

# ~ The Conqueror ~

by Mavis Applewater

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A big heaping thanks goes out to Joanne my over worked and under appreciated beta reader.

As always, this is for Heather

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## PART ONE

"Break her legs," The Conqueror added with a sneer. The redhead cried out in agony as the Conqueror turned her back on the young rebel. *'Now maybe you will fear me,'* The dark warrior thought coldly, trying to brush away the feelings of guilt that were creeping up on her.

"Conqueror?" Malik, her second-in-command, stammered nervously.

"Yes?" Xena responded in a bored tone.

"She's the one," Malik offered. the Conqueror noticed how the sweat on the man's brow began to bead up.

"The one what?" the Conqueror snapped, annoyed with the man's presence. Seeing to the day's duties and subsequent executions had not brought the pleasure she'd been seeking. Now she only wished to retreat inside her palace to escape the young rebel's whimpering.

"The slave," Malik tried to explain. "The one you have been seeking. She was the one who killed Mezentius," he explained nervously.

"Now you tell me," the Conqueror snapped bitterly. "This information would have been more useful before I ordered her crucified and had her legs broken." Malik looked down despondently. "Fine; the damage has been done. Cut her down. Have her brought to the room next my own and call for my healer. Let her followers know that I am sparing her life because she murdered one of my enemies."

"You wish to room her in the quarters you keep for your body slave?" Malik inquired in confusion.

"Do I stutter?" the Conqueror challenged him with an icy stare.

"No, Conqueror," Malik responded quickly.

"Good, then cut her down before she dies," the Conqueror grumbled before storming off to her palace.

"Why is it so hard to find good help?" Xena pondered as she disrobed. After she removed the cumbersome regal wear she donned for her public appearance, she dressed in a simple robe. Approaching footsteps alerted her that someone was nearing her private chamber. She threw open the door before the man had an opportunity to reach it. "Darfus," she sneered at her former second-in-command. She did enjoy belittling the man who had betrayed her many years ago. Perhaps giving him a dressing down would lift her spirits.

"Conqueror?" he addressed her respectfully. She didn't miss the look of hatred in his cold eyes. She simply sneered at him as she lifted a single eyebrow, questioning his presence. "I understand that you have decided to spare the rebel."

Just at that moment Malik and her healer approached, carrying the girl in question into the slave quarters. "I see you have *other* plans for her," he continued with a snarl.

"She is the one who murdered Mezentius, and if I'm not mistaken, that backstabbing arms dealer Krykus as well," the Conqueror informed him flatly. "Why weren't you aware of that when you arrested her?" she accused him. She had been looking for the slave who had rid her of the one man who had dared to challenge her as she lay claim to all of Greece. It had been years since the slave girl had murdered the two men and fled, but Xena never forgot how it helped her in her mission to become the Destroyer of Nations.

"I . . . Uhm . . . ," he began to stammer.

'*So you knew,*' her sharp mind quickly processed. "You were the one who arrested her," she continued harshly. "I seem to recall you boasting about having crushed the rebels and captured their leader? I am sparing her life for ridding me of Mezentius and Krykus, since by murdering them she accomplished what you failed to do. Perhaps I should find other duties for you to tend to? The stables could always use another hand," she threatened as his face turned red in anger. The angry man opened his mouth to speak. "Go before I send you to the stables," she threatened in a low growl. "And I don't want you anywhere near my private chambers again."

Darfus may have been untrustworthy but he wasn't stupid. He saluted her and quickly made his departure. "One of these days you will pay for the Gauntlet," she hissed softly as he disappeared from her view. "Now I must see to my new slave. Somehow I don't think I will be a welcome sight," she muttered as she reentered her chambers.

Xena strode quietly through the door that connected her room with the tiny chamber she reserved for her body slave. Since she hadn't had one in a long time, the room was empty. "How is she?" the Conqueror inquired of Rafkin, her healer. He and Malik jumped at the sound of her voice. The girl didn't flinch; she simply stared up at the ceiling her emerald eyes devoid of emotion.

"Your men do good work," Rafkin grumbled as he examined the small girl. "Clean break. She should heal quickly," he explained flatly as the girl continued to stare up at the ceiling, seemingly unaware that she was lying on the bed naked. Xena noticed the girl's state of undress as she felt a slight flush of desire. "Malik, go tend to your duties and keep a close eye on Darfus," she instructed her second-in-command who was keeping his back respectfully to the injured girl.

"I always do," Malik responded thoughtfully.

The Conqueror smiled at the dark young man as he made his exit. "She needs rest," Rafkin informed her in a stern voice as he pulled the blankets up to cover the young rebel. Xena smirked at his cautioning tone as she watched his gnarled hands tucking the girl in.

"I'm not an animal," the Conqueror responded drolly.

"I know." Rafkin smirked. "I am probably the only one who does know that. I will back in the morning, little one," he offered to the still unmoving girl.

Xena nodded her gratitude as the old man left them alone. Xena lit the candle on the table beside the girl's bed and took a seat in the chair next to the bed. "So tell me about yourself," Xena casually asked. She smiled when she noticed the rebel's eyes blink in surprise. The girl turned her head and cast an icy glare at the Conqueror who now sat by her bedside. "Not to worry; I won't harm you," Xena reassured her. "Unless you give me a reason to," she added in a cautioning tone. "Name?"

The rebel simply raised her fair brow in defiance. "What is your name?" Xena demanded as the rebel continued to glare at her. "I have to call you something, and trust me, you won't like the name I will choose for you," she threatened.

"Gabrielle," the girl finally spat out.

"Now that wasn't so hard," Xena said as she blew out an exasperating sigh. "I assume that you already know my name since you have been cursing it in every tavern in Greece."

"The Conqueror, Destroyer of Nations, Xena Warrior Princess, the Bitch of Greece," Gabrielle spat out.

"I never cared for that last one," Xena retorted thoughtfully. "But since everything you have been spouting off to the masses about me is the truth, you can call me Conqueror. I suppose you are wondering why I spared your life?" Gabrielle thrust her chin out in defiance. "Careful, little girl. I can still nail you back up on that cross. Even if you manage to escape I should warn you that

you don't have any followers anymore. I made certain that they all know that their peace-loving little leader is a murderer."

Xena could feel the hatred seething from the younger woman. "Mezentius and Krykus," Xena explained coldly. "You are the one who murdered them, aren't you?"

"Yes," Gabrielle hissed in response as her eyes grew darker.

From the cold hatred that now clouded the younger woman's eyes, Xena knew that it was the truth. And she knew why this champion for peace and justice had committed the act. "I understand," Xena offered, not knowing why she was trying to comfort this young woman who obviously hated her.

"Do you?" Gabrielle seethed.

"Yes," Xena confessed. "Mezentius owned you. A young thing like you is just the type he'd enjoy for a body slave. He probably shared you with Krykus as a reward for a deal that went very well. They did something, or something inside of you that you had thought was long dead awoke, and you snapped. You killed both of them and ran away. Finally free for the first time in years, you misguidedly decided to work for the silly notion of fighting for the greater good." She watched as Gabrielle's features softened slightly. "You see, I do understand. In fact, at one time I could have been you. But enough about me, tell me about you."

"I hate you," Gabrielle offered quietly.

"Fine," Xena answered with an uncaring shrug as she wondered why she was even bothering with this girl. "You should know that I don't believe in slavery."

"Really?" Gabrielle scoffed.

"It is true," Xena responded flatly.

"Isn't this room just off of your private chambers? Isn't its sole purpose to house your body slave?" Gabrielle accused her.

"It is just a term," Xena answered in an uncaring voice as she felt a strange sense of guilt wash over her.

"No, it isn't," Gabrielle responded bitterly.

"No one has lived in this room that didn't wish to serve me," Xena defended herself. "I have never forced my desires on anyone."

"That may be true," Gabrielle grunted. "But you have enslaved almost all of Greece and the surrounding nations."

"I am the ruler of this land," Xena boasted with a sneer. "After you have healed then I will find a place in one of my palaces to put you to work," Xena informed her coldly. "Of course you may change your mind and find your present accommodations to your liking," she added with a throaty purr as her hand cupped the smaller woman's face.

Not surprisingly Gabrielle jerked her head away and returned her focus to the ceiling. Xena caressed Gabrielle's cheek with the back of her fingers as she lowered her head. "I do so love a challenge," she whispered hotly in the unmoving blonde's ear as her fingers brushed across the soft blanket that was covering Gabrielle's body. "Tell me, have you only been in the service of men?" Xena taunted her as she slipped her hand under the blanket and ran her long fingers across the younger woman's firm abdomen. Despite the blonde's unwavering stare, the warrior could feel Gabrielle's skin responding to her touch. She smiled as she removed her hand and readjusted the bed covers. "Sleep," she commanded the smaller woman as she stood.

"I'm not a pet," Gabrielle flared.

"Hmmm," Xena gloated as she left the room.

Xena stood by the fire in her room, smiling as she fought against the fire building inside of her. "I think my new charge might just be the distraction I've been seeking," she pondered aloud to her empty room. "What am I thinking? She will probably just try to kill me the first chance she gets," the brooding warrior noted. A cruel smile emerged. "Should be interesting."

## PART TWO

Having completed her duties as ruler of most of the known world for the day, the Conqueror retired to her chambers and undressed. As was her usual habit she dressed herself in a soft silk robe and nothing else. The attire she chose to wear in the privacy of her bedchamber always gave her a strange sense of comfort. It reminded her of those few short days she'd spent in the company of Lao Ma. To this day Xena always regretted not paying heed to her mentor's words. Shrugging off the troublesome thoughts she made her way into the room that connected with her own.

Rafkin was covering the small woman's body as she entered. "How is she?" Xena demanded. The older man jumped in surprise.

"I wish you would cease doing that," the tiny man grumbled. "I'm an old man. We don't like being frightened," he explained as he looked down at his young patient. Xena couldn't help but chuckle at the man's antics. Rafkin was a gifted healer and probably the closest thing she had to a friend.

"How is our patient?" she repeated in a gentler tone.

"Very well," Rafkin informed her. "See for yourself."

Xena noticed the rebel flinch at the suggestion. She approached the bed carefully in order not to frighten the girl any further. She slowly pulled back the covers. Once Gabrielle's body was exposed to her watchful eye, she examined the wooden braces that held her legs captive. "Looks nice," she commented absently as her eyes drifted up the young rebel's body. Leaving Gabrielle's body exposed she placed her palm on the girl's firm abdomen as she turned her gaze toward Rafkin.

"I know that look," the elderly man sighed as he took in the weary woman's gaze. "Sparta, Persia or Rome?" he inquired directly.

"All three," the Conqueror sighed heavily as her fingers absently stroked the blonde's firm flesh. The young rebel grunted in displeasure. "Yes?" Xena droned as she turned her attention to the young blonde. She could see the woman shiver from the intense gaze Xena cast down upon her.

"You capture and control all of the city states and leave Sparta free. Why?" Gabrielle demanded.

"Persia," Xena explained flatly. "The Spartans, or rather the myth of the Spartans, will keep the Persians at bay. I'm not concerned that they are arrogant enough to try to recapture Corinth or Thebes. The Spartan's themselves will cause Sparta's downfall. I just need to wait and then I will free the Helots and sweep through Sparta."

"What do you mean?" Gabrielle inquired with a genuine curiosity as she lifted herself up on her elbows. The woman seemed to be completely unaware of her nakedness. Xena's eyes widened as they drifted down to the young rebel's firm full breasts.

Xena placed a gentle hand on the young woman's shoulder, guided her back down, and covered her body with the blanket. As she clasped the blonde's shoulder she felt the etching of a scar. "Lie down and when I return we will talk about Sparta," Xena promised as she stood, her long fingers still tingling from touching the blonde spitfire. She motioned for Rafkin to follow her.

Once she had led the healer out into the corridor, she closed the door to the rebel's room. "Discussing military strategies with a rebel?" Rafkin questioned her.

"Who is she going to tell?" Xena quipped. "I could use someone to converse with."

"Am I not good company?" he teased.

"Yes, you are." Xena smiled. "But you hate discussing military strategies."

"I'm a healer," he noted indignantly.

"I understand," Xena agreed. "Will she heal completely?" the Conqueror inquired in an unusually shy tone.

"Her body, yes," he explained grimly. "Her spirit may never recover. You felt the scar on her shoulder?"

"Yes." Xena shrugged, feigning indifference. "It's not uncommon. She tried to run away and was punished. Was she . . .?" she began in a fearful voice.

"From what I can see of her old wounds, she was a kitchen worker, used as a laborer, and yes, a body slave," he explained carefully. "What are you going to do with her once she recovers? Her body is strong and she will be back on her feet soon."

"I don't know," Xena answered honestly. "Perhaps she would fare well in the kitchen at my palace in Corinth?" Xena surmised as Rafkin gave her a knowing look. "She will only stay here if she wants to," she defended herself. "I doubt that I will be able to sway her in that direction."

"Yet you will try," he noted thoughtfully as she quirked an accusing eyebrow down at the frail man. "I'm warning you; her spirit has just about died."

"Her spirit seemed fine when she was spouting platitudes to the masses," Xena countered as she recalled the look of defiance the girl cast at her even as her men were tying her to the cross.

"But you have already shamed her in the eyes of her followers," Rafkin explained. "And later you will parade her around as if she is your body slave, whether she is sharing your bed or not."

"Look, I'm not trying to kill the girl," Xena spat out. "Well, not anymore," she corrected. "I just want her to stop trying to overthrow my government." Rafkin simply stared at her. "How is her appetite?" the flustered warrior spat out in an effort to regain control of the conversation. *'Why is he being so difficult? Yes, I am trying to bed the girl, but I'm not a monster. Am I?'* Xena listened as Rafkin explained that the girl needed to eat more. Neither of them was surprised by her limited ability to eat. Gabrielle probably hadn't had a decent meal in years. When he was finished, Xena abruptly dismissed the healer.

Xena returned to Gabrielle's chamber and took a seat next to the bed. "So you want to hear my theory on why the Spartans will bring about their own downfall?" Xena asked the young rebel who was eying her suspiciously. "Fine. I will tell you but you must tell me something about yourself." She could see Gabrielle cringe at her suggestion. "Something simple to start with - like your childhood," Xena prompted the frowning woman.

### PART THREE

So it began. Xena explained how the Spartan's cruel and strict code was causing their numbers to dwindle. Many of the Spartans were denied citizenship because they failed to live up to the unrealistic standards. Top it off with their unusual and disturbing mating practices and the army was dwindling simply because the Spartans couldn't let go of their old ways. Xena theorized that between the decreasing numbers in their army plus the lowered moral all she had to do was wait, then she would free the Helots who the Spartans had enslaved to provide them with food and whatever they demanded. She would then sweep through Sparta and claim the land for her Greece.

Xena allowed her hands to wander as she spoke. She never touched the woman in an overt sexual manner; she simply eased her into accepting her touch. Gabrielle seemed to relax as she listened to the raven-haired warrior. The young woman interrupted constantly, offering her opinion. Xena was impressed by the rebel's quick mind. It saddened her that such an intelligent gifted woman had been enslaved.

Their conversations became a nightly ritual. Xena learned of Gabrielle's peaceful childhood growing up with her sister Lila in the peaceful village of Potedia. Xena's touches grew slightly bolder each night, as she would massage the young woman's body. Despite the fact that Gabrielle wasn't granted the luxury of clothing, Xena never touched her in an overtly sexual manner. She was pleased when Gabrielle's body began to respond to her touch; still she held no doubt that the blonde was well aware of what Xena was doing.

Xena took her time, knowing that winning Gabrielle over would prove to be a challenge. So she listened to the girl's stories and learned everything she could about her. It wasn't hard; the blonde really enjoyed talking. Xena learned how Gabrielle's peaceful existence and innocence had been shattered when Draco's army invaded Potedia and enslaved all the women. Draco had ordered his men not to spoil the goods as he put it. Orsenaclies, one of Draco's generals, took upon himself to break in the new slaves.

Xena felt sick to her stomach as Gabrielle told her how he laughed while she begged for mercy and cried. As Gabrielle retold the horror of being trained, Xena was already plotting her revenge on Orsenaclies. She knew Draco was as harsh as she was; they had even ridden together. Still, even Draco didn't condone rape. Granted, neither of them gave a second thought to the fate of those they sold off. Draco probably knew that his men were violating his captives; he simply chose to ignore it rather than face his men turning against him.

Night after night they talked and Xena learned more about the woman who was weaving some kind of spell over her. She learned of Gabrielle's life being sold or stolen from one owner to the next until she took Mezentius' and Krykus' lives. "It was easy," Gabrielle explained in a disturbingly cold tone. "They had finished with me and ordered me to bring them food. He called me his sweet thing," she added with a hiss. "I felt the knife in my hand, and without thinking, I turned around and plunged it into his heart. It felt good. Krykus was so stunned he didn't move. It only took a moment for me to yank the blade from Mezentius chest to cut Krykus' throat before he regained his senses. I watched as they bled to death and washed the blood from my hands. Then I calmly walked out and informed the guards that they were not to be disturbed. My pulse was racing and it wasn't out of fear. I simply walked out of the fortress and kept going."

"Battle lust," Xena noted thoughtfully. "Some call it blood lust. Killing them excited you."

"Yes," Gabrielle answered softly. "I don't believe in violence but killing them felt good."

Xena's heart dropped as she saw an all too familiar gleam in Gabrielle's eyes. The young woman who had once aspired to become a bard enjoyed feeling the blood of her enemies on her hands. For some strange reason the thought made Xena feel incredibly sad. "Blood lust can be a

dangerous thing," Xena explained softly. "You get lost in a haze of desire," she added, knowing that the young blonde probably gave her body to the first person that interested her in an effort to quell that desire. Xena was surprised when a sudden pang of jealousy shot through her.

"Tell me, Conqueror, what are your plans for me?" Gabrielle inquired directly. "Now that I am healing and still have managed to resist your charms."

"What do you want, Gabrielle?" Xena asked, surprising herself with the question.

"I can't have what I want," Gabrielle responded softly.

Moved by the heart wrenching tone in the young rebel's voice, Xena reached out and cupped her face. Gabrielle jerked away from her touch and pushed Xena away. The Conqueror was becoming accustomed to the rebel's resistance. At times Gabrielle would even try being cruel with her. "Still trying to get me to throw you in the dungeon or execute you?" Xena quipped, knowing that Gabrielle sought that if she couldn't have her freedom.

"You should have left me to die on that cross," Gabrielle flared bitterly.

"But I didn't," Xena retorted. "And I won't lock you in a dungeon or kill you unless I . . ."

"Unless what?" Gabrielle demanded. "Unless I refuse you?"

"Stop," Xena commanded. "Be careful what you wish for, little girl."

Gabrielle stared back at her defiantly. Xena understood the need to stop existing and end the pain. She knew that she would never do that to this woman who's life had been stolen from her. There was something about the blonde that had gotten to her and she was defenseless against it. It was as if the rebel had melted a layer of ice from her cold heart. Suddenly angry with herself for thinking such foolish things, she reached out, clasped the back of Gabrielle's head, and pulled her towards her. She could feel the heat emanating off of Gabrielle's body as she captured her lips.

Xena was surprised and pleased when Gabrielle offered no resistance. *'She wants this.'* The Conqueror's heart soared as she parted the blonde's lips and deepened the kiss. As she explored the warmth of Gabrielle's mouth, she could feel the blonde's breathing becoming ragged. She pulled down the blanket that was covering the rebel's body and cupped her breast while Gabrielle's tongue joined her own and engaged in a sensual duel. Xena felt Gabrielle's nipple harden from her touch. Just as suddenly as the fiery exploration had begun, Gabrielle's tongue retreated and her body stilled. Aware that the woman was no longer responding to her, but had retreated into performing what she had been trained to do, Xena released the younger woman from her grasp.

Xena released a sigh of regret as she stood. The feeling grew as she watched Gabrielle lower the blanket down to reveal her body. The blonde lay down with a distant look in her eyes. "I've told you before; that isn't what I want," Xena explained as she pulled the blanket back up and covered

Gabrielle's body. Gabrielle looked up at her in confusion. "Offer me your body when you desire me to do the same," Xena said softly as Gabrielle continued to stare at her with a bewildered look. "Have you ever offered your body to someone you desired?" Xena asked her seriously.

"No," Gabrielle responded in a whimper that even Xena had trouble hearing.

"Has anyone you've desired offered you their body?" Xena pressed, not really wanting to hear the rebel's answer.

"Once," Gabrielle responded absently. "After I was free. But I didn't let her touch me."

"Blood lust," Xena accepted in a knowing tone. "Good night, Gabrielle," Xena offered in a sad voice.

After Xena had retreated back into the privacy of her own chambers, she began to question her sanity. "Why didn't I just accept?" she asked as the hair on the back of her neck rose. A flash of light confirmed her suspicions.

"My thoughts exactly," a deep voice responded in an incredulous tone.

"Ares," Xena said with a sneer as she turned to the God of War.

"Would you mind telling me just what you are doing?" he demanded.

"Excuse me. I don't seem to recall pledging my allegiance to you," Xena quipped in a bored tone.

"Another matter I would love to discuss with you." He smirked as he reclined on her bed.

"Get up and get out," Xena instructed him as she rolled her eyes in disgust. It was a familiar game with her and the God. He pursued her and she flatly refused, which only fanned increase his interest. Tonight she possessed neither the interest nor patience to deal with him.

"Fine," Ares conceded as he stood up. "First, tell me what is going on with that irritating blonde you should have crucified?"

"What were you doing? Watching us, hoping to get a cheap thrill?" Xena groaned in disgust.

"Yes," Ares responded honestly. "But that's not what is really important. She is no good for you. She is a peace loving pain in the butt. And I shouldn't have to point out that she has blood on her hands. I was there, and despite the way she remembers things, she acted in self-defense. Xena, Blondie is messing with your focus, and despite the fact that you haven't pledged your allegiance to me yet, you are good for business."

"There is nothing wrong with my focus," Xena lied as her mind drifted back to the attractive woman in the next room.

"Right," Ares scoffed. "Just bed her or kill her already, because you have far more important matters to deal with." Xena simply ignored him as he grumbled under his breath. Another flash appeared and there was a scroll in his hand. "Caesar has been busy," he stated firmly as he handed her the scroll.

"Caesar." The Conqueror seethed as she snatched up the scroll and quickly unrolled it.

The Conqueror was practically drooling with anticipation as she reviewed her enemy's activities. "Now that's my girl." Ares beamed before vanishing. All thoughts of Gabrielle faded as she reviewed the document, which explained all of Caesar's recent movements. Xena's head jerked up as she felt the presence of another in the room. A soft flash of pink light floated into the room just before the Goddess Aphrodite revealed herself.

"What is it? A slow day on Mt. Olympus?" Xena griped. "Who's next? Artemis?"

"Yeah, like Artemis would visit you," Aphrodite scoffed. "Did you like slaughtering most of her precious Amazons?"

"Something like that," Xena grunted, not understanding why people never remembered the good things she did like building schools and roads? "So what brings the Goddess of Love into my bedchamber?" Xena teased the busty Goddess with a sensual purr.

"You wish." Aphrodite giggled. "I was just wondering what you are planning to do with the Bard?"

"What Bard?" Xena asked in confusion.

"Gabrielle," Aphrodite said in exasperation.

"Oh, her." Xena shook her head. "Trust me; I have plans for her," Xena added with a leer.

"Besides doing the horizontal mambo with her," Aphrodite chastised her. "If that's all you wanted, you could have done that by now." Xena opened her mouth to protest when Aphrodite simply waved her hand in a dismissive manner. "I know. Not until she offers herself to you, which she wants to do by the way."

"No, she doesn't," Xena argued. "She thinks I'm evil."

"She wants to think that you are evil." Aphrodite chuckled.

"Hey, I am evil," Xena protested.

"Whatever, Warrior Babe." Aphrodite blew her off as she waved her hand, making a stack of scrolls appear on the table before Xena.

"What are these for?" Xena demanded, feeling the last of her patience crumble away.

"What is a Bard without a scroll?" Aphrodite explained.

"She isn't a Bard," Xena fumed.

"She could be," Aphrodite said. "You love her stories. You know, the ones she tells you when she is trying to avoid telling you about her past. Admit it; you really like them."

"They're okay," Xena lied, knowing in her heart she loved it when Gabrielle would go on and on with some fanciful tale or another.

"It's your call. You can banish her off to some kitchen or use her as a storyteller or scribe," Aphrodite uttered triumphantly before vanishing.

"Conqueror?" came a meek voice. Xena's eyes darted to the doorway that separated her chamber from Gabrielle's. "I heard yelling and my name. Are you all right?"

"I'm having the strangest day," Xena confessed as she rubbed her face, trying to clear her thoughts. "Maybe I need to go and kill something," she pondered as her eyes drifted to Gabrielle wrapped in a blanket, hobbling towards her. "You should be resting," Xena blurted out as she crossed the room quickly and gathered Gabrielle up in her arms. "Your leg braces were only removed this morning," she chastised the younger woman. For some unknown reason, she carried her to her bed instead of returning the blonde to her own room.

Xena wasn't thinking about her actions as she lowered the bedding and then gently removed the blanket that covered Gabrielle's body. Without leering at the blonde's body like she usually did, Xena simply tucked the girl into bed. Gabrielle looked up at her in bewilderment as Xena brushed Gabrielle's hair from her brow. "Are you sure that you are all right?" Gabrielle questioned her.

"No," Xena confessed with a shy smile. "Look, I know you are probably bored locked up in that room all day long and you are not strong enough to go outside yet. There are some blank scrolls on my table. How about tomorrow you keep yourself busy by writing down some of those stories you like to tell?" Xena's voice remained steady; on the inside her heart was pounding like a young buck proposing marriage to his sweetheart.

"You want me to write for you?" Gabrielle exclaimed in wonderment.

"If you want to," Xena encouraged her, completely captivated by Gabrielle's smile. It was the first time she had seen the blonde truly happy.

"Thank you," Gabrielle whispered with soft sincerity.

Xena blinked in surprised when she realized she had placed Gabrielle in her bed instead returning her to her own. "I guess you should sleep here tonight," Xena muttered, feeling slightly uneasy at the thought. *'What in Hades is wrong with me? My palms are sweating, my heart is*

*racing, and I'm actually being nice.'* Her mind raced as Gabrielle snuggled under the covers.

"Don't you need rest?" Gabrielle inquired with a heavy yawn.

"Yes," Xena agreed as she crossed to the other side of the bed, dropped her robe, and climbed into the bed next to Gabrielle who had already drifted off to sleep.

Xena curled up on the opposite side of the bed, fighting the urge to press her now naked body up against Gabrielle's. As she kept her distance from the younger woman's body, Xena once again contemplated her sanity. Xena had only been asleep for a short time before the whimpers and sobs of her bed companion awoke her. Xena was panic stricken as she watched the sleeping woman toss and turn, tears staining her delicate features. "Gabrielle?" she called out as she gathered the sobbing woman up in her arms.

Gabrielle clung to Xena as the warrior tightened her arms around the blonde. "You're safe," she whispered gently in Gabrielle's ear as the smaller woman trembled in her arms. Xena lowered Gabrielle down onto the bed and covered her once again with the blankets as Gabrielle nestled against her body. Xena gave in to the need to comfort the small woman.

Xena was perfectly content to simply hold the smaller woman in her arms. That is, until she felt the soft touch of Gabrielle's lips teasing her neck and shoulders. Suddenly Xena was aware of the fact that Gabrielle's naked body was lying on top of her own and the blonde's mouth and tongue were fanning the flames of her desire as she teased Xena's sensitive neck.

Xena caressed Gabrielle's back as she felt the younger woman's nipples brush against her skin. Xena looked up in amazement as Gabrielle lifted her body, allowing the bedding to fall away from them as she straddled the warrior's hips. Neither of them spoke as Gabrielle's calloused hands began a gentle exploration of Xena's broad shoulders. Silently Xena prayed that the silence would continue and Gabrielle would not fall back into the role of her slave or conquest. She watched as the blonde studied her body with her eyes and her hands. Xena gently clasped her lover's hips as she watched her lips part, as the blonde's breathing grew slightly ragged.

Gabrielle's long golden hair cascaded down as she lowered her head and shyly brushed Xena's lips with her own. The feel of Gabrielle's lips gently exploring hers and the soft caresses of the golden hair caressing her body made the warrior's heart beat faster. Xena released a soft moan as she felt Gabrielle's palm cup her breast and begin to gently tease it while she continued to steal soft kisses. The kisses they exchanged were so unlike the one Xena had forced upon the younger woman earlier that evening, and somehow the gentleness of them was far more passionate.

Strangely Xena realized that they could stop at that moment and she would still be happier than she had been in years. The strange thought frightened her as she began to wonder if perhaps Ares was right. *'Am I losing focus because of her?'* The troublesome thoughts quickly vanished as she felt Gabrielle's mouth move from her lips down her body. The blonde circled Xena's erect nipple with her tongue without touching the aching bud. Xena's hands drifted along Gabrielle's hips as she tenderly caressed them.

Xena sighed deeply as Gabrielle suckled her nipple in the warmth of her mouth. Xena simply allowed her lover to go at her own pace as she felt Gabrielle's desire painting her skin. As Xena's own desire grew she fought against the urge to flip the smaller woman over and ravish her. Now was not the time to allow the ugly dark side that brewed inside of the warrior out of hiding.

Gabrielle shifted her body and pressed her firm thigh against the warrior's passion as Xena mirrored her movement. "Please," Gabrielle whispered against her skin as her hips began to sway against Xena's body. Xena responded by thrusting her hips forward and pressing her throbbing clit against the blonde's thigh. Gabrielle whimpered in pleasure as they began to sway in unison.

Xena cupped Gabrielle's face and gently guided her lips up to hers. Gabrielle captured Xena's lips in a fiery kiss as they thrust against each other. Xena's body was on fire and Gabrielle's rhythm grew more demanding as they explored one another's mouth with their tongues. Gabrielle's clit pressed harder against Xena's thigh as the blonde's thigh stroked the warrior's clit with the same urgency.

Xena's body was trembling as Gabrielle's body arched up. The warrior knew they were both nearing the edge as the blonde's hips began thrusting in a frantic rhythm. Xena simply held her lover's hips as Gabrielle drove them into ecstasy. They cried out as their bodies exploded against one another. Xena held Gabrielle as the blonde panted heavily.

"I've never felt anything like that," Gabrielle confessed as her body continued to quiver. Despite the fact that it wasn't the most earth-shattering experience the warrior had experienced, she had to agree with Gabrielle; she too had never experienced intimacy this deeply before.

Frightened by the thought, Xena couldn't speak as she pulled Gabrielle down and wrapped her arms around her. She tried to banish her sudden fears as she held the smaller woman. Holding Gabrielle felt too good and the Destroyer of Nations was afraid of what she was feeling as her lover drifted off to sleep still cradled in her arms.

Xena awoke still cradling the slumbering Gabrielle in her arms. A feeling of pure bliss washed over her. Suddenly she was frightened and she rolled the blonde off her body. Xena couldn't understand what was wrong with her. She never allowed her conquests to spend the night, much less spend it in her arms. The Conqueror sprang from the bed in a need to distance herself from the smaller woman.

"Did I do something wrong?" Gabrielle inquired in a sleepy voice.

Xena simply stared at the younger woman as if she had sprouted a hydra out of her head. Xena felt her body warming at the sight of the naked woman lying on her bed. Gabrielle's emerald eyes were burning her skin and Xena felt her heart skip a beat. Suddenly the warmth in Gabrielle's eyes dimmed as the blonde hobbled out of bed and knelt before her. "Did I displease you, Conqueror?" Gabrielle inquired as she stared down at the cold floor she was kneeling on like a good slave should.

"Get up!" Xena blurted out more harshly than she had intended to do. But the sight of Gabrielle

kneeling before her like a slave felt like a knife cutting through her. The look of confusion was evident on Gabrielle's face as Xena assisted her to her feet. "Sorry, I didn't mean to snap at you," Xena apologized. Her face fell when she realized that she had actually apologized to the woman. She had spent the last moon trying to get her to agree to become her body slave.

Gabrielle seemed equally surprised by the Conqueror's apology. "Now that you are more mobile, you will need some clothing. It will be appropriate for your present position," Xena cautioned her. "You can work on your scrolls at my table. I will be leaving in a few days; I have some business to take care of," she explained as her thoughts turned to Caesar and the chance to beat him down once and for all.

"What is my position here?" Gabrielle inquired carefully.

"Just as it was yesterday," Xena responded flatly. "You are my captive, and unless you've had a change of heart, once you are healed I will send you far away. First I will do something that will hurt you deeply." Gabrielle looked up at the tall warrior fearfully. "I am going to do something that will completely discredit you with the rabble-rousers you incited against me."

"Oh." Gabrielle nodded in understanding.  
"You don't seem surprised," Xena stated.

"No," Gabrielle responded in a defeated tone. "You are going to parade me around like I'm your whore, whether or not I am."

"Yes," Xena responded directly.

"I hate you," Gabrielle sighed as Xena stepped closer to her.

"I know," Xena conceded.

"I hate that I wanted you last night," Gabrielle confessed bitterly.

"I know," Xena accepted as her heart sank.

Xena turned away once she felt herself being drawn to the blonde rebel. She prepared for her day as ruler of most of the known world and dismissed Gabrielle from her thoughts. When she returned to her chambers she found Gabrielle seated at the table, dressed in a short white gown appropriate for a slave. The blonde was furiously scribbling something across a scroll. Xena approached the busy woman and looked at the pile of scrolls Gabrielle had filled in one day. "You've been busy," Xena said softly as she examined the scrolls.

Gabrielle jumped in surprise. "I'm sorry. I didn't hear you come in," the blonde apologized as she began to roll up the scroll she was working on.

"You can keep working if you wish," Xena said with a smile as she brushed an ink smudge from Gabrielle's face with her thumb. "You have such a calming effect on me," Xena said absently.

The tension of her day slipped away as she smiled at the young bard.

"Long day?" Gabrielle inquired as she leaned into Xena's touch.

Xena released a heavy sigh as she thought about her arduous day and the news that Darfus and his growing number of supporters were probably conspiring with Caesar and that skinny bitch Callisto to bring her down. "I don't want to talk about it," Xena grumbled, thinking she would much rather deal with a Persian invasion than the growing number of vipers in her own palace. "I will be leaving sooner than expected," Xena explained as she watched the wheels in the young bard's head begin to turn. "If I asked you nicely, would you promise not to run away in my absence?" By the mischievous glint in the blonde's eyes she knew it was a futile request. "Then promise to write to me before my men throw you in the dungeon."

"I will," Gabrielle promised. "When will you be leaving?"

"Why? Planning your escape already?" Xena quipped as she knelt before the bard.

"Possibly," Gabrielle teased as Xena began to caress her thighs.

"I will be departing in the morning," Xena explained as her hands drifted further up the blonde's thighs. "Promise me one more thing. If I should fall in battle, get as far away from here as possible."

Gabrielle blinked in surprise before nodding in agreement. "Where will I be sleeping this evening?" Gabrielle inquired with a soft moan as Xena cupped her firm backside and drew her body closer.

"Where would you like to sleep this evening?" Xena inquired in a husky tone as she began to nibble on the bard's neck.

"Potedia," Gabrielle quipped as she wrapped her legs around Xena's body.

Xena frowned at the blonde's joke, wishing that she could grant Gabrielle's request. "I'm sorry," Xena apologized as she massaged the bard's firm backside. "For tonight I can only offer you your bed or mine."

"Yours," Gabrielle moaned before claiming Xena's lips in a lingering kiss.

Xena was reeling from the passionate kiss and Gabrielle's naked backside filled her hands. She always loved to dress her companions in a simple silk toga without the benefit of undergarments. As she felt Gabrielle tugging at her garments, Xena understood that tonight would not be the gentle exploration last evening had been. Tonight was about passion and desire that they both needed to sate.

Xena felt Gabrielle's center grinding against her waist while she tore the warrior's clothing from her body. They were gasping for air as they broke away from the smoldering kiss. "Do you still

hate me? Do you still hate yourself for wanting me?" Xena groaned as she guided Gabrielle to ride harder against her body.

"Yes," Gabrielle hissed in response before she lowered her head and suckled one of Xena's nipples in her mouth.

Xena pressed the bard harder against her body as Gabrielle teased her nipple with her teeth. The warrior's clit throbbed urgently. "If you hate me so much, then why are you doing this?" Xena pondered aloud.

Gabrielle was panting heavily as she released Xena's breast, her warm breath caressing the warrior's skin. Gabrielle leaned back, her eyes glazed over with desire, as she reached under her toga, clasped one of Xena's hands, and slowly guided it to her center. Gabrielle's wetness saturated the warrior's hand. "I've never felt this way before," Gabrielle confessed huskily.

"So wet," Xena groaned in pleasure as Gabrielle pressed the warrior's hand against her mound.

"Take me," Gabrielle pleaded. Xena opened her mouth to protest, fearing that the girl was only giving her what she wanted. "Please," Gabrielle begged as she ground Xena's hand against her clit. "One or both of us will probably be dead in the near future. I just want to know what real passion feels like."

Xena couldn't resist the request as she slipped her fingers into Gabrielle's wetness. The blonde's back arched as Xena entered her center. Xena plunged in and out of the younger woman. She pulled her in for another passionate kiss while she used her free hand to fondle one of Gabrielle's breasts. Xena tore her mouth from Gabrielle's lips and descended upon her nipple. She suckled the erect bud through the silk material of her toga while she continued to plunge in and out of her.

Gabrielle's hips rode against her hand while Xena began to tease her clit with a thumb. "Yes!" Gabrielle cried out as her body rocked urgently against the warrior's touch. Xena could feel Gabrielle's thighs trembling against her as the blonde clutched her shoulders. Gabrielle almost trapped Xena's hand between her thighs as she exploded in ecstasy. Xena drank in her lover's flushed features as the aftershocks filtered through the blonde's body.

Once Gabrielle's breathing slowed, Xena removed her touch from her lover's body and stood before the still-seated blonde. The clothing that Gabrielle had pulled from her body fell to the floor. Gabrielle licked her lips as her eyes filled with a hungry desire. The blonde stood before the half-naked warrior and began to remove the remainder of Xena's clothing, tossing it across the room.

Gabrielle's hands began to caress the warrior's body as she lowered herself in front of Xena. The raven-haired warrior was about to object to the bard's position when she felt Gabrielle's lips kiss her thighs. "Ssh, this is what I want," Gabrielle reassured her as she continued to kiss the warrior's thighs. Xena ran her fingers through Gabrielle's long golden hair as the bard parted her and ran her tongue along Xena's sex.

Xena moaned as Gabrielle's tongue dipped deeper into her wetness and the young woman eagerly began to feast upon the warrior's desire. Xena held her lover closer as Gabrielle suckled her clit in her mouth and teased it with her teeth and her tongue. The warrior gave herself over to the younger woman as Gabrielle plunged her fingers deep inside Xena's center. The bard's mouth and fingers moved in unison as Xena fought to remain standing.

Xena cried out as she erupted from the bard's touch. Gabrielle continued to pleasure Xena as the warrior's hips bucked frantically against the bard's body. "Sweet Aphrodite," Xena murmured as she assisted her lover to her feet. She kissed the bard deeply, savoring the taste of her own passion on her lover's lips as they held one another.

Xena took Gabrielle by the hand and led her over to the bed. Gabrielle placed her hands on the bed as Xena stood behind her. Xena ran her fingers through the bard's hair as she parted her thighs with her knees. *'I care for you a lot more than I should,'* Xena's mind screamed, cautioning her not to become attached to her young lover.

Gabrielle lowered her upper body down onto the bed, offering herself up to the Warrior. Xena clasped Gabrielle's hips as she pressed herself into the smaller woman. Xena was careful and gentle, wanting only to bring Gabrielle pleasure and not invoke painful memories. "Conqueror, please," Gabrielle offered in a reassuring voice.

"Xena. Call me Xena," the warrior offered gently. "Just for tonight."

"Thank you," Gabrielle responded as she tilted her head towards the warrior. "Xena," Gabrielle added with a smile as her eyes darkened with desire.

Xena leaned over and pressed her breasts into the bard's back as she captured her lover in a lingering kiss. Gabrielle ground her backside into Xena's wet center. Xena responded by clasp the bard's hips and pressing her wetness deep into Gabrielle as they moved in perfect rhythm. Xena reached around Gabrielle's slender waist and dipped her fingers in the bard's wetness and began to stroke her clit urgently as Gabrielle begged her for more. They were covered in a sheen of sweat as they climaxed in unison.

Xena exchanged promising kisses with the petite blonde as she led her to bed and tucked them both in. She knew in her heart that she should have sent Gabrielle back to her own room. Instead Xena gave in to the need to hold the bard as they both slept.

## PART FOUR

Xena led her troops to victory against Caesar's legions. Still she failed to crush the man completely. Even in victory, not having the opportunity to nail Caesar's sorry hide to a cross bothered her. Callisto was also nowhere to be seen. Xena deduced that she gave up on Darfus as the useless wonder that he was and moved on. Her one time second-in-command was probably no longer interesting; since the day she left with her troops, Darfus was spending his days and

nights mucking out her stables.

The only bright occurrence was when she would receive a letter from Gabrielle. They were filled with endless tales of adventure and the young bard's thoughts. Xena was worried at how much she was looking forward to seeing the blonde again. She was actually smiling as she entered her palace. Malik greeted her with a grim expression.

"What is it?" she inquired wearily. Malik seemed hesitant to respond. "Darfus?"

"No, he is still up to his knees in manure," Malik confirmed confidently.

"Good." Xena nodded in approval, not looking forward to whatever was bothering her second in command. She only wanted to see Gabrielle. Then it hit her; that was the problem. "What did she do?"

"She ran away," Malik informed her sheepishly. He seemed surprised that the Conqueror was actually smiling.

"Of course she did." Xena smirked with pride. "I wonder what took her so long? Where is she? The dungeon?"

"Yes, Conqueror," Malik responded. "I was going to simply lock her in her quarters but she insisted."

"She can be very persuasive," Xena confirmed as she started towards the dungeon that was located in the bowels of her palace. "When did she make her attempt?"

"Two nights ago," Malik informed the warrior. "After I informed her that you would be returning soon. We didn't catch her until yesterday afternoon," he continued as he led her to the bard's cell in the back of the dungeon. "I put her away from the others."

Xena simply nodded her head in appreciation as she looked through the iron bars at the Bard who was reclining on the battered straw mattress in the corner.

"Miss me?" Xena taunted the young blonde. Gabrielle simply shrugged in response. "I should leave you here," Xena threatened.

"If you must," Gabrielle responded flatly.

"Let her out," Xena grumbled as she wondered how she was going to explain why the girl wasn't punished. Gabrielle took her place by her side. "Come with me so I can punish you," she shouted loudly. She grabbed Gabrielle by the neck and led her past everyone who was watching.

Later Xena was lying on her bed, completely sated, as her lover sighed happily beside her. "You can punish me anytime." Gabrielle smiled up at her as Xena grimaced.

"Why didn't you?" Gabrielle pressed.

"I couldn't," Xena confessed bitterly. She was baffled by her behavior. When she'd engaged in her recent battles she'd refused to take anyone to bed and now she'd failed to punish a runaway. "Why did you run away?"

"Why are you trying to conqueror the world?" Gabrielle quipped in response.

"It is who I am," Xena explained honestly.

"And this is who I am," Gabrielle responded with equal honesty. "It seems we are at cross purposes."

"Could you at least limp or act like I beat you when other people are around?" Xena pleaded.

"Why don't you let others see the woman I see?" Gabrielle inquired seriously. "The woman who listens to my stories and talks to me late at night. The kind gentle lover."

Xena pulled away quickly. "That is not who I am," Xena argued. "Who are you?" she asked in bewilderment. "In just a few turns of the moon you have completely overpowered my senses like a tsunami. You do know that what we are feeling is probably going to get both of us killed?"

"Yes," Gabrielle conceded dryly.

Later that day Xena sat upon her dais; Gabrielle knelt by her side with a collar around her throat. Xena tugged on the leash attached to the collar and pulled the bard up onto her lap. Gabrielle couldn't look at the faces in the crowd; her shame ran too deep. Xena regretted what she knew she must do as she fondled the young woman. "Draco, so glad you came," Xena purred as Gabrielle's head shot up.

Xena watched as anger filled the young bard's face. "I'm always at your service, Conqueror," Draco responded brightly as he flashed her a toothy grin. "I see your taste is improving," he said, taking note of Gabrielle perched on her lap.

"Thanks to you," Xena responded in a droll tone as she felt Gabrielle's breathing growing heavy.

"Beg pardon?" Draco asked in surprise.

"She's one of your girls," Xena explained in a dismissive manner.

"I always did have good taste," Draco bragged.

"Is your man Orsenac lies with you?" Xena inquired casually as she felt Gabrielle grip her thigh.

"Yes," Draco responded curiously.

"Bring him to me," Xena commanded.

"I'm doing this for you," Xena whispered to the trembling woman seated in her lap. "You don't have to watch," she explained as they waited for Draco to return with Orsenaclies.

"Here he is," Draco announced as the man stood beside him. Draco's face was grim, almost as if he expected what was about to happen.

"Draco, when we rode together you always instructed your men not to mar the goods. Is that still true?" Xena inquired as Draco stared at her intently.

"You know how I feel about that," Draco spat out.

"And your men respect your commands?" Xena pressed as her icy blue eyes fell upon the overweight smelly man standing at Draco's side.

"Yes," Draco responded as he eyed Orsenaclies carefully.

"Gabrielle, were you a virgin when Draco enslaved you?" Xena questioned the frightened woman.

"Yes," the bard managed to choke out.

"Were you still a virgin when you were sold?" Xena continued, regretting her decision to have the bard confront the animal who had robbed her of her innocence.

"No," Gabrielle confessed with a fierce growl.

"Who violated you?" Xena encouraged her as she rubbed the blonde's back.

"He did," Gabrielle confirmed as she spat at Orsenaclies.

"Are you going to believe this whore over me, Lord Draco?" Orsenaclies cried, defending himself.

Xena watched as Orsenaclies' head snapped back after Draco backhanded him. "Do you want the girl to do it?" Draco said as he offered his dagger to Gabrielle. Much to Xena's horror Gabrielle reached out for the dagger with a cold look in her eyes.

"No," Xena commanded as she yanked Gabrielle's hand back.

"I will do it and he will suffer," Draco promised.

"One more thing - she had a sister. The village was Potedia. I know it was a long time ago, but if you could find her sister Lila and bring her to me I would be grateful," Xena added softly so no one else could hear her words.

"Done," Draco promised as Orsenaclies reached out to attack him from behind. Both Xena and Draco drew their daggers and flung them into the coward's chest. "Pity. I was looking forward to torturing him." Draco grimaced as he looked down at Orsenaclies' body.

"He's still breathing," Xena added with a shrug and a slight sneer.

Draco called for his horse, tied Orsenaclies up with a rope, and then mounted. Xena felt good as she watched the vile man being dragged off the steps behind Draco's speeding horse. "We are done for today," Xena informed Malik as she led Gabrielle away from the prying eyes of the crowd.

Once they were safely away from everyone, Gabrielle yanked the leash from Xena's grasp. "I wanted to kill him myself," Gabrielle fumed.

"You have enough blood on your hands," Xena uttered sadly.

Gabrielle's face fell and Xena reached out to her. "Besides how would it look if I let you handle a dagger?" Xena teased her as she cupped her face. "You killed your last owner."

"I would never hurt you," Gabrielle blurted out quickly. "Infuriate, defy, drive insane, but never would I hurt you." Xena was taken aback by the sincerity of the bard's words. "Is it wrong for me to feel good about him dying?"

"I don't know," Xena responded honestly.

Gabrielle snuggled against her body and the bard's hands began to roam underneath the ornate silk gown Xena was wearing. "What are you doing?" she asked as she felt Gabrielle's hands dip into her wetness.

"Thanking you," Gabrielle responded in a husky tone as she began to glide her fingers along the warrior's slick folds.

"Here?" Xena moaned.

"You're the boss. Who is going to complain?" Gabrielle taunted her as she began to tease Xena's aching clit with her fingers. Xena leaned back against the stone wall as Gabrielle brushed her collar aside and began to suckle her nipple. Xena's body pulsated with desire as Gabrielle pleased her in the middle of the hallway. Unable to resist the fire burning inside of her, Xena tore away from Gabrielle's touch, spun the bard around, and pressed her against the stone wall.

Xena ignored the embarrassed or interested passersby as she lifted Gabrielle's toga up to her hips. Xena knelt behind the blonde and began to feast upon the bard's wetness. Gabrielle pressed herself into Xena's mouth as the warrior plunged her tongue deep inside the blonde's center. Gabrielle begged her for more as Xena plunged in and out of her rapidly.

Xena withdrew her touch as she felt the bard trembling. Gabrielle whimpered as Xena stood

behind her and ran her hands along the blonde's backside. Gabrielle clutched at the wall as she pressed her body into Xena's. The warrior's fingers were covered with Gabrielle's desire as she plunged them into the blonde's center. Xena added another finger as Gabrielle rode her hand and begged for more. "Come for me, Gabrielle," Xena demanded as she took her lover harder. She felt the walls of the bard's center tightening around her fingers as Gabrielle cried out.

Xena held her lover tightly until Gabrielle's body calmed. "More?" Gabrielle pleaded in a hoarse whisper. Xena kissed her and led her to her chambers to grant the bard's request. The empire could crumble around them and Xena didn't care as she lost herself in Gabrielle's arms.

## PART FIVE

"What's that you are writing?" Xena inquired as she looked around the tavern they had stopped at. Gabrielle didn't look up. She continued scribbling on the scroll just as she had done since the moment they sat down. Xena had already consumed her food and most of Gabrielle's and now she just wanted to get back on the road before Joxer found them. "Gabrielle!" Xena finally fumed as she snatched the scroll from the irritated bard.

"Hey," Gabrielle grumbled as she tried to retrieve the scroll.

"Tell me what is so important that you have to spend all day writing about it?" Xena growled.

"I had the most amazing dream last night," Gabrielle began to explain excitedly as Xena rolled her eyes. "It was so real, Xena. I just had to write it down before I forgot it," Gabrielle continued. "You know how sometimes you forget a dream once you wake up and you just can't seem to remember it no matter how hard you try?"

"Yeah." Xena shrugged with boredom as Gabrielle pouted. "So what did you dream about?" she offered in an effort to placate the pouting blonde.

"Callisto," Gabrielle began.

"Eww." Xena cringed.

"Let me finish," Gabrielle chastised her. "Callisto went back in time and Hercules was never born."

"Sounds like a nightmare." Xena shuddered.

"Well, it gets better," Gabrielle continued. "You were an evil warlord."

"I was an evil warlord," Xena grumbled.

"This was way over the top even for you," Gabrielle continued, ignoring the look of boredom on the Warrior Princess' face. "You had conquered most of the known world, except for Rome."

"Of course," Xena snorted in disgust.

"You staked me to a cross. Broke my legs," Gabrielle continued with a flourish. "Then you made me your love slave. You fought the Romans and you had a plan to bring Sparta down." Xena's eyes widened as Gabrielle babbled on about the battles she'd endured and how she'd killed a Sharmeness named Alti.

"Back up," Xena choked out.

"Alti?" Gabrielle questioned innocently.

"Further back," Xena prompted her.

"Sparta?"

"Further."

"The Romans? The Persians? Draco?" Gabrielle continued to fish.

"Further back," Xena fumed.

"You tied me to a cross and broke my legs?" Gabrielle asked, unable to pinpoint what Xena wanted to know about.

"After that," Xena growled.

"You made me your love slave?" Gabrielle inquired with a blush.

"That's the part." Xena smirked as she unrolled the scroll. "Is that in here?" Xena quickly scanned the scroll. "So it is." Xena blushed as she continued to seek out the good parts. "When did I have time to conquer the world? According to this, we never got out of bed. Oh look, I get to tie you up."

"Give me that," Gabrielle squealed as she tried to retrieve the scroll.

"Oh, I don't think so." Xena laughed deeply. "This could be dangerous in the wrong hands."

"So what do you suggest we do with it?" Gabrielle asked as she folded her arms across her green top.

"First, you can go over to the bar, work your charm, and get us a room for the night," Xena explained in a breathy tone as her eyes continued to scan the scroll. "Then you can read this to me all night long," Xena finished as she looked up and captured her friend's gaze.

"You want me to read to you all night long?" Gabrielle teased her.

"Read, act out, whatever," Xena encouraged her.

"I'll be right back with the key to the room," Gabrielle offered as she stood. "Conqueror," she whispered hotly in the Warrior Princess' ear before turning towards the bar. Xena shivered from the tone of Gabrielle's voice.

"Wow," Xena sighed as her attention returned to the scroll. "Who knew she had such a creative imagination?"

The End

Be sure to read the sequel [Serving The Conqueror](#)

Send comments to [findingmavis@comcast.net](mailto:findingmavis@comcast.net)

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