

# ~ Understanding and Forgiving ~

by Red Hope

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## Disclaimers:

Violence ~ Lacking violence.

Sex/Subtext ~ Starts as subtext where it becomes maintext.

Copyright ~ Universal and MCA both own Xena and Gabrielle. However I own the story line, the characters Talus, Thallo, Jason, and Samantha.

Time Frame ~ Some where in the late second season.

**Note:** To sum this will be just another story. For others and me it is a personal story. It is story I hand out as an apology to a certain person and the ex-Guards. I have no other way to give a huge apology. This is my public apology to one of the bards of the Xenaverse and of the greatest lists in the Xenavers. May ex-Guards accept me someday, I'll be on their doorstep knocking if it happens.

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## Section 1

~\*Part 1\*~

Gabrielle stared up at the blue sky. She bit her lower lip at the reminder the blue sky gave her, the reminder of her best friend. Taking a deep breath, she turned away from the scene of the green sea and blue sky over the cliff side. She headed back onto the road. Her destination was Athens.

She and Xena had split up, again. Gabrielle left the camp this morning furious and feeling useless to Xena. Her normal tag along feeling rushed in on her over the week. Even more when she'd almost caused Xena's own death. So, here she was walking a dirt path headed for Athens with her scroll satchel and staff. She was looking for a new future and new friends.

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Slowly, the old woman peered up with a strict look. "And... who are *you*?"

The bard groaned inwardly. "I am Gabrielle."

The old woman chuckled. "You can not be that bard." She sat back in her seat. "Gabrielle of Potidaea left here over a year ago."

"You think I don't know that?" Gabrielle rolled her eyes and dropped her right hand to the table. "I am Gabrielle of Potidaea and I'd like to come to the Academy."

The woman bellowed with laughter. "You are not her." She shook her head and put on her anger facemask. "Now leave girl before I have you sent away."

"Fine." The bard propped her staff against the table and pulled her satchel forward. She pulled out one of her scrolls and tossed it at the woman. "That is mine."

The old woman peered up suspiciously but unrolled the scroll. Her eyes passed over the story and she came to the end to see Gabrielle's signature. "Alright." She raised an eyebrow at the Amazon Queen. "If your signature matches this one, I'll let you talk to the person in charge."

"Give me a parchment and quill." Gabrielle took her scroll back then rolled it up to put it away.

The old woman pushed a scroll and quill forward with an amused expression.

The bard smirked for a second but took the quill and signed. Afterwards, she turned the parchment to the old woman.

The woman's tongue ran across her molars. "You can see Talus about subscribing the Academy as a student."

"Thank you," said the bard sincerely. She snatched her staff up before walking past the table and went into the building.

"Third door to the left," yelled the old woman.

Gabrielle laughed to herself as she walked down the dark corridor. She spotted the third door and went in with a smile.

The old man lifted his head at seeing the woman enter. "Hello, young lady."

"Hello." The Amazon Queen shut the door on entering. "I was told to speak with you about joining the Academy."

"Yes, I am Talus." The man stood up from his desk. "And you are?"

The bard took a few steps and shook hands. "The name is Gabrielle."

Talus's eyes widened. "The Gabrielle?" He released the small hand. "That travels with the Warrior Princess?"

The young woman sighed. "Yes, use to anyway."

"I've heard of your contest here about a year ago." The older man smiled warmly. "You were very good. What brings you here to join the Academy?"

"A new life," utter the bard. She smiled sadly. "I was hoping I'd be allowed here."

"Of course." Talus stepped around his desk with a broad smile. "Tomorrow will be a new day."

Gabrielle chuckled at that then nodded. "Wonderful."

Talus walked over to the door opening it. "I'll show you to your quarters, Gabrielle."

He held the door open. "I am sure the bards here will be excited to meet you."

"Oh boy," whispered the small woman as she walked out.

The old man grinned after closing the door. "You'll be busy with your admirers."

"I take it my name gets around here huh?" The bard walked along side the man.

"Naturally, bards grow up saying they want to be you." He grinned at the young woman.

Gabrielle chuckled when she shook her head. "I'm in for it."

"We could use the help, Gabrielle." He smiled warmly. "You can be one of our... moderators among the bards."

"I'm here for that then." The Amazon Queen glanced up. "To help and learn."

"That's perfect. I'm still rather new to this, being the new owner of the Academy." Talus lifted his attention to the long hall and turned to his left. "Here we are." He opened the door there and let Gabrielle pass through.

The bard walked in to see the same kind of room she had the last time she was here. She also took notice to three other young people in the room.

Talus smiled warmly to the three other bards already in the room. "Everybody, this is the famed Gabrielle of Potidaea that has come to help us."

The three bards were all sitting on their beds. They'd been talking prior to the newcomers. They'd ended their conversation immediately to listen. But now their mouths were dropping at hearing who the young woman was standing before them.

Gabrielle smiled shyly. "Hi everybody."

The bards' eyes widened as much as their mouths.

The Amazon Queen sighed inwardly. *Maybe this was a mistake*, thought Gabrielle, *I'll never fit in with these bards*.

Talus cleared his throat. "Well, dinner is at sunset everybody. Make Gabrielle feel comfortable and do not scare her off either."

Two of the bards chuckled as they came out of their shock slowly.

Talus smiled and left the room silently.

Gabrielle studied the three bards on each of the beds. The bard on the bottom bunk was a male around Gabrielle's age. The one on the bunk above him was younger boy with a dumbfounded expression. Off to the right were two single beds and one was occupied by a young woman about Gabrielle's age. She smiled reassuringly to the three bards. "Well, what are your names?"

The boy sit on the bottom bunk spoke up first. "I'm Jason, I do poetry."

"Thallo," the boy on the upper bunk said as he raised his hand.

Gabrielle turned her head to the young woman on the bed.

The girl saw the gaze and lowered her eyes. "Sappho," she uttered.

A smile eased along the bard's lips. "Nice to meet you all." She sight went back to the entire group.

"You're really Gabrielle?" Thallo asked in a snap voice.

The Amazon Queen chuckled as her weight went to her right foot. "Yup."

Jason shook his head and held his hand out to the bed next to Sappho. "Sit down, your bed."

"Thanks." Gabrielle walked over to the bed and sat slowly.

"Where'd you come from?" Thallo shook his head. "I mean, we know you travel with the Warrior Princess but-"

"What was your last adventure?" finished Jason.

The bard sighed deeply but grinned. "I'm a little to tired to tell stories. I've traveled all day."

Sappho lifted her eyes from the bed to smile faintly to Gabrielle. "Please tell us," she whispered.

Gabrielle gave a warm smile to Sappho and scooted more onto the bed. "Alright, just one before dinner."

The three young bards all brightened up at hearing this. They became quiet so they could listen to the bard of Potidaea.

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Gabrielle watched the two male bards leave the room to head to dinner. She turned her head to Sappho slowly. "Must be hard staying in a room with two guys huh?"

Sappho nodded and lowered her eyes.

"Hey?"

The tiny woman looked up with almost fearful eyes.

"I don't bite." The bard let her lips ease into a loving smile. "Trust me?"

"Yeah," whispered Sappho. She chuckled a little. "Sorry, it's just you're so famed... you're like a goddess in the bard world."

The Amazon Queen shook her head then grinned. "I'm not quite good as you think."

The petite woman moved her head frantically. "That's so not true. You're very good and very popular." She dropped her eye contact. "I hope to be remotely good as you one day."

"I'm sure you will be." Gabrielle lifted her right leg to the bed to rest her arms there.

"How about this, I'll help you get on your path." She shrugged. "I'll..."

"Train me?" Sappho brightened up as a smile reached her eyes. "Gods, I'd love that Gabrielle."

The bard sighed however was smiling. "I'll help you. How does that sound?"

"I'm so excited." Sappho leaped off her bed with a smile. "When can we start?" She moved to stand in front of Gabrielle with an excited expression.

"Tomorrow."

"Perfect." Sappho started to smile bashfully again. "Um... I was wondering if I could read one of your scrolls."

"Sure." The Amazon Queen turned to her satchel on the bed. She extracted a scroll, unrolled it, looked at the title, and grinned. "Here you go. This is one I enjoy all the time."

Sappho took the scroll gingerly and placed it on her bed.

"You ready to go to dinner?" Gabrielle stood up with a stretch.

"Yes." Sappho smiled and walked over to the door. She opened it and waited for Gabrielle.

The bard sighed at seeing the admiration in the smaller woman's eyes. She walked out of the door and sensed Sappho walking beside her. *Wait till the truth catches up to her*, she mused sadly.

The dinner had been in a huge dining hall with loads of other bards. Gabrielle had been overwhelmed by all the people talking to her and the greetings. The entire time, she noticed Sappho had stuck by her side, silently but none the less stayed beside her. That night had brought about her fitful sleep.

Sappho on the other hand had spent a later night as she read Gabrielle's scroll. She became so lost into the story that she almost forgot reality. She hardly slept that night due to the story and the excitement of the tomorrow.

~\*Part 2\*~

Gabrielle sat under the tree, legs propped up, scroll in lap, and she was writing. She stopped as she heard small footsteps come up behind. Her eyes lifted up as she smiled. "Morning sleepyhead."

The petite woman laughed faintly. "Morning Gabrielle."

"Sit down." The bard patted the ground beside her in the sunny day.

The young bard sat beside the Amazon Queen. "What you working on?" she asked.

"A new story about Xena." The older bard lowered her quill to the scroll. "What you have there?" She directed her eyes to the scroll in Sappho's hand.

The tiny bard chuckled as she unrolled her scroll in her lap. "A story I've been

working on."

"May I see?"

"S-s-sure."

Gabrielle received the scroll and scanned over it. She began to notice the writing style. "Mmm." She shifted a little against the tree. "You have a good story line."

"But?" persisted the new bard.

"But you need to learn grammar and the traditional writing style," the bard grinned.

Sappho sighed and whispered, "I'm not good with that stuff."

"It's simple once you get it." Gabrielle leaned towards her friend and placed Sappho's scroll between them. "Okay, here." She pointed to a sentence on the scroll. "Timidly watched, that's wrong." She lifted her eyes to the young girl. Her hands moved in animation. "You don't use an adverb as an adjective." Her eyes lowered to the scroll. "It should be watched timidly." Her eyes peered up into amber ones. "You see what I'm saying?"

"Okay, that makes sense." The tiny bard studied her scroll finding a sentence. "So, like here." She pointed herself. "It should be... 'He walked briskly to the horse' instead of... 'He briskly walked to the horse?'"

"Exactly." Gabrielle nodded in authority. "Also." She started to grin at the other woman. "This is something every new bard doesn't know at first." She looked the scroll and pointed. "Wrong word."

Sappho furrowed her eyebrows. "Affect?"

"Yes." The Amazon Queen chuckled and grinned to the new bard. "That's the wrong affect. You're using the verb you want the noun... effect."

"Ooh." The new bard chuckled then shook her head. "That would make a difference."

"Uh huh." Gabrielle smirked as she said, "Your wrong affect could give the wrong effect on your story."

The two bards now started to giggle together over the small joke.

The Amazon Queen settled back against the tree with a smile. "So there's a few things to watch out for."

"What about traditional writing style?"

The older bard was about to respond but stopped when she saw bards in the garden heading inside. "We'll talk about it later. I think classes are starting now."

Sappho looked up to the sun. "You're right."

The older woman rolled up Sappho's scroll and handed it to her. "There you go."

"Thanks." The petite bard took her scroll then stood up.

Gabrielle gathered up her scroll and quill. She stood next and walked into the Academy with her friend.

The classes for the day dealt with studying of bards around the world. Later on into the afternoon the classes leaned more to history for education. The Academy believed a bard could not be good unless they understood how the world turned and what made it turned. So this even led to a little math and language in the late afternoon. At the end of the classes, the hundred or so bards left to go their own ways. Each having a little homework from those classes to keep their knowledge up.

Gabrielle had learned quickly that the first year or so in the Academy dealt with education. She was rather happy to hear that considering how uneducated the world was today. Despite the fact she was worldly somewhat she decided to stay in the classes knowing she could pick up a lot of things she even didn't know.

However, by the evening Sappho had sought out the bard and they sat out in the garden watching the sunset.

"How long have you been a bard for?"

The Amazon Queen pondered for a second. "Two years." She smiled to Sappho. "I've always loved a good story."

The tiny bard chuckled and gazed back to the sunset. "I understand." Her smile broadened. "I remember when I was young, I fed off bards' stories." Her eyes glossed over in memory. "Then one day I decided to try and write. I was so scared to try because of what my family might say... and well what people might think of my writing."

"But you found out different huh?" Gabrielle's lips eased into a smile as she stared at the sunset and remembered her own similar past. "I was the same way. I only listened to the stories... never wrote them." Her smile went into sadness. "Then I decided I wanted to try writing them and I was so nervous."

Sappho chuckled and sighed deeply. "Me too. It's a limb on a tree to walk out on."

"Uh huh." The bard patted her friend's knee. "But it's a nice view out on that limb huh?"

The new bard nodded gradually and smiled to Gabrielle. "It really is." She released a contented sigh. "Thank you for helping me."

"My pleasure." Gabrielle grinned with a hint of evilness. "See, I don't bite."

Sappho looked away as she turned red. "Yeah," she whispered. "You're still a goddess of the bards."

The older bard groaned and dropped her head. "Thanks... I think."

The tiny bard giggled and stared at the sunset once more. "I've read your stuff since the beginning."

The Amazon Queen furrowed her eyebrows instantly at the other woman. "Really?"

"Uh huh." The new bard smirked at her friend. "I was hooked on the first story I heard." She lowered her eyes. "One reason I tried writing."

"Well, I'm glad you did." Gabrielle stood up after noticing the sun had set. She knew it would be dinner soon. "You're very good." She winked. "A diamond in the rough."

Sappho smiled so happily and she bounced up to her feet. "Thank you." She took a step forward and hugged her friend.

The older bard was surprised but hugged back warmly. When she pulled back, she started walking. "Time for dinner."

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Gabrielle lowered her head as she walked out into the center of the courtyard. She lifted her eyes up to the moon. Her arms folded over her stomach. "How are you doing, Xena?" she whispered to herself. "I miss you."

She'd been gone only two days and was already missing her friend. Each night brought about a dream of her friend. The distance was making her love grow stronger and more needy for the warrior. Her days were dimming each passing moment. But she also was still angry with her friend for what happened. She was angry with herself still. She needed to settle the angry first before doing anything else.

Gabrielle was upset over her life feeling so out of control. She was hoping to gain at least a home here in the Academy. Maybe even family in the people in the Academy. But, first she needed to settle down her raging emotions deep inside. Emotions that consisted of self confidence and misunderstanding.

A footstep echoed through the courtyard.

The bard looked to the entranceway to see Jason. "Hey Jason."

"Hi Gabrielle." He smiled warmly and walked out into the center of the courtyard. "What you doing out here in the night?"

"Thinking." The bard smiled easily at the poet. "Why are you here?"

Jason shrugged a little. "Just came for the view of the moon." He grinned faintly to Gabrielle. "And to think."

"Oooh?" The Amazon Queen chuckled. "About what?"

Jason lifted his eyes to the moon and studied it while standing beside his new friend. "Life." He shrugged. "I only have a little time left here."

"Where you headed too?" Gabrielle furrowed her eyebrows at the young man.

"Somewhere." Jason never turned his attention to the bard. "But... I'll be back someday." He let a sad smile etch along his lips. "But, I had to confess." He smiled at the bard. "You're very good."

"So I've been told." The small woman chuckled at the small man with freckles. "How long have you been doing poetry?"



The poet shrugged. "Since I was little." He grinned at Gabrielle. "Its expressive. You do poetry?"

"I can." The bard's head bobbed. "Sometimes, I prefer stories." Her eyes focused on the full moon. "How long have you been here?"

"Mmm, about a year." The young man crossed his arms over his chest. "I love the Academy and the people." He grinned. "Can get a little gossipy but its family."

"I've noticed that." Gabrielle turned her head at the man quickly. "It's very... family like."

"Yes." Jason's smile went warm. "But when the challenges come each season, everybody gets a little antsy with each other. But we teach each other how to write and express ourselves." He laughed silently. "Its fun." He shook his head. "It's depressing too when people leave here."

"Many leave?"

"Birds have to fly sometime, right?"

The bard nodded in agreement. "Very true." She sighed sadly. *Will I be one of those birds soon?* Gabrielle had to stop her questioning.

The poet grasped the bard's arm. "Let me know if you ever need any help." He let a smile tweak his lips. "It'd be ashame to loose somebody precious as you."

Gabrielle chuckled and lowered her head. "I'll be here as long as I can." She shrugged once Jason released her arm. "We'll see..." Her head bobbed.

"Let's hope it's for a long while." Jason folded his arms over his chest and got an amused expression. "Has anybody ever written about you?"

The bard looked up in a flash with wide eyes. "No," she laughed.

The poet had a sincere expression. "Little Gabrielle... what a perfect character."

The Amazon Queen narrowed her eyes quickly. "Don't you dare, Jason."

"Somebody must write of the writers." Jason winked. "Well, I am going back to the room. Care to join me?"

"I'd love it." Gabrielle began strolling along side her friend. "And you are not writing about a character called, Little Gabrielle."

Jason responded with a snicker.

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Gabrielle shifted a little in her seat. She placed her quill back to the scroll to continue writing. This was something even she didn't know. Her eyes lifted back up to listen to the teacher, Samantha.

"Wait, Miss Sam."

The teacher stopped in the middle of her explanation of traditional writing with conversation. "Yes Thallo?"

Thallo chuckled but went serious. "Why do you... start a new paragraph on each conversation?"

Samantha smiled warmly as she walked over to the blackboard. "Well, picture it like this Thallo." She glanced back to the huge class. "And the rest of you."

Gabrielle lowered her quill to her parchment of notes to listen.

Samantha stood in front of the class placing her thoughts together. "You love your characters, correct?"

Everybody nodded for the most part.

"Now then..." The teacher leaned against her desk with her left hand. "You would want to show you're... respect and love to each of your characters by giving them their own paragraph. You see class?"

Thallo grinned at the teacher. "What if there's a villain and you don't like them?"

Samantha sighed deeply and raised an eyebrow at Thallo. "Thallo, this is something I tell my son often. Be kind to everybody you meet, for they're fighting a hard battle." She pointed a finger at the young man. "So give even your villains a new paragraph for their conversation."

Thallo nodded with a warm smile. "Yes Miss Sam."

"Thank you." Samantha turned shifted her eyes to her desk. "Let's move on then."

Gabrielle chuckled inwardly at hearing the teacher's words. *How true*, she added to herself mentally. She glimpsed across the classroom to see Sappho hard at her writing. She furrowed her eyebrows. *What can that girl be working on so much?* She shook her head in wonderment. She knew Sappho had been working on that scroll since last night when she returned with Jason. She sighed and concentrated on what Samantha was teaching on traditional conversation. One thing was for sure, she was enjoying this teacher's style and pleasant caring air.

The day rolled on for the bard. She kept with her classes but here and there her mind would wonder off to Xena. She was become extremely worried about her best friend. Her angry towards the warrior was fading but her own self anger was growing. And as she thought more about her recent writing, she hated it.

But by that late evening she thought more about the Academy. She was fidgeting constantly in classes not feeling comfortable around the people. She felt out of place in her age and out of place by the fact she'd seen so much more than they. But she tried to stick it out none the less. Maybe one day, she prayed, she'd feel comfortable with the people.

"Now it's time for your next class everybody." Samantha walked down the two steps in front of the class. "Your next class is with Talus, you do not want to be late."

The people in the class chuckled and stood simultaneously. They all walked pass

Samantha and thanked her. Together the people migrated down the large hall to go into Talus's classroom for more English relations.

At the end of the classes Jason and Gabrielle returned together to their room.

"How was your day?"

"Not bad." The bard shrugged. "Yours?"

"Pretty good." Jason smiled warmly. "I'm gaining more classes in poetry. I'm very excited."

"That's wonderful." Gabrielle smiled but her expression went curious. "How do the classes work?"

"Well..." The poet considered. "Well the longer you're here and the more you learn the higher up you move. As time goes on more and more of your classes focus on poetry, writing, or playwright. Depends on what you're into."

The bard nodded. "That makes sense."

"Yes." Jason shifted the scrolls in his hand as he kept walking. "I'm glad we have a poetry class together."

The Amazon Queen brightened up. "Me too." She chuckled. "I love good poetry." She placed her right hand over her scroll satchel. "I'd love to read your work sometime."

"I'd love for you to read it." Jason shot a grin. "If we can trade."

Gabrielle chuckled. "I knew there'd be a catch."

"Of course." The young man winked. "I love your musing."

"Thank you." The small woman fell silent while listening to her footfall echo down the hall. She decided to pick up a conversation. "Do you know what Sappho is writing?"

"I don't know." The poet shrugged. "She's been working on it twenty-four seven." He chuckled. "I don't think she got any sleep last night."

"Mmm, odd." Gabrielle walked over to the door to the right to go into their room.

Jason followed and closed the door silently.

The bard settled her satchel onto the bed. "I think I may go for a walk."

"Alright." The young man sat on his bed. "I'd come, but I'm too tired."

"I need alone time anyway." The Amazon Queen smiled warmly. "Thank you though."

"Welcome, enjoy your walk."

"I will." Gabrielle headed out the door.

The poet watched her go with a sigh. His eyes shifted to Sappho's bed and saw two scrolls lying there. He recognized one as Sappho's and the other as Gabrielle's.

Walking over to the bed, he grabbed them and started scanning over the scrolls.

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Gabrielle raised her head as she neared the Academy. She let a sad smile crease her lips as she stared at the large building. She sighed so deeply it fragmented her heart.

"Gabrielle!"

The bard looked up to see Jason power walking towards her. "Hey Jason, what's up?"

"I need to talk to you." The poet stopped to block Gabrielle's path.

The bard stood in the middle of the garden with her arms folding. "What's going on?"

"Can we go... somewhere private?" hinted the poet.

"Yeah sure." The Amazon Queen gazed around and saw a spot that was more remote. She walked that way with Jason following behind. "What's going on?"

Jason sighed as he rubbed the back of his neck. "Something... surprising happened." He dropped his hand. "Have you read Sappho's new story?"

The bard tilted her head with a curious look. "No... why?"

"Um, well you know your story..." He dropped his head in thought. "Fistful of Dinars?"

"Yes, what about it?"

The poet lifted his eyes with worry. "Sappho, took your story line basically."

"What?" Gabrielle's eyes narrowed instantly. "What you mean?"

Jason shook his head. "I saw one of her scrolls and it was about how this guy goes on a treasure hunt of sorts." He sighed. "Your scroll that you let her borrow was beside yours. She must have used some of your stuff." He laughed in upset. "I couldn't believe it." He ran his right hand through his short brown hair. "She used your idea."

The bard felt a rush of emotion. "What? Why in Hades?" She shook her head. "I can not believe that. She's my friend and she's taken my story?"

"She's plagiarized, Gabrielle."

The Amazon Queen felt her anger reborn instantly. She closed her eyes to calm it but only a few tears came. "My stories are so dear to me," she ushered.

"I know." Jason lifted his right hand to grasp his friend's shoulder. "Go talk to Talus." He shook his head. "This is wrong, Gabrielle."

"No." The bard opened her eyes slowly. "It doesn't matter." She breathed deeply to calm down. "It doesn't matter," she repeated.

"Yes it does." Jason narrowed his eyes while squeezing his friend's shoulder. "She took your story, Gabrielle. Don't let her get away with that."

"No, it's not worth it." The bard lifted her hands to pull back her bangs as the anger still controlled her. "I'm just better off leaving. I never belonged here to begin with."

"What?" whispered the poet. "You belong here. People would miss you extremely."

The small woman shook her head and dropped her hands. "I'm the... black sheep around here." She crossed her arms against her chest. "I'll let Sappho have the story line, she probably does it better than me."

The young man's eyes bugged out. "By the gods, Gabrielle that is your story she's taking. Your idea you worked on... you survived... lived." His eyes narrowed again. "Don't let her sneak off with it."

"Jason..." the bard breathed calmly. "I'll just leave here, that's it."

The man dropped his head. "It's up to you." He moved to hug his friend tightly. "Be safe, my friend."

"I will." Gabrielle smiled sadly as she watched the poet walk off. She looked across the garden with angry eyes. The emotions were surfacing from the past week plus. It caused her tears to flow. "Why this now?" she whispered. "To many things at once."

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Talus raised his eyes from his parchments at his desk. "Hello, Gabrielle."

"Hi, Talus. Do you mind if I come in?" The bard stood in the doorway.

"Come in, please." Talus held a hand out to a seat in front of his desk.

"Thank you." Gabrielle walked in, closed the door, and sat down.

"So, what's on your mind?"

"Well..." The Amazon Queen paused and sat back in her seat. "I'd like to leave the Academy. I really don't want to make a big gossip thing over it. It's a bit personal but I'll answer to anybody that asks."

The man sat back in his seat with a stoic expression. "Why is this then? You said I could ask."

"I did." The small woman lowered her eyes and gazed back up. "I've come to find out that Sappho has used one of my story ideas." She shrugged. "My story is about Xena, a few men, and I all hunting after a treasure. Sappho is working on a similar story line after reading my story that I gave her." She shook her head. "That's sort of why."

The owner of the Academy let his head bob up and down. "That's your reason for leaving?"

"Basically."

"Mmm." Talus fell silent in his thought. He focused his attention back on Gabrielle. "Well, would you like for me to announce that you're leaving or will you do it?"

"I'll do it." The bard gave a sad smile. "My job."

The owner nodded and shifted in his seat. "It's a shame." His eyes narrowed faintly. "There are other people in this world, I know, that have done this sort of story line." He shook his head. "I'd wish you and Sappho had talked this over first." His hands folded together on the desk. "I am not choosing a side... but I've seen other bards leave this Academy over the samething." He lowered his hands to his lap. "I've seen so many similar story lines in this world... its hard to accuse another. It's a subjective thing to do considering the facts."

"I know," whispered the bard as her head dropped. "I'll leave tomorrow morning." She stood up. "Thank you Talus."

The man nodded and watched the young woman walk out of his office. He sighed deeply and went back to his work at the desk.

Gabrielle walked back to her room she shared. Going in, she saw her scroll beside Sappho's on the bed. Carefully she picked up Sappho's scroll and sat on her own bed to read the first part of the story. As she scanned over the story, she started to cry. There she saw her story idea, not her story line. She also noticed Sappho's story all in third person while hers had been in first person. Gabrielle rolled up the scroll and placed it on Sappho's bed. She took her own and slipped it into her satchel.

The bard stood up shaking. "Great," she mumbled. "Talus was right." The door opened and she looked up.

"I heard you're leaving, Gabrielle."

The Amazon Queen nodded gradually. "I am."

"Wait, you can't leave the Academy." Sappho walked in and closed the door behind. "Why are you leaving? This isn't fair."

"I don't want to talk about it right now." The older bard started to brush pass the petite woman.

"No." The young bard grabbed her friend's arm. "Why are you leaving?!"

"We'll talk about it... later Sappho." Gabrielle closed her eyes to control her anger. "Not now, I'm to emotional for it." Her eyelids lifted. "But, its about you."

Sappho narrowed her eyes as she shook her head. "That's it, I give up." She dropped her hold. "To many good bards have left here and I can't handle it anymore."

"Sappho, please."

The young bard stepped back. "I just give up with these games. People talk to much."

Gabrielle held her hands up. "Sappho, nobody said anything about you." She dropped her hands. "I noticed your new story about the treasure hunt and how it is like mine. I got angry and told Talus that I'm leaving."

"Our stories are completely different."

"I know!" the bard yelled while stalking off to another side of the room. "That's my point." She turned around. "You didn't do anything Sappho." She looked away. "Just

so many things have happened to me this week that I've gotten to emotional. I just took this the wrong way. The straw that broke the camels back."

Sappho was hardly listening as she shook her head. "I was going to write a disclaimer saying I used your idea."

"I know," whispered Gabrielle as she dropped her head. "I'm sorry. To many things have happened... and I took them out on you," she uttered. She lifted her head. "I am leaving here tomorrow."

"Gabrielle, don't leave here." Sappho took steps closer. "I'll leave and you stay. I'll get rid of my story." She moved to the bed and grabbed it. She unrolled it preparing to rip it.

"No!" The Amazon Queen sprung forward to snatch the scroll from Sappho. "Do not destroy your story over this!" She rolled it back up. "It's a good story, Sappho. Don't leave over this... over my pettiness."

The new bard closed her eyes. "Don't leave here... please."

"I have too." Gabrielle held Sappho's scroll tightly in one hand. "I don't belong here."

"Yes you do." The tiny woman narrowed her eyes. "This is stupid."

"I'm a black sheep in this Academy anyway, Sappho."

"You're a black sheep?" Sappho had a distressed look. "What's that mean?"

"I don't fit in." Gabrielle came up to her friend. "Don't lose or destroy this." She handed the scroll back. "That's when I'll be furious."

The new bard took her scroll back and stared at it. "Don't leave here."

"I need to... at least for awhile. I feel out of place in this world, I need to find a home." The bard sighed sadly. "I definitely do not belong here if I've reacted to your story like this." She shook her head. "I should have been flattered but I took it the wrong way. I'm sorry I did that to you, Sappho."

Sappho closed her eyes and turned her head away.

The Amazon Queen closed her own eyes briefly and headed for the door. "Bye Sappho."

"Bye Gabrielle." The tiny bard watched her friend leave the room headed for the dining hall to break the news. Sappho wasn't sure if she wanted to go to the dining hall to hear the news. Her arms tightened over her chest with the scroll.

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle sat with her back against the cool wall. Her legs were up on the bed crossed. Tonight at dinner, she had told everybody in the Academy of her leaving.

Every bard there was shocked and upset. Some of them asked why, which she certainly answer to what happened but never why. She even had a teacher ask her and was ready to defend her. However the bard reassured the teacher that it was her own

fault and to leave it be. Everybody left Gabrielle knowing she shouldn't leave and that they'd miss her. All she could think was if only they knew the whole story. It even left her feeling in deep guilt tonight.

So here she sat, thinking and sorting her emotions out. She needed to before leaving tomorrow. She knew she'd miss this place and the huge family feeling she felt here. But what was done was done, so she thought.

On the other bed slept Sappho. Then on the bunk beds the boys sat writing.

The candles around the room flickered and glowed with their own emotions.

The bard had closed her eyes and was thinking. Sleep wasn't the top thing on her list right now.

A small knock came to the door.

Jason looked to the door and whispered, "Come in."

The door opened quietly with a tall form in the doorway.

Thallo looked up from his scroll as his mouth dropped.

The poet was gaping himself just as he did when Gabrielle first came to the Academy.

Gabrielle opened her eyes gradually to see a tall dark warrior standing in the doorway.

"Can we talk?"

The bard blinked. "Xena?" she uttered.

The warrior smiled weakly. "Yeah."

The small woman looked over to the young men to see them stunned to death. She grinned and hopped out of the bed quietly. She walked over to Xena. "Let's talk."

Xena nodded and flickered her eyes over to Jason and Thallo.

"Don't mind them." The small woman grinned to her two friends. "They do that all the time."

The Warrior Princess nodded and stepped back.

The young woman followed out and closed the door behind without a noise. "We can go out to the garden."

"Alright, lead the way."

The bard headed down the torch lit hall towards the gardens. She went outside with her friend.

Xena walked along silently. She was quivering inwardly.

"Xena?" The small woman stopped and turned to her partner in the moonlight. "I'm sorry. This week has been crazy."

"Sssh." The tall woman shook her head. "Let me say what I need to huh?" She



grinned. "Or I'll never be able to do it."

The young woman laughed uneasily. "Alright." She looked around. "Let's sit down." She nodded to a granite bench.

Together the pair trailed over to the bench and sat to face each other.

The older woman stared at her boots as she collected herself. Her eyes lifted to her friend. "I'm sorry about what I've said and done." She reached out with one hand to her friend's knee. "This has been a crazy week and I had a big hand in it." She sighed with pain. "I'd like for you to come back with me... but I think you may have found your place here."

The Amazon Queen lowered her eyes. "Not really... I was planning to leave tomorrow."

"Why?"

"It's a long story, Xena." The small woman reached down to take her friend's hand. "I'll tell you later, alright?"

"Yeah... sure." The warrior rubbed her thumb over her friend's. "What are your plans then?"

"What are yours?" prompted the small woman.

"To travel... what else?"

Gabrielle chuckled and squeezed her partner's hand. "Same here."

"Sso, you want to try traveling together... again?" The dark woman smiled warmly.

"Yeah," whispered the bard. "Tomorrow sound good?"

"Fine." The Warrior Princess licked her lips as she took a deep breath.

"There's more huh?" Gabrielle squeezed her friend's hand again. "What is it?"

Xena looked to their locked hands. "For starts... I don't hold anybody's hand these days." She peered up to her friend.

The bard blushed to her roots. "Sorry," she ushered and started to let go.

The older woman tightened her hold rapidly. "Nor do I want to hold anybody else's."

Gabrielle stopped breathing as her grip on Xena's hand went very tight. "Xena, gods I missed you so much." She shook her head as tears rolled. "I was so worried if you were alright or not. And I've been so angry about how I reacted with everything."

"Me too." The older woman placed her other hand over top of both their hands. "I've been so off these past days without you." She grinned delicately. "Don't leave me again huh? I'm too old for it." She shifted her grin into a smile. "I love you, Gabrielle."

The bard cried more but with tears of happiness and relief. Her free hand covered her mouth then moved to go behind Xena's head. "Gods, I've loved you for so long Xena."

The warrior smiled warmly and leaned towards her partner to touch lips.

The smaller woman was a little shy but pressed her lips against Xena's more as she leaned in. She moaned a little when she felt a strong hand grasp her side.

Xena deepened the kiss with her mouth covering her friend's. She slipped her tongue in carefully and let Gabrielle's into her own.

Eventually, the short woman pulled back from the kiss with a smile. "Traveling with a new relationship huh?"

"Only if you want too." The warrior gave a serious expression.

"Definitely." The bard held her smile. "Thank you for finding me," she whispered and added, "In more than one way."

"For you, only." The warrior let a loving smile take control and she scooted down the bench to pull her friend in close.

~\*Part 4\*~

Gabrielle pulled her scroll satchel strap over her head and shifted out the room quietly not to wake anybody. Coming out of the door she saw her partner waiting. "Hey," she whispered as she closed the door.

"Morning."

"Early morning you mean." The bard grinned to her warrior and came up beside her.

"You sure about leaving?" Xena held her partner at the hips.

"Yeah." The small woman nodded while brushing her fingers through her hair. "This isn't my place."

"It's nice here."

"I know." Gabrielle shrugged. "Let's go huh?"

"Yeah." Xena leaned down and kissed her bard tenderly.

The Amazon Queen smiled and patted her friend's chest. She walked down the hall with her head down.

The Warrior Princess strolled along side with a stoic expression.

The pair came outside of the Academy through the large double wood doors.

"Wait, Gabrielle!"

The bard stopped at the bottom of the steps and looked up to see Jason. She turned her head to Xena. "Go ahead, I'll catch up."

"Alright, I'll be in the stable getting Argo ready."

The young woman nodded. "Be right there."

Xena gave her own nod and headed towards the stables.

Jason rushed down the steps to his friend. "Please don't leave, Gabrielle." He grabbed his friend arm. "This is ridiculous for you to leave here. You're apart of this Academy." He narrowed his eyes with conviction. "You're an Academy bard."

"I'm not." Gabrielle paused as she let out a heavy breath. "This isn't my place here, Jason." She locked eyes with the young man as her expression went into pain. "I've always been a loner as a bard." She gave a smile of pain. "I love this place but I do not fit in with the others. As I've said, I'm a black sheep."

"You've lost confidence in yourself haven't you?" The poet shook his head in disbelief. "You're the best bard in all of Greece and you don't know it." He released his hold

"I don't know what to think, Jason." The Amazon Queen sighed in depth. "I've wronged the Academy and the people with getting upset over Sappho's story." She shook her head. "I should not have done that so I'm paying back everybody by removing myself." She leaned against her staff. "Sappho will make it far, I do not need to hold her back by being here." She shrugged.

"Will you ever come back?" Jason's face shifted into a plea.

"I don't know." The bard gave a sad smile. "If I felt right in being here and if everybody wanted me back. I'd be here in a heartbeat." She pressed her lips together for a moment. "If they ever understood what happened and were able to forgive me for it."

The poet closed his eyes in a little of frustration. "This is overly complicated." His eyes opened again. "I think you'd be back if you forgave yourself over something this small."

"Maybe so." The small woman straightened up. "Either way, I need time away so I can think and get things straightened out in my head what's happened to me this week." She smiled with love. "But, this place has had a good affect on me. I'd highly encourage it to anybody. Stay here as long as you can." She stopped for an instant. "Take care, Jason."

"I will... you too." The young man stepped forward to hug his friend tightly. "I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you too." Gabrielle pulled back and looked to her right to see her warrior standing near Argo, waiting. "My ride." She grinned up to the poet.

The young man chuckled and smiled to his friend. "Safe travels." He leaned forward to kiss his friend's forehead. "I'll listen out for your stories," he whispered.

"Thank you." The young woman turned to head to her partner. "Bye Jason" she called when she looked back to flash a smile.

Jason waved with a sad smile. "Bye Gabrielle." He watched his friend walk down the dusty road towards Athens. A sad smile broke out across his lips. With slumping shoulders and turned back to the huge double doors of the Academy of Performing Bards and walked in. He had a poem to write about a bard that stayed at in an

Academy for a short-lived time. Jason could only hope his poem would be heard and seen in equality. And he could only hope it would bring back that bard, someday.

## The End