



Fanfic cover by Silvermoonlight.

Seasonal Passion series, Vol. 4:

Love plans

written by maggielassie

Genre: *Xena Warrior Princess* alternative fan-fiction; Xena/Gabrielle femslash.

Disclaimer: I don't own the *Xena Warrior Princess* characters. Universal/Renaissance does.

Timeline: This story takes place just after the Season Four episode *If the Shoe Fits* (but before *Paradise Found*).

Warning: This story contains sexually explicit erotic moments between two consenting adult women. If this offends you, please refrain from reading. **If you are under 18 years of age, please do not read this** and come back later when you're older and you can read it. If lesbian romantic/sexual relationships are illegal in your country or state, please advocate a change in laws.

Author's note: (1) This is not a first time story. I think there are enough first time stories out there. I'm more interested in exploring the evolution of Xena and Gabrielle's intimate relationship as it must be taking place beyond the screen. Also, I believe that the warrior and the bard can still be intimately passionate with each other after their first time. (2) My femslash stories sometimes remotely follow each other; my first three were called *Closer than blood bonds*, *Circle in the sand* and *What matters most*. This is a seasonal X/G femslash series, which means there will be two more stories to come in the future.

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Feedback: see feedback page.

Once she, her taller lover and the young man had finished eating, Gabrielle took the dirty pan, plates and spoons. She went to kneel by the river and proceeded to wash all those dirty dishes in the water, scrubbing them with a cloth. The bard had been happy to come back to her Warrior Princess, but she was now frustrated that, once again, she had had to do all the cooking and was now doing all the cleaning. She sighed, annoyed, as she continued her task. Sunset was only one candlemark away and she would be able to go to sleep soon.

Xena, Gabrielle and Joxer had come to this little grass-covered area, which spread by a river, after they had been walking into the woods while they were on their way back from the castle where they had said goodbye to Alesia, her father and her stepmother. The warrior had wanted to go to the place where she had sent Argo in order to get her horse back. She had told her Palomino mare to head for the river as a way to create diversion for Zantar's men earlier in the day.

The three friends had put down their gear there. There was large cluster of the woods' trees and some bushes at the back of this wide and flat riverbank. Xena had whistled for Argo and the animal had trotted back towards her, whinnying. The smart horse had been hiding behind some dense foliage. The Warrior Princess and the bard had taken care of their usual evening routine of getting fire, food and supper ready while Joxer had simply sat there quietly.

Gabrielle now cleaned the last bit of dirt on the dishes, gathered them into her arms and stood back up. She was still wearing the sack she had cut in a particular way to use as a makeshift top. Her green shirt had been tattered to pieces by Xena when the dark-haired woman had used it to gag and tie up Zantar.

Joxer had already fallen asleep on a blanket he had been given. He was presently snoring. The storyteller went to tidy up the cookware she had just washed, not saying a word. Her warrior woman was now crouched down on the ground, spreading out two small bedrolls very close to each other on the other side of the fire, away from the noisy male sleeper. When the blankets were ready, Xena stood up.

The warrior then quickly went to check on Argo. She saw the mare peacefully sleeping on the grass somewhere close by. The tall woman walked back towards the bedrolls she'd just made. She removed every bit of her armour and weapons, her thigh-high boots and placed all those items on the ground near her as she went to lie down under her blanket. She looked up at Gabrielle as she patted the empty space beside her that was meant for her younger lover to sleep on.

"Coming to bed, love?" the older woman asked in a low voice.

"Yeah, I'm coming, Xena," the blonde woman simply replied. She took off her dark red boots and quickly slipped herself into bed too, next to Xena. She covered herself with a blanket. The two lovers occasionally slept on separate—though very close—bedrolls, especially when someone else was around.

The Warrior Princess kissed the bard's lips. She instantly noticed that her partner was not in a good mood when she saw her lack of responsiveness.

"Anything wrong, sweetheart?" she inquired.

"You let me do all the cooking and cleaning again. Maybe I'm the fairy gods-sister of dishes after all." Gabrielle lay supine, looking unhappy, while Xena lay on her side, keeping her eyes on her younger lover.

"Gabrielle... I'm sorry. I will help you more tomorrow."

The bard sighed in frustration. "That's what you always say, Xena..." She turned her head to stare at her best friend. "And my shirt, today, I can't believe you damaged it so that you could use it as a gag rag for that smelly warlord," she said in a slightly angry way. Both women were trying to keep their voices down because of Joxer sleeping nearby.

"Oh, Gabrielle, I'm so sorry," the warrior repeated, in an apologetic tone. "I'll buy you another one in town."

"Yeah, right... I don't think you'll ever find the same one." Gabrielle huffed. "You shouldn't have stolen my favourite top."

"Gabrielle, I had to use it because we ran out of rope," Xena protested. "Remember, last night? I had already been planning on catching Zantar that I had left a big coil of rope near our bedrolls. However, when I woke up this morning I found that most of the rope had been cut off and only a little bit of it was left. So that's why I had to use your shirt."

"Well, sorry, Xena, but I had to cut a great length of that rope you were keeping. I needed some rope to hang that showering pot from the side of that tree I'd found in the woods. There was no lake nearby and I had to get washed," the bard explained, sounding peeved. "I thought you would still have enough rope left to bind his wrists. So you didn't have to use my shirt."

"No, Gabrielle, I couldn't use that ridiculous bit I had left. I had to use something else. I'd seen that you'd used my rope to hang your water pot. Thank you very much." The dark-haired woman spoke in an irritated way. "You hadn't even bothered waking me up to ask me if you could do that. I had also been so anxious to catch Zantar that I'd overslept this morning. I'd asked to wake me up in case that happened and you didn't even do that."

The blonde diverted the subject of this conversation: "Xena, you overslept because you'd been so preoccupied with catching that warlord that you kept tossing and turning in your bedroll and you couldn't get to sleep last night."

"Well, Gabrielle, it's true that I was being nervous about that and other things. It had taken me a while to fall asleep." Xena's tone sounded somehow quieter.

Gabrielle shook her head. She now had something else to argue about. "Why didn't we make love last night?" she asked, in a voice kept low enough to avoid waking Joxer. "We haven't made much love these last few days... Are you that nervous? Is it your time of the moons, Xena, or what? It can't be..."

"No, Gabrielle, you know it's not," the warrior denied. "You've already noticed, countless times, that I usually get it pretty much at the same time as you do, which often is a natural occurrence when two women live together... Anyway," she continued, "our 'time of the moons' has hardly ever stopped us from doing stuff, my bard... so long as we bathed in water to momentarily stop the flow." The older woman winked and lightly smiled at her companion. She was trying to be funny with this womanly talk. She used it as an attempt to ease the boiling tension between her and her lover. It worked, if only temporarily.

“True.” The storyteller briefly chuckled, thinking about how their lovemaking had occasionally been the best kind of painkiller when she and her partner had had belly cramps. She still felt somehow irritated by the way her taller lover had been behaving recently, in general. “Xena... as I said earlier on when I came back, I realise that we are like a family and that we have problems of our own, but we still need to work things out, okay?” The blonde spoke in a tad friendlier way for now.

“Of course, Gabrielle,” the warrior woman simply said.

“So, why didn’t we make love last night, Xena?” The bard asked again.

“Gabrielle, we couldn’t have done much last night anyway, with Joxer sleeping near us,” Xena remarked.

“Yep,” Gabrielle agreed. “And he’s here tonight too, because you did not tell him to go sleep elsewhere so we could get some privacy.” The younger woman’s tone was angry again.

“Oh... you always put that responsibility on me. And we can’t tell him to go away all the time. It’s not nice, Gabrielle.”

“Perhaps... but, anyway Xena, I kinda already figured that you seemed too nervous for us to make love these last few days, Joxer being around or not. What’s making you so agitated that you have trouble falling asleep at night? It can’t only be catching warlords, is it?” The bard had turned towards her partner and propped her head up on an elbow. She was gazing into the eyes of the woman lying next to her.

Xena gave her a seriously sad look. “Gabrielle, I’ve already spoken to you about that vision I had, haven’t I?” she asked, talking about the fact that she had seen herself and her lover getting crucified together on a snowy mountain.

“This is bothering you again?” Gabrielle scowled. “Xena, I thought I had made myself clear before; I do not fear your vision. I don’t even believe in it.” Gabrielle moved to lay her back onto the bedroll again, wanting to go to sleep soon. “I’m glad you told me though. I understand that it’s still what’s making you so nervous.” She reached beside her, took the Warrior Princess’ hand in her own and gently rubbed it. “I’m also glad you’d told me about that vision, especially because I don’t like it when you hide things from me, like for instance you’d never told me you had a stepfather...” The blonde woman still sounded upset.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think it was important.” The dark-haired woman shifted to place her back onto the bedroll as well. “It just never came up, not before I told Alesia, anyway.” Both frustrated lovers were now looking at the night sky above while holding hands under their joined blankets.

Gabrielle changed the subject, to go back to what she had initially been talking about. “Well, I still don’t like the fact that you expected me to do all the cooking and the cleaning once again...” She removed her hand from Xena’s and swiftly kissed her partner on the mouth. “Now sleep well, warrior.” The younger woman shifted to go lie onto her side. She turned her back to her lover.

“I’m sorry, Gabrielle. And I’m also sorry I ruined your shirt.” Xena did not even bother moving at that moment. She just lay there, still partially thinking about the vision Alti had shown her. That terrified her inside.

“You know, Xena, I was thinking earlier on today...” The bard spoke over her shoulder. “Lately, when you got angry at me, it might have been a convenient way for you to avoid your deeper emotions. That’s like when you mistreat my belongings, like what you did to my green top today. That’s your way of avoiding intimacy.” Gabrielle put her head back down on the bedroll and shut her eyes, frustrated and not wanting to talk for much longer.

“Oh, Gabrielle...” Xena’s tone was cheerless as she turned herself to wrap an arm around her girlfriend. “I’m sorry. I’m gonna make it up to you. I’ll make things better for us, you’ll see.”

“You always say that,” the storyteller grumbled, unconvinced. She shrugged a shoulder as she kept her eyes closed. “You don’t know how useful I am to you... Goodnight, Xena,” she finally said, flatly.

“No, sweetheart, of course I do...” Xena objected, in a low and unhappy voice. She still understood that her blonde lover wanted to go to sleep now. “Goodnight, Gabrielle.” A few minutes after hearing this, the younger woman entered the Land of Morpheus.

Xena needed to dispel the disturbing vision from her mind at least for a while. She thought about the argument she had just been having with her lover. That troubled her so much seeing her Gabrielle being so bad-tempered. The Warrior Princess realised that she needed to figure out some exciting plans for the next day, so that her bard would be able to forgive her for the edgy mood she had been having lately. She needed to show Gabrielle, once again, how much she loved her. She would also have to try to rekindle the flame of their passion. She had her own ideas for that. After one candlemark or so, Xena fell asleep too, knowing she would have to get up early the next day. She was very exhausted as well, after having spent quite a few late nights agitated and worrying on her bedroll.

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The fire had burned out a long time ago when the dark-haired woman took a very early morning bath in the river. Gabrielle and Joxer were still asleep when she got fully dressed and led Argo to drink. Xena then walked to where the young man was lying. She crouched down and lightly shook his shoulder. He jumped up, wide awake.

“What’s happening?” he asked.

“Shhhh... Joxer. Gabrielle is still asleep,” the warrior murmured. “Didn’t you ask me, last night, to wake you up early in the morning?”

Joxer glanced at his surroundings. He then looked at the tall woman and lowered his voice as he spoke. “Huh... yes, I did. It’s my dad’s birthday today, and I have to get to my home village before midday.” He sat up and started putting his clumsy warrior outfit back on, starting with the boots. “Thanks for waking me up, Xena.”

“No problem. Won’t you even stay for breakfast?”

“Mmm...” He placed his round silver shield in front of his chest. “I would love to, Xena, but I’ve really got to go. I’ll get something on my way.” He then put his weird hat back on his head. “Can I still kiss Gabrielle goodbye while she’s sleeping?”

“Sure, go ahead.” Xena got up and went to get her fishing line.

Joxer rose from his bedroll and went to Gabrielle. As he approached the sleeping woman, he lowered himself down and kissed her cheek. “Bye, Gabby. I’ll see you later... hopefully.” The bard emitted a small whimper as she unconsciously turned the other way while keeping her eyes shut.

The young man sighed. He still thought about Gabrielle as he stood up and began walking away. “Goodbye, Xena.”

“Bye, Joxer.” After he left, Xena walked to the river. She fished, for her and her lover’s breakfast.

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The smell of frying fish slowly woke the blonde woman up. It was still very early in the morning. She rubbed her eyes and moaned lightly as she sat up on her bedroll. She blinked and saw her older lover making breakfast.

“Hey sweetheart, you’re awake,” the warrior woman observed, while she kept tossing the fish in the pan.

The bard yawned. "Uh... I guess I am."

"Come sit near me. Breakfast's almost ready."

Xena put two portions of sliced fish on the wooden plates once it was fully cooked. Gabrielle got up, went to sit next to the taller woman and was handed her food and a spoon so she could eat it. The Warrior Princess started to munch her own portion.

"See, Gabrielle," she said, between two mouthfuls, "I've made breakfast for you." She smiled.

"Thank you." The first bite made the storyteller feel even more awake.

After they finished eating, they were still seated on the riverbank when Xena gave Gabrielle a small bouquet of daisies. "Look, I went to pick them early this morning for you." She grinned at the bard.

"Oh, Xena..." The younger woman began to smile as she took the little bunch of flowers into her hand. "This is so nice." She gazed at her lover with her cheerful sea-green eyes. "Thank you so much, Xena."

"Anything for you, my bard." The warrior leaned down to quickly kiss the bard. "I'm going to go clean the dishes now." The taller woman then took the dirty frying pan, plates and spoons and stood up. She also seized a cloth and walked to the edge of the very close river as she carried on talking. "I've got some very exciting plans for you and me today," she said, her back turned as she knelt to wash the dishes in the water.

"Oh, really?" Gabrielle was astonished. Xena was being so kind and considerate this morning, in deciding to do all the cooking and the cleaning for once. No doubt the Warrior Princess felt she had things to make up for, the bard thought.

"Yes," the dark-haired woman answered as she began scrubbing the plates, "we're riding to Athens, very soon."

"Athens? Xena, it sounds exciting. We've not gone there for a while... By the gods," the storyteller realised, "this is going to take us a few hours." She got up and started taking her clothes off. "I'd better take a bath now, before we go."

"Yes, get ready, sweetheart. We're gonna be going soon." The brunette was careful not to drop one dish while she was cleaning, as the continuous stream of the water kept moving from right to left before her.

A naked Gabrielle approached Xena and kissed her deeply before going into the river to bathe. "Thanks for doing the dishes, my love... for once."

"No problem. I'll do them a little more often if you like." The warrior relished the view of her nude girlfriend swimming while she washed the rest of the cookware. Once everything got scrubbed clean, she went to tidy up their gear, pack the bags and prepare Argo.

Meanwhile, the bard soaped and rinsed herself, before climbing out of the river and drying herself with a towel. She got dressed with the same sack she now used as a top.

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In the early candelmarks of the afternoon, the two women, on horseback, approached one of the city's gates. They had been travelling through the Attica region for a while in order to get to Athens. They were happy to have finally gotten there. Xena slowed Argo to a slow trot while Gabrielle, sitting behind her on the saddle, tightly clung onto her waist with her encircling arms. Both lovers were hungry, as they had not had lunch yet.

The guards carefully looked at the women who were nearing the gate. "Good afternoon, ladies. Please state who you are and your purpose in visiting Athens," one of them asked.

The warrior brought her horse to a halt and looked down at the guard. "I'm Xena of Amphipolis, and I'm bringing my best friend, Gabrielle of Poteidaia, to visit the City Market. It's on today, I believe?"

"Yes," he replied, "it's on. We've heard of you, Xena, and the good deeds you've been doing in some villages these last few years."

"We don't believe you'd be looking for trouble," a second guard remarked.

"No, that's right," the first man who had spoken confirmed, respectfully smiling up at the dark-haired woman. "Have a good day visiting the market. You'll find stables for your horse somewhere on the right after crossing the entrance to the city. You can't miss them." He ordered the rest of the guards to open the gate.

"Thank you," Xena simply said as she made her Palomino mare resume her trot. Gabrielle kept holding onto her partner as they rode forward.

They got into the city, found a stable and paid a few dinars to the horse-keeper to take good care of Argo for the afternoon. Both women then strolled together further inside Athens. They found a nice tavern to eat a quick, affordable and good lunch in before going to visit the vast City Market, which was meant to be on until the evening.

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The two women leisurely wandered through Athens' huge and magnificent market. Merchants, coming from different parts of Greece and beyond, were selling a variety of diverse things: food, drinks, clothes, jewellery, soaps, perfumes, oils, candles, incenses, firewood, valuable goods, etc. The stalls extended up to several yards around and ahead of them. From where they were walking, Xena and Gabrielle could see the city's Acropolis if they looked up somewhere on the right. That high, flat-topped rocky hill, on which stood the temple called the Parthenon, felt so pleasant to their eyes.

"The Acropolis is so beautiful, Xena," the blonde woman said, holding her staff in one hand, as they both walked in between a steady flow of drifting people.

"Yep, the Temple of Athena looks splendid, viewed from down here." The warrior and her bard strolled by stand after stand of colourful textiles and clothing for sale.

"Have you got any money left?" Gabrielle stopped to look through a large display of shawls with intricate patterns on them.

"Yes, I've got a few dinars left. Just ask me if you need anything." Xena stayed by her lover's side for now.

"I'm alright just now." The storyteller kept browsing the stall she had stopped at. "I've got a bit of money too."

The taller woman spotted something further ahead. "Excuse-me, Gabrielle. I just need to go look at something. I think I may have found what I'm looking for."

"Sure. Go ahead."

As the bard remained where she was, the Warrior Princess walked to another stand that was only a few feet ahead on the left. The merchant there was selling various kinds of ladies' halter tops. The garments were made of the exact same fabric Gabrielle's green shirt had been. Xena carefully searched through the colourful displays.

“Can I help you, ma’am?” the clothes-seller asked. He was a short man in his mid-forties with a moustache on his face.

“Yes... perhaps,” the warrior replied. “Do you, by any chance, have something green and nice that could go on a petite woman?” She had the strange intuition that this merchandise came from the same weavers as her partner’s shirt had.

“Sure, ma’am.” The merchant proceeded to show her everything he sold that was green, until the dark-haired woman’s eyes came upon the exact same green halter top that Gabrielle used to wear.

“Here.” She pointed. “This one, can I have it? How much do you want for it?”

“Four dinars, please.”

Xena gave the man the four dinars he wanted and was handed the top. Gabrielle, who had finished looking at the shawls, walked towards her lover. The bard could not believe what she was seeing as she approached the warrior.

“My top, Xena... You found the same?” Gabrielle’s jaw dropped.

“Yes.” The Warrior Princess grinned as she turned to her younger lover and showed her the garment. “Isn’t this wonderful?”

“It is.” The blonde took the green shirt. She could not stop staring at it. “I never thought you’d be able to find a similar one.”

“Gabrielle, this was one of the reasons I wanted to come here today. We find everything in Athens.”

“Well, thank you, Xena. Where can I put it on?”

Xena turned to the clothes-seller. “Do you have a secluded booth somewhere? My friend wants to get rid of the sack she’s wearing and put this on instead.”

“Yes, ma’am. Just back there, at the back of my stand.”

Gabrielle walked towards the booth at the back. She went behind the large curtain that hid it and quickly changed her upper garment. She came out a few seconds later, criss-crossing the laces of her green top to fasten it shut.

“Thank you so much, Xena.” She repeated as she went towards her taller lover. She kissed her only on the cheek, since there were people around them. The bard was happy. She beamed at the warrior as they both resumed their walk around the market.

“No problem, Gabrielle. So much better than wearing that sack, huh?”

“Oh, I am so incredibly glad you’ve managed to find my favourite shirt in this market.” They kept wandering forward. The blonde woman was still holding her staff vertically as they strolled.

“Yes, so am I. I’d told you I would be getting you another one.” Xena gave Gabrielle her familiar slight half smile.

“This is so kind of you, Xena.”

As the two lovers turned around a corner, they heard a slur being hurled at them. “Harlots!” a male voice shouted. The warrior and her bard spun around to see a couple of old men sneering at them.

“Silly old fools!” The dark-haired woman retorted, with scorn. She saw the rude men shake their heads and walk away. She turned back to her girlfriend. “Don’t pay attention, sweetheart.” She gently placed a hand onto her shoulder, encouraging her to walk the other way, which they did. “Some Athenians are very conservative. Whenever they see women who don’t seem to have husbands or slave-owners, they call them ‘harlots.’ They simply don’t like to see free women.”

“Yes, I’ve heard about that, Xena.” Gabrielle shrugged. “It’s unfortunate.”

“It is. Gabrielle, we’re in a big city-state that’s not exactly egalitarian. Even the Athenian government owns some slaves.” The two women strolled across a square that bordered the City Market.

“Speaking of slaves…” Ahead of them, the storyteller and her older lover saw a bunch of male and female slaves being held in shackles and forced to advance as their traders whipped any trailing one. One of the masters kept yelling at them to move. It felt depressing for Xena and Gabrielle to see this.

“Gabrielle, I’m sorry. There’s nothing I can do for them, not within a city that’s got a powerful government on the side of the bad guys.”

“I know, Xena. I know… Let’s go back into the market.” Both women turned away and made their way back in between the stands. They were now wandering through the large section where vendors were selling fruits, vegetables and other food items.

“All that slave trading is so heartbreaking. That’s not one of the things I wanted you to see today.” The warrior’s tone was cheerless.

“It’s all right, Xena. I’m very grateful you saved me from such a horrible fate when we first met.” The bard briefly stroked the taller woman’s upper arm as they kept walking.

“Well, I’m glad I did.” Xena gave her a small, fleeting grin as she lightly patted her shoulder.

“I’m glad you did.” Gabrielle spotted stalls that sold empty scrolls a few feet ahead, just outside the food section of the market. “Xena, I need to go buy some more blank scrolls. I ran out and I’ve not been able to write about yesterday’s events yet.”

“Okay. You go ahead. I’m gonna look at the fruits. I’ll come find you later… soon.” They separated for a few moments.

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The Warrior Princess came near a berry stand. All kinds of berries were being sold there. With a dinar or two, she purchased one pound of strawberries and one pound of raspberries. She had kind of an idea of what to do with those items tonight.

“Do you have a bag I could put them in?” she asked the female vendor.

“Sure,” the woman answered. She wrapped the fruits in some cloth and placed them in a cream-coloured sack, which she then handed to Xena.

“Thank you.” The warrior carried the bag over her shoulder as she continued strolling until she had moved past the food stalls. A stand sold flowers, candles and essential oils. This gave her more ideas for the evening that was to come. She bought a bunch of white candles, some red roses and a bottle of almond oil from the merchant there. She put those things in her sack and began walking towards where Gabrielle was. The dark-haired woman felt a little

peevd that she now barely had any money left. She would have to find a way of making some more dinars before tonight if she wanted to be able to take her girlfriend to an inn.

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The blonde woman had just purchased five new blank scrolls and some more ink for her quill when Xena arrived. The bard felt satisfied that she would have a bit of a writing supply for a while, but the fact that she presently had only two dinars left annoyed her.

“Okay, Gabrielle? Having fun?” the warrior woman inquired as she approached.

“Yep.” Gabrielle looked at the little bundle her older lover was carrying. “What did you buy?”

“I’ll show you later on.” The taller woman winked.

“Fair enough.” The storyteller shrugged with a smile on her face. It somehow intrigued her that the Warrior Princess sounded so cryptic. She knew Xena so well that she had already surmised that her partner had some plans, though she had no idea what they were.

“Gabrielle, we have to leave this market to go somewhere else in this city. I have no money left, and I think I’ve got an idea on how I could make some more if you follow me, please. Is that okay?”

“Sure. I don’t have much money left either.” The bard carried her blank scrolls and the little pot of ink in one hand and her staff in the other as they started strolling away from the big market.

“It’s all right. You’ll have an opportunity to make some more, too.” Xena peacefully led the way as she and Gabrielle left the City Market.

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In the later candlemarks of the afternoon, the Warrior Princess and the bard arrived near what looked like an area for outdoor performances, enclosed by wooden barriers. There were various rows of benches with many people sitting on them; they were watching the current performers. On the stage, a man and a woman were telling a love story. Twenty feet from there, Xena and Gabrielle stopped walking in order to talk to each other before coming any closer.

“Gabrielle, this is a place for free performances, one of the few places in Athens where anyone can speak freely.” The warrior woman gazed down into her shorter lover’s eyes. “However, as you can see, they only have two guards to watch over the area; so whenever the occasional controversial view comes up on stage, it’s bound to cause a stir. I was thinking that, maybe, you could volunteer to tell them a story that would be against slavery. I know you’ve got some in your repertoire, right?”

“I do, Xena, but telling a story like that in Athens... This is not like in the small village taverns where I’d been doing some anti-slavery storytelling. We’re in a big city here. My audience would definitely be more agitated. Why would you want cause such a stir?” Gabrielle wondered. “Plus, I’d be the only one making money if my story worked.”

“No, Gabrielle. I would too,” Xena explained, “Anti-slavery views tend to come off as contentious to the more conservative Athenians, but they would be the only ones to protest. Some more open-minded and progressive people here would listen to your views on slavery, especially the ones who do not happen to own slaves... I was thinking that, perhaps, I could be making quite a few dinars in helping the guards maintain security and making sure that no one manages to interrupt your performance. I’m a warrior after all, and I could use some of my skills to help keep the peace around here. The people organising artistic events also tend to be enlightened. I’m pretty sure they would let me protect that kind of free speech. What do you think? Is it not a good idea?”

“Well... we’re broke, Xena. We don’t have much choice if we want to make money anyway.” The bard resigned.

“Thank you, sweetheart. Think about some of the people here. You could open their minds with a compassionate story.”

“Sure,” the storyteller agreed. “Let’s try it.”

The two women walked towards the small entrance to the outdoor performance area. The guards gave them slightly weird looks but then opened a corner of the barriers for them to go in. Xena and Gabrielle immediately went to sit on an empty bench at the back and waited until the current performance ended.

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“Who wants to go next?” the male organiser asked the audience, from where he was standing on the stage. He was short, overweight, grey-haired and bearded. His outfit was a white toga.

The blonde bard rose from her seat. “I do, sir,” she answered.

“Then come forward, little missy.” He smiled at Gabrielle as she began to approach while staring up at him. “My name is Apollinaris. What is yours, young lady?”

“I’m Gabrielle of Poteidaia.” She grinned back at him as she climbed the small steps that led to the top of the platform. She had her staff in one hand.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Apollinaris announced, making his voice heard to all the people watching, “Gabrielle of Poteidaia is going to tell you a story. Please consider rewarding her well if it turns out to be a good one.” He left the stage to the storyteller, who went to stand in the centre of it.

Xena remained seated behind the rest of the audience. She had put her bag of purchased goods down somewhere onto the stony ground in front of the bench she was sitting on. Her partner’s new scrolls and ink-pot lay next to it. The warrior’s eyes gingerly scanned around the place as her lover was just about to start telling a story.

From where she was standing, Gabrielle put her staff down on the floor and gazed around at the audience who was facing her. She could tell it included mostly married men and women. Athenian husbands had been taking their wives to come watch outdoor performances. Having performed a few times elsewhere, including in this city’s academy, the bard did not have any stage fright. She felt confident as she saw people smiling at her, and decided to tell a slave girl’s story she knew well.

“Once upon a time,” Gabrielle began, grinning at her audience, “there was a young girl. Her name was Timothea. She had been abducted by slave-traders when she was only sixteen. She still missed her parents and her big sister years after she’d been taken away from them.” Her facial expression became gloomier as she continued telling the story.

Among the Athenians watching, a few pro-slavery conservative people started to stir in their seats. They already did not like the idea of the story being about the misery of some slave girl. Other spectators, who did not happen to own slaves, looked very interested in the tale the blonde woman was telling. At the back, the Warrior Princess kept an eye on all the people watching.

“Every day, Timothea had to carry barrels and barrels of wine for her owner, who was a tavern-keeper.” Gabrielle carried on. “She was totally exhausted. She also had to clean the whole bar and main room in the tavern every night. Her master would then check that everything was ‘spotless,’ and if it wasn’t, he would whip and batter Timothea...” The bard mimicked gestures of physical violence. “... until she got so many bruises that her injuries made it even harder for her to work for him the next day...”

Some people in the audience were horrified by what the blond performer was describing. They could not imagine how bad the pain of slavery was. The young woman kept telling the story: "... but she still had to. So Timothea worked in slavery with a painful back and sore legs. Plus, she was underweight and in terrible health as she was being poorly fed by her owner. Every night before bed, she cried huge tears, praying the gods that her torment would soon be over." Gabrielle kept displaying sad features and speaking in a morose tone as she told the unhappy tale.

A pro-slavery man stood up and started protesting against the performance. He interrupted the storyteller and bawled in an angry voice: "This sort of story is the exception rather than the rule. Many slave-owners treat their slaves respectfully and feed them well."

Another man, who was rather burly and whose stylish clothes suggested that he was wealthy enough to own slaves, also stood up. Looking at the first man who had spoken, he added loudly: "Yes, that's right. We should stop all this hate speech against slave-owners! We aren't all bad people." Ironically, just after saying this, he got a dagger out of his vest and advanced towards the stage. He got past the front row of benches and stood in the empty space in front of the platform when the two male guards and Apollinaris walked towards him, trying to stop him. However, the burly man started punching the guards, who were not as sturdy as he was.

"Ayiayiyaiyiyai!" Xena ran to the front and kicked the attacker's weapon out of his hand. On the stage, Gabrielle was silent as she was seeing her lover fight the burly man. The warrior managed to punch him several times, making him growl in pain, while occasionally ducking herself to avoid his blows.

The first slave-owner who had spoken wanted to attack too, but he was not as muscular. He rushed towards the stage, got past the guards, and managed to climb on top of the platform while Xena was still busy fighting against the other man. "Take care of this one, Gabrielle!" the Warrior Princess shouted as she kept kicking the burly slave-master. Meanwhile, Apollinaris and the guards were attempting to keep some of the audience calm. Many people just sat and watched what was going on at the front as they really felt impressed by Xena's heroics.

The man approaching Gabrielle on the stage was unarmed. He was still very menacing though, as he looked like he wanted to attack her with his bare hands. The bard swiftly seized her staff, held it horizontally with both her hands and hit him hard in the chest with a couple of sweeping movements. She kept striking him with her fighting stick until she made him fall off the platform, knocking him out as his body hit the floor.

The Warrior Princess had severely weakened the burly man she had been fighting. With several kicks to his stomach, she managed to push him back towards the exit. One of the guards opened the barrier and let Xena kick him some more, until he got fully sent outside the outdoor performance area. The dark-haired woman then ran rapidly towards the other man, whom the storyteller had knocked off from the stage. She grabbed him by the shirt and, with all her mighty warrior strength, she lifted him and threw him over the surrounding fence.

Once the first two protesting slave-owners were away, their wives rushed towards the exit of the enclosed area to join them and help them get back up and go home. Xena walked towards Apollinaris while Gabrielle was still standing on the stage, waiting to find out if she would be allowed to go on.

"My name is Xena," the warrior woman said to the beardy organiser. "I'm here to keep the peace while my best friend is telling a story. Can you please let her go on with it?"

"Certainly." Apollinaris joyfully grinned at the tall woman. He seemed to be a light-hearted man who was not ready to give up on views that were challenging the unfair status quo in Athens. "Thank you so much, Xena. I'm one of the people who oppose slavery, and I would love to hear the rest of your friend's story."

"Thanks, sir." Xena gave him a slight half smile.

“It’s alright, Xena. If I had known I was to get a free performance of storytelling against slavery today, I would have hired some more guards, but since you’re here and you seem strong enough to beat those guys, I’ll pay you good money.”

“Thanks.” The Warrior Princess was glad. Her plan worked and, with enough luck, people from the audience would also offer her dinars for keeping the peace. Apollinaris looked up at the stage and spoke loudly to Gabrielle: “Please continue, young lady. Many people in the audience would like to hear the remainder of your story.”

“Yes!” Some progressive people amongst the spectators cheered at Gabrielle, raising their hands. “We want to hear the rest,” someone’s voice exclaimed. Xena now stood near the stage. She was surveying the audience and watching out for potential further trouble.

On top of the platform, the bard quickly placed her staff back onto the floor and briefly smiled at the audience. She then carried on with the story while speaking in a solemn tone: “One afternoon, Timothea’s sister, Eugenia, who had kept looking for her ever since the abduction that had taken place a few years back, walked into the tavern where the young slave girl was working. She recognised her sister but was horrified at seeing her looking so thin, so battered...” Gabrielle frowned. “... The slave-owner saw Timothea talking to who he felt was ‘a stranger’ and he slapped her right in front of her sister. Eugenia tried to get her little sister out of all this. The two women figured out an escape plan as they continued communicating through exchanging notes via slipping them under doors and windows...”

As Gabrielle kept telling the tale, Xena saw a man rising from his seat, brandishing a sword and coming to fight her. “Anti-slavery extremists!” he yelled. The warrior got her own sword out of the scabbard on her back and wielded it at him. Their weapons clashed a few times and the fight interrupted the bard anew. The blonde woman, the guards, Apollinaris and the rest of the audience simply watched what was going on in front of the stage.

As her blade kept clunking against the attacking man’s, the dark-haired woman replied to his slur. “Is that what you call extremists? People who just want to speak out on the suffering of the enslaved? You’re a bastard.”

“Why would people listen to harlots like you anyway?” he angrily retorted, while continuing the sword fight.

Xena succeeded in making a small cut on the back of his wrist. He bellowed and dropped his sword to the ground. She put her weapon away and gave him a shove with her boot, which made him fall. “Because women can be right too,” she simply replied.

The two guards picked him up and dragged him outside the barriers. His wife walked out to take him home. The Warrior Princess had to fight and kick out a few more pro-slavery folks before Gabrielle was allowed to continue her story.

Finally, the bard resumed her tale on the stage: “So Eugenia was able to get a key made for Timothea to unlock the chain on the collar that she was being forced to wear. One night, the slave girl managed to rid her neck of the heavy thing. Without her collar, no one would ever be able to identify her as a slave and take her back to her master. The escape plan nearly worked. Eugenia was waiting for her sister outside the place where she was being kept...” The storyteller loved the way her partner had fought those bad guys that had tried to stop her performance. She felt secure to tell the ending now.

“... Unfortunately,” Gabrielle bemoaned, knowing this particular story did not have a happy ending, “Timothea had just gone out the door when her owner ran out and stabbed her in the back, inflicting a deadly wound on her. He had somehow heard her footsteps when she was trying to flee his place. ‘That’s the price to pay for an escaping slave!’ he yelled, and turned to go back inside. Timothea died in her sister’s arms as Eugenia ran towards her as soon as she saw her collapse...” The bard shed a couple of tears while finishing the story. Many people in the audience were crying. Some did not own slaves and felt utterly aghast while thinking about the cruelty of slavery. “Timothea said, just before holding her last breath, ‘Please, Eugenia, don’t let the story of my life be forgotten...’”

The blonde woman dried her tears with the back of her hand and told the last part while keeping an earnest facial expression. “So a few months later, Eugenia went on to tell her late sister’s story all around Greece as she kept advocating for the emancipation of the enslaved. I’d like to add that what happened to Timothea is not an odd or unusual case. Although there may be some masters who are much less abusive towards their slaves than Timothea’s owner was, the story of her life represents the experience of many slaves and the potential threat for every person living nowadays under slavery: the experience of mistreatment, malnutrition, battering and even the threat of death. No one deserves this. People deserve real freedom.”

Most people in the audience applauded to Gabrielle’s story about a slave girl and, more importantly, to the political statement it conveyed. The bard thanked the audience for listening and climbed down the platform to join her lover.

Many spectators approached Gabrielle and Xena. They gave both women generous amounts of money. “With some friends that were with me and my husband tonight, I’m going to try to develop an anti-slavery movement right here in Athens,” said one woman as she shook the storyteller’s hand. The blonde woman replied to her something in encouragement for such a plan. Apollinaris and other people also gave lots of dinars to the Warrior Princess for protecting free speech and beating slave-owners while she had stopped them from interrupting Gabrielle’s performance.

Once they had said goodbye to all the open-minded people there and gathered their belongings, the two lovers left the outdoor performance area. It was now the evening and dusk had fallen as they both decided to make their way back towards the public stables where Argo was being kept. They smiled at each other, and Xena kindly encircled an arm around Gabrielle’s shoulders as they kept walking.

“I’d told you this was a good idea, Gabrielle,” the warrior woman warmly stated. “Each of us made some money and, at the same time, we’ve managed to speak out against slavery to those compassionate people through the real story you told. It’s sad that most people out there still don’t know what is really going on in slaves’ lives, but maybe a stronger anti-slavery movement which they would support could help bring more of the truth into light.”

“Yep,” the bard agreed, “we’ve opened their hearts, Xena. I’m glad they intend to do something useful with the awareness they now have.”

They arrived at the public stables when Xena said, “Let’s go to a relaxing place for tonight.”

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Xena and Gabrielle had just gotten out of the city’s gates on horseback. The Warrior Princess had placed her bard in front of her on the saddle this time. She had her arms around her younger lover’s bare midriff as she was manipulating the reins. This close contact thrilled the blonde woman as she strongly held onto her taller partner’s arms and leaned into her embrace while they were moving forward. The travellers rode to an inn that was situated in a small village somewhere just outside Athens.

As the two women neared the large public house with well-lit windows, Xena stopped Argo, climbed off the mare and helped Gabrielle dismount as well. The warrior tied the Palomino horse’s bridle to a wooden barrier that was located close to the entrance to the inn.

Gabrielle took the saddlebags off from the mare. One contained Xena’s sack of purchased market goods, and the bard handed it to her older partner. The lovers were gently holding hands as they walked towards the place’s front door. They then released each other’s hands as they got inside.

“It seems to be a very nice place, Xena,” said the blonde woman as she looked around the reception and into the main dining room, which she could see through the doorway that led to it.

“Yeah, it does,” the dark-haired woman answered. She walked to the front desk as she saw a woman who looked about fifty years old standing behind it, greeting them both. “Hello, lady. Can my friend and I have a meal and a room for tonight?” Xena got some of the dinars she had earned out of a small leather purse she had and put the money down onto the innkeeper’s wooden table.

“Certainly,” the lady at the front desk answered, grinning at both women.

“I can help with the cost, Xena, if you’d like me to,” proposed Gabrielle.

The warrior woman turned to her and refused the offer. “No, Gabrielle. I intend to pay for us both tonight.” The taller woman had really planned on paying for the inn with only her own money and let her younger lover keep her own part of tonight’s earnings to herself. “Please keep your own money, sweetheart,” she whispered in her ear.

“Okay,” the bard accepted and kindly shrugged. “Thank you, Xena.”

“No problem.” She gave her the familiar slight half smile, and then turned back towards the innkeeper. “Will this be enough?”

“Yes, sure,” the woman replied, and took the dinars Xena had put on the desk. “Make yourselves at home. You can go have dinner now if you want. Your bedroom will be the first one on the left after you go up the stairs.”

“Thank you. I will add a few more dinars for my horse to be taken to your stables. Her name is Argo and I left her just outside at the front.”

“All right. I will arrange for someone to take your mare to our stables at the back.”

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The soup and main course meal in the inn’s dining room had both been deliciously excellent. The two lovers were now savouring honey-covered dates that had been served to them for dessert. They were sitting at a table for two, lovingly exchanging little warm glances towards one another.

After they finished, the innkeeper took all the plates and cutlery away, and Gabrielle decided to place one of the blank scrolls she had purchased from the City Market earlier in the day on the table. She took her quill out of the saddlebag, which she had placed near her feet while sitting at the dining chair, and spread the empty parchment on the table. The bard looked at her partner in front of her.

“Sorry, Xena,” she said in a very friendly way, “but I’m still due to write yesterday’s events on a scroll.”

Xena smiled. “Sure. Go ahead. I’ve got to go upstairs and get our room fully prepared for tonight.” She winked, and then got up from the table, leaving the blonde storyteller alone to write. “Join me when you’re finished. See you soon.”

“Yes, see you soon, Xena.” Gabrielle was happy to notice that the Warrior Princess probably had something in mind for the two of them to spend a good night together, after their recent lack of intimacy.

First, her taller lover had made breakfast and done the dishes, for once. Xena had also given her a small bouquet of flowers that she had handpicked. Then, she had taken her on an unexpected trip to Athens. They had been wandering through the busy City Market and her older lover had bought her another green shirt, the exact same as the one that had been damaged. Sometime after that, Xena had found a brilliant, useful and interesting way for both of them to make money at a ‘free performance’ show. Finally, now that her dark-haired partner had taken her to an inn just outside the city, the warrior wanted to get the bedroom she had paid for ‘fully prepared’ for them tonight.

Something suggested to Gabrielle that perhaps Xena had some plans in mind, some love plans, to rekindle their intimacy. She knew Xena so well that she already figured that out. The bard had some of her own exciting love plans too. She smirked and kept writing about yesterday's events, deciding to concentrate on her scroll for now. She was a quick writer and, in a candlemark or so, she would be happily joining Xena into their bedroom upstairs.

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The warrior woman walked up towards the room that had been reserved for Gabrielle and her for the night. When she got in, she found a female servant still in the room, finishing preparing the bed. She was a woman in her thirties, with brown hair, and dressed in a rather plain chiffon outfit. "Is there anything I can do for you?" the servant asked.

"Yes, I think so." Xena looked around the room. It was gorgeous and big enough. There was a large copper basin placed not far from the fireplace. She turned back towards the servant. "Can you please prepare a hot tub for me and my friend tonight?"

"Sure," the innkeeper's maid replied.

"Thank you." The Warrior Princess went to put the saddlebag she was carrying on the floor near the bed. She got the cream-coloured sack of purchased market goods out of it and placed it on top of the bedside table.

As the servant came in and out of the room at regular intervals, bringing more and more buckets of very warm water to fill the copper tub with, Xena took off her scabbard and breastplate. She put her weapons and armour down near the saddlebag on the floor by the bed.

Once the hot tub was full and the servant had left, the warrior knew that Gabrielle would probably be up here in less than half a candlemark now. She wanted everything to go as planned. She took the fruits she had purchased earlier out of the sack of goods that was on the little table. She also got a couple of wooden bowls out of her saddlebag and poured the strawberries and raspberries into two different receptacles.

Xena found the almond oil she had bought earlier. She went to hide the two fruit bowls and the small bottle of essential oil somewhere on the other side of the bed, in a corner her partner would not see unless she really looked.

The warrior walked back to the bedside table and grabbed the sack that only had the red roses and candles left in it. She approached the hot tub, moved a hand into the bag she carried to pluck at the flowers and threw all the roses' petals into the bath. The little red bits floated on the surface of the hot water.

With the help of the fireplace, Xena lit all the candles she had purchased earlier on and placed them wherever she could, all around the room. The place looked so romantic when she suddenly heard footsteps coming from the hall and nearing the bedroom door.

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Gabrielle had just finished writing when she had put away her scroll and quill, left the dining room and climbed up the stairs with her own saddlebag in hand. She opened the door to their reserved bedroom and saw Xena standing, looking at her in a charming way. "I've just had the hot tub prepared for both of us, Gabrielle."

"Thank you." The bard walked further inside to go put her belongings near the warrior's on the floor. Her eyes wandered around. It was a very nice place. The bed seemed comfortable. The tub was full. The room was well-lit, with candles scattered here and there.

Xena walked towards Gabrielle, hugged her and then kissed her. They exchanged a deep, warm, passionate and tongue-mingling kiss. When it ended, the bard spoke.

“This is such a nice place you found for us tonight, Xena. Very romantic.” She gazed up at her taller lover with her sweet sea-green eyes. “I’m suspecting...” she said in a gentle tone, “that the candles and the rose petals were your ideas, right?” The Warrior Princess kept holding her close and caressing her beautiful long blond hair, which started to excite her.

“Yes. Of course the innkeeper’s maid wouldn’t have thought of that.” The taller woman chuckled. “Those were my ideas.” She playfully grinned. “And I’ve got a few more ideas for the two of us tonight.” She immediately leaned down to reclaim her younger lover’s lips, tenderly.

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Both lovers got near the hot tub once they had removed all their clothes. Gabrielle had taken two wooden hair sticks out of a bag. She handed one to Xena. Both of them had already washed their hair in the morning and did not want to wet it again. So they each lifted and rolled their hairstyles into buns on the back of their heads, before they climbed into the bath.

Xena got into the water and sat in the hot tub. So did Gabrielle who sat in between her lover’s legs, her back to her. The smell of roses felt very pleasant to the bard, as the bright red petals rested on the surface around them. The warrior had a bar of soap in her hand and started lathering her younger partner’s back with the creamy, frothy substance.

Gabrielle relaxed under the influence of Xena’s tender strokes. Underwater, both of her taller lover’s legs touched each side of her thighs. She placed her hands on the warrior woman’s knees while Xena kept rubbing her back.

The Warrior Princess also cleaned the storyteller’s shoulders and arms before asking her to turn around. Once the bard faced her in the bath, the dark-haired woman moved her body forward, kissed her younger lover and began running the soap along the blonde’s neck, collar bones and breasts. “So how do you like our romantic evening so far, Gabrielle?” she asked in an alluring tone while she kept washing the rest of her younger lover’s body. Xena’s azure blue eyes always mesmerised Gabrielle.

“Well,” The bard briefly chuckled, “it clearly feels like a bit of a change from the last few nights...” She kissed the older woman again as she snatched the soap from her hands. She lathered it all over the beautiful bronzed body, loving the feel of her taller lover’s curvy shapes. “Let me do your back now.” Once she managed to move her body around the warrior in this large tub, Gabrielle got behind Xena and washed her back. She put down the soap on the side of the tub and used her palms and fingers to massage her taller lover’s shoulders, back, spine and ribs.

“Hmm...” The warrior woman loved how the blonde’s touch made her feel at ease. Once the delightful backrub was over, she moved herself around in the tub and gathered the smaller woman into her arms. They both lay snuggled up to each other in the warm water of the bath, keeping their heads above the surface.

On top of Xena in the tub, Gabrielle felt the warrior’s wet hands move around her back. The Warrior Princess was seductively moving her fingertips across the younger woman’s spine. The blonde woman covered her older partner’s mouth with hers and their tongues intermingled as they both closed their eyes. When the kiss ended, the two women just rested in the large copper basin for a magic, quiet moment.

They were being absorbed in the absolute serenity that enveloped their senses in the peaceful Inn room. The scent of the bath, perfumed with soap and roses, smeared, immersed their skin and made them cuddle up to one another some more. Each woman revelled in feeling the other’s body pressed tightly against her own.

Once they felt they were clean enough and fully relaxed, they decided to climb out of the tub. Gabrielle got out first, seizing a towel that lay somewhere near and quickly drying her body with it. Xena followed a short while after. The bard had just finished drying herself when she covered the warrior’s skin with the towel and began rubbing it onto her. She stared up into Xena’s eyes.

"I love you, Gabrielle," asserted the warrior. She claimed the bard's mouth again, for a short but intense kiss. While kissing her, the older woman reached around Gabrielle's head and removed the stick that held the storyteller's hairstyle together. The younger woman's dry blond hair fell onto her back. She spoke as her dark-haired partner's lips then travelled to the corner of her face.

"Hmmm... I love you too, Xena." Gabrielle replied as she felt her taller lover's sweet little kisses moisten her cheek with love. Still holding the towel, she reached up and also undid Xena's bun by removing the wooden stick from the dark hair, which then cascaded down the warrior's back. Both women chucked the hair accessories aside.

"You know... I've also got some ideas of my own for tonight, Xena." the bard gazed up at the Warrior Princess with passionately libidinous eyes as she said this. "Please... Let me finish drying you, my love."

"Sure." Standing in front of her shorter lover, Xena let Gabrielle dry her.

The blonde used the towel to brush away the humidity that trickled down her lover's body. She first wiped the semi-damp cloth onto Xena's shoulders and back. She then moved the towel across the front of the warrior's body. Her strokes caressed the warrior's ample breasts. Once the two gorgeous mounds were dry, she could not restrain some deeply erotic desire to bring her mouth to them.

Interrupting her drying motions, Gabrielle placed the towel over her shoulder and leaned down to wrap her lips around one of Xena's nipples. At the same time, the storyteller grabbed and squeezed the taller woman's breasts.

"Gabrielle... Hmm..." The dark-haired woman had not imagined that Gabrielle would be taking control of her body so quickly. She had thought she would be the one to make the first lovemaking move on this romantic night at the Inn. As she felt the bard's delicious mouth switch to her other breast, the warrior woman uttered another moan of delight and forwent some of her initial plans. Now she could not wait to feel the blonde woman's skilled sweet little tongue touch her where she wanted it the most. "Gabrielle... Please..." Still standing, Xena slightly spread her legs in front of her younger lover. She gently caressed the back of the blonde's head.

Gabrielle noticed the hint her partner was giving her. After she had relished taking as much of each of the warrior's breasts into her mouth during a few more moments, she dropped to her knees and kissed the brunette's lower belly. She then took the towel and began to tease Xena by rubbing the large cloth onto one of the taller woman's legs, then the other. The bard noticed her older lover shudder as she caressed her inner thighs with the towel. She could feel that the Warrior Princess was becoming even more impatient. Gabrielle blew some hot breath onto the dark curls and the magnificent glistening folds before her.

"Please... Gabrielle..." Xena groaned in excitement. She put her hands onto the blonde's hair, delicately stroking the back of her head. "Your mouth on me, please... Lick me, my love..."

Unable to resist her strong sexual hunger any longer, Gabrielle dropped the towel onto the floor and nudged her lover's thighs a little further apart. Putting her hands on Xena's hips, she pressed her lips onto the warrior woman's soaking wet centre and thrust her tongue into the heavenly wild taste of her partner's sex.

"Oh... Gabrielle... Gods..." The Warrior Princess closed her eyes and tightened her grip on the storyteller's head. She gently drove the eager mouth and tongue deeper into the burning need between her thighs. "Gabrielle... Oh... Yes... That's right... Lick all of it, my bard..." Having her beloved little girlfriend pleasuring her like this, Xena let more sounds of enjoyment escape her mouth when she felt the incredibly skilled sweet bardic tongue glide its way around her engorged clit.

Kneeling in front of her lover's parted legs, Gabrielle had her face buried into the essence of her older lover's exotic heat while she flicked the tip of her tongue around the bundle of nerves for a moment. The warrior's wetness coated the bard's nose, mouth, cheeks and chin as she eagerly licked the tender hot folds, savouring every corner, every crevice of the dark-haired woman's intimate flesh.

“Gods... Gabrielle... Yes...” Xena lovingly ran her fingers through Gabrielle’s hair. She loved the way her bard always knew how to sexually gratify her with her amazing oral abilities.

The blonde woman carried on tonguing her partner’s centre with fervour. She continued to bask in the scrumptious scent and taste of her Warrior Princess. Simultaneously, Gabrielle was humming her joy against Xena’s sensitive textures as she performed this oral activity she always loved so much. As the bard moved a hand to her partner’s sex to tease the clit with her thumb, her tongue entered the warrior’s sodden opening and she plunged it back and forth inside it, eliciting more pleasure exclamations from her taller lover. After a little while, Gabrielle’s tongue made its way out and travelled back up towards Xena’s swollen bud, which she lovingly sucked and licked until her warrior reached orgasm.

“Gabrie-e-e-e-elle!” The Warrior Princess screamed the bard’s name. Her hands pressed the blonde’s head even deeper into the juicy heat between her legs as she came. As she breathed heavily and loosened her grip on Gabrielle, she gently caressed the smaller woman’s hair.

“Hmmm... You taste so good... Xena...” The bard licked and drank every last drop of her lover’s passion before affectionately kissing her centre. She stood back up and looked into her taller partner’s eyes.

Xena instantly bent her head down to kiss Gabrielle. She delighted in the feel of her own taste onto the younger woman’s lips. The two naked women kissed deeply, their tongues dancing around one another. The room was still being lit by the bright candlelight. The warrior could no longer wait for the rest, and she knew the bard needed some lovemaking tonight. The tall brunette reached down to the back of her blonde lover’s thighs and suddenly scooped the smaller woman’s legs up to wrap them around her waist. She started carrying her towards the bed.

The way Xena lifted her somewhat surprised Gabrielle, but she kept kissing her older partner as she tightly enveloped her arms around the warrior’s neck. The dark-haired woman could feel the warm dampness of her lover’s centre pressing against her belly as she firmly held onto the younger woman’s thighs while walking towards the mattress. She carefully deposited Gabrielle onto the bed. “Hang on, Gabrielle... I also have a couple of surprises for you tonight.” Xena walked around the other corner of the bed to get the things she had hidden there earlier.

The blonde woman lay on top of the blanket, hoping her beloved warrior woman’s surprises would be good ones.

Xena placed the small bottle of almond oil and the two fruit bowls somewhere on top of the bed. She then climbed up towards Gabrielle. The bard spread her legs as she saw the Warrior Princess approach her on the bed.

“What are these for?” Gabrielle asked with a gleeful sparkle in her sea-green eyes.

“You’ll see,” was the warrior’s cryptic response. She went to lie on top of the younger woman and pressed her lips onto hers.

As both lovers shared another blazingly passionate and deep tongue-searching kiss, they hugged each other in bed. Gabrielle constantly enjoyed how soft the dark-haired woman’s well-toned skin felt. Xena could not get enough of touching her blonde lover. She realised how much she had been missing the silkiness of her skin these last few nights.

The warrior caressed the bard’s mouth with her own a few more times before she began descending on her younger partner’s body. She nibbled at Gabrielle’s neck and placed a few little fiery kisses on her way down to her breasts.

“Oh... Xena...” The smaller woman shivered in bliss as Xena cupped and kneaded her breasts. She felt incredibly happy and aroused that her older lover was touching her again, after quite a few nights without lovemaking. “Gods... Xena...” Gabrielle exclaimed when the warrior woman’s mouth closed itself around one of her nipples, making it stiffen in response. She moved her hands back to grasp at the pillow that supported her head.

The Warrior Princess greedily drew the bard's breast into her mouth. She took joy in sucking it, flicking her tongue around it, before she switched to the other breast and gave it the same loving treatment, which made her younger lover moan pleurably again. After this, Xena lifted her head and was glad to see Gabrielle's nipples had become all sensitised by what she had done. She touched them with her thumbs before moving downwards and kissing Gabrielle's abdomen.

"Oh... Yes, Xena... Please." The blonde woman was becoming even more excited. She had been missing her older lover's lovemaking so much.

Before doing what she would usually do, however, the warrior raised herself to a kneeling position between the younger woman's legs, which made the bard whimper in disappointment. "Hold on, sweetheart. This is when my surprises begin," Xena said as she smilingly stared down at Gabrielle while running her strong hands over her lover's thighs.

The bard continued to wonder what the warrior woman was up to. The feeling of her partner stroking her thighs kept her excited, as she looked up at her.

Still kneeling between Gabrielle's legs, Xena grabbed a strawberry from one of the fruit bowls and held it by its green tail. She could see the beautiful blonde curls of her younger lover's centre before her. She lowered the red fruit to her girlfriend's sex.

Gabrielle held softly onto the cushiony fabric behind her head. "What are you doing?" she asked with astonishment, as she felt Xena gently running the strawberry between her nether lips.

The warrior gave the bard a radiant, wicked smile. She still had one hand placed onto one of the bard's thighs. "Just lay back and relax, my love. I'm just having a bit of delicious fun," she answered as she brought the fruit up to her mouth, after it had been well-coated with the blonde woman's nectar. Xena bit on the strawberry, savouring it, and especially the appetising juice that was on it. "Hmmm..." She lowered it to the storyteller's labia again and took another bite, eating the whole fruit. She discarded the tail and took another strawberry, which she, once again, positioned against Gabrielle's centre.

"Oh... Xena..." The storyteller moaned as she felt her partner, once again, touching her sex with the red fruit. "Why are you teasing me like this?" She was becoming impatient.

"Because it spices things up." Xena winked down at the bard and smirked. She slightly dunked the strawberry into Gabrielle's juicy entrance, turned it on the spot—covering it with the bard's essence— and took it to her own mouth to taste her lover's luscious nectar again. After she finished eating that strawberry, she took another one, dipped it in the younger woman's folds and then brought it to her supine partner's mouth. "Taste yourself, Gabrielle."

Gabrielle opened her lips and ate the strawberry Xena was giving her, tasting her own excitement on it. "I taste good." She grinned up at her older lover, who then discarded the fruit's tail.

"You do." The warrior used another strawberry to tease the bard's labia. She also tickled her clit with it, before smearing it with more juices and eating it. Xena even used one strawberry to dip it in her own wet centre. She immediately moved the fruit to her younger lover's mouth. "Taste me again, now."

Gabrielle instantly bit on the strawberry Xena was giving her, loving the taste of her lover's passion on it. She eagerly ate the whole fruit minus the green tail, which her taller partner chucked aside.

"And now I'm wanting some more of your precious cream for my strawberries, my love." The dark-haired woman smirked again before she coated a few more red fruits with the blonde's taste and hungrily ate them. "Too delicious." She put the strawberry bowl on the bedside table.

Gabrielle was becoming very aroused. "Uh... Xena... Please." She moved her hips slightly up a couple of times, to give her partner a hint of what she wanted.

"Hmmm..." The Warrior Princess smiled down at her younger lover, with her charming azure blue eyes. "You want me to put my mouth on you again, don't you?"

"Yes... Oh... Xena... Please." Gabrielle squirmed in over-excitement. Xena had been teasing her too much. She wanted more.

"Please, what, Gabrielle? Come on. Say it, my bard. Tell me you want me to lick you." The warrior woman, still knelt in front of companion, stroked the younger woman's legs.

"Lick me, Xena, please..." the blonde woman begged with impatience, briefly raising her hips again. "I want you to lick all of it." She wanted her lover to stop teasing her.

"Very good, Gabrielle... Whatever you want from me, you get, my love." Xena immediately moved back, lay on her stomach and positioned her head between Gabrielle's spread legs. She placed her hands around the younger woman's thighs and blew some warm air on the glistening blond curls, making her girlfriend tremble in delight. The warrior then placed Gabrielle's legs over her shoulders and buried her face in the bard's heat.

"Oh... Yes... Xena." Gabrielle felt absolute bliss when Xena's tongue touched her clit. She had been waiting for this for quite a few nights. She had missed her dark-haired partner loving her with her tongue.

The older woman used the tip of her tongue to stimulate the area around the storyteller's sensitive nub, licking it in slow circles.

"By the gods... Xena..." The bard kept her hands onto the pillow. She curled her hands into fists as she grasped more strongly onto the soft material while raising her hips up towards the warrior's face, encouraging her to dive deeper into her intimate parts.

Xena groaned pleurably against the excited flesh as she slid her tongue all over Gabrielle's centre. She sucked each of her younger partner's outer folds into her mouth, and then slowly licked the delicate pinkish textures of the blonde's inner labia. As she kept tasting and savouring her bard's succulent hot sex, the Warrior Princess glided her tongue into every crevice and every bit of the warm flesh, making Gabrielle utter more sounds of pleasure. Xena's tongue, lips, chin, nose and cheeks were now completely covered by her companion's ambrosial love juices, and the warrior hungrily carried on licking the bard's precious flower.

"Xena... Oh... Yes!" Gabrielle moved her hands down to tenderly caress her lover's dark-hair.

The warrior's tongue got inside the bard's wet entrance and the older woman moved it back and forth inside the blonde's love tunnel.

"Uh... Oh... Yes... Xena..." The younger woman enjoyed every moment of the sweet and loving activity her partner was performing on her, as she pushed the taller woman's head closer onto the area between her legs. She voiced her delight, once again, when she felt Xena use her thumb to rub her clit as the warrior continued making love to her orally and skilfully.

After a while, the dark-haired woman's tongue got out of its comfortable haven and moved upwards to touch Gabrielle's engorged bundle of nerves again. This time, she drew the node into her mouth, sucking it and tonguing it to bring her younger lover closer to climax.

After thrusting her hips up to press her centre more closely onto Xena's mouth, the bard moved her hands back towards the pillow behind her head, gripping it firmly as she orgasmed. "Xeeenaaa!" Her body fell back onto the mattress as she attempted to catch her breath again.

The Warrior Princess licked away at every trickle of Gabrielle's intimate essence. She loved drinking her bard's honeydewed liquid. It had such a deliciously unique taste. Xena gently kissed her younger lover's sex and lifted her body up. She raised herself to crawl back up the storyteller's body and fervently kiss her on the mouth.

The bard revelled in the taste of herself on her taller lover's lips. "I love you," she said, following the kiss' end.

"I love you too," Xena replied, gazing into Gabrielle's eyes. "What an amazingly tasty little treat you are, my bard." She claimed her lips again, and their tongues intertwined as they both hugged on the bed. The warrior softly ran her fingers along the bard's skin as the two of them rested for a few moments. "I have a few more plans for us tonight," she murmured sweetly in the storyteller's ear.

"What are they?" the blonde woman asked quietly.

Xena raised herself back up to a kneeling position on the bed. "Turn around and lie on your stomach, my love. I'm going to give you a massage."

"Oh, great idea." Gabrielle rolled over and moved her long hair away from the skin of her back. She dragged down her pillow to place it under her upper chest, keeping her arms around it. She closed her eyes as she lay prone onto the bed, anticipating her taller lover's skilled touch.

After quite a few years of being Gabrielle's lover, the Warrior Princess obviously knew by heart all the sensitive areas of her beloved companion's body. The dark-haired woman grabbed the little bottle of almond oil, opened it and went to straddle the bard's hips. She poured some of the sticky liquid onto one of her hands and rubbed her palms together to make it warm after she had put down the open bottle of essential oil on the bedside table. She first massaged the back of the smaller woman's neck with firm but delicate, skilful hands.

"Xena..." Gabrielle felt Xena's long fingers make contact with her skin while applying a pleasantly warm and oily substance onto it.

"Just relax, Gabrielle." The older woman kindly ordered as she worked her slippery hands onto her partner's shoulders for a little while. She then moved her fingers down towards the blonde's shoulder blades and started to rub them. With gentle pressure, she worked her slippery palms and fingers into the skin at the top of the storyteller's back.

"Hmmm..." The blonde woman purred, enjoying every moment of this delicious massage.

As Xena moved her hands further downwards in continuous, and sometimes circular, motions, she felt Gabrielle's muscles relax under her every stroke. She also used her thumbs and index fingers to work her smooth touch along the sides of bard's spine. The warrior got some more oil to massage her younger lover's lower back.

"Hmmm... Xena..." The younger woman just lay there, breathing calmly, with her hands around her pillow. Feeling her partner's oily touch slide further down her back sent thrilling shivers down her spine.

The warrior moved to straddle the bard's thighs. She intensely rubbed the small of Gabrielle's back with unhurried movements, eliciting a few more, occasional, happy low moans from the smaller woman. After this, Xena grabbed the small bottle again and poured some more almond oil onto her hands. She then kneaded her younger lover's firm, round buttocks. "You've got such a gorgeous butt, my love," the taller woman softly said.

Gabrielle chuckled briefly. She clung onto her pillow when she felt the Warrior Princess' oily hands massage her butt cheeks. The bard moaned quietly, feeling mild titillation when her partner softly brushed the back of a finger across the cleft of her rear. She experienced a very warm and pleasant sensation when her older lover lightly stimulated her little puckered opening with the tip of a thumb. The storyteller sometimes craved and loved the warrior's touch all over the sensitive parts of her body, like in this evening's gentle massage for instance.

After she had finished massaging the younger woman's buttocks, Xena glided her hands over the back of Gabrielle's thighs, moving herself on the bed accordingly as she kept slowly rubbing the touch further down the bard's body. Her fingers could still sense some taut muscles at the back of the blonde woman's legs, but this tension swiftly yielded under a few firm, but careful, tactile strokes. "Keep relaxing, sweetheart."

Gabrielle gasped when she felt Xena's fingers touch the back of her knees. She was particularly sensitive right there. The warrior worked her way further down her legs, and the storyteller enjoyed the way her older lover deeply massaged her skin there. She also loved how Xena took special and tender care of her feet.

After she had was done with massaging Gabrielle's soles and toes, the Warrior Princess went to lie closer to the younger woman on the bed. She spoke again. "So you loved the massage, Gabrielle, didn't you?"

"Hmmm..." the bard cooed, rolling herself back over to a supine position. "Xena," she grinned, "you know I always love massages from you, and I give you some as well sometimes."

"It's true." Xena smiled back and went to lie on top of the blonde woman's body. She passionately kissed her and ran her fingers through her hair.

Gabrielle touched her dark-haired partner too. They both loved the scent and the feel of each other's skin and hair. They shared a strong hug, loving the contact of their bodies pressing against one another. "Thank you so much, my warrior. I had been missing your touch these last few nights."

"Well, I really wanted to make up for it, my bard." Xena was caressing Gabrielle's skin. They were both gazing intently into each other's eyes.

"Have you got any more plans for tonight?"

"Well..." Xena sat up on the bed and took the bowl of raspberries, "I do have another little surprise." She grabbed a fistful of the dark pink fruits and placed the small bowl on the bedside table, beside the strawberries.

The bard wondered once again what the warrior was up to as she saw her holding a handful of raspberries while staring down at her. "What are you going to do with those?" Gabrielle asked.

"I'm just gonna be having a little fun." The Warrior Princess smirked. "Spread your legs, Gabrielle."

"You're not going to..." The blonde woman gave her partner an astonished look.

"Please, spread your legs, my love," Xena kindly requested.

Gabrielle could not resist and complied. The dark-haired woman pressed the raspberries against her lover's centre and gently squashed them. The pink fruits' juice spread all over the bard's centre. Droplets trickled on the blanket beneath.

"Hey, Xena," Gabrielle jumped slightly from feeling the raspberry nectar on her labia, "you are staining the bed. The innkeepers are going to charge us for this."

“It’s all right, Gabrielle.” Xena brought her fingers to her mouth to suck the raspberry juice off them. “I’ll pay for it. It’ll be all on me.” She looked at Gabrielle’s sex again; the raspberry liquid was all over it. “Hmmm... I’m gonna have to lick all this off now.” The warrior began to lower her head towards the bard’s centre.

“Xena, wait!”

“What?” The dark-haired woman stopped her motions to look into the storyteller’s eyes.

“If you’re going to do this to me again, I would like to be able to do it to you at the same time. Is that okay?”

“Sure...” Xena gave her a slight half smile. “I’ll also give you some of that fruity taste too.” She grasped another handful of raspberries and smeared her own sex with them, spreading the pink juice all over her nether lips.

After her blonde partner got her pillow out of the way and moved her body slightly further down towards the middle of the bed, the Warrior Princess turned her body around so her hips were positioned above the bard’s head. Unable to wait any longer, Xena moved her face down to Gabrielle’s centre. She started licking all the fruity nectar off from the gorgeous pinkish folds, intensely appreciating the taste of her younger lover mixed with the raspberry liquid. Her tongue got into every warm and wet recess of Gabrielle’s sex.

A few little drops of juice and bits of fruit fell onto the blonde woman’s face. She immediately reached up and lowered Xena’s hips until her hungry mouth made contact with the taller woman’s centre. The bard greedily tasted her partner’s sexual textures and enjoyed the juicy mixture of her lover’s passion and the raspberries.

The two women carried on orally pleasuring each other simultaneously. When there was no more fruit juice to lick off each other’s sex, they continued to eagerly savour one another. Xena took great joy in running her tongue all over Gabrielle’s precious flower while feeling her blonde girlfriend do the same thing to her. Similarly, it was intense rapture for the bard to be able to tongue her older lover’s intimate area while the warrior was performing the same ministrations on her. They both stimulated each other’s clit at the same time.

As they were closer to climax, Xena interrupted while they both remained in this position. “Gabrielle?”

Gabrielle stopped her oral task for a few seconds. “What is it, Xena?”

“When I come, please keep some of my juices in your mouth. I’ll do the same thing. I have an idea. You’ll see.” The warrior returned her mouth to her younger partner’s centre.

“Okay.” The bard also resumed her own activities. They both licked deeply and intensely into each other’s sex. Once again, each woman sought out the engorged nub of the other. After a while, they orgasmed and kept one another’s wetness into their mouths. Then Xena turned her body back around on the bed and took Gabrielle into her arms.

They both shared the most heated kiss they had ever experienced together, mingling their own intimate tastes into each other’s mouths. They searched each other’s tongues, and together they drank each other’s mixed love essence as they kissed deeply.

“I love you, Gabrielle.” Xena said as the kiss ended.

“I love you, Xena,” responded Gabrielle. “We’re so clearly made for each other.”

“Yup.” The Warrior Princess went to lie on her back onto the comfortable mattress and pillows.

The bard moved to lie next to her taller lover, placing her head on the dark-haired woman's shoulder, her hand on her belly and wrapping a leg over one of her thighs. Xena encircled an arm around her beloved companion. They rested, experiencing the agreeable post-orgasmic effects.

After a few moments, Gabrielle lifted her head. "Xena?"

"What?"

"I want us to make love again... in a truly soul-connecting way. Do you know what I mean?"

"Umm... I think I do... Come here." The warrior woman sat up, pulled the bard up and encouraged her to do the same. They faced each other, sitting up on the bed. "I've got an idea for a soul-connecting position," said the taller woman as she parted her younger lover's thighs. "Do you want to try it, Gabrielle?"

"Yes, absolutely, Xena."

Xena scissored her legs around Gabrielle's and tightened them around her partner's hips, causing both their warm centres to tightly press against one another. The storyteller shivered at the very warm and blissful contact, as she also encircled her legs around the dark-haired woman. With their legs interlocking like this, they firmly held onto each other's arms. They exchanged a very intimate and direct gaze into each other's eyes as Xena began grinding her sex against her companion's. "Follow my movements. Move against me, Gabrielle."

"All right." Gabrielle strongly clung onto Xena as she rubbed her own clit against the warrior's.

The two lovers embraced each other as they found the right rhythm for this intense, tribadic lovemaking. Xena leaned down to bring her mouth to Gabrielle's and kissed her for a short instant, grinding herself harder against her. The strong sensation they were mutually sharing swiftly rippled through both their beings. It would not take them long to find release again. The dynamic moves they were doing so marvellously connected their bodies and minds. Azure blue eyes and sea-green ones met again as both women brought themselves over the edge while screaming each other's names. The utter rapture of this moment filled their minds. They ground their mounds together again, one more time, mustering another strong climax within their groins.

Exhausted and sweaty, they quickly unlocked their legs and collapsed onto the bed, their damp and hot bodies snuggled up to one another. They had the odd feeling of a trillion of multicoloured stars having just exploded inside their minds. They both breathed heavily in the aftershocks of this interesting kind of lovemaking.

"Wow!" Gabrielle lay into Xena's arms, tired but so happily fulfilled. "I'll forever love you, Xena." She kissed the older woman's neck.

"Me too, Gabrielle." The warrior delicately stroked the bard's back. "I'll love you forever, my bard."

"You know, what, Xena?" Gabrielle asked quietly.

"What, Gabrielle?"

"I really believe that you and I share a soul-uniting connection of some kind. I feel we are destined for one another. You're part of me, Xena, and I have an idea." The blonde woman briefly lifted her head, just to look at the Warrior Princess. "I think we should go on a spiritual quest together. I think our next trip should be to India. That way we could perhaps find out more about our soulmate link."

"India, really?"

“Yes, Xena. I would love so much to go there with you, to find the answers that I need.”

“All right. India, it will be then.”

“Thank you, Xena.” Their lips joined and their tongues danced again with one another. After this kiss, Gabrielle spoke again. “Of course, we could always stop by some holy mountains on our way.”

“Anything you want, sweetheart.” The warrior briefly kissed the bard’s temple. “So, have I made it up to you today, with all the things I did for you? No more frustration, huh, Gabrielle?”

“No,” the younger woman beamed, “absolutely not... Xena, you’ve made me feel so glad today.” Gabrielle admitted sincerely. “First you made our breakfast and did the dishes. You also gave me flowers. Then you took me to Athens and found me another green shirt at the City Market. Then you found us an interesting and politically productive way to make money at the outdoor theatre.” She continued speaking about this wonderful day with an enthusiastic voice: “And you brought me to this pleasant inn and paid for the room and dinner. You found some exciting things to do in bed, with some fruits, and then you gave me a massage. Finally, we made love so wonderfully it felt even more intense than ever...” The blonde woman kept smiling. “I am so proud of you, Xena. Forget about the arguments we’ve had recently. None of them count anymore.”

“Good. I’m so happy too... I love you, sweetheart.” Xena gave Gabrielle a goodnight kiss.

“I love you too, warrior. I’m glad I’m so important to you.”

“You are more important to me than anything, Gabrielle.”

“It feels the same to me.”

They both got under the blanket on the bed. The bard fell asleep in The Warrior Princess’ embrace. Xena lay awake for a few more moments, listening to Gabrielle’s peaceful breathing. As she softly caressed her lover’s blond hair, she stared at the ceiling and thought about how happy she was about the fact that all her love plans had succeeded beyond expectation. She was satisfied she had so brilliantly managed to rekindle the flame of their passion.

Then a darker thought suddenly came over her: the haunting vision of them being crucified by Romans on a snowy mountain. The images in her head felt so cold, so frightening. Gabrielle had just been bringing up the possibility that they may be soulmates. If so, would they really have to die together in such a cruel and painful way? The warrior felt sad. If the vision was to come true, she would be dragging the bard to her death. She would do anything to stop such an awful thing from happening, even if it meant that she would herself die alone, sacrificing herself for Gabrielle.

Xena strove to dispel the abhorrent thoughts from her mind. She managed to join her bard into the Land of Morpheus. The next day she would pay for breakfast and the raspberry stains on the bed. Then they would both leave the inn, travelling together towards more adventures.

**THE END**