanted to beat herself up. *Goddamn it I'm so stupid and selfish.*

"Hey come here Mel." The archeologist pulled her taller soulmate in.

That's when everything seemed to flow out of Melinda, like the release from the depths of deep water. She'd finally had her chance to burst to the top of the surface and take in air.

Melinda began to cry hard, her body rocked. Janice felt her soulmate begin to weaken as did her own body. The archeologist's body was swamp with pain and hurt.

They both went down on the ground, sinking down to the grass. Janice sat on her knees and legs, she pulled Mel up into her lap. The belle's head under hers.

Janice felt her own tears come. She rocked her body with Mel's. Janice had been so

warped in her own world she'd forgotten Mel. She'd forgotten what the aristocrat went through. Went through with Hope.

The small woman's vision flashed back to Hope. Back to the scene in the temple. Hope staring back into her eyes. Hope falling to the ground dead and all the blood seeping out. Then the red dagger falls to the ground in front of Hope's open eyes. Janice shook her head as the vision disappeared.

"Either way Hope, I'll kill you over what you did to Mel."

It rung through Janice's head, the exact words. She shook her head again and gritted her teeth. She'd delivered on that one.

The archeologist then dropped her head on top of Mel's head. Words escaped her lips in a quiet whisper but sincere. "I'm here Mel. I'm here." She took a shaky breath. "Forever Mel."

Melinda kept her head under Janice's as she kept crying. Her arms tightly wrapped around Janice's body. Hoping to never have to let go. This was her security, her safe spot. This one other woman, her soulmate.

She cried on, Janice crying with her. Melinda didn't know which she cried about. Hope's rape or Janice realizing she need her. Maybe both.

As they cried, those stars above them kept sparkling and twinkling ever so brightly.

Part 2

Section 2

~*Part 5*~

The archeologist slowly opened her eyes, she quickly noticed it was morning, no stars just the blinding light. She groaned and reached to her right, her hands grasping her hat. Brining it over, the hat covered over her face to block out the sun's early light. Her small hands went back to her stomach near her belt. She sighed.

The small woman then felt a larger hand on top of hers, she grinned under her hat.

"Janice we need tuh get up."

The archeologist sighed again. "Later."

The belle grinned to herself, she squeezed her soulmate's hand then brought her hand back to her own stomach. That's when she could hear the sound of the backdoor opening to the mansion. Light footfall coming down the steps and somebody walking through the grass.

"I can't believe it."

Mel opened her eyes, Janice removing her hat to gaze up. The pair looked up into amber eyes that glistened down to them.

"You both slept out here?"

The archeologist grinned. "Yeah, got a problem with that?"

The Amazon chuckled. "Nope. Nice sleep out here?"

The translator brought her hands off of her stomach and under her head. "Yes actually. Duh stars were grand tuh look at last night."

Starling nodded, her hands going to her hips. "That's good." The Amazon then turned her eyes more to Melinda. "Is it alright if I make myself a cup of coffee?"

The southerner smiled. "Naw, go right ahead. Duh coffee iz in duh third cabinet right of duh sink above."

Starling dropped her hands from her hips. "Thanks Mel." She then turned on her heels and headed back inside to the kitchen of the mansion.

The aristocrat looked to her partner. "Yo sleep well?"

Janice's hat was back over her face. She mumbled through it. "Yeah, but not long enough."

Mel chuckled. "Sorry 'bout dat."

The smaller woman removed her hat, it finds a new home on her stomach. She then looks to Mel. "Nothing to be sorry about Mel. I should be apologizing."

The belle shrugged her shoulders a little. "It's over wid Janice. Let's jus' move on together huh?"

The archeologist smiled deeply. "Yeah."

"Speaken of moven, we need tuh get up."

"Mel."

The translator grinned then began to shift, she got to one knee and looked to her soulmate. Janice put that old hat back over her face again in response. Mel shook her head and reach with her right hand. She lifted the hat up from Janice's face and smirked down at her.

The archeologist narrowed her eyes to Melinda but let a grin take over. But soon she saw Mel's head coming down closer to her own, she lost that grin. She found her lips being claimed by Mel's warm lips. Normally she would have protested in public, but right now it was sort of hard. Nor could she argue with one of Mel's kisses.

The translator slowly pulled her head back up, seeing emerald eyes gradually open. She smiled to the smaller woman, Janice smiling back.

"Mel, this isn't a good place."

Melinda grinned. "Oh?"

The archeologist's eyes widen. "Mel." Warning tone.

The tall woman began to lean back down to Janice.

"Okay okay, I'll get up Mel. Just not here is the best idea. You know?"

The translator chuckled and straightened back up, placing the archeologist's fedora on the ground for a moment. Janice then began to sit up. As soon as she sat up she grasped Mel's close shoulder rather tightly.

"You okay Janice?" The belle's hands reached over to grasp the smaller woman's back to support her.

Janice closed her eyes for a few moments and took deep breaths. She slowly opened her eyes again, her vision swam. Then it slowly reduced and stopped. Moaning some, she dropped her head forward. "Jesus Christ, Mel remind me never to drink that much scotch." Her small right hand went up to rub her brow. She then leaned to her left against her soulmate. "Just punch me Mel, so I don't have to feel this."

"I will do no such thing Janice Covington." The southerner then began to shift to be behind Janice, her hands grasping the archeologist's sides. She began to lift her soulmate up. "Come on Janice."

The archeologist groaned and grabbed her hat with her right hand. She began to haul herself up with Mel's help. Once she was on her feet only did her vision swim all over again. This time she didn't have to grab for her partner, Mel already hanging on to her. Janice straightened her back out and took a deep breath. "I can do this. Just gotta make it to the mansion, simple enough."

Melinda chuckled at Janice's words. The pair began to very, very gradually walk to the steps to the kitchen. The archeologist had her left arm wrapped around her soulmate's waist, Mel keeping her right arm around Janice's back in support. Within a while they found themselves on the steps. Then the door was swung open by Mel, the pair walked through the door. The translator helped Janice to a chair at the table, the archeologist almost falling into the seat. Mel then went back to the door, closing it. She turned back around from the door.

Starling leaned against the sink and stared at the soulmates. "Interesting."

Janice glared up to the Amazon. "Funny Starling."

The Amazon grinned. "Scotch catch up to you finally huh?"

The archeologist kept her small glare. She then brought up her right hand with the hat, settling it onto the table.

Melinda looked from her other half to Starling. "You have any of dat coffee left?"

The Amazon nodded her head. "Yeah, real strong too."

The belle grinned. "Perfect." She then shifted off the door and went to Starling. Reaching to the cabinet over the sink, Mel pulled out a mug.

Starling had shifted to another part of the counter and reappeared with the small pot of coffee. She poured it into the mug Mel held.

The translator then went over to her partner at the table. She handed Janice the mug of coffee and then bent down to one knee. "Want something tuh eat now or later?"

Janice took a sip of the coffee, then looked back to Mel. "Later would be better. Want to see if this coffee will stay down first."

Mel smiled a little. "Okay." She then began to stand back up but leaned in to place a kiss to the archeologist's forehead.

Janice smiled back in return. She then leaned back in her seat and sipped on her dark coffee. It definitely invigorated her compared too earlier. Looking to the Amazon, Janice finally took note as to what Starling wore. That was pretty much a loose white blouse tucked in with a pair of cotton trousers, basic brown shoes on. Her sea swept eyes then shifted to her tall soulmate.

Melinda was by the sink, beginning to pull out plates, pans, and was pulling food from the fridge. Starling helping her a long. Definitely time for breakfast.

The small woman kept working on her coffee as she watched her soulmate and friend start on breakfast. Once she finished with her coffee she stood up, her vision didn't react to this movement. Her body was a bit shaky though from the lack of food. Her headache certainly still there and would make her grumpy as time moved on. But if she had a full stomach she might just live.

Janice moved to the sink, placing the mug down in it. Blue eyes looked to her, Janice looking to her soulmate. "How long you think it'll be?"

Mel grinned. "You've got twenty minutes."

The archeologist grinned. "Great, enough time for a shower."

The aristocrat shook her head. "Make it fast."

Janice nodded and made her way back to the table, getting her hat. She then left the kitchen, heading upstairs.

~*~*~*~

Melinda Pappas opened the door to her and Janice's room. She came into to see on the made bed are one of Janice's button up shirts. It's a dark forest green cotton button up. Mel came up beside the end of the bed and stared down at the shirt. She then looked back up, she felt her body go prickly.

Two warm arms snaked around her waist, she stiffened up real fast.

"Sorry Mel." Janice began to pull her arms back but Mel stopped her.

"Ain't you Janice. Jus'.... I felt you but couldn't see you."

Janice nodded, her arms tightening around Mel's waist. She then placed the side of her face against Mel's back. "Hope?"

"Yeah."

Silence.

"Mel?"

"Mmm?"

"I'm here."

The translator smiled to herself. She turned around in her soulmate's embrace.

"Thanks love." A pause. "I'll always need you."

Janice smiled up at her partner. "Same here."

Melinda smiled and brought her hands up to Janice's bare waist. Janice had on her clean pants, boots, and a bra. Her hair was down and wet, making her almost look younger than she is. Mel had to grin at that inwardly. She leaned down and kissed her soulmate deeply, Janice quickly responding.

Once they pulled away Janice looked up and grinned.

"What's duh grin 'bout?"

The archeologist shrugged her shoulders. "I was just wondering what it would be like to kiss you leaning down."

Melinda arched an eyebrow. So she decided to go along with that. She bent down to one knee in front of Janice. The archeologist laughed and then smiled to the southerner. Her small right hand went to Mel's right cheek as she leaned in. Another kissed happened between the soulmates again.

When it was over, Janice leaned her forehead against Mel's. She grinned. "Don't like you down there."

"No?"

Janice nodded.

Mel grinned and began to stand again, her tall lean body rising up to tower over Janice.

The archeologist was more than happy with it. Janice shifted to the bed and sat down, grabbing her shirt. She put it on and began to button it up. "I was thinking about something Mel, I thought was kinda interesting."

The belle walked over to their dresser, her back to Janice. "What's dat?"

Janice was looking down while she buttoned her shirt up. "About you and I." Mel turned around, arching an eyebrow at Janice as the archeologist looked up to Mel. "Us." The southerner grinned, Janice mirroring back the same grin. "I've noticed how you're not the perfect southern belle. Faint at the sign of blood." The belle crossed her arms against her chest. Janice coughed and looked back down as she really slowly buttoned her shirt. "You do have a southern side but then you have this... Xena side. But them together and you get Mel."

Melinda nodded. She then walked across the distance to Janice and handed the archeologist the belt. "So you're sayen I'm Xena wid uh southern twist?"

The archeologist stood up as Mel took a step back. She began to put the belt on as she replied. "Yeah."

"Then dat means you're Gabrielle wid an archeologist twist?"

Janice stopped her movement from putting the belt into the belt loops. She looked up to Mel. "Yeah I guess so Mel." Small hands went back to work on putting the belt on. Janice then unbuttoned, unzip her pants and began to tuck her shirt in. "Except its sort of taking Xena and hiding her strength to make it an inner strength."

"And taken Gabrielle's inner strength tuh duh foreground."

The archeologist buckled her belt and looked back up to Mel. "Exactly." She began to pull a little of her shirt out of the pants to lay nicely out. Looking back up, Janice furrowed her brows. "Did... did we just discuss something I couldn't admit to a while back ago?"

"Yup."

The archeologist's face dropped into quick frustration. "Damn me."

"Nope."

Janice grinned up at her soulmate. "I can't believe I did that."

Mel grinned now. "Come on love. I reckon Starling iz going tuh be real short tempered wid us if we don't get down yonder."

The archeologist nodded. "Right."

They left the room.

~*Part 6*~

Gabrielle shifted to sit down on the ground, her back going against a rock, it felt cool on her back. She looked straight ahead to the fire. Her friend was across on the other side, sharpening her sword. The pair just had dinner and were relaxing. The day had been long and grueling for the bard. Ever since they left the town during the day. Her thoughts on nothing but the past few days.

"The Light ... I need something."

The bard sighed at her own words. She shifted a little against the rock. She does need something. That something wasn't to far away but yet it is in another world.

"You seem so happy. It's like what you're doing has so much meaning for you. Am I right?"

Najara smiled to the bard. "I don't think about it much, but now that I think about it, yes, I'm very happy."

Gabrielle nodded then responded, not quite sure. "I just ... I don't know if I'm on the right path in my life." "You fight for Good. What other path is there?" Najara began to listen to the bard, then she responded to what would make sense to everybody but her. "Perhaps you need to commit totally to your life with Xena. You two do a lot of

Good."

"We do. Najara, does the violence ever bother you? I assume you've killed before?"

The woman sighed to the bard then responded. "Yes, as little as possible, but sometimes it's unavoidable."

The small Amazon Queen shook her head. "I don't think I could ever get used to that."

"Gabrielle, you need to make a full commitment to the Light. It will give you faith that what you're doing is right."

Her voice spoke low and unsure. "The Light ... I need something."

Gabrielle shuts her eyes. She then propped her legs up and rested her arms on her legs. She looked to Xena. The warrior was warped in her own world, but then she really never is. Gabrielle's eyes averted to the fire. That fire made her memory flash.

She looked to Xena. "I could have saved him. How do I get over that?" Her eyes went back to the funeral pyre.

"I can't answer that question. Maybe because there's nothing I can say to take away that feeling you have. You want to know that what you did was for all the right reasons. But, with that pain in your gut and the weight on your shoulders the best you can come up with was that it was a good day fighting. I have seen so many changes in you, things that I could never have expected. But, as hard as the changes have been you've got to know that it's all been for a reason. All this is for a reason, otherwise, what's the point? I was asking that same question before I met you."

The small woman took a deep breath. How did she get over that one? She never really has. Time and time again that good day would flash back to her in her dreams. Keep reminding her of the fact she didn't try hard enough. Phlanagus died because she hadn't given her everything. At least that's how she's always seen it.

Gabrielle sighed. She sat up then and padded across to Xena.

The warrior looked up as she came over. "How are you?"

It has gotten down just to that. Where they didn't even know how the other was doing. As least they still cared to ask each other. Step one.

"Okay." Gabrielle sat down beside the warrior on the log.

The warrior stopped her sharpening for the bard. "Good."

Silence. Not a comfortable silence like it could be, an agonizing silence that wrenched at their hearts and souls.

"So where do you think we'll head to tomorrow?"

Xena went back to sharpening her sword but slower. "Back west I figured."

Gabrielle nodded her head. She doesn't have say in that sort of thing. Even if she does, she didn't want it. She'd just travel behind Xena as her shadow. Anything to show she was still trying. She felt like she had no right to say anything anymore.

"Okay, I think I'm going to go to bed."

Xena nodded her head. "Sleep well huh?"

Gabrielle slightly smiled. "Yeah, you too. Night Xena." The bard stood up and made her way to the bedrolls. She crawled into hers.

"Goodnight Gabrielle."

Sleeping well? The bard wanted to laugh at that. The last time she slept well was before everything. She couldn't even recall when that was, too long. She couldn't remember when and how everything got started. All she knew was she'd be laying in this bed for a candlemark plus waiting for sleep to save her from this world.

Xena though, she went back to sharpening her sword. Her mind wandered back in the day.

"Did you tell her about the vision?"

Najara smirked. "No, that would hurt her and I don't ever want to do that. That's your job."

Xena gritted her teeth, the whetstone running down the blade of the sword a little harder than it needed to. The warrior took a deep breath. That's when it hit her all over again.

Jagged snow capped mountains appear, then it flashes to Roman shields lifting to reveal a Roman holding a hammer passing it to another. A nail was hit into the bard's palm, she cried out. Xena looked to her right at the bard. She watched as Gabrielle talked to her. Xena smiled and responded. A nail finds its way into Xena's feet. Then next to follow is the crosses she and Gabrielle are on, put up. Their bodies rocking with the quick halt of the cross.

The warrior's sharpening stone stopped streaking across the sword. She stared into the fire.

"Ah, now I understand. You don't plan to return from your mission against Marat. You want a place to leave Gabrielle."

Xena took a deep breath. "She'll die if she stays with me. You said it would take something drastic to change her destiny. Maybe this is it."

Najara nodded. "Once she realizes you've left her, you know she'll follow you."

The warrior looked away then back to Najara, hating to admit this part. "I see such joy in her eyes when she talks to you about your Mission. She's been looking for meaning. I think you can give it to her. It hasn't always been good for her being with me. I seem to hurt her."

"I know she forgives you. I promise I'll do everything I can to justify your trust."

"You better."

The warrior closed her eyes.

"She's been looking for meaning. I think you can give it to her. It hasn't always been good for her being with me. I seem to hurt her."

"I seem to hurt her."

"I know she forgives you. I promise I'll do everything I can to justify your trust."

"I know she forgives you."

Xena's eyes opened again, they were hard. It was as if ice filled her eyes, making them dull. She stood up from the log and walked over to the saddlebags. She opened the top and dropped the whetstone inside. After straightening back up she sheathed her sword. But she didn't move after that, instead she reached into a very small pouch hidden in the front of her leathers. There she removed two rings and necklace with it. She stared down at them. Her mind flashed.

She swung the door open roughly. If she'd found Gabrielle here in the hut she would have screamed at her and maybe even... She shook her head of the thought. Xena slammed the door behind herself and took a deep breath. Reaching up with her right hand she wiped away some of the remains from her crying.

Then looking to her right she spotted small items on the wood table. Slowly as if in a dream she walked over to the table. Her eyes fixed on the items that sparkled and twinkled up to her. Xena stood still and stared at what was on the table. She felt hollow, just a shell.

Reaching down Xena picked up two rings with a necklace and held them in the palm of her hand. That's when they seemed to stop twinkling and sparkling, going to a dullness. A huge lump entered the warrior's throat. Her heartrate picking up right along between a mix of anger and depression.

Xena took a deep breath and slipped the three pieces of jewelry into a hidden pouch in the front of her leathers. How long they would remain there, Xena had no idea. Maybe forever. Hidden in darkness.

She then lifted her left hand and reached for the gold and silver ring on her hand. She took it off and her eyes became fixed on it. She then looked to the inscription.

My soulmate forever.

The warrior's anger came to life, her upper lip twitching. She closed her eyes and placed the ring down on the table. Afterwards she reached behind her neck, unhooking the necklace and placing it down with the ring. She turned her back on the ring and necklace and made her way to her stuff. Collecting everything of hers and leaving everything of Gabrielle's. She left the hut.

The scene reflashd to Xena. She closed her eyes then opened them quickly. Her large hands dropped the items back in their home. She then turned back to where her friend slept, she made her way over there to rest. To torture herself.

~*Part 7*~

The doorbell rung. Janice stood up from her seat in the kitchen. "I'll go see who it is."

Melinda and Starling both nodded. They went back to eating their breakfast as the archeologist left to go to the lobby.

Janice opened the door and then smiled. "Hey Emily. What you doing here?"

Emily Leukos smiled. "Need to talk tuh Starling for a quick second."

Janice nodded. "Sure, she's in the kitchen."

"Um.... Alone if you don't mind Janice."

The archeologist locked eyes with the doctor then nodded. "Alright, go into the den and I'll tell her."

Emily nodded and stepped through the doorway. "Thanks Janice. Didn't mean to intrude. Sort of important."

Janice nodded. "It's alright, I understand." The archeologist then went back to the kitchen as Emily went to the den.

Both women looked up as the small woman came back in.

"Emily is here to talk to you alone Starling."

The Amazon furrowed her brows. "Okay, thanks Janice." She began to stand up from the table.

"She's in the den waiting."

Starling nodded her head. She left the kitchen and went to the den.

Melinda looked to her soulmate. "What's dat 'bout?"

Janice sat back down and shrugged her shoulders. "Don't know. Emily just said she needed to talk to Starling alone."

The belle nodded her head. "Probably has something tuh do wid Florida."

The archeologist arched an eyebrow. "I don't know Mel. We know about it. Why couldn't they just talk about it in front of us?"

The aristocrat ate some of her eggs that had extra salt on it. "Maybe 'cause we ain't Amazons."

"Still Mel, just weird."

The translator grinned. "You're jus' paranoid."

Janice grinned as she swallowed down a bit of toast. "I need to be in South Carolina."

Melinda looked back up from her food with an arched eyebrow. "Why? What's wrong wid South Carolina?"

The archeologist was about to reply, but Starling and Emily both came in. Starling went back to her seat where her food waited. "Sorry about that."

Melinda smiled while Janice nodded her head.

"Sorry again about the intrusion Janice and Mel."

Melinda nodded her head. "Nothing wrong wid it Emily. How are yo tuhday?"

The doctor smiled as she stood next the table. "Not bad. You Mel?"

"Ain't so bad myself."

Emily Leukos nodded. "Good tuh hear. I need tuh run. You'll have to excuse me."

Everybody but Starling nodded their heads.

"Bye Emily."

"Bye Janice."

"Have uh good day Emily. Bye."

"You to Mel. Goodbye." The doctor then looked down to Starling.

Starling nodded about something the soulmates didn't catch. "See you soon Emily. Bye."

"Bye Starling." And Emily Leukos was gone. Soon the door opening and closing was followed by her car starting up. Everybody in the kitchen was a bit silent.

Starling took a deep breath. "Sorry about that again." She looked up to Janice and Mel whom sat beside each other. "Emily had to tell me that the rumors down in Miami are getting worse. So we need to head down tomorrow, late morning."

Janice arched an eyebrow. "That early huh?"

Starling nodded.

Mel then cut in. "You reckon you will be back here afterwards?"

The Amazon reached forward and lifted her half-empty glass of orange juice. "Possible. Have to see how much time is left after the Miami crisis."

The translator nodded her head, as did the archeologist.

"Actually, I need to talk to you both before I go with Emily."

Both the soulmates looked up at the same time from their almost empty plates to look to the Amazon Queen. Something dropped in both of their stomachs for some reason.

"Alright, how about right after we finish here?"

Starling looked to Janice and nodded, responding also. "The sooner the better."

Janice nodded. Everybody went back to eating in silence. Janice and Mel were on edge over this one. So neither could really eat, they picked at their food. Once they felt like they'd had enough they began to clear the table.

"How 'bout if we sit in duh den? More comfortable."

Starling and Janice nodded in agreement to Mel's idea. So they all walked through the kitchen through the dining hall then into the lobby.

Starling stopped walking. "You two go ahead. I need to go get something from upstairs. I'll be right back."

Janice nodded and the two soulmates walked into the den. They both sat on the large sofa, Janice in the middle and Mel to her left.

Janice looked to Mel. "What you think this is about?"

"I don't know, but I ain't fancying it."

"Neither am I."

Starling came back in and sat down in the old leather chair. She looked across to the pair.

The two soulmates in a flash took note to what was contained in Starling's lap. Two sets of leathers. Janice recognized them both in a heartbeat. Not to mention her heart skipped a beat.

"I'm not sure how to quite put this to the both of you."

Mel grinned a little. "Try being blunt, it works well for duh both of us."

Starling nodded, but she was serious. So the translator went back to being serious.

"Well bluntly, you're both Amazons."

Silence.

A little more silence.

"Why does that not surprise me? Jesus Christ." Janice shook her head. "Can I just keep going with this? Am I the Queen too or something? I know Gabrielle was then I must be too huh?"

"Actually you are Janice."

Silence again.

Some more silence.

The archeologist looked to her soulmate. "Bluntly eh?"

The aristocrat looked down to Janice. "Well... maybe not quite dat blunt huh?"

"Well at least you're only an Amazon. I'm an Amazon and the Queen. However the hell that happened."

"I'll explain everything to the both of you."

Both women looked back to Starling. Janice nodded first then Mel did. Neither of

them could quite process it yet.

Starling took a deep breath. "I don't know where to quite start."

"Duh beginning always works nicely?"

The Amazon smiled a little to Mel then nodded. "Quite. Well do either of you know how your mothers passed away?"

Janice brought up an eyebrow and crossed her arms against her chest. Defenses came to life. "Don't know, nor care. She ran out on me and my father a long time ago."

Starling nodded her head. She looked to Mel. "Do you know about your mother, Katharine?"

The southerner thought for a moment. "I ain't quite sure. Daddy told me uh little 'bout her death. Said she passed away from some disease while she wuz in Greece."

Starling nodded her head again. "Well I can tell you both, they died with a lot of honor."

The archeologist's eyes narrowed. "How the hell can you say that? My mother left her family. What would you know about her?"

The Amazon sighed, she looked down at the leathers in her lap then back up to Janice. "She was Elizabeth's, my mom, closes friend."

"What's this have to do with us Starling?"

Starling nodded her bobbed her head up and down a few times and looked back to Janice and Mel. "Well back during World War one the German army found out about Dahak. They're the followers of the one-god."

Janice nodded her head. "Mel and I both know from Hope. She told us about it. The Deliverer is Hitler?"

The Amazon nodded her head. "He is. At the time during World War one the Nazis quietly formed and found out about Hope and Dahak. So a large group of them decided to invade Greece to retrieve Hope's remains. The German Amazons that found out quickly reported it to the Amazons in the Amazon territory in Greece." Starling took a deep breath. "Janice your mother, Mary, at the time was the Queen while Cliona was the princess, still is actually. She was quite young at the age of five. My mother, Elizabeth, was already in the Amazon territory as one of the three protectors. Then Mel" Starling looked to the southerner. "Your mother, Katharine, was an Amazon, she was well known. One of the sweetest and had a large amount of power with her money and connections. She was a great help to the Nation."

The amazon then looked back to both of the women on the sofa. "So both of your mothers elected themselves to go to the Greece to stop these Nazi Dahak followers. At the time along with Elizabeth in the territory so was Hellenes and Sylvia's mothers. Sort of ironic I have to say." Starling took another deep breath and shifted in her seat. "All five of them met in Thessaloniki and from there they went after the Nazis to stop them. As you can guess they didn't succeed. Everybody was killed but my mother, she barely escaped from the Nazis."

Janice shifted in her seat. Mel looked to her soulmate. Her large hand then reached down to grasp Janice's.

"At the time of Mary's death Janice, she told my mother that she wanted you to have the right of caste for Queen." Starling then looked to Melinda Pappas. "Katharine told my mother that you were to have her right of caste as an Amazon." The Amazon sighed then took a deep breath. "The only problem that was left was who was to be Queen? We couldn't let you be Queen Janice, since you were much too young. Not to mention your father was searching for the Xena Scrolls. Then Cliona was much too young herself. So what ended up happening my mother became the regent. She stayed as the regent till I grew to the age of twenty-one, that's when she told me everything. And she handed me the right of caste and I became regent." The Amazon stopped. She let it soak in with the soulmates.

Janice nodded her head, she looked up from her lap to Starling. "Now what's suppose to happen?"

"You're to become the Queen and take the right of caste."

"What happens if I don't accept?"

"Then I become Queen. Then more than likely the Amazon Nation will shun you since you turned your back on us."

The archeologist nodded her head. She looked up to Mel. "What you think Mel?"

The translator looked down to her partner. "Quite interesting."

"Tell me about it." Janice then looked back to Starling. "So that's how the Amazons knew so much about my father? He had the Amazon Queen right there beside him and he didn't even know it. I bet he's kicking himself right now." She grinned to herself and shook her head. Then looked back to Starling. "So why didn't you tell Mel or I about our right of castes sooner?"

"We had to wait for the right moment. We couldn't tell you personally Janice because your quest for the Xena Scrolls. I decided to wait and see what would happen. Mel on the other hand we wanted to let her know. But we found out about her father's death figured it wouldn't be a good time. Of course that's when you left for Greece Mel, to help Janice. Well you both know the rest."

"Starling, is there some sort of legend behind me?"

The regent Amazon looked away from Janice after hearing her question. She then looked back to Janice. "Yes there is actually. About the both of you."

The archeologist sighed. "What is it?"

"There's a tale or legend that is passed on. We don't know if it's quite true or not but I'm starting to think it is anymore. But the story is, somewhere in Gabrielle's line of decedents she will be reborn. In Xena's line she will also be reborn. Maybe not exact but relatively the same. Supposedly it is said that Gabrielle's decedent that comes along will be her brought back. During her reign she was the chosen of Artemis, saved the Amazon Nation. So it's believed this decedent will be able to bring back the Amazon Nation. Back during Gabrielle's reign she established the nation so it could

live on through time. Till she comes back and brings its rise again. The key element to it is Xena's decedent had to be born at the same time as Gabrielle's. Otherwise it wouldn't be Gabrielle without her soulmate. So the legend goes."

Both soulmates looked up to each other and locked eyes.

"So you're sayen I'm Xena wid uh southern twist?"

"Yeah."

"Then dat means you're Gabrielle wid an archeologist twist?"

"Yeah I guess so Mel."

Both soulmates' hearts skipped a beat. The same past conversation seemed to repeat in their minds.

Janice turned to look at Starling. "Will you excuse us for a moment?"

"Sure."

The southerner and archeologist both got up from the sofa, went out the front door, closing the door behind.

They got down the steps and Janice looked up to her soulmate. "That's total ludicrous Mel."

Melinda arched an eyebrow at Janice. "You said it yourself back up in duh bedroom this morning Janice."

"I don't care Mel. What Starling is saying is such... crap... its bullshit Mel." Janice's hands went to her hips. She stomped off then whirled around to look at Mel. "Its flat out stupid Mel."

"Iz it really Janice?"

"Mel you're not believing what she's talking about?"

"Truly Janice, I don't know what tuh reckon. I agree wid you but then I see what Starling iz saying."

"So you're saying I'm suppose to bring back the Amazon Nation?"

"Maybe Janice."

The archeologist sighed and stomped over to the steps sitting down on them. She brought her elbows up to her knees, her chin falling into the palms of her hands.

The belle sighed and walked over to Janice. "Janice be reasonable seriously."

Janice sighed, then responded in a clam voice. "Okay Mel, I'll try. What perspective you want me to look through?"

The translator smiled she bent down to one knee to be eye-level with her soulmate. "We both know we're the decedents of Xena and Gabrielle, whether we like it or not. We look just like them and are them inside. Right?"

The archeologist sighed. "Yeah I agree."

Melinda's right hand went to the smaller woman's left knee. "Then if you look at it dat way Janice. We're suppose tuh bring back duh Amazon Nation."

Janice huffed, her hands falling from under her chin and crossing in her lap. "Mel, I'm not Gabrielle nor are you Xena."

"No we ain't, you're right. But we're jus' like them. You can't tell me yo didn't feel dat connection wid them?"

Janice nodded. "Yeah I felt a real strong connection with them when they were here. Then those flash backs in Hope's temple and the dreams."

The translator grinned a little. "Not tuh mention my blackflips."

Janice brought up an eyebrow. "Show off."

The aristocrat chuckled. "Well Doctor Covington, I saw you usen dat staff pretty well."

The archeologist looked away, her right hand going through her hair. "Yeah well, felt like second nature."

"I know."

Janice nodded, her gaze going past her soulmate then back Mel. "So you think you can go grab that chakram and throw it?"

Melinda laughed. "No, not unless you want me tuh chop off our heads."

Janice grinned now. "Oh come on Mel. I'm sure you could throw it then get it to split in half. Then you could-" She was quickly cut off.

"Janice." Deep voice on that one from Mel.

The small woman grinned devilishly. "Gotcha." Janice sighed. Her eyes staring at the ground as she talked lowly. "Bring back the Amazon Nation in the forties. It's insane."

"Mmm I agree. But it'll be interesting love."

The archeologist looked back to Mel. "Yeah?" Janice shook her head. "I just wanted to be an archeologist, not be a hero bringing back a tribe of women."

The southerner nodded her head. "Yes it'z been quite awhile since we've played translator and archeologist huh?"

Janice now nodded. "It has. Maybe we're not going to follow in our father's footsteps."

The translator smiled. "Naw we will. In both of our parents footsteps."

Mel's soulmate nodded her head. "Yeah."

Silence came.

Melinda began to search her partner's face. Search her eyes. "Itz important tuh you."

Janice's eyes refocused to her soulmate. She locked eyes with Mel, then responded in a whisper. "Yeah, I don't know why either."

"'Cause they're apart of who we are."

"You're right Mel." Janice let her head bob up and down for a moment. She then looked back to Mel with a smile. "Let's go."

Melinda Pappas smiled back and stood up. Janice Covington then stood up. The soulmates went back into the house and to Starling in the den.

The Amazon regent looked up to the pair as they entered. She smiled.

Melinda stepped up beside her partner.

Janice looked up to Mel then back to Starling. "It's about time the Amazons had their Queen."

The regent stood up from her seat, leathers in arms with a smile.

The translator grinned and crossed her arms. "And I reckon duh Amazon Nation needs some funds from their southern aristocrat Amazon."

Starling turned around to drop those leathers on her seat. She turned back around and in a flash she pulled Janice in for a hug. Afterwards she pulled the belle in for a massively huge hug. Pulling back, the regent kept her smile. "God, this is great. I was so worried neither of you would accept."

The archeologist reached back behind her neck and replied in a teasing tone. "Yeah well, Mel kinda convinced me."

The aristocrat put her hands on her hips, she looked to her partner. "Lord Janice, we convinced each other."

Janice grinned. "Right... right." She dropped her hand back to her side.

Starling grinned and turned back to the seat. She picked up to the leathers. Turning back around, she handed the top set to Janice then the other to Melinda.

Janice found hers to be two pieces. She looked back up to the regent. "Gabrielle's?"

The Amazon nodded her head. "They are."

The translator chuckled at the leathers she had. "I can't believe Xena wore these things practically every day."

Starling chuckled. "She did."

Janice looked to the regent. "So how did the Amazons manage to keep a hold of their leathers? They're in good condition after all this time."

The Amazon grinned and crossed her arms against her chest. "With a lot of care shall we say."

Melinda looked up from Xena's leathers to Starling. "I thought they both were buried

wid their outfits?"

Starling shook her head. "No, actually Gabrielle had on a different outfit. While Xena was buried with her warlord uniform."

The archeologist lifted an eyebrow up. "Really?"

The regent nodded her head. "Definitely. As a matter of fact, that carving made on Gabrielle and Xena's tomb is not accurate. I should say wasn't accurate since its gone now."

"How wuzn't it accurate Starling?"

The Amazon looked to Melinda. "At the time of Gabrielle's death she had short hair. The reason why she put the carving when she had long hair was because that's when she became Queen."

Janice nodded her head. "So why didn't you say anything about this when Xena and Gabrielle reappeared out of thin air back in territory?"

Starling grinned and shrugged her shoulders. "Didn't really matter."

The archeologist huffed and shook her head.

Melinda then cut in. "Starling, I reckon Xena had armor right?"

The Amazon regent brightened up. "She did actually. Follow me."

The three females left the den and headed up the stairs, reaching the top they took a left. They walked passed two doors and Starling opened the third door, entering in.

Janice and Melinda came in, leathers still in their arms. They closed the door behind and stood while watching Starling going through her bags.

The regent pulled out different items from her bags, placing them on the bed in two stacks. Both the soulmate's eyes widen at the articles, recognizing them quickly. Whether they recognized them from scrolls or their own soul past, they couldn't figure out.

After pulling everything out, Starling looked to the pair. "These are all the items from Xena and Gabrielle. They were passed down Xena's line and Gabrielle's line. I've had them, cared for them, since my mother gave them to me to hand over to you both."

Both the soulmates looked up to each other. They slowly looked back to the foot of the bed with all the articles. They stepped up to the bed together.

There on the bed were the two piles. One contained brass armor, arm bands, gauntlets, and a set of worn boots. Melinda Pappas' back quickly stiffened up. Her eyes glossed over, her mind raced.

Xena walked into the dark cave, ducking down from the low mouth of the cave. In her right hand was a torch. The wire and gold in her armor reflecting off the firelight. She walked deeper and deeper in the cavern. After a few hundred footsteps in, the warlord grinned. She spotted five huge chests.

"Time for a change."

Xena looked to her left at the wall of the cave, she found a niche in the rocks. She rammed the torch into the niche and it stayed. Turning to the center chest, Xena opened it. The lid came up with a whining protest. The warlord ignored it and looked down into the chest. There inside of the heavy chest was a set of leathers in the center. Around it lay matching brass breast armor, bracers, and boots. Xena reached in and pulled them out. Her spare leathers and armor.

"Perfect."

Janice Covington looked to her right. A necklace made of feathers, each made of different metals. Then two leather gauntlets and worn boots as well shoulder bracers. Her eyes shut to this.

Gabrielle reached to her right, she buckled the left shoulder bracer. She then lifted her hair up in the back, cool metal fell onto her chest. Waiting for a moment, she felt it tied behind her neck. The bard brought up her hands to look at them then felt down her waist. The leather feeling different, quite different. It seemed to affect her mind, her attitude. She'd become Queen soon.

"You both can't forget these."

Both soulmates looked to each other. They knew what they'd been through. As they turned around from hearing Starling's voice, they saw what she held. Two masks. The regent handed the one in her right hand to Janice.

Janice Covington took the mask in stared at the front of it.

A young woman's hair waved in the breeze as she stood on a stage, four other women on the stage with her. Gabrielle gazed at the front of the mask, she smiled a little. She then turned it around and lifted the mask over her head. All the Amazons before her cheered. The bard stood tall and proud for a few heartbeats, letting everybody cheer. She then began to slowly lower it down to her head, her eyes closing.

Melinda Pappas gradually lifted the Amazon mask from Starling's hand in her right hand. Her eyes caught in the center of the mask.

The Warrior Princess smiled warmly to the Amazon Queen. She then bent down to one knee, unsheathed her sword, and placed it before her body. Xena lowered her head then spoke. Gabrielle responded. Xena looked up and then stood back up to her full height, her sword being resheathed. The warrior lowered her head, and Gabrielle proceeded to fit the mask over Xena's head. It fit to perfection, the mask going over her face, the feathers falling to her back.

"And that's what's been passed down through their generation." Starling smiled after saying that. She looked to the two soulmates, they are both in a daze.

Janice shook her head and looked to Mel. "I swear Mel, if we want to find out the history about Xena and Gabrielle, we should just touch everything."

The translator laughed. "It ain't gonna work then."

The archeologist snickered. "You're probably right."

The pair looked back to Starling. The regent had an arched eyebrow in question.

Janice and Melinda both started to laugh. Starling hadn't caught anything they said.

The belle took a deep breath. "I apologize Starling. Janice and I are laughing at each other, not yo."

The archeologist coughed and piped in. "Yeah what Mel said."

The regent crossed her arms against her chest. "Right." Starling uncrossed her arms. "Well there's one last thing we're missing." She turned back around to one of her bags. She pulled out a small bag and pulled out two small necklaces. Turned to the soulmates she held up the necklaces. On the necklaces is a charm of the Amazon bird. "Can't forget these."

Melinda grinned and lowered her head. Starling stepped forward, she hooked the necklace around Melinda's neck. The bird lay just above the necklace Mel wore to represent Janice.

The regent turned to Janice, the archeologist lowering her head as well. Starling smiled and hooked the last necklace around Janice's neck.

Both soulmates lifted the golden birds. They quickly noticed something different about these two birds, something small though. The translator's bird had small sapphires for eyes while Janice's had small emeralds for eyes. They both looked back up to Starling.

"Why do these have gems in the eyes?"

The regent grinned to Janice and answered. "Because you're both the chosen."

~*Part 8*~

Oh gods, how the last few days were heart wrenching. Soul wrenching.

Xena looked from ahead to her left but still a little ahead, to her friend. The bard walked along with no intent of anything other than to travel distances. The warrior sighed and looked back ahead. She listened to her own boots scuff along on the dirt road. She then tightened her grip back on the reins in her hands. Smiling, she looked to her mare and patted Argo at the neck. The horse nickered and threw her head back for a moment. Xena smiled and looked back to the road. By then, she noticed Gabrielle looking back to her.

The bard took a deep breath, she slowed up her pace to come beside the warrior. "You think Joxer will be fine?"

Xena nodded her head. "He'll be fine, it'll take him awhile though."

The Amazon Queen nodded at that. She brought her right hand up to run through her short hair. "Yeah. Some times I wonder Xena."

"Mmm?"

"It just isn't something you truly get over."

The warrior nodded her head in agreement. "No, I still have yet to get over my first kill."

Gabrielle turned her eyes away from Xena and back to the road. "I know." A low whisper.

Xena looked to Gabrielle for a second. Gabrielle looked to her. They locked eyes for a few minutes.

The bard then broke the contact, looking back to the road. "Anyway, when you think we'll stop for the day?"

Xena looked away from Gabrielle and turned her eyes to the road as well. "We'll keep traveling for another candlemark or so."

The bard nodded her head. "Okay." She looked to Xena and smiled.

The warrior caught the smile from the corner of her eyes, in turn she smiled. But anymore, Xena hated to lock eyes with her friend. She could see the immense sorrow in them. The warrior hated to remember as to why Gabrielle has that sorrow in them.

Gabrielle looked down a little to her feet. She then began to slow her walk up, falling behind Xena. She need to be alone. And she knew Xena knew that also. Hence her mind began to muse to the past few days all over again.

"When I think about some of the wounds I have caused, mortal wounds that'll never be healed, I feel so ashamed."

The bard sighed. "I'm sure that's hard, but, Najara, you've turned you life around, take strength from that."

Najara smiled. "The jinn say the same thing."

Gabrielle smiled back. "Listen to them."

"They also talk about that hospice we were going to start, remember?"

The small Queen nodded. "Yeah, I remember. A place whose only purpose is to ease suffering. It was a good idea."

"It still is." Such confidence Najara has.

"Najara, I think what you're doing is wonderful, giving up fighting, working through Peace, and starting a hospice will be good for you. But, it's not for me. My place is with Xena."

Najara's eyes widen as a protest comes to mind. "I know, and it always will be, until her continuing violence makes her do something that even you can't excuse."

The bard let's her eyes narrow a little, but just a little for she couldn't even be sure in this statement. "It's not going to happen."

"It has to, and then you will have to chose, not between me and Xena, but between

Xena and your own soul."

Gabrielle sighed, she looked up to Xena. She stared at the back of Xena.

"I know, and it always will be, until her continuing violence makes her do something that even you can't excuse."

"It's not going to happen."

"It has to, and then you will have to chose, not between me and Xena, but between Xena and your own soul."

The bard shook her head. She closed her eyes tightly to stop the words.

"Between Xena and your own soul."

"Xena and your own soul."

"Chose."

"Its' not going to happen."

"It has to, and then you will have to chose, not between me and Xena, but between Xena and your own soul."

"That even you can't excuse."

"Can't excuse."

"You can't excuse."

Gabrielle's eyes flew open. Her heart was raising, she took deep breaths. She'd almost had screamed right there. Her arms crossed against her body. Her eyes drifting to Xena and the mare in front of her.

"You betrayed her, therefore you are her enemy. She'll kill you now as soon as look at you."

The bard gritted her teeth. That can't happen. "You're wrong, you don't know her."

Ming T'ien laughed. "I know her. Tell me, why did you do it if you love her so?"

Her eyes dropped for a second. "I felt that she was betraying herself if she went back to the way of murder."

Ming T'ien took a step closer. "Murder is in her blood Gabrielle, her soul. It is more natural to her than love."

The bard's hand went through her short hair for a moment, her hand falling back down.

"Murder is in her blood Gabrielle, her soul. It is more natural to her than love."

"More natural to her than love."

"Than love."

Gabrielle gritted her teeth. She knew better than that, she'd seen different. Or hadn't she?

"Insurance? Against what? Against me?"

"Gabrielle ..."

"... Against my being a demon?"

The bard wanted to laugh at that. Bitterly laugh. Wasn't she a demon? In more than one way?

"My being a demon?"

"A demon?"

She still feels like that demon from so long ago in India. Maybe it still was retained in her. Or maybe she's just driving herself crazy with the idea. Sometimes she wished she could just forget everything that's happened. Gabrielle sighed, no she really couldn't do that.

"If I didn't have the painful memories, then I wouldn't know what the good ones were like, right? I just couldn't let it go, Xena, no matter what the pain. I'm sorry."

Oh how the bard dwelled on the past. Can she dwell as well as Xena can?

"You're awfully quiet, Xena. But, then you never were one to raise words."

The warrior snorted. "Nothing's changed."

She swayed back and forth on the horse. "Including me, is that it? You're wrong."

The warrior narrowed her eyes, her hands tightly gripping Argo's reins. "New outfit. New religion. Same old wacko underneath."

Najara took a deep breath. "You claim to have changed, why can't I? After all, we've both had the same inspiration, Gabrielle. But, unlike you, I changed my whole life for her, you just changed sides."

Xena glared up at Najara, her words coming out with an edge. "You hurt Gabrielle and I will change you in ways that are anything but peaceful."

Najara smirked. "You forget, hurting Gabrielle is your job, or have those visions gone away? You know, the vision of your death and hers. I want to share a life of Peace with her, you want to share a violent death. You tell me who's the villain here, me or you?"

Xena's hand was roughly holding the reins to Argo. She tightened her hold even more. She tried to stop Najara's words, but couldn't.

"You tell me who's the villain here, me or you?"

"Me or you?"

"You?"

"You want to share a violent death."

The warrior took a deep breath, her stride becoming larger.

"Would you try to understand? You went to prison after you were changed. You know what a waste that is."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. Najara hasn't changed."

Gabrielle's defensives came to like. "And how do you know that?"

Xena looked to the bard with hooded eyes. "Because I know her. She's the same zealot she always was, only now she's even more dangerous."

"How's that?"

Xena's voice was low, but serious. "Because she's won you over."

Xena was thanking whomever that those past few days were done with. To much had happen. To much of her had been exposed to the world around. Now she was back in her shell.

The man smiled. "No, that one will be taken care of in due time ... but thank you for Gabrielle."

Xena narrowed her eyes. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Khrafstar laughed. "Look inside yourself, you brought her here. And why did you come? To defeat Caesar. Your hatred brought you here. Dahak appreciates rage."

"You brought her here."

"Your hatred brought you here."

"Your hatred brought her here."

"How many more times are you going to follow me into battle?"

"How many more times am I going to hurt you?"

"Am I going to hurt you?"

"Hurting Gabrielle is your job."

"You tell me who's the villain here, me or you?"

"You want to share a violent death."

"It hasn't always been good for her being with me. I seem to hurt her."

"I seem to hurt her."

"No, that would hurt her and I don't ever want to do that. That's your job."

"No one should ever hurt you ... no one should ever hurt you ... goodbye, Gabrielle".

"I've killed Gabrielle."

"Everything's changed ... everything."

Defined as; one torturing themselves.

Xena closed her eyes tightly. She stopped walking. Her heart was racing. Voices and words echoed again and again and again and... She didn't hear the bard come up beside her.

Gabrielle slowly placed her right hand on Xena's closes shoulder. "Xena?"

The warrior took a deep breath and opened her eyes. She looked to Gabrielle. "Yeah?"

"You okay?"

Xena smiled a little. "Yeah, come on. Let's make camp, I'm not in the mood to travel anymore. Bit tired."

The bard nodded her head, she dropped her hand. "Yeah sure."

The warrior nodded her head. She walked off the road and into the woods.

The wind picked up a little then. Gabrielle watched Xena keep moving as she listened to the wind. It seemed to whisper the words; *Everything's changed... everything.*

She took a deep breath as she tried to ignore the wind. Gabrielle had never felt her own heart beat so fast as those few minutes ago when Xena stopped walking. Nor had she ever felt such darkness inside.

It had almost killed her.

The End