

# ~ Entity of the Soul ~

by Red Hope

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**Disclaimers:** Violence: There is a little violence, nothing much really. This is a non-plot driven story line this time, something new. \*L

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

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## Part 1

### Section 1

~\*Part 1\*~

The small form took a deep breath, her lungs quickly filled with the morning air. Beside her she listened to the clip clop of the horse's hooves on the dirt path. Her boots scuffed along, her staff tapping on the ground with each step she took. High up on the mare was her dark soulmate. Gabrielle had never felt this content in her life, this happy, it flowed through her body from head to toe. She looked up to the warrior on the war-horse and smiled.

Xena felt that warm smile directed at her, so she looked down at the bard, she smiled back to her. Xena pulled Argo to a halt and dropped out of the stirrups and saddle to the ground beside her waiting partner. The warrior gathered the reins in her right hand and the pair began to walk again.

"I'm ready for this" Xena looked to her small friend and nodded then retorted back.

"Me too. You especially need a break" Gabrielle nodded her head, knowing what the warrior meant by that.

"You think your mom won't mind"

"Nah, she'll put up with me" The small bard chuckled at the warrior's words.

"Oh come on Xena, she loves you and you know it"

"Yeah"

"But you don't think she'll mind me coming?" The warrior smiled, her eyes set ahead on the road.

"Of course not"

"Xena, Cyrene only met me twice, which were both along time ago" A pause and then the bard went on. "We didn't even really talk at the times, I was too busy...helping you I suppose" Xena's memories came to life from over a year and a half ago. The day when Gabrielle first saved her from being stoned to death. She still couldn't believe that young girl at the time followed behind her just to travel with *her*. Xena had always admired her soulmate's strong determination.

"You did help me then Gabrielle, always are. And mother will want you to come, I know her" Gabrielle looked up to Xena and smiled deeply.

"If you say so"

"I do" The Amazon Queen chuckled for a brief moment. Silence hung in the air for a while, then Gabrielle as always broke it with her light voice.

"Xena, you think we should...you know tell your mom about us?" The warrior's face etched into seriousness.

"We never had that talk like I said huh?"

"We got busy anyway Xena"

"Still" The warrior mentally slapped herself. She then refocused her mind and went on. "First of all Gabrielle, I want to make sure you know I'm not going to make the decisions okay?" The bard looked up into serious cobalt eyes that already stared down at her. Gabrielle simply nodded. "We make the decisions together" The small woman smiled to her soulmate.

"Thanks" They both looked ahead again and the bard continued on with the conversation. "So to start with about the whole relationship thing, do we tell your mom?" The warrior took a deep breath, her eyes still fixed ahead on the road.

"Well, what you think?" Gabrielle smiled to herself.

"Personally I think we should tell her" A deep breath. "She does have a right to know...right?" Xena looked down to her partner.

"Yeah...she does" The Warrior Princess looked back up. "Now the whole entire known world knowing of us that's a different matter" The bard began to laugh and Xena looked down to her soulmate with an amused face. "What?" The smaller woman took a deep breath and replied.

"Xena you made it sound like I wanted to announce it to everybody and their grandmother" The older woman smirked then looked back ahead.

"I know...I knew what you first meant" Gabrielle took a few more deep breaths.

"Okay...okay so we only tell certain people that we trust huh?" Xena nodded in agreement.

"Well I don't think telling somebody like my enemy was top on my list" The bard rolled her eyes and playfully slapped Xena on the arm.

"Very funny warrior"

"Seriously Gabrielle, we'll take it as we go. Okay?" The bard nodded her head.

"Whoever we feel comfortable with?" Xena also nodded her head in agreement.

"Yeah"

"Yeah well...I'll let you tell them" Xena looked to her friend and arched an eyebrow.

"Why me?"

"Incase they decided not to like it you can...help them like it" The warrior smirked.

"Mmm, don't give me ideas"

"You're the one to talk" Xena responded to that one rather quickly in a low deep voice.

"What Gabrielle?" The bard replied in a low almost squeak.

"Nothing" Her staff stamped the ground then Gabrielle jumped and screamed. "Ah! Xena no no no!" The warrior's large hands grabbed the jumping bard's bare waist. The bard squealed as the warrior tickled the smaller woman. Argo had stopped walking, her reins had been tossed up onto the saddle. The mare watched as the Amazon Queen dropped her staff and Gabrielle took steps back from her tall attacker. The bard then got to the edge of the road and lost her balance. She reached for one of Xena's invading hands and they both went toppling to the green grass off the side of the road.

The pair broke out into a fit of laughter, Xena had stopped her tickling attack. She now lay face forward into the grass, her head up laughing. Gabrielle though was on her back, laughing hysterically, one of her soulmate's arms draped over her stomach. Xena dropped her face down into the grass and took deep breaths to calm down. The bard for her part clenched her stomach and tried to stop laughing, little luck. Both soulmates took a deep breath at the same time and felt their laughter finally subside. Xena sat up to her knees and looked to her bard, her large hands in her own lap now.

"You okay Gabrielle?" The small bard nodded her head, her hands still on her stomach.

"Yeah, just my stomach hurts from laughing" The warrior grinned down at the smaller woman.

"Mine too" Gabrielle grinned and Xena's right hand went to the bard's stomach, lightly caressing it. Then it slipped down to Gabrielle's side and Xena leaned down close to the bard's face. "Still hurt?" Emerald eyes lock with the most dazzling sky splashed eyes ever. Gabrielle only could shake her head. "Good"

They kissed deeply at that instant. Both their bodies exploded and another memory was locked in their hearts.

Once Xena pulled her head up she smiled down to Gabrielle. "We better go huh?" The bard grinned.

"Yeah getting a bit hot here" Xena chuckled and stood up. She then bent forward

some and took the bard's hand. Gabrielle was pulled up to her feet. The warrior turned around and lifted up her soulmate's staff, tossing it to the bard. Gabrielle caught it and followed up onto the road behind Xena. "Xena, how much longer till we get there you think?" The warrior shrugged her shoulders.

"A candlemark...why?"

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The warrior's blue eyes drifted down to the sleeping form in her arms. Xena chuckled for a moment. Gabrielle had suckered the strong warrior into them riding and the bard was in the front snoozing away while Xena directed Argo. But Xena was glad to see her bard sleeping, knowing she'd been lacking the sleep she'd been needing. The younger woman was certainly snuggled into the warrior's arms. It felt good to hold the bard, she hadn't since this morning when they awoke to travel again towards Amphipolis.

The warrior looked back up to take notice to the area, they were getting close to Amphipolis. She pulled Argo to a halt and looked back down to her bard. She reached down and gently brushed some hair from the bard's face. Green eyes slowly opened up and looked up to Xena.

"Hey" Gabrielle smiled at her lover's voice.

"What's going on?"

"We're almost there" The bard nodded her head and straighten her back up from snuggling into Xena. "You thirsty?" Gabrielle's right hand went through her hair and she focussed her eyes.

"Yeah actually" The warrior nodded and reached back to the saddlebags, she produced a water skin. She then handed it to her smaller partner. "Thanks" Gabrielle took a few gulps then handed it back to Xena, the warrior placing the skin back in the saddle. The younger woman then began to move out of the saddle and dropped to the ground. Xena was next to follow. The Amazon Queen shifted to the back of the horse and retrieved her staff from the saddlebags. Xena waited for her then the soulmates were off walking again. Within a quarter of a candlemark they came up a small rise in the road. Once they did they saw a village straight ahead of them. The bard looked up to Xena with a huge smile. Xena looked down with a smile, twinkling blue eyes.

They entered into Amphipolis and headed to the other end of town to where Cyrene's tavern is located. Once they reached the tavern the warrior tied the mare to a post outside of the tavern. Xena took a deep breath, Gabrielle caught this. "You okay?" The warrior looked to her soulmate.

"Yeah" The bard gave Xena a smile of confidence, the warrior slightly smiled back. Her large hand went up to Gabrielle's back. The pair made their way into the tavern.

Cyrene wiped down her bar as she stood behind the counter. She then heard two pairs of boots move on her tavern's wood floor. She brought her gaze up to the new comers. She quickly realized whom the strangers were, not really strangers. Cyrene stepped around the bar with a smile, she briskly walked over to the two people.

"Xena?"

"Mother" The tavern owner smiled to her tall daughter and responded back.

"What...what you doing here?" Xena smiled slightly.

"Visit" Cyrene smiled some then looked to the bard. Xena followed her gaze.  
"Mother, you do remember Gabrielle?" Cyrene pleasantly smiled to Gabrielle.

"I do dear. How are you Gabrielle?" The bard smiled and bowed her head a little.

"Fine Cyrene, yourself?"

"Quite well" Cyrene looked back to her daughter. "How long are you both staying?"  
Xena quickly responded.

"We're not sure. Gabrielle and I were hoping we could stay here. But that's up to you  
Mother" The tavern keeper brought up both her hands to her hips, her right hand still  
holding the towel from earlier.

"It be wonderful if you both stay. Besides you and I have some catching up to do" The  
warrior nodded her head. Both Xena and Gabrielle knew what Cyrene meant by those  
words. The bard had to smile, Xena is as stubborn as her mother when it comes to  
letting things go.

"Thank you Cyrene" The tavern owner looked to the bard after her words.

"Anytime Gabrielle" She took a breath. "I suppose you both want separate rooms?"  
Gabrielle looked up to Xena, Xena already looking down at her. The warrior was  
about to say something, but Gabrielle cut her off.

"Yeah that'll be fine" The warrior was about to cut in herself, but thought better of it.

"I'll go get the saddlebags" Gabrielle nodded her head to her soulmate. Xena  
disappeared out of the tavern.

"Its quiet here" Cyrene nodded her head and dropped her hands. She shifted back to  
the bar, Gabrielle following behind.

"It normally is in the morning. The crowd won't come till drinking hour"

"Drinking hour?"

"Yes, that's normally sunset around here" Gabrielle chuckled some and Cyrene  
stepped behind the bar, the small blond sitting on a stool at the bar. "She seems well"  
Gabrielle quickly caught whom Cyrene meant.

"She is"

"Thank you Gabrielle" The bard blinked for a moment then responded.

"May I ask for what?" Cyrene dropped her towel to the bar table and seriously looked  
to the bard.

"For saving her" A set of boots came stomping in and Gabrielle turned around. The  
small bard hopped off the stool and went to her partner.

"I'll take them upstairs"

"You sure?"

"Yeah" The warrior handed the bard the saddlebags. Xena knew what Gabrielle's intent was by taking the saddlebags. "Which room?"

"It's Xena's old room Gabrielle. Go up the stairs and its at the very end on the right, your room will be right next to Xena's on the right side" Gabrielle nodded her head with a smile to Cyrene. She disappeared up the stairs. Cyrene looked from the stairs to her daughter. "She's a sweetie huh?" Xena's loving eyes went a little harder as she averted her eyes from the stairs back to her mother.

"She is" A bit of silence. "How have you been Mother?"

"Rather well" Cyrene stepped around the bar, leaving the cloth on the bar. The tavern keeper sat down on a stool and Xena shifted to sit on another one, they faced each other. "Glad you came" The warrior smiled some.

"Glad I was welcomed" Cyrene's eyes dropped to the floor for a moment then she looked back up.

"Well I apologize for that Xena"

"No Mother, don't you apologize. Not after everything...you had right" Cyrene looked back to the floor again and took a deep breath. She looked back to Xena and locked eyes with her.

"I wasn't supportive when you were younger"

"Supportive...of what? Me becoming a killer?"

"No not necessarily that but I was never there for you, Toris or Lyceus when you three were young"

"You were busy making money for us all to survive mother, there's nothing for you to forgive" Cyrene took a deep breath and retorted back.

"Xena I did something wrong somewhere because neither three of you ended up with the life you wanted" Xena's right arm went up to rest on the bar beside her.

"I never knew what I wanted at the time Mother...I never did till just recently" Xena sighed for a moment and went on. "Besides Mother, its in the past...neither of us can do anything about it...just learn" Cyrene smiled some and reached out with her left hand to grasp her daughter's larger hand.

"I suppose your right dear, that and trying to make it up" Cyrene squeezed Xena's hand for an instant. Cyrene released Xena's hand and they both stood up from the stools. "How about giving your old mom a hug?" The warrior chuckled and gathered her mother into a strong embrace. They pulled back from the embrace and Cyrene smiled, Xena did in return. "Why don't you go find your friend" Xena nodded her head.

"Thanks Mother" Cyrene nodded her head and watched the warrior ascend the stairs

to the rooms above. Xena saw the door to her old room ajar. She pushed open the door and spotted her soulmate over by an old dresser. Gabrielle turned around at the sound of the door creaking.

"Hey" Xena smiled at the welcome and stepped up beside the bard. "This is cute" Xena shifted her eyes to where the bard pointed. There propped up on the dresser is an old ragged doll. *Oh gods*. That was the first thing to come to the warrior's mind.

"Gods, I thought Mother got rid of that thing" The bard chuckled and stared at it. The doll was defiantly old, worn and a bit dirty. It had a round head, long blond yarn hair, small little round feet and small little round hands. Then it had on a dirty white dress with frills at the end.

"What's her name?" The warrior eyed her soulmate with a serious face. The bard grinned to her. Xena sighed and reached for the doll. She lifted the doll up and stared at it in her large hands. The strong large hands gently holding the doll as if it were made of porcelain and could easily break.

"You'll never guess nor believe it" The bard arched an eyebrow at Xena. The warrior looked up from the doll to the other woman.

"Xena?" The warrior grinned to her. "You didn't did you?" The tall woman chuckled and carefully placed the doll back down on the dresser with such care and love.

"I did, that's one reason I've always loved your name"

"Oh gods" Gabrielle then sighed dramatically after she said that. She then looked back to Xena. "How old were you?" Xena considered the doll as she reflected.

"I think I was about...five falls old then" Emerald eyes looked from Xena to the doll on the dresser. Its blond hair hung a little below her shoulders, small bangs in the front. The doll had two small black buttons for eyes, a black smile stitched in. Gabrielle was actually amazed at how well it was in shape.

"You know I never took good care of my dolls like this" The warrior smiled at the doll.

"Yeah, I was protective over her for some reason" Xena took a deep breath. "Toris use to love taking her from me"

"Oh boy bet that was a bad scene every time" The older woman chuckled then responded back.

"Yeah it was"

"Those two always got into a lot of little messes" Both women turned around at the familiar voice by the door. Gabrielle smiled at Cyrene, as did Xena.

"I'd love to hear some Cyrene" The tavern owner stepped more into the room.

"I will enjoy ever minute of telling them to you sweetie" Xena groaned to herself and Gabrielle grinned up at her soulmate.

"Mother" Cyrene looked to her daughter.

"Dear, you'll survive" Xena shook her head at her smirking mother. Cyrene then looked to Gabrielle. "I hear you're telling stories these days Gabrielle" The bard sighed.

"Sort of...who told you?" The tavern keeper smiled and replied back.

"Well I've heard many things of you from other bards that drop in here. They all seem to know of you, always saying marvelous things about you honey. Then Toris stopped in a while back told me he met you as well" The bard faintly turned red and Xena was enjoying the sight.

"Um well, yeah I haven't been telling many stories lately"

"Why is that dear?" Gabrielle shrugged her shoulders and retorted.

"Been a bit to busy for that" The warrior then piped in to help her soulmate.

"Gabrielle was considering on telling a few stories here at the tavern. But she's not sure just yet" Cyrene looked back to Gabrielle from Xena.

"Well if you feel up to divulging a story about an adventure hun you're more then welcomed too" Gabrielle nodded her head.

"Thank you"

"Well I think I'm going to leave you two alone again. I need to prepare for tonight's customers" With that Cyrene left the room to leave the soulmates alone. Xena looked down to her soulmate.

"You sure you don't want to stay in here with me?" Gabrielle turned to look at her partner.

"I'd love to stay in here with you but I don't want your mom thinking anything of it" The warrior nodded and sighed.

"The sooner we tell her the better" Gabrielle chuckled. "Hey, I'm going to go take care of Argo" Gabrielle looked up.

"Okay I'll wait here for you" Xena nodded her head and went out the door, closing it behind her. The bard turned her head to look at the smiling old doll. She stared at it for a moment then a small smile slipped onto her lips. Gabrielle then went to sit on Xena's old huge size bed. Gabrielle was rather surprised about how big the bed is, even if Xena was tall when she was young. She shifted to lie down on the side of the bed and crossed her legs at her ankles. Then her arms came up to cross under her head. She closed her eyes for a moment and let her mind drifted to random thoughts and images.

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The tall warrior climbed the stairs. She hadn't expected to take that long to stall up Argo. But then again she wasn't expecting to bump into the Constable of Amphipolis. At first he was a bit cold towards Xena, but Xena kept trying to talk normally to him. Eventually he loosened up and they smiled to each other in the end. Xena had to grin at that, it'd be useful later on.



She came to the end of the small hall and reached to the doorknob. She slowly opened the door and spotted her soulmate on the bed. Gabrielle's eyes are closed, her chest rising and falling at a slow pace, her body relaxed. The warrior grinned to herself she then moved quietly over to the other side of the bed, she unhooked her sword and chakram, placing them on the table by a small window, the bard's staff leaning near the window. Xena crawled gently into the bed and moved next to Gabrielle.

Gabrielle slightly awoke from the familiar body coming against her. The bard moved her head to rest on top of Xena's shoulder and Xena brought her hand down to rest on Gabrielle's side lightly.

"How's Argo?" Xena smiled some and replied to the groggy voice.

"She's happy" The bard nodded just a little bit. "Go back to sleep"

"I should go to my own room"

"No you're fine" Adding on, Xena squeeze her soulmate for a second then loosen her hold again.

"Sleep well Xen" The warrior smiled and kissed Gabrielle on the forehead.

"You too Love" Gabrielle smiled a little then slipped back into her dream state. Xena soon followed her.

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The door creaked open a smidge. Cyrene poked her head in. What she found was her daughter in the center of the bed and resting beside her was Gabrielle, the bard's head on Xena's left shoulder. Xena's hand lightly placed on the bard's side, their eyes closed. Cyrene smiled at the sight.

"I'm awake" Blue eyes opened and looked to the innkeeper. Cyrene smiled to her daughter. She then slowly crept into the room and moved the side of the bed Xena was closes to. Pulling out a chair she sat down and looked to Xena.

"How did you sleep dear?"

"Pretty well. How long we've been asleep?"

"It's almost sunset now, crowd will show up soon. So I'd say you both have slept a good two candlemarks or so" The warrior nodded her head.

"To much in my opinion"

"Mmm she looks pretty tuckered out" Xena looked to Gabrielle, staring at her for a moment, she turned her eyes back to Cyrene.

"Yeah it's been a rough couple of weeks on her" The tavern owner nodded her head.

"She sleeps hard too" The warrior grinned.

"I heard that" Xena chuckled and felt Gabrielle roll in her arm. Gabrielle propped herself up on one elbow and looked to Cyrene, her eyes still sleepy looking.

"She sleeps hard till you talk about her" Emerald eyes looked down to Xena.

"Don't even start" The warrior devilishly grinned, Cyrene watching the whole exchange.

"So you both of you up for supper tonight?" Immediately the bard looked back up.

"I'd love some" Cyrene smiled and stood up.

"Wonderful, both of you come down when you're ready. I better head down, it'll be busy" Cyrene then drifted to out of the room closing the door once she left.

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Gabrielle moved to sit at a stool of the bar. Cyrene nodded to some man then moved down the bar to Gabrielle.

"Hey sweetie, where's the other one?" The bard smiled.

"She'll be down in a sec" Cyrene nodded her head. A waitress then walked around to the back of the bar with Cyrene.

"Saada, come here dear" The waitress stopped moving and came to stand beside Cyrene. "Saada, I want you to meet Gabrielle, she's a bard and my daughter's friend" The barmaid smiled and held out her hand to Gabrielle. The Amazon Queen took the offered hand and briskly shook it.

"Nice to meet you Saada" The barmaid smiled and responded back.

"Nice to meet a bard in these parts"

"Saada has been here in Amphipolis all her life, she's a great help here" Gabrielle smiled to the tall barmaid. Her ear length hair hung down, it was brown. Her eyes are a hazel that had dullness to them but are kind.

"Well excuse me Gabrielle, I have many customers" Gabrielle nodded her head to Saada and the barmaid shuffled off to take care of her tables. The bard then heard familiar footfall from the stairs and she spotted her soulmate coming down. Gabrielle quickly noticed the fact Xena didn't have her sword or chakram. She guessed it because of her mother's rule of no weapons. Gabrielle knew her soulmate was respecting Cyrene with this small task.

"Hey you" Xena smiled and replied back, she sat up on a stool.

"Hi" Cyrene looked to the two soulmates with a warm smile.

"So, what could you two go for?" Gabrielle smiled.

"What you making Cyrene?"

"Anything your heart desires honey" The bard chuckled and looked to Xena. The warrior grinned to her soulmate. Gabrielle looked back to the smiling Cyrene. The innkeeper quickly took notice to something not quite right with the small bard. Something in those green eyes didn't seem right.

"Have any chicken?" The innkeeper nodded her head.

"We certainly do as a matter of fact I had some marinated in honey, the special" The

bard grinned, she knew this was perfect. Her soulmate's weak spot between the chicken and honey.

"That'll be great" Cyrene looked to Xena.

"Both?" The warrior nodded her head. "Drinks?"

"I could go for some port" Cyrene nodded her head then looked to Gabrielle for her response.

"Apple cider will do me fine" The innkeeper nodded her head. She then went into a back door behind the bar.

"You slept well huh?" Gabrielle nodded her head.

"I did, I can't believe how tired I am" Xena propped up one arm onto the bar and looked to her soulmate.

"I can, to much has been going on" Gabrielle turned her head to look at Xena.

"I suppose" A pause. "Its relaxing here" The warrior smiled.

"Yeah, Mother has a way of doing those sort of things" Gabrielle smiled and Cyrene came out of the back room with two mugs. One she placed beside Xena and the other in front of the small blond.

"You know Gabrielle, if you don't have to sleep in that other room if you wouldn't like" The Amazon Queen looked up from the mug to Cyrene. The innkeeper smiled and continued. "I know how nice it is to have somebody beside you to protect you" Gabrielle smiled deeply.

"Thanks Cyrene" The bard took a deep breath. "It is rather nice to have a something beside you in the dark" Cyrene chuckled a little.

"Yes well I'd say you have a rather large something there sweetie" A bell then sounded. "Oppose, excuse me" Cyrene then disappeared into the back room. The innkeeper then leaned out of the door and yelled for Saada, the barmaid quickly walking into the back room. Both soulmates guessed it to be the kitchen. The tavern was filled with the hustle and bustle of people moving, talking, plates clattering and mugs slamming onto tables. Gabrielle turned around to see that about three quarters of the tables were filled with people, Xena herself snuck a look behind too.

"Busy huh?" The warrior nodded her head in agreement.

"Its good to see" The bard also nodded her head and the pair turned back around. As soon as they did Cyrene came over to them behind the bar with two plates. She placed down the two plates, one in front of each of the soulmates.

"Enjoy" The bard smiled as did Xena and they watched as Cyrene disappeared down the bar to help somebody. Xena started eating first then the bard did as well. The chicken was perfectly cooked, the honey taste put a perfect zang to it that the soulmates thoroughly enjoyed. Beside the chicken was asparagus and mashed potatoes. The pair ate slowly knowing they were in no rush to get anywhere or do anything. Once they were done Cyrene reappeared with a grin. "Ha, you both seemed

to take a liking to that" Gabrielle quickly responded to that.

"It was great Cyrene, I just wish your daughter could pick up on the cooking" Beside the bard, the large form began to chuckle and Cyrene looked to Xena with a grin.

"Gabrielle I suppose I could teach her a few things while you're both here"  
Immediately the warrior stopped laughing and arched an eyebrow at her mother.

"I'll end up catching your tavern on fire Mother" Gabrielle cut in then.

"Actually I'd love to learn a few recipes myself Cyrene. The same old thing on the road is getting a bit boring" The tavern owner looked back to Gabrielle with a smile.

"Alright dear, it's a deal then"

"Mother?" Cyrene looked to her daughter. "Do you happen to have any nutbread?"  
Cyrene caught out of the corner of her eyes the bard's eyes widening and her face brightening up.

"I believe so, let me go look" Cyrene padded off back into the kitchen with the two empty plates and used silverware. Within a few heartbeats she came back out with two smaller plates with nutbread contained on them. Gabrielle broke off a piece of the nutbread once Cyrene placed down the plates. The bard popped the tid bit into her mouth. She sighed contently. Xena watched the entire time and smiled deeply.

Cyrene watched the two soulmates. The innkeeper knew there was more here than meets the eye. Knew that the glow to the pair wasn't just over nutbread or having a visit when they first stepped into the tavern. Cyrene knew what this glow was from, her own past years experience telling her.

"Cyrene, does this have cinnamon in it?" The tavern owner brightly smiled and replied back.

"It does dear, you like?" The bard then retorted back as she broke another piece off.

"I never tried it with cinnamon, taste even better. I like things with a bit of...spiciness to them" The warrior raised an eyebrow at her partner's end words. Gabrielle looked to Xena and rather rapidly began to blush to her roots. Cyrene grinned and patted the bard's hand and shuffled off.

"Spiciness huh?" Gabrielle groaned at Xena's words.

"Oh and like you don't go for things with...honey to them?" Xena almost choked on her nutbread. She swallowed it down then took a gulp of port. She coughed for a second then eyed her bard.

"I can't say I don't" The Amazon Queen grinned and went on eating.

"You know we're never going to last"

"Mmm?"

"Well you know, hiding us" Xena grinned some and ate the last bit of her nutbread. She then took a sip of her port and gently placed the mug back down on the table.

"Who said I wanted to?" A brown eyebrow went up at the warrior's question.

The night faded on. It was a quiet evening in the way of no fights. Cyrene, Saada, and the kitchen were rather busy filling orders and making everybody happy. Xena and Gabrielle didn't stay all the night. After they had finished the nutbread, the pair left the bar and went to sit at a table. They talked for awhile about anything and everything.

"Xena I can't believe you've been there and you never told me this" The warrior grinned and placed the mug back down on the table.

"I have"

"Gods, I'd love to go to Egypt" Xena smiled.

"Well I wasn't there for long"

"How long?" The warrior shrugged her shoulders. She sat back in the seat and let the chair lean against the wall.

"It was about two days if I remember. We had to just restock the boat then get out of there. The Romans ran Egypt...still do" Gabrielle nodded her head.

"What was it like there?" The warrior smiled and folded her hands on her lap.

"The pyramids were incredible and the people in Egypt dress completely different" Gabrielle nodded her head, facial expression in awe. The warrior loved this about her soulmate, Gabrielle could become so captivated about things the warrior had done.

"I've heard the pyramids are something to be hold" A pause. "You think we could go there sometime Xena?" Xena sighed.

"It depends on the Romans Gabrielle" The bard's eyes drifted to the floor briefly then looked back up.

"Forgot about that, especially after what just happened huh?" Xena nodded her head in agreement.

"Well maybe Egypt will take back its rightful land. They're a strong bunch" Gabrielle nodded her head and smiled some. The warrior noticed that the crowd was slowly depleting out the door. The older woman leaned forward and the chair went down with a bang and Gabrielle turned her head to Xena. "Feel like hitting the sack?" Gabrielle stretched in the seat then nodded. The Warrior Princess caught the tiredness in her soulmate's eyes. Cyrene then padded over to the pair.

"Both you dears going to bed?" Xena nodded her head.

"Yeah, sort of late" Cyrene nodded her head and reached down on the table and lifted up Xena's empty mug.

"Well you two both sleep well" With that the tavern owner shifted closer to Xena and placed a light kiss to Xena's forehead. The warrior smiled and Cyrene smiled back. She then moved to the bard and also placed a gentle kiss to Gabrielle's forehead. "Good night" Cyrene turned to leave and Gabrielle called back.

"Night Cyrene and thank you" The tavern owner turned her head back with a smile

and wink. She vanished back into the kitchen. Xena stood up then the bard did. They both made their way to the stairs then climbed them.

Once they were upstairs, the pair both slipped into a shift. Xena in own of her own and Gabrielle took the other one of Xena's. The warrior chuckled at that. Once they changed they both mingled into the bed as soon as Xena blew out the candles in the room. The bard snuggled into Xena's body and sighed. "Your mom is right?"

"About what?"

"Its nice having something protecting you in the dark" Xena grinned and placed a gently kiss to the bard's lips. They soon fell asleep.

~\*Part 2\*~

The sun slowly crept in through the window and shined on a dark warrior's form. Xena felt the warmth of the sun on her body and shifted a little. Gabrielle moaned from the shifting and wrapped her arms more tightly around Xena to keep her from moving. The warrior smiled to herself and opened her eyes to stare across her bedroom.

"Gods I love spiciness" Xena broke out laughing and the bard lifted her head up from Xena's chest. The warrior stopped herself from laughing at her soulmate's words and looked down to the bard.

"Morning" Gabrielle smiled and replied back.

"Morning yourself" The bard dropped her head back onto Xena's shoulder and took a deep breath. The warrior's spice scent filling her lungs.

"Gabrielle?"

"Hmm"

"I think I'm going to go visit Lyceus" The smaller woman lifted her head up again to looked into deep blue eyes.

"Would you like me to come with you?" Gabrielle then propped up her elbow to support her head as she stared into just faintly distant blue eyes. The bard watched as they lost their shadowing.

"Yeah...I'll always need you with me" After that Xena smiled and so did Gabrielle. The bard leaned in to capture her soulmate's lips in a gentle kiss. Once they pulled back Gabrielle replied.

"Same here" The warrior smiled and still felt some of the slight tension in the air. So she grabbed her bard's waist and lifted her. "Yah!" Gabrielle soon found herself laying on top of Xena's body looking into electric blue eyes. "Its windy" The warrior looked out the window as the pair both listened. They heard the wind howl then and some wood shake.

"Mmm it is"

"Bad hair days then" Amused eyes averted to look at Gabrielle again.

"Bad hair days?" The bard began to chuckle and she placed her face into Xena's chest. She looked back up and tempted to explain herself.

"Yeah you know, all the wind just messes your hair up" Xena arched an eyebrow and grinned to her soulmate.

"Can brush it" Gabrielle groaned and dropped the side of her head on Xena's chest.

"Never mind!" The warrior chuckled some and reached for the bard's head. She gently lifted the bard's head up and stared into dazzling new spring eyes.

"I knew what you meant" The bard grinned.

"Thanks" The warrior brought her head up and kissed the bard deeply. As soon as the kiss ended somebody rapped on the door. "Hades" Gabrielle quickly rolled off her soulmate and onto the bed the covers coming with her. Xena broke out into laughter, the door creaking open and Cyrene coming in. The tavern keeper placed her hands on her hips and stared at the laughing warrior and a faintly blushing bard. Xena took a deep breath and calmed down. She sat up in the bed and smiled to her mother.

"Good morning dear" Gabrielle took a deep breath and sat up as well and looked to Cyrene.

"Morning Cyrene"

"Morning to you too sweetie" Cyrene dropped her hands from her hips. "How'd you two sleep?" Xena responded to that.

"Pretty well" Cyrene nodded her head then she looked to Gabrielle.

"Dear don't you share the covers with my daughter?" For what seemed liked the hundredth time the bard blushed to her roots and dropped her head some. She looked back up to Cyrene. Gabrielle knew her soulmate had that smirk on her lips.

"Um...well...its...sort of hard to explain" The warrior then cut in to help her soulmate.

"Mother, normally I take all the covers...so she was just getting me back" Cyrene nodded her head and crossed her arms against her chest.

"If you say so" She took a breath. "Well I came up here to wonder when you two sleepy heads were going tuh come down for breakfast"

"We'll be down in a few Mother" The innkeeper nodded her head to Xena's answer.

"Wonderful" Cyrene then left the room, door closed behind.

"Oh gods" Xena looked to her bard. Gabrielle looked to Xena. "Xena, I feel like some kid that got caught stealing out of the candy jar" The warrior grinned then chuckled a little.

"That's Mother for you" A smile. "She means well" Gabrielle nodded her head.

"She better stop coming up here if she knows what's good for her" The warrior arched an eyebrow at the bard.

"Solari is right" A curious expression overtook the bard's face.

"About what?" Xena stood up out of the bed.

"About me rubbing off on you"

~\*~\*~\*~

Xena's boot lightly boomed on the steps then she hit the floor of the tavern. She spotted her mother coming out of the kitchen, a rag thrown over her left shoulder.

"Hey dear" The warrior smiled and went to sit on a stool at the end of the bar.

"Hi"

"Gabrielle coming?" Xena nodded her head and Cyrene brought her hands up on the counter. She went serious. Xena stiffened up. "Xena is she okay?" The warrior crossed her arms against her chest.

"Yes she's fine" Cyrene sighed and crossed her arms against her chest.

"Xena, I can tell something is wrong with Gabrielle, it's in her eyes. Your old Ma notices these sort of things" Xena sighed and dropped her arms to the bar. "Xena, what's happened to her?" Xena looked up from the bar to her mother. Cyrene reached out with her right hand placing it on the warrior's closes arm.

"Gabrielle's home was destroyed about three weeks ago" Nobody said anything, Cyrene stared into Xena's eyes. The innkeeper took a deep breath then responded.

"Her family?"

"Everybody was killed" Cyrene dropped her eyes for a moment then looked back up.

"How's she taking it?" The warrior closed her eyes briefly then reopened them.

"She's doing okay with it. Her nightmares have been settling" Cyrene nodded her head.

"That's why you came huh?" Xena nodded her head.

"Yes, she needs time to relax and I know how calm Amphipolis can be" Xena's mother slightly smiled.

"Glad you brought her" Xena sighed. Boots could be heard and Gabrielle appeared from upstairs. Cyrene squeezed Xena's arm then released it. "Was wondering when you'd show up little one" The bard chuckled and moved to sit beside Xena. "Breakfast is coming up"

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"You two stay warm"

"Mother" Cyrene smiled to her daughter as the warrior pulled on her heavy cloak. Xena looked to her bard and then shifted to help Gabrielle settle her own cloak on. Cyrene stepped up close to Gabrielle the bard smiled to her.

"Lovely cloak" Gabrielle smiled and pulled at the collar to straighten it out.



"Thanks, Xena picked it out" Cyrene looked to Xena with an arched eyebrow.

"Really?" Xena sighed and shook her head.

"Mother"

"Sorry dear, never thought you went in for style" Gabrielle chuckled at the innkeepers words.

"Only if its leathers Cyrene" Cyrene looked to Gabrielle.

"Very true sweetie" She smiled to the pair. "Be careful out there huh? It's a pretty blustery day out" The warrior sighed.

"We'll be fine Mother" Cyrene nodded her head.

"I know, just like to make sure that's all" Gabrielle chuckled and shifted her grip on her staff some. "Now then you to better go" And with that Xena began to make her way to the door followed by the bard.

"Bye Mother"

"Bye Cyrene"

"Toodles dears" The door to the tavern open and the soulmates stepped through. At once the wind engulfed them.

"Bad hair day huh?" Gabrielle rolled her eyes at her partner's words.

"Funny warrior. You lead the way" The warrior nodded and Xena walked ahead, Gabrielle beside her. They walked behind the tavern and into the woods that soon followed. Xena followed a marked path and they went around and through trees and brush. With a few they came to a gray stone building. Xena stepped up to the door of the tomb and pushed hard it slowly budged open. Gabrielle joined in and the door began to open faster. Once it was wide open the pair stepped in to a dark and bit musk room.

"Stay here" Gabrielle nodded, not able to see much. The warrior moved ahead in the cold dark building and went deeper inside. She felt along the wall then felt a torch. She bent down to the ground and felt two flint stones. She lifted them to the torch and cracked them together. The torch set on fire and brightens the room some. Gabrielle stepped in and watched as Xena lifted the torch up and moved to another one on the opposite side of the wall. Within a few heartbeats Xena had lit four torches.

There centered in the small room is a stone coffin. Xena shifted to the coffin and dropped her hands to the lid. Gabrielle came to stand beside her soulmate after depositing her staff against the wall of the tomb. She too stared down at the stone coffin. With her close arm, the smaller woman wrapped her arm around Xena's waist. The warrior smiled and dropped her right arm over the bard's shoulders.

"How old was he?" A lump entered the warrior's throat.

"He was about sixteen summers old" Gabrielle nodded her head. "He was too young" The bard looked up to her soulmate then back to the coffin.

"But he choose his path Xena" A tear trickled down the warrior's face.

"No, I should have stopped him"

"I don't think you could have Xena" Xena looked down to her soulmate in question. Gabrielle looked up. "He sounded to determined to be by your side" A pause. "I know that feeling" Xena nodded her head and looked back to the coffin.

"You've always reminded me a lot of him"

"Yeah?" Xena nodded her head. "Like what exactly?" Xena took a deep breath then responded.

"Well defiantly the determination, his smile" She began to choke up but went on. "His loyalty, he was always bright and talkative. We always had a lot of laughs" Gabrielle nodded her head and listened. "Always doing things together" Xena chuckled a little. "He has those same green shade of eyes, except yours are more deep then his were. Then for some reason he never had a problem with my strong side. He admired it, supported it...understood it"

"He sounds like a nice guy"

"He was" Gabrielle turned to Xena and grasped Xena's left hand and intertwined their fingers. Gabrielle then wrapped her free arm around Xena's waist and Xena brought her right arm back around to Gabrielle's back. Their intertwined hands fell down by their side. Xena dropped her head on top of her soulmate's head and stared at the coffin. Tears began to trail down Xena's cheeks and Gabrielle hugged her tall soulmate tightly.

A few trickles of tears streaked down Gabrielle's face. She cried too, knowing what her soulmate felt, cried over a man that this world missed out on, she cried for her soulmate.

Xena closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She straightens out and released her small soulmate, Gabrielle releasing her. Xena then shifted closer to the coffin and bent down. She placed a kiss to the head of the lid then straightens back up. Turning to Gabrielle she slightly smiles.

"You ready?" Xena nodded her head and reached down for the bard's hand. They fingers lacing together again. "The torches?"

"Leave them" The bard nodded her head snagged her staff off the wall and the pair left the tomb of Lyceus. The soulmates slowly walked back to the tavern through the woods, the wind still howling as they went. Once they spotted the tavern ahead Xena stopped in her tracks, Gabrielle as well. "Why don't you go in. I think I'm going to go take Argo for a ride" Gabrielle nodded her head.

"You sure, it's pretty cold" The warrior smiled.

"Yeah, I'll be fine" Gabrielle went in for a hug and the pair held each other for a few moments. Once they broke apart Gabrielle smiled up to Xena. "Thanks" A lopsided smile creased the smaller woman's lips.

"I love you Xena" Xena melted at that instant like wax on a burning candle. The older

woman bent forward and whispered back in all of the wind.

"I love you too" Gabrielle smiled and went up on her tiptoes to kiss her soulmate. Xena brought her hands to the bard's waist to support her. They both felt like they were in a dream. The wind whipped by, the leaves rustling and flowing along the stream of wind. The leaves flew by the kissing soulmates while their hair was picked up in the air. The cold chill to the air caressed at the soulmate's spirits as the smell of winter masked the air around.

They slowly pulled back, still smiling. Then the pair made their way into the town beside each other.

~\*Part 3\*~

The door slammed hard and Cyrene poked her head out of the kitchen door.

"Where's Xena dear?" Gabrielle looked up to the warrior's mother.

"She went to take Argo for a ride" Cyrene nodded then stepped out of the doorway.

"Well I'm almost finished up here sweetie. Why don't you and I take a little walk. Show you around Amphipolis a little" The bard brighten up some.

"I'd love that. But I need to run up stairs and do something quick"

"Go on right ahead, I'll be done in a sec" Gabrielle nodded, the innkeeper went back in the kitchen and Gabrielle went up stairs. She stepped into the room and went to her satchel, her staff finding a spot against the wall. She removed a scroll and her quill. She went to the table and stared at the scroll for a moment. The quill is being chew on a little. Her face brightens up and she began to write something on the bottom of the scroll. Gabrielle dropped the quill and carefully tore off the end of the scroll, folded it twice. She then wrote *Xena* on the front and placed the small bit of scroll paper on the center of the now made bed. The scroll and quill were placed back in their home and Gabrielle headed out the door without her staff for once.

Cyrene stood at the bottom of the steps, a brown fur cloak on, her hands on her hips. "Thought I'd have to go on up there and get you sweetie" Gabrielle smiled.

"Sorry"

"No harm done huh? Let's go" The two women headed out of the tavern and into the windy cold day.

~\*~\*~\*~

A short gray haired man looked up from his desk as a tall female entered into his office.

"Hello Xena" Xena smiled to the Constable some.

"How are you today Ferus?"

"Fine, what brings you to my office Xena?" The man's voice was hard, but he was calmer then last night.

"I was hoping I could get a favor out of you" The Constable crossed his arms against

his chest.

"That depends on what it is Xena. You know you're still not fully excepted back here in Amphipolis"

"I know, but I was hoping you'd hear me out"

"Go on then"

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"So where did you and Xena come from?" Gabrielle looked to the older woman.

"Well we left the Amazon Nation then came right here" Cyrene nodded her head.

"Which one is that?" The pair made their way to the opposite side of town, both of them tightly bundled up against the cold.

"It's the one about north-east of here"

"So how do you know them?" Gabrielle looked ahead through the town.

"We have a few friends there we made along time ago" Cyrene nodded her head again and looked to her right. She nodded to a building off to her right. A sign on top read *Fine Accessories*. Gabrielle smiled at the sign and the pair stepped inside of the building.

"Amazon friends huh? How did you two run in to them?" The bard looked around in the shop and quickly realized what kind of a shop it was. Nothing but jewelry.

"Wow!" Cyrene smiled and Gabrielle looked back to her. "Oh sorry, we just came through their territory one day and helped them from getting into a war" The innkeeper simply nodded her head and they went more in. An older man stepped out into the store.

"Hello ladies" He spotted Cyrene. "Well how are you Cyrene? Haven't seen you in here for a while" Xena's mother smiled and stepped up to the man.

"Quite well, how goes your days hun?"

"Pretty well, been selling quite a bit" He then looked to Gabrielle. Cyrene smiled.

"Oh gods excuse me. Potestas this is my daughter's best friend Gabrielle" The man smiled and shook Gabrielle's hand.

"Ah yes you're the bard from Poteidaia if I'm not mistaken" Gabrielle nodded her head. Cyrene watched as Gabrielle's smile dropped. "So what brings you to these parts Gabrielle?"

"Um Xena and I are visiting, taking some time off" The storeowner nodded his head.

"That's great. How is Xena? Haven't talked to that one in ages" Gabrielle began to smile again.

"She's quite well" Potestas nodded at Gabrielle's answer.

"Gabrielle, Potestas has some of the best jewelry in all of Greece" The bard looked to

Cyrene.

"Yes I do as a matter of fact" The Amazon Queen looked back to the man. "I have great connections all through the known world to get fine jewelry. Not to mention the fact I do engraving, not to many jewelers can do such a thing" The small bard smiled.

"That's what I've heard, hard to find a place that does engraving" The storeowner brighten up.

"Yes well if you ever need any done, you know where to go" Gabrielle chuckled with a smile.

"I do, thank you" Cyrene then piped in.

"Well Potestas, Gabrielle and I must be off. I'm showing her around Amphipolis" The man nodded his head.

"Ah well, I'm sure you'll take her to the writing shop huh?" Cyrene smiled.

"Oh course" Potestas chuckled and watched as the two ladies left the store.

"Bye!" The two females waved and disappeared out of the door.

"Nice guy"

"He is. If you ever need a good deal on jewelry Potestas is the one to see Gabrielle. He's a very reasonable man and he's always loved my family" The bard smiled at that.

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"Well I'll consider it Xena. You do have a slim chance not by my word but by this village's" The warrior nodded her head to Ferus.

"I know, but please consider it" Ferus stood up from his seat.

"I will, I'll discuss it with the other members of the council. I do see a change in you Xena, that is something I'm happy to see" The warrior nodded with a small smile.

"But this village still dwells deeply on the past, it'll take a lot to convince them"

"Yes it will. Thank you for your help Ferus" The Constable nodded his head with a smile.

"You're welcome, have a good day" Xena nodded and moved to the door to leave.

"Xena?" The warrior turned her head back to the Constable. "It's good to see you back" Xena smiled.

"Thanks. Have a good one" Ferus nodded and sat back down in his chair once Xena left. The warrior stepped out of the building after closing the door. Then she walked back to the tavern. Once inside she went upstairs to her old room, the door swinging open. She moved into the room and quickly spotted a piece of parchment on the head of the bed, her name on it. The warrior walked around the bed and sat on the edge. She reached over and collected the small paper in her hand. Opening it she read it;

*Emotions, Feelings, Desire, Hope, Love, Passion all revolve around you.*

The warrior grinned at that. She folded the small paper back up and went to the

saddlebag. She pulled out a small pouch that contained an article. Xena slipped the paper inside of the pouch then she went to her soulmate's scroll satchel. She dug through it and found the ripped scroll from earlier then the quill. Sitting back on the bed Xena reflected. Then grinning, the quill going to the paper. Xena quickly wrote down what she wanted, folded the slip of parchment that she took off the scroll. She then wrote her soulmate's name onto the paper.

The warrior stared at the piece of paper for a moment, she then stood up from the bed with the torn scroll, quill and small bit of paper. Walking over to her old dresser, the warrior grinned at her old ragged doll. Xena lifted the small paper up and placed it in the lap of the doll. Then with her free hand, the doll was turned gently a little to face the door of the room. Xena grinned to herself then moved back to her bard's satchel and placed the scroll and quill back inside.

Adjusting her cloak, she walked out of the room and down stairs. The warrior then made her way to the stables of the tavern's. Inside Argo waited for her owner. Xena began to tack up the war-horse.

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The bard's small hands went down to lift up the rough parchment from the basket of scrolls. She always loved that feel. For her imagination it held such power those scrolls. Gabrielle sighed then placed the scroll back down in the basket. She looked to Cyrene beside her with a smile.

"This is a nice store" The innkeeper smiled back.

"It is sweetie, well supplied" The bard nodded in agreement. The pair had walked into a store called *The Writing Corner*. It was easy to assume the use of this store. Once they had walked in, they quickly found the shop owner busy helping a few customers, so the two females wondered around in the shop. Gabrielle was happy to see that she could stock up on scrolls anytime she wanted to while in Amphipolis. "Would you like to see the view of Amphipolis?" Emerald eyes lifted up to Cyrene again.

"I'd love to"

"Wonderful, let's go dear" The bard nodded, Cyrene and Gabrielle made their way out of the store and into the wind. The two women went at a brisk walk, their heads down a little against the cool wind. Cyrene gazed up to see the small ridge that hung over Amphipolis, they made their way to it. The pair climbed around the ridge then walked out into it. Their eyes looked down on the town.

For the first time Gabrielle actually knew how large Amphipolis was, and that was large for a town. The bard's mind began to fill with the memories of the last time she came to the town. The time she saved her soulmate from getting pelted by stones. She sighed, that seemed like so long ago, it was.

Cyrene looked from the view to her daughter's friend. "Gabrielle?" The bard looked to Cyrene, her expression spoke of tiredness, weary.

"Yes?" Cyrene crossed her arms against her chest, tugging her cloak closer against her body.

"I was noticing while we were in Potestas' shop, he spoke of Poteidaia. You had a

solemn look. I was just curious as to why?" Gabrielle stared at Cyrene for a moment, then looked to the town again. Time passed, the innkeeper didn't think the bard would answer. Now it was Gabrielle who crossed her arms against her chest, but it looked more in a protective way. The small bard took a deep breath and slowly released it, her eyes still fixed on Amphipolis, and she spoke in a pain tone.

"Poteidaia...is...gone Cyrene" The innkeeper nodded her head, she looked to Gabrielle then back to the town.

"How did it happen sweetie?" The small blond blinked for a moment, her chest tighten. She took a breath then responded.

"An Amazon that was of the Nation destroyed it"

"Why may I ask?" A few tears trickled down Gabrielle's cheeks, she looked down to the ground below her feet. Looking back up she slowly answered.

"The Amazon, Velasca, was suppose to be Queen. I took the caste from her and she became a god in the process. Xena and I trapped her in a pit but she escaped with Ares' help. After that..." More tears came down the bard's cheek, but she held back the tidal wave. "After that she went looking for me...Eventually she went to... Poteidaia and burned everything...and everybody" Taking a deep breath, she sniffed, her last words just rasped out. "Nothing was left...everybody killed" Cyrene closed her eyes at that image, she couldn't believe it. Opening her brown eyes again, Cyrene looked to the bard.

Gabrielle had her back straight, a tear here and there crawling down her cheeks. Her arms tightly wrapped around herself, expression sad yet hard at the same time. Xena's mother moved to Gabrielle and pulled her in for a hug. The Amazon Queen quickly responded and wrapped her arms tightly around Cyrene, her face going into the tavern owner's shoulder. Neither of them said anything as they hugged for a while. They pulled back after a number of minutes. Cyrene sadly smiled to the bard.

"Gabrielle, I'm glad you came here" The small woman smiled to Cyrene, her eyes tinted with redness.

"Thanks. Finally get sometime to rest" The innkeeper nodded her head in agreement.

"You need time sweetie. I'm sorry you lost your hometown and family, I know that's hard. And this is coming from a woman whom lost her husband and youngest son. If you ever need somebody to talk to or cry with I'm always free" The bard sadly smiled.

"Thank you" Gabrielle paused. "That means a lot to me. Xena has been trying her best to help" Cyrene quickly responded in a strong tone.

"I'd hope my daughter was helping you. But knowing that daughter of mine she's been real helpful" Gabrielle nodded at that. Cyrene smiled and reached up with both hands, her worn hands going to the bard's shoulders, a tight squeeze. "Gabrielle, please remember sweetie that you're apart of my family too. I wish you'd had been one of my daughters with Xena. Either way, I'm happy you are apart of my life and more so of Xena's. Always remember that Amphipolis is much as your home as Poteidaia is" Gabrielle nodded with a smile, her eyes not as sadden.

"Thank you Cyrene" A corked smile crossed the older woman's lips. The innkeeper

squeezed Gabrielle's shoulder again for a brief instant.

"And sweetie, don't call me Cyrene. I prefer Mother or Mom" The bard's smile brightens even more.

"Okay...Mom" Cyrene then pulls the other woman into a tight embrace.

~\*Part 4\*~

Xena pulls the mare's reins back, the horse comes to a stop. The warrior stares down at the ground, her sapphire eyes narrow at something. Xena makes a clicking noise and Argo follows her keeper's direction to move forward a little. Argo comes to a halt and Xena leans to her right and stares down at the ground.

There on the ground are numerous hoof prints made into the ground. It was easy to guesstimate around twenty to twenty-five sets.

The tall warrior brought her boots from out of the stirrups once she straightens back up in the saddle. Swinging her left leg to the right side the warrior landed to the ground. Xena then begins to walk around the tracks, her cold eyes fixed on them. The wind continued to howl, her hair blowing in the wind. She then bent down to one knee, she touched one of the prints.

The dirt was still loose, her eyes narrowed at that. Considering the cold wind, it should have stiffened the dirt. Otherwise that meant the tracks were new.

"Hades" Xena sighed. Her fingertips grazed over the tracks again, they were deep. That's when we can naturally guess that the horses were being rode and that they weren't just wild. The tall form stood back up and her sky blue eyes followed the trail of the hoof prints. They went through the woods and headed south some. For how far Xena could not be sure. Her mind began to work as to what was south of Amphipolis other than the sea. Then she quickly remembered the old cave that was not to far away, rarely used at that.

The warrior glared to the south. She didn't like that at all, the tracks all lead in the direction of Amphipolis, directly to the ridge that over looked the town then another grouping of tracks that go south, which are the fresher set. Xena walked over to her mare and hopped up into the saddle. She turned Argo to face Amphipolis again, it was becoming late afternoon. The Warrior Princess kicked the war-horse into a canter and headed back home.

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Gabrielle sighed, she opened the door to her and Xena's room. She sauntered in at a slow gate. Closing the door the small woman leaned against it, her head resting against the door. She closed her eyes and took some deep breaths, her images slowly shifting back to memories once more.

Emerald eyes opened again and gazed around in the room. Her forest eyes locked on something to her right. Gabrielle stood up from the door and walked over to the dresser. In the small doll's hands was a piece of parchment, *Gabrielle* written on it. The bard's eyebrow arched up at it as small hands reached up to gently remove the paper from the doll's lap. The parchment piece was carefully open then read.



*You opened my heart and brought my shattered soul together.*

The bard reads it two times then stares at the words, her mind reads it yet a third time. A warm smile creases Gabrielle's lips. She folds the piece up again and walks to her satchel. Her diary is produced and the small woman places the small paper into the back of the diary for safekeeping. The diary was then placed back into its home, Gabrielle straightens her back up and moves to sit on the bed.

Then the door to the bedroom opened, a tall dark form came in.

"Hey" The warrior looked to her soulmate on the bed, she smiled to Gabrielle and replied.

"Hey, how was the walk?" The bard smiled lightly.

"Was nice. Went to the edge of the ridge, Amphipolis is big, never realized that" Xena's back stiffened at the information.

"The ridge?" Gabrielle nodded, her face constructing into confusion.

"Why?" The taller woman shifted to stand in front of Gabrielle. The warrior's cheeks were slightly red from the cold wind.

"There might be some problems" The bard's face dropped.

"Problems? What sort of problems?" Xena took a deep breath then answered back.

"I think there might be a band of raiders near by" Gabrielle groaned.

"How do you know?" Xena brought her arms up to cross against her cloak cover chest.

"Found some fresh horse tracks. Ran from the south to that ridge, then back south again"

"You sure they weren't just made by a wild group of horses?" The warrior shook her head.

"I'm sure Gabrielle, they were deep impressions"

"Ridden?" Xena nodded her head to the bard. Gabrielle stared at the floor then looked back up to Xena. "How many Xena?"

"Twenty to twenty-five, good size" The younger woman took a deep breath, the air slowly slipping back out between her lips.

"So what are we going to do?" Xena lifted her eyes from the wood floor to her soulmate.

"We're going to stop them" The bard slightly grinned at her soulmate.

"Sounds like a plan" The warrior chuckled.

"Come on, let's go down stairs and we'll talk about it. I need to go find the Constable" Gabrielle nodded then stood up, she began to take her cloak off. She placed it down

onto her bed, Xena waited at the door. The pair then made their way down stairs, once they reached the bottom of the steps, Xena turned to her soulmate. "I'm going to go get Ferus. I'll be back" Gabrielle nodded and the warrior quickly strolled out of the tavern. Gabrielle then looked to the door to the kitchen and as if on cue, Cyrene came right out.

"Where did my daughter go little one?" The bard smiled.

"She went to go get the Constable" The tavern owner arched an eyebrow.

"Why is that sweetie?" The small bard sighed.

"Xena seems to think that there might be a raider band near here" Cyrene's eyes widen, she moved closer to Gabrielle, her hands going to her hips as she replied.

"Really? Where about's?"

"A cavern south of here" The innkeeper nodded her head.

"I remember it, nobody goes to that cave these days" Cyrene then smiled. "Why don't you go sit down, I'll get something to drink for you and Xena" Gabrielle smiled brightly to Xena's mother.

"Thanks Mom" Cyrene smiled.

"No problem sweetie" The Amazon Queen made her way to a table near the door of the building, she pulled out the seat that was off to the right to face the door and the rest of the room. She sighed and tried to relax her mind, it was starting to get late. Soon in a half of a candlemark or maybe less it would be dusk. The wind still howled outside, the tavern shaking here and there with the gusts, it was eerie.

Cyrene came stalking out of the kitchen, she had two mugs. She quickly made her way over to Gabrielle's table. She placed one mug in front of the bard, it was filled with cider. The second one made it's home off to the bard's right, port in it. "Is there anything else you need Gabrielle?" The bard shook her head then responded back.

"No I think I'll be fine, thank you" The innkeeper smiled.

"I'll be in the kitchen preparing things if you need anything. I doubt there will be much ruckus here tonight"

"Why is that?"

"Cause of the wind, nobody likes to leave their homes in this sort of weather" The small Amazon Queen nodded and Cyrene headed back to the kitchen. Gabrielle lifted her mug and took a sip of the warm cider. She grinned. The bard loved her cider heated a little. Now she began to wander how Cyrene knew that one. *I wonder if that warrior...* But her thoughts were cut off as the person of her thoughts entered into the tavern. Gabrielle looked up to her soulmate with a smile, Xena smiled back and moved away from the door. Next to follow was an older man, shorter then Xena but taller then the bard. He had some short gray hair and wool clothes on and a dark brown wool cloak on. Gabrielle stood up from her seat.

"Gabrielle I want you to meet Constable Ferus" The bard smiled and looked to the

older man. Xena looked to Ferus.

"Ferus, this is my partner Gabrielle" Ferus looked to the bard with a pleasant smile and reached out. Gabrielle and Ferus shook hands, Ferus spoke to the bard.

"It's nice to meet you Gabrielle. You and Xena been traveling together for awhile?" The bard nodded her head then answered back.

"We have, for about a year and a half" Ferus nodded his head. Then he furrowed his brow.

"Hold on, I do reckon I've seen you before" He stared down at the table as he thought. His expression brightens up again and he looks to Gabrielle again. "Oh yes, you were the one that came in here and stopped that mob from stoning Xena over a year ago" The bard nodded her head. "You've changed quite a bit since then I must say" Gabrielle slightly nodded.

"Ferus, why don't you sit down. I'm going to go find Mother quickly and I'll be right back" The Constable looked to Xena then nodded. The warrior then made her way to the kitchen. Gabrielle shifted and sat back down, Ferus removing his cloak and hanging it from the back of a chair, he sat down.

"So I do reckon you and Xena have been through some capers eh?" The bard smiled, her fingers tracing the mug.

"We've been through quite a few"

"Now if I do recall you are a bard right?" Emerald eyes looked up from the mug to Ferus.

"I am. How did you know?" Ferus smiled then replied back.

"Cyrene spoke of you occasional when she talked of Xena. A number of times she mentioned that you were a bard. Also rumor gets around from Athens of the bards whom won the Academy contest" The Amazon Queen blushed a little.

"Yes well that was a long time ago"

"Not to long ago Gabrielle, people still speak much of you and your talents. Rumors get around of your bard skills" The small bard was still flushed some.

"Thank you Constable Ferus" The Constable nodded his head with a smile, he leaned back in his chair.

"Please just call me Ferus" Gabrielle nodded and then Cyrene with Xena right behind came out of the kitchen. Xena walked past Ferus to move to the other side of the table, she sat down at the seat with the mug of port, cloak still on. Cyrene came up to Ferus' side.

"What can I get yo Ferus?" The Constable looked up to Cyrene with a very warm smile.

"I'd die for some port Cyrene" The tavern owner smiled back and nodded her head.

"That's it?" Constable nodded his head. Cyrene then brought her right hand up to rest

on Ferus' shoulder. "I haven't seen much of you. How have you been?" Ferus' eyes dropped for a moment then he looked back up.

"I've been well. You Cyrene?" As Cyrene started to retort back, Xena and Gabrielle looked to each other with arched eyebrows. Gabrielle grinned and Xena slightly shook her head.

"I'm grand, happy to have my daughter and friend here" Ferus nodded.

"So I've heard. They're here for awhile" Cyrene grinned.

"That's what I hear too" Cyrene then looked to the entire group. "Now excuse me everybody" The innkeeper then shuffled off. Xena and Gabrielle both looked to Ferus, the older man looking to the soulmates.

"So what do you have on your mind Xena?" The warrior grinned then retorted back.

"I've found a large grouping of tracks south of Amphipolis, raiders" The Constable nodded his head, he wasn't shocked. He was to use to this.

"Where exactly did you find them?"

"They were about five hundred or more paces away from the ridge over the town" Ferus crossed his arms against his chest.

"And you believe them to be hiding where?"

"In the southern cave, nobody goes there. That's the most likely spot" Ferus nodded his head then stared at the table for a moment. He looked up to Xena.

"I presume you have an idea in mind?" The warrior grinned then nodded her head.

"I thought Gabrielle and I late tonight could go to the cave, do some investigating. Find out the numbers. My guess there are somewhere between twenty and twenty-five from the hoof prints" Ferus bobbed his head up and down, his eyes unfocused as he thought. Xena lifted the mug of port, taking a gulp of it. After setting it back down she looked to her quiet soulmate. Gabrielle looked to the warrior with serious eyes Xena very faintly nodded her head. Sapphire eyes looked back to Ferus. The door to the kitchen opened up and Cyrene came out with a mug of port. She placed it in front of Ferus.

"Thank you Cyrene"

"Quite welcome" Ferus smiled to Cyrene. The innkeeper smiled back then went back to the kitchen. To follow was the door to the tavern opening, two men came stomping in. They peered at the table the warrior, bard and Constable sat around. They nodded to Ferus and then made their way to a table across the room, Cyrene coming out of the kitchen to waiter them.

The cool air from outside loomed in the tavern, sending a shiver down Gabrielle's back. Xena looked to her bard with a questioning face, the bard just shook her head. The warrior arched an eyebrow and the Amazon Queen grinned a little. Xena sighed with a gentle smile and looked back to Ferus.

"Well Xena, what's the plans after that?" Now Xena devilishly grinned, she was about

to answer back. But the door to the tavern swung open again, it stopped her. Then came in a fairly tall man. He had black raggedy midnight hair. His face was round, a rather large nose, for eyes they were a dull blue. He had on black brownish leathers, sword at his side. The young man looked to the table.

"Toris?" The man smiled to the warrior's words. Xena stood up and gather her brother into her arms. They both hugged tightly. Once the embrace was broken, the siblings looked to the bard and Ferus whom had stood up.

"Constable Ferus, haven't seen you for awhile" Ferus smiled some to Toris and at his words.

"Nor have I've seen you around these parts much Toris. What have you been up too?" Toris smiled slightly.

"A little of this, a little of that" Toris then looked to the bard. "Hello Gabrielle" Gabrielle smiled to Xena's brother.

"Its good to see you again Toris"

"The same about you Gabrielle. You look more beautiful then last time" The Amazon Queen turn a light shade of red.

"Thank you Toris" The young man then looked to Xena with a smile.

"How have you been sis?" The warrior smiled one of those warm one's that are rare.

"Really well. You been up to no good?" Toris chuckled some.

"You know me"

"Mmm exactly my point" Xena took a breath. "So what brings you home?" Toris shrugged his shoulders.

"Well was passing through the area. Thought I'd stop by to see mother. I need to do a job then I plan on coming back here for Solstice. What you doing here yourself?" The Warrior Princess smiled.

"Gabrielle and I decided to take a little vacation from all the action and adventure" Toris chuckled at that.

"I've heard of some of your two's excursions. Well I'm going to go find Mother. She's in the kitchen?" Xena nodded her head.

"She is, come join us when you're finished. We could use your help with some local raiders" Toris nodded with a grin.

"Raiders eh? Sounds like fun. I'll be happy to help. Be back in a jiffy" Xena nodded and everybody sat back down, Toris going to the kitchen to visit Cyrene. Once Toris entered in, everybody heard a surprised low cry in the kitchen then a laugh from Toris.

~\*Part 5\*~

"Xena?" The warrior looked to her soulmate. "Did you tell your mother about my liking my cider warm?" The warrior devilishly grinned. "Xena" It was a bit of a

whine.

"Couldn't help it" The bard shook her head then smiled to her warrior.

The pair is just beginning to exit Amphipolis on foot. It was night, well after sunset. The night was cold, the wind settled some but still blew with a slight breeze. Gabrielle took a breath, her breath visible in the air. She had on her cloak, buttoned up and her staff in her right hand. Xena had on her own cloak and buttoned up, weapons with her.

"I had a talk with your mom" Xena looked to her partner then back to the faintly lit woods.

"Yeah? What about?" Gabrielle took a deep breath.

"About Poteidaia " The warrior nodded her head

"Did you tell her everything?" The bard shook her head.

"Not details...just glazed over everything" The older woman nodded her head.

"Well Mother had asked me earlier"

"You tell her?" Xena nodded her head.

"She knew something was up, couldn't hide it from Mother" The bard tugged her cloak closer against her body with her free hand.

"Thanks for telling her" The Warrior Princess looked to her soulmate, slightly astonished.

"Why?" Gabrielle shrugged her shoulders.

"I couldn't have told her on my own" Xena nodded her head, a bit of a smile slipping on her lips. Silence over took the pair, then Gabrielle broke it. A chuckle escaping between her lips. "Your mother asked me to call her Mom for now on" The warrior grinned and looked to Gabrielle.

"That's Mother for you" The bard smiled to her counterpart.

"Yeah, she's a great woman" Xena nodded in agreement.

"She is" The warrior then suddenly stopped. Gabrielle came up short beside Xena, looking to her. Xena looked to Gabrielle then back ahead. The warrior pointing straight ahead. The younger woman followed Xena's indication. There ahead was a faint glow of fire. "Be careful Gabrielle, follow me okay?" Gabrielle nodded her head. "Come on"

Xena went ahead, Gabrielle directly behind. The bard had lifted her staff up off the ground to make less noise. The pair stalked through the trees and woods, coming closer and closer to the cave. Within a few minutes they were off to the side of the cave, twenty paces away from the cave's mouth. They both listened. What they heard was the sound of men laughing, Xena's eyes narrowed. She then closed her eyes, listening more intently. The sound of horses nickered through her ears. Sapphire eyes opened again.

"Where are the horses?" The warrior looked to her soulmate on her right. Xena replied back at a whisper like the bard had.

"Not sure, going to go find out" Xena looked to the cave then back to Gabrielle. "Stay here and stay low. I'll be right back. Okay?" The bard nodded, Xena smiled some. She then disappeared into the shadows ahead. Gabrielle couldn't see much in the dark with the exception of the cave's entrance that glowed from the fire. The bard crouched down and leaned back against a tree, her staff in her lap. A tall figure then materialized near the mouth of the cave, the bard grinned.

Xena's hands went up to the cave, she slowly crept around the side more to the entrance. She then just peered inside of the cave. Gabrielle bit her lower lip at this, her heart rate pumping. The warrior started counting the men, twenty-three exactly. She grinned to herself then backed away to the side of the cave again. She then listened, the horses nickering again. She took a deep breath and caught the smell of horse. Following the sound and smell Xena quickly found the horses back in the woods away near the cave's side.

Gabrielle looked around for her soulmate, knowing she had left to seek out the horses. The bard then saw a figure coming out of the cave, Gabrielle's pulse picking up. Her hands gripped the staff hard, mumbling under her breath.

"Hades Xena... where are you?" The man from the cave began to walk in the direction Xena went, at least the bard presumed. The bard then spotted something large and dark on top of the cave, crouching. She knew it was Xena. The Amazon Queen clenched her teeth, he might see her. Gabrielle looked around on the ground for something. Picking up a rock, she pulled back her arm and hurled it through the air near the opposite side of the cave. It hit the cave's side then fell to the ground, the raider quickly rushed over there. Gabrielle looked up to where Xena had been, she was gone.

The bard sighed and dropped her head against the tree. She looked to the raider, seeming him stand and look around. He shrugged then walked back inside of the cave, Gabrielle grinned. She closed her eyes then within a few seconds she felt a presence directly in front of her, she knew who it was. The bard grinned and opened her eyes. "That was close" Xena crouched down to her partner.

"Yeah, thanks"

"No problem. Ready to get back?" Xena nodded her head. They both stood up. The heroes then quietly made their way out of the woods and into Amphipolis. "How many Xena?"

"Twenty-three, we'll be fine" Gabrielle nodded with a grin.

## **Part 2**

### **Section 2**

~\*Part 6\*~

The bard sat up in the bed, she was shaking some. Taking a deep breath her nerves calmed down along with her pounding heart. Quick to follow was the warrior sitting up in the bed beside the bard.

"Dream?" Gabrielle nodded her head. The warrior's large hand went to Gabrielle's back, rubbing it lightly. Gabrielle dropped her head forward, she tried to ease her body as Xena comforted her. She took another deep breath and looked to Xena, she smiled a light one. The warrior smiled back. "You okay now?"

"Yeah I think so...thanks" Xena nodded her head. Gabrielle then turned to face Xena and crawled into the warrior's arms. The older woman pulled her small soulmate in tightly and lay back in the bed, Gabrielle on top of Xena.

"Try to get a little more sleep"

The bard sighed as she felt her soulmate pull the covers back over the two of them. "When are we leaving Xena?"

"In about two candlemarks, it'll be close to dawn"

The Amazon Queen faintly nodded her head and tightened her arms at the warrior's sides. The soulmates shifted back into their dreamscapes.

~\*~\*~\*~

Xena slowly came out of her dream state. Her eyes opened and looked to the window, it was still night out. She then looked to the bard on top of her, the warrior's arms tighten more securely around Gabrielle.

It hadn't been a bad few days for our heroes, not at all. The only thing this pair had to contend to is a small band of raiders. Hopefully that wouldn't be a bad engagement they would have to confront. At least the soulmates hoped it wouldn't take much time to disperse them, Xena didn't think it would. But then there was always the bard who kept in mind that things can always go wrong, even with the warrior's perfect plans.

As of now, we have little guess as to what this pair's Solstice vacation will be. We know the beginning but we have yet to find out the end. But knowing our pair, it will be something quite incredible. It is easy to assume Gabrielle has yet to fully heal from Poteidaia's destruction. And we can see that Xena has little words these days to take away the pain, which is all too normal for the warrior. So in turn Xena compensates for this by doing physical things. Sometimes words don't hold enough power to do one's bidding, so that's when we resort to the physical, which can talk as well in it's own language. And in that physical language much can be told and done, especially for Xena. Hence Gabrielle feels the affect of Xena's efforts and they have immense differences in her healing process.

But now it is time for our heroes to roll out of bed, to confront yet another day. Consequently Xena began to run her right hand through the bard's strawberry-blond hair. Gabrielle groaned a little then lifted her head, a lopsided smile to her lips.

"Morning love" The bard stretched her legs and dropped her face to Xena's chest. "We need to get moving"

The bard grumbled then lifted her head to look at the warrior. "It's too early"



The warrior chuckled at her soulmate's words. "I agree"

The Amazon Queen arched an eyebrow at her soulmate. "Really?" Xena nodded her head, the bard grinned. "Well we'll make up for it later tiger" Xena grinned then Gabrielle began to shifted off the bed and her soulmate. Once her feet were on the wood floor, the bard stretched her arms, the large white shift moving up with her shoulders. Xena then bounced off the bed, fully awake and ready for action, she still had on her leathers. "How do you do that?"

The warrior looked to her partner, Xena grinned. "It's not that hard after several years"

Gabrielle looked to her warrior skeptically. "It doesn't matter how early or late I wake up, I still can't just bounce around like that"

Xena smirked. "Well you're not much for the mornings to begin with"

Gabrielle huffed at that. She made her way to the table where her normal attire lay. The pair got dressed in relatively silence, the bard slow about her attempts to dress, Xena dressing rapidly. The warrior finished first in her normal attire, cloak on as well, she then leaned against the door, staring at her soulmate. The bard turned around, her hands up lacing her top, she looked to her warrior and grinned. "I assume Toris is suppose to be up?"

The warrior nod. "Better be"

Gabrielle looked up from her top to the warrior, arched eyebrow. Gabrielle grinned a little then quickly finished lacing her top. She then gathered her cloak up and hefted it on, whirling around she plucked her staff up from against the wall. Xena opened the door and the pair headed out and down the stairs. As soon as they reached the final step did Toris look up from the bar, he sat on a stool.

"Morning Sis and Gabrielle"

The warrior smirked at her groggy brother and replied in a sarcastic tone. "Good morning Toris"

Toris rolled his eyes and stood up from the seat. The warrior and her partner padded over closer to Toris.

"Are we ready?"

Xena nodded her head. "Yeah, we need to head over to Ferus' office. You ready?"

Toris nodded his head and the three people made their way out of the tavern then to Ferus' office.

"Come in!" The Warrior Princess opened the door to the building and inside was Ferus sitting behind his desk. "Morning to you three" Everybody smiled a little to the Constable.

"Are the rest of the men ready?"

Ferus nodded his head to Xena and then answered as well. "They're just about"

"What about the oil jars?"

The Constable slightly grinned. "Those are prepared too"

The warrior nodded her head "Sounds good, we better move before dawn hits"

Ferus nodded his head in agreement, everybody migrated out of the office. As soon as they did they found themselves surrounded by a dozen other villagers. They all had swords with them, a few with bows and arrows, two men with lit torches and two other men with bags on their backs.

"Is everybody prepared?" All the villagers nodded in response to Ferus' question. The Constable looked to Xena then back to the villagers. "Everybody, you will be following my orders and Xena's. We must be careful, we are outnumbered and there are twenty-three raiders exactly. Each of you do understand the plan?" All the villagers nodded their heads or answer yes. "Follow Xena then"

Xena led the group through the town, Gabrielle, Toris, and Ferus at her side. The group made their way through the dark woods in the night, the torches lighting the way some. Then Xena knew she was close to the cave, so she stopped as did everybody else. She turned to the group and spoke in a low but stern voice.

"Here is how its going to work. There will be two of you to go back a ways in the woods, there are then the group of horses, round them up. Gabrielle and you four men with the oil jars and torches will go near the mouth of the cave when I say so. Then you will proceed to light the oil jars and throw them into the cave. That will smoke out the raiders then once they come out I want the rest of you men to surround the entrance of the cave with the raiders, that'll hold them in one spot. I'll take care of stopping the leader and we hope that will scare the rest of the raiders off. Does everybody understand?" The twelve villagers nodded their heads quickly. "Good, keep quiet and to whispers. Now I want two of you to go retrieve the raider's horses"

Two men quickly nodded their heads and shifted their way through the people to the front. Xena looked down to them, she then turned to the cave. She pointed in a general direction. "If you go that way for about three hundred paces you'll see them"

"It's taken care of"

The warrior smiled to the man and then the two men shuffled off in the darkness relatively close. Xena looked down to her soulmate. "You know what to do?"

The bard looked up with a small grin. "No problem"

Xena nodded with a grin too. "Be careful alright?" Gabrielle nodded. "Go get set up and don't start till I signal"

The bard nodded again and the four men with torches and oil jars came through the other people. "Follow me you four" The four men stepped in line behind Gabrielle. The bard's group mingled their way through the woods about a good two hundred paces away from the entrance of the cave. They all squatted down and the two men with the packs soundless removed the packs. Opening them, the oil jars with wicks appeared inside. Gabrielle grinned at this and she looked up to the direction Xena was.

The warrior's eyes narrowed at the direction Gabrielle went, she turned her head back to face her group. "Alright listen up. Four of you will be with me, the other four you will be with Toris and Constable Ferus. Each group will go on each side of the cave. Once Gabrielle's group starts throwing in the oil jars the raiders will come out. Once they do that, we are to encircle them, weapons at the ready. Let's go"

With that said, everybody split up into their groups. Xena's group went to the close side of the cave while Toris' and Ferus' group went to the farthest side, so they had to be quiet. Xena looked to her right, the sun's light was beginning to fill this world. The warrior just made out the lines of horses, she could hear them nickering. She turned her head forward where Gabrielle waited. Quietly unsheathing her sword Xena watched the sun's rays filter slowly through the woods, she turned her blade to face the increasing sun. The rays were reflected off the blade.

Gabrielle grinned. She looked to her four men with her. "That's the signal, let's get those oil jars lit and flying"

Everybody in Gabrielle's group hustled. The two men with the torches bent down next to the packs, pulling out the jars and lighting them. The other two men stood beside the torch men, they took the lit jars and hurled them into the cave's mouth. Gabrielle stood up as she watched the jars flying through the air and rolling into the cave. She lifted her staff up in a defensive stance.

Soon yelling and screaming could be heard from men. It echoed in the cave. There was the sound of metal clanking, men shuffling around yelling out fire. Then within a few heartbeats and about ten jars inside, raiders began to flow out of the cave's mouth.

Xena counted. Ten, eleven, fourteen, seventeen, twenty-one, almost there, now the magic number twenty-three. The warrior leaped up from the ground, her warrior cry escaping from her lips. All the raiders froze in place from the movement of other people. They coughed as well, smoke rising from inside of the cave out the entrance. Some raiders had sword and promptly drew them, but knew it wasn't worth their time.

Now the scene was quite different from earlier that morning. Here we have this cave letting smoke ripple out with twenty-three raiders half-dressed, half armed just outside of the cave surrounded by eight villagers, one Constable, and two warriors.

Xena stepped out from the ring around the raiders. "Good morning boys"

All the raiders looked to the tall warrior, they were a bit shocked. Somebody coughed from within the band of raiders and pushed through the raiders to Xena. He was a big guy, bit angry to say the least, fully dressed and armed, and hasn't bathed in to long. He glared at Xena. "Who in Hades are you?"

The Warrior Princess grinned devilishly. "The name's Xena"

The raider's face dropped. "You're Xena?"

"Yup and I hate it when people mess with my town"

The lead raider gulp, then he found his backbone again. His eyes narrowed. "Well then, we'll just have to put that to the test. I personally hate being rudely awoken in the morning" He drew his sword and leapt forward at Xena, the warrior quite prepared for

that.

She stopped his sword blow, the raider took a step back with a grin. Xena flashed her own grin, she laughed with a flick of her sword and drove forward. Her sword was stopped, but not her high kick she delivered. The kick sent the raider back coughing, he almost fell into his comrades behind him. He shook his head and stepped back up to Xena.

"Is that all you have?"

The raider growled at Xena and plunged forward at her. Xena jumped off to the side, the raider rushed past her and came to a stop. He turned back around and glared at her, he was hot tempered. The warrior laughed at him. Their swords then met again over their heads, then lower, followed by off to the right side a little. That's when Xena punched the raider in the face. He stumbled back and then recovered with the pair's swords meeting.

Everybody watched from around, raiders and villagers. Gabrielle had moved a little closer to watch her soulmate. The bard had then realized that her soulmate was toying with the raider, she grinned inwardly then shook her head. Even the raiders and inexperienced villagers knew Xena was toying with the raider. The only one not to know was the raider himself considering he was too consumed by his anger to know the difference.

Xena parried the raider's sword stab, she then kicked him in the stomach. He was stunned so Xena kicked his sword out of hand, it landed to the ground. The raider looked up to the grinning warrior, the next thing to follow was the warrior doing a round house kick. The raider went sprawling through the air and onto his back. The Warrior Princess walked up beside him and placed her sword tip to his throat.

"Now then, I highly recommend you leave here"

The raider blinked and looked up into dark blue eyes. The sword was pressed hard against his throat, he replied but it was choked out. "We'll leave"

Xena grinned to the man. "Good" The warrior bent down, her face going close to his. She continued speaking now but in a deep growl. "Don't come any where near these parts again" Silence for a few heartbeats. "Got me?"

The raider nodded. "No problem"

Xena smiled cynically. "Great, get out of here...now" The warrior stood back up and removed her sword from his throat. The raider stumbled up onto his feet, he looked to his friends and nodded to them. Xena looked to her right where Ferus and Toris were standing in the circle, she nodded to them. The Constable and Toris moved out of the way as did a few villagers. The raiders walked through with their leader in the back. Everybody watched the raiders leave, especially Xena. The band began to climb the ridge and disappear over it, the leader still in sight. Gabrielle walked up beside Xena, they smiled to each other. Xena then looked back up to the where the raiders went, her face dropped.

The leader had stopped walking and currently had his right arm moving forward, dagger in hand and aimed at one individual. Xena looked to Ferus, then to the raider,

the dagger gone from the raider's hand. The warrior moved to Ferus at an incredible speed. She reached out forward, her breath caught in her throat. Her fingers wrapped around cold metal and stopped the blade in midair, its tip only inches from Ferus' throat.

The Constable's stunned eyes turned to Xena. "Thanks"

Xena smiled a little. "No problem" She then looked to the raider, he still stood there glaring, Xena smirked and reached to her side. Her chakram came off her side with a cling and she threw it. The chakram went whistling through the air, bounced off a tree to the right, lowered in angel and came right at the raider. It struck him at the waist and the chakram was redirected back to Xena. The warrior snatch it out of midair once in was near enough, she hooked it back on.

There near the ridge's edge was a raider with his pants down. Everybody broke out laughing with the exception of Xena who snickered then just grinned. The raider pulled up his pants rather briskly and hurried himself over the ridge and out of sight.

~\*Part 7\*~

"Xena I can't believe you did that"

The warrior closed the door behind her and looked to her soulmate, she grinned. "He's lucky he only got that"

The bard chuckled, shook her head then proceeded to remove her cloak. "Have to admit it was funny even though what the raider tried to do"

Xena nodded at that in agreement, the warrior also taking off her cloak. She tossed it on the made bed beside Gabrielle's. The warrior then unclipped her sword and took off her chakram, she dropped them on top of her cloak.

Gabrielle placed her staff up against the wall and turned to Xena. "Now can we go get something to eat?"

Xena looked up from the bed and then grinned. "Yeah I'm quite hungry too"

The bard chuckled and shifted closer to her soulmate. "Xena?"

"Mmm?"

"Don't you think we should sit down with your mom and talk to her about us?"

Xena dropped her eyes to the floor and thought. Her blue eyes then shifted back to look at Gabrielle. "Yeah you're right, we better. Knowing Mother she probably already suspects"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "That's my guess too" The bard then chuckled.

The warrior grinned. "Come on let's go" The soulmates padded out of the room and ambled down the steps to see an empty tavern. "Go sit down. I'll go see Mother"

The bard nodded to her soulmate then headed over to sit at a table. She sighed. She still felt sleepy after waking so early. But she still had her growling stomach to make happy, which she had every intentions of doing. Gabrielle turned her head to the left

to see Xena coming out of the kitchen, Cyrene right behind her. The mother and daughter came over to Gabrielle's table.

"Good morning sweetie"

"Morning Mom"

Xena sat down beside her soulmate. Cyrene looked to both the pair now. "So I hear you two want some breakfast?"

Gabrielle grinned. "I could go for anything right about now"

The innkeeper chuckled. "Alright, I'll make something up for you both"

"Afterwards Mother, Gabrielle and I would like to talk to you"

The tavern owner looked to her daughter, expression serious as Xena's. "Alright dear" With that Cyrene turned around and headed back into the kitchen to make breakfast.

Xena's sapphire eyes turned from the kitchen door to the bard. "Sleepy huh?"

Gabrielle looked up to her partner. She nodded then responded. "Yeah afraid so"

The warrior nodded. "Get some sleep after you eat"

The bard stretched out her legs under the table, her legs falling on top of Xena's legs. Gabrielle chuckled and looked to Xena, the warrior grinned. The warrior lifted her own legs up and in turn the smaller woman's legs were lifted up. The bard smirked and Xena dropped her legs, but Gabrielle never moved her legs from over top of Xena's, the warrior not at all minding.

"You know I think I might just go take a nap after breakfast"

Xena chuckled. "I figured as much"

The Amazon Queen arched an eyebrow at her best friend. "Oh? And you're not going to join me?"

The older woman folded her hands in her lap. "I will but I have to do something first"

"And what's that?"

"Ferus wants to speak with me"

Gabrielle nodded then dropped her head against the chair's back. "Then you'll join me?"

Sparkling sky splashed eyes shifted to the bard. "Of course"

The bard fiendishly grinned. "Good"

The kitchen door opened and Cyrene came out, two plates in hand. She placed one in front of each of the soulmates. "Drinks?"

Gabrielle looked up. "Do you have orange juice?"

Cyrene smiled. "Of course, freshly squeezed every morning dear" The innkeeper

looked to her daughter. "You dear?"

The warrior smiled "The same"

The tavern owner nodded her head, reached into large pockets in her dress. She produced two forks and knives placing them on the table for the soulmates. Cyrene then headed behind the bar, filling up two mugs with orange juice. Once she returned she handed them to the pair.

"I'm going to go back into the kitchen to clean up, then I'll be back. Go ahead and eat" Xena and Gabrielle both nodded and Cyrene smiled. She disappeared into the kitchen while the soulmates began to eat.

"You know I feel real bad your mom is cooking everything"

Xena looked up from her plate, she swallowed some of her food. "She loves cooking"

Gabrielle grinned. "I can relate"

The warrior arched an eyebrow. "I can't"

The bard chuckled at that. She took a sip of the rich orange juice. "I think tonight I'll try and help her with the crowd"

Xena smiled to her soulmate. "She'd like that" Gabrielle nodded her head and went on eating. Xena then drank down some orange juice. "She'd probably also love it if you'd tell a story or two one night"

The younger woman let her fork's tip sink into the food as she held the top, she looked to Xena. "I don't know"

The warrior nodded her head. "I know...try it when you're ready"

Gabrielle sadly smiled. She wanted to be a bard again. "I will"

The bard's soulmate smiled deeply and went on eating, the pair being quiet for the remainder of the meal. Once they were finished Cyrene on cue came shuffling out of the kitchen. She sat down at a chair facing the soulmates.

"Looks like you enjoyed breakfast" The plates were clean.

Gabrielle grinned. "It was great Mom. Do you think tonight I can help you cook for the dinner crowd?"

The innkeeper smiled. "I could always use the extra help sweetie" Cyrene then pulled out a seat and sat down, still looking to the bard.

"Great, then I'll help"

Cyrene nodded with a smile then she focussed on both of the soulmates. "So what do you dears need to speak with me about?"

The warrior sat straight in the seat, Gabrielle's legs moving from over top of Xena's. "Well Gabrielle and I have something to tell you Mother" The warrior looked to her bard, Gabrielle to Xena.

The bard interpreted the look. Sensitive chats. Gabrielle looked to Cyrene. "You see Cyrene um how do you put this right?" Gabrielle looked to her soulmate. Xena arched an eyebrow then crossed her arms against her chest. The bard looked back to the innkeeper. "Well you see, Xena and I are...um..."

"Lovers"

Gabrielle looked to her soulmate, her mouth hanging open from Xena's one single word. The warrior shrugged her shoulders then grinned.

Cyrene looked from the bard to where her daughter sat after hearing Xena's...explanation. Cyrene simply nodded her head and rest back into the wood chair. She smiled deeply to the soulmates. "I knew"

The bard looked back to Cyrene. "You knew?" The innkeeper nodded at Gabrielle's question. "Well why didn't you ask Xena or I?"

The tavern owner smiled and leaned forward, her arms resting on the table. "I wanted you two to tell me when you were ready to"

Gabrielle nodded and Xena kept smiling. "How long Mother?"

The innkeeper crossed her arms against her chest and reflected. "I suppose since the beginning when you both stepped in here"

The warrior arched an eyebrow. "The two days ago or the year and a half ago?"

Cyrene chuckled. "Well I do have to say I noticed it in the making from the very beginning. Mothers know these things. But I could tell you both confessed it to each other when you stepped in here two days ago. The love you hold for each other just fills the space around you both"

Both soulmates looked to each other and Xena arched an eyebrow.

Gabrielle laughed at her partner. "Xena, it wasn't my fault"

The warrior's face went into question at the bard's statement. "Oh? And you're saying its mine?"

The bard nodded with a grin. "Yes you were the first one to make a move"

Xena grinned to her soulmate. "And who's to say you didn't make the first move back in that grove over a year ago?"

Gabrielle coughed then looked to Cyrene.

The innkeeper grinned at the pair. "Xena and Gabrielle" Both the soulmates went serious at Cyrene's serious tone, the innkeeper continuing. "I'm very happy for you both. I can tell that the other has helped you both tremendously. I can't be more proud...of you both" The tavern owner smiled very deeply, the kind of smile Gabrielle had seen only on Xena's lips at precious times.

Gabrielle smiled back very warmly. "Thank you Cyrene. I know that means a lot to me and Xena...for us"



The warrior looked to her partner, smiled brightly and Gabrielle smiled back.

Xena looked to her mother again. "I have to say Mother, I was very skeptical about telling you. I wasn't sure what your reaction would have been. But I'm really happy we did, thank you"

Cyrene nodded with her warm smile. "I want the best for you both and I know having each other is one of the best things...for each of you"

Gabrielle then stood up from her seat and moved to Cyrene. The innkeeper stood up and the two women wrapped their arms tightly around each other. "Thanks again Mom"

Xena's mother squeezed a little harder. The two women pulled back a little from the embrace to gaze at each other. "No thank you sweetie"

Gabrielle nodded her head, understanding what Cyrene meant by that. They broke the embrace and Xena now stood up. Mother and daughter now hugged strongly.

The tavern owner patted Xena's back. The warrior sighed and they broke the hug, smiling to each other. "Thanks Mother"

Cyrene nodded lightly then responded back. "Xena, no matter what I'll always love you"

The warrior nodded, her face constructed into a sad happiness. Gabrielle wanted to rush over and hug her soulmate, but knew it wasn't the right moment.

"I'm sorry for everything Mother"

"It's over with Xena, lets just move on" Xena nodded and Cyrene sadly smiled. "Why don't you two go get some rest like Toris"

Gabrielle stepped around from the table to stand closer to Xena.

"Yeah we will Mother"

The tavern keeper nodded to her daughter. "Good. Sleep well" With that Cyrene shuffled off into the kitchen, the soulmates heading upstairs to their room. As soon as the door to their room shut, Xena found Gabrielle in her arms. The side of the bard's face rested on the warrior's chest, Xena dropping her head onto the smaller woman's head. They stayed like that for minutes, letting time pass. There was such strength and protection in this for the pair. It is as if no man could ever break this invisible barrier around them, this invisible barrier known as love.

Xena took a deep breath, her eyes closed. "I should go" Gabrielle tightened her arms more around Xena. The warrior chuckled. "I take that as a no I shouldn't go"

The bard grinned, Xena feeling the grin form against her chest. "No don't go"

Silence loomed for a few heartbeats. They both enjoyed this more than anything.

Xena then groaned. "Gabrielle..." It came out as a low rumble and Gabrielle had felt her name vibrated through Xena's body.

The Amazon Queen chuckled a little. "Okay...okay" The younger woman released the warrior, Gabrielle looked up with a small grin.

Xena smiled back. "I'll be back soon"

The bard nodded. "All right" Gabrielle then shifted over to the bed, she lifted up Xena's cloak. She tossed it to the warrior. "Don't forget that, I don't want you getting sick"

The Warrior Princess grinned as she put on the heavy cloak. "Always looking after me huh?"

Gabrielle nodded with a grin. "Always"

Xena nodded with a smile, her eyes ever so slightly twinkling. Gabrielle couldn't help but wonder why too.

"Go hop in bed, I'll be back soon as I can"

"Yes Mom"

The warrior arched an eyebrow at her partner, Xena opened the door. The bard smirked to her soulmate, her arms crossing against her chest. Xena stepped through the doorway and looked back to her best friend, she wink to the bard then disappeared through the door. The door closed and Gabrielle sighed, her cheeks felt rather warm as did the rest of her body. The bard looked down at the floor, she chuckled, shook her head with a grin and mumbled to herself. "How does she do that?"

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Gabrielle shifted a little on the bed. Her quill went back to the diary. The small bard lay on her stomach on the bed, her legs up crossed at the ankles in the air. The bard faced the door, her diary right at the edge of the bed. She took a deep breath and went on writing.

*Well Xena and I told Cyrene about our relationship. It went really well, thank the gods. I could tell Xena was really worried about how her mother would react. I have to say I was really worried as well for Xena and Cyrene. But Cyrene seemed quite supportive of the relationship, I figured she would be. I think Xena and Cyrene are trying to make up for the past. I know Xena never wanted any of her past to happen but figured it to be to late once she was pulled in. Now though she knows it's never to late to change. Thankfully Cyrene knows that too. Its so wonderful to seem them back together as mother daughter. I can tell something has come back to life in Xena. Her eyes appear to soften a little each day.*

*Then Toris showed up yesterday, last night. He seemed well too. Said he'd been passing through the area and dropped in. Supposedly he has some kind of job he needs to do then he plans to be back on Solstice. I'm sure that made Cyrene happy. Toris seems happier then the last time I saw him, more at easy.*

*But Xena, myself, Toris, Constable Ferus of Amphipolis and a few villagers had to scare off some raiders. There were twenty-three raiders south of Amphipolis, Xena had found their horse's tracks. So we found them in a cave not to far away and earlier this morning we smoked them out. Xena then fought the leader and the band of*

*raiders ran after Xena defeated him.*

The bard looked up to see a tall dark form standing in the doorway, Gabrielle grinned. "Back already?"

Xena nodded with a grin, she stepped into the room and closed the door. "Yeah, didn't take long" The warrior made her way over to the bed. The warrior bent down to one knee and became eye level with her soulmate. "So why aren't you in bed?"

Gabrielle dropped her quill on the diary. "I am" Xena arched an eyebrow at the Amazon Queen. "What? I am"

Xena grinned. "Uh huh you know what I mean"

The bard huffed. "Such a mother hen"

The warrior chuckled, she brought up her right hand to Gabrielle's cheek. Gabrielle sighed and leaned more into Xena's touch. The warrior smiled. "I love you"

The younger woman sighed, her spring eyes closed then opened slowly again. "I love you too Xena"

Xena smiled lovingly, her soft fingertips glided from the bard's cheek to under her chin. Xena leaned in very slowly as the bard closed her eyes. Xena's crystal blue eyes closed as the soulmate's lips met. The kiss was so ever gentle yet the love poured through the light kiss.

The Warrior Princess pulled away slowly again their eyes opening and locking. Xena's fingertips still under Gabrielle's chin. The warrior's thumb delicately grazed across Gabrielle's full lips. The warrior felt how warm, soft and incredible perfect those red lips were. Xena began to stand back up, she saw how those incredible glimmering forest eyes began to ache from Xena backing away. The warrior grinned a little to the bard.

Xena pulled her cloak off and tossed it to the wood table off to the left where her weapons and the bard's cloak lay. She then turned back to Gabrielle and reached down, her large hands lifting up the diary and quill. Xena closed the book and moved to place it on the table, green eyes on her the entire time. The bard then rolled off her stomach and onto her knees near the edge of the bed, Xena came to Gabrielle again.

Without warning, Xena captured the bard's lips. This kiss was completely opposite of the other one, it was strong with an urging passion. The bard melted to the kiss and moaned.

"I thought you were tired Gabrielle?" The warrior's lips moved to Gabrielle's neck now.

The bard moaned some, her hands going into the warrior's hair. "Oh no...I'm quite awake"

Xena grinned against Gabrielle's skin. The bard then brought her hands to the warrior's straps, she pulled on them. The warrior followed the physical signal and began to climb onto the bed.

"Xena, what about your bother? Isn't he up here?"

The warrior chuckled deeply, her large hands going to Gabrielle's stomach, her lips slowly moving down to the bard's chest.

"He is and I don't care"

Gabrielle laughed some but then all thoughts of laughing left as the warrior's lips came to her mouth again. Xena's hand shifting to the green top.

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Slowly emerald eyes opened, her eyes looking up to the ceiling. Her body was tingling all over like prickle pears. Resting on Gabrielle's chest was the warrior's head, one of Xena's arms wrapped around Gabrielle's stomach while the other was under her neck. The bard had her right arm under the warrior's back her hand rest on Xena's side. Her other hand resting on top of Xena's hand. The warrior is sleeping on her side as their legs are intertwined, their nude bodies touching.

Gabrielle took a deep breath, Xena's head rising from the movement. Very slowly the bard released her breath, her mind drifting. Drifting to many things, many things that she had questions about but hardly answers to.

"What you thinking about?"

Gabrielle lifted her head to look down to Xena, seeing a smile form on the warrior's lips, blue eyes still closed. The bard dropped her head back down with a smile.

"Nothing really"

"Uh huh, why don't I believe that?" The warrior listened to Gabrielle's heartbeat, she really liked that. Silence hung in the air for a few minutes so Xena intertwined her fingers with Gabrielle's.

The bard smiled at that and took another deep breath. "Just thinking about some stuff I suppose"

"Mmm like what?"

"I don't know" Gabrielle paused. "A little bit about the bard thing"

Xena nodded a little against the smaller woman's chest. "Yeah? Like which part?"

The bard didn't respond right away, she began to let her fingers caress Xena's warm skin at her side. "How much I miss it"

The warrior lifted her head from the bard's chest and looked to Gabrielle. "Why don't you try tell a story tonight?"

The younger woman broke eye contact with Xena. "Something doesn't feel right yet to do that Xen"

Xena nodded her head lightly, she still wasn't satisfied. But she dropped her head back down on the bard's chest. "What about starting out with your writing again?"

Gabrielle began to smile to herself. "Yeah"

Xena smiled too and closed her eyes again. She then felt Gabrielle begin to move, her body coming down. Xena opened her eyes and looked into emerald ones. The bard ducked in closer to kiss Xena lightly. Pulling back, Xena brought her hand around to the back of her soulmate's head. She pulled the bard's head in under her chin. The warrior tightly held her soulmate.

Neither soulmate spoke for a few moments, they just let time move. Xena took a deep breath, opened her eyes and then leaned in a little to kiss the bard on the forehead. Emerald eyes fluttered open and Gabrielle grinned to her soulmate.

Xena grinned back with her warm eyes. "I think we better get up love"

The bard sighed and snuggled her face back into Xena's neck. "Not yet"

The warrior chuckled at the younger woman. Xena's large hand moving down to lightly caress the smaller woman's back. "We need to. I want to see if Mother needs anything done around here"

"Yeah and I promised Mom that I'd help her with the cooking"

The warrior's eyes began to twinkle right then. "Are you planning to pick up on anything new?"

The Amazon Queen lifted her head from under Xena's chin and looked into twinkling sapphire eyes. "Why?"

Xena grinned to her soulmate. "Just wondering"

Gabrielle chuckled and responded. "Uh huh, what recipe do you want me to find out?"

The Warrior Princess chuckled. "Well Mother happens to make these little eggs with the yolk whipped up in them. They're really good. Think you could get that out of her?"

The bard laughed a few times, took a deep breath. "Deviled eggs Xena?" Emerald eyes shut while the bard chuckled a few more times, she then looked back to her soulmate. "I'll try to swindle them out of her...just for you" The small form took a breath as she saw Xena's lips form into a grin. "Mmm I think I'll try to get that honey marinated chicken recipe. It was so good"

Xena nodded in agreement too. "Yeah I really loved that"

The bard then devilishly grinned. "So when you think you'll come back there in the kitchen and join the cooking fest?"

A dark eyebrow arched very high up. "Cook...Gabrielle. Not-"

"Not one of your many skills?" Xena nodded. "Well Xen, I think you should add it to your list"

"Oh no my bard. That's your department"

"Oh? You fight while I cook?"

"Okay fine, you fight and I'll cook. Deal?"

The bard's eyes widen rather quickly. "No thank you! I prefer my food scorched free"

Xena's eyes narrowed while a grin formed on her smooth lips. The bard's face dropped as she quickly realized what was going to happen. Small hands quickly shot out to catch Xena's larger hands. "Xena!"

The warrior laughed as those small hands tried hold back Xena's stronger hands. Unfortunately for our bard she couldn't keep it up. The warrior's hands went to Gabrielle's ribs and began to tickle her. The younger woman squealed and began to try and roll away from Xena getting no where. The bed sheets were quickly turned into balls at the foot of the bed.

The bard was breathing hard as she giggled uncontrollable. Gabrielle knew she couldn't stop her attacker by holding Xena's hands back. Her mind quickly came up with another idea, so she preformed it. The bard pushed her body against Xena's forcing the warrior onto her back. The Amazon Queen rolled on top of Xena and warm lips claimed Xena's.

Those hands that were tickling earlier now began to caress the bard's bare sides. Once Gabrielle broke the kiss she leaped off the bed and naked soulmate. Xena was caught completely off guard by this sudden change. She sat up in the bed to see her nude soulmate at the foot of the bed, hands down to the bed sheets. Gabrielle grinned at the momentarily stunned warrior. Her small hands lifted up the ball of bed sheets and tossed them at Xena.

The older woman quickly found the bed sheets smacking into her face and then falling into her lap. Gabrielle broke out laughing at the warrior. Xena shook her head and grinned.

"Oh Gods I'm a bad bard" After saying that Gabrielle winked at the warrior and sauntered across the room to retrieve her cloths.

Xena still didn't move or say anything, she just stared at her soulmate, her mind working rather quickly. Then a very cat like smile formed on Xena's lips as her very twinkling eyes narrowed at the bard's back. The Warrior Princess tossed the bed sheets to her right on the bed. In one quick fluent motion she hopped out of bed. Gabrielle turned around to look at her soulmate, seeing her out of the bed.

Xena's back was ridged, her eyes still twinkling with mischief. Her black hair flowed down but had a certain wildness to it that made her look lecherous. Slowly and with grace Xena strutted over near the bard where her leathers are also located. Gabrielle watched with intent, her skirt on and green top on, not laced though.

"Excuse me, I forgot my leathers over here"

Gabrielle raised an eyebrow skeptically at Xena. She watched as that strong warrior leaned down to lift up her leathers. Her emerald eyes were filled with the view of seeing the muscles move along Xena's body as she bent down and straightened back up. Xena looked to Gabrielle and flashed a sexy smile then ambled to the opposite side of the room.

The Amazon Queen continued to lace her top up ever so slowly as she watched Xena ever so slowly slip into her leathers. Gabrielle grinned to herself. *How do we do this to each other?* Sighing inwardly the bard knew exactly why too. She continued to lace up her top as she watched her warrior, her emerald eyes becoming dark as olives.

Xena pulled the last strap over her right shoulder. She turned to her left to the table, she picked up her armor and began to put it on. Second to last clip, she moves on to the last clip over her shoulder, done. She then reaches behind, pulling her hair up then letting it drop freely on her back. Blue eyes then shifted to the floor to find her boots. Lacing them up rather quickly, Xena turned to her fully dressed bard with boots on.

"Xena?"

"Hmmm?"

"You forgot something else over here"

The warrior brought up one eyebrow at Gabrielle. "And what was that?"

The bard grinned. "Your soulmate"

Xena smiled and walked over to Gabrielle. Two large hands rested on the bard's hips, Xena peering down into deep ivy eyes. "Mmm, I was just saving the best for last" The warrior slowly bent her head down to Gabrielle's face, only mere inches from each other, nose about to touch. The bard closed her eyes, complete anticipation of something.

Xena grinned, letting it stay that way for a heartbeat. She then whispered to her soulmate. "Gabrielle?"

The smaller woman's eyes opened back up slowly. "Xena..."

"Let's go" The warrior then brought her head back up and released Gabrielle. Xena moved over to the door and turned back to an annoyed bard. "Coming?"

Gabrielle narrowed her eyes for a moment. "Ohhh bad warrior"

Xena chuckled. "What comes around goes around"

The bard arched an eyebrow. She then walked up to Xena's side, looked up to the warrior with a grin. "Mmm...we'll see" Gabrielle smirked, opened the door and stepped through.

Xena watched her soulmate turned to her right and walked down the hall, the warrior closing the door as she stepped into the hall.

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Cyrene brought a knife down to cut the last bit of carrot, the kitchen door then swung open. Her eyes lifted to see a warrior and bard enter in.

"Hi dears"

Xena smiled. "Mother"

The bard walked past Xena and came up near Cyrene. "Need any help?"

The innkeeper looked to the bard with a grin. "Always sweetie"

"Mother, do you happen to need any wood chopped?" The tavern owner looked up to Xena with a smile. "I mean it is going to be winter soon"

Cyrene kept her smile as she replied. "Actually dear, I do need some of that done. Have loads of wood, just never gone and done anything about it"

Xena nodded her head. "Axe out there as always?"

The innkeeper nodded. "It should be, nothing much changes around here"

Again the warrior nodded. "Alright, I'll take care of that" Blue eyes then looked to the silent bard. "Gabrielle?"

The Amazon Queen looked up from the chief's table to Xena, the bard smiled with certain fiendishness. "Yes?"

A cork grin from Xena. "When you're done here. Why don't we do some sparring?"

"Love too"

"Good, just come out with your staff and my sword when you're done here"

Gabrielle nodded and Xena ambled out of the kitchen to leave Cyrene and Gabrielle alone. The innkeeper reached forward to grasp another carrot. The bard still watched the door Xena went out, she sighed and looked to Cyrene.

"She's a mess"

The bard looked to Cyrene after the innkeeper's words. "Yeah she is. I don't know how you handled Xena when she was young"

The older woman chuckled, shook her head and continued to cut the carrot. "I don't know either Gabrielle, she was a hand full"

"I can imagine" The small bard then spotted all the vegetables on the table. "Soup?"

The innkeeper nodded. "Knives right over there" Cyrene pointed straight across the kitchen.

Emerald eyes followed her gaze to see the rack of knives. She walked over to them.

The kitchen was a large wood table in the center. In the back of the building is where the oven with fire is located. Behind Cyrene were racks of pots and pans and a cleaning area. Where the bard stood to retrieve a knife is a counter with stacks of clean plates, bowls, mugs, utensils, smaller plates, and an array of items.

Her small hands lifted a knife and she turned around back to the center chief's table. She came up to it, and grabbed a vegetable. Off to her right was a huge pot. Cyrene gathered up her carrot bits and tossed them into that pot.

"So have any Xena stories you care to share Mom?"

The innkeeper looked up from her cutting to Gabrielle. She grinned and responded.



"Of course sweetie. Where would you like to begin?"

The bard chuckled, she is cutting up a potato. "How about with that doll? I'd love to know the history behind it"

Cyrene grinned and let her past drift back to the present. "You see Gabrielle, Xena was rather protective of that doll"

The bard nodded her head. "That's what I gathered"

Cyrene nodded her head, she then went on. "Like I told you sweetie Toris always tried to take that doll from her. It normally started out with Toris saying something like 'I'll take that doll.' Of course Xena would just huff and say 'No you won't'"

The bard chuckled. "I can just imagine that"

The innkeeper grinned. "Yes well it never ended there normally Toris would say 'Who says I won't?' Then you know how Xena gets those devilish grins?"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "All to well I know those, nothing but trouble"

Xena's mother chuckled. "Quite, she'd get one of those grins and reply to Toris in a sarcastic tone with 'I'd like to see you try Toris.' Constantly those two were at it, normally that's how I knew"

The Amazon Queen grinned, letting her mind imagine her soulmate doing this. The tavern owner grinned as more of her memories came to life from ages ago. Her voice filled the room as she went on telling the bard the tales behind that little well loved doll. Gabrielle listens and records every last detail into her memory.

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The warrior brought the axe down a little lightly onto the tree stump, the blade sinking in. Xena straightened up and reached to her wrists, she removed her gauntlets and tossed them to the ground. She took a deep breath and released it into the air. Her breath was visible in the cool air even though she felt hot from chopping the wood.

She stretched her arms out in front of her body. Xena then grabbed the axe again and lifted a large piece of wood on the ground. She placed it in the center of the tree stump, the axe came down on it splitting the wood in half.

Her large hands reached down to place another thing of wood in the middle of the stump, the halves from earlier on the ground. Xena then heard somebody coming up behind her, she knew whom from years' past.

"Hey Sis" Toris stepped up beside his sister and smiled to her. He was dressed in his normal attire, warm cloak on over top.

"Hi Toris. Finally decided to get up huh?"

Toris grinned and replied. "Oh it's only early afternoon Xena. It's not so bad"

The warrior shook her head and grinned. She brought the axe up then back down on the wood. The slivers dropping to the ground on top of other cut wood. "Sleep well?"

Xena's brother nodded. "Yeah, feels good to be in that old room"

Xena looked to her brother with a grin. "Yeah I know what you mean"

Toris chuckled. "So Mother asked you to chop wood?"

The tall woman centered another piece of wood. "Nope" Axe came down. "Asked her"

The older sibling nodded his head. "Nice of you"

Xena grinned up to her brother. "Uh huh" She chopped another wood piece in half.

"Uh...so how long are you and Gabrielle here for?"

The warrior arched an eyebrow as she lifted a lumber. "However long we want. Why?"

Toris shrugged his shoulders. "No reason"

"Mmm"

Silence fell over as the warrior chopped a few more pieces. By then she'd done plenty, so she stopped. Her large hands drove the axe into the tree stump. She leaned on it with her elbow and looked to Toris. "So why did you ask?"

"No reason Xena"

The warrior grinned. "No body asks things for shits and giggles Toris. Why?"

Toris brought up one hand to rub the back of his head for a moment. "Was just wondering. That's all"

The warrior nodded. "Okay"

He dropped his hand and smiled to Xena. "By any chance is Gabrielle married?"

One of the tall woman's dark eyebrows arched up. "Why Toris?"

"Thought I'd just ask"

Xena sighed. "She was"

"Was?"

The Warrior Princess nodded. "Yeah, while back ago. Long story"

"Who was it?"

"A young man from her village, Perdicus"

"What happened?"

Xena crossed her arms against her chest. "He died"

Toris dropped his eyes. "Ah sorry"

"Don't tell me that, I didn't go through it"

Xena's brother looked up. "Yeah I know. I'm sure that was rough huh?"

Xena nodded. "It was for her" Xena then bent down to the ground and started to lift up some of the wood. She turned to Toris and tossed the wood into his arms. "Takes some of these over to the oven back outside"

"Sure"

The warrior grinned and began to stake up some of the wood into Toris' arms.

"Xena?"

"What?" Xena placed a few more pieces of wood into the stack in his arms. Her hand still held one more, waiting for Toris to talk.

"Did...did uh Gabrielle ever mention anything about me after she first met me?"

One of the Warrior Princess' eyebrows went up again. "If she did Toris I don't remember" Xena slammed the piece of wood hard, down onto the stack in his arms.

Toris made a humph noise as he tried not to drop the wood. "Getting touchy aren't you?"

Xena's eyes picked up a faint hint of darkness to them. "Just go take that wood back there would you?"

"Of course sister dear"

Toris turned to his right and walked down along the side of the tavern to the back. Xena watched him go, her body untensed once he was out of sight. The warrior took a deep breath and began to collect the remaining wood. Once she had all she could collect, Xena went inside of the tavern. Her blue eyes shifted to the fireplace and she headed straight for it, dropping the wood near it. She then went back outside to chop more wood.

~\*Part 8\*~

Gabrielle walked around the corner, her left arm loaded with Xena's cloak and sword. The bard had her own staff in her right hand and her cotton-leather cloak on. She stopped and leaned against the corner of the tavern, her eyes locked on her soulmate. She watched as Xena chopped two pieces of wood. Brought the axe hard down into the tree stump. Xena then proceeded to stack up the wood on the ground. Once Gabrielle saw she was done she stalked over to the warrior.

"Finished?"

Xena looked up to her soulmate. "Was going to ask you the same thing just a second ago"

Gabrielle blushed, caught red handed. "Yeah well, I like watching you"

The warrior grinned. "So I noticed" Xena then bent down to the ground collecting her gauntlets and put them on.

The bard though blushed another shade at Xena's words. "So uh" Gabrielle a bit

flustered, so she cleared her throat. "You ready to do so sparring?"

The older woman nodded and smiled. "Yeah. You done helping Mother?"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "Yeah. Here would you put this on, I don't want you getting cold for Gods' sakes" The bard handed the warrior her cloak and sword.

Xena took the sword first, clipping it to her back. She then put on her dark heavy cloak, it felt good. "Thanks"

"No problem"

"Come on, let's go do some sparring before it gets to late. I know a good spot"

Gabrielle nodded her head. Xena then started walking behind the tavern, her soulmate right beside her. "Yeah I told your mom that I'd help waitress tonight, give Saada the night off"

Xena nodded then smiled. "That's nice of you"

The bard chuckled. "Yeah well it was a bit of a deal" The pair entered into the woods of Amphipolis.

"Deal?"

"Yeah"

"A deal about what?"

"Uh...just something or another"

"Gabrielle" It was another low rumble.

Gabrielle chuckled as her staff hit the ground. "What?"

Blue eyes looked to the bard. "What was the deal?"

The smaller woman shrugged her shoulders, she replied in a casual voice. "Oh just that I'd do some waitressing if she told me some stories"

"Stories about who?"

"Um you know, just some of those old stories" The pair entered into a clearing in the woods, the ground covered in brown leaves.

"Really? How many of these *old* stories did she tell you?"

"Just a few"

"That many huh?"

For a responds Xena got some chuckles from Gabrielle. The bard took a few steps back and lifted her staff up in defense

"Come on warrior. We both need a little work out"

The warrior grinned and chuckled as she unsheathed her sword. "After Mother's food

yup"

"So you just gonna stand there and look pretty with that sword or fight?"

Xena laughed while the bard grinned. That's when the sparring started from that little competitive question.

~\*~\*~\*~

The bard's staff dropped out of her left hand, the butt end landing to the ground. She leaned against the staff in her right hand and grinned. "That wasn't to bad"

The warrior arched an eyebrow at her soulmate, her sword in her right hand pointed tip down. "Thanks"

Gabrielle laughed a little and then smiled to Xena. "For me that is"

Xena grinned and spun her sword, she then brought the sword to her back, sheathing it. Metal scrapping against metal rung through the air. "So you ready to get dinner?"

"Definitely"

The warrior chuckled and the bard stepped up closer to her soulmate. The pair made their trek through the woods and back to the tavern. Soon they entered inside, it was already bustling with people. Xena nodded to her partner and Gabrielle nodded back. They mingled through the people and ascended the stairs going to their room. Once inside they both removed their cloaks, tossing them to the wood tables.

Xena reached behind unclipping her sword. "You planning to help Mother with serving?"

Gabrielle turned around from propping her staff up against the wall, she faced Xena. "Yes, I think she'll need it"

The older woman nodded her head and stepped up to Gabrielle. The bard looked up to her soulmate with a smile.

A warm smile eased its way onto the warrior's lips. "I forgot something again"

The Amazon Queen arched an eyebrow in questioning. "Oh? And what was that?"

"This" Xena leaned down and sealed her lips with the bard's. As the kiss went on, one of the taller woman's large hands went up to the bard's cheek. Gabrielle's hands grasping the warrior's leather hips.

They both melted to the kiss, it was long and searing. Their bodies came to life like a fire burning brightly in the night. The air around them softened incredible.

Slowly they pulled away from the kiss, Gabrielle's forest eyes peacefully opened. "I'll make sure to remind you for now on"

The warrior grinned. "I'm counting on it"

The bard chuckled at her lover's words. "Are we ready to go now?"

The older woman's brow went up while her voice came out low and rich. "Are we?"

Gabrielle blushed some and she replied in a low voice. "Yeah"

Xena smiled to her soulmate, her same hand from earlier came up and brushed some of Gabrielle's hair back. "Come on"

The smaller woman nodded and the soulmates left the room, coming back down to the busy tavern.

"Mother is probably in the kitchen"

Gabrielle looked up to Xena and smiled. "Yeah that's what I figure too" The bard looked around in the tavern then back to Xena. "Go sit down Xena"

The warrior looked away from the people to her soulmate. "You sure?"

The bard nodded her head. "Yeah, I'll go talk to Mom"

Xena nodded her head. The warrior went one way and Gabrielle the other way. The Warrior Princess went to the fireplace, noticing there wasn't any fire going. So she stooped down by the side, picked up five logs and tossed them into the fireplace. Rising back up the warrior spotted a torch against the wall to her right. She ambled over to it and took it then returned back to the fireplace. She proceeded to light the wood and once the fire came to life she put the torch back in it's home.

Looking around, Xena tried to find a decent spot. To her right she spotted a table in the corner, out of the way. Stalking over to it the warrior sat down, her arms crossing against her chest. She eyed the people, studying them all. Some she actually recognized from her childhood, others she'd never seen before.

Her eyes drifted up, she spotted her soulmate sifting through the tables coming towards her. Gabrielle caught Xena's dark eyes, the bard smiled. The warrior smiled back only to her, those blue eyes sparkling in the fire lit tavern.

The bard stepped up to the table and kept her smile to Xena. "What can I do for you Ma'am?"

Xena grinned up at her soulmate's from hearing that question. She uncrossed her arms and leaned forward on the table. "Well what I want I don't believe you have on the menu"

Immediately Gabrielle's face became the shade of the fire. She coughed then responded. "Well that's the special...the dessert special at that"

The warrior smirked, leaned back into her chair and crossed her arms against her chest again. "I'll remember that for later"

"You do that"

"So, what did Mother say?"

The bard looked to the table and placed her left hand on the table, leaning a little on the table. She looked back to Xena. "Said she'll probably only need my help for about two and half candlemarks. And that when you start dinner I could take a break with you"

Xena nodded her head. "Sounds good"

The bard smiled and straightens back up, her hand going back to her side. "So what can I start you out with to drink?"

The older woman chuckled. "The usual"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "Be right back" She began to walk off.

"Thanks Gabrielle"

The bard looked back and flashed the warrior a bright smile. She drifted through the tables.

The tavern is certainly busy, the noise dimming up into the air. Xena sighed and studied the people again. Stretching her legs out under the table, she looked to her left by the stairs. There she saw Toris reappear.

He looked around in the crowded tavern then he spotted the Warrior Princess. He smiled and made his way to the warrior's table. "Hey Xena"

Xena looked up with a small smile. "Care to join Toris?"

Toris nodded his head with his pleasant smile. "Love to" The man pulled out a seat across from the warrior. He brought up his hands to the table and clasped them together.

"Sleep the rest of the afternoon?"

Toris chuckled and replied back. "Nah, just relaxed...haven't done that in awhile"

The tall woman nodded her head in agreement. She took a deep breath and leaned back more into her chair. "So where did you come from?"

Toris smiled a little. "Not to far I was just in Stagira. I think in a few days I'm going to be moving on to Neapolis"

The warrior nodded her head. "Then you'll be back here?"

Toris nodded his head. He took his hands off the table and leaned against the back of the chair. "That's the plan"

"What you doing in Neapolis?"

"Visiting an old friend"

The warrior's dark eyes narrowed for a moment as she looked away. She shifted a little in her seat and looked back to her brother. "How long you think you'll be?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Ah probably three days there. Then it's about a good two day ride there"

Xena nodded her head and looked down to her boots as she responded. "So you'll be gone for seven days huh?" Her blue eyes looked back up to Toris.

"That's the plan"

Xena's eyes tore away from her brother and looked up to an approaching woman. Xena smiled some and Toris turned to see the bard coming.

He looked back to his sister. "You really care about her eh?"

Cold sapphire eyes lowered from the bard to Toris. "I do"

The man felt a chill ripple through his body. "Right"

Gabrielle stepped up to the table with a mug in her hands. She stepped closer to Xena and placed the mug down in front of her older soulmate. She smiled to Xena then to Toris. "Finally decided to come down and join the crowd Toris?"

The man looked to Gabrielle and grinned. "Figured I better or Mother would drag me down by my ear"

The bard chuckled, she smiled as she replied. "Well I'm helping Cyrene with the crowd. So I'm your server"

Toris grinned even more then before. "Really?" He quickly took note of the off-white apron the bard had on around her waist. "So I see"

"So what can I get you to drink Toris?"

The man relaxed in his seat more then replied. "Just some port would be great"

The bard nodded her head. She then looked to her soulmate. "Mom says thank you for starting up the fireplace" The warrior nodded with a warm smile and Gabrielle went on. "Do you want to order dinner now Xena?"

The tall woman reflected for a moment then looked back to her partner. "I'll wait a little longer"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "Alright I'll be back in a flash" The small woman disappeared through the tables and back to the bar.

"She's amazing"

The warrior's blue eyes moved from her soulmate to Toris, they went hard as she replied. "Really?"

Toris smiled some. "Oh come on Xena. You've been travelling with her for what? Over a year, you should notice something like that"

"Trust me Toris, I do"

"You hardly act like you do"

Xena grinned a little, she leaned forward and whispered to the man in a low voice. "Toris, let me put it this way. I know every little thing about Gabrielle. You don't"

Xena's brother arched an eyebrow and crossed his arms against his chest. "Who says I won't?"



Now it was the warrior's turn to cross her arms against her chest as she leaned back into the chair. "I'd like to see you try Toris "

Toris grinned slyly. He never responded but kept his cat grin. Xena for her part was on edge, she want to put her brother into his place. But then another side of her had some ideas on how to toy with Toris. She grinned inwardly at that. Not to mention the warrior couldn't wait to see her bard's reaction to Toris trying to bother her. Xena knew it wouldn't be the reaction Toris would be hoping for knowing her soulmate.

Speaking of which, Gabrielle came through the tables to Xena's and Toris' table with another mug. She placed it in front of Toris and looked to the pair.

"Dinner now?"

Toris looked up to the bard with a very warm smile. "What's cooking back there?"

Gabrielle looked to Toris. "Well we do have a soup Cyrene and I made. Homemade beef stew"

Toris nodded his head as he thought. Gabrielle looked over to her soulmate, Xena grinned. The bard arched an eyebrow at the warrior. Xena winked back and the bard's eyes narrowed in suspicion. The bard's soulmate just smiled warmly, it was the sort of smile the bard got when things were going to be fine.

"Well" Gabrielle quickly turned her head back to Toris after hearing him speak. "I think I could go for the stew to start. What else is there?"

"Your mother also prepared roasted pork cooked in onions and sage. With it is some peas, mashed potatoes, and corn bread"

Toris nodded his head. "Sounds wonderful, I'll have that too"

The bard looked to her soulmate. "Xena?"

The warrior smiled and replied back. "Skip the soup and I'll just have the main course"

Gabrielle nodded her head, she was about to move. But Toris spoke to the bard stopping her.

"Gabrielle?"

"Yes Toris?"

Xena's brother looked up with a warm smile and replied. "I was wondering if you're going to tell some stories tonight?"

The bard smiled but just a little. "No I wasn't planning on it"

"Well you should. You're quite good"

The Amazon Queen's smile broadened some. "Thanks but I'm not in the right...mood to"

"Oh come on, what could be stopping you?"

Gabrielle's hands went from being by her sides to resting on her sides, her face quite serious. "You wouldn't understand Toris"

"What's there to understand? You're an excellent storyteller and you should do a story"

Gabrielle arched an eyebrow. She looked to her older soulmate for a moment. She caught the warrior's eyes cold and staring at Toris. The bard knew Xena was letting her handle this, it would be worse if Xena did.

Gabrielle looked back to Xena's brother. "Another time Toris I might"

The man nodded his head. "I'll hold that on you"

The bard nodded then smiled with annoyance to her lips. "Great, excuse me" Gabrielle turned her back to Toris and walked over to another table with a smile. She started taking orders from those customers at her other table.

Xena sighed and relaxed her body some in the seat. She crossed her legs at the ankles.

Toris looked to his sister. "So why doesn't she tell a story or two?"

The warrior looked to his brother. "Long story"

"I've got time"

"I don't nor the patience"

"Right"

Silence loomed between the siblings. Toris for his part could not quite understand why his sister was being a little...hostile towards him. He just shrugged it off and began to look around in the tavern. He watched the bard head into the kitchen from a distant table. She went in and Cyrene came out with plates in hand heading to a table. Toris hadn't seen the tavern this busy since he was a child. Cyrene must be making good money from something like this.

He sighed and grasped his port, taking a drink from it. Turning to Xena again, he smiled some. "So have any adventures to tell?"

Xena brought up an eyebrow in response. Her fingers ran up and down the handle of her mug. "You're asking the wrong person"

Toris huffed and rolled his eyes. He replied in a hard tone. "I thought I just asked the right person earlier but it seems I didn't"

The warrior grinned, she took a sip of her port then placed the mug back down. She quickly replied. "You just didn't ask right"

Toris sighed and took some more of his port down.

Gabrielle then came back to the table, she smiled to her soulmate. "Mom said I could take a break" The bard grinned a little. "She'll bring out the food"

Xena nodded and the Amazon Queen pulled a seat out from under the table next to

Xena. Both women now faced Toris.

The bard looked to her soulmate whom was drinking from her mug. "Hey you never told me what you talked to Ferus about?"

The warrior was caught in the middle of her drink. She swallowed it down and placed the mug back to the table. "He wanted to go over the dispersing of the raiders we did"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "That was it?"

The warrior nodded her head. "Pretty much"

Emerald eyes looked straight to Xena. Gabrielle narrowed her eyes a little in skepticism. There was something going on she couldn't figure out. The warrior smiled but something was twinkling deep in those sky splashed eyes. They twinkled so strongly that it made the bard's stomach flutter and zap through her body. *Oh yeah there is definitely something going on with that warrior of mine.*

Gabrielle sighed and looked to Toris again. "So where you headed to Toris?"

"You mean my trip?" Gabrielle nodded and Toris went on. "Headed to Neapolis. Visiting an old friend that lives there"

The bard nodded her head. "That's nice"

Toris shrugged his shoulders. "Suppose so" He pause then questioned the bard. "So you still using your staff?"

Gabrielle nodded with a smile. "I am, have been for quite a while"

"Becoming good with it?"

"I am"

"Well if you ever want a sparring partner, I'm always free"

The bard wanted to laugh at that but she refrained herself. "That's alright Toris, thanks though"

"Gabrielle it's good to have a change in sparring partners"

The bard grinned and crossed her arms in her lap. "Toris, Xena is the only one I'll spar with considering she's the best around...you can't get anybody better so anybody else isn't worth my time"

Toris looked to Xena, the warrior grinned to him sardonically. He looked back to Gabrielle and smiled a little. "Ouch, well let me know if you change your mind. Sometimes a man can do you good"

The bard chuckled a little. "I'll remember that"

"Please do. I'd love to see that body of yours in fighting motion"

Gabrielle arched an eyebrow. "Oh really? Well you had the chance about a year ago"

Toris grinned with a chuckle. "Sorry I was in space then"

"Mmm you should have kept it that way" That line came out low from the bard's lips. So Toris didn't hear but Xena certainly did, it almost made her laugh.

Cyrene had arrived then with three plates. She carefully removed one from her right hand then the second off her left arm. The third was last and deposited in front of Toris. She then removed utensils to eat with and she looked to the bard. "Sweetie, you want anything to drink?"

"Oh I could really go for some of your warm cider Mom"

The tavern owner grinned and replied back. "Sure sweetie, be back in a sec with it"

Gabrielle nodded and the tavern owner headed back to the bar.

The rest of the evening was busy at first with the tavern's customers. But as the night wore on and the fireplace died a little in intensity, did the people begin to disappear. Gabrielle after her meal had went on helping the tavern owner with the crowd while Toris and Xena talked. They talked about the past some and the local happenings. Toris stayed away from the topic of the bard as much as possible knowing it is one of Xena's protective buttons. By late evening Toris, Xena, Cyrene and Gabrielle were all collected around the one table, talking. The customers had all left leaving this family here.

The bard stiffened a yawn, her body slipping down in the seat some.

Blue eyes shifted to her and then Xena grinned. "Tired?"

Gabrielle looked to her soulmate with a tired smile. "Yeah, that wore me out. I'm getting old" Toris and Cyrene talking back and forth some as the warrior and bard talked.

The warrior shook her head. "That's my excuse not yours"

The bard chuckled and she sighed. Cyrene and Toris both looked to the bard.

Cyrene smiled to the bard. "Sleepy sweetie?"

The bard nodded then tried to stop a yawn. "Just a little"

"Go get some sleep sweetie. It was a long day, thanks for the help"

Gabrielle smiled. "Anytime Mom. It was fun"

"Well you were a great help" Cyrene then looked to her son. "Go get some sleep dear"

Toris nodded his head, stretched his legs and stood up. "I think I will. Goodnight"

Everybody smiled to Toris.

"Night brother"

"Sleep well Toris"

"Goodnight dear, don't let the bugs bite"

Toris shook his head at his mother then headed to the stairs, disappearing up them.

The innkeeper looked back to the two women. "Well I'm headed to bed myself dears. You both better get up there soon. Especially you little one"

Gabrielle grinned to Cyrene. "I will, goodnight Mom"

"Night sweetie"

"Sleep well Mother"

The tavern owner stood up from the seat and looked to her daughter. "Night Xena, don't keep her up"

Xena chuckled and replied back with a grin. "I won't"

Cyrene sternly nodded. "Good" She then migrated up the stairs to her bedroom, opposite end from where the soulmates slept.

Gabrielle looked from the stairs to her soulmate. It was becoming dark in the tavern from the dying fire and half-lit torches. "That was a nice evening"

Xena looked to her soulmate and smiled. She shrugged her shoulder then responded. "For the most part, yeah"

"Most part?"

The warrior sighed and straightened up in her seat. "One word, Toris"

Gabrielle chuckled then dropped her head against the back of the chair. "Tell me about it. What's with him anyway?"

"Mmm he thinks he can take you from me"

The bard raised an eyebrow as she looked to her soulmate. "He knows?"

"No"

"Then..."

"Competition, runs in the family"

Gabrielle groaned. "Great"

The warrior chuckled, she then smiled to her partner. "Come here"

Gabrielle smiled, and was close enough to Xena's chair to just crawl over into the warrior's lap. The Warrior Princess securely wrapped one arm around the bard's back to support her as she sat in the warrior's lap, her right side leaning into Xena. The bard's own right arm was wrapped back behind the warrior and her small hand resting on Xena's opposite shoulder. Xena's right hand resting on Gabrielle's thighs.

She took a deep breath and dropped her head against Xena's left shoulder. "I think I'm going to try and write tomorrow"

"Yeah?"

The bard nodded her head. "I want to...need to"

The warrior smiled. "Good. Just relax tomorrow and work on your stories"

Gabrielle smiled her free left hand reaching to Xena's hand on her thigh. Their hands intertwined together. "What you going to do?"

Xena shrugged her shoulders. "I'll find something...or Mother will find me something"

The younger woman chuckled. "That's for sure" Gabrielle tried to stop a yawn, only partially successful.

"Let's go"

Gabrielle was about to get off her soulmate's lap. But she was to late, Xena had stood up with Gabrielle in her arms.

Xena grinned at the slightly shocked bard. The warrior began to ascend the stairs and talked in a light airy voice. "Top floor...rooms, baths, attic, bedrooms, and the *love room*"

Gabrielle went into a fit of laughter over her partner's words and voice. She buried her face into her soulmate's chest as she laughed, trying to be quiet but with little victory. They soon found themselves in the *love room* and piling into the bed for needed sleep.

~\*~\*~\*~

Times passed on for our characters and for us. We watch Xena and her soulmate enjoy their time in Amphipolis. Gabrielle's face was constructed into numerous smiles, her light voice filling the air around along with her laughter.

Xena even for her part was laughing and smiling more then she had since her childhood. Now her memories of Amphipolis were added onto, not just of her childhood or of the time when Cortese sacked her home. But now of her days she relaxed with her soulmate. On occasions the warrior would leave the tavern to ride Argo, spar with her soulmate, do odd jobs for Cyrene or do errands that Gabrielle knew little about.

The bard didn't remember the last time she was this quite happy. She'd began writing again, she hadn't written a single story since the day Perdicus died. There were a number of stories she wanted to write. That need in her soul built up in her again to write.

She needs a source of assuagement for her soul, and one is writing. Her imagination reeled as she wrote scrolls on Perdicus' death, she'd cry when writing it but she needed too. Not only to write it but to heal from her past. She'd labeled that scroll *Return of Callisto* the next story quick to follow was *Warrior...Princess...Tramp* which had the bard laughing. The next two were hardier when she dealt with Xena being in Callisto's body, those two entitled, *Intimate Stranger* and *Ten Little Warlords*. As of now the young bard was writing her story on the warrior's death and rebirth. This was not as an easy topic and it was slow progress but she knew she'd finish it no matter what. For the future and for herself.

The days were short as they rolled on, becoming closer and closer to Solstice. The

bard was becoming excited to have Solstice with her soulmate and in Amphipolis. The bard could tell her own soulmate was becoming excited even though she didn't care to admit it. But Gabrielle could tell by the way they both always spoke about their past memories with Solstice. The warrior becomes quite involved in the conversation with her eyes twinkling.

Toris had left seven days ago, they'd expected him back later on this day or into the evening. Gabrielle now was on her bed, writing as she leaned against the headboard. The warrior had disappeared into the village in the snow, it was about mid-day. And yes there was snow, it was the first day of snow. The bard had leaped out of the bed early in the morning when she saw it falling, the warrior had joined her at the window. They'd stared out the window for awhile, enjoying the scene and each other.

But now the bard lay on the bed writing, a table had been moved close to the bed with an ink well contained on top. Gabrielle chewed on the tip of her quill looked to her left and placed the tip of the quill into the ink. She brought it back out, she continued writing, her eyes were a bit red. She sniffed as she wrote.

The door then opened up. Gabrielle stopped writing and looked up to see her soulmate in the room, the door closed. Xena stood in her leathers with armor, cloak over top but she had left her weapons inside of the room earlier.

"Now where did you disappear to?"

Xena grinned at her soulmate and replied. "Just had to do something in town, nothing much"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "Mmm" Her eyes drifted from the partially wet warrior back to her scroll.

Xena grinned and walked up to the side of the bed the bard is closes to. "Feel like going for a walk?"

The bard's quill wrote something then Gabrielle looked up with a curious face. "Where to?"

"I thought maybe on the ridge. Can watch the snow fall over the town"

The bard smiled. "Yeah, hold on" She placed the quill on the table by the ink well and rolled the scroll up, placing it also on the table. She hopped out of the bed and went to the other side of the room. She grabbed her cloak and proceeded to put it on, Xena shifted back to the door. The smaller woman came up beside Xena. "Ready"

The warrior nodded with a smile and opened the door. The soulmates went down stairs and into the empty tavern, out the tavern. The pair made their way through the town and a little ways through the woods. It was cool but not enough to freeze a person just nip. Nip away at exposed skin making Gabrielle's cheeks red. The rest of her body was warm from the cloak as is Xena's body.

The ground was a bright white that glistened ever so slightly. The snow fell down like feathers and it was thick and light. The bard loved this type of snow, it was gorgeous and made her mind describe it. Describe it such as the ground being masked with something so white and looks light, a fluffiness. Yet it is of a thing of coldness. Everything is sheeted with this blinding white entity. It brings about a sense of

crispness, bringing almost a burning sensation to the lungs. Life waiting to live again underneath.

~\*Part 9\*~

Xena's soulmate took a deep breath, her warm breath could be seen in the clean cool air. Xena looked to her soulmate with a smile. Gabrielle looked up and smiled back. That same twinkle was back. Gabrielle's heart skipped a beat, her stomach twisted in suspense.

The soulmates walked out onto the ridge that over looked Amphipolis. Gabrielle stood in front of Xena, her arms crossed against her chest to keep her hands warm. The snow fell and slowly at that. Gabrielle sucked in a breath.

Xena grinned to herself, she reached into her cloak with her right hand. Her fingers going to a small leather pouch attached to her side. She opened it and removed an article, her large hand holding the article inside, concealing it from the world around. Her right hand coming back out and falling to her side, her hand still fisted up.

Gabrielle looked back to her soulmate with a smile. "Its beautiful"

"Isn't it? I always loved the scenery from up here"

Gabrielle nodded her head, Xena stepped up to her soulmate and wrapped her arms around her soulmate's small waist. Gabrielle leaned into Xena.

"Warm enough?"

Gabrielle's emerald eyes tore away from the scene and looked up to Xena. "I'll be fine"

Xena grinned. She then opened her cloak with her left hand and her right hand as best as she could. Enveloping her younger soulmate inside of her large heavy dark cloak. Gabrielle sighed as she felt Xena's warm body heat on her back, she pressed her skin up against the warm leather. Xena wrapped her arms around the bard again from the outside. Gabrielle crossing her arms against her chest inside of her soulmate's cloak.

The soulmates stayed like that for moments on end. Gabrielle studied the sight of Amphipolis being swept with white snow. Watched the forest behind be caressed by the snow. It was breath taking for her, she'd never forget it.

She looked up to her soulmate with a smile. "You know what this reminds me of Xen?"

"Hmmm?"

Gabrielle looked back to the scene in front of her. "Reminds me of those small little glass balls. That you turn up side down and the snow falls down on the little town inside of it"

Xena grinned then responded back. "Yeah it reminds me of that too" She then chuckled thinking more of her younger soulmate's words. Xena then let her right hand slip in between the folds of the jacket and rest against Gabrielle's hands, her hand still closed up.



Gabrielle felt that warm hand and with her left hand she lightly caressed her soulmate's smooth hand. That's when Gabrielle felt her soulmate's pulse pick up, she didn't know quite why either. But her heart rate had certainly picked up, Gabrielle's own heart began to pound now, her knees a bit shaky, just a bit though. She couldn't figure out as to why.

"I think somebody definitely turned us upside down"

Xena chuckled at Gabrielle's words, but the little joke didn't ease things.

"Maybe they did"

Now it was Gabrielle chuckling as she conjured that. But Xena's breathing was a little heavy so Gabrielle looked up to her. Xena smiled very deeply and Gabrielle smiled back just as warmly.

Her heart fluttered in that instant as Xena's warm right hand opened up inside of the cloak. Then something very smooth like metal and warm slipped onto a finger on Gabrielle's left hand. Gabrielle's eyes widen up at her soulmate, Xena grinned. Gabrielle looked back down to her hand as she brought her hand out from under her soulmate's cloak. Gabrielle's heart skipped a beat at the sight, she took a deep breath.

There on Gabrielle's left ring finger was a gorgeous ring, even in this cloudy day the ring's gems glimmer. It was a band ring, in the center of the band wrapped around were two gem types. One a brilliant green that sparkled, the other half of the ring held a deep twinkling blue, an emerald and sapphire. The stones inside of the center of the band are protected from the outside world. The trim of the band was a lustrous gold that glistened.

Xena bent her head down to Gabrielle's and whispered into her soulmate's ear with a warm voice. "Will you marry me Gabrielle?"

## **Part 3**

### **Section 3**

~\*Part 10\*~

*Will you marry me Gabrielle?*

It repeated over and over in Gabrielle's head. Her heart skittered each time. Xena lifted her head up from Gabrielle's hand as she waited. Slowly Gabrielle lifted her eyes from the ring and turned around. Xena's arms dropped from her soulmate's small waist, her cloak falling back to her side.

Gabrielle searched her soulmate's eyes. Gabrielle's legs were so shaky, her breathing ragged as her heart pounded and sent shots of electricity through her nerves.

Xena was smiling so deeply while her twinkling crystal blue eyes were soft and loving. Even for Xena this was making her nervous, she'd never been this nervous or even scared. Yes scared, scared of her soulmate's reaction being bad.

Their eyes are locked and they both thought time had stopped for them. Yet at the same time Xena thought time was ever so slow.

*Will you marry me Gabrielle?*

It repeated again in Gabrielle's mind. Her body went a little weak, so she reached out for her soulmate. Xena instantly grasped her soulmate by the sides and kept smiling at her small soulmate's reaction.

"Xena" It came out low as a whisper, almost like a plea. "Gods, Xena...I can't believe...gods...Xen...." Without anticipation from Xena, Gabrielle reached up for the back of Xena's head. She pulled Xena's head down and captured Xena's lips in a strong loving kiss. In between Gabrielle started to cry, they pulled away from the kiss. Their foreheads still touched. Gabrielle cried with a smile and just let a faint laugh escape her lips from the surprise.

Sapphire and emerald eyes met again. Xena never lost her smile.

Xena's soulmate was still crying some with her smile. She then whispered up to Xena. "Yes Xena...gods I'll marry you" Gabrielle went in for another kiss.

Once it broke, Xena sighed in relief. Her body relaxed and she felt her limbs all go shaky from the waiting. She brought up one of her hands from Gabrielle's waist and brushed back some of her soulmate's blond hair. Xena still smiled, a few tears started to roll down her cheeks as Gabrielle let tears trail down her face. They both smiled to each other.

"Xena how...when...gods...where"

Xena lowered her head down close to Gabrielle's with a lopsided smile. "Sshhh, I'll tell you everything later"

Gabrielle nodded her head. The soulmates closed in the distance and kissed again. The snow still fell and dusted over the soulmates. But they seemed to have forgotten about everything around them, nothing else mattered. After the kiss, Xena pulled her soulmate in, wrapping her arms tightly around Gabrielle. Gabrielle also wrapped her arms around Xena in a huge embrace. They savored the moment as their bodies began to relax again. Their breath was still heavy, hearts pounding, and bodies shaking, they felt drained. Another moment in time locked away in their soul they shared.

Soulmates.

~\*Part 11\*~

The soulmates had left the ridge after being in each other's embrace for so long. They really had no idea how long they'd been gone from the tavern, but they knew it was a good amount of time. Deciding it was best to head back to the inn before Cyrene went hunting for them. Xena knowing her mom like she does, she wouldn't be a bit surprised if Cyrene did exactly that.

By the time they returned to the inn, it was late afternoon or so. Once they entered into the tavern they went upstairs to warm up. The cold had nipped away at their bodies some, especially their exposed faces. So now Xena was in front of the small fireplace

in her room, she was lighting the logs inside of the fireplace.

Gabrielle though was removing her cloak and putting it on the back of a chair to let it dry. She came up behind her partner as Xena stood up. The bard's hands going up to her soulmate's shoulders and grasping the cloak. The warrior smiled as she shrugged out of her cloak and Gabrielle took it. The Amazon Queen went to another chair by the table and hung it off the back of that chair. The bard then moved to the saddlebags to rummage through them. She quickly found two mugs, tea, a spoon, and honey, she grinned.

Xena though began to remove her boots, quickly untying them. Once that was done with and boots set aside, the warrior removed her armor, gauntlets and armbands. Now she only stood in her leathers as she shifted to her old dresser. She began to open the drawers, searching for something.

The bard though was busy making tea, water almost boiled. As she waited she took off her own boots, placing them near Xena's. Heading back to the fireplace, Gabrielle removed the kettle from the fireplace, it was boiling. She poured the hot water into each mug that held the herbal tea. The water turned to a shade of brown as the tea and water mixed, steam rising from the mugs. Occasionally the ring would catch Gabrielle's eye on her left hand. The bard opened the jar of honey and poured some into the spoon, she stirred it into one mug. Repeating the same process with the second mug. The Amazon Queen then placed the spoon on top of the resealed honey jar. Lifting the mugs, she turned to her soulmate.

Xena sat on the wood floor, back against the foot of the bed's board. She smiled to the bard, Gabrielle smiling back. Beside the warrior on the floor was a quilt blanket, it look relatively old and used but warm.

The bard came up to her soulmate and handed a mug to Xena, the warrior taking it. Xena then propped up her legs and Gabrielle position herself between her soulmate's legs. Both their mugs hit the floor and Xena wrapped her arms around her partner's waist. The Warrior Princess tugged a little on Gabrielle, the bard grinned to herself and leaned back into Xena's warm body. The warrior's left hand released the bard and lifted the blanket from the floor and Xena opened it up. The blanket fell on top of both their bodies. They both quickly warmed between the tea, fire, blanket and their own bodies.

Gabrielle sighed in contentment. She could still feel the new found weight on her left ring finger, she smiled. Her eyes closed as her head rested against the warrior's shoulder. "I love you"

Xena smiled at her soulmate's low whispered affection. Turning her head some, the warrior kissed the bard on the temple. "I love you too Gabrielle" Xena's right hand was snaked around the bard's stomach under the quilt. Her left hand though was lifting the mug to sip from.

Gabrielle lifted her head from Xena's shoulder and lifted up her own mug, drinking from it. Afterwards the mug went back to the floor, Gabrielle dropping her head back again. "So do I get an answer to all of this?"

Xena grinned. "Which question first? The how? The when? Or the gods where?"

The bard chuckled. She brought her right hand from on top of the blanket to go underneath. She quickly found Xena's hand and locked their hands together. "Start with the how"

The warrior nodded, she brought up the mug sipping from it. Placing it back to the floor she answered. "Well I bought it, that's how"

"Very funny warrior. You know what I mean. How did you...pay for the ring? Give"

Xena chuckled, then she went serious. Gabrielle could tell by the way Xena's body just faintly went rigid. "Back when I was a pirate I still had a little hope...belief in love and that I'd find my soulmate someday. That of course was when my ship was filled with money. So I set aside some money incase I were to ever find my soulmate, I could buy them a ring or something. Forgot about it after I became a warlord but still had the money tucked away"

The younger woman nodded her head. "I never knew"

Xena grinned again and tried to relax. "I'd hope not"

Gabrielle chuckled a little then she took a deep breath. "So next question. When did you get it...plan this?"

"I have to tell all my secrets?"

Gabrielle nodded with a smirk. "Oh yes you do"

Xena grinned to herself and shook her head a little. She then took a sip of her tea, the mug going back to the ground, her fingers still on the handle though. "I bought it back in that small town after we left the Amazons"

"You mean the one that had the Dionysus festival where I got my scrolls?"

"Yup"

"You sneak" Xena chuckled and the bard went on. "You didn't need a sharpening stone at all did you?"

"Nope"

"Gods Xena. And I happened to look at a stand there selling jewelry that had wedding band rings"

"I know"

"Oh gods..." The bard then groaned. "You saw me at the stand?"

"Yup"

The bard then chuckled and shook her head. She reached down to retrieve her mug, drinking from it. The mug half drained while Xena took a sip from hers being three quarters empty.

"Xena?"

"Mmm?"

"How...how are we going to get married exactly? Amazons?"

The warrior grinned. Xena drank the rest of her tea. Gabrielle decided she didn't feel like finishing the rest. So she leaned back into Xena. Now both of Gabrielle and Xena's hands were under the quilt, intertwined together.

The warrior could feel the ring on her soulmate's hand, it made her grin. "I talked to Ferus"

"Really?"

"Uh huh, he talked to the council about us becoming married"

"So what happened?" The bard's words had come out fast and with excitement.

Xena grinned. "Welllll..."

"Xena"

The warrior chuckled and spoke again. "He talked to the council and reminded them about what happened with Draco over a year ago and then mentioned the raiders"

"Hold on Xena, they said you weren't a citizen of Amphipolis anymore right?"

"They did when I first came back here"

"Yeah so how can they hand out a marriage license if you're not considered a citizen, or me for that matter?"

"That's the other part Ferus talked to them about. After hearing that we stopped the raiders and the reminder of Draco they believe I've earned the right to become a citizen again"

"Gods that's great"

Xena smiled and nodded. "You'll also become a citizen"

"What?" The bard then looked sidelong to Xena.

"Once we marry that'll official make you a citizen of Amphipolis. I also mention the fact that if Amphipolis makes you a citizen then they'll have an alliance with the Amazon Nation"

"And they would too. How are we going to work the marriage? I mean Ephiny will kill us both if we don't have an Amazon ceremony. She'd already pulled that out on us not to long ago. But then doesn't Amphipolis want an official marriage too?"

Xena chuckled over her soulmate's wonderment and quick voice. "I took care of that too"

"You're good"

"I know"

"So what did you have in mind Xen?"

"I mention to Ferus that we could do an Amazon ceremony here in Amphipolis then the council could approve it as an official marriage as could the Amazons can consider it official"

"So did he go for it?"

"Ferus did, I don't know about the council. I think tomorrow it would be a good idea for us both to talk to the council. Make it official that the Amazon Nation will have an alliance with Amphipolis. It'll make them happy"

Gabrielle nodded her head in agreement. "Do that first, then send out a letter to Ephiny huh?"

Xena also nodded. "That's my thoughts"

"Xena, when are we planning the marriage date?"

Xena grinned devilishly. "Solstice"

Gabrielle turned around in Xena's embrace to face the warrior. "You're kidding?"

"Nope"

"Gods Xena" Actually expecting it this time, Xena felt her soulmate's lips seal with hers. The kiss was long and shot warmth through both of their bodies.

As the kiss ended, Xena smiled and talking in a low whisper. "Come here"

The bard grinned and snuggled up into the warrior's lap. Xena readjusted the blanket over them and dropped her head onto Gabrielle's. Soon sleep came to them as the soulmates drifted off into another world.

~\*~\*~\*~

The bard's sea green eyes fluttered open. She took a deep breath, her sense being filled with the scent of spice.

"How'd you sleep?"

The Amazon Queen grinned then replied back. "Pretty well. I can't believe I was tired"

"I know"

"We're both lazy"

Xena grinned at that, she tightened her arms more around her soulmate. "But we're lazy together"

Gabrielle chuckled and then smiled to herself. "We deserve it anyway"

"Uh huh"

Silence came between the partners for a little while. Gabrielle thought about everything that has happened and what will happen. Her face then brightened up.

"Gods Xena"

"Mmm?"

"Do you realize everything that will happen?"

"Uh huh"

"You'll be my consort, an Amazon, and a citizen of Amphipolis. I'll be a citizen of Amphipolis too and there'll be an alliance between Amphipolis and the Amazon Nation. Then we'll be married, gods"

"Yup" Xena then grinned and began to lightly caress her soulmate's warm stomach.

Gabrielle sighed then giggled a little.

"What's the giggling about?"

"I was just thinking that Toris will be my brother-in-law" She chuckled again while Xena grinned. "That's going to be real interesting"

"Yeah give me legal rights to..."

"Xena" The warrior started to laugh at her soulmate's warning voice. The bard grinned then continued on. "No it'll give me legal rights to kick-"

"Gabrielle"

The bard then snickered and snuggled more into her soulmate. "Was just agreeing with you Xe"

"Uh huh. I thought I fight while you cook?"

"Well somebody's gotta watch your butt"

"Oh no, you're gonna stay right beside me my bard"

"Fine by me" The bard then sighed.

Xena's head went down to kiss the bard on top of her head. "Speaking of butts, I need to get up"

"Oh yeah, I bet that floor hurts after a few" The bard then hugged her soulmate tightly, Xena doing the same. Gabrielle then stood up from Xena taking the quilt with her. The warrior looked up to her soulmate and the bard grinned. Holding out a hand, the warrior took it. She was then pulled up to her feet with her knees cracking.

"Getting old"

"Whatever Miss back flips"

The warrior rolled her eyes then grinned. She turned around to the bed where she left her armor and proceeded to put it on. The bard though lifted the mugs up and put them by the honey where the slowly dying fire is.

Then folding the blanket she walked over to her soulmate. "Nice blanket"

Xena looked to her soulmate with a smile. "Real old"

"Childhood?"

Gabrielle grinned and the warrior nodded. "Mother made it a long time ago. Surprise she still has it"

"I'd say she missed you"

After hearing that, silence fell. The warrior's eyes locked with her soulmates.

"It's hard to let some things go Xena. I should know"

Xena nodded her head to the bard. "We both know"

The Amazon Queen nodded at that then smiled some.

Xena smiled back with warm eyes. "Thanks"

Gabrielle nodded and kissed her partner on the forehead. "Love you Xena"

"I love you"

The bard smiled deeply. "Dresser third drawer?"

Xena nodded her head and Gabrielle went to the dresser placing it into the third drawer. Both soulmates then went over to their boots by the saddlebags. They both quickly put them on then straightened back up.

~\*~\*~\*~

Cyrene placed a few mugs down on her bar, she then looked up from the sound of boots connecting with the steps. She spotted the soulmates coming down and she smiled to them. "Well decided to come down dears?"

Xena grinned, she came to the bar first followed by her soulmate. "Yeah, we fell asleep upstairs"

Cyrene nodded her head. "Yes well I don't blame you" The innkeeper arranged her mugs under the bar table and looked back up. "I'm expecting a good size crowd tonight, hopefully"

Gabrielle then spoke up with a smile. "Mom?"

"Yeah sweetie?"

"I was wondering if I could do a story tonight?"

Immediately the tavern owner's face brightened up. "Why of course sweetie. That would be wonderful"

The bard then brought up her arms to the bar resting them there. "So when do you expect the crowd in tonight?"

Cyrene was about to reply, but she stopped as something caught her eyes. "By the gods sweetie. Where did you get that?" Quickly Cyrene's reached out with her right hand to grasp Gabrielle's left hand. She stared down at the gorgeous ring on the



Amazon Queen's hand.

The bard blushed while Xena grinned. The warrior looked to her soulmate. "Well you are going to tell Mother right?"

Gabrielle looked up to her soulmate to say something, but closed her mouth. She then looked to Cyrene and opened her mouth to say something again but didn't.

The tavern owner looked to Xena's smiling face then to Gabrielle's red face. Her eyes widen. "No?" Nobody said anything and Cyrene looked between the two women then smiled very warmly. "You're engaged to each other?"

The bard nodded bashfully and Xena still looked to her soulmate but nodded as well.

The innkeeper kept her smile and talked in a loud happy tone. "This is wonderful! Gods" Xena's mother released the bard's hand and came around from the bar. She quickly pulled Gabrielle into a hug, they both hugged tightly. "Congratulations sweetie"

"Thanks Mom"

Cyrene smiled and placed a light kiss to Gabrielle's right cheek. She then looked to Xena and went in for a bear hug with her daughter. "Congratulations Xena" Once the mother and daughter broke the embrace did Cyrene take a step back to face both soulmates. "Its about time you asked her Xena"

The warrior chuckled. "Well I had to work up to it"

Gabrielle looked up to her soulmate with an arched eyebrow. "Work up to it?"

Xena looked down to her partner with a grin. "That love, was the hardest thing I've ever done"

The Amazon Queen placed her hands on her hips. "How many fights have you been through? And you're telling me it was hardier then fighting?"

The warrior kept her grin but replied in a deep voice. "It was and I'd do it all over again"

The bard grinned back and dropped her hands from her hips.

"So when is the date set?"

The soulmates looked to Cyrene, Xena answering her question. "Solstice"

The tavern owner smiled brightly. "That's wonderful" Cyrene then grinned. "So who's going to be setting up the ceremony?"

"Mother"

The tavern owner looked up to daughter and placed her own hands on her hips. "Dear, I just want to make sure whoever sets up your marriage does it right"

Gabrielle chuckled. "Actually Mom, so far we're planning for the Amazons to do it"

Cyrene furrowed her brows and looked to the bard. "Amazons? Why the Amazons?"

The warrior took a deep breath and replied before Gabrielle could. "Mother, how about we sit down and we'll explain everything"

The innkeeper nodded her head. So the three women shuffled over to a table and sat down. The soulmates then went into explaining the whole plan and as to why. Cyrene had listened without questioning by the end though she definitely had some questions.

Once the soulmates had explained everything, Saada had come into the inn. She was about a half a candlemark ahead of the crowd, which gave her and Cyrene ample time to prepare for the dinner crowd. But once the crowd did show up, Xena and Gabrielle had already occupied a table off in a corner. The warrior had started up the fire in the fireplace, warming the inn faster. Toris though had yet to return from his journey in Neapolis that in turn concerned Cyrene.

The warrior looked to her right to see people come into the tavern and sit down at a table. She then looked to her left where her soulmate sat. She could tell her bard was thinking, her eyes were unfocused and dark. Reaching out, Xena's large hand fell on Gabrielle's right leg.

Gabrielle's eyes refocused and she looked to Xena. A smile formed on her lips.  
"Sorry"

The warrior smiled warmly and squeezed the bard's leg for a moment. She removed her hand back to her own lap. "Nothing to be sorry about"

The Amazon Queen nodded her head. "Xena?"

"Mmm?"

Emerald eyes shifted from the tavern to the warrior. "You don't mind becoming an Amazon...right?"

The warrior dropped her gaze for a moment, sighed then crossed her arms against her chest. She looked back to Gabrielle with a serious expression. "For you, I'd do anything"

"I know, but I also know you don't ever like being considered an Amazon"

Xena nodded a little then responded after a moment. "No I *didn't* but I've grown to like the Amazons a lot more than what I have" The bard smiled and the warrior did also. Xena then mumbled something low with a grin to her lips. "I'd better anyway"

"What?" The bard's question came out low and hard, but she was grinning.

Xena smirked and looked away from her soulmate to gaze around in the room. "I said I'd better anyway"

"And exactly what is that suppose to mean?"

"Its suppose to mean you're the Amazon Queen and I don't have much choice"

The bard chuckled. "Oh that's right" Then her face brightened up. "Wait a sec, so

you'll be an Amazon, one of *mine*"

Xena laughed and looked to her bard. "Yup, I'm all yours"

"Perfect"

The warrior lightly shook her head. Xena then spotted her mother coming over making her way through the people.

"Hey dears"

"Mother"

"Is there anything I can get you two?"

Gabrielle looked to her partner and shrugged her shoulder.

Xena grinned and looked up to her Mother. "Warm cider for the both of us"

Cyrene grinned with a nod. "Be back in a jippy"

The bard watched Xena's mom leave then she looked to her soulmate. "You're nothing but trouble warrior"

"I know"

Silence fell for a moment, Gabrielle then looked back to Xena. "Hey I need to go do something real fast. I'll be right back"

The warrior arched an eyebrow. "I'll be here"

"Good" After saying that with a wink to follow, Gabrielle stood up from her seat and went up stairs.

Xena watched her go the entire time then Cyrene returned with two mugs, a little steam rising from the tops.

"Where'd the little one go?"

Xena smiled. "Upstairs to do something"

"Interesting"

The warrior nodded at that one in agreement.

"Do you want dinner now dear?"

Xena grinned. "Yeah actually"

"Something spicy?"

The warrior chuckled and replied back. "Yeah, what's spicy back there?"

"Doing gyros. Gabrielle doesn't mind peppers, onions, chicken, and little mushroom?"

"Oh no, Gabrielle will eat anything"

Cyrene chuckled. "Okay, I'll bring out some. How many?"

The warrior reflected for a moment. "Five will do it"

The innkeeper nodded and left the table to go into the kitchen. That's when the bard reappeared from upstairs. Xena quickly saw her and she saw something very small and light brown slightly tucked down in the belt of Gabrielle's skirt on her side. The warrior quickly figured out it was a bit of scroll, her mind went into curiosity.

"Back"

"Was wondering what took you so long"

"Yeah well..."

Xena brought up an eyebrow. "Well?"

"Um...I forget"

The warrior grinned at the smirking bard. "Uh huh"

Gabrielle sat down then looked to her partner. "So what's for dinner?"

"I forget"

"Xena" It was definitely a low whine from the bard.

The warrior grinned and then replied back. "Two can play at that game love"

The bard huffed then crossed her arms in her lap. She then freed her right hand bringing it to lift the mug and she drank the warm cider. She felt it flow through her body and travel down into her stomach. Her body shivered for a moment as it rushed out the coldness.

"You'll like it though, something spicy" The spicy part came out low and deep from Xena's lips.

Now Gabrielle choked on her drink. She started to cough as she brought the mug from her mouth. After placing the mug down to the table she coughed a few more times then advanced to clear her throat.

"What?" The bard's question came out low as she coughed again.

"I said it is spicy"

"That's what I thought"

Xena chuckled at her soulmate and lifted her own mug to drink from it.

The bard then began to grin very devilishly. *Two can definitely play at this game.*  
"Well I know how you love real sweet things like...that cider for instance"

Xena's turn to choke on her drink. She placed her mug back down as she coughed now from the cider going down the wrong pipe.

Gabrielle then looked up to see Cyrene coming their way. The bard looked to her

warrior with a grin. Xena was still coughing a little. The younger woman then leaned to her right closer to Xena. She whispered up to her soulmate in a low sensual voice. "I'll take your surrender to this game later tonight in bed"

The warrior's eyes widen instantly as a very deep red blush crept up from her neck to the tips of her roots.

Cyrene put her hands on her hips as she stared at her blushing daughter. "Is there something wrong with the cider?"

Xena took a deep breath to calm herself but she still felt like she was on fire. "Um no Mother it's quite-"

"Sweet"

The tavern owner looked to the bard after she spoke. "Good, sweetness is good. Just like you sweetie"

Gabrielle looked to her soulmate, she watched as Xena went another shade of red that she never thought was possible. That's when Gabrielle broke out laughing, she leaned back in the chair clutching her stomach as she laughed. Her stomach began to hurt as her face went red from laughing so hard. "Oh...gods...that...that was...so funny"

The small bard kept laughing for a few more heartbeats. Xena though was trying to recover from her embarrassment. The warrior took a deep breath then looked to her partner who had finally settled from her laughter. The Warrior Princess slightly glared at the bard then smiled to her, the bard grinned back.

"Now then if you dears are quite finished. I came by to see if you needed anything else?"

Gabrielle shook her head. "No I think we're quite fine Mom"

Cyrene nodded her head. "Alright, I'm off to the kitchen" The tavern owner disappeared through the inn to her kitchen in the back. Saada came out of the kitchen heading to some tables.

"Get some good laughs out of that?"

The bard looked to her soulmate and grinned. "Uh huh"

Xena rolled her eyes some and shook her head. She looked to the tavern again. Gabrielle's grin slipped and she reached over with her right hand. Her small hand quickly grasped the warrior's larger hand in Xena's lap. Gabrielle squeezed Xena's hand and the older woman looked to the bard. The Amazon Queen smiled lovingly to the warrior, Xena smiled back deeply as her eyes warmed.

The warrior turned her hand so that her palm was up and she squeezed the bard's hand back. Xena was entranced by those sparkling forest green eyes. She ached to just lean over and...well let's just say she couldn't since so many people surround them. One last time Xena squeezed her soulmate's hand and then Gabrielle pulled her hand away before letting people notice anything.

Dinner came later on in the evening. Gabrielle certainly got her fill having three gyros

and Xena had the other two. Afterwards the bard rested back in her seat with a huge content look. The warrior looked to her and smiled. The smaller woman then looked down to her left hand resting in her lap. Her eyes stared down at the ring as it shimmered from the firelight. She sighed and looked back up and found Xena grinning at her. Gabrielle chuckled then stood up. "I think I'm going to go try out a story. Plenty of people"

Xena nodded her head. "Good luck" The warrior then stood up. "I think I'll stand so I can watch everything"

Gabrielle grinned and then leaned closer to Xena. "Xen?"

The warrior arched an eyebrow as she looked down to her soulmate. She leaned down closer to the bard. "Yeah?"

"I love you" Gabrielle peered up into blue eyes that started to twinkle very warmly to her. A rare smile creased Xena's lips as the warrior bent down more to reply back.

"You'll do wonderful up there" Xena then grinned and went on. "I love you too my bard"

The bard grinned. "Thanks" The warrior nodded and Gabrielle began to turn around, but stopped and turned back to Xena. She reached to her belt on the side and removed the small slip of scroll paper. She handed it to Xena whom took it. Gabrielle winked then turned back to the fireplace shifting to it.

The warrior arched an eyebrow as she began to open the paper. She didn't read it just yet but looked up to her bard who was in front of the fireplace.

"Excuse me everybody, I'm a...guess you could say a travelling bard and I was hoping I could do a story for everybody"

All the people turned their heads to Gabrielle once they heard a sweet voice cut through the dim of noise in the air. The tavern fell silent. Then some man yelled out a question.

"Who are you young lady?"

Xena grinned at this as Gabrielle smiled to reply back. "My name is Gabrielle"

There was a slight buzz to the air then everybody fell silent as the same man talked back. "Gabrielle of Poteidaia?"

"Yup that's me"

Then another man yelled out. "She's the bard who won the contest at the Athens' Bard Academy, really good"

Gabrielle slightly blushed and brushed a piece of hair back. "Yeah that was me too"

"Tell a story!"

Xena grinned at that she took a step back and leaned against the tavern wall. She looked down to the small slip of paper still contained in her hands. She proceeded to read it.

Days

Days fade in and fade out

I use to not remember them

Then you stepped into my life

Days were to long

Now my days don't fade in and out

Each day having its own tale

Each day having its own meaning

Days are to short

My life is yours

Yours is mine

We are intertwined

Days are ours

The warrior took a deep breath, her eyes burned just a little. She looked up to her bard, Gabrielle took a deep breath and went into bardic mode. It was so easy to see by the smile that took her lips, the look on her face, her eyes sparkling and her hands began to move.

Her emerald eyes looked over to Xena, knowing she'd just read the small paper with poem. Gabrielle smiled and Xena smiled back. The bard began to speak.

"This is a story of two friends..."

~\*Part 12\*~

Our image begins looking over a bed, a pair of soulmates sleeping soundless. It was early dawn, the lands around cloaked in snow. The air crisp with a zip of cold to chill the bones. Our heroes of course don't feel that cold, instead they feel the warmth of each other in bed. The night before was long but well worth it. The bard getting her surrender from her soulmate late into the night.

Gabrielle had never felt more herself in a long time. She'd thought she might have almost lost her bard side, but she hadn't. The audience last night was incredible, asking for one story after another. Eventually Cyrene had stopped them and said the bard had done plenty. Gabrielle felt good again knowing she'd never lost that side of herself. She is in a daze, a daze of love.

Xena had the confidence that her bard would do wonderful telling her stories and Gabrielle had. The warrior had listened to each story and kept smiling each time Gabrielle looked to her. Occasionally Xena would look down to that poem written in the small scrap of parchment and reread it. The warrior was no longer just a warrior, but a warrior with something to protect and hide from the world around. She had every intent in doing just that, anything.

Together the soulmates were in a daze, a daze of seeming perfection. A world they created together and ruled together, nobody and nothing outside could destroy it. A single realm meant only for each other where their parallels joined them. We can naturally assume this is what joins two people together, not only joins them but we can go farther to say that it binds them. We know through this that nothing around them could break this binding, nothing around them. Around them.

But this is the day our heroes have to confront the Amphipolis council. And in this instant the warrior's eyes slowly slip open to take in everything. She took a deep breath. Her smaller soulmate was actually sleeping on top of her. Xena grinned up at her bard's face as she tightened her arms more around the younger woman.

Gabrielle had her hands holding Xena's sides loosely. Her head rested on Xena's chest, on the right cheek. The covers were pulled over them to trap the heat in. Both their bodies were completely bare from last night, skin and skin touched.

The warrior took another deep breath. The bard stirred from it and tightened her hands a little on Xena's sides. Xena grinned and then released one of her hands to lightly caress the bard's back.

Gabrielle lifted her head from Xena's chest and she had a groggy expression. "To early"

The warrior grinned at the bard's words, she replied back in a low voice. "If you were to get up late in the afternoon, you'd still think it was to early"

The Amazon Queen grinned and dropped her head back down on Xena's chest. "Yup"

The older woman grinned to herself and brought her head up a little to kiss Gabrielle on her forehead. "Sleep well?"

The smaller woman nodded her head. "Yeah, you?"

"Not to bad"

A smile etched on to the bard's lips in response. A few heartbeats passed and then Gabrielle tightened her hold more on Xena. She took a deep breath and sighed in contentment. "Gods" It was low and came out with another sigh.

"Mmm?"

"Xen, this is just perfect"

The warrior grinned to herself and kept her caressing on the bard's back. "Yeah"

Gabrielle lifted her head with a bit of a grin. She pushed herself forward a little and claimed her soulmate's warm lips. Xena's right hand that was caressing came up to the back of Gabrielle's head. The warrior deepened the kiss more, the bard going with it, dying for it. They stopped the kiss for a quick instant then went into another long kiss, their bodies became hot as a blue flame.

They did stop the kiss soon though, knowing they needed to get up. So the bard dropped her head just under Xena's chin. The warrior's hand was still on Gabrielle's head but massaging the bard's head.



Emerald eyes closed and the Amazon Queen sighed. "Do we really need to get up?"

Xena grinned to herself. "If you want to get the marriage agreement settled, then yeah"

The bard grinned as she opened her eyes again. She then lifted her head a little and kissed her warrior on the cheek. Gabrielle then rolled off Xena and slipped out of the bed. She trailed over to her clothes on the table. She slipped into her skirt and then heard her soulmate shift out of bed. Once she adjusted her skirt she felt a warm presence come up behind her.

The bard felt Xena's warm strong arms wrap around her across her bare breasts. She leaned back into her partner and the feel of leather brushed against Gabrielle's back. She sighed and brought up her hands to Xena's arms, grasping them.

Xena leaned forward, her head going to the bard's ear. She whispered in a low voice. "We need to be careful today with the council"

The younger woman nodded a little then replied in her light tone. "Worried they'll take something wrong?"

"That but we need to be careful how we say...approach things. I don't want to strike an alliance with them that the Amazons might not be able to keep"

"Yeah, considering I don't have Ephiny or the Amazon council here"

"I know, we'll keep everything in the best interest for the Amazon Nation"

The bard nodded in agreement. "Sounds good"

That's when the comforting silence came around. Gabrielle dropped her head back as Xena lifted her head some. Eyes locked and the bard's right hand went up behind the warrior's head, she pulled Xena down. Their kiss was long, conveying of love and when that kiss was over, Gabrielle only turned around in her soulmate's arm to kiss again.

Once the second one was over did Xena release her partner. "We need to get moving love"

"Right...let me just remember how to get changed"

The warrior laughed and kissed her soulmate on the forehead. Xena then turned to the table to collect her armor and spot her bard pulling her top on. By the time the bard had everything of hers on did the older woman put on her boots.

So in turn Gabrielle snagged her cloak along with Xena's. She slipped into hers and waited for her soulmate. Xena tied her last boot then stood back up and looked to her bard, Gabrielle smiling to her. The warrior stepped over to the Amazon Queen and Gabrielle helped her soulmate put the cloak on.

The soulmates then went down stairs to the tavern. There Cyrene was cleaning the bar from the front side, she looked up when she saw the pair coming down.

"Morning Mom"

"Good morning sweetie"

"Mother"

Cyrene smiled to her daughter and replied back. "Morning dear. Sleep well?"

Xena nodded the responded as well. "I did"

The innkeeper nodded her head. "Good. So you both up for breakfast?"

Gabrielle looked up to her partner and Xena looked down to her. The warrior then looked back to her mother with a devilishly smile. "Definitely"

~\*~\*~\*~

Gabrielle shifted her weight from her right foot to her left as she stood in front of the council. She nodded her head to something in agreement. This meeting is getting way to long. She took a deep breath to calm herself and tried to stay focused on the topic at hand.

"So it will be assured that Amphipolis will receive an alliance with the Amazon Nation?"

The bard brushed back a piece of hair behind her right ear then responded. "Yes, I can guarantee you that the Amazon Nation will agree to an alliance. But what we need to make terms as to the alliance. Although I can't promise these terms because I personally may not be allowed to approve the terms without the consent of the council and our regent"

The head council member of Amphipolis nodded his head. He sat in the center of this long stretched table. Behind the table were six other members excluding the head member. Xena stood beside the bard and was listening carefully. The soulmates though were both standing before the council in front while off to the side sat Ferus.

"That is fine by the council if the terms are not yet agreed to. We prefer to wait till we can speak with the Nation about the terms instead of preparing them now. If that is alright with you Gabrielle?"

The Amazon Queen nodded her head. "That is fine, I'd rather wait myself"

The head council member nodded and looked to Xena, his face stern. "And Xena, the council has decided to make you a citizen of Amphipolis again. The reasons being because first you saved Amphipolis from the warlord Draco over a year ago. Second you stopped raiders from attacking Amphipolis and lastly because you saved Constable Ferus from being killed"

The warrior looked from the council to the Constable, he grinned up at Xena. The warrior nodded then looked back to the council. "Thank you, I've missed being apart of my hometown"

"Well then consider it your home once more Xena"

All the council members nodded as well all of them smiling. The head council member then rolled up one of two scrolls he had in front of himself. He then looked back up to the soulmates. "The third issue we must contend with is the marriage

arrangements. Constable Ferus re-laid to me Xena that you wished to have an Amazon Ceremony here. What is the purpose of having an Amazon Ceremony here?"

Xena took a deep breath and crossed her arms against her chest, she then answered. "The idea behind it is to say kill two birds with one stone. If we do an Amazon Ceremony in Amphipolis then I do believe the Amphipolis and Amazon councils can both approve of it as a marriage"

All the members began to talk in low whispers to each other. Some shaking their heads, others nodding.

The head council member then spoke up loud. "Silence" Everybody went quiet. "And exactly why an Amazon Ceremony?"

Gabrielle narrowed her eyes for a moment then took that question. "Because it will be required of me as being an Amazon even more so the Queen"

The council members all nodded their heads. The head was still staring at the bard.

Xena then cut in. "I do believe that Amphipolis can approve of the Amazon Ceremony as a marriage, correct?"

The head looked up to Xena. "I would have to discuss that with the other members"

Then another member at the far right end spoke up. "Will the ceremony be under control of Amphipolis or will the Amazons have completely control of the ceremony?"

Gabrielle took that one. "The Amazons will be responsible for setting everything up and the arrangements, its custom"

The head council member nodded his head along with everybody else. "It sounds if there would be little problems. Does everybody agree?" The head council member looked down at the follow members to see them all nodding or mumbling in agreement. He looked back to the soulmates. "It's agreed then. On Solstice day there will be held an Amazon marriage ceremony for Xena and Gabrielle. The marriage will be approved by the town of Amphipolis as a legal marriage. In turn Gabrielle of Poteidaia and Amazon Queen will become a citizen of Amphipolis. Finally the Amazon Nation and Amphipolis will have an alliance under the terms agreed between the Nation and Amphipolis. Is this agreed?" The council member looked to his right and watched as each member raised their hand up in favor. He then looked to his left to see the members raise their hands up as well in agreement. He nodded and looked once more to Xena and Gabrielle. "It is agreed then by the council of Amphipolis. This meeting is over" The head council member began to roll his scroll up as the other members all began to shuffle up out of their seats.

The soulmates looked to each other and grinned. Gabrielle wanted to rush over into her partner's arms but knew she couldn't quite yet. Xena nodded for the door and they made their way outside with Ferus following behind them. The soulmates walked a few steps then heard somebody call for them.

"Xena and Gabrielle"

The pair stopped and turned back around to see Ferus coming up to them at a power

walk. He smiled to them and then came up to them. "Congratulations"

Gabrielle smiled and replied back. "Thanks you Constable Ferus, you've been a great help"

The Constable nodded his head. "Quite welcome, I was glad to help out"

Xena now smiled. "You were a great help Ferus, I don't think we could have done it without you"

Ferus smiled to the warrior. "Its good to have you back Xena, this town has seen a large difference in you" He then took a deep breath. "Well now, I'll let you both go. A lot of planning. Let me know if there're any problems"

Gabrielle nodded. "We will, thanks you again Constable Ferus"

He nodded. "Welcome again, bye" With that he treaded off in the snow in opposite direction the soulmates were headed.

The soulmates looked to each other. Gabrielle grinned. "We did it Xena"

Xena smiled. "Yup, now we just have to get through the ceremony"

The bard laughed. "Oh that's the easy part"

The warrior arched an eyebrow. The Amazon Queen laughed and threw her arms around her taller partner. Xena hugged her friend back and then grinned. She grasped the bard's sides tightly and spun her around in a circle. The bard screamed joyfully until her boots hit the cold snowy ground again.

Xena lowered her head so that her forehead touched the bard's. "You're the best thing that's ever happened to me Gabrielle"

The younger woman smiled and replied back as she peered up into crystal eyes. "Xena, I...gods there's just no words to express how much I need you in my life. How much I love you. I could never stop loving the other half of my soul"

The warrior smiled very deeply as her eyes softened to a rare degree. She brought her lips down to lightly kiss the bard on her lips for a quick instant. Xena smiled and brought up a hand to the bard's back. "Come on, let's go before we freeze"

The pair began to walk to the tavern, the warrior's hand had moved from Gabrielle's back to her farthest shoulder. The smaller woman grinned and shifted closer to her soulmate and wrapped her left arm around Xena's waist. "Xena?"

"Mmm?"

"You think Toris is back by now? I mean he should have been back yesterday. Mom at breakfast seemed quite worried about him"

The warrior took a deep breath. "He's fine I'm sure. Just running behind 'cause of the snow"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "You're probably right"

The soulmates walked on in silence for a little ways then climbed the stairs to the inn.

Once inside the warrior stomped off the snow in her boots, the bard didn't care.

Cyrene came out of her kitchen while wiping her hands on her apron. "Thought that was Toris. How was the meeting dears?"

Gabrielle smiled and began to walk up to Cyrene while replying. "We did it Mom"

"That's wonderful sweetie"

Xena came up long side her soulmate. "Went well Mother"

Cyrene looked up to her daughter with a smile. "That's great to hear dear. No problems?"

Gabrielle shook her head. "Nope, they seem to be happy with the plans"

"That's just wonderful. So I guess this means you'll have to send for your Amazon friends?"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "Yeah, you don't mind them all coming here Mom?"

The innkeeper smiled. "Oh no sweetie. How many do you expect?"

The bard reflected then looked up to Xena. "Seventeen?" The warrior nodded her head and Gabrielle looked back to Xena's mother.

"Seventeen then?" Cyrene thought then looked back up with a smile. "I can handle that"

"Now Mom, they're a rowdy bunch these Amazons"

Cyrene chuckled at the bard's words. "Even better sweetie, no worries"

The Amazon Queen was about to retort but the door to the tavern swung open. There came stepping through the doorway was Toris, snow on him and falling to the floor.

Cyrene's face brightened up rather quickly. "Toris what took you so long dear?"

The tavern owner smiled as Toris walked up to the group of women. "Just got caught up in that snow storm. Sorry about that Mother" The man shrugged out of his wet cloak and tossed it to the nearest table.

His mother smiled and stepped up to him. "Its good to see you back dear" She then engulfed her son into a large bear hug, he returned it equally.

Once Cyrene stepped back, he looked to his sister. "Xena"

The warrior grinned. "Toris"

He then looked to Gabrielle who stood a little in front of the warrior and close to her. "Its good to see you again Gabrielle"

The bard smiled. "Glad you made it back safely Toris"

"Yes well it was a Hades' of an ordeal"

"I can imagine"

Toris' furrowed his eyebrows and he caught sight of something. He reached down to Gabrielle's left hand lifted the small woman's hand. "Now who's the lucky guy may I ask?"

Gabrielle looked up from the ring to Toris with a grin. "I'll give you one guess Toris"

Xena's brother released the bard's hands and he crossed his arms against his chest. "I have no idea"

The Amazon Queen looked up to Xena and the warrior grinned.

Toris caught this quite quickly. "No?"

The bard looked back to the man and nodded.

"I'll be centaur poop on a stick. When in Hades did this happen?"

Xena now crossed her arms against her chest and answer the question. "Yesterday"

"I'd never guessed. I guess you do know everything about her huh sis?"

The warrior rolled her eyes. "Toris"

The man chuckled. "Well congratulations to you both. That's wonderful news"

"Thanks Toris"

"Thanks brother dear" Xena then grinned and placed both of her hands on her soulmate's shoulders. Her eyes locked with Toris'. "By the way, she's mine"

Xena grinned, Cyrene grinned and the bard did as well.

Toris nodded his head and then grinned to his sister. "Right, got that part"

The warrior nodded with a grin then removed her hands from her soulmate's shoulders.

"Toris let me know if you ever want a...female friend, I can help you out. I know lots of them"

Toris shifted his eyes to the bard and laughed lowly. "I'll keep that in mind Gabrielle, thanks"

Gabrielle chuckled then looked to her soulmate. "Ephiny letter?"

The warrior nodded her head. "Sounds good" Xena then looked to Toris and her mother. "Excuse us, we're off to get things ready"

Cyrene smiled to the soulmates. "Let me know if you need any help dears"

"We will Mother thanks" The soulmates then were off heading to their room.

~\*~\*~\*~

*Dear Ephiny,*

*Xena and I have been relaxing in Amphipolis for the past two weeks. Its been so wonderful! I hope things are going well in the village. We had a bit of a small problem last week. There was a group of raiders south of Amphipolis. So Xena and I went to a cavern they were hiding out in and found out their numbers. Once we did the Constable of Amphipolis, Xena's brother Toris, Xena, few villagers, and myself went to the cave and scared them off. They didn't pose much of a problem. But so much has been going on for the past couple of weeks.*

*So, how are you and Solari doing? Are Ep and Teresa talking more? I could see there was something in the makings there. Did everything go well with Criostoir and the other mercenaries after we left? I know that must have been a big mess of a party to clean up after.*

*Right now though Xena and I are requesting you, Solari, Eponin, Teresa, the priestess and the council to come to Amphipolis. Xena and I are engaged and would love to have an Amazon Ceremony done in Amphipolis for our marriage. Ephiny, I can't wait to tell you how Xena asked me to marry her. It was so incredible, you'll die to hear it. You have to request the council and Artemis' priestess to come. We're planning the date on Solstice day. Get back to me as soon as you can. Take care Eph. It'll be great to hear from you!*

*Love,*

*Gabrielle*

The bard lowered her quill from the scroll and read over it twice finding it satisfactory. Gabrielle then dropped her quill to the table and looked to the bed where her soulmate sat.

"Xena?"

The warrior had between her teeth a bit of thread that she broke off. She pulled the gauntlet away from her face and looked up to her soulmate.

"Yeah?"

"Finished it up" Gabrielle then picked up the scroll and stood up. She walked over to the bed and sat beside her partner.

Xena placed the wrist guard down in her lap and looked at the scroll. She read over the letter to Ephiny. Xena then nodded at the end and looked up to Gabrielle. "Can I add something?"

The bard arched an eyebrow but nodded. "Sure"

The warrior trade with the bard, giving her the gauntlet and taking the scroll. She walked over to the table where the quill was laying near the ink well. Xena picked up the quill, tipped it with ink then wrote at the bottom under the bard's signature.

*P.S. Ephiny, do not even think of planning a party for this marriage between Gabrielle and I. We'll take care of that, sorry to put a small damper in your leathers.*

*Sincerely,*

*Xena*

The warrior grinned then deposited the quill down on the table again and reread it. She kept her grin as she walked back to her soulmate and handed the scroll to the bard.

Gabrielle read the warrior's words then started to laugh. "Xena you know that'll only antagonize Eph to do one?"

"I'm counting on it"

The Amazon Queen chuckled and shook her head. She then nodded. "Looks good?"

The warrior's hands went to her hips. "Yeah, you seal it up and I'll go find a messenger. Deal?"

Gabrielle grinned. "How about you seal it and I'll go find a messenger?"

Xena arched an eyebrow. "Why?"

"Because I want to get out and you can finish up fixing your armor"

"Alright"

Gabrielle handed her soulmate the scroll and Xena went to the table and rolled the scroll up. She then went to the bard's scroll satchel and retrieved a red ribbon with her bard's Amazon seal on it. Xena then tied the scroll with it and turned back to the bard. "Gauntlet?"

The bard looked down at the wristband in her hands and looked back up with a sheepish smile. "Whoops, sorry"

Xena grinned and took her gauntlet back and put it on. The warrior handed her bard the scroll as she stood up.

Gabrielle then walked over to the table again and retrieved her cloak from behind the chair she sat in earlier. "Okay I'll be back soon Xen"

The warrior nodded, she was back on the foot of the bed with her other wristband. "Don't take to long love"

The bard grinned and nodded her head. "I'll try not to" She then turned to her scroll satchel and reached in. Her small right hand lifted up a small leather pouch with something inside. She placed the pouch inside of her cloak where there was a small inside pocket. Standing back up, Gabrielle turned to her soulmate and walked over to the bed.

"Be careful"

"Xena, I'll be right across town, nothing to worry about"

The warrior nodded. "I know, I just like you to be careful anyway"

The bard grinned. "Thanks" The younger woman leaned forward and kissed her soulmate deeply, her right hand touching the warrior's smooth cheek. After pulling



away she grinned. "I'll be back, I love you" Gabrielle then moved to the door, opening it and going through.

"Love you Gabrielle"

The bard looked back to her soulmate before shutting the door. She wink at Xena then closed the door.

~\*Part 13\*~

The bard stepped out of a building, she'd just given a messenger her letter meant for Ephiny. She could only hope it would arrive in the Amazon Nation within two to three days. Gabrielle took a deep breath and reached up with her hands to the collar of her cloak. She pulled the collar closer against her throat then looked to her left. Taking a deep breath then releasing it and seeing it in the air, Gabrielle began to walk down the snowy quiet streets of Amphipolis. Her hands dropping from her collar to cross against her chest.

Passing by an array of buildings mostly shops her eyes gazed up at the signs. She then came to one and grinned. Climbing the steps the bard went inside of the shop, a man looked up as she entered.

"Well its great to see you again Gabrielle"

The bard smiled at the man. "Nice to see you again too Potestas"

The jewelry owner stood behind his counter, wiping down the counter a little with a dirty rag. He turned behind himself and dropped it on a stool. Turning back around he kept his warm smile to the bard as Gabrielle walked up to him. "So what may I help you with Gabrielle?"

The Amazon Queen grinned. "I need a wedding band"

In a flash Potestas' face brightens up. "I have a huge stock of them. Who's the lucky person?"

The bard grinned. "Xena"

"Gods, that's wonderful Gabrielle. When did this happen?"

Gabrielle smiled then responded. "Just yesterday"

"That's stupendous, my congratulations Gabrielle"

"Thank you very much"

The jeweler nodded his head then went into a back room directly behind him between two curtains. "So what kind of a band are you looking for?" He came back out with a wood box and a glass cover over top. "Something large or small?"

The bard reflected. "Um...about medium size and nothing to plain"

Potestas grinned with a nod. "That's what I figured my dear" He placed the box down on the counter and turned it so Gabrielle could peer down in it. "These are all my very valuable and rare wedding bands. I only show them to my special customers"

The bard looked up from them to Potestas with a smile. She then looked back down. Her eyes carefully looked over each and every one. Finding some too large, too small, or a right size but not a design she wanted. As she came to the end of the collection a ring caught her eye.

In the lower right hand corner of the case was a gold and silver band ring. The center of the band was made of gold and had a Greek design for immortality then surrounding the gold was silver to make the gold stand out.

The bard's lips formed into a lopsided smile. "Potestas can I see that one right there?" Gabrielle pointed to the ring.

Potestas nodded his head and opened the case, he carefully pulled the ring out of its home and handed it to Gabrielle. "Very lovely ring"

The small woman grinned as she inspected the ring. She turned it every which way looking at every detail. Now the size, next step. So the bard slipped it on to her middle right finger, too large for her middle. So she placed it on her thumb and it was just a smidge too big for her thumb. That's when the bard knew it would fit her soulmate's larger left ring finger. Almost perfect.

The bard looked up with a smile to the jeweler. "I love this one Potestas"

"That one? Lovely choice my dear. Engraving?"

"Was going to just ask you that"

"What would you like engraved?"

Gabrielle's emerald eyes looked down from Potestas to the ring, she thought. Looking to the inside of the band she figured the spacing. Her face then brightened up as she looked back to the jeweler.

"My soulmate forever"

Potestas nodded his head. "I do believe that'll fit. When would you like this done by?"

"As soon as possible please"

The jeweler nodded again and Gabrielle carefully handed Potestas the ring. He kindly took it and pulled out a bit of rough scroll paper and quill, he jotted down something. Looking back to the Amazon Queen.

"How much do I owe you Potestas?"

The jeweler shook his head, bringing up his right hand in protest. "Nothing my dear. You've done plenty for this village and Xena, that's all I need for payment"

"No Potestas I can't do that"

Potestas smiled very warmly. "May I speak freely?"

The bard nodded her head. "Please"

The jeweler took a deep breath then replied. "First this village could have been

destroyed by Draco but you helped bring Xena to stop him. Then second you both also stopped those raiders. And you brought Xena back home and stood beside her when nobody else would. Gabrielle I've always cared for Xena and I was quite sad to see what happened to her. But now she's back and that's due to your help. I can't thank you enough for that. Please except the ring as a gift, I'll feel insulted otherwise"

Gabrielle dropped her eyes then looked back up with a warm smile. "Thank you Potestas"

"Thank you my dear. I'll have it done within three days max, just stop by"

The Amazon Queen nodded. "Thank you again Potestas, that truly means a lot" Gabrielle then reached out and the two shook hands. She then began to head for the door.

"Take Care Gabrielle"

The bard opened the door looked back and smiled. "You too, bye" With that the bard was out the door and into the snowy streets. Gabrielle looked down a ways through the street. She looked up to the signs of different shops, she spotted one she wanted. *The Raggedy Shop*. The bard grinned and began to head down the street to the shop.

~\*~\*~\*~

Xena shifted her right hand a little under her head. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes again. This wasn't working, she couldn't sleep without her soulmate. It just doesn't work. The warrior chuckled at herself and then sighed.

She lay on the bed, boots off, armor, wristbands, and armbands all off. The only thing she lay in was her leathers. The only thing that was off was her mind, off and wandering. Each time she thought of the marriage it sent a shock of excitement and started butterflies deep within. A smile slipped onto her lips.

Crossing her legs at the ankles the warrior began to think about her soulmate. Think about the number of changes that has occurred in Gabrielle's life. There were numerous negative ones as there were positive ones. No now that she thought about it, Gabrielle would only ever see the positives, that is how it always is with the bard.

Sighing again Xena's mind slipped to her days. She began to compare her life before Gabrielle and since the time she met the younger woman. It amazed her the large difference this one single person had on her life. Hercules may have stopped the warlord side but he never ever helped Xena understand herself. No a younger more loving woman had stepped into her life and said a few words, kept at her side and flashed her confident smiles. Xena then began to believe in herself again and in turn understand herself.

Now, now she was about to be legally bind with the bard. Xena was quite happy with the fact she was able to arrange a marriage. Fear had struck in her that she might not have been able to do one. She knew to her bard it wouldn't have matter but then Xena knew how much it would mean to Gabrielle. And she'd do anything just to make her soulmate smile.

The door to the room opened, the warrior knew who it was a long while ago. Nothing was said between the two people. Xena kept her eyes close as she heard the other form

take off their cloak then boots. Within a heartbeat the warrior felt a warm presence come close to her. Warm lips claimed hers. Xena's right hand went up to caress a smooth cheek.

The kiss broke after a few, the warrior opened her eyes to look into emerald eyes. Xena smiled deeply. "What took you?"

Gabrielle grinned and then moved herself to sit on the side of the bed. "Bumped into some people"

The warrior nodded her head. She then removed her other hand from under her head to rest on her stomach with her right hand. "Get the message out?"

The bard nodded her head. "Yeah" Her right hand went on top of her soulmate's larger hands. "They seemed to think it would take two to three days"

Xena nodded her head. "Sounds about right"

Gabrielle then bent her head down to Xena's and the pair kissed again. Gabrielle found her hands on Xena's sides while the warrior's own hands went the bard's sides. Soon the Amazon Queen had herself climbing onto the bed well it's more like onto Xena as they kept kissing. Once the bard felt comfortable on top of her soulmate she stopped the kiss and dropped her head on top of the warrior's chest.

Xena's right hand went up to rest on the bard's head, massaging it while her left arm wrapped around Gabrielle's midsection.

"Xen?"

"Mmm?"

"Sparring?"

"Not now"

Gabrielle chuckled. "Later" That came out low. Her warm lips then began to kiss Xena on the neck. It left the warrior feeling on fire in each spot. Then it would shoot to the center of her being. The warrior's hand went under the bard's chin, lifting Gabrielle's head. Xena captured her soulmate's lips. And well, we can figure the rest out for ourselves.

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Soon after the soulmates'...rest they got up late in the afternoon to spar for a good two candlemarks then head back to the inn. There they had an early dinner and Gabrielle later on in the evening told stories to the patrons of the tavern. By the end of her lengthy stories she was smiling and thanking everybody. Once she thanked everybody she went to her partner, finally being with the one person she wanted to be near. Xena had given her a very warm smile and her eyes twinkled to the bard, Gabrielle knew that was Xena's way of congratulating her for the stories and captive audience.

But the following day was more peaceful around the town. They'd expected Ephiny to be receiving their message either today or tomorrow, they hoped. The soulmates had five days till Solstice day, not much time. The days passed on and on, the warrior and bard preparing for their marriage, mentally.

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The regent looked up as one of her Amazons entered into her hut. "Hi Ep"

The weapons masters smiled and stepped up to Ephiny's desk, she adjusted the cloak on herself then replied to Ephiny. "How are you Eph?"

The Amazon Regent looked up from a scroll on her desk to the other Amazon, she smiled. "Good, yourself?"

"Not to bad"

"Anything going on I don't know about?"

The weapons master grinned. "Actually yeah, Solari has a message for you. It's from Gabrielle, just came in from a messenger out of Amphipolis"

Ephiny nodded as she stood up, she pulled her heavy cloak off the back of her chair. She slipped into the cloak. "Where's Solari?"

Eponin thought for a moment. "I believe she's still on patrol"

"Great, thanks Ep" The regent began to move to the exit of the hut, Eponin right behind her. "Ep, why didn't Solari bring it?"

The weapons master shrugged her shoulders. "She was still talking to the messenger when I came to find out"

Ephiny nodded her head as Eponin closed the door behind them. The two Amazons were outside heading out of the village to the woods. Once outside of the gates of the village they came to the forest.

"Lead the way Ep"

The weapons master nodded her head and stepped ahead of Ephiny. The pair went through the forest for a ways and then up ahead the regent could see three people. One is a young man, Solari, and then Teresa all standing in the snow bundled up. The second in command was talking to the messenger.

"What's up?"

Solari looked up after hearing her regent's voice, she smiled. "Message for you Eph" She handed the scroll over to the regent and Ephiny took it.

The regent untied the ribbon then unrolled the scroll, she began to read. Her brows furrowed together at the first bit, the second half she grinned at then chuckled to herself. Then she came to the last paragraph, her eyes widen immediately. "Gods" She kept reading a little hastily and then read the part from Xena, that made her chuckle with a devilish grin.

"What's going on Eph?"

The regent looked up from the scroll and rolled it up as she looked to her second in command, replying to her. "Seems as if our Queen is getting married"

"What? Are you kidding? When?"

Everybody chuckled at Solari's words and Ephiny answered her second in command's question. "Solstice is the date. They want you, Ep, Teresa, the council, priestess and myself there"

"An Amazon Ceremony?"

The regent looked to Teresa nodded then retorted back. "Yeah, that's the plan"

Eponin looked to her regent. "If they plan on it Solstice then that doesn't leave us much time. What five days till Solstice?"

Ephiny nodded her head at the weapons master. "Not much time. We better leave early tomorrow morning" Ephiny then looked to the quiet messenger. "Exactly how long did it take you to get here?"

The young man reflected then replied back. "About two days"

"The roads treacherous?"

The man shook his head then answered back to the regent. "Not to bad at all. No ice yet"

Ephiny nodded her head. "Good. What's your name?"

The young man smiled. "Michael, but everybody calls me Mike for short"

The Amazon Regent nodded her head. "Okay, here's the plan everybody. I'll get together the council and priestess today and by dawn tomorrow we'll head out of here. Mike, you can ride with us, make things simple"

Everybody nodded their heads. Ephiny then looked to her second in command. "Take Mike to a hut for the night"

Solari nodded her head and looked to Michael. "Just follow me"

The young man nodded his head and followed behind Solari. Eponin and Teresa looked to the grinning regent. Eponin being the first to say anything about Ephiny's look. "There's something else you're planing I can tell Eph"

The regent grinned and looked up to her weapons master. "Yup"

## **Part 4**

### **Section 4**

~\*Part 14\*~

"I wonder if anybody is home?"

Solari grinned at Ephiny's words as she looked to her regent. Ephiny looked around in the tavern for somebody, anybody.

That's when the door behind the bar swung open, an older woman came out. Her hair

was black and curly, high cheekbones but short. "You two must be the Amazons"

Ephiny smiled to the older woman and replied. "I am Ephiny, I'm looking for Gabrielle. My guess is you're Xena's mother"

The innkeeper chuckled as she came up to the two Amazons. "I am, Cyrene. Nice to meet you Ephiny" The tavern owner then looked to Solari. "And you are?"

The second in command smiled. "Solari Ma'am"

Cyrene smiled. "Nice to meet you too Solari" She then looked back to the regent. "Gabrielle is out right now with Xena. They're doing a little sparring, left just awhile ago"

"When do you expect them back?"

The innkeeper's hands went to her hips. "Hopefully soon actually. By the way, I have rooms for you and your friends. Seventeen if I am not mistaken?"

The regent nodded. "Yes there's seventeen of us. But I don't think you would want to put up with all of us"

Cyrene grinned. "No I can handle a pile of Amazons, I've had worse"

Solari chuckled and the regent grinned at the second in command. Ephiny then looked back to Cyrene. "Thank you Cyrene, greatly appreciated"

"Quite welcome. Now then, there are nine rooms free. You don't mind sleeping in pairs?"

"Oh no, we'll be fine with that"

"Wonderful, the stable is right out side I'm sure you saw. They'll be taken care of by my stable manger"

Ephiny nodded and looked to her second in command. "Go outside and tell everybody to stable up their horses and come in with their stuff"

Solari nodded her head. "No problem, be back" With that said Solari went stomping out of the inn and to the other Amazons standing outside waiting.

The regent heard the door close and she looked back to Cyrene. "Thank you again for putting all of us with a room and food"

Cyrene nodded a little and answered. "Well you are friends of Gabrielle's so that means you're friends of mine as well"

Ephiny grinned, that sounded like Xena. "Yes well, now if I could just get a hold of the Queen"

"You might be able to find her and Xena just behind tavern, that's normally where they go to practice"

The regent nodded her head. "Thank you. I'll have to go see if they're there" Ephiny then turned around heading to the door, Cyrene watched her go.

As soon as the regent's feet hit the snowy ground she looked up, she noticed very small snowflakes coming down. She mumbled something under her breath to nobody but herself. "We got here just in time" The Amazon tugged her cloak closer against her body and looked to her left to where the stables are. She hears the nickering of horses as she walks closer to the barn. Once she steps into the doorway she spots her second in command. "Solari?"

The Amazon looks up from inside of the stall to her regent. "Hey Eph"

"Look, I'm going to go find Gabrielle and Xena. After everybody is done here just have them go inside of the inn till I get back"

Solari nodded her head. "No problem"

"Good" The regent then began to turn around, she stopped in mid action. "Solari?"

"Yeah?"

"Make sure you get us a good room"

Solari grinned to herself. "Anything for the regent"

Ephiny turned her head to the right to glance side long at Solari, she grinned. "Keep it that way"

"Yes my Queen"

The regent chuckled then looked back ahead, she stomped back out into the snowy cloudy day. She trekked past the inn to the back, near the woods. Entering in the woods she noticed tracks in the snow, two sets. One big the other small, definitely the soulmates. She grinned and began to follow them, that's when she began to hear fighting going on. Xena's voice rung through the air.

"Gabrielle if you duck first then swing, I think it'll be more...effective"

The regent chuckled at the warrior's words. She came to the clearing where they were, she watched them. Ephiny smiled at the sight as she leaned to her left against a tree.

Xena brought her sword down on the bard, Gabrielle stopping it with her staff. But Xena never backed off, instead she took two steps closer. Their bodies almost touching by mere inches. Xena peered down into her soulmate's eyes. Gabrielle grinned up at her soulmate.

So in turn the warrior bent her head down close to Gabrielle's. "We have company"

In that instant Xena heard her partner let a low growl from her lips. "Who?"

Xena grinned. "Your regent"

"Hades, she has some bad timing"

Xena's grin definitely went a little devilish now. "Why?"

Gabrielle arched an eyebrow. "You know why"



Now the warrior's eyes began to twinkle. She brought her sword down along with Gabrielle's staff with a strong force. The staff and sword at the soulmate's sides. With Xena's free hand she brought it up to the bard's cheek and leaned in. The kiss was long and loving, it sent fires through the women's bodies.

Once it ended Xena looked up with cold eyes to Ephiny. The warrior's blue eyes locked with Ephiny's zircon eyes. Xena then looked back to her partner, she released the bard. Taking a step back she sheathed her sword. "Glad you made it Ephiny"

The regent grinned. She straightened up from the tree and walked over to the pair. She then smiled. "Well I'd say the same if I hadn't just got such a cold look"

The warrior smirked. "Bad timing Ephiny"

Ephiny nodded her head.

By then Gabrielle had turned around to face Ephiny. "Safe trip Eph?"

The regent looked to her friend. "It was, made it in no time" Ephiny then smiled very warmly and without warning she pulled the bard in for an embrace. "Congratulations Gabrielle"

The bard returned the hug back in the same force. Once they pulled back, she smiled up to her Amazon friend. "Thank you. We're both excited"

"I know" Ephiny then looked up to the warrior with a smile. Xena smiled back. Ephiny shifted to the taller woman and pulled her in for a huge hug as well. "Congratulations Xena"

"Thanks Eph"

After releasing the warrior the regent stepped back to face both women. "So in two days is the big day. You don't leave us much time you two"

Gabrielle chuckled. "Have to keep everybody on their toes"

Ephiny rolled her eyes. "To say the least Gabrielle"

Xena then spoke up before anybody could say anything. "Let's go back to the inn so we can stay warm"

The other two women nodded at that. So the three women all migrated back to the tavern, going inside.

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Gabrielle grinned and then nodded. "That's all the time you have Eph"

The regent sighed. She then leaned forward picking up her mug. After drinking from it she slowly put it back down on the table as she spoke. "Well, this is going to be the quickest Amazon ceremony in history"

The bard kept her grin and looked to the warrior.

Xena saw her bard's grin and mirrored it back. She then looked to Ephiny. "Well I have confidence you can do it Eph"

The regent sighed and looked to Xena. The warrior sat to the right of the bard across the table. "Thanks Xena, that helps"

Gabrielle chuckled and crossed her arms in her lap. "So Eph, how long did it take you to get here?"

The regent reflected for a moment. "Around...fourteen candelmarks. We left early this morning. Surprised we made it here when we did"

The bard nodded at that. "I thought you'd be here tomorrow. Made good time"

Ephiny nodded too. "Definitely, the roads weren't to bad. We also brought the messenger back"

Gabrielle smiled at that. "Good, I don't think he wanted to trek back in all of this snow"

"That's what I figured" Ephiny's gaze then wandered across the tavern. The council sat on the other side of the tavern at a table together, conversing. Solari, Eponin, Teresa, and the priestess all sat together at another table, talking as well. The regent looked back to the soulmates.

The Amazon Queen reached up to her mug of cider, about to pick it up. "So how are you Solari doing?" She then lifted her mug to drink from it.

"We're doing well"

The bard nodded as her mug came back down to the table. She then grinned. "Has she moved into your hut yet?"

The Amazon laughed a little then replied. "I've been waiting for that one myself"

"Actually Gabrielle" The bard looked to her warrior and Xena went on. "Ephiny is moving into Solari's hut"

The bard snickered and then looked to her regent.

Ephiny rolled her eyes. "You wish Xena"

The warrior looked to the regent. "Oh I don't wish, I know"

The regent huffed as she lifted her mug again. She took a big gulp of her drink then settled it back on the table.

Gabrielle arched an eyebrow at Ephiny. "She doesn't deny it..."

Ephiny grinned. She sat more up into her seat. "So... are we planning to have anybody other then the Amazons at the ceremony?"

The Amazon Queen looked to her soulmate with a grin, the warrior understanding the look. Gabrielle then looked back to her Amazon friend. "Yup...Cyrene, Toris, Amphipolis council, and probably a few villagers will be there"

The regent nodded. "Is there any sort of deal being made with Amphipolis over this?"

Xena took that question. "There is, Gabrielle agreed that the Amazon Nation would set up an alliance with Amphipolis"

Ephiny furrowed her brows as she looked to the warrior. "What sort of an alliance?"

"That's between you, Gabrielle, and the council"

The Amazon nodded her head. "When's that meeting?"

The bard looked from Xena to Ephiny. "After the marriage once it's approved"

Ephiny nodded her head. "Sounds great. I think we can handle that"

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The day lagged on for the soulmates. The Amazons on the other hand rested for the day, catching their breaths from the long ride from the village to Amphipolis. By the night, Ephiny and her other Amazons were conjugated in Ephiny and Solari's room talking, with the exception of the council.

"Are you sure Eph?"

The regent sighed and looked to her second in command. "Yes, I told them. They'll be here on time"

Solari nodded her head and the priestess looked up to Ephiny. "Exactly when do you plan for them to show up in the ceremony?"

The regent reflected then responded to the priestess, the priestess Maired. "They'll be there directly at the end Maired, that's the plan"

The priestess nodded her head. "Wise choice"

Ephiny nodded at Maired. "That's what I thought" The regent then grinned.

Maired grinned back and chuckled. "Yes well I don't think Artemis want's any of her ceremonies interrupted"

Ephiny nodded in agreement.

That's when Eponin cut in. "Eph, how are we going to work things?"

All five of the Amazons in this one single room were collected in different spots. Solari, Maired, and Ephiny sat at the table. Which they had pushed to the foot of the bed in the center of the room. On the end of the bed sat Teresa with Eponin, bodies rather close.

Ephiny looked up to Eponin on the bed. "Tomorrow we need to find out where we're performing the ceremony. Once we do that we need to get things organized there. The following day Solari and I will take care of preparing Gabrielle for the wedding while you and Teresa take care of Xena"

Eponin and Teresa nodded their heads in agreement. Teresa then asked a question. "Do we even know if Amphipolis has a temple dedicated to Artemis?"

Ephiny shook her head. "No they don't. They have one to Athena, small. But that's it.

We might just be doing this outside"

Solari grinned. "That's going to be a cold one"

The regent chuckled as she looked to her second in command. "Well, whatever the Queen wants the Queen gets now"

Solari nodded at that and everybody chuckled. "Ephiny, what does the council think about this?"

The regent sighed then responded to her second in command. "The council agrees with the exception of one"

Solari rolled her eyes. "How many guesses do I get on who it is?"

"One guess"

"Masika maybe?"

The regent groaned a little. She then crossed her arms against her chest. "Yeah unfortunately"

"What is Masika's problem?"

Ephiny looked up to her weapons master. "Xena is her problem"

"She has something against Xena huh?" Eponin then huffed after that, crossing her arms against her chest too.

The regent shook her head. "Yeah, don't know what though"

"Somebody needs to set her straight" After saying that Solari grinned at her regent.

"I think we all know who's going to set her straight" Everybody laughed at Ephiny's words. "Okay everybody, why don't you each head to your rooms. We have to get up early tomorrow, it's going to be a long day"

All the Amazons nodded their heads in agreement and began to stand up. They all left with a word of goodnight, except for Solari.

She still sat in her seat watching everybody go. Once they did she looked to her regent with a smile. "You're going to go find Gabrielle huh?"

The regent sighed. "Yeah I need to talk to her quickly. I won't be long" Ephiny then stood up from her seat as did the other Amazon. That's when Ephiny took a step closer to Solari.

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The bard lifted her head from looking down at her scroll. "Come in"

The door swung open and the regent stepped in with a smile. "Need to talk to you Gabrielle...and Xena if she's here"

Before the bard could respond the warrior did for her. "I'm here" Xena came out of a room off to the regent's left that she hadn't seen. In the warrior's hand was a towel.

"Problems Eph?"

The Amazon sighed and moved over to the table Gabrielle sat at. She pulled out the other chair across from the bard. "A small one"

Xena nodded her head, she shifted to sit down on the end of the bed and looked to her soulmate and regent.

Gabrielle already is staring at Ephiny. "What's the problem?"

"Masika is the problem"

The bard groaned. "I forgot about her"

The Amazon nodded her head. "That's what I figured. Everybody in the council will approve of your marriage but Masika"

"And considering she's the head member, we have a major issue" Once those words passed between the bard's lips, she crossed her arms against her chest.

Ephiny nodded her head at Gabrielle's words. "That's about the gist of it"

Xena stared down at the towel in her hands. She looked up to Ephiny. "What's she been saying?"

The Amazon looked to the warrior. "That's just it Xena, nothing. The entire ride here she's said nothing. That concerns me"

The warrior nodded her head. "Well then..." Xena began to stand up, Gabrielle and Ephiny staring at her. "I'll take care of her" The Warrior Princess then smiled.

"Xena" Warning tone. The warrior looked to her soulmate. The bard then continued on but more in a light voice. "Let me talk to her"

"I could get the point across better Gabrielle"

"Yes which type of point is what I'd like to know? Sword point or dagger?"

Xena grinned at her partner. "Haven't decided yet, maybe both"

The bard grinned despite herself, she shook her head and looked back to the warrior. "Seriously Xena, let me talk to her. And if that doesn't work...you can have a "talk" with her"

Sapphire eyes looked up from the towel back to Gabrielle. Xena nodded her head and the bard smiled.

Gabrielle then looked back to her friend. "Go get some sleep Eph, tomorrow is going to be a long day"

The Amazon nodded her head at that. "Yeah, sleep well you two" The regent stood up and made her way to the door. As she left she heard the warrior and bard's voices call back saying goodnight.

The door closed behind the regent and Gabrielle looked to her soulmate. "What is it

with Masika?"

Xena sighed. "I have no idea" The warrior then went back into the washroom to deposit the towel, she came back out. Her gate took her to the bard. Both soulmates still fully dressed in their normal attire.

Xena bent down to one knee in front of her bard. Her large hands going to Gabrielle's lap. "We need to get some sleep too"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "Yeah" She looked to the scroll on the table then back to Xena with a sleepy smile. "I'm not in the mood to finish this story up" Gabrielle then uncrossed her arms, her hands falling on top of her soulmate's hands.

The warrior stared up into her partner's eyes. She saw some concern in them. "What you worried about?"

The Amazon Queen sighed, her fingers lightly rubbing across Xena's hands. "Just about Masika"

Xena smiled confidently. "We'll take care of it. She's not going to stop us, promise"

The bard smiled. "Yeah I know. I just wish she'd lighten up with you. She's judging you without knowing you first"

The warrior took a deep breath. "Well I'll always have that"

Gabrielle's face went a little hard at that. "Not in my nation as long as I am Queen"

Xena's eyes dropped for a second then she looked back up. "And what you going to do then Gabrielle? Kick everybody out of your nation if they don't like me?"

"No, she doesn't have to like you but she has to respect you as a human being"  
Gabrielle then sighed. "Xena its just I don't want to be doing things in the nation with your help and have Masika question them every damn time. It's ridiculous"

The older woman sighed some. She dropped her head for a moment then looked back up to the bard. "Give her time Gabrielle. Maybe she'll change perspective. Its been known to happen huh?" Xena then smiled, her hands tightening over Gabrielle's.

The bard smiled back. "Yeah I know, just get sick of it" Xena nodded at that in agreement. "Xen?"

"Mmm?"

"It really doesn't matter in the end"

The warrior arched an eyebrow in question.

Gabrielle grinned. "Nothing matters" She bent forward closer to Xena, her forehead touching Xena's. "Nothing matters when it comes to you and I"

Xena grinned up at her soulmate. "Nope, you only matter" The warrior brought up her right hand under the bard's chin. She brought the bard's lips to her own. Their lips locking in a kiss.

~\*Part 14\*~

The next day was busy to say the least of course. Ephiny in the early A.M. hours quickly found out the ceremony would be held outside. She had little problem with that. The rest of the Amazons though, well there was a lot of grumbling, understatement. So now all the Amazons were looking forward to having a long Amazon ceremony outside in the cold.

The Amazons set up the ceremony for outside. They set up a small stage in the center of the town which they got from Constable Ferus' help. Then they proceeded to decorate the stage with Amazon ritual items, that went on for a better part of the day. Ephiny and the priestess Maird on the other hand had the hardest job. And that was to watch Solari, Eponin and Teresa set up the ceremony. Occasional the priestess and regent would intervene on the setup, find something out of order. And then there was always the Amazon council. They watched the younger Amazons set up the ceremony. Every now and again the council members would talk among themselves. Masika had little to say, she just glared at the stage.

So this went on for the entire day. While our two soulmates were inside of the warm tavern. Cyrene had numerous decorations she wanted up for Solstice eve. Solstice eve being tonight. Here and there Gabrielle would go back into the kitchen where Cyrene was to help cook. The tavern owner planned to have the tavern closed for the night. Instead she was making a huge feast for Xena, Gabrielle, Toris, the Amazons, and Constable Ferus.

Gabrielle came out of the kitchen from helping Cyrene and found Xena stepping down off a chair. "Like you needed a chair to reach that high"

The warrior looked to her soulmate and grinned. "Didn't feel like pulling any muscles"

The bard rolled her eyes and looked up to see what Xena put up. Over the mantle of the fireplace were a plethora of garland and pine. The smell of the pine began to fill the room.

Gabrielle moved to her soulmate. Her right hand instinctively going to the warrior's side. "Hey Mom wants the square tables all put together for the dinner, right in the center of the tavern"

Xena looked up around in the tavern. They're going to need a lot of tables with twenty-two people at the dinner. "We can handle that"

The bard chuckled at her soulmate and Xena looked back to her partner. The warrior then lowered her head down to her soulmate's. They kissed.

Once they pulled back, Gabrielle smiled up at her other half. "Come on tiger, let's get this stuff moving...and ourselves"

Xena chuckled at Gabrielle. The pair then went to work at pushing the round tables off to the sides of the tavern and placing the square one's altogether in the middle.

By late afternoon the regent and her second in command came stomping into the tavern.

"Stop right there"

The two Amazons froze in the doorway as if they did something wrong. They arched their eyebrows at the warrior.

"What Xena?"

The warrior grinned devilishly at Ephiny's question as Gabrielle came up to her side. The bard looked up to her soulmate and Xena looked down at her. The warrior saw the question behind her eyes and so Xena looked back up to over the doorway. The Amazon Queen followed her gaze and spotted what was over the doorway hanging down. Gabrielle grinned.

"Above you two"

Quickly the two Amazons looked up above them, their expressions dropping.

Ephiny looked back to the two soulmates. "Very funny joke Xena"

"It's not a joke"

Solari looked to her regent. "How what you afraid of Eph?"

Ephiny lightly glared at Solari then looked to her Queen. "Was this your plan too?"

Gabrielle grinned and crossed her arms against her chest. "Nope"

"That's alright Eph, I forgot you can't handle that"

The regent arched an eyebrow at the warrior's words. She then looked back up again at the green and red mistletoe. She then looked to her right at her second in command. Turning her body fully to Solari, Ephiny brought up her right hand to the other Amazon's right cheek. Leaning in the regent captured her second in command's lips.

Xena grinned as the kiss went on, she looked to her soulmate.

The bard looked up and grinned. She leaned to her left closer to Xena and whispered up to her. "Sneak, good plan"

The warrior chuckled and they both looked up to see the Amazons end their kiss.

Once the regent's head was far enough away to look into her eyes, Solari grinned. "We'll have to walk under that more often"

Ephiny evilly grinned at the other woman. "Maybe" The regent's thumb grazed across the other Amazon's warm lips. "Or we'll just have to get some"

Solari arched an eyebrow and Ephiny removed her hand from the second in command's face. The two Amazons then completely remember where they were and looked to the warrior and bard. Solari then began to blush, Ephiny coughing a little to draw attention away.

Gabrielle snickered a little. "Excuse me I have to go help Mom" The bard disappeared behind the kitchen door rather quickly.



Xena grinned to herself. "Glad you both like the mistletoe. Have some extra if you want some"

Solari shook her head. "Uh nope what you have over the door is just great Xena" The Amazon took a deep breath. "Excuse me too" The second in command in a flash opened the door of the tavern and busted through the door into the cold day. Her body slowly cooled down from the kiss earlier.

Ephiny watched her second in command go. Once the door closed behind her the regent looked back to Xena. "You're a trouble maker Xena"

The warrior grinned. "So I've been told" Xena then looked back around to see the kitchen door open back up.

Gabrielle came back out with huge linens in her arms. "Need some help"

Xena nodded her head and shifted to her partner. "Table cloths?"

The bard nodded and Ephiny shifted from the door to the ten large tables in the center of the tavern. The three women began to place table clothes over the table.

Gabrielle straightened out the last corner on the linen and looked to her regent. "Where's Teresa, Eponin and Maired?"

Ephiny looked up. "Still in the square organizing the last of the ceremony"

Gabrielle nodded her head. "They should be back soon right?"

The regent smiled. "Yeah"

The bard grinned. "Great" She then looked to Xena. "Can you go get Constable Ferus?" The warrior nodded her head. Gabrielle then looked to Ephiny. "And can you go get Toris for me? He should be upstairs in his room. And then the other Amazons?" Ephiny nodded her head. "Great" Gabrielle looked to her soulmate. "Mom and I are going to get the food out. Dinner in...fifteen minutes?"

Xena nodded her head with a smile. "Good, I'll be back in a flash" The bard nodded and watched as Xena went to the door. Xena grabbed her cloak off the table to her right on a round table. She slipped it on and went out the door. Gabrielle watched as Ephiny went up stairs. The bard went into kitchen.

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By nightfall everybody but Teresa and Eponin were sitting at the dinner table. Granted Gabrielle and Cyrene weren't either. Those two were going back and forth between the kitchen and dinner table putting food out or getting drinks.

The bard came out of the kitchen with a huge round glass bowl of steaming mashed potatoes. That's also when the tavern door swung open and Teresa and Eponin came tracking in.

The Queen grinned and settled the bowl down on the table as the two Amazons stamped their feet on the floor to get the snow off them. Everybody at the table watches the two Amazons but the bard. Gabrielle looked back up and saw the two Amazons about to move. "Hold it right there"

The two Amazons went stiff where they stood. They looked to their Queen with questioning faces.

Gabrielle grinned and pointed to what hung over their heads. Eponin looked up first then Teresa did. Teresa then looked to Eponin as a blush crept up her neck to mask over her face.

The weapons master looked to the other Amazon. She coughed. Looking to Gabrielle with a pleading look. "Really Queen Gabrielle?"

The bard grinned, her eyes sparkled. "Really"

The weapons master grumbled. "Gods' damn mistletoe" After saying that, without any warning to Teresa. Eponin kissed the other Amazon. Her every intent was to make the kiss light and quick. But Eponin couldn't stop herself from deepening it, definitely considering Teresa helped her along. The pair slowly pulled back and Teresa opened her eyes to gaze into the weapons master's. She then looked around herself and realized there were people. The young Amazon blushed again while the weapons master smiled lovingly to the other Amazon. Teresa looked back to Eponin in time to see that smile, she smiled back in the same depth.

"Sit down you two"

Eponin nodded her head at Ephiny. The standing Amazons left the space near the door to sit down at seats across from each other. Their cloaks going to the back of the chair. Once they sat down, Xena stood up as soon as Gabrielle came back out again from the kitchen.

The warrior came up to her soulmate, taking the bowl of carrots from her. "Go sit down"

"It's alright I got it Xena"

Xena smiled. "I know but you've done enough. Sit down and I'll take care of everything. Okay?" It had all been whispered, the warrior's back to everybody at the table.

Gabrielle looked up into warm sapphire swirled eyes. "Thanks"

The warrior smiled. "No problem" She then placed a quick kiss to her partner's forehead. Gabrielle smiled and moved to sit down at the table. The warrior placing turning around to place the carrots down on the table. She then went into the kitchen to her mother.

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The warrior relaxed into her seat, her stomach entirely to filled. She hadn't eaten like this since...well let's just say she couldn't quite remember. *I'm going to be real out of shape thanks to Mother's cooking.* Xena grinned inwardly at that. To her left sat her soulmate then to her right sat Ephiny. Ephiny was carrying on a conversation with Solari. The bard though was listening to a tale Teresa was telling from her original tribe, Eponin was surely listening intently.

Xena grinned at that. She then looked to her soulmate. The warrior slipped her left hand over to the bard's leg, resting there. Gabrielle all of a sudden smiled and it wasn't

because of Teresa's story necessarily. Her right hand slipped off the arm of the chair. Her hand now resting on top of her soulmate's larger hand.

The night went on. Everybody laughing and having a good time. Why wouldn't they be? Soon two soulmates would be locked together in marriage. Not to mention it is Solstice Eve. It is a good night to relax and enjoy life. As the night progressed on, the bard was swindled into a few stories. She had no problem with that and got up to tell a few. By the time it was late at night, the food almost gone and settling into everybody's stomachs did people begin to shift to go to bed. Constable Ferus was escorted back to his home by Toris. Once Toris came back he went to his room, feeling the effects of the port from over dinner. The Amazons were quick to follow with the exception of Masika. Each going to their shared rooms but Masika went outside. All that was left was Cyrene, Xena and Gabrielle.

The bard was slouched a little in her seat. She looked to her soulmate with a warm smile. "I think I'm going to go outside for a second" Xena nodded her head. Gabrielle stood up and migrated out of the tavern without a cloak.

Cyrene looked to her daughter across the table. "Is she okay?"

The warrior nodded. "Yeah, she just wants to talk to Masika"

The tavern owner nodded. Cyrene then stood up and began to collect the dishes. The warrior also stood up to help with clearing the table.

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"Masika"

The Amazon turned her head at hearing the Queen call her name. "Queen Gabrielle" She bowed her head some as the bard approached.

"We need to talk"

"Of course. What seems to be the problem my Queen?" The Amazon was near the stables seeming to relax, or was. Gabrielle came up to her side, her eyes cold.

"You're the problem"

Masika's eyes narrowed at the bard. "Could you be more specific my Queen?"

"Centaur shit Masika, you know damn well what I'm talking about"

"If the Queen means the marriage with Xena then I do"

"Masika, don't play mind games with me"

The Amazon took a deep breath, she crossed her arms against her chest. She looked to Gabrielle. "You know what I think of the marriage Queen Gabrielle"

The bard's hands went to her hips. "Actually I don't Masika. All I know is you have a staff up your ass over Xena for some gods' be damn reason or another"

"What would my opinion matter anyway Queen Gabrielle?" Gabrielle took a deep breath, her eyes dropping to the ground. Masika sarcastically smiled and looked back to the sky. "Exactly my point Queen Gabrielle, it doesn't. Either way, you and Xena

will go through with this marriage"

"Yes but I'd like to have the council's approval" After her words the bard looked up to the Masika.

The head council member looked back to Gabrielle. "And you will Queen Gabrielle. It was agreed upon last night, majority ruled"

"But I do not have the head council member's vote do I?"

Masika looked back to the sky. "No, never"

"Why Masika?"

The older Amazon whipped her head to look at the bard. "Why do you care Queen Gabrielle?" The Amazon's eyes were cold and hard.

The bard took a deep breath. "Because you're one of my Amazons. If you have a problem with Xena then you have a problem with me. I don't like it when that happens in my nation. I like to know what's wrong so it can be fixed. Basically it comes down to me giving a big damn about every last Amazon's opinion in my nation. I maybe be Queen but I will not rule like one without everybody agreeing first"

Masika nodded her head, she looked back to the sky again. Gabrielle waited for an answer as silence took over.

Masika crossed her arms against her chest, she took a deep breath. "I must say you're quite the different Queen this nation has ever had"

The bard huffed. "Don't know if that's good or bad"

The older Amazon looked to Gabrielle, a very fine smile seemed to just faintly crease Masika's lips. "It's a good thing my Queen" The head council member sighed and looked back to the night sky. "I have a problem with Xena because I have a problem with my past"

"What?"

Again Masika sighed and looked back to the Queen. "A long time ago before I became an Amazon I got caught up with a warlord" Gabrielle's mind quickly worked with that new information as Masika kept explaining, her eyes drifting away into the past. "She was a fairly good warlord and she'd actually bought me as her personal slave. I became quite emotionally involved with this warlord" Masika stopped and took a deep breath. "Well my Queen" She looked to Gabrielle. "Lets just say she wasn't emotionally involved with me and used me. She almost killed me but I escaped and the Amazons found me. Took care of me and been an Amazon since that...experience"

Gabrielle's eyes dropped to the snowy ground. She looked back up and brought her right hand up to Masika's closes crossed arm. "I'm sorry Masika" She took a deep breath. "I know what you're thinking. You think Xena will do the same thing to me?"

The head council member nodded her head. "Yes my Queen, that's what I think. Old memories never seem to leave. I was young then and didn't know, you're young now"

and I wonder"

The bard nodded, her hand dropping from Masika's arm. "Thank you Masika"

The older Amazon looked to the bard, her expression in a bit of shock. "For what my Queen?"

"For being...concerned about my life"

Masika chuckled and looked away. "Yes well I do believe the Queen might have liked me to have approached it in a...better way"

"She would have but thank you for telling me Masika" The Amazon nodded her head as she still looked away. "And Masika, don't be worried about Xena. She isn't a warlord or even the same person as she was"

The head council member nodded her head. "I do believe you're right my Queen, I'm beginning to see it myself" Masika then looked to Gabrielle. "Besides that, I do believe the Queen is a lot smarter then what I was at this age"

"Nobody is perfect"

The older Amazon nodded her head. "Quite. Now then I think I'm going to retire for the night. Sleep well my Queen. Quite a huge day tomorrow"

"I will, sleep well yourself Masika"

"I will. Goodnight my Queen" Masika then began to move, heading back to the inn.

"Masika?"

The head council member stopped walking and looked back to Gabrielle. "Yes my Queen?"

"Try Gabrielle"

Masika nodded her head with a smile. "Goodnight Gabrielle" With that said the head council member disappeared off into the night to her room.

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The innkeeper picked up the butter plate and looked to Xena. The mother and daughter watched as Masika came in heading to the stairs. Before climbing them Masika looked to Cyrene and Xena. "Goodnight Cyrene and thank you for dinner"

"Quite welcome Masika. Have a good rest"

"I will thank you" The old Amazon then looked to Xena, her eyes not so quite cold as they normally are. "Goodnight Xena" She then turned back around not waiting for an answer. She went upstairs.

The warrior shook her head and furrowed her brows.

Cyrene shrugged her shoulders and looked to Xena. "Dear I've got the rest of this clean up job. Go outside with Gabrielle huh?"

Xena smiled. "Thanks Mother"

Cyrene smiled back. The warrior then opened the door of the tavern and went outside. Looking up Xena saw the stars above glistening so brightly, a clear night. She took a deep breath and released it. It was definitely visible in the night air, the moon full. Looking down Xena found her soulmate's fresh tracks, she followed them. They quickly led her to the stables. The warrior's eyes locked on the small form leaning against the stable, arms cross against her bare midriff. Xena had stopped walking and just stared at her other half.

A very rare warmth filled Xena. It started in the center of her body and swept through her. It was so strong it made her head buzz and her heart rate pick up. Then it traveled to her heart and that in turn leapt into her soul. Xena's vision wavered for a moment as she stared at her soulmate. It calmed back down and the warrior walked over to Gabrielle.

The bard looked up and smiled to Xena. "Hey"

Xena smiled back. "Hi"

For a cold night, the both of them didn't feel it at all. In all truth, they felt like they were on fire. They felt like ambers in a fire.

Xena stood beside her partner and looked up to the same stars Gabrielle looked to. "Pretty eh?"

Gabrielle nodded. "Yeah"

"Have a nice talk?"

The bard nodded her head. "Yeah, Masika and I figured things out"

"Good"

Silence loomed for a while. There were no words that needed to be spoken. Their connection told them all they needed to know.

Xena brought her right hand up to the bard's right shoulder. Gabrielle looked up into her soulmate's eyes, they were so incredible warm. And she knew what Xena's intent was by that. So she shifted off the stable's wall. The warrior then leaned against the cool stable wall. The bard moved in front of Xena. She then soon found the warrior's arms wrapped around her waist. Gabrielle then leaned back into Xena's body. Her small body molded with exactness to Xena's body.

And that's where we slowly fade away from. A scene of two soulmates being captured in time again. From a scene with soulmates wielding the strongest form of love. Soulmates defined as two people that are completely opposite but the exact same.

~\*Part 15\*~

Xena and Gabrielle both lifted their heads. Somebody banged on the door again, real hard at that.

"Yeah come in"

After the bard's words four Amazons came rushing in. They all had huge grins on their lips.

"Come on Queen Gabrielle gotta get up"

The bard groaned and pulled the sheets over her head. "Its to early Eph"

The regent grinned and went to the bard's side of the bed. The other three Amazons stayed at the foot of the bed. Ephiny bent down close to Gabrielle's head. "But its Solstice my Queen. Quite an important day"

Gabrielle pulled the covers from back over her head to look directly into Ephiny's eyes. "Hades I almost..." The bard pulled the covers from over her body. Gabrielle then rolled to her left to Xena. She grinned at her soulmate. She'd been told the plans from Ephiny yesterday during the morning. The bard quickly kissed her soulmate. "See you soon Xen" The warrior arched an eyebrow. This was even moving a little to fast for her. "Love you" But she knew overall what was going on.

"Can't wait, I love you too"

Gabrielle smiled and hopped out of the bed.

"My Queen, where's your Amazon attire?"

The bard looked to Solari as the second in command came to stand next to Ephiny. She shook her head. "It's...in the right saddlebag"

The Amazon nodded her head and went to the saddlebag, she dug out all the Amazon Queen attire. Solari then straightens back up and looked to Ephiny, she nodded.

The regent nodded back and looked back to Gabrielle. The bard stood in her normal traveling clothes. "Lets go my Queen"

Before Gabrielle could say anything, she was shuffled out of the door. Before closing the door, Ephiny looked to Eponin and nodded with a grin. The weapons master nodded back with a wink. The door closed, Teresa and Eponin looked to the warrior with a grin.

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Water was poured over the bard's head. She shook her head to get the excess water out of her hair. She then looked up to glare at Ephiny for a moment. The regent chuckled. Solari then came up behind the bard and proceeded to lather up Gabrielle's hair with soap. The Amazon Queen sat in a tub in the two Amazon's shared room. Gabrielle could only guess how Teresa and Eponin were doing with Xena. That made her snicker inwardly. After Solari finished washing the bard's hair, Ephiny came back to rinse it.

Gabrielle resurfaced from being dunked under the water. She then looked to Solari. "Solari I need you to do me a favor"

The second in command nodded her head. "Yes my Queen"

"I need you to go to this store at the other end of Amphipolis called Fine Accessories. There's a gentleman there by the name of Potestas, he has a ring for me"

Solari nodded her head. "I'll go get in now. Be back"

Ephiny nodded her head and she watched till Solari left the room. She then looked back to Gabrielle. "Wedding ring?"

The bard looked up to her regent. "Yeah" She then smiled warmly to the regent.

The Amazon smiled back just as warmly. They went back to the bathing process. By the time Gabrielle had risen from the bath tube she was drying, Solari returned. In her right hand contained a small black leather bag, She hand it to Gabrielle whom had a towel wrapped around her body.

Gabrielle opened the bag and let the ring fall neatly into the palm of her hand. The gold ring twinkled up to Gabrielle as if in greeting. The bard smiled down at the ring and lifted it to peer in the inside of the band. She read the inscription and grinned.

"That's beautiful Gabrielle"

The Amazon Queen looked to her regent. "Thanks Eph. Think she'll like it?"

Ephiny grinned. "I don't know how she couldn't"

The bard smiled and slipped the ring back inside of the bag, she handed it back to Ephiny. The two women locked eyes as Ephiny took the bag. The regent read the trust in the bard's eyes. The Amazon faintly nodded to Gabrielle, the bard's eyes softening to her. The Amazon then slipped the small bag into a bit of a large bag tied at her side.

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Cyrene knocked at the door and heard Gabrielle's voice answer back for her to enter. The innkeeper opened the door to see Gabrielle in the center of the room. She was dressed in completely different clothes then she was use to. Behind the bard on either side is Ephiny and Solari, they were braiding the bard's partially wet hair at her sides.

The tavern owner stepped in closing the door behind herself. She walked over to face Gabrielle. "My sweetie I thought you'd be wearing something else"

The bard grinned. "What did you have in mind Mom?"

Cyrene's hands went up to rest on her hips. "I don't know, maybe a dress"

The bard chuckled. "If I was doing a regular marriage, this is Amazon"

The innkeeper grinned. "So you wear the leathers huh sweetie?" Gabrielle nodded. Cyrene then nodded and crossed her arms against her chest. "Either way sweetie, I'd say you look gorgeous"

Gabrielle smiled warmly. "Thanks mom"

"So I guess the other one is in her room?"

The bard nodded her head. "Yeah, Teresa and Eponin her getting her ready"

Cyrene smiled. "I bet they're having a time with my daughter"

Gabrielle chuckled. "That's what I was thinking earlier"



The innkeeper grinned. "Well sweetie, speaking of getting ready I need to also. I was just um..." The tavern owner's eyes shifted behind Gabrielle to the regent. Ephiny locked eyes with Cyrene and her face went serious. The innkeeper then focused her eyes back on Gabrielle who had an arched eyebrow. "I was cleaning up from last night. Quite a mess it was too"

The Amazon Queen smiled. "I can imagine"

"I'll see you later sweetie"

"Bye Mom"

Cyrene smiled and shut the door. She went to her room to prepare. Gabrielle then felt the two Amazons drop her hair. On each side her hair was braided down the tips, the rest of her hair was left unbraided.

"Solari brush"

The second in command nodded at Ephiny and went to the table. She grabbed a brush and handed it to the regent. The only few things Gabrielle didn't have on was her Amazon feather necklace nor her boots on. The rest of her Amazon Queen attire is on.

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The bard brushed her hair back behind her ears, she looked to Ephiny. "God's Ephiny, I forgot something"

"What's that my Queen?"

"I forgot to get my scroll, Hades"

"Hold on my Queen" The regent looked to Solari. "Solari, go to the other room and see if they're still there" The second in command nodded her head. She left. Ephiny looked back to her friend. "Scroll?"

Gabrielle nodded. "Yes, I need it for the ceremony"

By then the second in command came back in. "They're gone amazingly, probably off getting breakfast"

"Great, let's go" The two Amazons nodded at Gabrielle's words. The Queen quickly made her way into her room and went to her scroll satchel. She dug through it and found the scroll she was looking for, she grinned. Gabrielle then looked through her satchel more, she quickly found what she was looking for as well. She pulled the small item out of her scroll bag and turned to the Amazons. They both arched their eyebrows at the article in Gabrielle's hand.

"Queen Gabrielle?"

The bard grinned at Ephiny and answered the unasked question. "Long story Eph"

"I can assume that naturally my Queen, but a doll?"

Gabrielle grinned, her eyes looking down at the doll in her hands. It was a small little doll, just like Xena's. But there are a few small exceptions, one the doll didn't have

blond hair, it has black straight hair. The eyes being blue buttons with a black stitched smile. Same type of skirt with frills though with a cute little round face, hands, and legs. Quite precise as the other doll.

The bard looked up to her regent. "Yup, just a doll" Gabrielle then walked over to the dresser in the room where the other blond hair doll sat. She carefully sat the doll up there beside the other one, their two little round hands touched.

Taking a step back, Gabrielle stared up at the two dolls. She memorized the sight. Ephiny and Solari glanced up at the two dolls. The two Amazons quickly understood and smiled to themselves. Everybody stayed like that for a few heartbeats.

Then the regent came up to Gabrielle's side. "My Queen, I do believe it's time to go"

Gabrielle nodded her head. She turned back around to face Ephiny. She took a deep breath. "Gods I'm nervous"

Ephiny smiled. "Don't be" The regent then pulled her friend for a hug. "You'll be fine Gabrielle"

"Thanks Eph" A pause as her eyes stared at the scroll in her hands. "Lets go" She looked back up to Ephiny and smiled. The regent nodded. They left.

~\*Part 16\*~

The air was crisp during this Solstice. The lands still covered in the bright glistening snow. There were no clouds above, only the sun. The crisp clean air pigmented the sky to a royal blue. The world around sparkled and twinkled with the sun's light reflecting off the snow. It was a glorious day that had a faint breeze. And in the breeze's air was a fine scent of fire. The sheer scent of fire coming from the center of one town in Greece, Amphipolis.

In the center of this one town was a young woman. Her hair was flowing a little in the light breeze as she stared up at the stage center in the town. Her stomach curled and twisted. Her heart rate picked up to a quick pace. She began to breath heavy. She gripped the scroll in her hand rather tightly.

"Easy up my Queen"

Gabrielle looked from the stage to her right at Ephiny. "Sorry"

"It'll happen so fast it'll make your head spin Gabrielle"

The bard grinned. "Thanks for the confidence Eph"

"No problem" The regent then noticed the priestess Maired step up onto the stage, near the back portion. She nodded to Ephiny. The regent looked to her friend. "Ready my Queen?"

"There is no ready, just go Eph"

"As you wish my Queen. A grand day" Ephiny then looked back to the stage where the priestess stood and nodded. Maired nodded back and she moved to the front of the stage.

Gabrielle stood off to the left side of the stage with Ephiny. In front of the stage was the audience of people, but there was a huge gap of space between the stage and audience. That struck Gabrielle as a bit odd. Mostly the two councils of Amphipolis and Amazon Nation were in the crowd. Then there was Cyrene, Toris, Constable Ferus, Potestas, Teresa, Eponin and then an array of villagers. All in all a huge crowd.

The stage though was carpet with a red linen, at all four corners were torch stands lit. Behind the priestess was what looked to be a golden statue of Artemis with two lit torch stands beside it. Then off to the priestess right was a table with a knife, red ribbon, and a mask. What Gabrielle really wanted to know, was exactly how her Amazons managed to pull off getting a gold statue of Artemis to Amphipolis? But as right now, she didn't care because she was too nervous with the situation.

"Its time my Queen"

As soon as Ephiny said that they both looked up to see the priestess of Artemis step up to the edge of the stage where the steps were. The crowd went silent at seeing this.

"Sweet mother of Zeus I don't know if I can handle this"

The regent chuckled at Gabrielle's low whispered statement. They both then looked back up to Maired as she spoke to everybody.

"Today on this Solstice day two women will be joined with the Artemis' grace and virtue. Let the Amazon Ceremony begin of Xena of Amphipolis and our Queen" The priestess bowed her head and straightened back up. She looked to Ephiny with a nod. Maired then stepped back close to that table and in front of the statue of Artemis.

The regent turned to Gabrielle and brought up the Amazon Queen mask over Gabrielle, then slipped it over her head. The mask covered the Queen's face. Ephiny then held hers up and put it on over her head.

"Let's go my Queen" Ephiny then brought her left arm up. Gabrielle looked to her and took a deep breath. She locked her right arm with the regent's. Ephiny smiled. "You'll do fine my Queen" It was a low whisper. Gabrielle nodded her head. The pair began to walk down the open space between the stage and the crowd. They came to the steps and Gabrielle looked up to Maired. The priestess smiled in reassurance and Gabrielle smiled back.

Ephiny and Gabrielle climbed up the steps to Maired. Everything was silent except the breeze slightly blowing. Gabrielle came up to the priestess with Ephiny still linked in arm. Once they came to the priestess, Ephiny released the Queen then stepped off behind Gabrielle some. Gabrielle then handed the regent her scroll, Ephiny placing it on the table.

The bard faced the priestess. Maired smiled and looked to her left over the other side of the stage. Gabrielle followed her gaze, there was Xena. Gabrielle swore her mouth must have hit the stage floor. Solari, linked arms, was escorting Xena up to the stage as well. As soon as Xena came onto the stage she stood there for a heartbeat for Gabrielle to take her in.

Xena stood in warlord clothes, which she hadn't worn in years. The gauntlets different, the armor different, boots, everything but the leathers. She was exact to her

warlord attire, right down to the chain across her chest with her old cloak on, flowing in the wind. Her hair was not pushed back or up, just loose. The way Gabrielle loves it.

Xena grinned at her soulmate. She then was escorted to the opposite side from Gabrielle, Solari releasing Xena and stepping behind her too. That's when Solari pushed her mask over her head, Ephiny did next then lastly was Gabrielle.

The soulmates face each other.

Maired grinned at the two women and stepped up more to them. The priestess then looked to Ephiny, the regent winked at the priestess. The priestess nodded her head. The regent then brought her hands to her lips and made a bird call. The soulmates looked to Ephiny with arched eyebrow. This is definitely getting odd.

From some where there was the sound of chanting. It was an Amazon chant. Gabrielle's eyes widen as she looked past Xena. Xena quickly followed her soulmate's gaze behind her. There came into the center of the square were Amazons, tons of them.

The Amazons continued chanting an Amazon ritual song. They were in three single files and marching into the center and right into the front between the stage and audience. They all had their masks on covering their faces as they marched and chanted.

Gabrielle looked to her regent with narrowed eyes. "Ephiny..."

Ephiny grinned devilishly. "Well you can't have an Amazon ceremony my Queen without Amazons"

Gabrielle shook her head and looked back to the chanting Amazons. The Amazon chanted for a while more till all of them were centered in between the stage and audience. The first Amazon at the first row stopped chanting and pushed her mask back, she smiled to the Queen. She then unsheathed her sword and kneeled down to one knee, her sword going in front of her body. The Amazon then bent her head forward. Quick to follow were all the other Amazons in her row following the same actions. Then the next row then the last third row. All the Amazons had stopped chanting, kneeling with their swords in front of them, heads bent.

Maired then looked to the Queen. "Queen Gabrielle this Amazon Nation has come here not only to watch her Queen take a Consort, but to hand over her life to you. This Amazon Nation is yours for as long as you live. You are no longer the Queen of this Nation, but we are your nation. Each Amazon has now handed her life over to what we consider the greatest Queen of our time"

*Breathe Gabrielle, its just a couple of hundred Amazons. Not a big deal. Oh gods!*  
The bard took a deep breath and tried to push her musing away. Maired then shifted to the table, she lifted something showing it to Gabrielle.

"Queen Gabrielle, this feather necklace has never been worn by any Queen in past. It was created so long ago by the first Nation for the Artemis' chosen. The chosen has come to our Nation. Each one of these feathers is a different color to represent all the different Amazons in all the Nations. Wear it we strength Queen Gabrielle" The

priestess then handed the necklace to Ephiny.

The regent stepped more behind Gabrielle. She removed the feather necklace on the bard's neck. She then replaced it with the new one, the old being deposited on the table.

The priestess then looked to Xena nodded, looked to Gabrielle and nodded. She then looked back to the crowd, Amazons still bowing but with their heads now up.

"Today our Queen will be bound to Xena of Amphipolis and Xena of Amphipolis to our Queen. They will become as one. Nobody will be able to break this great bond between this pair. And in the binding of Xena and Gabrielle so is the Amazon Xena created" Mairead turned to the table and lifted the mask with feathers. She turned to Gabrielle with the mask.

Gabrielle took the mask with a nod and looked to her soulmate. She took a deep breath and spoke loudly, her eyes locked with Xena's. "Xena of Amphipolis, you have been selected not only by me, but by this nation, and by Artemis to be accepted into this Nation. There are high responsibilities to uphold in this Nation and to our chosen goddess. This is an honor not to be taken lightly. Do you recognize the responsibilities as an Amazon, to this Nation, and to Artemis?"

Xena smiled, she lowered her head. "I do recognize the honor and responsibilities to all conceiving of Artemis" She brought her head up to lock eyes with her soulmate again. "And not only do I recognize the responsibilities and honor, but I recognize the greatness of this Nation's Queen" Xena then unsheathed her sword bent down to one knee and bowing her head. The sword stood in front of her. "So I hand my life over to Queen Gabrielle"

Gabrielle stood stunned for a moment. Her mind then quickly came back as she realized what she had to do. "Thank you rise back up"

So Xena stood back up and sheathed her sword. She bent her head forward as she felt her soulmate place the mask over her head. Gabrielle then grabbed each side of the mask and lifted the mask over Xena's head. Xena smiled to her soulmate and Gabrielle smiled back. That's when Gabrielle's body went shaky.

"Now let the ceremony continued, this ceremony in the joining of Xena and Gabrielle" Mairead then looked to Ephiny and Solari. The two Amazon both nodded and knew what that meant, they started to remove articles from their pouches at their sides. The priestess looked back to the soulmates. "Artemis has allowed this joining to be. Our Queen will be recognized not only as herself but as Xena of Amphipolis. In turn Xena of Amphipolis will be recognized as our Queen. Xena of Amphipolis will be Queen Gabrielle's eternal consort" Mairead then looked to Ephiny and the second in command, nodding to them.

Solari nodded and handed to Xena the article.

Xena smiled and nodded to Solari, she looked back to Gabrielle. Reaching out with her left hand, she took her soulmate's small left hand. She carefully slipped off the engagement ring, holding it into her free right hand. In her right hand Xena switched rings to a small band ring. But it wasn't a solid plan band, it was two thin little bands that intertwined with out end. She carefully slipped it onto her soulmate's left ring

finger. "I take Queen Gabrielle to be my consort and the other half of me...of my soul, forever" Xena then looked up from the ring to her soulmate with a smile.

Gabrielle looked back up and smiled to Xena. She then felt Xena slip back on the engagement ring. Her hand was squeezed and then release, Gabrielle then looked to her regent. Ephiny smiled and handed the bard the ring. She took it and looked back Xena taking her soulmate's left hand carefully. With her right hand, Gabrielle carefully and slowly slipped on the band ring on. She watched as it glistened in the sun's light. After it was on she looked up to Xena. "I take Xena of Amphipolis as my consort for eternity, it couldn't be any other way" The soulmates had their eyes locked, Gabrielle released Xena's hand slowly.

"Queen Gabrielle?"

Gabrielle looked to the priestess and nodded. She then looked to Ephiny and the regent quickly understood the look. Ephiny reached for the scroll and handed it to Gabrielle. She unrolled it and looked to Xena with a smile. Xena arched an eyebrow.

Gabrielle then grinned, she took a deep breath and began to read the scroll in her bardic voice.

"This is entitled *Entity of the Soul*" Taking another deep breath Gabrielle read her scroll.

I become lost in her eyes

Her touch invades my world

I become claimed by that smile

Her voice carries me across worlds.

Her eyes capture my heart

I become controlled by her touch

Her smile only brightens sending me over

I become flooded by her voice

My world spins out of control

I am her's

My body aches for her touch

I am her's

My heart soars heights

I am her's

My spirit screams for her

I am her's

Entity of the soul

After reading it, Gabrielle looked up to her soulmate. Xena locked eyes with Gabrielle. They stayed like that for heartbeats, they couldn't move. They couldn't look away from this perfect moment. Xena never felt such a love before, she'd do anything for it. Gabrielle had only dreamt of this sort of love, only read it, only told it. Now she lived it, she is it.

The priestess smiled at this connection she felt between these two women. She then spoke but low to Gabrielle. "Beautiful poem my Queen"

Gabrielle smiled and looked to the Maird. "Thanks"

"Quite welcome, we must continue on"

Gabrielle nodded and turned to Ephiny, handing her the scroll. Gabrielle looked back to her soulmate.

The Priestess of Artemis then turned to the table and pick up the small dagger with the hilt of the Amazon bird. She then lifted the red ribbon from the table, she turned back to the soulmates.

"Now" The priestess took a step forward. "It is time interlock these two beings" The priestess placed the dagger into her right hand with ribbon. She then looked to Xena. "Hold out your left hand" Xena nodded her head, lifted her left hand, palm up. Maird then grasped the bottom of Xena's hand with her free left hand. She brought the dagger over Xena's hand and cut across the warrior's palm. Blood immediately came flowing from the dagger's cut. It wasn't deep though.

The priestess then looked to Gabrielle. "Your right hand my Queen"

Gabrielle nodded her head and brought her right hand up. The dagger cut across her right palm. For once neither soulmate felt the pain of a cut.

The Priestess of Artemis then handed the dagger to Ephiny and looked back to the two soulmates. She then grasped the two soulmates' hands bringing them down by their sides and then putting them together. The hands interlocked together and the Priestess of Artemis took the silken red ribbon tying it over the locked hands. After doing so she straighten up and spoke again. "Do not let your interlocked hands separate for a day for if they do so might your souls"

The two soulmates nodded their heads at Maird. The priestess smiled warmly and looked to the entire crowd. "Let no harm come destroy these two for Artemis protects them. It has been done, the body, mind, heart, and soul of our Queen Gabrielle and new Amazon Xena of Amphipolis have been joined for eternity!"

Soulmates closed in the distance as soon as Maird stepped back. All the Amazons rose up to their feet. Xena locked her eyes with her Gabrielle and Gabrielle locked eyes with her Xena. Their eyes were filled with intense love. All the Amazons sheathed their swords. The soulmates leaned in and their lips sealed together. A roar filled the air around.

But as we know the soulmates were not hearing this cheering. They were in their own world that only contained of them, this kiss, love, and their shared soul. But once that kiss ended the cheer went up in volume. All the Amazons rushing up onto the stage

surrounding their Queen.

Gabrielle looked around at her Amazons and then she looked back to her Xena. Xena looking to her Gabrielle, she smiled. Gabrielle's heart rate picked up all over again, her body extremely shaky. Xena knew this and so she wrapped her one free arm around her Gabrielle's waist. Xena then bent her head down to claim her soulmate's lips yet again.

~\*Part 17\*~

"Ephiny don't"

The regent shook her head. "No I insist Gabrielle. It'll make things simple"

The bard sighed, she lifted her mug of cider with her left hand. Beside her sat her warrior. Their hands still locked from earlier today. Now it is night. All the Amazons and Amphipolis having been partying since the end of the joining. The Amazons showing Amphipolis how to do a party at the same time.

"Eph, I said I'd be there, so I'm going to"

The Amazon grinned as she leaned back in her chair. The scent of fire lingering in the tavern. "Gabrielle, you and Xena should get out of here tomorrow. Especially while you can. Go take a little time alone, just the two of you. I can handle the alliance between the nation and Amphipolis"

Gabrielle shook her head. "I can't do that"

The warrior finally decided to cut in, she leaned to her left to the bard. "If you don't except Ephiny's favor then we'll be stuck here fate's only know how long"

Gabrielle grinned and looked up to her soulmate. "You think so huh?"

"I know so"

The bard grinned and looked back to Ephiny. "You're sure Eph?"

"Positive, go enjoy yourselves. Gods ain't everyday you get married"

The Amazon Queen chuckled. "Thanks Ephiny"

"Anytime my Queen" The regent then took a sip of her port. "You both better get to bed, get an early start" Her mug went back down on the table. "If I were you"

Xena arched an eyebrow with her soulmate, Xena grinning. "Don't even Ephiny" The warrior and bard both stood up after Xena's words.

Ephiny huffed at Xena. "Sleep well and congratulations again"

"Thanks Eph, goodnight"

The regent nodded to Gabrielle. "Goodnight" The Amazon then watched the two soulmates head upstairs together. She relaxed back in her seat thinking about the amount of work she'd have to do.

~\*~\*~\*~



By the following early morning the two soulmates were up and about. They'd gotten all their stuff together and found Cyrene, Toris and Ephiny. They'd say their good-byes. Cyrene encouraging them to come back to Amphipolis as soon as possible. Toris though was a bit sleepy considering he was woken up. Ephiny on the other hand grumbled mostly due to the fact she had a headache from drinking late into the night. She'd just given them words of safety and hugged both soulmates.

The soulmates then made their way through the mangled Amazons on the floor of the tavern to get outside and to Argo. The quickly saddled up the warhorse and headed out of town in the early dawn, the day still cool.

Gabrielle tugged the collar of her cloak closer against her throat. "South huh?"

Xena looked to her left at her soulmate and grinned. "Yeah, it isn't going to be warm though"

The bard chuckled and looked back ahead. "Hades"

The warrior grinned. "I thought you liked winter?"

"I love winter and the cold, just not being cold"

The Warrior Princess chuckled. "Same here. We'll stay warm"

The Amazon Queen looked to her warrior and arched an eyebrow. "Trust me I know"

Xena now devilishly grinned she reached over to Gabrielle's staff. The bard handing it to her. Xena then attached it to the saddlebags on the horse. Next the warrior hopped up into the saddle and looked down to her soulmate, holding her hand out.

Gabrielle smiled and took her soulmate's hand. As she did she felt the cool metal wedding ring on Xena's hand. It made her grin inwardly. Soon the bard found herself in front of Xena, the warrior's cloak coming around to tuck her in closer to Xena's body.

"So why south?"

The warrior adjusted the reins in her hands. "I thought you might like the area by the coast. Really beautiful"

Gabrielle nodded her head, she then looked up to her soulmate. "Any area with you would look beautiful if not exquisite"

Xena stared down into her soulmate's eyes and then smiled warmly. Bringing her head down she kissed her soulmate deeply.

And that's where we leave the soulmates, entity of the soul.

The End

Author's End Notes:

To let me readers know. I know all of you definitely figured out all my stories are interlinked, even *Flying Time Warp* was, a series for sure. I'm am not positive whether if any of my readers do this, but it's a warning. If some of you only read just the Xena and Gabrielle stories and not the Janice and Melinda, or visa versa. Well the next one

is with all four. My next story is a really important story to Janice and Melinda and to Xena and Gabrielle. If you don't read it and go to read the following story, you'll be so lost it'll make you crazy. It's a real important story to all of them and my next story will sort of be like two stories in one, you'll see. But right now I plan to write two more stories in this series. Then I plan to start a new series, which has two stories right now to it. And I might come back to this series, it's still sketchy though, but I'll try to name both series.

Everybody just hang in there and you'll see. But my next two stories will be fabulous, they're all planned out and I'm so excited. As a matter of fact my next story is in progress. Be ready, they'll be fast moving story lines. Till then! Take Care!

-Red Hope