

Dying Inside

by anex

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Disclaimer: Studios USA/Universal/MCA/Renaissance (who cares anymore who owns em') can kiss my butt. So sue me... go on I dare ya!

Love and Sex: Love yes - no sex though (I'm British).

Genre: XWP/Alt/First Time - OK so this isn't exactly an unfamiliar storyline. But I thought I would have a go nonetheless.

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"Gabrielle? You're awfully quiet; do you wanna tell me what's bothering you?" Xena stilled the whetstone against her blade and looked attentively at her friend. The bard was standing a few paces from where she herself was seated.

The young woman stared intently into the flames of their modest campfire. She heard the question but could not bring herself to answer immediately. The battle to keep her emotions and feelings constrained for so long now was finally lost. Gabrielle fought the urge to run far away from the pain and misery her unrequited love was causing her. She *had* to tell Xena how she felt, Gods be damned at the consequences it couldn't possibly cause her more pain than she was already in.

"Xena, have you ever been in love?" Gabrielle finally spoke in a broken whisper; her eyes still fixed into the dancing flames began to brim with unshed tears.

Xena was surprised by the question but outwardly she remained emotionless. She watched as a single poignant tear fell cleanly to the ground without touching her friend's sorrowful complexion.

"Yes." The warrior eventually gave a simple and honest answer.

"And what if the love you felt was not returned."

"Then I would surely die inside." Xena replied, the realisation of her words settling deep within her chest, she suddenly found it hard to breathe.

"That's how I feel, I'm dying inside." Gabrielle brought a shaky hand up to stifle an errant sob.

Xena dropped her sword and whetstone; she rose and quickly enfolded the distressed young woman in her strong arms to comfort her.

"If love was a choice, who would ever choose such exquisite pain." Gabrielle cried into Xena's shoulder.

"I would." Came the tender reply. Xena tentatively placed her fingertips under Gabrielle's chin; gently she guided her verdant eye's back to her own so they could witness the certainty of her words.

Their eyes met and seeing the truth for the first time Gabrielle drew breath to speak...

"Shhh." Xena whispered as she gently captured those soft sweet lips with her own.

The kiss hesitant at first soon grew deeper as they unleashed their need for each other. Soft moans could be heard escaping from each woman as the intimate connection quickly became intense. Like wildfire sweeping through dry tinder on a forest floor they consumed each other. As tongues began to duel for supremacy, fingers blindly searched for purchase over backs, arms and shoulders until finally tangling black and gold hair together.

"Gods!" Xena drew back to catch her breath.

"Xena, I-I'm so in love with you." Gabrielle managed through her own ragged breaths.

Xena's cornflower blue eyes sparkled with tears of joy in the shimmering glow of the firelight. "Thank you for saving me Gabrielle."

"Saving you?" The bard looked puzzled.

"From dying inside."

THE BEGINNING